



Democracy in a Changing World

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A cultural historian and philosopher, Professor Erich Kahler was a member of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton University. He was born in Prague and came to the United States in 1938; it was Thomas Mann who suggested that he be invited to the Princeton faculty. His books include: *Man the Measure: A New Approach to History*; *The Tower and the Abyss: An Inquiry into the Transformation of the Individual*; and *The Meaning of History*. Professor Kahler died June 29, 1970.

Our entire world, its very existence and consistence, is in crucial jeopardy. It would be a desperate task to list the innumerable faults of innumerable people and the crimes of whole nations, at the source of this condition, rather than attribute all evil to the nature of man. I am tempted to presume that the present deplorable state of humanity derives—at least partly, but decisively—from changing circumstances, which we must examine carefully.

In doing this, we may, I think, safely choose the case of the United States as representative, in general, for the most advanced stage of world civilization—especially considering its size and power, and its having started from humanitarian and progressive principles that embodied the hopes of the modern world.

The concept of democracy is complex, having changed along with human evolution. But there are two basic distinctions that seem to me relevant to our inquiry.

(1) The first concerns a *radical difference between ancient and modern democracy*. The initial form of explicit democracy, the Athenian, originated in an oligarchic structure within a patriarchal monarchy. It was made up of a limited number of free citizens of the *Polis*, who exercised the power of government personally and directly. The leisure necessary for this task

was made possible by the primeval institution of slavery. Government, vested in this elite, which was identical with indigenoussness, was their prerogative and sacred duty; government carried the affirmative value of nobility. This ancient, limited democracy was *active democracy*. [249] Modern democracy evolved from a fight of people in whom a sense of individual identity and independence had begun to rise, in opposition to the age-old oppressive rule of feudal monarchies and privileged nobilities. It was therefore primarily a fight *against* being ruled; government was to be as restricted as possible, limited to the indispensable requirement of keeping the civic order functioning properly, a task for which authority had to be delegated to officials and deputies by a more and more numerous and dispersed population. The duties and preventive limitations of government had to be laid down by *law*. The arbitrary personal ruler was superseded by impersonal, suprapersonal rules. The "rights of man" and "civil liberties" were established through explicit constitutions, instituting equality of all citizens, "justice for all," and protection of individual independence. *Legality, equality, justice*, and individual *independence* are, accordingly, the elementary principles of modern democracy, which is primarily *defensive democracy*.

The defiance and distrust of government



found its expression in the original conceptions of "liberalism," capitalism, "free enterprise" and, more specifically, in the American Bill of Rights. It laid the foundation of the traditional attitude of the American people toward government: the protection of the people against undue "interference of government" in private affairs and, within government, the safeguard of Congress as representatives of the people against encroachments of the Administration.

This attitude was bound to become more articulate, when the Administration had to expand so as to be bureaucratically more effective in regulating the life of a rising population in more complex circumstances, a task that necessarily implied an increasing autonomy of special departments and agencies.

The tendency of defensively guarding against government is an impediment to timely adaptation of people's frame of mind to changing conditions. This attitude still appears as, what it was originally intended to be, a protection against authoritarianism. The situation, however, is more intricate. The reluctance, and increasing incapacity, of the people to concern themselves with government unless it touches their private interests is precisely what can now bring about tyranny.

(2) The second distinction is subtle, yet most important to keep in mind. It is the distinction between *form and spirit*. The American people are inclined to rely all too complacently on formal institutional safeguards. They want to believe that, for example, introducing elections and parliaments among liberated colonial peoples—some of them tribal peoples, [250] who for centuries have been subject to ruthless exploitation and neglect— is the way to introduce democracy among them. Winston Churchill has provided the formula for such a belief in his 1944 speech on Greek events:

My idea of [democracy] is that the plain, humble common man who keeps a wife and a family ... goes off to fight for his country when it is in trouble, that he goes to the polls at the appropriate time and puts his cross on the ballot paper showing the candidate he wishes to be elected to

Parliament—that is the foundation of democracy.. .

