

Mike. The Memoirs of Lester B. Pearson

Vol. 1, 1897-1948

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Vol. 2, 1948-1957

(Quadrangle; 344 pp.; \$12.50)

edited by John A. Munro and Alex I. Inglis

Paul Seabury

Of late, political biographies and memoirs seem designed as penny dreadfuls by and for voyeurs, or as means by which politicians try to launder their public reputations. The former category vastly outsells the latter—you've seen the TV hearings, now read the book. In this light the posthumous autobiography of Lester Pearson is a relief. Pearson did not pretend to entertain readers with self-serving little stories, nor to defend his place in history. A Canadian who set a world record—moving from a long career of professional diplomacy into very successful domestic politics (and ending up as Prime Minister)—he is one of the few twentieth-century international figures who left the world as he entered it: innocent of wickedness and esteemed by those around him. A nice guy, one gathers, who apparently enjoyed being nice, and, although he nowhere admits it, who acted out Kipling's chief poetic instruction in "If": it pays to be civil and decent to people.

From such a man one might expect only dullness. Not so. The memoirs are low-keyed, absorbing, and often funny. The better parts reveal matters of no new importance; yet they recall a life worth telling.

Pearson is less appealing as he recounts his later life. As he finally rises into higher atmospheres of U.N. politics, his prose exhales memorandese. The early and midstages of his life demand attention. They show good Canadians changing from backwoods servants of the Crown and Whitehall into international actors. They record also a Canada caught between an activist young American bull elephant to the south and an increasingly somno-

lent old Imperial lion to the east.

During World War II Pearson helped defend Canada's interests against two global Anglo-Saxons, Churchill and Roosevelt. In the early and middle years of the United Nations Canada, thanks to him, carved out a position (for better or worse) as moral tutor on collective security. (This short-lived role for Canada reached its apex in the 1950's. Then, in the General Assembly, Pearson, a Canadian foreign minister, acted in the Korean War and the Suez crisis as mediator and peacemaker among contending neutralists and Western states in their relationship to the Communist world.) The fruits of this diplomacy for mediatory internationalism must now be carefully assessed. In any event, his description of U.N. activities from 1943 through the late 1950's provides vignettes of a civilized time, when pistol-packing killers were not yet permitted to make parliamentary pronouncements on East 46th Street.

One little story deserves repeating. Pearson attended the *first* United Nations conference, convened under U.S. auspices in 1943 at Warm Springs, West Virginia. (This, rather than the San Francisco conference, was the first U.N. gathering.) It was called by order of Roosevelt to establish this new world organization and to deal with postwar food problems.

"The opening session on 18 May was the most original of any international conference I have ever attended, and I have attended many. The chairman, a good Democrat from Texas, tried to blend dignity with bonhomie; to combine the Congress of Vienna with a Rotary meeting. We opened with a silent prayer and ended by sing-

ing, not 'Hail to the United Nations,' but the 'Star Spangled Banner.' None of us was quite sure what we were to pray about and none of the foreigners knew the words of the American national anthem. In between, we were given a message of greeting from the President, a speech by the chairman, who neglected not a single cliché, and an inaudible reply from a Chinese delegate on behalf of the forty-two foreign delegations."

Current observers of the United Nations—where America and its two faithful allies, the Dominican Republic and Israel, register their growing apprehensions of failed influence—might note the contrast that time and history have brought to the American colossus. But to continue:

"At the end of this inaugural meeting, the [Texas Democratic] chairman introduced another idea into international gatherings. He called the roll of all the countries present, and asked each chief delegate to stand up for recognition, as his country was announced. The applause would indicate his country's or his own popularity."

A Methodist clergyman's son, Pearson grew up in that now almost forgotten arena of civic and moral certainty, the middle class of the early twentieth century. Since Canada fortunately was spared the worst onslaughts on the central features of this way of life, Pearson's childhood, except for the first World War, was visited by few agents of anxiety. At his birth, he says, "God was in his heaven and Queen Victoria on her throne. All was well." His clergyman father moved the family from parsonage to parsonage, in no way disturbing the simple, enjoyable parsonage life surrounded by lawns, trees, and honest company. A good athlete, later to win trophies in many sports, Pearson wavered among various possible careers: athletics instructor, airplane pilot, scholar, civil servant, and working in a Chicago meat factory (Armour's) run by an uncle who had defected to the U.S.

