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Author(s): Robert M. Hutchins

Source: *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors (1915-1955)*, Oct., 1943, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1943), pp. 467-482

Published by: American Association of University Professors

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40220462>

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TOWARD A DURABLE SOCIETY¹

By ROBERT M. HUTCHINS

University of Chicago

The great hope held out to us now is that the world is small and is getting smaller. The barriers of time and distance, oceans and mountains, have been swept away. A few weeks ago a bomber crossed the Atlantic twice within twenty-four hours. The liberal dream is that this shrinkage makes inevitable the unification of the world and the establishment of an enlightened world order.

These things are perhaps made possible, but certainly not inevitable. Though the distance between Richmond and Washington is only ninety-six miles, one of the bloodiest wars in history was fought by powers which made their headquarters in those two cities. Cain required no modern transportation to get in touch with Abel. All human experience suggests that if people want to fight they enjoy fighting their nearest neighbors more than anybody else. It is easier to get at them; and the advantages they possess, and ought to be deprived of, are more readily discernible to the envious eye. As geographical barriers are removed, political barriers are also likely to fall. But the only world organization of the past was founded on conquest. All the empires of the present, including our own, were founded upon conquest. The liberal dream has no place for conquest. It looks forward to the peaceful political amalgamation of peoples who are culturally diverse into a peaceful world society.

We can have no hope that the increasing horror of war will prevent war. After the last war we all convinced ourselves that the airplane was going to play such a dreadful rôle in the next one that nobody would ever start it. But desperation and ambition will always be ready to gamble if the stakes are high enough. As the horrors of war have increased, its prizes have grown.

¹ Reprinted from *Fortune*, Vol. XXVII, No. 6, June, 1943, through the courtesy of Time, Inc. (Copyrighted 1943.)

The prize now is the possibility of controlling, through the inventions at hand, not a continent or two, but the whole world. And a world political organization could become the greatest object of desperate ambition the world has ever seen. The struggle to control it could make the battles for the control of the Roman Empire look like street fights in a Chicago election.

What makes us think that the situation after this war will be any different from that after the last one? We cannot look to the insignificance of space or the ferocity of war. And we surely cannot claim that we have thought more than we did the last time. After America had been in the first world war for a year and a half the Fourteen Points rang through the world, and the platform of a League of Nations was well known. Now we have nothing but the vague and inadequate generalities of the Atlantic Charter. The position of India, for example, is definitely worse now than it was at this stage of the last war. There is less evidence that we are prepared for any world order than was at hand in 1918.

Since the important divisions among men are not those of space and time, they are not eliminated by the elimination of space and time. If the ideals of one part of the world are antithetical to those of another part, war must follow. The shrinkage of the world, therefore, cannot usher in the brotherhood of men; it can only accelerate the clash of antithetical ideals. Unless it is admitted that men can and should have common ideals, that the natural moral law underlies the diversity of the mores, that the good, the true, and the beautiful are the same for all men, no world civilization is possible.

II

We know that there is a natural moral law, and we can understand what it is because we know that man has a nature, and we can understand it. The nature of man, which is the same everywhere, is obscured but not obliterated by the differing conventions of different cultures. The specific quality of human nature, the difference that sets man apart as a species separate from the other animals, is that man is a rational and spiritual being and the other animals are not.

We discover what is good for any species by considering the specific nature of the species. To discover what is good for man we must discover what fulfills his nature. When we speak of what is best for man we mean what is best for him in terms of his rational and spiritual powers. An act or a policy is well directed if it is a manifestation of these powers or tends to develop these powers. The happiness of men, which is the aim of their lives, consists in the fulfillment of their natures, in the fullest exercise of their highest powers; that is, in living in accordance with virtue and intelligence.

As rational and spiritual beings all men are equal. Rationality and spirituality confer human dignity on every individual. No man may regard another merely as an instrument. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," is as rigorous a commandment as "Thou shalt not kill." Justice, the cement of human society, is simply the equal treatment of equals.

Men need all kinds of goods in order to exist. But in order to live human lives they must live in accordance with the law of their nature: they must be free, and they must use their freedom to exercise their virtue and intelligence.

Men are social animals. They must live in society in order to exist. But a society is good in proportion as it assists men to realize their human nature. It must be judged by its success in promoting the virtue and intelligence of the people and by its recognition of their essential equality, as well as by its achievement of those goods which are indispensable to mere existence.

