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**"Needed: Revolution Within" by Arthur Naftalin, Spring  
Commencement: June 8, 1969**

Arthur Naftalin

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University of North Dakota  
Commencement Address

**Arthur Naftalin**

Mayor of the City of Minneapolis

Sunday, June 8, 1969

**needed: revolution within**

ARTHUR NAFTALIN

*Citation*

June 8, 1969

A native North Dakotan, you have achieved distinction as a newspaperman, university professor and public administrator. As mayor of our nearest large urban center, you have not only improved upon the fair face of Minneapolis, but also in moving from the campus classroom to the City Hall, you have brought a mastery of economic, political and social science to focus on illuminating new perspectives on the city. As consultant to foundations, to federal agencies and to the Department of State, you have won wide recognition for your wisdom and perception in charting new directions for urban and regional planning. Welcoming you as a native son, the University of North Dakota salutes you and confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Laws.

**T**HIS is not a happy moment for one's graduation. It is a time of turbulence, confusion, uncertainty and fear. At every moment we sense the revolutionary winds that batter at our institutions and that test our attitudes and traditions.

War, civil disorders, riots, protests, demonstrations are the order of the day. The future appears unclear and threatening, and we watch with mounting apprehension modern technology's growing capacity for destruction. Our efforts to achieve domestic harmony and world peace seem so grotesque and ineffectual.

Today's graduation exercises thus takes on special meaning because we know that for all of us—as individuals and as a nation—there must be a new beginning. This is what commencement is all about.

For me personally the commencement season has special meaning, because I am embarking, too, on a new beginning. As I prepare to leave office after eight years as

Mayor of Minneapolis I am acutely conscious of the profound changes this decade has seen and of the enormously challenging problems that loom ahead.

These years have witnessed the deterioration of our central cities, escalating racial tension, an alarming breakdown in our educational system, a scandalous waste of human and physical resources, and a widening gap between the generations. The rising generation, of which you are a part, is weighing critically our sacred institutions—the family, the church, the governmental process, the educational system, the economic order—and is finding them increasingly unresponsive, irrelevant or inadequate. We are in a period of profound upheaval, a period that may rank with other great historic dissolutions, such as the fall of ancient Athens or the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire.

It is little solace to us today that man survived these earlier cataclysms because the revolutionary fires are now fed by energies so powerful they will, if not soon controlled and redirected, push us beyond catastrophe to apocalypse.

How shall we respond to this perilous challenge? This is the critical question of our time.

Three responses are today widely prevalent. The first is the response of those extremists whose alienation and impatience have given way to unbridled despair and hostility. They would destroy the present order. They have no clear view of the new society they seek;

they simply assume that once the hated system is leveled a new and better world will, Phoenix-like, rise from the ashes. Reason tells us clearly that this response is a certain recipe for chaos. It offers destruction for its own sake and in the process will destroy whatever hope there may be for social reconstruction on humane and human principles.

The second response is to continue our present course of half-measures based on partial insight. This response acknowledges the need for change, but it is bogged down in a simplistic commitment to the established order. Its spirit is business-as-usual, but it raises expectations among the oppressed and disadvantaged only to fail them because it does not provide any basic alteration in real conditions. It only fans the fires of protest and discontent.

The third response—one that appears to be growing in popular support—is to call for swift repression of all acts of protest and a vigorous and indiscriminating defense of the established system. The affluent and the comfortable, perplexed by the violence of the time, call increasingly for the use of counter-violence. If change is to come, says this group, let us first achieve tranquility at home and peace abroad, then there will be time to consider the demands of those who claim to be denied and oppressed.

This response almost certainly ensures the triumph of despair. It will lead either to a police state or it will send a divided nation to the barricades.

No, none of these responses offers a con-

structive new beginning. Assaulting society from without, repressing the dissidents or applying half measures are not answers to our present predicament.

There is, I believe, only one realistic course and that is to work within the system to achieve, through the traditional processes of democratic government, a new set of social conditions that are revelant to these times of profound change.

