

## STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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### THE CIVIL SERVANT AND THE STATE

An address by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, before the Professional Institute of the Civil Service of Canada, in Ottawa, on March 25, 1950.

I have had some difficulty in thinking of a subject which would fit this occasion. I recall that last year my Deputy addressed you in what I thought was a very interesting and thought-provoking speech - on the position of the civil servant in relation to--shall I say?--the political servant. Having experienced both roles myself, that of the bureaucrat and the politician, I am tempted to talk about the reverse relationship of the political to the official side of government. I will, however, resist that temptation because I wish to discuss with you another, but related problem which is of grave concern to us all - that is, the effect on the relationship between the civil servant and his employer, the government, of the concerted Communist attack which is today being made upon the free world.

This whole question - which tends to dominate so much of our life today - is of particular concern to the teacher, the student, the researcher, the government employee; to people who can only work effectively in that atmosphere of free enquiry, which is the very life blood of achievement.

We live in difficult and trying times, of serious problems, individual and collective, national and international. Certainly one of the most worrying of these is the reconciliation of individual freedom and group security. This problem becomes more important and more difficult as we become increasingly conscious of the threat to our free society - and to our individual liberty - of communism as the instrument of Soviet imperialism. If the communist system ever triumphed here, it would of course, destroy most of the things that make society of any value to the individual. This, as a domestic problem is serious enough and involves perplexing problems for government and for the individual.

So - even as an exclusively domestic issue - the struggle against communism would be serious enough; just about the most serious issue of the day. But the situation becomes infinitely more dangerous when we know, as we do know, that those who lead the communist forces in our country - and in other countries - are not inspired by feelings of patriotism for a national cause - however wrong and misguided - but are the agents - open and unabashed - of a foreign imperialism, masquerading under the guise of international communism. Canada, to these men, means nothing except as a satellite state of a communist Russia, the leaders of which are now merely Russian despots, using new methods to spread Slav influence and power over the world.

Those, therefore, who follow communism in this country are not only propagating a reactionary economic and social doctrine, but are, as well, the agents of an alien aggressive imperialism. This we must never forget, though every effort

will be made to make us forget it.

The present situation creates problems for everyone in the community who holds a position of trust and equally for everyone who has under his authority persons who hold positions of trust. These difficulties are not ones which apply solely or uniquely to government - to the relationship between the Civil Servant and his official employer. They apply - and we at times forget this - equally throughout the length and breadth of our society wherever persons perform functions which may affect our security. It is of the utmost importance that the loyalty and integrity of the men who pull the switches at our power plants, the men who hold in their possession the confidential information in our banks, the men who teach in our schools and universities, the men who direct traffic in our great freight centres, should be above suspicion. This is not a security problem for government alone; it is a problem for the whole community. The relation of the officials to government is only one aspect of it and not necessarily or always the most important.

Fortunately for us, there is in our country no cause for hysteria or panic and the problem is within easily manageable proportions. There are no great divisions in our society such as those which in other communities penetrate into the fabric of their essential services. We are a true democracy in that respect. More important still is the fact that, in the course of generations we have built up in this country a tradition of integrity in the performance of essential duties, whether public or private, that reduces to a minimum the fears we need have about the loyalty of those on whom we depend. Your own organization, and the principles which it upholds and the high sense of professional duty which is common amongst your members is as good an example as I know of this important element, integrity, in the foundations of our society.

The concept of "integrity" is defined in the Oxford dictionary as "the condition of having no part or element wanting; soundness of moral principle; uprightness, honesty, sincerity". These are characteristics of our own Canadian Civil Service which are so familiar and prevalent that we tend almost to take them for granted. They are also qualities which we have established as a basis for the new international civil service which is being formed. In the Charter of the United Nations, Article 101 reads in part as follows:

"The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity."

To ensure that this article shall be implemented, there is an oath or declaration which all members of the staff of the United Nations must subscribe to on accepting their appointment. This oath (which in a recent celebrated instance has been grossly violated by a communist member of the United Nations Secretariat) begins as follows:

"I solemnly swear (undertake, affirm, promise) to exercise in all loyalty, discretion and conscience the functions entrusted to me as a member of the international service of the United Nations."

In selecting persons for employment in the service of the Canadian Government, these standards which we have ordained for the Secretariat of the United Nations are, in effect, the ones we apply. In doing so, we have sought to secure not only the highest standards of efficiency and competence but also the highest standards of integrity.

