

The Contemporary Challenge to Democratic Leadership

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Dr. Pieh, Faculty and Students of Milton Academy, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very honoured at the invitation to give this lecture. The Milton Academy has a rich education tradition that dates back to this nation's earliest years -- and over a span of nearly two centuries it has played a notable role in helping to shape the minds and characters of many who went on to high positions of leadership in government and society. It is therefore a most fitting forum from which to reflect on the nature of leadership in a democracy -- and I am very much aware of the long line of distinguished scholars and statesmen who have preceded me in this memorial lecture series. As an Asian, I am also very proud and delighted to be part of this occasion marking the 25th anniversary of a scholarship fund which has made it possible for Asian students to share in the learning experience of the Milton Academy.

This lecture series, established in memory of those of Milton Academy who gave their lives in war, has been concerned, in the broadest terms, with both the promise and the burden, the opportunity and the responsibility, that comes with leadership in a democracy -- and Milton's roster of its young men and women who have died serves as a sorrowful reminder of what that burden has too often been in our modern era.

The resort to violence and bloodshed -- by one culture, creed, sect, race, nationality, or ideology against another -- has become a sickening normality of our daily headlines.

Nor, if we turn to the other side of the equation explored by these lectures -- the promise or opportunity of democratic leadership -- should we really be any less disquieted or troubled. Democracies now face unprecedented challenges -- domestically as well as externally -- with which they seem to have great difficulties coming to terms. This has left many of those who cherish democracy with a pervading sense of malaise.

The challenges come on many fronts. How, for instance, to make innovations in science and technology serve economic growth and employment and stimulate rather than reduce opportunities for dignifying work? How to reconcile economic growth with environmental limits? How can the dictates of security, in a world undergoing fundamental change on a global scale accompanied by violence, militarization and the threat of nuclear war, be reconciled with the imperatives of individual human freedom and the aspirations of the weak and the powerless? How can institutions that were created to serve other, older needs of the then emerging industrial society adapt to the needs of the post-industrial age?

Democracies seem hard pressed to respond to such internal challenges, and appear to be afflicted with a degree of paralysis which shows itself in a number of ways. We see undecided elections in which voters can't make up their minds, leading to weak governments with no clear mandate. There are increasing tendencies towards both split constituencies and single issue politics, each in its own way weakening democracy's ability

to act decisively. Antagonism between the executive and legislative branches of government often leads to a collective absence of leadership which further aggravates the difficulties of democracies in making clear and consistent decisions.

Added to these problems have been those arising from the economic recession, the increased expectations among various segments of society, and shifting demographic patterns resulting in larger numbers of older people -- the so-called "graying of society" -- and relatively smaller numbers of young people. Taken together, they have created new difficulties especially affecting the continued viability of the system of social services.

All of these elements have combined to bring on what we might call the crisis of the welfare state. It should be noted that the welfare state has been essentially a compromise between liberty and equity -- and that compromise appears to have come apart. In its lieu, two sharply divergent paths have presented themselves. Does the way lie in regression, the simple dismantling of the welfare state? Or does it lie in the endeavour to move beyond the welfare state to a more advanced and sustained form of statehood based on a newly dynamic configuration of the values of liberty and equity that more effectively relates economic growth, technology and employment? Implicit in a move in this direction is the notion that no country can any longer hope to overcome these problems in isolation simply on the basis of national solutions. Any national solutions will have to be within the context of the international dimensions of such responses.

The challenges that now confront democracy have many roots, and by no means all of them are pernicious. We are, for example, living in a time of enormous value change. There are, to cite one important instance, changing perceptions of work and the meaning one ascribes to work. Great numbers of people no longer think of work, essential though it is, as the chief purpose of life.

Here in the US, Daniel Yankelovitch, in his book, New Rules, published last year, cites a number of what he terms "plate changes" in American work habits, likening such changes to the vast shifting of tectonic plates in the earth's surface. Writing before the recent sharp increase in unemployment which may have changed the picture again, he noted that over the three decades, 1947 to 1977, the percentage of men in their prime working years who opted out of the work force had almost doubled -- to the point where nearly one man in four was not officially a member of the American labour force.

Value changes have also manifested themselves in the now overly familiar generation gap -- resulting largely from the rapidity of social change and the influence of communication. Communications have also impinged very sharply on the political process.

In the past, it used to be the political movements that shaped perceptions of society and determined the adherences and preferences of its various component parts. It was often the political parties that got people jobs, helped integrate them into society, and gave them access to information. One thinks here, of course, of the role played by the big city machines of the Democratic Party in the second half of the 19th

century and the early part of the 20th century in helping integrate various waves of immigrants into the United States. Another example would be the role of European trade unions early in their history in establishing Folkehøjskolen and Volks-Universit -- what we would now call community colleges -- that turned many workers into intellectuals.

