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**Address of J. L. Robertson
Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors
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on

"George Norris Day"

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Dissent and Democracy

It is fitting in Nebraska's Centennial Year that we should join to honor one of its great men, for it was iron-strong men and women who, in the short period covered by the lives of my father and myself, transformed Nebraska from a wild frontier, where only the Indians bothered the herds of buffalo that roamed its prairies, into a land of sophistication and plenty. Today, throughout the nation, Nebraska is known as the Beef State, because of the quality and quantity of its cattle. It is recognized, at least in financial circles, as the locus of the best known home town in America, Broken Bow. But its world-wide place in the sun is attributable to the superior men and women it has nurtured. History books are full of the contributions they have made, in war and peace, in all the arts and sciences, and especially in the fields of literature, law, and political science. The towering figure whom thoughtful historians credit with the greatest contributions of all is the one Franklin Roosevelt aptly referred to, in Chaucerian terms, as "the very perfect, gentle knight of American Progressive ideals". He is the one we honor here today - Senator George W. Norris of Nebraska.

Fifty years ago this year, the Senator was at a low point of his political career. At the height of his powers, he had taken an unpopular stand. Together with eleven other United States Senators, he had successfully filibustered against President Wilson's request for power to arm American merchant ships. Tremendous abuse was heaped upon his head. He was called a traitor and was denounced all over the country.

George Norris responded in a manner that was characteristic. He wrote to the Governor of Nebraska requesting a special election to give the people the opportunity to recall him from the Senate if they so desired. Senator Norris wrote:

"I have no desire to represent the people of Nebraska, either in the United States Senate or elsewhere, if my official conduct is contrary to their wishes..."^{1/}

The Senator packed his bag and came back to Lincoln to meet his constituents face to face. Friends warned him that

^{1/} Alfred Lief, "Democracy's Norris", pp. 2, 3.

he might be mobbed. His reception in Lincoln was remarkably cool. There was no mob, but neither were there many well-wishers. The newspapers ignored him, with the exception of a solitary reporter who took it upon himself to get the Senator's side of the story, promising to publish it in full.

The public meeting the Senator had arranged in the City Auditorium was attended by an overflow crowd, but George Norris, chairing his own meeting and confronting that mass of people alone, had no way of knowing whether they had come to listen to him or to mob him. He stood for a moment as an ominous silence came over the packed hall. Then he began.

"I have come home to tell you the truth," he said. And then, with complete frankness, he described the reasons for his action. When he had finished, the crowd gave him a standing ovation. There was no recall election. And although Norris was one of only a half a dozen Senators to vote, a few weeks later, against the declaration of war, he won renomination and re-election to the Senate the following year.

George Norris never regretted his futile battle to keep the United States out of the first World War. On the contrary, he and many others came to believe that history had vindicated his position. He lived to hear one of his severest critics, Senator James A. Reed of Missouri, describe the minority vote against the war as "the most superb act of courage this century has witnessed".

Many Americans have been inspired by the courage of Senator Norris. The individual who takes an unpopular stand always hopes that history will vindicate him, and the example of George W. Norris has been cited time and again as a dramatic demonstration that it is possible for men in public life to stand by their principles, maintain their integrity, and still succeed.

We are today engaged in another war - undeclared, but nevertheless real. The reasons for this war remain unclear in the minds of many good Americans. Vociferous dissenters

abound. No doubt many of these, perhaps including some of the present members of the United States Senate, look back at Senator Norris and that beleaguered minority who opposed our entry into World War I and find inspiration for their own present conduct. Indeed, some have gone even further into the past and have thought to find justification for opposition to the President over the war in the actions of an even more universally known and revered American - Abraham Lincoln.

Is this valid?

Let us go back and first take a look at the position of Lincoln in the Mexican War, since it bears some striking similarities to Norris' position in World War I.

Recently a synthetic quotation was created from disconnected phrases and sentences uttered by Lincoln in an effort to make it appear that Congressman Abe Lincoln of Illinois was a more caustic critic of the Mexican War than are some of President Johnson's present day critics of the war in Asia.

