"MAJOR UNSTATED PREMISES"

Notes for Remarks
by
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I am so admiring of the dedication of this Group, and so in awe of the accomplishments of so many of its members, that it is very difficult for me adequately to thank you for this invitation. By all rights, I should be listening to what you have to say, and benefitting from your wisdom. Having agreed to speak to you, however, I've chosen - with much deference - to share with you some of my concerns in the hope that these may be of some small help to you in your discussions. And if not, well, I'm encouraged by the statement of a former Canadian, Senator S.I. Hayakawa, who said "I'm going to speak my mind, because I have nothing to lose."

The art of oral communication is, of course, as old as the species; in this heyday of television and touch-tone telephone technology, however, it threatens to eclipse the written form. This is troubling to scholars, as it should be. A friend of mine - the brilliant young President of Bard College in New York, Leon Botstein, has written recently that "no one in America writes except from necessity. Our ease of movement and access to the telephone have made most of our exchanges not written but rather oral, distance notwithstanding. Good news is brought in person or by voice; bad news in writing. We tell someone we love them, and we write the proverbial "Dear John" letter. Bills, warnings, eviction notices and refusals come in writing.... The relatives we wish not to see are those to whom
we write. In this world, it is little wonder that no American child sees any need to become literate."

If Botstein's analysis is correct, you and I are left at this moment in a quandary. I am speaking to you, but I am reading from a printed page. Perhaps it's best if you waited until I finish before you decide whether my news is good or bad.

One phenomenon of the television age is that superlatives are commonplace, and that integrity and complexity evaporate in front of a television camera where the 20 second clip is the norm. In the result, a whole generation of youngsters has been raised finding it difficult to distinguish between meaning and pleasure, between heroes and celebrities, between depth and superficiality.

But perhaps we are approaching a turnaround. The world has not yet entered the final decade of this century but already we are paying a good deal of attention to the next. None of us were participants in the turmoil and excitement of the last fin-de-siècle but, voluntarily or not, we are being swept along as the 20th changes to the 21st.
Always, at moments such as this, there is much excitement, a sense of anticipation of a rare event, an expectation that things will get better. I haven't the slightest doubt that in coming years we shall all be barraged by multimedia campaigns to convince us that a better world is in the offing, brought to us of course by the same sponsors that have contributed to our present dilemmas. Instinctively, we know that we should steel ourselves, and swallow those messages with the same grain of salt that we reserve for glossy, "promise everything" airline ads. Airlines, I've often reflected, must be exempt from all truth-in-advertising legislation.

Happily, in this country, there are large numbers of persons who understand perfectly well that passivity on their part is not going to deliver the brave new world we seek, and who accordingly are thinking of, and working for, desirable change. A good number of them are members of this remarkable group.

You sense better than most the ferment and fluidity on all sides, the inability to keep in focus familiar landmarks, the difficulty of setting with confidence a clear course. One of the reasons for all this, of course, is that the stability and predictability which we long regarded as both desirable and possible now seem inconstant, even elusive. Are our values
error-prone, or are we fated to live in a period of continuing confusion, a modern variant of the Dark Ages when despair seemed often to be the determining factor?

There are many adjectives that are employed to describe present circumstances, and some conceptual theories - chaos, disequilibria, confusion; even some healthy argument as to whether all this is good or bad, natural, transitional, or inevitable. As the cultural inheritors of Newtonian and Darwinian scientific explanations, we have been reared on a diet of beliefs which rely heavily on rationality, certainty, and progress. We are instinctively loathe to acknowledge that the irrational - or at least the ironic, the uncertain, and the regressive - are or appear to be dominant. Yet this is the case in virtually all disciplines today. It began with physics, is now evident in the social sciences and particularly economics, and has for most of the century been a major force in the humanities where the graphic arts, most strikingly, have passed through several phases of abstract expression. My favourite explanation of all this is that of John Ciardi, a delightful American poet and critic of the mid-twentieth century. "Modern art," he said, "is what happens when painters stop looking at girls and persuade themselves that they have a better idea."
It is the quest for a better idea, while still admiring the fundamentals, that keeps many of us going.

