

Harry S. Truman (1884-1972)

Address at the National Convention Banquet of the Americans for Democratic Action

given on May 17, 1952

General Biddle and distinguished guests:

Your President has put me in a very embarrassing position. You know, it has been remarked before historically "O that mine enemy would write a book." Sometimes it's bad for your friends to write books.

It is a real pleasure to speak before the national convention of the ADA--Americans for Democratic Action.

- 5 The ADA was set up in January 1947. Those were dark days for the liberal forces in America. But you people had the courage to take up the fight and go forward. You dedicated yourselves to fight for progress and against reaction--against reaction of the right and against reaction of the left.

- You helped to hang the record of the 80th Congress around the neck of the Republican Party--and I finished the job. You held firm against the fanatical and misguided attacks of the Wallace movement. And since 1948, you have been
10 going down the line for policies and programs in the interest of the people and in fulfillment of the highest values we cherish in this Republic. I congratulate you on all the effective work you have done for the cause of liberal government.

Now then I am going to say something to you that I think maybe will please you a little bit.

- Of course, there was a time when it might not have been so pleasant for me to meet with the ADA. I understand that 4
15 years ago--along about this time--some of the leaders of ADA were engaged in rather wild fancies about the Presidential nomination.

I am told there was a little poem that gained some currency in ADA circles in those days, and it went like this:

"Between the Taft and the Dewey,

When defeat is beginning to lower,

- 20 Comes a pause in the ADA's occupation,

That is known as the Eisenhower."

- You know, the peculiar part about it was that you were a young political organization and you had not studied the history of conventions. A President of the United States, when he desires and when he wants to be nominated, there isn't anybody in the world can keep him from being nominated. The same thing is true when he doesn't want to be
25 nominated.

I doubt if you will be having any pauses for that particular purpose this year.

- In spite of the various notions about the nomination in 1948, the outcome of the election that year pleased all of us here--particularly me, and it astonished a great many people. It simply astonished a great many people. Mark Twain said, in an inscription I have always had on my desk, "Always do right. It will please some people, and astonish the
30 rest." Well, that's what we did in 1948. We astonished the pollsters and the sabotage press, and the opposition candidates--Republican, crackpot, and Dixiecrat. The results were good for the country, even though they set back the science of political forecasting for a full generation. I hope it set them back forever.

- You remember way back--you are too young for that--you know what happened to the Literary Digest in a certain poll. I like to remember Elmo Roper in his September spasm in which he said no more polls were necessary, Dewey
35 would be the next President, there really wasn't any use to hold an election in November. He has been apologizing about that ever since, and trying to get his poll back.

Now the time has rolled around again when you folks have the problem of trying to pick and choose a candidate to support. You are not the only ones who have that problem, and I assure you I am fully aware that it can be a very perplexing problem indeed.

- 40 But we are lucky in having a number of good presidential candidates in the field, and some of them are here tonight. I am sure that the ADA will find a candidate who expresses in his philosophy and in his record the things that this

organization stands for. Obviously, such a man would have to be a Democrat.

Because this is an election year, I would like to talk to you a little bit about politics. I know you are a nonpartisan or bipartisan organization. I heard it carefully analyzed here just a minute ago--at least, I have heard that you have some
45 Republicans among your membership, and I am sure that at one time it was true. I don't know whether it is now or not.

I want to ask these Republicans who are in the ADA not to include themselves in any remarks I am about to make about the Republican Party. When I talk about the Republican Party here tonight, I mean the dinosaur wing of the Republican Party-which unfortunately seems to be in control of that party. They are living in 1896 and 1920. They are made up of the Republicans of 1896 and 1920, under William McKinley and Warren G. Harding.

50 The first thing I will say about the Republican Party, believe it or not, is an expression of gratitude. I want to thank them for the way they help the Democrats win elections. Under the liberal policies of the Democratic administration, our country has grown strong and prosperous. And this has been true for such a long time now that people tend to forget what things were like under the Republicans. They criticize the mistakes the Democrats make, but they take for granted all the benefits we have brought them. Every 4 years it begins to look as if the people had forgotten what a
55 Republican administration would mean to the country. And the Republicans go around convincing themselves that they cannot possibly lose the presidential election. I have heard it happen 4 times.

