

# Isoworg Speech

Delivered by Henry Bentinck beneath Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, in the summer of 1969



[First few minutes unintelligible]

...how we got them there, it's our responsibility to try to make a really radical change. And for example, in the book I went and invented a spy force whose job it was to publish all the secrets they discovered instantly to the world. [00:01:00]

Well now you can't do things like that in real life but if you stay with me until the end, I think you'll find that the idea of a world government as a response to the direction in which the world is heading would lead to changes that would make that spy gimmick look about as original as a Victorian sermon.

Now it seems to me that at this time in this century, there is a feeling in the air that people may be ready for a reappraisal of our values and attitudes. And this is particularly because of the role played by young people. There is nowadays more importance given to the individual. There's a greater respect, I think, for non-conformity, which comes as a reaction against the sterile circle into which established attitudes have got us. [00:02:00]

And I think that's particularly true of group behaviour and the behaviour of international governments towards one another. And so it is that in this context, namely of thinking about world government, that the individual must be seen as of prime importance because it is unlikely that a movement towards world government would actually originate with

government. They don't as a whole look very kindly upon the prospect of giving up their own power and their own sovereignty.

I think it's very important to remember the role of the individual in the contemporary society. First of all, let me outline to you very briefly why I think some kind of world government is desirable. Then we'll look at what time and how we might move in that direction. And finally, and that's the most startling bit, and it is startling, we will look more closely at what is likely to happen if we don't. [00:03:00]

Now I'd like to make it clear that I have no creed, no party, no sect. I don't represent anybody and I have no committee. Nobody knows what I'm going to say. Not even my children, who are here. They just simply said well if Pa wants to go and do his own thing in Trafalgar Square then let him.

So they painted the banner and we addressed some envelopes, and here I am. Well now let's look at why world government seems a good idea, and I would like to suggest that it is because it has to cope with three problems. War, world resources, and economy and the pollution. Let's look at war first. You don't have to look at it for very long.

At the moment, we live under what I like to call the Pax Bomba, which is like the Pax Romana but as everybody knows it's a perilous piece, and the buddy, or [00:04:00] the tovarich who jabs the button, kills the world. Now a world government would of course have all the armed forces under a single command. State governments, which would be relieved from problems of defence and the problems which we'll come to in a minute, would have more time to get on with making Britain a more especially appropriate place for Cornish men and men of Kent and for Cockneys and Scouse and Welsh and Irish and Scots to live in their own idiosyncratic ways. And I think that the greater the difference between people, the more interesting and the more true to themselves they can be.

The second sphere in which world government is necessary is world economics - production and distribution, the old problems like America burning wheat while Indians die of starvation can't be solved without agricultural control, you know, like the egg marketing board or the milk marketing board. [00:05:00]

And it would be impossible to imagine such an organisation, unless it was part of a fully accredited government, with proper government powers, so that very briefly the second sphere in which world government would operate would be in the control of the world's resources, and the organisation of productivity and economic balance of the member countries.

Now people will say that the whole thing is too difficult, that there are too many problems. Well of course there are problems. And that's exactly what one wants to start a world government for. To solve the problems because at present, nobody can, and they aren't even trying very hard. Because if you think about the billions and billions of pounds and effort that is spent in the world on maintaining each country like a little prickly hedgehog all rolled up into a ball with its eyes and its ears tight shut, like granddad showed us, well [00:06:00] compare that with the piddling amounts of money and effort that are spent in

trying to find ways to solve our differences, I mean after all, one Intercontinental ballistic missile would pay for thousands of hours of conferences, and effort, and study groups. And for a lot of geophysical years and in any case, nobody wants one Intercontinental ballistic missile. They've got a damn site too many already.

So now the third area in which world government is needed is in the area of pollution of the world's environment. And since this involves the pollution of the skies and the air and the sea and life, and the interdependence of life, it obviously has to be an international authority which takes care of it because otherwise you would simply get authorities which stopped short at national frontiers. [00:07:00]

Just to give you a quick example, there has recently been a certain amount of discussion of the ways in which world climate might be affected if the water of several major rivers in Russia were diverted to flow into the Caspian rather than into the Arctic ocean. Well, if this increased the saltiness of the Arctic ocean, it wouldn't freeze over in the same way, and whole enormous expanses of it wouldn't freeze and it would affect the climate. Now I don't suppose Russia would do that, but the point is that if they did think about it, you can see for yourself that no amount of international discussion between sovereign nations would ever stop them. However, if there were an international government, which they had partially elected, you'd have a better chance.

