

Excerpts From Gardner's Talk, Barred

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 13—Following are excerpts from a speech that John W. Gardner, chairman of the National Urban Coalition, was to have given today to the Illinois Constitutional Convention at Springfield, Ill. The speech was canceled at the request of the convention officers when the text became available in advance.

The extraordinary reaction to the Administration's Cambodia decision was more than a difference of opinion on the war. The suddenness of the decision, the lack of consultation with key leaders, the evidence of internal differences within the Administration—all brought to a climax the growing crisis of confidence in our leadership.

I say that with regret because I speak as a Republican.

The seeming abrupt reversal of implied commitments deepened the question in the minds of millions of Americans as to whether they can believe the promises of their leaders.

A great many informed Americans believe, justly or not, that the President is isolated, that he is not adequately exposed to reasonable opposing views. They believe, justly or not, that he has not offered the level of moral leadership which we so need. They believe, justly or not, that he has given undue sanction to members of his Administration who seem committed to divisive courses of action, and undue attention to advisers who give him a distorted view of reality.

The President has two and three-quarters years remaining before the end of his term. It is essential that in those years the nation be governed by a man who is in touch with all segments of American opinion, a man who does not feel trapped and beleaguered, a man who easily hears and listens to conflicting views, a man who understands that people in power usually have deep complicity in their own isolation.

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Failure at Every Level

But I am not interested in indicting the President, because I believe that virtually all of us have failed in our duty as Americans. The failure goes to every level and phase of American life: Drug addiction in the slums and corruption in high places; crime in the streets and corporate fraud; personal immorality and betrayals of public trust.

And while each of us pursues his selfish interest and comforts himself by blaming others, the nation disintegrates. I use the phrase

soberly: The nation disintegrates.

This is a time for the highest order of patriotism. This is a time to ask what it is we stand for as a people. It is a time to re-examine our founding documents and to reflect on what to tell each other are the American virtues. It is a time to search our hearts.

It is, very, very easy for leaders to appeal the prejudice and fear and anger that is in us. It is easy for leaders to seek to the selfishness that is in us, to tell us that nothing in this country need be changed, and to find villains who may be blamed for our troubles.

But there is in us as Americans something better than fear and anger and prejudice, something better than selfishness, something better than the lazy, comfortable inclination to blame other.

There is in us, if our leaders will ask for it, the courage and stamina to face our problems honestly, to admit that we ourselves are partly to blame for them, and to identify paths of constructive action.

War on U.S.

Two Primary Tasks

We face two overriding tasks. We must move vigorously to solve our most crucial problems. And we must heal the spirit of the nation. The two tasks are inseparable. If either is neglected, the other becomes impossible.

The crisis in confidence is deepened by the divisiveness that afflicts the nation. Today's divisiveness is not confined to one issue or one set of antagonists. There are multiple points of conflict—the war, race, the economy, political ideology. There are multiple rifts—between old and young, between regions, between social classes.

Around these rifts we have seen hatred and rage, violence and coercion at both ends of the political spectrum. And matching the violent deeds we have had provocative and ill-considered statements from those in high places. Official statements and policies which feed the fires of regional suspicion or racial antagonism or the tensions between young and old may be as destructive as a bomb tossed through an open window.

If one considers the whole range of conflict—ghetto riots and shoot-outs, campus violence, widespread bombing and arson, school buses overturned by raging adults, and the chilling recent clash between construction workers and radical youth—if one reflects on that full range, one must conclude that we are dealing with disintegrative forces that threaten our survival as a society.

One might suppose that as

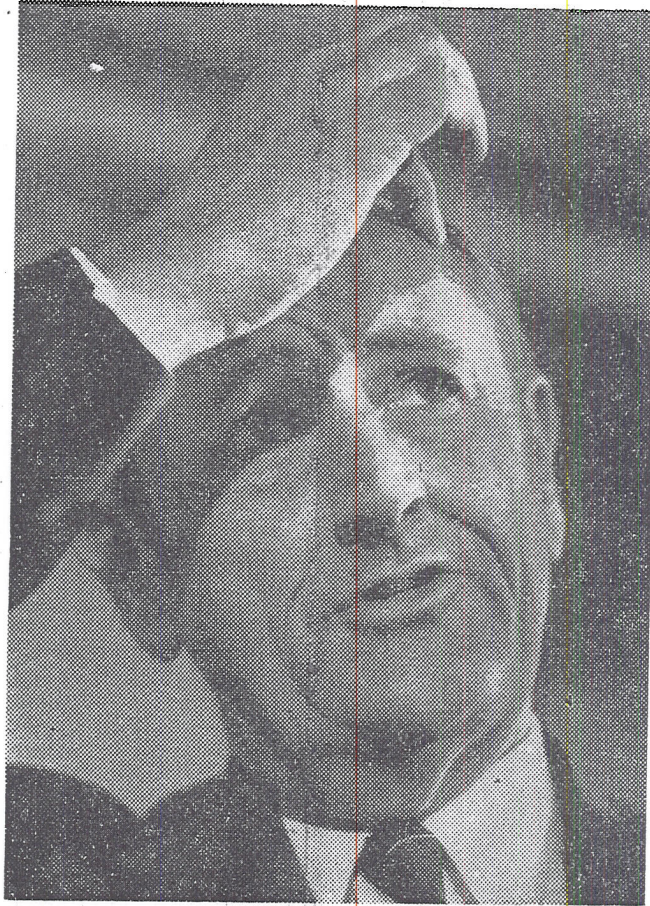
extremists become increasingly inflammatory, moderates would close ranks and oppose them. But just the opposite is occurring. The moderates begin to take sides against one another. We all become a little readier to grow angry, a little readier to identify villains, a little readier to resort to violence ourselves.

Complicity With Extremes

Lest this give the impression that moderates are victimized, it must be said at once that most of them have a secret complicity in the activities of the extremist. The moderate conservative does not explicitly approve of police brutality, but something in him is not displeased when the billy club comes down on the head of a long-haired student. The liberal does not endorse violence by the extreme left; but he may take secret pleasure in such action when it discomfits those in authority.

In short extremists often enjoy tacit support from the moderates nearest to them. Thus does a society tear itself apart.

Most Americans want to hold the nation together. But I do not meet many who are willing to do the hard things that are essential to that end.



Associated Press

John W. Gardner at a conference yesterday in the capital at which he discussed—and gave excerpts—from speech.