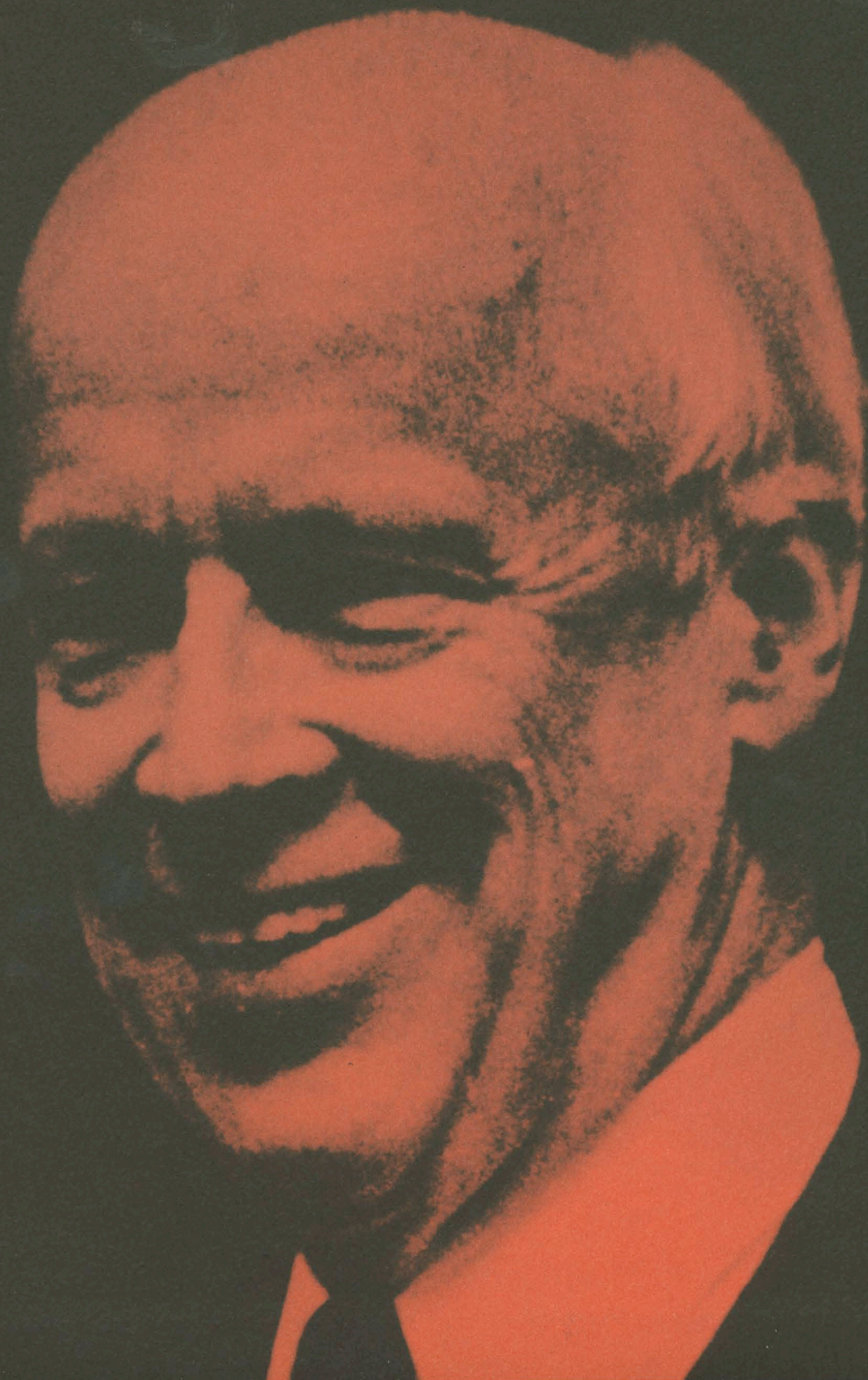


**THE MINORITY
PARTY
IN AMERICA**
featuring an interview with
NORMAN THOMAS
Produced by Howard Langer

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FH 5512

"For at all the levels of our national life, each man is sometimes called upon to stand for what he believes to be right against the pressures and opinions of friends, fellow workers, constituents or the force of popular attitude. At such a time each individual must look within himself for the resources to pursue his own course. But all the rest of us can contribute to the vitality of our democracy by refusing to join in unreasoning attacks upon those with whom we disagree; and by respecting them for having the strength to wage such a lonely struggle." President John F. Kennedy



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1961
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THE MINORITY PARTY IN AMERICA

featuring an interview with **NORMAN THOMAS**

Produced by Howard Langer

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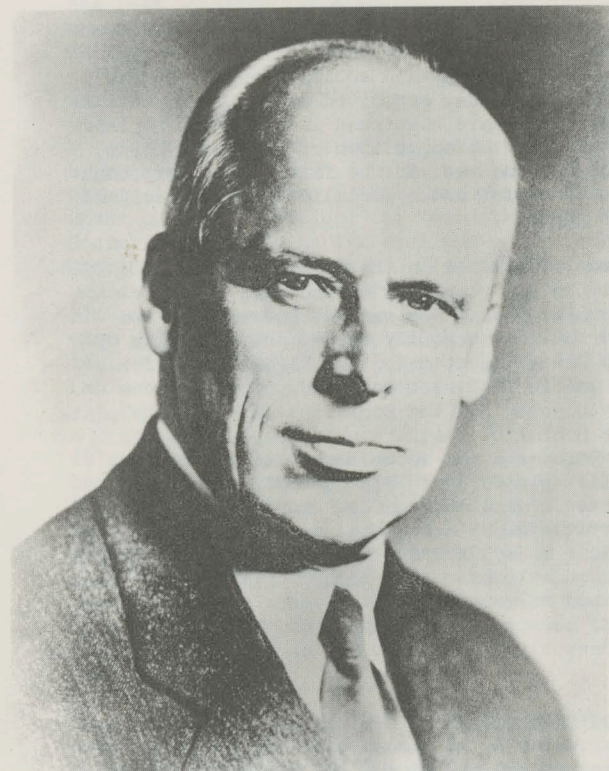
THE MINORITY PARTY IN AMERICA

FEATURING AN INTERVIEW

WITH

NORMAN THOMAS

Produced by HOWARD LANGER



BIOGRAPHY OF NORMAN THOMAS

(An edited version of this is heard on the recording)

Norman M. Thomas was born in Marion, Ohio. His ancestors were Presbyterian preachers and his father was then pastor of the Presbyterian church in Marion. Young Thomas had the usual odd jobs of a boy of his time in that sort of town and at one period had what was called a newspaper route. The paper was The Star, the property of Warren G. Harding.

