ADDRESS*
By
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Federal Security Administrator

I am glad to join with my old friends, George Meany and Walter Ruther, in celebrating with you the forty-fifth anniversary of the League for Industrial Democracy. I am here, not only in my own behalf, but as the representative of the President of the United States. President Truman has asked me to bring you his personal greetings and good wishes, and to express his congratulations on your forty-fifth birthday.

The President was especially happy to know that Senator Lehman is receiving your citation for his public services in behalf of democracy here and abroad. No one could deserve it more. Herbert Lehman is a great statesman and you honor yourselves in honoring him. The people of New York know and honor him — as Mr. Dewey found out back in 1938, and as one of Mr. Dewey's friends discovered only last fall.

I see that Mrs. Lehman is here with us today also, and I want to say a word of tribute to that charming and gracious lady who is no mean judge of political affairs herself, and who has stood alongside her husband, inspiring and encouraging him in all of the spirited campaigns through which he has gone.

And the secret of Herbert Lehman's statesmanship is not that he has been a politician but that he has been a Democrat — Democrat with a large D and democrat with a small d.

I have known Senator Lehman for a long time. I remember him back in the days of the first World War. I had gone into the Army, and wound up as a junior

officer in our infant air force. Not everybody, of course, was glamorous in the Air Force. Some were. They went over to France and piloted those little crates that were held together with bailing wire. But there were less exciting assignments, too, and I found myself in Washington working on contracts for the Air Force. During those hectic months, I met a young man who had already made a healthy reputation as a business man. He was a captain or a major, I believe, when I first met him, and he was on the General Staff as assistant director of purchase, storage and traffic in the War Department, winding up as a full colonel. I don’t know how well Colonel Lehman remembers Captain Ewing, but I can assure you that Captain Ewing remembers Colonel Lehman very well. I remember his resonant voice, his unfailing courtesy, his ability to combine attention to detail with a rounded view of major problems, the strength that was concealed under his tact, his good humor, and his simple human grace. Colonel Lehman received the Distinguished Service Medal for his services in World War I, and it was as well deserved as the citation you have awarded Senator Lehman today for his outstanding achievements in the broad field of public service.

You have heard much this afternoon about the public career of this great American. I think it may be useful to put this career in its proper perspective — as the historians will see it. During the past thirty years the leadership of four men is largely responsible for bringing liberalism to New York State. You know the four men I mean — Alfred E. Smith, Robert F. Wagner, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Herbert H. Lehman. They transformed the politics of the Empire State. They brought democracy to life and made it work — the democracy of both the small and the large D. We in New York are not so self-conscious about native sons as people in some other States, but I think every New Yorker is proud of that foursome — Smith, Wagner, Roosevelt, and Lehman.
Today Herbert Lehman, alone of the four, carries on their tradition. He is bringing to Washington the sum of his wisdom, his judgment, and his statesmanship. God knows we have needed him in Washington! When I look at the sorry Senators of the irresponsible right — the McCarthy's, the Wherry's, the Hickenloopers, and their ilk — I say, thank God for Senator Lehman!

We need him. We need him today for the short term in the Senate — and we need him even more tomorrow for the long term.

We need him because he is a man who is able to drive to the heart of the problems that confront our country. He is not terrified by the shrieks and slogans of the irresponsible right. When he was accused of favoring the Welfare State, he acknowledged it with pride.

Back in the days of the Revolution, the British had a term of contempt for the colonial Americans who presumed to set up their own independent nation. But the colonial Americans took the name to themselves. Sure they were Yankee Doodles, and they were dandy! I can remember, not so many months ago, when the Republicans were flinging the phrase "Welfare State" at us as though it were an epithet of reproach. It has backfired in the same way that Yankee Doodle backfired on the British. Sure, we Democrats are for the Welfare State — if by Welfare State you mean better health for the American people, more education, greater social security, good jobs at good wages, protection against the hazards of unemployment and depression, civil rights, good housing at reasonable cost, and the whole broad program of President Truman's Fair Deal. If that is the Welfare State, then we are for it, and proud of it. The American people are for it, and proud of it. And the Republicans have dropped the subject, so that today it becomes the theme, not of a Republican box lunch wake, but of a serious, dignified, important
gathering such as ours today.

