

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ACADEMIC EXCHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

An address by Mr. Sidney E. Smith, Secretary of State for External Affairs, to the Convocation of the University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, on January 25, 1959.

Some weeks ago, President Henry was kind enough to send to me a copy of the press release issued by the University in connection with this convocation and this document reveals that although my most immediate concerns are now the intricacies of the political scene, both national and international, they have not always been so, and I cannot conceal my pleasure at being present for these familiar academic proceedings. My pleasure is the greater because of the honour which has been done me in inviting me to address Convocation, and in particular in giving me this opportunity to extend greetings and congratulations to today's graduates. That you have as students brought credit to yourselves and to your university has been demonstrated today in the conferring of degrees.

I would remind you, however, that the privileges and obligations of membership in an academic community do not cease with today's formal ceremonies. Indeed, as graduates of this institution of learning, you are entering into a much wider if more diffuse association than the immediate one to which you belonged as undergraduates. As alumni, your first loyalty will be to your alma mater - and your most vivid recollections will be of the experiences, intellectual and otherwise, which were yours during your student days. But it is not what you are leaving behind that I ask you to consider. It is rather the fact that, whatever endeavours you may now undertake, you do so in good company, as members of the commonwealth of civilized thought, as citizens of the republic of learning. The only boundaries to your potential experiences and discoveries are your own personal inclinations and the outermost limits of the mind and spirit, where particular loyalties and national allegiances disappear into a deeper and more comprehensive tradition.

In these surroundings and at this particular time, it would be difficult to offer a better symbol of this comprehensive tradition than Abraham Lincoln, who is honored not only locally and nationally, but also throughout every part of the world where men live by the same ideals as those to which Lincoln dedicated himself. I recently returned from an official visit to Brazil and there, in the office of the governor of one of the Brazilian States, I was not surprised to find in a prominent place, a commanding portrait of this great American President. Nor is it any more surprising that the Mayor of West Berlin, whose native language may not be Lincoln's but whose voice rings with the same timbre of freedom, will deliver the annual Lincoln Day address in Springfield. And nowhere outside of the United States is the the memory of Lincoln more revered and more respected than in my own country. Abraham Lincoln is one of the few heroes of childhood years for whom admiration and affection only increase over the years of our lives, as the depth and magnitude of his life and achievements become the more appreciated against the background of our own experiences, aspirations, successes and failures. I believe that the almost universal appeal and meaningfulness of a symbol such as Lincoln is one of the most powerful psychological bonds within the free world and especially between Canada and the United States, between whom the bonds of international understanding are close and indestructible.

Let me assure you now that I do not intend to deliver the usual sermon on the sources of the Canadian-American entente, based on such commandments from the sacred scrolls as "thou shalt not defend the undefended border". I hasten to add, however, that I consider the commandments no less mandatory because they are so frequently discussed.

Less frequent and more appropriate in this present company, are references to a less dramatic perhaps, but enormously effective means of deepening our understanding of each other. I refer to the exchange of students and professors between our two countries.

Between Canada and the United States there may be differences, some of them very important, in tradition, in contemporary attitudes, but these are honest differences arising out of the inescapable fact that there are and will continue to be two separate political communities existing in the Continent of North America. Such differences, we may be thankful, do not arise out of deliberate distortions of facts or wilful misrepresentation. There are not now and as far as I can ascertain, there never have been any intellectual barriers between us. The freest possible flow of ideas across national boundaries, just as candid exchanges of views either between private citizens or government representatives, are the best possible form of insurance against the sort of mistrust and international paranoia which are so distressing a feature of the contemporary world.

It is not because Canadians and Americans are basically different from the peoples of any other two neighbouring nations that we get along so well together. We are not more virtuous, nor do we have any special criteria which apply only in our dealings with each other. What is perhaps special, is the fact that we both recognize that differences are bound to arise between us, that such differences do not divide us, and that the best way to settle our problems is to sit down together and talk things over, without a lot of fuss and fanfare. Only a few weeks ago some of my colleagues and I in the Canadian Government had the pleasure of being hosts in Ottawa to members of the U.S. Government for a meeting of the Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Affairs. Our deliberations were not protracted and they were not spectacular but this was not because of any lack of important matters on our agenda. We did have problems of significance to both countries to discuss but we did so in a spirit of complete frankness and cordiality, and as a result I am sure that each other's point of view is the better understood and respected. I would reiterate that we owe this remarkable degree of intimacy not to any innate and mystical kind of "we-were-made-for-each-other" sympathy, but rather to cold hard facts of life which we have learned, sometimes by bitter experience, in the process of establishing and maintaining two separate households in North America.

