

# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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## "THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE"

An address by Mr. Hume Wrong,  
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States, at Gettysburg College,  
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It is not easy to decide what to talk about. The traditional subject of commencement addresses is youth, the excellence of youth, the importance of youth, the opportunities of youth, the responsibilities of youth. I am not, however, going to bore you by harping upon this admirable but time-worn theme. It does, however, suggest a question which may be worth asking, even if it cannot be answered. Is this a good age in which to have been born? Or, to put much the same question somewhat differently: Are those graduating today more fortunate than the graduates of one, two or three generations ago?

I think that few intelligent persons would today answer these questions with complete confidence in the affirmative. Now, if the same questions had been put at the time when I graduated from college, I am sure that a good many intelligent people would not have hesitated to answer confidently: Yes, it is a good age, and you are more fortunate than were your fathers and your grandfathers. I graduated when the First World War had lasted for only the first nine months of its weary and blood-stained four and a quarter years. I am not sure that quite the same optimism would have been shown in any year since 1915. I dare say that today a good many people would find it easier to answer the question, if they had to say yes or no, with a flat negative.

It seems to me of interest to examine some of the reasons for the change. I grew up in an era when it was popularly accepted that progress was inevitable, automatic, a natural law as certain as the law of gravity. There were of course wise men and prophets, and cynics and scoffers, who did not accept this superstition; but it was an important part of the popular faith, and to dispute it was a form of heresy.

In 1914 there had been no major war for almost fifty years, no general war since the defeat of Napoleon. Man was thought to be growing wiser all the time. He was constantly contriving new and wonderful things for his happiness, safety, and comfort. As the scientists and technicians unwrapped the mysteries of nature, new opportunities, vistas of further progress, were revealed. The ugly things - and there were many of them which troubled the conscience - were in time to be eliminated. There was only one way to go - forward to better days. Each year was to be a little better than the year before. Especially in North America, but also in other continents, the horizon of the future seemed limitless and serene.

This attitude towards life was neither a philosophy nor a religion; it was rather a climate of opinion. Climates are fickle. Since then there have been many inclement seasons. No more is it possible, with easy optimism, to forecast the weather of the years to come as set fair. The tempests of war, the bitter cold of economic disaster, the thunder of clashing nationalisms, and now the thick fog of rival ideologies have dissipated, in the middle of the twentieth century, the old confidence

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that man is wholly master of his fate.

There has been produced in North America and in other progressive countries the best-equipped civilization that there has ever been. Yet I find that I can look back with some degree of nostalgia to the days of my boyhood, days when we lit our houses by gas or coal-oil, when we went about on our legs or on bicycles or rarely, as a luxury, in a horse-drawn cab, days of very few primitive motor-cars and wholly without movies or radios or airplanes. It is a common failing for people as they grow older to think of the days of their youth as better days, golden days; but in this case I doubt that the conservatism and caution associated with middle age can alone be blamed for my nostalgia. Much has been gained since then, but something valuable has been lost, or at least badly shaken. That is perhaps best described as the sense of security.

This is nowhere more evident than in the state of international relations. The 19th century vision of growing harmony between nations has faded, the vision expressed by Tennyson as "freedom slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent". Our technically-competent era has managed to produce the two most devastating wars in all history, the grimmest economic depression on record, and now a state of affairs described as a cold war, for which it is not possible at present to see even the outline for settlement.

The present atmosphere is certainly a trying one in which to live. It warps the judgment when what is most needed of every citizen is that he should stay calm, cool-headed and alert. It is especially trying, perhaps, for those about to enter on their careers because of the uncertainty with which the future is surrounded. It is also trying for older people who have seen so many of their hopes shattered.

Yet there are real grounds for hope. I believe that we are not bound inevitably to fight before long another great war in order to prevent our freedoms from being overthrown. I also believe that there is no short or easy road to security and lasting peace. We shall, I am sure, continue to be faced for several years at least with recurrent crises and pressing anxieties which will affect the lives of everyone of us.

Part of the current disillusionment over the prospects of peace in our time arises from having set hopes too high in the last stages of the war, just as people did twenty and more years ago after the other war. The major part of our disillusionment, however, comes from the positive actions of others, actions which a huge majority of the people of the western world now recognize as menacingly hostile to their chosen way of life.

