

**AN ADDRESS BY LADY THATCHER**

**TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE COMMONWEALTH  
OF VIRGINIA**

**State Capitol, Richmond  
Friday 3rd February 1995**



**SENATE DOCUMENT NO. 37**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND  
1995**

**Address by Lady Thatcher to the General Assembly  
of the Commonwealth of Virginia  
State Capitol, Richmond  
Friday 3rd February 1995**

**Press embargo 2.45pm (1445)**

**Check Against Delivery**

## The Virginian Tradition

Mr Speaker, Mr President, Governor Allen, Members of the General Assembly:

You have bestowed upon me a very great honour by your invitation. To address this, the oldest assembly in the Western hemisphere elected by popular vote, is an opportunity I will never forget, and I thank you for it.

Virginia, after all, was the crucible of constitutional liberty. It was from your hallowed soil that so many of the great teachers of democracy arose. It was Virginia that nurtured the great Thomas Jefferson, whose words in your Declaration of Independence still shine as a moral beacon. And we should treasure equally in our times another profound Jeffersonian observation: "I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than those attending too small a degree of it". For, ladies and gentlemen, those unwilling to live the strenuous life of liberty, those who do not value freedom for its own sake rather than for its comforts, are unlikely to hold on to it.

So too, it was Virginia that gave the world James Madison, whose sober eloquence made him the Father of your Constitution. Madison's warning that "liberty may be endangered by the abuses of liberty as well as by the abuses of power" provides our Western democracies with a salutary warning to balance Jefferson's idealism.

And, of course, it was Virginia that produced George Mason, Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee, whose doubts about Mr. Madison's constitution gave rise to your Bill of Rights.

These are men whose names will forever echo down the history of democracy. How could it be anything but an honour to stand where they stood?

As Chancellor of the College of William and Mary, I already feel at least an adopted daughter of the <sup>Commonwealth</sup> of Virginia. But when I consider all that this place has given to democracy I am moved to say that in spirit: I am a Virginian.

### Churchill's Legacy...

There is another reason I am honoured to be with you today, for I follow to this podium one of the greatest figures of our century: Winston Churchill. Forty nine years ago next month he came here urging renewed vigilance in the constant battle for liberty.

Churchill then stood at the threshold of what we have come to know as the Cold War. He reminded his audience that "it is in the years of peace that wars are prevented," - and that those who shared his belief in democracy must maintain their readiness and resolve during uncertain times. He said:

Peace will not be preserved by pious sentiments expressed in terms of platitudes, or by official grimaces and diplomatic correctitude... Great heart must have his sword and armour to guard the pilgrims on their way... Above all, among the English-speaking peoples, there must be the union of hearts based upon conviction and common ideals.

The Iron Curtain of which Churchill spoke did indeed descend, and barely a chink of light showed through it. Then one day it was torn down, and scrapped, due in great measure to the "union of hearts based upon conviction and common ideals" between your country and mine. Over the last fifty years, the United States and Great Britain have stood together, stalwart defenders of liberty against every form of tyranny. In the long run, we were victorious - and not only against the dictators, we also won the battle of ideas.

### Victory in the Cold War

Let me say at once that the victory of freedom and of the West in the Cold War, and the collapse of communism through most of the world was the most profound and beneficial revolution of my lifetime. I, for one, have no nostalgia for the atrophied certainties of the Cold War world.

After 1917 when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia having lost the election, and even more so, after the dead hand of communism fell across half of Europe at the end of World War II, humanity was subjected to a huge, controlled experiment. The economic and political freedom that we know has been pitted against the police state and the command economy. Some were taken in by that socialist alternative. It was your own countryman, Lincoln Steffens, newly returned from Russia in 1919, who said, "I have seen the future and it works." How wrong he was. Now that the struggle has ended, the final accounts can be drawn up. The contrast between Western countries whose living standards have surged and those of the former communist bloc still suffering their legacy of oppression, poverty and pollution is stark indeed.

