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A Program for America

Address by

DOROTHY THOMPSON

President of Freedom House

at

CARNEGIE HALL

APRIL 30, 1944

~~Note the
Chumant~~

A Program for America

AT THE BEGINNING of this evening our artists presented you with the theme: Freedom Never Dies. Do not draw complacent conclusions from it. Freedom **does** die. It dies every minute, every hour, every year, and every epoch; it is continually being slaughtered, here, there, and everywhere. If it has always lived, despite so many deaths, it is only because it has never been killed everywhere at once. Always, so far, some root of it has been left somewhere, upon which new growth could be grafted, to produce new seeds, for a new and spreading life of freedom.

There are other things that never die. Prejudice never dies. Aggression, egotism, rapacity, greed, bigotry never die. And alas, stupidity never dies. At no time, anywhere, have virtue, or love, or tolerance, or cooperation, or generosity, or intelligence—which are the **conditions** of freedom—enjoyed a secure monopoly of social life. The garden of freedom is not a weedless garden. It is one that requires incessant attention, lest its flowers be choked and the ground it has cultivated for civilization revert to the jungle of strife and tyranny.

Tyranny originates out of civil strife. Civil strife originates out of blind conflicts of interest and struggles for power. The conflicts of interest are present in every society. The presumption of a free and democratic society is that these conflicts can be resolved in justice and reason. The condition for their being resolved is the constant recognition that there **are common** interests, greater and wider than conflicting interests; a welfare of the community above the welfare of special groups however powerful or highly organized; and a public opinion that forever tests all struggles and conflicts by the standard of the general welfare of the whole.

Since the days of Aristotle, and before that, since the days of the Hebrew prophets and

statesmen, political philosophers have known that no freedom and democratic society can withstand more than a certain amount of pressures that come, either from oligarchies of great wealth, or from the rebellion of insecure and humiliated masses. All democratic political philosophers, and most notable for us, those of our own country, from Washington, Hamilton and Jefferson to Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie, have known that **a free democratic society rests upon the sweetening leaven of those of its members who have the moral strength and the impartial reason to consider social measures from the viewpoint of how society as a whole is affected.**

George Washington, in his Farewell Address, warned against the dangers of faction. By factions he meant political parties. That, and not the warning against entangling alliances, addressed to the specific situation of the moment, constitutes the main tenor of the famous address. Thomas Jefferson, and every great statesman after him, liberal or conservative, recognized that unless political parties agreed on more things than they disagreed on; unless they sought to encompass and sum up in their candidates and programs, the aspirations of the **whole** nation, they would become, not instruments of democratic government, but mediums for the imposition, by democratic means, of despotism.

All of our political philosophers have feared that highly organized groups, operating through mass pressures or money pressures would constantly seek to win control over political life over the state and the government, in order to administer it, not in the interests of a more perfect union, justice, defense, and the general welfare, but in the interests of themselves, and their own power.

The party system in the United States tends in that direction. Party membership between elections is a nominal thing. Neither of our two great parties contains millions of active dues-paying members, holding regular meet-

ings for discussion and criticism of legislation, and promoting constructive national and international plans, in an effort to improve the social, economic and political structure. They become popular parties only during campaigns. Their control rests in the hands, not of the most disinterested and patriotic, but of the most directly interested and self-seeking. They make only periodic bids to the electors for the leadership of the nation. Thus, their leadership and moving spirits are job hunters or job holders, or powerfully organized groups, seeking to use the parties and through them the people for their own self-protection and aggrandizement.

The pressures upon Congress come from the same sort of groups. There are lobbies of office-seekers; lobbies for dairy interests and oleomargarine interests; lobbies for Manufacturers and lobbies for labor—all employing high-pressure public relations counsels and attorneys; all wielding money and power; all exclusively motivated by self-interest. But the Peoples' Lobby—where has it ever been?

In this year of the great war, Fate and the Constitution have conjoined in one short period of time two major events. We are about to stake our all on a bid for victory of our arms; and we are going to vote as to whether or not we should change the government.

Whenever we discuss and vote as to whether we should change the government every conceivable division amongst us is magnified and every rift is widened. Those whose interests lie with the retention of the government become active and scheming. Those whose interests are most served by a change, bend every energy to put in power a government that, they hope and believe, will better pay them heed. A party and the interests most concerned with it, bidding to stay in power, and another party with its own satellites of interests bidding to take the power, temporarily forget that they are all members of the same community. Normally we live by creating the greatest

areas of agreement and tolerance between ourselves. But in election years we divide into two camps and act as though we were congenital enemies.

Yet, though debate and disagreement are a part of life and in the nature of the democratic process, orderly progress is possible only in those fields where there is maximum common consent and common agreement. No question can be **democratically** solved except by an immense measure of public consent.

