

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 49/34 . . . Address by Mr. L.S. St. Laurent, Prime Minister of Canada, in Acknowledgement of the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, N.Y., on October 14, 1949.

It is needless for me to say I am very glad to be here in Troy today, and I am exceedingly grateful for the high honour which has just been accorded me by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. It is a privilege I shall always treasure, to be associated with this Institute with its high tradition of scholarship in pure and applied science, and I am proud that the association begins at such a significant milestone in the history of the Institute.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute is, I believe, the oldest surviving school of science and engineering in the United States. As a result of the "application of science to the common purpose of life" to use the words of our founder, Stephen van Rensselaer, the Institute has played a major role in the industrialization and the development, not only of the United States but of the whole modern world. In peace and in war, the graduates of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have been prominent in the original conception and in the construction of vast and varied engineering projects. I am told early spectacular examples are Brooklyn Bridge and the original Ferris wheel. But Rensselaer does more than deal with the material things of life. From this Institute have come graduates trained and skilled at working with people as well as with instruments and tools. But you did not invite the Prime Minister of Canada to this Convocation to tell you about the history or the objectives of this great institute of practical learning. You know them better than I do. What I am going to do is to say something about the relationship of my country with yours; and the relationship of our two North American nations with the rest of the world.

The United States is now the most powerful nation in the world. Canada is even larger in geographical extent than the United States, but our population is less than one-eleventh, and our developed wealth only about one-sixteenth as great as yours. In other words, ours is a comparatively small nation living beside a very great one.

Now, in our generation, the fate of many small nations with great neighbours has been anything but happy. The classic example, I suppose, is Czechoslovakia - a nation with a population about equal to ours - a people remarkable for their industry, for their skill and for their civilized behaviour. Twice in a single decade, the people of Czechoslovakia have fallen under the domination of powerful neighbours.

How different our Canadian experience has been. It is one hundred and thirty-five years since Canadians and Americans faced one another as foes. Most Canadians, and I dare say most

Americans, have forgotten that a man named Rensselaer was one of your leaders in that war. In this twentieth century, even the possibility of conflict between your country and ours has receded from the minds of both our peoples. That has not always been so. The scattered British colonies which were united to form the Canadian nation in 1867 were brought together, in large part, to strengthen their defences against possible aggression from the United States. That attitude was a quite natural outcome of our earlier history. In the background was the memory of two centuries of frequent wars and continuous threats of war.

I have already suggested that the establishment of a satisfactory relationship between great nations and their less-powerful neighbours is one of the most acute problems of our times. It is a commonplace to say that, in this respect, the attitude of the United States towards Canada has set an example to the world. Certainly Canada has not fallen under your domination and equally certainly you have not threatened our separate existence as a nation. Although your country is more powerful than it has ever been, the Canadian nation today is more securely independent and self-reliant than we have ever been. But it would, I believe, be a mistake to think that the good relations between the United States and Canada are the inevitable result of circumstances; or that they do not need to be cherished, if they are to persist.

Great powers, like other nations, are concerned about their own external security. You, in the United States, naturally want to be assured that your security, and your interests as a world power, will not be prejudiced by the policies or actions of Canada. Your border marches with ours for 5,526.6 miles. I give you the figure which is given in the Canada Year Book. The openness of this border is a source of great convenience, but it might also be a source of great worry and danger. At least two of the historic approaches to the North American continent, Hudson Bay and the Gulf and River St. Lawrence, are approaches through Canada.

Those who lived in Troy and along your Hudson valley during the first two centuries after the original settlement knew all too well what it meant, in terms of insecurity and danger, to have the St. Lawrence and Lake Champlain in unfriendly hands. I am sure you who live in Troy today are glad to take it for granted that the lower St. Lawrence is going to remain in friendly hands.

