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States' Rights, 1948 October 21

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS OF J. STRUM THURMOND, GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA, AND STATES' RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AT MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, OCTOBER 21, 1948.

MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

It is always a pleasure to visit the great State of Tennessee -- one of the most typically American of all our states, and yet one which is also very much a Southern state because of the customs and the origins of her people.

I am especially glad that we can meet together tonight in Memphis. For in this renowned city the romantic traditions of the Old South are blended with the progressive optimism and the confident ambition of the New South.

Tennessee has a special meaning for anyone who has loved the great Democratic Party, for it was around the heroic figure of Andrew Jackson that the party was organized in a permanent way more than a hundred years ago. One of the very first resolutions passed by a Democratic convention was the endorsement of Jackson's nomination for a second term as President. The strength and popularity of Jackson gave the fledgling Party a tremendous boost in its early days.

No doubt old Andy heartily concurred in the first formal platform of the Democratic Party, adopted at its convention in May, 1840. We may well recall two of the resolutions contained in that platform:
"Resolved: That the Federal Government is one of limited powers derived solely from the Constitution, and the grants of power shown therein ought to be strictly construed by all the departments and agents of the Government, and that it is inexpedient and dangerous to exercise doubtful constitutional powers."

Also:

"Resolved, that Congress has no power, under the Constitution, to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of the several States, and that such States are sole and proper judges of everything appertaining to their own affairs, not prohibited by the Constitution."

There you have the Party's voice ringing in the ears of its leaders today!

It is interesting to wonder what crusty old Andy Jackson would have said, if he could have spoken to the Democratic convention in July, 1948. No doubt he would have measured his words by the courage of his convictions, yielding nothing to the radical temper of that infamous convention.

For that July convention wrote a sorry page in the history of the Democratic Party, when it strayed away from the historic principles that had made it great.

I cannot believe Andrew Jackson would have endorsed a repudiation of the rights of states, and a promise to violate the letter and spirit of the Constitution!
All our great statesmen of the past -- and particularly those of the Democratic Party -- have warned us time and again that the Constitutional principle of the rights of states can never be destroyed, without undermining our form of government and our way of life. But the statesmen of other days have no counterparts in the leadership of the Democratic and the Republican Parties today.

At Philadelphia this summer it was clearly demonstrated that our great nation has stumbled in its march toward the attainment of the democratic ideal.

It was clearly shown that the control of our major parties is now in the hands of men who are either so unscrupulous or so inept that they are willing to sacrifice our most cherished principles of government for the sake of minority votes.

And now we are treated to the spectacle of three candidates for the office of President of the United States, who were willing to sell out the principles of representative democracy in an attempt to buy out an election.

I do not speak lightly when I tell you that evil days have fallen upon the American political system.

We now have a President who has on several occasions
employed the high prerogatives of his office, both in the domestic field and in foreign affairs, to further his political campaign; we have a Presidential election in which three major candidates have offered to violate the Constitution in exchange for the support of a selfish group; and we have a Congress which has come closer and closer to passing legislation which directly and flagrantly violates the Constitution, without putting it to a vote of the people.

The American system of local self-government, therefore, is confronted with its greatest test since the days when our forefathers managed to shake off the yoke of tyranny. In all seriousness, I say to you now, that if Americans do not present a united front on home rule and local self-government, we shall have failed our destiny in this terrible hour.

All other domestic issues fade away into nothing by comparison with this threat to our way of life and our form of government. The American people through their elected representatives have shown their ability to solve their internal problems with justice to all men. Important questions of foreign policy, labor-management relations, public housing and utilities and the control of inflation, can be solved in the American way.
But our solutions for these problems will be but empty argument if we do not maintain a strict adherence to constitutional government in this country. If the right to rule and govern ourselves in domestic matters is to be bartered away for a political price, disaster to the American system will follow as night follows day.

The American voter today is lost in a confusion of domestic issues. He listens to the loud demands of this group and that, of this political faction and that one, and he becomes so confounded and confused that he frequently loses sight of the basic principles that lie underneath all the shouting.

