**THE FUTURE OF THE FEDERATION**

An Address Delivered by Jacobus tenBroek,  
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It would be easy and comforting on a ceremonial occasion such as this to recite our past achievements, count our blessings, and celebrate our virtues. We have come a long way together. Why not mark the occasion and let it go at that. Such was suitable for the 25th anniversary. This is the year after. It is time to take a long, hard look at what we are and where we are; to assess the obstacles and opportunities; to redefine our intermediate objectives, should that prove necessary; and to set our course. As Lincoln said in a speech that I shall quote further, "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it. " To say just that is what I shall attempt now.

One: A crisis reached and passed . We have passed through our hour of crisis. As Lincoln said about the nation in his famous "house divided" speech, the crisis either had to be met and overcome or the nation would perish. We met and overcame. Our role since has been restorative, first in binding up our wounds and then resuming our appointed tasks. At this convention, you have even gone so far as to resurrect a fallen leader.

One thing Lincoln did not emphasize in his famous speech was that there is always another crisis lying just beyond. It may not be quite as bad as Harry Truman found it in the presidency: just one damn crisis after another. But we can expect in the course of time other tests, some major, many minor, of our principles and our vitality. This seems to be a sociological law: action begets reaction; progress and retrogress are more often alternative than equilibrium. Apathy, cumulated grievances, imagined or real, conflicting personalities and personal ambitions, mistakes and misjudgments of leadership, the mere fortuities of events-all these may upon any given occasion form a combination and instigate a crisis.

Pending that occasion, we must fully exploit these piping times of internal peace while we have them. We must improve the hours, days, weeks, months and years with vigorous pursuit of program, creative adaptation to developing circumstances, and imaginative approach to new obstacles and opportunities. I believe that these are the demands of this very hour.

Two: Internal development . While the crisis was forming, when it reached its peak, and since it has passed, we have to some extent neglected the affiliates. Some of them have faded; one or two have fallen; others are limping along. We must now return to a stage of active building. Strength from the national organization must pulse throughout the system as well as strength from the affiliates pulsing to the central heart. We must renew our faith in ourselves and in our movement. We must do this by reinstituting our organizing efforts in states where we have no affiliates or where affiliates are weak or on the brink of dissolution. We must supply financial support and personal aid as resources become available to affiliates with programs requiring it. We must refresh recruitment of successful and professional blind persons as well as rank and file members. We must intensify legislative aid to affiliates which find this form of assistance advantageous. We must revive the system of survey teams in states where this is requested.

Our strength is not dependent on numbers but it is enhanced by them; and our representative capacity is what makes this organization what it is. Leadership, program, united and active support, tenacity--these are the sources of progress and the secrets of success in the affiliates as well as in the national organization.

Three: Policy and program . In the familiar fields of our central effort and concern--public assistance, vocational rehabilitation, employment--our gains over the years have been substantial, significant, and now and then sensational; but they remain unfinished and perhaps always will. The most essential of them all, public assistance, still resists our effort to transform it from a juggernaut of serfdom into a vehicle of liberation. Long ago designed to keep men alive, the welfare system must be redesigned to make them free. All the wretched rem- nants of the poor law which cling like fossil leeches to the aid programs must be burned away. The means test, the requirements of time served by way of residence, the incubus of relatives' responsibility, the entangling liens and attachments, the pervasive blanket of paternal and custodial controls, the degrading network of surveillance, the extended arm of the district attorney and the prosecutor--all must go. To see that they do, we must continue on the path we have been walking, a path that in large part we have blazed ourselves: step by step legislative and judicial improvement in public assistance; step by step incorporation of the blind within the social security program of disability insurance, In the field of rehabilitation, the awesome gulf between dazzling promise and niggling performance can only be seen as the shadow of failure, if not as hope betrayed.

