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Address at Annual Ladies Night Meeting of Hammerton Masonic Lodge No. 332

Strom Thurmond

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Worshipful Master, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Brother Masons, and My Friends.

It is always a distinct pleasure to visit in the Charleston area. Yours is indeed a proud community in the finest sense of the word. You preserve and uphold to a remarkable degree our finest Southern traditions and institutions. All other true South Carolinians cling to and uphold the same traditions, but I must admit a little enviously that most of us outside of Charleston have to speak in defense of our traditions and institutions without benefit of your deservedly famous Charleston accent. I have oftentimes wondered how many tourist dollars are attracted to this area solely because of that famous accent. A Charleston accent is a very famous trade mark indeed, first, perhaps, because it is so distinctive in itself, and secondly, because the Charleston area and Charlestonians have shown the way to the rest of the country in so many achievements and endeavors.

Charleston can claim a long list of American "first", and all South Carolinians share with you your justifiable pride in these achievements.

The first steam locomotive in the U. S. was the "Best Friend", built for the South Carolina R. R. in 1830, and it ran between Charleston and Hamburg.

The first landscaped gardens in America were the Middleton Gardens.

The first tea farm in America was near Summerville.

The Charleston area and South Carolina were the first to plant rice and indigo. Incidentally, during the past session of Congress, I introduced and succeeded in getting passed a bill that will help restore the rice industry to South Carolina. My bill provided 500 acres of rice allotment for new growers.

The first free library in America was built in Charleston in 1695.

The first public museum in America was built in Charleston in 1773.

The first free school for Negroes founded in this country was established in what was then Charles Town in 1740. We hardly think of Charleston as the home of textile manufacturing plants, but it might interest you to know that the first cotton mill in America was built on James Island by Mrs. Frances Ramage in 1789.

Charleston had the first Chamber of Commerce, the oldest drug store, and the first fireproof building in this country.

The first dramatic theater in America was the Dock Street Theater, which opened in 1736.

The first musical society in this country was the St. Cecilia Society, which was founded in 1762.

Charlestonians also founded the first municipal college in America in 1785—the great College of Charleston.

We South Carolinians who are loyal to our Southern heritage and our Southern traditions are proud that the first shot fired in defense of the South in the War Between the States was fired here in Charleston in the Fort Sumter incident.

Charleston furnished three of the four signers of the Declaration of Independence from South Carolina, Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, and Arthur Middleton. The fourth, Thomas Lynch, Jr., was from Winyah and the lower Santee section. All of the signers of the Constitution from South Carolina—John Rutledge, Charles Pinckney, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Pierce Butler—spent their lives in and around Charleston.

In short, Charleston and the South Carolina Low Country have been, along with the Virginia plantation section, one of the two principal wellsprings of Southern ideals and traditions. These great ideals and traditions have been changed considerably from their original form and content,
but Charleston and the low country contributed that which was best and that
which has endured unchanged throughout the years. You here in the Charleston
area should be very proud that you enjoy this great heritage in the highest
and purest form to be found anywhere. We in the South are now, and for years
to come will continue to be, engaged in a great struggle to preserve these
principles and beliefs. Charleston can well be proud of her outstanding
contribution.

In Masonry, as in the numerous other fields, Charleston again achieved
a famous first. The first Masonic lodge and the first Scottish Rite Lodge
in America were those founded right here in Charleston. Charleston occupies
a very special place in the history of Masonry in America. Reflecting on
all these accomplishments makes my visit here with you tonight an added
pleasure, because it's always a privilege to attend a Masonic meeting, when
good men and true get together in the spirit of the great principles they
share in common. In South Carolina we really believe in Masonry. It is our
largest fraternal organization, and I am sure that this is also true here
in Charleston.

There is an excellent reason for the devotion so many men have for the
Masonic order. The more than 4 million Masons in this country are bound
together by faith in principles as everlasting as the mountains and the
seas.

The other day I had occasion to review some of the undying and unchang­
ing principles of our order. The effort was well worth while, for I was
struck with the realization that the principles of Masonry are almost iden­
tical with the basic principles of Americanism. That is a good thing for a
Mason to know and to remember.