Because we have, with surprisingly few exceptions, found for our service, people who possess this quality of integrity, we are confident that they are capable of withstanding the temptations to which people in positions of official trust are peculiarly subject.

These temptations are numerous enough, I know. The temptation to active disloyalty is not, I think, the most common or the most difficult.

There is the temptation to wish to appear to one's friends and associates as the possessor of state secrets. There is the temptation to appear as a good fellow to newspapermen by giving them information which one hasn't any right to pass on.

There are certain weaknesses of character which make people especially susceptible to these temptations. One man, after a few drinks or a little flattery, may say more than he ever intended to say or should say; another man may not be scrupulous enough in his choice of friends and acquaintances; another man may do things or have done things may make it possible for those who wish to get information from him to blackmail him.

What we seek - and what we find - in our government service are people whose integrity is sufficient to make it possible for them not only to do their jobs well, but also to resist such temptations as arise out of those jobs. I am glad to say that, so far as my experience carries me (and that is now a very considerable experience) Canada has been remarkably successful in attracting to its service men and women who display this essential characteristic in marked degree.

If the dangerous times in which we live, on the one hand, call for the highest expression of integrity amongst our public servants, they also impose on employers in general and government in particular equally heavy obligations. These obligations are twofold. In the first place, we must take every precaution to make certain of the loyalty of those who serve us.

The danger which communist imperialism presents to our national existence and our free institutions is a very real one. In facing it - and in trying to remove it - government, in its relations with its citizens, has at times to take exceptional action. The citizen in his turn in his relations with his government has to recognize the nature and gravity of the menace and may, in certain circumstances, have to accept restraints which would be intolerable if that menace did not exist.

The danger which must be met has many manifestations. We know how the brilliant and constructive intellectual in the field of natural science can occasionally be a fool or a knave or both in the field of social science. We know that harm to freedom can be done by a magnificent but perverted mental equipment which is allowed to do its nefarious work under the banner of freedom and tolerance. The very quality of a man's genius may make him all the greater menace to society. Against that menace the state is entitled to take - indeed must take - every precaution, and no one of us has any right to complain if we may

seem to suffer some slight indignity in the process. Our personal prestige and pride is a small thing, against the necessity of guarding our free society against those hidden agents of Soviet reaction, who for reasons which vary all the way from lust for power to twisted idealism would sell us into Kremlin slavery. As a government we have an obligation to take every necessary and practicable measure to find and root out our treason and sedition in our midst; to see that we have laws adequate for this purpose; that we have security services and procedures which, while remaining under the law, are nevertheless effective to watch and when necessary, disarm those elements who would divide and disturb our country in peace and hand it over to the enemy in war.

Government, however, has another duty; to protect the state system and its servants against policies which in the name of security would destroy its efficiency and its free democratic character; especially to protect individuals against unfounded accusations and vicious insinuations which destroy the individual and weaken the social structure. We have no right to go about confirming the loyalty of our Civil Servants in such a manner that we destroy their self-respect or their efficiency - nor has government the right to take a single step against any citizen which is not warranted by the danger which we face. In attempting to decide how far it can go, in limiting the freedom of the individual in the interest of national security, the government is always faced with this terribly difficult and recurring problem of drawing a line and, once drawn, of not going beyond it.

This problem is difficult for many reasons. The very menace itself may lead to demands on the part of more excitable elements of the community for panic action which goes far beyond the needs of the situation. It also encourages irresponsible and reactionary elements to use the fear of communism as a means of weakening and destroying some of the healthy and democratic restraints which have been placed on their own appetite for power. Every army - however good the cause for which it fights - includes some dubious volunteers. And so it is in the fight against communism. Anyone who rejects the practices and the slogans of these elements is, of course, liable to be called an ally of the enemy - a red. This, in turn, creates dissension, division, suspicion and mistrust; it is playing the enemy's game as surely, and as effectively, as if it were being done by saboteurs or provocateurs. One of the best allies of the communist cause is, in fact, the hysterical diehard. The communists know that and therefore reserve their heaviest fire for the progressive democrat.

In our search for the hidden enemy of our way of life, we must also be careful not to impose regulations or create prejudices which shackle the spirit of enquiry by spreading the impression that anything unorthodox or enterprising or imaginative is suspect. If we reduce the high adventure of investigation to the level of a search in a shallow stagnant pool, we shall soon retreat into the dark recesses of torpid and absolute conformity which is the stuff from which the totalitarian police state is made. This retreat will be certainly assisted if public opinion ties the label of "dangerous" or "red" to everyone who may once have attended a luncheon of the League for Peace and Freedom, or played basketball at High School with the young Radicals. It is easy in a democratic state to become the victim of our fears, just as it is easy - frighteningly easy - to become the victim of our apathy and indifference. If we are to remain free and to move forward we have to avoid both these dangers.

