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Toward "The Great Society"

Now that enough time has passed for us to look back on the election with some sense of perspective, it becomes increasingly clear that a new era lies before us—if Americans have the intelligence, will, and dedication to deal with the challenges confronting them. The huge mandate given to President Johnson marks the end of one phase of a peaceful revolution that transformed America and the beginning of a second phase that may mean a still greater transformation—into what the President has vaguely called "The Great Society."

The first phase was largely wrought by Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was the product of somewhat patchwork, hit-or-miss, improvised programs, some of them misguided, some of them failures. Its labor pains included something approaching a class war, in which many business leaders and much of the press were bitterly ranged against Roosevelt, who in turn could cry: "They hate me, and I welcome their hatred." His allies were chiefly the fledgling unions, the hard-pressed farmers, and the unemployed "forgotten men." No reasonable man would want to live through such a hate-filled era again. But what it accomplished, in its curious, groping way, was a society that was neither socialistic nor purely capitalistic, but one in which both government and private enterprise managed to find their most useful roles. What is more, it worked. The country entered upon the greatest business prosperity the world had ever seen; General Motors' annual profit is now about one third the size of Herbert Hoover's last federal budget. Workers have enjoyed a similar rise in their standards: Widespread ownership of homes and cars is taken for granted, as is college education for the millions. The social-welfare measures that have developed, such as old-age pensions, unemployment insurance and bank-deposit insurance, have provided stabilizers against a recurrence of catastrophic depressions.

What Lyndon Johnson's election marks is the final acceptance and approval of this empirical, piecemeal revolution, not only by the majority of the people but by the powerful forces that once opposed it so bitterly. The Henry Ford who waged a personal war against Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal has been succeeded by the Henry Ford who supported Lyndon Johnson and The Great Society. The biggest businesses, the most important financiers, by and large, supported Johnson for perfectly good pragmatic reasons: It was good business. So did the press. So did many genuine conservatives. And the election showed that there is a consensus so broad as to widen the center until only the most extreme left and right cannot conscientiously join it.

In rejecting Barry Goldwater's drastic proposals for change, the American people endorsed both Johnson and the form that American society has developed during the past generation. But the mandate given to Johnson is not a mandate for him to sit complacently in the White House and congratulate himself. It is a mandate to keep the country moving forward with purpose and good judgment.

The problems facing us are staggering—the war in Vietnam goes from bad to worse; the Chinese Commu- [illegible] n of nuclear power is a deadly threat; the Atlantic allia [illegible] is badly split; the underdeveloped nations drift along in poverty and disorder. Yet our capacity to deal with these problems depends in large part on what we make of ourselves, what kind of nation we offer as an example to the world.

In purely material terms, it is clear that the American economy can provide all the surplus needed to pay for whatever improvements in public health, education or transportation the public welfare demands. And there is clearly enough support for these broad goals for them to be achieved in a careful, well-thought-out manner, without the need for ill-planned "crash" legislation. President Johnson would do well to create task forces truly representative of the American consensus to determine the specific needs of our society and the best approaches to fulfilling them. Let The Great Society be clearly defined and wisely planned.

Far more than immediate legislation, what America needs at the moment is a regeneration of its spirit, a rediscovery of national purpose. The campaign, with its frequent accusations of corruption, incompetence and irresponsibility, has left that spirit bruised, that purpose unsure. "The absence of inspiring leadership is devastatingly apparent in this country," said a letter in the New York *Herald Tribune* on post-election day. "There is not one religious or political leader present to capture the imagination of American youth and unite them in an extra-personal goal." In the same vein another reader looked back over the year since John Kennedy's death and observed: "What President Kennedy realized was how deeply ingrained in the American spirit is the myth of those pioneering days when people were capable of disentangling themselves from their past and of living their lives in accordance with the dictates of their hearts and consciences. What is so essentially missing from present-day society is the sense of novelty and adventure that characterized the early days of the Republic. . . . Hence, the realization of the necessity of space travel, the proclamation of a new birth of freedom for the Negro, the Peace Corps—however meritorious each was in its own right—assumed a deeper meaning against the larger symbolic design through which the spiritual yearnings of the American people could be fulfilled."