**W**HAT is needed is revolution from within. What is needed is a new set of economic and social values that achieves for this great and powerful nation a much fuller measure of the goals and ideals it has always set for itself. Nothing could be more truly revolutionary.

The blueprint for such a revolution is, I believe, beginning to emerge as our creative thought-leaders struggle with the basic questions of achieving universal economic security, of redirecting our nation on a more sensible course of world relations, of remolding our social and economic institutions so that people of all races and colors and creeds may live harmoniously, of restoring confidence in ourselves as a free nation enjoying the most bountiful economy ever known in human history.

The revolution I urge is the precise opposite of violence and destruction. It demands the full exercise of the processes of democracy—discussions, debate, negotiation—and, resolution and legislation that will produce a re-



ordering of national priorities and the formulation of new social theory that is more consistent with the reality of the modern world.

It demands that we see reality with a clear eye, that we look beneath the confusion of these times to grasp the true character of our society.

The new beginning requires that we unlearn many false notions about ourselves and our institutions. It requires that we discard beliefs that are no longer true or relevant so that our view will be unobstructed and our intellectual energies unimpeded.

Many obsolete notions operate today. I will mention only four—four myths of our time. Each critical in one broad segment of our lives and each is illustrative of a network of misconceptions and falsely-based attitudes.

The first I call *The Myth of the American Creed*. There is no more hallowed notion than the idea that we as a nation actively seek the ideal of "liberty and justice for all." Our national anthem reassures us that America is the "land of the free and the home of the brave," and we enjoy a moment of sweet compassion and a glow of patriotic pride when we hear the words inscribed on our Statue of Liberty:

Give me your tired, your poor,  
your huddled masses, yearning  
to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your  
teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest  
tossed, to me;  
I lift my lamp beside the golden  
door.

The truth is, we long ago abandoned any

notion that we would accept the "wretched refuse" or the "homeless" of the world. The Kerner report spelled out the indictment that America is divided into two societies—one rich, the other poor; the one black, the other white. Discrimination has been a primary force in our national life throughout our history. The evidence is so obvious it requires no detailing. Yet, somehow, our most vocal patriots still wave the flag and shout the creed while arming themselves against the young and the black, the rioters and the protestors, whose main crime is that they know the creed is not true but are still trying to make it become so.

When we have come to see that the idea of equality has always been a myth we shall be on our way to refashioning our human relations, because so long as we fail to perceive reality we will not be able to take the needed action.

The second myth is *The Myth of High Taxes*. This deeply imbedded notion has special force in preventing us from making a rational response to the needs of the rising new world.

The plaintive cries of our suffering affluent are heard throughout the land. To be sure there are great inequities and indefensible loopholes in our tax system, but the fact remains that we are not prepared to tax ourselves sufficiently to meet our needs.

We should compare ourselves with other advanced nations—with Sweden, for example, where 43 cents out of every dollar of income,

as compared with 26 cents in this country, goes for taxes. Sweden as a nation accepts the responsibility for rebuilding and preserving its cities, for honoring its senior citizens with respectable pensions and for providing housing, recreation and education on a scale and of a quality that is demanded and justified by today's rich and powerful economy.

Even with our enormous expenditures for Vietnam and our huge defense establishment the United States ranks tenth among the industrial nations of the world in the percentage of national income spent for public goods and services. Yet, our great nation—with 6 per cent of the world's population and 40 per cent of the world's wealth—is dedicated to the proposition that taxes are too high. As a result we are not providing the public programs that will educate our children, that will build the homes we need, that will produce a sensible mass transit system, that will yield methods of disposing of waste before it engulfs us, that will rescue our millions of disadvantaged from starvation and hunger and that will help us preserve our rivers, lakes and landscape.

We must abandon the myth that we are impoverished. We must come to appreciate our enormous wealth and productive capacity and to put them to work in achieving a new and better world. As we enter for the first time in history an age of automation in which machines will perform the drudgery and the manual labor, we must learn to believe that the abundance of the future belongs to us all, not just some, and we must learn how to dis-

tribute that abundance so that all share in it. We must learn that we can afford, in the public realm, whatever we are bold enough to want.

