
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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Sioux Falls, SD - Campaign Speech

SPEECH OF HONORABLE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
SIOUX FALLS, MINN., Aug. 14, 1920

I want to drive home a thought on the League of Nations which is apt to be overlooked, that is the fact that it places, for the first time in history, the relation of one nation to another on exactly the same basis as the relation of one individual to another. The time is long passed when an individual "bad man" could run amuck in the community, immune from punishment except by the starting of a "blood" feud retaliation by friends or relatives of his victims. Civilized communities have police forces, with the result that law and order are legally enforced.

Why should a different rule apply in a civilized world? Why should one outlaw nation be able to run amuck and murder or maim a brother nation without being called to account for it, without being prevented from further misdeeds in the community of nations?

Yet up to the splendid conception of international morality, fostered by the whole American Nation at the close of this war, the Law of Nations was hopelessly behind the times. It has always been the custom when one nation started a war for the

other nations not directly involved to issue proclamations of neutrality, thereby giving a free hand to aggression and imperialism. I want every thinking man and woman to ask themselves what would have happened in 1914 if Germany and Austria had known that an attack on Belgium and France would mean they they would have against them the whole civilized world. Anybody who has read the history of the beginning of the great war knows that Germany expected the complete neutrality of Great Britain, Italy, the United States and the dozen other nations which eventually entered the war against her. A true League of Nations at that time would have prevented the very firing of the first shot in that war - that staggering blow to progress and humanity would never have been struck. America would never have been forced to send two million of our boys across the seas.

It is too late to change what is already written in history, but it is not too late to prevent a recurrence of that terrible holocaust.

The League of Nations is designed with the primary

purpose of preventing a recurrence of this war or of anything like it.

No one asks that the United States or any of the twenty-nine nations that have already ratified and accepted the League, shall give up one iota of their independence or change their fundamentals of government.

Those who oppose the League dishonestly, that is to say for purely partisan reasons, have flooded the Nation with falsehoods as to the true meaning of the instrument. They have used every means at their hands to poison the minds of the public.

I want to call your particular attention to the fact that the Committee of distinguished lawyers, most of them Republicans, who were appointed by the American Bar Association to report on the League of Nations, have just handed in a verdict in favor of the ratification of the league just as it stands. They take the position that there is absolutely nothing in the treaty as presented to the Senate which contravenes in any way the Constitution of the United States, the decisions of the Supreme Court, or the Law

of the land. They find that every American right is safeguarded. That is the point of view of the majority of a Committee of the greatest legal minds we have.

But if there be any citizens who still have doubts on this subject - if there still be any who believe the false assertions made by that little clique of Senators, the friends of the League are entirely willing to have a clear and definite declaration made a part of the treaty itself - a declaration that the Constitution of the United States shall be in every way supreme - a declaration of what every school child knows, that Congress alone has the right to declare war or to authorize the sending of American Armies again across the seas.

But the question in the broadest sense is as to the primary purpose of the League. Can anyone doubt, knowing how it was started - knowing how the American people have believed in the principle of a league for peace, that this is the only way in which wars can be avoided in the days to come?

Let me give you a definite example out of my own

experience. I have been helping to run the Navy of the United States for seven years. I tell you that I have always wished the United States to have a Navy wholly sufficient to protect us in all of our international relations, but I have never asked for a Navy of such size that it would be regarded as a menace of aggression by other powers. I tell you that if the United States does not enter the League of Nations and returns to its old position of isolation, we Americans will have to have in the future a Navy even larger than what we have had in the past, even larger than what we have today, and even larger than what our present building program contemplates. The Navy today costs the people of the United States nearly a half billion dollars a year. If we do not join the concert of nations that cost will increase as every year goes by. If, however, the United States, containing the largest civilized population of any nation in the World, shall throw its splendid moral force into the League and become the keystone thereof, then the first practical beginning will be made on the limitation of world armaments.

I see every reason why, under the League of Nations,

complete agreement will be reached so that standing armies and navies can be enormously reduced. There is no reason from the practical point of view why, under an arrangement of this kind, the cost of the United States Navy, for instance, cannot be cut at least in half. From the point of view of the taxpayers alone a saving of a billion dollars a year from its army and navy is a considerable item, but that, after all, is a sordid way of putting it and of minor consideration compared to the great moral principles at stake.

The United States loves peace, but she loves her honor more. Her honor is pledged. It is pledged in the great national purpose for which we threw ourselves as a nation into the fight on April 6, 1917. It is pledged in the effort of a hundred million of Americans, men and women, in the preparations for and in the conduct of that great struggle. It is pledged in the heroism of thousands of the flower of young American manhood who gave their life-blood for civilization. It is pledged in the splendid record of the men in khaki and in blue who served in our armed forces on land and sea.

It is pledged in the sacrifices of the mothers of the nation who saw in those sacrifices a purpose bigger than the winning of battles.

Are those pledges to remain unfulfilled? Are these sacrifices to go unrewarded? Are we to stop short of the complete fulfilment of that goal to which our eyes were lifted? NO! I am very confident we will see this thing through without allowing ourselves to be deceived by those who quibble over words, by those who spread whispered innuendoes, who would have you believe the League is just what it is not.

If you want the possibility of a repetition of another war against civilization, then let us go back to the conditions of 1914. If you want the possibility of sending once more our troops and navies to foreign lands, then stay out of the League - then accept the wild suggestions we have heard of attempting to form some new kind of agreement between nations along lines which have never been defined.

On the other side of the picture, the Democratic Party offers something definite - an immediate ratification of the treaty

and the League of Nations, with every American right safeguarded. That is keeping faith with the rest of the world, including also the peoples of Germany and the other powers with whom we lately fought. Do not forget that the Central Powers of Europe entered into the Armistice on November 11, 1918, with the express understanding that the principle of the League of Nations as outlined by America would be embodied in the terms of final peace.

I feel confident that, if the Democratic nominee for the Presidency is chosen in November, the treaty and the League of Nations will be ratified within sixty days. I believe that this Fall the American people will speak so emphatically in favor of the League of Nations that Republicans in the Senate of the United States will join with the Democrats in immediate ratification.

The opposition to the League and to the Treaty of Peace comes primarily from that little group of reactionary Republicans, most of them the very men who in 1912 forced the forward-looking members of the Party into the Progressive Party. These same men dominated,

as you know, the platform and selection of the candidates at the Chicago Conventon. Theirs is a policy of vagueness. They seek to cover up the fact that they are the same wolves in sheep's clothing who tried to deceive the American people on so many occasions in the past. Theirs is a theory of Government by the few and for the few. It is only through a complete rebuke of these men that the traditions of the Republican Party can ever again be restored.

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