



## STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 48/43 : "THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS"

An address by Mr. L. B. Pearson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the 27th Annual Conference of the Canadian Teachers' Federation at the Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, August 11, 1948.

As an ex-teacher, I am always at home in a gathering of teachers, especially when I do not have to make a speech. However, when your Secretary some weeks ago asked me to address you, I found it difficult to refuse. In wondering what I should talk about, I naturally put my audience and my present profession together and arrived at the subject "The Role of the Teacher in International Affairs". This is a subject, of course, which lends itself to platitudes and I suspect that you have already, during this Convention, had more than enough platitudes directed at you. I will do my best to avoid the obvious, but it is nevertheless true to say that some phrases have become platitudes because they are so essentially true and important that they are repeated over and over again. One of these is the vital role of the educator in our contemporary life, which includes international life.

Education is now far more than learning the three R's. I heard it defined not long ago in a striking way as "the creation of finer human hungers". One such hunger should be for good citizenship, for freedom, for tolerance, for understanding which is the only basis for sound nationalism and likewise the only basis for good internationalism. In this field the role of the teacher is all-important, though the difficulties confronting him in successfully playing this role are formidable. These difficulties arise out of the complexities and confusions of modern life, out of the great gap between scientific and social progress. We have made astounding advances in the natural and physical sciences. We have literally changed the face of the world. Above all, we have released atomic energy. But we shrink with fear from the results of that release. Why? Because we live in a world of social and political anarchy. Because we are afraid we will blow ourselves to pieces with what we have discovered. Because in 1948 our international morality is that of the stone age. Because we cling to old ideas in a new world.

The bankruptcy of the political and moral ideals of our time has been tragically demonstrated in two world wars and one world depression. I do not envy the teacher who has to explain that bankruptcy to the students of today who are understandably cynical about the failure of their elders, forgetting that their elders of today were the young of twenty-five years ago who, in turn, blamed their elders and vowed that it would not happen again. The youth of today, while serious, is suspicious; while progressive, is somewhat arrogant. There is no point in mouthing to them the old platitudes about international goodwill, international freedom, peace and understanding; just leave it to your elders, all will be well and eventually we will sign another peace pact outlawing war.

Robert Louis Stevenson expressed the pattern of recrimination in his day, and I think it applies even more today, between the mature and the young, in the following parable:

"Be ashamed of yourself," said the frog.  
 "When I was a tadpole, I had no tail."  
 "Just what I thought," said the tadpole.  
 "You never were a tadpole."

On the other hand, there never was a time when the mature were more tempted to reply - especially I suspect teachers - in the language of the Shepherd in the Winter's Tale (I wouldn't quote this, as too vulgar, if anybody but Shakespeare had written it):

"I would that there were no age between  
 ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth  
 would sleep out the rest; for there is  
 nothing in the between, but getting wenches  
 with child, wronging the ancients, stealing,  
 fighting."

Assuming, however, that as teachers you have been able to close this gap between the young and the older, what role can you play in international relations? I am not thinking of your role as citizens which, I suggest, should be the same in opportunity and responsibility as any other citizen: I am thinking of your role as teacher.

In the first place, I suggest that only good citizenship in each separate country can ensure good international relations between countries. In establishing such good citizenship, it is merely repeating the obvious to say that the teacher is all-important. The first objective of such teaching, even in respect of citizenship, is to think clearly, to express thought clearly, both in word and in writing. This may seem an irrelevant, even trivial consideration, but I assure you that it is not so. International relations are bedevilled by prejudice and misunderstanding which are often the result of the inability of the half-educated mind to resist the appeals of other half-educated minds; of inability to look behind the headlines which, with all respect, are often mischievous and misleading; of inability to distinguish between the sincere and the sham, between the true and false appeal, between the appeal to prejudice and the appeal to reason. The results can be disastrous when sloppy thinking, when the mentality of the catch slogan and the comic strip, is applied to international problems.

Not many persons in recent years have had better opportunities than I have had to note the lamentable results when uneducated, or worse still, evilly educated minds are applied to contemporary political problems; especially in the international sphere, where there is so much room for prejudice, passion and misunderstanding. The representative of a country at an international meeting, reflects the views and opinions of his government. In a free democracy, if those views are wrong and narrow, they will, in most cases, reflect the wishes of the free people who put that government in power. The fault may be in the fact that those free people have not been educated, they have merely been taught sums.

