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Democrats in World War I

Alexander Mitchell Palmer



OVERVIEW

Alexander Mitchell Palmer served as United States attorney general from 1919 to 1921, under President Woodrow Wilson. In the following speech, delivered after World War I, Palmer honors the contributions of Americans in the war and defends the actions of Democratic leaders during the war.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- Why does Palmer feel he needs to defend Democrats in the war?
 - What appeals is Palmer making to his audience?
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Ido not put our victory in the World War in the proud list of Democratic achievements. Though fought under the great leadership of the greatest Democrat since Jefferson, and although without the support of his party in every crisis it could not have been brought to its successful and triumphant conclusion, it was the people's war in a peculiar sense. The patriotic support given to the government during the war by men of every political faith, proves that passionate love of country and intense devotion to our institutions are a part of the creed of every political party in the nation.

But I do insist that we shall hear no more of the old slander that the Democratic party cannot be trusted to lead in a great war. We may give to individual Americans the full measure of praise which a grateful republic will always shower upon the men who sprang to its defense with unprecedented valor and unhesitating devotion to its Christian cause. But the impartial historian must and will write it down as an incontrovertible fact that the party in power rose with unstinted enthusiasm to the needs of the hour, while its leadership translated the will and spirit of the American people into decisive and courageous action, without which ignominious failure would have been our portion in the Armageddon of the nation.

It has never been any reflection upon the courage or the patriotism of the millions of northern Democrats who followed his leadership, for history to accord to Abraham Lincoln and the party which he led the full measure of credit which was their due for saving the Union in the dark days of the Civil War. The great empire on whose dominions the sun never sets gratefully acknowledges that success could not have come to British arms without the superb political leadership of that masterful little Welshman, David Lloyd George. While France—rescued from the very jaws of death by the courage of her sons, whose blood has colored all the rivers that wash her sunny slopes—

does honor to the skill of her generals, the courage of her men, and the sacrifice of her women by acknowledging the chief debt to be due the old tiger of France, Clemenceau.

Must we forever sit silent under partisan charges of waste, extravagance or mistake—many of them the necessary accompaniment of war—without any credit for the great and overwhelming result which we achieve? Let history begin to tell the truth now, and it will say that the common courage of our men and women, the combined efforts of capital and labor, the joint support of city and farm, all were welded into an irresistible force, by a leadership never surpassed in the history of parliamentary government. And that was the leadership which the Democratic party gave to the world when it joined its practical achievements with its high ideals behind Woodrow Wilson.

The hard won victory of American arms will prove but a hollow and unavailing triumph if we do not make certain that out of it shall come a greater liberty, a better America, and a surer peace—these three, and the greatest of these is peace, for peace means liberty for everyone. Peace means America forevermore. And peace means the bright new skies of that glorious day which was ushered in by the Master when He blessed a weary world: My peace I give unto you. My peace I leave with you.

Source: Library of Congress, American Memory. “American Leaders Speak: Recordings from World War I and the 1920 Election, 1918-1920” [Document posted on the World Wide Web]. Retrieved May 5, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://memory.loc.gov/>