

Speaking Notes for Honorary Doctorate Presentation
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I feel so touched, so moved by this gesture. So affirmed at being honoured by the makers and adjudicators of official public knowledge, especially because of the route I took, even when as an undergraduate at McGill in the 1960s. I was part of occupying the Sociology Dept., demanding that the courses speak more to the particulars of people living in local communities like St. Henri, to the particulars of women too. We insisted on bringing those realities, those stories, into the classroom, first as teach-ins, to test and challenge existing theory.

I think it informs what I want to say to you today.

Ninety years ago next month, in a trench somewhere in war-locked Europe, my Great-uncle Evan Bayne gathered together a few precious things. He poured the milk he had obtained into his mess mug, and into it, he cut shavings off the last square of chocolate he'd saved from a care package. He lit the short stub of a candle he'd salvaged, and wedged it out of the wind next to the dirt wall. Finally, and perhaps with a smile on his face, he held his mug from which he'd soon be sipping hot chocolate over the flame. Then the ground shook from a mortar blast, and a clod of putrid mud fell into his mug. He didn't tell me whether he broke down and cried. Yet his carefully planned Christmas treat for himself was ruined, his bit of peace was shattered.

I'm remembering this story partly because of recent sabre rattling about a possible Third World War, the continuing miasma of the so-called "war on terror" and the renewed status of the arms trade to both the global and the Canadian economy. In our time of remembrance today, it might be useful to remember lessons of the First World War, the exhausted end of which we commemorate in our annual rituals and silence.

The first lesson of this war, and perhaps of all wars, is that the war need not have been declared in the first place. Time historian Stephen Kern has revisited the evidence of those crucial weeks and hours that followed from the gunshot that assassinated Arch-Duke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. He argues that an

avoidable war became an inevitable war in part because of two new technologies: the telegraph and telephone. Their instant communication lent urgency and an authority to those people who think fast and strategically, namely the army chiefs of staff. It was their influence that caused an ultimatum to be telegraphed to the Serbs (the first of five dispatched over the next 12 days) threatening war within 48 hours. Arguing too for a quick pre-emptive strike as the most cost-effective measure to contain the pan-Serbian movement, they dispatched telegrams to begin mobilization as soon as possible. By the time the German Kaiser got in touch with Russian Tsar with a joint view to have the conflict resolved at the Hague Conference, it was deemed “technically impossible” to stop the mobilization process.

Equally, Kern argues, these fast lines of communication sidelined the traditional voices of diplomacy, steeped in a culture of listening and of fine-tuning gestures and the choice of words through face-to-face conversations, to find and tease open a crack of possibility, to cultivate a middle ground, a diplomatic solution. He quotes from Ernest Satow’s 1917 book, A Guide to Diplomatic Practice: “The moral qualities of statesmen and nations – such as prudence, penetration and wisdom – of have not kept pace with the development of the means of action at their disposal [notably] the rapidity of communication by telegraph and telephone. These latter leave no time for reflection or consultation, and demand an immediate and often a hasty decision on matters of vital importance.”

I am among the many, perhaps millions, of Canadians who have been dismayed – and puzzled -- at the sudden shift in the face Canada presents to the world – from representing the “soft” power of peace building in the Pearson and Axworthy tradition, to now, waging war. And so I have read with great interest Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang’s recent book, The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar that examines the cause of this. I detect many echoes of the lesson I’ve just outlined in the current situation. The consensus seems to be that Canada got itself into an emphatically military role in Afghanistan partly because of Rick Hillier, Canada’s Chief of Defence Staff. Because his leadership was “so strong, so strategic and so focused,” the authors argue, “it has unbalanced the relationship between civilians and the military” – such that “it is the

military that is forging policy” when it should be civilians – and political leaders answerable to Canadians through parliament.