Norman graduated the high school in Marion in 1901 and in that summer his family moved to Lewisburg, Pa., seat of Bucknell University, in which he spent his freshman year. He then entered Princeton University as a sophomore and was graduated in 1905. He then did church and settlement work in New York and was graduated at Union Theological Seminary in 1911.

After graduation, he became pastor of the East Harlem Church and chairman of the American Parish, an aggregation of religious and social agencies on the upper East Side (of New York), supported by the Presbyterian Church. He might have continued indefinitely in the field, but aroused the great opposition of contributors to his work because he was, in the First World War, both a religious pacifist and a Socialist. Hence he resigned, having founded a monthly magazine, The World Tomorrow, of which he was editor. This was supported by the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He also helped to form the American Civil Liberties Bureau which became the American Civil Liberties Union.

He first ran for office on the Socialist ticket in 1924 and after that was regularly a candidate for some office for many years. He ran for governor of New York and mayor of New York City twice and for President of the United States six times. His highest vote for President was in 1932 when some 900,000 votes were counted for the Socialist ticket (there were a great many not counted). The platform was a Socialist platform going beyond the immediate demands which later the Democrats and Republicans accepted. It is, however, true that the Socialist platform of 1932 came far

nearer anticipating the reforms made under Franklin Roosevelt and accepted by the Republicans than any documents of the old parties. Mr. Thomas today is chairman of the Post War World Council, an active member of many committees, a writer, and a lecturer.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This interview was conducted early in 1960, and reflects Mr. Thomas' feelings about individual political personalities at that time. In the light of changing national and international developments, he might speak differently--either better or worse--about some of the personalities under discussion.

SIDE I, Band 1:

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDING

MR. LANGER:

America has a two-party political system. Yet minority parties continue to pop up on national, state, and local ballots. What is their role on the American political scene?

In a few moments, we will be asking Mr. Norman Thomas --one of America's most distinguished and respected minority party leaders--to discuss this subject with us.

This is Howard Langer in New York. Directly across the table--tall, thin, grey-haired--is the dynamic head of the American Socialist Party.

Norman Mattoon Thomas was born in Marion, Ohio. His ancestors were Presbyterian preachers and his father was pastor of the Presbyterian church in Marion. Young Thomas had the usual odd jobs of a boy of his time in a small town. At one period he had a newspaper route. The paper was The Star, owned by Warren G. Harding.

Norman Thomas became pastor of the East Harlem Church and chairman of the American Parish. This was an aggregation of religious and social agencies on New York's upper East Side, supported by the Presbyterian Church. He might have continued indefinitely in this field but aroused the opposition of contributors to his work because he was, in the First World War, both a religious pacifist and a Socialist. So he resigned his church posts.

He first ran for office on the Socialist ticket in 1924. After that, he was regularly a candidate for some office for many years. He ran for governor of New York, mayor of New York City twice, and president of the United States six times. His highest vote for president was in 1932 when some 900,000 votes were officially counted for the Socialist ticket. The platform was a Socialist platform going beyond demands which the Democrats and Republicans later accepted. The Socialist platform of 1932 came far nearer anticipating the reforms made under Franklin Roosevelt and accepted by the Republicans than any documents of the old parties. Today, Mr. Thomas is chairman of the Post War World Council, an active member of many committees, a writer, and a lecturer.

STUDY GUIDE SUGGESTIONS

1. Define: socialism, Communism, state capitalism, welfare state, federalism, direct election, proportional representation.
2. Identify: White Party, No-Nothing Party, New Deal, "End Poverty in California."
3. Why should labor union officials oppose third party candidates?
4. Comment on "A platform ain't to stand on--it's to get in on." Compare and contrast the Republican and Democratic platforms of 1960, 1956, 1940, 1936.
5. Write a theme on how third parties help, or hinder, American democracy.
6. In 1960, the Socialist Party decided NOT to run a candidate for President. What effect would this have on the strength of the Socialist Party? The Democratic Party? The Republican Party?
7. Comment on Thomas' statement: "Franklin Roosevelt was elected the first time because he wasn't Hoover." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
8. Why does the Electoral College tend to perpetuate our two-party system?
9. Identify the following personalities: Robert La Follette, Jasper McLevy, Frank Zeidler, Eugene Debs, Huey Long, Upton Sinclair, Joseph R. McCarthy, C.C. Burlingame.

10. "In a democracy," says Thomas, "there's got to be pressure." Comment.
11. What would be a fair method of allocating "equal" radio and TV time for political candidates?
12. "Roosevelt wasn't a man with political principles," says Thomas, "he was a supreme pragmatist." What can you find out about Roosevelt's actions to either justify or disprove this statement?
13. Says Thomas about free enterprise: "The only persons that really practice free enterprise are small boys playing marbles for keeps." Discuss.

Howard Langer is editor of Scholastic Teacher magazine. He has produced a recorded interview series for Folkways Records, including interviews with William O. Douglas, Margaret Chase Smith, Robert M. Hutchins, Al Capp, Margaret Mead, James A. Farley, Eleanor Roosevelt.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. NORMAN THOMAS SIDE I, Band 2:

MR. LANGER:

Mr. Thomas, what is the function of a minority party in America?

MR. THOMAS:

In the broadest and deepest sense of the word, it's educational.

If you look back at history you will note that no third party ever came to power politically in America. The Republican Party is not an exception. The Republican Party was the second party in its first national election. It completely supplanted the Whig Party which disintegrated. Nevertheless, the existence of third parties has been very much more important than the average superficial historian has allowed.

All the ideas were first advanced by the small minority parties, beginning with free public schools by the workman's party and going on down to modern times. I don't mean that all minority parties were good either, they weren't. There was, for instance, about the middle of the last century, there was the very bad No-Nothing party which fortunately was defeated.

MR. LANGER:

Well, what do you feel have been the Socialist Party's contributions to America?

MR. THOMAS:

Well, again, as it turned out, mostly educational but educational in a very important sense. It would be hard to get some of the young people to understand the difference in the discussion of socialism and of social issues between my youth and the present time. For instance, when I was young the great argument was that without the profit motive and without a laissez faire type of free enterprise you could get no industrial or economic progress. By now, we know better and now I've lived to hear people say to me, "Well, how do you expect us to keep up with the Russians, they can plan."

