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An address by
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April 13, 1943

On the occasion of the presentation
of the
Four Freedoms Annual Award
by the
Italian American Labor Council.

Mr. Justice Douglas, members of the Italian-American Labor Council,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am deeply touched, Mr. Justice Douglas, by your introduction of me to speak to this great audience. The presentation of this beautiful medal by the Italian-American Labor Council is an honor which I too well know I do not deserve. But that knowledge on my part makes me no less proud to receive this generous token of your appreciation. Tonight, in acknowledging my thanks, and my deep emotion at having thus been honored by your members, I take it that you wish, in making the award, to record publicly your deep satisfaction at my action, taken almost exactly six months ago, and declared here in Carnegie Hall, New York, in releasing Italians in the United States from the burden of being classed as "alien enemies". I take it also that just as in that action I represented the deliberate policy of the national government, and made the decision with the approval of the President of the United States, so you tonight are expressing your gratitude, not to me as an individual, but as the Attorney General of the United States, carrying out the mature policy of a great country which, in the midst of a war with the kingdom of Italy, could be wise and clear-sighted enough to recognize that in truth Italians on these shores owed their first loyalty and love to the land where they had chosen to live. Tonight you represent not alone the members of the Italian-American Labor Council, but all Italians in our country, and all Americans of Italian descent. Thus you bear their universal gratitude through me to the American men and women, their brothers and sisters, who make up our country: a country which thus said, by so simple an act of justice, that these 600,000 Italians were in fact a part of us.

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Some of you may remember that I said on Columbus Day: "We now have the results of ten months of an unprecedented exercise of wartime vigilance. We have watched these Italians, these so-called 'alien enemies', we have investigated, we have acted on the slightest impulse of doubt. We have taken no chances. And what do we find? We find that out of the total of 600,000 persons, there has been cause to intern only 228, or fewer than one-twentieth of one percent!" Six months after the release of Italian aliens from the status of alien enemies, the number of Italians interned is 270 - still under one-twentieth of one percent.

I added for the benefit of those who were affected by this change that they had proved their loyalty to the democracy which had given them this chance, and that they should see to it that all Italians remain loyal. This they have done; and I am convinced that they have fulfilled and will continue to justify the confidence we have placed in them.

This occasion is made doubly memorable because it marks the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Jefferson. All over our land today that anniversary is being reverently celebrated. For Jefferson is one of the great heroes of our American world, whose memory stirs the hearts of men everywhere today. It is fitting that a democracy should honor its dead heroes, for they are the cherished symbols of its own deep aspirations. The forward movement is slow, faltering at times, but I venture to think that in our land it has been continuous; and we can discern

its direction and measure its progress by the achievements of our great men. Wise old Benjamin Franklin, industrious, homespun; Washington, who wanted to live at home and tend his farms, but did what he had to do; Jefferson, whom today we honor; Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall; Andrew Jackson; then Lincoln, a little melancholy, deliberate, humorous, who held our nation together; Grant and Lee, those two great soldiers; Theodore Roosevelt, with his "square deal"; Woodrow Wilson, who knew that isolationism must go, that some day there would have to be a new international human order. And among our great names I know that history will place in strong outlines the courage and statesmanship of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who marshalled the free peoples of the Western Hemisphere to stand against world inroads of despotic tyranny.

A democracy is not a town meeting where each neighbor's voice can be heard. The people choose their leaders; they must then trust them. They will forgive much, mistakes, human weaknesses. They will differ in detail, in ways and means. But unless they can understand and choose the important issues, the wider policies, democracy can suffer failure and disintegration in the larger sense. The people must today balance their individual discomforts and irritations against the vast human outcome of the future. They must see the relation between sacrifice and victory, and they must daily choose. For the country that you love is nothing less and nothing greater than the people. And the people know that the price of leadership invariably is villification and the suffering that comes to strong men in public office - the hatred of the little jealous men for all great figures who lead the people; the hatred and slander that were piled on Jefferson, on Lincoln, on Wilson.

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Jefferson almost welcomed it as proving the strength of a country where speech and the press were free. In his first inaugural he did not denounce the Federalists as monarchists (as he believed them to be) but invited them to rejoin the republican faith. "If there be any among us," he said "who wish to dissolve this Union, or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

Lincoln, his eyes sad but his lips smiling, would turn away the shock of the abuse by his slow humor. Someone asked him what it felt like to be President. He considered for a moment. "Well," he said, "it's like the man who was asked what it felt like to be tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail. 'Except for the honor', the man answered, 'except for the honor, I'd just have leave of walked.'"

Jefferson's father was neither well-born nor wealthy, but his mother came from one of the most distinguished and aristocratic families in Virginia. In person tall and loose-jointed, sandy-haired and freckled, carelessly dressed, he had simple habits and disliked form and ceremony. I like to think of him remaining up to the day of his first inauguration at Conrad's boarding house, and then walking to the nearby Senate chamber of the uncompleted Capitol to receive the oath of office from his cousin, John Marshall, the Chief Justice; or riding alone to open Congress and hitching his horse to the post at the gate.

He was a great statesman. What has, I think, so firmly held the outline of his greatness in the American imagination, generation after

changing generation, is the positive quality of his beliefs. To Jefferson, government was no end in itself. It was but a means to human happiness.

Freedom was more important than order, for freedom was the secret of happiness, and all men were entitled to the pursuit of their own happiness.

For this buoyant faith, youthful as national ideals are counted, and often perhaps naive, this faith in our world, in our dream, in our power - what he himself called "This Government the best hope of man" - this surely is the faith that has conquered and built this continent in so short a time. It is the well-spring of our untamed imagination, of our restless individualism.

