

ADDRESS TO BE DELIVERED BY RALPH J. BUNCHE
AT THE COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, ANN ARBOR,
MICHIGAN, 16 June 1951, 5:00 p.m.

(Check Against Delivery)

I am highly honoured at the opportunity to greet and congratulate this impressive company of graduates. Nor do I forget the parents, mates, relatives and friends, who, in so many instances, have contributed greatly, materially and otherwise, to the achievement which brings these graduates before us today.

If I may be pardoned for a personal reference, this is a particularly happy occasion for me, a native of this great state. There is a special thrill in returning to one's original habitat, providing, of course, that the return is a congenial one.

I must say, however, that I am rather diffident about

/commencement

commencement speeches. The graduates are properly the centre of attraction on this day. They have certainly earned this one day in the sun. I hope for them that this day is only a promise of many happy days to come. The commencement speech, it seems to me, is a diversion, which serves only to make already impatient graduates wait a few painful minutes longer for the conferring of the degrees, which, after all, is the main business of the day.

If the commencement speeches being made throughout the length and breadth of the land during this month of June - the month of the academic ritual - were to be put end to end, they would, I imagine, total more yardage than all of the Wolverine football teams have rolled up on the gridiron since "Hurry Up" Yost's juggernauts began to make football history for the Maize and Blue. And I fear that if the

/graduates

graduates tried to absorb all of the conflicting views and advice poured forth by the commencement speakers they would surely end up as the most intellectually confused generation in history.

In such circumstances, one may at least be mercifully brief.

You are graduating at a time of greatest challenge. In this hour of the atomic age, mankind is living through the most decisive moments of human experience. The unfolding of international events in the next few years - or perhaps even months - may well determine the fate of humanity on earth.

There are fundamental facts in the world today, which we Americans, who bear new and - to most of us, perhaps - still strange international responsibilities, must grasp and understand thoroughly,

/or all

or all of the values that we have come to regard as indispensable to the existence of free and self-respecting men could well be lost.

I know that to say these things and other things that I shall say in the next few moments is to utter platitudes. Indeed, most of the things that are really worth saying and that need to be said in these trying times, are trite. But platitudes are no less true because they are trite. The verities always become platitudes. They are so utterly and obviously true that they frequently escape our notice when we most need to rely upon them. Fundamental truths need to be repeated over and over again, until they are thoroughly and universally understood by all who enjoy the privilege of thinking freely. This is the only answer to the propaganda weapon of the reiterated "big lie".

/In a free society

In a free society like our own, especially, events occur in such kaleidoscopic procession, the mind of the individual citizen is so constantly crowded with concerns of pressing urgency, we are so incessantly assailed by a clamouring array of unsorted facts, that we may easily lose sight of the simple and yet most vital truths.

There are some such truths to be read out of the happenings in the world today, and in my view, it would be disastrous if we were to permit them to escape us and would fail to set our national course by them. I should like to dwell briefly on a few of what would appear to me to be the most irrefutable of them.

Korea is very much in our minds these days. The pros and cons of the historic debate about it are as vigorous as they are voluminous. But few will deny certain compelling truths which emerge from the

/welter

welter of conflicting evidence.

When last June the Republic of Korea became the innocent victim of a naked act of aggression, the United Nations was confronted with its gravest challenge. Ill-prepared as it was to do so, it had to exert every possible effort to meet this challenge or lose its moral force in the world, its integrity, its very reason for being. We who love freedom may be deeply thankful that it rose to that challenge. The United Nations was created for the specific purpose of securing war-torn, long harassed peoples against aggression - by peaceful means, if possible, by force, if necessary. Peaceful means failing in Korea, the employment of international force became necessary and will continue to be necessary until the war there can be brought to a satisfactory end.

/The tragedy

The tragedy of Korea has become the severest test of the post-war world. It is providing an increasingly clear and cogent answer to the most searching question of our times: Is there a resolute will in the world to oppose aggression? Could the world stomach a new Munich?

