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**The American Legion and World Peace : Address of Percival P. Baxter, Governor of Maine, at the State Convention of the American Legion, Presque Isle, Maine, September 6, 1923**

Percival P. Baxter

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THE  
AMERICAN LEGION AND WORLD PEACE

Address of

PERCIVAL P. BAXTER,  
*Governor of Maine*

at the

STATE CONVENTION <sup>of</sup> the AMERICAN LEGION

PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE

SEPTEMBER 6, 1923





ADDRESS OF PERCIVAL P. BAXTER, GOVERNOR  
OF MAINE, AT THE STATE CONVENTION OF  
THE AMERICAN LEGION, PRESQUE ISLE,  
MAINE, SEPTEMBER 6, 1923

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THE AMERICAN LEGION AND WORLD PEACE

I often have been asked, and have asked myself, what is the underlying purpose, and what is the future of the American Legion? These are questions which concern the people of this State and Nation for an organization with a possible membership of several million men, on account of the great influence it may exert on International, National and State affairs, is of sufficient importance to attract general attention.

PURPOSE AND FUTURE OF LEGION

No organization long can endure unless the ends it seeks to attain are worthy. To my mind the American Legion has a two-fold purpose: first, to serve this country in times of peace as faithfully as did its members during war; and second, to care for all disabled and needy veterans of the late conflict.

In 1917 approximately four million men were on the military rolls of this Nation, and with rare exception they played their part faithfully and well. The record of these men is a bright page in our history. Once having served their country they are not content to rest on their laurels, but are animated by a desire to do their part in peace as well as they did it in war. In their daily lives they see countless opportunities for unselfish but oftentimes prosaic service, which, especially when the stimulus of war is lacking, require physical and moral courage of the highest order.

I believe the American Legion intends to "carry on" in the spirit of 1917-1918, and during the present and next generation it has a wonderful opportunity to prove its worth. Should the Legion live up to its own high ideals and those its friends have for it, if it shuns false leaders and successfully avoids the temptations that inevitably will be placed in its path, history will accord to it a great achievement, and its record will prove an inspiration to generations yet unborn.

## WORLD PEACE—LEGION

Throughout this country there are active groups of young men of a thousand or more Legion Posts, like those gathered here today, who can exert a tremendous influence for good in every State of the Union by helping this country advance toward better things. The Legion already has justified its existence by espousing the greatest of all causes, the cause of World Peace. On November 11, 1918 when the message that peace had come rang forth from every steeple and belfry in this land, a great sigh of relief escaped from millions of hearts and countless prayers of thanksgiving went up to Heaven. What did peace mean to those in the trenches when they heard the news that shells, mines and airplanes were no more! Those on this side of the Atlantic never can understand the full significance of the message that flew up and down the lines on that eventful day.

Both at home and abroad many thoughtful persons had good reason to believe that the World War really was to be the *final* war, for had it not been said a thousand times that it was "a War to end War"? This great hope has become dim with the passage of time. Although the condition of certain nations is chaotic and the future seems ominous, there are those who have faith to believe that these vexed problems are capable of proper solution. What forward steps can be taken to insure a lasting peace among nations, a peace that both service men and civilians will endorse?

## WORLD PEACE—HISTORY

Sometimes we regard the movement for world peace as a modern invention, whereas in fact it is as old as history. The marvel is that men and women of past centuries so utterly failed to make substantial progress toward it. Nations, like the individuals that compose them, have been selfish and grasping and never have learned that enduring peace cannot be attained unless both nations and individuals observe the Golden Rule and respect the rights of others. Through all these centuries men have warred upon their fellows with little or no thought as to how those wars could be prevented.

The peace movement in the United States began in 1682 when William Penn made his first plea for it. In 1788

Samuel Adams said, "Would to God the harmony of nations were the object that lay nearest to the hearts of sovereigns." In 1794 Franklin advocated and George Washington negotiated the first arbitration treaty. The first American peace society was established in 1815 with Thomas Jefferson as a member. The Massachusetts Senate in 1832 passed resolutions advocating international peace, and from those early days to the time of President Harding many public spirited, far seeing men and women have devoted their lives to this cause.