Now, I don't like the Russian planning and I think its more of a kind of state capitalism with planning and welfare benefit than it is true socialism, but nevertheless, the whole long socialist agitation did emphasize the fact that in the world into which we were entering with industry was a world in which necessarily there had to be cooperation, there had to be integration, there had to be a great deal more planning than in simpler times. The Socialist Party carried that message and it carried with a conscience.

I don't mean we were always perfect and we didn't make mistakes, but we said, and we said it because we meant it with some conscientious earnestness that this planning had to be in terms of the good of all for the conquest of poverty.

Now, some of the plans we had advocated we would change ourselves, some of them have been fulfilled, others haven't, but the great emphasis still continues that in the modern world peace and prosperity and freedom depend upon the triumph of the principle of cooperation between men and between nations over the principle of strife. This principle of cooperation alone will enable us properly to use our magnificent technology everywhere for the conquest of poverty.

MR. LANGER:

You say some of your points have been adopted, do you mean things like social security?

MR. THOMAS:

Yes, of course.

I'm not going to say, as some people say to me, "You're responsible for all the things that were done by the New Deal." Not necessarily. Many of the things that we advocated were piecemeal advocated by other people. For instance, if you'll look back at the first platform of the Socialist Party to which I belong on which Gene Debs ran, you will see that they spoke about income tax, about woman suffrage, and so on, things that other people also were after. They were against child labor, so were other people. But the Socialist Party pioneered on something like a comprehensive program.

The Socialist Party also pioneered quite specifically on such ideas as the responsibility of the government as a government if there was unemployment. You must remember that back in the time of Grover Cleveland he had vetoed a bill which provided nothing more than seeds for the benefit of farmers in Texas who had suffered terribly from drought and he wrote a rather famous and sincere and ponderous message, the gist of which was that he was sorry for the farmers but in America the citizens had to support the government not the government the citizens.

This idea -- the change in that -- the enormous change in that was primarily advocated by Socialists and the expression of it in social security, in guaranteed collective bargaining, these things were in so far as they were foreshadowed were far better foreshadowed in our platform and speeches than in anything the Republicans and Democrats said, which doesn't mean that we always were perfect. I remember that as far as I know, some historian may prove otherwise, but as far as I know, the first municipal platform in America which in a little detail outlined a program, not just a proposal but a program for housing was the platform I ran on for Mayor of New York in 1924. As I look back on it I know it was quite inadequate but it was a pioneer effort and it was an effort made at a time when we hadn't the slightest idea that Congress would give any money or that if Congress voted

it the Supreme Court could declare it constitutional. Lots of things have happened, progress along those lines.

So I think that the greatest contribution of the Socialist Party, again, is -- has been educational. It's got a lot of work still to do.

MR. LANGER:

Well, you say it has a lot of work to do and yet in the last presidential election the candidate of the Socialist Party polled something like -- oh, something a little over 2,000 votes.

MR. THOMAS:

I thought myself, if I may say so now, that it was a great mistake to run. In fact, I came to the conclusion along about, oh, along about 1950, that under present conditions the best strategy for the Socialist Party to do its work was not to nominate candidates for president and vice president who would have to stand rather than run. I am not criticizing the devoted men who did try to run, but what was the trouble? The trouble was that increasingly it is difficult to get on ballots as these men were only on, I don't know, two or three states -- I forget myself.

It's increasingly expensive to run and increasingly there is a definite opposition of organized labor to Socialist nominations for president and vice president, the reason being practical. (Labor leaders) say that you are likely to draw off from voters we need to see that our preferred candidate gets in rather than the other fellow. It may be because they like a preferred candidate or because they hate his opponent, but in any case they don't want the Socialist Dream.

The last time I ran in 1948 as I remember it the only employers who were quoted to me as having said to their employees "Don't work for the Socialists" were labor unions and progressive labor unions at that. This is largely the explanation. This situation has been developing mostly since Roosevelt put in the New Deal. Before that back in Debs' time we could pretty honestly say, "Well, there isn't enough difference for you to worry about anyway." You could say that of the platforms as late as 1932. Its been increasingly hard to say it and get away with it since.

I don't know that this will always be true, the future is something else. There has been a sort of a standstill which I do not think will continue, (there) will be again a ferment for more progress along these lines and then what will happen I don't predict. Meanwhile, I want the Socialist Party to continue as an educational force, as a leavening force, perhaps nominating candidates in Congressional Districts where they might have a chance. This is personal. Not all Socialists agree. If they had agreed with what I am saying they wouldn't have nominated the last time.

MR. LANGER:

Well, let's see, you ran for president six times starting in 1928 and ending in 1948. Which times did you poll the highest?

MR. THOMAS:

Oh, much the highest in '32. I got around nine hundred thousand, some were thrown out so -- very un-

fairly I may say - and a great many more weren't counted. A political student, a journalist at the time, made a careful study and decided that we got about two million.

You must remember that in those days and especially with paper ballots, in small towns particularly, it was such a chore to count the ballots and to find out who won that they said "What difference does it make, these boys are licked." This aside from plain theft.

I never felt like making too much of a sad face about it because a party ought to be strong enough to watch out for the counting of votes if it wants to win, but we were always pretty systematically defrauded of a good many votes.

MR. LANGER:

What accounted for the rise and fall of your individual vote? Was it pretty much economic times?

MR. THOMAS:

Almost wholly Roosevelt. We won't even say it was just economic. It was the economic program of Roosevelt expressed in the personality of Roosevelt. Roosevelt was elected the first time because he wasn't Hoover.

It's hard for a young man like you to know how the opinion changed about Roosevelt. I can swear that in '32 there wasn't any tremendous enthusiasm for Roosevelt. There was considerable admiration of him for his physical courage, but I myself was a tremendously surprised man to hear his inaugural address. Nothing that had happened led me to think that he'd say what he said or do what he has done. The whole country was surprised and most of it was enormously pleased and by '36 people were voting for Roosevelt I assure you and they continued that while he continued to live, not always with the same fervor but with considerable fervor.

SIDE I, Band 3:

MR. LANGER:

Well, America today is virtually a two party system, do you think this is good or bad?

MR. THOMAS:

Oh, it's awfully hard to give a categorical answer. It can be argued. You could have a nice high school debate on the subject.

In general, I would say that it was good. Anyway, I will certainly say that it's practically necessary under our system of electing a president. Let me remind you that in order to be elected president of the United States you don't get a majority of the popular vote or even a plurality. You get an absolute majority of an electoral college which gives, by the way, considerable advantage to the smaller states in respect to representation.

