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"THE RIGHT USE OF DEMOCRACY"

An Address

by

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at the

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THE RIGHT USE OF DEMOCRACY

The Encyclical from which the theme of this Congress is taken tells us that "men live in civic society, not only for their own good but for the good of all."

The guiding objectives of the Constitution under which the members of this Congress live is the "general welfare" and the liberty of the individual.

Thus we are met in a two-fold tradition - the tradition of Christianity and the tradition of American democracy.

It was in the spirit of these terms - of the "general welfare" and individual liberty - that this nation was founded. In these terms our frontiers - geographic, economic, and political - were expanded to encompass the most highly developed economy and the most complete democracy in human history. Motives of private gain alone could not have fashioned such a structure. There had to be also a confidence in the future of free and equal individuals living cooperatively with one another.

It is in these same terms of the "good of all" and the "freedom of the individual" that we must mould our future lives and shape our future relationships. The terms must be kept, but there must be a new emphasis on both - a new awareness that it is not sensible or just for a few to propser while many live in fear, that individual liberty contemplates more than the fundamental civil rights.

For a century and a half, we have shared the conviction

that the combination of a democratic polity and an economic system of private enterprise could provide for the common man more happiness, more freedom, more of the necessities and comforts of life than any other system or combination of systems. I believe that despite all that we have been through in the last ten years, that conviction is still unchanged.

Today we face the inescapable necessity of proving that our conviction is justified.

Many of us, I believe, are not aware that our leadership in the ability to provide for the good of all is challenged and challenged seriously. I realize, of course, that in many nations, in the vast majority of nations, the welfare of the common man is far less than the welfare of the average American.

But I am also aware that a few nations on this earth have quietly and inconspicuously advanced to a point where the general welfare of their people is equal to, if not greater than, the general welfare of our people.

I refer to those modest, unassuming, but remarkably peaceful states that we group loosely under the adjective "Scandinavian." You will recall that about one of them Marquis Childs has recently written a very interesting book significantly titled "The Middle Way." You will also recall that we have recently sent a delegation to these countries to find out by what curious method they maintain so much industrial peace. I sometimes wonder if some other nations of the world might not profit by sending delegations to inquire into the strange devices by which these states have achieved so much international peace.

It is true, of course, that the Scandinavian states do not compare with us in the elaborateness of the economic mechanism. They do not have problems as complex as ours. They have the advantage of homogeneous populations, while ours is a cross section of all mankind.

But, on the other side of the ledger, neither do they have our tremendous and diversified resources. Neither do they have our wealth of scientific advancement. Neither do they have, perhaps, the diversity of mental talent that we possess. They have builded with modest materials, and at this stage of the game it is not easy to say whether they have not in some ways builded better than we.

But we should not need to seek reasons and justifications for the difference that seems to exist between their peace of mind and ours.

We cannot explain away the ultimate fact that, all things considered, we are undoubtedly the richest nation on earth. And I mean not merely rich in iron mines and wheat fields and forests of pine, but rich in genius and native talent. We cannot successfully deny that we have not builded as well as we should have builded. We cannot deny that in the century preceding this decade, we failed to give the right kind of emphasis and the right amount of emphasis to the two terms that underlie our social structure - the "good of all" and the "liberty of the individual." We cannot deny that we failed to use the institutions of democracy in a way that would insure the good of all, as well as a balanced, rounded freedom for the individual.

It is this way of using the institutions of democracy that

has been the central aim of progressive endeavor throughout our history. It is the central aim of the Administration of President Roosevelt, and if I have been correctly informed about the discussions at your 1938 meeting at Milwaukee, it is also the central aim of this Conference.

It has not always been easy for us to understand this use of the institutions of democracy - mainly, perhaps, because in the earlier years of our national life it was unnecessary to understand it.

When we were an agricultural nation of a few million people, with unlimited frontiers to move into, and unlimited opportunities for new employment, our people needed government only in its negative aspects, as the machinery by which obstacles to the enjoyment of a natural, secure existence could be removed. Government needed to act chiefly in the maintenance of order, and the prevention of anti-social practices, such as land speculation. Our main growth lay in the economic rather than the political field.

