

# HERBERT H. LEHMAN: IN MEMORIAM

BY LOUIS FINKELSTEIN

**T**HE passing of Herbert H. Lehman was a profound loss to all who had labored with him for the welfare of the Jewish community and, indeed, to all in our country and throughout the world who had shared his concern for humanity. To a nation still mourning the untimely death of its young president, the loss of this second life, long an inspiration to the forces of enlightenment, deepened the sense of desolation and darkness that hung over those tragic days.

The nation lost more than a venerated statesman whose dedication to the cause of justice and humanity had made his name a legend throughout the world. Lehman the idealist, the man of action, the man of courage, stood as the shining symbol of America at its finest. No one more truly represented the spirit of liberty and brotherhood so deeply rooted in the history of this country than this second-generation American Jew. For traditions and teachings older than the country itself had contributed to mold his character and to fire him with the passion for social justice that illumined his entire life.

Sixty years of that life had been devoted to the service of his fellow-man, crowded years of dedication and unremitting industry, marked by milestones of progress and reform. His interests had led him to vastly different areas of activity, in national and international affairs, in the government of city and state, in the realm of commerce and labor, in the world of education and philanthropy. And to each undertaking Lehman had applied himself with all the spiritual and physical resources he could command. He had followed only one line—and that was the line of his conscience from which he could not be swayed. He knew what was right, and he did it without regard for personal interest. In providing

leadership for the forces of morality in this country he was not afraid to take a lonely or unpopular stand.

Awesome to contemplate in their scope and span are the achievements of this one man, the great causes associated with him both at home and abroad. As Governor and as Senator he worked incessantly to build a better America: stabilized finances, welfare and housing programs, improvements in relief distribution, in prison conditions, are some of the solid landmarks of the Lehman administration in Albany that helped to ease the conditions of social and industrial upheaval that existed between the wars. Later, in Washington he was always to be found in the forefront of the battle to protect the rights of the individual; his often the lone voice raised in the Senate to protest against the forces of reaction.

Lehman's commitment to those in distress was not bounded by barriers of frontier, religion or race. As an early member of the Joint Distribution Committee he gave valiant service to his fellow Jews in the pogrom-ridden lands of Eastern Europe. Through JDC and its ancillary, the Agro-Joint, he was able to bring relief to millions who had suffered under Russian persecution. Lehman's work helped to rehabilitate entire communities ravaged by the First World War. Later, as Director-General of UNRRA, he undertook responsibility for a monumental life-saving operation that has no parallel in history, one that involved the welfare of 44 million people. It was a challenge Lehman found infinitely rewarding and he threw heart and soul into the job. His was undoubtedly the greatest single contribution made by any one person to the epic task of post-war rescue and rehabilitation.

When the Governor died all America, indeed all lovers of freedom, mourned with a sense of irreparable loss, but perhaps the most grievous loss of all was suffered by American Jewry. Unique was the position that Lehman held: no other Jewish leader has exercised such power over, and enjoyed such prestige within, the entire community. Lehman himself always minimized the divisions in Judaism, maintaining that the forces unifying Jewry were far stronger than the differences that held us apart. "All that I require of a Jew," he insisted "is that he follow the basic laws, precepts and traditions of our faith. It makes no difference to me whether a man goes to a Reform, Orthodox or Conservative synagogue." And he gave evidence of his conviction by becoming in time a member of synagogues conducted by all three groups.

Politically, Lehman could depend upon the loyal support of the community. The liberals of New York City helped to vote him into office time and time again, with increased majorities. For although in his origins

and early advantages, Lehman differed from the urban multitudes, he represented their general outlook and ideals. In essence, the values that Lehman stood for were the fundamental values of enlightened liberalism.

### JUDAISM A WAY OF LIFE

The Lehman epoch had particular value for his fellow Jews—a proud reminder of the eternal values of the Judaic tradition. We recognized in his struggles against injustice, in his protests against man's inhumanity to man, the guiding precepts of the ancient Hebrew prophets.

These precepts, part of his spiritual heritage, were strengthened by family training and tradition. Born to wealth and status, there was developed in the young Lehman, almost from infancy, a powerful sense of responsibility towards those less fortunate. His father, Mayer Lehman, was wont to have the six-year-old child accompany him on his visits to hospitals and other missions of mercy.