## WORLD PEACE—HARDING

World Peace was very close to the heart of our late President. He understood the moral wrong of war and realized the economic folly of spending on war 85 per cent of all the money raised by the taxation of our people. It required courage of the highest order to call together the recent Limitation of Armament Conference, and his last public utterance was in favor of a World Court to peacefully settle international disputes. The letter written to Walter Wellman and given to the newspaper a few days ago, shows the President in his efforts to make a lasting contribution to this great cause did not hesitate to jeopardize his chances for re-election. He had come to know the American people, and expressed his understanding of them when he said, "Our people have never really thought on this matter and when they do really think of it they will land with all their hearts and souls in the right place." This remark is to be classed with that of Roosevelt, "when you once get the American people to think and think hard—well, you had better stand from under." We never had a more unselfish and disinterested President than Harding. History will acclaim him a great leader and patriot who, standing head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries, feared not to speak.

## WORLD COURT

It formerly was said that the world was "wide," and there was reason for the statement. Today however when this continent has been crossed in 28 hours, when messages flash instantaneously half-way around the globe, and when airships

are being constructed to cross the Atlantic in 24 hours, in reality the world is small. The more congested it becomes and the closer the contacts between peoples, the more need is there of proper regulation by law. Most, probably all, of the differences between nations are possible of settlement without resort to war; at all events thoughtful consideration should be given to the possibilities of such settlements and every effort should be made to pave the way for them. General Grant once said, "There never was a time, in my opinion, when some way could not be found to prevent the drawing of the sword."

Individuals and the States of the Union long since have abandoned force in the settlement of their disputes. Nations can do likewise. The fallacy has been exploded that there are great irreconcilable differences between the peoples of the East and of the West, of the North and of the South, for human beings the World over are much the same. They are stirred by similar aspirations and emotions and the only lasting differences are the colors of their skins. There is no unbridgeable gulf between the nations, and the sooner this is understood the sooner will they work together, each carrying out its own destinies without trespassing upon the rights of others.

I am a firm believer in the World Court idea and in the not far distant future expect to see it realized. Hardly more than 50 years ago the Islands of Japan deliberately isolated themselves from the rest of the World. Foreigners were not welcomed, and seldom were allowed to land on Japanese shores. An almost impenetrable wall of seclusion was built around those islands. Their rulers and people were self-sufficient and self-centered, and the rest of the world was considered barbaric. Japan believed in its own destiny and shunned contact with outside nations. That was an example of extreme nationalism, and I cannot believe that this nation of ours in international affairs will continue to remain aloof and fail to play its part in the concert of Nations. Our commercial, industrial and social relations with the rest of the world are intimate, and of necessity our political relations must be likewise.

## REDUCTION OF NAVAL ARMAMENTS

It is indeed strange that it was not given to President Harding to live to witness the successful consummation of

his Conference for the Limitation of Armaments. He died on August 2nd and a few days later during the same month, the great powers that had participated in that conference gave their final and complete assent to the treaty prepared under his direction. As yet the magnitude of this accomplishment is not fully appreciated. When it is understood that the original proposal called for the scrapping of 1,878,043 tons of capital ships built and building, and that the final treaties substantially followed the original proposals, it is apparent that the Conference fully justified the expectations of its sponsor. The moment the treaties were signed and officially deposited in our State Department, a message was flashed to shipyards and docks and the work of reduction began. One ship that was to cost \$42,000,000, on which more than \$9,000,000 has been spent, is already in process of destruction. All the war ships destroyed during the conflicts of a century would not begin to equal in tonnage the war material that is to be scrapped under these treaties. Notwithstanding the carpings of those who from the beginning predicted the failure of President Harding's efforts, the work of demolition is being faithfully carried out by the parties to the Treaty. We are too close to this great event to obtain the proper perspective.

