



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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An address by The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L. B. Pearson, to the Assembly of The National Council of The Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Boston, Massachusetts, December 2, 1954.

Some centuries before the Christian era, a Greek philosopher proclaimed to all who would listen that "Man is the measure of all things." In this age of gadgets and geophysics, that wisdom is worth recalling. The recognition of the individual man as the fundamental criterion of all things temporal, of institutions and social orders, has been one of the great liberating forces of history. Among its monuments in Western civilization are the achievements of the Renaissance, of the great humanist movements, and of liberal democracy.

Today, however, too often government, and particularly, of course, totalitarian government has taken the measure of man, and reduced him in the process to the level of a machine. Man, of course, must bear some share of the responsibility for this when they measure themselves by any but the highest standards.

The besetting danger of democratic societies has always been that men may, like the prodigal son, sell themselves "short." It is all too easy to accept the shoddy and second-rate in place of that which is first-class; to be satisfied with counterfeits, so long as they promise to pass muster with a majority; and then to seek to evade the inevitable emptiness which these things produce by ingenious escapisms. There is a world of difference between tolerance and indifference. "I couldn't care less" is the slogan of the voluntarily disinherited who in art seek the contemporary in place of the timeless, and in politics seek the safe in place of the enduring.

When men lower their sights and reduce their standards in this way, they become increasingly forgetful of their true nature and unaware of their full possibilities. This makes it easier for them to be treated as pawns to be used merely for the achievement of some ulterior political purpose.

It is sobering to recognize how frequently, today, in democracies as well as elsewhere, the very

vocabulary used to describe and analyse man's political actions is taken from fields whose subject matter, far from being warm and human, is cold and inanimate. If politicians are praised or blamed, as they often are, more for being architects of social institutions than for anything else, they may come to regard the preparation of blueprints as their most important function. We should be skeptical of such blueprints. The work of the politician or diplomat or social scientist should be more like that of a gardener than a draftsman; for he is dealing with living things, and at best is only preparing the ground for their growth.

As Professor Butterfield has recently remarked:

"The makers of blueprints are sometimes like the child who, on seeing the sunset, said: 'Do it again Daddy,' or the child, who thought that it was the gardener who actually made things grow. We seek too great a sovereignty over our history. It is wiser to imagine ourselves as rather preparing the ground where many of the most important things in life will grow of themselves."

Among other things, the gardener knows the value of patience, the absence of which is so dangerous in international politics. Patience is not weakness, and should not be lost if in today's difficult and complex diplomatic problems we are unable to achieve spectacular victories, or sudden, and clear-cut solutions; the kind for which we have a passion because decisiveness has been the keystone of so much material advance on this continent. To the extent that this need for patience is inadequately understood, public opinion in democracies may tend to make self-defeating demands on its own political servants. Or even worse, force them into rash and unwise actions.

Moreover, it is worth considering whether sensational diplomatic victories are always desirable, even when they are possible. Serious, constructive diplomacy should always have its eye on long-term results. Diplomatic conversations are often likely to be more permanently successful when designed to convince the other government rather than to satisfy the immediate emotions of the spokesman's own people. In a democracy, this demands not only courage on the part of public men, but maturity and generous understanding on the part of public opinion.

Two weeks ago I noticed in an editorial, aptly entitled "Brickbat Corner" in the London Economist, the following sentence:

"Independent journalism serves no useful purpose unless editors are prepared to use their immunity from popular wrath to say things that would lose millions of votes if said by politicians or start a strike if uttered by the heads of a corporation."

Serving such a purpose can be a valuable and vital function, not only of independent journalism, but also of those who preach and those who are political servants of the state.

This subjection and submergence of the individual by the totalitarian planners and the architects of grandiose social and political structures emanates basically from a belief in and employment of the doctrine of historical determinism.

The more I see of the policies and processes of government, the more remarkable it seems to me that serious and intelligent men could ever have brought themselves to propound, or to accept, such a doctrine; that we are slaves of fate and playthings of destiny. Such a view is only comprehensible when the human intellect loses or surrenders touch with its spiritual bearings.

Such a surrender is, of course, the essence of all theories of determinism. It not only blurs but blots out the whole question. For precisely what gives significance to life and history and politics, is the possibility which men and nations always possess - though they by no means always use it - of acting creatively in their environment, rather than merely reacting to it. To some extent, of course, all men transmit to the future impulses determined by the conditioning of the past, or respond almost mechanically to impulses from outside. But men can do more than this. If they will, they can always, in some degree, transform the situation in which they find themselves. They can take creative action which, while tailor-made, as it were, to fit the environment, is in no sense merely a product of it.

The whole of our belief in the possibility of constructive action, whether by men or nations, is, of course, based on the assumption that man, and his mind, are more than merely products of heredity and environment; that he does have this possibility of contact with the realm of the spirit. Public opinion and political judgment, therefore, are bound to reflect among other things the level of a people's moral insight and spiritual stature. This is as true in international as in domestic affairs.

