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By ~~_____~~ NARS, Date 5/17/80

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE PRESIDENT

I have been giving some thought to our experience of the past two years, and the seeming direction of events in the two years to come. Here, for what they may be worth, are four general propositions.

1. The primary problem of American society continues to be that of the eroding authority of the principal institutions of government and society.

You will recall that in a long memorandum I sent you before the Inauguration I argued that the challenge to the legitimacy of our institutions and the processes associated with them was then the primary issue facing the nation. It seems to me it has continued to be such, and that this situation is not likely to change. In one form or another -- from calls for "law and order" on the Right to demands for revolutionary change on the Left -- the central theme of American politics at this time is that our institutions are failing.

There has been some recent improvement, above all in the Presidency, which was a beleaguered and badly damaged office when you took over. The authority of the Presidency had been undermined by various events, primarily by the war in Vietnam, especially the way it had been "begun" in the face of a seeming solemn pledge during the 1964 campaign, and the way it had been conducted. The legitimacy of the Presidency has now been at least partially restored. It is still very much a partisan office, but there is nothing necessarily wrong with that. The essential point is that the powers exercised by the President are seen to be those conferred by law, and not usurped or illegal, as was

increasingly the charge in the latter years of the Johnson administration.

(One way to interpret the intense shock of Cambodia is that it appeared that the "illegitimate" use of the war powers that had seemingly characterized the Johnson years was being revived. After it had come to seem this was a thing of the past. Even so, Massachusetts passed a law asserting that the war is unconstitutional, and is even now importuning the Supreme Court to pass on whether or not this is so. After Cambodia the press, from The New Yorker leftwards, was able to revive the notion that the exercise of power in Washington is fundamentally illegitimate, and this idea is now fixed in the minds of a large number of persons, the general rule being that the "better" educated they are, the more they are likely to hold a more or less conspiratorial view of the Presidency. On balance, I would say that after two years those who distrust the Presidency do so with greater intensity than before, but there are somewhat fewer of them. This is a gain of sorts.)

Of no less importance, major civil disorders in the Negro residential areas of large cities have -- almost abruptly -- ceased. It is not possible to call this an achievement of the Administration. No one really understands the causalities involved. But the end of the recurrent, annual rioting occurred at precisely the moment the Administration took office. As you are blamed when it rains (or, in this case, will be if it starts to rain again) you might as well take credit when the sun shines.

From 1964 to 1968, there were five successive periods of massive civil disorders in which urban blacks tore up their neighborhoods, fought the police, and generally assumed the posture of a pre-revolutionary proletariat. In the spring of 1968, following the murder of Dr. King, practically every major black neighborhood outside the South went up in flames. Buildings were burning ten blocks from the White House. When we arrived here we were literally given pads of printed forms for declaring a state of emergency and calling out the National Guard. Simply

fill in the time and place. A white phone on my desk connected directly with the riot center of the District Government. It was tested morning and afternoon. The widespread presumption was that this situation would simply go on escalating until God knows what happened.

This was barely two years ago. Yet it seems decades. In ways the most important domestic fact of your Administration is that after five years of ever mounting urban violence, there has been an abrupt ending. It may start again. (And, to be sure, a ripple effect has continued, so that smaller places have had disturbances.) But for the moment it seems over.

Thus count good progress in reasserting the legitimacy of executive powers and easing urban racial confrontations. At the same time, however, things have got worse on other fronts. I would mention, in particular, two institutions central to the normal functioning of society: the courts and the universities. Both have suffered serious declines in their prestige and authority during the past two years.

The courts are the most conspicuous example. There is no other institution so dependent on the principle of authority, as against power. Once challenged they prove exceedingly vulnerable. (Authority relations, as I remarked two years ago, are consensual. If people don't give their consent, the system collapses and is replaced by power relations, which are coercive.)