I hope that in this country we will never yield to hysterical clamour for a witch-hunt; or accept mere association as a proof of guilt; or exploit for selfish reasons the genuine anxiety we all feel about our nation's safety; I hope also we can avoid loose and irresponsible talk about communists infesting government departments.

That kind of talk creates general suspicion, distrust of our system of government, division in our minds and among our people, uncertainty and uneasiness. Above all, it weakens confidence in the integrity of the government service, which weakening is one of the first objectives of the communist policy.

We can be grateful that we have been spared this kind of thing to any great extent in Canada. We should be on guard against it, however, just as we should be on guard against the more immediate menace of the individual who, beneath the mask of loyal service to his country, or wearing the mantle of the Peace Congress, has knowingly or unknowingly sold his soul to Moscow.

One result of unfair and irresponsible attacks on public servants as suspect or disloyal is that you may eventually get people so cautious, so mediocre, so determined not to do anything that will leave them open to criticism from any quarter, that your public servant will become as mechanical and inefficient as that of a Communist state. In Communist states the functionaires are so terrified of giving any advice or taking any initiative that may be regarded as a departure from the party line that they never make an original move, or give any objective advice at all. They merely tell those above them what they think those men want to hear.

A recent editorial in The New York Times has some wise words on this subject. May I quote its last two paragraphs:

"If we cannot do better, if every federal appointee to any important office is tried like a suspected criminal before he takes up his work and is thereafter likely at any moment to be assailed and denounced like an escaped convict, what sort of persons may we expect to have in public employment? Certainly they will not be the courageous, plain-spoken and intelligent men and women whom the urgency of our times demands. They are more likely to be weak mediocrities whose principal concern, like that of the minor functionary in far-away Russia, is to keep out of trouble. And democracy will become a pitiful mockery if its affairs are administered by people whose loftiest ambition is to make no mistakes.

"There is a security inherent in democracy itself which may be lost if we lose faith in free institutions. There is a security in the existence of intelligent men and women willing to make their own moral and intellectual decisions and abide by the consequences. There is a security in the fact that such men and women will not permit any agency of government, executive or legislative, to dictate such decisions to them. There is a security in the faith that does not shiver at every shadow or at the whistle of every wind. We must certainly devise a machinery, if we can, that will keep our essential secrets safe, but it would be far better for a few secrets to leak out than for this nation to imitate the communist or fascist pattern

and suppress, in the private citizen or the office holder, the right of private conscience."

In facing the problem I have been discussing, as in most things, the obligation of those in authority is to strike a balance which corresponds to the realities of the situation. It is the duty of those on the political side to defend the Civil Servant, the "bureaucrat" who is not in a position to defend himself, against unfair attacks from those who seek to win some transient popularity by an assault on one who is fair game apparently for anybody's shafts. At the same time, it is equally important for those on the political side to do their best to ensure that the Civil Service is composed of men and women who deserve such defence; of persons who have been appointed because of ability and quality alone and who are able to discharge with efficiency and responsibility their vitally important function in the machinery of modern government.

But however efficient the Civil Servant may be, however industrious, however underpaid, I don't suppose you will ever be able to erase completely from the limited minds of some people the distorted picture of the "bureaucrat" - especially the top "bureaucrat" - as an indolent person, conceived in influence and born in politics, who fattens at the public trough; and works a couple of hours a day winding and unwinding - if I may use the word without becoming a security risk - "red" tape.

I have, of course, had some experience with the strangling effect of a literal and cautious observance of all the fussy niceties and formalities of official procedures. But I have also learned that, at times, there is one thing far more delaying and destructive than "red tape"; that is misguided and premature efforts to cut across wise and well established administrative rules. You can, I suppose, get more toothpaste more quickly by squeezing the top of the tube. The result is messy and wasteful. I do not, therefore, take seriously the recurring joke about the complexities and delays of public administration, and I know that we have every reason in Canada to be proud of our public service. So, in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, may I say simply this. In striking the balance between freedom and security, in the difficult days ahead, I hope that we shall have enough good sense and enough faith in our own institutions to act so that the confidence, the self-respect, the initiative and the devotion to duty of our Civil Servants will be strengthened and encouraged.

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