Now, at this stage in history, after the experiences we have endured, this formula cannot but appear as a gross, hypocritical simplification. We know too well what utterly undemocratic practices have been engineered and supported all over the world under the cover of formal constitutional proceedings. We have, before our eyes, the sham elections, which the South Vietnamese junta has dressed up as representative of the people, to soothe the easily reassuring qualms of the American public. We have witnessed what happened at the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention and the subsequent trials. Fundamental changes of the structure of American society and of the conditions of its global involvement have by far exceeded the scope of constitutional provisions. These changes have created loopholes and have left wide stretches of public life—uncovered by even an attempt at "law and order"—open to arbitrary practices, permitting a misrepresentation of the letter and disregard of the spirit of the Constitution.

Even if the letter of the Constitution, e.g., the First Amendment, were more faithfully observed than it is, this would not be sufficient to guarantee the preservation of democracy. No document alone, be it the noblest and most carefully worded, can provide such a guarantee. It is the spirit of the people, the people that created it and the people that uphold it. And this very spirit seems to me imperiled by the change of conditions in our century.

It is useful to recall what we all know, but easily forget. After the American Revolution, the population of the country was about 3,250,000 people, of whom approximately one third was unfree. Not counting the women, who had a limited status and no vote, and the many settlers in remote regions, about only 120,000 Americans could meet the religious, property, and other qualifications for full citizenship; moreover, those who did qualify were mostly farmers, cities being still rare. This was the people for whom the Constitution was designed. To be sure, the later amendments [251] added some most important provisions,



like women's right to vote, and the formal abolition of slavery, among others; but the established order remains fragmentary and profoundly inadequate to the present situation.

Today, the population of the United States has grown past 200 million and is increasing rapidly. Industry, technology, and science have recast the structure and texture of society. A nation of rural individuals has turned into a nation of principally urban, indeed megalopolitan, highly industrialized, and technically organized masses, and even agriculture is being industrialized. Mechanical mass production is correlated with standardized mass consumption; they have mutually created and promoted each other. Science and its technological applications—expanding, changing, ramifying incessantly—have outgrown the control of the individual, have functionalized, instrumentalized, our way of life; and the computers are on their way to taking even crucial human functions and decision-making out of man's mind to handle them mechanically and automatically. *The apparatus of life encumbers its substance.*

The interference of the power of advertising, in conjunction with the development of mass media, has invalidated the law of supply and demand, by constantly producing artificial demand; supply is correspondingly manipulated. Advertising, in the form of novel methods of propaganda and persuasion, has also falsified the democratic process. For a candidate who does not have the millions to buy costly television time is doomed. Russell Baker stated in *The New York Times*—and it was not a joke, but thoroughly documented—

As everyone should know, but probably doesn't, political candidates are no longer elected. They are sold. In 1966, to cite a case, Governor Rockefeller was put in the hands of an agency (Jack Tinker and partners) whose other accounts included Alka-Seltzer, and their work converted him from a sure loser to the hottest product since Bufferin.

In addition, modern means of communication and mass media have contracted our world, have made it into one, closely interdependent, if un-unified, unit, and have

immensely accelerated and multiplied happenings. Daily, indeed hourly news and its reactions produce daily, indeed hourly events. We live in a constant turmoil of happenings that benumbs and befogs our consciousness. The borderlines between national and international politics have become fluid.

When we look for a valid concept by which to measure the huge [252] divergence of the prevailing condition from the requirements of a commensurate, human democracy there is no better one than Lincoln's classical formula: Government of the people, by the people and for the people. Taking this formula as a yardstick, we shall find that the nations, which most closely approximate this standard, are the small European ones, like the Swiss, Dutch, and the Scandinavian, all of them long civilized and homogeneously cultured, whose populations, due to their limited size, are able to remain in close touch with—that is, to know, judge, and control—the personalities they elect for government. They are—again because of their size—less relevant to the course of world events, and their concerns therefore are mainly domestic and well-defined economic problems, which can be grasped by their direct impact on everybody's life. This illustrates the crucial role that the size of population plays for the maintenance of democracy and underscores the threats inherent in an excessive population growth.