Of the estimated five million disabled persons in the United States today, not counting the undetermined number of annual additions to the rolls, no more than 120,000 are even claimed to be rehabilitated each year into employment. That figure hardly scratches the surface of the nation's need. Indeed, the scratch appears still more superficial in the light of some of the employments commonly accepted as adequate. Fifteen per cent of all of those rehabilitated end up in the occupation of homemaker, surely an important role in the family but scarcely a remunerative one in the economy. Again, some three percent of all of those said to be rehabilitated are employed, if I may so abuse the term, in sheltered workshops. The figures are still worse for the blind. No less than one-third of our people--and these are the admitted figures of VRA itself--pass through rehabilitation only to wind up in sheltered shops, as home-makers, or as unpaid family workers. Whatever that may be called and however it may be justified, it cannot be called vocational rehabilitation and cannot be justified as such. In those data are seen the spreading tendency to retreat from the vocational into the generally rehabilitative, to escape from the onerous tasks of specifically vocational training and placement in remunerative occupations in open employment into the welfare functions of self care, work therapy, and pastime endeavors; into the medical functions of curing disease, improving health, and physical restoration; and into the educational functions of developing self-knowledge, imparting knowledge of the ways of society and one's potential role in it, orienting to what is as well as to what need not be, and instructing in basic skills.

These are not my criticisms alone. Let me quote the words of Professor Herman Somers, a recognized authority on the Princeton faculty: "Despite unqualified and universal lip service to the principle of rehabilitation," Professor Somers writes, "we have hardly begun to exploit its possibilities, to our great loss as a society." Why? Because of "lack of faith, lack of personnel and facilities, reluctance to make the initial capital investment, and growing indifference as we become accustomed to living in a labor surplus economy."

"I thus must end," says Professor Somers," on the pessimistic note that the disabled are likely to remain among the most unfortunate disadvantaged in our population for the foreseeable future."

In the field of rehabilitation, our policy must be, so far as we can possibly achieve it, to stay the headlong flight of these agencies from their primary if not their exclusive function of seeing to it that disabled persons, including severely disabled persons, get training for remunerative jobs and then are placed in such jobs. In working toward the end of vocational rehabilitation, these agencies will have our help and our prod.

In the programs of public assistance and vocational rehabilitation, the future will bring increasing problems for us in maintaining our separate identity and in securing attention to our peculiar needs. Pressure will continue to mount for the abolition of the categories in aid in favor of the common inelting pot of title XVI or some other form of so-called integration and in favor of casting the blind into the comm.on stew of general rehabilitation.

We must resist these pressures with renewed determination. We must demand to be seen and heard in our authentic image--as persons whose special needs are governed by blindness and by nothing else. We are blind, not paralyzed, however much the rules of society and the attitudes of the public may tend to immobilize us. We are blind, not mentally defective, however mad may be regarded our normal aspiration to live self-supporting and contributing lives. We are blind, not indigent, however impoverished we may be from social rejection and lack of opportunity. As a group, we have been a long time securing an identity appropriate to our true condition--a long time rising from the alms house to which all disadvantaged souls were once consigned as to a bone yard. We do not wish to return. We are still not well enough detmed or identified--apart from others of the physically disabled, apart from stereotype and superstition, apart from administrative convenience and simplification.

We who are blind are not disabled merely; we are not disabled mainly. We are not as a group bedridden or chairbound or incompetent or infirm. We are normal men and women who cannot see.