But it is just at this point, when things look darkest for the Democrats, that you can count on the Republicans to do something that will save the day--that is, it will save the day for us. You can always count on the Republicans, in an election year, to remind the people of what the Republican Party really stands for. You can always count on them to
60 make it perfectly clear before the campaign is over that the Republican Party is the party of big business, and that they would like to turn the country back to the big corporations and the big bankers in New York to run it as they see fit. They are just not going to do it.

Just leave them alone, and the Republicans will manage to scare the daylights out of the farmer and the wage earner and the average American citizen. They always do that.

65 I had the best time I ever had in my life going up and down this country, telling the people the truth, and when they found out what the truth was, you know what they did. And I am here to say to you that when a man in politics, if he is a leader, has the right ideas, the people are willing to listen to what he has to say. It is a matter of salesmanship.

And that's the reason the pollsters are wrong, whenever you have a candidate who will go out and say what is good for the people--they will believe him; but they go down the street and meet the first three or four people, and ask them
70 who you are for and why you are for him. "Oh," they say, "I'm for this fellow. Of course some article in the paper said this or that about him." And they don't know anything about them, really. That is really what makes leadership in politics. You have got to go out and sell yourself, and what you stand for. And we are going to get a candidate like that, and he is going to win.

Now, the Republicans in 1948, in that 80th Congress of theirs, they went after organized labor with their Taft-Hartley
75 law. They went after all wage earners by their attacks on the social security program. They went after the farmer by tampering with price supports and by failing to provide grain storage.

This year they are at it again. The Republicans think they have been so successful with their campaign of smears and character assassination that they have the Democrats on the run. And they just can't restrain themselves enough to hide their true colors until after the election. They are too impatient. First one way and then another they are giving
80 themselves away. Take this steel dispute.

I am not going to talk about constitutional issues here tonight; they are before the Supreme Court. I just want to bring out a few facts about the economics of this dispute in the steel industry.

The steelworkers came in before a Government agency and proved that they were entitled to some wage increases. It was all perfectly fair, clear, and aboveboard. You can look at the figures and you can look at the record and see for
85 yourself.

And then it was the turn of the steel companies. They were asked to agree to fair and reasonable wage increases and to come in and submit their case for price increases, if they needed any. But would they do that? Not at all.

Their profits, whatever yardstick you want to use, have been running close to record levels. I think that is the reason

why they don't want to submit their case for consideration on its merits. They refuse to abide by the rules of our
90 stabilization program. They just come out flatly and say that the Government has to give them a big price increase, or
else. And I think they want a strike.

Now the Republican leadership didn't have to get mixed up in that fracas at all. The Republican leaders could have
taken a calm, judicious attitude and weighed both sides and decided where the merits lie. But that is not the way the
Republican leaders act; it never is--thank goodness.

95 They rushed into the fray at once. They took it up in Congress, and they made speeches up and down the Nation. They
demanded four or five new investigations. They threatened to wreck price control, and they're doing their best to do it.
And what is the purpose of all this? The purpose is to preserve high profits for the steel companies and prevent wage
increases for the steelworkers.

That shows exactly where the Old Guard stands. It shows that their hearts lie with the corporations and not with the
100 working people. It proves that the old Republican leopard hasn't changed a single spot. It ought to serve as a big,
glaring danger sign to the voters of this country of what to expect if they turn the administration of the country over to
the Republicans who are now in control of that party.

I am glad to say that there were a few Republicans in Congress who did not join in the hue and cry against the
steelworkers. Some of them looked at the facts and drew very different conclusions. And one of them did a fine,
105 courageous job of presenting the facts on the Senate floor. That was Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon.

The main body of the Republican leaders are doing just what they do every election year. They are making it good and
plain to the American people that so far as domestic policies are concerned, the Republican Party is the party of
reaction and the party of special privilege--just as I proved in 1948, and the people believed me; and they will yet.

And they are keeping pace in the field of foreign policy, too. Day after day, they are making it plain that the
110 Republican Party is dominated by isolationists--the ones described by General Biddle--who don't really believe in
international cooperation at all.

Today, most of the American people know that the survival of our country depends on our foreign policy. They know
that a firm, consistent foreign policy can arise only from a nonpartisan foundation. They know that the leaders of both
parties should work together in foreign policy for the good of the country, and that partisan politics should stop at the
115 waters' edge.

The wiser heads of the Republican Party understand these things, too. Some of them have worked for a common
agreement between Democrats and Republicans on foreign policy, for the good of the country. But just as these wiser
heads appear to have succeeded in getting the Republican Party to stand for the good of the country in foreign affairs,
a revolt breaks out; and the old, unreconstructed, isolationist wing of the Republican Party sets out in full cry again--
120 and scares the people half to death.

