

HERBERT H. LEHMAN

March 28, 1878—December 5, 1963

*“Citizen and statesman,
he has used wisdom and
compassion as the tools
of government and has
made politics the highest
form of public service.”*

PRESIDENTIAL CITATION:

Medal of Freedom

December 6, 1963

HERBERT H. LEHMAN

Philanthropist, businessman, twice Lieutenant Governor, four times Governor of New York State, twice elected United States Senator, and the first Director General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Herbert Lehman found no human problem too great to cope with or too small to command his attention.

He was the youngest of eight children. His parents were German immigrants who came to the United States in 1848 and settled in Alabama. They moved to New York City in 1868 where Herbert was born on March 28, 1878 and later attended school.

When Herbert Lehman was a boy, his father often took him walking through the tenement districts of New York's lower East Side, where he soon learned how the less fortunate immigrants toiled in sweat shops and lived in misery. These observations influenced him permanently and led to a lifetime of effort devoted to the cause of social justice and the securing of civil rights. As a young man, soon after graduating from Williams College in 1899, he began his work for human welfare by

conducting a boys' club at the Henry Street Settlement.

On his retirement from the United States Senate almost sixty years later, a distinguished English journalist wrote in the Manchester Guardian Weekly:

"Never at any stage in his career, no matter how staggering the odds or how perilous the consequences, had he ever faltered in his hatred of injustice and his passion for equality. This millionaire banker was revolted by the sight of slums, by discrimination against a Negro, by cruel quotas in the immigration laws."

After eight years with a textile manufacturing firm, where he began work at a salary of \$5.00 a week, Herbert Lehman joined his family's banking house, Lehman Brothers. From 1908 until he was elected Lieutenant Governor twenty years later (except for time in uniform during World War I), he continued as a partner in the firm.

It was during this period, in 1910, that Herbert Lehman entered the most cherished partnership of his life when he married Edith Altschul. This marriage, which was destined to last for over half a century, sustained him in spirit throughout his long career. They had three children — Peter, John, and Hilda Jane and five grandchildren.

In 1914, before the United States entered World War I, Herbert Lehman's dedication to philanthropy was called into action when he helped to organize the Joint Distribution Committee for the relief of Jews in Europe. Later, as an American Army officer, he was in charge of the procurement of supplies, and subsequently of the negotiation of contract settlements. Colonel Lehman was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the first of more than a dozen military and civilian awards, American and Foreign, which he was to receive during his lifetime.

Herbert Lehman was recognized as a servant of the people long before he officially entered public life. He had, in full measure, the confidence and respect of different elements of the community — labor, industry, finance, welfare groups and government — and helped frequently to aid in solving difficult community problems. He was often called upon to settle serious labor disputes in the garment industry; he was chairman of the Mayor's Committee on New York City Finances; he played a leading role in many Jewish philanthropies. Close friend of Alfred E. Smith and of Franklin D. Roosevelt, he became increasingly involved in various Democratic party activities.

Then at fifty, Herbert Lehman entered public life. His experience and his concern for the welfare of the people made him the logical candidate for Lieutenant Governor in 1928 when Franklin D. Roosevelt first ran for Governor of the State of New York. Far more active in that office than his predecessors, he was called "my strong right arm" by Governor Roosevelt. As Lieutenant Governor, Herbert Lehman played the principal role in rehabilitating New York State's hospitals for the mentally ill, and sponsored an enlightened parole system.

GOVERNOR OF NEW YORK

Herbert Lehman was elected Governor of New York in 1932, the same year that Franklin D. Roosevelt was summoned to the Presidency of the United States. He was elected to four successive terms, the only Governor in the State's history to be so honored, and he served for ten years. During most of this period, the Legislature was controlled by Governor Lehman's political opponents, but this did not deter him from advancing a liberal program of social legislation. That program, much of which is taken for granted today, was adopted largely because of the Governor's persistent efforts in arousing public support.

It was during Herbert Lehman's time as Governor that New York State:

- established an unemployment insurance fund;
- adopted an eight hour day for public works and public institutions;
- created savings bank life insurance;
- qualified women to serve on juries;
- strengthened the regulation of public utilities;
- provided aid for dependent and crip-

pled children, for the blind, and for maternal care under the Federal Social Security program.

Other achievements of Governor Lehman's four administrations include:

- a vast program of slum clearance and low-rent housing under the first State public housing law in the United States;
- protection of union membership;
- encouragement of collective bargaining;
- legislation against discrimination.

