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LIBERALISM AND THE REVOLUTIONS OF OUR TIME

Speech by Senator Hubert Humphrey
Georgetown University
May 16, 1960

Hasten Lecture

I shall discuss tonight -- or, perhaps better, think
out loud -- the revolutions of our time, their character
and their contradictions. Yes, they present problems.
But they offer opportunities as well. There is a role for
American liberalism to play in meeting the problems and seizing
the opportunities. And in my opinion, the liberal is better
fitted to play this role than the conservative.

↳ This half-century of revolutions began with the Communist
seizure of power in Russia 43 years ago. Millions of words
have been written on this subject, and it will serve no purpose
to recapitulate them now.

Indeed, I think it may be worthwhile, if only to get a fresh
viewpoint on this subject, to set aside these millions of words
and the 43 years of history which they cover. Let us rather
look at the Soviet Union as that proverbial visitor from Mars
would see it.

First, let us examine it -- in the authentic Marxist tradition -- as a system of production. Obviously - like capitalism - it works. Yes, it has worked rather better than our system in producing sputniks. It works quite well in heavy industry. Its achievements in housing and in consumer goods are not impressive - but they are improving. Its record in agriculture cannot be rated any higher than poor, particularly in contrast to the spectacular advances in efficiency which American farmers have made.

↳ The Soviet state has not, as the early Marxists confidently predicted, withered away. On the contrary, it remains all-powerful, and deprives Soviet citizens of most of the basic freedoms - freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to elect a government and to turn it out of office.

Yet this is not the society of robots pictured, for example, in George Orwell's novel, 1984.

Judging by what we read, China in its early years of Communism looks far more Orwellian than Russia in its fifth decade. Most Russians remain stubborn individualists. The churches are crowded with worshippers. Of course, we are told that most of the congregations are middle-aged and elderly -- but we have always been told that, and the old people of today are obviously not the old people of 20, 30 and 40 years ago.

L Yes, a visitor from Mars would note the triumphs of Soviet industry and science and persistence of human individuality in spite of the massive efforts to stamp it out. But I think the thing that would strike him most forcibly is that this appears to be a highly purposeful system. Its leaders have a clear idea where they are going, not only next month and next year, but for the decades and centuries ahead.

The second wave of revolutions in this half-century has been nationalist in character. We have too often auto-
matically assumed that nationalism is the natural - and even
the most effective - opponent of communism. This is not true
to the extent that we tend to think it is today, and it
may be even less true tomorrow.

For instance, we have fallen into the habit of saying
that Communists "infiltrate" nationalist movements, as if
they were outsiders or strangers to these movements. On the
contrary, they have often been a part of them from the
beginning. Mao Tse-Tung and Chiang Kai-Shek were fighting shoulder
to shoulder in early stages of the Chinese revolution against
foreign domination. After 1927, their paths diverged - one to
become the Communist ruler of the mainland, the other to become
the conservative ruler of Taiwan.

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But both remained nationalists to this day, in the sense that they reject, so far as it is in their capacity, any interference from outside, even by nations which are, respectively, so intimately associated with them as Russia and the United States.

So long as the Soviet Union was the only Communist state in the world - and so long as it displayed its own nationalism by imposing its power upon all other Communist movements - there was a built-in contradiction between nationalism and Communism. But we cannot safely assume that this will always be so. - *Yugo - Poland*

More serious -- nationalism today is limited as a rival to Communism because too often it lacks on-going significance, once freedom is achieved. The struggle for freedom inspires and unites. But freedom in itself is only an empty bottle, however

fresh and glittering it may appear. The important question for the future is what wine is poured into these bottles.

↳ After the new flag is hoisted, after the rockets have been set off in celebration, there comes a cold grey dawn, when the people awake to find that all the problems of nationhood confront them. I am speaking metaphorically, of course. Disillusionment does not come immediately; the enthusiasm generated by the struggle for freedom has a momentum which may persist for some years. But, when that momentum has spent itself, there comes a critical period in the lives of new nations. We see that today in many areas of the world, and notably in the rise to power of the generals and the dictators.

↳ Let us not delude ourselves - there is no permanent security in military or civilian dictatorship, unless they have a program for the future of their nations and can rally popular support for it.

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Otherwise they may be swept into the ashcan of history, as Batista was last year and Syngman Rhee this. At the next round, or the round after that, a desperate people may turn to the men who, whatever their massive faults, do hold up a program - the Communists.

Indeed, the character of the world into which these new nations are being born accentuates the problems of their leaders. For thousands of years, most people were content to live very much as their fathers and grandfathers did. There was no pressure upon the rulers of nations to "deliver the goods" in the form of a better life for their people. A man could go down history as a "good" king simply by letting the peasants till their soil in peace.

Here and there such placid backwaters still exist, but they are rare. Take the islands^{east} of New Guinea - Melanesia, as they are called - where some of the world's most primitive societies still persist.

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There we are seeing the impact of the modern world and the half pathetic form of the so-called "cargo cults."

For decades, small colonies of white Europeans have lived in contact with these primitive peoples. The Europeans have radios, clocks, and a hundred and one other gadgets which are delivered to them by ship or plane. Yet they seem to work no harder than the natives. They must, the Melanesians think, have acquired these things by magic.

In some places the Melanesians have demanded, with anger and indignation, to be let in on this magic, so that the cargoes will come for them as well. On at least one island - and this may give us food for sober thought - the rumor actually spread that "General Russia" was about to land, with a cargo of radios and fountain pens for everyone.

