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Highlights of Discussions
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National Commission on Coping with Interdependence

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania November 19-20, 1975

During the third and final meeting of the Commission in Philadelphia, the members considered developments since the previous meeting in April, debated the role of government in coping with interdependence, discussed the proposed content of the Commission's final report, and suggested follow-up activity in five of the six elements of American society that were studied -- government, education, labor, business, voluntary agencies and the media.

Perceptions of Interdependence

Since one of the Commissions objectives had been to increase public awareness of the facts and challenges of interdependence, members exchanged impressions on progress in that direction during the past seven months. The picture was mixed.

Numerous isolated events were cited to indicate some forward movement in certain fields. Secretary Kissinger's speech to the special session of the United Nations on the world economic order contained promising proposals for dealing with several major interdependence issues. President Ford met with the government chiefs of five other leading industrial nations to discuss, perhaps for the first time in history, the internal economies of their countries and their impact on one another and on the rest of the world.

Public interest in interdependence was particularly noted in Philadelphia, where participants in the meeting heard details of the "Declaration of Interdependence" project of the city's World Affairs Council. The project, chaired by Commission member Frederick Heldring, involves an imaginative program of events related to the planned public signing of the "Declaration" by members of the U.S. Congress in 1976. The Philadelphia Council contemplates follow-up activities to generate interest in interdependence issues in subsequent years in the school system and in the community generally.

Indications of interdependence consciousness on a lesser scale were also reported, as signs of the times. Education officers of a state school system have started planning projects in international education, something that might not have occurred to them two years ago. A top-rated TV comedy show featured a lively episode about the danger of fluourocarbon sprays to the ozone. Opinion polls indicate some greater concern about the quality of life.

On the other hand, there was plenty of evidence that consciousness of interdependence and the need for facing its challenges had not sunk very deep in the American mind. Polls and statistics show that Americans are doing less about conservation than they were a year ago and that they are thoroughly bewildered about whether or not there really is any overall energy problem. The Department of Agriculture still operates on the principle that "surpluses are bad" rather than on the understanding that, with world yield per acre declining and with population growth largely unchecked, American food surpluses are a boon to the world. There is

no authoritative voice to make clear that it is necessary to sell wheat in order to buy oil. Some working people are interested only in immediate issues of jobs and living standards, while longer range questions which may ultimately affect jobs and living standards cannot get their attention.

The Role of Government

The better part of one session was devoted to a discussion of the paper prepared for the Commission by Adam Yarmolinsky entitled "Beyond Sovereignty: The Role of Government in Coping with Interdependence". The paper's main thesis, that the Federal Government's departmental and decision-making structure should be altered to blur the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs, provoked a lively debate. The general objective of the paper gained broad approval but some of its specific proposals and formulations elicited sharp questions.

Would lodging major domestic-international decisions in an expanded White House coordinating mechanism create a top-heavy, duplicating bureaucracy?

Would diffusing responsibility for foreign policy concerns to the domestic departments be effective if it was not preceded by a drastic change of attitude in those departments regarding the importance of the international implications of their domestic decisions?

Why would greater responsibility entrusted to a White House coordinating mechanism work any better than the present Council for International Economic Policy, which has been relatively ineffective in coordinating decision making?

Would the restructuring of "domestic" departments to reflect the international character of the functions they perform reduce special constituency pressures to such an extent that the whole Executive Branch would become less responsive to the public, which is always composed of a variety of interest groups?

Does the emphasis in the paper on the importance of considering the international consequences of all U.S. decisions lead ultimately to a yielding of U.S. sovereignty and to a one-world concept?

Professor Yarmolinsky said he was expecting to revise the paper and would take these questions into account. Specifically he would make clear that a change in attitude toward the international aspects of "domestic" policy was an essential precondition to the change in structure he was suggesting. He would also rephrase the passages that implied a diminished responsiveness on the part of the bureaucracy to the general public and its component interest groups. As for the one-world idea, the paper was designed to develop a way in which sovereign national governments could respond to one another's concerns in the absence of a world government.

The Yarmolinsky essay sparked a broader discussion of the sovereignty issue. One view was that it would be impossible to solve the serious global problems ahead of us without giving up some measure of sovereignty to an international authority, whether in regard to the sea, the environment, or even international finance. Others responded that the majority of Americans was not prepared to yield the independent, decision-making authority of the U.S. Government on any major issue and would reject any such

proposal out of hand. This view was most clearly set forth by Clare Boothe Luce in her colorful review of U.S. public attitudes toward international involvements when she addressed the World Affairs Council luncheon meeting. She urged that ways be found to address the new issues effectively without arousing a domestic political backlash.

Mr. Cleveland suggested that the dilemma might be resolved by taking a leaf out of the European Community book. The Common Market countries have been able to "pool" or "lend" their sovereignties for specific purposes and mutual benefits but are able to withdraw their sovereignties intact whenever they wish to do so. Other participants agreed that the idea of "pooling" sovereignty for limited objectives in the common interest would be more acceptable to Americans than any concept of "surrender" of sovereignty.