Men are political animals. They are not simply gregarious. They form political societies in which there are rulers and ruled. The fullest development of the highest powers of men requires political activity. It requires either that they rule in turn or that they be rulers and ruled at the same time. To deny any man political rights is to deny that he is human.

Men are political, social, rational, and spiritual. But they are not angels; they are not divine. Though they are animals with powers which make them essentially different from the other animals, they are animals still. And so they must resort to law as a method of educating and controlling themselves. A law is an ordinance of reason directed to the common good. It is the

product of virtue and intelligence and is designed to foster the virtue and intelligence of the people.

These few simple principles of moral and political philosophy are the minimum basis of any durable world order. "Men cannot work together," said Confucius, "unless they have common principles." If we cannot believe and act upon these principles, and believe and act upon them together, the prospects of a durable world society are not bright.

If this be pessimism, make the most of it. I deny that it is pessimism. It is simply true. We cannot escape the facts by asserting that they do not exist. If we recognize their existence, we may be able to do something about them. Either we grant that we are doomed to perpetual war because no common ideals are possible, or we exert ourselves now to discover what our ideals should be and how to make them the common aspiration of the peoples of the earth. This doctrine is optimistic, because it holds that even at this late date we can save the world by our own exertions.

It is not homogeneity or uniformity that we require. The mores may vary widely from country to country, but the moral law is the same everywhere. Human beings are different, but they are identical in their humanity. Their identical humanity is the foundation of any durable world civilization.

For civilization is the deliberate pursuit of a common ideal. The pursuit must be conscious; men must know what they are after. The ideal must be common. Civilization implies something more than the yearnings of the few. American civilization, if there is one, is a reflection of the conscious aims of the American people as a whole. If there is any conscious aim of the American people as a whole, the American people are civilized and not otherwise. The aim which makes a people civilized is an ideal, something which they hope they can achieve but which they do not now possess. The ideal of America is comfort for everybody; the ideal of Germany, we are told, is world domination.

Education is a deliberate attempt to form human character in terms of an ideal. To discover the ideal of a country, look at its educational system. Do not listen to what the country says. Pay little attention to what it does. Find out what it brings up

its youth for. The educational system of this country centers around getting ahead, as might be expected of a nation whose ideal is comfort for everybody.

We find the same ideal reflected in the slogans of each political era: the full dinner pail, a chicken in every pot, two cars in every garage, and the American Way, coming to us through the courtesy of the National Association of Manufacturers as a large, dark red convertible coupe filled with all the members of the family off to the movies. Depression and war have convinced us that full employment will solve all our problems, with or without the addition supplied by those extreme radicals who think that we may need also to provide the whole world with a pint of milk a day.

If we are to have world civilization, we must get the world to accept an ideal, to pursue it deliberately, and to pursue it as common to the whole world community. But the ideal of comfort, which is the best we have been able to think of for ourselves, will never do as the aim of a world order. Men can never be comfortable enough. Two dinner pails, two chickens, four cars, and a quart of milk a day are better than half as much. And since they are better, they constitute the new ideal. We never can have enough material goods if material goods are what we want. Any world order with this ideal will be torn to pieces by the divisions to which it leads. So Richard Tawney said of the divisions between capital and labor: capital was quite right to say that labor could never be satisfied; there was no reason why labor should be satisfied as long as the ideal of the country was wealth, as long as wealth, instead of being proportioned to function, belonged to him who could get it, and as long as it was the duty of every man to get as much as he could.

A nation that has comfort and no higher ideal can fight only a defensive war. It is fighting to retain its comfort. Even if it attacks, it does so only because it is afraid that it will be attacked and its standard of living will be menaced. Such a nation, too, can make only a defensive peace. It can make a peace allocating to various nations certain possessions and resources in the way most likely to leave it undisturbed. Perhaps this is all we can look for from the present war. Perhaps we can call such a peace a peace.

III

Probably never in modern times has there been an actual scarcity of material goods in the Western world. Yet the record of crime, poverty, oppression, revolution, and war is plain for all to see. In the light of this record we must conclude that our faith that our diseases could be cured by larger and larger doses of material goods has been naïve. We have assumed that technology could take the place of justice. Through the aid of science we could produce so much that everybody would have everything he wanted. This theory has been reduced to absurdity by the coincidence of the zenith of technology and the worst depression and the most terrible war in history.

