

From the First Lady—A challenging reply to critics of some recent events in Washington

WHY I STILL BELIEVE



*Liberty
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it is not the youngsters, nor even what they do or what they say or think, but it is the circumstances which have led to these groups getting together which inspire people with fear. So far, these

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WHEN you and I were young, there was no need for a youth congress. We sat and listened to our elders. We went out, when the time came to earn a living, and we found jobs—at low wages, to be sure, and with pretty hard working conditions; but that was what we expected to find. We did the jobs, and a surprising number of us managed to find new avenues opening up, new opportunities, new worlds to conquer. The rest of us lived and died in drab and difficult surroundings, with our enjoyments frequently curtailed to some rather elemental things.

I once asked a woman who held a baby in her arms, and was surrounded by half a dozen other children of varying ages, why, in her community, all the men and some of the women got drunk on paydays. Her answer was: "There are only two pleasures we can have. One is drink and the other is sex." Hence the preponderance of drunks in the old days in what was known as the "lower classes" and the numberless children of the poor.

Enough people went out and found new opportunities for us to forget those who did not.

The need for a government program to help unemployed people; the need for a government program to help youth get more training for a job; and the need for various groups to get together to discuss their own difficult situations, is why we have forums, workers' alliances, and a youth congress. That is why people do not see in a name just a happy group of youngsters, and why some people are afraid of them. In reality,

groups are not very strong, but nobody knows when they may be. That is why we find the comfortable people of the world looking at them warily. Between four and five million unemployed young people is the estimate made by the American Youth Commission. That means that there are more people unemployed today below the age of twenty-five than over. A serious problem for youth.

Let us stop for a minute to consider just what our attitude as older, responsible citizens in a democracy should be. We cannot deny that we have a certain responsibility, because the world as it is today was made by us. If we have wars in Europe and in the Far East, it is not the young people of twenty to thirty who carry any of the responsibility. It is we who saw war, the last war of twenty years ago, who have been directing public affairs, either actively or indifferently, ever since, who must now wake up in the night and wonder just what kind of world we have built for the youth of today.

Oh, we can hide behind such remarks as: "Life is no more difficult today than it was forty years ago." . . . "Those who want to work really can get ahead." . . . "Youth has gone soft. We have done too much for them." All these things are probably true in isolated instances. But the big thing is that we made the world such as it is today, and we had better face the fact that at least youth has a right to ask from us an honest acceptance of our responsibility, a study of their problems, co-operation with them in their efforts to find a solution, and patience in trying to understand their point of view and in stating our own.

Like so many other countries in the world, we are seizing upon the fear of Communism as a good excuse for attacking anything we do not like. Of course we have Communists in this country, and of course they appeal to youth. The Communist Party leaders are giving youth training; they will help them to live while they volunteer as workers in something which they believe is going to help other young people. They are giving them a feeling that they are important in the world, a wide brotherhood working to improve the conditions of their fellow human beings. We who believe in democracy could do just the same for youth if we would take the trouble; but we have either failed in intelligent understanding of youth, or we have been apathetic ourselves, and believed that the apathy which is the attitude of the greater part of youth even today would continue and make unimportant the activity of any small number of people.

Even when a reputable journalist like Mr. Fulton Lewis, Jr., starts out to give a report on a meeting of a youth group, he does not take the trouble to get the details of the picture accurately—and that is one of the things which make youth resentful. For instance, he says that "the Dies Committee subpoenaed the head of the Youth Congress, Joseph Cadden." If he would look back in the records, he would find that the Dies Committee subpoenaed no one before making a statement to Congress about the Communist control of the Youth Congress; that the committee was then requested to allow some of the Youth Congress leaders a hearing, and did nothing about it until November, after the report had been made to Congress in the previous January. Then, not Mr. Cadden, who had been secretary for two years, but Mr. William Hinckley, who had been chairman two years before, was subpoenaed. Mr. Hinckley was notified that the hearings were postponed, and then one afternoon a telegram arrived at the office of the American Youth Congress asking Mr. Hinckley to appear before the committee in Washington the following morning.

