

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
BY
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ANNUAL CONVENTION OF AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION
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Once again Americans for Democratic Action meets in free and open convention; once again millions of Americans are watching our deliberations and looking to us for leadership. It is difficult not to be sentimental about this occasion. When our founding meeting was held in this city five years ago few of us, I venture to suggest, would predict that ADA could achieve so decisive a place in American life in so short a time. Then, as now, we were damned and derided by both the reactionaries and Communists.

I think that, if the truth be known, we didn't quite realize our own strength when we first came together.

It is five years since then and what ADA has demonstrated above all, it seems to me, is that there is a direct connection between so-called "practical politics" and liberal idealism; that in the rough world of the Twentieth Century people are no longer willing to accept the proposition that there is a fatal conflict between political activity and the use of the human mind.

We believe that politics belongs to the people; that politics is the people's business and if the people don't take care of their business, they'll get the business.

We don't believe in political bosses and the backroom giants who presumably know all the political answers.

ADA's basic premise is that there are no political infallibles. We meet in free debate. On occasion we even change each other's minds.

[There are those in America who would poison the climate in which this free exchange of ideas occurs. Just as the Communists like to describe us as "fascist warmongers" because we believe free men must resist the challenge of Soviet aggression, so the camp-followers of American reaction would brand as "Communists" all those who stand firm in defense of our free institutions at home. We must meet head-on the issues of guilt by association, political smear, McCarthyism.]

[We in ADA recognized long ago the Communist threat to the free world. We recognized long ago that in the battle for the allegiance of Asia's millions

bread was as crucial as armed strength; and we rallied behind President Truman's fight for Point Four aid -- a program, as vital to the cause of democracy as the creation of the NATO army.]

[We recognized long ago that the realization of civil rights in the fullest sense for every American was an issue on which there could be no compromise, no retreat, no double-talk. It is America's shame that Negroes can still be asked to die beside whites in our armed forces but dare not ride beside them in buses; it is America's shame that the children of a dead Negro soldier may not share the schoolroom with the kids of a man whose life he may have saved in battle. It is America's shame that men who have served under the flag of freedom may be turned away at employment offices because their color is black or their religion unacceptable.]

I know all the formulae of the compromisers. I know we will be told again that we must not try to move "too fast". I know we will be told that we have no right to criticize the internal affairs of certain states in this great nation. There are also those who tell us that we have no right to criticize the internal affairs of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. On this subject, I say, we cannot be of two minds or two heads.

[I speak with feeling on this issue. Many told us in the summer of 1948 that we had destroyed the Democratic Party by forcing men to take a stand on the issue of civil rights at the Philadelphia convention. Even if they had been right we could not have done otherwise; for I say in all solemnity that the Democratic Party does not deserve to endure if it equivocates on the issue of civil rights. To the talk of "harmony" I say that to achieve harmony - whatever that is -- at the expense of principle will and should relegate the Democratic Party to the position of being one of the most harmonious minority parties in American history.

But I also say that the true moral of the Philadelphia story is that the honorable thing to do usually proves the wise thing to do. We licked the Dixiecrats at Philadelphia and we confounded Tom Dewey in November. We can do it again no matter what respectability the Dixiecrats may coat themselves with and no matter what uniform ^{THE REPUBLICANS} Mr. Dewey may wear.]

But that isn't the whole story either. The whole story, I think, is that in 1948 the country was again convinced that liberalism was dominant in the Democratic camp and that reaction still ran the Republican Party. And that is the fundamental fact of American politics. 90 per cent of the editorial pages in America still vote Republican. It is even possible that the Republicans, by their conduct in the recent steel crisis, have won a 100 per cent vote of confidence from the Board of Directors of the United States Steel Corporation. I am sure that Fulton Lewis, Jr. will stand with the Grand Old Party this year as before. These are the surface noises of American life. Sometimes they are terribly loud; all of those typewriters clattering in unison make a real racket. But the astonishing and wonderful thing about America is that the people can be neither stampeded nor scared.

And in every decisive showdown of our generation -- if I may speak as an elder statesman for a moment -- they have finally rallied to the banner of liberalism.

I believe they will do so again -- if the choice is clear.

I believe it is again ADA's historic chance to make certain that the choice is clear.

As in the spring of every presidential year, there are, of course, those who are grimly telling us that the country is "swinging to the right". There have been occasions in recent weeks when -- if one believed what one reads and hears -- it hardly seemed worthwhile to go through the usual motions of a national election. Why not call everything off after the Republicans choose their candidate?