That sense of commitment, translated into constructive deeds, runs like a leitmotif through the career of Herbert Lehman. His lifelong concern for the poor and the persecuted was an almost ingrained response to the ethical teachings, biblical in origin, which have been inculcated by prophet and rabbi through the centuries. Lehman was in every sense an heir to this rich legacy.

His life exemplified consistently the talmudic tradition of service for its own sake or "for the sake of heaven." He belongs not only to the great tradition of Jewish servants of mankind, but to the specifically American tradition which included in its roster the Schiffs, the Warburgs, the Sulzbergers, the Guggenheims, Julius Rosenwald, Louis Marshall, Sol M. Strock, and a host of others, less well known, but equally dedicated.

Lehman himself, aware of the sources of the inspiration which made him the great man he became, seized many public occasions to stress how largely his sense of social responsibility stemmed from "the faith that I acquired earlier in life—faith in the fundamental ideals and traditions of Judaism." To Lehman, Judaism was always "a way of life, dictating all the actions of men, coloring all their thoughts."

Fundamental to this way of life, Lehman showed, was a perpetual concern with the basic human rights of all men. Long before these ideals became common currency amongst the nations, the Torah had laid this charge upon the Jews. He declared:

The sanctity of human life, the right of every man to certain unalienable rights, the concern for man as man, regardless of how humble his status or background—these are the ideals inherent in the Jewish faith.

Thus, to be a Jew and an heir to the great spiritual legacy of talmudic teaching was to bear a constant commitment to the service of all men. In moving terms Lehman defined his commitment in the address he gave in 1936 at the semi-centennial celebration of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America—of which he was a board member and later chairman of the board of overseers:

So long as we can live and work, each of us owes to himself, to his country and to humanity the duty to apply to each social problem the spiritual values which experience has shown are universal, immutable and eternal.

The Jew could not stand passively on the sidelines when injustice was perpetrated but was duty bound to come to the support of those victimized. On the attitude of Jewish teachings to the social evils of the day, the Governor was explicit:

Judaism stands in persistent protest against the exploitation or oppression of any human being. It insists that each man, woman and child is an incarnation of the spirit of God, is entitled to the fullest life. . . . There is a wonderful continuity in the ideals to which Israel has devoted itself through the centuries, characterized by a continuous yearning for freedom that has grown out of its own experience. For Jews speak in social terms, not as theorists, but out of the pain of countless generations who remembered the injunction to bring freedom and justice to all men, even as they themselves were brought to freedom out of Egyptian slavery.

He went on to make the observation that even as today's widely accepted principles of human rights and freedoms stemmed from rabbinic teachings, he was convinced that a study of the talmudic tradition would produce further insights meaningful to the problems of the day. What was needed, he felt, was a study of the Bible as a source of "fresh insights for living." He urged

. . . translating the ancient moral law into a guide post for a compelling present might reveal that not by power and might but by humility and spirituality will we build the world anew.

It was in response to these exhortations that the Seminary in 1958 established the Herbert H. Lehman Institute of Talmudic Ethics in honor of the elder statesman's 80th birthday.

Lehman took strenuous issue with those who argued that religion was a spent force and could expect to play little part in the future affairs of men. As a philosophy of life, he believed that Judaism could provide its

adherents with spiritual inspiration. On one occasion, discussing postwar political tensions and unrest, he expressed the belief that the root of many current problems was a spiritual one:

What we need at this juncture of history is a faith for living, a philosophy of life that will give us a sense of direction and serve as a guide through the confusion of our times. We need a faith that will inspire us with hope and courage against the inhumanity of the world.

This faith, if it is to capture the imagination of people, must be based on the best of the past, concerned with present-day problems, and a forward look into the future. Judaism, properly interpreted, has a vital role to play in this crisis. It can contribute towards the deepening of the world's conscience and give all of us a sense of world responsibility. It can give us the hope and faith we need so badly to face the next critical decade.

#### LEADERSHIP IN JEWISH COMMUNITY

Lehman bridged the gap between two generations of American Jewish leaders. He entered service as an apprentice in the footsteps of Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, and those other titans who graced the early years of the century, and he continued to serve side by side with succeeding generations to the last day of his life.

