

# "THE BESIEGED STRONGHOLDS OF THE MIND"

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ADDRESS TO ASSEMBLY  
OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICE  
BY  
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When the times cry for action rather than words, an international discussion meeting such as this can be justified only by the assumption that the deeds of men are the products of their thoughts. It is idle to deny that by and large the deeds of the United Nations, except in defense of actual homelands in Russia and England, have been on a disappointing level of accomplishment. I think that our Dunkirks, our Pearl Harbors, our Singapores and our Tobruks are best explained by things we have in the back of our collective heads—or by things lacking there. The failure of our strongholds may be the outward and visible sign of a failure in our thinking.

Foremost among the paralyzing influences upon the intellect is a fatalistic attitude, fostered, if not created, by the manner in which the United Nations got into the war. Not one willed the war. Some went even as far as Munich to avoid it. Here in the United States we now realize that a free choice to fight or not to fight probably never existed.

This makes it hard for us to escape the feeling that we are in the grip of forces beyond our control, and perhaps even beyond our comprehension. This feeling deepens as the individual finds his choice of conduct narrowing. The decision as to whether he will fight, and in what capacity and in what part of the world, is made for the young man by an authority above his control, to serve a strategy above his understanding, but in the calculations of which he knows that his individual wishes and interests

can be little consulted. The rest of the family sees that it too is losing control of its direction under the push of inflation, taxation, shortages, and transportation difficulties. The response is not complaint; it is a submissive helplessness, often expressed, "Oh, well, what can you do about it?" An American people, whose tradition has been to seize its problems with the spirit of men who are consciously the captains of their souls and masters of their fate, tends under the shock of events to hopeful but helpless waiting to see what external forces will do to it next. This weakening of our old time assurance that rational men by their own reason may order their own destiny puts a damper on the boldness and imagination which once characterized our actions.

The Nazi and the Jap have not labored under any such handicap—so far. They took the initiative with a national policy which presupposes that by their collective will and strength they could make a fate to their liking. Up to now the forces that upset their individual lives at least appear to be those they chose to set in motion. Their effort has the early advantage of the lift men always get from doing the driving—even if only toward catastrophe—and that impulse is part of the striking power of every enemy tank and submarine.

A second paralyzing force is a mental conflict involving moral values, before which we Americans stand a bit baffled. We have long been taught, and still believe, that might does not make right. And yet we see that all we hold to be morally right is in jeopardy wherever it does not also possess physical might. We are in the anomalous position of believing that right makes might and yet forced to adapt our policy to the idea that might will determine whose ideas of right shall survive.

The Nazi and the Jap suffer no such conflict. Their policy is dominated by the doctrine that might is all that makes right and they apply themselves to exerting brute force with brutal singleness of mind.

A third retarding influence is an unrealistic emphasis on preservation of the *status quo*. Its preservation is to some extent a necessary implication of a war of defense. But our pleas to "preserve our way of life" too often do not get much beyond pleas to save the *status quo*. Such an appeal has obvious limitations. The proportion of any population that is wholly content with its lot is small. Native populations are in sullen opposition to the existing order in areas important to our military success. Youth is likely to regard the current order as an obstacle against which he must make headway, or as a tight caste he must break into. Hence the response of the people to the battle cry of the *status quo* is cooled by many reservations and indifferences. To make matters worse those whose lot or temperament makes them content with the existing order are by that very fact also made disinclined to risk their positions and possessions by bold and aggressive moves. And the war in all of the non-axis nations has been much in the hands of such as these.

In contrast, the Axis stirs the imagination of masses with promises of a New Order which will give windfalls to "have nots" among individuals and peoples. The Axis has sought to inflame and enlist all of the scattered discontents within its reach while the United Nations are, in many respects, trying to make headway against important currents of dissatisfaction. And the power of even smouldering discontents to nullify any national effort is never negligible.

Beyond the maintenance of the *status quo* our announced aim to establish everywhere the four freedoms is an ideal to which I heartily subscribe. And while these aims seem idealistic and remote to the masses of hard-pressed men, you who are students know their value and their promise.

The Axis on the contrary states its aims in the all too seductive terms of greed and pride and of revenge and self-vindication. Their aims are low, but comprehensible to low men.

Constructive thought in all influential and official levels of the United Nations must be built on the basic reality that the question is no longer whether the world will witness a "new order", but whose "new order" it will be. Shattered economic systems, unsettled relationships between nations and between groups, and obsolete forms, cannot be put together again to make the same old humpty-dumpty. And this wise men will accept, not in the spirit of disaster but as an opportunity for reconstruction on more just and rational lines.

Your identification with this meeting of student youth is a pledge of your conviction that the ultimate strongholds of freedom are the minds of free men. The perils of this hour summon you to advance to their relief wherever they are under attack or siege. What, then, are the intellectual weapons which may be used by those who would vindicate a right to be leaders of the forces that make for a free world?

The free forces of the world must again take their posts at the guiding end, not at the receiving end, of fate. Appraisal of their numbers, their resources and their position shows they suffer no material weakness. Given such a cause there need be none in spirit. Will, unity, determination and organization, are all that is needed—and they are imperatively needed—if we are to make the opportunity to shape the inevitable new order ours instead of the enemies'.

