

notion runs strong that our present international system is in a sense the inheritance from an era of colonial conquest and spoils. That one has been argued endlessly. I suggest we abandon the argument. The point, the essential political point, is to determine if the international economic system really works to the global advantage. There are clear signs it does not.

If it sustains poverty to the point where a billion people live on the margin of human existence, it does not. If a dozen, two dozen, perhaps more, recently dynamic, growing economies have had their promise crumpled by ballooning financial problems, it does not. And if the industrialized economies are themselves beset by uncertainty and confusion, it does not.

There is an erosion of confidence in the international economic process. The feeling is widespread that the international institutions are not working to common advantage and purpose. These, ladies and gentlemen, are fundamentally political problems. The solutions have to be developed at the political level. Because that's where choices are made. In fact, they are the kind of choices we, in government, make daily.

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.

#### Unclear choices

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.