The best symbol of the erosion of judicial authority was the trial of the "Chicago Seven" which was an almost total victory for the forces of disorder. The judge was made to look a fool, which one gathers is not difficult. The prosecution was made to seem venal and incompetent. Racial extremists were given the incomparable prize of a black militant chained and gagged in court. (I have not been in a black neighborhood since without seeing a poster of Seale in that situation: a symbol of white justice.) Not to be underestimated, the old network of Stalinist lawyers was, as best I can judge, revived and restored to its mythic role as the defender of injustice. The only saving grace was a sensible verdict by the jury.

The delegitimation of court proceedings will now, I believe, become a fairly common practice. No doubt it will offend the silent majority: but it also tells them, and everyone else, something that no one would have believed until very recently, namely that you don't necessarily have to do what a judge tells you.

The universities are a not dissimilar case. The Cambodian affair brought a temporary truce to the campuses as they united in opposition to the Administration, but the basic fact is that before and since powerful forces arose on most elite campuses dedicated to destroying the authority of the university itself. "Shut it down" was the cry of the radicals. The radicals have quieted somewhat of late, but the fact remains that universities -- and all they stand for -- have been shown to be extremely vulnerable to internal coercion. There used to be a joke in Cambridge about a secretary telling a visitor to Massachusetts Hall that "the President is in Washington seeing Mr. Coolidge." Alas, the President of Harvard is now only a man who may or may not resign next year. (That is to say the next President. The present one has already resigned. So have the Presidents of M. I. T., Boston University, and Brandeis!)

These may seem small things, but I would argue they are powerful indicators of how stable the society is and of how much we should expect abnormal as against normal behavior. On balance I would judge the amount of behavior based on rejection of the authority of American society has continued on the increase in the past two years. We have seen the beginning of organized terrorism, of a more or less classic Nihilist pattern of upper class youth blowing up symbols of their parents' authority, and on occasion themselves as well. As you know, I believe trouble has already started in the Armed Forces, and will get worse. An avowed revolutionary movement has established a base within the black population. Etc. I conclude that my argument of two years ago was valid, and is likely to remain so.

2. The mass of the American population is troubled by the seeming collapse of traditional values but is not able to do much about it.

This is a development I would not have forecast two years ago. It is my principal interpretation of the mid-term election results. I do not know which has surprised me most: the sudden emergence of a revolutionary neo-Marxist critique of American society, or the almost total incapacity of the moderate-to-conservative forces of the society to argue back. The silent majority is silent because it has nothing to say.

This may be the most important point I ever make to you. I had expected that the advent of a responsible, respectable Republican Administration, following a period of unexampled excess and vulgarity in Washington, would inaugurate a period of fairly lively and interesting advocacy of the conservative virtues: moderation, decency, common sense, restrained ambition, attainable goals, comprehensible policies. Nothing of the sort has happened. Bill Buckley continues, but no Nixon spokesmen have emerged. No debate has begun. Apart from a half dozen of your speeches, nothing has been said worth listening to. I repeat this has startled me. If I may be allowed, I think we have got it all wrong when we talk about the news media being in the grip of liberal ideologues. This is not a matter of choice, much less of conspiracy or design. It is a matter of plain necessity. There are no conservative ideologues. (With one or two exceptions of which, again, more later.) For example, the New York Times has been repeatedly, or so I feel, unjust to you in its news columns, as well as on its editorial page. (Where no one would object.) But this is not really a matter of design. I think I know this, as I know that paper moderately well. Abe Rosenthal, the managing editor, sounds at times almost desperate. He has a news room still predominantly made up of old time liberal Democrats who can be counted on to report a story in a straight-forward manner, but every time one of these goes and is replaced by a new recruit from the Harvard Crimson or whatever, the Maoist faction on West 43rd Street gets one more vote. No one else applies.

