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States' Rights, 1948 October 5

Strom Thurmond

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MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

It has been my pleasure to meet thousands of North Carolinians during the past two days. Yesterday I was in Charlotte, Gastonia, Hickory, and Hendersonville. Last night I was privileged to address the people of your beautiful mountain resort city of Asheville. Today I had many happy associations with friends in Winston-Salem, High Point, Greensboro, Burlington, and Durham. And now I am accorded the courtesy of addressing my North Carolina neighbors here in beautiful, prosperous Raleigh.

I want to reassert my admiration for the historical fight which North Carolina has made for democratic, local self-government. It was the spirit of the North Carolina founding fathers which helped so much to guarantee that the Constitution of the United States would have a Bill of Rights. They would not ratify that Constitution until the Bill of Rights was inserted to guarantee the sovereignty of states, and thus to make possible a government close to the control of the people.

When we observe the foreign schemes of centralized, tyrannical government spreading into America, we must bow to the immortal wisdom of your North Carolina forebears.

In the words of the great Disraeli, "A nation is governed either by its traditions, or by the sword." You cannot violate human custom, except with the bayonet. To men like Hitler and Stalin, age-old traditions meant nothing. Only the bayonet was important.

That has never been true in America. As a people, we have built our progress upon the great traditions of human liberty, and the great customs of representative government. But in our time there has developed a tremendous threat to the America way, a threat born in the philosophy of the total state and nourished by the ideologies
Many good Americans are seriously concerned with that trend. If it is allowed to continue, it will inevitably result in radical changes in the government of the United States as laid down in the Constitution, and upheld, protected, and defended by every generation since 1787.

The effort to destroy our representative government is being made through the agency of minority blocs in states where elections have been closely contested. Because they promised to swing those states, they have succeeded in ramming into the platforms of the three Philadelphia conventions, proposals which are in direct violation of the Constitution.

The three candidates nominated by those conventions therefore find themselves promising to make radical changes in our government in an unconstitutional manner. Whether Harry Truman, Tom Dewey, and Henry Wallace are mere willing tools of the minorities, or whether they actually favor a powerful, centralized, Hitler-type state I will not attempt to say. But the fact that they have made a political bargain which endangers the American way of life is enough to give serious concern to every loyal citizen. After the last Philadelphia convention, they asked themselves, "Where can I place my vote to discourage and condemn this unconstitutional and un-American political bargain?"

The answer was not long in coming. The States'Rights Democrats have become their voice. And the American people are going to rise up and tell those three candidates that we will not let them sell us down the river for bloc votes!

Government by minority bloc is not the American way. There is a haven of liberty for all men under our Constitution, and that document is the best means ever found by mankind to preserve human rights. But those rights must be protected within the Constitution, and not by violation of it.
When Harry Truman's platform was passed at Philadelphia, there were those who assured us that we needn't worry—it wouldn't be carried out. "We've got to vote this way—just for the record," they said, "but we don't really mean it."

My friends, let me ask you: what has happened to America when its greatest political Party will submit to a miserable, cheap trick like that? What has happened when the Democratic Party will prostrate itself in public to make a cheap bid for the votes of a selfish, special interest?

I will tell you: It is because the agents of the total state are winning control of the political machinery of this country. It is because the Democratic Party, which stood solidly for States' Rights for a hundred years, has been taken over by the foreign schemers and the pinks and subversives.

But I say to you that true Democrats will not prostrate themselves for the sake of votes. Our Party is not for sale. We will cast out those who would place the Presidency of the United States on the auction block!

Yes, they scorn us and ridicule us. They smear us with lies and brand us with fabrications and falsehoods. And behind the backs of their hands, in a base, cynical way, they seek to lead us astray by saying that the unconstitutional civil rights proposals will not be carried out.

In other words, they are trying to tell us Harry Truman won't keep his promises.

We had a visitor down in Columbia the other day—a high government official for whom we all have great admiration. One cannot blame him for being loyal to an administration of which he is an important part. But I sincerely believe he was acting rather boldly when he said, from the public platform, that President Truman would not, or could not, carry out his promises to the minorities to break down segregation in the armed forces and in our factories and business.
Harry won't do it? Well, he named the Civil Rights Commission himself. He endorsed their unconstitutional proposals. He begged and pleaded with the 80th Congress to pass them. When the Southern Congress members blocked him, he was not satisfied, and he called a political Special Session and demanded that the proposals be passed.

