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THE ROAD BACK TO SANITY

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INTRODUCTION

There seems to be an assumption today that we need a complex set of ideas to handle the complex problems of this complex world in which we live. We assume that a big problem needs a big idea; a complex problem needs a complex idea for its solution. As a result, our thinking tends to become more and more tortuous and muddled. Nowhere is this more true than in matters of international relations. It seems to me that the road back to sanity - and this is where my title comes in - lies

(1) In having a few simple and clear ideas about the world in which we live.

(2) In expanding and correlating our ideas, not in a vacuum, but in reference to things as they actually are. Let us not generalize from fantasy; let us know in fact what we are talking about.

(3) In being tough-minded, in not letting ourselves be too disappointed because the complex world never quite fulfills our most cherished expectations of it.

(4) In knowing very clearly the class of events to which our ideas and methods relate. This is so we will not use a saw as a hammer. A saw is a useful tool precisely because it is limited and designed for a certain purpose. Do not criticize the usefulness of a saw because it does not make a good hammer.

Although this last statement is obvious with regard to such things as saws and hammers, it is less well understood in the area of international relations which are based on human relations. Too often we try to solve

human problems with nonhuman tools and, which is still more extraordinary, in terms of non human data. We take data from which all human meaning has been deleted and then are surprised to find that we reach solutions which have no human significance.

It is my simple thesis that an international relations problem, as a human problem, requires a human solution. First, we have to learn to recognize a human problem when we see one; and second, upon recognizing it we have to learn to deal with it as such and not as if it were something else. Too often at the verbal level we talk glibly about the importance of the human factor; and too seldom at the concrete level of behavior do we recognize a human problem for what it is and deal with it as such. It is my purpose therefore to substantiate this proposition, to exhibit some of the difficulties that stand in the way of arriving at adequate solutions, and to point out some of the measures to be taken in order to overcome them.

THE ROAD BACK TO SANITY

I

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PROBLEM A HUMAN PROBLEM

In the broadest sense the term international relations embraces all intercourse among states and all movements of peoples, goods and ideas across national frontiers.¹ And this being inherently a world of opposing interests, conflicts are inevitable. For the peace and security of the changing world, therefore, there must be a continuous balancing of interests and settlement of conflicts. From a rational point of view, conflicts are the result of forces inherent in human nature and hence international relations problems are human problems. It follows that as human problems, they require human solutions.

In China, Chaing Kai-sheks' nationalist armies had far more machine guns, far more tanks and far more planes than the Communists, yet the Communists won. They won because they recognized a human problem and acted in a manner to solve it. They promised to correct the causes of the peoples' burden. They promised land to the tiller and they promised an end to the old system of lending money which had borne so heavily on rural people. They promised a turnover in power in the villages. The Communists neutralized the power of modern weapons by capturing the minds of the people in the belief they had a solution to a human problem.

¹ Hartman, Fredericka H. The Relations of Nations New York; The Macmillan Co. 1957 p. 5

Another illustration that an international relations problem is a human problem requiring a human solution has recently been provided by a practising psychiatrist.²

It is Dr. Frank's opinion that the inability of Russia and the United States to break out of the arms race may involve several psychological factors. First, fear tends to make us deny the existence of danger especially since the threat of being in an atomic attack lies outside previous experience and it requires imagination to be aware of its presence. The denial of a danger prevents taking action, and herein lies the tragedy. But even when we do face up to the threat, the same fear makes it difficult for each country to change the behavior which creates the danger; especially since each is forced to behave in such a way as to confirm the others suspicions - the self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, no matter who the enemy is or who we are, the enemy tends to be perceived as intellectually inferior but possessed of an animal cunning which enables him easily to outwit us. The enemy is seen as cruel, trecherous and bent on aggression. Our side is seen as intellectually superior but guileless and therefore, easily victimized, peace-loving, honorable, and fighting only in self defense. The fact that the enemy is viewed as untrustworthy is a major source of tensions leading to war.

And the terrible thing about mutual distrust is that it is justified. Enemies cannot trust each other

²Frank, Jerome D. M.D. "The Great Antagonism" Atlantic Monthly Nov 1958 pp 38-42

because each is forced to act in such a way as to justify the others misgivings. This is what the sociologists term the self-fulfilling prophecy. This is based on the fact that all social behavior tends to elicit corresponding behavior from the person to whom it is directed. Friendliness begets a friendly response, hostility a hostile one. So if you expect someone to react to you in a certain way, you may act toward him in such a manner that he reacts in the way you predicted. Thus you cause your own prophecy to be fulfilled.