In addition, America has inherited a special fateful predicament. All important Western nations have indulged in the shameful custom of slave trade, but all of them have been able to liquidate these remnants of the past through colonialism. They supplanted slavery by colonialism, which is external, remote, in a superficial sense legitimized collective slavery. America is a unique case, having herself issued from a colony and from a colonial war of liberation. This laid the seeds of a deep contradiction in principle from which America could hardly extricate herself. She created a colony within a colony, thereby converting slavery into a *domestic colonialism*, a colonialism within her own borders. The basic, constitutional principle of democracy induced her to a nominal liberation of the slave



population that has developed into a full-fledged compact people, with customs and aspirations of their own, an ethnic group that, however, was held in the same state of misery and degradation as all colonial peoples everywhere in the world, only in the midst of their own masters, not in faraway regions.

This "colony" cannot be liberated by eliminating it from the make-up of the country. The black people have become, like other ethnic groups, part of the United States. This is their home, in spite of all that has been done to them. However, in the face of universal liberation movements, they can no longer be peaceably reassured by further procrastination, nor by surreptitious means of suppression, or "benign neglect," lest the democratic foundation of this nation be fully destroyed. As matters stand, their rightful, abrupt claims are apt to clash with all sensible attempts at reform, and so threaten to tear the country asunder. [253]

Now let us look a little closer into our situation and examine how the tremendous changes have affected the democratic process.

Take the *government*. The Constitution provided for checks and balances, for a division of powers—legislative, judicial, executive. It did not make provisions for the formation and activities of parties. To be sure, the development of parties is a natural consequence of the democratic process; it is fully implied. Hence party politics started with the initiation of modern democracy itself. But parties further grew with the population, and in the process became institutionalized.

Inevitably an administrative party officialdom, the party machines, developed, whose overwhelming influence is sufficiently known. Since an increasing population has less and less opportunity to know the personalities eligible for national government, nominations of candidates are presented to, and sometimes forced upon, the constituency by party officials; because of party competition, the charisma and vote-getting capacity of the candidate is all-important, and hardly any consideration is given to his governmental capacities: a broad view and knowledge of the world, perspicacity, independence, and clarity of mind.

This state of affairs appears to have been an

inevitable result of the expansion of democracy, but its further development under the American party system carries particular dangers for the democratic process. We have witnessed in large democracies two extreme alternatives: the uninhibited *multiparty system*, based on full parliamentary control of the administration, and the dogmatically protected American *two-party system*, based on the division of powers, with its checks and balances, and fixed terms of office. The two-party system has obvious advantages over the excessive proliferation of parties—often brought about by no other reason than the reckless ambitions of would-be leaders—a system that ruined democracy in France, Italy, and Weimar Germany. The two-party system affords the democratic process a protective stability, which functions fairly well in a time of relative calm. In our rapidly changing, revolutionary world, however, it hinders the adjustment of new developments and conceptions, and obstructs their open expression, clinging as it does to the status quo. The European democracy before, and partly after the Second World War, died of too much flexibility. The American democracy is on the point of dying of extreme rigidity and formalization.

The two ruling parties in this country have grown all-powerful. They are deeply, traditionally entrenched, and shielded from any potential competitor by preventive measures in various states, such as making recognition of a new party dependent on a size of membership that cannot [254] possibly be reached in the initial stage, and on the approval of State Attorneys, who belong to either of the ruling parties. The Democrats used to be identified with social progressivism, and the Republicans with social and economic conservatism. But these traditional differences are dwindling. Both parties are "umbrella parties"; they include progressive as well as reactionary elements. The progressives in each party are forced to harmful compromises and timid, tactical expedience. As far as foreign policy is concerned, we have in fact a one-party system. What there is of critical opposition operates within, but not between, parties. This state of affairs makes voting along general party lines of political conduct hardly



possible.

The emergence of a third party which could become one of the ruling parties, as in England, or a vertical split of the existing parties, is prevented by the insurmountable strongholds of the traditional parties. Since the terms of office of the Administration are fixed, and the unity of the parties is sacrosanct, conscientious people are made temporary prisoners of the ruling administration, whatever its failures. In England, for instance, after revelations such as the Tonkin resolution hearings produced, a Prime Minister could not have stayed in office one day longer. Indeed the whole investigation would have happened much earlier, and all the blood and toil and suffering, all the subsequent pernicious influences of an irresponsible regime, might have been spared. Americans, however, have to wait at least for the end of the four-year term, and chances are that by that time most of the people will have forgotten to ask how it all came about and will have been carried farther into a condition that "has to be accepted now we are in it." This is an unhealthy, frustrating situation that obstructs a timely expression of change through regular channels and induces stagnation of the democratic process.

