



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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No. 54/53 An address by the Prime Minister,
Mr. L.S. St. Laurent, to the Second National
Conference of the Humanities Research Council
of Canada, at Ottawa, November 19, 1954.

May I first of all assure you that it is a real pleasure for me to be with you this evening on the occasion of the Second National Conference of the Humanities Research Council. I should like to say how honoured I am to be invited to speak at such a distinguished gathering of intellectual leaders from across the country.

The theme of your meeting, I understand, is the contribution of the humanities to government and society. As the leader of the government I want to assure you that my colleagues and I are grateful for that contribution. We know that the esteem in which Canada's Civil Service is held in international circles is in large part due to its ability to attract to its ranks many dedicated men and women of high intelligence, breadth of knowledge and great understanding.

The federal government is fortunate in having the services of men and women of high calibre available to it and it recognizes that the humanities in Canada have helped to make this possible. But it does not feel that it deserves to reap the harvest without having made any contribution to the tilling of the soil and the planting of the seed.

One reason why the Massey Commission was established was to examine the part played by federal agencies in producing this harvest and to recommend means to make their contribution more effective. With your permission, later on I shall reverse the theme of these meetings and refer to the contribution of government to the humanities in Canada.

In the preface to their comprehensive survey "The Humanities in Canada" Dr. Watson Kirkconnell and Dr. A.S.P. Woodhouse state that "the function of the humanities is to humanize by stimulating the imagination to develop in breadth and depth until the individual becomes enlarged into the full measure of humanity". It is obvious that the sort of education which these gentlemen had in mind in setting this high goal was not the mere accumulation of knowledge in order to pass examinations or to enable students to earn a certain salary after having completed their formal education. What they had in mind was the search for a deeper and more complete understanding of man.

The understanding of mankind and the appreciation of life in terms of human values are basic to a study of the humanities. The field is vast and the challenge a very great one, but the rewards are proportionate to the effort expended. I can think of no more worthwhile occupation than this study of the human being with all his moods and all his problems. And I can think of no more important work than, if I may take liberties with William Wordsworth, encouraging "man's humanity to man".

In Canada when we speak of education and of the humanities, we think of a subject which is frequently discussed by after-dinner speakers and writers today, the development of a truly Canadian culture. There are those who affirm that a Canadian culture does not yet exist and there are others who defend our country with vigour and enthusiasm against such an accusation. I think that the very fact that this subject is attracting such frequent attention is an indication that we are in fact developing characteristics of our own. I am one of those who are convinced that we are not only geographically and legally a nation, but that as a people we have also developed certain values which distinguish us from our neighbours.

While the Canadian nation is young and has only recently attained full national sovereignty it has nevertheless been heir to the achievements of the ancient and modern civilizations of the other side of the Atlantic. To recognize this great debt does not imply either conformity or inferiority. We have been able to adapt to our own peculiar conditions the best of what has been offered and to add contributions of our own.

Through the long period of evolution of our nation, from the time the first European settlement was precariously established on our shores, we have striven to maintain the best of the Old World and apply it to the development of the New. Thus today Canada can boast of a cultural heritage dating back not only to the Renaissance but to the Hebrews, the Greeks and the Romans.

We recognize the importance in our national life of those values salvaged and further humanized through the teachings and practices of the Christian Church which have been transmitted to us from the earliest oriental and western civilizations. They emphasize the importance and dignity of the individual, the place of moral principles in the conduct of human relations and standards of judgment which transcend mere material well being.

In addition to the French and English cultures which flourish side by side within our borders we have welcomed the gifts and talents of peoples of other origins as well. The contributions of the newer Canadians have added new richness and strength to the Canadian fabric.

During my voyage around the world earlier this year, I could not but feel that there was already some recognition that we were making substantial progress toward this goal of a separate national identity in the broader sense of the term. Of course, I had to confess, particularly in Asia, that our national development was, in terms of years, in early infancy as compared to the centuries of evolution of the rich civilizations in many other parts of

the world. But I also said that we dared to feel that through constant work and faith we were developing something which some day might not unworthily be compared with their accomplishments.