A vote in South Carolina for various reasons, I once figured, is worth about six votes in New York in the weight that it has. Alright, you've got to get a majority of the electoral college. If you don't get a clear majority the election goes into the House of Representatives where each state has one vote New York and Nevada, and this is very undesirable.

Back in 1924 when we Socialists promoted a king of coalition it wasn't union with the Wisconsin La Follette progressives and ran the elder LaFollette and did pretty well. It seemed as if we were doing so well that toward the end of the campaign the newspapers raised everywhere the cry, "A vote for LaFollette is a vote to send the election to the House of Representatives." We lost, I'm sure, hundreds of thousands of votes.

The situation is made to order for two parties. Our founding fathers were great men but on this they miscalculated. They thought that the electoral college bypassed politics. Only the good men would select a better man for president. Actually, they forced upon us a two party system - rather disadvantageously in my judgment.

I have frequently said to my English friends who are perhaps a little skeptical that we would probably have had a strong - about a strong a Socialist Party as their Labor Party provided we had a parliamentary system such as they have, a centralized system - we've got a federal system where fifty states now determine the qualifications to get on the ballot and so on; - and (further) provided that we had a direct election instead of the king of election that we have.

MR. LANGER:

Do you think proportional representation would help you some, too?

MR. THOMAS:

Well, no, not much. I'll come to that in another connection.

I have advocated and I think in practically every campaign a constitutional amendment and you'd be amazed how little interest I ever succeeded in arousing - either during the campaign or out of it.

The constitution of the United States ought to be amended so that we elect directly the president of the United States, the one man who represents us all. There should be uniform qualifications not one set in Alabama and another in New York, uniformly applied. There should be uniform provisions for getting on the ballot not separate provisions in each of fifty states which is the present condition. However, in order to prevent, I've said, a man getting elected president by say thirty percent of the vote because you had so big a field fix or six splitting the vote, it should be necessary either that there be a runoff between the two highest candidates in case nobody gets a majority, or at any rate almost a majority, or else there should be what I would (prefer, namely) preferential voting, whereby you would number your ballots or you could do it on a machine if the machine is properly constructed voting your order of choices. If your first choice was low man, your second choice (would) count, and so on. It's not an unfamiliar system at all and would be easily learned. Naturally, I have a selfish interest for it because notably in '32 had there been a system like that I would have had a very large vote and even other years I would have had it. You don't know how often people say, "Well, Mr. Thomas, I thought I'd vote for you or I wanted to vote for you, but I was afraid (the man) would win, you know, (thom I especially) don't like." This is the thing that I have advocated and that I am still advocating.

SIDE I, Band 4:

MR. LANGER:

Major parties are pressured by manufacturers, and labor groups and veterans groups and so forth, there must be some pressures that are put on you?

MR. THOMAS:

Well, of course all parties are pressured and it depends on how you define pressure and how you're thinking about it, whether you think it's bad.

I have letters, you know, denouncing pressure politics by such and such a group and ending saying, "Be sure to write to your congressman," which is just another form of pressure.

In a democracy there's got to be pressure. What do you have a democracy for? What's wrong is the type of pressure which uses very unfair or dubious means. What's wrong is the pressure that depends upon - primarily upon money or some unfair advantage. What's wrong is that pressure so strong against a political office holder so weak that he is swayed by pressure rather than by any principle or even by loyalty to the supposed program of his party. That's what's wrong and it's very wrong, but you don't deal with that wrong by a blanket speech denouncing pressure politics. You want to say what you're bleating, what pressure group and what particular forms of action it uses.

One thing that ought to be clear and is now much clearer than it used to be, pressure groups should be labelled they should be registered, we should know who's doing what. Lobbyists now are registered in Washington.

MR. LANGER:

Would the same kind of groups be putting pressure on you, such as the labor groups, etc.?

MR. THOMAS:

Oh yes! Of course! Depending on how important they thought it should be. The Socialist Party never was strong enough to get quite the kind of pressure. Our pressures are pretty much internal and are consequent upon our real democracy.

You must know that while Socialists agree in a general principle, and work hard, that there never was a time when Socialists were monolithically united and you get the pressure between those who think you ought to emphasize immediate demands especially the immediate demands for their group, and those who think you ought to emphasize the complete overhaul of society. You get the pressure group of certain farm interests the pressure group -- inside the party - of labor. We've dealt with it I think fairly well and that pressure has never been connected with payola.

MR. LANGER:

Well, maybe one of the reasons ... Take a Congressman who is elected. He has gotten some support by -- a manufacturer, say, who would like very much to have heavy duties put on a competing foreign product. This man feels duty bound to come up with some kind of legislation to protect his friend. Now if there were Socialists in power I guess they would be subjected to almost the same --

MR. THOMAS:

Yes, but his friend wouldn't be one man. It would be a group and in protecting that group you would be carrying out pretty much the spirit of the platform. That is to say your platform would be pretty much of a guide of the limits in which you are operating.

We never had too much reason to test ourselves, we only had two Congressmen, both of them men of strength. Myer London here from New York and Victor Berger from Wisconsin.

One of our misfortunes, I have always felt, was that for some reason we are more successful in electing around the country in the days of our greater voting strength -- we are more successful in electing people to executive offices, like Mayors, than we were to legislative.

Ideally we should have elected people that changed laws rather than people to enforce laws, some of which we were trying to change. But that isn't the way it worked out. We had the Mayor of Milwaukee, who's still a Socialist -- I mean the present Mayor of Milwaukee Frank Zeidler is a Socialist, a very active and well known Socialist. They elect him out there on a non-partisan ballot. We had a lot of Mayors in days gone by.

MR. LANGER:

Mayor McLevy of Bridgeport is another.

MR. THOMAS:

Mayor McLevy was elected I don't know how many times.

SIDE I, Band 5:

MR. LANGER:

You mentioned before the party platform. Now this is another point. Now, Franklin Roosevelt, I guess he was half serious, he once said that -- he quoted a streetcar conductor that "A platform ain't to stand on. It's to get in on."

MR. THOMAS:

Well, Mr. Roosevelt and his conductor never made that one up, that's very old, and of course it's very true. So true that it's hardly arguable. I'd go a little farther, though. The party platforms of the old parties are written to get the temporary cessation of quarreling between party groups. They therefore say as little as possible that is definite and explicit and they are usually forgotten except when it suits the candidate to trot out one plank in one place. Before radio, before television that was the usual custom. You could take the plank you like when you're talking to farmers another plank when you talk to workers, but it's a little harder to do now.