Of course he will carry out those promises—if he is elected. And so will Governor Dewey and Mr. Wallace, whose platforms carry identical promises.

Everyone knows that Congress gets closer to passing these laws each time they are brought up. Everyone knows that the Supreme Court, in considering such laws, proceeds on the basis that the Congress is sworn to uphold the Constitution. The Supreme Court is not in itself a sole guarantee against Constitutional violation. We cannot depend on one branch of government to protect our constitutional rights.

In this connection, let us take the word of the President's Civil Rights Committee, which said: "The Committee does not believe that the action of the Supreme Court in declaring parts of the 19th century civil rights legislation unconstitutional, proves that a well-conceived present-day attempt to strengthen the federal civil rights program would meet a similar fate."

Ladies and gentlemen, when this election is over, the selfish minority groups will know that the American people are going to meet their attacks on our Constitutional self-government, whenever and wherever they may arise!

Our opponents say with a sneer that ours is a sectional movement. They say the South is up in arms because the so-called Civil Rights bills are aimed directly at the South. That is true. The unconstitutional laws would gain their ends by punishing the South and violating her way of life. But there is nothing sectional about what those laws would do to representative self-government in every state in the union. The rights of California would be destroyed
along with those of Carolina. The customs and traditions of the West, the North, and the East will be taken over along with those of the South.

It is quite true that the recommendations of the President's Civil Rights Committee included numerous attacks upon the Southern states. It is full of snide remarks about our methods of solving our own problems.

I wonder whether you North Carolinians know that the Committee actually recommended economic sanctions against the South, as a means of forcing us into obedience to their unconstitutional demands?

Let us quote again from their report: "Another useful sanction is grant-in-aid. Today, public services provided by state and local government agencies and by private organizations are increasingly financed by federal grants-in-aid in part or wholly. The federal government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually for this kind of support. These grants-in-aid could be made contingent upon the elimination of various forms of discrimination or other violations of civil rights. The increasing use of such sanction is desirable."

This means that they propose to hold a federal club over our heads, in addition to their national police system, to force us to comply with laws that violate our rights to manage our own internal affairs. Is not that a sad commentary upon the trend in government in America today?

It must be quite evident to any thinking American that those who want to change the American way of life do mean business.

They have accused you and the rest of the South of discrimination against the Negro race. I defy them to prove it. I defy them to show that the Negro has not made tremendous progress in a very short time in this state. And I would quote them just one statistic among many: It has been shown that there
are more Negro teachers in the State of North Carolina, than there are Negro teachers in all the states above the Mason-and-Dixon line combined. That is a fact of which you may be justly proud.

Recently, you have had some "important" visitors in North Carolina to demonstrate what they want you to do. It is rather puzzling to me that they have sent Senator Barkley to threaten you with political reprisals, and to lecture you because you would not support Al Smith in 1928. It was Barkley, my friends, who as Majority Leader had seven Southern Senators "arrested" by the Sergeant-at-arms and brought to the Senate to force them to consider an unconstitutional Anti-Poll Tax bill.

And it is amazing to see the cheap political stunts thrown at you by Henry Wallace, who had visited you many times before without once criticizing your customs and laws. Such actions are bare-faced, brassy bids for power.

Such cheap tricks will not work in a free state which has a splendid record for solving its own problems, and which will stand on its constitutional right to manage its own affairs.

When these three candidates make their bids for your support, let us remember that all three--Truman, Dewey, and Wallace--have promised the minorities to force you to give up local and state management of your own problems. In committing this high crime against all that is sacred in American traditions, the three candidates are equally guilty. Do not be misled about that.

But let us see how their proposals would violate the fundamental human rights of people in every state.

They have promised an Anti-Poll Tax Law that will take over control of elections within the states. They have promised to usurp the functions of state legislatures and state courts by passing an Anti-Lynching Bill. They have promised to interfere with state and local laws regarding separation of the races, and to force your sons and daughters in the armed forces to associate with those with
whom they do not care to mingle. They have promised to assume
the right to regulate private business and employment within the
states by passing the FEPC. And they have promised to create a
national police force to enforce these laws, thus taking over the
functions of our sheriffs and our local police.

