

The middle way presents no panacea for the easy attainment of general wealth, but it accepts the responsibility of government to assist in protecting and raising living standards and, if necessary, to take bold and well-planned action to help maintain economic activity.

The middle way, unlike extreme political doctrines, has positive faith in the good will and common sense of most people in most circumstances. It relies on their intelligence, their will to cooperate and their sense of justice. From its practitioners it requires determination and patience, the strength of tolerance and restraint, the discipline of the mind rather than the jackboot, and the underlying belief that human problems, vast and complicated though they may be, are capable of solution. This, I believe, is the political philosophy which best preserves the free society which you will be discussing at this conference, and which indeed gives to that free society many of its most important characteristics.

It is not enough, of course, merely to keep to the middle ground. It is necessary to go somewhere. The history of politics is full of the obituaries of groups in society who stood firm, and still, in the middle of the road, or who, like the old Duke of York, merely marched up and down the hill. For this reason, the parties of moderation and tolerance in a progressive society must continually chart new country overhaul and modernize the administrative machine in which they travel, adapting it to the demands of new conditions. They must move with the times, so that they do not collapse simply through inaction. They must also test the validity of the principles by which they chart their course, checking their philosophical and political roadmaps against the sign boards which are provided by the practical day-to-day problems of government.

In this move forward, one of our most immediate problems is the protection of our free society against those who wish deliberately to destroy it by overthrowing our system of government. We must be constantly vigilant lest our free political institutions are used for this destructive purpose. We know from experience, both in international affairs and in our national life, what happens when a resolute minority which does not believe in government by consent, gains power. It uses our free institutions for its own purposes and it does its best to see that no one else uses them. The communists, for example, will, if they can, use your town council for the destructive purposes of their own political propaganda, though they will conceal these purposes behind a smoke screen of humanitarian proposals. They will also do their best to prevent you from using the same Council to give effect to some sensible and practicable scheme of which they do not happen to approve. If, through the democratic process, they gain control of any agency of government they will do their best to prevent anyone replacing them through the same process. We know how tactics of this kind can corrode and destroy the fabric of a democratic state. We saw the Nazis do it in Weimar Germany. We have seen the communists do it more recently in Czechoslovakia. We have also seen a great international organization like the United Nations brought on occasions to a complete standstill, when its communist members used their democratic privileges to frustrate its will. In our national life, though not so often as in some other countries, we have seen groups of citizens start to work on some problem of common interest, such as the adjustment of a labour situation, and fail because a determined communist minority has been able to lead a divided and fluctuating majority into courses which made any solution impossible. I think we have had enough of this sort of thing in both national and international affairs, and that it is time we put an end to it. It can be stopped by an intelligent public which knows what is happening, which refuses to have its institutions and its democratic processes thrown into disarray by an irresponsible minority, and which shows initiative in making sure that what it wants done it gets done. This takes time and thought and resolution, but it can be accomplished.

At the same time, we must remember that we help the enemies of freedom if we take unnecessary short cuts to deal with them for by so doing we ourselves may weaken the very political institutions which we are seeking to preserve. I am sure, therefore, that we should continue in our national life