After a few months of operating a Chicago sausage machine he summoned courage to tell his uncle that he would prefer Oxford to the stockyards. The uncle's reply was more tolerant

than Pearson expected: "I don't think you are cut out for business anyway." Aside from this deviation, Pearson's career is very straight; it provides a glimpse of the pleasure of accidentally being in the right place at the right time. (Years later, when he became Foreign Minister, an old tutor at Oxford cabled him: "With Dean Rusk (St Johns) Secretary of State in Washington, Michael Stewart (St Johns) Foreign Secretary in London, and Mike Pearson (St Johns) Prime Minister in Canada, all's well in the world.")

To be a young Canadian coming to Oxford in the early 1920's was a variant on a Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court. Pearson's experiences in dealing with the still confident British is a good account of the inexorable, gradual, and good-humored transformation of Imperial relations. His Canadian mentor, the historian Bartlett Brebner, gave him valuable warnings as he left for college:

"I was told to check some of my plebian North American social impulses, at least until I had achieved a status which would make unrestrained behavior acceptable; in other words I should adapt myself to the dignity and disciplines of the society of an Oxford college....The most important man in college, apart from the president and the senior tutor, was the head porter with whom I should get on good terms, but again, by convincing him that, while a colonial, I was a well-bred and cultivated one. Above all, I must not be mistaken as an American." (When Pearson finally got there, he made the gaffe of mistaking the senior tutor for the head porter, and asking him for help with his bags.)

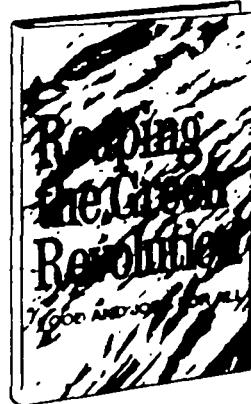
By way of contrast, Pearson's much later account of his meeting at Chequers in 1951 with an aging Winston Churchill—slumbering in reminiscence of past British greatness—tells much of the changes which life and history bring to such relations.

"I was taken by Lady Churchill into the Great Hall, where the Prime Minister, clad in his own special boiler suit, zippered and baggy, was lost in a large chair, dozing before an enormous, blazing fireplace. He showed no pleasure at being awakened to greet his

guest. Indeed, Lady Churchill had to remind him that I was...the Secretary of State of External Affairs of Canada. Just then the pre-lunch drinks arrived and things looked up; our host came to life. He got even livelier as the lunch went on, with its accompanying wines. Over coffee and brandy, Sir Winston continued to get brighter and brighter as I got droopier and droopier."

That discussion of high affairs touched such delicate matters as the Royal Canadian Navy's changing its anthem from "Rule Britannia" to "Vive la Canadienne." This inspired Churchill to recite tutorially many patriotic verses he had learned at school. "Indeed he was now prepared to spend all the time that was necessary to educate me in the grand tradition of the Royal Family and the Imperial Navy. But by this time I was as sleepy as he had been when I arrived, so I pleaded an appointment in London. As he saw me off, his last words were, 'Now, please, beg of your Prime Minister on my behalf to restore "Rule Britannia."' I promised to do my best." The promise, however, was not to fulfill the request. Things had much changed.

Pearson also permits us glimpses into the lifestyle of his sometime master, Mackenzie King, the long-tenured Canadian Prime Minister. King combined shrewd public caution and tact with a private obsession with mysticism, but rarely allowed this private habit to cross up his sense of reality about public things that mattered. It is characteristic but disappointing that Pearson refuses to reveal rich morsels from the private life of this much-neglected gnome of the North. There are several thin tidbits, however. King had a high diplomatic desire occasionally to impose trivial requests upon foreign worthies in lengthy TOP SECRET communiqués that had to be deciphered before forwarding—a source of great embarrassment to overseas Canadian diplomats. One hobby of this distinguished Canadian, at his country seat, Kingsmere, was maintaining a stately garden of ruins—a Gothic contrivance of crumbling things such as romantic architects of the 1840's once made popular. In wartime London, after a particularly devastating German air raid, Westminster Hall itself fell



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victim to the savagery of war. The following evening a cable from Ottawa arrived at Canada House in London marked "Secret and Most Immediate." Pearson, awakened at his home by an embassy code clerk, learned that it was from the Prime Minister himself, "asking if it would be possible to get a stone or two from the ruins of Westminster...for his own ruins at Kingsmere." This tells us a little of secret Canadian war correspondence, but tells more about the unpretentious role the nation as a whole played in the war.

