



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 54/4

FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE ADDRESS

An address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, at a Federation of Agriculture luncheon, held at London, Ontario, January 27, 1954.

It is a pleasure to be here with you today, and to talk to the members of your Federation, an organization which has established such an important place in the life of Canada.

We hear a lot these days about expansion and development in our great and growing country. Encouraging and exciting things are happening. New areas are being opened, new vistas are unfolding, new resources being developed, new records being made. It is all very thrilling and gives cause for justifiable pride in Canada - and in the people who are doing these things. All this development, this energy, this broadening and deepening of national activity, is knitting our country together into a cohesive unity and strength that gives us great hope for the future; if even more startling advances in the science and chemistry of destruction give any country hope for any future.

We should not forget, however, and I know that you do not forget, that the soil and the men who till it, without regard to 40 hour 5 day weeks, remain the basis, the solid foundation of the national structure.

Farming, like every other activity today, bears the marks of mechanical and industrial progress - which has made the farmer's work, and especially his wife's work somewhat easier and more attractive; it also reflects the problems and the complexities of contemporary national and international political and economic life, which in its turn has forced government into the picture, both in the production and marketing aspect of agriculture.

Agriculture today, to a greater and greater extent, has become closely related to the policy of government; and not only that of its own government. A decree in some far off country whose very location may be somewhat vague to a Canadian farmer, may, nevertheless, have an important bearing on whether his wife will be able to buy that new electric washing machine. It is a chastening thought which should be kept in mind as we talk about our independence and our sovereignty and control of our own affairs.

The fact is that no country today has control of its own affairs and, within a country, no individual, no group, no profession, no occupation has sole control of its affairs. Even the farmers - or should I say especially the farmers - share that control with others, especially with those they have chosen to act for them - as Canadians - in Parliament and government and with officialdom.

Because government today has so much influence and control over the lives of its citizens - a control which became inescapable when those citizens began to demand more and more from government in the form of services and assistance and security - you, naturally, as farmers and as citizens are anxious to ensure that this control - this influence - be exercised in your best interest. That is certainly a legitimate anxiety and activity - the exercise of co-operative group influence on government - providing it is done responsibly and constructively; and with full recognition of the fact that influence is also exercised by other groups, of producers and even consumers; and that government has to balance and weigh these sometimes conflicting pressures.

Indeed, without the right kind of influence in and on government, exercised by organizations which reflect public opinion, there might be little change or little progress. The English 17th century philosopher Bacon said, "That which man changes not for the better, time, the great innovator, changes for the worse".

It is therefore the duty of government to do what it can to see that man makes changes for the better and to make the "adjustment to the inevitable" - which is the art of politics - as smooth and productive as possible.

A distinguished professor in Toronto, at whose feet I once sat and even learned a little Latin, wrote the other day that "Government was the administration of the unintended". That may be to a greater extent than we think. There is far more in politics and history that results from accident than the historians realize or the politicians admit. But it is the objective of Federation such as yours, to ensure that, in so far as farm policy is concerned, accident is reduced to a minimum and that policies are worked out beforehand to meet the needs of agriculture which, however, are inseparable from the needs of the rest of the Canadian people.

It is, as I have said, the function of government to balance your proposals and assess your needs in the light of other demands and other needs. It is not an easy function to perform to everybody's satisfaction, federally or provincially and no democratic government can attempt it without encountering difficulties. If I may adapt a quotation, I would put it this way, Government - any government - these days is in trouble with some of the people all of the time, most of the people some of the time, but not, I hope, with all of the people all of the time. If the latter fate overtakes it, it soon ceases to be a government! It is not an easy life for any of us in 1954. Willa Cather, the poet, once said "Life is hard for most people, and when its easy, its hardest of all". There are times, however, I must confess, when I find it difficult to accept that philosophy that a life of ease is really a life of hardship and vice versa.

In your plans and programmes as a Federation, as in those of the government, both the production and marketing sides of agriculture have to be considered.