I have often heard it said, as I am sure you have, and particularly regarding foreign politics, that governments pursue their national interest irrespective of moral considerations. This verdict, I think, begs most of the real questions. Of course, governments pursue the national interest, as they conceive it. That is their duty. The real questions are, however, first, how accurately governments (or people) can discern what is the real national interest, and secondly, how wisely they act in trying to reach the goals which they set. But here moral, even more than political, insight is required to decide where your real interest lies, and how to achieve it.

The foreign policy of a democracy is thus in large part a product and a test of the moral insight of a whole people.

In stressing the decisive relation of moral considerations to effective judgment -- in international affairs as in other fields of activity -- I am not, of course, suggesting that all political and diplomatic questions should be regarded as issues between right and wrong. Far from it. A moral approach to problems does not require that we should see all of them in simple terms of challenges to righteousness; or of black and white.

Indeed, the contrary is true, and gray is the prevailing shade. This should induce humility and tolerance. Some wise words on this subject were spoken by Professor Brebner when he spoke at the Columbia University bicentennial convocation on October 30 last. He said:

"During recent years, a hurricane of investigations and persecutions has lashed those parts of the earth where men in political authority have conceived themselves to be compelled to maintain one set of values and to attach all others. Throughout these operations, nothing has been more dreadful than the common assumption that every man must at all times be 'right.' Surely this intolerance of variation is the insolent vain-glory and self-assurance that the Greeks denominated hubris, the basic, the suicidal sin. In our time this sin may take the form of worshipping the power over nature or over human nature, or the deification of a man, an economic entity, a political party or a nation state."

An arrogant Pharisaism and smug satisfaction with one's own superior righteousness, in a person or in a nation, are not only unamiable qualities, they are not conducive to clear political judgment. He whose humility and moral sensitivity is least highly developed, is most likely to confuse principle with questions of fact or expediency, and to make an easy subconscious identification of his own viewpoint with the cause of right.

Furthermore, self-righteousness in international affairs is likely to lead to rigidity of thought and intolerance of other views. This often prevents a wise understanding of complex and changing situations; and tends to make diplomacy captive and inflexible.

There has, for example, been a tendency in recent years, for public conferences between governments, at least those where the U.S.S.R. or its satellites participate, to be regarded less as opportunities for the negotiation of differences

than as arenas of conflict between right and wrong; where popularity with press and radio and television audiences goes less to the searcher for a solution than to him who emerges as the stoutest, or at least the most vociferous and violent champion of the right.

This tendency for diplomacy to degenerate into popular appeal, resulting in adulation or denunciation (the two often follow each other in quick succession) is largely the result of communist tactics. Such tactics were laid down and built into a system by Trotsky as long ago as 1918 at the Brest-Litovak negotiations, when he tried to appeal to the people over the heads of the government with whom he was supposed to be negotiating. But the fact that the primary fault is communist does not make it any wiser for national representatives of free states to treat international conferences chiefly as opportunities to make resounding speeches which are designed primarily to go down well with the audiences back home. Vigorous replies to false and vicious communist charges are, of course, often essential. In the face of some propaganda attacks silence could be interpreted as acquiescence. But let us not deceive ourselves that such diplomacy is other than a deplorable necessity. To be merely anti-communist is not enough. If it were, Hitler would be on a very high pedestal in history.

That is why it is not, in my view, naive to take some satisfaction out of the fact that in the current session of the United Nations General Assembly on two important issues, disarmament and the peaceful uses of atomic energy, the Western and the Communist countries were able to agree, if only on procedural questions.

It is, I think, not inconceivable that the improvement in atmosphere, and in diplomatic habits and manners, which these two developments illustrate, may contribute to a gradual but genuine easing of tensions. This may give later and more important negotiations on substantive questions, a better chance of success.

We remember, of course, that these United Nations developments are in line with the current Soviet "peace offensive." That "offensive" may only be a tactical move in a strategy which remains threatening and unchanged. But tactics may have their effect on habits and attitudes and, ultimately, even on policies. We cannot base our plans on the probability of such a good result but we can and should be ready to take advantage of it, if and when it occurs. To that end we have some ground for encouragement though none for complacency or wishful thinking, in the somewhat better international climate of today.

In our vigorous and uneasy effort to transform what improvement there has been into real progress towards peace we should be prudent, without losing our vision. President Eisenhower

put it well and succinctly the other day when he said that we should keep our feet on the ground and our heads in the stars. It is not easy; to keep one's feet on the ground without getting stuck in the mud; or to keep one's head in the stars without drifting aimlessly in the stratosphere.

From the earliest days of the Christian church, the insight of theologians has recognized prudence among the seven cardinal virtues. So today, while exploring every possible step toward a genuine peace, we must be careful that we do not in the process prematurely weaken our defensive strength or weary in that vigilance which is still an essential part of the price of liberty. In his Easter message last year, Pope Pius said,

"The danger of today is the weariness that afflicts the good."

