

Remarks Of  
JAMES RUSSELL WIGGINS  
at the  
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“We now enter upon the history of a period, rich in disaster, gloomy with wars, rent by sedition, and savage in its very hours of peace. Ceremonies of religion are violated, adulteries are countenanced, the sea is crowded with exiles, nobility and wealth are alike treated as crimes, virtue is a certain source of ruin, informers are rewarded with detestable wages, slaves betray their masters, freedmen their patrons, and he who has no enemy is destroyed by his friends”.

These words are taken from Tacitus. They are from his introduction to the history of the reign of Galba, who followed Nero, in 68 A. D. They are only a part of his long account of the misfortunes of the Roman Empire in that critical year. Pessimists repeat them as though they might be construed to have a relevance to our own time. Optimists, like me, on the other hand, recall them, as a reminder that life has been difficult for man, on this planet, a great many times before.

After a long period of relative prosperity, peace, and well being, people regard any intrusion upon the even tenor of their way as an indignity not lightly to be borne. When a society accustomed to ever-expanding prosperity, steadily widening affluence, multiplied comforts and convenience, is suddenly faced with a pause in the

un-ending improvement of life, it is likely to find the situation a reproach to government, a flaw in the social system, a weakness in all political institutions, and a manifestation of unfairness.

The critical attitudes engendered by recession are not without their merit in the reformation of our institutions and the improvement of administration. And in times like these, we can find abundant occasion for discontent, alarm, and dissatisfaction. If our present circumstances prove anything at all they prove that the world has not yet wholly mastered those fluctuations of fortune.

Whatever else we must lose in such seasons of adversity, however, we will do well not to lose perspective — the ability to measure the disadvantages of our society and its relative advantages, realistically, against, not an ideal and flawless human system, but against any alternative system available or likely to become available in a real world.

In a period of rising unemployment, diminishing economic opportunity, inflated prices, scarcities in oil and energy, hardships in many fields, there is bound to be discontent and dissatisfaction. People complain legitimately of the difficulties of ordinary life. And their complaints are not lightly to be dismissed.

Neither are they to be accepted as an ultimate, final, adverse judgment upon all the institutions of our society.

What is remarkable about our own recent times, it seems to me, is the discontent that prevailed in our own country in the long years of relative abundance, and general affluence during the sixties.

Look at some of the indices of our national well-being from 1950 to 1973.

The civilian labor force went up from 62,208,000

to 83,299,000. The number employed went up from 58,918,000 to 83,299,000. The number of people required to feed the country fell from 7,160,000 to 3,295,000. In spite of this agricultural displacement and the normal growth of population, unemployment rates range from 3.5 percent to 5.9 percent. It is doubtful if any society in all human history so successfully accomplished occupational transitions of this magnitude with less human hardship.

Median income rose from \$5,757 to \$11,116, annually. The percentage of persons earning under \$3,000 a year declined from 18.3 percent to 7.2 percent. Those earning \$15,000 and over rose from 4.6 percent to 30.3 percent.

Federal outlays for education rose from \$7 billion to \$18 billion annually. School enrollment from 46 million to 60 million. Those over 25 with 4 years of high school or more rose from 34 percent of the population in 1950 to 58 percent in 1972. Those between 25 and 29 years with more than 4 years of high school rose from 38 percent to 79.8 percent. Those over 25 with 4 years of college or more rose from 6.2 percent in 1950 to 12 percent in 1972. Those between 25 and 29 with four years in college increased from 7.7 percent to 19 percent.

In the sixties, the number of air conditioning households went up from 12.4 percent of all households to 35.8 percent of all households. The number of households with washing machines went up from 40.8 percent to 59.9 percent. The number with dryers from 17 percent to 41 percent. The number with home freezers from 18 percent to 28 percent. The number of homes with television sets went up from 87 percent to 95.5 percent.

Home ownership increased from 57 percent in 1950 to 65 percent in 1970.

Two car families increased from 11.4 percent in 1970 to 22 percent in 1970.

Median incomes of white American families, in current dollars, adjusted for inflation, rose from \$3,445 in 1950 to \$10,672.

