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"OPPRESSION AS A CAUSE OF INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE"

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## OPPRESSION AS A CAUSE OF INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE

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When thinking of what I was going to say tonight, I found myself drifting into the question of violence generally; so possibly I may start off by dealing with some aspects of the violence which seems to plague humanity at the moment. I came to realise that very little thought had been given to the spread of violence and brutality in the world generally. Each time we tend to regard it as isolated violence arising from some particular cause. But there has been no analysis made as to what general circumstances were responsible for the spread of violence in the course of the last ten or fifteen years in particular. By violence I refer particularly to what could be described as political violence: violence inspired by political motive as distinct from violence inspired by a personal motive of gain or satisfaction of some passion. It seems to me that the first thing we have to realise and admit to ourselves is that violence has been growing generally in the world, both political violence and also what can be called criminal violence. Both have been on the increase. What is this due to? Nobody seems to have really analysed this. True, we can find many causes for particular cases of violence in different regions of the world. But it seems to me that the main cause has been a breakdown in the various elements that act as a brake on violence. Human beings are generally speaking violent: every human being is born as a rather violent human being, a violent person. But violence is curbed to a large extent by parental influence, parental control, by education, by discipline, by environment, and so on. So if there has been an increase in violence in the world in recent years, should we not look for the cause of it in the failure of the restraining influences that usually prevent a human being from being violent? In other words, should we not look to the question of parental control, to the question of education and also religion to a large extent as well as to the surrounding circumstances in the world which seem to be conducive to violence? To what extent, for instance, did the last war create a situation in which violence was likely to become more prevalent? To what extent did the extermination of Jews during the war break down certain resistance to violence? Because violence is contagious. It seems to be very contagious at the moment in the world: it spreads from one end of the world to the other. I think experience generally shows that there is a certain element of contagion in violence and in brutality. So to what extent do we blame the last war for some increase in the violence? Because people have become inured to cruelty, to brutality, to people being killed. The fact that several million Jews were put

in gas chambers horrified us at the time -- at least those of my generation. But hasn't that worn off? Haven't we become accustomed to that? To what extent has Vietnam inured us also to brutality and violence? I am only groping and searching for the various factors that have been conducive to the creation of a situation in which violence and brutality have become more prevalent.

I think among all these, one factor probably stands out more than any other: it is that we have undergone the greatest scientific and material revolution that mankind has ever undergone in the course of the last 25 years, a revolution which has had tremendous influence in every sphere of human activity. We have hardly realised it because we have been living through it. But there has never been in the whole history of mankind a scientific revolution or a material revolution as great as the revolution through which we have been living for the last 25 years -- at every level, medical level, scientific level, material level, and this revolution has had a number of different results. One of them has been the total breakdown in both public and private morality. I think it is very likely that one of the causes of violence in the world today arises from the fact that there has been this breakdown in public and private morality, due to the revolution itself. To what extent has the discovery of nuclear energy been a cause of the breakdown in public and private morality or a cause in the increase in violence? No sooner was nuclear energy discovered than it was immediately harnessed to new weapons of destruction that are capable of wiping out the whole of humanity. All the young generation and the not-so-young generation have grown up to accept this as a fact of life, that any day nuclear war may break out and that the whole of humanity will be wiped out. What impact has that had on the thinking of the younger generation? What impact has it had on the restraining influences that normally would prevent human beings from resorting to violence or to brutality?

I felt I should begin this talk tonight by pulling out a few of these questions and examining them more closely in the light of particular circumstances in the world as they exist. Naturally a degree of oppression and injustice will provoke a reaction. The extent and intensity of the reaction will depend first of all on the degree of oppression, and secondly on the extent to which human beings are being violent and cruel in a given situation. And here I think we must face up to the situation that governments themselves have largely provoked violence. Governments by their conduct have created situations in which violence was more or less inevitable. Let me take a simple example. Take Brazil. We all know that thousands and thousands of political critics or would-be critics of the government are arrested regularly,

tortured and then released. We know too that there are squads organised by the police that shoot suspects at sight. More or less the same thing is happening in Chile now. All right, if you are a person who is likely to be suspected in these countries and if you know that if you come across this particular squad of police, they will shoot you at sight, you very likely decide to be armed and to draw your gun first. So that there is a kind of classical example of action by government, by state authority, which provokes in its own oppression violence in opposition, and I think that this occurs in many areas of the world where people have been denied elementary human rights or where there is an endemic built-in violence in the system, for instance, because there can be violence built into a system; there can be economic violence, violence condemning people to live below certain standards of living, violence which forces them to accept a given system.