A- The
weakness
of our entire
P.R. effort

This is a large subject, going well beyond the realm of the merely political. The current issue of The Public Interest is

devoted to the subject of capitalism. Our general conclusion is that capitalism is in the gravest trouble, simply because it seemingly cannot produce persons who will defend it in terms that have to be respected. This is a problem of the culture and, to come right out and say it, all the signs suggest that bourgeois culture is in a bad way. In that issue Daniel Bell writes:

. . . While minority life-styles and cultures have often conflicted with those of the majority, what is striking today is that the majority has no intellectually respectable culture of its own -- no major figures in literature (the best is James Gould Cozzens), painting (except, perhaps, Andrew Wyeth), or poetry -- to counterpose to the adversary culture. In this sense, bourgeois culture has been shattered.

Very important

As I say, this surprised me. And it may be I have got it wrong. But I have been struck over and again by the pathetic inadequacy of the arguments put forth on behalf of the Administration's programs and its general philosophy. The only persons with any vigor on their arguments are the real right wingers, and by and large their line is that you have been misled by sinister liberals of the variety of John Ehrlichman. No one argues, as it were, the Ehrlichman case.

Do not doubt that there is a struggle going on in this country of the kind the Germans used to call a Kulturkampf. The adversary culture which dominates almost all channels of information transfer and opinion formation has never been stronger, and as best I can tell it has come near to silencing the representatives of traditional America.

If this is so, we are in a pretty serious situation. I spoke to this theme in an address to the American Council on Education last month.

Thirty years ago Orwell wrote: "The common man is still living in the mental world of Dickens, but nearly

every modern intellectual has gone over to some or other form of totalitarianism." Just this month Norman Podhoretz repeats this observation, deploring "the barbaric hostility to freedom of thought which by the late 1960's had become one of the hallmarks of the radical ethos."

It was the practice of the university radicals of that period to compare the America of the Johnson Administration to Hitler's Germany.

This was absurd. What one fears is not absurd is the growing conviction among critics of the left that the present era can be compared to the Weimar era in Germany, when the same devaluation and detestation of everything the polity was able to achieve was also the mark of the high intellectuals.

There is a poignant quality to this growing estrangement, namely that the encounter is so unequal. The silent majority, if you will accept that term, is silent not least because it finds it so difficult to say things in terms that will win a respectful hearing among those who judge such matters. Like Orwell's working class, it lives in a world not far removed from Victorian virtues. I for one find those virtues -- confidence in the nation, love of the nation, a willingness to sacrifice for it -- priceless. But the symbols of those beliefs are tattered, even at times tawdry. It is not fair. But it is true.

But the Weimar Republic analogy may be quite wrong. It may be that the traditional culture of the nation is so demoralized that it will never fight back. Consider a moment. When we have a rally on behalf of your foreign policy, who do we get. Kate Smith. Wouldn't you really rather watch Joan Woodward at the anti-Nixon gathering? The other "side" pays attention to detail. The minute word gets out that you liked the movie Patton

word comes back that George C. Scott is campaigning against the candidates you have endorsed. You are simply out-gunned. You may have more troops, but the other side has more fire-power. Infinitely more. And I believe this to be a basic cultural condition. There may be, as I would think, rather more fourth rate minds around the Administration than is absolutely necessary, but it is not a matter of recruitment. It is a matter of the odds: the odds are against you in the cultural struggle of this period.

It comes down to the case of poor Foran who prosecuted the Chicago Seven. He simply could not understand the defendants. Lurching about in his not overly furnished mind, he stumbled on the idea that they might be homosexuals, and started talking about "freaking fags." He probably knew better. In truth he probably envied the heterosexual abandon of the young men involved. But he didn't know how to say so. All he could think to say was something that made him look pathetic to the very persons he was trying to scorn.

3. The most effective allies of the Administration with respect to issues of civic order and the legitimacy of established institutions are likely now to be found among writers on the left rather than those on the right.