Now, I've just outlined the three areas in which I think that world government should operate. Let's look very briefly at what sort of government this would be. [00:08:00] In the first place it would be elected by individuals for individuals. Secondly you don't have to wait till every person or nation in the world wants it. If a majority of people living in democracies want it, they'll get it. And one would start with the democracies, among other things because they are politically the most advanced and experienced. Autocracy is an immature or probably retarded form of government and broadly speaking it's only those people who haven't had the experience of freely governing themselves who put up with it for any length of time without revolt. So to solicit the participation of the autocracies at the outset, would only retard the development of the union. It would be quite feasible indeed to begin by extending the European community to embrace all of Europe, add the American democracies and Commonwealth countries, and without going into any further details [00:09:00] you would have a nucleus which would be strong enough to begin with.

Next, how would this world government be elected? By individuals. State governments would remain, their jobs would be modified and the federal government would be elected by the people over and above the state government.

So, I've now mentioned defence, economy and environment.

Well, that's enough of that and this isn't the time or the place to lay down a prescription. It the place to try to persuade you to perceive the need for it.

I put into the few notices that I could afford the words, 'If you are interested in survival, please come.' And I meant survival in every possible way that you can think of. I mean the

survival and protection of emergent nations. Survival against the threat of war. Survival against the threat of pollution.

And this really brings me to the [00:10:00] point where my own feelings and observations caused me to get up here and speak. Because let's take a look at the really fantastic position that we are in. It makes your head spin. Just listen. The world at the last estimate is about 10 thousand million years old. So, imagine its age as represented by the height of Nelson's Column. And civilised man has been around for something like ten thousand years, twenty thousand years, which upon the same scale can be represented by the thickness of one hair from your head.

Now as we know, there are thousands of different kinds of minerals and chemicals and birds and animals and flora and fauna all involved with one another. And they, for a lot of the time, are represented by the column to establish the rhythms and disciplines [00:11:00] of the environment we know. So think of the permutations of interdependence that have grown up in all that time, while civilisation has been around for only the time represented by the thickness of your hair.

Now I want you to think of that great column of interdependencies because this is very important for what comes later. I want you to think of that great column of interdependencies balancing upon a formula for environmental equilibrium that hasn't yet been worked out, and is not understood.

That's the big picture. The small picture is something that we can understand. Those of us who like butterflies know that there are very few left. The birds don't sing in the spring the way they did. One in ten of the world's flowers is doomed. All the fish in the Rhine were killed at one stroke. [00:12:00] And so on. We know about the details of the pollution of our world.

We all know a little bit about it, and I suppose some of us think that its cure is only a question of developing a detergent that tastes nice in the drinking water or insecticides that are good for humans, or plastic that degenerates of its own accord so that we can have artificial flowers, which wilt.

But it is obviously a great deal more grave than that, more grave than the spoiling of the view or the smell, or the raising of the level of the ocean owing to the melting of the ice caps and so on.

At this point in our tiny sojourn upon the earth as civilised creatures, just one hair's breadth of time, [00:13:00] information has come forward that makes it look as though we might be on the brink of upsetting that much evolution.

Some of you may have read the review in the Observer of June the 27<sup>th</sup>, of a survey of the problem of world pollution, put out by the very respected Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which is called World Dynamics. Its findings are so extraordinary that I'll remind you of how they were arrived at.

There is an informal group of people called The Club of Rome. They come from all nations and they comprise 75 eminent industrialists and academics. They were so appalled by the lack of response on the part of responsible people in government to the implications of the pollution situation that they commissioned the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to do the research necessary to assemble the greatest possible [00:14:00] quantity of information and to feed it into a computer.

The computer was programmed to produce answers to two questions. The first was, where would our present course lead us, and secondly, where would we get to if we changed our global way of living in order to offset the conclusions reached in the answer to the first question. The answers are so shattering that you wouldn't expect sober-minded, informed people to take much notice of them. What therefore is doubly shattering is the fact that they do.

