On this Armistice Day the cities of Europe cower under cloaks of darkness by night and watch fearfully for the shadows of wings by day. Only here are we free to observe this anniversary of the end of the World War. Today we give thought to the principles for which America sacrificed her youth and her treasure in the hope that she might help end wars forever. That was America's effort to prove that all peoples might accept a principle of government permitting them to live in a spirit of amity.

The light of that hope burns low now in the deep gulf which lies today between the spirit of the original Armistice and the spirit that leads reckless dictators on its 22nd anniversary. The blighted expectations of nations and of whole generations, and the liberties of millions of men and women, cry out for a return to the spirit that brought peace to the World in November 1918.

For all but America the Armistice has turned out merely as a tragic interlude between wars. To our eternal regret there is a renewal of the tramp of marching armies and the roar of cannon. In spite of the tremendous sacrifices, in spite of the staggering cost in lives and property, the war we fought did not end in a solution of world problems. It had rather the opposite effect. Out of the attempt to establish a just peace came totalitarian governments. They destroyed political, religious, and economic rights. They deprived men and women of life and individual happiness. They took away freedom, and made millions of helpless people mere vassals of the state, doomed to a bare existence.

Five European nations, it is true, did rid themselves of their monarchs and set themselves up as republics. And six new democracies were founded. Of the five former monarchies turning to a republican form of government, four have succumbed to dictatorships. Of the six new democracies, none is left. Eleven nations have gone down before the tidal wave of aggression. And so war is raging again. This time it is not against autocracy. It is totalitarian tyranny seeking to dominate free people. Britain, our former ally, is now bearing the brunt of the renewed fighting, standing alone as the last bulwark of human liberties in Europe, for even the great Republic of France has fallen.

In America alone, the Armistice still endures. In America alone, this anniversary is being observed today. Here it is a national holiday made so through the efforts of The American Legion. Only here does observation of Armistice Day have direct relation to its original meaning.

We are gathered here today for two purposes.

First to celebrate the end of the World War for us, and to pay tribute to the valor and sacrifice of all who made that end possible.
Second, to rededicate ourselves to the ideals for which so many brave Americans died on the battlefields of Europe, and to renew our pledge to keep faith with those who died.

What were those ideals? What is the faith we are under sacred obligation to keep?

Our honored dead of the World War, and I am proud to add, our heroes of every American war ever fought, gave their lives for those things for which America always has sacrificed — the ideals of peace, justice, and liberty. The torch they threw to us to hold ever high is the torch of freedom.

The faith that we must keep with our hero dead, is the completion of the task for which they gave their sweat and their blood, and for which they died. Unless we keep that faith their sacrifices will have been made in vain.

The task they set out to perform was to defend liberty, and to keep the scourge of future wars from America.

We of The American Legion have kept that faith and are keeping it now.

For 22 years The American Legion was almost the lone champion of militant Americanism and of an adequate national defense. For more than two decades we have been urging our fellow citizens to keep our national defenses adequate to repulse any attacks from without or within. We fought the public apathy that lulled the nation to a false sense of security.

It took the storm of dictatorships, breaking over the World in a deluge of aggression, to arouse America to its peril. Dire events abroad finally gave an impelling weight to the counsels of The American Legion. Belatedly America bestirred herself to repair the damage of a generation of neglect. The 15 billion dollar program for America's external and internal defenses today is a vindication of The American Legion's many years of keeping faith with its dead.

But the neglect of two decades can not be overcome overnight, and events abroad have moved with kaleidoscopic rapidity. When The American Legion met in its 22nd national convention in Boston, Mass., September 23 to 26, England remained alone of all the European governments to repulse the tide of brutal aggression. The shadow of ominous events lay heavy over the convention.

Fully aware they lived but as instruments of fate to keep alive the faith of their comrades who had died in the last World War, the Legionnaires of America met the issue with the same valor and courage as did the honored dead a generation ago. They recognized that the cause of liberty in Europe, was the cause of liberty in America. For with tyranny triumphant in the rest of the World, it would mean an isolated America facing a united World in a struggle to the death.

They came out for a still stronger program of national defense to insure America still further against having war thrust upon her once more. They voted for every practicable help to liberty's cause abroad.
In ringing voices that echoed across the Nation and around the World, the Legionnaires in Boston convention assembled declared:

"We believe that a sound, national defense policy for this country requires that we should at this time give all practicable aid to Great Britain and those aligned with her in their fight for freedom!"

And echoing the idealism which fired the men who died in the World War fighting against tyranny and oppression, the Boston convention further resolved:

"We of The American Legion, as lovers of peace and human freedom, devoted to the principles of justice, liberty, and democracy, condemn aggression and aggressor nations. We condemn all war parties which are leading their own peoples to death and ruin, and the World to chaos.

"To those countries which have been ruthlessly and without just cause invaded, and particularly to our former comrades in arms in the invaded countries, we express our sympathy and the confident hope that soon they will break the chains of their present servitude. To the people of the great British commonwealth who are so heroically defending their shores and their freedom, and to the gallant Republic of China, we extend our friendship and the assurance of our sympathy. We urge that the Government of the United States exercise all lawful means to prevent the shipment of war materials to the aggressor nations and that it continue to extend to all peoples who are resisting aggression the fullest cooperation consistent with our obligations, our security, our liberties, and our peace!"

So on this day - the anniversary of the end of fighting for America - let us unite, one and all, in a common determination to make America so strong that none will dare to challenge this Nation's mode of life. For in its strength, in defenses both external and internal, must be rooted those ideals of peace, justice and liberty, through which America is destined to lead the rest of the World to the happy days when the sovereignty of God and the dignity of the human soul are recognized universally.

That will be keeping faith with all our honored dead.

That will be bridging the gulf that now lies between the Armistice of 1918, and its future anniversaries.