Of less worry to me than that scientists, humanists, even some theologians, are engaged in debate about their understanding of the basic underpinnings of our species and our universe, is my concern that for the most part politicians seem not to be so engaged, even giving the impression that constancy is a given and disengagement a good. Aristotle, to whom they all owe their beginnings, must surely wonder what he started. As the concepts of democracy and freedom of thought become ever more widespread, we in the older democracies find increasingly that here freedom of speech is vacuous - governments and oppositions seem so seldom to have anything credible to say. Are they all really convinced that ideas no longer matter? That is the impression they are creating.

Post-Planck physicists, comfortable with particle wave theory, are not upset to realize that certainty and accuracy - at least in the absolute sense - are impossible, that Newton's assumption that better measurement needed only better instruments was quite incorrect. But for the rest of us, some important ingredient of both accuracy and predictability, as determinants of stability, are very important to us.
In region after region in today's world, turbulence is so common as to be the norm. But need it be normative? The question is an important one because much of today's turbulence cannot under any circumstances be passed off as a positive, as a constructive dynamic. This is turbulence and instability of a threatening, often destructive kind, and the effects are not containable within geographic boundaries any more than they are always subject to classical dampening mechanisms.

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. was used to employing an analytic phrase when he began many of his magnificent judgements. Often he would refer to what he called "the major unstated premise" in the litigation before him. Many years have passed since I earned my living by arguing in a court of appeal but that early training prompts me still to search not only for the juridical elements in factual situations, but as well to ponder over the "major unstated premises". For many years now, I have believed that buried deep in the foundations of all that we fuss about and talk about in our daily preoccupations with personal and governmental affairs, are three primordial issues which go to the very root of the human experience. For a long time these were the major unstated, or rarely stated, premises that fuelled much of human intercourse, whether domestic
or international. Perhaps because each of these possessed and aroused major ethical issues were they for so long uncomfortable to address in unmasked fashion. Now, happily, they have emerged from the cave of darkness but all too often leave the impression of being only shadows, not at all adequately fleshed out in all dimensions.

The three are conflict, impoverishment and stewardship. I'd like to spend a moment on each and relate them back to my earlier comments on predictability and turbulence.

II

Let me turn first to conflict, the repository of both savagery and lyricism.

Deep within the human species is the instinct to rationalize conduct, to seek to justify one's behaviour by circumstances. The instinct is found both in individuals and in institutions, but is probably more perverse in the latter because, as Reinhold Niebuhr argues, groups are more immoral than individuals. There is no shortage of examples of rationalization: in the juvenile courts where sadistic bullies whine that their fathers didn't respect them; in corporate
boardrooms where executives argue that absence of quality or
environmental damage or safety shortcuts are justified by the
competition of the marketplace; in government propaganda
agencies which seek to distinguish the brutality of the sneak
attack of the Japanese on Pearl Harbour from the nobility of the
unannounced military incursion into Grenada.

Will any of this change in the years to come? I'm
inclined to think that it will, for the reason that we have no
alternative. And if it does, the 20th century will be regarded
by historians as a limited episode: one of the most perverse,
consciously greedy, and self-serving periods since records have
been kept. The brilliance of technological accomplishment, the
advances of medical science, the reversals of centuries of
colonial practice - these will be measured against the indulgence
and the excesses of 100 years of modernism. The 20th century has
reached unprecedented levels of materialism, of resource
exploitation, and of indifference to staggering disparities in
living standards. This century has as well elevated conflict and
barbarism to heights that would have made Attila or Genghis Khan
blush. Those tough guys at least had the humility to admit the
enormity of their cruelty. Justification for rapacious conduct
was widespread well before Constantine decreed the concept of
"just war" with its consequences for victor and vanquished.
Literature abounds with many examples. Of Polyneices, the traitor, Creon proclaims "Leave him unburied, leave his corpse disgraced, a dinner for the birds and the dogs." In this century, however, the savagery has either become institutionalized and thus made anonymous, or trivialized à la Rambo. But in each instance there is present the dangerous belief that violence provides a catalytic, cathartic resolution of problems; the dangerous impulse to demonstrate that conflict can be an exemplar of vitality and technical brilliance, a harbinger of better things.