Along with a number of other factors -- such as the growth of the civil services, more sophisticated ticket splitting due to broader education, and governments providing social services formerly offered by political machines -- communications has contributed to the decline in political party power. Television focused attention on the candidate not the party. Political leaders can no longer decide which information to pass on to lower echelons -- widespread and virtually instantaneous dissemination of information has destroyed the concept of power based on exclusive or initial possession of information. Now it is the media who provide information to anyone who wants it -- this function of the political parties has largely become redundant in the emerging Information Society.

One thus sees a general erosion, across the board, of the power of the conventional democratic political and social organizations -- the trade unions, the parties and other older institutions. This is true both east and west of the ideological divide.

At the same time, we are witnessing intensified political awareness and assertiveness from outside the mainstream. Let us make no mistake about it, these are expressions of profound value changes of great magnitude as well as of grave fears about the actual probabilities of

humanity's continued existence. The possibility of nuclear extinction has come to be a very real one to increasing numbers around the world, and particularly the young -- some of whom now bluntly and openly question whether they will in fact live out normal life spans. There is deep worry also that the damage being done to the environment might already pose great threat to our future survival and that of our children. These sorts of perceptions, emotions and fears are being translated into political and social action capable of sharply altering national policies, institutions, and even governments. The new values being expressed have the potential to give societies whole new directions and thrusts. Groups such as the peace movement, the anti-nuclear forces, the environmentalists, and advocates for women's rights or minority treatment are largely outside the control of the older established political parties or trade unions. A major challenge for democracy is to find ways to integrate these value changes into society either through adaptations of existing institutions or the creation of new institutions.

Another dimension of the crisis is the nature of the bureaucracies that the industrial states have created and the developing nations have largely emulated. These have often grown to be huge, impersonalized, uncaring, unheeding of individual privacy, and have sharply restricted areas of autonomy and freedom of choice.

Overarching these internal concerns is the reality of global interdependence. The solutions of the internal problems of inflation, unemployment, technological development, the nuclear threat, or security all have international dimensions and cannot be resolved by a nation

alone on the basis of national interest even though democratically determined. Conversely, there are large global problems -- of, say, the international economy, shifting configurations of power, or management of the environment's global commons -- that are affected by the responses of national elites to national problems. National problems must be seen in their global context; global problems require national responses, relevantly arrived at. No country can escape the responsibility for the international environment in which it will have to live and on which its future will in part depend. Each nation must help shape the international environment in order to ensure its own survival and that of its people in line with its own basic values. How to take the decisions necessary to accomplish this in a democratic way goes to the core of the new challenge to democracy.

The recognition that no country can afford to be guided solely by the expressed wishes of its own constituents as defined by their own immediate interests can be a tough lesson for democracy to learn. As De Tocqueville observed, "Democratic institutions generally give men a lofty notion of their country and themselves." One task of the democratic leader will be to help build or evolve political constituencies which are aware how necessary that global outlook is to their own long-term good. It also means helping new constituencies -- the environmentalists, the peace movement, the women's cause, and so on -- to relate their own single issues to broader national or international interests and movements. One cannot hope to save the global ecology without attacking poverty in the Third World -- because the poor of those regions must damage the

environment simply in order to stay alive. The environment thus automatically should enter the North-South dialogue.

Beyond the constituencies at home, there are other new voices from beyond the democratic leader's own national borders that should be heeded. These voices -- of the marginalized, the landless, the powerless, of many little people now on the march -- are bound to require new organizations and new institutions, or restructured and reoriented existing ones, to deal with their very legitimate and proper demand for a more significant share in the political processes of the world. All of this will require new national and international responses which the democratic leader cannot ignore.

No truly democratic leader, for example, can avoid assuming some responsibility for the state of human rights beyond his own national borders. This brings us to the heart of a relatively new, but no less fundamental, problem of where national interests cease and global responsibility takes over. The question of human rights obviously raises delicate issues of infringement upon the sovereignty of other nations -- still there are calls for loyalties that reach across borders and beyond the commitments of the internal democratic process.

The same holds true of efforts to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons or lessen the trade in conventional arms; any real hope of success in these areas hinges on our capability to be realistic and responsible about the international implications of national goals, ideologies and prides. Similarly with the global commons -- those regions, processes and interactions on the planet where mutual respect

and care are of the utmost importance. We are coming to realize how foolish it is to see environmental problems only in national terms. We cure one country's smog by building taller smoke-stacks only to find that the increased height helps to feed another country's acid rains. What is needed is a serious re-examination and rethinking of where a country's sovereign rights regarding its own natural resources end, and responsibility and accountability for the transnational and global impact of how these resources are used begins.

I have concentrated thus far mainly on the industrial states. But I should point out that in the Third World we are struggling with essentially the same problems. The difference is that we have had to address them in a situation, and at a moment in history, where our own political institutions were frequently too young or too weak to cope with problems of such magnitude. Our first generation political institutions have in many instances collapsed. The second generation are still being tested -- and it could be that these may still have to be replaced with a third or even fourth generation of political institutions.