At the conclusion of the only period of his administration when his own party had control of the Legislature, the State Federation of Labor declared:

“. . . These enactments establish an achievement in social and industrial well-being for men, women and children that has no parallel in the legislative history of this or any other state on the American continent.”

The public servant, so dedicated to social reform, did not, however, neglect his training as banker and business man. He succeeded in balancing the State's budget, and eliminated a deficit inherited from the depression years. He ended his tenure as Governor in December 1942 with a surplus in the State Treasury.

DIRECTOR GENERAL
OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND
REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION
(UNRRA)

At sixty-four Herbert Lehman continued his selfless career to alleviate human suffering, this time on a scale larger than was ever before attempted. The goal was, in his words, "to feed and clothe and find shelter for the millions whose lives had been disrupted by World War II." After one year as Director of the United States Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations (OFRRO), he was elected by over fifty nations as the first Director General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). During his challenging years in office, from 1943 to 1946, UNRRA shipped 25,000,000 tons of supplies to the destitute on every continent touched by the ravages of war. These shipments included food, clothing and medical supplies for the relief of millions of refugees and displaced persons, in addition to equipment to rebuild industrial and agricultural capacity in war-shattered cities and villages. The man who, as a boy, had been deeply

moved by human misery on the streets of New York, again was dedicating his great talents to alleviate man's suffering, this time as an international civil servant in the greatest relief operation in the history of the world.

UNITED STATES SENATOR

When his UNRRA years ended Herbert Lehman returned to New York and devoted his energies to public and philanthropic causes until 1949, when at the age of 71 he was elected United States Senator to fill the unexpired term of Robert F. Wagner, Sr. Re-elected for a full term in 1950, Senator Lehman gave six more years of distinguished service to the people of his State and Nation.

His courage, moral integrity and unfaltering dedication to duty soon made Senator Lehman one of Washington's most beloved and respected Senators; just as they had won him affection and honor in New York and on the world scene. He became known as "*the Conscience of the Senate*" as he led those who stood for liberal principles and for the rights of accused individuals in the early 1950's when Senator McCarthy's influence was at its peak. Utterly fearless and disdainful of his own political fortunes he fought, at times almost alone, against tremendous odds and powerful opponents.

He was among the first vigorous fighters for bills protecting the civil rights of members of minority groups. He also

led the battle against discriminatory national quotas in the immigration laws.

Just as Governor Lehman, in the 1930's in the State of New York, had been in the forefront of every struggle to expand social security, to develop public housing and public power, and to protect the natural resources and the rights of working people, so as Senator in the 1950's he fought for similar legislation on the national scene. In international affairs the Senator and former Director General of UNRRA spoke and voted in favor of every effort to protect world peace through the United Nations.

Even after Senator Lehman retired from the Senate at the age of 78, his public career was not ended. His role continued to be an active and constructive one. He led the Reform Movement of the Democratic Party in its campaign to strike down entrenched political bossism in New York City.

Herbert Lehman was revered as New York's beloved Elder Statesman by people of all political parties and of all religious faiths. His abiding interest in public and philanthropic affairs continued until December 5, 1963 — the very day he was preparing to leave New York for Washington to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom — when his great heart came to rest.

CIVIL AND PHILANTHROPIC INTERESTS

Herbert Lehman received twenty honorary degrees from American colleges and universities. He was awarded many foreign decorations, especially for his services during the UNRRA years. He was a dedicated director and officer of many charitable and educational organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, Brandeis University, Henry Street Settlement, Joint Distribution Committee, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Conference of Christians and Jews, American Association for the United Nations and the Fund for the Republic.

His selfless devotion of time and personal energy to humanitarian causes was equaled by his generous gifts. Best known, perhaps, is the Children's Zoo in New York's Central Park, a "Gift to all the children of the City of New York by Governor and Mrs. Herbert H. Lehman, 1960." Another is "Pete's House" at the Henry Street Settlement, given in memory of their elder son Peter, killed in action overseas during World War II.

HERBERT H. LEHMAN

On the Floor of the Senate, February 25, 1955:

“In the present state of world affairs we dare no longer tolerate on our statute books the present shameful (immigration) law which is losing us friends abroad daily, holding us up to contempt in the eyes of free mankind, and working havoc among our own people. It is intolerable that we should continue to maintain our own Iron Curtain — against visitors and alien immigrants alike — while criticizing the Iron Curtain abroad.”

