



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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No. 55/18 An address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, to the Conference of United Nations Associations in Canada, at Ottawa, May 27, 1955.

This is, I believe, a unique meeting in Canada.

Not so long ago it would have been virtually impossible to find enough Canadians interested in what then may have seemed to be remote lands to make up a conference of this size and quality. Even if such a meeting could have been assembled, it would certainly not have been possible to hold the kind of serious and informed discussion which you will have over the next day and a half. Although many Canadian missionaries and a few of our businessmen had been in close touch with important aspects of life in these industrially backward countries, we did not until very recently have much familiarity with the problems of economic development confronting the people there; problems which took new forms and became even more acute with the "revolution of rising expectations" which accompanied the achievement of political independence and national life following the war.

We now have a considerable amount of experience on which to draw. For the past four or five years Canada, and a good number of Canadians personally - many of whom are here today - have been cooperating actively with the people of these countries in the development of their economies through the United Nations and its agencies and under the Colombo Plan. It is well that at this stage we should pause to take stock - or, better still, take stock without pausing which is what I see you are doing by having these meetings at the week-end!

I shall not attempt to foreshadow what you will hear from those who have been administering these programmes or actually working in the field. Neither will I venture to forecast what your conclusions will be at the end of your meetings. I would merely like to mention at this stage some of the general considerations which you may wish to have in mind as your discussions proceed.

There have been a great number and variety of estimates of the amount of outside assistance needed by the materially under-developed countries. There has also been considerable public discussion in Canada concerning the size of the contribution which we should be making, particularly in Asia. Questions of priority and proportion in the allocation of national revenues are always among the most difficult that governments have to face. I think we are at least all agreed that the needs are very large and that Canada should be doing its part to meet here. I believe also that all Canadians can take real satisfaction from what we are in fact doing;

even those who do not think that we are doing enough.

I would not want to indulge in rather empty comparisons between our efforts and those of other countries though I must say that Canada emerges quite well from such comparisons. I have no doubt you will be hearing something of the details of our contributions during your meetings. It is more important to know that we are doing many things which will be of substantial and lasting value to the countries which we are assisting. Our subscription to the International Bank is being put to good use. Our financial contributions, and the services of Canadian technicians and institutions, are doing valuable work through the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies in many parts of the world. The technical assistance and the aid in plant, equipment and materials which we are providing to South Asia under the Colombo Plan are beginning to show results. The aid which we are giving for relief and rehabilitation is helping to deal with particular emergencies and special cases. We are looking forward to playing our part by a substantial contribution to the constructive activities of the proposed International Finance Corporation in stimulating useful private industries in many of the under-developed countries.

In addressing this audience I would like to mention specially the work which the United Nations is doing in the field of economic development - the welfare approach to peace and international co-operation. The co-operative activity which has grown up within the United Nations in this field is one of the most heartening aspects of the international scene. Anyone who is inclined to feel discouraged by the difficulties encountered by the United Nations in its efforts to resolve world political problems might well reflect on the extent to which the countries comprising it have been able to co-operate in meeting the challenge of economic development on a world-wide basis. The activities of the United Nations in this field greatly surpass those of the old League of Nations and reflect a new spirit of international co-operation in this postwar period. I think, too, that the Commonwealth deserves much credit for the positive manner in which it responded to this same challenge by launching the Colombo Plan, in which many important countries outside the Commonwealth, notably the United States, are also participating. The Colombo Plan does not, of course, operate in isolation. There is very close collaboration between those participating in it and those responsible for the programmes of the United Nations.

So far as Canada is concerned it is, of course, desirable that we should review frequently the amount of aid to be made available in the light of our own situation and of the other things - some of essential and first importance, all useful - which we are trying to do. However, I think it would be a mistake for us to become preoccupied with the matter of amount to a point where we lose sight of the question of quality, which is also important. We should ask ourselves not only how much Canada should be doing, but how we should be doing it, and why?

To my mind this last question may in reality be about the most significant of all.

When I was talking at Princeton some weeks ago, I said I thought we should be sure of our reasons for providing help to the materially under-developed countries. I expressed the view that "if we of the West provide material aid only or primarily for cold war motives, we are likely to fail in achieving any good and permanent results." Speaking of Asia I said that I thought it "important to guard against any false idea that we can purchase or should try to purchase allies... The East will not become a mercenary in our ranks. It would be deplorable if Asians believed that Westerners had insulted their dignity, or misread their integrity, by entertaining such notions". You will, I hope, forgive me for quoting myself but I do think it

important that our motives should not only be, but appear to be, beyond reproach. This is an area of international and human relations which is so delicate and so open to misunderstanding that it is really not good enough even to be right for the wrong reasons. . . .

I would almost go so far as to suggest that in order to test our real motives we should ask ourselves from time to time whether we would be doing what we are if the political and military menace of Soviet and Chinese Communism did not exist. It sometimes seems to me that we in the West come near to owing at least one debt of gratitude to the international communists - and we have precious little else to thank them for over the past few years - for helping to keep us up to the mark in these matters. It is a sorry commentary on the postwar period that without them and the threat which they represent we might not so readily have done what we should have been doing anyway. Certainly we are glad that the majority of the economically under-developed countries, seeking to preserve their own heritage of human and spiritual values, have chosen to work out their economic destiny by democratic means. Their refusal to grasp for quick and illusory results at the price of freedom is a major contribution to the democratic cause throughout the world. It should for us be a matter of great satisfaction rather than sacrifice to be able to assist them to develop themselves in such a constructive and far-sighted manner. The lure of the alleged successes of communism and the threat which communist states present to the security of other countries and our own, add, of course to the urgency of the task. To my mind, however, there are other and even more substantial reasons for providing assistance to the under-developed countries and for co-operating effectively with them.

