



knowledge
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the leadership forum

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KNOWLEDGE WAVE 2003

ADDRESS TO EMERGING LEADERS PRE-CONFERENCE

WEDNESDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2003

8.30AM

SHERATON HOTEL, AUCKLAND

SPEECH NOTES PROFESSOR M J A BROWN

“WHAT SHOULD NEW ZEALAND’S DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS BE IN 2020?”

IN ONE OF THE CANTOS TO DANTE’S INFERNO HE ISSUES A WARNING TO THOSE WHO MIGHT EMBARK ON FUTUROLOGY WHERE HE SAYS “SEE HOW HE MAKES A BREAST OF HIS SHOULDER BLADES! BECAUSE HE TRIED TO SEE TOO FAR AHEAD HE NOW LOOKS BACKWARDS AND GOES RETROGRADE.

THE ORGANIZERS OF THIS SECTION OF THE CONFERENCE HAVE SUGGESTED TO ME THAT I MIGHT LIKE TO ADDRESS TO YOU CERTAIN KEY QUESTIONS AS FOR EXAMPLE THE FOLLOWING:

“WHAT DO YOU WANT NEW ZEALAND TO BE LIKE IN 2020?”

WITHOUT WISHING TO BE INORDINATELY OBTUSE IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ANYONE’S INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCES WILL TO A LARGE EXTENT, BE IRRELEVANT.

FOR EXAMPLE, DEVELOPMENTS IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS, COMPUTATION, TECHNOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY ARE EVEN NOW A REALITY. EVEN BY THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT SCIENCE “HAS

TAKEN US TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER AND TO THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE”. IT HAS GIVEN US UNPRECEDENTED MEANS, TO SAVE, PROLONG AND ENHANCE LIFE; IT HAS GIVEN US UNPRECEDENTED INSIGHTS INTO THE NATURE OF HUMANITY AND TO THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE. KARL SAGAN THE ASTROPHYSICIST DESCRIBED THOSE AS “THAT CENTURIES GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS BUT HE THEN WENT ON TO SAY WHETHER WE WOULD ACQUIRE THE UNDERSTANDING AND WISDOM NECESSARY TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE SCIENTIFIC REVELATIONS OF THE 20TH CENTURY WILL BE THE MOST PROFOUND CHALLENGE OF THE 21ST CENTURY.”

FURTHER ISSUES SUGGEST THEMSELVES, PRE-EMINENT AMONGST WHICH, WOULD BE THE NEED FOR SOCIETY WITH A VISION AND A SET OF VALUES TO GUIDE US IN “ASSESSING THE UNDERLYING MORAL PRINCIPLES WHICH CONTROL THE WAY WE HARNESS THE POWER OF THIS KNOWLEDGE”.

I WOULD SUGGEST TO EACH ONE OF YOU, THAT THE SOCIETY THAT WE MIGHT LIKE, WOULD HAVE TO BE ARMED BOTH ETHICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY TO DEAL WITH SUCH PHENOMENA.

PASSIONATE IN ITS OPPOSITION TO WHAT IS SECOND-RATE AND WHAT IS PLAINLY WRONG!

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU KEEP YOUR MINDS OPEN. I AM POSITIVE THAT ONE OF THE QUALITIES REQUIRED WILL BE A FLEXIBILITY TO ENABLE US TO

NEGOTIATE THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF SHIFTING CIRCUMSTANCES AND PHENOMENA.

IT HAS BECOME I BELIEVE PROFOUNDLY OBVIOUS THAT ONE CREDIBLE APPROACH MAY LIE WITHIN THE NOTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ALL OF YOU NO DOUBT WILL HAVE BEEN AWARE OF THE CONTROVERSY AND DISCUSSION THAT SUCH A CONCEPT HAS EVOKED.

IN MY VIEW THAT SOCIETY WOULD HAVE TO BE IN MANY WAYS UNLIKE THE SOCIETY WHICH WE NOW HAVE.

- I WOULD BE THE FIRST TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT PARTICULARLY AMONGST OUR YOUNG PEOPLE WE HAVE SOME STUNNING NEW ZEALANDERS. BUT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FEATURES WHICH ARE GREATLY DISTURBING I WOULD SUGGEST AS EXAMPLES THE FOLLOWING:

- WE ARE CLOSE TO THE CREATION OF A PERMANENT UNDERCLASS CHARACTERIZED BY POOR HEALTH UNACCEPTABLE LEVELS OF EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT WITH THE INEVITABLE COROLLARY OF POOR LIFE PROSPECTS.
- IN SOME CASES AN INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLE OF WELFARE DEPENDENCY A BURGEONING DRUG CULTURE.
- TEENAGE SUICIDES ARE A DISGRACEFUL INDICTMENT ON OUR WHOLE SOCIETY.

- A SORDID STATISTIC OF THE RISING INCIDENCE OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES.
- THE PREVALENCE AND INCIDENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEVERE MENTAL HEALTH AND OR BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IS I SUSPECT MUCH LARGER THAN IMAGINED.

