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CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

An address by Mr. W.E. Harris, M.P., Parliamentary Assistant to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Westmount Rotary Club, Montreal, April 14, 1948.

Sometime ago, I was asked by the Chairman of your International Service Committee to address you. The subject was to be "Three Years of International Co-operation", and I believe it was so announced. I hope you will excuse me if my remarks do not bear out the title, although the title can still remain. However, before proceeding I should thank you most sincerely for the opportunity of meeting the members of your Club and their guests. I should also extend to you the warmest felicitations from the Markdale Rotary Club. I am bound to admit, of course, that our activities are on a very small scale compared with yours, but I think that Rotary International is founded on the principles which every Christian person thinks should be practised as well as professed; that in different places and at different times opportunities will arise for our Clubs; that the measure of our good intentions is how we deal with the opportunities and not the number which may come our way. From what I have heard in the short time I have been here, it is clearly evident that you make full use of your opportunities to advance the principles on which we are founded.

I understand that this occasion marks the resumption of a programme devoted to International Affairs - a programme which you carried on before the war, but which has been interrupted for the past several years. It is regrettable that such should have been the case, but I think the interruption was well worthwhile in that we still retain the great privilege of meeting here tonight without fear, in fact, without second thought, for the purpose of saying what we please without regard to the consequences. May I, therefore, repeat that the time has not been lost and to commend you for your plan to initiate gatherings of this kind, and to compliment you on having the patronage of so many distinguished representatives of foreign governments and international organizations.

It was my intention to dwell somewhat on the work of the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations because it did appear to me that they had met with greater success in the past three years than their more important cousins - the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations. I suppose they have taken sure steps where the others have stumbled because they are technical bodies and technical problems seem more likely to be discussed objectively than political issues. Scientists and technicians at international conferences seem to be better than diplomats at getting along with one another, but this has not meant that scientists have not reflected in their deliberations, the political thought of their countries. But when I realized that the Specialized Agencies had been so successful, it seemed better to discuss the political issues as they are the ones which are causing the greater trouble. I do not claim for what I am about to say the dignity of Government policy, although I do not think it contradicts it. I am going to speak not as a Parliamentary Assistant, or even as a back-bencher.

The international situation was to have been discussed in the House earlier this week, but domestic problems intervened to cause a slight delay. Members on all sides of the House are expected to take part in the debate and we shall witness one of those important occasions when Parliament genuinely attempts to take stock in the widest possible terms of some basic aspect of our national life. Each year we have a larger number engaged in a serious attempt to assess our external position. I am satisfied that this is due in large part to the increasing public demand for periodic consideration of our position - a demand which is increasing due, in no small part, to the pressure of education carried on by service clubs and other informed public bodies. No one can take great comfort from the facts as they will be brought out in the debate. During the long years of war, we thought that one of the few advantages of waging war twice in a generation would be that we should know better the second time how to re-organize the world when the fighting stopped. We might have known better if we had read our history books more carefully. Great wars create more problems than they solve, and the last one was no exception to this rule.

There are still some Canadians who think that the best answer to the complexities of our foreign relations is simply to ignore them. For some reason there is a tendency for their number to increase as the dangers of the situation become more apparent. These are the people who say "the world is in such a terrible state we can do nothing about it." "The best course is to mend our own fences and leave the rest of the world alone." Then there are those who say "we are a small country. Even with the best of intentions, we are incapable of influencing events. We had better let the others do the work." Happily they are fewer than they used to be. I am not surprised for in the past few decades, a good deal of tail plumage has been lost by people who insisted on protecting their heads in this manner. It must be clear now to any really thoughtful person that events which may take place today on the plains of Outer Mongolia or the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains may well affect the lives of individual Canadians tomorrow. Take for example the question of Palestine. I took part in the discussion of the Palestine question during the General Assembly in October and November last. At that time no aspect of my political responsibilities seemed more remote to the interests of my constituents than the future of this small land at the east end of the Mediterranean. I felt very much that way about it myself. Many of the place-names, like Dan and Beersheba, were very familiar but only on account of events that had happened there two thousand year ago. Yet here I was sitting on a committee which was trying to decide what should be done about these places now in the twentieth century. What conceivable difference did it make to the farmers and the townspeople of the constituency of Grey-Bruce? On second thought it obviously made a great deal of difference, it was a serious business, affecting every one of the 57 United Nations, so serious that many tried to avoid a decision. There may be difference of opinion as to whether we were able to make very much of a contribution to the solution of this problem. There can be no doubt that the catastrophe which may take place in Palestine within the next few weeks and which if it happens will endanger the stability of the whole Near East, will very soon affect the welfare of this country. Therefore, let us continue to study the problems of that unhappy country to see if we can find a solution which will bring peace where there is now conflict and at the same time remove the possibility of a much greater tragedy.