The myths that plague us are external as well as internal. For half a century our world view has been conditioned by the xenophobic fear of communism. We have persuaded ourselves that we live in a world of adversaries who spend their every waking hour devising ways of burying us and that we have no recourse but to build mightier and mightier military defenses, at whatever cost, against this enemy. That we live with genuine cause for concern cannot be denied but we suffer from what I would call *The Myth of the Omnipotent Enemy*. In our apprehension over our adversaries, we cloud our judgment, attributing to them powers, capabilities and intentions that they do not possess. Reflect for a moment that we spend billions of dollars and thousands of lives trying to teach Vietnamese villages the free enterprise system and democracy—with very little success—yet we think our enemy can spread communism simply by willing it.

Because our judgment is clouded we are not capable of making common-sense evaluations of our adversaries' true capacities. We are blinded to their failures and we persist in believing that our self-interest requires the commitment of all our resources, to the extent—and this is Senator Russell's view—after world nuclear destruction, when the human experiment on earth starts over again—that we

make certain that we begin with an American Adam and Eve.

Disarmament, disengagement and détente should be possible in this world in which insanity of engagement must now be clear to all. But we will not move in this new direction until we have abandoned notions that prevent us from seeing reality in the relations among the nations of the world.

**F**INALLY, a new beginning requires that we evaluate with clarity the present state of our representative system of government. Do we in fact as a people control the policies that are shaping up our future? Is it our will as a people that a war that no longer has a purpose shall go endlessly on? Can it be that our belief in *The Myth of Popular Sovereignty* has blinded us to the fact that we, the people, have lost control over some of the most important public decisions of any time, decisions relating to our involvement in war, to the size and character of the defense establishment, to the preservation of our human and physical resources. Gradually the *process* of the government has come to be its *policy*; the people have yielded control to a system that sets its own requirements. It is only the appreciation of the loss of popular sovereignty that may make it possible for us to regain it.

The challenge before us calls for a new assertion of our capacity to govern ourselves. We must understand the inadequacies in our present governmental arrangements and move

resolutely to bring the forces shaping our future under democratic control.

It is in these terms that I speak of revolution from within as a new approach to the problems of this troubled world. It does not call for destruction of our present system. It calls rather for unlearning old misconceptions, of seeing the reality beneath the confusion of our times so that we can organize our energies as individuals in the service of our nation and all humanity.

The revolution from within is at once institutional and personal. Just as the system cannot be changed by assault from without, new individual attitudes—which are the necessary pre-condition for institutional change—will not be achieved by external command. The changes in our society will come only when enough among us—especially the young—respond to the promptings of conscience and intelligence and when we throw off the false notions that enfeeble our efforts at fundamental reform.

Perhaps this is what Robert Frost had in mind when he wrote

"I bid you to a one man revolution.  
The only revolution that is coming."

The future can be made safe for humanity but only if we are prepared to help fashion that future with clarity of thought and a willingness to make our attitudes and beliefs consistent with the world we live in. To accomplish that objective requires the only revolution that is worthy of a rational and compassionate society.



### DR. ARTHUR NAFTALIN

Dr. Naftalin received the Ph.D. degree in political science from the University of Minnesota in 1948 and was a newspaperman, political science professor and author before his election to the office of mayor of Minneapolis in 1961.

In the summer of 1969, Dr. Naftalin joined the University of Minnesota faculty as professor in the School of Public Affairs. He serves as consultant for the public affairs division of the Ford Foundation, member of the national advisory council to the Office of Economic Opportunity, presidential appointee to the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and trustee for the National Center for Education in Politics.

The North Dakota native served as commissioner of administration for Minnesota from 1954 to 1960 and as consultant in Vietnam for the International Cooperation Administration, a project of Michigan State University in 1957. Dr. Naftalin is co-author of *Personality, Work, Community: An Introduction to Social Science*.