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The British Commonwealth and the New International Outlook

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PRESIDENT GEORGE H. SEDGEWICK: In these last days, when we do not know until we see our morning papers just what our status is in the British Empire, and when we may wake up tomorrow morning and find that a new formula has been invented under which we may be we know not where, it follows logically that we ought to know something of the outside world and our possible future relations with it. It is therefore very fortunate that at the first meeting after our Declaration of Independence we should have with us a gentleman who is eminently qualified to state the facts to us, and start us off on the right track. I have much pleasure in introducing Professor Zimmern.

PROF. ZIMMERN: Gentlemen, as an Englishman I am not going to have the temerity to deal with the latest phase of Canada's International Relationships, but rather to take a brief account of the international situation as developed in Europe in the last few months, and then describe the new form which I think political institutions in general are taking as a result of the new conditions in the post-war world, which will perhaps show you how to relate the news of this morning to broader considerations.

Firstly: The recent entry of Germany into the League of Nations, in an atmosphere of the very greatest harmony, was followed almost immediately by a remarkable rapprochement between France and Germany, when Mr. Briand proposed to Herr Stresemann the physical evacuation of the

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Rhineland—a move which was sanctioned by the French people. That means that the League of Nations is starting out with a new lease of life; that the pre-war diplomatic system will not recur; that we are face to face with a new and more co-operative system of political relations in Europe; and that the whole international situation has been to that extent transformed. I believe that this new relationship between France and Germany will be as permanent as anything in political affairs can be.

Great Britain will undoubtedly associate herself closely with this new Franco-German relationship, and if those three countries act together in Europe they will form a bloc of influence so powerful that no other states or groups of states can form a counter-weight. Not merely will the sore in the Rhineland be healed, but these two nations will make agreements and associations which will bind them closer and closer, and these will gradually draw in other nations east of Germany—Poland and Czecho-Slovakia—who previously had closer relation to France; and thus the whole of Central Europe will become more and more one bloc. That is a very happy solution, and I think there is a possibility of all sorts of practical steps being taken in the International Economic Conference next year that will have a good effect on the economic problems of Europe.

Secondly: The Council of the League has been re-organized, and now consists of fourteen members, and is much more representative of the General Assembly and of the general membership. We cannot forget that at present the British Empire only has one of those fourteen members. I think the feeling at Geneva would be perfectly ready to welcome a second representative from the British members, and as Canada is the senior Dominion it is natural to think of Canada in that connection.

Thirdly: The big factor on which I would like to dwell is the special position which the British Commonwealth occupies in the League. With Europe drawing more closely together, and with the United States not a member of the League, the British Commonwealth is becoming more and more a new link between Europe and that great non-member, that important part of the world which is not in the

League. The British Commonwealth has also a particular point of view to represent on the League. At present economic considerations are dominant in Europe, which is a debtor continent. In some respects Europe feels in a position of great inferiority. Very large investments of capital are going into Europe from outside, and this has somewhat weakened the power of democracy and democratic ideas there, because some of the peoples of Europe hardly feel that they are any more self-governing, because they are under the control of economic forces over which they have little or no influence. On the other hand, we in the British Commonwealth represent what may be called the political habit of mind, the political traditions and belief that public opinion, public ideas and forces, must be dominant, as against those great private forces, however beneficent they may be, which are assuming more and more importance in the modern world.

Now, taking a broader survey, let me say that we live in a world utterly different from that in which our traditional political institutions grew up, when the watchword of the political architects was "Stability." Men created institutions to resist the onrush of popular passion. Today we have an entirely new situation.

1. We are now living in a world which is economically interdependent, with railways, telegraphs, cables, etc., stretching, like a material body, through the habitable globe; also we have stock exchanges, vast international banking, and other industrial and commercial corporations. We are therefore in face of an international organization, but it is operating only on the economic plane, and operating privately rather than publicly.

2. We have a world which is swayed by the movement of democracy. Although in the last hundred and fifty years the world, materially speaking, has become much more uniform through railroads and such facilities being scattered throughout the globe, at the same time it has become much more diverse. The world that was represented at the Conference of 1815 was politically far more uniform than the world that is represented in the League of Nations today. The spread of democratic ideas from England, from Hol-

land, from Switzerland, from France has led to a movement often called self-determination which has brought into existence centres of power, centres of public discussion, centres of confusion and agitation which have made our world far more living, far more nervous, and—most important of all—far more rapid in its reactions.

