

April 29th

Dear Ones,

Things are picking up a little, although the office is not very cheerful. We played a couple of hours of bridge last night and it was really swell. In a few minutes Hal Stein is coming down here and I am going to take off for the rest of the day - fast! I wrote three letters last night but it hardly dented my due out column. I still haven't shaken off that nervous restlessness that has been bothering me altogether.

Boy, I have a stack of your letters three inches high to answer - if I don't accomplish much now I will sit down and read them over again tonight. I am glad that I waited until all of your comments on the death of the President came in, because - as you may have expected - I agree with your first reactions but not with your later statements. I would like to define the limits of this letter (it is now after supper - I spent a pleasant day far from this office, and managed to get back in time for a session of volleyball before supper; I'll skip the movie.) I want to deal with just four letters of yours, Daddy, and consider your treatment and analysis of Roosevelt, that is, try to avoid the broader discussion of Truman and our current status. As always when a leader dies, his contemporaries try to predict the position which history will assign to him, try to predict whether he will be forgotten or remembered. So anything we say is strictly opinion - no man can predict the course of history and the conditions under which its evaluations will be made, we can only venture our guess and in doing that we in fact give an inkling as to the kind of world we are looking forward to, what standards we will judge it by. All right then, let me summarize your letters: the first, written on the 13, reflects the national shock - you say that the greatest tragedy is in the inopportunities of the death of Roosevelt, our loss of his personality at this time and go on to reflect on the warmth and humanity of his charm and kindness and his ability to project that to whomever he was in contact with. You recognize in his humanitarianism one of the great cornerstones of the international community. In your letter of the 17th, you start off in the same vein - "his great heart." And continue - "That is why he dared to attempt to transform constitutional government into personal government." Then you go into the "indispensable man" line - showing that his personality was both his strength and his weakness. And on the 19th (you are already over into the topic of Truman which I will try to cover later) you again hail the idea of the "returning to a constitutional form of government." And the final note in the series so far on the 20th restates these arguments in answer to Max Lerner's statements in the PM editorial - personal rule and the centralization of power and its intrinsic inconsistency with American constitutional tradition.

My first answer to you, Daddy, is that your letters are based on an impossible standard - you have separated Roosevelt from his times. You talk of spending and economies without once mentioning the social-economic conditions with which the New Deal was concerned. I don't want to rehash the discussions of last November all over again - but at every indictment, you have ignored the American scene, the critical 1930's, the years of war and the myriad conditions created and the alternatives with which we were presented. Your entire evaluation springs from your opposition to one thing: the fact that the American people chose to reelect FDR to his third and then to his fourth terms - from that one factor you build your case: and yet there is nothing unconstitutional in a third term and when the American people made their decision it was based on an overall evaluation - I remember asking you the extreme question: if Roosevelt had been opposed by Ham Fish in 1940 or 1944 for whom would you have voted? To carry your argument to the point that the personality of one man was a cancerous growth threatening by its standard to overthrow our democracy is hardly an affirmation of faith in the maturity of the American mind and political progress. We have had personalities before - Marshall for the Court, the many great Speakers of the House, and our greatest Presidents. Jefferson did not overthrow his country and neither did Jackson or Lincoln. Did FDR ever upset a single American Constitutional practice? Did Congress ever become quiescent, did the Supreme Court ever lose its vigor, did the American people ever lapse into political indifference? To inter-



pret his selection of bi-partisan Senators to join in our staff at San Francisco as a concession to his personal role is grossly unfair. And lastly to hail a return to Constitutional government seems to reveal the mistakes of your reasoning - did our new leadership spring from nowhere, did order suddenly spring from "the sixes and sevens" at which we were left? Did our national economy suddenly take on aspects of logic and intelligence which it did not have before? No, Daddy, despite your espousal of liberalism, despite our agreement as to the basic principles of argument, despite our recognition of certain common national goals, these factors are missing in your evaluation of President Roosevelt - I certainly did not grow up in an atmosphere friendly to the President and the New Deal; in college I never did really grasp the political significance of the world in which I was living; in the Army politics and its detail are deemphasized. And yet I feel something in FDR - it is something which either escapes you or which you deny - I see in his humanity and his love of mankind, not an emphasis on the role which he took upon himself but what he stood for; his achievement was not in centralizing control but in broadening the base of our democracy, in opening the way for greater economic equality, social security, political independence. He sought, through Constitutional means, to better the lot of our country and the lot of the entire world. To see only in his striking figure his own role is to miss the whole significance of the evolution through which the world is going today. To close your eyes to the social and economic progress of our country in the past twelve years, to close your eyes to the crises which we have successfully weathered, is to misunderstand the man and the era in which we live.

The phenomenon in American political history which Harry Truman represents will not soon be forgotten; the combination of factors surrounding his role in the White House is a curiously promising group of conditions. His strength is going to lie in the fact that he offers a negative personality in the midst of a constructive era - this is something which we will comment on again and again. Truman's job for the moment is the melding together of forces which are already in motion and for that he is admirably suited; his contrast to the vibrant personality of his predecessor puts him in the position of have no enemies, he can command support and strength from all sides - when questions of positive policy come up, such as the picture of our post war economy, we may have to judge his current advantages in a different light. The very fact of Roosevelt's death and our loss of his leadership is one of Truman's strong points. The country has rallied to him; we need effective leadership and coordination and it must come from him - we realize now that the strength of FDR was but the sum of our national determination and that we have lost our foremost statesman of it. There can be no doubt but that the days of experimentation are over - the day of consolidation of national agencies is at hand, planning within government is just as important as the planning which the government is interested in and regulating. But the principles remain - and they are not Roman holiday principles or something for nothing principles; they are the principles of the progress which we seek, the era of ever broadening democracy, the era of the common man if you like, and they are as alive as ever. Truman has already made it clear that in no sense will he abandon the lines of social policy set down by FDR - his first moves included retaining the same cabinet. Why you insist on interpreting everything as a glorious return to constitutional government is beyond me, Daddy, - the executive branch of the government has always been the fountainhead of our system, the branch where policy is laid down and programs are established - the President is the direct representative of the people. Why you place the onus for Taft's never coming to the White House entirely on FDR is not clear to me - but be that as it may, it is to Truman's advantage and to the ultimate advantage of the country to have the bond with the Senate which he has. And as a final note, Daddy, I do think you "hipped" on the subject of two terms, etc.

OK for tonight - there is still a week's letter writing material in the draw - but I want to drop a note to Juj -

All my love,

Regards to Doris.

