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CONFIDENTIAL: The following statement of former President Harry S. Truman to be delivered at Kansas City, Missouri, is for automatic release at 10:00 P.M., C.S.T., Monday, November 16, 1953. No portion, synopsis, or intimation may be published or broadcast before that time.

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On November 6 the new administration, through Herbert Brownell, Jr., a former Chairman of the Republican National Committee now serving as Attorney General, made a personal attack on me. Brownell made this attack in the course of a political speech before a luncheon club in Chicago. This attack is without parallel, I believe, in the history of our country. I have been accused in effect of knowingly betraying the security of the United States. This charge is, of course, a falsehood, and the man who made it had every reason to know it is a falsehood.

On Tuesday, November 10th, as a direct result of this charge, I was served with a subpoena of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which called on me to appear before it to be questioned about my conduct of the Office of the President of the United States.

First, I would like to tell you, the people of America, why I declined to appear before that Committee. On the surface, it might seem to be an easy thing, and smart politics, for Harry Truman, now a private citizen of Independence, Missouri, to use that Committee as a forum to answer the scurrilous charges which have been made against me. Many people urged me to do that. It was an attractive suggestion and appealed to me. But if I had done it, I would have been a party with the Committee to an action which would have undermined the constitutional position of the Office of President of the United States.

The separation and balance of powers between the three independent branches of Government is fundamental in our constitutional form of Government. A Congressional Committee may not compel the attendance of a President of the United States, while he is in office, to inquire into matters pertaining to the performance of his official duties. If the constitutional principle were otherwise, the Office of President would not be independent.

It is just as important to the independence of the Executive that the actions of the President should not be subjected to questioning by the Congress after he has completed his term of office as that they should not be questioned while he is serving as President. In either case, the Office of President would be dominated by the Congress, and the Presidency might become a mere appendage of Congress.

When I became President, I took an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. I am still bound by that oath and will be as long as I live. While I was in office, I lived up to that oath -- and I believe I passed on to my successor the great Office of President of the United States with its integrity and independence unimpaired. Now that I have laid down the heavy burdens of that office, I do not propose to take any step which would violate that oath or which would in any way lead to encroachments on the independence of that office.

So much for the Committee. Now for the charge which Mr. Brownell made in his political speech -- a charge that I knowingly betrayed the security of the United States. Let me read you what Mr. Brownell said.

He said: "Harry Dexter White was known to be a communist spy by the very people who appointed him to the most sensitive and important position he ever held in Government service." There can't be any doubt that Mr. Brownell was talking about me. Now, let me talk about Mr. Brownell and the phony charge that he has made.

His charge is false, and Mr. Brownell must have known it was false at the very time he was making it.

Mr. Brownell has made a great show of detail as to the dates on which particular FBI reports were forwarded by the Department of Justice and the manner in which they were handled. As Mr. Brownell should have learned by this time, a great many documents pass daily through the White House. It is not possible to recall eight years later the precise day or the precise document which may have been brought to my attention. In fact, when Mr. Brownell first made his charges, I was unable to remember the precise documents to which he referred, just as President Eisenhower was unable to remember that he had met with Harry Dexter White and Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau in 1944.

But, of course, I knew of the intensive investigation of communist activity which was then going on and which involved many persons. As a matter of fact, this investigation was one of the many important steps which my Administration took, beginning in 1945, to render the communist conspiracy ineffective in this country. These steps included the successful prosecution and imprisonment of the top communist leaders in the United States.

I believe that the American people are entitled to know the facts, not just the misleading statements that this present administration finds it politically expedient to make. I have had my files examined and have consulted with some of my colleagues who worked with me on this matter during my term in office. The facts, as I have determined them in this manner, are these:

In late 1945, the FBI was engaged in a secret investigation of subversive activities in this country. In this investigation, the FBI was making an intensive effort to verify and corroborate certain accusations of espionage made by confidential informants.

A lengthy FBI report on this matter was sent to the White House in December, 1945. The report contained many names of persons in and out of Government service concerning whom there were then unverified accusations. Among the many names mentioned, I now find, was that of Harry Dexter White, who had been in the Treasury Department for many years and who was at that time an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.

As best I can now determine, I first learned of the accusations against White early in February, 1946, when an FBI report specifically discussing activities of Harry Dexter White was brought to my attention. The February report was delivered to me by General Vaughan and was also brought to my personal attention by Secretary of State Byrnes. This report showed that serious accusations had been made against White, but it pointed out that it would be practically impossible to prove those charges with the evidence then at hand.

Immediately after the matter was brought to my attention, I sent a copy of the report, with a covering note signed by me, to White's immediate superior, the Secretary of the Treasury, Fred Vinson. In this note, dated February 6, 1946, I said:

"I am enclosing you a memorandum from the Secretary of State, which came to me this morning.

"I suggest that you read it, keeping it entirely confidential and then, I think, you, the Secretary of State, and myself should discuss the situation and find out what we should do."

Later -- I believe it was the same day -- I discussed the matter with Secretary Vinson as well as with Secretary of State Byrnes.

As I have mentioned, Mr. White was at that time an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. It had been planned for some time that he should be transferred from that position to be the United States member on the board of executive directors of the International Monetary Fund, a new international organization then in the process of being set up. His appointment had been sent to the Senate for this new position, and it was confirmed on February 6th, shortly before I saw Secretaries Byrnes and Vinson. In this situation, I requested Secretary Vinson to consult with the appropriate officials

of the Government and come back to me with a recommendation.