On the Floor of the Senate, July 12, 1956:

“Like every other public official, I have been attacked; I have been criticized; I have been vilified by the press. I have not always liked it. However, I can truthfully say that I believe in the right of the press to criticize me, however wrongfully. I judge it more important to have a free press than to escape even unjustified criticism. . . .”

In a Magazine Interview, October 1956:

“There is and should be an increasing emphasis on the role of young men and

women in the affairs of government and in the vast areas of national life outside of government. We need fresh viewpoints, fresh thinking, fresh inspiration and fresh dedication to democracy, justice and freedom.”

In a Charter Day address at Howard University, March 15, 1958:

“There is a crying need for positive leadership — for firm, strong voices among our elected officials to speak and act with zeal, not out of political necessity, but out of deep conviction.”

In a letter to a young boy seeking advice, November 21, 1960:

“Never try to compromise with your convictions because they may not agree with those of the group in which you find yourself. . . . Any man who seeks public office and allows his ambition to affect his religious affiliation is not worthy of the confidence of his fellow citizens.”

QUOTATIONS

“You have faced your national tasks with determination, courage, unswerving loyalty, and wisdom.”

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT
December 7, 1943

“. . . He has earned and won the most honorable title that any man could ever aspire to, world leader in an international humanitarian effort.”

LESTER B. PEARSON
Canada
March 28, 1946

“Senator Lehman a Senator of courage and integrity.”

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY
1956

“Herbert Lehman is a great Democrat. More than that, he has long been one of the outstanding leaders of Liberal America. His devotion to the causes of the little man, and those who are of the minorities in America is unsurpassed in our history.”

HARRY S. TRUMAN
January 11, 1956

“... There are very few men in public life whose consistency of conscience, ardor of devotion to public service, and acuteness of understanding, enlist nearly universal admiration. Such a man is Herbert Lehman.”

ADLAI E. STEVENSON

In a letter to Senator
Hubert H. Humphrey
January 19, 1956

“... One of those rare figures in public life to whom right and justice always have come first, and political considerations last.”

GEORGE MEANY

President, AFL-CIO
in JUSTICE
December 15, 1956

“Certainly, no one in our time has rendered greater service to the introduction of the moral dimension in the civil life than Senator Lehman. His service to the American people and to the world has assumed historical proportions and in many ways he has become a spokesman for the American conscience.”

EARL WARREN

Upon the dedication of the
Lehman Institute of Ethics
March 24, 1958

“. . . Few people of his years look back less. Few minds seem so eager to attack the problems of today and to look to the possible lines of policy for tomorrow. . . . Herbert Lehman is not detached when it comes to the struggles of our day; he is still in there fighting. It is not so much age and maturity that strike you; it is a mind and a vigor that refuse to grow old.”

BARBARA WARD

On Herbert Lehman's
80th Birthday
March 28, 1958

“. . . You have demonstrated that courage, persistence, determination, and conviction win out. . . . Your example is a wonderful inspiration to all of us.”

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

September 11, 1961

“. . . You were not only the conscience of the Senate, but I think you have been the conscience of a great many people in the inspiration which your life has given them to be of service to their country.”

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

At a Dinner given in his honor
by the America-Israel Cultural
Foundation
January 16, 1962

"There is no one whose esteem I value more, for you are a rare person and this is a better world because you are in it."

SAMUEL LEIDESDORF

October 25, 1962

". . . Herbert H. Lehman, ever conscious of the people's welfare, has given unstintingly of his talents, energies and resources to promote many projects for the public good, for his country, his state and his city, but in loving all mankind, he cherished especially the children and youth of his native city for whom he labored most of all."

MAYOR ROBERT F. WAGNER

Proclamation of
Herbert Lehman Day

March 28, 1963

". . . The best man I have ever known in political life and the noblest Senator of my generation."

PAUL H. DOUGLAS

December 5, 1963

"Rarely have I personally known anyone with standards so noble, or with a sense of duty and responsibility so profound."

DAVID DUBINSKY

President International Ladies
Garment Workers Union

December 5, 1963

“ . . . This was a man who outwardly appeared reserved but who always left those whom he had just seen feeling warmer than before. This was a man who was modest in bearing but who brought distinction to every venture he joined. This was a man of peace, yet he met every assault on democracy with an iron will and an inner fire that carried the day. This was a man who cared for and loved people, yet his capacity for righteous indignation was never dulled by the years. This was a man of matchless courage and rare integrity . . . ”

JUDGE EDWARD WEINFELD

In his Eulogy at the funeral of
Herbert H. Lehman

December 8, 1963