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CANADA'S POSITION IN THE WORLD

An address delivered by the Prime Minister,
Mr. St. Laurent, to the Canadian Club, Ottawa
January 16, 1953.

...I don't think most of us realize how greatly the actual position of our country in the world has changed since 1939. But if our real position in the world is changed, I think our attitude to it has changed even more.

Many of us may have forgotten that, in those far-off years after Hitler came to power in 1933, the great debate among Canadians was whether our connection with the Commonwealth, our membership in the League of Nations and our racial and cultural affinities with Europe were not likely to drag us into troubles which were no real business of ours. Literally nobody in Canada talks that way today.

We all know that what happens to the rest of the world is our business and most of us realize it is the most important business we have. The only debate today is how much we should do and how far we should go in helping to keep world affairs from deteriorating into another world war.

Even on this subject there are happily no fundamental differences between the major political parties in Canada. Such differences as there are cut across party lines and are mainly differences of emphasis. There are those who think that we have taken our responsibilities a little too seriously and have tried to do a little too much to solve the world's problems. There are those who think we aren't serious enough and aren't doing enough.

I am sure that all of us realize that a country which in territorial extent is the third largest in the world, which has undeveloped wealth even the most optimistic dared not dream of in the 30's, which has a population as skilful and as enlightened as that of any other country, which has know-how and developed capital greater in proportion to its population than that of any other country of the world but one -- a country with all these advantages and many others besides cannot fail to have heavy responsibilities for what goes on both within and beyond its own borders.

Canada is not a great power but it is nevertheless a real power in the world, and public men and responsible citizens both have a duty to see that that power is exercised not only for the common advantage of all Canadian citizens of today but with a proper sense of responsibility toward future generations of Canadians. And, as I shall try to show in what I am going to say to you today, that also means a proper sense of responsibility toward future generations of mankind.

...I would suggest that the door to our relations with the rest of the world hangs upon two hinges, one hinge called peace, the other called trade.

If our people are to be happy and prosperous there must be peace in the world and there must be a high and steadily expanding volume of international trade. If, therefore, Canada is to have the position in the world we all want this country to have, the main concern of the Government in the conduct of our external relations must be for the preservation of world peace and the expansion of international trade.

If the hinge of peace were to break down Canadians would be involved in the horrors of atomic war. If the hinge of trade were to become rusted, Canadians would suffer a drastic decline in their standard of living.

If we Canadians are to follow sound policies in what we do to help maintain peace and develop trade between nations, then those policies must be carefully thought out in the light of the best knowledge and advice we can get, they must be administered with the highest sense of responsibility and they must enlist the understanding and support of the great majority of Canadians.

We Canadians know that, in this age of supersonic airplanes and atomic submarines, it would be impossible to remain neutral and secure in the event of another world war. Terrible though our losses were in previous wars, a future war would bring casualties and suffering to the civilian population as well as to the armed services that are too horrible even for us to imagine. No price that peace-loving nations are able collectively to pay can be too high to prevent such a disaster. But we do want to be very sure that the insurance policy for which we are paying is the right type of policy.

I believe the courageous and persistent resistance of the United Nations to aggression in Korea has reduced the prospect of open aggression elsewhere; and I believe the North Atlantic alliance and the build up of strength in Europe have reduced the danger there. But we must keep up the insurance and I am convinced Canadians want to do their share.

But, if our national welfare depends on peace it also depends on a high level of international trade. Indeed, if our external trade stopped altogether, life in Canada could be maintained only on a relatively primitive basis.

We have become so accustomed to the buying and selling of goods across political boundaries that many of us are apt to take trade for granted until some difficulty overtakes us. But we all know that if our imports were suddenly suspended we would in a short time notice the effect in our homes. Many of the things which we now consider essential to good health would no longer be available.

You all remember our shortage of American dollars in 1947 and how we missed the fresh vegetables for the few months we had to get along without them at that time. And we can imagine what our hot summers would be like without light cotton clothing, or our cold winters without enough hard coal or fuel oil.

And it would not be our homes only which would feel the lack of imports. Great industries such as the textile and the aluminum industry, whose operation depend on foreign raw materials would fail as soon as existing stockpiles were used up.

And if the imports are essential, so are exports. Our farmers, our fishermen, our miners and our foresters whose products now furnish the basis of our national wealth would, in the absence of an outlet for a great part of their production, be forced to reduce their activities drastically. The total effect of this loss of trade would be to force our nation back to a local self-sufficient economy reminiscent of the pioneering days of our great grandfathers.

But, in order to keep ourselves in a position to do our part toward achieving a peaceful and prosperous world, Canadians have to keep in mind other broad and general considerations.