Accordingly, the competition between the two parties has been voided of substance and degraded to a functional contest, like that of the Mets and the Cardinals. The two-party system was originally meant as a means of mutual control, part of the general system of checks and balances. But, since dirty spots and failures can be found everywhere, any electoral campaign tends to degenerate into a balance of abuses.

It is widely held that a party division based on general attitudes and orientations would not fit the complexity of American conditions. But in reality, this very complexity, this growing and ever-changing complexity, has arrived at a point of exploding the hollow shells of the parties. Recently, the conflict between doves and hawks cut deeply into the official parties and, paradoxically, both these unofficial parties were sometimes united in their opposition to the ruling party's administration. [255]

Another practice that has a degenerative effect on the democratic process by blocking change is the seniority system prevailing in the

congressional committees. This favors the established, older, frequently segregationist politicians and bars younger, more alert contenders from leadership. This is most harmful in the case of the Rules Committee, which is able to allow or deny any proposed legislation access to the floor, and thus constitutes a usurped power. As Duane Lockard has observed in the *Nation*:

... the gatekeepers are chosen not by any overt act of political parties ... indeed not even by the members of Congress. They are chosen by the lottery (not even a lottery, but the comfortable assurance of perpetual re-election) of the Seniority System ... Public acceptance of this dispersal of authority is a fact ... The great majority (of the people) have no strong feelings one way or the other, for the simple reason, that they are not given to assessing the operation of Congress or of any other major institutions of government.¹

All this is symptomatic of the growing inattention of the people to government, and the resigned trust in *technical experts*, due to their inability to cope with the bewildering intricacies of modern conditions. The modern situation demands *active democracy*, increasing popular participation in the irresistibly expanding government, but the people as well as Congress in its majority is still geared toward *defensive democracy*—that is, restricting public administration, as well as the people's attention to its control.

As a result of this state of affairs, the political life of the nation has abandoned the constitutional channels of democracy. The legal process of democracy runs idle, and the direction of the crucial concerns of the nation is left to uncontrollable influences and undercurrents. Political determination has shifted to authorities of constitutionally different competence (like the courts handling the race issue, and the initiative to legislation coming from the Administration instead of from Congress) or to wholly illegitimate sectional and

¹ The *Nation*, March 24, 1962.



functional forces: lobbies, pressure groups of all kinds, administrative agencies like the Pentagon, in concurrence with the interests of industrial corporations and the millions of people in their service (Eisenhower's "complex," which indeed has expanded to a military-industrial—and labor union complex), the *AEC*, the *CIA*, the *FBI*, the *A AM*, the *AM A*, and so forth. These have become the decisive factors in public affairs. [256]

In the initial stages of American democracy, congressmen were meant to represent the common interests of the nation, and in a small community with a fairly homogeneous population, the interests of sectional groups were, in spite of the divergence of agricultural and business interests, still conformable to the interests of the nation as a whole. Today, the immense dispersion, variety, and specialization of regional and occupational group interests make it almost impossible for congressmen to attend both to the dominant concerns of their constituencies and to the true interests of the nation, which more often than not run counter to the immediate interests of sectional groups, and which "the folks at home" are utterly unprepared to understand and care for. It takes exceptional courage and self-sacrifice to stand for the nation, and even for humanity at large, against one's district; there are very few men in Congress who so risk their political lives and they usually do not survive the next election.

In this context, most congressmen have to worry perpetually about reelection. From the moment a congressman is elected, he starts steering for reelection. There is hardly a year left to him to devote himself comparatively unencumbered to his government duties. In his second year, again an election year, his every action is geared to vote-getting. More and more, with memorable exceptions, *a congressman appears to be elected for the main purpose of being reelected.*

The changes in the character of government since the establishment of the Constitution correspond to the changes in the structure of the *people*, which are even more fundamental. In point of fact, the changes in government and the changes in the people are one interacting

process and should be seen as one.

