

S p e e c h e s

at a

L U N C H E O N

Given by Dr. BENES,
Minister for Foreign Affairs of
the Republic of Czeckoslovakia.

to Delegates to the Assembly
of the League of Nations
and Members of the Oxford
Group International Team.

Geneva 23 September 1935.

S P E A K E R S

at

LUNCHEON AT HOTEL DES BERGUES, GENEVA, 23 September, 1935.

Mr. A.S. Loudon Hamilton

Christ Church, Oxford.

Mr. Henry Armitstead

Former Chairman of Armitstead & Co.
London.

Baroness Connie Hahn

Brigadier David Forster

British Army.

Mr. Bremer Hofmeyr

Pretoria, South Africa.

Baroness Dina Hahn

Riga, Latvia

Mr. James Watt

Former member of Executive of
Young Communist League of
Great Britain.

Ma Nyein Tha

Burma

The Rt. Hon. C.J. Hambro

President of the Norwegian
Parliament.

Dr. Frank N.D. Buchman

Leader and Founder of the
Oxford Group.

Mr. A.S. LOUDON HAMILTON.

We are very grateful to your Excellency for inviting us to-day to this lunch. No one need be reminded that most people are looking for an answer. I remember the story of the small boy who was faced with an examination paper. and discovered that he was quite unable to answer any of the questions. So he wrote at the bottom of his paper "God knows the answer. I do not. Merry Christmas". When the results of the examination were heard his paper was returned to him marked "God gets one hundred per cent. You get nothing. A Happy New Year."

The Oxford Group began when Dr. Frank Buchman came to my rooms in Christchurch, Oxford, in 1921. He brought two Cambridge men with him whose lives had been changed. One was an Irishman. It was naturally a matter of great interest in Oxford that people in Cambridge were being changed. Most of us think that the other person will need to be changed first. That is the conviction that I had with regard to Cambridge and also with regard to my own family. They also felt I needed changing. The message came to us as an answer to the post-war cynicism and disillusionment. We had had two years of peace so called. We had begun that peace with great hopes. Two years had been long enough to make us realise that we were not achieving the results for which everybody had hoped. In Oxford at that time it was considered narrow minded to have any convictions whatsoever; it was very bad form to show any enthusiasm about anything and as for idealism that was always treated with a rather acid smile of academic superiority.

It was into an atmosphere of that sort that Frank Buchman first came bringing a message of life changing. We little realised what would follow from that evening in my rooms at Oxford, just as to-day perhaps we may not realise what may follow from a luncheon like this. Very great things I am convinced will follow from the meeting here to-day.

Personally I had always found the club, the cocktail bar and the ballroom more interesting than the church. It seemed to me that people were nicer and most of us kept well out of the reach of any influence of a religious sort and the excuse we gave ourselves was that religion apparently had failed the world in the greatest crisis the world had ever had to face, and we thought that if it failed then it was not worth the serious consideration of modern and intelligent men. It was just the fact that modern and intelligent people were being changed and were finding reality in religion that compelled us in Oxford to pay attention to the message that Frank Buchman brought to us.

He brought us the revolutionary idea that perhaps after all Christianity might become a living force in the world to-day and in evidence of that conviction we began to see the lives of people being radically changed - radically and permanently changed. Not just a temporary awakening, not just a temporary emergency solution for a special period of difficulty, but here was a cure that went to the real root of the problem and gave a complete and satisfactory answer.

Our thought for this hour to-day is this: **EMBOLDENED LEADERSHIP IN THE MODERN WORLD CRISIS.** You will hear to-day what we heard when Frank Buchman first came to Oxford. We are to hear from people themselves how this change came in their lives. It was experience and not theory. We had any amount of theory and philosophy and discussion in Oxford but very little actual experience and that was once of the first things which struck me about this Group, that people were speaking from what they had actually experienced for themselves. I am going to ask one or two people to tell you what their experience has been. We have no long speeches in the Oxford Group.

Baroness Connie Ehn.

Three years ago here in Geneva my husband and I met the Group at an Oxford Group luncheon. He was then journalist accredited to the League of Nations. Three things struck me tremendously at this luncheon: firstly, freedom from fear, secondly, the solution of problems, and thirdly the power to help. I feared the opinion of my friends, I feared for people, for families and for my country's security. I feared **above** everything that someone might some day discover what I really was.

Then I met these people who were free from fear, and I envied them. At 4.30 in the afternoon I found myself still deep in discussion. I found then how I could become free myself. That was three years ago, and I am still here now. My husband was changed. The basis of his work was changed. It was put on a basis of honesty and the tone of his despatches changed too.

