

GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE
Fifty-first Annual Meeting
San Juan, Puerto Rico

ADDRESS OF THE HONORABLE GALO PLAZA

STATE DINNER
Monday, August 3, 1959

It is a great honor for me to address the annual State Dinner of the Fifty-first Governors' Conference: not only because of my audience and of the highly appreciated privilege of joining a distinguished line of outstanding personalities who have done so in the past, but because it affords the opportunity, for one who has tried to serve the cause of democracy for a good stretch of his life, to be a witness and even to participate in the activities of a unique organization, devised outside the formal structure of government, to strengthen and vitalize that precious institution: democratic government as it is understood and practiced in the United States of America.

One of the illustrious Presidents of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, as Governor of New Jersey, in an address to the 1912 meeting said of the Governors' Conference: "It is an extraconstitutional enterprise, but natural, spontaneous, imperative, perhaps creative In brief, we are setting up; outside the sphere of the Federal Congress, a new instrument of political life, national in its character, scope and intention; an instrument, not of legislation, but of opinion, exercising the authority of influence, not of law". These words have impressed me and helped me grasp some of the insight of the role the Conference plays in the mechanics of government.

When my friend, Governor Muñoz Marín inquired if I would be available to address this meeting and invited Mrs. Plaza and myself to be his guest at La Fortaleza, I was delighted to come to Puerto Rico to see this show window of what can be done through economic cooperation between a less developed area and an advanced economic complex, for people of our same blood in a land that faces problems similar to those we are attempting to solve in Latin America. I always follow with genuine interest what is going on in Puerto Rico and look with admiration upon the extraordinary performance of her people under the leadership of their great Governor. I am certain that after my visit impressions and sentiment will be ratified and strengthened.

What I would like to talk about tonight takes me back to a clear and sunny day in 1945. It will also bring back memories to one among us here. Nelson Rockefeller and myself were working hard at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, and one Sunday afternoon after a long and strenuous week, I invited him to cross the Bay, and in reminiscence of my college days at the University of California, we climbed the hill beyond the campus to the Big C.

We commanded, from where we sat for a rest, an imposing view of the valley and the great bay cities. Jose Iturbi, the pianist, was giving a concert in the Greek Theater below. Chimes from the campanile could be heard from time to time. It was a fine day for reminiscing, but our minds were not in the past, we were thinking of the future.

Your great nation was then at the threshold of a new era. The sub-continent, protected from aggression by two ocean barriers where a freedom loving people lived a life of opportunity and abundance, peaceful and secure, was to become a thing of the past. Notable advances in aeronavigation had converted the ocean barrier into broad avenues of approach, and a major scientific breakthrough, in the use of nuclear energy, had made possible the atom bomb. Freedom and security could no longer be taken for granted. The people of the United States experienced for the first time fears of aggression from without. New generations of Americans would have to be on the alert and if necessary fight to protect their precious heritage: their way of life.

The back breaking efforts of the war had left the United States in a position of pre-eminence in the world, and a new factor, the emergence of Soviet Russia as a great power, had destroyed the dreams of "one world" that had fired the imagination of many after the tragic ordeal.

As we started back to San Francisco at sundown we wondered how the people would readjust to the changes that their country's new destiny demanded, and how she would meet the new responsibilities.

If we look back over the years since 1945, we will find that deeper changes have taken place in the American scene than we imagined, and that United States leadership as a whole, in spite of severe criticisms, has measured up to its responsibilities in the face of formidable difficulties.

From the day the United States discovered she had to concern herself with the rest of the world as a matter of self-preservation, political policies, both national and international, that had been for generations the law of the land, became obsolete.