Moreover, that whole experiment was totally unnecessary. Neither the French Revolution of 1789, nor the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, added anything of value to - though they subtracted much from - the principles of the American Declaration of Independence. It is to this Assembly of Virginia, not to the mobs and demagogues of the Old World, that those seeking to improve the human condition should have looked. For, although their history, culture and experience have specially shaped the Anglo-Saxon peoples for liberty, those rights of which Thomas Jefferson spoke were to be ascribed to all men at all times - to men who "are created equal, endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights".

### The Rights of Man

These rights are inalienable precisely because they spring from our common humanity. Therefore to deny or curtail them infringes the dignity which belongs to man as man. In spite of all the religious and cultural differences of our world, we share a natural moral sense of good and evil. And we share too a common destiny of freedom. Nor are these concepts just dry abstractions of philosophers. Their truth is borne out in the flourishing of societies like ours which honour them and the impoverishment of those like communist ones which do not.

It was perhaps only natural that in our countries an exaggerated optimism would mark the sudden, all but bloodless, victory over communism. Too many Western leaders allowed themselves to be lulled into the careless slumber of complacency while the forces of evil and tyranny remained active. It has now become brutally clear that there is no new world order; the problems of politics

are, alas, permanent. Only the context changes.

The world has now learned over the past several years how right Churchill was in Virginia to warn against relying on "pious sentiments" to maintain peace. But perhaps we still tend to forget the enduring superiority of our system of economic and political freedom and the timeless value of the principles which inspire it.

### **Competing Civilizations?...**

So, for example, we are now told that ours is but one of a number of competing civilizations which will clash in the years ahead, because of the inevitable tendency of historical forces beyond our control. According to this view, what is at stake in that conflict is just one set of beliefs among many.

I do not argue that the concept of competing cultures is without merit as a tool of analysis and prediction. But I am deeply suspicious of all kinds of cultural relativism - in particular, the notion that there is nothing deeper to our beliefs than the fact that we hold them. We are also now berated for the alleged sins of our tradition. Columbus, these critics hold, did not discover the new world that opened the door to mankind's greatest achievements, but rather he treacherously imported European problems onto virgin soil. The industrial revolution, they say, did not unleash mankind's imaginative powers to produce a better world, but rather introduced the new oppression of capitalism to greater numbers. Even the concluding act of our vigorous defence of our way of life in the face of Japan's aggression during the Second World War is now derided as an immoral assault on the Japanese by the use of the most awesome instrument of destruction ever known to man. And the re-writing of freedom's

history continues.

Rightly, Robert Bartley has written very critically of this so-called conventional wisdom of our day. "Exhausted and jaded by our labours and trials", he noted, "we now probe the dawning era for evidence not of relief but of new and even more ghastly horrors ahead. In particular, we have lost confidence in our own ability to shape the new era, and instead keep conjuring up inexorable historical and moral forces".

Like Mr Bartley, I reject this corrosive cynicism. For the fact is, our tradition of liberal democracy, of confidence in constitutionalism and the rule of law is not simply one alternative among many. It is the way of life that has elevated mankind above any previous age - politically, economically and morally. Our obligation in the years ahead is precisely to turn our attention to strengthening our traditions, and especially our beliefs in the primacy of the individual, against those who would not simply deny the truth of our principles but who seek to destroy them.

And a still mightier challenge is to apply those insights to build freedom beyond the West. How can the challenge be met?

### **Entrenching Freedom**

Transplanting liberty is not easy: but it is possible. We in the West have had several centuries for it to take root: nowhere more deeply than in the United States, where personal responsibility and the pioneering spirit always flourished. But neither the ex-communist countries, nor the new democratic régimes of Latin America, nor the emerging economic superpowers of the Asia-Pacific can



1

wait three centuries. Nor need they, if they learn the lessons of history. We in the West for our part must actively promote and nurture political and economic freedom in all these countries. Our task is to set out the principles and, where possible, strengthen the structures of liberty: it is not to provide a blueprint.

Whatever the country, or the continent, democratic freedom in its fullness has to satisfy three broad conditions.

