



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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NORTH AMERICA IN THE POST-WAR WORLD

Commencement Day address by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, delivered at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, on June 18, 1950.

This is a time of the year, and this is an occasion, when it is customary for advice to be given to those who are about to leave the great army of "academics anonymous" for the even greater army of those who, in one form or another, are making an active contribution to the life of our time; to its turbulence or its good order; to its progress or its retrogression; to its scientific and mechanical achievements or its social and political confusions. The invitation with which I have been honoured to address you is the licence which authorizes me to take full advantage of this "open season" for advice. I think, however, that you have probably been told sufficiently how the world is now your oyster, and how to go about opening it. I would only remind you that there will be other graduates in years to come, so I hope that you will leave some of the oyster for them.

May I make one or two other observations? The proliferation of human activity, the many-sided character of modern knowledge, the frightening complexity of modern life, have necessitated a degree of specialization in our educational processes which would seem grotesque to the scholar of a century or so ago, and which remains depressing to many of the scholars of today. In a university, however, the dangers of over-specialization are lessened by the contacts you make with others, the views you exchange; the shoulders which you rub of men who live with you but work in other fields than yours. You thereby have the means of laying a good solid general foundation on which to build your special structure.

As you begin in a new phase in the struggle for existence, a phase which will often be more competitive than co-operative, there will be a strong temptation to concentrate on your own particular activity, with less and less interest in what is going on in other fields; to seek the success which expresses itself in fame or power or recognition, and lose the greater satisfaction that comes from an ability to appreciate the beauty of a sonnet or a sunset. I hope that you will resist and defeat this temptation. Above all, may I hope that when you are faced with problems and opportunities in the days ahead, which may require you to call on yourselves, you will always find somebody at home.

These problems will be perplexing and challenging. We live in that kind of world. The opportunities will be correspondingly great. Speakers at commencement exercises sometimes concentrate on them - the opportunities - because they assume that it is material progress that is uppermost in the graduating student's mind. But

someone from outside your country who looks at you - and at your country - as you leave the university, will be even more concerned about your responsibilities and the way in which you meet them. It seems to us from abroad, that the generation of students who are graduating during this decade is inheriting responsibilities greater in size and greater in burden than those assumed in any previous period of American history. This is largely because of the tremendous change which has taken place in the power and influence of your country in world affairs. I do not think there has been any development of such importance since the centres of power in Europe shifted from the city-states of the Mediterranean and the towns of the Hanseatic League to the Atlantic seaboard in the 16th Century. Within the last half century another great shift in the centre of world power and authority has taken place. To some extent it has moved eastward to the borderlands between Europe and Asia. To a much greater degree, however, it has been transferred across the Atlantic to the North American continent. It is in this continent that world power is now predominantly centred.

This is not the result of any imperialist plan on your part. It is, indeed, almost accidental! If the British Empire was built up in a fit of absence of mind, American power rests on the basis of a reluctant acceptance of it. There is certainly no aggressive imperialism here.

A characteristic comment of your generation is "So what?", and I suppose you may be tempted to utter these words in response to my large generalizations about historic movements affecting you and your country. It may appear to some of you that what I say is something which may influence the lives of politicians and senior civil servants; and magnates of industry and commerce; but that as far as you are concerned, there will be no noticeable departure from the patterns of life which have been familiar to Americans for generations.

I am quite sure, however, that no matter what you do in life you will not be permitted to escape the consequences of the new responsibilities which have fallen to your country. If you are teachers, you will constantly be called upon to explain in language that will satisfy your students, the policies which your country must follow in the world because of its new and greater role. If you are editors or writers on public affairs, you may often be up against the problem of exercising your critical faculties in the manner which this University has taught you, without, at the same time, unfairly and dangerously undermining the position of your country abroad, or of its public servants at home. If you enter administration, whether it be in Government service or in the service of one of your great industries, you will find yourselves unexpectedly wrestling with the financial and political problems of strange people in distant lands. If you enter technical or scientific services, you may even find yourselves confronting these problems physically, for you may well be drafted for some of the technical undertakings which your country will be called upon to perform in many parts of the world.

It may be that you will only - I apologize for that "only" - be involved as a tax payer. But even here you will certainly be reminded of your new role in world affairs during your annual encounter with your income tax forms. Somehow or other this new role which has fallen upon your country will affect you personally.

You will recall that one of the characters in South Pacific - and I refer now to the book rather than to the play -

stranded on some desolate Pacific island outpost, asks himself in a moment of almost pathetic anguish, "What am I doing here?". It was the irrational and unpredictable circumstances of war which led to that question, but I am sure that one way or another Americans will be asking themselves again and again, even in the peaceful courses which we all hope we shall be able to follow in the years to come, "What in the world am I doing here?". They will find the answer only in the role which destiny has called their country to play in this century.