These "cargo cults" - the naive and spontaneous reaction of a primitive people to the Twentieth Century - illustrate in poignant and dramatic form the revolution of rising expectations which is

sweeping the world. It means that the peoples of the new nations will be far less patient with their governments than they would have been even a generation ago. They are expected to show the way to a better life - not today or tomorrow, but at least next year or the year after.

Yet - as we as well as the Melanesians are discovering - there is no magic key to economic development. When President Truman first launched his "point four" proposal in 1949, there were many who thought that all we had to do was to send American technicians abroad, have them impart their "know-how" to the less privileged peoples, and economic growth would take off like a rocket. We know better now - and, indeed, one of our problems with the overseas aid program in Congress is that many of my colleagues resent the fact that it was first "sold" to them as a cheap and temporary thing, whereas it has become a long-term and an expensive effort.

Overshadowing all these political and economic revolutions is the revolutionary progress in science and technology - which, within the past 15 years, has unlocked the titanic energy of the atom and

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sent sputniks soaring into outer space. Unfortunately, the world is ill-prepared for the opening of this Pandora's box.

For the first time the human race has in its hands the capacity to destroy itself - precisely when the world is more deeply and dangerously divided than ever before in history. Satellites circle the globe in less than two hours - yet an earth so small is divided into increasingly many sovereign states.

We are in the midst of a serious international crisis resulting from the crash of an American espionage plane in the Soviet Union. The flight of a plane 65,000 feet is still regarded as a violation of national sovereignty. Yet the satellites are recognized as transcending any claims of sovereignty, and it is only a matter of time until they will be providing both sides with photographs just as good.

Indeed, just as more and more nations are achieving sovereignty, it is losing much of its old value and significance. There was a time when a national flag sufficed. Now in many parts of the world the

possession of the most modern jet aircraft is considered an essential
aspect of sovereignty. President DeGaulle - and perhaps others -
seem to think that the setting off of an atomic explosion is
necessary to national self-respect.

Technological progress is likewise tending to increase the
gap between the industrialized and the developing nations. The
nature of modern technology is such that "to him that hath shall
be given" - not in arithmetical, but in geometrical, ratio.

It is a turbulent and a fast-changing world through which
our nation is moving. Not only are these various ~~resolutions~~
running at full tide, but - as we have seen - there are dangerous
cross-currents. We need the most skilled and resourceful navigators
for our ship of state.

In my final few minutes, I shall outline the reasons why I think
American liberalism is better able to give leadership in this period
than are the conservatives - and I shall give a few of my own ideas
as to how we should go about it.

As I see it, the decisive difference between liberals and conservatives today is in their concept of the role of government.

Conservatives believe that government should do as little as possible.

Liberals do not - as socialists have maintained, though with decreasing conviction in recent years - believe that government should do as

much as possible. But they do believe that government initiative

is fully as necessary to our success as private enterprise - and

that we should be bold, imaginative, and creative in using government

for national purposes which private enterprise cannot fulfill as

well, or indeed at all.

(Planning)

As liberals see it, socialists and conservatives are both

prisoners of dogma - the dogma of big government in one case and

of little in the other. We liberals are pragmatists - we judge each

case according to its merits.

There is another relevant difference between liberals and

conservatives, although here the lines are rather less sharply drawn.

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Liberals are, in overwhelming majority, willing to move boldly in building the influence and authority of international organizations, above all the United Nations. Although there are many conservatives who are genuinely international in their outlook, they are hampered and held back by the strength - still very great - of isolationist sentiment in the ranks.

These are our liberal capacities - now for the problems to which we must address ourselves, problems which will require all our efforts, public and private, for their solution.

1. We must set our own course at full speed forward.

That means government must act to provide the basis for sustained economic growth at the rate of at least 5% a year - not the intermittent, stop-and-go 2% average we have registered in recent years. It means also clearing away the barnacles of racial discrimination which cling to us, and hamper our progress. It means above all knowing where we are going, recovering our sense of national purpose - so that the world's peoples will know what we are for as well as what we are against.

Progress

2. We must make a determined effort to negotiate safeguarded disarmament with the Soviet Union - and, ultimately, replace national armed forces by an international police force. Competition between our two systems is inevitable and should be vigorous - but it should be waged on political and economic, not military, lines.

3. We must dedicate ourselves to an adequate, long-range program of technical and economic assistance - so that the peoples of the new and developing nations will have hope for the future, and there will be time and opportunity for democratic institutions to take root and grow.

Planning

4. We must take the leadership in moving from independence to interdependence - by building up rather than by-passing the United Nations and other international institutions.

5. We must make science the servant rather than the master of humanity - by pressing forward on its new frontiers on an international, rather than a narrowly national, basis.

These are complex problems, and I do not expect ~~full~~ and immediate agreement among liberals on their solution. For, as the late President Roosevelt observed, when asked how it was that liberals were often divided, and conservatives generally united:

↳ "There are many ways of going forward, but there is only one way of standing still."

Yes, standing still is easy - but it is dangerous. If we learn anything from history, it is that the one thing which will not, which cannot endure is the status quo. We cannot, like King Canute, command the tides of revolution to stand still for our comfort and our convenience.

↳ If we are unwilling to make history, others will write it for us - and they will be, for our children and our children's children, tragic pages to read.

↳ Yet we have, as we have shown again and again, the capacity for greatness. What we ~~lack~~^{need} is the leadership to rally all our resources

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- public and private - to meet the problems and rise to the opportunities ahead.

I believe that liberalism can offer this leadership - and can steer us through these turbulent 60's into the wider seas of world peace with justice which lie beyond.



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