As the menace of communism grew, with the military might of the Russians, to challenge democracy, the United States, burdened with the responsibility of leadership of the Western World, was forced to arm for defense to meet the threat and began to prepare a new generation to man a greatly expanded diplomatic front. While this was taking place at home the cold war had to be fought abroad. Not always were the issues clear cut, nor did the allies in the West agree always on tactics. The all important initiative proved elusive. At times the United States, that had once been a colony and had fought for its independence, found itself painfully confronted with situations where communism, to further its cause, had taken advantage of the genuine aspirations of the people for freedom, while democracy was accused of siding

with colonialism. These years since 1945 have been difficult and confusing, but in spite of everything the world has so far been spared the tragedy of another war, and the United Nations has successfully served its purpose in lessening tensions or paving the way for peaceful solutions of conflicts.

During the last fourteen years while the two great blocks, the democratic West and the Soviet world, faced each other across the Iron Curtain, new sovereign states in Asia and Africa have been rising from the liquidation of the colonial empires of the Nineteenth Century.

The people in these countries, who for centuries had taken for granted their humble conditions of life, have become aware of the technological, social and political changes in the Western World and are eager to embark on programs of their own of economic development and social reform. The governments, hard pressed by these aspirations, confronted with formidable obstacles to effect the far reaching changes necessary to bridge the gap of centuries, look for assistance and guidance from more advanced nations. Their leaders are attracted by the ideals of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. They dream for their people what democracy has done for the people of the United States. But when their dreams are over and they wake up to the stern realities of life, they realize that western civilization, as we know it today, is the culmination of a process that has lasted 500 years, from the philosophic reasonings of the Greeks, the legal concepts of the Romans, through the spiritual revolution of Christianity and the political, social and economic advancements that came forth with the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the French and American revolutions, and up to the scientific development of this century. The non-western nations did not receive the full impact of these experiences; they benefited somewhat from them by their contacts with the western world, but were not carried along by the main flow.

The great civilizations of the East, that had flourished for thousands of years when Europeans were barbarians, had long been left behind. These people realized that to create a modern economy and a new concept of life they had to replace or readjust the ancient faiths and ways of life to a degree that meant the skipping of centuries.

Western democracy that strives to build an enduring world community, based on economic and social growth, with respect for national and human dignity, has tremendous appeal to the peoples of Asia and Africa. Undoubtedly they would like such a system for themselves, although they suspect that the democratic way demands, as a prerequisite for success, experience in self-government, a wealth of natural resources and a series of traditions and experiences that have to be built up over the years. The big question for them is, can democracy succeed in meeting the more pressing demands in the social and economic fields, where resources are limited, democratic tradition

nonexistent and the time element all important.

On the other hand, they are impressed with the remarkable performance of Soviet Russia that, after lagging behind the West for a hundred or more years, has been able, through great efforts and sacrifices, to almost catch up with the "capitalist world". Although they realize that the impressive Russian performance has cost her people a high price in blood and loss of freedom and human dignity, they wonder if there is no other alternative, if it may not offer them a short cut that would leave behind much of the road that leads into the nuclear age.

When they observe that other great historic transition taking place in Communist China, which is coming from still further back in its economic development in a relatively short period of time, to bring about spectacular material results, the impact on the under-developed nations of Asia and Africa is still more effective, because they see what communism can do for people like themselves.

It is not communism as such that attracts them; as a matter of fact the cruelty, ruthlessness and the violence of its tactics have, so far, kept them from joining the communist camp; democracy with its human appeal is far more attractive as a political doctrine. If democracy could only prove convincingly that it is capable of bringing about the urgently needed developments, without the cruel regimentations that communism demands, the neutral countries would no longer be uncommitted. Hence the most important task to be carried out during the coming years by the Western democracies is to win over the countries in the Third Position, that of neutrality, by ways and means more convincing than the all-out efforts of the Soviet World.

Puerto Rico is a prime example of democracy at its best, at the task of helping the common man to improve his lot without sacrifices in freedom and dignity. But is not Puerto Rico, with its two and a half million people, too small a show window for the world to see in contrast with Communist China, with its 600 million inhabitants? Must not the West also make a demonstration on a far larger scale of the virtues and capabilities of democracy?