Now, these gains were not shared equally among all groups. But the adjusted Negro income went up to \$6,440. The percentage of Negroes earning less than \$3,000 fell from 51 percent in 1947 to 20 percent in 1971. Not as good as the white population, but, nonetheless, a spectacular change.

Ben Wattenberg, in his book *REAL AMERICA* has pointed out the contrast between the rhetoric of the sixties and the reality of the sixties. Among other signs of healthy change in the decade, he cites:

- # Improvement in the social and economic conditions for blacks more rapid and significant than during any time since the Civil War.
- # Greater economic progress in terms of real purchasing power for ordinary Americans than at any time in the Twentieth Century.
- # More creative work patterns than at any time in the history of mankind.
- # A generation better educated than any in our history.
- # Greater social and economic independence for women than ever before.
- # A fifty percent reduction in the incidence of poverty.

In spite of these gains, he points out that critics have charged that women are enslaved, that this is a white racists nation, that the United States has stolen the resources of the planet, that the rise in gross national production is misleading, that the nation is immoral, that we have a sick society.

The American people, in the decade of the sixties,

by any cultural or economic standards that might be applied, made more progress than they or any other people ever made in a like period in human history; and at the same time, the voices of complaint and criticism (and even despair) and revolution, seldom were louder or more strident.

Why was the rhetoric of the sixties so poisonously critical at a time of such widespread general well being? It is a very interesting and intriguing question. That it was a time when Americans generally, in large numbers, felt very critical of their government and their society, is well established by all the polls. Why?

The phenomena has to be considered at two levels — that of the individual, and that of the individual's view of the nation.

At the individual level, it seems to me there are three relevant explanations:

Those living at the bottom percentile of the population provide a starting level of discontent. Although their absolute situation was enormously improved they could look with some discontent at the even greater improvement of those in the mid percentiles. I know of no solid figures on this, but there seems good reason for a high percentage of the bottom 20 percent to find fault with the society.

Those in minority groups, it seems to me, nurtured the dissatisfaction and discontent characteristic of those who, although bettering their condition, are increasingly aware, as they better it, of past discrimination and increasingly bitter about remaining discrimination. Myrdahl has pointed out persuasively how this bitterness rises against the remnants of racism, the fewer they are.

For the rest of our society, including all those whose level of well being made such spectacular gains, I suspect the greater attraction of *getting* than *having*,

of *going* than *arriving*, of *aiming* than *achieving*, is partly an explanation. Nothing for which human beings plan and which they anticipate is ever quite as gratifying in fulfillment as in expectation. It is not an attractive aspect of human nature, but it is, I am afraid a prevailing aspect of human kind. The man who in 1960 looked forward to having two cars, a television, a home of his own, all the modern appliances, two snowmobiles, a month's vacation, and three times the money he had ever earned before couldn't possibly be as gratified with all these gains in hand in 1970 as he thought he would be when he started the decade.

Most of us judge the society in which we live, the way one of the late Senator Alben Barkley's supporters judged him. The Senator described a typical reaction of a citizen of Paducah, Kentucky, who had been a decades long beneficiary of the Senator's favors. But he admitted he was supporting his opponent for the Senate. When the Senator reminded him of past assistance, he asked, indignantly: "But what have you done for me recently?"

Gratitude, we have to be reminded, is an instinct aroused by the expectation of future favor. It is not much excited by the favors of the past. And the maxim applies no where with more force than in the measurement of the gratitude of citizens toward their government or their society.

It is, sad to relate, also diminished by the hard fact that the more credit society gets for a man's well being, the less credit is left to his own ingenuity, skill, prudence and wisdom.

So, in the nature of things, successful social and economic systems are not likely to diminish criticism and reproach. The anomaly that Wattenberg has pointed out is to be expected, no doubt. But it is important that the anomaly be understood. There is no ceiling on human well being, so there is no clear mark where content-

ment ought to start. But the alarming question is, if people are discontented when the system is working well; do they become even more discontented when it stops working so well? It is a somewhat discouraging proposition for those in government. Is it true that the more the system succeeds the more it gets criticized; and the more it fails the more it gets criticized? Heads I win; tails I lose?