## REDUCTION OF AERIAL ARMAMENT

Another great forward movement has been started, and the American Legion is its sponsor. The Legion, foreseeing that the next war, if such there be, will be fought from the air, has proposed a world conference for the limitation of aircraft. If the sea forces of the world can be limited, why not the forces of the air, and later those on land? In a few years the men of 1917-1918 will have passed the age of active military service, and they now seek to protect their younger brothers of the future from the sufferings and sacrifices of war.

## DRAFT 1917-1918

I personally recall those eventful days when every man from 18 to 46 was registered and classified. The draft during the World War justified itself although those who inaugurated it had some misgivings. On the whole it was



satisfactory and was carried on without inequalities or favoritism. There were certain unsatisfactory cases where favored individuals took successful refuge in shipyards, in clerical positions, and in what were termed "essential" occupations. In my jurisdiction there were cases where individuals with large incomes filed claims for exemption on the ground that their wives and children were "dependent upon their labor for support." I recall one registrant in particular whose income ran into very large figures who made this claim. In this case exemption was denied by the Portland Exemption Board, of which I was Chairman, but on appeal later was secured from the District Board on "essential industry" grounds. Fortunately for certain reputations the war closed a few weeks after this particular decision. Should another conflict be forced upon us the wealth of the country and all its resources, its men and its women as well, will be subject to the draft. President Harding did not hesitate to speak frankly on this subject and his words met with the approval of the nation.

## WAR—GAME OF OLD MEN

War has its sordid as well as its heroic sides. The price of war is paid by young men, who too often have been used as the pawns of designing statesmen. Justice Clark until recently a member of the U. S. Supreme Court says, "The battles of the world are fought by boys sent to premature graves by ambitious, proud old men. War is a game of old men in which the stakes are the lives of youth." An illustration of this is the story of those Venetian Senators, "their hands too stiff to grasp the sword hilt," who after they were shown Gallileo's invention of the telescope expressed their delight by saying, "This glass will give us great advantage in time of war;" they might have added, "we can now see the battles from a safe distance in the rear." Statesmen who bring on war usually enjoy waging it from a safe vantage point behind the lines. In my opinion the youth of the future will insist upon knowing why they are called upon to fight and why fighting is necessary. They must understand the reasons, and once they do so there is not likely to be war unless it be for a truly worthy cause. That old Prussian Militarist, Frederick the Great, himself said, "If my soldiers thought, there would be no wars!"

## "MAGNA CHARTA OF PEACE"

Last year at the close of the National Legion Convention the representatives of the European War Veterans and your newly elected Commander, Colonel Owsley, signed a great document. They were the spokesmen of nine million soldiers scattered over the civilized world. The document reads in part as follows:

"That all international agreements among governments affecting the entire people shall be open and above board, with full publicity.

"To oppose territorial aggrandizement.

"That an international court be established to outlaw war.

"To proceed as rapidly as conditions permit and when the decrees of such courts become operative—entirely to disarm and disband sea and air forces and destroy the implements of warfare."

These spokesmen being practical men do not expect immediate results from these resolutions, but they have established an ideal, and a very definite one, towards which they have pledged their support. Commander Owsley in commenting on this document said:—

"It may not result in immediate effects, but when these men grow to positions of power in their governments, they will try to do what they can to meet their comrades of other nations on the footing of friendship. I think these resolutions mean much for the future peace of the world."

It is not overstating it to say that those millions at home who stood behind the men at the front now support them in their determination to make these resolutions effective. This "Magna Charta of Peace" will carry weight in every civilized country, and it is prophetic of the time when general, simultaneous disarmament will come. When that great day arrives all the leading nations must disarm, or at least reduce their armaments, at one and the same time, for no thoughtful citizen would entirely sacrifice the practical side of this question to the ideal. "If we don't destroy War, War will destroy us" is the significant remark of Hon. James Bryce,

the eminent British historian and student of government, while Warren G. Stone, the Labor leader, considers World Peace as overshadowing all the other issues that confront the laboring men of America, for the man who digs the trench and carries the rifle pays the highest price for war.

