

From the Office of
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FOR RELEASE
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Creation of a Permanent Federal Commission on Civil Rights, with an adequate budget and staff, was called for by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D.-Minn) last night (Thursday, Nov. 12) in an address before the Seventh Annual Conference of the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials in Coffman Memorial Union at the University of Minnesota.

Senator Humphrey emphasized, however, that he urged establishing such a Commission as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, eventual enactment of an effective equal opportunity in employment law, or other civil rights legislation.

He described the Commission plan "as a possible first step in the direction of further Federal legislation".

"I believe that such a proposal could be enacted, and would not be opposed by a filibuster," he declared. "It would serve the constructive purpose of presenting to the Congress recommendations for necessary legislation, and for appropriate actions by the administrative agencies of the government.

"It would be a searchlight for reason, intelligence, and good will. I believe that it could exert a constructive influence on national policy, and would be a valuable instrument for securing further necessary legislation. Such a commission would fulfill, on the Federal level, the same vital role being filled on the local level by the Mayor's Council on Human Relations".

He pointed out that Minneapolis had both the Mayor's Council and a Fair Employment Practices Act.

Progress toward improved intergroup relations, he declared, is challenged today by "complacency, irresponsibility, isolationism, and fear."

The latter, he said, is "perhaps the most dangerous challenge to the whole fabric of our civil rights and our civil liberties."

"The real danger that we face from the totalitarian government of Soviet Russia has made us readily susceptible to those who cry 'wolf' at the approach of a friendly dog," Senator Humphrey declared. "This hysteria is being cleverly and effectively used by the enemies of democracy to deprive us of our liberties in the name of national security. Their use of irresponsible innuendos goes far toward destroying the strength and the unity of our people. Responsible community organizations, such as are represented here, must constitute the bulwark of our defense against this dangerous enemy."

"The fear and hysteria of our times", Senator Humphrey warned, "has serious repercussions in the relationships between governments and between peoples over the face of the earth."

"The seeds of suspicion are easy to sow, but the cultivation of understanding is a slow and difficult task," he added.

Senator Humphrey also called for "changing our immigration laws in order to eliminate from them the evil elements of discrimination on the basis of race, religion and national origin which they now contain." He termed the present McCarran-Walters Immigration Act "a threat to the integrity of our democratic faith."

TODAY'S CHALLENGE IN INTERGROUP RELATIONS

An Address

By Senator Hubert H. Humphrey

Delivered at the Seventh Annual Conference
of the

National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials
at 6:00 P. M. on Thursday, November 12, 1953
in the Grand Ballroom of Coffman Memorial Union
University of Minnesota

It is a pleasure to meet with so many of my old friends from Minneapolis and from the State of Minnesota who have been active in supporting and in carrying forward the programs for expanding human freedom and for building mutual understanding and respect between all of our citizens. It is also a great pleasure to greet our guests who have come here from all parts of the United States to share experiences and to work together to improve the weapons to be used in the battle against bigotry. These weapons which you are fashioning here may truly be called the "arsenal of democracy".

I have been asked to speak to you on "Today's Challenge in Intergroup Relations" and I am happy to respond to the request. In considering the nature of this challenge, I have thought of the progress we have made since I was first asked by interested citizens in 1945 to create a Council on Human Relations if I should be elected Mayor of Minneapolis. I did appoint such a Council and I think it did and is still doing an excellent job. Many other mayors and other city councils in various parts of the United States took similar action to meet the challenge which had been called tragically to their attention by the Detroit race riots of 1943. In this connection, I want publicly to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to my close personal friend, Bill Leland, who helped nurse our Minneapolis Council from its infancy and who can be justly proud of its success.

We have made progress in Minneapolis and progress has been made in other parts of the United States. However, it is the very realization of that progress which creates the first challenge that I want to talk with you about today. That is the challenge of complacency. We face the terrible danger of being tempted to look back with satisfaction on the road we have traveled rather than to look forward with courage and determination to the steep and arduous path still to be climbed.

Let's take some bitter pills to cure our complacency. We have no reason for complacency when we find a Negro graduate engineer and his charming wife, who is also a college graduate, unable to rent a decent apartment, even though they enlisted the active aid and support of the intergroup relations agencies working in the Twin Cities. Their problem was finally solved only by renting from a Negro owner.

We have no reason for complacency when we hear rumblings of anti-Semitism at supposedly respectable dinner tables, when serious questions are sometimes raised as to the advancement of Jewish workers to executive or managerial positions and when teen-age boys still tip over head stones in Jewish cemeteries.

We have no reason for complacency when some state officials still want to assign separate facilities to our citizens of American Indian ancestry or when the body of a Korean war hero is refused burial in an American cemetery because he was of the Indian race.