If Americans were dissatisfied with their own lot, in the sixties, they were more dissatisfied with national policy. And that is an interesting matter, too. It is not my purpose to discuss the merits of the policies pursued in that turbulent decade, but it is pertinent, it seems to me to point out that something was missing in our national goals.

There was a surprising unanimity of sentiment in the United States in the course of World War II. The people of this country were confident of their purposes and objectives and generally certain they would succeed. They had a war to win. In the postwar years, as the cold war developed, they were almost equally united in the belief that Soviet power had to be contained. The country had a job to do. It had a sense of purpose. It had a direction. It had a destiny.

It seems to me that great states, in order to retain the confidence and support of their citizens require this "sense of mission". This is not an argument over whether the mission is right or wrong, wise or unwise, correct or mistaken. A great country, like a great ship, must be underway before it responds to the rudder. If it is not moving, it is an unresponsive hulk, rolling in the seas, out of control. Since 1930, when the New Deals talked depression, this country has had a succession of "missions" that commanded wide popular support for intervals. Recently, it seems to me, national opinion has not coalesced upon a mission for the nation. It is just possible that it takes great peril to act as a catalytic agent upon a great body politic. Certainly it takes some

kind of stimulus, purpose, objective, or enterprise, to lift a people out of normal stride, their habitual discontent, this wonted ease, and harness their enthusiasm, their interest and their talents to a larger goal than personal advancement or betterment.

Our own immediate past suggests that people's degree of contentment may be unrelated to their comfort, affluence, success or well being. If this is discouraging; it is at the same time comforting, as we enter a period of obvious challenge. There surely is something to Toynbee's theory of challenge and response. A people not sufficiently challenged seem to fall victims of apathy and decline; those overly challenged to despair and resignation; those challenged to just the right degree seem to rise to the occasion.

We are, I prefer to believe, entering a period of challenge appropriate to our ingenuity, agility, and fortitude, and not emerging into an era in which our resources of mind and heart and will are unequal to the challenge.

What are some of these challenges?

Most conspicuous, at the moment, is the economic challenge. That we are in for a period of adjustment, and at least temporary economic decline, can hardly be denied. Interludes of such fluctuating fortune have occurred since the beginning of the industrial age. What a picture Thomas Carlyle drew of England in the 1870's, when he wrote:

"England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition. With unabated bounty the land of England blooms and grows; waving with yellow harvests; thick-studded with workshops, industrial implements, with 15 millions of workers, understood to be the strongest, the cunningest and the willingest our Earth ever had; these men are here; the work they have



done, the fruit they have realised is here, abundant, exuberant on every hand: and behold some baleful fiat as of Enchantment has gone forth saying, Touch it not, ye master workers, ye masteridlers, none of you can touch it, no man is the better for it; this is enchanted fruit. On the poor workers such fiat falls first in its rudest shape; but on the rich master-workers too it falls neither the rich master-idlers, nor any richest or highest man escape, but all are like to be brought low with it, and made poor enough, in the money sense, or a far more fatal one”.

To the anxiety conjured up by this description of classic depression we can, and must say, we do not live in the England of 1871, nor the America of 1929, nor the world of 1930's. History repeats itself, but not quite monotonously like an idiot. There is no evidence whatever that we deal now with a crisis, like that in 1929. We have learned something from the past, and have set about using what we have learned. We are more skilled in checking economic decline, and more resourceful in mitigating the hardships that flow from it. We may have to re-think the unthinkable and unscrew the inscrutable, here and there, but the country has the talent and the will to do it.