As Barbara Tuchman wrote of the war to end wars,

"Men could not sustain a war of such magnitude and pain without hope - the hope that its very enormity would ensure that it could never happen again and the hope that when somehow it had been fought through to a resolution, the foundations of a better-ordered world have been laid.... Nothing less could give dignity or sense to monstrous offensives in which thousands and hundreds of thousands were killed to gain ten yards and exchange one wet-bottomed trench for another."
In his brilliant new book "Rites of Spring", Modris Eksteins calls the Great War the psychological turning point for modernization. "The urge to create and the urge to destroy had changed places."

The historic reputation of the entire 20th century lies still in the balance. Will we be remembered for those strategic and ultimately barbaric concepts of 'unconditional surrender' and 'total war', or will we emerge as the period when the defence of "Superior Orders" was renounced, the age in which the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops deplored the "just war" theory and opted instead for the Christian ethic of "non-violence"? The question remains open. Ten years and three months remain for us to choose, a much longer period than Antigone required for her ringing challenge of Creon's edict, "For me it was not Zeus who made that order." Ten years and three months to come to grips with the fact that military planners still target nuclear warheads at centers of population, still insist even in the aftermath of the "Vincennes" obscenity that technology will be our saviour, still see no contradiction in their reluctance to disarm and their insistence that nuclear proliferation by others be contained. Ten years and three months - or much less if miscalculation, or error, or nuclear terrorism intervene - to remove ourselves from the current insane posture...
in which the nuclear weapons states are fearfully dependent on weapons systems which are inherently destabilizing.

Stable defence systems demand two ingredients. One is deterrence, about which we hear so much, and the other is reassurance, about which we hear next to nothing. Each is equally critical. 'Deterrence', as we know, is the effective discouragement of the resort to war; the knowledge that the commencement of hostilities will result in a military response which would inflict unacceptable punishment. 'Re-assurance', on the other hand, is the maintenance of self-confidence within each alliance that one's own and one's adversary's military strength is (a) adequate, and (b) intended to defend. Re-assurance is not strengthened by the current modernization policies of either of the alliances. That is the case because modernized nuclear weapons are essentially destabilizing.

The desire of the military for more and more weapons of frightening cost yet questionable value is all too prevalent, but it need not, I sincerely hope, be determinative. The criterion of nationhood, of responsibility, of burden-sharing should not - must not - be determined primarily upon the size of a defence budget. I have little doubt that if Ken Dye were allowed to audit the cost-effectiveness of the military
expenditures of either of the two champions in this respect, the United States and the Soviet Union, his assessments of wastefulness would be the subject of worst-case scenarios in the leading business schools as well as in numerous Monty Python scripts.

In Canada, in developing countries, in the superpowers, there are challenging, necessary, honourable roles for the defence forces. Many of these roles bear little relation to the rigidities which have dominated policy formulation for such major portions of this century. If we are looking for entry points for change, we might begin with Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and Article IV of the proposed Chemical Weapons Treaty. Every one of them a solemn undertaking of the high contracting parties; every one of them resonant with hope; every one of them so far barren of attention or accomplishment. But time is running. Ten years and three months.

III

Impoverishment, my second issue, is familiar everywhere, but particularly in the developing countries which television delivers to us in an instant and as quickly replaces...
with more comforting scenes. The image of impoverishment, we assume, is clear: swollen-bellied, stick-limbed, lustreless-eyed children in a far-distant location; baton-wielding police and goose-stepping soldiers of an authoritarian regime in a far-distant location; wretched families torn from their homes by the furies of nature - hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions - always in far-distant locations. This imagery conveys two impressions: one, of visiting turmoils of old testament quality, and, two, of distance from and unconnectedness to the daily life of Canadians. Quite unapparent on the TV screen is any impression of grinding, continuing poverty and hopelessness, year after year, generation after generation. Equally undetectable are any links to Canadians apart from the requests of charitable organizations to share in the funding of emergency relief.