And armies are united bodies of men. There is not a Democratic and Republican Army. There is only an American and a United Nations Army. That American and United Nations Army, acting under an American Army plan will, within the next weeks and months undergo the most gruelling test in this war. Millions of its members may not be able to vote under any plan that has been or may be devised—for they will be in the midst of battle. They will not be fighting for the Democratic or Republican party, but for the American people, and the people of the world. The challenge of their unity at the front is to the unity of the rear—the home country.

This challenge Freedom House has accepted. We have presented an American program, addressed to all men and women of good will in all parties. Our intention is to demonstrate, to the men at the front that behind them are Americans, of whatever party label, who are determined to stand together on all the basically important things, and to work for them, no matter who is elected and no matter what party may be in power. Our program is indeed, dedicated to the ten million men and women of the fighting forces who have left so large a share of their political affairs in our hands. We bear a double responsibility—the responsibility for ourselves and for our sons, for our own generation and for the one that is offering its lives for the future.

You in this audience, and others like you, could, if you would, demonstrate to the conventions of both parties, to their candidates

for the Presidency and the Congress, and afterward to the Congress itself, that there are voices in America to which they must listen, over and above those which continually clamor for legislation in their own interests, regardless of the just claims, reasonable expectations and obvious needs, of the people as a whole. You could, if you would, set out to create a most powerful pressure group—the pressure group of patriots, concerned exclusively with the general welfare of our people and the people of the world.

The Freedom House program is not a post-war blueprint. It is for action—NOW. Action on the basis of intelligence. It is stupid and dangerous to assume that the war is one thing and the peace an entirely different thing, and that with the success of our arms a new era of cooperation and national and international progress and serenity will automatically break upon the world, like the sun of heaven.

The way the war is conducted; the actions of our day to day diplomacy; the spirit and vision creating itself in the people, as the war unfolds will determine what sort of world the end of the war will bring. Our domestic behavior now, during the war, will condition the post-war period. History does not begin and end with war or with peace. For better or worse it is continuous, constantly unfolding, and what we shall be tomorrow will be conditioned by what we do today.

Neither are **national** and **international** aims and behaviors two **separate** things. International cooperation is only enduringly possible between nations of people who are pursuing approximately the same objectives, whatever variety of means. If, for instance, every nation and state is concentrated on making the best and wisest use of its political instruments, its means of production, its labor, resources, money, talents and skills, to promote the welfare of its own people as a whole, then it will naturally follow that a world order will develop motivated by the **same** purpose. If, however, even one single great

state seeks to improve its own standard of living by the exploitation of people in other lands; or if powerful groups within states collaborate across frontiers to strengthen and solidify their particular social or economic interests against the welfare of their own countrymen or regardless of their welfare, then a world order of ruthless imperialism will take root and freedom will be slaughtered again. There cannot be one aim for the nation and another aim for the world of nations. Conflicts within nations inevitably tend to create conflicts between nations, as the conflicting interests attempt to widen and enlarge the bases of their power.

In all nations and even in all individuals, two kinds of competition exist. There is the competition for privilege and advantage, which gives us inner strife and international war. But there is also the competition for perfection, which gives us great civilizations. No one ever injured his neighbor by trying to be better than he in any creative process. No one ever injured any craft or any profession, by trying to be the best possible carpenter, or physician, or manufacturer. It is the competition that drives men to seek **special** advantages over others, not residing in superiority of technique or skill, but residing wholly in positions of economic or political power, that corrodes society, driving man against man and people against people.

If, therefore, we seek to create a more free and democratic society, at home and in the world, we must seek to create a more harmonious society, by lifting competition above the struggle for mutual elimination, into rivalry for greater perfection and more constructive achievement. Nations must seek to advertise to each other those things which they **do** best—whether it be in technological organization, or in labor relations, or in road building, housing, the care and education of children, the securing of homes or the production of art. The competition between nations can be immensely creative, if it does not consist

in being drunk with sight of power, releasing "wild tongues that have not thee in awe; such boastings as the gentiles use and lesser breeds without the law," to quote Kipling's words. Were the standards applied to nations those which measure the serenity, welfare, progress and happiness of the people, states that counted as insignificant powers would stand very high in the great race of humanity after a better life: Denmark, Sweden, Holland and Norway would loom in many ways above the greatest powers. We ourselves could learn from free Norway how to feed school children, from Denmark and Holland how to make rich and prosperous farms on reclaimed soil, supporting a miraculous agrarian culture, from Sweden how to create harmony between the various classes of producers, and from Switzerland how to overcome racial, national and religious hatreds.

