

EXCERPTS FROM SPEECH OF  
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NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION,  
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Throughout the land, speakers at ADA-sponsored dinners in memory of Franklin D. Roosevelt are discussing "freedom of inquiry in a democratic society." In this age of anxiety, of tensions, and of great changes, few subjects are more worthy of discussion. Franklin Roosevelt, with his great insight, knew this well. "Freedom to learn," he said, "is the first necessity of guaranteeing that man himself shall be self-reliant enough to be free."

Why is it necessary to stress "freedom of inquiry" today? Does not everyone agree with Thomas Jefferson's observation that "inquiry leads to truth"? Certainly no one who ever went to second-year high school science class can dispute it. When we wanted to see what a microbe looked like, we put it under a microscope. We inquired, and we found the truth.

No, you can't deny that inquiry leads to truth. But there are many who regret that it does, because they don't want the truth to be known.

This, I think, is why it is important that we discuss freedom of inquiry tonight. In this country and in the world there are powerful forces who would close the channels of inquiry, require a strict conformity from all the people, and keep our society rigid and unchanging. Regardless of the specific names they are known by in their own land, they all stand for the unquestioning acceptance of things as they are. They equate inquiry with subversion and conformity with patriotism.

But this has never been the way the American people have wanted it. From the early days of the New England town meetings our country has always stood for free discussion - freedom to question, freedom to examine, freedom to inquire. If I may quote President Roosevelt again, in one of those perceptive remarks we learned to expect from him: "You will never have a completely stable world without freedom of knowledge."

There are two ways of reporting history. The first is in terms of battles won and lost and the fall and rise of governments; the other is in terms of the discoveries of the mind. In every generation the mind of man reaches out to new length and never shrinks back to its former dimensions. Fortunately, though man is mortal his thoughts and ideas are immortal. Each generation salvages the immortality of the preceding ones to create a steady progression of civilization.

The creative ideas of man have developed fast in recent years. It was only 300 years ago that man began to seriously question himself about the nature of the physical world in which he lived.

The 17th Century was characterized by the great intellectual revolution, the Age of Science. Men became possessed with the idea that the physical universe was their concern - that they could ask questions about natural phenomena without incurring the wrath of God. They became possessed with the idea that there were physical laws they could fathom. Here indeed was the triumph of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton - men of ideas, men fearlessly inquiring into the unknown.

The 18th and 19th centuries were characterized by new inquiries, by new ideas that possessed men - the idea that if there were physical laws of the universe that men could fathom and ask questions about, then why not inquire about the nature of man-made society.

With this inquiring, the ideology of democracy came into being.

Until the first world war this ideology was on the offensive. The action against it was rear-guard, defensive, and uncertain. Democracy was the concept of today and tomorrow. Men everywhere heard of it and spoke of it and acted to achieve it.

But, in this generation democracy has been challenged by another ideology. Italy, Germany and Russia the leaders talked of what they said was a "new order", - something new and streamlined.

But what did we see when we examined this "new order"? We have found it wasn't new at all. It was the old, old doctrine of authoritarianism, pushed with the force of guns and marching feet - yes, nothing more than the ancient curse of "divine right" of the strong to rule the weak.

Democracy met and conquered this old concept years ago in nearly every civilized nation of the world. Today, if we fully understand the power of inquiry, the power of our idea and its full meaning, we can easily maintain the eminence of the democratic faith that only yesterday spread from mind to mind and heart to heart throughout the world.

Of all people who should understand the strength of freedom of inquiry, the power of democracy, the American people should be the first. Our idea of democracy was embodied in the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence, and in the words of our Constitution. It has as its philosophers Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Tom Paine, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt. These men all spoke of the same ideology; all were possessed of the same idea. They sought to free men from fear; to free them from poverty; to free them from social and economic injustice, and from insecurity; they sought freedom of inquiry.

Strange as it may seem, America has let loose upon this world the most powerful and dynamic political and social force in the history of man. It has its roots deep in the spiritual substance of Judeo-Christianity. It receives its political inspiration from the logic of the stoics, the compassion of the martyrs, the faith of the philosophers of natural law. We are of the first to present to the modern world a coherent political faith, based upon the dignity of the individual, the equality and fraternity of mankind. We are of the first to pattern a structure of government and a form of society in which the liberties of a people were guaranteed and opportunity was to be assured.

This was an idea - or better to say - an ideology more powerful than the arms of the conquerors. History proves this fact. It was our call to freedom in 1776 and our realization of a government of the people, by the people and for the people that let loose in this world a social and political revolution. This revolution upturned the thrones of Europe and convulsed the continent. It put into the hearts and breasts of the colonial people, the under-privileged and the subjected, the consuming desire of individual liberty, a desire which today is manifested by such rebellions as we see in Indo-China, in Indonesia, and in the fact of India's freedom. We never moved a battalion or a regiment on the continent of Europe in the 1800's, yet the idea of the Declaration of Independence produced the doctrine of the "Rights of Man" and broke the back of oppression and the power of kings.

