

Governor Cox's Acceptance Speech

(Full text of Governor James M. Cox's speech of acceptance of the Democratic nomination for the Presidency of the United States, delivered August 7, 1920, at Dayton, Ohio.)

Chairman Robinson, and members of the Notification Committee: The message which you bring from the great conference of progressive thought assembled under the formal auspices of the Democratic party inspires within me a pride and an appreciation which I cannot voice. At the same time I am mindful of the responsibility which this function now officially places upon me. As I measure my own limitations the task ahead of us should be approached with more than a feeling of diffidence if I were not strengthened and reassured by the faith that one has only to practice true fidelity to conscience, it is not the difficult thing to know what we ought to do; the sense of right and wrong has been given with Divine equality. The mistakes of history are the result of weakness in the face of tempting interests. I thank God, therefore, that I take up the standard of Democracy a free man, unfettered by promises and happy in the consciousness of untrammelled opportunity to render a service in the name of government that will hold for it the confidence which it deserves.

We are in a time which calls for straight thinking, straight talking and straight acting. This is no time for wobbling. Never in all our history has more been done for government. Never was sacrifice more sublime. The most precious things of heart and home were given up in a spirit which guarantees the perpetuity of our institutions—if the faith is kept with those who served and suffered. The altar of our republic is drenched in blood and tears, and he who turns away from the tragedies and obligations of the war, not consecrated to a sense of honor and of duty which resists every base suggestion of personal or political expediency, is unworthy of the esteem of his countrymen.

The men and women who by expressed policy at the San Francisco convention charted our course in the open seas of the future sensed the spirit of the hour and phrased it with clarity and courage. It is not necessary to read and re-read the Democratic platform to know its meaning. It is a document clear in its analysis of conditions and plain in the pledge of service made to the public. It carries honesty of word and intent. Proud of the leadership and achievement of the party in war, Democracy faces unafraid the problems of peace. Indeed, its pronouncement has but to be read along with the platform framed by Republican leaders in order that both spirit and purpose as they dominate the opposing organizations may be contrasted. On the one hand we see pride expressed in the nation's glory and a promise of service easily understood. On the other captious, unhappy spirit and the treatment of subjects vital to the present and the future, in terms that have completely confused the public mind. It was clear that the senatorial oligarchy had been given its own way in the selection of the presidential candidate, but it was surprising that it was able to fasten into the party platform the creed of hate and bitterness and the vacillating policy that possesses it.

In the midst of war the present senatorial cabal, led by Senators Lodge, Penrose and Smoot, was formed. Superficial evidence of loyalty to the president was deliberate in order that the great rank and file of their party, faithful and patriotic to the very core, might not be offended. But underneath this misleading exterior, conspirators planned and plotted, with bigoted zeal. With victory to our arms they delayed and obstructed the works of peace. If deemed useful to the work in hand no artifice for interfering with our constitutional peace-making authority was rejected. Before the country knew, yea, before these men themselves knew the details of the composite plan, formed at the peace table, they declared their opposition to it. Before the treaty was submitted to

the senate in the manner the Constitution provides, they violated every custom and every consideration of decency by presenting a copy of the document, procured unblushingly from enemy hands, and passed it into the printed record of senatorial proceedings. From that hour dated the enterprise of throwing the whole subject into a technical discussion, in order that the public might be confused. The plan has never changed in its objective, but the method has. At the outset there was the careful insistence that there was no desire to interfere with the principle evolved and formalized at Versailles. Later, it was the form and not the substance that professedly inspired attack. But pretense was futile when proposals later came forth that clearly emasculated the basic principle of the whole peace plan. It is not necessary to recall the details of the controversy in the senate. Senator Lodge finally crystallized his ideas into what were known as the Lodge reservations, and when congress adjourned these reservations held the support of the so-called regular Republican leaders.

From that time the processes have been interesting. Political expediency in its truest sense dwarfed every consideration either of the public interest or of the maintenance of the honor of a great political party. The exclusive question was how to avoid a rupture in the Republican organization. The country received with interest, to say the least, the announcement from Chicago, where the national convention was assembled, that a platform plank, dealing with the subject of the world peace, had been drawn, leaving out the Lodge reservations, and yet remaining agreeable to all interests, meaning thereby, the Lodge reservationists, the mild reservationists and the group of Republican senators that openly opposed the League of Nations in any form.

As the platform made no definite committal of the policy and was, in fact, so artfully phrased as to make almost any deduction possible, it passed through the convention with practical unanimity. Senator Johnson, however, whose position has been consistent and whose opposition to the league in any shape is well known, withheld his support of the convention's choice until the candidate had stated the meaning of the platform, and announced definitely the policy that would be his, if elected.

