

introduction of Norman Thomas...1-1-1

Everybody knows Norman Thomas. Practically no one knows me. It is therefore almost absurd that I should be on this platform for the purpose of introducing the Socialist Party candidate for President, and many of you no doubt are wondering how much gall and nerve I must have to perform this function. Most of you are well aware, however, that excess nerve and gall are not required to appear on the same rostrum with anyone as unpretentious and unassuming as he is. As a matter of fact, to my knowledge there is only one person who lacks the nerve to appear on the same platform with him. That man is Henry Wallace, self-appointed leader of the common man, who has time and again avoided debate on any issue with one of the few men in politics who has consistently fought on the side of the people.

It was my privilege to work for some months in the offices of the Post War World Council of which Norman Thomas has been chairman since its inception. Frequently I think of an incident of that period that typifies his character: One afternoon when the window cleaner appeared to present his bill, he noticed Mr. Thomas busy in his office and expressed the desire to meet him. Inasmuch as Norman Thomas ~~has~~ has never been too busy to see anybody, I told the window cleaner to go in. He did so and introduced himself, whereupon Mr. Thomas said, "I'm very pleased to meet you, my name is Norman Thomas." The window cleaner replied, "Yes, I know; I've always wanted to meet you, but I must confess that I've never voted for you." Mr. Thomas was equal to that occasion; his reply was a laughing, "Indeed, and a great many good men have never voted for me."

Those of you who have read Dwight MacDonald's book, "Henry Wallace, The Man and the Myth" may recall MacDonald's account of a conversation Norman Thomas had with the late President, Franklin D. Roose-

velt, concerning the sharecroppers. At the request of H. L. Mitchell, later head of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Mr. Thomas made a tour of the South to see how the sharecroppers were faring under the Agricultural Adjustmant Act during Wallace's agricultural secretaryship. He was appalled to find that conditions were far worse than they were before the triple A and issued a widely published report. More than that, he tried to see Henry Wallace who was always too busy or out of town. Twice during the same period, however, he did get to see President Roosevelt who was NOT too busy. During one of these conversations, Mr. Thomas brought up ~~in~~ a clause in the sharecroppers' contract which had been interpreted into meaninglessness by Wallace. The President's comment was, "That can mean something or nothing." Mr. Thomas replied, "It means nothing." Whereupon the President, nettled, snapped, "I'm a damn sight better politician than you are, Norman." Norman Thomas was equal to this situation too. He replied, "That's obvious since you are sitting behind that desk and I'm in front of it."

These two conversations are closely related. It is precisely because a great many good men have never voted for Norman Thomas that he has never been behind the desk he stood before. It is precisely because a great many good men have not believed enough in the validity of their principles to support those principles rather than to make compromises and select the lesser of two evils, that Norman Thomas has been for five elections merely the protest candidate. The failure of our candidate to gain the Presidential chair then has not been so much due to the opposition of bigots as to the failure of the good men to unite with other good men in support of their convictions.

For several years now, ever since people became cognizant of the fact that we are not communists, we Socialists have been accused of being dreamy idealists (this in a country where no one could be elected to any political office without claiming to belong to a Christian denomination,

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presumably idealistic). As Vic Reuther pointed out in connection with another parallel subject, the real trouble is that the critics who accuse us of having our heads in the clouds think so because they have their heads in the sand, ostrich fashion.

Certainly we are idealists, but that does not automatically make us impractical as our critics imply; we are idealists because that is the only practical method of achieving any kind of principled end. No good end is gained by sacrificing principle during its achievement in the name of practical politics. We reject the fact that the ultimate fulfillment and measure of practicality is the success with which we sell our souls to the machine politics of Grundy and Prendergast.

The good of the commonwealth never has been nor ~~never~~ will be promoted by such a thing as the lesser of two evils. Expecting good to emerge, therefore, from the lesser of two evils is the rankest kind of impractical dreaming. It cannot be done.

Many of our Democratic friends have pointed to the record of the legislative branch of the government and have echoed President Truman's accusation that it is the second worst Congress in the history of the nation. Our Republican friends on the other hand can just as easily point to Truman and make almost the same judgment of the Administration. Both, of course, are justified. Semi-progressive planks that were in both major party platforms in 1944 were scuttled in such key items as housing, civil liberties, and conservation. To put it bluntly, both major parties have been proven liars in the past three years; they stand guilty of tampering with the welfare of 140 million people.

The man who has systematically warned the nation for the past twenty years with rare insight of the evil way it was going is Norman Thomas. Most of his warnings have been borne out and still neither his warnings nor

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his constructive suggestions have been heeded to a great extent because he has been sneered at as an idealist and do-gooder.

This is the sixth time that Norman Thomas has sought the Presidency of the United States. Few people indeed are capable of carrying such a seemingly hopeless burden with such grace. I was about to say that NO one could, but we do not believe in supermen and Norman Thomas would be the first to deny that he belongs with them.

For five elections he has been a symbol of protest, gaining in that time such a reputation for courageous integrity that he has come to be known as "The Conscience of America" by even the politically hostile press. For five elections, Norman Thomas has been a protest candidate.

But in this coming election, his sixth try, he is NOT a protest candidate; he is the only one for whom a vote cast will not be a vote wasted.

It is a great honor for me to introduce to you the man, who more than any other person I know, lives consistently by the philosophy he preaches, NORMAN THOMAS.