

Sen. Warren G. Harding's Speech to Americans about their "Liberty Under the Law"

My countrymen, the menacing tendency of the present day is not chargeable wholly to the unsettled and feverish conditions caused by the war. The manifest weakness in popular government lies in the temptation to appeal to group citizenship for political advantage. There is no greater peril. The Constitution contemplates no class and recognizes no group. It broadly includes all the people with specific recognition for none, and the highest consecration we can make today is a committal of the Republican party to that saving constitutionalism which contemplates all America as one people and holds just government free from influence on the one hand, and unmoved by intimidation on the other.

It would be the blindness of folly to ignore the activities in our own country which are aimed to destroy our economic system and to commit us to the colossal tragedy which has both destroyed all freedom and made Russia impotent. This movement is not to be halted in throttled liberties. We must not abridge the freedom of speech, the freedom of press, or the freedom of assembly, because there is no promise in repression. These liberties are as sacred as the freedom of religious beliefs, as inviolable as the rights of life and the pursuit of happiness. We do hold to the right to crush sedition, to stifle a menacing contempt for law, to stamp out a peril to the safety of the Republic or its people when emergency calls, because security and the majesty of the law are the first essentials of liberty. He who threatens destruction of the government by force, or flaunts his contempt for lawful authority, ceases to be a loyal citizen and forfeits his right to the freedom of the Republic.

Let it be said to all of America that our plan of popular government contemplates such orderly changes as the crystallized intelligence of the majority of our people think best. There can be no modification of this underlying rule, but no majority shall abridge the rights of a minority. Men have a right to question our system in fullest freedom. But they must always remember that the rights of freedom impose the obligations which maintain it. Our policy is not of repression. But we make appeal today to American intelligence and patriotism, when the Republic is menaced from within, just as we trusted American patriotism when our rights were threatened from without.

We call on all America for steadiness, so that we may proceed deliberately with the readjustment which concerns all the people. Our party platform fairly expresses the conscience of Republicans on industrial relations. No party is indifferent to the welfare of the wage earner. To us, his good fortune is of deepest concern, and we seek to make that good fortune permanent. We do not oppose, but approve, collective bargaining, because that is an outstanding right, but we are unalterably insistent that its exercise must not destroy the equally sacred right of the individual in his necessary pursuit of a livelihood. Any American has the right to quit his employment, so has every American the right to seek employment. The group must not endanger the individual, and we must discourage groups preying upon one another. And none shall be allowed to forget that government's obligations are alike to all the people.