So I think we have to face up to a situation that much of the present-day values probably arises from the breakdown in the public morality of governments and in their own excesses and their own tendency to resort to violence and illegal behaviour. Let us also face this situation, that by and large -- it is very hard to generalise it -- governments have behaved immorally themselves, have not set good examples. Take the Nixon period of government -- I am living in the United States at the moment -- surely this was bound to lead to a break-down in the respect for public morality? And he is not an exception. We have had this kind of thing all over the world, particularly if you realise that at the moment I think 70 per cent of the governments of the world are military dictatorships that have secured power by the use of force and usually assassination and different illegal methods. So that one of the causes for violence, and indeed one of the causes for oppression as well, stems from the lack of moral behaviour on the part of the political leaders of the world -- and this we tend to accept much too easily. Normally it would be the churches, the religions, whose task it would be to maintain certain standards of morality, certain ethical behaviour, but they have been completely overtaken by the speed of the scientific and material revolution; they have not been able to adjust to it; and churches in any case were never devised so as to be able to react quickly to any situation. They are so built so as to change very slowly. So the churches have been unable to keep up with the speed of the changes that have been taking place. Monolithic churches haven't changed, and in many cases the churches were themselves involved with an unjust order; in many cases they themselves were closely linked with a corrupt establishment, an establishment that tried to maintain the status quo for the benefit of

a certain small section of the people. So that the churches have also failed to correct the situation.

Now, all this sounds rather depressing, but I felt I should draw attention to these matters in order to be able to emphasise some other aspects that I think are important. Among these of course is the question of the effective protection of human rights. The leaders of the postwar period, most of whom had lived through the last war and had occupied positions of responsibility, I think foresaw the situation in which we are living now. That is why they got together in 1948 or '46 and started elaborating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is an extremely important document, probably the most important human document that humanity has produced. It is much more comprehensive than any other similar instrument; it is much more comprehensive than Magna Carta or the French Declaration des Droits d'Homme or the American Declaration of Independence or even than the Karl Marx Manifesto, because it is comprehensive, it comprises every aspect of human relationships, of relationships with human beings with their governments, and also it is universal in its application. So to a large extent it is probably the most important instrument that humanity has produced, and this was produced with the intention that it should form a new set of standards for governments and for human beings. I think a lot of credit is due to the statesmen of that period who produced it and who believed in it and tried to get it implemented. But while the Universal Declaration was fine, it was merely a declaration of intent, and it was not binding. The intention of the leaders of that period was to make it binding, and accordingly work started on the preparation of two main covenants for the protection of human rights. Work started immediately after 1948 and continued until 1965. In 1965 two covenants were unanimously adopted by the United Nations after a great deal of discussion of details. But these documents were not ratified. One of them was ratified, i.e. it acquired the requisite number of ratifications in October of this year, when Jamaica finally ratified the Convention of Economic Social and Cultural Rights. So that it is ratified, and forms part of international law with regard to the countries to which it applies. But I doubt if any of you have read the Covenant on Social and Economic Rights. It is an extremely important document; and I cannot understand how in a country like the United Kingdom where the Labour movement is strong, where the trade unions are well organised, they have not taken the initiative to ensure that it would be ratified and applied here. I am not going to bore you by going through the provisions of this Convention, but it forms part of the international law of the world, and I think it would

be useful if a greater study could be made of its provisions. For instance, Article 1 provides that all peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Article 3 states that parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal rights of men and women to enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant. And it goes on in great detail to deal with the rights of workers, the right to strike, the right to organise trade unions, the right to decent wages, and so on. But I venture to suggest that no trade union leader has even read this Convention, and I would urge very strongly that a study should be made of it and that the Government should be asked why it hasn't ratified this Convention, why Britain should not ratify it. It would be possible for Britain to ratify certain portions of it at least, if not all of it. But certainly it is an extremely important Convention and it is absolutely extraordinary how it has been more or less cast aside and nobody has given any thought to it. The Convention on Political and Civil Rights has not yet been ratified by the 35 countries of the world; it has been ratified by 34 countries and I think it can be assumed that it will be ratified by one other country within a matter of the next few months, probably before the end of this year. Then we will have a Convention on Political and Civil Rights ratified. As soon as it is ratified, machinery will be set up for its application. A Commission of 18 members will be set up, with a whole set of powers. But Britain has not ratified it; the United States has not ratified it; France has not ratified it. Very few of the Western democracies have ratified it, except the Scandinavians. Accordingly, this Commission which will be set up will be set up largely by the Socialist countries. We will probably have a situation in which the chief guardian of the human rights of the world will be the Soviet Union. I don't think anyone has given any thought to that. It is absolutely fantastic that none of the big Western democracies have ratified it. Why don't they ratify it? What is their objection to it? Do they realise that by not having ratified it, they have excluded themselves from being able to participate in the implementation of the mechanism for the protection of human rights. A strange thing happened too, which was completely unanticipated at the time, that there is a protocol to the Convention, which enables individuals to make complaints, and that sets in motion mechanism a little bit equivalent to the mechanism of the Convention of Human Rights. We all thought at the time that this protocol would never be ratified. It has been ratified and will come