And similarly, if the two great American political parties were genuinely contending with each other, as to which of them could best bring about a great, constructive and enduring peace, provide the widest measure of employment and social security, do most to reclaim our waste lands, restore our soil, broaden and deepen our education, reduce crime, give us energetic and economic government, further the widest possible creation and distribution of material satisfactions, and lift the intellectual and spiritual level of the people, their contests with each other would all be creative.

Is it too much to hope for such a development? It is not too much to hope for. Such development is not outside the range of human yearnings and desires. But hoping for it will accomplish nothing whatsoever. Only believing in it, working for it, living for it, and fighting for it, will bring it about.

Nor can we work merely as isolated individuals. The egotistic graspers after special privileges and powers are always highly organized and plentifully heeled. There is no political or economic instrument of power

which does not attract them with its opportunities. Their lawyers and public relations counsels are present when the laws are being written and when the laws are being interpreted; they are ever busy with their pencils and adding machines, toting up the effect of every measure upon their own enterprises, whatever they may be. They are immensely efficient in their own interests, and that is, in fact, their sole test of efficiency.

Is it impossible to expect a measure of the same effort from those who consider the efficiency of their country, their society, and their world above their own narrower interests? Is it impossible to expect from civilians the same social disciplines for the common interests, the same consideration for the nation as a whole and for the freedom and welfare of the world that we **take for granted** from our soldiers?

We of Freedom House, believe that millions of Americans are open to the challenge to lay aside their egotistic interests, open their minds, widen their sensibilities and set out to seek the welfare of America, its land, its culture, its people and the larger welfare of the peoples of the world.

We started as a small group, growing out of the old "Fight for Freedom," composed of those people who did not think it a matter of no concern to the people of America whether the peoples of all the rest of the world should fall into exploitation and slavery.

But we have never thought of ourselves as a small group. We feel ourselves, in our very ones, as a great movement—here in this country, and all over the world. Almost with astonishment we see that as the people of England and of the underground movements in Europe, come out with their programs and begin to dream of their futures—they think and say the things that we have been thinking and saying amongst ourselves.

We have never spoken or thought of ourselves as liberals, conservatives, radicals, or revolutionaries. Somehow none of these words seem

to fit the needs of our hearts and the aspirations of our minds. If it is liberal to believe in Mankind, in man's power through thought and action to control his own destiny in freedom, then we are all liberals. If it is conservative to cherish the wisdom of the past and to pray that we will move into every future over a bridge instead of a yawning chasm—then we are all conservatives. If it is radical to know that there are new powers, new inventions, new resources, new opportunities in the world that demand new thinking and fresh evaluations and a rebuilding of our American house along modern lines—then we are radicals.

And if it is revolutionary to be determined to replace the rule of force by the rule of law; if it is revolutionary to be absolutely determined that for the next hundred years no more boys shall be blinded, and deprived of their limbs, and line our hospitals with shattered faces, then we are revolutionary!

Let us be done with these meaningless labels with which men put posters over their brains to cover the absence of Reason! Let us go to work—with anyone who will go to work with us—for the triumph of reason over empty slogans, and content over patent medicine formulas! Let liberals liberate, let conservatives conserve, let revolutionaries change what needs to be liberated, conserved and changed!

We sit here tonight in Carnegie Hall and we are relatively speaking, a handful of people. But we belong to a movement which is sweeping the world. The blood cries from the very earth to all who have ears to hear—and on those who have ears to hear belong to the future. What keeps unknown millions of men together—Britons, Americans, Russians, Chinese, Norwegians, Frenchmen, South Slavs and West Slavs and all the rest? What is the cement? Is it only fear? Is it not also hope?

To what do they look forward? To the same situation that produced this mess? To 1918? To 1929? To 1933? To 1939?

No. But we must give form to the aspira-

tions which we dimly comprehend. And we must think with cool reason of what is immediately and ultimately to be achieved.

Thus we have written as the first plank in our platform "the realization in victory, and the basis of the collaboration already established amongst most of the nations of the world, of a world organization for peace under law, with equal freedom, equal justice, and proportionate responsibility for all nations."

We want to be specific as to meanings. We say: "We recognize that Peace can be ultimately defined only as the substitution of the rule of law for the tests of force. We know that international law to have the same force as domestic law demands the creation of an international authority to legislate, adjudicate and enforce it."

We do not intend to be swerved from this objective even if the peace does not establish this organization—even if it takes the rest of our lifetimes to establish it. We are not going to take our dolls and go home if we don't get perfection the moment the war ends. But meanwhile, we have a very immediate and practical proposal. We advocate an amendment to the Constitution ending the power of one-third of the Senate to hold up the aspirations of the world. We shall therefore work for "an amendment to the Constitution relative to the treaty-making processes which would substitute for the present requirements of two-thirds concurrence by the Senate, a majority concurrence by **both** houses of Congress."