Four: The right to live in the world . We must secure legislative enactments and judicial decisions to safeguard and enforce this right. The right to live in the world means that the disabled are not to be confined to their houses and institutions, threatened if they emerge, not only with social sanctions but with legal sanctions as well, in the form of legal barriers, disadvantages and inadequate protections. Nature may confine them to an iron lung, a bed, a wheel chair, straps, braces, and crutches, or moldering in health and idleness in chairbound blindness; but mistaken public and family attitudes and the dependent law may not so confine them. Such would in effect be a form of house arrest which in the houses of the poor may not be noticeably better than outright imprisonment. Because of the importance of the right to be abroad in the community, personal liberty, in this basic sense of the right not to be unjustly or causelessly confined, has been taken as a fundamental natural and social right in Chapter 39 of Magna Carta and the Due Process Clause of the Federal and State Constitutions. If the disabled have the right to live in the world, they must have the right to make their way into it. Therefore they must be entitled to use the indispensable means of access on terms that will make the original right effective. They have a right, on such terms, to the use of the streets, walks, roads, and highways. This is a rock-bottom minimum. The right to gain access to the world in which they have a right to live must also include, as a part of the same rock-bottom minimum, the right to utilize the common thoroughfares by riding in connmon carriers. Upon descending from these, or independently of getting into them, for that matter, the disabled have a right of uninhibited and equal access to places of public accommodation to seek their ease, rest, sustenance, or recreation.

Five: New horizons and new allies at home . If the outer world is in a state of flux and change, the scene at home is closely parallel. We are witnessing in our country today an upheaval among the poor and disabled which bids fair to remake the map of public institutions and re-write the statute books of welfare. Within the past few years established patterns have been wiped out, giving way to novel alignments and constellations, to new groupings and rising demands. The most spectacular of these developments is the exploding movement of the poor themselves--galvanized by the War on Poverty, inspired by the successes of civil rights. All over the land coalitions of the poor have been taking form and taking action, based in some part on the recipient categories of public welfare.

One phase of this uprising is the emergence of newly defined groups of the disabled and the deprived--both national and local, general and specific. They make clear that the day is gone when we held the field of self-organization among the disabled almost alone. Today we are surrounded by kindred groups with similar purposes. How should we respond to their ideas and actions? One way is to stand aloof, in splendid isolation with the haughtiness of early arrivals on Plymouth Rock. At the other extreme we might merge our cause with theirs and become assimilated within a general movement of the disabled and deprived.

I propose that we do neither--rather that we assume the role of active and sympathetic collaborator, sharing our experience and giving freely of our knowledge, contributing our counsel where requested--but niaintaining our independence and adhering to our separate course.

In short, our posture toward others of the physically disabled and deprived should be neither that of alienation nor amalgamation but of active alliance. Where our frontiers meet and our interests coincide, let us act together for our common benefit; where our needs diverge and our problems differ, let us recognize and honor those distinctions.

An example of what such differences may be is provided in the vast apartment complex now being built in the city of Toledo, Ohio, expressly for the disabled and elderly, at a cost of two and a half million dollars. With all its skillful design and good intentions, this housing project appears to be as segregative and stereotyped as any old-fashioned home for the crippled and indigent--where the inmates might be grateful, docile and unseen. Not only will the residents live, congregate and snack together, but they are also to work together: the building is linked by tunnel to the community sheltered workshop.

That conception of a separate institutional setting may or may not reflect the needs of some disabled groups--but it is directly contrary and profoundly repugnant to the basic philosophy of the organized blind.

We have in common with all men that we are human; but this does not drive out our recognition of individual differences. We have in common with all disabled groups that we lack a physical capacity; but this should not prevent our recognition of the important differences in kind, in character and in consequence among the various impairments that flesh is heir to.

Six: The Kennedy Bill revisited. The rise of new organizations of the disabled and the deprived is but one phase of the revolution of self-consciousness and self-expression on the part of th se invisible legions of the poor whom Michael Harrington has called "the Other Ainerica. "In point of fact this revolution of human rights has already found official sanction in the War on Poverty--in the Economic Opportunity Act. The heart of that statute, which became law two years ago, is its establishment of community action programs under Title II, defined as programs which are "developed, conducted, and administered with the maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups served."

Does this concept ring a bell in your memory? Where have you heard such sentiments before? Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act is none other than the Kennedy Bill writ large. The very object of that bill, introduced on our behalf by Senator John F. Kennedy in 1957 but never passed, was to guarantee to blind people the right to self-expression through their own organizations--the right to organize and be consulted in the programs affecting them.