I said a few moments ago that our country is, in territorial extent, the third largest in the world; that it has undeveloped wealth, even the most optimistic dared not dream of a few years ago; that its population is healthy, skilful and enlightened; that it has know-how and has developed capital greater, in proportion to its population, than that of any other country of the world but one. It also has stable political institutions, and long experience has shown there are none better suited to maintaining a proper balance between the freedom of individuals and the well-ordered co-operation between them, both indispensable to the proper functioning of organized society....

What I am referring to is stability based upon the equality of opportunity provided to all individuals under one system and in which each one plays an intelligent and constructive part; the stability which survives changes in the political leaderships of our governments; the kind of stability which encourages the making of treaties and agreements with Canada; the kind of stability which encourages foreign investments in Canada because of the confidence that treaties and agreements will be kept and that investments will not be destroyed or imperilled by governmental or parliamentary caprice.

Let me give you two or three examples of what I mean by equality of opportunity for individuals:

A year and a half ago I visited some of the groups of newer Canadians in our western provinces. One evening I was enjoying a Ukrainian repast alongside of a young man who turned to me and asked me to convey his greetings to my youngest daughter whom he had met a few years before while she was serving with the CWACs in Regina. It appears that he and she, both as Captains of their respective units, used to command Sunday morning church parades to the same religious ceremonies. I had him write down his name for me so that I might be sure to have it right for my daughter and then asked him about his Canadian background. He told me that his father and mother had come to Canada about forty-five years ago and that, when they reached Saskatoon, they had exhausted all their resources and had to start from scratch with nothing to rely upon but their confidence, their willingness to work

and a very rudimentary knowledge of just a few English words. They had, after a period of earning wages by working for others, been able to secure a homestead and they had brought up three children. All three had gone to our Canadian schools and high schools and universities. One of them was a medical doctor practising in Saskatoon; my young friend himself was superintendent of the northern educational district of Saskatchewan; and his sister, after becoming a trained nurse, had proceeded to post graduate research work and was then employed in scientific research in one of the university laboratories; just one generation from virtual serfdom in the Ukraine, to free Canadian citizenship, the absorption of distinguished scholarship and corresponding satisfactory careers in this new land.

Another example: the group of small shopkeepers from London, England, members of the colony founded in the same area by Rev. I.M. Barr but soon taken over by its chaplain, Rev. George Exton Lloyd; the town of Lloydminster is named after him and his group and their offspring now constitute most of the prosperous population of that district. One of their descendants was with me on that same evening. He had been the president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, president of the North Battleford Agricultural Society, president of the Western Canada Fairs Association and was then and is now an influential member of our Canadian Parliament.

What about another Canadian at that same Ukrainian festival? His Canadian ancestry went back almost three centuries. He was the French-speaking Roman Catholic son of a general storekeeper in a small mostly English-speaking village in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. He used to help his father sweep out the store before it opened for business in the morning and before he went to a little village school administered by the Parish priest but supported by a grant from the Protestant Board of School Commissioners of his township. He too managed afterwards to get to college and, from there, to the university and then - no he is not the one who has just become a Cardinal in the Catholic hierarchy - he went to the Bar of his province in spite of the fact that some with old world ideas felt it was preposterous that a country shopkeeper's son should think it fitting that he might become a lawyer. Well, he did become a lawyer and some forty years later the political party to which he belonged, and of which the majority differed from him in race, in language and in religion, chose him to be the leader of their party, and afterwards a majority of the Canadian public agreed to try him out as Prime Minister of the whole country.

These are just three illustrations of the kind of economic, social and political opportunities which are open to our people and which help to explain the position Canada has in the world today. There are only 14 million Canadian people, according to the 1951 census, but there were only 5½ million at the census of 1901. There is room for a lot more and, at the same rate of growth, there are apt to be 35 or 40 million at the census of 2001. There is room enough for that number and for many more; and there is wealth enough for that number and for many more awaiting use and development. And the present numbers, and I think it will be true of the increasing numbers, remain deeply attached to the traditions and lore and culture of their ancestry from many different parts of the world.

But that attachment to the past does not prevent Canada from being a new country, its people from being a young people, open to new ideas, to new experiments, new techniques in dealing with material things and in the application of new discoveries in the use and control of the forces of nature as well as in the practical application of the fundamental law of human relationships, "Love thy neighbour as thyself". . . .

Canada is one of the few countries in the world today where human enterprise can stage great new dramas of human activity on scales comparable to those which were performed during the last century in the lands just south of our own frontiers.

But, in order that such gigantic plays may unfold their courses with appropriate effect and splendor, we must be careful that we do not spoil the setting. We must, of course, work for peace in the world; we must work for trade throughout the world, but we must also husband the strength of our people, the stability of our institutions and the wealth of our resources.

