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Fidac and Peace

By
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American Legion
FIDAC AND PEACE

By Ray Murphy

An address delivered on the occasion of the presentation of the Fidac award to the University of Hawaii for outstanding service in the field of international relations. The presentation was made at the Twenty-fifth Annual Commencement of the University on June 23, 1936.

My Fellow Americans:

It is a unique pleasure to be here on this occasion, representing not alone The American Legion but serving also as the spokesman for eight million veterans of eleven great nations who have entrusted to me the high honor of presenting the University of Hawaii a permanent testimonial of their gratitude for its efforts and accomplishments in the interest of world peace. This is a mission I am proud to fulfill.

Fifteen years ago, when the scars and memories of the World War were yet fresh and painful, there came into being a remarkable international organization with a grave and important mission to perform. By virtue of its components, it adopted the name Federation Interalliee des Anciens Combattants, which in our language means the Federation of Former Allied Combatants. It is more popularly known as Fidac, a single word composed of the first letter from each of the five words comprising the official name.

The purpose of Fidac is to preserve and foster the spirit of understanding and comradeship which welded the Allied nations into a unit during the World War, and endeavor through that comradeship finally to lead the world to an era of enduring peace and international good will. In that noble effort, The American Legion gladly joined Fidac as the representative of the United States, the other ten member nations being Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland, Roumania, Portugal, Czechoslovakia and Greece.

Wisely the founders of Fidac determined that the world's best hope for escape from the crushing burden and appalling horror of war rested in the hands of youth, where true progress ever has planted its most fertile seeds. To the colleges and
universities, therefore, the interallied veterans of the World War look for the leadership that may yet save civilization from the madness of international conflict. And, quite properly, they determined to give world recognition to those colleges and universities which each year performed distinguished service in the field of international peace.

At the sixteenth international Fidac congress in Brussels last fall, the University of Hawaii officially was designated as the American university which had done most to promote an interest in the Far East. It was one of three American universities to receive recognition from the distinguished international board which makes the selections, and one of possibly a dozen universities in the whole world to receive such recognition last year. May I say, that this is indeed a high testimonial to the kind of leadership and the high type of faculty Hawaii enjoys in its great, progressive University.

Out here, literally in the mid-Pacific, where the East and the West—the Orient and the Occident—meet, the University of Hawaii is performing distinguished service in bringing the two together upon a basis of mutual understanding, friendship and helpfulness. The university gives due consideration to this fact in its course of study, it maintains and encourages regular exchanges of students with higher institutions of learning in the Orient, it encourages its own students further to pursue their studies in the Orient, and it has arranged for an exchange of credits to facilitate that objective. It houses and partially maintains the famous Institute of Pacific Relations Library and in numerous other ways it is making a direct and important contribution to the promotion of a better and sustained understanding between the peoples of the East and the West.

As further evidence of the fact that the University of Hawaii recognizes its duty as a leader in interpreting East to West, in cooperation with the Institute of Pacific Relations it is helping to prepare high school text books which present sympathetically and accurately the true history and culture of the peoples of China, Japan and the Philippine Islands. No greater contribution to the promotion of international understanding could be offered. Truth and understanding are the foundation and the keystone of the whole structure of peace.
We are living in times when we must speak frankly and sincerely, whether our subject deals with domestic affairs or foreign relations. If I may, I should like to speak frankly about some things which are in my mind. They belong not alone to me but, I believe I may say with clear conscience, they also are the thoughts of nearly one million American veterans of the World War whom I have the honor to lead this year as National Commander of The American Legion. They bear directly upon the question of international neighborliness and lasting peace.

Who has a better right to work and to fight for lasting peace than the men who manned the guns in the last great war? Deserting class room, factory and office, we went out not only in defense of our country, but as crusaders in a cause which for sheer righteousness has no peer in all history. I speak not of the economic side of that conflict. I speak solely of the idealistic side. I know not what may have motivated those who led America into the World War. I do know what motivated the men of the American Army and the American Navy as they swept with irresistible determination to victory. It was the conviction that they were fighting the war that would end wars.

The World War was won on the military and naval fronts. It was lost on the diplomatic and economic fronts. More than 130,000 gallant American youths laid down their lives, some 250,000 more sacrificed their health and their future, to attain the ideals for which America fought. Yet, those ideals remain un-attained. The American Legion has only one answer to that. In the name of the dead and the maimed, we shall carry on until the victory is completed.

