

Dear Sumner,

Max Lerner's Notes on the Succession is a piece of slick writing. It is not, however, sound. He says that the death of Roosevelt proves that there had been no dictatorship and no personal rule and no right of succession. The fact that the country has taken up with a new President without any lag or pause or hitch is proof that all the talk that had been made in Roosevelt's lifetime about his being a dictator and about his administration's being the last in our democracy were just bugbears and just so much hogwash. Now, of course, nobody ever said that Roosevelt had brought an end to democracy and that representative government as we had known it was no longer in existence. What had been said is that if personalized government were to continue term after term the tendency would be toward the passing of the form of government that this government had enjoyed since 1787, and that the next President might be less benevolent and more ruthless and, given term after term because of the power and control which he had arrogated to himself and for which Roosevelt had set the precedent and pattern, would bring about a collectivist form of government in which the President would be the sole dominating power, or dictator, if you will. To say that is not to say that Roosevelt had already established a dictatorship by his personal rule. To say that is to be slick in statement. It is just as though a man had a small growth on his body and went to a doctor who advised him to have it cut out. The advice was taken, the minor operation was performed, and the laboratory test disclosed that the growth was benign, not malignant. Therefore, Lerner would say that the doctor was an alarmist and a distrustful person because after the operation it was proven that the patient was well and would go along in his usual and normal way. The truth of the matter, however, was that if the growth were not taken out in time it would have developed into a cancer with its terrible and deathly results, and that is the point. Doctors and insurance companies are spending millions of dollars to make the people cancer conscious and to watch any outward manifestations on the body to have them removed before it is too late. That is just exactly what those of us who did not and do not believe in the personal rule and third and fourth terms and centralization of power have said about Roosevelt. No one can say when the cancer sets in and no one can tell when Roosevelt's conception of government would have reached a cancerous state. The accession of Truman and the return to a Constitutional form of government does not deny the existence of potential danger to democracy in Roosevelt. So I say that Mr. Lerner's reasoning is very superficial and special pleading.

For the sake of the future and to prevent the growth of the glamour of personal rule as is practised by Stalin, I would like to see a constitutional amendment which would prevent any president from serving any more than two terms. As an American I would not envy Roosevelt for his having broken the American tradition if I were sure that he were the last to have acquired that peculiar honor. Until such an amendment becomes part of the basic law we must be ever alert for we are about to experience great changes in our post war economy and we will be tired enough to want to leave it to some personality to concoct the panacea for all our economic ills. The precedent having been broken, there will always remain the danger, unless removed by Constitutional amendment, that some one will rise and with great paternalism become the great white father who personally cures all ailments. In a word, we will once more be looking for government of a man and not of laws. Don't think me hipped on this subject. It is one which we must not lose sight of for an instant, else we may find ourselves sold out souls for a temporary mess of pottage. Such an editorial as this one by Max Lerner is not only fallacious in its reasoning, but dangerous in its implications. This country cannot afford another Franklin Delano Roosevelt of three and more terms with unlimited money to spend and unlimited power to tax, and with control of government localized in himself.



Pierre Van Passen will be here Tuesday night and, of course, we shall hear him and write to you about him and his talk. The next night Harold Halpert gives his paper before the Maimonides Club on "Introduction to James Joyce". He has been working honestly and faithfully for the past two months on the preparation of this paper. Unquestionably, it will be scholarly but whether it will be understandable and whether the rest of us will be able to contribute anything in the discussion period is problematical. Harold has been fully conscious of our limitations in that regard for some time ago he wrote a personal letter to each one of us in which he assigned a particular phase for study and preparation for discussion. Mine was the reading of the opinion of the Federal Judge who ruled that 'Ulysses' was not pornographic, was literature, and was, therefore, not to be barred from admission into this country. This decision is found in the front of one of the editions of the book and Harold gave it to me read as my assignment. I have read the decision but I will be damned if I am going to read the book. If there be anything in the paper which I can absorb and anything in the discussion worth recording, I'll jot it all down for your edification.

A hearty good night.

Affectionately

*Saddy*

Friday-20 April