Lincoln, to be sure, did disagree with President Polk about the necessity of the war and the way in which it was begun. But the fact is that he held his tongue for over a year after the war was begun. He explained why in these words:

"When the war began, it was my opinion that all those who, because of knowing too little, or because of knowing too much, could not conscientiously approve the conduct of the President, in the beginning of it, should nevertheless, as good citizens and patriots, remain silent on that point, at least till the war should be ended...and I adhered to it, and acted upon it, until since I took my seat here; and I think I should still adhere to it, were it not that the President and his friends will not allow it to be so."^{2/}

^{2/} "Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln", Rutgers University Press, Vol. I, p. 432.

Lincoln explained that he was forced to depart from this course of silence only because a vote was being forced on resolutions which required him to state his position. Lincoln later noted that even though his party had generally held the view that the war had been begun unconstitutionally and unnecessarily, once it became the cause of the country, he and his fellow Whigs, with few exceptions, had supported the war with their votes, their money, their services, and their blood. He cited approvingly the position of General Zachary Taylor, saying:

"...as a citizen, and particularly as a soldier, it is sufficient for him to know that his country is at war with a foreign nation, to do all in his power to bring it to a speedy and honorable termination by the most vigorous and energetic operations, without enquiring about its justice or anything else connected with it."^{3/}

Abraham Lincoln came to have reason to wish for that kind of support from his fellow Americans when the duty fell upon him of leading the bitter struggle to preserve the Union. This being a civil war, he found behind his own lines a dangerously large number of critics, obstructionists, and sympathizers with the rebellious South. Lincoln found it necessary to do far more than cast aspersions on the patriotism of those who through word and deed obstructed the successful prosecution of the war. He suspended the writ of habeas corpus and, in an action which exemplified his difficulty, placed under arrest one of the prominent leaders of the opposition, a man named Vallandigham. Lincoln justified the arrest, saying:

"...he who dissuades one man from volunteering or induces one soldier to desert, weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a Union soldier in battle."^{4/}

He went on to say:

"Must I shoot a...soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wily agitator

^{3/} Ibid. p. 515.

^{4/} "Collected Works", Vol. VI, p. 264.

who induces him to desert? This is none the less injurious when effected by getting a father, or brother, or friend, into a public meeting, and there working upon his feelings, till he is persuaded to write to the soldier boy, that he is fighting in a bad cause, for a wicked administration of a contemptible government, too weak to arrest and punish him if he shall desert. I think that in such a case, to silence the agitator, and save the boy, is not only constitutional, but, withal, a great mercy."^{5/}

History has vindicated Lincoln, not the dissenter Vallandigham.

And this is a point that must be remembered by those who are enamored of the drama of dissent. Vallandigham may have been a man of courage and integrity. I do not know his character. But in the cold light of history he was on the wrong side - not merely the losing side, but the wrong side. No matter how much courage he displayed or how much sacrifice he made in his efforts to obstruct the Union cause, history will never vindicate him.

George Norris did not oppose American entry into World War I for the sake of opposing. He studied the facts carefully and concluded that the German ambitions did not constitute a threat to the security of the United States. It was his reasoned judgment that there was no justification for shedding American blood to defeat the Kaiser. He was subsequently vindicated, because in retrospect it appeared that his judgment had been correct, although the crucial test of his position - a German victory in the war - was, of course, avoided.

We must also note that Norris, like Lincoln in 1846, did not go on opposing the war and harassing the President in his conduct of it once the die was cast. On the contrary, once the war had become the cause of the country, he gave it his full support. He voted against the declaration of war on Germany, but he voted for the declaration of war against the allies of Germany -- Austria-Hungary, Turkey,

^{5/} Ibid. pp. 266-7.

and Bulgaria. He fully supported with his vote the powers and appropriations required to bring about the successful conclusion of the conflict. When an amendment was offered in the Senate to prevent transportation of soldiers to the European front without their consent, Norris denounced it as an unjustifiable interference with the powers of the Commander-in-Chief. He told all who inquired that the war "is now my war as much as it is the war of our General Staff". He, himself, volunteered for service in the Marine Corps at the age of fifty-seven, and refrained from pursuing the matter only upon being informed that, because of his age, he would not be permitted to serve in France.