Now, with regard to the United States. Let us make no mistake. The problem of a small country spread out like the frosting

on top of a cake and placed beside a larger one is no easy matter. It is not unique with us. It exists in many other places. We are fortunate because of the enlightened views and advanced political systems of our neighbours. We are fortunate also because we are not threatened by any ambitions amongst our neighbours. Nevertheless, if we are to make our contribution as a nation to world affairs, we shall have constantly to scrutinize our relations with the United States, making sure from day to day that our willingness to cooperate in matters of mutual concern or our desire to profit from benefits which the United States may offer, does not lead us to the point of taking too narrow a view of our own interests.

With respect to the BRITISH COMMONWEALTH. Here is a political instrument with great flexibility. The day has long since passed when our independence is in the least threatened by our association in the Commonwealth. Let us take our part in ensuring that this instrument is used constructively and imaginatively for the purpose of protecting and developing our common interests. The survival of a strong independent United Kingdom is of supreme importance to this as to all countries in the American hemisphere, not only for what she has been, but what she may have yet to be - a strong bastion against potential common enemies, both in an ideological sense and in a material sense.

If we consider the major problems in world affairs, we cannot help thinking of the COMMUNIST WORLD. First of all let us tolerate no nonsense within our own borders from people who wish to take advantage of our free institutions to betray the interests of this country. Second, let us realize that Communism has never established itself in any country without the support of Soviet troops. The real question, therefore, is how far we as individuals in Canada are prepared to see the military influence of the Russian Government spread. Where must we draw the line against the expansion of Soviet Military power? In making this decision we must remember that there is no use drawing a line unless we are willing to stand on it. Our Prime Minister said recently, that a way must be found "to ensure that nations which are still free will not be suborned, defeated or destroyed one by one". And further, "it is vital to the defence of freedom to maintain a preponderance of moral, economic and military strength on the side of freedom." So, I repeat. If we draw the line we must stand firmly on it. Then if, in the company of our friends, we have taken this stand, we must go on with the political effort to settle by negotiation and compromise the issues which are dividing the world. It will be a long, slow and unspectacular process. There are many who will doubt that a country of our size can have very much effect on the course of events. But I am sure that the courage and initiative which we have shown in wartime, the capacity we have demonstrated to influence events in war are equally a part of our natural resources in the peacetime affairs of the world. In following this course, we shall be drawing open the iron curtain which may not be as formidable as it seems. There are, I think, many significant breaks in the curtain. The most important are the countless numbers of people, especially in countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland, who know and understand the ideals and traditions of western freedom. They, within the limits that are imposed upon them, will welcome the opportunity to keep in touch with us.

If we are going to talk of drawing lines, we must think of WESTERN EUROPE. An important process of political integration is going on there at the moment. The Prime Minister, speaking in the House on March 17th with reference to the Brussels Treaty of Mutual Guarantee, said that "the peoples of all free countries may be assured that Canada will play her full part in every movement to give assistance to the conception of an effective system of collective

security, by the development of regional pacts under the Charter of the United Nations." As an individual Canadian, I believe that we should play that "full part". I hope that conviction is shared by the great majority of my countrymen. I hope that conviction is based on entire knowledge of the initiative and responsibility which may be entailed.

Membership in the UNITED NATIONS is certainly, at the moment, no joy-ride. It does not, in present circumstances, give us that national security through collective action which it was designed to give. In the presence of the great division between eastern Europe and the rest of the world, it has not yet proven effective for dealing with problems like the defence of the Greek border. Nevertheless, I think this is a commitment of great importance in our national life. Again and again we are brought back to the conclusion that the world is a safer, better place for a country such as ours if it is organized on some basis of collective political action rather than merely in the groupings of states around big powers. Even now, in its present form, the United Nations is important to us to the extent that the conflicting objectives of big powers can be brought out into the open discussed perhaps even modified. To put the matter at its very lowest value, it is important to us that a question like Kashmir or Palestine cannot be settled by unilateral action on the part of some great power, at least until an honest effort has been made to settle it by other and less dangerous means. If there were no United Nations today, I am sure that the Canadian people would hope that one would be set up. As it is, our best interest is served by supporting it in spite of discouragements and in spite of all temptations to cynicism. It can be a long-term instrument of great importance in maintaining the chief object of our foreign policy - our own independence in a community of free states. That independence born in the political struggles of a century ago, defended in two world wars, must not be lost by indifference.

While the primary purpose of foreign policy must be to obtain national security for ourselves, its final objective is to gain stability and peace throughout the world, firmly, based on the freedom of all peoples. Only then can the full energies of the government and people of Canada be devoted to the great opportunities of national development which lie before us.