## EDUCATION FOR PEACE

Education is the firm foundation on which to base world harmony. For centuries war has ruled the world. The children of all nations have been brought up in its atmosphere, while little or no serious, consecutive efforts have been made towards the establishment of permanent peace. Recently at San Francisco (July 1923) there was held a World Conference on Education the outstanding feature of which was the adoption of a program to unite the rising generations for world peace. If the children of all countries are taught that war can be abolished, and that nations can live together in peace and harmony, each carrying out its own proper aspirations without interference from others, soon the peace spirit will spread into every corner of the globe. Children as well as adults must be taught to *think* in terms of peace.

At the conference referred to 62 nations sent groups of earnest teachers whose chief interest in life is to guide the youthful mind in the proper channels. This great international convention of school teachers, unlike conventions of diplomats and politicians, was wholly unfettered by those jealousies and suspicions that so often have proven the undoing of international gatherings. The school teachers of the world now for the first time have been brought together in a great cause, and if the seeds of self-respect, self-restraint, and tolerance are sown in the heart of the child the fruit that comes therefrom will be abundant.

An interesting feature of this San Francisco convention was the discussion that took place over modern school textbooks. Many of these books are mere recitals of one war following another, and the student is given to understand that the history of the world is but a succession of wars. In my day I was taught along these lines, and little or no attention was given to studying the causes and effects of the great economic, social and political changes that have left a more indelible mark on the world's history than have its countless military conflicts. A phrase used repeatedly

in modern school books is that "war broke out," just as though human beings were not responsible for it. It is likened to some fever or disease "breaking out" of its own accord. As a matter of fact very few wars ever have "broken out" spontaneously, for the seeds of discord and strife too often have been carefully nurtured in the selfishness and passions of men. A new generation is now upon the stage of life, and those who cling to the old ideas soon will realize that they must step into the background. The textbook of the future will accord war its proper place but the other essentials of accurate history will not be overlooked. If the cost of a single battleship (from 40 to 50 million dollars) could be expended in furthering the principles adopted by the recent San Francisco conference a new day of peace and security would dawn throughout the civilized worlds. Let the nations appropriate \$1 for World Peace for every \$9 spent on preparation for war and what a transformation in world politics would quickly follow!

## WAR MONGERS

In many nations there are men and organizations who make huge profits from war and from the sale of materials with which to carry it on. Recently in South America a well laid plot of these war-mongers was exposed, and their plans to bring the South American republics into conflict were uncovered. Several nationalities were involved. Recently the Turks in Asia Minor used their French guns to drive the Greeks into the sea, and threatened to use them to push the British out of Constantinople. The French, Greeks and British were allies in the Great War and the Turk is the sworn enemy of all. Turkish leaders boast that they can buy guns and ammunition from any country in the world when they have the price, and this when the very guns they buy are to be turned upon the Nationals of those selling them! The German Krupps were not the only offenders for they have their imitators in other continents.

## UNIVERSAL COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE

Not long ago a campaign was inaugurated in this country for universal compulsory military service, in other words for the conscription of all our young men for military service

in times of peace. Under pretext of building up their bodies and teaching discipline it was proposed to train the youth of this country in the art of warfare just as was done in Germany. Peace-time conscription however is contrary to the spirit of America, and the fathers and mothers of our land never will countenance the maintainance of great armies and armaments that almost inevitably are used to threaten or make warfare upon other nations.