Our conviction is that right is the only ingredient that can make might lasting, that power without right is but a prod which arouses forces that ultimately bring about its own destruction. That conviction must be manifest in our policy and conduct towards each other, towards minorities and disadvantaged men or people—yes, even towards our enemies. Only thus can the sceptical world be assured that we would use an opportunity to write the peace of the world in terms of justice and fair dealing.

We must show that we are bold enough to conceive and execute practical plans for dealing with future international lawless aggressions. The history of the evolution of legal institutions gives us no warrant for the timidity which has heretofore arrested our efforts to place international conduct under legal restraints.

Among the most ancient and unremitting tasks of law and state-craft has been that of defining from time to time what should constitute unpermissible aggression and of prescribing reparations or penal sanctions to be invoked against transgressors. The problem of undue aggressions by individuals against individuals underlies the long evolution of principles dealing with assault, murder, larceny, robbery and trespass. Lately, by new techniques often involving the use of the administrative tribunal and by new concepts of what society may permit, the law has begun to deal with aggression by or against groups or classes. Among such are discriminations by railroads among shippers, deceit or unfair advantage by management or promoters against the interests of investors, excessive charges by utilities against consumers, restraints by monopolists on the freedom of trade and unfair labor practices by employers against employees. Thus has the law vindicated in our time its capacity for growth, by revising its concepts of undue aggression to prohibit acts which a different day tolerated.

But today the most disastrous and far-reaching aggression of all—that of aggressive war waging—remains untouchable by the sanctions of the law. On the contrary, certain concepts and doctrines operate to sanctify and perpetuate the sort of anarchy that now envelops the world. Such a one is the doctrine that a sovereign state can submit to no limitation upon its right to go to war. Another such is the precept that neutral states may not judge a war-making sovereign but must accept war as legal and treat it as just. Another is the principle that bystanding states must either remain rigidly impartial or join the war,

and cannot extend help short of war to one under attack except on pain of losing neutral rights. These concepts, still dominating many influential minds, tend to make the world a relatively safe one for aggressors.

But those who would advance to a better world need not be ridden down by such dogma. Long ago the sovereignty of the United States was restrained to such an extent that it may not deprive its own people of life, liberty and property without due process of law. It is not probable that the useful elements of the doctrines of sovereignty would be lost by a general limitation to protect the peace of the world against destruction at least until adjustment procedures under law were invoked. The dignity of no well-meaning state would be harmfully impaired even by a requirement that it submit justiciable grievances to the World Court and others to arbitration. Treaties have already pledged renunciation of war as an instrument of policy. No greater task challenges a bold and progressive generation than to so organize the scattered forces of the world that they may be brought to the support of its moral judgments and to implement well meant pledges with sanctions which make them really law.

Make no mistake about it, this war will not be over on the day an order is given to cease fire. If we are to make good the promise of an international society in which force will be under law, which will insure broadened rights of access to the world's raw materials and markets and sources of wealth, if we really try to stop or even to minimize the exploitation of people thru the practices of the old imperialisms and extra-territoriality, there will be struggle aplenty, though battles are over.

You must not delay considering the part you will play, and the spirit in which you will play the part for which you may be cast. You as youths of many nations are fast being summoned to take over the places of your elders in this epic struggle. No doubt the world is not to your liking—and for two reasons. First, being the kind of a

world it is, no one can contemplate its state with much exaltation. But more importantly there is in youth a "divine discontent" which urges it to remake any world—even a much better one than we know. Do not waste your precious energies and your too short time in the old man's pastime of grouching about the state of the world. Its every defect and imperfection is a challenge to wise action by your generation. If you inherit rather more than your share of anarchy, so there is given to you greater opportunity. A settled world would yield little response to your touch, a world in flux will yield much. The pattern of the future must be shaped by the ideas that find acceptance in the minds of oncoming youth and established by the courage that is in their hearts and the strength that is in their hands.

But courage and strength often run amuck without wisdom. Wisdom is best taught by study of the failures and achievements of the past. Progress is most sure-footed when it respects the importance of continuities in our order of living at the same time it recognizes need for amendment.

Each of the groups represented here is the inheritor of an ancient culture. Each has the same task of reworking the material of his culture as it passes through the present generation on its way from the past to the future. We are aided in the task of selecting that which our generation will reject or abandon and that which we will improve or emphasize by the opportunity to compare the items of our several cultural inheritances. Scholars know that to point out our differences is not to disparage. Each national group will contribute towards the realization of a better world but collaboration shall not imply that any one capitulates to any other.

We of the United States can offer no more significant contribution in support of wisdom and fortitude than the history of our experiment in adapting older democratic thought to the needs of our time and country. The sum of

the wisdom to be learned from study of the genesis and struggles of self government in this country is to confirm the wisdom taught by the great cultures that antedate us—that it is not only liberal governments but wise self restraints that make men free. We must hold these lessons high to become a light unto them that sit in the darkness of conquest.

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