Those who have designs upon our government are well aware of these things. They hope that the loud hullabaloo for human rights will conceal their desire to destroy our Constitutional rights.

But I tell you now that there is no confusion among the States' Rights Democrats.

We are going to see to it that the American people are not betrayed by those who seek to win elections by turning the United States Constitution into a scrap of paper!
There are millions of thoughtful men and women in America today who know that the time has come for a purification of our political system, and a rededication to fundamental democratic principles.

There was a day when the American voter's great difficulty in Presidential elections was that of choosing between two good men. After the Philadelphia conventions in 1948, however, it appeared that his difficulty had now become that of choosing between evils.

To many of us, this situation appeared entirely unnecessary.

We believed that the American political system was designed to elevate the best men to the highest offices. We did not feel it necessary to trim those offices down to fit the size of the pygmy politicians who demanded them.

We did not think it necessary to deliver up the office of President on a silver platter to an inefficient and confused little man who had brought his machine connections into the executive chambers with him.

Nor did we believe it desirable to hand over that office to a pennyweight glamour boy who had shoved himself into the limelight with the best vaudeville techniques, and who had used the machine minorities of the big-city states to capture the nomination.
Neither did we find it desirable to boost into office a tool of the subversives who had publicly announced his willingness to turn over our security to the Communists.

Evils? There was not simply a choice among evils. There was no choice at all, after Philadelphia, for any American who believed in the preservation of the Constitution, and the protection of local self-government.

But there is a choice today. There is a way in which an American may vote his convictions, instead of being forced to give half-hearted support to someone his heart tells him is not fit for office.

Every vote for the States' Rights Democrats is a powerful contribution to the preservation of Constitutional government in this country. Every voter who joins our cause may tell his grandchildren that he helped to return America to democratic principles, at a time when it seemed they would be forgotten.

Every vote for the States' Rights Democrats will appear in the history books forever as another powerful voice, saying, "I stand by the Constitution, and I will not be moved!"

My friends, when I speak to you about these things, I assume that every person listening to me is proud of
his American heritage. I take for granted that you have the kind of self-respect for which our people are famous. I assume that you value your dignity as an individual in a society which gives you the right to a voice in the affairs of your community, your county, your state, and your nation. I take for granted that you value your right to come and go as you please, to choose your own friends, to elect your own representatives, to control your own police, and to conduct your own private business as you see fit.

I say "take for granted." Perhaps we all take these things too much for granted. Perhaps we are inclined to forget why they are possible.

Let us remember, now, tonight. Let us recall that our freedoms are possible because we have in this nation something called "local self-government." And let us remember that self-government is possible only because the United States Constitution makes it so. How does it do it? By the Bill of Rights, which says, in Article X, that powers not delegated to the Congress are reserved to the states.

These words may appear simple on the surface. As a matter of fact, they contain one of the most profound political declarations ever conceived by the mind of man. All our liberties rest upon them, as upon an immovable rock.
And yet, for the first time in our history, neither one of the old political parties has made a stand for the rights of states. And, in fact, both have announced their intentions to ignore those rights and violate the Constitution. The Republicans were first to make this promise. Then came the National Democrats, and the job was done.

But the false prophets who forced the National Democratic Party to violate its historic principles, employed as their weapon a program which was directed primarily against the traditions of the Southern states. They forgot that the South was the very cradle of the Democratic Party, and that our every political action has nourished the Party and kept it alive in good years and bad.

The South is now, and ever shall be, loyal to the principles that made our Party great.

We cannot -- we will not -- remain quiet and submissive while those principles are violated and destroyed to buy the votes of a selfish minority.

We are speaking out, like good Americans, against the treachery of those who have seized control of the Democratic Party, and against the efforts of the Republicans and the Progressives to debase and puncture the Constitution.
We will not yield our state control of elections and of voting qualifications to an Anti-Poll Tax Bill, which will open the way to federal control of the manner in which we choose our own representatives in Congress.

We will not yield our control of state courts and our state laws to an Anti-Lynching Bill, which uses the horrors of an almost non-existent crime as a pretext to turn state laws into federal laws.