This happened again, just a few weeks ago. Senator Wiley, the ranking Republican Member of the foreign Relations
Committee in the Senate, made a speech to the newspaper editors on April 19. I had a press conference for those
editors, and had more fun than I have had in a long time. He said there was a great deal in our international relations
of which every American could be proud. He said that the Republican Party should not engage in unjustified criticism
125 of our foreign policy, but should play a constructive role. And he asked us all to remember that, and I quote Senator
Wiley verbatim, "We are first and last of that breed called Americans."

It was a good speech, and it was an honest one.

Well, what happened? first of all, the Bettie McCormick sabotage press jumped on Senator Wiley. They said he had
endangered his country, betrayed the voters of his State, and imperiled his party. Then his Republican colleagues in
130 the Senate went after him. Senator Cain from Washington, Senator Welker and Senator Mundt, and Senator
Hickenlooper from Iowa, Senator Schoeppel of Kansas, and Senator Bridges of New Hampshire, and that great one-
man grand jury Senator Ferguson of Michigan, all these gentlemen went after Wiley in a pack. They sneered at him,
they jeered at him, they distorted his words, they cross-questioned him. They gave him to understand that this was an
election year, and that it was the duty of every Republican to attack the foreign policy of his country. They made it
135 clear that first and last, when it came to foreign policy, they were of that breed called Republicans, and Senator Wiley
ought to be likewise. In other words, they are Republicans before they are Americans.

And there wasn't a single Republican who got up on his feet and said Senator Wiley was right.

Nobody ought to be in doubt, now. That was the Republican answer to the latest plea, from one of their own members, for a bipartisan foreign policy. That was their answer to a fellow Republican who dared to stand up and say that our
140 country is doing a good thing when it cooperates with other countries, in Europe and in the far East, to hold back aggression.

Isolationism is not dead. Far from it. Even if the Republicans get a presidential candidate with a good record in foreign affairs, he will not be able to drown out the raucous isolationist outcries of the rest of the party. And that prospect is beginning to scare the voters--and it ought to scare them.

145 Now, we can always rely on the Republicans to help us in an election year, but we can't count on them to do the whole job for us. We have got to go out and do some of it ourselves, if we expect to win.

The first rule in my book is that we have to stick by the liberal principles of the Democratic Party. We are not going to get anywhere by trimming or appeasing. And we don't need to try it.

The record the Democratic Party has made in the last 20 years is the greatest political asset any party ever had in the
150 history of the world. We would be foolish to throw it away. There is nothing our enemies would like better and nothing that would do more to help them win an election.

I've seen it happen time after time. When the Democratic candidate allows himself to be put on the defensive and starts apologizing for the New Deal and the fair Deal, and says he really doesn't believe in them, he is sure to lose. The people don't want a phony Democrat. If it's a choice between a genuine Republican, and a Republican in Democratic
155 clothing, the people will choose the genuine article, every time; that is, they will take a Republican before they will a phony Democrat, and I don't want any phony Democratic candidates in this campaign.

But when a Democratic candidate goes out and explains what the New Deal and fair Deal really are--when he stands up like a man and puts the issues before the people--then Democrats can win, even in places where they have never won before. It has been proven time and again.

160 We are getting a lot of suggestions to the effect that we ought to water down our platform and abandon parts of our program. These, my friends, are Trojan horse suggestions. I have been in politics for over 30 years, and I know what I am talking about, and I believe I know something about the business. One thing I am sure of: never, never throw away a winning program. This is so elementary that I suspect the people handing out this advice are not really well-wishers of the Democratic Party.

165 More than that, I don't believe they have the best interests of the American people at heart. There is something more important involved in our program than simply the success of a political party.

The rights and the welfare of millions of Americans are involved in the pledges made in the Democratic platform of 1948 and in the program of this administration. And those rights and interests must not be betrayed.

Take the problem of offshore oil, for example. The minerals that lie under the sea off the coasts of this country belong
170 to the Federal Government--that is, to all the people of this country. The ownership has been affirmed and reaffirmed in the Supreme Court of the United States. Those rights may be worth as much as somewhere between \$40 billion and \$100 billion.

