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The Art of Peacemaking

In his 1956 address to the UN regarding Canada's stance on the Suez Crisis, Lester B. Pearson explained that peace is "much more than ceasing to fire". By extension, there is much more to peace than the absence of war; Canadian and international peacemakers continue to recognize this in their ceaseless mediating efforts.

A peacemaker is not particular to any single body of opinion: in war, these are men and women who risk their lives for universal disarmament; in politics, they seek to benefit the international community through often difficult compromise; in our everyday lives, these are people who resolve conflicts by expanding our perceptions of what can be 'right' and 'wrong'.

Lester B. Pearson is an excellent example of a great Canadian peacemaker. When Egypt nationalized the economically vital Suez Canal, there was an international outcry followed by a series of injustices in both the Western and Egyptian camps. The British and French governments condemned Egypt for its attack on Western economy, while they themselves planned a 'peacekeeping' offence against it through an Israeli invasion. There was no single cause of the crisis, and no set of 'sides' (much less a 'right side') on which these conflicting nations stood.

It was not Pearson's solution to the complicated crisis but the way in which he formed it that characterizes peacemaking. Through respect toward all conflicting parties, he was able to find a stable compromise. Through a love for diversity, he was able to see the qualities of peace already fostered in the existing system. A peacemaker does not seek to impose peace, but rather strives to expand the peace inherent in all people. As in the

famous “teach a man to fish” proverb, a peacemaker empowers others to maintain their own peace, rather than feeding them an artificial harmony.

On a non-military level, ethical conflicts divide society. Even here, there are peacemakers that inspire compassion in many ways. Some are community leaders organizing events to unify the people around them; some are people offering kind words in troubling times; some are artists challenging perceptions and inviting audiences to accept the world in different ways. A peaceful society is a unified one, with balance between respect toward diversity (whether it be cultural, religious or ethical) and recognition of our interdependence as human beings.

Toronto’s theatre community is a bright example of artists pushing the frontiers of societal unity. Over the past few years, there has been a growing effort toward internationally inspired theatre that both educates and connects audiences to a broader world. Antagonisms often evolve from lack of knowledge, and therefore art seeks to inform. As true peacemakers, true artists find and nurture the beauty in everything, while recognizing those areas that still need change.

There is much to be proud of in Canadian peacemaking, from its military heroes to political leaders and artistic pioneers. In acceptance and establishment of balance, there can be peace with these men and women guiding its growth.