

## The Crisis in Confidence

The extraordinary reaction to the Administration's Cambodia decision was more than a difference of opinion on the war. The suddenness of the decision, the lack of consultation with key leaders, the evidence of internal differences within the Administration — all brought to a climax the growing crisis of confidence in our leadership.

A great many informed Americans believe, justly or not, that the President is isolated, that he is not adequately exposed to reasonable opposing views. They believe, justly or not, that he has not offered the level of moral leadership which we so need. They believe, justly or not, that he has given undue sanction to members of his administration who seem committed to divisive courses of action, and undue attention to advisors who give him a distorted view of reality.

The President has two and three-quarters years remaining before the end of his term. It is essential that in those years the nation be governed by a man who is in touch with all segments of American opinion, a man who does not feel trapped and beleaguered, a man who easily hears and listens to conflicting views, a man who understands that people in power usually have deep complicity in their own isolation.

### A NATIONAL FAILURE

But I am not interested in indicting the President, because I believe that virtually all of us have failed in our duty as Americans. The failure goes to every level and phase of American life: drug addiction in the slums and corruption in high places; crime in the streets and corporate fraud; personal immorality and betrayals of public trust.

And while each of us pursues his selfish interests and comforts himself by blaming others, the nation disintegrates. I use the phrase soberly: the nation disintegrates.

We face two overriding tasks. We must move vigorously to solve our most crucial problems. And we must heal the spirit of the nation. The two tasks are inseparable. If either is neglected, the other becomes impossible.

The crisis in confidence is deepened by the divisiveness that afflicts the nation. Today's divisiveness is

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#### THE AUTHOR

*This editorial is adapted from an address by John W. Gardner prepared for delivery at a Plenary Session of the Illinois Constitutional Convention, Springfield, on Wednesday, May 13, 1970. Mr. Gardner, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, is head of The Urban Coalition.*

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not confined to one issue or one set of antagonists. There are multiple points of conflict — the war, race, the economy, political ideology. There are multiple rifts — between old and young, between regions, between social classes. Around these rifts we have seen hatred and rage, violence and coercion at both ends of the political spectrum. And matching the violent deeds we have had provocative and ill-considered statements from those in high places. Official statements and policies which feed the fires of regional suspicion or racial antagonism or the tensions between young and old may be as destructive as a bomb tossed through an open window.

### DISINTEGRATIVE FORCES

If one considers the whole range of conflict — ghetto riots and shoot-outs, campus violence, widespread bombing and arson, school buses overturned by raging adults, and the chilling recent clash between construction workers and radical youth — if one reflects on that full range, one must conclude that we are dealing with disintegrative forces that threaten our survival as a society.

One might suppose that as extremists become increasingly inflammatory, moderates would close ranks and oppose them. But just the opposite is occurring. The moderates begin to take sides against one another. We all become a little readier to grow angry, a little readier to identify villains, a little readier to resort to violence ourselves.

Lest this give the impression that moderates are victimized, it must be said at once that most of them have a secret complicity in the activities of the extremist. The moderate conservative does not explicitly approve of police brutality, but something in him is not displeased when the billy club comes down on the head of a long-haired student. The liberal does not endorse violence by the extreme left; but he may take secret pleasure in such action when it discomfits those in authority.

### ALL THE KING'S MEN

In short, extremists often enjoy tacit support from the moderates nearest to them. Thus does a society tear itself apart.

Most Americans want to hold the nation together. But I do not meet many who are willing to do the hard things that are essential to that end.

That means that we must support leaders prepared to bring about constructive change. We must reject leaders who will not seek change, and reject leaders who use the rhetoric of change but refuse to make the hard decisions that will move us on to new

solutions. We must examine every one of our institutions to see where reform or structural redesign will help it adapt to contemporary needs. Not least among such targets of change I would list the Congress of the United States.

Second, we must put an end to the deliberately provocative words and acts that feed the flames of conflict. We must isolate the small segment of our population who are practitioners of violence and coercion. We must discipline policemen and members of the National Guard who exceed the bounds of disciplined law enforcement. And we must reject leaders who exploit our anger and fear and hatred.

### RESPECT FOR PROCESS

Finally, every citizen must support the established processes of the society — legal and judicial processes, the ballot, civil liberties. We must strengthen those processes and make them worthy of our confidence. We must act firmly against those who would destroy them.

But it is not enough to call people back to a respect for process. It is necessary to examine the frustrations which may have produced the loss of faith. Institutional failures invite alternatives that may ultimately destroy the institutions.

We find, for example, that due process of law does not always exist for some of our minorities. If we want them to respect the process we must make it worthy of respect.

Similarly, doubts as to the integrity of the legal and governmental process arise when federal officials are deliberately lax in their enforcement of civil rights laws or make public statements that create an atmosphere of ambiguity around those laws.

But the process available to a free people that is most seriously neglected today is the political process.

The notable fact about civil tumult today is not that a few fanatics start it but that larger numbers of peaceable people tolerate it and lend themselves to it. Behind that sympathy with disorder is usually frustration and a sense of impotence. It stems, at least in part, from people who want to have their say and feel that they have not been listened to, who feel that they have suffered injustice and have been denied redress, and who feel that in matters of self-government they have been lulled with rhetoric and denied effective power.

The solution lies in giving them outlets *within the system*, that is, in providing them constructive paths of action.

