THE ADA AND ITS FOREIGN POLICY

Usually, when I am addressing an audience, I am speaking for myself - for Leon Henderson only. Tonight I have the privilege of speaking on foreign policy for a group of American liberals who have associated themselves together for political action.

Let me tell you first a little bit about our organization, Americans for Democratic Action, of which Wilson Wyatt is the Chairman. Most of us in this new group have felt for some time that progressives had lost somewhere along the line the binding force which in the past had rallied Americans when they faced dangers to their democracy and their freedoms. We knew that the American people, as a people, had not abandoned traditional values and allegiances, but their ability to come together for common purposes had been impaired. We set out to find again the precious amalgam of truly free association. We found it in a simple formula of rejection of all totalitarianism, from whatever direction its drive was derived. We found it in the simplest of principles, the dignity of the individual.

This new organization we call Americans for Democratic Action emphasizes democracy and action. It rejects all disciplines which subordinate the individual right of decision.

When we can together, we found a uniting bond in our repudiation of the police state, whether it be the Spain of Franco or the Yugoslavian government of dictator Tito. We knew, as free men and women, that if our declarations were to have meaning, then we should need to lend a helping hand to the nationals of any country who believed in the processes of democracy. Frankly, we felt that the liberal, progressive citizen of America had been thwarted in recent years, that the growing crises from the right and from the left called for raising the ancient banners of free speech and action.

Believing these things I have phrased in my own humble language, the ADA did not find it difficult to formulate its foreign policy.

Let me tell you how we went about it. I should qualify as a good witness because I was chairman of the program committee. I believe our declaration of foreign policy was achieved in a fully democratic way. First, we drew on qualified members of ADA for the first tentative suggestions, which were worked over by an organizing committee of 25 during January and February of this year. The revised planks were submitted for criticism and debate to meetings of several hundreds of our members. Then, at our national conference on March 29, the delegates debated earnestly and voted section by section. There was no outside discipline dictating to our assembly. There was no hidden hand of a foreign power shoving secret resolutions to adoption. Oh no! The gentle, and sometimes not-so-gentle art of democratic debate was always there. Nor was there reliance on any single individual’s opinion, who might claim to be the single, only heir to the precious Roosevelt tradition.
You and I know that there are those who proclaim themselves as the executors of Franklin Roosevelt's opinion. To me this is as dangerous as it is absurd. I deny that anyone can say with assuredness what Roosevelt would have decided to urge as resolutions for any of our major problems. I do know something of the processes he employed, and they are still valid today. And the genius of his processes has been handed down so that those who run may read. People sing them, and repeat them. Always he stood for an America which would help the weak to protect themselves against the strong. Always he urged the protection of peace-loving nations against aggression from whatever quarter.

The ADA started with good material to build its foreign policy - the ideas of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Thomas Finletter, Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., Paul Porter, our special ambassador to Greece, the columnist, Marquis Childs, and men who had held high posts in the occupation governments of Japan and Germany.

These materials were heat-treated in the furnace of town-meeting debate. A strong, realistic policy was forged.

Let me use our Chairman, Wilson Wyatt's words to tell you what ADA believes.

ADA rejects the theory that war with Russia is inevitable. It rejects with equal conviction the theory that we must purchase peace through continuous surrender to Soviet pressure. There are some who proclaim that we cannot escape armed conflict with Russia and hence we should abandon all attempts at peaceful settlement of our differences. There are others who contend that our own country is engaged in a program of cynical and ruthless imperialism, and that liberals must therefore oppose the United States at every point where our position collides with that of the USSR. Both views are extreme and dangerous. We believe that it would be a world tragedy if the peoples of Europe were misled into thinking that any substantial group of Americans supports the extremes of war or appeasement.

Americans for Democratic Action rests its foreign policy program on three basic principles.

First, any return to isolationism means disaster for America and for the world. From the extreme right and the extreme left - from the Chicago Tribune and the Daily Worker - come demands that we keep our hands off the crises in Greece and Turkey and stay out of the affairs of Europe and Asia. These same demands came from the same sources with regard to Hitler in 1940. We rejected that alliance of the isolationists and the Communists then; we reject it now. No longer can the United States resign from the world and pull the oceans over its head. To ensure peace and our own security, we must pursue positive policies - and we must recognize that doing nothing is itself a policy decision which may undermine our national security.

Second, the United States must exercise its power, wherever possible, through the United Nations. We must work in every way we can to strengthen the United Nations and to support its economic and social agencies - and we ask that other great powers meet us half way. The existence of the United Nations does not, however, eliminate the need for action by individual nations where the United Nations is powerless to act.
Third, the United States must throw its moral, economic and political support to nations struggling for survival and to the forces of independent democracy within those nations. We must let the world know that our vast resources will be used to create economic and political conditions favorable to the growth of democratic ideals.