This may seem a bizarre idea, but I believe there is evidence to support the thesis. To begin with, I have been impressed with how little conservative writers -- such as they are -- have been for you, and how often they have been positively opposed. In part this is because there has been a radicalizing process at work among them, as well as among their counterparts on the left. I have been reading Garry Wills' Nixon Agonistes. (Let me say he is at least as nasty to me as he is to you!) The book is pretty much standard brand elite contempt for people in the middle. But recall that Wills is a National Review writer. Bill Buckley has made an honorable effort to call attention to the fact that his erstwhile protege's conversion to the view that "Amerika" is an imperialist fascist war machine has come rather late in life. But Buckley, who is a Catholic conservative does not, I feel, really understand the authoritarian temperament.

H. True - This is Shultz's real challenge to find a few bright people who will be on our side & who are not the far right?

Left-Right really doesn't make that much difference to the true believer. You will recall from the 1950's cases of conversions from Left to Right. Today the opposite is more common. Thus Karl Hess, one of Goldwater's speech writers in 1964 has now become a big leftist. But more importantly left and right in their extreme distaste for what America now is and likely can become have more in common with each other than they do with Republicans or Democrats of the center.

Comment

The main attack on the society at this moment is coming from the authoritarian left. In a curious way this means that the most effective spokesmen against these tendencies will be found among persons of moderate to left views who are not authoritarian. (And also, if I may, who are not crazy. The amount of plain craziness around accounts for more than any of us, I suspect, quite realize.) This is a situation reminiscent of the long struggle against the Stalinist dominated Communist Party here in the United States. My reading of that history is that the Stalinists lost not because the Chicago Tribune was against them, but because Partisan Review was. That is to say there existed on the left men who understood what the Stalinists were about, could out-think them on their own grounds, and who were willing to give their lives to that effort.

To a quite astonishing degree, the situation of the 1930's and 40's has been recreated. It would have been thought impossible, but it has come to pass, and with it there has been a powerful resurgence of anti-authoritarian thinking among liberal-left groups. Some years ago, William Phillips of Partisan Review said to a New Left critic that he could not discuss politics with him, because the young man's arguments were so old that he, Phillips, had forgotten the answers. This year, however, my colleague Nathan Glazer has published a book entitled Remembering The Answers. Meaning of course that if the old lies are in fashion again, then the old truths have got to be brought out to combat them.

Many persons would be surprised at how vigorous this new opposition is. I think you would be surprised at how much

support your policies receive from this group. They were disappointed in the tone of the Congressional campaign -- there is no reason you should not know this -- but in general have understood what you have been trying to do, and have approved. It is also to be noted that this "second round" of authoritarian attack on democratic institutions -- Norman Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, speaks of "the barbaric hostility to freedom of thought which by the late 1960's had become one of the hallmarks of the radical ethos" -- has led to a reassessment of what can be done. There is an increased perception of how fragile and vulnerable a free society is, and how much care is needed to preserve it. This perception has ever been the hallmark of the true conservative, and increasingly it is shared by persons who in the past have thought themselves anything but that. Thus Glazer begins his new book with a pronouncement that is already causing a stir in intellectual and political circles across the country.

How does a radical, a mild radical, it is true, but still one who felt closer to radical than to liberal writers and politicians in the late 1950's, end up a conservative, a mild conservative, but still closer to those who call themselves conservative than to those who call themselves liberal in early 1970? I seem to have moved from a position in which I was somewhat embarrassed to be considered liberal (surely I was a degree further left than that!) to a position where I am once again embarrassed, but from quite a different perspective.

These men of the old liberal left grew up to assume that conservatives were perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. They now begin to realize how ideologically weak conservatives either always were or have become. Glazer writes: "The loss of confidence and nerve that follows when the bourgeoisie is inundated by an anti-bourgeois culture -- which is just what is happening today -- can scarcely be imagined." We see this everywhere in America. It extends to the haute bourgeoisie who

run our universities, and who almost everywhere have collapsed or collaborated. Note, for example, in the testimony taken by the Scranton Commission that apart from Dumke (a good man) just about the only support for your general position came from Sidney Hook and Steven Kelman -- both socialists, but aroused and informed anti-authoritarians.