When the Charter of the United Nations was being drafted in the spring of 1945 it would have seemed almost incredible that the victorious allies, after putting forth the effort and enduring the suffering that won the war, should so soon be ranged in two great opposing groups. Yet that is what has happened, and the differences between the groups are such that they are impossible of settlement by our usual democratic method of compromise.

Political problems are very rarely wholly solved. They change their shape and their importance. There is no neat general solution for the international rivalries of today, no possibility of devising a panacea that will heal the differences between great powers. Beware of the person who propounds simple solutions, who thinks that if the Charter of the United Nations were amended, or if some of the chiefs of governments were to meet around one table, or even if the issues were forced rapidly to the point of war, the world could soon emerge into an era of harmony and prosperity.

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We must work towards amelioration rather than hope for complete solution. Steps have been taken in that direction. It was Benjamin Franklin who said at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "We must all hang together or assuredly we shall all hang separately". The Economic Recovery Program, that great feat of imaginative statesmanship, is now in operation under skilled guidance. In the middle of March the United Kingdom, France and the Low Countries concluded in Brussels a very far reaching economic and military agreement. On the same day President Truman told Congress, "I am confident that the United States will by appropriate means extend to the free nations the support which the situation requires. I am sure that the determination of the free countries to Europe to protect themselves will be matched by equal determination on our part to help them protect themselves".

Now, one of the great problems of helping the free nations to protect themselves arises from the development of a new and skillful technique of conquest from within, of which the events of last February in Prague are the latest of several examples. In several countries disciplined minorities, prompted and supported from abroad, have succeeded in imposing their rule on the majority. This is what has happened in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, in Hungary, in Rumania and in others of the satellite states.

This variety of indirect aggression has succeeded by bloodless, or almost bloodless, methods and often with an appearance of legality, though not with its substance. Its success is not based on any principle acceptable to the believers in democracy, and it brings with it the simultaneous introduction of all the deplorable machinery of the police state.

What means can be devised to prevent the pattern being repeated in other countries now outside the Iron Curtain which are very important to the security of the rest of the world? The Security Council of the United Nations is not able to deal with indirect aggression of this sort. It is paralyzed by the use of the veto. The Charter of the United Nations was framed as a constitution for the international community. It is far from a perfect constitutional instrument, but the troubles in the United Nations today do not arise from its defects. They stem from the fact that there is no international community. You cannot have a collective system unless you have a collective will to make the system work. Such a collective will is lacking, for there is no common purpose among the greater nations to join together in an honest search to remove the troubles that plague the world.

Within the compass of the Charter, however, means can be devised whereby the free countries can voluntarily "hang together" and so avoid being "hung separately". Many of those who were at the San Francisco Conference hoped that the then current euphemism for the veto, "the unanimity of the great powers", might have a positive meaning; but they had their doubts and what are now Articles 51 and 52 were added to the Charter. Article 51 preserves "the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence pending positive action by the Security Council". Article 52 authorizes regional agreements between member states.

Use can be made of these articles to bring together some at least of the free countries which have a collective will to unite against threatened dangers. In my own country the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. St. Laurent, a month ago outlined the possibilities in words worthy of quotation:

"The formation of such a defensive group of free states would not be a counsel of despair but a message of hope. It would not mean that we regarded a third world war as inevitable; but that the free democracies had decided that to prevent such a war they would

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organize so as to confront the forces of communist expansionism with an overwhelming preponderance of moral, economic and military force and with a sufficient degree of unity to ensure that this preponderance of force is so used that the free nations cannot be defeated one by one. No measure less than this will do. We must at all costs avoid the fatal repetition of the history of the pre-war years when the Nazi aggressor picked off its victims one by one. Such a process does not end at the Atlantic."

He went on to say that he was sure that it was the desire of the people of Canada that Canada should play its full part in creating and maintaining this overwhelming preponderance of moral, economic and military force and the necessary unity for its effective use.

