



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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Education, Foreign Policy, and the Hydrogen Bomb

Address by the Honourable L.B. Pearson,
Secretary of State for External Affairs, at
the Ontario opening of Canadian Education
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To be asked to speak to an audience of teachers and others specially concerned with education, and to help initiate such a significant event as Education Week is a great privilege.

These days we talk a great deal of education. We are also prone to "weeks". Indeed, we now have such things foisted on us as "Eat More Prunes Week", "Be Kind to Mother-in-law Week", or even "Bow Tie Week"!

Education Week, however is something else, because if there was ever a time when it was wise to direct attention to the importance of education in our society, it is now; the kind of education that may start at kindergarten but goes on through life; that begins with the three R's, but includes the responsibilities of citizenship, and the pursuit of the good life.

Education, it has been said, is the "creation of finer human hungers".

If this is true, and I think it is as good a definition as any, then there is a lot of what is called "education" which has nothing to do with such creation. Indeed, there are in higher institutions of learning on this continent courses of study which have as little to do with education - or at least the right kind of education - as the World Hockey Championships, which were happily concluded in Germany this afternoon, have to do with the easing of international tensions.

Only yesterday I read in a newspaper - appropriately enough on the sporting page - that a university in the United States had added to its curriculum a course in "fresh and salt water fishing", and there are hundreds of similar examples of such lowering of the standards of education under the pressure of mass appeal or mass laziness or mass indulgence.

Goodness knows, I need instruction in fishing - both fresh and salt water - but I don't think I am entitled to it at the expense of the taxpayer, and I don't think it should be called education in any but a Pickwickian sense.

However, I take comfort from the words of the President of Columbia University that there is no curricular device which can prevent a student getting a good education, if he wants it.

I certainly do not wish to enter into a controversy over the proper balance between frills and fundamentals in education. That kind of controversy can make a political dispute seem mild. But surely it is obvious in this age when the necessity for honest and clear thinking is greater than ever before, when we are surrounded by, and, at times, engulfed in an unprecedented complexity of problems, moral, political and material, that the fundamentals of education, should take precedence over the frills.

One such fundamental, I venture to say, is the opportunity, indeed the obligation for every Canadian to be at home in both the languages of Canada. I speak on this feelingly, as one who was not subjected to such an educational regime when he was young. I was unwisely permitted to choose -- this was of course many years ago -- when things were different -- between French and other modern or ancient languages. My choice was a sorry reflection, primarily on me, but also on a system which assessed in that way the relative importance in our national life of various languages.

Another fundamental, and I feel pretty strongly about this, is that the status, prestige, and compensation of the teacher in the community must be raised. Communist states could teach us something here, though their teaching itself has been prostituted to wrong and often evil ends.

Communist experience shows us also how easy it is for education to create, not "finer" human hungers, but those desired by the state for selfish, dangerous political purposes; prejudices, hatreds, fears, violence.

We have evidence before us every day to show the power that communist educational systems can exert over the mind and the soul. We have also the horrible experience of Nazi Germany to prove what evil education can do to a single generation. We know that such education can bend and warp the mind, especially when it adopts, not the simple techniques of the little Red School House, 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.

This kind of so-called education, which arouses in us feelings of discouragement and even

despair, can be devilishly effective in the wrong way. Indeed 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.

By now I have no doubt given myself away as an ex-teacher. Perhaps there is nothing so tiresome as an ex-anything who presumes to give counsel in matters concerning which he has once had some experience and now has no responsibility. This is a dangerous combination and often produces advice and conclusions divorced from reality and practicability.

I will try to avoid these pitfalls by turning to matters closer to my present profession than to my former.

What I have to say about foreign affairs, however, is certainly closely related to the necessity for good education and for the realization by the community of its vital bearing on our national and international problems.

Those problems today are intimidating, and seem overwhelming, in their complexity and intractability. One unattractive result of this - and education can help to correct this, - possibly as nothing else can, is the growth of defeatism and cynicism; of the feeling that we ourselves can't do much about anything; of an unwillingness even to make the mental effort required to understand. All this results in a growing tendency not only to shift responsibility from ourselves to the state, but to minimize and shrug off the efforts of others who take their responsibilities as citizens more seriously.

