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Address by Councillor P. R. B. Lewis, M.P.C., to the
Transvaal Students' Society of the Institute of
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SOME ASPECTS OF CIVIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA

When I was asked to speak to your Society on my trip to America I readily accepted because I had seen and learnt so much which I thought might be of interest to you. However, when I got down to preparing the speech I found great difficulty in deciding what to put in and what to leave out, because there is so much to tell.

I think I should first tell you how I came to undertake this trip. The State Department of the United States Government arrange for visits to their country by people from all over the world, and I was fortunate enough to be given one of what they call their 'Leader Grants' for last year. Under this Grant the air fare to and from the States is paid by the State Department, and while in the States one's travelling expenses are paid, and a per diem grant of \$20.00 per

day is made. No provision is made for the expenses of one's wife. I was fortunate, however, in that my wife was able to accompany me as, besides the companionship, my wife was able to keep up the correspondence with the family, to write the 'thank you' letters to the people who gave us hospitality, and my laundry bills during my whole trip came to under \$5.00, so my wife has qualified for her merit certificate as a laundress. The length of the Grant is for 60 days. Prior to my departure for the States I was asked what I was interested in studying, and whether there were any particular things I wanted to do and see. Under this Grant no report is required at the end of the trip, and that I can say was a very great relief.

On arrival in the United States we were met at the airport and escorted to our Hotel in Washington. I had chosen to go to the Conference arranged by the International Union of Local Authorities which was held in Washington in mid-June, as I felt that Conference, which was dealing with local govern-

ment in the United States of America would give me a general background to their civic administration prior to taking up my grant, which started from the 1st July. On arrival in Washington I interviewed the Office of Cultural Exchange in the Department of State, and they passed me on to the Governmental Affairs Institute with whom they had arranged to do the detailed programming, so that during the time the Conference was being held I was able to plan what I was to do and see.

I asked that they arrange the trip on the basis of my visiting Cities where I could find examples of the various methods of civic administration. I also told them of my interest in forestry and that I would like to see some of their forestry methods. I also wanted to see some of their Indian Reservations. I had been invited by a friend to visit the factory of his parent company, Norton Abrasives, in Worcester, Mass., and I wished to accept the invitation of Professor Stephen Bailey, the Dean of Syracuse University, who had asked me to join him at his hideout on one of the

lakes in Maine during his vacation. I naturally wanted to see as much of their country as was possible within the limit of the 60-day period.

A Mr. Eldridge was the programme officer at the Governmental Affairs Institute, and while I was attending the I.U.L.A. Conference he got busy on making the arrangements. My itinerary finally included the visiting of cities in New England on the east coast, and then up into Maine. We then crossed to the Niagara Falls, visited Chicago and then went to Minnesota, which is one of the extreme northern States, and then went right down to the mid-West to Denver at the foot of the Rockies from where we went by train, the Californian Zephyr, across the Rockies to San Fransisco. This journey started early one morning and went on until 6.15 the following evening, passing through magnificent country. We then went south through California to Los Angeles from where we started heading west again, our first stop being at the Grand Canyon. This was an unforgettable experience. We

then headed south-west to Oklahoma City. Lest you think that my trip was a grand holiday, I would just like to give you my two days programme in Oklahoma City : QUOTE..... From there we went right down to New Orleans near the mouth of the Mississippi. This area is very swampy, and the water table is so high that people cannot be buried underground, so that mausoleums are built above ground. From New Orleans we went to a city called Atlanta in Georgia, another of the wouth-western cities, before visiting Williamsburg in Virginia. Williamsburg is near Jamestown, which was the first place occupied in Virginia in 1607. Jamestown proved such an unhealthy spot that the people moved inland to Williamsburg. Largely through the generosity of Mr. Rockefeller, it was decided some years ago to try and restore Williamsburg to its original character in the colonial days. The old plans were found, and the buildings restored to their old-time character. Period furniture has been installed and as many relics and antiques as possible have been placed in the village. On arrival at the reception centre, a film is shown of the occasion when the Colonials resolved to sever their ties with

Great Britain. It also depicted the life at that time. After leaving Williamsburg we returned to Washington where, after a few days, we left for New York and home.

Before we left Washington on our trip we were handed our itinerary which scheduled our daily programme, giving details of our travel arrangements, the Hotel accommodation, our Sponsor in each City and the things laid on for us to do. The Sponsors were people with whom the Governmental Affairs Institute were in contact, who acted as guide, philosopher and friend to visiting persons such as ourselves. The Sponsor arranged the contacts in the cities with the particular persons we were interested in visiting. In some cases the Sponsors would be private individuals - in Buffalo it was the Buffalo World Hospitality Association, in Chicago the Institute of International Education, in Maine the International Centre for Students and Visitors, and in Los Angeles it was the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, and so on. These Hospitality Associations are something I think we could copy. They set

out to welcome newcomers to the City, students from foreign lands and travellers from abroad. In very many cases they were voluntary organisations, with people giving freely of their services.