A part of this economic crisis is, of course, the energy crisis. And seldom has a people been confronted with difficulty more amenable to the remedy of human ingenuity, if the will and energy to attack it be but present in our body politic. There is not much mystery about it. It derives from no occult, unknown, concealed and mysterious force, but from facts known to our very children. The people of the United States, and of the free world generally, have been depleting the world resource of fossil fuel at a rate inexcusable on economic, financial, conservation and moral grounds. We have been increasing the use of energy and of energy derived from oil, year by year. This profligate waste of a non-renewable resource, sooner or later, had to cease. The oil producing nations, for reasons of their own, have

multiplied the price of petroleum in a way that makes us face up to the problem sooner than we would have had to face up to it. But their action has not altered the fundamental issue. This country must turn to other sources of energy (and most of the West must do so, too), not out of a spirit of resentment or reprisal at Arab nations, but out of decent regard for resources we have been using improperly. In the short run, we may have to diminish consumption of energy; in the long run, we must turn to alternative sources.

Nowhere is the proper course of action more apparent than it is here in Maine. Here we sit, shivering at the prospect of fuel shortages and high prices, while we leave untouched along our whole Atlantic seaboard, in three thousand miles of bays and inlets, such a massive source of untapped energy as exists nowhere else in the world. The great tides that flow forth and back twice daily with a volume and speed that makes Niagara Falls look puny, at a hundred inlets, spends itself in futility because the citizens who people the shores (who once used some of this power) are indifferent to the riches that lie at hand. We cry for jewels while we walk on "acres of diamonds". After the abortive and tentative beginning at Passamaquoddy in the 30's, we have abandoned and neglected our great riches in the sea. It is amazing. Even the success of the great tidal power project at Rance, France has not awakened us to our potential riches.

Similarly, although we live in one of the great forested areas of the world, there is not in all of Maine one processing plant utilizing skills and techniques known for more than a hundred years, by which much of our wooded wealth might be converted into such usable fuels as methanol. The Office of Energy of the State of Maine has begun to call attention to this resource, at last. Elsewhere in the United States, there are other sources of energy, abundant, inexhaustible and renewable that we can draw upon. What kind of a spell keeps us from doing so?

Domestic political challenges also confront us. Many people are discouraged in the wake of the political debacle that overtook the Nixon Administration. Their confidence in our political institutions, they say, has been shaken. Watergate, beyond doubt, put the system to a test. But it met the test in a way that ought to increase rather than to diminish confidence in the system. Some of the dismay so often expressed, I am afraid, springs from defects in the national memory.

This is not the first time that men in high places have abused their trust, that they have disregarded the law, that they have corrupted colleagues and subordinates, that they have enriched themselves at public cost, that they have trespassed on the rights of their fellow citizens. A piece of reading to be recommended to all Americans in these times is Allan Nevins' *TIMES OF TRIAL*, depicting the great crises in the American past, I wish to quote one paragraph:

“During its last months, the Grant Administration virtually came apart at the seams. Whole departments were demoralized or staffed with raw and inexperienced recruits. The Cabinet was in a turmoil of resignations and appointments, and the President was patently without a policy to his name and losing much popular respect. Investigating committees of Congress were busy digging up the disgraceful details of the relations between the White House and the Whiskey ring. No Administration in our history has closed with such general demoralization as that of Grant. The only thing that distracted public attention from the bankruptcy of the national government was the near-bankruptcy of the electoral process in the Hayes-Tilden contested election. Its competing furor of war threats, vote selling, state purchasing, bribery, jobbery, and graft quite drowned out the noise the Grant Administration made in collapsing”.

The journalists and politicians who have been playing the hounds to the foxes caught in the national

henhouse are not to be reproached for their baying and clamor. But, it is well to recall, from time to time, that the circumstances of the past year are not wholly without precedent. This country, in the past, again and again, has had to survive similiar corruption, deceit, fraud and maladministration. And it has survived it. And it will survive it again. Senator Sam Erwin gave us a parting admonition a few weeks ago. He said it was a time for "truth, faith and courage". The younger generation might have said more succinctly, that, now that we have dealt with the problem, it is time "to pull up our socks" and get on with great tasks of more importance than either pious lamentation or the zealous pursuit of vengeance.