There will be one other new circumstance in life as you will live it in your generation. People in other lands will not only be aware of this nation's new responsibilities, but they will constantly be asking themselves and others how well it may be expected to fill its new role. They will ask it, of course, about your country as a whole, but they will formulate their answer often in terms of the way in which they think you, as an individual, are measuring up to their expectation. It will be a new experience for Americans to find that any question might be raised about their very presence might create even a suspicion of fear in the minds of people abroad. It is, however, an inevitable consequence of the power which you will inherit that people will wonder, sometimes with apprehension, whether or not you will wield this power with restraint, with wisdom, and with a high sense of obligation and responsibility. They will know that unless you exercise these qualities your power will in the long run betray you and destroy you, as it has others in the past who have not known how to use it. They will know also that it is within your power to control and release forces, both political and physical, which must have for them far reaching consequences for good or ill.

Only time can tell and only history can record whether or not the United States will meet the full measure of responsibility which has been laid upon it. As one whose job is in part to observe the conduct of foreign policy, and who has had long and happy contacts with your country, I venture to make a prophecy. I believe that the American people, both as a nation and as individuals, will meet the challenge which these times present them, with honour and honesty, and that they will fulfil the world's hopes of them. This prophecy will be fulfilled, however, only if certain important characteristics or tendencies which have already established themselves in the policy of this country are nurtured and permitted to grow. I am sure that the result will make you proud.

One reason for my confidence is drawn from the good relationship which exists between your country and mine. This provides a fine illustration of how a relatively small country - in power and population - can live along side a great one without any sense of fear; can conduct its relations with that country without any sense of inferiority; can work closely with it in general international matters without any feeling of being led by the nose. This relationship is almost unique in its intimacy and its day by day friendly exchanges. In an uneasy and distressing world it is a steady beacon of hope.

Of course, we in Canada have our complaints about the United States, one of which is that, for some unaccountable reason, you have attracted so many of our best people that by now there must be hundreds of thousands of Canadians in California alone, where they seem to prosper rapidly and assimilate easily, and, so far as I can gather, become without great difficulty movie stars, bank presidents and university heads (I put these occupations in inverse order of repute!)

An outstanding example of this larceny by you of our human resources is, of course, your own President. I recall him first as a stalwart University of Toronto freshman. At that time, I was doubling as a history professor and a football coach (we have to organize our resources very carefully in Canada). I spotted young Sterling as a potentially great line-man. He became one and where he planted his feet no opposing ball carrier passed. I thought also that he might, with diligence, become a good historian, but I never dreamed that he would migrate to the Presidency of this great university. This loss to Canada temporarily cast a shadow over our relations with you, and we considered for a time throwing up an academic curtain along the border! But wiser counsels prevailed, we swallowed our pride, and Canadian-American relations remained the model of what relations should be between states.

That relationship, however, should not be misconstrued as meaning that Canada is moving inevitably and happily into union with the United States. That is not true. We are quite content with our present position of independence inside our Commonwealth of Nations. We are also willing and anxious to accept responsibility for the economic, political, and social development of the northern half of this continent. We may, of course, be wrong, but somehow or other we feel that our political and social and legal institutions are better, for us, than yours would be. We move at a somewhat slower tempo in Canada and we like it that way. We feel that we have a sense of social solidarity and cohesion, of ordered progress, which would not be strengthened by a change to any other system of government or by amalgamation with any other country. We are, moreover, engaged in an important and successful venture in the incorporation within one state of two peoples of differing background - English and French - who are committed to the survival of their respective languages, cultures and traditions. We consider this experiment too significant for us and for others to endanger it by absorption in any other state.

We wish, of course, at the same time, to continue and, indeed, to strengthen our close and friendly contacts with the United States. For one thing, we are acutely - I use the word advisedly - aware of your importance to us economically. We would like to deepen and broaden our commercial relationships with you and bring them more into balance. It would, for instance, be fine for us if your 145 millions would buy as much from us as our 14 millions do from you. That would, we think, help both our countries, and would make unnecessary the restrictions we at times are forced to place on trade with the United States because the greater proportion of that trade - the largest volume of trade between any two countries in the world - consists of Canadian imports from this country. But here again, the closest possible, the freest possible, trade arrangements cannot, and in our view need not, mean for us the loss of our economic independence by a customs union or in any other way.