Now by 'the strength of our people' I mean that of their bodies, of their hearts and of their minds; and, by 'the stability of our institutions', I mean social and economic, as well as political stability; and, by 'husbanding the wealth of our resources', I do not mean that we should allow them to remain buried and idle like the talent of the unfaithful servant, but that we should use them wisely and in such manner that, instead of depleting them to the cost of the generations that will come after us, we will have increased their productivity in proper proportion to the increases in our population.

You know, I do not think we are doing too badly in that respect at the present time. Late last summer I went up to the Lake St. John district in my own home province of Quebec. I saw a plant up there which is putting aluminum metal on the world markets at the rate of 150 million dollars' worth a year and the only Canadian elements that go into that commodity are Canadian labour and electricity developed from the running water of Canadian streams.

Shortly afterwards I went out to Trail in British Columbia. You will remember that about 25 years ago the smelting company out there was subjected to a very substantial claim from the farmers of the adjoining state of Washington for the damages caused to the vegetation of their district by the obnoxious fumes from its tall chimneys. Well, there are no scars to remind one that there ever was any damage to the vegetation in that area. Things grow out there and they grow fast. The company paid the damages assessed by an international tribunal and, since then, has been applying these obnoxious fumes to the treatment of phosphate rock brought in from the state of Montana and the combination of the phosphate rock and the obnoxious fumes has become a fertilizer of which 25 million dollars' worth each year is marketed by the company. And under normal conditions each ton of that fertilizer means twelve additional tons of field crops.

I then spent a good part of five days in air trips over the mainland of British Columbia and Vancouver Island. I was tremendously impressed by the extent and density of the forest wealth of that Pacific coast. It looked to me that we were not making any wasteful inroads into that forest wealth in spite of the very large-scale lumbering operations which have been and are being carried on out there.

Perhaps my impressions may have been coloured somewhat by the fact that there was a \$40 million dollar pulp and paper mill which was just being completed at Campbell River and at which nothing but what was formerly refuse, sawdust, edgings, and so forth, is going to be used as raw material. That looked to me like taking care of something which many regarded as unnecessarily wasteful heretofore.

I then flew over to Edmonton and saw the petro-chemical works which are being completed there. I understand oil and gas have to go through refineries before they are available for use. I had already seen at Sarnia that the waste products from an oil refinery there provided the raw material for the synthetic rubber of the adjoining Polymer plant and that such parts of the waste that didn't go into synthetic rubber were turned over to the Dow Chemical Company for plastics and other commodities in an integrated joint operation of those three separate industries. That left nothing unused but some faint smell not unlike that we get from across the river from time to time from the Eddy plants over in Hull.

I think we are making pretty good use of such natural resources as we have to consume. But I think we must continue to do so and must not lose sight of the fact that our children and grandchildren are going to be part of a nation of many millions more than there are Canadians alive today.

We must be as careful as we can be to conserve not only enough of our over-all resources to let each one of those many millions still have a fair share but we must also try to conserve our equality of opportunities for each one of them; opportunities sufficiently attractive in each and every one of our essential industries and fields of activity to retain sufficient numbers to carry on those industries and engage in those activities; agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining, manufacturing, transportation, trading, teaching in all its forms, the so-called learned professions - including health services and scientific research and the application of scientific discoveries - the arts in all their various cultural forms, governments - local, provincial and national -, the organization and direction of religious worship and so on.

All these and many others are activities essential to the welfare of a sturdy and growing nation.

And to keep them flourishing and in proper balance, the economy of the nation must be such that each one of these activities and those engaged in them can expect that they will get a fair share of the goods and services available to the nation as a whole, and that no sector will succeed in getting more than a fair share to the detriment of the other sectors.

Governments and parliaments and legislatures must do their part toward that end but they will be successful only in the measure in which they have the understanding and support and co-operation of the majority of the men and women of the whole nation.

At the present time we are enjoying unexampled tranquility and prosperity in Canada. The signs are that prosperity will be continued throughout 1953 in so far as anything likely to happen in Canada or, indeed, on this continent affects our situation. But the fortunate state and position of this country and this continent should not blind us to the fact that we are living in a very dangerous world. If we wish to retain for our own and for future generations the position in the world which we have now and to which Canada can reasonably aspire for the future, we have no choice but to take seriously all our responsibilities both at home and abroad. That is apt to require all the wisdom and experience, all the patience and perseverance the Canadian people can bring to bear upon their domestic and their world problems, as well as the most responsible leadership they can provide in every field of their activities.

This country must do its part at home and abroad, to build and to maintain the peaceful and balanced and prosperous world which is essential to peace and growth and prosperity for ourselves and for those who will come after us in this fair land of Canada. It can be done and I am one of those who feel confident it will be done.

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