The pattern of co-operation which has been built up between Canada and the U.S. as separate international entities, is, I firmly believe, something which has been achieved rather than bestowed by a benign historic and geographical providence. It is a tribute to the spirit of mutual accommodation which we have developed that we do not remind ourselves more often than we do - and I refer to Americans as well as Canadians - of the fact that this experience has not always been harmonious. Unlike the Bourbons however, we have learned, and if not forgotten - the historians see to that - at least we have learned to overlook.

In achieving this degree of mutual understanding I am convinced that the universities of our two countries and the close bonds of co-operation which they have developed have played no small part. Over the years there has been a steady growth in the two-way traffic between Canadian and American universities. An ever increasing number of Canadian students, both graduates and undergraduates, are studying for at least a year and often longer on American campuses. For the academic year 1957-58 there were no less than 5300 Canadians in approximate numbers engaged in studies in this country, many of them able to do so through the generosity of your universities in not limiting scholarship assistance to students from the United States. This breadth of spirit on your part is surely a manifestation of the best traditions of the academic world and has too often been taken for granted and gone unacknowledged. And the situation is happily not unreciprocal; for the 1957-58 academic year there were in Canada between 1700 and 1800 students from the United States.

But the close ties between our universities are not limited to student exchange. In addition, the tradition of visiting professors is one which we have honoured, and which has helped to inspire new perspectives and to produce flourishing new hybrids in the realm of ideas by cross-fertilization of the best strains of thought. Surely the same is true with regard to the fact that the pages of scholarly journals are not closed to anyone other than the nationals of the country of its publication. If other examples be needed to complete the pattern of our academic inter-relationships, I would mention very briefly the increasing use to which the unique historical materials in the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa are being put by students from the United States, and the increasing awareness on their part that this continent's significant events over the past three centuries are not confined to a revolution and a civil war. No visiting scholars could be more welcome. At the same time I find it both heartening and interesting that centres of Canadian studies are being established at American universities and that the only Centre for Commonwealth Studies as a separate undertaking exists at Duke University in the United States of America.

There is, I need hardly remind you, a vast flow of people crossing our border in one direction or the other each year, but from this flow I have singled out one relatively small stream because its qualitative importance in the long run is far out of proportion to its quantitative size. To me, one Canadian student who has lived in your country for a year and come to know something at firsthand of the United States, of its people and of their thinking on contemporary problems is far more significant, in terms of exercising a reasoned and responsible influence in his community, than are the countless tourists who know little more of the United States than that Florida is warm and pleasant in the winter. The reverse situation is equally effective in dispelling the idea so prevalent in the United States that Canada is a broad and beautiful holiday hinterland which differs in few if any significant ways from its neighbour. It is a sad reflection on the age of mass misinformation in which we seem sometimes helplessly to be immersed, that such are the criteria by which popular assessments are often made. However deplorable such standards may be, they are nonetheless all too frequently applied, and to them the only effective counterpoise is to be found in a free, uninhibited and vigorous intellectual exchange across our borders. I can think of no more effective medium through which this two-way traffic, the life-blood of our stable and friendly relationship, can be conducted than the university community.

Whatever is true for Canada and the United States should, I assert, be applicable in principle to the rest of the world. The Canada - United States relationship is not as unique in character as it is sometimes made out to be. It is true, of course, that there are some unique aspects to it but it is primarily a sound and sensible relationship because we have

wanted to make it so and because we have learned by experience that we can trust each other. The engineers who have built the indestructible bridges of understanding between us have numbered among their company a good many itinerant scholars who have ventured out from their own immediate world in search of inspiration elsewhere, in search of stimulating and challenging new horizons.

