

Correspondence between Oscar Chapman and Reinhold Niebuhr, November 30, 1946. Correspondence and Reference File Relating to Political and Patronage Activities, Chapman Papers.

Political file

UNDER SECRETARY

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

December 2, 1946

Mr. Reinhold Niebuhr, Chairman,
Union for Democratic Action,
819 - 13th Street, N.W.,
Washington 5, D.C.

My dear Mr. Niebuhr:

In answer to your invitation to be present at a meeting of your Organization on January 4, 1947, I may say that it is a little difficult for me to commit myself definitely at this time, however, I will make every effort to be present.

Sincerely,

Oscar L. Chapman.



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UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION

819 — 13th STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON 5, D. C. • PHONE DISTRICT 3807

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November 30, 1947
[1946]

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Mr. Oscar Chapman
Under-Secretary of the Department of Interior
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Chapman:

Would you meet in Washington on Saturday, January 4, 1947, with a limited group of about fifty prominent American liberals in a completely off-the-record and informal session to make a real effort to rechart a desperately-needed path for the months and years ahead?

The enclosed provisional statement of principles will indicate the lines along which a number of us have been thinking for many long months before the political disaster of November 5th. We are convinced that there are powerful forces in American life that share these principles. Ways and means must be found to create a climate of liberal opinion which is explicitly and uncompromisingly democratic in purpose.

We can think of no more important task at this particular moment in history. We therefore hope that you will set aside any previous engagements in order to be in Washington on January 4th. Among those who have already agreed to be present are Mrs. Roosevelt, Chester Bowles, the outstanding progressive leaders of labor, both AFL and CIO, and many others in various fields. The Board of the Union for Democratic Action has authorized its National Office to make its facilities available in arranging the meeting, but the conference is not intended to be an exclusively UDA project.

The sessions will begin promptly at 9:30 A.M. on Saturday, January 4th, at the Willard Hotel, and will be concluded at 5 P. M.

May we hear from you within the next few days?

Most cordially yours,

R Niebuhr
Reinhold Niebuhr
Chairman

*own tentatively
calendar
1947*

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Confidential

Set on Mr. C
on 11/14/46

11-15-46

A PRELIMINARY AND PROVISIONAL STATEMENT
OF PRINCIPLES

All over the world there are millions of men and women to whom the democratic idea has deep personal validity.

People of all races and creeds fought a world-wide war against fascism because, amid bewildering power-struggles and diplomatic intrigue, they recognized that this was a war of ideas, a conflict in which fascism was making a ruthless bid for the conquest of men's minds even as it sought physical domination of the world. They were fighting more than a defensive war; they were fighting to establish for themselves and their children those conditions of economic security which must form the foundation of expanding political democracy. Their goals were freedom and economic justice; the goals were indivisible.

Now the military war is over; yet throughout the world there is uneasiness among democrats. In America, as elsewhere, liberals face great decisions. A new wave of the future is being heralded by men to whom democracy is merely a strategic slogan. We are asked to believe that we now face a simple, inexorable choice between imperialist and fascist reaction and communist totalitarianism. We are told that rigid adherence to a one-party line is a necessary discipline to insure economic security, that we must blindly accept the foreign policy of Soviet power or align ourselves with the makers of a new war.

American progressives must reject these alternatives. They must assert their conviction that liberalism is a positive, dynamic force, the faith of free men.

The responsibility resting on American liberals is particularly heavy. Throughout the world progressives awed by the post-war power of this nation are wondering apprehensively how that power will be used. Will America again go through a period of false prosperity to be followed by an economic disaster leading inevitably to world chaos? Or will this country find within itself the vision and the courage to build a stable and equitable economy which alone can serve as the basis for lasting peace? Will the America which served so successfully and so heroically as the arsenal of democracy become, after the military victory, the powerful center of world reaction and imperialism? Or will the leadership which we have acquired through our human and material resources be used for the reconstruction of a democratic and peaceful world? Will America be a symbol of hope or of fear?

This is the challenge to American progressives. It is a challenge that can be met, and met successfully, only by individuals and organizations whose devotion to democracy is unquestioned, whose faith in the principles of political freedom has stood the test of this chaotic period in history. American progressives must, at this time when democratic principles are again being called in question, reassert their belief in the dynamic of freedom as an instrument of social progress. In so doing, they must make clear that freedom can survive only in a world of peace.

must make clear that freedom can survive only in a climate of economic stability and well-being.