Normally when we arrived at our Hotel we would have a letter of welcome from the Sponsor, saying what had been arranged for us, and what private hospitality had been laid on. This meant that we were meeting people in their homes in most of the cities we visited, and while this proved a bit strenuous and exhausting, it did give us an insight, and did establish contacts which would not have been normally available to the visitor. We stayed in Minneapolis for a week and had six dinner dates in a row, at each of which the host and hostess had asked their friends to meet us, all of whom were interested in what was going on in South Africa. This proved rather exhausting, as one had to go over the same ground time and time again, and one's waistline also began to feel the strain.

To understand the civic set-up in the United States one must have a broad background of the relationship between the Federal Government, State Government and the Cities. In America their standpoint is that the essence of good government lies in the division of power: their classic phrase is the system of 'checks and balances'. This standpoint was inherited from the 17th century when King and Parliament were fighting for supremacy. America's first Constitution was in 1788, and any law, either Federal, State or City, can be challenged if not in accordance with that Constitution. The American Constitution enumerates the Federal powers and gives the residual powers to the States, quite contrary to our Constitution where it is the Provinces whose powers are limited to those conferred upon them under the Act of Union. In America the Federal Government cannot veto a State Law unless the matter deals with a specific responsibility allocated to the Federal Government.

In the United States Senate each State elects two

representatives who hold office for six years. Every two years one-third of the Senators retire so the Senate gets new blood every two years, but there is continuity through the retention of two-thirds of the old members. The 437 members of the House of Representatives are elected for two years - each voting constituency consists of approximately 300,000 voters. The President is elected for four years. He is the Chief of State and the Chief Executive Officer. He appoints his own Cabinet, with the consent of the Senate, and this Cabinet holds office at his pleasure. Members of the Cabinet are not members of Congress, and have not collective responsibility. The President, as Chief Executive Officer, is responsible for the enforcement of Laws, but he does not make them - it is Congress and the Senate which does that. The members of the Cabinet have no right to participate in the deliberations of Congress or the Senate, but the President can address joint sessions of the House of Representatives and of the Senate, and he can also send messages to Congress. Where the President and the Legislature meet is in Congress-

ional Committees which deal with various aspects of Government, and it is at these Congressional Committees that the President's representatives would put forward the President's proposals. The extraordinary aspect of American politics, from a South African point of view, is that the voting in the House of Representatives and the Senate is not on strict Party lines. A motion will get votes from some members of the Democratic Party and some members of the Republican Party, but on another motion the alignment may be representatives of the North vs representatives of the South, and so on. In a book comparing the Constitution of the United States with that of Canada, this statement is made:

"Just as the framers of the American Constitution intended, national government in the United States depends on a perpetual process of adjustment and compromise between independent political authorities.

As a matter both of law and of practice, the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives have powers which enable each to balance and check the others. The

"art of American politics is to bring them into mutual agreement. When the two Houses of Congress come up with different versions of a new law, the only thing to do is to iron out the differences in a joint conference committee. When the President and Congress are at loggerheads, the President must use all his resources to bring the Congressional leaders around, at least in part, to his own way of thinking. He can try to influence them both directly and through the medium of public opinion; he can also use the veto as an ultimate threat to lend force to his arguments. Like any bargaining process, this all takes time, and the outcome is always uncertain. The United States, with its extreme devotion to the principle of the separation of powers, is a remarkable demonstration of the fact that government by negotiation can also be made to work.

The American concept of democracy is complex. Relying as usual, on the principle of checks and balances, it regards the will of the people with a nicely balanced

"mixture of respect and suspicion. It believes, on the one hand, that a democracy should be continuously responsible to the electorate. To allow a government, as in South Africa, to go for as long as five years without having to renew its popular mandate would be quite out of keeping with this particular side of the American democratic tradition. It is very much concerned, on the other hand, with the dangers of absolute majority rule. Although minorities should not rule majorities, it does not follow that majorities should have an unlimited right to rule minorities. To make government immediately responsive to the will of the people, and at the same time to prevent it from degenerating into majority tyranny, is the goal.

These ideas are fully embodied in the American political system. The principle of continuous responsibility is reflected in Congress. Every two years the whole House of Representatives, and one-third of the Senate, have to face the electorate. This prevents

"the legislature from ever getting very far out of touch with public opinion, but provision is also made, as in Canada, to counteract the disadvantages of a government too responsive to popular whims. Since the President is elected for four years, it is possible for him, like the Canadian Prime Minister, to stand somewhat apart from current opinion and take a long-range point of view. The six-year term of Senators also works in the same direction. Thus the balance of powers between President and Congress, and between the two Houses of Congress, insures a continual compromise between short-term and long-term considerations.