The most important plank in our domestic policy is the preamble to the six that follow. We insert in that preamble that "the General Welfare of the American people takes precedence over **all** special, sectional, group or private interests."

With that in mind, we intend to support competitive enterprise in all fields except natural monopolies, recognizing however that **all** enterprise exists, not just for itself and its own profits, but to serve the people.

We believe that full and efficient peacetime

employment of our resources, machines, and men is the prime necessity of material welfare and human dignity. The unemployed man is a disfranchised and frustrated creature in a modern industrial society. And we insist on government aid for this, wherever government aid is necessary.

We realize that if freedom has any meaning whatsoever it must mean greater and more equal educational and economic opportunity for **all** Americans, regardless of race, color, creed or economic status.

We recognize also that the power to tax is the power to destroy as well as the power to create. Our taxation system is utterly irrational and obsolete. We demand a complete overhauling of it, a "taxation reform, to facilitate creative economic forces as against sterile wealth, to eliminate inequalities, and to rationalize and simplify the municipal, state, and federal system as a whole."

We recognize further that good government means responsible government, purged of the chance to pass the buck. We therefore demand a better federal administration, through a more responsive cabinet system continually in touch with Congress, with strict definitions of the frontiers of all departments, to end overlapping and increase responsibility.

And finally, we demand that **all** the branches of government realize that **the basis of everything is people**. We demand that they realize that we have a declining population growth that must be put on the upswing by the creation of greater confidence and security—for the worker at whatever task, and for the home and the children for whom he makes his chief effort. We know and insist that the American home, and the American child, is the bulwark of the nation and the hope of the future. We intend, therefore to work for housing programs, school feeding programs, extended dental and medical care especially for children, better organized and more appropriate cultural activities, vastly improved physical training, a radical improvement in all

states of mothers' pensions, and extended and rationalized plans for family security.

Freedom House does not want to blueprint all these ideals. But we intend to work with all groups, whether they arise in the ranks of industry, labor, government, or the free professions who are putting expert thought upon these problems. We will criticize and publicize their findings. And we shall not rest until America has achieved what is in our magnificent land, our incomparable resources, our highly productive labor, our advanced technology and our educated brains to achieve.

It is our intention to raise a standard, hold to it, and hold other people to it.

I ask you: Is this worth while? Is it as worth while for you as it is to me? I know that I cannot go on, writing words on paper, making speeches over the radio, receiving fan letters and slam letters, all as a kind of prima donna performance. I know that I have got to join the people who feel as I do, and care as I do, and put whatever talents I may have at their service. I want to be part of a body of human beings who are going somewhere. And I believe with everything there is in me, that all of us want to be doing something that will enable us to look into the eyes of the young men who will come back from the war—something that will enable us to **look** into their eyes proudly and not cast our eyelashes to the ground when we pass them.

If you feel this way, too, than make up your minds tonight to join us. Copies of the program which I have outlined are available at Freedom House. If you want to go along with it, sign up, join us, and make up your mind to work. We need allies—millions of allies. We will welcome and collaborate with all other organizations and movements that in one phase or another are going the same way.

Influence is not enough. Virtue must create energy, and energy must create power, and power is in numbers and in organized will.

You here tonight are challenged to be the vanguard. You are challenged to take this

program up and use some private initiative about spreading it—in your personal mail, in all your contacts, in your party and group affiliations. You are challenged to furnish ideas and to take steps to implement them yourselves.

We shall be bound together to further movement. And I have not the slightest doubt that if even half of the four thousand people gathered in this hall go out to further this movement, using their own wits, and their energies, it will gather at a rate that will astonish the nation.

Do we not all see that the collapse of tyranny will leave a vacuum in the world? With what shall it be filled, if not by the thoughts and programs of men and women of intelligence and good will.

My friends, with all the earnestness at my command, I entreat you to believe me when I say, that Free Democracies must do more than merely defeat their enemies in this war; they must do more than merely survive! They cannot merely survive. If that is our program, we shall perish as a free society no matter how the war ends. Democracy must demonstrate its capacity to meet the crying needs of this frustrated and rebellious world. It must create a great era of peace. It must solve the economic problem, creating work for all able-bodied men and women; it must be constantly creating and re-creating a living, worthy culture; it must meet the increasing social problems of a highly interdependent industrial age. If we fail the youth who come after us will not tread the old paths, just because they were once trodden by heroic men, when democracy was young. They will make their own new world, to meet these problems, and if they cannot make it peacefully they will make it with violence. Nothing stands still in this life. Social life grows, changes, expands, and moves and whenever it stands still it is pushed over by something more dynamic.

Fellow Americans—the invasion is about to begin. Let us, also, begin our invasion.

FREEDOM HOUSE



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