Great progress, astounding progress, has been made in the former - but that progress, especially in an exporting country like Canada, won't mean much to the farmer unless we keep up the marketing end. But here we come right up against problems and against difficulties that simply cannot be solved - though they can be caused! - by national action alone. The most industrious and efficient of national producers, assisted by the wisest of national governments cannot themselves determine the levels and value of international trade, and therefore the income that will be received by individuals.

That is only one reason why I am not going to attempt to forecast the course of international trade or the level of economic activity in Canada or elsewhere during the coming year. But I would like to refer to one or two aspects which are of special interest to you and which have a bearing on our relations with other countries.

We have recently had difficulties in the United States, and elsewhere, in marketing our farm products and we will continue to have them. We hear much of import restrictions and even more of rumours of such restrictions. To a large extent, the pressure in the United States for these restrictions arises out of their present agricultural programme and mounting stocks in the hands of the United States Commodity Credit Corporation; now worth about 5 billion dollars. The accumulation of these large stocks also threatens to create problems in other markets which are of concern to us and to other countries. Movements of massive United States surpluses, or "reserves", as they are sometimes called, through give-away programmes or through sales at cut prices or for local currencies are almost bound to affect ordinary exports directly or indirectly. I am not now referring to relief shipments for famine and distress. That is something very different to the disposal of surpluses by "fire sale" marketing methods.

In the circumstances which now exist, it is not surprising that so much attention - and by others than Americans - is being concentrated on future agricultural policies of the United States. We in Canada naturally hope that these policies and the arrangements which the U.S.A. will make for disposing of existing agricultural surpluses, will help and not hinder the creation of conditions throughout the world in which both consumption and economically sound production will be encouraged.

None of us wants to see food production curtailed or surplus food destroyed when there are so many hungry people to be fed. Indeed as long as these people remain hungry there can't be such a thing as a "surplus" except in the economic sense. All of our humanitarian and social instincts rebel at a policy of contrived scarcity and food destruction. It is not in the interests of the underfed, however, to have temporary surpluses of food created in some countries by means which involve restrictions on the exports, and hence ultimately on the output, of other producing countries. Nor is it in their interests to have "surpluses" distributed in a manner which will disorganize markets and thus reduce production elsewhere. These are not the ways to bring about a real and dependable increase in the world's supplies of food.

Furthermore, except from the most short-sighted point of view, it is not in the interest of the farmer in either exporting or importing countries to produce at prices - supported by government action - which will discourage consumption and involve subsidies at a level which cannot be sustained indefinitely. This is not the road to real and lasting prosperity for agricultural producers.

Some of the measures resorted to recently in several countries are essentially expedients to meet temporary problems. They should not divert attention from, or postpone action on, the more fundamental problem of encouraging normal exports, particularly to the food deficient areas of the world, through a healthy expansion of international trade in all directions. Any measures which tend to distort ordinary trade patterns - by import restrictions, by the encouragement of uneconomic production at the expense of the more economic, or by the movement of large surpluses through artificial means - should therefore be examined very critically. That is not to say that we deny the necessity for emergency measures to relieve distress or famine or that we consider foreign aid programmes to have no place. Far from it. As I believe our record clearly shows, we are very mindful of the special needs of other countries.

In the light of the record, no one can have any doubts about our deep interest in the welfare of people less fortunately placed than ourselves. We realize full well that, unless these people can look forward to improvements in their standard of living, they can hardly be expected to hold steadfastly to democratic ideals in the face of Communist blandishments. We are anxious, however, that emergency relief or economic assistance should be provided in a manner which will achieve the most durable results and will not compromise objectives which are to the long-run advantage of all countries.

So far as the prospects for international trade are concerned, much depends on the line which U.S. policies will take. This is inevitable because of the important position occupied by the United States in the world economy. For the past year, an effort has been made by most countries to "hold the line" while U.S. trade and agricultural policies were being formulated. Many countries will now be anxious to learn the form these United States policies are likely to take. That form is taking shape - so far as the administration is concerned. The report of the Randall Commission, which was set up to review the foreign economic policies of the United States, has now been made and it will be read with great care. Its recommendations are important. But more important is the question of what will be done with them. The President's various messages to Congress will be studied thoroughly, but again, more important, is the response of Congress to them. The day-to-day activities of the Tariff Commission and other bodies concerned with United States trade will be watched intently and in no place more than in Canada.