As modern wars go, the Korean war, despite the heavy casualties and the appalling destruction in that hapless land, is a minor war. Still, on this limited, localised war in Korea, the future of mankind and the survival of the civilisation man has tortuously built may well depend. For, in response to the call of the United Nations and for the first time in human history, peoples of many nations, races and creeds are firmly united in a determined collective effort for the sole and simple purpose of repelling aggression and

/ensuring

ensuring peace.

The aggressive adventure in Korea has sounded the alarm; the

free and peace-loving world has been alerted. Because of this,

the odds against the success of any new aggression are far greater

today than they were last June.

It is foolhardy to speculate on

the future, but the evidence mounts that the pages of later history

may recall the Korean incident as the decisive event of modern times.

This is the great truth of Korea.

No one in the world can be

unaffected by it.

Though it is constantly said that the United Nations is the

world's sole hope for peace, there are many amongst us who do not

believe it.

Nevertheless, could any truth be more obvious?

/Those who

Those who profess not to believe it and who denounce the United Nations and the principle of collective security on which it rests, as ill-conceived and impotent, have nothing constructive to offer in its place. Some of them propose, with shocking disregard for the facts of international life today, or distortion of them, that we must depend for our security exclusively or primarily upon our own military strength and resources. They lightly dismiss our friends and those other vast millions who may well be won to our side if our course is wisely charted. They would have us pursue a neo-isolationist course whereby we would not only be aloof from the rest of the world but the rest of the world would be forced to keep aloof from us.

/Others

Others have only war to offer in place of the United Nations and collective security, and for some of them, apparently, the sooner it comes the better. They would not be disturbed even at the thought that we might initiate it. They bewuse themselves with the magic spell of our atomic weapons and are deluded by wishful thinking about a quick and decisive atomic war. They cannot seem to realise that atomic weapons have a far more menacing rattle than the swords of old; that when they speak of atomic war they speak not of the glory of victory but of the sacrifice of millions of innocent lives, among whom many would be our own.

These, clearly, are not responsible answers to the sore dilemma of our age. We in America wish peace. The generality of peoples everywhere wish peace. Peace, clearly, cannot be

/achieved

achieved by fighting wars. When the tragedy of war descends, peace and hope with it, are gone. We have learned by two distressing experiences in a generation that wars today settle little if anything and lead only to new and greater wars. I believe most earnestly that the United Nations does reflect the fervent desire of peoples for peace and the way in which they wish to see it ensured. The United Nations seeks peace in the only way peace can be achieved - through collective effort.

The principle of collective security is neither mystery nor plot. Every man in the street knows well enough that if one faces the prospect of a fight it is very comforting to be surrounded by friends. The purpose of international collective security is precisely that - it draws together in a bond of common purpose, in the interest of /their own.

their own security, all nations and peoples who are opposed to aggression and who are prepared to oppose it with force, if necessary.

The question is: If not the United Nations, what?

I know of no reassuring answer to this question other than full support for the historic effort of the United Nations in a determined resolve to make it succeed, and thereby to save us all from indescribable catastrophe.

We Americans have yet to realize that peace cannot be cheaply or quickly won. It is only by patient, unrelenting and undismayed effort that peace can be achieved. There are no easy roads to peace, no short-cuts or pat solutions. Each week I receive in my mail elaborate peace plans of one kind or another, devised by private /individuals.

individuals. They are as impractical as they are sincere, but they do reflect the intense devotion of their authors to the cause of peace.

There is no question of peace at any price, of appeasement or surrender of fundamental principle. Peace, clearly, cannot be won in this way. But, on the other hand, neither can peace be won by the threat of war, by bristling speeches and intransigence. The tried and true instrument in the conduct of international affairs is negotiation. The settlement of international disputes by negotiation and compromise is a difficult and tedious and today, particularly, a frustrating process, but the dividend is peace. In an age of atomic weapons this is a handsome dividend in which all mankind would share.

/I can scarcely

I can scarcely avoid calling to your attention the fact that the termination of the potentially dangerous little but vicious war in Palestine now more than two years ago was possible only because the Israelis and the Arabs were willing, even though reluctantly, to reach agreement through mutual and honourable compromise.