I admit that it is tempting to switch from the Citizens' Forum to Jackie Gleason. I have been known to yield to it occasionally. But if the switch became automatic and universal, the results on our democratic society would be disastrous.

I am particularly conscious of the danger of cynicism and defeatism as applied to the solution of international problems; to the search for peace. There are times, I confess, when one feels impotent and frustrated to the point where everything in this field seems almost hopeless. Yet it is essential, both for citizens and for nations to reject this belittling and negative reaction to the discouraging confusion of present day events.

Today, the choice, literally, which we face, is whether we will live in peace or live at all.

This choice between peace and death is not, of course, a very new one. In our own

lifetime a hundred thousand Canadians have so chosen; have given their lives to preserve the things that we enjoy in peace today in this very fortunate country; to ensure that our values, our standards, might continue to thrive in home, school and church, and in the minds of our children.

But if the history of sacrifice in war is to repeat itself, it will now be on a scale increased to the point of universal tragedy and destruction. It is this frightening advance in the science of destruction, unaccompanied by anything like it in the social sciences or in political morality, that has given rise, I think, to much of the cynicism that marks and moves the discussion of world affairs today. If we believe that not only will material destruction be total, but that ideals and principles and all good and related things will go with it, we will, almost inevitably, yield in cynical resignation to the inevitable.

This attitude is often rationalized by the argument that nothing anyone can do today has any effect on the course of world affairs. Great events, according to this view, are governed by mysterious and irresistible forces or perhaps by a few powerful and highly placed persons. Ordinary people may be the agents or the objects of these mysterious powers, but they cannot influence them. All humanity are passengers on one of two trains which are running toward each other and whether they crash or not is something that the passengers cannot do anything about.

This desolate conclusion is a matter for grave concern because it leads to indifference and irresponsibility, and that, in turn, makes certain the very situation which the cynics assume already exists. If we act, individually or nationally, on the assumption that we are helpless by-standers, then we will soon become just that.

In free societies such an attitude may indeed turn out to be an invitation to extinction. Just as the wish is often the father to the thought, so cynicism and resignation often beget the very situation that is most feared. Indeed, in their most sophisticated forms, they are themselves forms of fear, and they can come close to despair. This, in fact, is the acknowledgement of defeat before the struggle has even begun. Nor is it justified by a reasoned examination of all the facts including, indeed especially, the most disagreeable.

If an examination of international affairs in 1955 does not seem to offer much ground for optimism, this, should be a reason for not running away from the facts but for having a fresh and deep look at them. It is least of all the time to accept the cold comfort of a cynical wisecrack.

I certainly do not suggest that we become a nation of Pollyannas, or keep whistling in the dark. But there is no harm in turning on the light.

What are some of the international facts we will find?

By far the most important of them - so much the most important that nothing else is comparable - is the release of the power of the atom, and the direction, up to the present, of that release primarily into destructive channels.

It is not easy to adjust our thinking to the implications of this new power that men have learned to set off, but not subdue. Indeed, it is even difficult to understand its extent. The mind can hardly take it in, and when it does the senses tend to reject what the mind has grasped.

Until ten years ago, the most powerful weapons were, I suppose, the ten-ton TNT bombs, or so-called block-busters. The atomic fission bomb dropped at Hiroshima, which revolutionized warfare, had the power of 20,000 tons of TNT; was a thousand times more powerful. But the power of hydrogen weapons, which today exist in significant and growing numbers, is measured in the so-called megaton, or the equivalent of a million tons of TNT. They are as many times more powerful than the Hiroshima weapon as that one was compared to the big bomb of the last war.

If one of these thermonuclear weapons burst near the surface of Ottawa, it would, by its blast and heat, not only obliterate this city, but through the fall-out effect of radioactive material, it would probably gravely endanger the lives of all people exposed in Montreal and its vicinity as well; also contaminate that city that it would have to be evacuated. If the winds, including those up to 80,000 feet above the earth, were going faster than usual, the area of lethal contamination might be much larger.

There is no reason to think that this fearsome process cannot be pushed further yet, if men wish. Indeed, it will be much easier to continue along this dread line, to which I see no theoretical limits, than it will be to change direction by finding a method of controlling this new power. But only in such a change of direction, I suggest, can there be any ground for satisfaction at this stupendous human achievement in the physical sciences.

