

1929

*Ammer  
Holiday  
Armistice Day*

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 \* Address of National Commander O. L. Bodenhamer of The American  
 \* Legion at The Legion's National Armistice Day exercises at the Washington  
 \* Auditorium on Armistice Night, November 11, 1929. The delivery of this  
 \* address followed immediately after that of President Hoover. The complete  
 \* text of Commander Bodenhamer's speech is given below.  
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In celebrating the Armistice of the World War, as we are doing tonight, The American Legion seeks to bring back, in some degree, that joyous hour of eleven years ago when the hearts of all Americans were stirred in wild acclaim with the victory of our allied forces. It is the patriot's occasion for happy memory. It is The Legion's heritage of exalted honor, awarded in the valedictory of America's service in that great conflict.

As the recollections of that triumph of eleven years ago flood back to us, we of The Legion stand erect and renew the spirit of supreme devotion to our country; the same spirit that carried us on and through to victory. Out of that spirit, The Legion was born. In that spirit tonight, The Legion rededicates itself to unselfish service to God and to country, mindful now, as we were mindful then, of our duty, and of our country's duty -- mindful of our pledge to the highest ideals of patriotism, and mindful of our country's everlasting obligation for the sacrifices of the past.

In our adherence to the principles of unselfish service, The Legion places first, as The Legion always has done, our nation's debt to those who paid the most for the victory which we celebrate tonight. The care of our disabled comrades has been and still is, the first duty of The Legion, and likewise the first duty of the nation.

Within the reach of my voice tonight, in the government hospitals from coast to coast, are 26,000 of those comrades -- the disabled defenders of America. To them I make this statement, as I stand here across the river from the Arlington hills, where rests the tomb of the Unknown Soldier:

"The American Legion is carrying on for you in word and in deed, holding high the torch you flung, staunch in the pledge which we have made to you that our national life, for which you gave your all, shall be preserved in purity and in honor, and that the peace of the world, for which you fought, shall be promoted. Today, the world is at peace. To this state, you made no small contribution."

In keeping that pledge for national security and a permanent peace, The Legion travels the safe middle of the road. On one side of us, we see the danger and the futility of extreme militarism as exemplified once by the German Empire. Militarism did not keep Germany out of war. On the other side, we see the danger and the futility of the lack of preparedness which has characterized America at the time of our entry into every war in which our nation has participated. Lack of preparedness has never kept us out of war -- rather it has worked the other way.

Adequate preparedness for defense only, always has been and still is the real policy of The Legion. The Legion's stand is this: an adequate preparedness program, subject to reduction within safe limitations, and with a mind and heart for peace. The end we all seek is the same -- permanent peace. The only difference of opinion which may exist, is as to the means by which that end can be reached most quickly and most effectively.

The veterans of the World War love peace, and want peace, but they also want preparedness, in case of another war, against the recurrence of the confusion and extravagance and reckless expenditure of money and of life which accompanied our entry into the recent World War, because of unpreparedness. We believe that it is a national crime to send men to war, untrained and unprepared. Now, being properly prepared does not necessarily indicate a war-like spirit. It is just good, common, horse sense in the life and the welfare of the nation. This stand of The Legion has been distorted by some and characterized as being militaristic. Such is not true, and any one who twists The Legion's stand into anything other than loyal devotion to America, and to American institutions, and to a peaceful democracy, is a snake in the grass, whose venom belies the doctrine under which he hides, and from under the cover of which he hisses his foul and false tirade.

The Legion talks of peace and The Legion talks of preparedness in the same breath, because we believe that the two go hand in hand. The Legion believes that over and above any specific and passing item of national defense, there is a greater and more fundamental principle on which must rest any real preparedness, any adequate national defense program, and any real guarantee of permanent peace. That fundamental principle is wrapped up in the spirit of union and unity -- the spirit of one for all, and all for one. We call it universal service.