Affairs abroad are threatening. The Middle East is far from a real and lasting peace. Great military forces stand poised ready for the resumption of hostilities that might draw into the vortex of war the armed forces of the world. The patient efforts of American diplomacy have helped hold back calamity, but the great work of achieving peace remains before us. There is, however, nothing predestined, irreversable, or irresistible about the forces involved. This is a man-made crisis. And men can un-make it. The injustices of hundreds of years, the heritage of generations of hatred, the toxins of thousands of remembered acts of hatred and animosity — all these have led us to this crisis. We deal with two great peoples the world has treated unfairly, unkindly and inhumanly. Somehow or other, we must bind up their wounds, reconcile their differences, and restore their peace.

The long war in South Viet Nam, from which we have made our military escape, still goes on. Let us hope that this country will not allow differences of the past to blind interests of it to the future. We have a stake in the survival of those who do not wish to have imposed upon them a government not of their choice. We have a concern in seeing that the institutions of the Gulag Archipelago are not forcibly imposed upon the

whole of the Indo China Archipelago. There are means short of force and our interest in the independence of small nations, the survival of self-government, and the maintenance of what brave Americans achieved there, counsels the employment of those means.

But the great, overpowering and overwhelming concern abroad that ought to animate this country's government, night and day, week by week, month by month, and year by year, is no present war, but the possibility of a great thermo-nuclear war that remains hovering over us, threatening to extinguish, not this country alone, not the Soviet Union alone, but literally, civilization and even life itself, upon this planet.

The Salt Talks have made a beginning in the great effort to chain the atom . . . but it is only a beginning. The Vladivostok agreement is not a destination, but only a point of departure. We must go on from there to not only limit but to abolish the threat of nuclear war. No man of any sensitivity or awareness can sleep well at night, as long as this monster hovers over us. American opinion must give encouragement to every effort to bring this beast to bay. It is not a task beyond human ingenuity, skill and will. We do not deal here with some occult force, some mysterious agency, some remote and cosmic entity. We deal with the conscious intent of human beings. We must turn that intent to the survival of mankind and not allow it to move us toward extinction.

It would be comforting to think that salvation in this enterprise lay in the great organization for peace that we created in the United Nations. It would be comforting, but it would be deluding. In one of its two great bodies there is so little power that it cannot stop talking; and in the other, so much power it dare not start talking without prior agreement as to the result.

The General Assembly passes resolutions it can-

not enforce, demonstrating at once that it is impotent and that it is a good thing that it is impotent.

The Security Council, unlike the Assembly where almost anything can be passed, is a forum where almost nothing can be passed except resolutions of moral reproach, couched in language sufficiently ambiguous to avoid a veto. It is idle to suppose that such an institution can intervene in a meaningful way in the great effort to control and eventually to eliminate atomic weapons. Powerless in the face of supreme political issue of our time, the General Assembly uses the brutal vocabulary of ideological controversy to debate issues on the same plane as a sorority quarrel over which girls are to be admitted to membership. While the great powers split the atom, it splits hairs over seating rules. Some purpose is served. It is better to have people shout at each other in New York than to have them shoot at each other elsewhere. And there always is the chance that sobriety will return to a chamber drunk with the appearance of power and wasteful of its reality. But that cavern of the winds through which there flows months of pointless rhetoric and gales of purposeless fulmination is a far cry from the "parliament of man" and the "federation of the world" of which mankind has dreamed. Even its subsidiary organizations, like the United Nations Educational and Social Council has become infected with the universal politicization and devotes itself to waging war by means other than arms instead of seeking that brotherly betterment of mankind that was its purpose. The United Nations, despite these distressing disabilities, labors on with economic problems, the solution of which may help prevent the wars of the next generation, even if it cannot do much about those in this generation.

It is to the great powers that the world must look if the menace of nuclear war is to be exorcised; it is primarily to the United States and the Soviet Union that it must turn. Because, at this point, it is primarily a bilateral matter, there is no occasion for despair. The more we fear each other's arms, the more incentive we

have to seek mutual reduction and eventual elimination of them. And no powers on earth have fears of these weapons quite as great or informed.