It's amazing how little regard is really paid even by the major party candidates to platforms. We Socialists had to. We got a watchful party. We had to pay more attention to it, but even we weren't absolutely bound.

Let me give you an illustration of what I mean. The first time I ran back in 1928 I think it was in Boston, and I wanted to make a reference to a Republican platform and I found I didn't have it with me. I was staying at a hotel very near the main headquarters and I thought I'd like to see what Republi-

can headquarters looked like anyway and I went around. In those days I wasn't too well known so I didn't have any difficulty getting by the guard or anything like that and I asked for a platform. They hunted all around and couldn't find the platform. They had all sorts of literature or alleged literature, I (shudder to) think what Shakespeare would have said about it, but they didn't have a platform. It was that unimportant. The platform was Cal Coolidge that year and what a platform that was. Anyway he wasn't Harding.

SIDE I, Band 6:

MR. LANGER:

Now, you mention radio and television. For some years now, this FCC ruling on equal time has been going along quite well, now it seems like the networks have been trying to put pressure on Congress to change this. What do you think about that?

MR. THOMAS:

Well, so literal an interpretation as was given in '56 to the equal time was really pretty well impossible. I'll say that as a minority party man.

I never felt that you could claim absolute equal time. In the days that I was very active I got along pretty well with the networks -- well after the very early days of radio. The first five times I was supposed to be on radio they ruled me out, so rigorous was their censorship. But we arrived at a pretty good working agreement later on I guess its pretty nearly as far back as '28. It was that until the convention the big companies would not sell time to candidates. They would give it and they would treat Socialists the same way. They wouldn't necessarily give us as much but they'd give us a pretty fair break, which they did. After the last convention they wouldn't give anybody time, they sold it and they sold it on even terms and this worked pretty well except that we never had the money to buy much time. This was very unfortunate for us.

Later, in years when I haven't been so active, there have been modifications, on the whole for the worst. A greater emphasis on the strict interpretation of the law. For instance, some unknown whose name I have now forgotten managed to get himself (on the ballot) in one state - Maine? In (a radio speech) he derided and denounced quite falsely the Socialist Party, so I had a right to get time representing the party.

I forget which network had made the mistake of letting this fellow on, but they were very worried. Well I said he's so unimportant nobody seems to have paid any attention, so all I'll ask you to do is to read a statement simply saying -- you know, in what language is permissible on the radio, that he's a damn liar. (I think a record can use the word.) Which they did. That kind of thing is foolish.

Of course, the whole subject needs to be overhauled. You ought to do one of two or three things. Either you should do what Walter Lippman, among others, has suggested, namely either the government or a private group of citizens should launch a completely independent system free of advertising, supported either by subsidy as a public service or as private universities are supported. Or perhaps in addition to that a rule should be adopted which I have urged ever since radio came into being, unsuccessfully, that is, that every station, television, radio, as part of the great privilege of enjoying one of a

limited number of channels should give X hours of good listening time for the discussion of public issues. You might have local committees that would advise you on what the public issues were. There are a dozen ways you could handle that.

During campaigns the time should be for campaign purposes and it should be equitably divided between all parties that get on the ballot in the different states and I think there ought to be further laws that no party out of sheer wealth could be allowed to buy an indefinite further amount of time. This would give us a fair discussion of public issues and would be comparatively easy to work out if we had to will. We need something of it, for its a real scandal that the report of the Gore sub-committee on the enormous amount of money spent, without bribery, in the last campaign got no action at all from Congress. Very belatedly the Senate has adopted somewhat better rules on campaign contributions that haven't gotten through the House yet. Even they are inadequate and a large part of the trouble is the amount of money you can legitimately spend for spot time on television and all. I think there's a diminishing return about it. I don't think it produces the returns that people think. I think on much less time you (could) get far more attention of the voters if it were properly handled and properly managed. This I feel very strongly about, and this along with the -- what I've said about the direct election of the president is one of the subjects that I've gotten least attention from the public about.

MR. LANGER:

You mentioned the television time which is quite expensive, I have heard quotes that it may cost as much as fifteen million dollars to elect a president. How could the Socialist Party come anywhere near that?

MR. THOMAS:

Of course it couldn't and this is one of the really very serious things. Not only about Socialists but any other new party that's formed. It's got progressively worse -- ever so much worse.

For instance, one half hour or an hour, I don't know for sure, I have known but have forgotten, good listening time over a television to cover the United States costs more money than I ever had or the Socialist Party ever had in any of my campaigns. Just one of them.

MR. LANGER:

About how much did the Socialist Party spend in the last presidential election? Roughly.

MR. THOMAS:

Oh, I have no idea but next to nothing, it was hardly a race, it was just a sort of a soul saving form to nominate somebody, if you mean '56?

In '48 I guess we spent about, well it was under one hundred thousand, very considerably. The most that we ever spent was probably around one hundred and fifty thousand, along about '32 and I think that will include an independent committee at the same time.

In '36 the Socialist Party ran a quite lively campaign. I think the party and the independent committee -- well there wasn't much of an independent committee -- it was under fifty thousand. I think

the party only raised about twenty five or thirty thousand. Imagine that.

MR. LANGER:

Where did it get its money from? Individuals mostly?

MR. THOMAS:

Oh, yes. In the old days occasionally a union would give something. Mostly it is individuals and we used in the old days of Debs and in my campaign, we used to take collections. That was a very important business for us. Taking collections. And we used to get quite a lot of money out of audiences when we got them stirred up. But believe me it's a problem.

We did have some fairly well to do friends who gave rather generously, not always wanting to advertise the fact. They gave not because they thought we were going to do anything for them, it was a sort of satisfaction of their own conscience.

SIDE II, Band 1:

MR. LANGER:

One other point I'd like to ask you about is this. More and more the major parties are relying on television in major convention coverage, and some political observers think there's too much of a tendency to put on a show for the public. Do you think this is true?

MR. THOMAS:

There is that tendency and it was very bad in '48, the first year that television was used. I think it has grown less. The public's gotten more and more used to television and I think is more and more demanding that there be a television of these conventions. On the whole I think the preponderance is on the side of the good rather than on the side of the hurtful effect of television. It's a good thing for people to see what kind of a crazy show the average political convention is. It's educational, and mind you, it didn't take television to make them crazy. They were crazy before.

