

English 3201/3281
Literary Essay Unit

Implications of a Free Society

By Lester B. Pearson

1 The essential lubricant for a free society is tolerance. This, however, does not necessarily apply to all societies. There are obvious examples of states which are held together without the least regard for tolerance. It does apply, however, to all states where the government is by *consent*. Canada, where various groups live and work together within the boundaries of a national state, is a good example of this principle in operation. This country exists on the *assumption* that, as far as is humanly possible, the interests of no group - racial, geographic, economic, religious, or political - will *prevail* at the expense of any other group. We have committed ourselves to the principle that by *compromise* and adjustment we can work out some sort of balance of interests which will make it possible for the members of all groups to live side by side without any one of them *arbitrarily* imposing its will on any other. It is my belief that this is the only basis upon which Canada can possibly exist as a nation, and that any attempt to govern the country on any other basis would destroy it. In these circumstances, the basic quality of tolerance in our national character is of the first importance.

2 Of almost equal importance for our national welfare, and indeed arising out of the practice of tolerance, is the avoidance of extreme policies. This is often called walking the middle of the road. This of course is not so easy as people usually think. It imposes self-restraint and discipline, even when we assume the traffic is all going in the one direction. Anyone who chooses to travel in the middle of the road must not deny the use of either side of it to persons who prefer to walk there. He condemns himself, therefore, to accept during the journey the constant jostling of companions on either side. This middle ground, is, I think, becoming more and more difficult to maintain, and the temptation to abandon it is constantly increasing, especially in the face of road blocks thrown up by unfriendly fellow travellers. I do not wish here to criticize those who choose other ground upon which to walk, or to question the basis of their choice. I wish only to make a strong plea for the preservation of this middle position in our national life. *Paradoxically*, it is only in this way that the existence of many of those on each side can also be preserved. If the middle group is eliminated, less tolerant elements fall under the irresistible temptation to try to capture the whole roadway. When the middle of the road is no longer occupied firmly by stable and progressive groups in the community, it is turned into a parade ground for those *extremist* forces who would substitute *goose-stepping* for walking. All others are driven to hide, *disconsolate* and powerless, in the hedges, ditches, and culverts.

3 How can the meaning of the middle way in our free society be described in a few words? What principle does it stand for? Where does it lead in practice? Is it merely the political line of least resistance along which drift those without the courage of their *convictions*, or simply without convictions? It is, or should be, far more than that. The central quality of this approach is the stress which it always lays on human values, the integrity and worth of the individual in society. It stands for the *emancipation* of the mind as well as for personal freedom and

well-being. It is *irrevocably* opposed to the shackling limitations of rigid political *dogma*, to political oppression of, and to economic exploitation by, any part of the community. It detests the abuse of power either by the state or by private individuals or groups. It respects first of all a person for what he is, not who he is. It stands for his right to manage his own affairs, when they are his own; to hold his own convictions and speak his own mind. It aims at equality of opportunity. It maintains that effort and reward should not be separated and it values highly initiative and originality. It does not believe in lopping off the tallest ears of corn in the interests of comfortable *conformity*.

4 The middle way presents no *panacea* for the easy attainment of general welfare, but it accepts the responsibility of government to assist in protecting and raising the living standards of all, and, if necessary, to take bold and well-planned action to help maintain economic activity for that purpose.

5 The middle way, unlike extremism in political doctrine, has positive faith in the good will and common sense of most people in most circumstances. It relies on their intelligence, their will to co-operate, and their sense of justice. From its practitioners, it requires determination and patience, tolerance and restraint, the discipline of the mind rather than the *jackboot*, and the underlying belief that human problems, vast and complicated though they may be, are capable of solution.

Complete the following questions:

1. Find the denotations of the following words. Include the part of speech (i.e. noun, verb, adj., adv.)

-consent; _____

-assumption; _____

-prevail; _____

-compromise; _____

-arbitrarily; _____

-paradoxically; _____

-extremism; _____

3. To what extent is this essay as much a descriptive essay as it is an argumentative one?

4. According to Pearson, what is the purpose of government?

5. Compare and contrast the ideologies of Lester Pearson to Donald Trump.