The world is still an unsafe place for the weary -- as well as for the weak and unwary.

Nevertheless, prudence without vision would be a sterile and unrewarding thing. To the Christian, educated in the rich tradition of our religious heritage, it should be a truism that the real driving force behind every important political and social movement has been vision. As the Hebrew prophet pointed out long ago, where there is no vision the people perish. We are far too apt to pigeonhole this in our minds as a moral exhortation, rather than to recognize it for the hardheaded political observation that it is.

Patience and strength, prudence and vision are, then, four qualities which should guide our policies and our diplomacy as we move forward, steadily and relentlessly, in the search for a peace which will rest on something firmer and more lasting than force.

The penalty of failure in this search is not pleasant to contemplate, for it would be a war beside which all others would pale into insignificance. It would be a war from which no one could escape; a war which would bring home to us in awesome and terrible fashion, something that has long been evident to religious insight, the oneness of all men.

It is a significant feature of this age that interdependence, which has always been there on the spiritual plane, has become a fact also on the physical and political levels. Its most graphic and awe-inspiring expression is a hydrogen bomb.

The power of nuclear explosives which scientists have now developed is already such that the burst of a single bomb can pollute with radioactive poison or "fall-out", as it is called, thousands of square miles. Quite apart from their destructive effect, there is reason to believe that the explosion, within a fairly

short period, of a few hundred such weapons anywhere in the world might well so contaminate the atmosphere as to threaten grave and lingering illness to many millions of its people. The use of a few thousand might threaten the existence of all human life.

Yet within a few years several countries may well have the power to deliver such explosives by intercontinental ballistic missiles travelling at thousands of miles per hour.

Faced with these facts, to debate such a question as whether co-existence is desirable or not, seems an idle occupation. There may be only one answer, either co-existence or no existence.

These dread and chilling facts of hydrogen warfare are grounds, not for panic, but for ensuring that we do everything that we possibly can do to convert a co-existence which we cannot escape into a co-operation which will be more than a propaganda slogan and something better than the co-operation between Jonah and the whale.

Since the beginning of history, each individual man and woman has had the capacity for suicide. As individuals, we have learned to live with this capacity; almost to ignore it. We have now reached that stage in history when what has always been true on the individual and spiritual level has become true also on a world-wide social and political plane.

To survive, we must accept and put into practice, the organizational or political implications of these facts. The first step in doing so is clearly to realize the dimensions of the situation, and then to act on that realization through policies which will often have to be supra-national in inspiration and result.

This means the application -- on a far wider front -- of that concept of neighborliness and co-operation which characterizes the relations between the United States and Canada. Some progress has been made. The development of collective security, on the one hand, and of technical assistance and economic aid to the underdeveloped countries on the other, show that we have already begun to move in the right direction.

We will, however, have to go further; and this is more difficult. We must be ready to negotiate solutions for international problems even with those we have cause to fear and whose good faith we have reason to suspect.

We should not, in my view, refuse any offer to negotiate any difference with anybody; unless that offer is obviously insincere, or designed merely to delay and frustrate policies on which we have embarked and which we are convinced are right.

Such a policy of negotiations -- which is neither a confession of weakness and need nor involve any betrayal of principle - becomes easier as the free world becomes stronger and more united. For we should not forget that our growing strength is not an end in itself but a means to an end; namely, the solution of international problems by peaceful means and the easing of international tensions.

I would like to conclude these remarks by returning to where I began; to the individual man and his own responsibility.

Today, it is true, we live in fear and tension and under the awful shadow of a nuclear cloud. But if each of us remains true to Christian ideals and Christian principles, which provide an answer to every question, a solution to every problem, we have no cause for despair.

Professor Arnold Toynbee has suggested that no great society is ever defeated by outside pressures or attack, unless it first defeats itself by disintegration of its own moral standards. If this is true, and I think it is, then the real issues, which will in the long run determine the political future and fate of our society must be faced and fought out within the minds and wills of each one of us. There is no escape from our individual responsibility and no other road to reach our goal.

A great and wise and venerable American jurist and citizen, Judge Learned Hand, gave us the answer to many questions that are troubling us when he wrote:

"You may build your Towers of Babel to the clouds; you may contrive ingeniously to circumvent nature by devices beyond even the understanding of all but a handful; you may provide endless distractions to escape the tedium of your barren lives; you may rummage the whole planet for your ease and comfort. It shall avail you nothing; the more you struggle, the more deeply you will be enmeshed. Not until you have the courage to meet yourselves face to face; to take true account of what you find, to respect the sum of that account for itself and not for what it may bring you; deeply to believe that each of you is a holy vessel unique and irreplaceable; only then will you have taken the first steps along the path of Wisdom. Be content with nothing less; let not the heathen beguile you to their temples or the Sirens with their songs. Lay up your Treasure in the Heaven of your hearts, where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves cannot break through and steal."

If we all lived our lives and conducted our affairs in the spirit of those words, then, indeed, would we have found a sure and Christian foundation for world order.