There is scarcely an organization within the community that did not benefit from his wisdom and wealth of experience. He sat on the boards of virtually every major Jewish educational and philanthropic institution, and despite the tremendous burden of responsibilities he constantly carried for government or political affairs, he never lost touch with the needs of his community. The list of important offices he held is almost endless. His honorary chairmanships alone constitute a roll of American Jewish community agencies: American Association for Jewish Education, American Friends of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, American Friends of the Hebrew University, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Brandeis University, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Home for Aged and Infirm Hebrews, Israel Bond Organization, Jewish Agency for Israel, Jewish Child Care Association, Joint Distribution Committee, National Foundation for Jewish Culture, Palestine Economic Committee, Surprise Lake Camp, Synagogue Council of America, United Israel Appeal, United Jewish Appeal, and World Organization for Rehabilitation through Training.

To the Jews in the oppressed lands of Eastern Europe, where the JDC

accomplished its memorable work, Lehman was a legend, his name synonymous with hope. Lehman, who was one of the founders, was absorbed in every aspect of its work. Had this been his sole accomplishment, it alone would have won him a place in the annals of Jewish history.

As chairman of the JDC's Reconstruction Committee, he was the prime mover in restoring the shattered communities of Russia after the First World War. The Agro-Joint, through Lehman's efforts, was able to free from the ghettos hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews and to help them start on new, freer lives as farmers and artisans. ORT, which set up technical and vocational schools for indigent communities in many parts of the world, was another project Lehman helped to sponsor, characteristic in its emphasis on self-help. Imperative to his mind, was the importance of re-establishing self-respect in those he helped, and in this he was mindful of the teaching of Maimonides, who enjoined that the noblest form of charity was the gift that enabled a man to regain his livelihood, and to become free from dependence upon his fellow-men.

Herbert Hoover called Lehman's work at this time "one of the most striking feats of human engineering."

Lehman often spoke of the inspiration he had received from those he came to succor. For the first time he was drawn into close contact with the pious Jews of Eastern Europe, and he developed a profound admiration for Orthodox Jews who, despite all vicissitudes, clung so tenaciously to their ancient values. It served to reinforce his own spirit. In 1928 he said:

If anything has made me feel the value of Jewish spirituality, it is my connection with the cultural and religious activities of the JDC.

When you know of hundreds of thousands of men and women who preferred to have money used for the development of their religious life, rather than for terribly needed food and shelter; when you see these people making tremendous sacrifices to maintain their synagogues and religious schools and to bring up their children in their ancient creed, then you realize why the Jewish people and faith have indomitably survived the storms of several thousand years.

Lehman gave ten years to the massive task of Jewish relief and rehabilitation in Europe. The work helped to broaden and mature him. It transformed the sociable, sports-loving young man into an earnest, hard-working man of action concerned with social problems and world affairs. His exposure to suffering deepened his sense of commitment until it embraced all mankind.

## DIRECTOR OF UNRRA

His work with JDC and its ancillaries had an important direct benefit—it provided him with a unique experience in organization and planning that prepared him for the even greater responsibilities he would assume in the future, in the wake of yet another world war. As Director-General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) Lehman held one of the most inspiring roles of humanitarian leadership to be undertaken by one man. It was under his directions that this epic task force, in an unprecedented expression of international unity, assumed the burden of restoring to productive life the human souls crushed by the Nazis. Of his services for UNRRA, which saved millions of lives and brought many millions more on the road to recovery, Lehman later wrote:

. . . despite its headaches, its heartaches, its frustrations, this was, bar nothing, the most rewarding experience of my life.

Lehman accepted the challenge of the UNRRA assignment in a spirit of consecration. It seemed that the whole of his previous life had been but a preparation for this mission of mercy. His temperament, his training, his distinguished record in philanthropy, all marked him as the best man for the job. Roosevelt's choice was widely applauded. The immediate reaction of the American public in December 1943, when his appointment was announced, was expressed in the comment of one well-known journalist who wrote:

No one who has known him will doubt that he is the ideal man for this important and difficult undertaking. We in New York know his management will be sound, able, patient and courageous.

He flung all his energies into the task, working unsparingly. The situation was urgent and speed was imperative. Every day hunger, cold, and weakness brought death for hundreds. Following in the wake of the Allied forces, UNRRA strove desperately to meet the demands of the devastated countries for food and supplies. As the Nazi-dominated lands were liberated the open gates of the concentration camps set free enormous numbers of helpless human beings marked by the Germans for destruction. Homeless and hopeless, these displaced persons, Jews, slave workers, war prisoners, political deportees, depended upon UNRRA for survival, and the organization grew constantly to meet its increasing responsibilities.