into operation automatically as soon as one other ratification is given to the Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. So again here may I urge that a study should be made of the provisions of the Covenant, and that some pressure should be put on parliaments and governments of countries that have not yet ratified it, to ratify this Convention, or at least to give a valid explanation as to why they will not ratify it.

I feel that this was a matter that deserves some attention because it is only by the development of adequate mechanisms for the protection of human rights that you can avoid forcing minorities into using force in order to rectify the injustices from which they are suffering. In most parts of the world of course it is minorities which are oppressed. And here let me pay a tribute to the work of the Minority Rights Group in drawing attention to the various minority issues that exist in the world, and there are a great many of them. But quite apart from minorities, we also have majorities that suffer from oppression, like in Southern Africa where the vast majority of the people are oppressed, specifically and decidedly oppressed, by a white minority. Here again we come to this question as to whether or not violence is justified in these cases. Largely it is a question of degree, but I think it is as well to refer to what President Nyerere of Tanzania said yesterday, because I think it is a statement which will carry a lot of weight in Africa, and I think it will probably explain events which are likely to take place on the African continent. He said "It appears that in Namibia as in Rhodesia, the African Freedom Movement will have to intensify the arms struggle before any serious negotiation for its liberation can take place." So this is again a case where we are faced with a situation that when there is no mechanism, no way in which injustice or oppression can be remedied, then inevitably people resort to violence, to force, in order to rectify the injustices under which they have to live. Then it becomes a question of degree as to the extent to which you are entitled to revolt against injustice, or a degree of injustice which justifies you to armed rebellion or revolt. I would say that in Southern Africa where the whole regime is based on racialism, based on inequality that has all kinds of economic and social repercussions as well (for instance, the statistics for infantile mortality in Namibia is that 350 children out of every 1,000 die before reaching the age of 3 -- that is a tremendously high proportion), are you justified if you are a parent of children, if you are living there, in accepting these conditions? Or are you justified in rebelling against these conditions?

Again, as we know, there were last year a number of cases of political supporters of the Liberation Movement in Namibia being arrested, stripped naked, flogged until they fainted. Are you entitled to revolt against that kind of treatment? Are you entitled to revolt against the system that deprives you of the right to education, deprives you of the right to work, and so on? So that it is largely a question of degree. But I think we can certainly accept it as basic that wherever you have an injustice, you are likely to have violence, you are likely to have violent conflicts. The degree of the injustice which justifies you in using violence is much more difficult to determine; it depends on different regions, different situations. But the only way in which you can obviate a course of violence is by providing an alternative mechanism, and that alternative mechanism is not being provided at the moment in most part of the world. I was also glad to see that President Nyerere yesterday made reference to the events in Angola. It is very hard to avoid the suspicion that South Africa is not interfering in Angola in order to pursue its colonial aims or at least in order to try and divide the African Liberation Movements and possibly the African states as well. President Nyerere referred to the fact that South Africa was using Namibia as a base for its military operations in Angola and as a staging-post for organising mercenary activities in Angola. All the information that is available to me coincides with the statement made by President Nyerere, that undoubtedly South Africa is utilising Namibia now as a staging-post for military incursions into Angola. Therefore we may well have the makings of a situation in which Angola may become a second Vietnam, and we may have a long protracted war which would have the effect of dividing Africa in the same way as the Vietnam War divided South-East Asia. Now is the time to face the fact that there are dangers in that situation and to try and stop it. It is very difficult for the United Nations to take any action to stop it, in that most of the major powers in the Security Council are directly involved in the Angola conflict now.

Mr. Chairman, I am sorry if I have rambled on, but I felt I should touch on some of these things, and possibly in the discussion we will touch on more.

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