Proposals to the same effect are being heard in other countries. There is pending before the Senate of the United States a resolution unanimously reported by the Committee on Foreign Relations, which, among other things, advocates the development of regional and other collective arrangements under these Articles of the Charter and the association of the United States with such arrangements.

I should be very loath to see action taken by any of the democratic powers which would have the effect of wrecking the United Nations as a universal organization by bringing about the withdrawal of any important group of its members. It is true that many of the proceedings in the Security Council or in the Assembly are reminiscent of words used by a character in Webster's play, The Duchess of Malfi: "Think of the crab, who, though it walks backwards, thinks it is going forwards because it is going its own way". It is at times even difficult to detect movement in any direction! The filing cabinets at Lake Success are too often used as refrigerators for good ideas, such as the scheme for the international control of atomic energy, which was developed by the United Nations Commission, on the basis of the American proposals, and is now laid away in the hope of better days, because of the opposition of the representatives of the Soviet Union and the Ukrainian Soviet Republic.

Despite all this frustration, by all means let the United Nations be kept alive, but let it not become an obstacle to collaboration between like-minded countries. I hope, therefore, that the free nations of the western world will soon band themselves together and promise each other mutual support against armed attack. The Preamble to the Charter pledges the nations "to practise tolerance and live together at peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure.....that armed force shall not be used save in the common interest". Those members of the United Nations who wish to honour these pledges can fulfil the spirit of the Charter and abide by its letter through joining together in pacts for mutual defence and other worthy purposes.

What I have said about the international scene is not irrelevant to the question which I put at the beginning: Is this a good age in which to have been born? I expect that we can all agree that it is an exciting age, a dangerous age, a terribly complicated age. Perhaps we had better leave it at that. The stupendous achievements of the scientists and the technicians are breaking up the traditional patterns of thought and action. Old institutions, old beliefs, old ways of life, are under a severe strain. I often wonder whether our knowledge has not far outrun our wisdom.

In this college devoted to the study of the liberal arts it is appropriate to emphasize the urgent importance of the humanities in this age of technology. Put in homely terms, the central conception of democracy is that nobody has the right to push anyone else around unless it has been established that it is for the good of society. Our complex

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society cannot be run without a good deal of pushing around. The maximum amount of free choice for the individual can only be preserved if every law, every regulation, every executive act, which has the effect of pushing people around is freely discussed, freely approved, freely criticized and freely changed when the need arises. The criterion must always be the good of society.

To protect that end there must be in every community people whose training and outlook extend beyond the profession or craft or skill by which they earn their living. A community may have a high standard of living, but it needs as well to have a high standard of thinking. A good many years ago that detached British statesman, Benjamin Disraeli, expressed in a trenchant sentence some of his doubts about the modern industrial age: "The European talks of progress because by the aid of a few scientific discoveries he has established a society which has mistaken comfort for civilization". A high standard of living should be much more than ample food and clothing and automobiles and plumbing and so on. These are the comforts, the useful, desirable and welcome comforts, but they are not the essence of civilization.

It is of peculiar importance, in these days of the cold war, that the study of the humanities should continue and flourish. Our humane tradition is threatened more gravely than ever before. It is not so much threatened by force, by overthrow in war, as by an opposing philosophy which denies the soundness of its foundations and goes in for a great deal of pushing people around. If the opposing philosophy should triumph, our civilization would disappear. The Nazi doctrine was not so dangerous, for it did not travel well outside the German boundaries, whereas the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist dogma is readily exportable and keeps for a long time. It can also infect even those whom it does not convert. The best guarantee of immunity is to set beside this ruthless, militant, and narrow creed the rich heritage of our own culture.

I conclude by quoting a passage from a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay, to which she gave the title "St. George Goes Forth to Slay the Dragon - New Year's, 1942". Though the dragon she wrote of was Nazism and Fascism, her words are applicable to the dragon of today:

"Not to be spattered by his blood - for what, should he be slain,  
Done to death by my hand, and my hand be stained  
By him, and I bring infection to city and town  
And every village in our land - for he spreads quickly -  
What then, shall we have gained?  
Why then, I say, sooner than that, why, let him live, and me  
Lie down!  
For it is fitter that a beast be monstrous than that I should be."

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