The Republican candidate has spoken and his utterance calls forth the following approval from Senator Johnson:

"Yesterday in his speech of acceptance Senator Harding, unequivocally took his stand upon the paramount issue in this campaign—the League of Nations. The Republican party stands committed by its platform. Its standard-bearer has now accentuated that platform. There can be no misunderstanding his words:"

Senator Harding, as the candidate of the party, and Senator Johnson are as one on this question, and, as the latter expresses it, the Republican party is committed both by platform in the abstract and by its candidate in specification. The threatened revolt among leaders of the party is averted, but the minority position as expressed in the senate prevails as that of the party. In short, principle, as avowed in support of the Lodge reservations, or of the so-called mild reservations, has been surrendered to expediency.

Senator Harding makes this new pledge of policy in behalf of his party:

"I promise you formal and effective peace so quickly as a Republican congress can pass its declaration for a Republican executive to sign."

This means but one thing—a separate peace with Germany!

This would be the most disheartening event in civilization since the Russians made their separate peace with Germany, and infinitely more unworthy on our part than it was on that of the Russians. They were threatened with starvation and revolution had swept their country. Our soldiers fought side by side with the Allies. So complete was the coalition of strength and purpose that General Foch was given supreme command, and every soldier in the allied cause, no matter what flag he fol-

lowed, recognized him as his chief. We fought the war together, and now before the thing is through it is proposed to enter into a separate peace with Germany! In good faith we pledged our strength with our associates for the enforcement of terms upon offending powers, and now it is suggested that this be withdrawn. Suppose Germany, recognizing the first break in the Allies, proposes something we cannot accept. Does Senator Harding intend to send an army to Germany to press her to our terms? Certainly the allied army could not be expected to render aid. If, on the other hand, Germany should accept the chance we offered of breaking the bond it would be for the express purpose of insuring a German-American alliance, recognizing that the Allies—in fact, no nation in good standing—would have anything to do with either of us.

This plan would not only be a piece of bungling diplomacy, but plain, unadulterated dishonesty, as well.

No less an authority than Senator Lodge said, before the heat of recent controversy, that to make peace except in company with the Allies would "brand us everlastingly with dishonor and bring ruin to us."

And then after peace is made with Germany, Senator Harding would, he says, "hopefully approach the nations of Europe and of the earth, proposing that understanding which makes us a willing participant in the consecration of nations to a new relationship."

In short, America, refusing to enter the League of Nations (now already established by twenty-nine nations) and bearing and deserving the contempt of the world, would submit an entirely new project. This act would either be regarded as arrant madness or attempted international bossism.

The plain truth is, that the Republican leaders, obsessed with a determination to win the presidential election, have attempted to satisfy too many divergent views. Inconsistencies, inevitable under the circumstances, rise to haunt them on every hand, and they find themselves arrayed in public thought at least, against a great principle. More than that there conduct is opposed to the idealism upon which their party prospered in other days.

Illustrating these observations by concrete facts, let it be remembered that those now inveighing against an interest in affairs outside of America, criticised President Wilson in unmeasured terms for not resenting the invasion of Belgium in 1914. They term the League of Nations a military alliance, which, except for their opposition, would envelop our country, when, as a matter of truth, the subject of a League of Nations has claimed the best thought of America for years, and the League to Enforce Peace was presided over by so distinguished a Republican as Ex-President Taft, who, before audiences in every section advocated the principle and the plan of the present League. They charge experimentation, when we have as historical precedent the Monroe Doctrine, which is the very essence of Article X of the Versailles covenant. Skeptics viewed Monroe's mandate with alarm, predicting recurrent wars in defense of Central and South American states, whose guardians they alleged we need not be. And yet not a shot has been fired in almost one hundred years in preserving sovereign rights of this hemisphere. They hypocritically claim that the League of Nations will result in our boys being drawn into military service, but they fail to realize that every high school youngster in the land knows that no treaty can override our Constitution, which reserves to Congress, and to Congress alone, the power to declare war. They preach Americanism with a meaning of their own invention, and artfully appeal to a selfish and provincial spirit, forgetting that Lincoln fought a war over the purely moral question of slavery, and that McKinley broke the fetters of our boundary lines, spoke the freedom of Cuba, and carried the torch of American idealism to the benighted Philippines. They lose memory of Garfield's prophecy that America, under the blessings of God-given opportunity, would by her moral leadership and co-operation become a Messiah among the nations of the earth.

These are fateful times. Organized government has a definite duty all over the world. The house of civilization is to be put in order. The supreme issue of the century is before us