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REMARKS BY ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ADMINISTRATOR
JEROME KRETCHMER AT THE HUNTER COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT,
JUNE 1, 1971.

I DON'T WANT TO LECTURE YOU HERE ON WHAT KIND OF
WORLD IT IS WE LIVE IN OR WHAT'S WRONG WITH OUR SOCIETY.
YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I, PERHAPS BETTER. IT IS NOT JUST
THE WAR AND THE RECESSION, NOT JUST A FEW PROBLEMS
HERE AND THERE TO BE SOLVED WITH A LITTLE EFFORT AND
REALLOCATION OF RESOURCES. I THINK IT IS CLEAR THAT OUR
SOCIETY IS IN TROUBLE, THAT OUR INSTITUTIONS ARE FAILING
US, AND MANY, IF NOT MOST OF US, FEEL GROWING DESPAIR
ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF MAKING SOME SENSE OUT OF THE
INSANITY AND BEDLAM AROUND US.

ALL OF THE IMPORTANT NOTES WERE SOUNDED BY THE PRO-
TEST MOVEMENTS OF THE EARLY SIXTIES, THE MAIN ONE,
PERHAPS, ON THE BERKELEY PLACARDS THAT SAID, "I AM A
STUDENT. DO NOT FOLD, SPINDLE OR MUTILATE," THE DAWNING
AWARENESS THAT OUR INSTITUTIONS DO NOT SERVE US, BUT
PROCESS US, THAT THE INTERLOCKING CORPORATE AND BUREAU-
CRATIC INTEREST GROUPS CHURN ON IN PURSUIT OF THEIR OWN
NARROW GOALS AND ARE ONLY OCCASIONALLY AND SPORADICALLY
RESPONSIVE TO ANY REAL HUMAN NEED.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE GLIB AND PARANOID ABOUT "THE SYSTEM."
ON THE OTHER HAND, YOU WOULD HAVE TO BE TOTALLY IGNORANT
OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES NOT TO REALIZE
THAT THE SYSTEM FUNCTIONS PRETTY MUCH THE WAY THE

PROTEST GROUPS SAY IT DOES.

YOU AND I HAVE GROWN UP UNDER A FORM OF PLURALISM THAT CAN BEST BE LABELED INTEREST-GROUP POLITICS. REAL POWER BELONGS TO THE INTEREST GROUPS AND THE POLITICIANS WHO MEDIATE AND BARGAIN AMONG THEM. IT IS A GAME IN WHICH INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE NOT PLUGGED INTO A SIGNIFICANT GROUP -- CHIEFLY THE POOR, THE YOUNG, THE BLACK AND THE BROWN -- HAVE NO CHIPS TO PLAY WITH.

THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF THE POLITICIAN UNDER THIS SYSTEM IS TO MAINTAIN A ROUGH EQUILIBRIUM AMONG PLAYERS ALREADY ADMITTED TO THE GAME. HE NEGOTIATES, HE DEALS, HE COMPROMISES. IDEOLOGY, OR EVEN GOALS, ARE UNNECESSARY, AND IN FACT THEY TEND TO UPSET THE GAME, BECAUSE THE POINT IS TO MAINTAIN AS MUCH OF THE STATUS QUO AS POSSIBLE. THE POLITICIAN CONDUCTS HIMSELF ACCORDING TO THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION AND MAKES ONLY WHATEVER SMALL DEPARTURES THAT CAN BE MADE WITHOUT DISRUPTING THE POSITIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GAME.

THE ASSUMPTION UNDERLYING THE GAME IS THAT OUR SOCIETY IS SO FRAGILE, SO DELICATELY HELD IN BALANCE, THAT ANY SERIOUS CHANGE WOULD MEAN CHAOS. IF CHANGE IS TO COME, IT MUST COME INCREMENTALLY, IN SMALL DOSES, ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PLAYERS. SO INTEREST-GROUP LIBERALISM -- OUR POLITICAL

HERITAGE AND THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN--OFFERS US A POLITICS OF QUIESCENCE, A RANGE OF ASSUMPTIONS AND OPTIONS GROUNDED IN A PROFOUND CONSERVATISM.

