

COOLIDGE CUP DECLAMATION CONTEST

Calvin Coolidge Speech Packet

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Economy in the Interest of All (Excerpt)

Meeting of the Business Organization of the Government · June 30, 1924

[...] We are often told that we are a rich country, and we are. We are often reminded that we are in the best financial condition of any of the great powers, and we are. But we must remember that we also have a broader scale of existence and a higher standard of living. We have a freer Government and a more flexible organization of society. Where more is given, more is required. A tropical state of savagery almost maintains itself. American civilization is the product of a constant and mighty effort. One of the greatest perils to an extensive republic is the disregard of individual rights. In our own country such rights do not appear to be in immediate danger from direct attack, but they are always in jeopardy through indirect action.

One of the rights which the freeman has always guarded with most jealous care is that of enjoying the rewards of his own industry. Realizing that the power to tax is the power to destroy and that the power to take a certain amount of property or of income is only another way of saying that for a certain proportion of his time a citizen must work for the Government, the authority to impose a tax on the people has been most carefully guarded. Our own Constitution requires that revenue bills should originate in the House, because that body is supposed to be more representative of the people. These precautions have been taken because of the full realization that any oppression laid upon the people by excessive taxation, any disregard of their right to hold and enjoy the property which they have rightfully acquired, would be fatal to freedom. A government which lays taxes on the people not required by urgent public necessity and sound public policy is not a protector of liberty, but an instrument of tyranny. It condemns the citizen to servitude. One of the first signs of the breaking down of free government is a disregard by the taxing power of the right of the people to their own property. It makes little difference whether such a condition is brought about through the will of a dictator, through the power of a military force, or through the pressure of an organized minority.

The result is the same. Unless the people can enjoy that reasonable security in the possession of their property, which is guaranteed by the Constitution, against unreasonable taxation, freedom is at an end. The common man is restrained and hampered in his ability to secure food and clothing and shelter. His wages are decreased, his hours of labor are lengthened. Against the recurring tendency in this direction there must be interposed the constant effort of an informed electorate and of patriotic public servants. The importance of a constant reiteration of these principles can not be overestimated. They can not be denied. They must not be ignored.

There is a most urgent necessity for those who are charged with the responsibility of government administration to realize that the people of our country can not maintain their own high standards, they can not compete against the lower standards of the rest of the world, unless we are free from excessive taxes.

With us economy is imperative. It is a full test of our national character. Bound up in it is the true cause, not of the property interests, not of any privilege, but of all the people. It is preeminently the source of popular rights. It is always the people who toil that pay. It seems to me, therefore, worthy of our highest endeavor. It is this which gives the real importance to this meeting.

I would not be misunderstood. I am not advocating parsimony, I want to be liberal. Public service is entitled to a suitable reward. But there is a distinct limit to the amount of public service we can profitably employ. We require national defense, but it must be limited. We need public improvements, but they must be gradual. We have to make some capital investments, but they must be certain to give fair returns. Every dollar expended must be made in the light of all our national resources, and all our national needs. It is here that the Budget system gets its strength as a method of fiscal administration. [...]

[...] We must have no carelessness in our dealings with public property or the expenditure of public money. Such a condition is characteristic either of an undeveloped people, or of a decadent civilization. America is neither. It stands out strong and vigorous and mature. We must have an administration which is marked, not by the inexperience of youth, or the futility of age, but by the character and ability of maturity. We have had the self control to put into effect the Budget system, to live under it and in accordance with it. It is an accomplishment in the art of self government of the very highest importance. It means that the American Government is not a spendthrift, and that it is not lacking in the force or disposition to organize and administer its finances in a scientific way. To maintain this condition puts us constantly on trial. It requires us to demonstrate whether we are weaklings, or whether we have strength of character. It is not too much to say that it is a measure of the power and integrity of the civilization which we represent. I have a firm faith in your ability to maintain this position, and in the will of the American people to support you in that determination. In that faith in you and them, I propose to persevere. I am for economy. After that I am for more economy. At this time and under present conditions that is my conception of serving all the people. [...]

So far as it is within my power I will not permit increases in expenditures that threaten to prevent further tax reduction or that contemplate such an unthinkable thing as increase in taxes. If with increasing business our revenues increase, such increase should not be absorbed in new ways of spending. They should be applied to the lowering of taxes. In that direction lies the public welfare.