At this hearing a request was made that Mr. Cadden and Mr. Jack McMichael, the present chairman of the Youth Congress, should testify with Mr. Hinckley because the latter was not familiar with many of the activities of the Youth Congress during the past two years. This was allowed. Mr. Lewis proceeds to say that I was at Mr. Cadden's elbow and helped him

THE YOUTH CONGRESS

BY MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

and his companions to plan their testimony, and that I suggested the tactics, and at midday recess and in the evenings dined them at the White House. That last statement is the only statement which is true. I went to the hearings, but I was not at Mr. Cadden's elbow, nor did I plan the testimony nor the tactics.

Then you come to the description of what Mr. Lewis calls "the Youth Congress Institute of Citizenship." And again the statement is inaccurate; because the Youth Congress sponsored and arranged the Citizenship Institute, but the people who attended were not of necessity affiliated with the Youth Congress. It has been said that they were not a cross section of the youth of America, and we will have to accept that as true; because a cross section, to be truly representative, would have to have in it a great many young people who would never leave home to go to any institute of any kind.

These youngsters came from all over the United States, however, and from every type of background; and it was quite reasonable to suppose that among such a big group there would be at least an organized representation of the Communist group, and that, having been trained while many of the others had not, they could make themselves felt. There is nothing very surprising about that.

Now let us come down to the actual meeting. Mr. Lewis says that Mr. Cadden told him that about 1,900 of the 5,130 young people who registered came from New York City, and that other officials said that close to 4,500 of this group were from New York City. I am sure Mr. Cadden was speaking from his knowledge of the registration, but I have asked for the final check, and find that 2,212 young people came from New York City. I also find that thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia had representatives at this Institute.

As to the difficulties which my young cousin, Archie Roosevelt, and his friends had in being heard, I can only say that I think they showed very little intelligence if they really were interested in getting over their point of view and not merely interested in making a disturbance. My experience is that if you want to get over a point of view, you find out the

correct way of being heard. These two young men attempted to present a resolution during a meeting which was scheduled for speeches only, and no discussion. When informed that it was not the time to present a resolution and that the Institute could pass no resolutions, Mr. McArthur or Peter Tropea threw a book of rules governing the Senate and the House at the chairman of the meeting, and were then hustled out by those who felt that the meeting should proceed as scheduled. The next morning, before the opening meeting, the rules governing the procedure were adopted. Every one wishing to speak could send up his or her name and, in the order in which the slips were received, would be allowed to come to the platform and speak for two minutes. You can say a good deal in two minutes if you are willing to be concise and clear. Here was the chance for these two young men to put over their point of view; but they did not take advantage of the opportunity.

At the last session, young Archie Roosevelt sent up a question to me in the proper manner, and I answered it—in fact, picked it out to answer first, so as to be sure that it would not be overlooked.

I have attended a great many meetings in the course of a long life, and I have seen steam-roller tactics used by adults, and I have yet to see those methods used in the American Youth Congress meetings.

It is true that only every fourth person from New York City asking to speak was given a hearing, but that was done to get a greater variety of speakers before the group.

This was a serious crowd of young people. Most of them had barely enough money to come to Washington for the three days. They sat up all night in buses and in cars. The fact that 20 per cent of those present were Negro youth simply means that Negro youth has many problems.

It did not mean that these youngsters were out on a spree, whether white or colored.

Now to the question of the meeting on the White House lawn. Many young people started to parade after spending the night in buses with very little sleep. It was raining and it was cold. The young people to be addressed stood without any protection. There was nothing in the weather to encourage enthusiasm or to inspire a mood in which reproof could be accepted without rancor. The President tried to be ingratiating and he certainly had a kindly feeling toward his audience. It is true the young people showed bad manners, but how many older people would have gone through that ordeal and have accepted criticism gracefully? I do not condone bad manners, nor do I condone disrespect for a high office; but only a fraction of those present showed such disrespect. I think all of us in public life understand the type of audience we are addressing, and we do not expect, under certain conditions, the kind of self-discipline and self-restraint which might be expected from older people or even from young people with different backgrounds. I wonder if older people would always be able to rise above the feeling of being baffled by their problems when those to whom they



Officers of the Youth Congress as they appeared before the Dies Committee. From left: Jack McMichael, William W. Hinckley, Joseph Cadden.

look for leadership and reassurance seem to fail them?

