AMERICAN LIBERALS IN POLITICS
(A Suggested Outline for a Political Four-Year Plan: November 1948 — November 1952)

I. Introduction. At this post-election point, the ADA should set forth a broad outline of a four-year plan, whose sole objective will be the restoration of liberal government to America. Essentially, the ADA must carry out two inseparable functions: (a) education, (b) political action. The ADA could not continue to justify its existence if it neglected either of these two functions.

A. Education. Not to be conceived exclusively in the Fabian Society sense, but more in the direction of a public relations program aimed at creating the right kind of a climate of opinion. This is a function both of the national organization and of the local Chapters. The execution of such a program is a technical matter to a major extent. It involves merely the promotion of the immediate and long-term program of ADA.

B. Political Action. Strategy for the political functioning of the ADA is more difficult to outline. It must have a relationship to the existing political situation, to electoral laws, to present political parties, etc. This report has as its purpose to suggest a political strategy for ADA over the next four years.

II. The Present Political Situation. Obviously, this section will have to be written after the results of November 2 are known. However, for the purposes of this outline, it will be assumed that some Congressional victories will be won, but that the national Presidential election will be a Republican victory.

A. If a Republican victory results on November 2, the liberals will be in the position of complete political opposition for the first time in 16 years. Most liberals do not recognize what a fundamental difference this will make in terms of
political strategy. It will affect the actions of the Democratic Party as such and of Democratic Members of Congress. Tragic as it may be for the country, it will give the whole liberal movement a psychological impetus, since the dynamism of opposition, always an effective political motive-power, will be on the side of the "outs."

B. There will have to be an analysis of the results of the Congressional elections. The chief items to be determined are (1) whether the Democratic Party controls the Senate and (2) whether there is any new liberal Democratic leadership elected to either or both Houses.

C. There will have to be an analysis of the results of the Wallace campaign. The chief items to be determined are (1) the effect of the Progressive Party vote on the Congressional elections, (2) the effect of the Progressive Party vote on Wallace and his future plans, and (3) the possibilities of the Progressive Party as a permanent institution.

D. An analysis will have to be made of the results of the Dixiecrat campaign. The chief item to be determined will be the problem of its permanence as an increasingly important home for Southern reactionaries.

III. Major Political Alternatives.

A. A New Party. An effective and realistic argument against the possibility of forming a new national party should be made. Such an argument would include the following points:

1. The recent experience of the Wallace Party, and its probable continuation in some form.

2. The probable continued opposition to a third party on the part of the vast majority of labor unions.

3. The difficulty of founding a new party unless and until the fight for progressivism is fought out and lost in both major parties.
B. A Completely Independent and Non-Partisan Political Approach. The difficulties of such a program, in terms of ADA, would have to be outlined. Points would include:

1. The ADA’s emphatic endorsement of the Truman-Barkley ticket in 1948 undoubtedly diminished any pretense of political independence.

2. Even from a non-partisan point of view, the fundamental differences between the two parties have become increasingly clear.

3. Most of ADA’s political leaders, both nationally and locally, are working in the Democratic Party.

C. A Program of Working Exclusively within the Democratic Party. The difficulties of such an approach, especially if made public, would include the following:

1. It would eliminate from the ranks of ADA, not only whatever liberal Republicans are with us, but most of the independents, including many trade union leaders who are unwilling to align themselves publicly to this extent.

2. Such an approach would make it possible to support a Republican candidate for any office, even on the local level, without risking the charge of betraying the Party.

D. A suggested realistic and practical political program for ADA would be a combination of alternatives B and C. This would be accomplished as follows:

1. ADA should have no reluctance to make it abundantly clear that we consider the Democratic Party the principal national electoral agency for progressive ideas and progressive candidates. Such a position would depend, in large measure, on the national leadership of the Democratic Party. If the top structure of the Party were to be taken over by conservatives, many liberal and labor people, in and out of ADA, would look for other political vehicles.
2. However, the ADA should also continue to make it clear that, either nationally or locally, we are prepared to endorse Republican and independent candidates for office where their records and their views are more liberal than their Democratic opposition.

IV. ADA and the Democratic Party. Two important generalizations should be stated with regard to ADA's approach to the Democratic Party, as follows:

A. ADA's effort will be to sell its political ideas to the Democratic Party, not to capture it, control it, dominate it; to influence the selection of Party officials, including those of the National Committee.