I think that one of the Canadian traits which can be compared to some extent with those of the Far East is our broad tolerance and our desire to understand our fellow men. The Asian peoples have lived beside one another for thousands of years and most of them have learned that no lasting solution to problems is ever arrived at by brutishness, arrogance and intolerance. They have learned to reflect on the real problems of life and to attain a deeper insight into them.

Some of you will have heard the outstanding lectures given recently at McGill University by the Vice-President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan. Dr. Radhakrishnan is that happy combination of an eminent and capable statesman and a great scholar. Even if we knew nothing further of the Indian people we could not help but find encouragement and inspiration and a warm feeling of friendship for a nation that can produce a man of such great talent and call him to a post of such high responsibility.

We Canadians can benefit greatly from these contacts with peoples whose way of life is different from our own. It is not only in keeping with our international obligations but also with our national interests to encourage the exchange of ideas with our friends beyond our borders. This sharing of knowledge and the mutual respect and confidence thus engendered will help us all to find practical solutions for the many problems with which we are faced.

Here in Canada it is this attitude of cooperation and understanding between our two principal races and the others who have come to join us that is the key-stone of Canadian unity. This is the characteristic which has been spoken of as tolerance. In my opinion tolerance is more than mere acceptance of a situation or of circumstances as being beyond our control. The word has a much more positive meaning. Surely it is the genuine recognition of and respect for the rights of others different from ourselves, recognition of their inherent dignity and appreciation of the intrinsic value of their own principles and ideals.

That historic decision in the eighteenth century which gave our two races the inalienable right to live as free men in this part of the North American continent was of vital importance for all of us.

The French settlers who decided to remain here instead of returning to France accepted the guarantees which were offered; they felt they could survive as a distinct cultural community and live useful and worthwhile lives alongside of others on this continent. I for one, and I am sure that the vast majority of their descendants would agree with me, am convinced that that decision was the right one for them to make. And I have no fears about our survival.

But there are still a few among us who question the possibility of two linguistic and cultural groups flourishing side by side within the same national borders and who would recall the statement of the old man on his golden wedding anniversary - "Domestic bliss," he said, "is a question of compromise and mutual concessions. Marriage is a give-and-take affair. When we set up house my wife drank coffee, and I drank tea. Now we both drink coffee."

Of course there have been problems and there have even been moments of bitterness, but reason and understanding and goodwill have always triumphed in the end, and today the Canadians of French origin and those of English origin are able to live side by side and work together with the more recent arrivals in building a greater Canada.

My own ancestry is divided between these two important Canadian groups and for this reason I am perhaps in a favourable position to judge their value and their effect upon one another. Both groups have been the richer for their contact with the other. Just as the French-speaking Canadians have been the beneficiaries of the British system of justice and of Parliamentary government, so too their English-speaking fellow citizens have benefitted from this association. And each still has opportunities to enrich itself from the culture and heritage of the other.

It was Goethe, one of the great figures of another important culture who said "each language bestows upon you a new life". It is for this reason that I claim that Canadians should rejoice that this double cultural heritage is available to us.

Our pioneer ancestors who faced the elements with poor tools and meagre resources knew that the ability to get along with their neighbours was vital to their survival. This ability to get along together, to listen to and respect the opinions and rights of others and yet to be true to oneself marks the mature man.

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt in her recent book, "It Seems to Me", gave her definition of a mature person in different words.... "A mature person" she wrote, "is one who does not think only in absolutes, who is able to be objective even when deeply stirred emotionally, who has learned that there is both good and bad in all people and in all things, and who walks humbly and deals charitably with the circumstances of life, knowing that in this world no one is all-knowing and therefore all of us need both love and charity". It seems to me that Mrs. Roosevelt's definition of maturity should be a standard for nations as well as for individuals.