The present understanding between Canada and the United States for the maintenance of our mutual security is based upon an exchange of pledges made in 1938 by the late President Roosevelt and by my predecessor, Mr. Mackenzie King. The Ogdenburg Agreement of 1940 for the Permanent Joint Board on Defence, the Hyde Park Declaration of 1941, and the agreed statements on defence by your President and our Prime Minister of February 12, 1947, were based upon this common recognition of mutual responsibility for the defence of the whole continent. The agreed statement by President Truman and Mr. Mackenzie King declared that "in the interests of efficiency and economy, each government has decided that its national defence establishment shall, to the extent authorized by law, continue to collaborate for peacetime joint security purposes." One of the principles of collaboration laid down in this statement of common policy is the encouragement of common designs and standards in arms, equipment, organization, methods of training and new developments."

Our two countries have made considerable progress in working out plans for the standardization which is so obviously necessary if there is to be fully effective co-operation in defence. But the only way in which we in Canada can hope to carry out plans for standardization is to reach an understanding with the authorities of your country on procurement.

We cannot undertake to manufacture all the many and complicated and costly items of arms and equipment for modern military forces; many of these things we must obtain from your manufacturers. But, in order to pay for them, we must be in a position to provide you with certain other items for your forces which we can produce efficiently in Canada. That is how we co-operated, under the Hyde Park arrangement, during the war. And both countries benefited.

It seems to us only common sense to apply the same policy in peacetime; but that is not possible under your present legislation. Such a policy would, however, not mean any loss of business for your manufacturers or of employment for your labour. All it would mean is that you would sell arms and equipment for our forces and we would reciprocate by supplying some of the needs of your forces.

I might remind you that only last week the principle of integrated defence was accepted as the governing factor in the defence planning of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. At the meeting of the Defence Committee all agreed that each party must do its part as determined by its position and its resources to contribute to the common security of all. Without some arrangement for reciprocal defence purchasings with the United States, Canada cannot make the most effective contribution to the security of this continent and the North Atlantic area. And our aim in Canada is the greatest possible co-operation for our common security consistent with the maintenance of our independence as a nation. Co-operation to maintain peace and security is fortunately only one aspect of the relationship between your country and mine.

Canada is, by far, your greatest external field of investment, and you have never had any serious worries that political revolution or extreme action of any kind would endanger that investment. Our country, as you know, is the best customer in the world for your exports. And you sell a good deal more to us than we sell to you. For us that creates a dollar problem. This special economic situation therefore gives us an exceptional interest in your trade and financial policies. What you do or fail to do is of the utmost importance to Canada.

Our country, like yours, was once only a group of British colonies. The fact that we have worked out our relationship with the parent country by a slow process of adjustment by mutual consent, rather than by a quick break, does not mean that we are less independent than you. Since Canada became a nation we have not been a dependency of the United Kingdom, and the British people and government recognize that we are a better friend and ally because we run our own show.

On all the fundamental problems which we face in the world today, you are right in feeling that we in Canada will be on the same side, not because we dare not oppose you, but because our fundamental interests are the same as yours. At times we may differ with you, perhaps in matters of principle, perhaps in matters of tactics. We shall always seek to settle these differences by amicable discussion and, if necessary, by compromise.

But I hope you will continue not to expect Canada always to be the one to give in.

Though the United States and Canada have been remarkably successful in the past in handling our common problems harmoniously, I believe we can do still better. And the better we do, the more the world will profit from our own experience. We are living in the midst of a great struggle between two conceptions of the political destiny of man. The one is that men should be free individuals, and that political institutions exist to secure the freedom and promote the well-being of individual men and women. The other conception is that individual men and women are simply the material out of which to erect a powerful state. This other conception often attracts well-intentioned people who believe that the inhabitants of a state may, in their own interests, be deprived of personal freedom and well-being in order that they may eventually share in the greater wealth of an all-powerful state. That such a conception is a fallacy has been proved for all to see by the increasing despotism and the increasing misery in each successive totalitarian state.

In this atomic age, the United States has appeared as the foremost champion of the one conception and the Soviet Union of the other. The struggle between these two ideas will not be decided by material power alone. In that struggle, one of the sharpest contrasts is provided by the respective attitudes of the two great powers in the world to their smaller neighbours. Just compare the position of our country with the fate of Czechoslovakia.