Several members urged a view of the sovereignty issue in the longer perspective of American history, particularly in the period of the formation of the Union 200 years ago. The individual states faced many difficulties in deciding to give up many of their powers to a new federal authority. Emphasis on some of the parallels involved would be especially appropriate in this Bicentennial period. Attention was drawn to an intriguing analysis of the international views of early American leaders in an essay prepared for the Commission by Ralph L. Ketcham, "From Independence to Interdependence". The paper just came off the press on the eve of the Philadelphia meeting. The central point of the paper, that the founding fathers understood interdependence better than many of their successors, was noted with great interest.

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Proposals for Follow-Up

Commission members advanced numerous suggestions for stirring up intensified discussion of interdependence in most of the six categories of American life considered by the Commission. Some of the suggestions offered and views expressed were these:

Government. The White House and the State Department should restore the publication of annual foreign affairs reports, which were suspended two years ago. The reports contained the facts and figures needed to document the reality of interdependence. The meeting was informed that issuance of some of this factual material will be resumed by the State Department in the coming year.

Briefings and seminars on interdependence issues should be held for government officials in the Executive Branch and among members of Congress and their staffs. Assistant Secretary of State Richardson noted that the sensitivity of officials to the international aspects of policy was not automatic and that outside groups had a constructive role to play. He felt that the bilateral commissions recently formed between the U.S. Government and several foreign governments on a wide range of mutual interests had begun to involve U.S. domestic departments in international relationships which were novel to them. Mr. Richardson and Assistant Secretary Reinhardt said they expected that their respective offices, the Bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs and of Public Affairs, would be stepping up their activities relating to interdependence in the coming year.

Education. The newly published paper, written for the Commission by Ward Morehouse, "A New Civic Literacy", outlined a comprehensive program of action to energize the whole

educational system to prepare coming generations of Americans to understand and face the challenges of interdependence. Commission members agreed that the message of necessary change in educational philosophy, curriculum and textbooks has to be brought home to the universities, teachers' institutions, school boards and textbook publishers. A group including Clark Kerr, Harlan Cleveland and Robert Gilmore has been meeting to consider setting up a committee to work on the problem of getting global perspectives into the nation's school system. The need exists for a new set of goals to be established for American education by some authoritative leaders such as those of the Educational Policies Commission of the NEA some decades ago.

Labor. Consideration is being given under the leadership of Glenn Watts to organizing discussions within the AFL-CIO about such questions as the dilemma of nationally organized unions dealing effectively with multinational corporations. In the current economic situation the only global subjects likely to gain the attention of union members are those that can be translated immediately into bread-and-butter issues.

Business. American business has increasingly learned to think internationally because of its growing foreign inter-connections. But many insensitivities remain and they create problems. More can be done to broaden the appreciation of global factors among executives through business informational channels such as the Conference Board, whose officers have been discussing possible programs on interdependence.

The Media. Efforts should be made to get newspaper editors and the producers of the electronic media to focus

more attention on interdependence subjects. Network television specials could be devoted to aspects of interdependence which have automatic public appeal because of their relevance to everyday life. Informal briefings on core global problems should be given to the scriptwriters of soap operas, family comedies and other daily and weekly serial shows because of their constant need for material and their willingness to introduce subjects which have "relevance". Erwin Canham is interested in developing discussions on interdependence at the next meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and at later gatherings of other media associations.

One proposal was that special task forces be set up to bring the message to the leadership elements in each of the above categories and in the non-profit institutional sphere.

Specific Issues

Several members urged that attention be concentrated, in the Commission's follow-up activities, on a limited number of specific issues or cases which can serve to dramatize the meaning of interdependence and "grab" the public's interest. Numerous suggestions for such specifics were offered:

Two cases related to food. One was the total world food situation which will probably put the American people in the position in the next two or three years of having to decide such difficult political-moral-economic questions as whether to sell grain to Russia to feed its livestock or send some of that same food to save people from starvation

in Bangladesh. The other food issue dealt with the constant reduction of the fish catch in the North Atlantic as a result of pollution and overfishing. The public might be lured to an interest in the problem of getting agreement among the 17 fishing nations in the North Atlantic if the public is persuaded that the consequences of success or failure will directly affect the price of haddock in the supermarket.

Another suggestion was the possible danger to the United States of any serious collapse in Western Europe due to the ravages of inflation. Mr. Anderson pointed out that Americans at one time were convinced that Europe and Japan could not have prosperity if the United States was not doing well. Now we have to learn that our prosperity may depend on others.

Additional issues proposed for concentrated treatment included the urgent need to develop other sources of energy, global environmental problems such as the weakening of the ozone layer by fertilizers as well as by freon sprays, and the necessity for an accord on a Law of the Sea to prevent emerging conflicts over mineral extraction, fishing rights, pollution control and navigation lanes.

Final Statement

By unanimous agreement, Mr. Cleveland was requested to draft a final report for the Commission, to be issued after clearance with the members by mail. The participants at the Philadelphia session had much to say about the content and tone of their closing statement.

The primary audience for the report, it was felt, should be the leadership elements of the six sectors of American

suggestion was that, since attitudes required changing before structures could be altered, it could take four or five years to affect attitudes and another eight or nine to make the needed institutional changes.

Members recommended a positive tone for the final statement, It should avoid any suggestion that Americans should have a constant sense of guilt about their way of life. Nor should it imply that the consequences of interdependence are necessarily unhappy. It should stress the benefits of coping with interdependence intelligently, both in maintaining living standards and improving the quality of life.

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