Unfortunately, it is not sufficient for a nation in this modern age simply to sit back with a tolerant understanding of others; in the words of the political philosopher Edmund Burke "for evil to triumph it is only necessary for good men to do nothing".

The people of Canada have taken up arms on two occasions during this century in defence of the way of life of free men and nations. It was our hope that after the last conflict it would be possible for us to devote

ourselves completely to the task of developing our part of the North American continent. However, not many years passed before another and perhaps even greater menace began to loom on the international horizon. In 1950 we Canadians responded to the call of the United Nations to send our own men once more to halt aggression, this time in far off Asia.

To prevent a similar outbreak of international lawlessness in Europe we took the historic step in 1949 of joining a military alliance in time of peace in order to prevent Europe from being once more overrun and devastated. Since that time we have been spending in the neighbourhood of two billion dollars a year on national defence. This figure represents about half of our federal budget, a sum which all of us would much rather be devoting to our internal development. But despite this unhappy but essential diversion of our national energy, Canada has developed and is developing at a far faster rate today than at any other period of her history. We all look forward to the moment when such heavy expenditures on defence can be diminished with safety and we can devote our resources more completely to the arts of peace.

Regrettably, with the very survival of our way of life at stake, priority has had to be given to those studies which can achieve the maximum of physical safety in the shortest period of time. But to continue to over-emphasize the immediately practical to the detriment of the humanities would be short-sighted indeed. We would find in time that those values we are trying to protect had disappeared through atrophy and that we would become members of a mechanical and soulless society not too different from the one which threatens us today.

Canadians should be grateful for the work being done by the Humanities Research Council to keep up an interest in the humanities, which after all are a vital force in our kind of democracy.

It is appreciated, I believe, that your work seems to be done in the face of both public apathy and financial difficulty. You are therefore to be commended all the more for your efforts in the face of such formidable obstacles. Your achievements have been considerable in spite of these problems and I would be presumptuous indeed were I to attempt to summarize them. Nevertheless, I do feel that I would be a most ungrateful guest if I did not make reference to some of the achievements of the Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The sixteen scholars who comprise the membership of the Council by their research in the humanities are continuing to emphasize those things which are of lasting value in a free society. But the Council's work goes beyond this in its contribution to our nation's spiritual and intellectual resources. You have made possible the publication of important books which a commercial market would not have made available to scholars and to the reading public. By the pre-doctoral fellowships which the Council has granted you have enabled Canadian scholars to do valuable

research in the subjects covered by the humanities.

I was particularly interested to read in your recent report that arrangements have been made for the exchange of university professors between Australia and Canada. I sincerely hope that this experiment will be a successful one.

When Mr. Casey, the Australian Minister of External Affairs, was in Ottawa at the time of the Colombo Plan meetings, he made a broadcast in which he expressed regrets as he had done in private conversations with many of us that there was not a greater exchange of information between our two Commonwealth nations and he suggested that we would both profit by an interchange of newspaper correspondents. I am confident that the example of the Council in arranging for visiting professors to be exchanged will meet with Mr. Casey's full approval. It should contribute in a most practical way to greater understanding between the Australian and Canadian peoples.

This reference to some of the achievements of the Humanities Research Council is intended to indicate that the government is conscious of and grateful for the contribution of the humanities both to society and to government. Under our constitution the ability of the federal government to express that gratitude in terms of tangible assistance is of course limited. It is scarcely necessary to recall that under the terms of the British North America Act, education is a field reserved for the provinces. I am convinced that it is right that this should remain so and my colleagues and I have reaffirmed on several occasions our desire to maintain that situation.

Formal education must be adapted to the circumstances in which people live, their conditions, their customs and their environment. The shores of the Pacific are very different from my own province of Quebec, and the Prairies form a strong contrast with industrial Ontario. Yet each of these areas is an integral part of the Canadian whole and each in making its contribution must be allowed to develop its own traits. We do not want Canadian education to be uniform or standardized; it should take into account all the different features, geographical and human, which characterize this nation.