IT IS A POLITICAL SYSTEM, AS THE POLITICAL SCIENTIST THEODORE LOWI WRITES, THAT IS "PERFECTLY DESIGNED TO MAINTAIN AN EXISTING SET OF AFFAIRS, ANY EXISTING SET OF AFFAIRS."

I WAS AN ASSEMBLYMAN FROM THIS CITY FOR NINE YEARS, AND I CAN TELL YOU THAT THIS HAS BEEN MY EXPERIENCE. IF YOU HAVE BEEN READING THE PAPERS DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS, YOU MUST HAVE NOTICED THAT ALBANY IS NOT EXACTLY A SHOWCASE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY. IT WAS THE SAME WHEN I WAS THERE. THOSE OF US WHO STOOD FOR SOMETHING MORE THAN THE USUAL GLACIALLY SLOW CHANGE DIDN'T WIN MANY BATTLES. NORMALLY, WE WERE HAPPY NOW AND THEN TO STOP SOME OF THE LARGER OUTRAGES, BUT THERE WAS LITTLE ROOM FOR REAL REFORM.

DURING THE SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION CONTROVERSY, I HELPED TO ORGANIZE WHAT I CONSIDER A TRUE GRASS ROOTS MOVEMENT. THERE WERE RALLIES, PROTESTS, BUS TRIPS TO ALBANY. OVER A PERIOD OF FOUR MONTHS, THOUSANDS OF PARENTS MADE THEIR DESIRE FOR DECENTRALIZATION KNOWN TO THE LEGISLATURE. AND WHEN IT WAS OVER, THE GOVERNOR AND THE TEACHERS UNION SETTLED THE MATTER THEMSELVES. THIS IS

THE NORMAL ALBANY EXPERIENCE. THE INTEREST GROUPS ARE TOO POWERFUL TO MOVE MUCH FROM THE STATUS QUO.

NOW I AM ADMINISTRATOR OF THE CITY'S ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY, AND THE PROBLEM IS THE SAME. LANDLORDS FIGHT THE NEW AIR CODE, PACKAGERS FIGHT PACKAGING REFORMS, MERCHANTS BLOCK SIMPLE STREET-CLOSINGS, THE PORT AUTHORITY BUILDS OFFICE BUILDINGS, WHICH WE DON'T NEED, INSTEAD OF MASS TRANSIT, WHICH WE DO; CON ED INSISTS ON BUILDING ANOTHER HIGH-POLLUTION PLANT IN THE MIDST OF THE MOST SULFUR-POLLUTED AIR IN THE NATION. THERE IS HARDLY AN ENVIRONMENTAL REFORM OF ANY KIND THAT IS NOT FURIOUSLY ATTACKED BY SOME NARROW VESTED INTEREST.

I THINK YOU KNOW THIS IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM AS WELL. THE SIXTIES PRODUCED A GREAT THRUST TOWARD REFORM IN THIS COUNTRY--TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION, POVERTY AND WAR, TO REFORM THE CONGRESS, THE UNIVERSITIES, THE BUREAUCRACIES--AND YET WE MUST ADMIT THAT STRUCTURALLY LITTLE HAS COME OF IT. THE WAR GOES ON, THE CRUSADE AGAINST POVERTY HAS PETERED OUT, OUR RACIAL PROBLEMS REMAIN AS EXPLOSIVE AS EVER, THE POWERFUL GROUPS IN OUR SOCIETY HAVE ALMOST UNDIMINISHED CONTROL OVER OUR LIVES. THE PROTEST MOVEMENTS ARE IN DISARRAY. THEY FLARE INTO ACTION NOW AND THEN OVER A CAMBODIA OR A KENT STATE, BUT THEY CANNOT SEEM TO GATHER THE ENERGY OR STAYING

POWER THAT THEY ONCE HAD. WE ARE LEFT WITH DISILLUSIONMENT, A RETREAT TO PERSONAL CONCERNS, SPORADIC VIOLENCE AND A GENERAL UNWILLINGNESS EITHER TO JOIN THE SYSTEM OR FIGHT IT.