The enactment and enforcement of these proposals would
mean the same kind of police state control that prostrated Europe
under Hitler, and that is enabling Joseph Stalin to spread his
network of evil control all over the world.

As some of you may know, the so-called Fair Employment
Practices Act—the FEPC—originated under Stalin, who wrote such
a law in 1920. Those who do not believe it did, have only to
compare the wording of the Russian law with that of the American
version. Stalin wrote the original, and he knew that it would
enable him to gain control of business and industry and thus
to win domination over the personal lives of all Russians.

The FEPC would deny the right of an employer to choose
workers suitable to his business, and would actually force him to
employ persons who, by their presence, would ruin his business.
It would force working men to stay on the job side by side with
persons with whom they do not choose to associate. It would
force labor unions to admit persons unsuitable to them. It
would force working men to use the same rest rooms and recreational
facilities used by persons with whom they are not in the habit of
mingling.

My friends, perhaps some of you are thinking that we are
considering internal problems here, which are less important than
the overwhelming fact that America today faces the threat of another
war. Let me say that if we do not fight for the basic guarantees
of our kind of democracy—if we do not retain our balance of power
between the states and the federal government—then we lay ourselves
open to the same kind of tyranny that is now threatening Europe.
We say that we favor a United Nations in which the rights of all
countries—big and little—are respected. Then how can we deny the
rights of states within our own nation, in the same manner that Stalin would deny the rights of nations in the world organization?

And one other point concerning the FEPC: it is easy to see how the Communists would use this law to spread their network of spies throughout America. They have only to employ racial differences—to demand their so-called rights under the FEPC—and they could force their agents into any industry, atomic or otherwise, in the United States.

But Americans know the threat of Communism. They will denounce the FEPC for what it is—a dangerous threat to the safety and security of this nation—unwanted, undesirable, and un-American!

The States' Rights Democrats offer real Americans the opportunity to resist this threat to our safety. There is no other way of opposing it in this election. Because we have offered the only means by which your ballots can count against this program, we have been accused of various subtle intentions—among them, the false hood that we are helping the Republicans.

Nothing could be more ridiculous. All of you know, that if our ticket had not been placed in the field, a huge number of Southerners would have voted for Dewey, out of opposition to Truman. Those votes are coming to us now, where they can accomplish something.

I do not believe the Republicans will carry a single Southern state, simply because the States' Rights Democrats are taking them from him. We are keeping them for the true, historic principles of the Democratic Party.

The South cannot gain a thing by voting for Governor Dewey. I will mention just one reason. You know very well that the South has struggled for years under freight rates set up so high that we could not bring in industry to compete with the East. When the Southern Governors finally won a victory over this un-just treatment, it was over the opposition of Dewey. He publicly
admitted that he was an enemy of the South, by fighting to retain freight rates which kept us in the chains of economic slavery.

I do not see how such a candidate can afford to lay claim to a single vote in the Southland!

Ladies and gentlemen of North Carolina, we are asking you to join us in a movement which will mean the rebirth of the once-great Democratic Party. We ask you to help us reclaim that Party from its false leaders, and to restore it to the great Principles for which it has stood for a century.

We ask you to join us in restoring the Southland to a position of political respect, so that never again will any Presidential candidate ignore our needs because he thinks we are "in the bag."

There is a good possibility that we may accomplish these things by preventing any candidate from winning a majority of the electoral votes. If we do, our chances will be good when the election is decided by the House of Representatives.

But whatever comes, we shall have crystallized American sentiment against the invasion of our Constitutional rights. We shall have confounded and defeated the agents of the total state. We shall have demonstrated to the selfish leaders of minority blocs that it is not profitable to traffic with American liberties. And we shall have gained for the South her American right to solve her own problems in her own way, under the Constitution she is bound to protect.

Our agency is the ballot box—the vote of our people—the most sacred privilege we have, and the only one by which our liberty can be preserved. And by that vote our united voices will protect and uphold the immortal principle of the sovereignty of states and the everlasting rights of the individual man.

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