

PROFESSOR FRIEDRICH HAYEK'S CLOSING SPEECH

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On the last day of February, it was exactly forty years ago, that in a lecture to the Political Society of King's College, Cambridge, I developed the idea that if, after the war, international contacts were not to be confined to etatists of various sorts, and there would still be private communication between ~~the war~~ thinkers, we ought to consider preparing a society, which I proposed to call the Acton- Tocqueville Society, for two of the great liberal thinkers of the last century. And of course, a few weeks before, I published in England a book called The Road to Serfdom, which later in that year appeared in the U.S. And only a few weeks after that speech at King's College, a certain gentleman named George Orwell published a review of The Road to Serfdom. I won't claim too much. I know, now, that he was already looking for a publisher for his first famous book, but anyhow I think he has contributed much more, than The Road To Serfdom has in its original form, to cause the reaction to totalitarianism of which the history of this Society is of course a very important element. It was a year later, largely as a result of the publication of the American edition, and even more so, of the publication of excerpts of the American edition in the Reader's Digest, that led to my extensive travels, first in the U.S. and then elsewhere, lecturing on the topic of The Road to Serfdom.

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(then I had) the curious experience, as I moved from place to place, first in the States, then on the European Continent, in almost each city I went, there was a single person that came up to me afterwards and said, "You know, I agree completely with you, but I am the only person I know who thinks like this, and it's such a pleasure at last to meet a person who holds to that traditional liberal conception."

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I think it was a result of that experience that I came to the conclusion that it was essential to bring these people together. I had a very important basis for such an effort because, shortly before the war, the late Professor Louis Rougier had, in the summer of 1938, organized, in Paris a meeting on the occasion of the publication of Walter Lippman's book The Good Society. The results of which were published in a volume: Le Colloque Walter Lippman. I had made the acquaintance then of a number of the leading thinkers in this field, and the late Professor Rougier had started organizing something which might have become the MPS if war had not interfered. After this experience, as perhaps a too typical liberal, I went on talking how nice it would be if we could organize such a society, until I found a curious situation in Switzerland which suddenly produced the means for a first meeting, and I may perhaps tell the story which is in a way tragicomic. This concerns the two men who helped me most in the first dozen years of the Mont Pelerin Society.

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In travelling through Zürich, in my then usual communication between London and Vienna, I encountered a certain gentleman named Albert Hunold (2) to whom, as to ~~all~~ people, I said, "How nice it would be if I could only raise the money to organize such a meeting!" Upon which Dr. Hunold told me, "You know, I have got the money. I have

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raised it for a similar purpose. I have raised the money in order to enable Professor Röpke to edit a liberal journal. But we have since found we ~~no longer need it. Take the money from me.~~ If you can persuade Prof. Röpke to permit me to hand over that money, which was intended for his journal, for the new society, we can hold a meeting. My first task was to reconcile Mr. Hunold and Prof. Röpke to raise the funds for that meeting which Dr. Hunold organized on the Mont Pèlerin. Quite extraordinary when I think The Road to Serfdom first appeared in the beginning of 1944, my journey in America was in 1945, and we already met on Easter 1947.

do not sufficiently agree about how to do it. Arthur

I then had a list of 70 people whom I thought would be appropriate members of such a society. I sent invitations to all of them. But only half that number, or more exactly thirty-six, were able to accept and assembled on Mont Pèlerin. We had a long meeting there, leading up to the formal foundation of the Society. The personnel of this first group, the thirty-six who met, were very largely the people who had assembled six years before at the Colloque Walter Lippmann, and ultimately the other thirty-five or thirty-four whom I had invited, joined the society that was created that moment. I am very sad that of these thirty-six people, a few have left the Society and only ten actual members have survived. And of these ten members I am afraid I am the only one who attends this meeting today.

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The Society has done, on the whole, a very good job, ~~and~~ I think of the role which it has played in the undeniable revival of liberalism, but I think nothing is more representative of this event, that now we have a meeting in Paris held by a group of young men. In 1945 all the liberals I could find were ~~very~~ old men although at that time by old men I meant usually men older than myself, but now forty years later we can count on a group representing reviving liberalism, in - if I may say so - the intellectual center of the world where my hope had been leashed. I have gradually come to recognize that the great obstacle to the preservation of the liberal tradition is a philosophical conviction which overestimates the powers of human reason: Cartesian philosophy which had been largely dominating French political thought, disposed French thinkers to an extent much more than elsewhere to think that our reason is powerful enough to reorganize society and make its structure and efforts more satisfactory than they have been.