In the result, Canadians are invited to assume that residents of developing countries are basket cases who, on occasion, inexplicably leap from prehistoric agricultural practices to post-industrial technical accomplishment and in so doing endanger Canadian jobs by flooding our markets with quality, low-cost merchandise. Years ago, someone, somewhere, coined the catchy but misleading phrase "Foreign Aid". These unfortunate words have perpetuated the image of we in the North, in our philanthropy, willingly sharing with the destitute in the
South our brilliant technologies, our surplus food, and our superior wisdom, little of which it must seem to the average taxpayer, is either graciously received or effectively employed. We should not be surprised that this is the impression. How many Canadians, after all, turn to the inside pages of the financial sections of their newspapers to learn that this year the net flow of financial resources continues to be from South to North, that it increased from US$43 billion to US$50 billion? That, increasingly, private banks are disengaging from developing countries, literally writing off those societies and those economies, foregoing their own responsibility for the original loans and for high interest rates, abandoning any prospect of future business profit - all this in order to preserve the absolute purity of the concept of debt. To those tireless proponents of the effectiveness of deterrence - the advocates of nuclear weaponry and of capital punishment - add the majority of bankers. But please note, however, the lonely exception of Ced Ritchie, and encourage him in his courageous policies for they are correct - correct for the world and correct for the banking industry.

This kind of discussion means little apparently to Canadian newspaper editors and nothing at all to television news editors but it's front page news in the South. No wonder that
developing country leaders are less than laudatory of the North's rhetoric and of the overall effects of "foreign aid".

We miss the point completely if we judge Canada's relations with the developing countries primarily on the quantum of ODA (official development assistance). At best, bilateral aid programs are of marginal help. At worst, ill-conceived, politically-attractive conditionality lends negative influences. The very term North-South is misrepresentative because it assumes the dominance of the North, avoids the perverse and unsustainable transfers of wealth from the poorest to the richest, fails to understand that the South is not able indefinitely to pay its debts, buy our goods, protect our environment, respect our values, and refrain from destabilizing our world. It is in our long-term interest that the South develop in the broadest sense of the word - economically, socially, culturally, spiritually. That means, among other things, that those aberrant financial flows must be stemmed, even reversed. One of the obstacles to that happening is the uncertainty and instability I referred to earlier.

An immediate casualty of instability is the flow of capital investment. Without some certainty of political tranquility and the constancy of a favourable investment climate,
investment funds simply do not flow. Without them, development or growth (not always the same) are much inhibited.

In this period of emphasis upon structural adjustment of national policies, it must be stressed that external financing nevertheless remains an essential element. Absent adequate inputs from external sources, national policy adjustments are generally impossible because of the high political and social costs. It must quickly be added, of course, that financial flows in instances where policies have not been placed in order lead to unsatisfactory results: in some instances capital flight, in others non-productive government activity and consumption, and in still others investments with low social returns. There is a complementarity here; it is one that is not always easy to attain, or to maintain. In its absence, national accounts quickly reflect a down-turn and this in turn triggers a descending spiral of the various indicators which measure and predict social instability.

Until relatively recently, the countries about which I have been talking were generally found only in the South, but perestroika has suddenly brought towards the mainstream of the global economy some of the hitherto non-market economies of Eastern Europe. Now issues of financial transfers and major
domestic policy reforms are as much a matter of consideration in Poland and the Soviet Union as they have been in Mexico or Indonesia. Yet deeply troubling to me is the general assumption in so much of the industrialized world that these activities and circumstances elsewhere are truly elsewhere, of only peripheral or passing importance to those of us in the highly developed North. Besides, don’t we have our own problems?

I believe strongly that that attitude is wrong, is dangerous; that inexorably, Canada’s present and future are being shaped and influenced by events in the South. These influences are not incidental and they are not spasmodic; they are major and they are persistent. Yet as a nation, Canada has not acknowledged the importance of the relationship. Canadians of so many walks of life profess unawareness of this country’s vulnerability to events in the South. They claim ignorance of the pressures of natural and physical laws, of economic uncertainties, and of political volatility. South-North relations will inevitably occupy a major segment of Canada’s conscious attention, of its economic and scientific activity, of its foreign policy. As it will come to dominate the policies and activities of all the industrialized nations.
The only question is whether this recognition and this realignment of priorities will be in time to avoid the environmental catastrophes, the economic turbulence, and the political upheavals now gaining momentum. Our unwillingness to recognize what is real, our conviction that the palliative of foreign aid is an adequate response, our assumption that we in the North can somehow be shielded from events in the South - these are in large part manifestations of arrogance: that we are more capable, more knowledgeable, more experienced. This kind of arrogance assumes that in this single biosphere, in this planetary economy, in this age of satellite communications and inter-continental ballistic missiles, a draw-bridge policy and a withdrawal attitude can be effective. To think in those terms is nonsensical.