No, I do not condone bad manners, but I am experienced enough to understand them sometimes in both old and young. Youth should not be pampered, but they should be treated fairly and sympathetically. They must learn by their own mistakes, but we must not make them feel that their mistakes are irretrievable.

Now as to the hisses which greeted some of my statements. Why should any one who goes before a group of people to express points of view which conflict with those held by some of the audience expect not to be hissed?

The Columbia University students mentioned in Mr. Lewis' article were quite right when they said: "Do we have to pay for her help by subscribing to what she says?" I never for a minute would expect such a thing. I hold no office which requires respect. The President does. That is why bad manners on the lawn of the White House was worse than bad manners in the auditorium. I did not go to answer questions for the Citizenship Institute as the President's wife. I went as Eleanor Roosevelt, to answer, as honestly as I could, questions that were going to be put to me as an individual. I had the obligation not to place the President or the administration in any difficulties through my answers. Outside of that, I had an obligation to be truthful and give whatever information I could. The young people had an obligation to listen to me because they had asked me to come, but no obligation whatsoever to agree, nor to suppress their feelings, whatever they might be.

The disturbance in the gallery of the Congress was, of course, unfortunate. Had these youngsters been older, they would have realized that it was very foolish and that it would bring them discredit. In addition, it would tend to create antagonism to the bill in which they were interested.

MR. LEWIS quotes Mr. Ernest Lindley as writing: "They [the American Youth Congress] have washed themselves out. It is doubtful whether even Mrs. Roosevelt could obtain a hearing of their case [in public opinion] after their performance here." This is perfectly true as far as newspapers and certain sections of public opinion are concerned, but they haven't washed themselves out with the young people. Whatever else the Institute did, it awakened in a great many young people a realization that there are others who are struggling with the same questions that they are struggling with. A boy earning two dollars a week told me that the main thing he got out of the meetings was the feeling that he had a lot of friends all of whom had similar problems to his own. It gave the young people a sense of fellowship.

All the attacks made upon the congress have only consolidated the feeling of "youth against the world."

That is a danger, I think; because what we want to do is to have all ages work together to solve the problems of today. We have gone about obtaining this co-operation most stupidly. Whether we can retrieve what we have lost, and make these youngsters feel that the attacks that have been made upon them in the press do not represent the attitude of thinking and sympathetic older people, I do not know. If we cannot, then I think we have done a dangerous thing; because, whatever else this meeting did, it awakened a great many more young people to the fact that they were being attacked as young people, and that is not a good spirit to foster.

THERE are many young people who attended the Institute who differ with many things which were said, and who do not hold many of the beliefs expressed even by some of the American Youth Congress leaders. Young people are no more apt to think alike on every subject than are older people. The fact remains, however, that a big group of young people who have taken very little interest in their government, or in the attitude of their elders, or even in the troubles of other young people, are beginning to stir.

The American Youth Congress may lose some of the groups which were affiliated with them, but they will gain many more. I personally will be sorry if they lose any members, because I think it is important to join together in work on the main issues—namely, (1) to try to help young people to get jobs; (2) to try to advance the cause of civil liberties in this country; (3) to try really to study what will bring us more permanent peace in the future.

So much for the Institute!

The American Youth Congress itself, because of the action of its New York City Council, was condemned for withholding approval from Finland and tacitly approving the Russian invasion. At the last meeting, the cabinet which is the governing board of the American Youth Congress voted to "dissociate itself from the statement on loans to Finland made at the pre-Institute meeting in New York," and pointed out that this New York City meeting was not empowered to act for either the American Youth Congress or the New York City Council of the Congress.

I wish we could look at this whole question of the activities of youth-led organizations from the point of view of the wisest way for older people to help youth. We certainly cannot help by attacking them, or by refusing to co-operate when we are asked for financial assistance or for speakers to attend their meetings. Making inaccurate statements about them is not helpful. We must go and deal with them as equals, and we must have both courage and integrity if we expect respect and co-operation on the part of youth.

THE END