### DON'T SCORN POLITICS

*Such paths are available.* I want to talk chiefly about one such path — the political process. Many dissidents who resort to disruptive tactics say "We

*tried working within the system,"* but most have not in fact tried very hard, certainly not within the political system. And in this they reflect a failing of the American people generally, we have typically scorned politics and neglected the political process. And by that neglect we have not only denied ourselves the most significant path for effective action, we have allowed the public process to decay.

We can't understand our current frustrations if we look only at specific substantive goals in education, housing, employment and the like. What is not working is the process and the mechanisms which should serve us in achieving all of our goals.

It is precisely in the political forum that free citizens can have their say, trade out their differences, and identify their shared goals. Where else, how else can a free people orchestrate their inevitable conflicting purposes?

It is essential that we bring about a renaissance of politics in this country. We must open up clogged channels. We must bring a vitality to political life that will attract good men and women. We must repair rusty and outworn machinery. We must renew the system.

### THE PRINCETON BREAK

In our present crisis of confidence, both college students and faculty members are beginning to look to politics. A year and a half ago I urged in a national magazine that college students who wished to work within the system should address themselves seriously to the political process — but at that time they were not ready. Now they are. One of the most hopeful signs of recent days has been the action of Princeton University in declaring a two-week break before the November elections. I urge other colleges and universities to follow suit, so that students may express their views through conventional political channels.

But it is not just our young people who must recognize the value of the political process. Citizens generally — from every part of the political spectrum — should give far more attention to every phase of that process. Some should run for office. Others should become involved in the machinery of their party (and try to change it for the better). Some should engage directly in lobbying. Some should give money and time. Others should undertake to influence public opinion in behalf of the causes that interest them.

It is precisely to the political process that we must turn in order to end the war in Southeast Asia. At this moment, the war is the most divisive element in our national life. Nothing we are doing to help or harm our friends or foes in Southeast Asia can compare to what we are doing to ourselves as a nation. The erosion of spirit that we have experienced is beyond calculation. Weighed against that erosion, any

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and models of car, according to each car's ability to protect occupants and to resist damage. Insurance premiums could then, for the first time, be used to encourage car makers to make safer cars. That can only be done if the car owner is insuring his own car, rather than insuring some car he will run into and whose make and model obviously cannot be foreseen. It is ironic that when the State's largest auto insurer, a vigorous opponent of reforms such as we propose, recently announced a premium discount for sturdier automobiles, the insurer proposed the discount only on collision insurance — a first-party, no-fault coverage that would be the main insurance for vehicle damage under our proposal.

Predictably, our proposal has met fierce resistance. Some people have an immense interest in seeing to it that the fault insurance system — the system we have today — is what we have tomorrow. Let them defend it for as long as they can. But they cannot defend it forever.

Tottering institutions out of touch with the needs of the people they profess to serve, however formidable and entrenched, eventually fall. Special interest can obstruct change for a time. But change will come. Eventually change always comes. Here at least we have all had ample warning and a chance to influence what is bound to happen.

—RICHARD STEWART

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prerogatives of elected officials and for constitutional procedures.

Even if the Cambodian operation is "successful," it may subject Mr. Nixon to such bitterness that the Republican leadership will have to be extraordinarily resourceful to avert a permanent breach between the Executive and Legislative Branches.

6. THE ECONOMY: In March, 1968, before President Johnson's speech of withdrawal, European investors lost confidence in the dollar as a result of rumors of Vietnam escalation. An international financial crisis ensued. It was ended when the United States negotiated a two-tier price system for gold and gave assurances to European central bankers on the future course of the American economy. A prolonged American presence in Cambodia could produce a new crisis of confidence.

Pierre Rinfret, Mr. Nixon's economic adviser during the campaign, put it well on April 29: "If Cambodia accelerates and they accelerate Vietnam, you are witnessing the end of the American economy as we have known it. We will have the worst of all worlds — high inflation, high money rates and high unemployment."

7. THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: This overrid-

ing defect in the President's three speeches on Vietnam was that they failed to put the war into clear perspective in the global context of U.S. foreign policy. The President has perpetuated the notion that the United States and Hanoi are engaged in a contest of will and bluff — in a poker game — and that if Washington appears to lose, its commitments everywhere in the world will be in jeopardy.

In fact, the United States is engaged not in a poker game, but a chess game. Its major adversary is not Hanoi but Moscow; North Vietnam is but a corner of the board. And while American resources and attention are occupied there, Moscow is able to pick up pieces in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Japan.

## UNDERSTATED LIMITS

The only way President Nixon can regain control over this situation is to impose strict limits on the incursion into Cambodia. White House briefings have defended the operation as focused on a target within 20 miles of the border — one which can be captured or destroyed within six to eight weeks.

But these specific limitations were not in the President's speech, nor, to all appearances, have they been made operational in orders to the military. Nor have they been made credible to foreign powers capable of widening the war.

This gamble has got to be sharply defined and limited, and its results coldly evaluated over the next eight weeks. If the President doesn't do this, the Congress should.

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possible geopolitical advantages in the war must be seen as pitifully small.

### END THE WAR

I have spoken of the political process as an essential instrument of our freedom. Americans must now use that instrument to end the war. The objectives should be:

1. To withdraw all U.S. forces from Cambodia now.
2. To avoid further escalation *in any form*.
3. To achieve an orderly termination of our presence in Vietnam within one year.

These are measures now before Congress which embody these objectives. Citizens should communicate with their Senators and Congressmen to express their views. There should be a concerted effort to support candidates in the 1970 election who will oppose the war and will work and vote to end it as soon as possible.

But it is not just a question of bringing our boys back from Vietnam. It is a question of what kind of country we are bringing them back to. The end of the war will be only the beginning of the healing of this nation.