The Oxford Group, to my mind, is the Church at work. I was brought up a Catholic, but being changed has made me a much better Catholic. I am learning to take on myself the responsibility that I have in my Church.

MA. NYEIN THA. (Formerly Headmistress of Moulmein High School, Burma).

Like almost everyone in the East I had looked at the West with defiance and intolerance over the defensive walls of prejudice, and we felt that the West looked at us over the walls of distrust and non-comprehension. I believed in having fellowship with those of other races on an intellectual level, but until I met the Oxford Group I never dreamed I could share my deepest problems with them. Now not only do I meet with them and exchange ideas, but I live and work and share my joys and plans and failures and victories with them. That is possible only because the walls of defence are down on both sides. "East is East and West is West" but the twain do meet with no reservation in the fellowship of of this spiritual army.

Brigadier David Forster

I have served thirty-eight years in the British Army. Since the war I have studied world conditions, both political and military from several privileged points of view. I have seen during the last fourteen years the purposes of God work out for myself and others in widening circles through the Oxford Group. I have found that God can guide you not only to meet the ordinary needs of people, but also in social things and in official matters. For instance, after I had left the Washington Conference in 1922 to undertake an official tour in Canada I felt guided to go back there to see about a clause in the Pacific Treaty, of which the first draft was not satisfactory and seemed liable to cause friction between other countries. The question had been in abeyance for several weeks and nobody knew when it would be re-opened. But I found that I arrived back in Washington at that very moment when it was under discussion. It was as if I had been whistled for from around the corner, instead of coming several hundred miles. As a result I was able to help in producing the final draft of this clause which has worked out satisfactorily ever since.

Mr. Henry Armitstead.

I believe I can best illustrate the points of my witness if I tell you a short anecdote. A small boy was in his father's study at a loss what to do. He asked his father to give him an occupation. The father was very busy and much snatched a piece of paper on which was printed a map of the world and tore it up, throwing the pieces on the floor. 'There you are, Jack', he said, 'that is a puzzle for you which you can put together! In a few minutes Jack had put the paper together. 'Well', said his father, 'you must have a better knowledge of geography than I thought.' 'Oh no', said the boy, there was the picture of a face on the other side, and I found that when I put the man right, the world came right.'

That is just what the Oxford Group is doing. The world to-day is full of explosive material which can destroy our civilisation. Fear and selfishness are at the bottom of our problems, personal, national and international. When I came into contact with the Oxford Group Movement I saw that God could change human nature, but I also saw that I must change myself first. If I wanted to take part in changing the world, I must change myself first and then I could become a life-changer

Mr. Bremer Hofmeyr, Pretoria, South Africa

In an English newspaper, there is a report of a letter send to a man whose purse had been stolen.. It reads: "Dear Sir: I stole your money. My conscience is troubling me. I am sending some back. If my conscience troubles me more, I will send some more back."

I lived on ~~this~~ principle. When my conscience troubled me, I decided I would try not to do it in the future. When this crowd came along, they taught me to put the last thing right. It was very necessary in this country because the Dutch and English had not always loved one another as much as you would expect. Then the Oxford Group came and this was changed. You found that the Dutch people would go to the English people to apologise to to them for attitudes in the past, and the Dutch would go to the English for a promotion of understanding. There was a widow in South Africa who had sworn never to use the English language because of her hatred of that race. At a houseparty, she was changed and for the first time used the English language as a sign of her new friendship.

Recently, the University in the capitol city raised the racial issue for the whole country. The question was whether the Dutch or English was to be the official language. Passion flared up. Physical violence followed. There was an agnostic professor, very hard and very bitter, who had kept the blood stained coat of his father who had been shot in the Boer war. At the heighth of the conflict, his life was changed. He went to the English professors and apologised for his attitude and for his part in the conflict. He went to the Dutch parties and told them that as far as he was concerned, all bitterness was gone. An English professor was changed and the two former enemies spoke together on the platform, and from that reconciliation a tide of healing went out over the entire country.

BARONESS DINA de HAHN, Latvia, formerly Princess Lieven of Russia

I am one of those people who have known revolution. I have known two different revolutions. I knew materialistic revolution and the spiritual one, and the cost of both. The cost of the materialistic revolution meant the loss not only of all material possessions and family, but the loss of all ideals and all aim and all I cared for. The cost of a spiritual revolution has meant a change in my own life, my personal life, and has meant being honest with myself and others, and surrendering everything that was pride and self to God. It meant more than a personal revolution; it meant realizing a spiritual revolution on a worldwide scale. It meant the transformation of my own self from a self-centered life to a God-centered life. It meant the transformation from a world-centered life to a God-centered world.

