

COOLIDGE CUP QUALIFIER FOR DECLAMATION

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Inaugural Address (Excerpt)

Washington, D.C. · March 4, 1925

No one can contemplate current conditions without finding much that is satisfying and still more that is encouraging. Our own country is leading the world in the general readjustment to the results of the great conflict. Many of its burdens will bear heavily upon us for years, and the secondary and indirect effects we must expect to experience for some time. But we are beginning to comprehend more definitely what course should be pursued, what remedies ought to be applied, what actions should be taken for our deliverance, and are clearly manifesting a determined will faithfully and conscientiously to adopt these methods of relief.

[...]

This Administration has come into power with a very clear and definite mandate from the people. The expression of the popular will in favor of maintaining our constitutional guarantees was overwhelming and decisive. There was a manifestation of such faith in the integrity of the courts that we can consider that issue rejected for some time to come. Likewise, the policy of public ownership of railroads and certain electric utilities met with unmistakable defeat. The people declared that they wanted their rights to have not a political but a judicial determination, and their independence and freedom continued and supported by having the ownership and control of their property, not in the Government, but in their own hands. As they always do when they have a fair chance, the people demonstrated that they are sound and are determined to have a sound government.

When we turn from what was rejected to inquire what was accepted, the policy that stands out with the greatest clearness is that of economy in public expenditure with reduction and reform of taxation. The principle involved in this effort is that of conservation. The resources of this country are almost beyond computation. No mind can comprehend them. But the cost of our combined governments is likewise almost beyond definition. Not only those who are now making their tax returns, but those who meet the enhanced cost of existence in their monthly bills, know by hard experience what this great burden is and what it does. No matter what others may want, these people want a drastic economy. They are opposed to waste. They know that extravagance lengthens the hours and diminishes the rewards of their labor. I favor the policy of economy, not because I wish to save money, but because I wish to save people. The men and women of this country who toil are the ones who bear the cost of the Government. Every dollar that we carelessly waste means that their life will be so much the more meager. Every dollar that we prudently save means that their life will be so much the more abundant. Economy is idealism in its most practical form.

If extravagance were not reflected in taxation, and through taxation both directly and indirectly injuriously affecting the people, it would not be of so much consequence. The wisest and soundest method of solving our tax problem is through economy. Fortunately, of all the great nations this country is best in a position to adopt that simple remedy. We do not any longer need wartime revenues. The collection of any taxes which are not absolutely required, which do not beyond reasonable doubt contribute to the public welfare, is only a species of legalized larceny. Under this republic the rewards of industry belong to those who earn them. The only constitutional tax is the tax which ministers to public necessity. The property of the country belongs to the people of the country. Their title is absolute. They do not support any privileged class; they do not need to maintain great military forces; they ought not to be burdened with a great array of public employees. They are not required to make any contribution to Government expenditures except that which they voluntarily assess upon themselves through the action of their own representatives. Whenever taxes become burdensome a remedy can be applied by the people; but if they do not act for themselves, no one can be very successful in acting for them.

The time is arriving when we can have further tax reduction, when, unless we wish to hamper the people in their right to earn a living, we must have tax reform. The method of raising revenue ought not to impede the transaction of business; it ought to encourage it. I am opposed to extremely high rates, because they produce little or no revenue, because they are bad for the country, and, finally, because they are wrong. We can not finance the country, we can not improve social conditions, through any system of injustice, even if we attempt to inflict it upon the rich. Those who suffer the most harm will be the poor. This country believes in prosperity. It is absurd to suppose that it is envious of those who are already prosperous. The wise and correct course to follow in taxation and all other economic legislation is not to destroy those who have already secured success but to create conditions under which every one will have a better chance to be successful. The verdict of the country has been given on this question. That verdict stands. We shall do well to heed it.

Economy in the Interest of All (Excerpt)

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

[...] 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.

[...] 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. [...]

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. [...]

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. [...]