Americans are rightly troubled over the problems connected with aid to Greece and Turkey. As Americans, we as liberals are troubled, of course. We do not like the reactionary and often corrupt government of Greece, which, on its record, has not shown capacity to set that country on its feet. Nor do we consider Turkey to be a democracy as we define democracy. But these countries have appealed to the United States for economic and military aid, and our president has proposed that we supply it. Americans for Democratic Action voted - and I emphasize that we voted - to support Truman's main proposal. The Roper poll shows that the majority of Americans support this stand. The poll shows, too, that the majority of Americans would have preferred that the United Nations, if ready and strong, should handle the problem.

We, as liberals, are seeking the protection of international security. We believe, with good reason and evidence, that both countries are threatened from without by forces which would annex their territories and destroy their national sovereignty. If the integrity of these nations, or any other nations, can be threatened by continuous wars of nerves, or if the constituted governments can be kept from maintaining order by incipient civil wars, fomented by foreign countries - then our hopes for a strong Union of Nations and world peace are headed for destruction.

The world must act at once in that troubled area we call the Middle East, and the natural center, in fact the only center, for such action is the United Nations.

There are those who would risk the long process of submission of the Greece-Turkey requests to the United Nations - even though they admit that in its present structure, no aid can come quickly from this quarter. The United Nations today lacks the legal powers, the forces and the funds to act quickly. Meanwhile, collapse is imminent in Greece, a country distinguished as a brave ally through the bravery of its people.

The ADA favors quick action by the United States - but we also favor quick action by our country, too, that will place the new instrument, United Nations, in a position to take over the responsibilities issuing from the crises in Greece and Turkey. We must urge this strengthening so that never again will we find international weakness when the issue cries for strength.

Within the Soviet Union there are many who are urging friendly attitudes toward the nations of the West. We believe there are basic strengths of peace here which strong action on our part would encourage. We are equally aware that if we, and those associated with us, do not find the pools of strength to curb aggression in the Mediterranean - then those in the Soviet Union who urge aggression will look toward similar ugly actions in Italy, France and the other nations of Europe. That would not mean just failure of a noble idea - it would spell conflict and ruin.

If we wait, if the United States stays its helping hand, we believe far greater and wider-spread crises will be created - which, above all, cannot be
avoided and would produce decision of even graver moment.

We do not regard military security as anything but a temporary answer - but we do see it as necessary. If we are to answer the challenge of Communism - we must be stronger, we must be able. We must use some part of these strengths to remove conditions in which Communism thrives - the threats of hunger and want, wherever they may exist!

Many of us, as liberals, as individuals have long been asking for a positive foreign policy which would give meaning and structure to the democratic ideas Roosevelt repeatedly enunciated. If we want freedom to grow - then we must favor political and economic reconstruction. Greece and Turkey - grave as they are - have presented us with an opportunity. Many feel that the United States has run away from its world responsibilities. Today we have a chance to take up our notes of commitment to world order.

We in the ADA do not favor an unconditional grant to the present Greek government. Let’s get that clear. And I don’t believe the Truman administration ever so regarded aid to Greece. We have noted Secretary Marshall’s proposals of last February, and our program calls for aid to Greece to be put on a basis of fortifying the Marshall objectives. Nowhere have we, as a liberal group, urged a blank check to those grafters and reactionaries who have wasted the precious relief funds already afforded to Greece.

Let me again advert to Wilson Wyatt’s able statement of the ADA demands. Wyatt says:

"The United States must follow through on the use of our aid. We must ensure that all military supplies be used against external aggression and not against the liberties of the people. We must insist on a genuine amnesty - so that all who have fought against reaction and corruption in the interest of a decent and independent Greek government shall be free to lay down their arms, without fear of reprisal, and begin the rebuilding of their country. We must employ our influence to democratize the civil service, to revise the tax system, to institute effective price and exchange controls - in short, to tighten up the whole Greek economy and set it on a firm and healthy basis. If we do our job well, we will have shown that we can meet the totalitarian challenge on the level of economic reconstruction; that we can fill stomachs, and do it without cutting out tongues.

This will be a tough job. We need time and tranquility in order to build dams, to plan soil erosion programs, to revive and expand industries. Our task is to place the Greeks on the road to a reasonable standard of living and at the same time guarantee the free play of political expression.

If we continue to allow the ragged and hungry people of Greece to be exploited, we shall only fan the fires of Communism. But if we assume the burdens of guarding national independence and supervising economic reconstruction, we will give to the democratic alternative to Fascism and Communism new strength and vitality throughout the world."