All we can be certain of about the postwar world is that nobody will be thinking of anything but his economic condition. We shall all have been deprived of the gadgets to which we have been devoted, whether we owned them or not, and this will make us gadget crazy after the war. The great hopes of industrialists are built on this great fact. The postwar boom is the pot of gold at the rainbow's end. We can do without now because there will be pie in the sky by and by. Then at last there will be plenty for everybody. There will be. But there always has been. Everybody hasn't been able to get it, and those who got it were dissatisfied nevertheless. Bigger and better wars have succeeded one another with greater and greater rapidity. If what we want is gadgets, if this is our ideal, then we can say we are civilized if we like, for we are united in the hot pursuit of a very common ideal. But we can hardly hope that such a civilization will last. Societies which cherish the ideal of comfort are in the position of the man who planned to tear down his barns to build greater. That night his soul was required of him.

There is no doubt that our country is afflicted with many material problems, and they must be solved. The sanctity of the business cycle cannot be permitted to condemn people to starvation in the midst of plenty. Full employment is necessary if a durable industrial society is to be maintained. A pint of milk a day is not an excessive ambition for the human race. It could be attained by taking a little thought and probably without

great sacrifices on the part of anybody. The slums, the monopolies, the land question, the cartels, the tariffs, the labor problem, the racial issue—all these questions can be tackled empirically and momentarily solved. If we were prepared simply to take the view that we are all consumers, that this is, economically, our only common bond, and that we should unite as consumers in the conviction that everybody should get the most of the best for the least, many of our economic difficulties would cease to plague us. In this view the pressure group that tries to keep us from getting the most of the best for the least is our natural enemy; and the remedy is not to form a pressure group of our own to get a larger share of the consumer's dollar for less, but to abolish all pressure groups, so that the consumer may get the most of the best for the least. Industrial tariffs justify agricultural tariffs, which justify higher industrial tariffs, which justify higher agricultural tariffs, and so on to the end of time.

The trouble with the empirical attack on economic problems is that it assumes that we can accomplish a just distribution of material goods without knowing or caring what justice is and even without a conviction that there is such a thing as justice. This attitude is sentimentalism, that vague desire to improve our fellow men which, since it has no other standard, erects the standard of our own prejudices as that by which the condition of everybody else must be judged. The sentimentalist will resort to force, if necessary, to give the rest of mankind the benefit of his prejudices. This is certainly better than using force to preserve or to increase one's own comfort. But those who want to fight for selfish ends will always enjoy the enthusiastic cooperation of those who want to fight to make other people like themselves. The selfish are delighted with the assistance of the sentimental: the propaganda of the sentimental sounds so unselfish.

To rest content with an empirical attack on economic problems is dangerous not only because it is empirical, but also because it distorts the relative significance of living and living well. The distortion of education in America, and particularly that distortion of Negro education associated with the great name of Booker T. Washington, shows the necessity of emphasizing over and over again that in the practical order it is the end that is the first

principle. Unless we know where we are going there is no point in moving at all. The end of life is not life, but the good life. Without clarity and conviction about the end any steps we take toward "improvement" can lead to real improvement only by accident. They are just as likely to take us further into the wilderness.

It may be said that it is necessary to settle economic questions before we proceed to the larger question of how to organize the world for the deliberate pursuit of a common ideal. On this theory the ideal of the most of the best for the least is regarded as a preliminary step which must be taken in order to get people into a condition in which they can think about something else. In a sense this is sound. Starvation and poverty and the constant fear of invasion do not supply a favorable atmosphere for pursuing ideals. Men must be able to live before they can think about what they are living for. But it is just as true that men must know what they are living for before they can organize a society which will let them live at all. The ideal of comfort, even if it carries with it the notion that everybody ought to be comfortable and nobody ought to be more comfortable than anybody else, will not suffice. There are two ways in which men can be made to sacrifice themselves for the comfort of others. They can be forced to do so, or they can voluntarily do so for the sake of an ideal higher than comfort. The first way is out of the question for us: we propose to bring the world freedom from fear. We must therefore resort to the second: if our ambition is to bring the world freedom from want, we can hope to achieve it only if we can discover a higher ideal for which men will sacrifice themselves. The rich may legitimately complain at having their money taken away from them if the sole object of doing so is to make somebody else rich. The poor will not give up their meager comforts merely to make others less uncomfortable.