In and out of the poverty programs the poor are organizing, congregating, demonstrating all across the land. They are taking charge of their affairs, changing the landscape of their communities, shifting the power balance of their city councils. They are demanding to be heard and consulted--not in terms of tokenism but in terms of "maximum participation."

Time and tide wait for no man and no organization. We were ahead of our time once. In the Kennedy Bill we were the prophets of maximum feasible participation. Now that others have caught up, let us not lag behind. Let us recapture the spirit of the Kennedy Bill, and revive that cause in its essential purpose: namely, to maximize our own participation in the decisions and policies affecting our well-being.

There is still ample need to assert our right to organize. Where-ever we find a company union of sheltered workers, that right requires to be exercised. But the greater need, and the brighter opportunity, has to do with the right to be consulted, to be admitted to the councils of policy and administration. That right cannot be satisfied by the mere appointment of an occasional blind person to a board or a commission, however able the blind person or iinportant the board or commission. He may be or may become the spokesman for other and perhaps antagonistic interests. More likely, he may be or become the cipher of the powers that be in the agency. He nnay be or become the token of their acceptance of the principle of maximunn feasible participation. He may be or become in effect their hostage for the good behavior of the blind from whose ranks he may have been chosen. The blind are consulted in the sense of the principle for which we contend only if they are allowed to express our views where and when they count, through blind spokesmen who are their representatives, selected with their assent if not actually chosen by them, and retaining not only the support of the blind but a continuing and lively sense of accountability to them. An illustration of one possible method of giving effect to the principle of participation is contained in a Welfare and Institutions Code section adopted by the Legislature of California in 1965:

It is the intent of the Legislature to encourage and aid organizations of recipients to conduct demonstration and experimental projects designed to promote a more effective and efficient systenn of public aid and service. The Legislature intends to encourage the participation of individuals on public assistance to the fullest extent in the workings of the public welfare program and... hopes to provide a mechanism for organized groups of recipients to mobilize their resources and through concerted and cooperative action contribute solutions to the economic, social and personal problems which tend to prolong dependency.

Seven: Old poor laws and new conceptions. It has been our special strength as a social movement that we have suited the action to the word, and the word to the thought. Our enterprise has been at once a movement of action and a movement of ideas, with each diinension energizing and fortifying the other.

We have played, and continue to play, a pioneering role in what might be called the philosophical exposure of the law of the poor as a separate, distinct and discriminatory structure in welfare and elsewhere. By historical research, current analysis making explicit patterns that are implicit, we have carried forward the work of theory and doctrinal evaluation. The product of our thought and investigation has found its way into conferences, articles in scholarly journals, addresses and discussions. We have stimulated and provoked others to join the campaign and take up the cause.

In our movement, today as ever, ideas are weapons--often the ultimate weapons. As we disseminate knowledge of the enormity of the legal gulf separating the "two nations", the nation of the poor and the nation of the comfortable, as we intensify the understanding of scholars, judges, lawyers, legislators and planners concerning the inequality and injustice of this dual system of law, as we may claim the necessity of applying the constitution to our welfare system and bestowing its benefits on the poor--great new vistas of social and human improvement open up.

Welfare and other provisions for the blind are part of the over-all system of the law of the poor. While compared with other groups who inhabit that region, their lot may be special and favorable, they cannot gain ultimate release into the larger cominunity until that over-all system is demolished. Once that is done, the constructive work of positively fitting them into the law of the new environment still remains to be performed. This, too, is a particular responsibility and opportunity assigned to us.

Creatively we must discern and formulate the ways in which the policy of integration of the blind into society must result in reorganization of society and its laws. We have engaged in this process with considerable success in the field of public assistance. Employment in the public service and for teachers in the public schools are other areas--areas in which we explored the legislative approach to striking down legal and administrative barriers. A new effort on this front only now brought to completion will be published under the title of "The Right to Live in the World: The Disabled in the Law of Torts". That monograph consists of an attempt to reformulate in this field standard legal doctrines in order to adapt them to the goal of integration. This intellectual work of creative adaptation, of finding new formulas, new constitutional, legislative, and legal approaches to orient and re-orient the whole legal legislative structure to the over-all conception of the integration of the blind must continue to receive our best efforts. Before the action must come the thought; before the deed must come the doctrine; before the organization must come the conception; before the preacher must come the gospel.