If we back down on our determination to hold these rights for all the people, we will act to rob them of this great national asset. That is just what the oil lobby wants. They want us to turn the vast treasure over to a handful of States,
175 where the powerful private oil interests hope to exploit it to suit themselves.

Talk about corruption. Talk about stealing from the people. That would be robbery in broad daylight--on a colossal scale. It would make Teapot Dome look like small change.

I got a letter from a fellow in Texas today, who is a friend of mine, and he was weeping over what the schoolchildren of Texas were going to lose if Texas didn't get its oil lands 9 miles out from the shore. And I composed a letter to him,
180 and then didn't send it. I said what about the schoolchildren in Missouri and Colorado, and North Dakota and Minnesota, and Tennessee and Kentucky and Illinois, do they have any interest in this at all? Evidently not, it should all go to Texas. Well, it isn't going there, if I can help it.

I can see how the Members of Congress from Texas and California and Louisiana might like to have all the offshore

oil for their States. But I certainly can't understand how Members of Congress from the other 45 States can vote to
185 give away the interest the people of their own States have in this tremendous asset. It's just over my head and beyond
me how any interior Senator or Congressman could vote to give that asset away. I am still puzzled about it. As far as I
am concerned, I intend to stand up and fight to protect the people's interests in this matter.

There's another matter I don't intend to back down on. That is our party's pledge to develop the vast natural power
resources of this country for the benefit of all the people, and make sure that the power produced by public funds is
190 transmitted to the consumer without a private rake-off. How could we back down on a pledge like that? When we look
around us at the great good that has been done by the TVA and the Grand Coulee and the Southwest Power
Administration--when we see what projects like these have done to improve the lives and increase the prosperity of
our people--how could we possibly justify weakening our policy? We just can't do it.

I don't care how much money the power lobby puts into this campaign against us. I don't care what lies and smears
195 they put out. There is a principle here which goes to the welfare of the country. And we are going to stick to it. We are
going to win on it.

There is another thing we must stand firm on. That is our pledge on the issue of civil rights. No citizen of this great
country ought to be discriminated against because of his race, religion, or national origin. That is the essence of the
American ideal and the American Constitution. I made that statement verbatim in the speech on March 29th, in which
200 I said I would not run for President, and I hope that speech, and this, will be the fundamental basis of the platform of
the Democratic Party in Chicago.

We have made good progress on civil rights since 1948, in the Federal Government, in the Armed forces, and in the
States. But we still need the legislation which I recommended to the Congress over 4 years ago. We must go ahead to
secure for all our citizens--east, west, north, and south--the right of equal opportunity in our economic and political
205 life, and the right to equal protection under the law. That is real, true, 100 percent Americanism.

This is very important to us abroad as well as at home. The vision of equal rights is the greatest inspiration of human
beings throughout the world. There is one member of this ADA who can tell us from her own experience how
important it is for the world to know that we share this vision. She has been our spokesman on this subject in the
councils of the United Nations and she has done a wonderful job--and that is Mrs. Roosevelt.

210 Another part of our fight that is extremely important--that is, to protect the civil liberties of Americans. Your national
chairman, Francis Biddle, has pointed out the terrible dangers that lie in wait for us if we surrender to the clamor of
McCarthyism, and adopt the practice of guilt by accusation. We cannot, we will not, give up nor weaken on this issue
either.

I got a great kick the other day out of a headline, or article, on the left-hand side of the paper, in which it said that a
215 committee in the Congress was going to investigate the Justice Department for browbeating witnesses. Now, I am not
casting any reflections on any good Senator or Representative, but they had better investigate themselves on that.

These are some of the principles for which the Democratic Party stands, and for which the ADA stands. We stand for
better education, better health, greater opportunities for all. We stand for fair play and decency, for freedom of speech
and freedom of the press, and the cherished principle that a man is innocent until he is proved guilty.

220 Taken together, these principles are the articles of the liberal faith. I am sure that the liberal faith is the political faith
of the great majority of Americans. It sometimes happens that circumstances of time and place combine to deny its
expression. But the faith is there, and the reactionaries can never hope to have any but temporary advantage in this
country.

That is why the fair Deal program will not be weakened by compromise. That is why the Democratic Party will
225 nominate a liberal for President.

That is why, this time, as in 1948, the ADA will throw its energies into the campaign battle--and will carry on the
good fight against reaction, fear, and selfishness.

And that is why, this time, as in 1948, we'll win.
(4104 Wörter)

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