Up to the end of the nineteenth century the people consisted of "rugged individualists," carrying on their personal trades. (The collectivistic trend, though, was noticed even by Tocqueville in 1840, in a period that was technically not ripe for it.) Free enterprise meant personal enterprise, freedom of the human individual. Today, the people consists of innumerable and manifold collectives—corporations, unions, associations, organizations, bureaucracies—and of economic, professional, administrative, academic, and scientific groups. Accordingly, the personal interests of people predominantly *coincide with the interests of the collectives* to which they belong and on which they depend. Views and purposes are, to an ever-diminishing degree, their personal own; they are directed by their collectives. [257]

In the daily turmoil of our mass society, under the impact of an uninterrupted stream of inflated news, offers, displays, inventions, and new findings, people are unable to form stable reasoned opinions. So, as far as they do not follow the lines of their specialized group interests—the ones they can best grasp and judge from experience—they *take in the predigested material of our largely coordinated newspapers, journals, and commentators.* They have hardly time and strength left for careful thinking and for obtaining thorough information. Our tremendous apparatus of mass communication, with those panel discussions of experts who pour out heaps of diffuse arguments, is unable to convey a correct and organized picture of the problems and their background. All this is too much and not enough; it augments the confusion instead of resolving it. Even discussions of scholars hardly produce more clarity; one of them remarked after a meeting: "We are still confused, but on a higher level."

What is worse, factual truth is submerged under more or less palpable *indoctrination.* We do not have a consistent, critical opposition press of wide distribution. How many people read the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, the *Progressive*, or *J. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly*—not to speak of foreign newspapers; who takes the



trouble to look up the *Congressional Record* for occasional oppositional speeches, delivered before empty houses? The newspapers, again with notable exceptions like *The New York Times*, are a chorus, echoing with slight, obliging variations the official versions. Conscientious reporters and commentators, like Walter Lippmann, are scarce. The dependence of radio and TV networks on commercial sponsors and the consequent cautiousness of program producers are common knowledge.

Democracy is a two-way process. Guidance in the form of thorough, coherent information has to reach the people so that they can develop valid opinions. It is useless to poll people on questions which they never have reasoned out properly. Their answers would be random emotional reactions, or current clichés. What goes under the name of public opinion is often what the government itself, and what the collectives—either directly or indirectly, through their influence on the government, the press, and mass media—have publicized, and what then, in turn, the Administration heeds in its political conduct.

We are today at a crossroads where the well-being of the nation, and indeed of humanity, often stands in opposition to the requirements of sectional groups; it is thus bound to demand sacrifices from them. The worst of it is that these demands are determined by complex global [258] interrelationships, which are not immediately apparent and can be grasped only through extensive information.

These circumstances require for the presidency a man with wide knowledge of the social, psychological, and intellectual currents of our age, a man whose mind is firmly independent and capable of forming concepts and convictions, yet still is resilient enough to learn from experience; a man who has traveled extensively in foreign countries and not just on "good-will" tours; who has made himself truly familiar with foreign peoples, their conditions and aspirations, so as to gain a broad view of the world, unencumbered by propaganda.

To summarize: the domestic situation of the United States shows us *the perilous gap that has evolved and keeps widening between the people and their government.* This is not like

the ordinary "generation gap" that has always developed between the young and their elders. (To be sure, the young sense both the defects of an inveterate system and the hypocrisies with which the government tries to conceal them much sooner and more sharply since their own future—life or death—is involved.) The gap I have in mind is a much deeper, *constitutional gap* that can no longer be patched up by single reforms, even if the people were amenable to radical reforms at all.

The determination of policies has abandoned the constitutional channels of democracy. Relations between the people and the government are formalized, and the actual power of Congress is paralyzed between the inordinate demands of sectional collectives from below, and the uncontrolled pressures of power groups from above. Complicating matters, a gap even worse has developed between the perceptive capacity of the common man and the technical and global complexities of problems he faces as he tries to cope with the stress of urgent decisions—which, to be beneficial, need to be taken, not according to particular preferences or compromises, but in accordance with the welfare of the whole nation.