We believe in reverence for the Supreme Being, and in immortality of
the soul. Surely no principle is more characteristic of Americanism than
that, and no other principle has had more to do with American history.

We believe in fraternality, the brotherhood of man, and the duty of one
man to another. Americans never could have carved out new homes in this
continent, if it had not been for this spirit of helpfulness and brotherli­
ness.

We believe in the improvement of the individual, and in the value of
progress through personal effort. The very core of the American system
of free enterprise is this principle of faith in mankind's ability to
improve itself.

We believe in the equality of justice, the right of every man to fair
treatment. From the earliest times, Americans have built the structure of
their democracy on the cornerstone of equal justice to all men.

And, finally, Masons believe firmly in the right of mankind to enjoy
liberty -- religious liberty and political liberty. Freedom to worship and
the freedom of self-government were the most cherished aims of our fore­
fathers, when they settled this continent, and when they wrote the American
Constitution to make their new land secure.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the greatest of the early
American patriots were Masons, and that the Masonic ideals were prominent
in the great documents they created as permanent assurances of American
liberty.

Just as the Masonic order existed before the American Constitution was
written, so the American ideal -- or its counter-part -- existed in the
hearts of men long before the North American continent was discovered.
Millions of men in other parts of the world had believed in the same prin­
ciples we believe in, and dreamed the same dreams. But few men had ever
been able to put those principles into practice, or to realize those dreams,
before the American nation came into being. No group of men had ever been
able to maintain those principles of freedom for any great period of time.

In reviewing the basic precepts of Masonry, I was struck with another
thought -- that our principles are completely opposed to the philosophy of
the total state. The kind of government that existed in Germany, Italy and
Japan, and which led to World War II, is a complete violation of the great
beliefs of the Masonic order. Masonry thrives only in an atmosphere of
democracy. It cannot flourish in a land where the people are servants of
the state. Since it is based on faith in the essential dignity and worth of
the individual man, Masonry is crushed to earth under a government founded
on the principle that the individual is nothing, and the state everything.
As an illustration, the Masonic order is just now beginning to get on its feet again in Italy, where the fascist ideal was triumphant for so long. Over 30 years ago, the dictator Mussolin suppressed and persecuted Italian Masons, because they would not go along with his plans for the total state. Today, democratic principles are flourishing again in Italy, and Masonry has been revived.

It is true that one of the rules of our fraternity is that the Masonic order, as an organization, does not participate in partisan political affairs. This does not mean, however, that a Mason must stand idly by at a time when the liberties he holds dear are being threatened. The true Mason is a good citizen, and the good citizen makes his voice heard when the principles of his country and of his order are threatened.

I think it is well for us, today, to remember the fate of Masonry in the totalitarian countries, and to ask ourselves whether the same fate may not be in store for Masonry in America, if some of the governmental trends evident today are not stopped.

The philosophy of the "total state" was not crushed when Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo were brought to their doom. That philosophy, preached and practiced by the agents of Communism, is threatening individual freedom all over the world today. The subjection of the individual to the state is the aim of the Communists, just as it was the aim of Hitler and Mussolini.

Only one great force deters this insidious enemy -- the resources and power of the American people. It has been truly said that the eyes of the suffering world are fixed on this Nation at this point in history. Every intelligent citizen in every nation of the world is anxiously watching the American people. They are watching us, not only for the latest developments in science, the latest inventions, and to see how many dollars we will give away, but also they are watching something deeper, something more important than material things. They are watching to see whether our system of democratic government can stand the test of the pressure caused by our new position of world leadership. They know that if our system fails, there is no longer any hope for free men.

There is no other nation to which men may turn for the protection of democratic principles and personal freedom. The British Empire, once the most powerful union on earth, goes from one financial crisis to another; the French are struggling to hold onto their last remnants of power; and the Germans as a nation are still divided and unarmed.

We, as Americans -- as Masons -- are therefore faced with the greatest challenge ever to confront us. The American spirit is going to be tested in the years ahead as never before. The desire of mankind for freedom depends now almost solely upon the manner in which Americans can stand up to the test.

In a recent issue of Newsweek, Henry Hazlitt discussed just one technique these sinister ideologists use to achieve their ends through the use or misuse of words and their meanings.