However, the national government of this country does have a responsibility in matters of importance to Canadians as a whole. It was in recognition of that responsibility that in 1949 we appointed the Massey Commission to consider the part played by certain federal agencies in the development of a Canadian way of life and to make recommendations concerning their future operation.

Many of you who are present this evening made a contribution toward the conclusions of that Commission either as members of the Commission or members of groups who made presentations to it. You all know too, the tenor of the recommendations that were made to the federal government as a result of this study and that many of them have already been acted upon.

The Massey Commission drew attention to the serious financial plight of the universities in the post-war era of rising costs and diminishing endowments and it

strongly recommended federal aid for higher education. Recognizing the grave crisis facing our institutions of higher learning the very first reaction of the federal government to the Report was the implementation of a system of financial assistance. Despite all the safeguards which were applied to prevent even the appearance of federal interference in a provincial field one province, after accepting the grants for a year on behalf of its universities, to our great disappointment decided that it could not continue to do so. But the universities of the other nine provinces are putting to good use the more than five and a quarter million dollars voted to them by Parliament this year.

The government still feels with respect to these grants that it is in the national interest to assist the universities to perform functions which are, as I said on June 19, 1951, in introducing the measure to Parliament, "quite essential to the country, and indeed to the proper administration of the government of the country". In making these grants, we believe we are recognizing an obligation to assist in paying for benefits the nation and the government are deriving from Canadian universities.

Besides this assistance to the universities, as you know other recommendations of the Massey Commission that have been acted upon to date include those referring to the National Gallery, the National Library, the Public Archives and the radio and television broadcasting. In the radio and television fields the government is trying to assure that these forces are developed in the national interest, that they contribute to greater unity and provide for the expression and growth of Canadian talent.

The recommendation of the Royal Commission which I know is of particular interest to this audience is the one which refers to the establishment of a Canada Council. I should like to acknowledge at this point the keen interest that has been shown in this matter by organizations like yours and the helpful advice that has been given to my colleagues and myself. Although my colleagues and I have viewed this recommendation with favour, for a variety of reasons it has not yet been possible to create such a body. Nevertheless, I wish to assure you that we have been giving very active consideration to this subject particularly in recent weeks and I am hopeful that before too long we shall have something of a very positive nature to report.

The creation of such a body will be of great importance to Canada, both in assisting cultural development within our borders and maintaining our relations with cultural organizations abroad. We also hope that it will provide the machinery to facilitate even more extensive research in the humanities.

These are some of the contributions that the government is endeavouring to make to assist in the development of a Canadian way of life. However, I am sure you will all agree that a cultural

development cannot be forced by governmental grant or agency. These can help but in the final analysis the responsibility for growth lies primarily with the universities and with the citizens themselves.

In our democratic society we have had a unique opportunity for individuals to develop their own talents and to share their own destinies. Speaking in 1953 of recent developments in his country, Mr. Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, said "we have decided to build India according to democratic methods because ultimately we feel that democracy is something of the highest human value". In the democratic society which we enjoy in Canada we too have the opportunity to develop and bring out the finest qualities with which Providence has endowed man.

I should like to pay tribute to the devotion and enthusiasm which you who are engaged in this important work are giving to your task, and, as the leader of the Canadian government, to express our sincere gratitude to you all. My colleagues and I are deeply appreciative of the co-operation, advice and assistance which we have received from you in this field. I realize that you might well have cause to hesitate before the magnitude of this task, but I know too that you will continue to rise to the challenge.

The future of Canada and of the free world does not depend alone on the ability of our scientists and on our material progress. Important as they are, these aspects of our life cannot do more than open up to us the possibilities of greater human progress in other fields. Great also is the part the humanities have to play not only in enriching the lives of Canadians but by helping us to understand other peoples, their thought processes and their way of life, they too are contributing to world peace.

In conclusion may I extend once more my sincere thanks for the opportunity of being with you this evening and my best wishes for the success of your deliberations.

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