My background was a country life. My family founded in traditions and personal ties with the old Russian empire, came out of the Russian revolution, more or less, quite broken. It meant starting new and yet I personally and my family came out of this epoch badly disillusioned, full of resentment and absolutely lacking a constructive aim. It was in this state of mind and spirit that I married and starting a home of my own and after ten years of deception in my own life, I realized by personal bankruptcy. I had two sons who were to go out into life from that home and I had nothing constructive to give them. They grew up in an atmosphere of resentment and bitterness. It was then that I met the Oxford Group and realized that all this was sin. It meant my realizing that God had the power to free me; it meant identifying myself with the sins of my class and the mistakes in past history. Since giving my life to God, it has meant new responsibility. I have been perfectly free from all those resentments and bitterness and I have found a new responsibility towards my country which in former times I have not wanted to accept. I have found anew faith and power to cooperate in a spiritual world revolution and I am now working in being active in a world reconstruction.

Mr. LOUDON HAMILTON. Let us hear now from one who has taken an active part in one of these revolutions. He is a man who made things rather uncomfortable for a lot of people during the General Strike.

Mr. JAMES WATT.

There are two things this fellowship has taught me: the first, that reconciliation must take place in the world, and the second that this world needs a sense of direction. My background is entirely different from that of the previous speaker (Dina Hahn). This Group teaches a man to be really honest with himself about those things in his life which have separated him from other people. It is easy for us to see the things wrong in other people. It is terribly difficult for us to see the things wrong in ourselves. As Robert Burns said:

O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as others see us.

And that is just the thing they taught me to do - to see myself. And then I saw that it was possible for God to make me different and bring about that reconciliation which was essential first of all in my own home and then among the particular group of people among whom I worked, and later with those men in society with whom I was at war. Reconciliation is indeed more than anything the one thing that the world needs to-day, among classes, creeds, and races of all colours. I believe this fellowship is doing more than any body of people to bring that reconciliation about. They are working towards that reconciliation on a basis of surrender to the Will of God.

In relation to the second thing I have been taught. Bernard Shaw was once asked if he thought the other planets were inhabited. He replied: "If the other planets are inhabited they must be using this one as a lunatic asylum!" And there again I believe the only possibility of finding a purpose for the world elements in conflict is to work in obedience to God's Will. God who has made the world can remake it through the purpose and direction of people in living touch with Himself.

STORTINGS PRESIDENT HAMBRO FROM NORWAY.

Two years ago I was invited by the Oxford Group in Geneva to a luncheon given at the International Club. I had been placed opposite the man who took the chair, and following the custom of my country when the luncheon was over I thanked him not only for the invitation but for the inspiration that some of the witnesses given had been to many of us who were present. We have a saying in Norway that if you give the Devil your little finger he will take your whole hand. I think that some of us have the experience that if you give God your little finger, it is very hard to let go. After that luncheon I followed with interest the work of the Oxford Group and read some of the books. I had never met Dr. Buchman but I had a letter asking me to come to the House Party in England and also asking me who did not belong to the Oxford Group to come to a meeting arranged in the House of Commons. I was afraid. I safely entrenched myself behind my duties. I was bound to be in Stockholm on a certain day, and I was bound to be in Geneva for the Supervisory Commission on the day on which the meeting was to take place in the House of Commons. While I was in Stockholm I got a telegram telling me that it was difficult for the President of the Supervisory Commission to keep the day fixed, and asking me whether I had any objection to meeting in Geneva four days before. So the Supervisory Commission was over just two days before the meeting which took place in the House of Commons. I left Geneva and went to London. I had never taken part in anything to do with the Oxford Group. I was met by people from the Oxford Group and taken to Brown's Hotel and given some necessary preparation before the meeting in the House of Commons, and after that they took me along to a big meeting at Croydon. I spoke to the Members of the House of Commons not about the Oxford Group but about certain principles of international policy, certain principles that would naturally be seen by any man or woman who has had work to do in Geneva. In listening to a speech made before 150 members of Parliament by an American who had taken a great part in the work of the Group, Mr. Carl Vrooman, one of the leaders of the Democratic Party, and Assistant Minister of Agriculture, I began to see more of what the Group meant. He spoke to the House of Commons about the necessity, not only of individual sharing, but of national sharing. He told his English colleagues of the national sins of his own country. He told of the moral background of the crisis in the United States and I have no doubt that every member of Parliament who was present in that meeting had a higher notion of the public spirit in America than he had when he came there. It was a most courageous thing to do and it gave me a new view of the possibilities of international life.

Then I went with some of the young men in the Group to the House Party in Eastbourne, and I can only say in a very few words what I found there. I had a feeling which I had never experienced before - a most acute feeling of God's presence. Now to anybody who professes to belong to the Christian Church that ought to be an everyday experience, but I think most politicians, and even some diplomats will agree that it is not an everyday experience either in their own Parliaments nor in the Conferences to which they go. That is perhaps the reason that the results are not remarkable.