Here I come to my third great force—the nervous system of the modern world; the immense speed with which movements work themselves out. Events overtake ideas. No sooner is an idea promulgated, no sooner do we realise that an issue arises in the world, than some event takes place which makes us realise that what might almost be called material forces are outstripping the movement of men's considered thoughts.

Consider the world as it was in 1906 and as it is today. Who in 1906, looking at the map of Europe, or at the condition of Russia, Turkey, China, or the British Empire, could possibly have predicted the changes of the last twenty years? Any one who in 1906 had predicted the world as we have it today in those different regions would have been considered a lunatic. Nevertheless, those great changes have come about without the considered, deliberate will of any body of men, but simply by the operation of those great forces which are in danger of becoming material, or non-human, unless we devise means for controlling them.

The point I want to make is that the political institutions of this twinkling, nervous, moving, changing post-war world must be adapted to those conditions, and we must revise our whole conception of what political institutions are and how they function. In fact, such a revision has come about. The League of Nations today and the British Commonwealth today are entirely different from what men imagined they were or would be in 1918.

I was one of those who had something to do with framing the British draft of the Covenant, and in December, 1918, we imagined that the Council of the League would be a kind of 19th century body brought up to date—a sort of rehash of the Concert of Europe, bringing in the United States and Japan. We imagined that it would be possible in some way to bridge the gulf between the Triple Entente

and the Triple Alliance, and form a central instrument for the co-ordination, even the centralization, of European policy. We imagined that as Sir Edward Grey in 1913 had co-ordinated the policy in the Balkans, and as in 1878 Lord Salisbury and Bismarck had co-ordinated the policy in the Near East, so it would be possible to co-ordinate the policy generally.

Not the working of the League itself, but the events of a few weeks in Geneva in 1919, showed that that idea was completely mistaken, and broke down on the first trial. The attempt was made to co-ordinate the policy of the Powers towards Russia, but it was at once found that Britain had one policy, France another, America another, and so on. We know now that, with the growth of democracy, the spread of public interest, the fact that Parliaments throughout four or five continents wish to have their say in foreign affairs, any idea of centralizing or co-ordinating policy is impossible. We know that policy is more and more subject to local influences and interests; and we have witnessed the steady regionalization of policy in the growth of the Little Entente in East Central Europe; we witnessed it in the Washington Agreement; and more recently in certain phases of the Mediterranean question; and we will witness it more and more.

The League of Nations cannot co-ordinate policy. What, then, is its function? To provide a framework within which this living, moving, nervous force can operate without detriment to the world as a whole. The chief political function of the League is not to conduct diplomacy, which it can never do, and which if it tried to do would lead to corruption and to neglect of the other tasks that are carried on at Geneva. Its chief function is to be the limiting factor in diplomacy, to supply the moral authority, and if necessary the physical and economic authority which will prevent any outbreak of violence, or any breach; in other words, to provide a world law within which nations and groups can move about freely and flexibly, as the conditions of the modern world require. Often I read in the newspapers that a new India or a new China has been made, and that this is another blow at the League. It is exactly the

opposite. Provided that those alliances, those treaties and documents contain nothing contrary to the Covenant—contain no war or threatened war—they represent the very satisfactory adjustment of local needs to the general framework.

I will give you two definitions of the League:—"A framework for decentralization." A new dynamic definition, which I much prefer, made by a friend of mine in the secretariat—"The League of Nations represents the maximum of co-operation between Governments at any given moment." That is to say, there may be more League of Nations after discussions in committee than there was before; there may sometimes be less. At the end of the March Council there was very little League of Nations left. The League simply represents the maximum co-operation between the wills and desires and needs of individual governments at any particular moment; and what is keeping the whole thing going is not any constitution, but simply the living forces of which I have spoken, which must learn more and more to co-operate rather than conflict.

Therefore the real work of the League is not carried on in those departments of high diplomacy where nations bargain and negotiate with one another like so many lawyers representing different clients, but rather in those departments where men are working for better health, better transportation, better education, better labor conditions, and so on. They find when they meet around the table that they have a common professional interest which enables them easily to co-operate once they understand one another's point of view.

Thus the League of Nations, so far from being an instrument of centralization, has in fact been an instrument of decentralization. Previous to 1914 the sovereign states met only at one point—through their diplomatic representatives, through the agents of power. Today they meet at many points—their Ministries of Health, of Transportation, of Finance, etc., meet. So that the League has decentralized political functions, and led men to realise that just as there is an international system through which all sorts of professional men meet one another across national and

frontier lines, so there must be a public international system to enable men of all kinds to meet.