As I see it, the central problem that faces our two governments in their relations with each other is the extension and the deepening of these political and economic contacts, without creating the impression in either country that co-operation means absorption. In any event, I feel sure that Americans would rather co-operate with a free, vigorous and growing Canada than absorb 10 Canadian provinces, which would presumably become States. Surely you do not want another dozen Senators! And what would Hollywood and fiction do if the scarlet-coated Royal Canadian Mounted Police became the Federal Bureau of Arctic Investigation!

The record of Canadian-American relations, then, gives us cause for confidence that this country will play with honour and distinction its new role on the world stage. Another reason for that confidence is the strong and deep-rooted democratic traditions of this country.

It is a happy circumstance - and one of great importance for the world - that the enormous power of this land is held by a people of liberal traditions with a democratic form of government and with a strong sense of responsibility for the welfare, not only of their own, but of the world community. This quality in your society gives the world reason to believe that you yourselves will be the critics of your own policies; that your own conscience both national and individual will be the most effective check on your actions; and that you will protect yourselves against the dangers of arrogance, rashness and provocation which often attend the exercise of power. The debates which go on in this country, at times tumultuously and acrimoniously, especially in matters of foreign policy, occasionally confuse and disturb the observer from abroad. We can ease our concern by the knowledge that this noisy clamour gives assurance to the rest of the world that your public is determined to be informed of every aspect of your foreign policy with all its implications.

The spirit of the town meeting remains - even though it may at times seem obscured and distorted by klieg lights, whirring cameras, microphones and sensational headlines. Curiosity and intelligence, idealism and generosity, a sense of fair play, with decision only after full discussion remain strong elements in the character of the American people. They give us in other countries the hope that your foreign policy, once it is formulated, will be strong without being arrogant; dynamic without being rash; realistic without being reactionary.

My third reason for having faith in the wise discharge of your responsibilities as a great nation is the evidence you have already given in the post-war period of far-seeing and statesmanlike policies in the face of grave emergencies. History will record that the Marshall Plan was an expression of national policy almost without parallel as an example of enlightened self-interest in the best meaning of that term. There are other examples, which I have not time to mention. Taken together, they give the world good reason to believe that the people of this country, by a combination of shrewd judgment about the realities of the situation and willingness to adopt measures conceived on a majestic scale in the international field, will be equal to the role of leadership which they have now assumed.

My fourth reason for confidence is the constant evidence that the people of this country really wish to enter into a genuine partnership with other nations in the conduct of their foreign policy. As the aims of that foreign policy gradually become more clearly defined, it also becomes increasingly evident that the people of this country do not wish to force their policy upon anybody. On the contrary, through international organizations based on democratic conceptions, they are prepared to work out with their neighbours and with other like-minded states all over the world, procedures which are mutually acceptable. This is a slow process and sometimes frustrating. It never produces exactly the results which are desired. However, the determination to pursue it, with firmness and magnanimity, is one of the principal hallmarks of greatness in a powerful state.

My final reason for encouragement is one with special significance to a Canadian. I think that the national life of our

two countries is based upon moral, spiritual and intellectual values which together we have drawn from the peoples of many lands and from generations of human experience. For us in the North American continent these values are a common inheritance from our European background, which we have developed in our trans-Atlantic environment and which we believe underlie our civilization. Three years ago, in a lecture given at the University of Toronto, the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. St. Laurent, endeavoured to define the general principles of Canadian foreign policy. At that time he said that he thought the Canadian people were fully aware of the values upon which their national life was founded, and that they were anxious to preserve these values. Here is what he said:

"No foreign policy is consistent nor coherent over a period of years unless it is based upon some conception of human values. I know that we live in an age when it is fashionable to speak in terms only of hard realism in the conduct of international affairs. I realize also that at best the practice of any policy is a poor approximation of ideals upon which it may be based. I am sure, however, that in our national life we are continually influenced by the conceptions of good and evil which emerged from Hebrew and Greek civilization and which have been transformed and transmitted through the Christian traditions of the Western World. These are values which lay emphasis on the importance of the individual, on the place of moral principles in the conduct of human relations, on standards of judgment which transcend mere material wellbeing. They have ever influenced our national life as we have built a modern state from east to west across the continent. I am equally convinced that on the basis of this common experience we shall discern the same values in world affairs, and that we shall seek to protect and nurture them."

Those are good words. The principles they express apply equally to the people of the United States. It is our common responsibility to nurture and defend these values. We can do so by stating them clearly, by observing them in the conduct of our national affairs, by maintaining them in the presence of those strong materialistic forces in the contemporary world which attack them, and by creating as far as possible conditions in the world in which they may thrive. So long as we do so, I am sure that we may face the future with confidence. May that future hold - for you who are graduating today from this great university - the happiness which comes from honest endeavour, constructive achievement and the good life.