To show the extremes to which some advocates of universal training go I recall a gathering of Maine National Guard Officers at which I was present, which was addressed by an army officer of high rank. This officer desired to make the point that our country should be armed for all emergencies, and in doing so spoke of the rapid expansion of Canada, and especially of the agricultural and industrial growth of the Province of Ontario. He prophesied that the day was coming when Ontario, in need of a short cut to the Atlantic and an ice-free port, would look with covetous eyes upon the northern half of Maine where it projects itself into Quebec and New Brunswick. This officer argued with apparent seriousness that we must be prepared to prevent Canada from seizing the upper half of our State. He thoroughly aroused his audience and the danger of invasion seemed imminent to them. It is as unreasonable and as unfair for us to imagine that Canada covets a part of Maine, as it would be for Canada to think that the U. S. was planning to seize all the territory south of the St. Lawrence River. Both are absurd propositions.

It should be admitted however that there are some public-spirited citizens who really believe in compulsory universal military service. I do not question the sincerity or loyalty of such persons, although I disagree with them.

## THE NATIONAL DEFENSE

In advocating world peace through education and the efforts of patriotic societies, and in protesting against great armaments, I do not overlook the realities of the present situation. It is impossible for us to conceive the United States as an aggressor in a military conflict, but we must be prepared to defend ourselves should an attack be made upon us from without or within. An adequate policy of national defense is essential, and especially during the present disturbed state

of the world all reasonable precautions should be taken. We need a standing army of sufficient size to form a nucleus out of which a large force can be expanded. This army should be kept in perfect condition, and its officers should keep themselves informed as to the progress of military science throughout the world. The naval problem in large measure has been settled for the time being. As a second line of defense we require a thoroughly equipped National Guard of proper proportions. During my administration I have offered every encouragement to the Maine National Guard, and under my direction it has grown from 1319 in 1921 to 2228 in 1923, an increase of 68 per cent, while the appropriations made for it by this State have increased in proportion. I personally have visited all its seven annual encampments and am familiar with its work. It is a military organization of high standards and our citizens have reason to be proud of it. Next to the National Guard come the Reserve Units which are skeleton organizations, and after them such auxiliaries as the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and the Citizens' Military Training Camps. All these are desirable but none of them should be expanded beyond what is reasonably necessary for actual defense.

The C.M.T.C. affords an unusual opportunity for young men from 17 to 24 to come in contact with army officers of experience and ability. The purpose of these camps is to make these young men good citizens in the broad sense of the word, and good citizenship implies a readiness to respond to the national defense. A certain amount of military training and discipline is given these students, and the contact they have with their fellows from every walk and station in life encourages a proper democratic spirit. If the military training is not unduly emphasized these volunteer camps will prove of real benefit to those attending them. The C.M.T.C. quotas of the New England States in 1923 were only 61 per cent. filled, with Maine outranking her five sister states. This indicates that there is something wrong either with the C.M.T.C. or with the young men who failed to take advantage of its training. In my opinion the young men are at fault and not the Camp, and I should like to see the New England quotas filled in 1924.

As to the R.O.T.C. I believe it desirable to have it at certain institutions like the University of Maine, where the young men are mature and well developed, but I doubt

its value in high schools and academies where the students are mere boys. In these schools I prefer the volunteer "cadet" companies for boys from 13 to 16 years of age. The volunteer plan of the Portland High School Cadets is preferable to the compulsory R.O.T.C. system of the Bangor High School. Professor Dudley A. Sargent, the "father" of modern physical culture and for many years physical director at Harvard, is authority for the statement that military drill for boys of tender years is not the most desirable and rational form of exercise.

All these different organizations however serve a good purpose at the present time and deserve the support of citizens and of the Legion. While encouraging them we all should look to the future and do everything in our power to create an atmosphere of confidence and trust, and to bring the world up to a higher standard. In this great cause each individual should do his or her part for the nation cannot rise above the average moral standard of its individual members. No single nation however can afford to wipe out its armaments. The United States, England, Japan, France, Germany, Russia and Italy all must join in the movement if it is to be successful, and a sufficient force must be maintained for police duty both at home and abroad. Oftentimes however the economic boycott is more effectual than war, and today if the nations of Europe and the United States together would stop all communication and intercourse with Italy, that belligerent nation soon would bring to a close her recent mediaeval Grecian adventure.