With reference to this very point, Douglas MacArthur once stated:

Present tensions are kept alive by two great illusions. One, a complete belief by the Soviets that capitalist powers are preparing to attack it, that sooner or later we intend to strike. And the other, a complete belief on the part of the capitalist countries that the Soviets are preparing to attack us. Both are wrong. Each side so far as the masses are concerned is equally desirous of peace. For either side, war with the other would mean nothing but disaster. Both equally dread it. But the constant acceleration of preparation may well, without specific intent, ultimately produce a spontaneous combustion."³

How far this conscious recognition of world problems as human problems will go is a question. But I know that how well we solve problems by human solutions will be the measure of our success in international relations.

³Frank, Jerome D. M.D. "The Great Antagonism" Atlantic Monthly Nov 1958 p 40

II.

OBSTACLES TO THE SOLUTION OF HUMAN PROBLEMS:

The Role of Culture. In the solution of human problems, one would expect to find a simple connection between peoples complaints and the object about which they were complaining. Hence, the solution would be easy: correct the object of the complaint, if possible, and presto! the complaint would disappear. Unfortunately, the world of human behavior is not so simple as this conception of it. Research has shown that human behavior cannot be understood apart from feelings or sentiments, and manifestations of sentiment cannot be understood as things in and by themselves, but only in terms of the total situation of the person. The role of culture in influencing human behavior scarcely can be overestimated.

It is hard for Western man, after a century or so of scientific indoctrination to imagine himself back in the twilight of tribal ignorance, but that is what we must do as a prerequisite to understanding and solving human problems in our relations with some African countries. Barbara Ward pointed up the problem when she said, "No one can travel far in Africa - or indeed in any area of tribal society without becoming aware of how large a part the fetish (a source of magic power) plays in mens' affairs."⁴

As stated by Ruth Benedict:

The life history of the individual is first and foremost an accomodation to the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community. From the moment of his birth, the customs into which he is born shape his experience and behavior. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and

⁴Ward, Barbara. "Shrunken Heads - and Shrunken Minds" New York Times Magazine Nov 9, 1958

by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, its habits are his habits, its beliefs are his beliefs, its impossibilities are his impossibilities. Every child that is born into his group will share them with him, and no child born into one on the opposite side of the globe can ever achieve the thousandth part. There is no social problem it is more incumbent upon us to understand than this role of custom. Until we are intelligent as to its laws and varieties, the main complicating facts of human life must remain unintelligible."⁵

The understanding of culture is a formidable obstacle to the solution of human problems, but it is not the only one. When one gets down to specific cases, such as sitting around a conference table composed of delegates from many lands, how does he know what they really think as differentiated from what they say?

DIAGNOSING THE SITUATION. What do people think of persons, ideas, events, things? How do they feel? It would seem that the obvious way to find out would be to ask them, but this is most difficult if not impossible in problems on the international level. Throughout the history of the Western civilization until the twentieth century, the way to study public opinion was to sit down and think about how people think or should think. Since that time, much experimentation has taken place to develop the polling process, the interview, and the observation. In addition, there have been panels and the Historical-Statistical Method, the collection of statistics, their interpretation as to past meaning and their projection into the future. To date there is no very satisfactory way of knowing what people think. Much more research is required before we will have reliable knowledge.

⁵Benedict, Ruth Patterns of Culture Boston Houghton Mifflin Co 1934 pp2-3

The diplomat and policy maker has to size up human beings and human situations. He has to make diagnoses. Many times he has to handle a situation which is unsatisfactory to some one or more individuals. In as much as often the source of discontent cannot accurately be stated by complaint, it is up to him to go from the symptoms to the underlying situation. Although he may realize that each individual is unique and is bringing to the conference table a different background and a different set of personal experiences, he must also be aware when handling any one person that what he does may affect that persons relations with other persons in the group. He is dealing not only with an individual, but also with an individual as a member of a particular country or bloc.

The solution of human problems are made complex by the fact that each person or group of people is different and it is most difficult to determine what they really think and feel about any particular idea, proposal, or thing.