In our span of life we have seen our government try many formulas in a sincere effort to diminish the probabilities of war. We tried the formula of disarmament as an example to other nations. That way led to war. Then we sought international security by treaty compact, through an exchange of agreements among the nations renouncing war and promising to submit all disputes to arbitration before resorting to arms. We must admit the truth, and the truth is that treaties are less sacred today than before the World War.
Have we not, then, come to a point where we may hope to reach our goal by charting a new course? Let us set our own house in order and give the world a new example, the example of one great nation that can maintain peace. The American Legion offers you a three-point program which we believe may accomplish this purpose, without jeopardizing the security of our country or sacrificing our national honor, which we never will surrender.

America should have slight reason to fear becoming involved in war if (first) we establish and maintain a national defense adequate to protect our territory against invasion, if (second) we enforce strict neutrality laws to keep us out of other nations' wars, and if (third) we enact a universal service act which will take the profit out of war. These are the three points of the Legion's program. To this I would add a fourth—the promotion of a better understanding among all peoples by carrying forward the kind of work that is being done by the University of Hawaii, to the end that there shall be a free exchange of accurate information not only through great institutions of learning, but in the daily press as well.

Let us consider this program briefly.

In the first place, just what is an adequate national defense? Does it mean that we should attempt to join in the armaments race now in full swing among other nations, that we should create vast military juggernauts such as we see rumbling through other parts of the world? Most certainly not. It does mean, however, that we must build and maintain an Army sufficient to insure every foot of land over which the Stars and Stripes fly against invasion, with a Navy second to none in all the world.

This is not militarism. It is only common sense in view of present world conditions. We are living in a more dangerous world than in 1917. Much of the security we once claimed by virtue of wide seas that separate us from the guns of a potential enemy has been destroyed by the progress of invention and science. Vast fleets of swift airplanes may now bring tons of death dealing explosives and poison gas to our shores if we are unprepared to stop them. Women and children become victims along with able-bodied men.
Those who still preach the gospel of "splendid isolation" and "disarmament by example" make a great cry about the cost of national defense and claim that it will lead to "militarism and war." Facts disprove such claims. Our isolation was greater in 1917 than today and certainly we had carried disarmament to a fine point, but in that year we were hurled into the greatest war in all history. The cost of adequate national defense is less than the interest alone on the debt we piled up from that war. "Isolation" and that brand of disarmament proved to be costly experiments.

America has no territorial aspirations. If proof of that statement were needed, we have but to consider our country's position in the World War. We of the Legion do not ask national defense for the purpose of encouraging war, we ask only enough to insure peace. We have seen something of war, and we want no more of it. We would spare our sons, and generations yet to come, the experiences we went through in 1917 and 1918. I think most of us, at least, realize that we, too, might have been spared if our country had been better able to defend itself.

National defense alone, however, will not save us from war. There are certain essential corollaries. One of these is the enforcement of strict neutrality when other nations are at war. As we look upon the World War in retrospect, we see conditions in a different light than was possible when we were mobilized to defend our national existence. In those by-gone days war was upon us and there was but one thing to do. That was to bring the conflict to a victorious conclusion as rapidly as possible. I know that the men who wore the uniform never questioned the right of our cause. I am equally certain that they are as united today in the opinion that we should not permit ourselves again to be drawn into a foreign conflict.

Regardless of divergent viewpoints upon the causes of our participation in that struggle, I believe we may all agree that our chance of avoiding it would have been greater if we had enacted and enforced adequate neutrality laws at the beginning of hostilities in 1914. The Congress now has enacted such laws and, I have no doubt, it is prepared to strengthen them if oc-
occasion should so require. We owe it to our country, to our children and to ourselves, to insist that these laws be enforced. For that the American Legion will fight.

I want to read a paragraph from a newspaper clipping telling the cost of war: "What is American neutrality worth in dollars and cents. The cost of our participation in the last war can give some basis for an estimate. According to the Foreign Policy Association, the last war cost the United States upwards of $55,000,000,000, or more than all of the crime now committed in the United States, plus the total cost of education for five years, plus the cost of all surface roads in the nation, plus the cost of medical care for the whole nation for five years, plus all fire losses for twenty years."

Can any profits business may hope to make from trading with warring nations, can any temporary savings in the national budget at the expense of adequate preparedness, possibly outweigh losses as large as this, or larger? And the clipping, of course, did not attempt to take into consideration that which is more precious than dollars and cents, the sacrifice in human lives and human suffering. Should we be tempted again, let us remember that the profits will be small and short remembered as compared to the losses which surely must follow.

Universal service is a new term in the vocabulary of the average American citizen, but it will become a permanent term shortly. It means the end of the profiteering system in time of war. When Congress enacts such a law, as it most assuredly will, capital and industry will have formal notice that if our country is forced into another war, great profits will be adjourned and dollars will fight on equal terms with men. And when that happens, my friends, we shall have taken an important step in the direction of permanent peace.