In fact, the League has extended the whole scope and meaning of the term "Politics." We still too often think of politics simply in the sense of the play of party; but today at Geneva the banker, the engineer, the educational expert, are just as much at home as the representatives of the Labor political tradition. I can illustrate this in my own field of intellectual co-operation. Before the war, scholars considered that they ought to have nothing to do with governments; they were shy of governments, which they feared might interfere with the freedom of thought and expression. Today the astronomers, botanists, biologists and other scientists realise that if they are adequately to follow the work that is done in their own field in other countries there must be international organization; for instance, that if they are to get free exchange of learned publications, which is extremely desirable, they have to deal with a very stiff-necked body called the Universal Postal Union, which will not allow additional mail to go free of charge without the sanction of an international convention. One of our jobs in the Paris Institute is exactly this—to frame into a form of treaty these common needs of the learned world which cannot be brought about without governmental action.

Now a few words on the economic organization of the League, on which I fear there is considerable misapprehension. If a political superstate is ill adapted to the needs of the modern world, an economic superstate is still more so. As the Socialist Movement of the 19th Century, which tried to associate the state with the management of trade and industry, proved a failure, so the application of that idea to the international field is still more impossible. It is inconceivable that an attempt should ever be made to manage the production and distribution of commodities through any system of international government. Politics are to economics as land is to labor; and if it is difficult to organize politics from a common centre it is still more difficult to organize that sphere of our own relations where you are subject to constant change and fluctuation and oscillation

through the failure of crops, movement of prices, effects of climate, etc. But you can do in the economic sphere exactly what you can in the political sphere—lay down a very good frame-work within which these infinitely various forces of economic life can operate without detriment to the welfare of the world as a whole. That is the task which this League Economic Conference will attempt to work out next year.

I think an advance can be made in one or two particular directions. It would be obviously absurd for the League to attempt to bring about a uniform tariff policy, as some nations will remain free trade, others will remain protectionist; but a good deal can be done in detail to bring about more uniformity in tariff procedure, and sweep away many elements in tariff—features of discrimination, features of reprisal, sometimes matters that may lead to tariff wars, to the great disadvantage of the trading community everywhere. In speaking of tariffs I am thinking of discriminations such as we suffered from in Britain in the matter of shipping. I think that when these matters are put upon the table it may be found that everybody has something to give up and everybody has something to gain, and the result may be more satisfactory than if negotiations were conducted between one country and another.

Then we face that whole big realm of the use by governments of physical force, and exacting of economic penalties; a question which was forcibly brought to notice on the occupation of the Ruhr; a question still unsolved in international law. The question of the right of governments to use economic penalties is intimately bound up with the devising of some international system of economic penalties to deal with recalcitrant states. But I know that that is a very delicate subject in a country which has a long frontier with a non-member of the League. I mention it as one that is being widely discussed.

Another big subject is what I might call the problem of Locarno in its economic aspects. By that I mean the drawing of a frontier between regional economic agreements and activities of the more universal system. One of the things we fought against in the war was the ideal of Berlin-Bagdad, or the idea the Germans had of enclosing this system

of rails and switches and using it in their own interest entirely. There is undoubtedly an impression today that the idea may recur in altered form. There is a certain idea in those agreements that are being made in Europe; nevertheless, those agreements, from different points of view, are highly desirable. It is the task of the expert to work out exactly how far it is desirable that agreements should be made over a limited area, and to what general principles such agreements should conform in the interests of the world as a whole. I believe that the great financial, manufacturing and trade community, which now has its own international organizations, will prove equal to the task of devising the safeguard and perfecting that organization.

Now, where does the British Commonwealth come in this development? I believe that since the war the development of the British Commonwealth has conformed exactly to the new situation in which we find ourselves. Just as the League of Nations in its development has been quite different from what those who framed it believed it would be, so the development of the British Commonwealth has run counter to many ideas which were current in 1918. It may seem to some of you that the British Commonwealth is getting lost in the League of Nations; as though the League in some respects has done away with the need for the spread of the British League of Nations; but I think nobody who knows Geneva could hold that opinion. You must never forget that the existing League of Nations, with its fifty-four states, is very insecurely founded, because those states have so very little in common among themselves. It is true they have great common interests—peace and security—but they have very little in common, or nothing at all, in tradition. What is common in tradition between China and Chili? The Geneva League of Nations is, as it were, establishing itself on the first floor without any foundations. The difference between our British Commonwealth and the Geneva League is this—that we are a League with common roots, common traditions, common political experience, and I believe common tasks to perform in the future. The place of the British Commonwealth in the League is a unique one because of its including a large

single group of nations who really know what we want to do. There are other groups, but they are not nearly as intimate as ours, and they are not founded on anything nearly so enduring.

