



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE WESTERN WORLD IN SEARCH OF A VISION

An Address by the Right Honourable L. B. Pearson,
Prime Minister of Canada, at the Atlantic Union
Award Dinner, Springfield, Illinois, June 11, 1966.

In conferring on me an Atlantic Union Pioneer award this afternoon, you have done me high honour for which I am very grateful. You have confirmed my admission into ranks of the Atlantic Pioneer Corps, and have chosen for the confirmation this historic setting of New Salem and Springfield, steeped in memories of one of the towering figures of history.

At the same time you have added to my feeling of grateful appreciation by coupling my name with those of Christian Herter and Adlai Stevenson as recipients of the Atlantic award. I know, as you do, how much we owe to these two men. Not only the United States and Canada, not only the Atlantic Community, but the whole world is in their debt.

Mr. Herter is an old and valued friend, about whom I will say only that high ideals and constructive achievement have characterized everything he has done, in the service of his country and of free men. I wish he could have been with us this evening.

Adlai Stevenson was also my friend. When he died I tried, as many others did, to pay him tribute. We all tried and I think we all failed, because it is still too soon to take the true measure of this man and his contribution to our times. He wore out more than his shoe-leather in the persistent and patient search for peace and better relations between nations. In spite of all the difficulties (sometimes it seemed the impossibilities), in spite even of his own occasional doubts, he served with grace and distinction, with devotion and wisdom, the vision of what the world could be and what it must become. His was a more significant service than anything a man could do for himself or for his own political aspirations. Though he was denied the Presidency of his country in favour of others who shared his ideals, he gave an inspiring lead, especially at the United Nations, to his own people and to all people in the search for those ultimate and essential goals which we must reach or perish.

As I look back on the years through which we have passed since the second great war of this century, I am struck by the fact that our destinies have depended so very much on the vision and leadership of a few men; on their

understanding of what, at a particular moment, was the right way out of danger, and the right way to move ahead. These rare individuals had always before them an ideal of human brotherhood, of a world at peace and with freedom. They also had a firm and confident sense of direction in trying to achieve their ideal. Chris Herter and Adlai Stevenson are such men.

Clarence Streit is another who for many long years now has accepted the challenge of a great idea - the idea of a federal union of the peoples lying on both sides of the North Atlantic as a step to an even wider union of all men. That idea has not yet been realized. Indeed, in some of the Atlantic countries, it seems at the moment to be of little interest. But it is acting upon the societies of our two countries and I believe is doing the same, although perhaps less noticeably, in Europe. It has life and dynamism. Its impact on politics in North America has increased and this is bound to convey a reflection on the other side of the Atlantic.

NATO - the Atlantic alliance - is an encouraging, if imperfect, reflection of this ideal. It has served us well for the past 16 years. NATO could hardly have achieved its political and its military expression, however, if the yeast of the Atlantic unity idea had not been at work before the Treaty of 1949 was signed. When Clarence Streit published Union Now, he was called a visionary, a dreamer. How could governments and peoples, long imbued with their own proud traditions of history, of nationalism, and of sovereignty, how could they give up some of their very substance, of their state freedom, to form a union with other nations -- even for those national purposes which, the history of our century has shown, could no longer be achieved except by collective action? But they did.

If the lessons of history are depressing, it is because they seem never to be learned - at least until it is too late. Yet we can also take some comfort from this historical record, as we look at the scene around us and the road ahead.

If we tend to become too depressed over the troubles that face the world today, we should recall how things seemed in the Atlantic world in the forties.

In 1948, it was our hope that Western Europe and North America, working through co-operating national governments, could provide a nucleus of military strength, economic prosperity and political stability, around which a global balance could be re-established and the extension by force of aggressive Communist imperialism be stopped. We did not know at that time whether this would be possible at all. We did not know, whether, if it were possible, it would take, five, ten, 20 or 50 years to accomplish. We certainly cannot even say today that it has been accomplished. But we have reached a kind of provisional framework - an equilibrium - in which we can live together, both we and the Communist states in Europe, with a hope for progress to something better than mere co-existence.