There are also important different variables to our problems. In most developing countries, for example, the populations are getting younger, not older, and we thus have bigger and bigger youth cohorts demanding a place in an already sorely-pressed employment market. However, while the median age is expected to continue its downward trend for some time, the number of older people, in absolute terms, is also increasing, due in large part to better health care. A sad irony of this seeming improvement in the human condition is the enormous strain on the family

and frequently resultant misery of the aged in the Third World.

Problems arising from new nations with various language groups or many different minorities impose additional strains on Third World institutions. The perspective of different cultures or different kinds of history will likely guide our response to the problems -- in many developing countries, for example, there is the persistent and seemingly intractable problem of their dualistic economies, with small but powerful urban elites and huge and powerless rural poor majorities which are a legacy both of colonialism and of particular economic development problems.

It needs further to be remembered that, from the long view of history, the developing countries are being thrust very rapidly onto the global scene only a few short years, in many cases, away from gaining our nationhood. The United States had the luxury of many years of isolation in which it could develop and stabilize its political institutions -- and make mistakes out of the brutal glare of publicity now thrown on any nation's errors by the global communications systems. The Know-Nothing party could function in the relative international obscurity of mid-19th century America; a similar fundamentalist intolerance virtually anywhere in the world today is the stuff of headlines and TV news.

But whether here in America, or in emerging democracies of the Third World, the same basic problems are being faced and the same leadership need is urgent: long-term vision that cuts across and looks beyond the very real, very understandable, and very urgent short-term demands of national or parochial interests. To see interdependence in

its true light, to recognize the imperative of settling differences across ideological boundaries, to be willing to conciliate national interests with those of a broader global constituency are leadership requirements the world over.

I fully realize that this may appear to be asking the political leader in a democracy to be ignoring his very life's blood -- the goodwill and votes of those who put him into power. But to the extent that he is committed to democracy, he cannot escape some very hard long-term questions. Otherwise, the enfeeblement of the democratic system -- and its open and free conferral of power by the people -- seems an inevitable consequence.

Why is it, for instance, that in the scenarios developed by futurologists, the implicit assumption often seems to be the inevitability of authoritarian forms of governance. Is a democratic scenario of the future possible?

We need to ask such tough questions now, I believe, before the temptation to deal with economic strain, troubling cultural differences, unruly voters and perceived security risks by authoritarian means threatens to grow too strong. Seeking answers to these questions could lead us to examination of the institutional changes we need to make to increase political sophistication among those who are citizens of democracies -- to aid the various constituencies of this global citizenry in developing transnational relationships among themselves and others around the world.

This pursuit should then logically lead us, I believe, to closer

co-operation with intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations. The UN should be strengthened, even though -- we should remember -- it will only be as strong as its Member States wish it to be. This leads me back to the UN Charter and its opening words that "we, the people" of the world desire peace. From such a notion, we might wish to think about ways to represent the people not simply by the Member States but also by elected representatives. The European Parliament, as a regional expression, might offer a model to be adapted, and applied to other regions in the world, or even, at some time in the future, to the UN system.

Democracy, I believe, can survive the enormous challenge posed it by the current state of the world. But if there is one lesson I hope I have left with you here this evening, it is this: If democracy is to survive, people everywhere who believe in it and live under it will have to accept the fact that national decisions, however democratically fashioned, cannot be taken without consideration of their international dimensions. Recent events have shown all too well that it is not impossible for democratic governments, supported by their parliaments, to commit aggression and condone massive violence abroad. Other events also show that external issues can paralyse the democratic process at home.

Clearly, internal security and foreign policy can no longer be the preserve of governments and experts alone. Contemporary democratic leadership will have to ensure that governmental attitudes and policies are faithful to the essential and deep-rooted sense of the moral worth of a nation which is over and above the question of formal parliamentary

support.

More than ever, the survival of democracy needs strong leadership guided by a global vision that also encompasses the long-term national interests. Such vision must arise from within the moral core of the nation's self-perception, but equally should be capable of reaching out to other people in the spirit of human solidarity. The leadership must be able to forge effective constituencies, grounded in the changing value configurations of society, in order to be able to deal democratically with the interdependence of global and domestic problems.

The United Nations University is a global institution located at the intersection of the world's international organizations and the world's scholars -- and thus seeks to provide service to and draw insight from both the UN system and the academic community. The UN and its various intergovernmental bodies of necessity concentrate on relatively immediate issues of high political context. The world of the university strives for the longer and more detached view, but is often remote from everyday realities. We see our job as helping these differing approaches to converge to mutual benefit.

Our Charter, granted by the UN General Assembly, mandates us to study "pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare." Through our research and training efforts we hope to contribute to broader understanding of these urgent human concerns and their complex interlinkages by future democratic leaders. It is those like you young students here tonight, who may well hold important positions in various segments of the democratic society, for whom this understanding is so

crucial to the future of democracy. We can no longer be guided only by national interest, but must embrace the concept of human solidarity on a global basis.

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