Toleration and Liberalism (Excerpt)

Speech to the American Legion · October 6, 1924

[...] The bringing together of all these different national, racial, religious, and cultural elements has made our country a kind of composite of the rest of the world, and we can render no greater service than by demonstrating the possibility of harmonious cooperation among so many various groups. Every one of them has something characteristic and significant of great value to cast into the common fund of our material, intellectual, and spiritual resources. The war brought a great test of our experiment in amalgamating these varied factors into a real Nation, with the ideals and aspirations of a united people. None was excepted from the obligation to serve when the hour of danger struck. The event proved that our theory had been sound. On a solid foundation of a national unity there had been erected a superstructure which in its varied parts had offered full opportunity to develop all the range of talents and genius that had gone into its making. Well-nigh all the races, religions, and nationalities of the world were represented in the armed forces of this Nation, as they were in the body of our population. No man's patriotism was impugned or service questioned because of his racial origin, his political opinion, or his religious convictions. Immigrants and sons of immigrants from the central European countries fought side by side with those who descended from the countries which were our allies; with the sons of equatorial Africa; and with the Red men of our own aboriginal population, all of them equally proud of the name Americans.

We must not, in times of peace, permit ourselves to lose any part from this structure of patriotic unity. I make no plea for leniency toward those who are criminal or vicious, are open enemies of society and are not prepared to accept the true standards of our citizenship. By tolerance I do not mean indifference to evil. I mean respect for different kinds of good. Whether one traces his Americanisms back three centuries to the Mayflower, or three years to the steerage, is not half so important as whether his Americanism of today is real and genuine. No matter by what various crafts we came here, we are all now in the same boat. You men constituted the crew of our "Ship of State" during her passage through the roughest waters. You made up the watch and held the danger posts when the storm was fiercest. You brought her safely and triumphantly into port. Out of that experience you have learned the lessons of discipline, tolerance, respect for authority, and regard for the basic manhood of your neighbor. You bore aloft a standard of patriotic conduct and civic integrity, to which all could repair. Such a standard, with a like common appeal, must be upheld just as firmly and unitedly now in time of peace. Among citizens honestly devoted to the maintenance of that standard, there need be small concern about differences of individual opinion in other regards. Granting first the essentials of loyalty to our country and to our fundamental institutions, we may not only overlook, but we may encourage differences of opinion as to other things. For differences of

this kind will certainly be elements of strength rather than of weakness. They will give variety to our tastes and interests. They will broaden our vision, strengthen our understanding, encourage the true humanities, and enrich our whole mode and conception of life. I recognize the full and complete necessity of 100 per cent Americanism, but 100 per cent Americanism may be made up of many various elements.

If we are to have that harmony and tranquility, that union of spirit which is the foundation of real national genius and national progress, we must all realize that there are true Americans who did not happen to be born in our section of the country, who do not attend our place of religious worship, who are not of our racial stock, or who are not proficient in our language. If we are to create on this continent a free Republic and an enlightened civilization that will be capable of reflecting the true greatness and glory of mankind, it will be necessary to regard these differences as accidental and unessential. We shall have to look beyond the outward manifestations of race and creed. Divine Providence has not bestowed upon any race a monopoly of patriotism and character.

The same principle that it is necessary to apply to the attitude of mind among our own people it is also necessary to apply to the attitude of mind among the different nations. During the war we were required not only to put a strong emphasis on everything that appealed to our own national pride but an equally strong emphasis on that which tended to disparage other peoples. There was an intensive cultivation of animosities and hatreds and enmities, together with a blind appeal to force, that took possession of substantially all the peoples of the earth. Of course, these ministered to the war spirit. They supplied the incentive for destruction, the motive for conquest. But in time of peace these sentiments are not helps but hindrances; they are not constructive. The generally expressed desire of "America first" can not be criticized. It is a perfectly correct aspiration for our people to cherish. But the problem which we have to solve is how to make America first. It can not be done by the cultivation of national bigotry, arrogance, or selfishness. Hatreds, jealousies, and suspicions will not be productive of any benefits in this direction. Here again we must apply the rule of toleration. Because there are other peoples whose ways are not our ways, and whose thoughts are not our thoughts, we are not warranted in drawing the conclusion that they are adding nothing to the sum of civilization. We can make little contribution to the welfare of humanity on the theory that we are a superior people and all others are an inferior people. We do not need to be too loud in the assertion of our own righteousness. It is true that we live under most favorable circumstances. But before we come to the final and irrevocable decision that we are better than everybody else we need to consider what we might do if we had their provocations and their difficulties. We are not likely to improve our own condition or help humanity very much until we come to the sympathetic understanding that human nature is about the same everywhere, that it is rather evenly distributed over the surface of the earth, and that we are all united in a common

brotherhood. We can only make America first in the true sense which that means by cultivating a spirit of friendship and good will, by the exercise of the virtues of, patience and forbearance, by being “plenteous in mercy”, and through progress at home and helpfulness abroad standing as an example of real service to humanity. [...]