For instance, the incredibly stupid business that you have to put on a twenty minute demonstration after the nomination of any candidate. I literally saw this done back in '52, in Chicago, and I was almost ashamed to have to look at it. General MacArthur had been nominated. He had said he didn't want to be and any juice there was to his campaign had faded away, but some diehard had nominated him and they felt obliged to demonstrate twenty minutes. Everybody -- he had left, himself, he had left Chicago -- everybody knew he hadn't a chance, and they had one of the sorriest parades around that big hall I ever saw. And some Chicago newspapermen -- I was covering it at the time -- some Chicago newspapermen said, "You know, these are skid row bums, a lot of them, we know them when we see them. This is pathetic." And this is part of the show.

I remember some foreign correspondent said to me about that time, "We don't understand what you people are going." I said, "Neither do we, we just do it."

MR. LANGER:

Along the same line, there's the whole matter of the public relations organization running a political show. In other words, they're out to sell the candidate. Do you think this is to the good?

MR. THOMAS:

No, I don't think it's to the good. Ideally, you ought to -- the people who believe in a candidate ought to get together. You oughtn't -- even Billy Graham doesn't hire an advertising agency on Madison Avenue to sell the Gospel, and I suggest that to the Republicans. But when you know how some Republican campaigners are and how dull, you see why they want to do something a little better than that.

That goes also for some Democrats. I don't want to see any Democrat get too happy at this point. Campaigns are pretty dull, you know. If the average Congressman wasn't a little better and a little more responsible once he got in Congress than he is when he's talking "God save America," and he'd have a worse job saving it than today. I said the average (congressman) - there are the citizens. We are too willing to excuse ourselves because we're so foolish and we're so easily imposed upon. I get a little tired of that continual line. "Well, what can we do, the public relations man is our rock, and we're a lot of suckers." I don't like that public relations people employed in this capacity but I don't think it's the major fault in our present life.

SIDE II, Band 2:

MR. LANGER:

Now, I'd like to call off the names of some of these -- well, I'll call them famous, or in some cases notorious political figures, and I'd like you to tell me what you think they have contributed for good or evil to America.

Let's start off with Eugene Debs.

MR. THOMAS:

Oh, he contributed a great deal, not just as a candidate but as a man. He did embody the desires of the conscientiously radical wing of labor and of the American public. He was a man of very high character, of great personal charm, of much courage. I would not say he was the greatest systematic thinker in the world but he was a man of tremendous sincerity, tremendous devotion. His contribution was great and should not be forgotten, not only as a Socialist but in the earlier days as a labor organizer.

MR. LANGER:

How about Franklin Roosevelt?

MR. THOMAS:

Well, Franklin Roosevelt as President did a thing that absolutely had to be done. I was critical of the way he did it, often. And in retrospect I wouldn't withdraw my criticisms. I might make them less strongly but by and large he did what had to be done to save American democracy. I don't think the average American -- especially the average young American -- has any real idea, and a lot of people who are older want to forget, in what a desperate

strait we were. We were in a desperate strait because of the depression and its unmitigated burden on all sorts of people - your middle class people, too. And in that situation there was a profound distrust in democracy, even after the popular vote had gone to Roosevelt.

But in that long gap -- now somewhat shortened by Constitutional Amendment -- (after the election and) before his inauguration I found -- I was still travelling and speaking in all sorts of places -- I found the most extreme cynicism about democracy, and (doubt) that you could do anything by it.

If Roosevelt hadn't been elected, or if he had been cheated of the election, I hate to think what would have happened to American democracy. The Socialist Party would have been stronger, the Communist Party certainly would have been stronger, but I'm afraid that a sort of American fascism of the type -- oh, foreshadowed by Huey Long and Father Coghlin would have taken the field. Roosevelt, wasn't a man with political principles, he was a supreme pragmatist. You notice I said political principles -- I'm not denying the general excellence of his intentions.

He did quite contradictory things sometimes. But he did something -- there was action. And he was able to change and steer his action. This pragmatism fitted the mood and temperament of the American people. And while I thought that we socialists could have often plotted a more logical and consistent program, he did get the things done. Somehow or other these things were done. And I think that by and large we came near to having a peaceful social revolution, so great were the changes between '33, his inauguration, and let's say, '38, let's say the validation of the Wagner Labor Act by the Supreme Court, and the successful founding of the United Automobile Workers.

After that the New Deal kind of ran down and there came along of course the foreign crises, and later the President was to say that Dr. New Deal became Dr. Win the War. I think Roosevelt was a very able and satisfactory war president on the whole. I do not think he can be so well judged as to his approach to peace. That his intentions were good, yes. But he was fooled pretty much I'm afraid by Stalin, and gambled too much on the hope of cooperating with Stalin in peace as in war. On that basis he favored the U.N. where the emphasis was on the Security Council. I do not think the handling of the approach to peace was good. It was very unfortunate that we had nothing but a program of unconditional surrender which is negative. It was very unfortunate that at the Cairo Conference, for instance, all that we and the English had to offer to Asia was to break the Japanese yoke which meant the restoration of the French, the Dutch and for that matter the English rule, and made the whole subsequent history very much harder. I deeply regretted that at the time. It was unfortunate that Roosevelt, advised by his military men, apparently was at one time so trustful of Stalin that he gambled on running the world in conjunction with Stalin, and yet so distrustful of him that he thought he'd make a separate peace with Hitler unless he got almost everything. And we made far too many concessions at that time, in my judgment. That's a long story, but of the period between '33, his inauguration, and say, '38, he accomplished something that -- at least he led in the accomplishment of something that was the salvation of the United States, quite literally, and of our democracy. And he did it without giving very much ground for anticipating it in his campaign of '32.

MR. LANGER:

You mentioned Huey Long. He was somebody else on my list. Huey Long.

MR. THOMAS:

A very interesting demagogue, a clown, a playboy; but nevertheless a man of great force and native power. He could argue, they say, in dignified fashion before the Supreme Court. He didn't always have to clown. Along with a good deal that was bad, along with tolerance of corruption and the rest of it, he did do some good things in Louisiana, even to the building up of the State University, in spite of the fact that he controlled the university in a very bad, unsatisfactory way.

Nevertheless, by and large what he stood for was a native demagogic type of American fascism, less militaristic than in Europe but which would have been awfully bad for the country.

MR. LANGER:

How about Upton Sinclair. You remember "End Poverty in California"?

MR. THOMAS:

Oh, I've known Upton Sinclair for years and years. I like and admire him. He's an indefatigable writer of books, some of which have had a real influence. He himself said of his most famous book, "Jungle" that he tried to reach the heart of America and he reached the stomach. That had to do with conditions in the stockyards, you'll remember.