THE ONLY APPROPRIATE QUESTION IN AN ERA SUCH AS OURS, IS WHAT CAN WE DO? HOW CAN WE MAKE SENSE OUT OF OUR LIVES AND THE SOCIETY WE LIVE IN?

FIRST, I THINK IT IS CLEAR THAT THE YOUTH CULTURE, OR THE COUNTERCULTURE, IS AN IMPORTANT REALITY, THAT IT HAS A HEAVY SOCIAL INFLUENCE BUT VIRTUALLY NO POLITICAL POWER.

THE EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE ARE ALL AROUND US, AND I DON'T MEAN SIMPLY THE IMPACT ON MUSIC AND FASHION. THE COUNTERCULTURE HAS SPAWNED MOVEMENTS THAT ARE ENDING SOME OF THE LESS WELL RECOGNIZED FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION, CHIEFLY AGAINST WOMEN AND HOMOSEXUALS. IT HAS ERODED VIRTUALLY ALL THE TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND EXPECTATIONS IN THE ARMY, TO THE POINT WHERE OUR ARMED FORCES WILL PROBABLY NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN. IT HAS EVISCERATED THE POT LAWS, TO THE POINT WHERE THEY ARE LIKELY TO BE REPEALED OR SIMPLY BECOME DEAD LETTERS IN A YEAR OR TWO. IT HAS CALLED INTO QUESTION THE WORK ETHIC, TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF CIVIL OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE,

THE ENTIRE NOTION OF THE GOOD LIFE IN AMERICA.

THESE ARE IMPORTANT SOCIAL CHANGES, BUT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN TRANSLATED INTO BASIC POLITICAL CHANGES, SO THE SYSTEM HUMS ON, SOMEWHAT SHAKEN, BUT WITH VIRTUALLY NO REDUCTION IN ITS POWERS OR DIRECTIONS.

THIS COMBINATION OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE BUT NO POLITICAL INFLUENCE WAS BOUND TO HEIGHTEN FRUSTRATIONS, AND IT SEEMS INEVITABLE THAT A THEORY WOULD ARISE TO TELL THE CULTURE NOT TO WORRY ABOUT ITS POLITICAL IMPOTENCE, THAT SOMEHOW SOCIAL INFLUENCE IS ENOUGH.

AND SO WE HAVE THE THEORY ABOUT "THE GREENING OF AMERICA," A SOOTHING MESSAGE THAT POLITICAL FAILURE WILL SOMEHOW BE MAGICALLY CORRECTED BY TENDING YOUR OWN GARDEN AND NOT WORRYING ABOUT THE BUMP AND SHOVE OF POLITICS. THE APPLE WILL FALL INTO YOUR LAP ANYWAY, SO IF YOU WANT TO DROP OUT, GO AHEAD.

THE GREENING THEORY MAY BE PSYCHOLOGICAL BALM TO THE WOUNDS OF ABANDONED POLITICAL BATTLES, BUT UNFORTUNATELY IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WAY STRUCTURAL CHANGE COMES ABOUT.

THE SOCIOLOGIST PETER BERGER SPEAKS OF HOW THE SYSTEM WOULD PROTECT ITSELF AGAINST "GREENING." HE CALLS IT THE "BLUEING" OF AMERICA--MEANING THAT THE HISTORIAN OF THE FUTURE, LOOKING BACK ON OUR TIME, WILL SEE ONLY THAT AS

PRIVILEGED WHITE-COLLAR YOUTHS DROPPED OUT OF THE SYSTEM, THEY WERE REPLACED BY BLUE-COLLAR YOUTH ANXIOUS TO CLIMB THE LADDER. THAT, HE THINKS, IS LIKELY TO BE THE CHIEF IMPACT OF "GREENING" OR "BLUEING." I THINK HE IS CORRECT. POWERFUL INSTITUTIONS CAN ALWAYS RECRUIT ELSEWHERE, DEVELOPING NEW CONSTITUENCIES TO RALLY BEHIND THE STATUS QUO. THOUGH MANY OF US WOULD LIKE TO THINK SO, YOU JUST DON'T CHANGE OR STOP A SYSTEM BY IGNORING IT.

