

Indeed if we draw the right conclusions from the experience of the past, we can gain thereby for the future. But experience in itself though a valuable channel to wisdom, is no guarantee of it. You may remember Napoleon's comment when someone recommended one of his officers to him for promotion on the ground that he had been through an exceptional number of campaigns. "My horse", Napoleon is reported to have replied, "has been through even more". Some of us have been through a good many U.N. campaigns. I hope we have learned more than our horses. If, however, we are to benefit from our experiences, the first step must be to draw the right conclusions from them.

May I recall one detail of experience. Ten years ago, in San Francisco, the smaller powers paid a price, by making certain concessions, for a foundation for the United Nations which we hoped would be solid, but which certainly proved to be illusory. This foundation was to be Great Power co-operation. The price we paid was to give these Powers a special position under the Charter.

We could not have had the United Nations at all without paying this price. It was not too high and it should not be made an excuse for our failures. The veto, for instance, is not the cause, as I see it, so much as the result of those failures. Other international organizations in which, in effect, all members possess a veto have worked well. Our machinery is adequate; but the will to operate it successfully has often faltered or been frustrated.

Improvement in that machinery - as in any kind of machinery - can, of course, be made. But the remedy for our ills lies not so much in such improvement: as in the desire and determination to make the existing mechanism function better, and for that international agreement on disputed questions. The responsibility for such agreement rests mainly on those members of the United Nations who have the greatest power and the special privileges.

True, the Charter has given us all, great or small, a set of standards of international conduct which it is our duty to follow. The greater the power of a State, however, the heavier is its obligation to exercise this power, in the United Nations and elsewhere, with restraint, with justice and in accordance with the principles of our Charter.

This week we renew - in words - our determination to live up to those principles; above all, to rid mankind of the scourge of war. But, if we are to succeed where all previous generations have failed, words alone will be of little avail. It is not enough merely to set up an efficient international organization and lay down an ideal code of international conduct. It is not enough to hoist a United Nations flag with a map of the world, though it may remind us that we are all more directly and vitally interdependent than ever before. It is not enough to meet one another in the Assembly, in the Councils and the Committees of the United Nations, though that should increase mutual understanding. It is not enough to learn to know each other as human beings outside our official contacts, though that also helps. It is not enough to accumulate more knowledge about each other, though that makes it easier to put ourselves in one another's place - something which is essential if understanding is to grow. It is the translation of all these things into political and social action; the application of high principles to individual and collective practice that matters.