

Albert B. Cummings Speech on the League of Nations, February 1919 (Pgs. 2-4, 30-31)

... No greater mistake could be made than to assume that there may not be an effective compact among nations, the sole purpose of which is to prevent, so far as humanly possible, future wars, without surrendering a single necessary attribute of our own sovereignty. I cannot concur in the argument which seems to lead to the conclusion that any form of internationalism is an unwise invasion of nationalism. I cannot agree that the highest ideals of Americanism preclude cooperation among nations looking toward the abolition of war. From the very beginning of our national life, indeed, from a time antedating the triumphant close of the Revolution by five years, or more, we have been making treaties of peace and amity with the various powers of the world and we have now a long and honorable series of agreements for the settlement of international disputes. The United States was a party to the Hauge Convention and it joined in establishing the Hague Tribunal. In 1909, this country participated in the London Conference and approved its work; a conference that was called and held for the purpose of civilizing, clarifying and simplifying the law of nations. I am saying these things not because anyone has specifically denied them, but because it is helpful just now to remember there is an internationalism which is not only in harmony with the most exalted spirit of nationalism but which supplements and strengthens that national power which every self-respecting government must exercise for itself.

It must be clear to every thoughtful person that there must be in a world like ours, where an increasing intimacy among nations has been brought about by the genius of invention, the imperative demands of commerce, the drifting tides of population; and, with the constantly growing opportunities of conflict and controversy, a developing internationalism that will meet successfully conditions as they change from year to year ...

It is my belief that the close of the unparalleled conflict in which we have been engaged presents the most favorable opportunity that we ever have had or that is likely to occur in years and years to come to do something that will be a distinct advance toward preventing war in the future ...

Mr. President, I do not ignore the deep anxiety which the President as the spokesman for the instrument feels for the laboring people of the world, and his keen desire to see the full justice is done to the people, I quote to him, "who go to bed tired and wake up without stimulation of lively hope."

They understand their wrongs and they are moving to correct them. Sometimes in the best way, sometimes in the poorest way. They need no such League of Nations to assert their rights. They have always been strong enough to do it here, and now they are powerful enough to do it everywhere. Just what will come from the turmoil through which the world is now passing God only knows, but we can fervently hope that from the conflict justice to every human being will emerge; but a polyglot and incoherent power imposed upon the mass of conflicting and irreconcilable aspirations will do more to plunge all mankind into continual strife than any plan that can be conceived.

The President repeats over and over again that we must accept our responsibility in world work and I agree with him. I am no advocate of isolation. It seems plain to me, however, that the chief contribution to peace and good order at this time is to meet boldly to solve wisely for ourselves that one mighty question which is tearing Europe asunder and which is advancing upon us with terrific force. If we cannot show the world by our own example that workingman can get more justice, more happiness, more comfort under a reconstructed system of individual industrial activity than he can secure through complete socialism the world will try the experiment and from my standpoint with the most disastrous results to civilization.

We ought now to be heading all of our energies upon the vital subject of reconstruction, and this should be our immediate contribution to the welfare of humanity.