We will not yield control of our social legislation, which permits us to solve the problems of our race relations in a manner best suited to our own states, in order that politicians may seek minority votes with Anti-Segregation proposals. We will not break down separation of the races in the states where such action would promote lawlessness and discord.

We will not yield the rights of our businessmen to employ whom they please so that an FEPC law may be passed to please the Communists and the selfish racial groups. We will not yield the right of our working men to associate with whom they please, so that votes may be purchased in violation of the Constitution.

And we most certainly will not permit a federal police force to roam this land, meddling with our private affairs,
to enforce an invasion of our personal liberties.

How can any real American be expected to support a law such as Dewey has forced on New York with the so-called FEPC? It is not the American way to deny a businessman the legal right to ask an applicant for employment what his real name is, whether he is native-born, or where he was during World War I. Yet that's what Dewey's law says, and now he has promised to force such a law upon every state.

Our loyal members of Congress have recently been trying to smoke out the Communists in government. And yet Truman, Dewey, and Wallace have all three sponsored the FEPC -- which would make it impossible for an industrial plant to spot the Communists among those who ask for work, and to keep them out.

Thus Truman, Dewey, and Wallace have become tools of the subversives and of the socialistic planners who are trying to weaken our Constitution and to undermine our way of life.

But the States' Rights Democrats say to you, with all our hearts and with all the strength of our patriotism, that they will not get away with it!

By piling up a heavy vote in this election, the States' Rights Democrats will deal a crippling blow to this unconstitutional program. Our votes will repudiate and drive out the petty political leaders who have tried to turn America
aside from the straight road of local self-government. And our leadership will restore the great Democratic Party to the principles which have made it a bulwark for the democratic way.

My fellow Americans, I believe we are all agreed that the two-party system is best for our country. I think we all realize that the use of two great political parties is the best way of maintaining the checks and balances which insure our freedoms.

But at Philadelphia, our two parties were like birds of a feather when it came to the preservation of the United States Constitution. Any man who supports either of them is contributing to a violation of that Constitution. No good Democrat can do that, and remain a good Democrat.

We must use our votes in this election to reclaim the leadership of the Democratic Party, and to return it to its rightful place in the two-party system in this nation. We cannot let it go the way of the Dewey-Republicans or the Wallace-Progressives.

I have always been a good Democrat. But I am not, and I never will be, the kind of Democrat who will forget all the basic principles of the party because of pressure from a selfish minority group. I am not the kind of Democrat who will
debase the party by yielding to the hysterical demands of a Truman or a McGrath or a Humphrey.

There are millions of good Americans, in both the Democratic and Republican parties, who place loyalty to real American principles above loyalty to the political leaders who have gained temporary control.

Acting together in this election, we shall teach those false leaders what loyalty really means.

And when this election is over, we shall continue to act together until the Democratic Party has been cleansed so that it can regain its rightful place in our nation's political affairs!

Do not be misled by those who tell you we are going to make a brief struggle and then give up the fight. Ours is a cause that can never be relinquished if American ideals of self-government and individual freedom are to be maintained.

Our purpose is not to seek temporary power in the government, although we have an excellent chance to throw the election into the House of Representatives, where our ticket will be respected.

Instead, we have as our purpose the permanent establishment in this nation of a Democratic Party dedicated to Constitutional, representative government. The party has always
been symbolic of true democracy in the past. There is no good reason why it cannot be made to remain so, in the future, no matter what its false leaders have done in this political year.

The States' Rights Democrats stand on the faith that our great party can be and will be restored to the type of leadership that gave us Jackson and Cleveland and Wilson. To that end, we invite the support of Americans everywhere, whatever they may have called themselves in the past.

And while we are at it, we shall demonstrate to the nation that the great South is not "in the bag," to be kicked around for political purposes. We shall restore the South to a position of respect in the political life of this country which she has not had since 1860. We shall bring our great Southern states back into the full enjoyment of all the privileges that combine to make ours the greatest nation on this earth.

The voice of the States' Rights Democrats will tell all the world that the American people value their hard-won liberties, and that they will not relinquish them to the demands of any foreign philosophy, whether it be fascist or Communist or what not.

Let all those who cherish their liberties join with us in this great determination.

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