Both Roosevelt and Churchill regarded Canada as a convenience. The British, even in the 1940's, continued to esteem Canada as a great jewel in a Crown of Empire. The Americans saw it as a good friend who would go along with any worthwhile project. It thus became the job of Canadian diplomats such as Pearson to insure that they were taken for granted neither by their once Imperial masters nor by their hyperactive American "best friends." They were repeatedly slighted or ignored by both. (Churchill and Roosevelt planned their Ottawa Conference of 1944 on Canadian soil without troubling to consult even one Canadian official in advance.) In London, during the Anglo-American negotiations of 1941 which led to the Destroyers-for-Bases deal, skilled Canadian intervention at the last moment was necessary to prevent Whitehall from giving away to the Americans important base rights in Newfoundland! A draft joint communiqué of 1943, by which the Americans and British planned to announce the Allied invasion of Italy, made no mention at all of the very substantial Canadian forces involved. Canadian officials were understandably outraged. Such slights pointed up the deep difficulty attending Canada's peculiar position, squeezed between its two closest friends. As Pearson put it: "If the British sometimes forgot the Statute of Westminster, the Americans hardly knew that it existed." As Canadian Ambassador to Washington late in the war, he once sent a memorandum to Ottawa in which he said:

"Suspended somewhat ambiguously

in the mind of so many Americans, between the position of a British colony and that of an American dependency, we are going to have a difficult time...in maintaining our own position."

One feature of the American-Canadian relationship, as Pearson notes, is that in wartime the Americans not only took them for granted; most of the time Washington officials had difficulty in distinguishing Canadians from ordinary, cheery country bumpkins from home districts. But there were also advantages to this. The polite and gingerly way British diplomats treated their American colleagues, for fear of offense (Keynes once described these Americans as "flying confusedly about like bees, in no ascertainable direction, bearing with them both the menace of sting and the promise of honey") was to be contrasted with the Canadian gift of candor and frankness in negotiations with their North American neighbors. Once a British official (the Right Honorable Oliver Lyttleton), after difficult bargaining sessions in Washington, politely told an American audience how, despite disagreements, "when they left London for Washington in depression, [British delegations] always returned with hope." When Pearson added a few words on behalf of the Canadians, he recalls, "I...told my American friends that, when Canadians went from Ottawa to Washington, they left in hope and returned in confusion." Afterward Lyttleton told Pearson: "You Canadians can say anything over here and get away with it but we have to be more careful." And so the stories go.

It is regrettable Pearson could not complete his memoirs before his death. The second volume was completed by his son Geoffrey, with assistance from former aides. It carries his story, however, only to 1957—a full ten years before his career ended. Although he himself wrote a draft of much of Volume II, the pleasing intimacy of earlier chapters gives way to abstract accounts of Pearson's diplomatic role at the U.N. Nonetheless, in their own way these are equally important.

The memoirs end with a long account of Pearson's central role in the Suez crisis of 1956—central in the sense that it was Pearson's agile role as negotiator in the U.N. that contributed to the formula by which peace was restored and the Anglo-French invasion withdrawn after U.N. intervention. For this service he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957.

In the United States recently there has been some "revisionist" reinterpretation of these events by people who have been led (by subsequent developments in the Mideast) to conclude that North American abandonment of European allies in this enterprise set the stage for the subsequent and extraordinary decline of Western influence in that area and elsewhere. As Pearson shows, it was Dulles and he in collusion or, more correctly, the Americans and Canadians, who undermined the whole undertaking.

For diplomatic historians there is probably little in this straightforward account that adds to what is known of the Suez disaster. Yet it makes important reading now; what we see for ourselves is the now famed U.N. double standard, vigorous then, even in infancy.

