



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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No. 51/18 SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT CANADIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

An extract from a speech by the Canadian Ambassador to the United States, Mr. H.H. Wrong, to the St. George's Society of Baltimore, on April 23, 1951.

It is not easy for an Ambassador - even one from a country as friendly as Canada - to make a public speech in the United States at this time, in the midst of an acute domestic controversy over very important international and strategic issues which has deeply stirred popular emotions. I shall avoid touching on the issues raised in this controversy. I could do this easily by following a pattern that has become very familiar to me, and perhaps to many of you, on the theme of the cordial relations between Canada and the United States, bringing in all the well-worn phrases about the undefended border, the 135 years of peace, the historic friendship, and so on. Such a speech would be full of platitudes and perhaps even more boring to me than to you.

Yet a platitude is but a frozen truth, and one must not allow the fact that it has become tedious through repetition, so that it no longer stimulates the imagination, to prevent one from recognizing the truth which it contains. Ambassadors suffer from the occupational handicap that they are rarely able to speak their minds freely in public; it is a part of their duty to say nothing likely to cause offence either in the country in which they are stationed or in their own country. I might describe what I shall try to do tonight - and I think it is an appropriate theme on this occasion - as an effort to unfreeze some of the familiar platitudes about the relationship between Canada and the United States. I shall attempt in so doing to set in perspective some of the achievements in international co-operation, of which we are rightly proud, and some of the problems which we must face from day to day in preserving and extending these achievements.

This involves a brief excursion into history. Our two countries have grown up side by side and divide between them the North American continent north of the Rio Grande. In several respects there are close parallels between the national development of them both. Both at one stage in their history were groups of British colonies on or near the Atlantic seaboard, with a vast hinterland behind them in the west; both in time settled this hinterland and incorporated it in their metropolitan territory; both developed a democratic and federal structure of government.

The timing of these events, however, was very different in Canada and in the United States. When the Declaration of Independence was signed Canada consisted of the French-speaking settlements along the St. Lawrence River which had been ceded by France to Great Britain in 1763 only 11 years before;

there was also the maritime area which has now become the four provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland; the total population of both did not exceed 100,000. The Constitution of the United States came into effect in 1789, but it was not until nearly 80 years later, in 1867, that the Canadian Constitution welded together in a federal union the original provinces of Canada. Furthermore, the independence of the United States was achieved at a stroke as a result of the Revolutionary Wars, whereas the independence of Canada has come about as the result of a long process of evolution during which the constitutional links with the United Kingdom were modified one after another by peaceful agreement.

The slower start in Canada was imposed mainly by physical and geographical conditions, which I shall not describe. The process which is often called the taming of the continent is still continuing, especially in the vast areas of the Canadian Northland which will never be really tamed or support a substantial population. But great advances have been made, and there is in Canada today a confident and vigorous national sentiment, the good sort of nationalism which leads to greater national achievement.

Thus we have now two very large sovereign states extending across the continent, both wealthy, both highly productive both hitherto unexposed to the danger of direct attack from abroad, both pledged to the principles of democracy and individual liberty, both thoroughly aroused to the menace of these principles of Communist imperialism, both therefore more deeply concerned than ever before in their history with problems of security, and both resolved to maintain an effective partnership in protecting and developing their heritage.

So much for some basic similarities. Let me touch on some basic differences. The United States is vastly more powerful, more wealthy and more populous. It has 11 times more people than Canada and its volume of production is about 17 times greater. It is the greatest of the great powers whereas Canada is a secondary power which does not have that responsibility for world leadership which has come to the United States through its great strength and vitality.

The partnership between Canada and the United States is not between two countries that are equal in stature, nor is it likely ever to become so. Furthermore, it is not exclusive; it is one of several larger partnerships to which one or both countries belong, such as the North Atlantic partnership established two years ago, the older partnership between the United States and the Latin American Republics in the Organization of American States and the continuing Canadian partnership in the British Commonwealth of Nations. In some ways, however, by both choice and necessity it is a wider partnership than these others, because of the great range of matters on which our two nations, as sharers of a continent, need to work in concert, because of the enormous volume of traffic which crosses the international boundary, and because of the constant intermingling over several generations of the two peoples.

The newest, but already very extensive, field of activities in which the partnership has been applied is the field of defence. This is wholly a product of the last war and of the tensions which now divide the world in two. Today, when defence dominates so much of our thinking, it is almost a shock to recall that it was only in 1940 after France had been overrun by the Nazis that co-operation in defence began between Canada and the United States.

Considerations of defence did indeed play a part in the earlier history of both countries but not in the interests of partnership. I am not seeking to revive ancestral fears and prejudices when I remind you that twice in the past have American armies sought to conquer Canada. The first time was in the Revolutionary War when General Montgomery after taking Montreal was killed in a vain attempt to capture Quebec in a winter assault in 1775. The second was in the War of 1812 when an American force took York, now Toronto, and burned its public buildings. This, incidentally, led to a much better-known reprisal a couple of years later when British troops captured Washington and burned the Capitol.