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I have long doubted that the possibility of turning the efforts which we started in 1947 into an international movement was really a thing to be expected. You will now understand why I say "even in France" a group of "nouveaux économistes" of a younger generation has ~~been~~ taken over the message and developed it. I ~~then~~ became convinced that the task I had started so long ago, for which I had received support from a few men in France who were older than myself, where I for a long time had little hope of finding younger people, were influential enough to attract public attention, and to be able to hold a meeting. I don't want to be unjust to a French contribution in the history of the Mont Pèlerin Society. We had at a very early stage a particularly memorable meeting at Beauvallon on the Riviera. ~~It was~~ I think the first biggish meeting, to me particularly memorable because it was the only occasion on which the President gave a formal presidential address, and I chose to explain the topic, which I think has become rather significant in the history of the society, which I called my presidential address, the only one I gave in the twelve years I was a president of the society, "Why I'm not a Conservative." I think in a sense this characterizes the intellectual development of

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the MPS. I stress intellectual development, because from the beginning, the MPS was almost chiefly concerned with a basic philosophy, and aimed from the beginning to convince not directly the masses, but those makers of opinion who gradually and in turn affect political developments. The MPS has never taken such positions on political matters. It hasn't even mainly concerned itself with problems of current policy, but its concern has been largely and predominantly to revive and to adapt to our present day thinking the problems of the basic philosophy of a free society. I think most of us have been aware of this, and most of us have been concerning ourselves chiefly with that basic philosophy.

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This is very relevant if I now turn to what must be my main question: how far has the position changed in those forty years? How far has the movement which we tried to initiate been successful? In all these years I have constantly fluctuated between being encouraged by particular steps and being disillusioned and depressed about what governments still actually are doing. I have now arrived at a formula which I want to give you, which I believe provides an answer. I have to admit that the effects on practical politics have been very small. But the effects on the movement of ideas have been absolutely fundamental. There is a great change in the attitude of the active younger generation. I used to say, more than 50 years ago, that the only people who still believe in classical liberalism were old men, and in the middle generation there were a handful: Mises and Rueff belonged to the older generation really, Rueff, and of my contemporaries there were just perhaps Röpke, and Bill Hutt, who is here, and two or three others.

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There was a complete lack of liberals among younger people. Liberalism in the classical sense was regarded as something antiquated and no longer up to date. Now this has completely changed, and I am prepared to claim that although they have not yet had much influence on the practice of policy, I think we have contributed at least a great deal to a change of opinion, particularly a change of opinion among the young. Something which 20 years ago would have been unacceptable among the young proves to me they are influential. When I'm now being asked - and I repeat a formula which many of you will have heard, and we used many times before - whether I am optimistic about the future, my regular answer is, "If the politicians do not destroy the world in the next fifteen years, there is very good hope indeed." Because there is a new generation coming up, which has rediscovered, not only the material advantages of freedom, but the moral justification of a philosophy of freedom, and I think we can really be quite pleased how things are moving.

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There is a new tradition, but it teaches one thing, which I think I ought to say in conclusion of what I have just said: "Our task must be not directly to participate in current practice of politics." When I mean "our" I mean as a society. Of course each of us has a duty as a citizen of his particular country to take part in political programs. But this society ought to concern itself with a much more important task: with the task of changing opinion. And changing opinion is fundamental, because I think we ought to admit and ought to realize that the class of society which is responsible for things having gone wrong for the past hundred years, was not the Proletariat. It was the Intellectuals. It's intellectuals who have really created socialism, who have spread socialism, out of the best intentions, out of a factual mistake, out of what is in a book on which I am working, I call a fatal conceit, the idea that human reason is strong enough to

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reorganize society deliberately in the service of known, foreseen ends and purposes. Now this turns out to be an intellectual deception. More and more of the young people see that what is intellectually so fascinating, so attractive, what drove so many, I have to admit, of the best and most intelligent of the young people into the left camp, for the whole period from the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century, has turned out to be factually wrong. We are gradually discovering, and that I regard as my chief task ~~at~~ the present, and should be our general chief task, that it is not merely the endowment with intelligence which has enabled us to build up the extensive order of Mankind which now can maintain 200 times as many people than existed 5000 years ago on this world, but there is a second inheritance, equally important, an inheritance which is not the product of our reason: a moral inheritance, which is an explanation of the dominance of the western world, a moral inheritance which consists essentially in the belief in property, honesty and the family, all things which we could not and have never been able adequately to justify intellectually. We ~~only~~ have to recognize that we owe our civilization to beliefs which I sometimes have offended some people by calling "superstitions" and which I now prefer to call "symbolic truths", truths very different from the truths of reason, which are the result of a process of selection, which made those practical rules of conduct, which enabled societies to grow and to expand and become dominant. We must return to a world in which not only reason, but reason and morals, as equal partners, must govern our lives, where the truth of morals is simply ~~as was~~ one moral tradition, that of the Christian west, which has created morals in modern civilization.

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Thank you.