OUR FAILURE TO INVEST IN THE HEALTH AND MORAL WELFARE OF THAT GENERATION WILL INEVITABLY CREATE A TRAGIC AND HUGELY EXPENSIVE LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

IF WE ARE TO THINK OF A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF NEW ZEALAND IN SAY 17 YEARS TIME I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU AND I HOPE THAT THE ADDRESSES FROM THE TRULY DISTINGUISHED BEVY OF SPEAKERS WHO WILL CONFRONT AND CHALLENGE YOU IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS MAY STIMULATE US TO THINK OF DIVERSE SOLUTIONS VIBRANT COMMUNITIES, CREATION OF A SKILLED ENTERPRISING WORKFORCE CAPABLE OF THE FLEXIBILITY THAT WILL BE REQUIRED AS WELL OF THE OLD FASHIONED VIRTUES OF THE WORK ETHIC LITERACY AND THE PROSPECT OF GREATLY ENHANCED NETWORKING. PERHAPS ALSO THE SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT NOT BASED ON A COMMAND AND CONTROL ENVIRONMENT BUT RATHER ONE OF MUTUAL RESPECT ACKNOWLEDGING OUR DEPENDENCY ON EACH OTHER.

CLEARLY TO IF WE ARE TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY OURS MUST BE ONE WHICH PRODUCES A MUCH GREATER NUMBER OF WELL EDUCATED PEOPLE WHETHER THEY BE ASTROPHYSICISTS OR

HIGHLY SKILLED TOOLMAKERS IT SEEMS TO ME LESS IMPORTANT THAN THAT EACH ONE OF THEM IS EQUIPPED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES WHICH WILL CLEARLY ABOUND.

THERE IS ANOTHER TENSION. HOW DO WE RECONCILE OUR SEEMINGLY INTRANSIGENT RESISTANCE TO SO-CALLED ELITISM, PARTICULARLY IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR, WITH THIS COUNTRY'S DESPERATE NEED FOR OUTSTANDING EXCELLENCE BENCHMARKED ON AN INTERNATIONAL INDEX?

WE KNOW FOR EXAMPLE THAT THERE WILL BE WHAT IS DESCRIBED AS A LOOMING WAR FOR SKILLS. THERE IS A DEMAND PREDICTED IN THE UNITED STATES WITHIN THE NEXT DECADE FOR SOMETHING UP TO 200,000 MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS. GIVEN THE COSTS FOR TRAINING IT MAY WELL BE THAT SOME MORE IMAGINATIVE THINKING IS REQUIRED RATHER THAN THE CURRENT STUDENT FEE LOAN.

WE ARE TALKING ABOUT CHALLENGES AND THINKING A WORLD MARKET FOR SKILLED WORKERS THAT MAY WELL BE AN ARGUMENT FOR A TOTALLY DIFFERENT IMMIGRATION POLICY. WHICH IN TURN COULD REQUIRE A FAR MORE THOUGHTFUL AND CONSIDERED STRATEGY THAN MAY PRESENTLY EXIST.

- PERHAPS AN IDEAL CRITERIA WOULD BE TO JUDGE POTENTIAL IMMIGRANTS ON THEIR CHARACTER RATHER THAN THE COLOUR OF THEIR SKIN.

WE NEED TO ADDRESS THE INEQUALITY ISSUES. HERE AS IN VIRTUALLY EVERY OTHER CHALLENGE THAT CONFRONTS YOUR GENERATION I SUGGEST IMAGINATION AND LATERAL THINKING ARE ESSENTIAL.

I HAVE ALREADY TOUCHED ON THE QUESTION OF AN EMERGING UNDERCLASS AN OVER PRESCRIBED EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE DRUG MENACE.

IS AN ISSUE OF AN AGEING POPULATION WHERE NOTWITHSTANDING REMARKABLE ADVANCES IN MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE WE MAY BE CONFRONTED WITH AN INABILITY TO AFFORD THE COSTS OF ADVANCED HEALTH CARE.

RATHER THAN SINKING INTO SOME MIASMA OF PESSIMISM LET US REMIND OURSELVES OF THOSE ELEMENTS THAT WE DO POSSESS. SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

- NEW ZEALAND IS STILL A RELATIVELY CLEAR CANVAS.
- WE HAVE IN THE PAST AND I AM CONFIDENT THAT WE CAN IN THE FUTURE BE RECEPTIVE TO NEW IDEAS, INITIATIVES AND BOLD THINKING.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE LAST CENTURY WE WERE SEEN AS THE SOCIAL LABORATORY OF THE WORLD, AND I HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THAT COULD NOT HAPPEN AGAIN SO LONG AS WE DO NOT BECOME ENGULFED IN SMALL DIFFERENCES.