The Group would not let me go and I wanted very much to see the Group movement at work in my own country. After consultation I arranged the first big House Party in Norway. That means that my wife did all the work and I got the honour. It often happens like that. I told Dr. Buchman and the others that the Norwegians are very sceptical and that we were by nature perhaps not the most tolerant people of the world. What happened in that House Party went beyond any expectations, and the work has been spreading in Norway ever since, and hundreds and thousands of lives have been changed. The influence of the lives changed through the groups is felt in every district in Norway.

One day Frank Buchman came to me and said that a big public meeting was being arranged in Oslo, and that he wanted me to open the meeting. I felt very shy. Now that is a feeling which is not generally tolerated in politicians, so I did not tell him that I did not like to do it. I knew better than anyone else that I was not worthy in the spirit of the Group to do such a thing. There were many things in my own life that wanted clearing up and cleansing. I had never appeared in a religious meeting before, and it was not exactly my line, and I was afraid that a party leader in a country was perhaps not the best man to introduce a spiritual movement. Again I entrenched myself behind the Supervisory Commission, and told Dr. Buchman that I had to go away. I told him also that it would be very difficult to get the hall for that meeting. He said, you go right ahead and make arrangements. Well, I got the hall, and just as on the occasion of the first house party I was called on the long distance telephone, which was once more from the Secretary of the Supervisory Commission, stating that, if it were possible for me, the President would be grateful to postpone the meeting for three days. I had to answer that it would not be very difficult for me to wait and so I did open the meeting in Oslo. To everybody who knows of the Supervisory Commission I think it is perfectly obvious that there can have been no arrangement between them and Dr. Buchman.

The work has been spreading all over Norway and also to the neighbouring countries, Denmark and Sweden. The Movement has swept Denmark in a way hardly credible to any of us. Men and women in our country and in neighbouring countries, who were not in any way religious have been listening to the message of the Groups and the reason seems perfectly clear.

To most politician there comes a day when they are bound to contrast the result of their work with the vision of youth with which they started. The politician is bound to contrast the things he longed to do with the things which later on he thought he ought to do.

There comes a time when many a public man on leaving a big political meeting, however rich his programme may be and however good his speech may have been, will have a feeling of emptiness - that feeling that he has not been able to give the people who came to listen anything that is of really vital importance, making it possible for them to go to their homes with new ideals and new standards for their lives. He knows that he cannot give more. I should say that any man who came into real contact with the Group through the humiliating or uplifting experience that these people had something to give that he had never been able to give, that they could give to individuals what he had never been able to give - and to most politicians individual problems are brought nearly every day, and I know how seldom they are answered - would find it a very fruitful experience. I know that some of my English friends, after having been in contact with the Group, find that they cannot talk party politics in exactly the same spirit as they did before. One man who had been leading party meetings in a certain town in England had been captured by the Oxford Group and presided at a meeting in the same hall. He said I cannot now preside over a political meeting in the same way in that same hall. I think everybody will be able to understand that. In the same way with international affairs I have not the slightest doubt that no man or woman who has been in touch with the Group will go back to his international work in the same spirit that inspired him before. It has been made impossible for him to be ruled by hate or prejudice.

If you look back on the history of the past 200 years, it seems to me that there is only one peace that has been solid. And that was the peace made by Abraham Lincoln after the Civil War in the United States. It is more difficult to settle a country after a civil war than after an external war, and this peace was solid simply because Abraham Lincoln knew in his personal life and as his maximum for his political life the absolute political wisdom of the word of Scripture 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' And the only Peace Conference that will bring any solid or lasting peace among the nations will have to be based on that same principle. Until such a day arises, international disturbances will be bound to occur and to occur over again.

All of us who are present here to-day will have experienced the feeling that the Oxford Group represents a true international movement. They are binding together in the same wonderful fellowship men and women of conflicting races, countries, and churches. It is only through repentant individuals that the countries can move forward, and it is only through repentant nations willing to acknowledge their own sin that the world can move forward. We have seen a light that will show us a way out of our difficulties, individual and national, and we can all be glad if we may be used as instruments to draw people, individuals and nations, near to that light.

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Dr. Frank F.N.D. BUCHMAN.

Last year at Geneva a Prime Minister said that the influence of the Oxford Group had been felt in every village and town in his country. One man changed - a million changed - a nation changed.

A statesman has said that the Oxford Group is supernational.

There are those who feel that internationalism is not enough.

Nationalism can unite a nation. Supernationalism can unite a world. God-controlled supernationalism seems to be the only sure foundation for world peace.