Lehman's job at the helm of this complex machine involved constant vigilance at many levels. He had to scrutinize the procurement of supplies, the creation of transport, the hiring of personnel, the rise and fall of the financial barometer. He had to evaluate new relief plans every day; to enlist and coordinate the work of the many voluntary agencies working with UNRRA—of which there were some thirty scattered in Germany alone; and to see that the claims of UNRRA to Lend-Lease resources and military surpluses were pressed.

An important aspect of his job was to enlist support for his mission from Americans at a time when a return to pre-war isolationism claimed many supporters. At a large rally in Central Park on "I Am an American Day," in May 1945, Lehman argued that true Americanism embraced a responsibility for less fortunate nations. He exhorted:

Are we going to allow starvation in Europe or prevent it? Are we willing to make a small sacrifice at home in order that millions abroad can regain their health and dignity?

It was an issue on which feeling ran high. Lehman, always sensitive to personal attack, continued to campaign valiantly, despite the pain of carping criticism. UNRRA faced fire from many sides; among other problems it had to cope with the hostility of the military commands, attempted pressures by foreign powers, refusal by some national relief agencies to coordinate activities, indifference or even opposition of the American public. Above all it was dominated by the increasing need for funds, to pay for food and urgent services.

In an energetic campaign to persuade Congress to pass on the appropriation for UNRRA, Lehman set himself to mobilize public sentiment. Tirelessly he addressed rallies, marshalled witnesses, canvassed his friends in the Senate and House. Enlightened opinion was on his side and he had the backing of many influential newspapers across the country. Eisenhower's strong endorsement was decisive and Congress passed the appropriation which enabled one per cent of the national income to be used to alleviate the desperate need of war-wracked Europe.

By spring 1946, the picture in Europe had changed. Thanks to the contribution UNRRA had made, famine had been stayed, epidemics blocked, the naked clothed, the unemployed given hope and work. The agency had helped with the restoration of roads, railways, canals and ports, dispatching a vast staff of experts to advise on rehabilitation in every field. In that year alone UNRRA delivered 24 million tons of supplies to 17 nations; it had distributed more clothing than any other agency; it had conducted the largest international medical program in history.



Lehman had worked himself to the point of utter exhaustion when he left UNRRA in March 1946. By then it had virtually fulfilled the vital task of bringing life-saving relief, and Europe was ready for the second stage of its recovery in which American assistance would take the form of Marshall Plan aid. For his spectacular contribution, Lehman was showered with decorations and with tributes both by his own countrymen and by the men of other nations. A perceptive evaluation of this contribution was given by a British statesman, Philip Noel Baker:

No tougher assignment was ever faced by any one man. He has carried it through . . . but the greatest service of all has been his personal leadership—the moral authority which he has established with the governments and peoples of the world, the sense of spiritual power he has given all his colleagues in this work.

#### IMMIGRATION REFORM

Of the tragedies to which he had been witness during his UNRRA service, none had moved him so profoundly as the plight of the pitiful victims of the concentration camps, against whom all the nations had barred their doors. Upon his return to political life Lehman resumed his attack on restrictive immigration policies. In his plea that the United States extend a welcome to the peoples of all races, Lehman was expressing not only his convictions, and those of the liberal forces he represented; he was also speaking in the voice of the American tradition which, from the founding of the Republic, had provided a haven for the oppressed.

The political climate of post-war America was against him but Lehman never abandoned the fight for immigration reform. He fought against the passing of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, denouncing it as “repugnant to every concept we call America.”

Year after year he introduced his own counter-measures, suggesting rational standards for immigration quotas that would rest on worth and need. None of these measures got off the ground, but Lehman’s persistence kept immigration reform a living issue.

#### DEFENDER OF ISRAEL

Lehman became a staunch defender of the State of Israel. Earlier, like many others, he had been convinced that the future of Jewry lay in the countries of the diaspora, and he had demonstrated this faith by his labors for the rehabilitation of the Russian Jewish communities at the time of the First World War.

The course of history changed his convictions. By the end of World War II he recognized the importance of Israel to the Jewish refugees. Bitterly he assailed the British policy that denied admission to these hapless victims. Movingly he put their cause:

I have visited many countries and I have seen with my own eyes the indescribably pathetic plight of the pitiful remnant of Jews which survives in Europe—a million and a half out of six million. And yet they stand before us, not as beggars pleading for crumbs of charity. They stand before us with a stirring faith and will—as brave men and women who are anxious to take their rightful place in the world.