I CAN SYMPATHIZE WITH THE SOCIAL PRESSURES THAT HAVE PUSHED MANY OF US TO LEAVE THE CITY FOR THE FARM, THE ACTIVE LIFE FOR THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE. BUT IT LEAVES THE STRUCTURE INTACT AND THE STRUCTURE IS THE PROBLEM.

THE REAL TRUTH, UNDERNEATH ALL THE ILLUSION OF THE GREENING THEORY, IS THAT WE HAVE ENTERED A PERIOD OF POLITICAL QUIETISM, AT LEAST AS FAR AS REFORM IS CONCERNED. THERE IS A FEELING THAT WE'VE BEEN THERE BEFORE, WE'VE DONE EVERYTHING AND IT DOESN'T WORK. DISCOURAGEMENT IS HARDENING INTO IDEOLOGY.

BUT I SUGGEST TO YOU THAT WE MAY HAVE LEARNED THE WRONG LESSONS DURING THE 1960'S. THERE WERE, IN FACT, MANY PROMISING MOVEMENTS THAT SEEMED ON THE BRINK OF MAKING IMPORTANT CHANGES, BUT THEY REMAINED JUST THAT--

MOVEMENTS--AND NEVER TURNED THEMSELVES INTO STABLE, ONGOING, FUNCTIONING POLITICAL GROUPS. FROM THE RISE OF SDS TO THE McCARTHY CRUSADE OF 1968 THERE WAS AN INNOCENCE ABOUT POWER AND THE WAY IT MUST BE REACHED FOR IN AMERICA. THE DISTASTE FOR HARD ORGANIZING, FOR LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE THAT CHARACTERIZED MUCH OF THE LEFT IN THE SIXTIES LEFT IT EXCRUCIATINGLY VULNERABLE IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. GIVEN THE WAY OUR INTEREST-GROUP POLITICS FUNCTIONS, AND GIVEN THE HARD FACT THAT YOU MUST BE A FAIRLY POTENT AND HIGHLY ORGANIZED GROUP TO PLAY IN THIS KIND OF GAME, IT CAN BE SEEN NOW THAT SDS, FOR EXAMPLE, COULD NOT SUSTAIN ITSELF. IT HAD NO ROOTS. AND LIKE ALL MOVEMENTS WITHOUT ROOTS IT HAD A SPECTACULAR RISE AND A SPECTACULAR FALL, ALL WITHOUT MUCH TROUBLING THE SYSTEM IT OPPOSED.

I DO NOT WISH TO ATTACK THE MOVEMENTS OF THE SIXTIES. THEY TAUGHT US A GREAT DEAL. BUT THEY HAVE IN FACT COLLAPSED, AND IT IS USEFUL TO ASK WHY. THERE ARE MANY REASONS, OF COURSE, BUT AMONG THEM ARE UNWILLINGNESS TO ORGANIZE COHESIVE GROUPS STRONG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND SETBACKS; THE OVERRELIANCE, IN MANY CASES, ON THE CHARISMATIC LEADER; THE AMBIVALENCE ABOUT POWER. WE ARE PAYING THE PRICE FOR THESE FAILINGS NOW, JUST AS SURELY AS WE ARE PAYING FOR THE FAILINGS OF THE SYSTEM ITSELF.

RALPH NADER WAS ASKED RECENTLY WHAT KIND OF PERSON HE LOOKS FOR IN RECRUITING FOR HIS ORGANIZATION. HE SAID, IN EFFECT, HE LOOKS FOR PEOPLE WHO EXPECT TO BE FRUSTRATED, OVERPOWERED, DEFEATED, BUT WHO KEEP HAMMERING AWAY AT THE BUREAUCRACIES UNTIL THEY GET THE REFORM THEY WANT. A FOOTBALL COACH, HE SAID, HAS LITTLE USE FOR A LINEMAN WHO GIVES UP AFTER BEING KNOCKED ON HIS BACK THREE OR FOUR TIMES IN A ROW; HE LOOKS FOR THE MAN WHO KEEPS GETTING UP AND HITTING AWAY UNTIL HE WINS.