Norris avoided all further discussion of the causes of the war once we were in it. Like Lincoln, he thought it best to remain silent, but he did not insist that others follow his example. He thought Robert M. LaFollette, for instance, was unwise in attacking our entry into the war after we were in it, but the situation was obviously not as dangerous as it had been during the Civil War, and he saw no reason why LaFollette, or anyone else, should be deprived of the right to state his opinions.

Norris never changed his view about World War I, but he took a very different position with respect to the Second World War. Here again he analyzed the war in terms of the danger to the United States, and he reached the conclusion that the Axis powers represented a genuine threat to American security. He therefore supported our entry into the war. Had he clung blindly to the role of dissenter, we would have to say today that he erred, for history has not vindicated those who opposed and obstructed our battle to save the world from Hitler, any more than it has vindicated Vallandigham.

But George Norris displayed sagacity as well as integrity. He was not stopped by his horror of war and bloodshed, because he had an even greater horror of seeing the world engulfed by a new barbarism, of seeing liberty crushed under the iron heel of the Nazis. He pointed out the menace of the totalitarian philosophy, saying:

"Have the unreasonable, the murderous desires of dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, as well as those of Japan, affected the mentality of humanity?"

Are we drifting in a direction where the theories of these men, who would obtain power by murder and robbery and destruction, gradually are gaining control of the hearts of men?"^{6/}

He observed that the world was confronted with a new and dangerous philosophy of government - the theory that "any government has the right to conquer any other government or any other people if it has the power to do so". The threat was very different from that which confronted the nation in 1917. "At that time," he said, "there was still honor among nations and men, even though they were enemies upon the battlefield. The enslavement of peoples was not then at stake. There was no likelihood that the life of our nation, as well as that of every other democracy in the world, would be endangered, no matter what the outcome of the war might be... However, in this war," he continued, "we are confronted with an enemy whose ambitions are known to the world and that means the destruction of every democracy in the world."^{7/}

George W. Norris was willing to see war come that the kind of society which permitted men of integrity to thrive might survive.

And that is precisely the challenge that confronts us today.

We need not speculate about what George Norris would do or say if he were still among us. We know that he would be shocked by much of what is happening - the burning of the American flag and the flight of young men to Canada to escape military service. He would also be shocked at those dissenters who try to deny to others what they claim for themselves - the right to state a case or to submit a rebuttal. He would be shocked at the refusal to recognize that the die has been cast and that the war is now everyone's war, not just the Administration's.

There is no doubt that George Norris would stand firm today for the defense of the democratic system and the security of the United States. There are not many Americans,

^{6/} Leif, op. cit. 527.

^{7/} Norman L. Zucker, "George W. Norris, Gentle Knight of American Democracy", pp. 134-5.

even today under the threat of nuclear war, who would cringe before a tyrant and purchase life at the cost of chains and slavery. We have never been a nation of cowards, and the love of liberty burns more fiercely here than in any nation on earth. This country was founded by free men. It is up to each generation to guard that precious heritage of freedom and pass it on to the next. Those who follow will honor us if we succeed, as we honor the Lincolns and the Norrises who have handed us the torch. They will curse us if through a misreading of the objective facts we err, and permit the flame of liberty to die.

What are the objective facts that we must examine with such care?

One fact is that in 1967, no less than in 1941, there are in the world, governments that believe they have the right to conquer any other government or any other people and subject them to their totalitarian system. There is no room to doubt or deny this. The totalitarians - for that is their proper name - have told us repeatedly in speeches, articles and books that they have this right and that they intend to exercise it. What is more, they have shown by their deeds that they mean business.