First, government will be through the consent of the majority, expressed in regular free elections. And for a true democracy there must always be a party or a combination of parties in opposition which, if the electorate so decides, can replace the government of the day.

Second, freedom requires a fair and just law which applies to everybody - rich and poor, citizens, politicians and government alike. And it must be enforceable by an impartial and independent judiciary.

Third, there has to be a market economy based on free enterprise and private property, in which state ownership, intervention and controls are minimised.

It will be immediately apparent that some countries will find it easier to fulfil these conditions than others. For example, countries where authoritarian régimes left in place the basic structures of law and private property - or where they actually promoted free market capitalism - have a head start in entrenching a fledgling democracy. Indeed, free enterprise capitalism is economic democracy: it limits the power of government by maximising the power of the people. And the pattern of events from Latin America to South Korea is that once personal choice begins to rule through the market, in time it extends to the ballot box too.

Under communism, where private property, the rule of law and personal expression have been systematically crushed, the transition to freedom is generally far more difficult.

### **Russian Hesitations...**

The situation in Russia reminds us how uneven is that path from tyranny to democracy. The process of reform has proved harder than either we or they had imagined. Four years on there is still no rule of law, no independent judiciary, no laws on private property or commerce, no stable currency. But as we know, you cannot have freedom unless you have order, and you cannot have order unless you have law.

Events in recent months have demonstrated that we should be cautious in expecting Russia's "inevitable" progress to freedom. They are a sharp and timely reminder that there are still a lot of communists about and that the forces of reform are far from being in the ascendancy.

The onslaught in Chechnya also reminds us that even when we cannot intervene we must continue to speak out - and speak the truth - where a wrong is being committed. It is not a question of whether the Chechens have acted lawfully or whether Russia has been provoked. What matters is that Russia has been wrong in its response, and wrong in a way that has left thousands dead. And those in Russia who truly believe in freedom and reform will not resent our stand; they will welcome it. Indeed, they have criticised the lack of Western response so far. Perhaps the most encouraging result of these brutal events is that the old fear of speaking out in Russia has been overcome, as ordinary people openly criticise the action of their government. We hear now the shouts

of thousands where once there were only the whispers of the courageous few.

### **Chinese Possibilities...**

Second only to Russia in importance to our interests, and indeed to the cause of freedom more generally, is the destiny of China. Although consistently denying personal and political liberty, Deng Xiaoping since 1978 has permitted the growth of a market economy. Moreover, China has benefited from investment from its diaspora in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. All this has allowed the highly entrepreneurial Chinese people to overcome much of the legacy of communism. But a secure and impartially administered rule of law will be required if the country's economic potential is ultimately to be fulfilled. Nor does it seem likely that the Chinese régime can in the end escape the indissoluble connection between economic and political freedom. When you open the door to trade and investment, ideas will march in with them. Demands for democracy will grow.

### **Standing Together**

We can apply a range of pressures - and offer a range of inducements - to encourage the development of democracy and free enterprise. We can provide technical assistance - for example, in Russia we could have helped set up a currency board to stabilise the rouble. We can publicly condemn abuses of human rights. We can continue to trade - so as to promote the economic progress that will encourage political reform. But perhaps the most essential condition for extending liberty more widely is, as it has always been, to protect the liberty we already have.

NATO has served us well. Its role is still vital to the West's defence. And the Central European countries need its assurance too. But crucial to NATO's credibility is the historic and continuing relationship between the United States and Britain.

When Winston Churchill spoke in 1946 to this Assembly of Virginia he said that there was one special, one "very simple message" he had for the people of our two countries. "It is," said Churchill, "that we should stand together". And I today, for my part, repeat that message.

We must not permit our moral sense to grow numb, allow our courage to fail us, or forsake those principles which have done so much to make *our* political tradition the most formidable stumbling block to tyranny the world has ever known. As we witness the atrocities in Bosnia, the war in Chechnya, and the continuing oppression in those few countries still under the yoke of communism, we see how real the dangers still are. Let these be to us, to borrow Jefferson's powerful words, as a "firebell in the night" waking us to our political duties and our moral responsibilities.