Eight: Agencies for and against the blind . Let us begin the discussion of this topic with a basic fact. Agencies for the blind are a problem for the blind. The problem is not what it was in 1940. Then the agencies had spoken for the blind without let or hindrance. There was no one to test their claim of superior knowledge. There was no one to contest their claim of authority and representation. In a quarter century the organized blind have changed all that. Throughout the land it is under- stood that the blind are organized, that they can and do speak for themselves, that they have knowledge of their own problems and the proper solutions, that agencies often reflect their own interests which are not infrequently conceived of as conflicting with those of the blind. Now, just as colonialism is on the way out, so custodialism is in retreat. The blind are no longer the agency man's burden. After a quarter century of association and action the blind have proved their claim to self-direction and their right freely to speak, to organize, to petition, to be heard, and to be believed.

Today in this country there are agencies which choose to work not for the blind but with them as collaborators, colleagues, and co-equals. Among them are such agencies as the Commission for the Blind in Iowa, the Division for the Blind in California, and the Massachusetts agency which the blind are seeking to retain by legislative action.

Moreover, in at lease one dimension of action agencies have learned to work side by side with the organized blind. For years we have formed a common front for legislative purposes, a coalition which has resulted in great gain for the blind of the nation.

There are agencies that affect towards us a posture of indifference and a mask of neutrality. There are agencies--such as the Department of Rehabilitation in California--which regard it as their special mission to fight the blind at every turn and with every weapon.

There are agencies such as a number of sheltered shops which believe it is their function to control, suppress, and sweat the blind. There are agencies such as the Community Services for the Blind in Seattle whose paternalism is out of this world. Listen to this statement from that agency's director--a veteran, incidentally, of many years service with the American Foundation for the Blind. The statement was sent to a group of blind people who ocassionally meet on the premises of the agency. It was preceded by a declaration of devotion to COMSTAC and its standards:

Since we bear considerable responsibility for any individuals or groups that utilize these facilities and services, we are required to ask you to furnish us with a copy of your constitution and bylaws. We would also like to have from you, in writing, a list of your elected officers, with the designation of that person who is our direct liaison, and whenever this would change we would like to be informed. Further, it is essential that we request that you consult with us before you engage in any fund raising program, or any organized political activity. This is solely because we need to be aware of these matters, and also could not condone any such activities which would in any way be contradictory to our principals [sic] and practices, or which would be, for one reason or another, embarrassing. We believe that this establishment of principals [sic] and practice will be helpful to you, as well as to us.

Most agencies taken as a lot resist the principle of maximum feasible participation by the blind themselves in their decision-making process and administration. We have had a striking example of this recently in the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind which bitterly fought all attempts to gain for organizations of the blind the representation which is their due.

Now comes COMSTAC, the latest, greatest, and most ominous of all agency efforts to dominate the field to the exclusion of the organized blind. The title in full is Commission on Standards and Accreditation of Services for the Blind. COMSTAC's twenty-two autonomous members--for so they describe themselves--are self-appointed; its tasks are self -assigned; its authority is self-arrogated; its special knowledge is self-proclaimed; its actions are self-serving. The standards it presumes to set for others are misconceived, misdirected, and mischievous. Its outlook is paternalistic and condescending. Its interest in the content of program is incidental if not accidental.