The second important fact is that the totalitarians today plan to extend their sway not by massive use of their own manpower and armament, as did Hitler, but by the far less costly device of internal subversion and local wars, fought with manpower supplied by their intended victims.

The third important fact is that their ultimate goal is the subjugation of Western Europe and the United States to their brand of inhuman totalitarianism, employing the softening tactics of confusing our vision and weakening our will to resist, while gradually chipping away to undermine our alliances and detach our supporters throughout the free world. They plan to exploit our weaknesses, sowing the seeds of dissension and demoralization within our ranks. At the same time, they would bleed us abroad, confronting us with the dilemma of either committing our own manpower to battle

in inconvenient places - such as Vietnam - or seeing additional millions of people and thousands of square miles of territory fall under their dominion. Anyone who doubts that this is their intent should read the lengthy article published in Cuba last month, under the name of "Che" Guevara, which stated the goal with perfect clarity.

We cannot afford to close our eyes to these unpleasant facts.

Some 2500 years ago a Chinese strategist said, "If a man knows himself and knows not his opponent, for every victory he will suffer a defeat. If a man knows neither himself nor his opponent, he is a fool and will suffer defeat in every battle."

And the great authority on war, Clausewitz, said, "The conqueror is always a lover of peace; he would like to make his entry into our state unopposed."

The totalitarians are bending every effort to encourage the notion that they are lovers of peace, so that they might better defeat us in every battle and enter our state unopposed. They have virtually taken out a copyright on the word "peace" itself. But while they talk of peace, they plan new aggressive adventures. This we discovered again for the umpteenth time last month when all the progress toward détente was rudely shattered in the Middle East.

This should not have come as any surprise, for it is merely another example of the pattern of tension, relaxation, tension, relaxation that we have seen in operation for the last half century.

Listen to this: "The Communist Party has always acted on the assumption that the peaceful co-existence of the two systems does not exclude but, on the contrary, implies a further development of the working people's class struggle. The contemporary general line of the international Communist movement does not freeze the initiative of the people, but, on the contrary, mobilizes them to a greater

extent. It opens up before all revolutionary forces of our day new prospects for successful advance."^{8/}

Those are not the words of any dyed-in-the wool opponent of the totalitarians, bent upon slandering them. They are the words of the totalitarians themselves, published in one of their official organs in 1963, when relaxation was again being promoted after the awful tension of the Cuban missile crisis. But note: the relaxation was for us, not them. Those new prospects for successful advance were developed to the hilt in Vietnam.

Just last month, a special statement setting the theme for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Bolshevik Revolution was published in Moscow. While it spoke of peaceful co-existence, it made it clear that the relentless effort of totalitarianism to obliterate liberal systems of government throughout the world would go on. This struggle, it stated, "has become the pivot of world politics".

There are, perhaps, some people who might sincerely disagree with my insistence on calling a spade a spade and a totalitarian a totalitarian. They will insist that this is out of date, that things are changing. Perhaps they are. But we do not call a day-old baby a man merely because we hope that everything will go well and he will some day become a man. We have to deal with things as they are. Confucius once said that the first thing he would do if he were a ruler would be to call things by their right names, for, he said, if things were not called by their right names then statements would be misleading, and when statements are misleading, nothing can be accomplished.

How true! A young Harvard philosophy student was recently quoted in a Washington paper as saying that he found nothing "morally objectionable in communism". Now, any young man smart enough to gain admittance to Harvard is smart enough to know that "communism", as we know it in the twentieth century, is not simply an economic pattern; it has nothing in common with the old Utopian doctrine of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". The

^{8/} T. T. Timofeyev, "International Affairs", 1963, No. 9, pp. 18, 19, quoted in D. G. S. Stewart-Smith, "No Vision Here", p. 3.

countries that call themselves communist have the most totalitarian regimes history has ever known. Consequently, if we follow the advice of Confucius and apply the right name, it would appear that the Harvard student finds nothing morally objectionable in totalitarianism, and a particularly inhuman totalitarianism, at that!