As we will see, the failure of the cumbersome, superannuated apparatus of the old democratic system has suddenly been made apparent by the awakening of humanity to the overriding and worldwide problem of pollution with its immense implications and ramifications; the fateful condition of man's natural environment by far surpasses in gravity all the special problems of single nations and ideologies. To grapple with world problems we first have to deal with "national interest," the crucial concept on which the policies and conflicts of the nations hinge. [259]

"National interest" has never been denned, not even by international law. Like many other crucial terms, as for instance, "aggression" and "defense," it has been left comfortably open to casuistic interpretation, adaptable to all kinds of national and privately usurped purposes. The term could be stretched to the claim for "Lebensraum," as in the cases of the Third Reich and Japan; indeed it has been stretched by



America to apply at least 10,000 miles away from the homeland. Most fatefully, however, this unlimited concept is held up as the legitimate basis of government. Now, however, we are suddenly confronted with a universal interest that only conflicts with the "national interest."

Today, even under a dictatorship, every person has an inescapable share in the conduct of national affairs. Whether he wills it or not, he is made an accomplice of his government. Reckless behavior in "foreign affairs" finds its response in the spread not only of criminal violence in the street, and in the outbreaks of despondent protesters, but in civic groups that have dropped all public responsibility: doctors who, oblivious to their Hippocratic Oath and with the support of the AMA, leave hospitals unattended; striking hospital personnel, fire departments, garbage collectors, grave-diggers. A nationwide mail strike in open distrust and defiance of the government threatened chaos as it has existed before only on the international scene. Even a national guerrilla war seems under way. *All of this signifies the breakdown of the old boundaries between domestic and foreign issues, which are now so interwoven.*

All nations, even the most powerful ones, are inextricably entangled in a world that *combines technical unity with an unprecedented political anarchy*—unprecedented precisely because of the underlying, unacknowledged technical unity of the world which conflicts with its political anarchy. No superior authority exists, capable of keeping the discordant political, economic, and ideological "national interests" in bounds. On the other hand, no disengagement of a nation from the rest of the world is possible any longer.

There are other, even more consequential factors breaking down the barriers between domestic and foreign policy. *Transnational economic forces* and giant industrial corporations determine our policies everywhere, and their conglomerately allied, if occasionally rival, interests span half of the globe. The Standard Oil Corporation of New Jersey, whose assets in the United States amounted to about \$ 11 ½ billion during the early sixties, sold its products in more than a hundred countries and

owned 50 percent or more of the stock in 275 subsidiaries in fifty-two countries. Similar [260] figures are available for corporations dealing in steel, rubber, aluminum, chemical, and other commodities; they far exceed the gross national income of more than half of the existing nation-states. The impact of these firms in determining national policies is notorious. One need not be a Marxist to realize that the Cuban Sugar Export Corporation had something to do with the American policy toward the Batista regime and its successor; that the Union Miniere and British Petrol were rather sizable factors in the Congo crisis; and that Anderson Clayton and United Fruit were not totally disinterested in what happened in Guatemala and Brazil. In fact, the American ambassador openly prided himself on having brought down the progressive regime in Guatemala. It need not be stressed that the CIA is the clandestine harbinger of these forces which make havoc of the concept of "national sovereignty" and "national interest." This intervention by alien enterprises, over which the people at home have no control, carries the most serious implications. For the crimes committed by these unscrupulous transnational forces—their wanton, atrocious wars and interventions—are enacted in the name of the people by national governments who present them to the people as required by the national interest when, in fact, "national interest" means private interests.

All this is taking place while problems of utmost exigency, supranational, supra-ideological problems threatening the very existence of all humanity, call for immediate action and international cooperation. The most pressing of these problems is the rapidly increasing *overpopulation of our planet*, almost too late to solve; and it is not only an overpopulation of people, but also—as a result of all these people's incessant urge to make money—of the proliferation and acceleration of technology; it is an almost instant massification of everything—of objects, projects, procedures, of all the residual trash of life, even massification of rarities.

Into this most critical state of our world there has erupted that revolutionary event I



mentioned before: the wholly unprepared emancipation of the colonial peoples, which, by creating a host of quasi-independent new nations, made the structure of the U.N. obsolete and signaled a new climate of international democracy. At present this development has increased the prevailing anarchy and made all international problems more intricate.