We have now reached the position where man has to sit on such a bomb or have it drop on him. Neither prospect is comfortable or comforting, but we have no other choice.

Because the bomb is such an uncomfortable seat, there are even a few who imagine that anything would be preferable to this position,

even preventive war. This, of course, would be the supreme folly, especially when we have no reason to despair of finding an easier peace than that which goes by the name of "cold war"; or to give up faith and hope. In my opinion, there are now grounds for believing in the victory, not of arms, but of reason. There are no grounds of any kind for believing that a preventive war would result in anything but total tragedy.

To this the cynic may reply that history shows that an arms race carried on in an atmosphere of fear and hostility (and who will say we are not now in the midst of such a race?) always ends in whatever arms are available being used.

This is not an unreasonable deduction from history, but I maintain that it does not necessarily apply to the situation in which we now find ourselves. There is, in fact, simply no parallel in history that can be applied to our special and unique problem - the Hydrogen Bomb. We must find our own solution outside all past experiences and the key to it may lie in the very nature of the weapon itself.

For the first time it is now possible to predict the outcome of a war with a pretty fair degree of certainty. What a difference it would have made if rational people everywhere could have known in advance what the results of the last two world wars would almost certainly have been. Such mad fanatics as Hitler and his disciples would probably not have been discouraged from war by the virtual certainty of their doom. That is a characteristic of madmen. But could they have commanded the support which, even in a totalitarian state, is essential to launch a war in the first place? Would Germans have given Hitler the support he required to wage war if they could have known in advance the fate that would befall them; that their cities would be reduced to ruins and desolation, their hopes to dust and ashes.

In supporting the view that we can now predict fairly accurately the outcome of a nuclear war, I would point to two basic facts of the Atomic Age that all responsible persons on all sides of all curtains are aware of. The first is that in this divided world each side has the power to smash and grievously injure the other side. The second is, and this is terribly important, that neither side can prevent the other from using this power. If both sides remain alert, there is very little likelihood of being able to prevent nuclear retaliation against attack. Nor is distance now any protection against such retaliation. Geography has been neutralized, if not nullified. The Hydrogen Bomb is a leveller in more ways than one.

As Sir Winston Churchill put it in that very moving and memorable speech he made last week in London:

"To this form of attack continents are vulnerable as well as islands. Hitherto crowded countries like the United Kingdom and Western Europe, have had this outstanding vulnerability to carry. But the hydrogen bomb, with its vast range of destruction and the even wider area of contamination, would be effective also against nations whose population hitherto has been so widely dispersed over large land areas as to make them feel that they were not in any danger at all."

If my assessment of the situation is correct, either side can now reduce its enemy to the point where it would be incapable of pursuing total war as a modern industrial state. But in so doing it would itself be reduced to the same condition.

Therefore, assuming that the opponents were roughly equal to start with, they would be roughly equal after they had irradiated each other. True, perhaps one side may have a larger stockpile of superior bows and arrows than the other, or even a numerically superior army somewhere out of reach of the first atomic onslaught. But is there a madman with a sufficient number of other madmen behind him to start such a nightmare on the theory that the devastation of his country might be slightly less than that of his enemy? It is hard to believe that any leader of any nation has reached that stage.

It has been said that the present situation is like that of two men with loaded revolvers pointed at each other's head. But there is this important difference; the possibility of escaping retaliation by pulling the trigger first does not exist. In this particular horror comic, which is not at all funny, the revolvers are pointed at equally vital, but not instantly mortal parts. The death of the enemy may or may not be brought about by such an attempt, but it would not be instantaneous and it would not prevent him from administering equally grievous wounds. In this context preventive war is not only a moral impossibility - at least for our side - but impossible in practice by either side. This leads to the question: might not the time be approaching when the same may be said of any sort of war?

This is what Sir Winston Churchill meant when he used these striking words:

"It may well be that we shall - by a process of sublime irony - have reached a stage where safety will be the sturdy child of terror and survival the twin brother of annihilation."

