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An address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, delivered at the closing of the Centenary Celebration at St. Michael's College, Toronto, March 24, 1953.

...In many ways this UN Session has been a frustrating and a depressing one. From the President's chair, I have listened to many speeches and during them - I say this without disrespect to the speeches - I have had much opportunity for thought and reflection. As these speeches continued to emphasize the tragic and menacing division between the two worlds; and as the accents of conflict and controversy became sharp and clear, often angry and shrill, I could not help but think - with something approaching despair - of the distance we had travelled - in the wrong direction - from those days of San Francisco in 1945 when, for a brief moment, to use Oliver Wendell Holmes' beautiful phrase, we caught "a dreaming glimpse of peace". For that vision there has now been substituted in much of our UN discussion the harsh reality of bitter controversy; factional disputation which seems to admit no compromise; the use of words which turns their normal meaning upside down; debate which is frank, at times, to the point of ferocity.

It is easy to despair in such circumstances; to throw in one's hand and admit failure with all its inevitable atomic consequences. But it would be folly to do so. For the UN with all its failures, remains our best hope for the solution of present international difficulties and for peace. It remains an indispensable - the indispensable - piece of world machinery for nations to use if and when they wish to. Of itself it can force no decision, determine no action. It is no super-state, nor even a court of law with power behind its judgments. But it is the agency through which co-operative action can best be worked out by those states who wish to do so, and it is the forum in which the collective moral purpose and the conscience of mankind can best express itself. Above all, it is the recognition of the interdependence, for better or for worse, of all the peoples of the world in which we live.

This interdependence does not itself necessarily make for peace - but it does make necessary some world organization in which the universal problems it creates can be discussed at a world level.

The UN has not failed. But even if it had, it is no crime to fail in a good purpose. It is only a crime not to have made the attempt. Indeed, I would go further and assert that it is more important to deserve success than to achieve it. Shakespeare felt that when he said "'Tis not in mortals to command success but we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it."

Let us then not abandon our effort for peace through UN. Even more, let us make sure that our own national policies, and - in so far as we can - the policies of the free world, will be such as to deserve success, if not to achieve it.

We may be facing new tests in this regard - both nationally and internationally - as words are uttered and gestures are made which promise an easing of tension in quarters from which we have been accustomed to experience only implacable hostility and relentless attack. In considering these moves, it will be tempting, but very unwise, to become the deluded victims of our own deep longing for peace and accept uncritically any and every comforting statement as something which warrants a slackening in our own free-world policy of security through growing collective strength and unity.

But it would be equally foolish to dismiss as not worthy even of serious examination any new possibility for a relaxation of tension. I suggest that we should always go half way - and even further if necessary - in meeting any overture; but that we should keep our eyes and ears wide open as we move and not allow our response to interfere with the steps we have already taken to ensure that we can move - in any other direction - firmly and confidently if things go wrong. We should give a joyous welcome to any genuine harbinger of peace, but we must be sure it is that, before we begin rejoicing. A hawk is no less an aggressive bird because its wings have been made to look like those of a dove.

The strength of the free world is now becoming a great buttress of peace by removing the temptation from a potential aggressor of quick and easy victory. As important, however, as our strength is our unity. There are those who would destroy that unity - by fair means or by foul. So we should remain on guard as we examine, as we should examine, and in a fair and honest way, every proposal, every suggestion, every indication that some of the problems which divide the two worlds might now be solved.

In the success of this effort to preserve peace through international action no group has a greater stake than that which will have to bear the main immediate burden of its failure; the men of our colleges.

During the time I spent in New York, I met and spoke with a large number of students and young people from Canada and other parts of the world. In October and November there were visits from international relations clubs from Toronto and Queen's, and from the University of Montreal, and, in this part of the session, from student representatives of the newly-formed Canadian Association of Students for the United Nations. Only last week at United Nations Headquarters, I met with a group of students of high school age from thirty-five different countries: from Canada and Burma, from Germany and Israel, from Siam and Pakistan.

In the eyes of these young people who come from near and far to see for themselves this experiment in world organization, there is an unmistakable idealism. They are not interested in causes or parties or movements which merely promise to bring the branches down within their reach, indeed they not only believe, they insist, that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp". They have also, I think, a deep faith in mankind's ability to surmount great obstacles. But there is something else that I, for one, have found; an almost disconcerting directness in their questions, an impatience with diplomatic double-talk, an abhorrence of

prejudice, a keen awareness of the ancient snags and snares in the way of progress. From my own experience the combination of qualities that I associate with the college generation of today is faith and courage tempered by a cool and critical awareness of the times we live in; above all, a rejection of sham and hypocrisy.