Now, what unites us is not interest; it is something very much deeper. When you sit down and try to discover what are the common material interests uniting the different parts of the British Commonwealth it is difficult to find them; and many conferences have failed to devise anything of a very large nature. But when you sit down and think out wherein we differ from the rest of the world, it is in our political ideas and institutions you find the growth. For instance, you find that the Covenant of the League itself has embodied for the world as a whole the same main factors and elements as in our own political tradition. The disputes clauses of the Covenant; the clauses under which peace is safeguarded subject to enquiry and delay, so that members of the League are not allowed to go to war with one another short of a considerable cooling-off period—what is that but the application internationally of one old ideal of the Pax Britannica? Similarly one of the greatest advances in the Covenant—the Mandate clauses—are the application in the international sphere of the idea of proceedings with backward peoples which were slowly worked out by British Administrators in India and elsewhere from the end of the eighteenth century and onwards.

If, then, you are tempted to think that recent readjustments in the relations between the Dominions and Great Britain have in any way loosened the bonds of the British Commonwealth, I think that idea is a profound mistake. I think the very flexibility of those relations shows how extremely well adapted they are to conditions of the peace of the world. I think that possibly one reason why your great neighbor to the south has been unable to associate itself as fully as people expected in international action is because she is burdened with a rigid constitution. I express no opinion on exactly what has happened in London at the Conference. But whatever you or I may think of it, it is a very remarkable illustration of the workings of a flexible constitution; and to have flexibility in this democratic age

is the essence of political life. There are things that have been done in this Imperial Conference which, under a different constitutional system, or in a different temper, would have led to serious crises—led, as for instance in the case of Norway, even to separation. The fact that such readjustments could be carried through with such perfect good temper shows, I think, that we have a set of institutions which are really in harmony with the spirit of the age, and really meet the developing needs and ideals of the nations concerned.

I think, then, that the function of the British Commonwealth in the larger League of Nations is to do exactly the same pioneer work which it has already done in the nineteenth century. There are a number of questions, delicate questions, which if they were today referred to the League of Nations, could not be solved; which, if discussed around the table at Geneva, would lead to the Committee parting in anger. They can be solved, and must be solved, within the narrower relationship, the more intimate relationship of the British Nation.

We are the pioneers to the larger international world, and the people at Geneva must be accustomed to regard us in that light. They do so already, to some extent; and if we are, together, the pioneers of Geneva, it is not too much to say that you in Canada are, in a sense, the pioneers in this newer development. It is inevitable that you, rather than we, should lead, because we in Great Britain are at the mercy of what and the other Dominions think. We are at present in a situation where we have to take the lead, but naturally, until full equality is reached, that must necessarily be the case. When the transition has been fully completed I think the elements of our permanent association will stand out much more clearly, and I believe that, so far from weakening the Commonwealth, all those recent readjustments that have taken place between 1918 and last Saturday will have the permanent effect of strengthening, and bringing out more into public view for ourselves, and showing the nations of the Commonwealth in the world, the big permanent factors which unite us.

In closing I would lay stress upon my opening remarks

as to the need for holding fast all the essential political traditions of our Commonwealth. We work in an age when democracy is being weakened. It is not being weakened so much from dictatorships, which are due to local causes, but from those more dominant forces beyond the control of individual peoples and individual parliaments. We have the great tradition of thinking politically; of thinking always in terms of public interest and the common interest rather than simply in terms of private interest; and if we hold fast to that tradition we shall help the world to get past the very awkward corner which it has now reached, owing to its poverty and the growth of vast agglomerations of private power. This assertion of the moral principle of democracy—which is only the application of the principle of public service—this assertion of the general political point of view is in harmony with our whole development for the last six or seven centuries, and is, I believe, the chief contribution which we, all of us in our respective nations in the Commonwealth, are giving separately and giving together to the welfare of mankind.