It is in this area—the intangible area of morals, of *esprit*, of purpose, of ethics—that the President can use his enormous mandate to help America rediscover and rededicate itself. He must first reestablish the public's confidence in Washington's own standards of honesty and morality. Conflicts of interest in both houses of Congress need public exposure and correction. The beginning that has been made in correcting an inequitable tax system, which is at the heart of so much deterioration of personal moral standards, should be followed by fuller and deeper tax reform. A system which places a premium on half-truths and on clever evasions should give way to one which taxes all citizens on the same basic principles, and keeps the maximum rates low enough to encourage initiative as well as honesty. In this same moral area, the first Southerner to be President in a century must continue to speak out over the heads of bigots to reach the receptive and inquiring minds of the younger generation and teach the necessity of equal rights for all Americans. By breaking the chain of racial hatred in one generation, the President could break it forever. Only when the national spirit is restored can The Great Society truly make a quantum leap into a new order of excellence.

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of the A FL-CIO. Among his announced reasons for leaving was his belief that CORE would not follow through on the ghetto projects: "People were saying," Hill recalled, "'That's not CORE; it's social welfare.'" Risk-taking in the South, and fighting the white school and the white neighborhood in the North are far more romantic than organizing in the filth and apathy of the ghetto. Carl Rachlin, who opposed Hill's Chicago program, argues that "CORE's whole strength is its romanticism; take that away and it fails. You can't do anything about these problems scratching at their roots—you have to get at them in the sky."

Nevertheless, as a member of the Chicago task force doggedly pointed out to a convention deeply stirred by reports from Mississippi, there are more Negroes in Chicago than there are in Mississippi, and CORE cannot reach them with an integration argument. "Getting a new play street or a traffic light on a corner," says a Chicagoan, "means a lot more to them than finding a few jobs for educated Negroes in an insurance-company office."

There are some indications that the new generation likes the change. "The young leadership," says Rudolph Lombard, who at 25 is serving his fourth term as CORE's first vice chairman, "feels that the civil-rights movement cuts to the core of this society. It goes beyond the mantan, the color of the skin. This business of being black—I'm not harassed by it."

Tall, bearded, dressed in faded overalls, self-consciously diffident in his public manner, Lombard is the idol of the younger CORE members, and next to Farmer the most popular person in the organization. Though he is not himself a working-class product (his family had enough money to send him to the University of Michigan for a year when he finished high school in his native New leans, and he is now completing work rd a Ph.D. in Social Science at n University), Lombard can make th Negro workers and tenant a way that few of the other n. When James McCain found New Orleans' Negro Xavier ity in 1960, he was studying ss administration. CORE made m a force in a cause.

It has done the same for others less well-endowed than Lombard. At the convention, Marvin Rich waved toward a boy asleep on a couch, taking a break after an all-night committee meeting. "That's a Freedom Rider," Rich said. "When he came to us four years ago, there was absolutely nothing to him; now he's one of the best field secretaries we have. Even if we accomplished nothing else, what we've done for these kids, the way they feel about themselves, would make the movement worthwhile."

But the youngsters who make up perhaps four fifths of the CORE membership signed up for something different from what they now seem to have. Work in the ghetto lacks the drama and the victories that drew them to the organization. And the impatient activists find it hard to accept Farmer's opinion that ghettos are going to be with the Negro for a long time, that even the end of active discrimination would leave him still at the bottom, that integration alone will not be enough to bring Freedom Now.

"Can our members live with this?" said Gordon Carey, Farmer's assistant, repeating a question that had been asked of him. "They'll have to live with it. Our continued existence depends on living with it." THE END

Farmer speaks from a Mississippi pulpit. Because he is a marked man in the state, his first act is to notify the FBI of his arrivo