

Americans for Democratic Action
Convention Headquarters,
Room 107, Hotel Sherman
Chicago, Illinois

For release in Afternoon
Papers of Saturday, April
9, 1949

Keynote Address by
Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of
Minnesota
Acting National Chairman
Americans for Democratic Action
at the ADA
Second Annual Convention
Hotel Sherman, Chicago
Illinois

We are meeting today in Chicago for the second annual convention of Americans for Democratic Action. Two and a half years is a short time in the life of a nation; but it is an eon in the life of a liberal organization. The trail of progress in America is strewn with the wrecks of movements which started out in radiant hope and after a time foundered in apathy or in resistance. But ADA seems to be in a pretty robust condition, even at its present advanced age. And we are serving notice here in Chicago this weekend that we propose to stick around a little longer.

ADA has grown steadily since its beginning in 1947 for a number of obvious reasons. I know that I will not be misunderstood when I say that our growth is partly due to the extraordinary leadership in this organization. The ideals and objectives of ADA have attracted men and women of great talent and stature and I am deeply proud to be associated with them. But we have never been an organization dependent on leadership; we have never confused leadership with demagogery; we have avoided the Pied Pipers of the Left. But we have been fortunate in having men dedicated to ADA principles whose wisdom, practical statesmanship, and fighting faith have been vital to us all in the job of reconstructing American liberalism. I want to pay tribute first of all to Wilson Wyatt, who perceived early that liberalism could afford no entangling alliances with totalitarianism and had the courage to embody this conviction in his chairmanship of ADA. And I want to pay special tribute to my very good friend, Leon Henderson - that battle-scarred veteran of American liberalism whose irrepressible gusto and bold heart brought the organization triumphantly through the great 1948 campaign. In the few months since the press of personal affairs compelled Leon to resign as National Chairman, I have been serving as Acting National Chairman, in his stead; and I can tell you from my personal knowledge in his office, as you all know so well already, how

lucky ADA was to have Leon Henderson at the helm in 1948.

And there is another man who, from the day this organization was founded has given unsparingly of his enormous energy and extraordinary talents. If there is such a thing as an indispensable man in the ADA, that man is Joseph Rauh.

Another in this distinguished group who, as far as I know has dedicated more time of his young life to the development of an independent, non-Communist organization than any man in America, is Jim Loeb, Executive Secretary of ADA. ^{Jim} ~~was~~ was breaking the ground and preparing the way for such an organization as this long before the idea seemed possible of fulfillment.

But the leadership alone could not have made our movement prosper. The true reason, I believe, for the success of ADA lies in the nature of the idea which has brought us together - the central vivifying idea which Wilson Wyatt and Leon Henderson have represented in the national scene and which the rest of us have been working for each in our own sphere of activity. What is that idea? The ADA idea is briefly that the struggle for a decent and fruitful society can only be carried on by the methods of freedom; that you cannot construct democracy and freedom out of despotism and tyranny. The rise of the totalitarian state, we well know, is the result of the defects of free society; but totalitarianism is no cure for these defects; it simply entrenches and deepens them. By repairing the defects and shortcomings of free society, we strike fundamentally against totalitarianism; and this must be our main job. But we must remember along the way that it is to the interest of the believers in totalitarianism to make free society fail, not to make it work; and that consequently no honest liberal can work toward liberal objectives in collaboration with the sworn enemies of these objectives, whether the enemies dub themselves fascists, Communists - or just simply members of the new Tory coalition which is trying to dominate the 81st Congress.

When we in ADA first enunciated this idea - the idea that the values of liberalism were profound and compelling enough so that they did not have to seek the aid and support of the enemies of liberalism - we ran into a certain amount of opposition. But the last two and a half years have dispelled most of that opposition. We cannot claim all the credit for the disappearance of the opposition. We should mark up some assists for Molotov, Vishinsky, and Henry Wallace. Certainly experience and history have now shown

conclusively that totalitarianism and democracy are like oil and water: no amount of shaking them up together can make them mix.

And the last two and a half years have shown one other thing pretty clearly. They have shown that the best way ultimately to combat totalitarianism is by programs of positive social reconstruction which will remove those shortcomings in free society which drive people, in the depths of desperation, to clutch the totalitarian solution. ADA stands foursquare for such programs of social reconstruction. We intend to make America a country where no man need fear that his race or his creed or his color or his economic circumstance will bar him from any success to which his talent and his character entitle him. We intend to make America a country where human dignity is not an abstraction for the orators but an emotional fact, expressed in the bearing and in the faces of every man in the country. This is where we are heading. We are on the march.

I think most of us first began to sense the true vitality in the ADA idea in the Democratic Convention last summer. We all remember that torrid Wednesday afternoon in July in the city of Philadelphia when a whole convention came alive with a fervent conviction that it must record itself without compromise on the great issues of human rights and freedom. Many of you were in the thick of that fight. We all remember the sense that surged through us that democracy was not ready to be put on the shelf.

The convention was just the beginning. The whole convention was one long continuing testimony to the fact that the ideas behind ADA were the most powerful ideas in the land. Harry S. Truman waged his unbeatable fight on the clear principle that the struggle for genuine American democracy meant a two-front war: a war against the monopolists and reactionaries on the right and against the totalitarians on the left. We are still engaged in that two-front war. It is likely to occupy us for some little time yet.