But with the emergence of mass industry, with its violent fluctuations, its periodic unemployment, and its train of man-made abuses, the role of government in this country had to change.

The old notion, that Government should not interfere in the operations of the economic system, died hard, although perhaps the suggestion that it is already deceased is premature. There is a good indication of how strong that belief has been in a statement made by Grover Cleveland, the reform President of the eighties and nineties, when he vetoed a bill passed by Congress to give ten thousand dollars worth of seed grain to the victims of a terrible drought in

the Southwest. "I do not believe," he said, "that the power and duty of the Federal Government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering. Federal aid in such cases," he added, "weakens the sturdiness of our National character."

If there has been one human factor that, more than any other, can be credited with bringing about an understanding of the new, positive role of Government, it has been the untiring and devoted efforts of that perennial minority we know as "the progressives." If I were to choose an example, I could think of none better than that amazing fighter for social justice, the man who, as Mayor of Cleveland, wrote his name large in American history, the indomitable Tom Johnson.

Always in our history, the progressives have made their fight under tremendous handicaps and against powerful opposition. Consistently, they have been shelled and bombarded with the ancient epithets of "communist" and "radical" that today are still being used by a misguided few in the familiar attempts to prevent the institutions of democracy from being put to their right use.

To the accompaniment of gloomy forebodings about a collectivistic state, the progressives introduced the now commonplace postal system, the income tax with its frank recognition of the essential principle of taxation, the Interstate Commerce Commission without which we would today have anarchy indeed.

To the accompaniment of the same mournful complaint, the progressives have led the people in proving, during the past six years, that the institutions of democracy can in fact bring nearer the "good of all" if they are used in the right way, that they can be

used to do for the people the things which they are powerless to do individually.

It is a matter not for vanity but for gratitude and future inspiration that the Catholic faith has contributed much to the progressive movement.

Fourteen years before the Administration of President Roosevelt came into being, the need for many of the reforms achieved in the last six years was brilliantly stated in the "Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction." And I am happy to have the opportunity to observe that the last surviving signer of that document is the courageous spiritual leader who is host to this Conference, Bishop Schrembs.

Twenty-eight years before that, the incomparable Leo XIII examined the condition and the needs of labor with an accuracy and an insight seldom equalled, in the Encyclical Rerum Novarum.

And the late Pius XI, in his statement on Social Order, pictured the new role of government in terms that appeal to every progressive, regardless of creed. These are some of his words:

"The duty of rulers is to protect the community and its various elements; and in protecting the rights of individuals they must have special regard for the infirm and needy. For the richer class have many ways of shielding themselves and stand less in need of help from the State, whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back upon and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the State. And for this reason wage-earners, since they mostly belong to that class, should be especially cared

for and protected by the government."

That truth was never before more grimly true than it is today. For today an estimated ten million of our wage-earners stand temporarily outside the economic system. The system cannot provide them with the opportunity to earn a wage, and they themselves are powerless to create that opportunity. This is the greatest problem before us.

There are other great problems, of course. We need to build houses for those who live in shacks and slums; to bring medical care to those who cannot buy it; to stabilize the farmer's market and conserve the soil he tills; to help the railroads back to solid ground; to improve our system of social security; and to continue our search for industrial peace.

These are tremendous tasks and important tasks. But the one that overshadows them all is the task of putting our people back to work.

We may properly count on giving many of them jobs through a broad, long-range program of public works. That is sound and sensible. But the main problem is somehow to return most of them to jobs within the economic system, to see that they are justly paid, and to see that their employment is stable and permanent.

Somehow we must organize the economic system to make these things possible. Unless we do, the "good of all" will remain a myth and "individual liberty" a mockery for those who live in fear.

It is true, of course, that our resources and our industrial plant are not collectively owned. This is not a collectivistic state,

and if we build aright, it will never be a collectivistic state.