The computer results which, and this is important, cover the next hundred and thirty years, suggest that population growth and the industrialisation are very rapidly approaching the limits of the earth's capacity to support them.

We may now be living in a golden age and the quality of life must decline [00:15:00] because industrialisation, which of course involves the scarring of the earth's resources and capital investment, which uses them up, disturbs the world's environmental capacity even more than population growth, and that the highly industrial societies may be self-extinguishing because of exhaustion of resources.

And we should take particular note of this, the alternative would be international strife over pollution and the resource rights. But the most profoundly disturbing conclusion is this, that if we want to improve the situation, any of the ordinary methods now begun or envisaged, will only make matters worse. For this reason.

If the drain upon the earth's resources is cut, sufficiently to effectively halt pollution, the [00:16:00] consequences will bring population crashing down. If on the other hand, the population were held steady and the industrial activities, et cetera, including the draining of resources therefore not drastically reduced, then a runaway pollution would ensue, which would equally bring population crashing down.

Now that I agree is very, very briefly put. The computer goes on then to assert that in order that our great great grandchildren should inherit a world worth living in, we would have to start now upon the following amazing course of action.

The rate at which natural resources are being used up would have to be cut by 75%.

The generation of pollution by 50%.

Capital investment by 40%.

Birth rate by 30% and food [00:17:00] by 20%, since hunger has always been the most effective break upon economic and population growth.

Now, it's a jolly strange thing for me, a nobody, to stand up in a public place and utter words as astonishing as these, and in a way I apologize for my presumption, but only in a way, because 10,000 copies of this report have been circulated by highly responsible people to all the heads of states and decision makers through the world, who are in fact being told that survival is threatened by precisely the three things that I mentioned as being the proper business for world government.

That is all out war over the world's final resources. Failure to control the handling of the world's resources, which goes on to gross pollution of the [00:18:00] environment. The computer's prescription for survival is a world regime of amazing severity. A kind of institutionalised Spartanism.

This would of course involve a complete change in our attitude to life, and our standards and values to which, if you remember, I alluded at the beginning. So, the question is, do we believe it?

Or do we believe half of it? And if we do, so what? We'll all be dead long before the crash comes. Well, let's look at whether we believe it or even believe it's pointing in the direction we're headed, because none of us here is equipped to examine the evidence and either confirm or deny the computer finding.

So our reaction must be one just of our own instincts, our own intuitions, [00:19:00] our own feelings, particularly of our common sense. And I keep feeling the presence of all that much evolution, which is why I described it to you. Thousands of billions of cyphers in a formula for equilibrium that is obedient to rhythms and disciplines that we don't understand.

And I keep feeling that mankind is just a tiny digit in that equation. And that if he reaches plague proportions, as he is doing, and if he can rape the planet and pollute the environment, which he demonstrably can, then within the enormous rhythm and the implacable discipline of that equilibrium, we'll cop it. Squelch. Like a dinosaur or snails in the old seas.

This seems simple, obvious, common evolutionary sense. And that's why I don't think that [00:20:00] the findings of the computer are so extraordinary. It seems to be an easy thing for all that evolution to rub out something which has only been around and only been troublesome for an infinitesimal portion of time.

To put it more colloquially, I feel in me water that our little boat is pointing right up shit creek and we'd better look to the paddles.

Now I said earlier on that I was just representing nobody but me, and I said I'd come back to that point because I began thinking about world government as being a solution to many of the world's problems a long time ago, but I kept saying, like most people do, oh I'm only just one person, nobody would listen to me, it doesn't matter what I do and there's no reason why they should listen and it doesn't matter what I do, as I said. But during the last thirty years there's been a change because individuals are more involved. The individual point of view is more respected.

[00:21:00] There's something in the air as I said at the beginning, like the extraordinary assertion, 'make love, not war', that makes the people in the Kremlin and the Pentagon and in Whitehall purse their lips and shudder. Opinion is formed by individuals, and I and you are individuals and I am here, just one individual, representing nobody but me, trying to talk to other individuals. And I don't want to start an association or a militant group that gets bogged down in committees and meetings and compromises.