Young people do not merely want to know, for instance, what the aims of the United Nations Charter are, or the broad purposes of international co-operation. They want to know whether the specific steps which Canada and other nations are taking today are calculated to achieve these aims; the precise pattern of the relationship between collective defence measures and technical and economic assistance in the struggle to resist the inroads of Communism; how the Colombo Plan works; how it might be made more effective. They do not want merely to hear about "peace"; they want to know what they can do to achieve it.

And they show a highly creditable preference for solutions over resolutions. I can still see the face of a young Korean boy of high school age whom I met with a group of students the other day, who rather shyly waited after his friends had asked their questions, and then slowly raised his hand. His question was: "How can the United Nations bring peace to Korea?" I started to explain what had been going on in the Assembly debates, and how 54 nations out of 60 had agreed on a resolution sponsored by the Indian delegation aimed at resolving the prisoner of war issue which had deadlocked the Armistice negotiations, and how this had been rejected by the Governments of Communist China and North Korea. When I had finished my account he raised his hand again and said with a quiet persistence which symbolized, I think, the deep desire, the agony, for peace which must fill the minds of the people of the war-torn and divided land: "Yes, I know, but when are you going to bring peace to my country?"

Youth today has an honest and inquiring mind. It desires to test life in terms of its own immediate experience. But it does not merely put the questions. It gives answers as well; often with an assurance that I once had as an undergraduate at Victoria and much of which I confess I have now lost.

Since the aggression in South Korea not quite three years ago, many thousands of the youth of Canada have seen service in the Commonwealth Division or on the destroyers and aircraft which Canada has sent as its contribution to the common effort which has been made by the United Nations to restore the peace there, so that the peace may be preserved elsewhere.

Add to these - (and if I speak of Canadian youth, I do not for a moment forget that they are part of the vast company of the youth of the free world) - the young men who, as part of the NATO forces in Western Europe, stand guard in Germany in the 27th Brigade; man the Sabre Jet squadrons in France, in Western Germany, in Britain; sail the seas under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic; and it will be plain that youth does not only ask the questions, it gives answers as well in terms of action. It accepts defence preparedness as the only possible answer in a time of crisis and danger like the present; but preparedness of a kind which does not mean building up our defences and maintaining our security by political methods which would leave little worth defending.

Preparedness, yes. But the threat which the free world faces is not merely the military threat of armed aggression. There is a spiritual and moral threat even more sinister, pervasive, challenging. The peoples who are the heirs of the Christian tradition, and the peoples in all the countries where freedom has not been exterminated by the all-power state, must face this threat, and defeat it or the steps we are taking to defeat aggression in the military field will not bring peace or security.

Here again the answer lies in preparedness - but of a different kind, with weapons drawn from the arsenal of our moral strength; especially from the faith and the freedom we have inherited. From this we can gain the strength necessary for victory in this other conflict - but only if we recognize that freedom without discipline and responsibility defeats itself; and will soon bring about a society where freedom itself has become the possession of only a tyrannical few.

The guardians of this other arsenal are institutions like this college of St. Michael's. Our Prime Minister, Mr. St. Laurent, who visited you a year ago on your hundredth birthday, said then "The churches, colleges and schools are the main repositories of our spiritual heritage and the main sources of the spiritual strength of the free world".

This is profoundly true and from what I know of this college, and the role which its teachers, its students, and its graduates are playing in this community and throughout the world, I am confident that this spiritual and moral strength will not diminish in the years ahead.

In a lecture which Professor Jacques Maritain gave in Paris in 1939 on the eve of the last war, entitled "The Twilight of Civilization", he said "Each time that someone in any country cedes to some infiltration of the totalitarian spirit, under any form whatsoever, one battle for civilization is lost".

The faith on which this college was founded and on which it so solidly rests has never yielded, and will, I'm certain, never yield, in this battle for civilization. I know that you who are graduating from St. Michael's this year will play your part in that battle.

It is, I know, customary on occasions, such as this dinner, to try to exhort and inspire those who are about to leave college. Your exposure to this process is a small price, of course, to pay for the happy years of college of which your presence here tonight is the witness. Recalling my own experiences as a student in years gone by, I have resisted the temptation to preach or to persuade you; or even to suggest that never before has there been such a fine group of young people released from a college upon an unsuspecting world.

You do not need me to tell you that you are graduating at a time of turmoil and turbulence; of great struggle and great opportunity. I suspect that this has been told every graduating group since the first commencement - or graduation dinner - held in a cave sometime around 5000 B.C. Nor has this kind of challenge ever disturbed any man of spirit.

True, the challenge is now greater than ever before in the face of the military and spiritual menace of Communism and all it stands for. But you are better equipped to accept it than those who have gone before.

So I know that you face the future with eagerness rather than anxiety, with defiance rather than despair. And if you encounter some difficult problems and have some trying experiences, as you will, you have, I know, learned at this college something deeper and more enduring than book learning, which will support and assist you in those times; that will help you to remember that "after the sunset and above the city lights, there shine the stars".