IV

Aristotle said, "It is not the possessions but the desires of mankind that must be equalized, and this is impossible unless a sufficient education is provided by the state." Look at what has happened to education now. It has been more rapidly abandoned

in this country than in any other except Germany. But Germany has not for some years pretended to be a democracy or to give a whoop for the brotherhood of man. Here since the Northwest Ordinance we have presumably been devoted to education as the means of making our ideal common and as one method of achieving it.

When it became clear that education would stop in this country at the age of eighteen, a good many college presidents objected, just as a good many small businessmen objected when it began to look as though their undertakings might be abolished. But nobody else objected. If education is to help us get ahead, if it is for vocational training and social prestige, it must lose its hold on the popular imagination when the only vocation is soldiering and the only prestige military. And the weakness of the college presidents' position was that after insisting for half a century on the validity of getting ahead as the aim of the higher learning they could not make clear how it was that they had suddenly developed other and more essential aims for it, or how after dedicating themselves to getting ahead for so long a period they expected to implement these other aims which they had thought up for the emergency. For some reason or other, education has lasted a great deal longer in England and Canada than it has in this country, though England and Canada have been in the war much longer than we have and have been accustomed to make much less noise about education than we.

I think it fair to say that only a small fraction of the professors in this country believe in education. Offer a scholar a post in politics or in business and see how quickly he will snap it up. See the light that comes into his eye when he tells you about the realities he has faced, the big names he has met, the policies he has influenced, the streamlined trains he has been on, and the hotel suites he has got away from less potent individuals. This is life at last. We are a short-term people, given to quick swings of feeling and much bustle and activity. We all belong to the cult of success. It is not altogether the professor's fault that he becomes dissatisfied with his place out of the main stream of the life of his country and that he feels that his contemporaries set so little store by him and his work that there is no

use carrying it on. In the days of the Brain Trust we used to see references in the press to professors as parasites living on the charity of others, and ungrateful parasites at that, since some of them sometimes ventured to criticize, in a mild way, the system and even the individuals who provided their subsistence. What is honored in a country will be cultivated there. If the ideals of the scholar are not the ideals of the country, he must exist as a tolerated excrescence on the periphery of society or assimilate his ideals to those of the country. The position of a tolerated parasitical peripheral excrescence is not enviable enough to justify us in blaming the professor who gives up his ideals.

What are the ideals which should be common to all the peoples of the earth and which they should deliberately pursue? The first obstacle we meet in attempting to answer this question is the doctrine, very popular among liberals, that there can be no community of ideals. Truth, they say, is relative to the environment. Environments differ; therefore there can be no truths common to them. Virtue is relative to the environment. A good man in modern Greece might be a bad man in contemporary America, and would almost certainly be one in ancient Greece. The great lesson we have to learn, according to this doctrine, is the lesson of tolerance, of live and let live, each to his taste, and it takes all kinds to make a world. The Chinese are peculiar, even the modern Greeks are peculiar, but they will leave us alone, and we will leave them alone, and we'll get olive oil from Greece and tea from China and let them have machine tools in exchange and everything will be all right.

But the Germans and the Japanese are peculiar, too, and one of the most peculiar things about them is that they will not leave us alone. They have the strange conviction that they are entitled to things that other people have. And they insinuate that the way in which they propose to get them is the way in which the other people got them. How shall we persuade the Germans and the Japanese that this way of getting things has gone out of style?

One way of doing it would be to exterminate them. The expressions of Lord Vansittart and his cannibalistic equivalents in America have certainly had one effect: they have prolonged the war. If you were bound to be exterminated if you surrendered

and had a chance of survival if you fought, you would go on fighting until you were exterminated.