Without our having realized it, the world has changed and with it the rules of survival. This change is not one of the marginal power re-alignments that occur from time to time and to which we have learned to adjust. We are now in the early phase of one of the major shifts of human relations, of a kind that has visited only occasionally in all of recorded history. Combined with this change and contributing to it is a technological capacity that informs billions of people worldwide that their wretched impoverishment is becoming worse and that the
consumption patterns of the wealthy, but particularly in the countries of the North, are becoming obscenely excessive. It is a formula for disaster.

IV

May I beg your indulgence for just a few more moments in order to mention the third of my three 'major unstated premises' - the environment. I err, of course, in using the term "unstated". Today, there is not a political or industrial figure anywhere that is not a vocal champion of the environment. How welcome is their conversion. And how timely. I don't suppose that in principle our generation is either more or less guilty of environmental indifference than the several that preceded us. If, after all, one accepts the long-held theological interpretation of Genesis II that man's dominion over the earth and the divine direction given him to subdue it means that humankind possesses an authority not impeded by scientific truth, we have a God-given right to be irresponsible.

Morality aside, however, the issue is before us because we are now so much more proficient in our destructive capabilities. The most astute of the sages of the past could not have imagined the scale of 20th century devastation. Even in the
absence of a major nuclear exchange with its holocaust consequences, the list is horrific: atmospheric warming on a global scale, rain-forest destruction of near continental proportions, maritime pollution and biological stock reductions in all the major oceans, the thinning of the ozone layer, the depletion of soil nutrients in vast regions, the erosion of much of the Himalayan foothills - the list is so extensive and the damage so severe than an interstellar observer would be forced to assume that the human species was possessed of a collective death wish.

This generation, which is more dedicated to cost-accounting and statistics gathering than any in history nevertheless continues the age-old practice of consuming its most valuable capital asset without any accepted determinant of cost, or of value reduction. As Harlan Cleveland has said, humankind is engaged in a worldwide, unauthorized experiment in its unsustainable quest for creature comforts.

It is not as if warnings had not been given, or standards of conduct not set. Far from the earliest of these, but certainly my favorite, is that of John Ruskin in the mid-nineteenth century: "God has lent us the earth for our life; it is a great entail. It belongs as much to those who are to come..."
after us, and we have no right, by anything that we do or neglect to do, to involve them in unnecessary penalties, or deprive them of benefits which are others by right."

With the special environmental issue of The Scientific American now available in every newsstand, it would be pretentious of me to attempt to speak in any detail about matters of such magnitude and complexity. Unquestionably, this mix of threats and events contains elements which are political, economic and societal - as well as biological and geological. As we were told at the V International Conference on AIDS in Montreal in June when addressing another major societal challenge, the only effective response in the long-run must be attitudinal in nature. It has been a combination of error-prone values and human misbehaviour that has led us to this point. A revision of those values and of that behaviour will require personal - or attitudinal - change but it will require as well changes in social institutions. That means, as always, political action, not simply political reaction.

Global as these problems are, most have very local points of origin. They can be addressed. To do so, responsibilities must be assumed, and discharged. In this respect, no single government or state can either plead...
privileged status or claim a private leadership role. There are no automatic opportunities but neither are there automatic disqualifications. The record of Canada in the design and application of The Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act and, later, the Arctic exemptions in the Law of the Sea Treaty is an example of what can be done if imagination, dedication and stamina are brought to bear. Of that accomplishment, the late John Holmes wrote: (It) "asserted the right of a lesser power not only to challenge but also to push along international law when the great powers were intransigent.... it launched the Trudeau administration on its most effective and laudable international enterprise, a leading and highly constructive role in the most important contribution to world order since San Francisco." Those initiatives, it is well to remember, were opposed vigorously and relentlessly by the great majority of the major maritime powers, including the United States, Japan, Holland and Norway. Canada succeeded because the case was just and the resolve was firm.