Some learned opinions in the United States have advocated a greatly expanded western effort, for the cause of democracy, in India, as an example for the uncommitted world to see. It is pointed out that British administration served to develop gradually well rooted democratic institutions in India, that the country is passing through a profound social revolution that might ultimately break down the cast system and liquidate in other aspects the old order, which may facilitate modern economic and social developments. Furthermore, it is said that the gradual, non-violent character of the Indian democratic evolution would be particularly appealing to the uncommitted world. Finally, the size of India, with its 400 million people would measure up to the communist experiment in China.

But it is doubtful if such a scheme would give democracy a fair chance to succeed. Would not the Indian experiment prove far more difficult than the Chinese? The people of India have deep rooted religious and philosophical concepts which affect their way of life and their attitude toward the rest of the world to a point that might obstruct or at least slow down any significant changes in the economic and social fields; while in China an ancient tradition of authoritarian Government from above, and at the level of the peasantry, and widespread discontent since the Mid-Nineteenth Century, have facilitated the changeover to communist rule. No organized religion stood in the way, the cast system never existed, while a fierce national pride a chinese characteristic, helped spark the drive toward progress, in contrast with religious beliefs in India which teach man that the highest values are non-material, and that he must stand ready to divest himself of mortal goods and aspirations if he is to attain eternal life.

In no way am I implying that democracy does not have a chance to succeed in India; on the contrary, I believe that it has deeper roots than in most anywhere in Asia, and a real chance to become the backbone of a new India and a citadel for freedom nearest to the Eastern Communist World. But the democratic process is being carried out in the Indian way, slowly and if possible without violence, while circumstances today demand a much quicker pace in order to match without delay the Chinese demonstration.

With these thoughts in mind, would not Latin America, with its twenty independent nations, that in spite of differences make up the most homogenous community of nations in the world, prove to be an adequate testing ground for democracy to clearly show its worth in a large enough scale? Some might argue that Latin America is too far from where the demonstration is most needed. This argument might have been valid in the past, but today no place on earth is too far away.

Latin America, like China, occupies a large area, although not as densely inhabited; its population is growing at a faster rate than in China -- in fact, the fastest of any major area in the world. Our problems in Latin America are different from those in highly industrialized societies; many of them are similar to those in Asia and Africa. Although our respective cultures stem from different ancestries, many of the characteristics in the struggle for economic development are present in Latin America: Past colonialism, limited available resources, too great a dependency on the major industrial nations, economic instability, a history of unstable national governments, misguided nationalist sentiments -- and, as in Asia and in Africa, when the aspirations for a better standard of living can not be attained through purely economic efforts, political action is brought to bear. We share the same yearnings, the same rising expectations, the same frustrations.

On the other hand, our ties to the West are stronger, we share the same concepts of the organization of society and the place of man in society. Our religion and philosophy of life stem from Western civilization. The basic

difficulties for a change to a modern concept of life that still persist in India and that could retard the democratic process are certainly not present in Latin America.

There are still more convincing reasons, from the point of view of United States interests, why Latin America should become a test case for democracy.

As we are neighbors, the solution of our problems are of common concern. In spite of differences in our respective backgrounds, of a historical, cultural and geographical nature, there are more analogies that can be found among the nations of other regions of the world. Our cultures stem from European civilization. We in the Western Hemisphere fought for our independence, inspired in the same principles and ideals of the American and French Revolutions. Our ancestors showed the same courage and indomitable spirit as they carved out of the wilderness this new civilization of the Americas.

Today Latin America is the largest trading partner of the United States. United States private investment has a large stake in Latin America. And above all, we both firmly believe that prosperity and social justice can flourish in a free society, where free men have the opportunity to realize their possibilities as human beings. These are some of the reasons why democracy can and must succeed in Latin America.

Because the freely elected Governors represent government nearest the people and public opinion in a democracy plays an important part in determining political action, both domestic and international, I have spoken tonight of world problems that may need a serious reformulation of United States foreign policy.

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