As we know, the Suez crisis was, by coincidence, part of a greater international crisis, of which the rebellions in Eastern Europe against Soviet hegemony came to be a part. As Anglo-French forces landed in the Port Said area to reassert Western control over the canal zone, Russian tanks were moving into Budapest to reassert Soviet authority over its satellites. The resemblances between these simultaneous and troubling events should not cause us to ignore the central, strategic difference between them: It was the pressure of so-called Third World political forces in the United Nations behind Nasser that broke the will of the Western enterprise and successfully split the U.S. from West European policy in the Suez. No such harassment was concerted against the Soviet Union.

The break between the U.S. and its chief NATO allies on this question was a consequence of much more than, say, a personality difference between Anthony Eden and John Foster Dulles.

Dulles's position from the beginning of the Suez crisis (i.e., Nasser's seizure of the international waterway) had been absolutely clear: The United States, chary of its relations with "emerging nations," would not tolerate the use of force to recover what Nasser had grabbed. If the lesson then learned by America's allies was that gunboat diplomacy no longer worked, the lesson well learned by the Russians was that tank diplomacy worked very well indeed. These two contradictory outcomes of that intertwined crisis were to have long-lasting implications. (Nasser's blackmail of the West, his threats about permitting Russian "volunteers" to aid him in the "restoration of the peace," was another harbinger of things to come.)

It was Pearson who contrived the formula for the U.N. interpositional force to serve as cover for Anglo-French withdrawal, and as tissue-paper barrier between Arabs and Israelis in the subsequent cease-fire. (In 1967 Nasser dismissed them with a wave of the hand and the war was on again. But that is another story.) As Pearson himself described it, the "force" from its inception was no force:

"As a footnote to these times [he wrote] the original draft of the report by Hammarskjöld and Bunche used the phrase 'to enforce and supervise the cessation of hostilities' and it managed to slip through our revision during the early hours of 6 November. However, I spotted it an hour or so later, just as the draft was going off to be reproduced. We changed it to 'secure and supervise.' Thank goodness I noticed it, because we would have soon been in the soup if this force had been charged with the job of 'enforcing' anything!"

It is clear from Pearson's candid account that he viewed his role in this whole adventure as one of seeking to prevent a major, enduring break between the United States and Britain—a development which would have had intolerable consequences for Canada. But also Pearson—a loyalist to the great (if now extinct) British Commonwealth—feared for its future if Britain, in the process of restoring the Canal to Western control, were to alienate such paragons of peace as India and Pakistan. Yet in seeking to reconcile America and Britain he worked closely with Dulles, not with

Eden. (In fact, the whole Anglo-French maneuver raised storms of outrage in Ottawa.)

Was the Dulles-Pearson stratagem correct? None can doubt that, left to Anglo-French devices, and with North American eyes delicately averted, the Canal would have been restored to Western possession. In fact, had the British and French permitted Israeli forces to continue their march on Cairo, what had been pretense would have been transformed into reality; the British and French would have become a very effective peacekeeping barrier between Israel and Egypt.

Not only Pearson but others were troubled at the time by the possible price of victory. As British diplomat Selwyn Lloyd remarked to him several weeks before the invasion, he was "as ready to bash the Egyptians as anybody," but "he had to ask himself where his country and the Commonwealth would stand after the bashing had been done." Clearly, the humane *crise de conscience* about the use of force went deep, not merely in Washington and Ottawa but in England as well; the French, then tougher on such matters, probably would have

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weathered the storm of conscientious protest more firmly. As it was, the whole undertaking collapsed, and the two still Imperial powers found one big excuse to accelerate their retreat from global strategic activities.

Hammarkjöld, the Swedish mystic-statesman, appears to have been without misgivings about the outcome, which he regarded as a triumph. When the Secretary General informed Pearson one day that Nasser insisted the UNEF remained in place only at his will, Pearson voiced alarm that Hammarkjöld "did not seem to take this too seriously." "I remember," he writes, "reacting quite strongly, but not violently. I said, 'This is going to

cause trouble in the future. Hammarkjöld said: 'Oh, don't worry about it, because I told him that condition was quite inadmissible.' It did not turn out to be inadmissible eleven years later."

