

Let me assert at the outset that there is a world of difference between the experience of a national government office-holder responsible to a set of diverse, competing, interests and that of a committed representative of a compelling cause. I have been both - and, in all honesty, I try, as do my colleagues, to remain both.

Thank God for the committed exponents of the right causes! Without them, the causes wouldn't be advanced.

But the two experiences are of different orders. I won't say which is the higher. I know what the public is said to think of politicians. But I know also which has the greater order of difficulty. It's necessarily the one where the choices are the hardest.

At the national political level, at least in the industrialized democracies, the choices in the North/South area are not clear.

In simplest terms, they seem to be between "us" and "others", between costs now and possible benefits later. But in a broader perspective, the choices can be seen to be vastly more complex, involving a mixture of costs and benefits. The direction individual governments should take needs clearer understanding at the international level.

I personally think that the present state of affairs in North/South relations has a lot to do with the absence of clarity about what we are attempting to do politically on the international level. There is a generally agreed concept of a New International Economic Order but only in what I consider to be notional and generalized terms of abstractions. When it comes to translating these into direct arrangements, the negotiating process fails us.

Much has been said about the nature of the negotiating process, about the need to find ways to negotiate on a less generalized level. I won't elaborate on this except to say that I understand the political dynamic involved in developing country solidarity for negotiating purposes. But to the extent that it obscures economic realities, it is part of our political problem.

Negotiated incrementalism is the result. At best.

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