Indeed, some of our troubles today are the results of our successes in these recent years. In 1948, we were anxious and frightened - with cause - at the threatened extension westward of totalitarian Communism, into those European countries which, while still free, were badly shaken in their political

confidence and almost completely disrupted in their economic life. After the war our problems were of immediate, not ultimate, survival. But today we are concerned with longer-range problems of peace, of prosperity, of development. This is a measure of our progress.

Once the course of history has been changed, even a little, we are prone to look back and regard that change as inevitable. But in 1945, as we looked ahead, there seemed nothing inevitable or certain about the reconstruction of a democratic, prosperous, independent Western Europe that was to take place. There seemed nothing inevitable about a change in the old American habit of peace-time isolation, which had been dominant for 150 years. It was far from inevitable that countries that had never in peace-time pooled any part of their sovereignty would do so now and together organize a collective defence that, in the conditions of the modern world, might prove effective enough to deter another war. We were up against physical destruction, economic stagnation and political defeatism. Vast human and material resources had been blown away and destroyed in war. Out of this waste and weariness could we really construct something new that might help to meet and solve our problems?

Well - it was done. Gradually, hesitantly, painfully, but steadily, things were done. An alliance that was designed to be more than military was welded together in peace-time. Its members began to believe in the possibility of a secure peace - of a good life. Indeed, as the years went by, many even began to forget or ignore the continuing dangers of a yet more horrible war. So they became impatient with the structures and the processes that had made their own comfortable conclusions possible. They - some people and some governments - began to fall back into those historic nationalist grooves which had been the source of so much of the bloodshed and conflict and chaos they had recently endured. With recovery came also impatience and doubt and some distrust.

We should have seen this happening in the Atlantic alliance and countered it. In December 1964, Canada proposed in NATO a reassessment of the nature of the alliance in the light of these changing conditions. Little was done.

Unhappily, it is man's weakness to cling to the ideas, the institutions and the habits of the past - even the recent past - instead of adapting them to the needs of today and tomorrow. So it was with NATO. The weight of inertia and a vested interest in a new status quo, felt especially among the most powerful governments of the alliance, made it difficult to find anyone in a responsible position on either side of the Atlantic who was prepared to come forward and specify in any detail what should be changed. A lot of people were talking about the need for change but nobody, no government, in a position of power was really doing much about it. Then abrupt and unilateral action by France thrust change upon us. Crisis, as always, forced our hands.

We should have acted earlier and not under the compulsion of events. We should have tried to move forward together to a closer international association in order to remove the risk of sliding backwards. In these matters, there is no standing still. Surely the course that should have been taken - should still be taken - is clear.

Today, the facts, the compulsions, and the opportunities lead inexorably toward closer international association and away from the self-sufficient sovereignty of the nation state. The jet planes that fly, the rockets that range in outer space, the universal revolution of rising expectations, combined with the speed of technological change which make their realization possible -- all these make it essential that we move ahead in the field of political and social organization in a way which is at least remotely comparable to our technological and scientific progress.

We can begin with the "like-minded" Atlantic nations, which have already acquired a sense of community and a habit of co-operation, but we must include, ultimately, all mankind. The world is too small for less, yet we continue to boggle even at the first careful steps.

If there is anything that has been made crystal clear by the grim experience of half a century, it is that neither peace nor security nor prosperity can be achieved or maintained by national action alone - or by national policy alone.

So this is no time to weaken in our support for the NATO alliance because it is having difficulties. We must solve these difficulties. But we must not stop there. We must move forward with new resolve toward an international community with common political institutions which covers more than a single continent and spans the Atlantic.