The Inspiration of the Declaration of Independence (Excerpt)

Philadelphia · July 5, 1926

[...] In its main features the Declaration of Independence is a great spiritual document. It is a declaration not of material but of spiritual conceptions. Equality, liberty, popular sovereignty, the rights of man these are not elements which we can see and touch. They are ideals. They have their source and their roots in the religious convictions. They belong to the unseen world. Unless the faith of the American people in these religious convictions is to endure, the principles of our Declaration will perish. We can not continue to enjoy the result if we neglect and abandon the cause.

We are too prone to overlook another conclusion. Governments do not make ideals, but ideals make governments. This is both historically and logically true. Of course the government can help to sustain ideals and can create institutions through which they can be the better observed, but their source by their very nature is in the people. The people have to bear their own responsibilities. There is no method by which that burden can be shifted to the government. It is not the enactment, but the observance of laws, that creates the character of a nation.

About the Declaration there is a finality that is exceedingly restful. It is often asserted that the world has made a great deal of progress since 1776, that we have had new thoughts and new experiences which have given us a great advance over the people of that day, and that we may therefore very well discard their conclusions for something more modern. But that reasoning can not be applied to this great charter. If all men are created equal, that is final. If they are endowed with inalienable rights, that is final. If governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, that is final. No advance, no progress can be made beyond these propositions. If anyone wishes to deny their truth or their soundness, the only direction in which he can proceed historically is not forward, but backward toward the time when there was no equality, no rights of the individual, no rule of the people. Those who wish to proceed in that direction can not lay claim to progress. They are reactionary. Their ideas are not more modern, but more ancient, than those of the Revolutionary fathers.

In the development of its institutions America can fairly claim that it has remained true to the principles which were declared 150 years ago. In all the essentials we have achieved an equality which was never possessed by any other people. Even in the less important matter of material possessions we have secured a wider and wider distribution of wealth. The rights of the individual are held sacred and protected by constitutional guaranties, which even the Government itself is bound not to violate. If there is any one thing among us that is established

beyond question, it is self government; the right of the people to rule. If there is any failure in respect to any of these principles, it is because there is a failure on the part of individuals to observe them. We hold that the duly authorized expression of the will of the people has a divine sanction. But even in that we come back to the theory of John Wise that "Democracy is Christ's government". The ultimate sanction of law rests on the righteous authority of the Almighty.

On an occasion like this a great temptation exists to present evidence of the practical success of our form of democratic republic at home and the ever broadening acceptance it is securing abroad. Although these things are well known, their frequent consideration is an encouragement and an inspiration. But it is not results and effects so much as sources and causes that I believe it is even more necessary constantly to contemplate. Ours is a government of the people. It represents their will. Its officers may sometimes go astray, but that is not a reason for criticizing the principles of our institutions. The real heart of the American Government depends upon the heart of the people. It is from that source that we must look for all genuine reform. It is to that cause that we must ascribe all our results.

It was in the contemplation of these truths that the fathers made their declaration and adopted their Constitution. It was to establish a free government, which must not be permitted to degenerate into the unrestrained authority of a mere majority or the unbridled weight of a mere influential few. They undertook the balance these interests against each other and provide the three separate independent branches, the executive, the legislative, and the judicial departments of the Government, with checks against each other in order that neither one might encroach upon the other. These are our guaranties of liberty. As a result of these methods enterprise has been duly protected from confiscation, the people have been free from oppression, and there has been an ever broadening and deepening of the humanities of life.

Under a system of popular government there will always be those who will seek for political preferment by clamoring for reform. While there is very little of this which is not sincere, there is a large portion that is not well informed. In my opinion very little of just criticism can attach to the theories and principles of our institutions. There is far more danger of harm than there is hope of good in any radical changes. We do need a better understanding and comprehension of them and a better knowledge of the foundations of government in general. Our forefathers came to certain conclusions and decided upon certain courses of action which have been a great blessing to the world. Before we can understand their conclusions we must go back and review the course which they followed. We must think the thoughts which they thought. Their intellectual life centered around the meeting-house. They were intent upon religious worship. While there were always among them men of deep learning, and later those who had comparatively large possessions, the mind of the people was not so much engrossed in how

much they knew, or how much they had, as in how they were going to live. While scantily provided with other literature, there was a wide acquaintance with the Scriptures. Over a period as great as that which measures the existence of our independence they were subject to this discipline not only in their religious life and educational training, but also in their political thought. They were a people who came under the influence of a great spiritual development and acquired a great moral power. [...]