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Percival P. Baxter

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1924

What Is the Issue?

Republicanism or Sectarianism?

What Would Lincoln Say?

Maine for Coolidge!

Address of

PERCIVAL P. BAXTER

Governor of Maine

AT THE

Annual Banquet of the Lincoln Club



February 12, 1924

PORTLAND

ADDRESS OF PERCIVAL P. BAXTER, GOVERNOR
OF MAINE, AT THE ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE
LINCOLN CLUB, PORTLAND, MAINE
FEBRUARY 12, 1924

The annual banquet of the Lincoln Club is an event to which we all look forward with pleasure. Upon these occasions we renew personal and political friendships, outline our plans for the future, and meet and listen to many of the leading public men and women of the Nation. The messages these speakers bring broaden our outlook and inspire us to nobler efforts.

This evening we are fortunate in having with us Mrs. Penelope B. P. Huse of New Jersey and Senator Wesley L. Jones of Washington. As governor of the State it gives me pleasure to welcome them to Maine, and I want them to feel that they are in the house of their friends. We appreciate the effort they have made to be with us.

Lincoln and Coolidge

I feel that I voice the sentiment of ALL the Republicans of Maine in saying that our chief interest in the coming campaign is to continue in the Presidential office the typical New Englander who now occupies it. Everything else is secondary, and in so far as I am concerned, I shall do my utmost in President Coolidge's behalf.

In many ways the comparison between President Coolidge and the great Lincoln, in whose honor we meet this evening, is striking. Our President has the quiet determination, simplicity of life, directness of speech, sense of humor and unaffectedness of Lincoln. So with his kindness, strength of character, and vision. In all these and more does Calvin Coolidge resemble his immortal predecessor. I do not believe we ever had a President who possessed the fine characteristics of Abraham Lincoln in as marked degree as does our present Chief Executive.

The Nation First

The welfare of this great nation hangs in the balance. It is the duty of the Republican party to be tireless in its efforts, not for the good of the party, but primarily for the good of the country. Our interest is more than partisan; it is patriotic; and I believe that PATRIOTISM should be the slogan of our party in the present campaign.

I could stand here this evening and indulge in a few harmless remarks, leaving everybody complacent and contented. Not long ago, a close adviser said to me: "I hope that for the next few months, you will not really say anything in

your speeches, but will just indulge in a few platitudes." The remark was made seriously with the intention of being helpful. I, however, have not been in the habit of indulging in platitudes, for that is futile and reflects upon one's audiences. I shall speak frankly about political conditions in Maine and, if blunt in my remarks, it is for the purpose of arousing the Republicans of this State to action. The crisis warrants it.

Republican Party in Maine.

The condition of the Republican party of Maine at the present time is disturbing. If things are allowed to drift as they have started, disaster threatens, and every well informed person in this audience knows it. I am not a candidate for office and retire from the Governorship within a year, but I feel it my duty to speak frankly. If I were a candidate, however, I should voice these same sentiments and not a word of this address would be omitted or altered. Having been the titular head of the Republican party in this State for over three years, I know something of conditions, and my observations may be helpful. I make no claim to be the party's "organization" leader and never have assumed that exalted position. Others are entitled to whatever distinction that may bring. I, however, want the 150,000 Republicans of Maine to know that I am grateful for the honors they have conferred upon me, and intend to show my loyalty to Republican principles by helping the party in every way. The heart of our country is sound and true.

As President Cleveland once said, "We face a condition not a theory". If we Republicans are to win in the coming campaign, the people of Maine must be given to understand that the Republican party is not under the domination of any special group or influence. All small and petty schemes and plots must be thrown into the discard, and the Republicans of Maine must unite in the support of President Coolidge and his Administration.

Ku Klux Klan

The most uncertain element in Maine politics today is the Ku Klux Klan whose members claim to be "100% American", and who openly state they will control the next legislature and elect "their own" governor. This organization is growing daily and opposition seems to strengthen it. Its program is well defined, its leaders aggressive.

Opposed to the Klan are several groups with divided leadership and mixed motives. These groups, although Anti-Klan, with propriety consider themselves equally "100% American". On both sides of this unfortunate division are Republicans, and as a result the Republican party is endangered. I do not question the good citizenship, the loyalty or the Americanism of any of those of whom I speak, Klan or Anti-Klan, and have many friends on both sides. I meet all on equal ground with everything open and above board, and deeply regret that religious dissension is rampant throughout

the State and that the split between races, sects, and creeds daily grows wider.

Secrecy

Secrecy is deplorable and the mask is a two-edged sword. Within the year three gentlemen came to my office at Augusta and introduced themselves as "klansmen". I greeted them cordially as "citizens" of the State, told them that my office was open to everyone however exalted or humble, but declined to receive them as members of any secret order on a secret mission. At first they demurred, but as I insisted and wanted no misunderstanding of my position, they finally yielded and were received simply as "citizens", with my office door wide open. We had a pleasant conference upon public affairs. If the good men and women of this State will come out in the open and frankly discuss their differences, an end soon would come to present distrust and suspicion.