We have no reason for complacency when every major civil rights proposal in the Federal Congress is effectively blocked by a minority of the Congress who oppose this legislation.

The critical discussions which have been going forward at this Conference should be an effective cure for our complacency, since they highlight our failures, our present critical problems and the great work still to be done.

No, my friends, we will have no reason for complacency until we, and all of our fellow citizens, set aside all considerations of race, ethnic background, or national origin in judging each other and until we value every man and woman solely on the basis of his ability, his intelligence, his character and his personal charm as a fellow human being.

The second challenge we we face in the intergroup relations field today is irresponsibility. This, too, is, in a sense, a product of progress. There are fewer and fewer people today who openly support bigotry or who directly oppose measures designed to grant equality of opportunity to all of our citizens. Instead of saying, "It shouldn't be done.", they now say, "Let George do it."

Therefore, when a Fair Employment Practice law is proposed, we see City Council members saying that fair employment practices are certainly fine, but they are the responsibility of the State legislature. Likeminded members of the State legislature say they love everyone and believe in equal opportunities for all, but action of this kind should be left to Congress. And finally we have Senators and Representatives who say that all action to promote the general welfare must be taken at the local level.

This problem and this attitude are not limited to the realm of political action. Some employers profess to have no prejudice in their hearts, but, of course, they can't hire any non-white workers because of the prejudiced attitudes of their present workers and their customers. Some union leaders say they would like to see workers from all groups in their unions but, of course, no one is eligible for union membership whom the employer fails to hire.

We sometimes find this same kind of "buck passing" between the church, the school and the home, with each group saying that the other should take primary responsibility for combatting bigotry and for preparing young people for democratic citizenship. We see this, too, in the field of housing, hotel accommodations and restaurant services. Those in position to provide these facilities claim to be pure in heart, but find themselves bound to practices of discrimination by the prejudices of their neighbors, their clients and their customers.

Those who thus evade their personal responsibilities are called, in professional language, "reluctant gatekeepers". The presence of such irresponsible people in large numbers in our American population constitutes a major challenge to our continued progress in the intergroup relations field.

A third serious challenge is the apparent swing toward isolationism. This involves the failure of many of us as Americans to understand how intimately our national welfare is bound up with the welfare of other peoples all over the world. It involves further, a tendency for the members of specialized racial, religious and ethnic groups within our own country to fail to see how intimately the welfare of each of us is bound up with the welfare of every other man, woman and child in the United States.

Symptoms of this problem may be found in the attacks on our school systems when they have attempted to give the students an understanding of the role of the United Nations in world affairs, to give them an appreciation of the problems of people in other nations and to teach them an attitude of mutual respect for people of all races, religions and national origins as a necessary basis for discharging their responsibilities as democratic citizens of these United States.

Another evidence of this serious isolationist threat is the Bricker Amendment to make it more difficult for our Government to assume its proper responsibilities in the field of international cooperation.

So, also, is the McCarran-Walters Immigration Act a threat to the integrity of our democratic faith. I recognize that the one good result of that Act has been the granting of opportunities for citizenship to people who were born in Japan. This is an action which was long overdue and I know that all of you join with me in rejoicing at its accomplishment. It is my hope that the proper and understandable satisfaction which our Japanese American friends feel for this step forward has not left them unaware of the many evil and discriminatory isolationist provisions of the McCarran Act. I pray that our Japanese American friends will be in the vanguard with all of us here in seeking to change our immigration laws in order to eliminate from them the evil elements of discrimination on the basis of race, religion and national origin which they now contain.

Another serious evidence of "creeping isolationism" is the effort being made to reduce or eliminate our foreign aid programs. Those who propose these cuts argue for them on the basis of economy and national security. I say to you that no expenditures which we Americans can make will do more to safeguard American security and to promote our own future economic welfare than will the right kind of economic aid to people in underdeveloped areas designed to raise standards of living, provide an economic foundation for democratic government, and to build good will among the freedom loving peoples of this earth.

The final and perhaps the most dangerous challenge to the whole fabric of our civil rights and our civil liberties is fear. The real danger that we face from the totalitarian government of Soviet Russia has made us readily susceptible to those who cry "wolf" at the approach of a friendly dog. This hysteria is being cleverly and effectively used by the enemies of democracy to deprive us of our liberties in the name of national security. Their use of irresponsible innuendoes goes far toward destroying the strength and the unity of our people. Responsible community organizations, such as are represented here, constitute the bulwark of our defense against this dangerous enemy.

The fear and hysteria of our times has serious repercussions in the relationships between governments and between peoples over the face of the earth. The seeds of suspicion are easy to sow, the cultivation of understanding is a slow and difficult task.