Significantly, Commentary, the journal of the American Jewish Committee, and by common consent one of the two or three most important intellectual journals in the nation -- or world -- has become the principal source of sustained argument against the positions of the radical left.

Whatever the case, the essential fact is that there exists here a potentially enormously influential source of support for a positive and reasonably optimistic view of American society -- before, during, and after the Nixon Administration.

I would argue that this source should be encouraged, given access to the Administration, and just as importantly listened to. For the moment, these men -- the Kristols, the Trillings, the Seaburys, the Reismans, the Wildavskys -- are the true conservatives. They are defending what America has been able to achieve. At some future point they will doubtless be on the attack again. (Almost to a man they were against the war in Vietnam. But this was in 1962 when no one knew there was one. By and large they now take your word that you are going to bring it to an end.)

To be blunt, the Administration needs some class in its supporters. For the moment we are utterly outclassed. The price of this is that our only dependable support comes from persons who feel they are outclassed too. We all deserve something better.

4. Crime does not pay.

This at least would be my view. If the electorate is worried about the stability of the society it can only become more worried to the degree it is reminded how unstable things are, and how

H - People like this should come in on occasion (5:00 PM)
H absolutely true

much lawlessness exists. Crime and disorder are "natural" issues for a party out of power. They are an implicit indictment of the competence of the party in power. The first operating principle of a democracy is that if you don't like the way things are going, vote for the outs.

Surely, confidence in the Johnson administration was severely shaken by the annual succession of urban riots. In no sense could he be said to have been responsible. But then the Emperors of China surely were not responsible when the Yangtze flooded. Yet when it did the folk concluded that the mandate of heaven had been removed, and so frequently was the head of the Emperor.

There are two further points here, of which the first is that relatively little can be done about the problem. No one understands crime well enough to know how to prevent it. We have some notion about street crime, and have some (small) success to claim here in Washington. (Although, of course, things are considerably worse today than they were when we took office.) But we have almost no understanding of how to control nihilist crime of the kind we have been giving such prominence to of late. What you can't control you had better not draw attention to.

Correct

There is a more subtle, perhaps overly subtle, point which I would also raise. As you know, I am strongly of the view that the politics of the radical left in this country at this time -- as in most countries at most times -- are a form of upper class aggression. Close up, this fact is rather blurred. (Assuming of course that it is a fact.) But from sufficient distance it is often obvious. In the 1930's when I was growing up in New York City the Ivy League campuses were teeming with radical youth intent on redeeming the working man through the C.I.O. or whatever. We could not have cared less. From America Firsters to Young Communists they were all the same to us: "rich college f---s." I do not know, but strongly suspect, that especially to working class America, the misbehavior of students is seen as a form of class privilege. Which it is. The instinctive response to the worker in such situations is to turn to the Democratic, not the Republican party. To this I am equally

sure is added a resentment at being reminded that something he very much wants for his kids -- a college education -- may not be good for them.

You have been meticulous in pointing out that the radicals are a small minority. But these nice distinctions have not always characterized Administration spokesmen, and the general impression is that we have been running against "the kids."

I hope I might be understood as proposing that we pound away at the problem of crime -- especially the heroin problem -- but that we make less of an issue of its increase. As with the war in Vietnam, we should look to the prospect of reporting that under the Administration it has declined.

Envoi

As you said at the Cabinet meeting last Thursday, it is peace and the pocketbook that matter. These should be our principal themes of the next two years. Peace at home and abroad. Prosperity, not just of the pocketbook, but also of the spirit. The former should not be hard. The great challenge is to bring the nation to the point where it is once more proud of what it is and confident of what it will become.

Daniel P. Moynihan