But I take it that the most bloodthirsty of our friends do not seriously contemplate the massacre of 150 million people. What they really mean is that Germany and Japan must be so reduced in military and industrial strength that they can never again threaten the peace of the world. The fate of the attempt to treat Germany this way after the last war warrants a certain skepticism about the success of a like effort after this one. And suppose we did make Germany and Japan harmless for centuries, what guarantee have we that as soon as Russia, India, and China have the requisite industrial power they may not decide that where Germany and Japan failed they will succeed? After all, these countries have been so far away, before the world began to shrink, and have been so concerned with their domestic problems that we have had little practical experience with their peculiarities. Perhaps latent in all of them is the distressing predatory peculiarity of the Germans and the Japanese. The Mexican and Spanish wars and the acquisition of the Canal Zone suggest that it may even be latent in us, and that the reason it has not appeared in action more often is that we took almost everything we needed from the Indians.

We want a world civilization. We want the peoples of the earth to unite in the pursuit of a common ideal. Thus, and only thus, shall we make the world one community. We want this community to endure. If it is to endure, it must be built upon the solid rock of human nature. We must insist that no matter how environments differ human nature is, always has been, and always will be the same everywhere. Above all nations is humanity; and beneath all human law and custom lies the natural moral law which is the same for all men. The various governments which make up the spiritual community must be conducted not for the good of rich men, or white men, or educated men, but for the good of all men. Justice, the equal treatment of equals, must hold each state together, and justice among the states must hold the world community together, for nothing else will.

The administrative structure of the political organization of a world community is beyond the scope of this paper. What we are

talking about is the deliberate pursuit, on a worldwide scale, of a common ideal. If we can determine the ideal and discover how we might persuade ourselves and persuade others to join in its pursuit, our present requirements will be met. In any event, any world political organization must follow and not precede agreement upon and pursuit of the common ideal. The fate of the League of Nations is decisive on this point.

V

If we want a world civilization we shall have to join in the pursuit of the democratic ideal. We shall have to try to get true democracy everywhere. You may well say that the ideal is unattainable. We have not succeeded in making this country democratic; how can we ever hope to make the whole world democratic? My answer is that if we cannot make the whole world democratic we had better give up the idea of a durable world civilization, for the only civilization that can endure is a civilization based on the common humanity of men, on their common human rights, and only democracy recognizes these rights. People will fight, and are entitled to fight, until they get the rights which human nature carries with it. Some people will fight after they have these rights; but the united conscience of the world can deal with them. The reason why marauders have been so difficult to deal with in the past is that there was no united conscience of the world. We were all marauders. We could not muster much moral fervor against a man or nation that was doing exactly what we had done and would like to do again.

You may reply that democratic governments have been very unjust, very sordid, very lawless, and full of inequality. But they were not democracies. They merely pretended to be. The external forms of a government are not important. Hitler's plebiscites did not make Germany a democracy. Woman suffrage did not purify politics. Chicago has been plundered by Republicans and Democrats alike. What matters about a political system is its aim and execution. A society which aims at the virtue and intelligence of all the people is a truly democratic society, for its cornerstone is the dignity of every human being.

If we want a durable world civilization, then, we must strive for world democracy. How shall we proceed? How can we get the Germans and the Japanese to be democratic? We cannot force them to be democratic. Democracy rests on deliberate consent. We cannot force a democratic education upon them; for even if we knew what a democratic education was, we could not supply the teachers or the inspectors to staff the German and Japanese schools, and we could not control the conversations of German and Japanese children with their German and Japanese parents out of hours. If we cannot terrorize them into democracy and cannot educate them into democracy, how can we make them democratic?

A military defeat may help. The *New York Times* has suggested that "perhaps the example of the power of democratic nations to win victories over totalitarian nations and then deal justly with them would be enough." But the next generation may cherish the hatreds growing out of this war as Hitler cherished those which grew out of the last. Changing circumstances in various parts of the world may seem later to offer convenient opportunities for the exploitation of that spirit of revenge which has been the most conspicuous feature of European politics since 1870.

Defeat plus justice might be enough. The combination has never yet been tried. But we cannot treat the Japanese and Germans justly unless we are just. Justice is a virtue. Virtues are habits. Habits are formed by acts. If we are to be just to the Germans and Japanese we must have formed the habit of justice by repeated just acts. We must be members and missionaries of a just society. Think of the hope that would come to the millions who do not want to be fascists or ruled by fascists if the American people should decide that the way to change the face of the earth was to change their own hearts.