His respect for human dignity led him to support particularly the many educational institutions which arose in Palestine and later in Israel. The Hebrew University, the Technion and the Weizmann Institute for Research at Rehovot, all benefitted from his counsel and his generosity.

For Lehman there was involved no clash of loyalty in being an American and being a Jew: he felt on the contrary that the spiritual heritage the Jewish immigrants brought to this country found its perfect soil in the atmosphere of freedom, and that freedom had been in turn enriched.

#### EARLY INFLUENCES

It was the promise of freedom that brought Mayer Lehman over from Bavaria in 1848. He was part of a steady stream of German Jewish immigrants who, stirred by the winds of change moving across Europe, saw in the New World the opportunity at last of being able to live free from the age old threat of persecution. Many of those immigrants settled in the South in the decades preceding the Civil War. These newcomers, with their industry, intelligence, and business skills, played an important role in the commercial development of the southern states. Some were the founders of dynasties which were to make outstanding contributions to the growth and greatness of this country.

Lehman's father and his two uncles started out as cotton traders in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1863 Mayer Lehman, well-known as a Southern patriot, was chosen by the Confederate Army to act as negotiator in an exchange of prisoners with the North.

After the Civil War, the families moved to New York and Lehman Bros. became recognized as one of the city's more important brokerage houses. The partners, who helped to organize the New York Cotton Exchange in 1871, were prominent citizens, zealous in fulfilling their obligations in civic affairs and in philanthropy.

It was into a warm, comfortable, loving family circle that Herbert H. Lehman was born, on March 28, 1878. The Lehman family formed part of a solidly established and prosperous German Jewish community, who accepted, as the obligation imposed on their position of privilege, the duties of philanthropy and public service. Both at home, and in the religious school of Temple Emanuel, that sense of social responsibility was a fundamental part of the training young Lehman received. Overriding in his upbringing was the emphasis on utter personal integrity, and his whole life serves to underline how deeply these teachings took root.

Precept and example deepened the natural sympathetic instincts of his character. Early in life they made him aware of the existence of human misery. The visits with his father to the hospital charity wards, which started when he was six years old, were followed a few years later by others to the poverty-stricken districts of the city. The scenes of squalor and suffering he witnessed strengthened his resolve to be of help. Later, recalling these early experiences, Lehman wrote:

I was shocked. How much direct effect it had on my later thinking, I don't know, but probably a great deal.

He had barely left his teens when he was fired with enthusiasm for the great work Lillian Wald was accomplishing in the Lower East Side. He became an active member of her task force, at the Henry Street Settlement, helping to organize and run a boys group. Lehman never lost interest in the work of the Settlement, which continued to benefit from his advice and support.

It appears that his father had originally harbored plans for Herbert to be a mining engineer, for which his son professed neither talent nor inclination. Fortunately, Mayer Lehman decided to send his son to Williams College. There, after an initial period of loneliness, the boy's open nature won him many friends and the respect of his teachers.

#### BUSINESS CAREER

After his graduation from Williams in 1899 Lehman settled unhesitatingly upon a career in business. He did not immediately choose to enter the family banking house, but decided instead to take a job as a salesman in a large textile concern. At the age of 28, through his own industry and business acumen, he had become vice president and treasurer of the business. In 1909 he became a partner in Lehman Bros. and under his leadership the banking house entered upon its most important phase of development. Widely expanding its interests, the company undertook many major

financial ventures, taking part in the development of the South by financing railroads, utilities, timber plants, and mills. In New York it helped to organize banks and trust companies, to form the great gas, ferry and traction concerns.

Lehman Bros. was among the first banking firms to undertake support of the vast mercantile houses, acting as financial agents for such stores as R. H. Macy, Gimbel Bros., Federated Department Stores, Allied Department Stores and the Interstate group. The firm retained leadership in this field, so that it could be said in 1950:

Of today's twenty largest retailing enterprises Lehman Brothers has been or is presently regarded as investment broker for more than half.

The sale of Bamberger's, in Newark, to R. H. Macy was Herbert Lehman's last important transaction as a banker before he abandoned his business pursuits to enter public life in 1929. By that time the family business was firmly established as one of the most respected in the city. Lehman Bros. had built a reputation for responsibility and constructive progress accomplished through sagacious, conscientious management.