And so today when we celebrate his noble spirit we should remember that he was never afraid - afraid of what the people might do if given power to rule themselves; afraid of too much education; afraid of tolerance; afraid of what might happen to the world when war was over.

He would not be afraid today, were he with us, but would think of this war as another step in the long struggle. He would see how many of the fundamentals for which he had fought with all his powers are now accepted - universal education, religious tolerance, the gradual growth of democratic institutions. He would see them threatened once more, and he would throw all his strength into their defense. And in the midst of the war he would sit down like the beneficent human architect that he was, to plan the world that is to follow the war--a world that might be nearer to perfection if only men had more faith in mankind.

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This is the hour when we can be great as a nation, or when we can fail. I do not doubt but that we shall win the victory - but let us win greatly. If we fail it will be because, even under the stress of war, with the losses and sacrifices of the best and the bravest, we have not yet learned to act for the largest unity. Today and each following day we can achieve the unity of our national soul. We speak first of United Nations, but let us be sure we speak of a united America. Those who rejoice to sow dissension among us will stress the fact that in this far-stretched country we have many nationality groups, and that within these groups there are separate factions. There is room in our life for the expression of individual ideas, for the furtherance of special programs. But separate leadership leads too often to rivalries, rivalries to disunity.

It is when we begin to eliminate factions that we shall be better united as Americans. Then we shall no longer speak of Irish-Americans, or Swedish-Americans, or Italian-Americans. This does not mean that we shall not look back to the dear homes of our ancestors for the traditions and culture that have enriched our groups. But that will not prevent us from being united as a single people, stronger for the underlying cultural diffusion. In that day an Italian-American will be no different from an Irish-American or any other kind of American.

Do you think only Italians were proud of First Lieutenant Alexander R. Salvatore, of Glendale, California, who was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action over Kokoda, New Guinea, on September 15, 1942? He departed

on a lone reconnaissance flight with orders to attack Japanese concentrations of any kind. He attacked a supply pile, descending in the face of two machine guns firing at him, and strafed the objective. Sixty Japanese dead were later found on the spot.

Sergeant Pete R. Muscarello advanced into enemy-held territory between two hills at Guadalcanal against machine gun and sniper fire which was so sudden and heavy that about half the men started to retreat. He exposed himself openly to the fire, succeeded in stopping the men and regained the lost ground. He was awarded the Silver Star by President Roosevelt. Pete Muscarello is an American. Hometown, Chicago.

Anthony W. Brunetti enlisted in the Navy at 18, in 1941. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, with this citation:

"For extraordinary achievement in aerial combat as rear gunner in an airplane of a Scouting Squadron in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 8, 1942. Brunetti successfully repelled an enemy attack on his plane, shooting down one of the hostile aircraft in the engagement. His courage, skill, alertness and a complete disregard for his own personal safety were directly responsible for the saving of his own plane and the destruction of one of the enemy aircraft."

Tony Brunetti is an American boy from Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Perhaps they have heard of these American boys in Genoa and Naples, in Rome, Milan, Turin, Florence, through the towns and villages of Tuscany and the Piedmont. I am told that the Gestapo has supplanted the Ovra; and that in every village and city, behind the puppet official of Mussolini, sits a

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member of the Gestapo. Italy, under the heel of the Gestapo, forced to lick the boots of the Tedeschi! Italy, of whom Garibaldi once said:

"O Italy! ... When thou once more shalt rouse thyself, they will tremble at the defeat of their united powers, combined in the league of Hell, to oppress and degrade thee. Be great, then, once more, O Italy! And then the powerful voice of the Almighty will be heard by all thy Sons; and the hungry and cowardly vultures which destroy thee will be stunned by its thundering sound."

Too long has Italy, under a traitorous rule, been deaf to that old call to valor. The "cowardly vultures" still go on with their work. Today the "glory" that Mussolini once promised echoes bitterly in Italian ears. Glory? What a glorious opportunity the German war machine held out to those Italian divisions which Mussolini poured into battle at Hitler's command! The opportunity to cover the German retreat in Russia, from Alamein - anywhere in which dying might serve to spare German lives! Yes, the opportunity to serve as protectors and saviors of the super-race. Hitler has been most generous in dispensing that opportunity. Whenever that glorious occasion arose, under a blazing desert sun or on the snow-swept steppes in mid-winter, invariably the honor of perishing was given the Italian soldier, while the German elite guards, the panzer divisions, were hurried homeward. For this distinction, some sign of gratitude might have been expected - and it has been forthcoming; to Italy's sailors has been given the honor of maintaining a life-line across the perilous Mediterranean. While the planes of the Luftwaffe are busily engaged in protecting German armies and German cities, these Italian

sailors are given exclusive rights to the protective canopy of the blue skies above.

How long the Italians can bear up under such lavish honors, I do not know. There is a limit to the amount of such heroics that any nation can take. It is time that the Italian soldier and sailor cast off this mantle of glory - the glory of dying for Germany - so that it may be worn by those who most deserve it - the German Nazis themselves.

The time may not be long. Even now the bell tolls and each man must make his choice. Death will come, and suffering in the barricaded streets. But there will be the marching of feet of the mighty army of liberation, the army of liberation bringing freedom to the conquered land of Italy. Each man must make his choice - whether to accept that army, or to follow the discredited ranks of the weak tyrant who has sold Italy to her oppressors. We then will know our friends - and we will know our foes.