#### PRESIDENT COOLIDGE

We New Englanders have reason to take pride in the man from Vermont and Massachusetts who now occupies the Presidential chair, for he is the finest product of New England traditions. He is young, 51 years of age last Fourth of July, for I remember he celebrated his birthday while in Maine as my guest. Brought up on a farm he always has lived a simple life, quiet, unaffected and unspoiled by the great positions he has held. Thoroughly educated and a close student of international affairs, he is forceful, kindly, independent, courageous and is animated solely by a desire to serve his country faithfully and well. I consider him to be a God-given leader and we all must trust and support him.

President Coolidge has the greatest opportunity given to any man since the Civil War to lead the world towards righteousness. In the crisis of 1861 this Nation was led by the immortal Lincoln and its fate hung in the balance. In the present crisis however the whole world is involved, and the field for successful effort is thus greatly expanded. We all are familiar with the President's phrase "Have faith in Massachusetts," but this well can be paraphrased "Have Faith in Calvin Coolidge." We look forward with assurance to the accomplishments that are destined to be his.

## THE CALLING OF NAMES

One of the weaknesses of today is the tendency to criticize those who do not always agree with us. It is easy for some people to cry out against others, and to use the word "bolshevist," "pacifist" or "red" against persons who hold opposite views. Most of those who indulge in these epithets do not understand their full meaning. Apparently intelligent citizens often use these terms of reproach when they scarcely know what they imply. To some people anyone who is not a hard and fast conservative is a "red" or "radical," and the words "pacifist" and "bolshevist" can be conveniently used to describe almost anyone who has progressive ideas. In my opinion the "radical" menace often is exaggerated, and "reds" and "war scares" sometimes serve as a background for military and political propaganda. As a matter of fact this country probably needs a few radicals or progressives to offset the reactionary and ultra-conservative influence that are exerting a powerful influence in the affairs of this nation. Only in this way can a proper balance be maintained. The use of these epithets has been grossly overdone. The calling of names is an empty sport and oftentimes the only harm done is to those indulging in it.

There is nothing incompatible in working for peace and at the same time adopting reasonable means for self-defense. In doing this, however, one is likely to be misunderstood. Some newspapers adopt a hostile attitude against those who advocate World Peace. It is especially unfortunate that certain great newspapers with noble traditions of the past should become abusive and intolerant of those with whom they differ. Such attacks often are animated by jealousy, while the usual slanders of political life are resorted



to for the purpose of misleading the public and defeating political enemies. To one occupying a high position however these attacks are a part of the day's work and after all amount to but little. The more discussion and agitation there is on a great public question like World Peace, the sooner will the truth emerge.

## A SUMMARY

I have given you a summary of the peace movement and have shown you how your own organization, the Legion, is giving it splendid support. As one writer has said: "If civilization has any sense at all it will use its best resources against another breakdown of civilization such as the World War." The World Court, the Limitation of Armament Conference of 1921, the proposed Air Limitation Conference, the work of President Harding, the "Magna Charta of Peace" of the Veterans' organization, the Educational Conference and the leadership of President Coolidge all are contributing towards the ultimate success of this cause. Many of the great social, economic and political leaders of the country are behind the movement. Scores of organizations and associations, like the American Legion, Womens Christian Temperance Union, American Bar Association and American Federation of Labor are backing it, and the thoughtful women of the nation are giving it their support. For centuries men have made but little progress in this cause but the women now are being heard from. More sincere, less selfish and more willing to render service, the women of the World offer encouragement for the future. General George Washington said, "My first wish is to see the whole world in peace and the inhabitants of it as one band of brothers, striving who could contribute most to the happiness of mankind." The American Legion with its million or more members standing behind this great movement with the enthusiasm of youth, and with its hope and its power consecrated to service, has a wonderful opportunity to organize for ultimate World Peace, and to lead this Nation to better things. If this Nation leads, others must follow.