Today, too, the vital force in the world is the search for freedom. We see many manifestations of it; the rise of nationalism of the colonial peoples; the oppressed and the poverty stricken following the leadership of those who use the symbols of freedom, even though their purpose may be otherwise. We find economists and political philosophers talking in terms of abundance within the framework of individual freedom. Men are no longer just content to talk of their security. They want security, and liberty. The humanitarian of this generation is one who understands the interdependence of these two principles - freedom and security.

There are those who today feel we have moved away from this idea, when in fact it is but maturing. It is growing strong in its own sense of competence and rich in its experience. The great political and social experiments taking place in <sup>free</sup> Europe are but another expression of this idea of democracy. Our groping and experimentation in the hall of Congress, evolving such programs as the New Freedom and the New Deal are but further expressions of a people with the desire to emancipate themselves from fear, from insecurity, and from oppression.

No better example of our maturing democracy can be found than the ever-growing demand that all people, regardless of race, color, or creed, be guaranteed full and equal civil rights. The morality of our democratic faith compels us to cleanse our body politic of the guilt that arises from our distortion of Democratic principles through discrimination and bigotry. The American people are acting to redeem their honor. In city after city - in State after State - human rights are being reaffirmed and protected by law. The democratic spirit of the people now calls upon our national government to destroy the last vestige of intolerance.

Our maturing democracy calls for the recognition that all must be free from insecurity. All must be privileged to enjoy the opportunity of good health, of productive work, of education, of adequate housing, and of decent living conditions.

This is democracy's answer to the challenge of totalitarianism.

One of the finest examples of the spirit of freedom and free inquiry in a democratic society was the investigation and report two years ago of President Truman's Commission on Civil Rights. Its report added immeasurably to America's store of

knowledge about itself; 44 lynchings in 11 years, with not a single person given the death penalty for these crimes. The poll tax and other ballot restrictions, denying the vote to literally millions of Americans. Newspaper "help wanted" ads offering jobs for which only whites or Gentiles need apply, and job seekers required to list their religion on application blanks. The demonstrable fraud of "separate but equal" schools for whites and Negroes. Job discrimination keeping minority groups in relative poverty.

On the basis of these findings, President Truman formulated his civil rights program and sent it to Congress. These proposals have languished there for two years, kept in the shadows of inaction by the combined power of Republicans and Dixiecrats. But the test is approaching. I'm sure many of you heard about the National Emergency Civil Rights Mobilization which took place in Washington earlier this month. Fifty-three national organizations took part in it, including ADA. The 4,000 people who attended the mobilization were earnest, devoted, non-Communist liberals. They buttonholed practically every member of the Senate and talked frankly to them on the civil rights bills, and particularly FEPC. Many of my colleagues were deeply impressed. Given this kind of encouragement, we who are committed to the civil rights proposals can make a much better fight when the issue comes up. It will come up shortly, and I promise you that the fight for fundamental decency in human relations will be made.

The reactionaries, the racists, the monopolists - all of them are loudly protesting their love of freedom these days. They profess to see the danger to freedom in the minimum standards of security which the people are seeking to set up through their government. But the conservatives' devotion to freedom hardly ever embraces protection of basic civil liberties against the peril of contemporary hysterias and the intolerant demand for unquestioning acquiescence in things as they are.

That is why this country so desperately needed a Franklin D. Roosevelt. That is why it needs today the vigor of the liberal movement that honors him on this day. That is why America needs an ADA.

Today we are a country incomparably the strongest, the richest, the best protected in the globe. Our nation and our constitution have withstood the vicissitudes of 160 years. Our people are intelligent and they are moral, - they are devoted to freedom.

The real danger we face is that a fear of free inquiry will produce an atmosphere of suspicion and timidity that will discourage independence of thought, original investigation and association. The real danger we face is that a program of suppression will seriously endanger effective operation of our democracy.

The real danger we face is that a spirit of hysteria will endanger the morale of American science by putting a premium on mediocrity in a field requiring independence, originality and full freedom of inquiry and communication.

The real danger we face is that a society gripped by fear strengthens the hand of the military in areas traditionally and wisely entrusted to civilian control.

The real danger we face is that freedom of teaching will be imperilled by requiring conformity to standards, by introducing the grave peril of censorship in textbooks and ideas and drive away from the teaching profession men and women of independent minds. We must guard lest it create an atmosphere in which teachers find safe not in orthodox ideas, for they will never know fully which ideas are orthodox, but safety in no ideas. Yes, the real danger we face is that the right and necessity of criticism is threatened. No government can operate successfully without criticism and no government which censors its critics can get the criticism that it needs.

Finally, the real danger we face is that the hysteria we are confronted with, strikes at one of the most precious of all rights, one essential to the effective operation of democracy, the right of association. As Professor Commager recently pointed out, the practice of voluntary association is a peculiarly English and American practice. The Pilgrim fathers associated themselves into a compact and since that time Americans have customarily operated around hundreds of voluntary associations. It is in these associations that the average American has found the training for government and real democracy to take the place of the town meeting. Any policy which discourages or crushes voluntary associations will totally dry up the very roots of American democracy.

Our security lies not in secrecy but in the preservation of peace and in the encouragement of free inquiry; our real long-term security lies in perfecting our democracy. Even as our society now exists, it is the freest in the world and confers the most benefits on the humblest of citizens. We must make sure that it is kept free and flexible.



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