But the story is infinitely more complex than a few run-away soldiers good at sound bites. There’s another factor I want to explore, one that will bring all this a little closer home to you, this year’s graduating class, and at the same time hark back to the war where my Uncle Even was gassed nearly a century ago. In their book, Stein and Lang argue that the decisive strategic thinking of Rick Hillier gained the prominence it did equally because the other two institutions of Canada’s international relations -- development, through CIDA and diplomacy through Foreign Affairs -- were essentially not there. It wasn’t just their slower pace of decision-making. Cutbacks and over-bureaucratization, they argue, have rendered them “dysfunctional,” “debilitated” and “demoralized.”

These words are familiar to me from the research I’ve done over the last several years on stress. A combination of doing more with less because of cutbacks, plus generally doing more, more more in a 24-7 on-line work environment has produced an epidemic of stress that is costing the economy billions in lost productivity and mistakes. Yet stress is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it first gained broad attention as a disease state in the trenches of World War I, as shell shock or battle fatigue. Then, it was the sometimes 24-7 bombardments, the sudden jolts of sniper fire or the walls of a trench collapsing. Now, it’s the 24-7 stream of get this, do this, change this. The core problem is, as Dr. Archibald Hart wrote in the late 1990s, “physiological disintegration.” It’s the loss of inner equilibrium and balance essential for focus, presence, sustained concentration and engagement. I was struck by how often the authors Stein and Lang used the word focus in their book, including in their assertion that “The absence of strong, focused institutions with critical and independent voices deprives the government of advice it needs...”

The public discussion on stress has only recently shifted from how stress makes individuals sick to how it makes organizations sick and dysfunctional. One study documented a 10-point drop in employees’ IQ due to so many email interruptions. Another study, reported in the Harvard Business Review looked at “presenteeism,” a variation on absenteeism in which people show up for work so brain dead with fatigue or

so lost in focus and perspective that at best they merely go through the motions and, at worst, waste others' time and make mistakes. According to this article, it's costing the economy \$150 billion U.S. a year.

Some research that a colleague, Janice Newson, at York University and I did in 2001 shines a deeper light on this. It's a study of academics' time in a wired campus environment, and through a combination of survey questions and interviews, it uncovered a disturbing trend toward digital connection without presence and engagement. Fifty eight per cent reported that their ability to stay focussed on their work had decreased, 51 per cent said they no longer had enough chunks of free time in which to think, and nearly 30 per cent identified with the phrase "I can't slow down enough to be in touch with my innermost thoughts. "

I don't know how many of you will end up in Ottawa or elsewhere directly affecting the face, the voice and the position Canada offers to the world beyond our borders. But it doesn't matter. Wherever you go, you aren't just credentials on legs. You are a set of relationships, participants in the larger conversations on what matters, and it's secondary to my mind whether the locus of those conversations is parliament and foreign policy, hospitals and health-care policies or corporations and human-resource policies.

And so the message I'd like to leave with you today is to honour the other way of saying and writing the word remembrance – as re-memberance, re-integrating not just body parts, but mind and body so that they are attuned to each other. This is essential for focus and that inner dialogue between you and yourself that the philosopher Hannah Arendt maintains is the key to thinking for yourselves, not as others would have you think. And this, I would suggest is your responsibility as citizens: to be present and accountable, simultaneously to yourself and, through that, to the public good, the welfare of our world and our planet.

That's the torch I would urge you to carry forward from today: modelling peace and equilibrium in how you live, in how you work and communicate, and championing policies that will foster this in organizational systems and in institutions of governance. It is my dream that the global economy could become a place of balance and equilibrium. After all, it's from the ranks of angry young men displaced from traditional local

economies or unemployed in the global one that organizations like al-Qaeda and the Taliban recruit so many of the “insurgents” who enact the modern form of war.

That’s also why I wear the white as well as the red poppy today. The red symbolizes the blood sacrificed so nobly among the poppies of Flanders Field and the white, adopted by the Women’s Cooperative Guild in 1933, symbolizes a commitment to peace and non-violence in resolving differences. And how do we begin to foster this? Through conversation and stories, stories like the one I began with. The personal is political. Stories can honour the particulars left out of theories and categorical concepts like *causus belli*. Stories can open the cracks of possibility and of hope that we can somehow find a way out of this mess. As First Nations writer Thomas King said in his 2003 Massey Lectures, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”

It’s a truth worth remembering.