

SPEECH

BY

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TO

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It is good to be back in Washington, even for such a short time. It is particularly good to be among such distinguished and enjoyable company.

It may be that, before the lunch is over, somebody - I mention no names - will feel impelled to tell me exactly what in his view is wrong with Britain.

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For me the United States remains the most stimulating and exciting country in the world.

In good times and in bad the American people act unfailingly as a tonic and a stimulant.

I will not disguise from you that on some occasions I have come to your country filled with anxiety and apprehensions.

Yet I always return to Britain intellectually refreshed and invigorated, made aware once again that however obstinate the difficulties faced by the United States, her reserves of strength and vitality are so great that she can but overcome them.

That has been the <sup>constant</sup> ~~instant~~ <sup>in</sup> impact on an Englishman who in office and in opposition has known five Presidents in Washington and has prized the friendship of so many Americans in both private and public life.

So perhaps I could get my oar  
in first. And I have the advantage -  
shared by some of you here today -  
of having been born after both Marx  
and Freud!

It is of course understandable  
that some people here are asking  
"What is happening to Britain"?

I will tell you a good part of what is happening. And as these stories have still to find their way into the American press, I have taken the trouble for your benefit to encapsulate them into easy headlines.

"British Queen still on throne".

"UK jobless remains under 1 million".

"Free Westminster Parliament  
continues to function".

"Still the best country in  
the world ~~in~~ which to live".

Obvious, yes. But not so  
obvious if one were to believe all  
the stories about Britain that  
frequently appear in the Press.

There is always a tendency among politicians and even among journalists to over-react to a situation and to gravitate towards an extreme position.

Extremes are so simple. And I know that there is nothing more attractive than a simple story.

But I must tell you now that what is happening in Britain is far from simple.



At one level Britain is going through just the kind of economic crisis that has gripped other western economies over the past eighteen months.

We have all reeled, Western Europe in particular, from the shock of the four-fold increase in oil prices.

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Higher prices, wage inflation,  
depressed demand and rising  
unemployment: those are the problems.

Britain is certainly not unique  
in that respect - though it is  
profoundly worrying that while in  
many countries these problems are  
now beginning to ease, in Britain  
they are still getting worse.

But at another level the crisis in Britain is more than just economic.

In my view Britain is going through a phase of readjustment between the different forces which exist in the state and the authority of Parliament.

Of course, Britain is not the first country to face this kind of crisis.

In 1968 France underwent a crisis of authority in the Presidency.

And last year here in Washington there was a succession of events which triggered off a crisis of confidence in the United States.

Why then is Britain being singled out for special treatment as though somehow we were unique?

Because, to be perfectly honest, there is still throughout the world an enormous fund of goodwill towards Britain.

Our friends are therefore sad to see us in a position where we are increasingly borne down with our domestic difficulties.

Nowhere is this more true than in Europe where our friends and partners look to us to make a constructive and imaginative contribution to the development of the European Community.

There is a second reason.

The British love of liberty and their democratic traditions have for so long been renowned throughout the world, that the mere thought that they might ultimately give way under the strain of a modern industrial society gives our friends real cause for anxiety.

And thirdly, I think that some countries are actually worried more about themselves than about us.

They wonder what would happen to them if something went wrong in Britain.

If it could happen in Britain, despite our strong traditions of orderly democracy, why should not other countries with perhaps weaker institutions be similarly threatened? That is what they ask themselves.

But don't jump the gun.  
Things may not be going as we  
would like in Britain, but they  
are not yet so wrong that they  
cannot be put right.

It is now up to us in Britain  
to recognise the precise nature  
of our crisis.



We are facing a crisis of confidence - confidence in our ability to manage our economy; confidence in our capacity to reconcile the conflicting interests in society in a peaceful manner; confidence in the resilience of our democratic institutions; and confidence in ourselves.

The right policies are vital.

But those will not be enough if the British people lack the will; the will to survive and prosper in a competitive world; the will to reconcile the interests and claims of others in a complex industrial society; the will to accept their responsibilities in a mature but evolving democracy.

The answer to our problems does not lie in technical and mechanistic solutions.

It lies instead in the capacity of our politicians to offer a national lead and in the willingness of the British people to respond.

And so to assess Britain's future you have got to make a judgment on the kind of people we are.

I reckon I know the British people pretty well.

It is my profound conviction  
that we in Britain will pull  
ourselves out of our current malaise.

And if you want to put that  
into simple journalistic prose,  
you can say, if you like, that I  
am backing Britain.

In the thirty years since the  
end of the second world war Britain  
has been passing through a difficult  
transitional period.

We have shed the responsibilities of empire but we are only just taking advantage of our new opportunities in Europe.

On 5 June the British people will vote on whether to remain a member of the European Community.

A decisive Yes will confirm that our membership of the Community, now nearly two and a half years old, opens up a new and noble chapter in our history.

If I were you, I would put my money on Britain's future.