Now, I am not presenting to you, for your consideration, any definite plan for such a universal service. I am, however, asking that you consider the justice and equity of the principle which underlies this so-called universal service act. We must admit that the burden of war is the nation's burden. It, therefore, should fall equally upon all men and upon all property. There should be no profit in war. War is a national sacrifice, and every citizen and the property of every citizen, should join in that sacrifice. But such has not been the case, in the past. And The Legion is saying to the American public that we ought to have a system of national defense through which it will be impossible for any one element of our people to profit by the waging of war. The present situation is very much as follows: The soldiers don their uniforms; go to war; risk their lives; work for menial pay; return to their homes and then help pay the war bills. Now, if there is to be equal responsibility in paying the war bills, then, there should be equal service, and equal responsibility during the time those war bills are being created. Let us, therefore, prepare our national defense program so that all citizens and all property shall bear the equal punishment of war, if war shall ever come again. Let us pay in materials, as well as in men.

If this principle is right and fair, and just, then it should be written into the law at this time, rather than to wait until a national emergency should arise. Just as the principle of universal draft was imperfectly put into effect, during the last war, so will it be adopted again, perfectly or imperfectly, in case of another war. Why is it not wise, therefore, for us, in time of peace, to sit down around the conference table, and determine upon a plan which will be fair and more nearly perfect than any possible plan which might be agreed upon during the stress of war?

And this is just what The Legion is asking for today.

The Reed-Wainwright resolution, in which The Legion is vitally interested, calls for the creation, by Congress, of a special commission to study this problem, and to report a bill back to Congress as agreed upon by the different elements of American life represented on that commission. This special commission would be composed of members of the Senate and House, together with representatives of labor, capital and the other elements so vital to the success of modern warfare. The commission would study the universal draft principle, and would report back to Congress on a specific piece of legislation.

What plan of procedure could be more equitable to all elements concerned? Certainly, The Legion does not favor, and would not favor, any plan which would put an unfair burden upon any one element of our national life. In time of war, no man has a right to roll in the lap of luxury, while another of his comrades rolls in the mud and in the mire of the battlefield. Such conditions and tendencies as existed in the recent World War are undemocratic in nature, and should be and can be corrected, to a large extent, by the passage of a proper universal service act. Conditions which permit of profiteering, are out of accord with the principle of American democracy. Such profits add to the government's cost, in the prosecution of the war. A universal draft would have a tendency to prevent such profiteering, and would thus reduce the cost of war, and the resulting taxation necessary to retire such cost.

Now, military authorities agree that the existence of the universal draft law, prior to the beginning of the World War, would have reduced the cost of that war, to America, by millions upon millions of dollars, thus reducing the burden of taxation to all American citizens. In view of these facts, therefore, it is my firm conviction that a law should be written, and written now, which would draft every man, every industry, every natural resource and every manufacturing enterprise into the service of a common cause, in case of another war. If you do that, you will take the profit out of war, as nearly as it can be taken out of international conflicts. You will take the burden from the shoulders of the men who carry the rifles, and distribute it equally as between citizens, whether in or out of uniform. When American capital is forced to give as freely of its dollars, as American manhood gives of its blood, and when such a principle is written into the law of the land, and made available for use, during the time of national emergencies, then, in my humble opinion, we will have a fundamentally well prepared nation, and, at the same time, a sincere and peace loving people.

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At this time, when American leaders and other great forces in the world, are lending their best thought and energy to crystallizing a plan which will make for permanent peace, we of The Legion, who know the futility of war, are sincere in our wishes for their success. But as we march toward that goal, is it not the part of wisdom for the United States and for all the other nations, to advance in even rank, step by step, as we discard and reduce the weapons of war?

Recognizing the power of America and her place of leadership in world affairs, is it not wise for us to assume leadership in this march of progress? But never should we advance so far as to make our position unsafe or inconsistent with the value of our property and with the magnitude of our people.

On behalf of 800,000 members of The American Legion, scattered throughout the length and breadth of this great land, I want to express our gratitude to the President of the United States for his having honored us with his presence at our Armistice Day exercises tonight, and for his having given his words of council on a subject in which we are very much interested. As an evidence of our interest, there will be set aside in each of our 11,000 posts, between now and January 1, at least one meeting which will be devoted entirely to the study of foreign relations and international good will.

Service men are also studying the problems of government. Already, there have come to the Senate and House of the United States Congress, nearly a hundred Legionnaires who have in the past and who will in the future, contribute to the constructive leadership and unselfish service of our national government. And tonight, as we close this Armistice Day program, and as we feel our way along in the solution of national and international problems, I want you to know, Mr. President, that The American Legion desires to serve in peace as it did in war.

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