We know -- or think we know -- better than any others, the measure of responsibility in world affairs which has fallen upon the United States in recent years. We know, as no one else knows, how, by tradition and experience, the people of the United States hesitate to become involved in affairs far from the shores of this continent. We know you have no lust for conquest and no urge for domination. We appreciate and respect your historical desire so aptly expressed in the good old American phrase "Minding one's own business". We know, as you know, that it is not by choice that today no great nation is free to mind its own business, in the old sense of that term. Both our peoples are proud of their national independence, but both are also a part -- perhaps the most fortunate part -- of the whole of humanity.

We, in North America, are still in less danger of direct hostile attack than most other parts of the world; but we have learned that we can have no security in a world of insecurity and no peace in a world at war. We, in North America, enjoy the highest standard of living in the world; but we are beginning to learn that we cannot count upon lasting and stable prosperity in a world of poverty and misery.

I have already mentioned the part which the graduates of Rensselaer have had in the scientific and technical advances of our industrial age not only on this continent but across the face of the globe. In the twentieth century the United States has led the world in invention and in the application of science to the production of wealth, and we in Canada, as your closest neighbour, have shared perhaps more than others in the benefits -- as we have also shared in the achievements themselves. The world needs more than ever the scientific knowledge and technical skill of this continent. But in a world dislocated and impoverished by two terrible world wars, we have learned that it is not enough to give leadership in invention, in engineering and in industrial development. The demand upon the statesmanship and

political leadership of this continent, and particularly of the United States, is even greater.

Your leaders have shown remarkable capacity for acts of statesmanship in new and perplexing circumstances. That statesmanship, exemplified in the Marshall Plan, the North Atlantic Treaty, and your President's Point Four, gives us confidence, and the whole world renewed hope.

We are proud that Canada, of all the nations which signed the North Atlantic Treaty, was the first to ratify it. For both our countries the North Atlantic Treaty represents an almost revolutionary departure from tradition. We have learned that security depends on the strength, economic and social, as well as political and military, which springs from combined endeavour. And in these last few months we have been harshly reminded that economic strength is quite as essential as military strength to the security of the free world.

For four centuries after the discovery of America, the nations of Europe gave the world political, economic, scientific and technical leadership which, whatever its defects, did result in a vast increase in the standard of living not only of Europe, but of many other parts of the world. In this twentieth century, the old continent of Europe -- twice ravaged by war -- is pre-occupied by its own restoration.

We, in Canada, know how rapidly the investment of American capital, American engineering skill, American industrial "know-how" can transform the wilderness, develop natural resources to serve human needs and human desires, and contribute thereby to the rising standard of life which we, on this continent, are justly proud. But, in a world with a steadily increasing population, with growing needs to be met, and vast resources crying out for development, we here in North America must, in the interests of our own lasting security and prosperity, look beyond the confines of this continent.

To many thoughtful people it appears today that the application of science and engineering to the conservation of the soil, the production of better crops and the more effective and economical use of the products of field and forest may be even more important than the further development of industry to the future of the human race. That is why there are many who feel that no more promising agency of international co-operation has been created since that war than the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

I recently read a book which fascinated me. It is called "The Coming Age of Wood" and was written by Mr. Egon Glesinger, Chief of the Forest Products Branch of the Food and Agriculture Organization. The purpose of the author is to show what a great and continuing contribution forests can make to the building of a world of plenty.

Of course, I have not the competence you here at Rensselaer have to judge its merits, but I do feel sure that its constructive outlook is the kind of attitude we need in the free world, if we are to present a positive and dynamic alternative to the system which prevails beyond the iron curtain.

One judgment I do feel competent to make. It is this: in the establishment of security and peace, in the restoration of

devastated regions, in the expansion of world trade, in the development of the resources of backward areas, in the conservation of the soil of the earth, of its forest resources and its water-power, and in the industrialization and diversification of the economies of other continents, there is only one nation with the wealth and the energy and the knowledge and the skill to give real leadership, and that nation is the United States. And where your nation is ready to lead in such constructive tasks, I am convinced you will have no difficulty in securing the active co-operation of all other free peoples.

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