With the family business on solid footing, Lehman could with clear conscience turn his attention to other matters. His business experience had brought many satisfactions, and he had become recognized as an authority on problems of finance and industry. He had enjoyed the excitement of negotiating complex deals, the challenge of devising programs that brought weak companies back to strength. Nevertheless, at heart he was not a businessman.

#### PUBLIC OFFICE

Most of all Lehman felt the urge to enter public affairs. During the First World War he had served briefly as an aide to Franklin D. Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and in this important role he had acquitted himself with distinction, earning the DSM for his services. The war over, Lehman returned to his business career. Yet he looked back with a great deal of satisfaction to his two-and-a-half years in Washington. His stint of government work had left him with a feeling of positive accomplishment and the desire to make a further contribution.

Twelve years later, the pattern repeated itself. Lehman returned to public office, again as aide to F.D.R. Inexorably, he had been drawn into public life. Appointed by Alfred E. Smith to head a commission investigating conditions in the garment industry, he had been successful in averting a major strike: as adjudicator, his integrity and capability won

the confidence of both sides. Democratic party leadership was swift to recognize Lehman's potential as a force for influencing voters. In 1928 Smith became a candidate for the presidency, and seeking means of increasing his support from New York, urged Roosevelt to run as Governor. The New York Democrats were in a weak position and faced with a strong Republican nominee. F.D.R. evinced a natural reluctance for the combat. Further, he argued, in the unlikely event of his election, his condition—he was then convalescing—would make it impossible for him to carry the heavy responsibilities of the Governor's office. Thus the choice of his running mate, one who could be relied upon to bolster public support and to undertake part of the administrative burden, became a decisive factor. One man was completely qualified—Herbert Lehman. Smith lost the state and the election to Herbert Hoover, but, by a small margin, F.D.R. was elected, and Lehman with him as Lieutenant-Governor of New York. Lehman, justifying Roosevelt's confidence, proved himself an administrator of great competence and compassion. While he knew less of the ways of politics than most elected officials, Lehman drew upon his knowledge of finance, of management, and of human problems.

Lehman's wide business experience and his close association with labor and philanthropic groups, coupled with his prodigious energy and industry, made it possible for the Governor to delegate significant responsibilities to his lieutenant. For the first time the position became important in the administration of the state's affairs. Lehman executed his tasks with a precision and thoroughness that won him the confidence of the legislature. To the crippled Governor he was "my good right arm."

In 1930, both Roosevelt and Lehman were returned to office in a landslide: their record of constructive reform had worked for them. On the eve of his nomination, the New York *Herald Tribune* in an editorial warned the Republicans that if Lehman were named, only a man of the highest capacity could hope to defeat him. In 1928 Lehman had carried the state by 14,000. In 1930 he had a plurality of 565,000.

It followed logically in 1932, when Roosevelt became Democratic candidate for the presidency, that Herbert Lehman would succeed him as Governor. But even his supporters were astonished by his unheard-of election plurality of 849,000 votes.

The sequel of his political career in New York is history, but the achievement reads more like legend. Governor Lehman was reelected three times, serving the state as Governor for four successive terms. He remained the most successful vote-getter in New York history.

Lehman's political prospects were most favorable when he decided to

forsake political life and to dedicate himself to the task of rehabilitating the stricken people of Europe. He returned to the political scene on the completion of his mission for UNRRA, to be twice elected United States Senator from New York.

It was a time when the country lay under the shadow of the forces of reaction. The doctrines of McCarthyism dominated the capitol and had succeeded in poisoning the minds of a large segment of the public. When valor gave way to discretion, and liberals of weaker fiber fled the scene, Lehman remained uncowed. Often his was the lone voice protesting the degradations inflicted on the human spirit. Time and time again in the Senate he waged an unequal battle. Despite the odds against him he would not give up. Nor could any question of political expediency cause him to slacken his vigilance. When adherence to principle imperiled his position, he was prepared to sacrifice the position, but not the principle.

His position on the McCarran-Walter Internal Security Act was heroic. The large body of the American public was eager to accept the bill, which they were persuaded was a powerful weapon to smash the Communist conspiracy. Lehman was one of the small band of senators who fought the bill as an invasion of civil liberties, and, of the seven voting against the bill, only he was running for reelection.

The bill came to a vote two weeks before the Democratic state convention at which Lehman would come up for nomination. Tremendous pressure was put on Lehman to vote for the bill: he was warned by party officials that a negative vote would destroy his hopes of renomination.