"Today Socialists, fellow travelers, and Communists all call themselves liberals. As a result the word has gradually come to have a sinister and evil connotation." Originally, however, as its Latin root indicates, "the liberal was a man who believed in freedom". Politically, the liberal tradition stood for freedom for the individual, the Rule of Law, strict limitation of the powers of government, and decentralization and diffusion even of these limited powers. Economically, the liberal tradition stood for protection of private property, freedom of prices, and freedom of enterprise.

But through intellectual confusion, the word "liberal", particularly in this country, has altered and finally reversed its meaning.

"Today, in popular speech, a 'liberal' has come to mean a person who wants constantly to expand the powers of government, and to centralize them in Washington at the expense of the States and localities. It has come to mean a person who disparages Congressional restraint on the executive power, and who prefers bureaucratic discretion to the Rule of Law."

"Economically, it has come to mean a person who distrusts freedom of markets and freedom of enterprise; who distrusts private ownership and management, and extols government ownership and management; who presses for more government 'planning', and who wants to tax success to subsidize failure."

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The real liberals are those who believe in personal liberty and limited government but who are today referred to as conservatives.

To meet the great challenge of this age, we cannot depend along upon the strength of our military machine, or upon the atom or hydrogen bomb, or the new guided missiles and rockets, or new and more horrible methods of biological warfare. We should be foolish to rely entirely upon such weapons.

The question of internal security is as important as military might. We must have a strong and vigorous people first. You will recall that it was not by the strength of our arms along that we were able to tip the balance of victory in World War II. Without the unbelievably vast amount of goods and materiel produced in America, the war could not have been won.

The production record of the American people during the war was possible only because of the value and efficiency of our system of free enterprise. Those goods for war were produced by free men, working on their own initiative, and at tasks which they chose for themselves. You could not have driven Americans to do such a job. They did it because of an inner belief in themselves, and because of their devotion to the democratic way of life.

It follows that if Americans are to fulfill their new role of world leadership for democracy, we are going to have to strengthen and renew the qualities within us which have made us what we are today. The free enterprise system and the democratic way must be made to work better than ever before. That is the sensible and logical viewpoint.

Nevertheless, we are compelled to admit that all is not well with the American people today. Our basic beliefs in free enterprise and individual liberty are undergoing dangerous assaults from within our own borders. Philosophies of government which are foreign in origin and alien to the American system are gaining headway every day. The peoples' rights under the Constitution have been reclassified and dangerously abridged, and they are being threatened by proposals in Washington which strike at the very heart of our dual system of government.

Too many of our people are inclined to forget that our democracy is based upon local self-government. It became all too fashionable in the recent past to look to Washington to solve all our troubles, both civic and personal. Our people have been turning more and more toward the national government, and forgetting the responsibilities of local and state government. The time has come when we must reverse that trend if we are going to preserve our liberties and Constitutional government. This centralization of power in the federal government to the detriment of the states and the people can only be stopped at the ballot box. There must be a rebirth in this country of the responsibilities of citizenship. In many elections, only a small fraction of our people participate in deciding vital issues. Those who want special favors and consideration from government are organizing into great blocs of voters. Politicians fear their strength, and do their bidding. They are showing this nation down a road of socialism and bankruptcy.

All Americans realize today that there are necessary controls which government should exercise in an economy so vast as ours. We all know that there are many fields in which government can serve to make our lives more secure. We know that in wartime the executive branch of the government must be given vast powers. We know that sometimes there are emergencies in peacetime which must be met with government action.

No thoughtful citizen wants to hamper the federal government in exercising its responsibility to the people under a proper interpretation of the Constitution. We must have a strong and stable government to protect us from aggression and to help preserve peace in this world. There are obviously many fields where the federal government can and must operate in building a stronger America. We cannot, however, go along creating dangerous socialistic programs.