Many nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America now struggle against insuperable odds; they will never be capable of reaching prosperity and full independence unassisted. Yet, as their population grows, foreign aid—minimal in comparison to the colossal need—seldom passes the ruling [261] cliques to benefit the people; in any case, it is mostly military and has political strings attached.

And now, when anarchy mounts throughout the world, new sources of conflicts are plainly before our eyes: the arms race is starting a new round with the production of ABM and MIRV; suppression, and this means perpetuation, of civil wars of liberation is sought; and the United Nations, our first faint attempt at the institution of a peaceful world order, is arbitrarily being bypassed or misused by the important powers.

To avert such catastrophe, we need a global antipoverty program, a pooling of aid, indeed, a sharing of resources among all nations. Who would be able to organize and administer such common aid, but a world organization? National governments will never be prepared to do this, neither the capitalistic governments, elected to further their "national interests" at the expense of others, nor the Soviet-dominated regimes, blinded as they are by the despotic maintenance of group orthodoxy. But how can one expect an uninformed, in fact ideologically misinformed, at best apathetic, public to understand that today the true national interest, and any partisan interest, has become identical with the interests of humanity at large.

Here we are at the crucial point, or rather at the crucial vicious circle. Only when 1) in the opposing camps the awareness of perils threatening all arises, and 2) an intense common anxiety produces the necessary feeling of human solidarity—only then would we come close to establishing an effective world organization, one

equipped with a strong judicial executive, and with nuclear arms in its permanent custody.

This dilemma in which we are caught makes the interconnection between national and an incipient global democracy quite evident. For a genuine democracy at home—a rule of legality, equality and justice for all, as projected by the American Constitution—is not sustainable in a world of anarchy, lawlessness, and carelessness. The whole world is present everywhere, at all times. The curtain has vanished, and the violence, intrigues, and corruption that go with the power struggle abroad disintegrate the domestic order.

I have no illusions about the prospects of near-utopian aims. They could only be approached by what Gunnar Myrdal calls "the courage of despair." And yet, we have no choice. They constitute, taken all together, the unique, ineluctable challenge of our age, and the purpose of this approximate survey of our paradoxical circumstances was to show the extent and the dimensions of these circumstances. [262]

Our hope goes to our young people, who feel vaguely that there is something profoundly wrong with our civilization. In March, 1969, Harvard biologist Dr. George Wald, in a memorable speech, spelled out this common cause, underlying the directionless unrest of young people in our days. It is their feeling of being cheated not only of their youth, their present, but indeed, for the first time in history, of their *whole imaginable future, including posterity*. No establishable goal seems left to them, no common human aim, even beyond their own life.

"We are on the road to extermination," another great biologist, Dr. Albert Szent-Gyorgyi says, "American society is death-oriented ... All our ideas are death-oriented ... According to very respectable scientists," he adds, "man's chances of survival are dropping toward 50 percent, and by the end of the century will be below that." Why, then, should we be surprised at the sight of young people who have begun to enact the foreseeable destruction that the adult world has in store for them anyhow?

There exists for them, however, a final way



to save their own future and that of humanity: *an ultimate attempt to unify*. What cannot be achieved by dispersed groups with scattered purposes may be accomplished by joining forces, by creating a unified youth movement, a strong international movement of young people, beyond ideological and parochial boundaries. The prerequisite of such an undertaking would be setting aside, if only provisionally, minor differences of opinion, remaining perpetually and firmly aware of the one superior task, and the dangers of ruinous divisions. It would be also imperative to forget all previous patterns, and start afresh to think things through, to build a new up-to-date socialism out of our present circumstances and our most pressing needs.

This movement should refuse to serve as a

lightning rod to channel away the revolutionary temper of young people. It should not accept an assignment from the old order to concentrate energy in just fighting pollution —as if pollution was something that could be isolated from the rest of the gigantic task. It should insist on taking on the whole revolutionary mission, all the while exercising self-discipline, renouncing violence, seeking thorough factual information, pursuing patiently, soberly, systematically, the various salvaging goals and their coordination. It should strive to prevent the computerization, this consummate dehumanization, of our whole life. What should inspire it is the pride of the awful responsibility that today lies upon it, and the unique, singular joy of being intensely, actively, undeceivably alive. [263]