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Democracy and Peace

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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My fellow-Americans:

We meet today to celebrate the Armistice ending the World War twenty-one years ago. We fought in that struggle not for glory or gain but to make the world safe for Democracy. Many of our comrades made the supreme sacrifice in order that we might live to enjoy the privileges and prerogatives which are ours; many are still paying the penalties imposed in hospitals, asylums, and shortened lives. These people are our fathers, brothers, and friends and to them we owe a debt we can never repay. Their fight for Democracy in this country was not in vain and we honor them gladly for that which they did so willingly.

But democracy - as we know it, love it, and understand it - is today facing a challenge as to its very existence. This challenge must be met, met by all who believe in its fundamental processes and who love the liberties and responsibilities of a democracy. It is dangerous in this world of today to take democracy for granted. It is up to us, all of us, to take cognizance of the dangers affecting our system and to clarify our thinking as to our responsibilities. Only as long as we have democracy in our daily lives will we continue to have democracy in our government.

At the present time the world is engaged in another war and the people of all countries are apprehensive. Even we, in America, are affected by this struggle despite the fact that we are not active participants. We veterans, we Americans, stand for peace because we know full well what the horrors of war really are. Those of us who participated in the last struggle realize that we are citizens in the only real democracy left in the world. Ours is the last outpost of representative government.

We are sincerely anxious for peace, all of us, whether or not we be veterans, and our only desire is to promote the best interests of our country. Across the ocean decisions of life and death are being made by small groups of men but here we have a real free forum - the only one in existence - representing the people. May God grant to our Congress and to our President the privilege of guiding our nation safely through any storms which may be encountered in our national life.

War is hell because it tears down so much that we have fought to achieve over a period of centuries. Standards of morality are lowered and religion is relegated to a position of secondary and in some instances, no importance. All this, and much more, can be traced to the ravages of war and that is why we, the people of America, stand for peace. We are proud of the record of our country in this respect because we have been, still are, and will continue to be, consistent in our efforts for peace. These dangerous days demand cooperation among all of us and our energies will be used, without stint, to keeping this country out of war. We can achieve our aim because we are one people, with one mind, and guided by one purpose - the welfare of our nation. Let us remember the words of President Roosevelt that this is not our war and not of our making and face the truth that America can in no way be benefited by entering the present struggle.

The present war is not a war to preserve democracy or to preserve liberty. It is a war to preserve the balance of power in Europe. Under the present circumstances and regardless of our sympathies for the belligerents, truth impels us to state that

the victory of one or the other will no more solve Europe's problems today than it did in 1918. Let the Europeans settle their own problems and let us settle those (and they are many) which confront us in our own land.

We are primarily interested in the preservation of a democratic form of government in the United States. If we join in another world war, it might be difficult to maintain such a government in this country. We would be bound to go far toward totalitarianism because modern war is the enemy of democracy. Our best service to the cause of democracy is to keep it alive in the United States and provide a standard to which the world may in time return.

Other countries wage war; we must wage peace. If we want to keep out of war we must keep clear of the roads that lead to war. These paths lead to the pursuit of a dangerous temporary prosperity out of the profits of war trade. We should follow paths of prosperity which are based on production for peace and not for war. We can wage peace best if we build up a resistance to foreign propaganda and to our own emotionalism. We can wage peace by insisting upon the control of our own destiny: namely the right to say whether or not we wish to enter a war.

Older people declare wars; younger people fight them. Why not reverse the process to the extent of making those who seem so anxious for war and who have the power because of their official positions to bring about a declaration of war - why not make it mandatory that they be the first to go? It is almost a truism in this country of ours that we would never go to war if those in responsible official positions had to do the fighting themselves instead of sitting in comfortable offices, uttering platitudes, and cheering the population on.

War has no place in our present system in America. We all desire, under the supervision of our own democratic government, to go on living like normal Americans in past generations have done: to work, to marry, and to raise our children in comfort and peace. We want to find an answer for our present unemployment problem. We want an ultimate prosperity and security. This is our modest and earnest appeal and our government must not fail us.

In these days of difficulty we must think of our duty to ourselves and to the memory of those who have died for their country. We must stop this talk that we will be drawn into a European war, that we cannot avoid it, that our participation is inevitable. If we say it often enough - if this fatalistic talk goes on - we will become involved. The position of a nation is largely what that nation thinks its position is.

Instead of talking as though things were beyond our control, we should stress the fact that we can stay out, that we should stay out, that we must stay out, and begin at once the devising of constructive measures to keep us out.

We desire nothing that is selfish or cowardly. We are willing to risk our all in a real cause but let it be an American cause. This is no time for any kind of action except united action. America must stand as a unit if American ideals are to be preserved. The freedom that we in this country enjoy is the result of the labors of many patriots in the past. The American nation is the triumph of the men and women who fought for the principles upon which it is founded. The

America of the future will similarly bear the marks of the political and economic workmanship of the present generation. Let us hope that those who follow us can look back upon our actions with pride and continue the enjoyment of the democratic practices which are ours today.

How different these principles of democracy which characterizes us are from the principles of hatred and distrust so prevalent throughout the world today. When I think of our Constitution and our Bill of Rights I thank God that He has seen fit to establish a country such as ours.

In other countries are people who live, yes, but under what circumstances. They are regimented and told what to do and what not to do. Freedom, equality, and justice are meaningless words to them. They aren't smiling, or friendly but rather they are grim and fearful because they know not what the morrow has in store for them. The law under which they live is the law of the dictator not the law of the people. Free gatherings are practically unknown and massed assemblages - unless on order - are prohibited. Contrast that with this and you will realize - as I know you have - that there can be no compromise between the two. We are indeed fortunate to live under a flag and in a country such as ours where we can practice what we preach; where we can disagree but still remain friends; where there are no concentration camps, where no one is liquidated, where we have complete religious tolerance; and where we can live and enjoy life knowing full well that tomorrow the sun will shine and that all is well with America. America the country, Americanism the ideal, and American the people represents an actuality worth living for, worth fighting for, and if need be, worth dying for.

The really fine thing about us is that we're just American.

There are no distinctions among us because we practice equality as we preach it. There is no lack of harmony because we believe in cooperation. This is necessary if any country is to survive and grow.

It was harmony, cooperation, and teamwork which brought into being this great nation. America will always be the symbol of the united efforts put forth by the different peoples who combined to bring it into being.

Out of this assimilation of peoples from various countries of the world evolved Democracy as we have it today. Our comrades of the world war gave their lives to preserve this Democracy. Let us honor them today and in their memory keep alive the fires of freedom, justice and equality, and let us, as real Americans, dedicate ourselves to peace in 1939.

Handwritten notes:

- ... of the world war gave their lives to preserve this Democracy*
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- ... our comrades of the world war*
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Introduction

First & last a VFW
Followed proper of our country

Introduction

I that we were democratic
till I saw the duck or turkey
First & last a VFW
Followed proper of our country
We can assure him

We meet today

But Democracy

Our organization

~~the~~ The present war

Other countries urge war

Older people declare

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39-40

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