When the men who followed the flag in the World War returned home, they found conditions which might well have made cynics of less patriotic and well trained citizens. Our country reeked with profiteering and inflation. It has been said that for every cross on Flanders Fields, a new millionaire's mansion arose upon the hillside of America. At least it was quite evident to us that not only had we fought the war,
but that we also would have to pay a substantial part of the costs for profiteering.

There seemed to be little we could do about it, but we could do something about a repetition of such scandals in the future. The American Legion, then less than two years old, appointed a committee composed of high ranking and experienced officers to investigate conditions not only in this country but in Europe as well. As a result, after a thorough investigation, at our convention in 1922, The American Legion brought out the first proposal for the enactment of a “universal service law.” We have fought for it ever since and in the next Congress expect to see it enacted.

The law we demand is clear and it is right. In effect, it provides that in time of war the nation will conscript, on a basis of full equality, capital, industry and manpower, with special privilege and profit for none. We give you no socialist doctrine in this recommendation. Remember, such a law would not become operative until war is declared and it would cease to function promptly with the restoration of peace. Furthermore, it would not cost one penny, requiring no special peace-time boards for administration.

Paradoxically, such a statute also will be a corollary of national defense. Competent authority has stated that it will be more of a protection to this country than a standing army of a million men. It will permit our existing military and naval authorities to plan their sources of supplies in advance and mobilize them upon a moment’s notice—without long delays over price questions and profits, for the profit problem will be adjourned. At the same time, when the profit motive is removed, one of the great sources of propaganda for war will be silenced.

This, my friends, is the peace program of The American Legion. It is materialistic, not idealistic. It is a product of the crucible of hard experience, and was wrought by those who know war by experience. We may not say that war never again will visit its horrors upon us. We do believe that the danger may be reduced to a minimum if we set up the safeguards which, in the light of present conditions, seem to be only common sense. We have followed the road of fanciful idealism to
its end, and there found war. May we not at least explore the road of materialistic sound judgment, for there I believe we shall find peace.

The American Legion has no desire to see our country create great armaments. It believes that such armaments as are necessary for defense should be reduced in proportion to the willingness of other nations to reduce. We place no minimum upon such reductions, but we insist that we shall not again expose ourselves to war by reducing while other countries are building. We earnestly support proper diplomatic efforts to bring the nations to closer mutual understanding and cooperation.

It must be self-evident to the average citizen, however, that foreign relations is not a job for diplomats alone. It has become a job for all citizens. Permanent peace probably will come when truth replaces propaganda and the peoples themselves understand one another's problems and true aspirations. Our colleges and universities are leading the fight to tear the mask of untruth and distortion from knowledge. By this means, they are making a powerful contribution to the cause of peace.

How much more rapid our progress would be, however, if similar efforts could be brought forth by the daily press. I understand the problems of the press. The public demands sensation, and sensation is seldom the companion of truth. The American newspaper, however, by virtue of the very protection it receives from the Constitution itself, has a duty to perform which should be above a mere effort to satisfy public clamor. The press should lead and guide, not follow.

I hope that some day our publishers may steal a leaf from the great American universities and colleges, like the University of Hawaii, and have regular exchanges of editors and reporters between countries, to the end that there may be better understanding and, possibly, a more accurate interpretation of the news. Too often the news we read from abroad is too fragmentary and obviously sensational, rather than adequate and factual. I do not criticize the press, but rather the trend and the common willingness to follow rather than lead. A great
opportunity seems to offer itself in a closer liaison between the
two forces of education—academic and journalistic.

And so, it is a distinct pleasure and privilege for me to
deliver this parchment and medal, symbolic of the outstanding
achievements of the University of Hawaii in the field of
international relations and peace. May it serve as a permanent
reminder that eight million men who experienced war lived to
cherish the nobility of peace, and, so doing, salute the efforts
of this great institution of higher learning.

I have heard poets and great authors extol the beauties of
Hawaii. I have lived to learn that their most extravagant ad-
jectives underestimated the truth. Our language has not yet
developed words which adequately describe the inspiring, soul-filling beauty of these matchless islands. So I shall make no
effort to compete with genius. But beauty is not your sole claim
to renown. Hawaii is our country's ambassador of good will
in the Far East. You stand at the threshold, the gateway be-
tween two entirely different concepts of life and living. Upon
these shores they meet—and understand. That is a contribu-
tion not alone to our common government, but to all civiliza-
tion. It is your mission; preserve it and foster it.

And as for me, when I have returned to my duties in the
mainland, I know that I shall ever be saying, over and over,
the words of the bard who sang:

"Far over the seas an island is
Whereon when day is done
A grove of tossing palms
Are printed on the sun.

"And all about the lovely shore
Blue breakers flash and fall.
There shall I go, methinks,
When I am done with all."