Secretary of the Treasury Vinson consulted with Attorney General Tom Clark and other Government officials. When the results of these consultations were reported to me, the conclusion was reached that the appointment should be allowed to take its normal course. The final responsibility for this decision, of course, was mine. The reason for this decision was that the charges which had been made to the FBI against Mr. White also involved many other persons. Hundreds of FBI agents were engaged in investigating the charges against all those who had been accused. It was of great importance to the Nation that this investigation be continued in order to prove or disprove these charges and to determine if still other persons were implicated.

Any unusual action with respect to Mr. White's appointment might well have alerted all the persons involved to the fact that the investigation was under way and thus endanger the success of the investigation.

It was originally planned that the United States would support Mr. White for election to the top managerial position in the International Monetary Fund -- that of Managing Director -- a more important post than that of a member of the board of executive directors. But following the receipt of the FBI report and the consultations with members of my Cabinet, it was decided that he would be limited to membership on the board of directors. With his duties thus restricted, he would be subject to the supervision of the Secretary of the Treasury, and his position would be less important and much less sensitive -- if it were sensitive at all -- than the position then held by him as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.

Tonight, I want the American people to understand that the course we took protected the public interest and security and, at the same time, permitted the intensive FBI investigation then in progress to go forward. No other course could have served both of these purposes.

The appointment was accordingly allowed to go through, and the investigation continued. In 1947, the results of the investigation up to that time were laid before a Federal grand jury in New York by the Department of Justice. Mr. White was one of the witnesses called before that grand jury. The grand jury did not indict Mr. White, although it was the same grand jury which indicted the 12 top communists in the country. All this was done in the American way, by due process of law. In the meantime, Mr. White, in April, 1947, resigned his office referring to reasons of health. Although my recent off-hand comment concerning his resignation was in error, the fact is that he was separated from Government service promptly when the necessity for secrecy concerning the intensive investigation by the FBI came to an end. He died in 1948 after appearing before the Un-American Activities Committee of the House.

Thus, what this new administration has attempted becomes clear. It has distorted a decision that enabled an investigation of great importance to proceed -- as it did -- unembarrassed, and with ample safeguard to the public interest, into an alleged harboring of communists. This is shameful demagoguery.

It is worse than that. Herbert Brownell, Jr., the Attorney General of the United States -- the highest legal officer in our Government -- has degraded the highest function of Government -- the administration of justice -- into cheap political trickery. The Attorney General of the United States has not only degraded his office, he has deceived his chief as to what he proposed to do. And in saying, "Harry Dexter White was known to be a communist spy by the very people who appointed him" he lied to the American people. In backing away from this charge with the mealy-mouthed statement that he had no intention of impugning the loyalty of any high official of the prior administration, he lied to the American people again.

If this were a matter which merely involved the name and reputation of Harry Truman, private citizen of Independence, Missouri, I would not be as concerned as I am. I can take care of myself. I believe that the American people know me well enough from my service as Captain of Battery D in World War I to my service as President of the United States to know that I have always acted with the best interests of my country at heart.



But Mr. Brownell knows that, in this matter, while the final decision was mine, I relied on my principal advisers. One of them -- one of those most concerned -- was the then Secretary of the Treasury, and later the beloved Chief Justice of the United States, Fred M. Vinson, who is now dead. No man I ever knew was a more patriotic American. The wild imputations of disloyalty which Mr. Brownell has made were directed not only against me, but also against him. I do not mind too much for myself or for those members of my Cabinet who are alive, for we are able to defend ourselves. But I deeply resent these cowardly insinuations against one who is dead.

There is one aspect of this affair that should be clear to everyone. That is the obvious political motivation of this attack on me. In launching this attack, the Republican Attorney General worked hand in glove with the Republican National Committee. The manner and the timing of what has been done make it perfectly clear that the powers of the Attorney General have been prostituted for hopes of political gain. No election is worth so much.

The whole history of our Republic does not reveal any other such attack as this by a new administration on an out-going President. Up to now, no administration has ever accused a former President of disloyalty. In communist countries, it is the practice when a new government comes to power to accuse outgoing officials of treason, to frame public trials for them, and to degrade and prosecute the key officials of the previous government. That is the way the communists, whose only god is power, run their public affairs. It is not the way Americans behave.

At least, it has not been so in the past.

This tragic debasement of high office by the Attorney General is bad enough, but the thing I wish most to get over to you tonight is that this incident is only the most publicized and the most recent example of the decay of the basic principles of freedom now taking place in this country.

It is now evident that the present administration has fully embraced, for political advantage, mccarthyism. I am not referring to the Senator from Wisconsin -- he is only important in that his name has taken on a dictionary meaning in the world. It is the corruption of truth, the abandonment of our historical devotion to fair play. It is the abandonment of the "due process" of law. It is the use of the big lie and the unfounded accusation against any citizen in the name of Americanism or security. It is the rise to power of the demagogue who lives on untruth; it is the spread of fear and the destruction of faith in every level of our society.

This is not a partisan matter. This horrible cancer is eating at the vitals of America and it can destroy the great edifice of freedom.

If this sordid, deliberate and unprecedented attack on the loyalty of a former President of the United States will serve to alert the people to the terrible danger that our Nation and each citizen faces, then it will have been a blessing in disguise. I hope this will arouse you to fight this evil at every level of our national life. I even hope that this may serve to stir the conscience of this present administration itself.

May God preserve our Nation, its Constitution and the birthright of freedom in every heart.

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