As Gottfried Lang put it: "To recognize the reality of cultural differences is to recognize that the culture acts upon its bearer like spectacles through which the bearer views the world and which modifies what he sees according to the character of the lenses."⁶ Only when we can really communicate with foreign peoples can our help be effective. This does not merely involve language skills (though these are very important

⁶Lang, Gottfried O. "The Walls of Culture" The Commonweal Oct. 31, 1958 p 47

indeed) but even more important the need to understand the messages sent to us in their proper cultural context.

III

IMPROVING THE PICTURE

Effective international cooperation based on a solution to human problems as we have seen requires sympathetic understanding of the way each nation looks to other people. What can Americans do to improve the picture our friends and enemies have of us?

AS OTHERS SEE US. Unlike the English and French, Germans and Russians, Japanese and Chinese, who have rubbed each other the wrong way for centuries, we are not used to being disliked, feared, resented, or opposed. We have had a picture of ourselves as a great democracy, living by the highest of world standards, and willing to help the poor and the weak and to fight evil wherever we find it. We have come to learn that neither our friends or our enemies share this view. From a Harvard project based on interviews and replies to questionnaires administered to thousands of refugees from the Soviet Union, we have an authoritative view of the picture as Russians see us.⁷ Some of the main elements are as follows:

1. America is aggressive and bent on world domination.
2. America is respected for its technology and its material power.
3. Capitalism is a decadent socioeconomic system which survives only by exploitation of the workers and under the artificial stimulation of armament production.
4. The standard of living of the rank and file citizen is lower than it is in the Soviet Union.

⁷Bauer, Raymond A. How The Soviet System Works
Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1956 pp 123-133

5. Americans are materialistic and lack spiritual values.
6. All people are not treated alike in America. There is discrimination against certain racial ethnic groups.

To find Soviet citizens believing these things is no great surprise because they are basic points in Soviet propaganda. But to find that some of our friends hold some of the same views comes as a great shock.

Most perplexing for Americans is the critical attitude toward our way of life displayed by non-communists. Still more alarming is the fear held by some of the better educated young generation who fear the United States seeks to dominate their country and who are trying to find some third way of life to avoid both Sovietism and Americanism. It is a blow to be called materialistic. How can we be so considered when we have so many volunteer activities for the benefit of our communities and in particular when we have given so generously to aid the helpless of foreign lands with no thought of material return? With some good hard soul searching and an analysis of past events, however, the answer is available. Time after time we have failed to see the current problems as human problems rather than economic problems or as defense problems. For the sake of expediency, we have solved problems as isolated matters without proper consideration of the ramifications, and we have fought communism with every trick, fair and foul, that we could find regardless of how it stacked up with our moral code. We have no one but ourselves to blame for much of the picture.

WHAT WE CAN DO. What can we do to improve the picture of America in the eyes of our friends and enemies? We do not have the possibility in other countries of swaying votes, building up party alignments and exploiting the press and radio as we do at home. We do have our economic power, but that has limitations as we have already learned. What then can we do? A complete answer to this question is an impossibility and a comprehensive one out of the scope of this paper. What I suggest therefore, is a generalization of broad steps. As I see it there are two main steps to be taken. The first step is to decide what picture of America we want. The second is to act in such a way as to make that picture a reality. Once we live that picture, the job of telling others about America will be much easier. If we have a clear, true to life picture, it will be seen as such by our friends and enemies alike. With a new lease on truth and a recognition of the human problems we will have an opportunity to solve our international relations problems so that tensions will be reduced below the danger point.

IV

SUMMARY

There seems to be an assumption today that we need a complex set of ideas to handle the complex problems of this complex world in which we live. It seems to me that what we need is a road back to sanity, and I believe it is to be found in having a few simple, clear ideas about the world, in working with ideas in reference to things as they really are, in being tough-minded about what we can expect in this world, and in knowing our tools and how to use them. It is my simple thesis that an international relations problem is a human problem that requires a human solution. There are obstacles to the solution of human problems in the full understanding of the influence of culture on human behavior and in our inability to diagnose what people really think about things, but even so, we can do a creditable job if we try. The picture of America as seen by our friends and enemies alike is not one to our liking, however, most of the fault lies within ourselves. We have been guilty of transgressions and, therefore, should not seek a scapegoat. What we must do is decide what kind of an America we want, then we need to act in such a manner as to make it a reality. When this is done and we recognize our international problems as human problems, we have the necessary ingredients for a solution that will keep world tensions below the danger point.

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