Humanity not only faces new challenges like the control of nuclear weapons, but many of the old ones, like world-wide hunger still remain with us. After struggling with food surpluses for 50 years, the United States suddenly finds itself in a world of vast food shortages. Perhaps the surpluses always were better described as surpluses above the world demand articulated in the market place, rather than surpluses beyond the actual nutritional needs of the peoples of the world. There always has been hunger in portions of the globe. But the recent meeting at Rome brought to the world's attention an imminent threat of real starvation beyond local and transient shortages of the past. This country is going to have to export food — and the knowledge, machinery and techniques for producing food — more than ever before. Once again, as in the days after World War I when Herbert Hoover rescued Europe and Russia from starvation; and as in the days after World War II, American agriculture is the best hope of the world's starving multitudes. It is a mission for which we are prepared by resources, skills, and experience. It is, to be sure, a great crisis — but one less devastating to the spirit of this country than such calamities as the long years when human labor, skills and talents themselves were all in surplus. If there ever was a task to which American genius was suited it is this one.

The current food shortage takes on the dimensions of that which existed in the Middle Ages. Hunger had existed before, but was limited as to area and time. In the middle Ages it struck the known world in a famine that ravaged the countries of the globe. In 1300, pestilence followed famine. Only slowly did humanity recover from dreadful centuries of want, and pestilence. The response of government, during these dreadful centuries, was negligible.

At the Rome conference, the world governments commenced the task of forestalling such calamity. No nation is better equipped for leadership in this struggle than the United States. India with about the same tillable acreage grows only 2/5 of the farm crops. Efficiency in terms of many hours involved is even greater. No country even closely rivals us both in the efficiency of manpower utilization and soil utilization. No other country has mounted great food distribution programs like those which followed both World War I and World War II. Our very pre-eminence as the reliever of famine may confront us with tragic decisions on where food can be used with a chance of forfending disaster, and where more food would only more widely distribute human misery.

We are face to face again with the great challenge of hunger of which Laurence Binyon wrote so movingly in the London Nation of December 1918. I quote his eloquent poem:

I come among the people like a shadow.  
I sit down by each man's side.  
None sees me, but they look on one another,  
And know that I am there.  
My silence is like the silence of the tide  
That buries the playground of children;  
Like the deepening of frost in the slow night  
When birds are dead in the morning.  
Armies trample, invade, destroy,  
With guns roaring from earth and air.  
I am more terrible than armies,  
I am more feared than the cannon.  
Kings and chancellors give commands;  
I give no command to any;  
But I am listened to more than kings  
And more than passionate orators.  
I unsweat words, and undo deeds.  
Naked things know me.  
I am first and last to be felt of the living.  
I am Hunger.



This is the great common enemy of all mankind which we can defeat only if, in the United Nations organizations and elsewhere, we give up the bootless disputes over place and precedence, politics and ideology and close our ranks to meet a common foe.

The political climate in Washington is said to be poisonous these days, and perhaps it is. But it has been that way before. It can hardly compare with the description of the Great Secession Winter by Henry Adams, of which he said:

“The most flagrant treason was openly proclaimed, accompanied by threats that reminded one of the days of Catiline. Clerks in government departments mounted the disunion badge and talked openly of oaths they had taken never to permit the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. Before that should happen Washington would be a heap of ashes. Some of them appeared in costumes of homespun, and announced that it was the uniform of a corps of five hundred who were bound by solemn oaths never to allow the election to be declared or the inauguration to be consummated. Persons whose business led them to keep late hours were alarmed by meeting bodies of men drilling at midnight in the environs of the city.”

If we consult our country's history, and the world's history, we will be slower to panic. We can gain from an intimate study of our past a more tranquil understanding of our present. If we know what has happened in the generations before ours, we will have more stable nerves. We will neither soar into euphoria at every modest success nor plunge into despair at every temporary reverse. We will gain perspective.

No thoughtful man can be unaware that we face grave difficulties, at home and abroad. But when has this not been so?

The American people, despite all alarms, remain ready to be summoned to great missions. Virgil Par-

rington, writing in one period of discouragement said:  
"With ebbing faith men may deny their own divine nature, but the divinity is not destroyed; the music of the indwelling Godhood murmurs in the shell 'till the tide returns to flood it again". And so it is with the spirit of Americans. It is waiting for the tide to flood it again.

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