To a Canadian, and especially to a Canadian whose most immediate concerns are those of my own portfolio, there are other bridges of tolerance and understanding spanning the world, no less important than those which span the 49th parallel. I refer to the Commonwealth, that association of independent nations which has emerged with a new sense of vitality from an imperial organization of an earlier time. It is not my intention to try to reveal to you, as Canadians before American audiences are so often willing to do, the mysteries of the nature of the Commonwealth. Rather, I prefer in these august academic surroundings to deal with facts and in the contemporary international scene, there are few more compelling facts than the existence of the Commonwealth and its potential influence as a force for peace and goodwill throughout the world. In the Commonwealth, Canadians see not a power bloc, or a pressure group, or a militant lobby which might serve as a means of imposing our wishes on others. We see instead a loose and flexible and friendly channel of communication between diverse areas and peoples of the world. With the rapid rise to independent status of so many new national units in recent years, there has been the ever-present danger of a breakdown of communication between these and the older nations of the international community. There has been the danger of erecting, in response to resurgent and militant nationalisms, national barriers and ramparts of prejudice which can be as dangerous in one sense as the most lethal machines of destruction. The Commonwealth, I maintain proudly as one who numbers himself as one of its citizens, has by its very nature exercised a moderating effect on some of these trends. In making this assertion I do not speak in a patronizing spirit of something which the white, Anglo-Saxon, natively English-speaking members of the Commonwealth family have achieved. On the contrary, the achievement, if it can be termed such, is really that of all members of the Commonwealth on the basis of complete equality, for their decision to remain in this association is one which each has taken without compulsion. To the question, why do the members of the Commonwealth stay together in this peculiar association, there is a very simple answer which is not unlike the answer to the question, why do Canada and the United States get on so well together; because they want to; because the leaders of these nations recognize that in the channels of friendly exchange and interchange available through Commonwealth membership, there exist opportunities which might otherwise be unavailable, or at least more difficult of attainment, for correcting the myopic perspectives which often afflict the vision of national governments.

In the evolution of this free association of independent states, the role of the university has been an enormously important one. This is not casual speculation but an indisputable fact. In particular, the Commonwealth stands greatly in the debt of the older universities of the United Kingdom which in earlier days formed the intellectual focus of the Empire, drawing students from the most remote corners of a far-flung imperial system. It is a tribute to the overriding wisdom and to the independence of these institutions that the ideas and ideals which they promulgated were not dictated by political exigencies. That students who, during the most formative years of their lives studied in the United Kingdom, later returned home to play leading roles in the achievement of independence for their countries is beyond doubt. At the same time these same leaders have insisted on maintaining close association with other Commonwealth members with whom they share similar values and ideals.

In recognition of the singular importance which universities have played in the ever-changing mosaic of the Commonwealth, a decision was recently taken at the Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference which met in Montreal in September, to institute a far-reaching programme of scholarships and fellowships for Commonwealth students. Although the details of this programme remain to be settled, it is envisaged that when in full operation, almost one thousand students from Commonwealth countries will be studying in any given year in the universities of other Commonwealth members. Conferences of Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers provide governments with splendid opportunities for exchanging views. Beyond the realm of policy, however, there is the important - and in the relations between democratic states, perhaps more important - area of understanding and friendship amongst private citizens. If this new scholarship programme helps to train those who will occupy positions of authority and responsibility in the public life of their countries, we will be satisfied. We will be better satisfied if it results over the course of years, in the predisposition on the part of anyone, regardless of his citizenship or vocation, towards a more sympathetic understanding of those who may differ from him; if it results in an engineer from Asia having a clearer idea of parliamentary democracy in Canada and a Canadian teacher having deeper and fuller appreciation of the rich and colourful heritage of Asia. Such benefits as may accrue from this imaginative project are not those, we expect, that will be measured in terms of kilowatts or miles of paved highway or even in terms of the new fetish of our times, the gross national product. If this multilateral exchange can open new intellectual perspectives for even a few citizens of some countries of the world, and if it can foster an awareness on the part of only a relative few that the inevitable differences which exist between and among the peoples of the world need not be regarded as threatening, the universities of the Commonwealth will have provided an enormous service, not only to the Commonwealth, but also to the whole world. For in this association, we see not an exclusive club but an international testing ground, a microcosm of things as they might be.

I have taken you far afield in attempting to describe the influence of the university in fashioning the ties of friendship which exist between Canada and the Republic of the United States and between Canada and the Commonwealth of Nations. I now return to my original point of departure and suggest to you that this constructive influence has been able to make itself felt simply because the university as such has refused to bow to national considerations and swears first allegiance to the universal republic of learning and the comprehensive commonwealth of civilized human thought. To the humanizing and civilizing mission of the university, the contemporary world looks with greater expectation and with higher hope than ever before in recorded history. Spanning the gulf of time, and all the barriers of geography and all man-made boundaries is the human capability, the capacity for the understanding and appreciation of our fellow man. In that capability is our greatest hope and in our universities are our most effective laboratories for its creative development. Wars begin in the minds of men. In the universities of the free world - and I have the privilege of speaking at one of this illustrious company - is the only effective equipment for opening the mind which is narrow, biased, one-track or, more fraught with danger, closed.

I salute this company of graduates, one and all, and bid you Godspeed in whatever direction you may have chosen for yourself. May the charts of the human spirit which you have been privileged to glimpse, even if only briefly during your years at this university, serve you well in the specific voyages you have undertaken and in the challenging days of discovery which lie ahead for all of us.

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