No doubt we will hear more of this refrain. At this juncture in history I should like to offer two inflexible and dogmatic comments on the political situation:

- 1) It is a long time from May to November.
- 2) Never underestimate the capacity of the Republican Party to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

Beyond that I have no political secrets.

But this much I do know: if there is to be a real choice for independent liberal voters this year, if they are to have a place to go, the Democratic Party

will again have to provide it for them.

As in 1948, the Democratic Party can either offer a fighting liberal program that will capture the imagination of the country's independent voters or it can finally suffer the defeat that has been forecast for it so often.

We believe that politics belong to the people; that politics is the people's business and if the people don't take care of their business they'll get the business.

Let's talk a little straight politics. I want to talk directly to those who aspire to lead the liberal democratic forces in our country. No one ever won a foot race running backwards and no political party has ever achieved victory by spinning its wheels in reverse.

The campaign of 1952 will be hard fought. The opposition to liberalism will be formidable.

Liberalism can win, however, if we choose to fight -- if we present candidates who are willing to carry the message of liberal democracy to every farm, village, hamlet, and city in our Republic.

If this is to be a campaign of unity-unity, love-love, and sweet nothings on the great political issues, then we have lost before we start. How, then, do we prepare ourselves to win? We do it by program, platform, and issues. It is just in this field that the Republican Party is appallingly weak. The Republican Party is barren of program or principle. It has become addicted to the habit of negative criticism, of complaining, of chastising and of accusation.

The American people want to know not only what a candidate is against but what he is for. The American people remember the sad mistakes of the Republican Party and they have had little or no evidence that would lead them to believe that the Republican leadership has made any change since it was last in office. The Republican Party is still the Grand Old Property of reaction.

It is true that something new may be added. General Eisenhower is a great American; he is respected by millions of people. To be sure, he has been entrusted with great responsibility by two great Democratic presidents -- Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. This within itself is a tribute to him. But, General Eisenhower is not unbeatable. He will cease to be the General if he gets

the nomination. He will become Mr. Eisenhower, Republican candidate for public office. There are already indications -- as in the letter he issued supporting the oil lobby's raid on the public treasury -- that he is trying to convince Colonel McCormick that he is more conservative than Bob Taft. And whether the GOP candidate is General Eisenhower, General MacArthur, General Motors, or General Electric, it's the same old party.

To be sure, there is that handful of liberals -- people characterized by Senator Morse of Oregon -- who properly honor the memory of Lincoln and the fighting spirit of Teddy Roosevelt. But Senator Morse is a brilliant and moving voice in the wilderness and blindness of Republican reaction. We honor him, and his few colleagues, for their spirit and determination to reawaken the Republic Party to its responsibilities and obligations. But they are knocking on the door of the Republican stronghold and go unnoticed by the keepers of the Republican castle of political reaction.

Now, what do we do in light of this situation? First of all, my party cannot come before the people claiming perfection of performance. We, too, have our faults. We have been in power a long time and the little and big mistakes have been made. There is a natural tendency on the part of the people to desire a change -- and change they will unless we can prove to them that the change would be disastrous, or at least would set America back economically and socially.

Liberals cannot win an election by just warming over the biscuits of the New Deal and at the same time toss half of them out the window? But that is what some want to do. I suggest that our political menu for 1952 better have more to it than just old phrases, old faces, and old ideas.

[We must present a program to the American people that is understandable and meaningful in terms of their economic and political well-being. This means that we start with the policies of the New Deal and the Fair Deal and move forward and not backward. This means that we must direct our program to those very people who have given us a majority in every election since 1932. These people are the working people -- the farmers, those who need social insurance, the teachers, and the small independent businessmen who fear monopoly and favor fair and equitable treatment. It is to these people our program and policy must direct its appeal. It is to their welfare that we must dedicate our efforts, because they represent

the real America -- its strength, its hope, its future.]

In more concrete terms, I am saying my party cannot backtrack on the gains we have made. We cannot scrap the 1948 platform without scrapping our chances of victory in 1952.

Despite all the daydreams of the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Association of Real Estate Boards, men in all lands are refusing to accept poverty and frustration as an inevitable law of life. They are looking at the horizon for hope of a better day. They are looking for economic security within the framework of freedom. That was the underlying premise of the Roosevelt New Deal and the Truman Fair Deal. It is the first plank in the platform of ADA.

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