It must also be more than a military alliance. Try as we might, we have never been able to make NATO much more than that. An alliance for defence only, however, is an anachronism in the world of 1966, especially when nuclear power is not shared, by possession or by control, among its members. As Professor Hans Morgenthau has put it: "It is no longer possible to rely completely on the promise of a nuclear ally to forfeit its very existence on behalf of another nation." A guarantee of nuclear support against aggression simply does not now have the credibility that would make it a fully effective deterrent and therefore a guarantee of security.

I repeat, we must develop common, unifying political institutions which would provide for collective foreign and economic policies, as well as genuinely collective defence.

Nothing less will be adequate to meet today's challenge of jets and rockets and hydrogen bombs.

As a leader of a government, I am very conscious that politics is the art of the possible. Anyone with political responsibility must think in terms of what can be done at any given time -- of what public opinion will accept. He must not allow the best to become the enemy of the good. Nevertheless, if we don't keep "the best" always before us as an eventual and essential objective, not only shall we never reach it -- we may even fail to reach the more immediate and good objectives. Nor should we always wait for a crisis to force us to act.

In 1940, Britain - only a few years before cool and confident behind its channel - proposed full union with France. It was the moment when continental Europe was about to fall victim to the Nazi aggressor. The offer was too late. Offers made under the imminence of defeat and collapse, for radical and immediate action to implement ideas which the day before yesterday were considered as visionary and unrealistic, such offers always are too late. Do we have to have panic before we can make progress?

At this moment, moreover, a feeling of discouragement is more likely to work in the wrong way -- not in the transformation of NATO into something better, but in its reduction into something less. This is a very real danger. French policy has underlined it.

General de Gaulle has rejected Atlantic defence integration. He has ordered France's withdrawal from the North Atlantic defence organization. In doing so, his procedures have been brusque and his ideas understandably disturbing to France's friends and allies.

It would be foolish, however, to push the panic button over this. By doing so, we might merely push France not only from the NATO military organization but out of the Atlantic alliance itself. And France does not want to leave the alliance.

It would be shortsighted, also, not to realize that the attitude of Western Europe to American commitments in Europe is changing, just as the attitude of Eastern Europe toward Moscow is changing.

We should not try to throw all the blame on France and General de Gaulle for recent NATO developments. Some of General de Gaulle's decisions, I know, have been disconcerting and seem to indicate a return to a kind of nationalism from which France has suffered as much in the last 50 years as any country in the world. Before we condemn, however, we should try to understand what is behind France's recent actions. France is not, has not been, and will not be, satisfied with an Atlantic organization, or an Atlantic alliance of independent states, dominated by America. France, and not only France, feels that continental Europe is now strong enough (in large part because of the generous assistance of the U.S.A.) to be given its rightful share in the control of the policies of the alliance.

While France is not alone in this feeling, only de Gaulle has translated it into policy and action. If he has gone too far in that action (as I think he has), if he is on the wrong course, we should not drive him farther in the wrong direction but try to bring him back to the right course by seriously re-examining the purposes and the organization of NATO in the light of 1966, not 1948. As I have said, we should have done it years ago. If the reason for General de Gaulle's action is his belief that the other allies will not consider any change to NATO to meet new conditions, let's take positive action about the necessary reforms. Surely it doesn't make sense any longer to take the position that NATO is sacrosanct and mustn't be altered. Our reaction should be just the opposite.

In short, to rail at General de Gaulle, because he is demanding, for France, a position in the Atlantic alliance equal to that of Britain and somewhat closer to that of the U.S.A. is to show a dangerous misunderstanding of the situation.

May I refer on this point to some observations in Max Frankel's penetrating article, "Our Friends, the French", in the April number of Freedom and Union?

Mr. Frankel is somewhat critical of his own country's share in the responsibility for NATO, as he puts it, "becoming an anachronism whose defensive or military purposes were long ago overtaken by technological change and whose diplomatic purposes we have never managed to define or construct". He believes that not de Gaulle's stubbornness but a long chain of events and conflicting governmental policies - including those of the United States - has caused the disarray.