We would and do join in every legitimate effort to improve the qualifications of workers for the blind--that is, to insure that they become more wise, more perceptive, more humane, and more imbued with sympathetic understanding. We would and do join in every reasonable effort to improve programs for the blind--that is, to see to it that they liberate our people from self-imposed and socially imposed restrictions, to restore them to normal lives and normal livelihoods. But these are not the goals of COMSTAC--those twenty-two autonomous men who would destroy the autonomy of others. Their highest hope--may it be a forlorn one--is to create a profession out of irrelevant and immaterial qualifications, and to devise programs for human beings out of the whole cloth of myths and stereotypes and the stuffing of physical plant and paraphernalia.

For all its bright and shiny newness, COMSTAC in reality is obsolete. Its philosophy of goods and services derives from an earlier age in which the recipients at the end of the line were simply human objects to whom things were done. Those were the good old days, before the revolution in welfare. But the revolution has come--and has brought with it recognition of the recipient not as a passive object of professional manipulation but as a responsible participant in the making of decisions that affect his life and the administering of programs that bear upon his welfare. Of all this COMSTAC is unaware--and disinterested.

In George Orwell's fantasy of the future totalitalitarian state, 1984, the name of the ruling tyrant is simply "Big Brother". In the course of the novel it is increasingly borne in upon the reader that this totalitarian authority--obviously highly trained and thoroughly professional, administratively expert and politically astute--is not one man at all but a committee of men: a kind of politburo or bureaucratic elite, whose title might well be the Commission on Standards and Accreditation of Services.

Nine: New horizons over seas. The dream that we have dared to dream--of blind people free and united, self-expressive and self-sufficient--is a dream that knows no geographical boundaries. Just as we are committed to carry the message of federationism to the towns and hamlets of America, so should we carry it to the blind in other lands as well.

At Detroit, four years ago, we took the first step toward the creation of a world organization of the blind themselves. At Phoenix, two years ago, we helped to lay the cornerstone of that organization and voted our formal participation. In New York, shortly after, we joined in building the actual structure of the International Federation of the Blind--and one of our number became its first president. Since then, the first implementive steps have been taken, more organizations of the blind in additional nations have become affiliated, and both the high prospects and the huge difficulties of this grand design have daily become more apparent. Yet these beginnings are only beginnings.

Without distracting from our efforts here at home, we must continually find new ways to aid our fellow blind in other lands. Without in any way distracting from the fact that we are citizens of this great nation and blind persons in this land of wealth and opportunity, still we must recognize and discharge our obligations as citizens of the international community and as blind persons in a world where their status is that of abject poverty and dismal lack of opportunity. Without in any way diminishing our labors in the NFB, we must lend full support to the IFB.

Why should we do this, when there yet remains so much to be done here at home? One answer was given by President Kennedy in a foreign aid message to Congress: "We have not only obligations to fulfill," he said, "we have great opportunities to realize. History will record that today our [foreign aid efforts are] giving hope where hope was lacking, sparking action where life was static, and stimulating progress around the earth.., helping to build the kind of world com- munity of independent self-supporting nations in which we want to live, and helping to serve the deep American urge to extend a generous hand to those working towards a better life for themselves and their children."

We may think of our contribution to the cause of the world blind in this way, too. It is not that we owe it to others; we owe it rather to ourselves. Our commitment to the world is not so much an obligation as an opportunity.

Why should we do this? We should and must do it because we are human beings and we are tied to blind people everywhere by indisseverable bonds of humanity. We must do it because we have the strength, the experience, the knowledge, and the opportunity. We must do it because of our common disability, our common life experience, however varied the society, our common burden of the misunderstanding of others, our common suffering from an irrational discrimination that is universal.

Finally, we must do it not only for the good of our souls but for the good of the NFB. Shocking as it is to many Americans, we can learn something from our colleagues overseas. We don't know all there is to know about organization of the blind, about possible and desirable projects and programs, about the ways of the blind in society. In some respects, some organizations of the blind abroad have made greater progress than we. It behooves us to tap their experience, to share their wisdom, to savor their triumphs, and to draw upon their sources of strength.

John Donne has taught us that no man is an island unto himself. Just so, each continent is a part of the world.

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