Can the American people change their hearts? Though we can hardly be said to practice freedom, law, equality, justice, and democracy, we are further along that road than any other nation. The words, moreover, are words on which we have all been brought up. No political leader has yet dared to call upon Americans to espouse the cause of inequality, injustice, and tyranny. Though

we haven't bothered to understand the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, because we haven't had to; though we have used these phrases sometimes as slogans and sometimes as opiates; though we have thought of them as the guarantors of continued and increasing comfort, it should not be as difficult for us as it would be for nations unfamiliar with them to grasp the meaning of these phrases, to establish them as the goal toward which we must strive, and to turn household words into household practices. The best postwar planning we can do is to make the United States a working model of democracy now.

Here arises the responsibility of the individual. The character and ideals of a country are the character and ideals of the individuals who inhabit it. Upon each one of us, therefore, is thrown the obligation to understand and to pursue the democratic ideal. After all, ten good men would have saved Sodom and Gomorrah. The same fraction of our population might save this country, and through it the world; for everywhere there are men who are anxiously scanning the horizon for some sign that somewhere the standard of humanity will be raised. When it is raised they will rally to it.

If we want to convince the world of our intention to make America a working model of democracy, we should join in the effort to get a few things done as evidence of the sincerity and seriousness of our purpose. These things may be insignificant in terms of the ultimate destiny of the race; but they take on significance in the context of those worldwide doubts of our integrity which would permit our enemies to pass off the expression of our intentions as high-sounding propaganda.

Is it possible to get anything done in wartime? The answer usually is that nothing is possible in wartime because all we can do in wartime is to try to win the war. It is difficult to take this argument seriously. A frontal attack on racial and religious discrimination, an attack based on the common humanity of men, would not divert us from the war effort. It would, perhaps, strengthen the war effort, because it would help to unite people who may now see little reason why they should fight to preserve an order in which they fail to detect the beauties commonly associated with the American way.

The attempt to break up monopolies and cartels, an attempt based on the natural right of all men to the means of life, may inconvenience corporations now engaged in the manufacture of munitions. But if these combinations are not broken up, we can hardly convince our own people, to say nothing of those in the oppressed countries of Europe and Asia, that we actually propose that just distribution of material goods which goes by the name of freedom from want. This will cost some money and will interfere somewhat with concentration on the immediate task of producing munitions; but it may be that the gains, even from the strictly military point of view, will outweigh the losses.

VI

It would not divert us from the war effort to assert the political rights of man by getting rid of the poll tax; the state of Tennessee has just done it without being torn by civil strife. Some states seem to get along without a tax that levies on consumption and hence on the poor man rather than the rich.

It would not divert us or be particularly difficult to recognize that the aim of the state is the virtue and intelligence of the people and to open education on the basis of merit to all the people of this country, regardless of their color, their parents' condition of servitude, or the resources of the state of the union where they happened to be born. It would not divert us to establish national competitive scholarships so that any young person who could show that he ought to be educated could get the best education we had to offer. Nor would it be expensive, quite to the contrary, to exclude from education those studies which impede the preparation of the young for life in a democratic civilization, and to base the curriculum on the proposition that if we are all to be free we must be educated for freedom. It would not divert us or be expensive to try to figure out what education for freedom is, so that in addition to the blessings which it might confer on our country, we might be able to tell our defeated enemies what it is in case they happened to ask us.

But the primary change we have to make is the one we have insisted on for the Germans and the Japanese. We must want

to be democratic. If we want to be, we shall be. If we want to be, all these questions of political machinery and social practice will answer themselves. Justice, equality, and law, a society devoted to virtue and intelligence—these things are matters of resolution. We can have them if we want them. If we want them, we shall get an education calculated to produce them. If we want them, we shall get a tax system, a party system, a political order, and a social structure that exemplify them.

If you say I am a pessimist, I deny it. I say I am an optimist; for I hold that we need not give up because "you can't change human nature." Human nature is good, and we can realize it if we will. The time may be long and the motion slow. But we can become human beings, democratic human beings, if we want to be. The price may be high for all of us. Pressure groups pay a high price for democracy if the price is going out of business. Educators pay a high price if the price is the reconstruction of a system to which the habits of a lifetime have wedded them. Legislators pay a high price if the price is democratic performance instead of democratic oratory. Every one of us pays a high price if the answer to the question "What shall I do to be saved?" is the same as that given two thousand years ago. But what is the price of declining to pay the price? It is the possible loss of the war. It is the certain failure of the peace. It is the surrender of civilization.