On the eve of the Senate vote Lehman said:

There are many citizens of my State and elsewhere who mistakenly understand—they have been so told—that the McCarran bill is an anti-communist bill. Because of this misunderstanding, some of my colleagues, whom I highly respect, will vote for the McCarran bill. The time will come when they will regret that. As for me, Mr. President, I will not compromise with my conscience. I will not betray the people of my State in order to cater to the mistaken impression which some of them hold. I shall try to clarify the issue and not to confuse it. I am going to vote against this tragic, this unfortunate, this ill-conceived legislation. My conscience will be easier, though I realize my political prospects may be more difficult. I will cast my vote to protect the liberties of our people.

Those were his words on that day in June 1950. A week later, in Syracuse, the convention unanimously, even proudly, nominated Herbert Lehman to run for reelection.

Lehman held to the same basic principles throughout the whole of his political career. Injustice in all forms was the enemy; prejudice by color or race invoked his special ire. He was a fighter. He could not be intimidated by the opposition nor silenced by considerations of political expediency. To the friends who strove to persuade him to pursue more cautious tactics, he replied with intensity:

I cannot stand above the battle. I identify myself with the victims of oppression and discrimination wherever they may be.

He worked incessantly to translate his ideals into action. Stories of Lehman's industry have become legend. As New York's Governor he had a working routine that lasted sixteen hours each day. In Washington his was the largest and most active working team employed by any Senator, part of the cost being borne by Lehman himself. Through the tensions of his years at UNRRA, he drove himself without respite, sustaining physical hardships that would have crushed a man of fewer years, less stalwart in spirit.

#### ELDER STATESMAN

His "retirement," achieved only when he declined to run for reelection, was the signal for Lehman to turn with renewed enthusiasm to other numerous areas of community and civic life. Education, civil rights, party reform—these are but a few of the many causes to which he gave vigorous leadership during those latter years.

He was in his eighties when he won one of the greatest political triumphs of his career; the defeat of the old hierarchy that had long dominated the Democratic party in New York. Leading the struggle to reconstitute the party on truly democratic lines, Lehman himself worked tirelessly. The young men who worked with him during that broiling summer of 1961 recall with awe the gallant campaigner who canvassed without respite, day after day, addressing rallies and meetings throughout the city. To his influence and inspiration is largely due the victory of the reform forces.

The Rabbis tell us that the wisdom of the righteous increases with the harvest of their years. So it was with Herbert Lehman. The years, instead of diminishing, deepened and intensified his qualities of mind and heart. His influence was at its zenith—crowned with honors, in the fullness of his powers, he was actually on the point of departing for a conference with the President—when, on December 5, 1963, in his eighty-sixth year, he died suddenly. His loss was felt not only by his constituency but by millions throughout the country and around the globe. Posthumously,

there was conferred upon him The Freedom Medal, the highest civilian award in the United States.

The veneration he inspired was dramatically demonstrated at his funeral. A simple ceremony had been planned in accordance with Lehman's life-long eschewal of pomp. Yet, so great was the spontaneous outburst of grief, that the scene was one rarely witnessed in New York.

No one present on that day will ever forget how New Yorkers, in hundreds of thousands, converged upon Temple Emanuel where the funeral was to be held. Halting traffic, the crowds lined the streets for long blocks across upper Fifth Avenue. Silent and stricken with sorrow, they stood there on that cold winter day, shoulder to shoulder, people of all classes and races and faiths, come together to mourn what each of them felt as a personal loss.

Memorable and infinitely moving was this concerted expression of grief. From his first entry into public life, a rare personal relationship had existed between the Governor and the people he represented. He had served New York in many capacities; always with the complete confidence of the electorate, who knew there was no more trustworthy custodian of the public weal. As long as he chose to run, New Yorkers returned him to office, each time with increased majority.

In his latter years, as the revered Elder Statesman, particularly after his retirement from the Senate set him free to devote more time to affairs on his home ground, it was touching to witness the demonstrations of affection he evoked from his fellow citizens. As the venerable white-haired figure was recognized, striding purposefully about New York, voices from the crowd would be heard in solicitous comment, "He looks strong," proudly; or, anxiously, "He doesn't look well today." Strangers would touch his sleeve as he passed. These were expressions of affection that came straight from the heart; it was affection for one who would fight with the same intensity for the rights of the little-known individual as for the great liberal causes.