We have the tragic and horrible evidence of Nazi Germany to prove what evil education can do to a single generation. We have evidence before us every day to show the power that communist educational systems can exert over the mind and the soul. We know that education can bend and warp the mind, especially when it adopts, not the simple techniques of the little Red School House and the three R's, but when it batters the brain and heart with every modern mechanical device for forming thought and creating emotion; the radio, the motion picture, the mass appeal.

In Communist countries, children are taught at an early age that foreigners, except of course, communist foreigners and fellow travellers, are their enemies, with whom no friendship or mutual understanding is possible - even on an intellectual plane. There is much evidence that this kind of education, which arouses in us feelings of discouragement and even despair, can be devilishly effective. The essential prelude today, to the establishment of a dictatorship, whether of left or right, is the false education of youth. The essential foundation of a free democracy must, in its turn, be the good and true education of youth. That is where the teacher comes in.

Particularly important, I think, is the teaching of history, a sound knowledge of which is an essential basis for international relations. An understanding of history gives one a sense of perspective and of balance. It prevents too much exuberance when things go well and too much despair when they go badly. One danger, however, is a comfortable belief that history always repeats itself. It doesn't, at least not always in the same way. Another danger is that first historical impressions are lasting. It is the knowledge you get of a foreign country from studying its history in your primary school book that often colours your attitude towards that country for the rest of your days. It is, for instance, difficult to escape a certain British prejudice when your kindergarten walls are covered with pictures of the "thin red line" and the "Charge of the Light Brigade". It is also hard to get away from the impression created by certain history books that foreigners are people that you have licked in war. There is, in fact, too much historical emphasis on conflict and not enough on co-operation: too much time is given to the glamorous exploits of the man with the sword in a red coat and not enough to the man with a pen in a frock coat; too much on the tank and not enough on the covered wagon. I realise, of course, the difficulty here. Conquest by battle is more dramatic and, therefore, more easily taught than conquest by peaceful conference. It is much easier to convey a lasting impression of a knight on horseback than a circuit rider on a pony. The mental image of the battle axe of Richard Coeur de Lion usually overshadows the ploughshare of the pioneer settler. History, of course, in its teaching should not ignore the virtues of patriotism and loyalty to one's own state. They should be exalted, not scorned. The difficulty here, however, is to reconcile loyalty to one's own country as the essential foundation for citizenship and good international relations, with loyalty to the wider community of people; to understand that loyalty to one's own country does not mean that our country is above criticism or change. Nationalism, of course, but not an arrogant or exclusive nationalism. The teaching of that kind of nationalism is folly, and worse, in any country. In a country like Canada, especially, the teacher should emphasize not only our own just pride in our own achievements, our confidence in our own destiny, our determination to build up a united people. He should also emphasize the inescapable inter-relationship between Canada and other countries. For no country in the world is this inter-relationship more important. Our experience in the past proves this. Developments in the future will drive it home, both in the economic and the political field. For Canada, therefore, as much as for any country in the world, a sound and understanding knowledge of other countries, of their history, their problems and their possibilities is essential. Only on such knowledge can peaceful and progressive international relations be based.

Take, for instance, the relations between Canada and the United States. They are rightly held up to the rest of the world as a model of what relations between neighbouring states should be. Yet, the two countries do not know nearly as much of each other as they should. In the case of the United States it is the lack of basic information about Canada. In the case of Canada, it is a lack of appreciation of the problems and the achievements of the United States.

Twelve years ago the President of the University of Maine, Dr. Hauck, made a test survey of the knowledge of Canada among students in the United States. I quote from that survey:

"About 1200 high school seniors in the United States and about the same number in Canada took this test. The ignorance shown by the American students was appalling. For example, only one in five knew that Ottawa was the capital of the Dominion, or one in eight, the name of its Prime Minister. Even more disappointing was the fact that 33 per cent of the Americans taking the test said that Canada was 'a possession of Great Britain', 'ruled by Great Britain', or 'owned by the British'. The following remarks are typical of hundreds found in compositions which were written to supplement the test.

"Canada should have its independence from Great Britain. She has enough population to protect herself. She has large exports and can import what she needs from us. Let her have her independence."

"The government is not very liberal, nor have the British subjects the right of free speech, freedom of press, nor religious freedom."

"Canada is no country. It is just a province of England. England should give her more freedom."

"We should purchase Canada from England."