I would not, however, leap too quickly to this conclusion and the comfort I get from it is qualified. We have had a number of bloody but

non-nuclear fights in the world since the Atomic and even the Hydrogen Bomb were invented. War, it seems, can be waged in the atomic age without the use of atomic weapons. Furthermore, there are two situations in which, it seems to me, these nuclear weapons might be used even in the knowledge of the dangers that might result from doing so.

First, if an aggressor knew that his victim had become weak and careless and had ignored the necessity of keeping ready for instant and resolute use the means of swift and powerful nuclear retaliation. Weakness here would remove the deterrent effect of the possession of nuclear war power. That is why the primary and persistent objective of Communist policy is to lull us into a false sense of security and persuade us to destroy all atomic weapons prior to any other form of carefully supervised disarmament.

Secondly, a nation which was on the verge of conquest by what we now, ironically, call conventional weapons would be under impossible pressure not to use nuclear weapons if they were available.

It is inconceivable that any general would stand by and watch his troops being defeated by an overwhelming superiority of numbers while he had in his arsenal a means which might restore the situation. Would we, or our possible enemies, permit ourselves, or they, themselves, to go down under a foreign invader while in possession of any weapon that might stop him? The answer is no. Indeed, the decisive nature of the weapon would itself likely determine in favour of using it if the alternative were defeat and destruction by other weapons.

In a war of limited area and limited objectives, as in Korea, nuclear weapons could be put aside. But in total war, it would be different. Sooner or later, the hydrogen bomb would be employed and the horrors of nuclear attacks would be visited on both sides.

So we must face the practical certainty that if any general war is allowed to begin, it would become nuclear war, and both sides would have to face the catastrophic consequences. Surely, any creature capable of reason must prefer the present situation, however unsatisfactory, to such consequences. Surely, too, both sides would prefer to tolerate the uncertainties of present day life to the certainties of nuclear war. Surely, finally, the alternative to peace is now so horrible, that all governments will eventually come to realize that peace must be made secure.

There remain, however, these local wars which, without involving atomic annihilation, have nevertheless caused much blood and much sorrow. The threat of the H-bomb may not

put a stop to them. Perhaps the greatest danger to world peace at this moment is that limited wars may begin or continue, with the ever present possibility that they will spread like a bush fire until the conflagration is general and then the bomb is dropped.

Against this gradual or accidental war it is the duty of diplomacy and wise policy to protect us. In recent years lines have been drawn across a great many maps; Korea and Indochina are two examples. More such lines remain to be drawn to mark off the areas where shooting is, by agreement, out of season and violators will, by agreement, be prosecuted. Defiance of the agreement must be met by force but violators will know from the beginning what the consequences may be.

This of course is not a very satisfactory state of affairs. For one thing, it means that we must keep our defences strong, our guard up; and that a great part of our energies and our resources cannot be left free for our own peaceful development. This is what is called in diplomatic language a modus vivendi, "a means of living". It is a far cry from "a way of life".

But is war between the great powers of the world can be avoided, not by compromise on principles but on an understanding of the consequences of war, then I believe time is on our side if we use it. As it becomes apparent that neither side is going to try to impose its will on the other by force, the tense peace, imposed by the awe of hideous destruction, but which is after all far removed from real peace, may relax to the point where such real peace may be achieved; where co-existence - a sterile concept - may become co-operation. After all, violence is the chosen method for the advancement of communism, and without the threat of violence that ideology would hold no terrors for us. Our method is peaceful persuasion and perhaps we are approaching a juncture in history when violence might seem less attractive to its devotees than discussion and agreement. We must work on in that hope; never give up. Otherwise at worst we will descend to the depths of destruction of nuclear war; or at best we will keep living in that twilight zone in which peace - such as it is - will depend, not as of old on a balance of power, but on a balance of terror.

It can be seen that whatever happens we will need, in the trying circumstances that we face, strong nerves, and deep faith; great wisdom and patience and understanding. And we will have to shape our education and our teaching more than ever to these ends.

Good and universal education alone is not the answer to our problems but we will not find that answer unless education is widespread and good and follows right principles; is made the strong foundation for national life.

So - for that reason - may I end where I began by stating again my gratitude at the privilege of participating in something so vitally important to us all as Education Week.

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