By the way, Confucius erred on one point. We know today, as a result of experience during the intervening years, that when statements are misleading a great deal can be accomplished - by those who know how to use misleading statements to blind their innocent victims to the truth.

On the eve of World War II, George Norris was worried about the growing acceptance of the theories of those men who believed in using any means to achieve total concentration of power in their immoral hands.

Today, the men are different, but the passion to overthrow and destroy the liberal system of government is as strong as it was a quarter of a century ago. Why? Because the mere existence of a free country is a threat to the totalitarian rulers, as the ugly wall that divides Berlin so graphically demonstrates. We may think the world can peacefully exist half slave and half free, but they know it cannot. They know that the free countries stand as proof, convincing to all who have access to the truth, that the totalitarians lie when they say their system is superior. That alone is enough to make the free countries targets for destruction.

This explains why that faithful servant of the totalitarians, Ho Chi Minh, presses relentlessly his effort to seize control of all Vietnam. This is why trouble is stirred up in Thailand and why the tools of the totalitarians are being prodded into renewed activity in the Philippines. This is why Cuba - using the name of "Che" Guevara - calls for Vietnams throughout Latin America and Africa, with the objective of weakening and eventually bringing down the United States itself.

This is why I feel obliged to do what George W. Norris did in 1917. I must exercise that precious right of dissent - in this instance, dissent against the dissenters - and tell the truth as I see it. The totalitarians have sighted in on us. We are the one country in the world that has both the material and moral strength to frustrate their plans. They seek to sap our material strength by drawing us into endless wars of attrition. They seek to sap our moral strength by a variety of means - playing on popular dislike of the costly wars they provoke, creating racial tensions, encouraging the spirit of alienation and purposelessness among our young people.

It is important to remember that the totalitarians derive their peculiar concept of morality from Lenin, who taught that morality was whatever contributed to the achievement of his objectives. It was proper, in those circumstances, he said, to resort to every kind of trick, cunning, illegal expedient, concealment, or suppression of truth.^{9/} And, of course, one of the most cunning and effective of their tricks is the concealment and suppression of the truth about their own tactics and goals, even though they must necessarily publish this information for the enlightenment of their own followers. The trick is to denounce and try to destroy the credibility of anyone who dares to make known to a wider circle what they, the totalitarians, say about themselves, but prefer to keep within the family. They have succeeded in developing an almost Pavlovian reaction, where exposure of their machinations is almost certain to evoke denunciation and ridicule of the exposé.

This is why it takes almost as much courage today to speak out against the totalitarian threat which confronts the free world as it did to speak out against the rush to war fifty years ago. But speak we must! As Milovan Djilas, the former Vice President of Yugoslavia, said, in one of the books that Tito had him jailed for writing:

"Those who wish to live and to survive in a world different from the one Stalin created and which in essence and in full force still exists, must fight."^{10/}

^{9/} W. W. Kulski, "Peaceful Co-existence", Regnery 1959, p. 80.
^{10/} Milovan Djilas, "Conversations with Stalin", 1962, p. 191.

We must fight, not, we hope, with guns (although in Vietnam guns seem to be necessary), but we must fight with the weapons of idealism, humanitarianism, freedom and devotion to truth. These are powerful weapons, if we can only marshal them and direct them at the proper targets. It is one of the bitter ironies of our age that the totalitarians who crush freedom and suppress the truth whenever they seize power, play on man's idealism and love of freedom and truth to undermine and destroy the societies that are free, humanitarian and respecters of truth. Many of those who helped build the tyrannical regimes that now crush idealism in Eastern Europe, Cuba, and China started out as idealists in search of greater freedom. But, by subordinating truth to goals that they thought were more important, they missed the idealistic and noble ends they sought, which got lost in the muck of absolute despotism.

And so while we uphold the right of each man to defend the truth as he sees it, let us also teach our young people that they must not tear the needle of truth from their compass just because they do not like the direction in which it points. If we can do this, we may be able to safeguard that most essential of all freedoms - the freedom of each of us to be, as was George W. Norris, a man of integrity and honor.