The genuine desire of Canadians to help others who are less fortunate, the recognition that the more quickly other people's standards of living rise the better off we shall all be, the conviction that economic and social progress are essential to a durable peace, the judgment that the resources of most of these countries are capable of supporting a fuller and richer life, the evident effort which the people of these countries are themselves making to improve their conditions, and the sympathy which we as citizens of a relatively young country feel with those who are trying to establish their own nations on a new and durable basis - all of these seem to me to be more solid and more fundamentally significant reasons for providing assistance.

Not only should we be sure that we are acting from worthy motives but we should also make certain that our method and manner of providing assistance are calculated to achieve our purposes most fully. As I suggested earlier, we should examine critically both why we are helping and how. Even the most massive amounts of money and vast numbers of technicians, if provided in the wrong way - that is, indiscriminately, extravagantly or without proper regard for the practical problems involved - might accomplish less than our present programmes and might in the process create a less wholesome relationship between the under-developed countries and the West.

So far we have I think been successful in this regard. We have undoubtedly made mistakes. That was inevitable in a novel venture - novel at least for Governments - in which it was necessary to proceed largely by trial and error. The errors have been fewer than might have been expected, however, thanks to the high quality of those directing and participating in the programmes and to the readiness of all concerned to benefit from the experience of one another.

None of us I am sure would say that improvements can still be made. One of the results of your discussion would be, I hope, to point up some of the respects in which we and the international agencies might do things better in the future.

In general we have probably all come to appreciate more fully the complexity of the operation in which we are engaged.

We have learned how difficult it is to secure the kind of people or the kind of training facilities really needed. We all know of experts or students who have been almost overwhelmed by the adjustments which they have had to undergo or the frustrations to which they have been subjected. Yet when the right kind of technical assistance has been supplied we have seen what returns and satisfactions it could bring.

We have, I think, - expert and laymen alike - come to realize also that assistance to these countries is not simply a matter of transplanting equipment or methods wholesale. We probably have now a new respect for many of the tools and techniques of the so-called "under-developed" countries. This is a healthy state of mind in which to approach the problems of these countries. We of the West may have been just a little too inclined to replace the old-fashioned "holier-than-thou" superiority attitude with a no less objectionable modern equivalent which might be expressed as "more know-how than thou". It has, I think, become apparent that in many cases a substantial adaptation is required in our ways of doing things to fit them to the conditions and cultures which exist and have existed for centuries and cannot easily be displaced. In fact, I believe it has been found in some cases that it is better to start with the local methods and tools, attempting to introduce only the minor changes which might be needed in them. These processes of adaptation are more difficult and more time-consuming than mere transplanting. But they are also more fruitful.

One field, however, in which it might seem that it will be practicable to transfer or transplant the technology of the West directly to the East is that of atomic energy. It would also appear that this source of energy will be of great value to those many under-developed economies which are lacking in ordinary sources of power. I am sure it is desirable that progress be made in the application of atomic energy to economic development as rapidly as possible. I think we shall find that the materially under-developed countries, some of whose scientists have already played a part in the development of nuclear physics, will themselves have a contribution to make in adapting this new discovery to their own conditions. The fact that an international meeting on the peaceful uses of atomic energy is taking place soon and that a distinguished Indian scientist is playing a leading role in organizing it offers promise for the future.

Returning to more "conventional" forms of assistance, I have no doubt that in your "round tables" you will be examining in considerable detail exactly how aid is now being provided. You will doubtless be considering the problems which arise in the provision of governmental assistance and also the prospects for an increasing flow of private investment. I shall, therefore, not attempt to generalize further on these matters at this luncheon meeting. I would, however, say again that we will make the most out of whatever resources are available if we go about it in the right way and in the right spirit. Only then will our aid have the maximum impact on our friends abroad and receive sustained support at home. As Canadians we are I think - and rightly so - less attracted by a shallow "do-good" appeal than by an effective "do-well" approach.

Before I close I would like to say how important in making these activities effective is the work which many of you are doing as private persons - and not only as taxpayers or informed critics, important as those roles undoubtedly are.

I have in mind particularly the attention which you have been giving to those who have come to our country for periods of training. These visitors must often find our ways strange and difficult to get used to. I am sure that they and we benefit greatly from the informal and friendly contacts which take place. While we do not want to create an artificial life for them here I think they should be encouraged to get to know us as we are and we in turn should seek to understand them better.

I am also impressed by the useful work which many of you are doing through voluntary agencies to provide assistance to other countries.

These personal contacts and voluntary activities have become more and not less important as we as a country have joined in the great international assistance programmes. If the people of these countries are to realize that we are genuinely concerned with their welfare and are not regarding our aid programmes as mere mechanical operations, it is important that they should know how deeply interested we as individuals are in them and in their problems and aspirations.

It has often been said that by far the larger part of the development programmes must come from the resources of the under-developed countries themselves. That is undoubtedly true. The fact that external aid may often be marginal does not, however, make it unimportant. Many a garment might unravel if it were not for the hem. In much the same way the fabric of economic and social life in many of these countries is strengthened by the function which outside assistance performs and by the evidence which it brings of widespread interest, sympathy and support.

It speaks well, I think, for the people of Canada that they are not so preoccupied with the challenging and difficult problems posed by the development of their own economy and the defence of their own security that they have no time to give aid - and thought - to the economic development of other countries who are struggling against much greater odds. In this way we are not only assisting the people of those countries to improve their material conditions and establish their lives in a more satisfying and self-respecting foundations, we are also helping them to make their full contribution to the enrichment of life on this planet of which we are a part - and sometimes a not too comfortable part.

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