Today the same issues are with us, and in exaggerated form. Could it have gone differently? Might things have been better today? The question is certainly not academic, but we can say this much: The Nobel laurels wore longer without wilting on Pearson's head than did the Nobel laurels on Kissinger for his Vietnam role. A decent man, Pearson set on the international scene an honorable example that will not, one hopes, become obsolete.

Returning to his unit by way of Sigmaringen, temporary seat of Vichy-in-exile, and an unsuccessful request for an audience with Pétain or Laval, he caught up with the already decimated Charlemagne on the Eastern front in Pomerania in February, 1945, and fought, retreated, starved, froze, and finally surrendered a month later to a Polish contingent with the half-dozen survivors of his command. This is prelude to a series of other close survivals that punctuate a narrative of imprisonment in various disguises: by the Russians as a journalist attached to the Waffen SS (no tattoo, recall), and then in Russia with a group of French conscripts from a German labor battalion; repatriation to France, where his identity is rediscovered, and incarceration in Fresnes prison in Paris; then (after trial in 1946 as a collaborationist journalist, but not as an SS officer, La Mazière successfully claiming to have been in the *propaganda-kommando*) Clairvaux prison until 1948.

La Mazière is justly proud of his wits, but he does not fail to credit his fantastic good luck. Surrendering to Poles, not Russians, La Mazière could speak sufficient Polish to explain who he was and avoid being shot: La Mazière's father, a career army officer, ex-vice-commandant of the French cavalry school at Saumur, was a minor hero in Poland, having fought with Pilsudski against the Russians in 1920 and later having taught at the Polish war academy. (La Mazière recalls, when he was five, wandering down from his bedroom in Warsaw, nightdress, ringlets of hair, into a gala French Embassy reception and being introduced, amid the sentimental approbation of the guests, to Paderewski.) He was lucky in his French judges, both in their leniency and either their gullibility or interested readiness to credit his story. And perhaps he was lucky to have "his Jew." In 1943 La Mazière had done a friend a favor by securing false identity papers for the friend's tailor, one Grundstein, and settling him outside the official occupation area. But, in truth, one does not get the impression from the narrative that this act was any overriding consideration in the court's decision.

The Captive Dreamer by Christian de La Mazière

(Translated by Francis Stuart. Saturday Review Press/
E.P. Dutton; 271 pp.; \$8.95)

Samuel Hux

Why would a young Frenchman of that marginal aristocracy of a republic—"good family, military-nationalist traditions, cavalry-officer father—a journalist of no particular renown on a collaborationist newspaper of minuscule circulation, decide, on the eve of the liberation of Paris, to join the French "Charlemagne" Division of the German Waffen SS and plunge himself, late 1944, into the last and obviously terminal spasms of Nazi defense? Christian de La Mazière's own answer—through a sacrificial leap, "to be true to myself"—does not convince. Not that it is wrong, but incomplete, unless La Mazière is a great deal more superficial than he appears "in person"—or, rather, on film in Marcel Ophuls's documentary of occupied and Vichy France, *The Sorrow and the Fury*. The reader may recall, in Ophuls's film, the youngish middle-aged penitent, languorous of manner and attractive in a classically Gallic way; his nervous articulateness, touches of arrogance, look of someone haunted. Much less does his answer

convince after one has read his memoir of war and imprisonment, *The Captive Dreamer*, which is a great deal better than its conclusions.

In August, 1944, La Mazière, with a colleague, was approached by Allied agents looking for French rightists close enough to German movements to be useful and opportunistic enough to know the score, to take up preventive arms to forestall any German *Götterdämmerung* or Parisian *soviet*. Paradoxically (schizophrenically?), La Mazière did some minor liaison work and then took off, as he had already planned to do, for Germany and enlistment in the Charlemagne at Wildflecken. Instead of a position in the *propaganda-kommando*, offered him as a journalist, he opted for a commission in an antitank unit; such was his insistence on the real thing, immersion in the *Kamaradschaft* of the combat arm of the SS. But not totally: La Mazière, in a moment of cunning and foresight, avoids the telltale SS tattoo just before temporary transfer to Czechoslovakia for élite training.