The conflict in America today is one of individualism versus collectivism -- personal freedom versus bureaucratic centralism. The nature of collectivism is to make the individual secondary to the state. That is why it is inconsistent with Americanism. The American way is build upon the strength of the individual to improve himself. The struggle for self-improvement has prompted Americans always to seek new and better ways of doing things, so that more people may have happier and more comfortable lives. Our inventive genius, stimulated by the desire for self-improvement, has given the world the steamship, the cotton gin, the telegraph, the
telephone, the automobile, the airplane and the television. It has harnessed electricity, brought machinery to the farm, and created the assembly line to bring all these blessings to the average man in greater numbers than he enjoys anywhere else on earth.

The American way has made us the richest nation in the world, with the highest per capita wealth on earth. We have 70% of the world's life insurance, 85% of the world's automobiles, 51% of the world's telephones, 46% of the world's radios, 56% of the world's electric power, 35% of the world's railways, and over 30% of the world's improved roads. About 20,000,000 Americans own their own homes, and about 5,000,000 own farms. We spend about 10 billion dollars a year on education, which is more than is spent by all other nations together, including Russia. Our 165,000,000 people earn more wages than all the 650,000,000 people of Europe. Our wages are the world's highest, and they buy more and better conveniences than can be bought anywhere else.

Those are some of the fruits of the American system of individual initiative and free enterprise. No socialistic or communistic government can match them. Let us remember, there is no such thing as modified national socialism. You cannot modify socialism, and you cannot have socialism without destroying the American system. But the bureaucratic politicians in Washington are persuading many otherwise intelligent Americans into the belief that our people must be coddled and petted with "just a little socialism" so that they will not yield to the doctrines of Communism.

That is the immediate danger that we face as Masons and as citizens today. Remember, it is easy to fall victim to the expert propaganda of the socialists, who have been practicing their arts of deception for many years. It is easy to listen to the beguiling promises of the politicians, who talk only about what they are going to do for you, and never mention what they are going to do to you.

We are witnesses today of the socialistic regime which brought England to the verge of national bankruptcy. When we consider the sad plight of the English, we should remember that when their present program was presented to the people in 1945, no mention was ever made of the word "Socialism." The British public did not know at that time what kettle of fish they were buying. They eagerly accepted the program, without realizing what the inevitable consequences would be.

The socialists never offer their bitter pills without a coating of sugar, and they never offer all the pills at one time. Their assaults on the American way of life are made in installments, because they know that if they attempted to promulgate their entire program at one time that none of it would ever get past the American people.

We are forced to admit that we sometimes grow lax in our defenses when such programs are offered. The benefits of freedom have brought us prosperity, and during periods of prosperity, we are not so quick to discern the steady progress of the insidious program which leads to centralization of government and the loss of personal freedom. As South Carolina's great John C. Calhoun once said: "We have passed through so many years of prosperity, we have passed through so many difficulties and dangers, without the loss of liberty, that we begin to think that we hold it by divine right from heaven itself. It is harder to preserve than to obtain liberty."

The picture today is not entirely gloomy, however. There are hopeful signs all about us that the American people are waking up to the challenge that confronts them. American ideals are being remembered and discussed with a new frequency. A slowly awakening interest in what is happening to our government is evident everywhere. During the past year, I have received thousands of letters from people in all walks of life and from every state in the nation, testifying to the concern of the writers for the safety of basic American principles.

As Masons and as citizens, we owe it to our country and to ourselves to become staunch advocates of those American principles which have made our nation the greatest on the face of the earth. We need a large dose of old-fashioned Americanism in this country -- not the empty bragging kind, but the self-respecting, self-critical kind of Americanism of our forefathers.

Honest, cut-spoken pride in our country is more to be desired than the false and crass kind, which merely complains of America's faults while it forgets her virtues. We have a right to be proud of America, and of what our people have accomplished under the liberties we enjoy.
We have a right to the inspiration of a just pride -- pride in our noble traditions of democracy, pride in the sturdy character of our people, and pride in our energetic and God-fearing spirit.

The right kind of Americanism should keep us ever vigilant to preserve and protect our way of life, so that every American may continue to enjoy the fruits of his toil without regimentation and without dictatorship.

The right kind of Americanism should lift our hearts in the faith that the American way shall some day show the world to prosperity and to peace.

The right kind of Americanism should fill our hearts with the determination that the great American ideals of the dignity of man and of individual freedom shall be handed down to our children's children, and that those ideals shall one day be realized by all men everywhere.

THE END