The American system also imposes many restrictions on the principle of absolute majority rule. The disproportionate power of small States in the Senate, and the special majorities required for the confirmation of treaties, for the over-riding of a presidential veto, and for the adoption of con-

the amount it required and the period for which the money was wanted and the purpose for which it was required, and asked people to submit offers on the basis on which they would lend the money. In the City of St. Paul, an official was elected called the Comptroller. His function was to prepare the budget for the ensuing year, and once the budget was approved, to see that the money expended was in terms of that budget. Remember he was an elected official and once he had prepared his budget it was submitted to the Council, the Council then had to submit it for public hearing for a certain number of days, and after the public hearing the Council framed the budget, but in framing the budget the Council was not allowed, in terms of its Charter, to vary the Comptroller's budget by more than 10%, and if it did vary it it had to balance the budget by increasing the source of income. If a budget is not agreed to by a certain date, the last year's budget applies.

In Los Angeles, where the City has a Council of 15 full-time Councillors who receive a salary of \$12,000: each, they have a senior official who is called the City Administrative Officer, who has under him Budget Control Officers. 32/...

These Budget Control Officers are responsible for the scrutiny of the budgets proposed by Departmental Heads. In so far as is possible these Budget Control Officers remain responsible for the control of the budgets of the same departments for a length of time so that they get thoroughly conversant with the working of that department. A manual is issued to these Budget Control Officers on the method to be adopted in assessing the budgets. One of their functions is to scrutinise the number of staff employed, and in the preparation of the budgets Departmental Heads have to show the number of employees under their various categories over a period, so that any increase is readily ascertained. Once the budgets have been approved, the Budget Control Officer's duty is to scrutinise monthly returns to see to what extent the budget is being maintained. These latter budgets are called performance budgets.

In many of the Cities great reliance is placed on these monthly returns to see how performance is matching the budget, and I would like to hear members' views, as it occurs to me that very often, once an item has been placed on the estimates

and approved, we tend to lose sight of whether we can provide the facility budgeted for at less cost. If expenditure is exceeded a fuss is raised, but do we pay sufficient attention to whether the same result could have been achieved at a lesser expenditure. I have a shrewd suspicion that a certain Professor Parkinson has expressed some views on this matter.

What were my main impressions after my quick flit around that vast country. First and foremost was the friendliness of the American people. I found them extremely easy to get on with; they were very informal; very intelligent and very courteous. It struck me very forcibly that when a person was speaking no one would interrupt, and if two persons started to speak simultaneously, one would immediately defer to the other.

I was surprised to find the extent of the Karroo-like areas in America - vast wastelands. We found the climatic conditions very trying - being there in the height of summer the humidity and heat were overpowering. When one considers that a lot of these areas which suffer from heat in the 34/.....

summer become frozen up in winter, one realises how lucky we are in South Africa, and I felt after my trip that I would never again complain of the Transvaal climate. The thought had not occurred to me before how low-lying most of the large Cities are. We were in Denver which calls itself the 'Mile-high' city and it was the highest of the large cities. The next highest was Atlanta with an altitude of approximately 2500 feet. Most of the other large cities are either at sea level, on the lakes, or in low altitude positions.

We were naturally struck by the wealth of many Americans and by the amount available for research and education. We often felt that money was too easily available and often wasted on apparently needless research.

The Americans are essentially a people who want to be liked, and who are very anxious to be well thought of by the peoples of the world. I have told you about the hospitality associations and the reception committees who welcome students and visitors. We found the women took a

that something that happened in Boston could occur here. There, one of their Mayors was found guilty of fraud in connection with Municipal matters, and was sentenced to a period of imprisonment. When he came out of prison he resumed office and was re-elected in the next Elections.

I found that people were very interested in our re-housing schemes and were very impressed by the fact that we gave each person a plot of ground. I wish that many of our Non-European people could see the conditions under which many of the negroes exist in the cities of America, as I think our conditions bear very favourable comparison.

While we have problems to face in South Africa, I do not think we need be ashamed of the way our cities are run. I think for the size of our population, and the means at our disposal, we have done well, but there is a lot to learn from what has happened in the older countries. When one attends a Conference such as the I.U.L.A., one realises that the basic problems of city management are very much the

same the world over, and South Africa would probably do well if it stopped regarding its problems as being so unique.

I am now waiting for somebody else to make me another grant, as with the background information I have now obtained, I feel I could make much more beneficial use of the next trip. Any offers?

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