Policies cannot be re-made overnight - or even over-year. We must appreciate the difficulties involved in the laborious process of re-shaping agricultural and commercial policies. At the same time, the need for action is urgent and the danger of missing opportunities which may not return is great.

Over the next few months, we shall have many occasions for consulting on these matters with our friends from the United States and other countries. Within the next few weeks representatives of the Canadian Government will be meeting with members of the United States Cabinet in the first full meeting of the Joint United States-Canadian Committee on Trade and Economic Affairs to discuss some of these trade and agriculture policies which are of direct concern to our two countries. In connection with agricultural surpluses and stockpiles, President Eisenhower has also indicated that he envisages exchanges of views with foreign governments. In these and other ways, it is to be hoped that effective international co-operation will be secured in working out solutions to these many and important problems which will expand trade and best serve the interests of all countries. We want no more of the "beggar-my-neighbour" policies which were sometimes applied with such unfortunate results in earlier periods before the war. The Canadian Government will, I assure you, play its part in promoting constructive and co-operative measures. We realize - and have more than once stated - that economic conflict and political co-operation are not easy to reconcile.

In this course I am confident that it will have the strong support of the farming community which has such a stake in healthy and vigorous international trade.

There is something, however, even more important than international trade. That is the struggle to preserve and strengthen peace and security.

That struggle, and its chance of success, is in the back, indeed in the front, of all our minds. If we fail here, we won't have to worry about the prices of wheat or cattle. Our only concern will be survival amidst the horror, the unutterable horror, of an atomic war, which will make the last one, with all its death, destruction and devastation, seem like a sham battle.

It seems to me unwise, and even dangerous to fall into either panicky pessimism or self-induced optimism when looking at the realities of the international situation today.

It is true that there has been some easing of tension in the last year, but the world remains a dangerous place for the weak, the weary and the unwary.

If the feeling of crisis, of immediate and acute danger has subsided somewhat, and it has, this may be due in part merely to the fact that when you live under conditions of tension and insecurity long enough, you become used to them, and custom makes even hard things seem a little easier. But it is true, also, that there have been developments, inside and outside Russia, which give us some concrete ground for encouragement. The former may imply nothing more than an orthodox change of communist tactics, designed to deceive and divide and, hence, weaken us. But it may be more, and therefore we should be alert to take every advantage of any genuine move to peace, without assuming that every bird released from the Kremlin ark is a dove! There is a difference between an open mind and a soft head.

But there has also been improvement outside Russia. This may, indeed, be the very reason for any easing of the situation which may have occurred through shifts in Russian tactics and talk. I refer to the growing strength and defence cohesion of NATO and the Western Alliance. In four short years it has removed the greatest temptation for a potential aggressor to cause trouble; the hope of easy and quick victory. So let us not throw away or weaken the instrument which has brought about this improvement. The free nations, including Canada, must keep strong and united, using their strength, not provocatively or rashly, but to flash a steady warning sign against anyone who would break the peace; if we can follow this course of unity and strength among the free world; if we can resist panic action on the one hand, and appeasing concessions on the other, we can face the menace of our divided world with at least some confidence. But all this means discipline, steadiness, and effort, on the part of all peoples who believe in freedom and peace, and are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to this end.

It means also tolerance and understanding between friends; compromise and give and take as we try to keep the free world coalition together. The very fact that the sense of imminent danger has lessened makes this task, while as essential as ever, more difficult. Animals will automatically huddle together in a blizzard, but when the sun comes out will begin to squabble over the limited pasture rights.

So the days ahead are bound to be critical ones, not only for defence, but for diplomacy. And by diplomacy, I mean not only the search for a settlement with the communist world, but keeping together among ourselves, and reducing our own disputes and divisions to a minimum.

It is, in truth, a "time for greatness", and I hope that we will all be equal to its challenge.

S/C