It seems to me, then, that progress toward improved intergroup relations is challenged today by complacency, irresponsibility, isolationism, and fear. I have tried to suggest some of the specific barriers which these attitudes create. It is our common purpose here to develop the weapons with which we can successfully attack these barriers to our further progress.

I have no simple solution. However, I think we can draw upon our experience for means and upon our faith for inspiration to mount a fresh attack.

The key to the attack on complacency lies in self-criticism and self-evaluation for each of us as individuals. This may lead us to a new list of immediate objectives and may stimulate us to adopt new methods for reaching established goals. On the community level, we may find that the people whose complacency is slowing the wheels of progress are the "reluctant gatekeepers" and not the active workers in the intergroup relations field. An effective instrument for dealing with this problem has proved to be the Community Self-Survey. Through participation in examining community practices, people in policy-making positions may be made aware of injustices and may be given a sense of urgent responsibility to work for their solution. Our excellent experience with the Community Self-Survey in Minneapolis bears this out.

For the agencies in the field, such Conferences as this one provide fresh tools, new inspiration and the continuing recognition of the fact that eternal vigilance is required, not only to move forward, but to hold the ground we have gained.

I think that even more can be done to attack the problem of irresponsibility. For one thing, the adoption of legislation can clearly place responsibility on the shoulders of those who are in policy-making positions in each area of community life. I was very much interested in the comment which I understand Professor Gordon Allport of Harvard University made during one of the sessions of the United States National Commission for UNESCO here on the University of Minnesota campus in September. I am told that Dr. Allport said at that time that legislation has proved to be the most effective single instrument for attacking and correcting practices of discrimination. I understand that he said further that this change in practice leads to a reduction in the attitudes of prejudice.

Such a comment from so competent an authority is especially heartening to me because it is in the area of legislation that I may find the personal opportunity to act.

As you may know, when I was mayor of Minneapolis, we had the satisfaction of establishing a Mayor's Council on Human Relations and of carrying forward a successful Community Self-Survey which has continued to exert a beneficial influence on intergroup relations in the community. We also adopted a Fair Employment Practice Ordinance, with enforcement powers, and I had the privilege of appointing the members of the first municipal Fair Employment Practice Commission in the United States. The state commissions in New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts were the only ones in operation at the time our city commission was established.

Passing an Equal Opportunity in Employment law, or any other civil rights law, does not automatically solve the problem of discrimination. The law simply creates an instrument which may or may not be used. Specific problems will be solved only if those who encounter discrimination make use of the services of the Commission which are available to them.

On the national level, attempts to secure civil rights legislation have been almost completely blocked in recent years. At the Democratic National Convention in 1948, I called upon the delegates to "come out of the shadow of states' rights and into the sunlight of human rights". We succeeded in getting civil rights into the Democratic Platform in that year and we had an even better Platform statement in 1952, but that's as far as we got. Unhappily, the Republicans haven't gotten any farther.

Civil rights is not a partisan issue. Senator Ives and I, and other Senators in both parties, introduced an Equal Opportunity in Employment bill last year and called it the Humphrey-Ives Bill. We introduced it again this year and called it the Ives-Humphrey Bill. This was our gesture to demonstrate the non-partisan approach to civil rights.

The first problem in securing adoption of any civil rights legislation at the national level is to change the Senate Rules so as to give ultimate control to a majority of the members of that body. The amendment of Rule 22 to make it possible to invoke cloture by a simple majority vote and thus to bring debate on any issue within reasonable limits, is the first essential step. The catch is, of course, that the attempt to change the Rule is, itself, subject to a filibuster.

A number of the organizations represented here have suggested that the Senate is free to adopt new rules at the beginning of each session, and that Rule 22 could be amended by simple majority vote at such a time. This strategy could succeed only if the President of the Senate would so rule. Vice-President Nixon has indicated that he would not support such an interpretation. Therefore, this proposed solution of the problem apparently must await the election of a new Vice-President.

As a possible first step in the direction of Federal legislation, I should like to see the interested groups support a proposal to establish a Permanent Federal Commission on Civil Rights with an adequate budget and staff. I believe that such a proposal could be enacted and not be opposed by a filibuster. It would serve the constructive purpose of presenting to the Congress recommendations for necessary legislation and for appropriate actions by the administrative agencies of the Government. It would be a searchlight for reason, intelligence and good will. I believe that it could exert a constructive influence on national policy and would be a valuable instrument for securing further necessary legislation. Such a Commission would fulfill on the Federal level the same vital role being filled on the local level by the Mayor's Council on Human Relations.

Action can take place at the Federal level by administrative action, without further legislation. We can be proud of the steady elimination of separate units and the integration of the men in our armed forces without discrimination. This program was set in motion by President Truman and has been carried forward under President Eisenhower.