I don't want to give too rosy a picture of ADA's development. One thing we have always tried to do in ADA is to be honest with ourselves. We have never known how to get infallible answers to the problems that torment us. We have had to go about our business in that old, democratic way - the way of learning by mistakes. We have made mistakes. I think it is safe to say that we have probably learned some things too.

And this process of learning is something in which we have always been involved. The final test of the strength of the ADA idea lies in the simple fact of what goes on in the cities and towns of our country. Sometimes I like to think of ADA as a great collective education of the men and women of our land in the practicalities of liberalism. We all need both sides of that education -- the liberalism as well as the practicality. Through the nation ADA has supplied the means for educating ourselves through experience in what has to be done to make democracy a living reality.

I think we have some reason to be proud of our chapter record. We have now established chapters in almost all our great cities. Many of the smaller towns of the country are beginning to form their ADA groups. We are making some advance - slow and belated but real -- in the rural areas. The campaign gave all these chapters hard testing under battle conditions. To take my own state, for example, without the fine organizational work of ADA we could not have elected a senator and three new congressmen. I know this was true elsewhere throughout the country. As perhaps most of you know, a large group of our mutual friends in both the Senate and the House had planned to be here for this convention. They were sorely disappointed when at the last minute the legislative schedule in the House made it impossible for most of them to leave Washington. But the fact that they wanted to come here and take part in our discussions is very real evidence that ADA today has more than just ideas and ideals; it has the force and dynamism to fight for its objectives not only in the cloakrooms of the Capitol but in communities and states throughout the nation. I hardly need to say how happy we are in the Senate to welcome to our side ADA National Board Member Frank Graham, the new Senator from North Carolina. In addition, we have governors and many state and local officials who are ADA members or are sympathetic to our principles and purposes.

If there is any single job confronting ADA which is more important than another it is our obligation to encourage political and civic responsibility among the young people of the nation. I think that the work of Students for Democratic Action, the student affiliate of this organization, is one of the most promising and

hopeful signs in America today. SDA, organized on 148 campuses throughout the nation has challenged both reactionary and Communist leadership and given students from coast to coast an unprecedented opportunity to assume genuine liberal leadership. They must receive our aid and encouragement to the full extent of our resources.

The most essential element in ADA's political success has been, of course, the close working partnership with the great labor organizations. In state after state, ADA members worked side by side with the CIO and AFL and the leaders of many great independent unions in drafting programs, selecting candidates and working in campaigns. The Massachusetts United Labor Committee, composed of AFL, CIO and ADA, is a particularly good example of an effective coalition between liberals and labor. We all share a common belief in democratic society; we share the common objectives of a liberalism which will give all members of society equal opportunities under law. It makes sense for labor and ADA to clasp hands and unite in the common political effort. We want to strengthen and extend that alliance in every state and community in the land.

The election left us all feeling jubilant and, perhaps, just a little self-satisfied. The 80th Congress seemed to have bit the dust. The neo-Confederates below the Mason-Dixon line were lining up in front of Appamattox Court House. As for the Wallace Movement, the most ambitious attempt on the part of the Communists to influence American politics, you could not even see it until long after the dust had settled; that Third Party about which we had heard so much turned out on closer examination to be only a Fourth Party.

Well, jubilation set in, and complacency followed close on its heels. The complacency, as we look back was our great mistake. For the election was not so much a victory as it was a reprieve. It gave liberalism a new lease on life, a new chance to solve the grave problems of our time but the mere fact of electoral victory did not solve these problems automatically. The people had certainly spoken, but some of their representatives in Congress turned out to be a bit hard of hearing.

Could this session of Congress turn out differently? There is no doubt in my mind that in the final analysis the answer to the question rested with the Republicans. As you certainly all know

I am a Democrat with a capital D. But I know as well as you do that there are elements which claim membership in the Democratic Party but who openly defy its great principles and its platform. They never pretended to be for civil rights or for many other basic programs which are in our Party Platform. But I really believed that the Republicans were going to honor the pledges they adopted in their own platform at Philadelphia last June. So it was really a question whether the Republicans would be foolish or contemptible enough to make the deal - to support the neo-Confederate filibuster in exchange for southern support against economic and social legislation. I think we should give all credit to those wise and liberal Republicans, Wayne Morse, George Aiken, Cabot Lodge, Irving Ives, and the others, who believed in keeping that pledge. But their example could not check their party from rushing into this rotten political bargain - a bargain consummated at the expense of the homeless, the tenants, the poor of the North and the Negroes of the South.

Before the Civil War there used to be in circulation a useful word which perhaps ought to be revived. That word is "doughface", and it was used to refer to those northerners who supported the southern system of slavery. The doughfaces, it was said, were "northern men of southern principles". We have a new crop of doughfaces today, and they are funning the Republican Party.

The coalition of Bourbons and doughfaces is temporarily in the saddle. But I feel deeply that the Republicans, in pursuing this wicked policy of a coalition against human rights and dignity, are digging their own graves. They are sacrificing their long-run moral vitality as a party for the short-run advantages of administering a few political setbacks.

I do not see how, in 1950, the Republican Party -- except in scattered localities - can go before the people without a deep sense of shame, hiding as it will be behind the platform so many of its representatives were so quick to betray.



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