So the Republicans have now gone back to worrying about Socialism. A few weeks ago they told us that "liberty versus Socialism" was the Number One issue before the country. Since nobody paid much attention, they have dropped its popularity to Number Ten on their latest list of abbreviated slogans. If it goes down any further, it will fall out of their ten-point platform entirely.

The cry of Socialism is always a sign of the bankruptcy of conservatism in the United States. I am sorry the Republicans have sunk so low, because in our political system we must always preserve a strong two-party system — and that means we should encourage a healthy conservative minority!

But a conservative party is not healthy when it yells "Socialism." It is very sick — made sick, perhaps, by the logic of history. A hundred years ago, those who opposed establishment of free public schools called them "Socialistic." That was not conservatism; it was stupidity. In 1887, when Congress set up the Interstate Commerce Commission, the railroads all shouted "Socialism." That was not conservatism; it was selfish stupidity. In 1913 the nation's bankers let out the same cry when the Federal Reserve Act became law. And remember how the Wall Street brokers bemoaned the end of free government when the Securities Act of 1933 was passed, and how insurance companies howled "Socialism" when the Social Security Act was passed. They were not being conservative; they were being stupid.

As you know very well, Socialism means nationalization of production. Neither I nor anyone else in President Truman's Administration has the remotest desire to nationalize anything. On that, I can agree with the most reactionary member of the National Association of Manufacturers or of the American Medical Association. I believe with all my heart that our American system is the best that man has so far devised. But that does not mean it is perfect. That does not
mean it has no defects to be corrected. It is these defects which we are seeking to correct. And we want to correct them with the least possible disturbance to our society and our economy.

The conservatives may yell "socialism" at any suggestion for improvement. They may feel the hot breath of revolution with every proposal for change. But the most dangerous enemies we have to our American way of life are those very people whose emblem is not the eagle but the ostrich -- who refuse to recognize the defects that exist and who resist all efforts to take up these defects one by one and try to cure them. The surest way I know to encourage forms of government we do not like is to refuse to recognize and cure the imperfections in what we have.

What does this mean in practice? For one thing, it means that we have the obligation to ourselves to expand our Social Security program so that it covers a greater portion of our population -- and to increase the benefits so that they are more in line with the cost of living in this year 1950. I am confident that the Congress will make such amendments in the Social Security Act during the present session, and I think this will mark a great step forward. I do not have to explain the philosophy of social insurance to this audience. You understand the principle as well as I do -- and you recognize it as the only way in which our complex society can manage to build a floor on which people can stand when old age or death comes.

We have as a nation accepted this principle of social insurance in one field. We have yet to accept it in another -- the critical field of insuring ourselves against the costs of medical and hospital care. Too many Americans are compelled to worry about the costs of such care when illness strikes. Too many Americans cannot afford to pay for the care they need. The only way to
remove such worries is by adopting President Truman's program for a nationwide insurance system in which employers and employees would contribute to a fund out of which doctors and hospitals would be paid for the services they render.

We have as a nation accepted the principle that education should be free, universal, and supported out of tax funds. Since we have, as we should have, a decentralized educational system, operated by the States and local communities, this has thrown a heavy burden on the poorer parts of the country — and we must somehow work out a way of mobilizing the resources of the nation to build and modernize schoolhouses, to increase the number of teachers, as well as to increase the salaries of teachers, and to raise the level of our education standards.

In every field — housing, labor legislation, conservation, utilization of great new sources of energy — we must build strongly for the future. We must have the positive approach.

It is good to see that a valiant champion of this positive approach, a man without venom but with a full heart and a courageous mind, is recognized for his public service. Senator Lehman, and all of you who are here today, agree on the goal that lies before us -- the goal of a better, a safer, a happier America in a better, a safer, a happier world -- a well-faring world, if you want to call it so. Our paths toward that goal may vary. But all who seek it are joined in the common cause — and it is the cause that counts.