I do want to fling out into the world of thinking and reacting and feeling people, ideas that may contribute to an alteration in the climate of the mind. I would like ISOWORG, the International Society for World Government, to be a society of ideas, so that it may become fashionable, the norm, to think that world government is the best way to elect an [00:22:00] organisation with the power and objectivity to tackle the problem of our survival, because governments don't look 130 years ahead. They aren't elected or paid or motivated to look so far ahead as that. You may ask what motive in the name of heaven is there that that can make us seek a world government to institute a reign of Spartanism and austerity to ensure the survival of our descendants. You may say it can't be expediency for ourselves. It is not fear of death, because we will die anyway before the crash comes.

So what is it? And the only motive that I can think of when cogitating around, because it does seem kind of natural that we should, the only motive that comes to mind is, curiously enough, a motive of love, for our earth and for our species.

And it seems odd because if you read [00:23:00] history books, you'll find that fear and rapacity and violence and mistrust, and exploitation and cruelty and lies have been substantial influences in the growth of our civilisation. People may say that you can't change human nature. On the contrary, human nature is susceptible of an infinite range of change and it's always changing and adapting its mores and its conventions and its conditioning. For example Victorian women would have fainted at the behaviour of modern girls, and then when they came round, they'd have jumped up and tortured them one way or another in the name of the God of love. And everybody would've said they were right. So things do change, I mean, remember a phrase like a 'whipping boy', well if a man today thrashed his servant for his son's misdeeds you'd think he was mad. Well, some years hence it may well be that people who are disinclined to take the problem of survival and remedial measures necessary seriously, will be [00:24:00] looked on by the rest of civilisation as unfashionable, fuddy-duddy freaks, in short, nuts. So you see human nature does change, in the sense that it become fashionable to think in one kind of a way and not in another. I only say this as a means of showing up the narrow-minded futility of the adage that you can't change human nature.

And if people who talk as I am talking are accused of having their heads in the clouds, which they will be, it's a very great deal better than having one's head in the sand. Human nature can change and change begins with individuals like you and me, and here and now. But obviously it works very slowly, which is why today seemed to me like a good day to start.

Now I spoke earlier of the enormous alterations in our way of life and of the values and attitudes that might [00:25:00] be involved in planning under a world government for our survival, and I spoke of the rhythms and the disciplines of the ecology of which we are a

part. Now it's a very curious thing, but at about the same time as scientists are beginning to predict disaster at the end of the road we are traveling, many of us, but principally the younger generation, are vociferous with questions about why we are traveling it at all and wouldn't it be better to take a quite different path with different values and attitudes.

And so it seems that the young, in obedience to inner rhythms of existence, are coming to the same sort of conclusion. So that while the computer prescribes a life of material austerity for a combination of physical reasons, young people are already voluntarily moving in that direction anyway. Parents brought up to [00:26:00] worship, or to think very highly of ambition and material status symbols, are worried because their children don't. They think them lazy and despicable. But if a tremendous blurring of material standards of living is on its way, and it must be accompanied by a rise in spiritual and aesthetic values.

And it looks as though it may be.

And so this speech is just one tiny attempt to sow the seed of an attitude of mind, so that if it is protected and nurtured, it may in time grow to form a great body which will choose its destiny by electing a world government specifically to cope with the problems of our survival.

And it depends upon individuals, hourly and daily, being active ingredients, like yeast cells, in this changing climate of the mind. And if you say, what difference does [00:27:00] it make what I do, then take heart, because we all feel like that and so did I. But for once I got myself together, I put in my two pennyworth, and you can do it too.

This brings me to my last paragraph. I said that the only motive I could think of would have to be love for the world that we live in, with all its amazing beauty and interest.

Finally therefore I think there is enough evidence to justify the suggestion that you go home with this idea in your mind. If the unfettered and aspiring hearts of individual men and women are set upon survival, then our children's children will live and their living will be lovely. But if our individual hearts are selfish and indifferent, then it seems certain that one way or another our world will die.

[Applause]

[00:28:00] If anybody wants to write to me, or correspond, my name is Henry Bentinck, Henry like Henry and Bentinck like B-E-N-T-I-N-C-K. And my address, you can reach me through an address at 33 Park Lane. 33 Park Lane. I don't want people to think I'm anonymous or hiding behind anonymity.

Thank you.

[Applause]