These happenings were long ago. But they left their mark on the course of national development in both countries and perhaps particularly in the smaller country. As you know, the passions aroused by the Revolutionary Wars led to a considerable migration of Loyalists (or Royalists) to Canada, where they played a great part in the settlement of large areas in Ontario, southern Quebec and the Maritime Provinces. The organizations of Daughters and Sons of the American Revolution in this country can be matched with societies in parts of Canada made up of descendants of the United Empire Loyalists.

I could add a considerable list of incidents in the 19th century to show that there have not always been sweetness and light between Canada and the United States. There have been boundary disputes which aroused bitter feelings. There have been hot issues over tariffs and trade and fisheries. Public opinion on both sides of the line has not always been temperate and understanding in its assessment of the actions of its neighbour. The point I want to stress is that the present intimate relationship is a fairly new thing. It has not grown up without careful cultivation. Although it is solidly established, it must still be constantly tended.

I well remember the different and far more critical atmosphere that prevailed in Canada towards the United States when I was a boy and a young man in the years before, during, and for some time after the First World War. I do not mean that in those days there was anything that could be called a spirit of hostility between the two countries. There was, however, a much greater aloofness than now exists and not nearly so much of the active friendliness which we all welcome. Each country tended to go its separate way.

Since then our relationships have become far more complex with the growing complexity of government, of business, and of international affairs. The volume and variety of official transactions have vastly increased, especially in the last decade. With the assumption by the United States of the leadership of the free world - an extremely welcome development - the whole area of American foreign policy has become of great importance to Canada and all free countries in a way which could not exist in the days of American withdrawal from world affairs.

The people of Canada are anxious and ready to pull their weight in meeting the issues which confront the free world. They are proud of their record and sensitive, perhaps unduly sensitive, to uninformed criticism of it. They know that they can only be junior partners because of the limitation of their numbers and their resources. They recognize that in a partnership the partners are not free agents, and they realize that this is true of the North Atlantic partnership deliberately created two years ago and of the Korean partnership hurriedly established in the crisis of last July. In the direction of great enterprises

such as these, they do not expect to exercise an equal influence with their greater partners, although they do require their views to be taken into account.

In an alliance of democratic states each government must be able, through its own constitutional machinery, to satisfy its own people that its accepted part of the joint effort is wise and just. Our contemporary world is bewildering. There will never be complete agreement among free nations, with their very different backgrounds and current problems, on what at any given time ought to be done by them all to meet a particular danger. There cannot be any satellites in a democratic alliance, for that would deny the faith on which it is based.

I am trying to make a very simple, indeed obvious, point: that we must not expect even countries as closely associated as Canada and the United States to come to exactly the same conclusions and to interpret their international obligations in exactly the same manner at the same time. We and the associated countries of the free world have travelled a remarkable distance in a short space of time, under the impulse first of the Nazi and then of the Soviet menaces, towards a common assessment of the threat to our heritage and of the need for meeting it by concerted action. And the free countries are not doing badly. But we must not ask or expect too much, or think that the partnership is going to pieces because all the partners are not keeping exactly in step all the time.

There has never been a period of modern history when the facts of international affairs were more frustrating, or the consequences of mistakes likely to be more disastrous. Frustration is a mood which stimulates the emotions rather than the intellect. Yet what the leaders of the free world must try to do is not to outbid or out-bluff the leaders of the Soviet world and collect the pot after a show-down, as in poker, but to engage with them in a cautious, prolonged and carefully thought-out matching of wits, as in chess. And their supporters, the peoples of the free world, must try not to make it harder for their leaders to concentrate by shouting angrily across boundaries and oceans that the last move was wrong or that a new gambit should be tried or that the game would have been won long ago if only the opening moves had been different.

This involves a hitherto unparalleled degree of national and international restraint and mutual understanding. We have gone quite a long way in developing this between Canada and the United States, but we have in both countries further to go, and there is still more to do in adjusting our attitudes towards our more distant friends and allies.

In trying to explain a little of what I think is the central truth in the platitudes about Canadian-American relations, I have been specially concerned to show that there has been nothing automatic or inevitable in the process whereby our countries have reached a position in which they can proudly say that their relationships with each other are an example to the rest of the world. This state of affairs is the product of hard work, mutual understanding, and tolerant respect for national feelings and national prejudices. It is not to be taken for granted. The qualities which have produced it are continuously needed to maintain it and to strengthen it. They are needed especially at times of danger such as the present. They are needed in a much larger context than the preserving of the unity of purpose of the United States and Canada, in order to foster and strengthen the larger alliance of free peoples.