

Negotiated incrementalism is the result. At best.

If the incremental changes were stages in a dynamic, evolutionary process, it makes sense. But it is the result of patchwork effort under intense short-term pressure in conditions of very little given or shared understanding on the real issues, then I suggest that it is poor political process.

Need of a long-term view

I am not arguing for over-all, sweeping change, today or even tomorrow. But I am arguing for a long-term political view of the choices we have to make.

Bob McNamara had this perception at the basis of the observations he made which ultimately led to the creation of the Brandt Commission.

We must have a shared, serious view, a political view, of global needs, and particularly of the long-term needs of developing countries, both over-all and specific. We must measure these needs against the effectiveness of the institutions we have in place. We need to look at the performance and contributions of these institutions in terms of the sustained needs of the developed countries. We have to be able to look at the whole situation, in a long term, and from the political viewpoint of the equitable sharing of power. When I speak of international institutions, I am really speaking of the access to tools. The institutional contributions can be measured not only in terms of their effectiveness in promoting the interests of all countries concerned but also as instruments in assisting their access to tools — to capital, to technology, to markets.

The point is that we need a long view. One which indicates our choices at the international level, and choice at the national level. One from which we can work backward in technique. This would be an informing framework for political choice. Since choices can only be made at the political level, the framework needs to be developed and agreed at the political level.

If we agree that this is the view we need, we can probably as readily agree that it's one which our political circumstances have great difficulty in providing. In the democratic process, the long view is often obscured by the preferences of the moment. It's not a difficulty easily overcome since the democratic process is, of course, the essence of our political system. But it is often said that it is a risky proposition for elected politicians to try to deal with the future at all — indeed, some hold that a politician's own future is best assured by his personal commitment to retrieving the past.

This is possibly because we're scared by the circumstances of the present. But unless we act on its behalf, the future is likely to be a lot worse.

Hence, we had better now agree politically that there is one political commitment of overriding importance we need to take — that there will be a sane, equitable, and productive future. We need political recognition that we cannot continue as we are doing now.

For this recognition to take effect at the national level, we need not only public support in the developed countries, but also international understandings among national political leaders.

---