But in one sense, our resources are collectively owned. They are owned by the people together in the sense that all the people - owners and non-owners - depend on those resources for their lives. Unless the resources are used in the interests of all, the non-owners will suffer, as many have suffered in the past and as many suffer today.

These facts, too, the Church has recognized. And this is the recognition of them, expressed by Pius XI:

"It follows from the two-fold character of ownership, which we have termed individual and social, that men must take into account in this matter not only their own advantage but also the common good. To define in detail these duties, when the need occurs and when the natural law does not do so, is the function of the government. Provided that the natural and divine law be observed, the public authority, in view of the common good, may specify more accurately what is licit and what is illicit for property owners in the use of their possessions. Moreover, Leo XIII had wisely taught that 'the defining of private possession had been left by God to man's own industry and to the laws of individual peoples'."

It is because these things are true that the people have a right to insist, through their democratic institutions, that the owners of the nation's economic resources and machinery use them in a socially desirable way. From that there is no escape. Adopt the other philosophy and you leave the non-owners of property - those who depend on the property of others for a living - you leave them

outside the economic system. Those who adopt that philosophy will have to accept the consequences.

What are the blueprints of the reconstructed economic system, I do not profess to know. I do not know, for example, whether we can find help in the methods of the Scandinavian states. It may be that their methods are not applicable here.

But this I do know. The blueprints can be found. The drawing of them is a task for the businessmen, the industrialists, the engineers, and the economists, working with those who represent all the people. And under present circumstances we cannot afford to adopt the view that such blueprints cannot be drawn.

Because our people are convinced of the fundamental soundness of the democratic system and the system of private enterprise, the task is a grave and difficult one. It would be easier if we were to do what some others have done - scrap our liberties, scrap the idea of individual enterprise and put everything in the hands of an all-powerful state.

But we are not cut out for that kind of system. Whatever exact plan the reconstruction follows, we want our essential institutions preserved. We want to keep every civil liberty. We do not want government to run business. We only want business to run itself - with any help from government that may be necessary - in a way that will provide for the "good of all."

There is one other matter which, it seems to me, men are likely to forget in their concern about economic problems. It is the necessity for absolute integrity in those who administer the institu-

tions of democracy.

We struggle in these years of crisis to understand our new problems, to end poverty and unemployment, to establish just relationships among government and business and labor and every other group in our population. We struggle to express the people's will and meet the people's needs with good laws.

But every one of these efforts, every one of these laws, is doomed to fail or to succeed only in part, if we cannot look to our administrators, our executives, and our judges, from the smallest hamlet to the nation's capitol, and see them single in their devotion to their oath of office, single in their resolve to let no improper act violate their public trust.

I could do no better to express my convictions on this subject than to read to you a passage from the Pastoral Letter issued in 1920 by the Bishops of the Catholic Church over the signature of the beloved Cardinal Gibbons:

"In a special degree," the letter said, "the sense and performance of duty is required of those who are entrusted with public office. They are at once the servants of the people and the bearers of an authority whose original source is none other than God. Integrity on their part, shown by their impartial treatment of all persons and questions, by their righteous administration of public funds and by their strict observance of law, is a vital element in the life of the nation. It is the first and most effectual remedy for the countless ills which invade the body politic and, slowly festering, end in sudden collapse. But to apply the remedy with hope of success, those

who are charged with the care of public affairs, should think less of the honor conferred upon them than of the great responsibility. For the public official above all others, there is need to remember the day of accounting, here, perhaps, at the bar of human opinion, but surely hereafter at the judgment seat of Him whose sentence is absolute: 'Give an account of thy stewardship'."

In a sense, we are all vested with a stewardship - whether we sit in the councils of government or toil in the service of Christianity or run life's course in the ordinary occupation of the average citizen. As members of a democracy, we are obligated to keep our minds open and our thoughts abreast of events in a fast-moving world.

Let us be Christian in our approach to all problems, determined in our struggle to solve them, confident of our ultimate victory. And one day, other peoples, weary of strife, will turn to us for guidance in regaining the liberty they have lost.

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