We still have some problems. I have recently protested a decision by the Secretary of the Army to defer until some later time the integration of schools on military posts which are now conducted by local civilian authorities. As you are kept informed, through your several organizations, of similar problems, you can help the forward march of progress by protesting bad decisions and supporting progressive actions.

I am happy to note that President Eisenhower has appointed a Committee on Government Contracts to carry forward the work which was started by a similar committee appointed by President Truman. The Vice-Chairman of this new Committee, Mr. J. Ernest Wilkins, addressed this Conference at its opening session. I hope that the new Committee is able to implement some of the recommendations made by its predecessor and that it may succeed in more effectively enforcing the non-discrimination clause in Federal Government contracts. All of you here can aid in its work by reporting incidents of violation which may come to your attention.

Even if a full program of Federal civil rights legislation could be adopted immediately, state action would still be needed to cover intra-state commerce and to extend otherwise the application of legislation to community problems. Every state should guarantee fair employment practices, fair educational practices and equal access to public accommodations by laws with enforcement powers. Furthermore, experience shows that these laws should be administered by a state civil rights commission with an adequate budget and staff. No member of a state legislature is justified in saying that this action should be taken instead by municipal governments or by the national Congress. If he takes this position, he should be labeled as an opponent and treated as such.

In my opinion, if effective state action is taken, municipal action would not be required in the civil rights field. However, in the absence of state laws, the members of city councils have a clear responsibility to protect the civil rights of citizens within their area of jurisdiction. Furthermore, favorable experience with municipal laws has proved to be a valuable influence in the direction of securing sound state legislation. Therefore, no city councilman should be excused from taking present action on the ground that state legislation might be adopted at some future time.

The same principle should be applied in every field of endeavor. Every man should be expected to stand his own ground and to oppose prejudice and discrimination wherever he may find it. To be worthy of a position of leadership in business, labor, school, church or community, a man should give evidence of an understanding and responsible concern for the public interest, and he should be ready to take some risks and make some sacrifices for the sake of his convictions.

Isolationism used to be considered a middle-western disease. We thought we had it cured, but it seems to be breaking out again. Intellectually it can be combatted by knowledge about the world and about the inter-dependence of all people in it. However, like most human relations problems, isolationism is primarily a matter of emotional attitude. We tend to fear and hate people we don't know. In these terms, the cure is to become personally acquainted with people of other groups on a normal, equalitarian basis to share common interests and to discuss common problems.

In the field of international relations, this is accomplished in part by the various exchange programs that have been sponsored by the United Nations and the American State Department. Visits by business men, labor leaders, journalists and government officials, as well as by students and teachers, have done much to build understanding and good will. I think the current curtailment of funds for such purposes constitutes a dangerous and false economy. These programs must be restored and expanded if we are to have hope for peace and prosperity in the world.

Even human relations agencies can, and sometimes do, become isolationist in their point of view and in their organizational activities. Vested interests develop and jealousies and suspicions rise. It seems to me that NAIRO is doing a valuable and effective job toward combatting such tendencies in the human relations field. By welcoming into membership all professional and policy-making people in the agencies seeking to combat prejudice and overcome discrimination, bonds of fellowship and understanding are developed which cut across all organizational lines. Through such contacts, you come to realize that your fellow workers are not as smart as you feared and are more likable than you used to think. That brings about a healthy disrespect for authority and a still healthier basis for comradeship and cooperation.

The conquest of fear is both more important and more difficult than any of the other problems facing those who are working to build a more effective democracy in the United States and throughout the world. The fear of national insecurity, is difficult to combat. On the one hand, we must clearly recognize and forthrightly prepare to meet the real threat to American democracy and to human freedom created by the totalitarian government of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, we must not permit the fear of communism to be used as an excuse for depriving us of our civil liberties or for halting the forward march of liberal programs required to solve basic social, economic and political problems.

I have two suggestions for combatting this dangerous trend: One as to procedure and the other as to principle. First, let the real problems of Soviet espionage and national security be dealt with by the F.B.I. and not by amateurs and junior Dick Tracys with an eye for the headlines. This is a professional job.

Second, let us speak out against undemocratic practices, whoever may be guilty of them, and let us work tirelessly for the preservation of our civil liberties and the extension and effective guarantee of full civil rights to all of our citizens. On a more basic level, there is a considerable accumulation of scientific evidence that fear and insecurity are the basic elements which nurture prejudice and which support and perpetuate practices of discrimination. Broad programs to provide opportunities for more secure and satisfying lives for all our people are required for the solution of this basic problem. The organizations and individuals here represented can give invaluable support to such programs, and you can do so in the knowledge that you are accomplishing your immediate objective of combatting prejudice and discrimination, at the same time that you are building a sounder America and a better world.

Thank you.



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