

ADRIAN SCOTT SPEECH

March 5, 1948

Tonight, on behalf of my colleagues, I would like principally to speak about you who are assembled here --- and about those countless people here and abroad --- laboring men, union men and women, artists, ministers, lawyers, professional and business people who have rallied to an idea.

Tonight, we prefer to consider this, not an occasion which honors us, but an occasion, rather, that celebrates an idea --- a vigorous and progressive idea which Franklin Roosevelt, alive and dead, so eloquently represents.

We would like to pay tribute to you -- to all of you -- in a world on the edge of chaos, seeking further chaos as a solution, who will not let this idea be hidden or crushed.

The decision that faced us in embracing this idea in Washington, in October, is the decision which has faced you. I do not risk contradiction -- by my colleagues, at least -- when I say that the decision which faced us was easier. It may have been more melodramatic and hysterical for us, but it was easier for us.

I do not believe there is one among the Ten (or The Nineteen) to whom, at one time, it hasn't been said that he has displayed a rare courage.

Now -- it makes us feel fine to be thought of as courageous. But confidentially, it isn't true.

This may seem somewhat modest and even contradictory, and it may seem that I am about to invoke that hallowed cliché -- that one about the tired, be-whiskered sergeant in dirty uniform who, without blinking, has killed a couple of hundred fascists -- and who says to the astonished young private first class, "I was scared."

I do not wish to invoke that frequently repeated scene. I don't seem to have any use for it since I have severed my connections with the motion picture industry.

What I mean to say is that we didn't choose this issue. This issue chose us.

True, we had simply resolved before we ever went to Washington that the Thomas-Rankin Committee had gone on long enough and that it must be ended, and that we, as individuals, must establish the machinery in the courts by which it could be ended. That was true.

But what concretely confirmed and clarified our stand was the people we faced before we ever faced the Thomas Committee. It helps explain why our decision was so easy.

If you faced, as we did in Washington, people --- unknown people - who came to our office in the Shoreham Hotel, who knocked on our door and said, "You must win this fight" -- If you found this happening again and again - and then, if you found that these people were government workers - victims of the infamous loyalty oaths and the subsequent purges, on evidence that is inadmissible in court -- delivered by an agency which arrogantly refuses to face the people it accuses -- If you found this and

faced it, you understand our position a little better.

Face another man. Face a member of the Zionist organization of America who came to us. He said, "I have failed to prove what I know is true. I have failed to prove the anti-Semitic conspiracy that exists in this city. Nine out of ten people who are under fire in the State Department are Jews, and the tenth is married to a Jew. They are P.H.D.'s, professors, distinguished educators. And what they are doing to you is part of the pattern."

And face the small group of newspapermen -- who coldly announce that this whole show is part of the psychological preparation of a country driving toward war.

And face the labor leader, sent specifically to Washington to see us - to tell us a defeat for us was a defeat for labor - to beg us to do what we could to destroy the Un-American Activities Committee - and to remember, once having set up the means to test the constitutionality of this Committee, the job was just beginning.

And he told us a story. He told us of that moment when Hitler and Goering seized power in Germany, and when Goering was given the assignment of getting rid of the duly elected premier of Prussia. Goering flew to Prussia -- went to the Premier's palace - into his office - and by the seat of the pants and the nape of the neck, he threw the Premier bodily down the steps of the palace. As the Premier landed, he screamed at Goering, "The Supreme Court will overrule you."

This labor leader concluded -- we would be sustained by the Supreme Court. Of this he was certain. But meanwhile - a

job of dramatization of the issues must be done -- we could not allow this issue to hibernate - in this our "winter of discontent."

And then face Berthold Brecht, the German poet and playwright -- high on Hitler's proscribed list of cultural workers. In the midst of wild and sleepless activity in the Shoreham Hotel, Brecht smiled and smoked a cigar and beamed at us. Someone asked why. "Simple," he said. "This did not happen in Germany. Nineteen men did not act in concert. If only we had....." And then, when he was leaving, after having been congratulated by a member of the Thomas Committee, and his fearsome wonder at what he had said wrong, he told us, "Do not engage in hopeful rationalizations. Do not say 'This is the face of fascism' or 'this is the road to fascism'this is fascism. Do not break ranks. They will try to divide you. If they succeed they will subdivide you and subdivide you more until you are one. And when you are one....." Brecht then made a German noise -- a guttural German noise -- which the vowels and consonants of our Anglo-Saxon language cannot simulate.

This all accounts partly for what we said there --- or if you are a purist -- what we didn't say there. It seemed easy with the propulsion of these ideas and those people -- to do what we did.

But what about you, assembled here, and those people I've referred to? What did you face? I need not recall the most divisive -- the most Goebbels-like propaganda campaign -- that it was the pleasure of certain sections of the American press to inflict upon you.

You lived in a context in which it was dangerous to support ideas which only yesterday were the fashionable chit-chat of swank parties...You found, in this context, that the century of the common man begun a few years ago, transmuted into its opposite - transmuted into a century of the loyalty oath. You were intimidated by your employers - frightened by your neighbors, buffeted by rumor, by threats.... ~~It could be more simply demonstrated if, at this point, I passed out among you all the adjectives in a Roget's Theasurous.~~

But you saw the conflagration that was lighted in Washington by the Thomas Committee... And you could see the fires that were lighted elsewhere by other Thomas Committees... And you could see they were American Reichstag fires -- and you could see the ideas that were being thrown into these fires.

And then you had a choice -- to stand by and watch the flames grow as some have done -- or to move forward and put the fires out.

The fact that you are here, qualifies you as members of a people's fire department.

Which is why we pay our tribute to you. And we pay tribute to the ideas which you represent. Ideas, if this generation is to see peace, must now be generously and vigorously re-established. We must see to it that in any struggle which exists between property and people (as in Palestine) that people are more important -- that all the Arabian king's horses and his men and his oil are not worth one yet unborn Arab or Jewish child....

We must see to it that the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter are realities -- and not catchwords of a dying liberal thought. We must see a forthright renewal of the attempt to establish equality for minorities.

We must, in short, see to it that the progressive tradition - whether at home, or abroad, in the office or in the home - must follow the architectural design we have inherited from Franklin Roosevelt.

Thank you.

Adrian Scott speech, March 5, 1948.

Courtesy Adrian Scott Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming-Laramie.