B. No national pattern can be set down with regard to the ADA's relationship to the Democratic Party, in view of the fact that the Democratic Party, structurally and politically, varies so greatly from region to region, from state to state, and even from community to community. While a special case could be made for each state or local Democratic Party, the following types of situations are illustrative:

1. Maine, Vermont, etc. A special problem is present in those states where Republicanism is so dominant that no state-wide Democratic victories seem possible within the foreseeable future. In some of these states, younger progressives tend to go into the Republican Party. In such states, influence in the Democratic Party is, nevertheless, important in terms of national Democratic policies and will be of importance for the national convention of 1952.

2. Minnesota. Here, the Democratic Party is completely in the hands of progressives and ADA-minded individuals. The political activity of ADA as ADA in such a state will inevitably become secondary, although it would seem that the continued existence and activity of ADA would be essential in order to prevent the Democratic Party from falling once again into the hands either of the left or the right.
3. **New York State.** Here, the existence of a non-Communist third party, the Liberal Party, complicates the situation. Furthermore, an additional problem presents itself in the machine control of New York City.

4. **New Jersey, Illinois, etc.** While there is no non-Communist third party in states such as these, there remains the problem of machine control. Frequently, the machine is prepared to nominate liberal candidates for national office, but is reluctant to welcome liberal and labor people within the structure of the party organization, or to adopt liberal programs and principles in state and local affairs.

5. **Wisconsin.** Here, the Democratic Party is under liberal control, but it has not as yet succeeded in uniting all liberals within its ranks, due to the fact that many of the old LaFollette progressives, including Senator LaFollette himself, have joined the Republican Party.

6. **Maryland, Kentucky, etc.** These are border states which are particularly complicated for liberal and labor people.

7. **The South.** In these formerly one-party states, the whole political situation is chaotic at the moment. It is precisely at this point that the liberal-labor coalition can and should make itself felt.

Most state political situations could be classified in one of these groups, although there would be, naturally, considerable overlapping. Thus, in California, San Francisco and the North would be more like Illinois, and Los Angeles and the South perhaps closer to Minnesota. The chief point to be made is that, to a great extent, strategy would have to be worked out locally, but the single objective would be to influence the Democratic Party in the direction of liberalism so that it might become, both nationally and locally, the political instrument of liberals.
V. Political Methods and Functions of ADA, in Terms of this Objective.

A. Greater Emphasis on a National Information Service in the National Office of ADA. With respect to a national political campaign, this is perhaps the most important function of the ADA National Office. Surely, this was found to be the case in the pre-1948 convention activities and at the convention itself. In the course of the coming years, the ADA should have continuing information on the political developments, especially within the Democratic Party, in all 48 states. Solid and direct contacts should be established. Perhaps the National Office should work up a series of correspondents who will report on local developments with a fair degree of regularity. Such reports should be correlated in the National Office, and important local developments should be communicated to the Chapters through a kind of national political information service.

B. An intensification and an extension of local ADA organization is imperative. While the first 22 months of ADA have produced real organizational accomplishments, there are still enormous gaps in our national structure. These must be filled in.

C. There should be a national and local campaign to encourage ADA members to become active in the Democratic Party work. There might well be exceptions, as in New York.

D. All Chapters should be encouraged to participate in all local elections: municipal, school board, county, and state.

E. Increased efforts should be made to achieve cooperation between ADA liberals and the labor movement, and to effect cordial working relationships between the several branches of the labor movement. In other words, the Massachusetts pattern should be promoted nationally.
F. A special plan of legislative activity should be worked out in the National Office, in order to fit in with the "Political Four-Year Plan." The liberal Democrats, both in the House and the Senate, will find themselves in the position of opposition. As in the case of liberals generally, this new position will have an enormous effect on their functioning. The ADA National Office should seek to organize, on a completely informal basis, the good Congressional liberals, and should service them regularly. In all probability, the Democratic National Committee, both because of its internal contradictions and because of its traditional between-elections inactivity, will not fulfill this function. It never has. It is worth noting that the Research Committee of the Democratic National Committee is being disbanded as of November 1.

G. A special program should be worked out for the training of liberals in direct political work. Such successful undertakings as Philadelphia's "School of Practical Politics" should be repeated in communities all around the country. In addition, the ADA might well organize regional conferences and summer schools for such political training.

H. By no means unrelated to the political activity of ADA must be its educational work on all the issues in which ADA is interested. We should encourage our Chapters to do more such educational work through forums, lecture series, etc.

VI. Summation and Conclusion.