WHETHER WE ARRIVED IN THIS COUNTRY YESTERDAY OR SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO I SUGGEST THAT WE ARE HUGELY FORTUNATE INHABITANTS OF THIS BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY. BUT WE ARE DESPERATELY IN NEED OF THE INSPIRATION TO REALIZE AND HAVE CONFIDENCE IN OUR OWN STRENGTHS WHETHER THAT BE AS INDIVIDUALS OR IN A VARIOUS AND EXTRAORDINARILY NUMEROUS COLLECTIVE ENTITIES.

RACE RELATIONS AND THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

UNDOUBTEDLY THERE IS NOW A GREAT DEAL OF TREATY FATIGUE WITH INCREASING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE REACTING TO MENTION OF THE TREATY WITH INDIFFERENCE OR IMPATIENCE UNABLE TO SEE ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT DAY, THAT IS A TRAGEDY AND HAS THE CAPACITY TO BE GROSSLY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE FOR FUTRUE GENERATIONS REGARDLESS OF RACE.

- IN THE TIME ALLOCATED IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO GO INTO ANY DETAIL ON THIS ASPECT. LET ME SUGGEST THAT INTER ALIA WE COMPLICATE AND OBFUSCATE DEBATES BY USING KEY WORDS LOOSELY AND IMPRECISELY. FOR EXAMPLE TWO WORDS THAT ARE BADLY IN NEED OF DEMYSTIFICATION ARE “RANGATIRATANGA” AND “SOVEREIGNTY”. WHAT PASSES FOR DEBATE AT THE MOMENT SUGGESTS THAT THE PARTICIPANTS ARE CONTINUALLY TALKING PAST EACH OTHER. I THINK THE USE OF THE WORD “PARTNERSHIP” IS ANOTHER WHICH IS SUFFERING THE SAME FATE. I AM UNSURE AS TO

WHETHER THERE IS UNANIMITY AS TO WHAT "TREATY PRINCIPLES"
ARE.

THE POINT I AM ENDEAVORING TO MAKE IS THAT THIS TOPIC NEED NOT BE SOMETHING THAT HAS TO BE NEGOTIATED THROUGH CLENCHED JAWS ACCOMPANIED BY GLOWERING SCOWLS RATHER THAN WHAT IS REQUIRED IS ROBUST YET RATIONAL DISCUSSION ON THE BASIS THERE IS A I BELIEVE A DANGER OF AN INSIDIOUS DIVISIVENESS INTRUDING UNNECESSARILY THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY AND THE DANGER THAT WE CAN FALL INTO THE TRAP OF REIFYING MAORI CULTURE AND TRADITION ROMANTICIZING OR DEMONIZING A GOLDEN AGE THAT NEVER WAS. AND IN DOING SO FAILING OR REFUSING TO RECOGNIZE ADAPTIVE CHANGES AND THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICES.

UNTIL THAT OCCURS WE CAN NEVER BE A NATION ONLY SOME DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP WHICH COALESCES FROM TIME TO CONVENIENT TIME.

ELSEWHERE IF A FUTURE ROLE FOR THIS COUNTRY IS TO BE A SIGNIFICANT TRADE/ EXPORTING ENTITY THEN I WOULD LIKE US TO HAVE AN UNSULLIED REPUTATION OF HONESTY AND ETHICAL PROBITY WHICH MAY BE A DISTINGUISHING NICHE IN THE NEW WORLD ECONOMY.

A DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF OUR SOCIETY IN MY RESPECTFUL VIEW IS AN EXTRAORDINARY FAITH AND CONFIDENCE THAT LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

IS THE PANACEA FOR MOST FAILINGS. BUT I AM REMINDED BY THE WRITINGS OF MICHAEL IGNATIEFF IN HIS BIOGRAPHY OF ISAIAH BERLIN WHERE HE SAYS “EVEN GREAT POLITICAL FIGURES RARELY UNDERSTAND THE HISTORY THEY WERE TRYING TO SHAPE TO THEIR OWN DESIGN, AND THAT POLITICS ALWAYS HAS THE POTENTIAL FOR TRAGEDY, BECAUSE OF THE FORCES IT SOUGHT TO MASTER WERE NEVER WITHIN HUMAN GRASP.

- i) THERE IS A LOVELY QUOTE FROM RALPH WALDO EMMERSON WHEN HE SAID, “WE TRAVEL THROUGH LIFE SEARCHING FOR THE BEAUTIFUL. BUT UNLESS WE CARRY IT WITH US AS WE GO. WE WILL NEVER FIND IT.”
- ii) WHAT I WOULD WISH TO CONVEY AND LEAVE WITH YOU IS PERHAPS THAT GREATER THAN LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY NEW POLICIES, CURRICULUM DEBATE, TREATY COMPLIANCE SECTIONS ETC. THE CHALLENGE AND STRENGTH MAY ULTIMATELY LIE WITHIN EACH OF YOU AS INSPIRED LEADERS.

WHETHER YOU TAKE UP THAT ROLE OR NOT IS YOUR DECISION.