I do not see the Atlantic nations going forward together to a secure and hopeful future without France. Therefore, we must find a way out of our present NATO difficulties so that France can fully participate in the march to greater, not less, Atlantic unity.

We must not give up the ultimate vision of closer Atlantic unity just because some clouds are obscuring the immediate future of NATO.

Indeed, a new move forward to realize the greater vision may help remove some of the nearer clouds.

We must now look at the picture ahead of us with the courage and imagination we showed 17 years ago when the NATO pact was signed. Taking this same cradle area of the Atlantic nations, we must ask ourselves what sort of Atlantica would we like our children to inherit from us in five years, ten years, 20 years? What sort of vision of the future can we hold up as a rallying point, as an objective of policy, without pretending that it must turn out the way we wish but convinced in our own minds that, given goodwill, dedicated hard work, and a certain amount of good luck, it could be that way.

This forward march must be Atlantic, and not merely European or North American. But it must provide for more control by Europe of its direction and its character -- a Europe, moreover, which would include Britain.

I realize that a united Europe, would, in its political, economic and military decisions, be more independent of Washington than is the case now. But what is wrong about this?

There are those who worry about the "separateness" of such a European development and who would therefore prefer to concentrate now on the federal union of all the Atlantic peoples, even at the expense of earlier European union. If we are realistic, however, we may have to accept at this time the more practical immediate objective of a united Europe -- not as an obstacle to, but as a stage on the way to, Atlantic union.

If we cannot at present achieve a pattern of Atlantic federalism, it may be necessary to acknowledge the realities of the situation and, as North Americans, work with Europeans in the hope that, in the longer sweep of history, both European and North American will come to realize that their respective affairs can best be harmonized in a wider union. If an intervening European stage is necessary, however, it must be taken not in continental isolation but in close Atlantic co-operation and understanding.

As I try to grope my own way towards a conception that would make sense for North America, and for both Western and even Eastern Europe, I am convinced that we cannot insist on retaining NATO in its present form as the only foundation for building a more genuinely international structure more appropriate for the future. I am equally sure that continentalism, either of the European or North American variety, is not the answer.

Finally, I believe that only the United States can give the effective lead required for Atlantic unity. Without its active participation and support, nothing can be done -- at least on the broad front which is essential. Without its leadership, we shall be driven back to a national or continental solution for the organization of security and for progress.

So we in other countries should be heartened by the fact that 111 senators and congressmen, from 34 states and from both parties, have co-sponsored or supported the resolution on Atlantic unity -- along with ex-presidents, former presidential candidates and governors. The list includes two names that mean much to all free citizens throughout the world -- President Truman and President Eisenhower.

With this kind of backing, with this kind of understanding and vision, who dares not take this initiative seriously?

Years ago, before the North Atlantic Treaty or the United Nations Charter, even before the United States or Canada had ever been heard of, when the Sioux and the Blood Indians hunted over the western prairies, their young men, on coming of age, would retire alone to some hill or mountain. There, in solitude, fasting, watching, they would seek before entering on their adult years to look at themselves with the best that was in them, to purify their thought and their feeling, and to seek the guideposts they would try to live by as men. This solitary vigil they called "crying for a vision". Now, more than ever before, we need as individuals, as nations, to "cry for a vision", and then, with devotion and persistence, to strive for its realization. It is a tribute to the peoples who live on both sides of the Atlantic that, at critical times in their history, they have always rallied to a great and challenging cause once they were convinced that this was the right and necessary thing to do.

Tonight I pay my humble tribute to those good and brave men (some are present here tonight) who have this conviction and who are working with single-minded dedication to lay the foundation of policy and action looking toward a union of peoples for peace and freedom.

What we seek is new and unprecedented. But so is our world. Abraham Lincoln once said: "As our case is new, so we must think and act anew."

Today, we must think anew and act anew.

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