But by and large he reached to a very considerable extent the heart and head of America by his very voluminous writing. His "End Poverty in California" was interesting, and probably stimulating, and there are those who think he really won. I don't know. I wasn't a hundred per cent crazy for that particular campaign that particular way. And I once hurt his feelings and I'm sorry I did because I liked him. After the event I told him that it wasn't really an epic plan but at best only a lyric. This, however, maybe wasn't a fair judgment. It wasn't adopted and life went on and went on fairly well because not so much of what was done in California but because of what was done in Washington.

MR. LANGER:

Richard Nixon.

MR. THOMAS:

Well, it's too early really to give any final judgments. We've got a campaign ahead and who knows what after that. The thing that's in my mind against Nixon was the way he campaigned. His campaign -- his first campaign against a friend of mine named Jerry Voorhes for Congress, his second against Helen Gehagen Douglas, his third, the famous soap opera -- that was bad, disgusting.

In a way that's a reversion. A while ago we were talking as I remember about public relations people and so on. And we may have given the impression that the times are worse than they used to be. Not by any means in every respect. Once a New York historical society had an exhibit of old campaign posters and so on. They called it "Hats in the Ring." And that exhibit brought to mind the very fierce way our ancestors campaigned, their recklessness in calling names. Nixon would look almost like a gentleman compared to some of those old timers.

Washington was the object of such wrath. Lincoln was the object of such indecent wrath. I remember before -- and there were no public relations people in this -- in my first campaign in '28, I'd gone down to Arkansas trying to build up the party and so on. I was there early, it was very hot and the Democrats were having their primaries. I think there were five candidates for governor and I gathered from the paper that four of them were candidates for the penitentiary.

I said, there's one fellow that seems to be left out. They said, oh well, we don't know much about him. He's too young. That fellow, I'll tell you, was Brooks Hayes who turned out quite well you know, in later times.

So, I don't want you to think that Nixon really invented something in bad campaigning. But he campaigned very badly, and this gave me a great prejudice against him. I think it has to be said that on his travels he's done surprisingly well, better than I would have imagined he could do. He's credited with quite a lot of ability. A man who's name you would know, only I have no right to quote it -- he said it almost jestingly in private conversation -- a very well known American speaking of Nixon said, "He's all right, he's able, everything's all right except his motives." This is something that I am not passing on finally but simply telling you the story. I shall watch with great eagerness to see how he campaigns now. Of course, he's in a very difficult position. He's got to run as the champion of Eisenhower's policies, or lack of policies, of course, and yet he's got to suggest that maybe he can do something.

He made a rather clever speech the other day in that direction.

MR. LANGER:

How about Harry Truman.

MR. THOMAS:

Truman interests me greatly. You know the old saying so often quoted that power corrupts -- or tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Truman proves that power doesn't always corrupt, that in a proper setting, in a democratic setting in educates, it develops, it calls out the best that's in a man. Truman will rank among our good presidents, perhaps among our great presidents. I don't think at the very top. There certainly was nothing in the life of this small time politician to indicate it.

I remember an interview that one of our Socialists got with him when he was nominated for Vice President. It was a very disappointing affair, on race for instance. Yet, he did brave, and good things on race, and on other matters. I came to like him, respect him. I still like him, very much, but I don't think that out of office he's lived up to what he did in office. I am not too much impressed with all his speeches.

MR. LANGER:

Senator Joseph McCarthy.

MR. THOMAS:

Oh, just a loss. Only thing good you could say there is that the fact we survived gave us perhaps a little immunity to the next McCarthy, I'm not sure. We may have learned something. I don't even think that he was an honest demagogue to the degree that Huey Long

was. Huey Long did really care after his fashion about the poor people from whose midst he had sprung. He did have a program -- maybe demagogic. McCarthy had no program but personal aggrandizement. He looked for issues, he almost stumbled into the big issue he found in his Wheeling speech. He never really had a program. And it was just a pretty despicable business.

MR. LANGER:

Dwight Eisenhower.

MR. THOMAS:

A good man, as everybody says, who did the country and the world a service as the Commander of these armies, even if he wasn't a brilliant military strategist, and I'm no judge. He certainly held together disparate groups in very fine style. When he was first talked of for President I was very much opposed on the ground that he hadn't had the political background or political training. He hadn't even voted until he was out of the Army. And I said that to a good many people then, and I think that the reasons I said it have been justified in his subsequent time. But I think there's a tendency right now for the sophisticated -- and especially if they're Democrats -- to go a little far in abuse of him, or denunciation of him. No policy, no this, no that. Well, he had about as much as they had in a lot of spheres, and in his own way he in general has really loved peace. It was a very good thing that he did the other day when he assured the Cubans that he intended no retaliatory measures.

He was, I think, very much on the side of peace when even Dulles on whom he depended seemed to be taking us to war about Ido-China, if you will remember. The only personal contact I ever had with him, when I finally succeeded in getting to him I found him very reasonable and he did what he promised, which was to stop some of his underlings from a process of firing from civil service -- especially from foreign service -- every Socialist. Meaning by Socialist, everybody who was for TVA.

I think history will have to -- in calmer times -- write the final score about Eisenhower. He is a man who in a amazing degree had the confidence of the people, father image or what you like, no man -- hardly Roosevelt -- had such high percentage of general approval. And at the same time few men have had such a unanimity among the sophisticated of criticism. And I think history will have to come in.

Some of the Democrats bore me a little with their criticism. I could turn the tables if I were running against them.

MR. LANGER:

Finally, what is your evaluation of the work of Norman Thomas.

MR. THOMAS:

I make no evaluation. Let other people do it. I will write no autobiography either.

MR. LANGER:

Well, let me ask you this in conclusion. If you were a young man perhaps considering a political career, which political party would you belong to and why?

MR. THOMAS:

I'd still be a Socialist I'm quite sure. I think our party is now coming up, we've drawn back some dissident elements, we've got committees working quite strongly on a statement of Socialism adequate to the times. The times have been profound changes which would make the old debate between Marxists and non-Marxists, or between the old orthodox economists and the Fabian society pretty irrelevant.