There could only have been for the peace of the world at large a disastrous result from that war if either party had insisted upon surrender of the other party as the sole basis for peace or had rejected negotiation.

The United Nations believes, and rightly, in a new concept of victory in war - victory for humanity, by ending wars through international conciliation before they have been fought to their bloody conclusion in sheer military victory. The United Nations is

/fighting

fighting a war in Korea, to be sure, but only because no honourable alternative has been available. It has not, in any sense, relaxed its effort to end the fighting there by negotiation, nor will it do so. It will never seek to extend the scope of any war except as a last resort. The United Nations seeks no glory in war and finds none. Peace will always be the primary concern of the United Nations.

There is no dishonour in negotiation and no shame attached to striving for peace. Indeed, in our times, it is only the strongest of nations which can strike effective blows for peace. To work for peace is itself a source of national strength. For let us not forget that peace itself is a powerful weapon in the world. It carries a commanding appeal for most peoples.

/These are

These are critical times and the course of future events depends so very much upon our own understanding, our own attitudes and objectives. We must be very clear in our thinking and we must know what we are seeking to achieve in the world. We are for peace. We wish security. We strive for world order. We adhere to the United Nations and the principles of its Charter. But there are some questions, it seems to me, upon which we must calmly reflect when we think of the prospects for peace in the world. We are determined to defend ourselves, our way of life, our ideals against any threat, external or internal. But what, if anything, do we seek beyond that? We are vigorously opposed to communism. But does this imply that we are determined to destroy communism in the world, wherever it may be found and however

/it may

it may conduct itself?

Are we committed to the thesis that

there is not room enough in the world for democracy and communism?

If so, are we then to embark upon a fateful crusade, a fight to the bitter end, with the objective that all peoples whatever their history or present attitudes, shall be "liberated" from communist control?

If this should be our design we may well weigh soberly what the chances for peace in our time may be. Such an objective, surely,

would differ markedly from a determination to oppose, with all the force at our command, communist or any other kind of aggression

against free peoples anywhere. This, surely, we must do.

Are we content to accept in the organised world community any nation and people who will abide by the principles and obligations of the

United Nations Charter?

Aggressors, clearly, do not do so.

/I am not

I am not at all sure that such questions have been clearly thought out in our minds. The future of the world may well depend upon our unemotional reflection on them and on our ultimate conclusions.

In this connexion, may it not be said that no people can think clearly or act wisely under the influence of fear. It seems to me that we in America are threatening to indulge ourselves in a strange and dangerous experience. Some of us, apparently, are working ourselves into a mood of fear. It would be a new phenomenon to see Americans frightened and fearful. Increasingly, as I go about, I find fellow Americans talking and acting not with detestation but with fear of communism. And that fear is less concerned with the military might of the Soviet Union than with the

ideas and tactics of communism and the communists. There is a tendency by some to attribute everything bad to the designs of the communists. We sometimes ascribe to them powers which they might wish they had but which, in fact, they do not have.

This is a disturbing psychology. We must, of course, be fully alert to every danger and firmly determined to protect our nation, our institutions and our traditional way of life against any threat. But we can only weaken ourselves if we become frightened, if we begin to feel insecure among ourselves.

We in no way serve the interests of our national security by creating bogey-men and super-men out of communists, whether they be within or without our borders.

/We as a nation

We as a nation have momentous responsibilities to discharge,
both domestically and internationally. We can discharge those
responsibilities decisively - and we dare not fail to do so -
only if we are ^{as} strong as we have it in our power to be.

Excitement, fear and the hysteria which fear induces in people,
are weakening influences. On the other hand, great and confident
strength is to be derived from composure. Calmness, patience,
self-sacrificing preparation and unshakeable resolve will equip our
nation to meet any challenges.

Above all, we must retain our traditional faith in ourselves
and in our ideals. May we constantly reaffirm that faith, and
may every one of us dedicate himself to the causes of peace, freedom
and equality among men.

/In conclusion,

In conclusion, may I offer to the graduates only these few

words of advice. Never despair. Never lose hope.

Go forward always, confidently and boldly. The world is not

lost and it need not be lost. If you keep faith with high

ideals the future will be yours to command.