THE RESULT IS, OF COURSE, THAT NADER IS ACCUMULATING REAL POWER IN AMERICA, LONG AFTER THE REFORMERS WHO STARTED OUT LIKE HE DID IN THE SIXTIES HAVE FADED FROM THE SCENE. I DON'T KNOW IF NADER IS A RADICAL OR WHERE HIS MOVEMENT AND ORGANIZATION ARE HEADED. BUT I SUGGEST TO YOU THAT BY ATTENDING TO ORGANIZATION AND DETAIL, BY ORGANIZING AROUND ISSUES, HE HAS LED THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE TO SEE SOME TRUTHS ABOUT THE CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES THAT CUT MUCH DEEPER THAN CONSUMER ADVOCACY. AND IT IS AN ORGANIZATION THAT MAY SOON HAVE SOME EXTRAORDINARY MUSCLE TO USE AGAINST THE STATUS QUO.

YET I DON'T THINK ANY OF US SHOULD HAVE ANY ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY OF GETTING REAL REFORM IN THIS COUNTRY, FOR A SOCIETY SUCH AS OURS, ORGANIZED AROUND INTEREST GROUPS, LOSES MUCH OF ITS CAPACITY FOR CHANGE;

PARTICULARLY IN AN ADVANCED, HIGHLY TECHNICAL ECONOMY. AND IT IS CLEAR TOO THAT IT CAN NO LONGER BE MOVED AS IT HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN. THE APPEARANCE OF NEW INTEREST GROUPS--NO MATTER HOW HARD WE WORK TO ORGANIZE THEM-- IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH.

THERE ARE POLITICAL REALISTS WHO WOULD ARGUE THAT OUR INTEREST-GROUP POLITICS IS THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN, AND THAT IF WE WANT TO HAVE ANY IMPACT AT ALL ON SOCIETY, WE MUST PLAY IN THAT GAME. BUT I'M AS HARD-HEADED A POLITICIAN AS ANYBODY IN THIS HALL, AND I KNOW THAT ALL THE PLAYERS IN THAT GAME ARE LOSERS. WHAT THEY WIN AS WAGE-EARNERS, THEY LOSE AS CONSUMERS: WHAT THEY WIN IN CONVENIENCE, THEY LOSE IN A POISONED ENVIRONMENT; WHAT THEY GAIN IN PRIVACY AND AFFLUENCE, THEY LOSE IN QUICKLY-DECAYING SUBURBS.

THE THEORY OF INTEREST-GROUP POLITICS IS THAT HIGHLY ORGANIZED, SPECIALIZED GROUPS WIN-- BUT THE PROBLEMS THAT CONFRONT US ARE GENERAL. ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS TRANSCEND INTEREST-GROUP POLITICS; ENDING THE WAR IS MORE THAN A SPECIAL INTEREST. AND IT IS AROUND THESE GOALS--THE ONES THAT AFFECT US ALL--THAT WE MUST ORGANIZE.

WE HAVE TO GIVE UP OUR ROMANTICISM--THERE WILL BE NO GREENING HERE AND NO REVOLUTION. WE HAVE TO GIVE UP OUR INNOCENCE--THERE WILL BE NO MAN ON A WHITE HORSE, NO

SUDDEN RESPONSE TO OUR PROBLEMS BY THE POWERS THAT BE.
AND WE WILL HAVE TO GIVE UP OUR FRAGILE NOTION THAT
ONE, TWO OR EVEN TEN YEARS OF EFFORT TO GET CHANGE
SOMEHOW ENTITLES US TO AN HONORABLE DISCHARGE FROM THE
CAMPAIGN.

TO ME, THIS IS THE ONLY SANE RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS
AROUND US. IF WE REALLY WANT CHANGE, WE HAVE TO FIGHT
FOR IT. WE MUST BE IN THE GAME TO STAY.

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