When Khrushchev was here for instance, that debate between Socialism and Capitalism, between him and his American hosts was beside the mark. What Khrushchev has got is welfare state capitalism controlled by a dictatorship which is doing pretty well economically, I must say. And has, as I already said, welfare features. It's anything but what Marx would call Socialism. He said Socialism would be achieved, by his definition, when the worker got the full product of his toil, which isn't true in Russia where the worker gets what the government, gives him. And the dictatorship has revived a great many extreme capitalist devices like incentive pay and the rest of it, its taxation is retrogressive and so on. I don't think that's Socialism. On the other hand, I don't think that what we've got is Capitalism by the pure definitions of my youth. It's a mixed up thing. It's a State Capitalism of a milder sort. It's a situation in which -- as a friend of mine whom I often quote says, "The only persons that really practice free enterprise are small boys playing marbles for keeps." They don't have any parity payments, any tariffs, any collective bargaining. We've got subsidies all over the map, all kinds of controls, by taxation, labor legislation, pretty good controls many of them, but we've got them.

So that we live in a time where we need to have some new thinking about pretty fundamental theory of social life and progress. Especially in the field of international relations. We're doomed if we're going to go on indefinitely claiming that the highest form of social organization is the absolute national state, whether that state's the size of Iceland or the United States, the size of Albania or the size of the USSR. We're just doomed, that's the modern idolatry. I believe in love of country, I believe in nationalism as an alternative to imperialism and as the principle of decentralization, but not as a god that you worship.

Now, we Socialists have been on the right track about that. We've been more international than others. We need to clarify and develop it. I think there's a tremendous appeal to being a Socialist now. A Socialist, because the Socialists more than anybody else have insisted that we have to have the dominance of the cooperative principle to conquer poverty in the world. A Socialist because Socialists more than anybody else have insisted on implementing internationalism. Right now, the Socialist International wants a one per cent contribution of the national income of every country, just income for a fund for the cooperative attack on poverty, which is more than other parties have said. Moreover, as Socialists, we're working at what's awfully difficult and we haven't gotten too far -- that is on the triumph of democracy as against its being crushed by bureaucracy.

These are things that I find a tremendous appeal in and I'd like to think a younger generation will find, and carry on beyond what we know and understand. So, I would be a Socialist if I were a young man. But I would be a Socialist and insist that the party, until the time had come when we could have a new alignment, when we could have perhaps a new grouping, that the Socialist Party shouldn't keep me from participating at election time with the major parties.

Until another day comes, perhaps, I wouldn't want to be a kind of eunuch, not being politically effective at all unless I could vote for a Socialist.

This I have said in Socialist ranks and I say it outside. I'd like therefore to be a Socialist who would be free in the region where I lived, to go into the primaries of the party that seemed to me the best or the least bad, for the candidate that seemed to me the best or the least bad, unless there could be a Socialist candidate.

This is the line I would want. As for a career, yes I want men who think well of politics as a career. You know, here I want to stand up a little for people who do go into politics, and for their honesty. Did you ever think for instance that the great source of dishonesty is the private person that does the bribing, the private corporation that does the bribing. I think the level of honesty is probably much higher in civil service, in the federal government at least, than it is in lots of corporations.

You don't have to feel as if you're giving away your character when you go into politics. Not if you've got some guts and some ideas of your own and have the courage to stand up for those ideas. On the other hand, I do not think that a young man does his best when he says, I am going to go into politics in order, come hell or high water, to be governor of New York, President of the United States, Senator, whatever. You better go into politics because you believe quite sincerely that on certain things depend our peace, our prosperity, our justice. And you ought to serve those ends. And you believe that you can serve them in office. But the ends are more important than whether or not you are elected. I do not think that I didn't accomplish anything because I wasn't elected. And I think I may have had more influence not being elected than if I had been elected and had to do things that I didn't want to do at all in order to be elected, or in order to keep office.

It's not an unhappy life, I assure you, to stand for what you believe and fight for it. It has its own compensations, its own satisfactions which aren't to be despised at all. By and large I'm inclined to think that we Socialists didn't throw away our votes under our two party system, especially in the years when we were active. Because we voted as we did, we had more influence in bringing about the changes that came with the New Deal than a lot of people that conventionally voted democratic in Mississippi, or Republican in Maine. That seems to me to be very obvious.

So that when I talk about young people in politics, I say this. There has to be some new formulation of ideals and programs in our bewildering world in which change has been so breathtaking. Some new formulation but along lines that are familiar, along lines of democracy and justice that we've always cared about. It's a tremendous challenge to try to help to make that, and if in making it you offer yourself for public office and are elected, you can greatly serve. But you can also serve sometimes if you're defeated, and you can also serve if you're never even a candidate.

To give a rather conspicuous example, at least in the City of New York, a lawyer named C. C. Burlingame died at the age of a hundred odd I don't know when. One of the most remarkable men I ever knew. He wasn't a Socialist, he was a Liberal. He was an exceedingly honest, witty, intelligent man with a

marvelous memory of the past. He was behind almost every decent movement here in New York. I don't think he ever even tried to be elected. He was a counselor to judges, Supreme Court judges would stop off in his old age to talk to him. It was a benediction. Well, that's the wrong, it was an inspiration of a sort to go to see him as I occasionally did. I'm not saying this because I agreed with everything he said or that he agreed with me. But that's the kind of man we need more of. He was a man of certain peculiar talents, but the general idea -- we won't have our democracy unless there are people who are willing to pay quite a price in hard effort. Democracy is -- a good democracy is not a simple and an instinctive thing. It requires work, it requires education, it requires effort, it requires a capacity to cooperate with others. Which means, if you like, sometimes you compromise because even in a family you can't get along by saying, like Luther, "Here stand I, I could do no other so help me God," all the time. You may have to say it once in a while.

Politics is in a sense the art of compromise, but it's the art of compromise of people who have a sense of direction, who know where they're going and who don't compromise too easily without a fight, as so often happens. It's by politics that we'll have peace or war in the end, no matter how much good will there is suffused. It's by politics that you will make an end of legal discriminations against the colored Americans and others. It's by politics that we'll come to grips with questions like -- well, in the end even birth control and the explosion of population, with all kinds of economic problems, with the proper guarding of our diminishing natural resources, with the proper extension of our technology, with the proper conquest of poverty throughout the world.

MR. LANGER:

Thank you very much, Mr. Norman Thomas.



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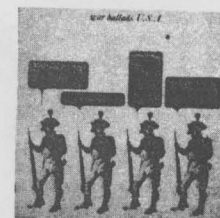
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Sixpence, I Don't Want to Join the Army, Gee But I Want to Go Home, The One-Eyed Riley, Bell Bottom Trousers, The Officers Ride the Whale Boats, Were You With The Marines, The Engineers, The Fighting Q.M.C.

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