

be such an elementary demand of equity and fairness that the simple people find it difficult to understand why legislatures at the state and federal level have balked for nearly ten years at meeting this simple demand. Social peace and social harmony are best preserved by the timely elimination and correction of social, political and economic abuses wherever or whenever they occur.

I have often asked myself why, since the consumer abuses are not new, and in fact even worse things may have happened in our past history, why suddenly do I see a connection between these abuses and riots? Maybe because of two things, and now I refer not to the hoodlum elements who are taking advantage of this situation but to the poor misguided slum dwellers, who have been manipulated into being part of the mass that goes on a holiday spree. Why did older generations, why did the Irish, the Italians, the Jews, the Poles, and so forth work more or less within the law without resort to civil insurrection to correct inequities and abuses? I wonder if it's because European civilization has a long history of the people's slow fight for right, justice, and freedom. The European peoples know from their fathers and grandfathers that the achievement of a decent society is a slow and painful process and in most cases is able to be won through the civilized procedures of law and government.

Other people from other civilizations may be more simple and direct. They instinctively see and feel the evil connected with exploitation, usury, and extortion. And they make simple connections between economic injustices and thievery. They think society is unable or unwilling to do anything. Therefore, they may see nothing wrong at all with returning one form of thievery for another.

Now, to the extent that our laws and commercial customs have been rigged in favor of the seller and against the consumer, to that extent they have perpetuated an alienation of the people—a loss of conviction that they could work through the orderly processes of government and law for the amelioration of their difficulties. Too often the law has been used against them. This breeds the conviction that the law and the forces of law and order are the enemy.

This is what I have preached right from the beginning of the Consumer Movement, namely, that government, legislatures and courts had to convince the general public that they were on the side of fairness and equity to all and were not being manipulated by special interests to hold down, exploit and deceive the people.

Let me say, by way of digression, that I am not here suggesting a clean-cut division between white and black, because from several sources I have been informed that the poor people are exploited by black owners and landlords just as much, if not more, than by any other seller. The main problem we are dealing with here is not one of color or race, but a problem of economic power and economic justice.

Therefore it is high time for the government of this great country, through its legislature and courts, to set the balance right between consumers and sellers with particular reference to access to credit.

In addressing these words to you, gentlemen, I know I am echoing thoughts addressed by Cardinal O'Boyle in a letter read to the people of Washington on the National Day of prayer proclaimed by President Johnson. The Cardinal called the riots "the frenzied cry of alienated people who are trying to tell us, out of a sense of enervating despair and utter hopelessness, that they want to be heard and want to participate as full-fledged American citizens in the economic, social and cultural life of our cities and our nation."<sup>1</sup>

I might call your attention also to the words of the Archbishop of Detroit after the recent, sorry spectacle. The Archbishop urges us to ask, "Was there something I could have done to prevent this?" He says: "Each of us must begin to ask himself these questions: Have we ignored for too long the conditions of slum dwellings . . . the countless humiliation in every-day existence for the poor who see the products and the rewards of American middle-class prosperity, but can attain neither."<sup>2</sup>

These are only two voices out of the many who have urged us to delay no longer the injustices that make even good people willing to listen to outside agitators and disturbers.

<sup>1</sup> *The Anchor*, "Urges Action to Eliminate Slum Evils," August 3, 1967, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *The Anchor*, "Prelate Says Riot Presents Concrete Test of Faith," August 3, 1967, p. 12.