One student produced this startling statement which, however, I do not put forward as typical:

"I always thought until this year that Canadians were a fierce warlike people - somewhat like savages and then I discovered that Canadians are civilized and have a good government."

Questions were also asked Canadian students about the United States. Their answers, as might be expected, showed greater knowledge, but their appreciation of United States civilization was, in spots, a trifle distorted.

The following quotations are typical:

"The United States is a hot-bed of hustling, flag-waving, gum-chewing men and women whose dignity is conspicuous by its absence."

"The crime in the United States is astounding. Weapons are easy to obtain and anybody out of a job joins a gang and becomes a gangster. The people have much too high an opinion of themselves and do too much talking."

It is, however, not enough to know about other countries. It is equally important to know about other ideologies, other systems of government, other ways of life than our own. It is particularly important at this time, for instance, to appreciate the essential difference between totalitarian communism and free democracy. The first, which is in some ways as reactionary as feudalism and as old as sin, should not merely be damned: it should be understood. Unless we do know what it

means, what communist doctrine means, we will never understand what lies behind and guides the policy of certain countries where that doctrine prevails.

In his book "Russia and the Russians" Edward Crankshaw gives a balanced and enlightened analysis of this subject. May I quote just a paragraph from that book?

"Violence, arbitrary law, sustained privation and under-nourishment, blind, trampling stupidity, the uttermost harshness of rule over body and soul impartially, bodily slavery with no compensating freedom for the spirit, forced atrophy of the independent mind without bread and circuses to fill the gap, physical drabness and squalor over all, reflecting perfectly a mood of hopeless apathy..."

As to free democracy, it is equally important to know what it is and what it is not. It is not the rule of a mechanical majority: the divine right of 50% plus 1. It is not the right of the powerful to trample on the rights of the weak. It is not liberty for the capitalist to exploit or for the labour leader to extort. It is not extremism of the right or the left. Nor is it merely anti-communism or anti-fascism. It is the middle of the road which is leading in the right direction. All this has been said much better than I could say it in a magazine of humour and of wisdom, the "New Yorker". Its editor once soliloquised about democracy as follows:

"It is the line that forms on the right. It is the 'hi' as against 'heil'. It is the 'don't' in 'Don't Shove'. It is the hole in the stuffed shirt through which the sawdust slowly trickles; it is the dent in the high hat. Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time. It is the feeling of privacy in the voting booths, the feeling of communion in the libraries, the feeling of vitality everywhere."

In the struggle between these two doctrines, it should not be difficult to ensure victory for the forces of light and progress if we are willing to expend half the energy and intelligence in defending and developing our free democracy as the communists are willing to expend in attempting to overthrow it. A negative policy alone, however, will never prevail. We should recognize that we cannot remove the menace of aggressive communism - at home or from abroad - merely by damning it and by including in that damnation, as communists, anyone who votes the other way. If democracy is to flourish - or even survive - it must be far more than anti-communism. It must become, and remain, a positive and dynamic doctrine which proves, by results, that it can contribute more to the welfare and happiness of the individual than communism can. We need not fear communism from within or from without, as long as, in their foreign policies, nations are willing to co-operate in the prevention of war, and give up some of their old and outworn sovereign rights in the interest of greater security; and as long as, at home, they keep their democratic society strong, healthy and progressive. But, as it has been said: "Being strong and healthy is not the same as beating our chests and staging war-dances in front of the iron curtain. Being strong and healthy means keeping our own house in order and arranging the life within it so that all the members of the household are proud to belong to it and do not look elsewhere for their salvation from oppression."

Furthermore, in this struggle of democracy, free, expanding, progressive democracy, against communism, tyrannical, restrictive, reactionary, we should be careful not to adopt weapons, or to use weapons in such a way, that we win battles but lose the war. We must not allow freedom to be used to impose slavery. But neither must we lose our freedom in the name of security.

In avoiding these extremes, in establishing free democracy at home and good international relations with other countries, education based on truth, tolerance and understanding is our only hope. In the realization of that hope, the teacher, I repeat, is all-important, and should be given opportunity and encouragement in the exercise of his high calling. At present we place him, in tangible recognition of this importance, somewhere below the plumber and completely out of sight of the professional hockey player. Good teachers - not million dollar gymnasias or convocation halls - mean good education. That, in its turn, means an alert and informed public opinion which is the mainspring of policy and action in our democratic society and must become the mainspring of action in every society, if peace and freedom are to be preserved.