His profound interest in people and in human problems had been one of the compelling factors that drew him into public life. His preference for the title of Governor over the more honorific Senator, he once explained with a smile, lay in the implicit personal relationship it represented. As Senator Paul Douglas observed:

Lehman is kindness personified—not only to mankind in the abstract, but to mankind in particular.

Countless are the instances of his personal kindness and thoughtfulness. The Children's Zoo in Central Park, that has become one of the



greatest delights of youngsters in this city, was a gift from the Governor and his wife, a token of their special attachment to children. It was one of a series of public spirited donations on the occasion of their fiftieth wedding anniversary in April 1960. The zoo is located close to the late Governor's New York residence, and, when the Lehman's were in town, scarcely a day passed without a visit to the zoo and a kindly word and helping hand to the many juvenile visitors who surrounded the Governor and his wife.

### HIS MARK ON PUBLIC LIFE

The Lehman saga is the story of a Jewish immigrant's son who rose to become a great American statesman. Yet the student who pauses to examine the characteristics of this history is apt to be disconcerted by a number of paradoxical elements. Lehman's rise to eminence was achieved in flat contradiction to the formula for political success prescribed by the rules.

Few public servants in our time have been so universally respected, admired and trusted as was Lehman. Throughout his political career he remained New York's "most unbeatable candidate."

However, qualities which are usually held to be vital to a politician's advance, were lacking in Lehman. It was said of him that he "neither looked nor talked like a politician." In appearance he was unimposing, in personality, non-flamboyant. He eschewed the usual publicity techniques, disdained tricks. Although there were occasions, as when his strongest emotions were aroused, when he could rise to heights of eloquence, he was not a rhetorician apt to sway crowds or dazzle with his wit: he spoke in earnest tones, of matters that meant much to him, and was oftentimes accused of monotony.

Lehman's popularity demonstrates that the electorate, which frequently permits itself to be swayed by the aura of "glamour" or by persuasive oratory, is unerring in its judgment when the rare, dedicated spirit stumbles somehow onto the political arena.

The strength of Lehman's appeal was rooted in his character—his qualities of conviction and courage. There was about the Governor an air of sincerity that immediately inspired trust. His honesty was quite patent for all to see. His conscience remained his sole guideline and he followed his principles without regard to partisanship, or pressures. Sensitive to criticism, he was prepared to suffer unpopularity rather than compromise on what he believed to be right.

At a seminar of the Institute of Talmudic Ethics at the Seminary,

Lehman was once asked how he handled the conflict to which a democratically-elected legislator was subject, in attempting to reconcile the dictates of his own conscience with his obligations to represent the possibly opposing views of his constituency. With a characteristic twinkle, he told his questioner that he always followed his conscience, but that he had observed that its dictates were in accord with the long-range interests of the citizens of New York. If the electorate took a shorter-term view, he suggested, they could always find another representative! His constituents were apparently well satisfied; they continued to reelect him until he withdrew his name as candidate.

He risked political repercussions on many occasions when his conscience compelled him to take an unpopular stand. Frequently he was under fire from his own party, especially from the forces of Tammany who opposed him, knowing Lehman could not be bullied or "bought."

Nor was he afraid to stand up to the powerful figures of the day when a moral issue was at stake. It was an act of great courage on his part, at the time Roosevelt was planning to "pack" the Supreme Court, publicly to denounce the scheme: it was an act which might well have resulted in the complete severance of their relationship and the end of Lehman's political aspirations.

In Washington, the courageous fight waged by Lehman against McCarthy and McCarthyism remains one of the brightest episodes in a shabby decade of American politics. Were it not for Lehman, posterity might almost have been left to conclude that the spirit of freedom was absent from the Senate during that era.

It was said of Herbert Lehman that he became a statesman without ever passing through the intermediary stage of being a politician. He never acquired the art or the taste for the political maneuvering, for the "deals" that play such a large role in the operation of the legislature. Lehman could not bring himself to compromise on a moral issue, nor to accept a dubious course as an expedient. And, in consequence, he never became a member of the Senate's power clique. His power was not of this ephemeral kind.

Lehman's greatness is of the stuff that transcends politics—it is of the fabric that molds the mind and the character of a nation. The moral leadership exercised by this beloved figure has provided one of the greatest sources of inspiration of our day. Many are the causes Herbert Lehman labored for, both Jewish and nonsectarian. His memory will be recalled with affection and gratitude by the millions whom he served, at home and abroad. The world has been greatly enriched by his presence.