V

Which brings me full circle back to the role of government in a period of fluidity which reveals no likelihood of early cessation. Not one of my three major concerns are of
recent origin. Each has been part of human experience for millennia. Each has attracted attention now and then. But never before have each of these issues been of a planetary dimension, and never before have they so intersected to form destabilizing compounds of unprecedented complexity and destructive potential. Governments today are all too often ineffectual in their responses but it is too easy simply to blame the incumbents. The form of our governments, after all, has not changed for 300 years. In an age marked by rising social expectations - an information age, a nuclear age, an age of a global economy - governments continue to function largely as they have since the time of William and Mary. Creaking command and control structures designed to regulate are now simply inadequate. Nor is the answer found by throwing up hands and assigning tasks wholesale to the private sector. Decisive, anticipatory, flexible government or para-government structures are not only desirable, they are entirely possible. I know because I'm associated with one. The key ingredient is humility - a willingness to welcome pluralism, to be consultative, coherent, and consensual, to acknowledge the essential wisdom and skill found throughout the organization. With that kind of organizational philosophy, leadership is a relatively simple task. Without it, leadership is doomed to be ineffectual.
We know instinctively that our own governments are not responding to change as rapidly and effectively as we - and they - desire, yet we simultaneously assume that governments elsewhere are somehow able to do all kinds of things, thus relieving ourselves of worry and responsibility. This, surely, is a presumptuous error on our part. Our impressions of the Third World offer a good example.

One of the shadow-like perceptions that flutters in and out of all commentary about the developing countries is the illusion that the governments of those countries are capable of resolving problems, of overcoming difficulties - of governing in the sense that we attach to the word. This illusion permits us to avoid responsibility in a range of issues. Narcotics: if the governments of the Andean and golden-triangle countries would only suppress coca and poppy cultivation, there would be no supply and we would have no drug problem. Environment: if the developing countries would limit the irrational and rapacious destruction of forests and pasture land, we would all be so much better off. Debt: if the borrowing nations were only more disciplined, they would control flight capital and non-productive activities, and the performance of our banks would be improved. Terrorism: if governments in so many parts of the world would only permit dissidents to work within the norms of decent
conduct, we would be more inclined to sympathize with and solve their problems. All true. But all false.

If we are to reach the 21st century relatively unscathed, we must accept that the necessary tasks are beyond the ability of any single government or any single combination of governments. If we the rich, the ones who claim experience and competence, do not more effectively and more constantly demonstrate our maturity, the image of a brave new world becomes evermore tarnished. Fairness, justice, equity, ethics, these concepts don’t tarnish. They shine all the more brightly because the powerful technologies now unleashed by 20th century scientists force us to rethink so many of the accepted norms in the age of modernism.

Decency and dignity should not be thought of only in terms of distant goals for a just society. They are essential elements in the psyche of the architects and the navigators. Their presence or absence at the design stage, at the beginning of the grand journey, will determine the final outcome.

Father Mathew Fox, the Dominican priest silenced by the Vatican last year, argued that a sad result of Cartesian philosophy is the separation of the heart from the mind. He
characterized this concentration of attention on the left side of the brain as a lobotomy of the sensory and visceral, a turning away from the instincts which the aboriginal peoples of this planet have relied upon to sustain themselves and their environment for millennia.

A different but strikingly similar observation was uttered by the late Richard Feynman, a Nobel Laureate in nuclear physics, in his explanation of his participation in the Manhattan Project: "You see, what happened to me - what happened to the rest of us - is we started for a good reason, then you're working very hard to accomplish something, and it's pleasure, it's excitement. And you stop thinking you know; you just stop."

If the 21st century reverses the excesses of this one, and elevates humanism to a pre-eminent position, we must ensure both that we listen to our hearts and that we not stop thinking. We have ten years and three months to practise.