We all believe in law and in its vigorous enforcement by the regularly constituted authorities. Such enforcement I support to the limit of my ability and not a day passes without some definite action on my part toward that end. The time will not come during my administration when the secret will of any organization, be it Catholic or Protestant, will be substituted for the orderly process of law.

Governor Baxter's Three Issues

The principal issues between Klan and Anti-Klan, between Protestants and Roman Catholics and their sympathizers are three: no public money for sectarian schools; investigation of our tax exemption laws with a view to their revision; and the Bible in the Public Schools. The official records of the Legislature show that the first was originally brought out and advocated by me in my inaugural address in 1923. For more than twenty years I have had this matter in mind waiting to introduce it at a time when it had a fair chance of passage. It received the necessary two thirds vote in the House, 88 to 54, but in the Senate failed of passage by 7 votes. The second and third were both drafted and introduced at my suggestion and became law. Such of these issues as still are unsettled can and should be discussed calmly and reasonably, and the 1925 Legislature, if Republican, no doubt will give them wise consideration.

Protestant schools will suffer more than Catholic, if the non-sectarian Amendment is passed, for the Commissioner of Education reports to me that the Methodist, Baptist and Quaker Academies will lose a total of \$18,577.32, while those of the Catholics will lose but \$7,400. He also assures me that no public money is paid by the State or municipalities to what strictly may be called parochial schools, although in Northern Maine Roman Catholic Sisters in uniform are employed as teachers under the supervision of the regularly elected union district superintendents. These Sisters are not supposed to teach sectarianism during regular school hours.

The non-sectarianism amendment would not affect non-

sectarian high schools and academies now receiving State aid as high schools, and Methodist, Baptist, Quaker and Catholic institutions would retain their State aid by abolishing sectarian management and instruction.

These issues are clean cut and should be faced and settled for all time by constitutional amendment. Our public schools must be protected against encroachment by those who are insisting that parochial schools shall share in public funds, and inequalities and abuses of our tax exemption laws must be remedied. These two questions are of the utmost importance and no candidate for office should evade them. As regards the first, at the moment a large sum of money is not involved and for that reason it should be settled before becoming complicated by larger figures. There must be no alliances, no compromises. The future of our public schools and the equalization of tax burdens, both bed-rock principles of Americanism, are at stake.

General U. S. Grant once said, "Not one dollar appropriated for the support of schools shall be appropriated for***** any sectarian school". He meant either Catholic or Protestant. I regret on Armistice Day to see the children of our Public schools marching under one school banner with those of the Catholic schools marching under another and separated from them. But after all, over both groups flies the American Flag, they all are American children, and the same loyalty and love of country beats in all their childish hearts!

Both sides have erred. An unfortunate attack was made on our Public Schools, and this provoked a reply that now has developed into a political issue. Our people are in hostile camps. They forget that there are other important issues at stake in Maine. In years past, the dividing line between citizens was "party", Republican or Democrat. Party principles were involved and the records of administrations were scrutinized. Today, racial and sectarian animosities seem to have become campaign issues and to have taken the place of parties. It is most deplorable that these should dominate the political situation.

Tolerance is Gone

Maine formerly was a State of Tolerance. Party harmony and respect for each other's opinions, religious and political, prevailed. That commendable condition has passed and now families and communities are divided, and there is an undercurrent of discontent and suspicion. So unrelenting is the conflict that every candidate for office, from lowest to highest, is put to the test—"Klan or Anti-Klan"? In the State House men holding administrative positions about whom there is no taint of sectarian prejudice are being threatened with defeat unless they declare themselves. Certain departments are criticized because of the religious beliefs of some of their employees. If this continues, our voting lists no longer will be marked with capital "R" or "D", but with letters denoting Anti-Klan or Klan. Outside of political life what almost amounts to boycott prevails in some sections of our State.

I hold no brief for either side, but I am proud to hold one for the Republican Party. A Protestant myself, I care not whether my neighbor worships his God in a Cathedral, Meeting House, Temple, Synagogue or Klavern, so long as he loves his God and is a good citizen. I also enjoy having him a good Republican. They all are my friends and I respect and recognize their good points and high principles.

"Americanism"

"Americanism" should be practiced as well as preached. No group in this state be it social, religious or political holds any monopoly on that magic word, nor is loyalty to our Country found purer in one than in the other. The finest definition of Americanism I ever read was made, not by a Catholic or a Protestant, but by a Jewish Rabbi. He says:

"What is Americanism? Americanism is not a matter of birth and ancestry, for the American is self-made not born. It is not a birthright privilege but a life-long responsibility. America is not a place, not a region, not a locality. America is an atmosphere and an Ideal and Vision as yet unfulfilled. No man is an American who does not place America first, before himself. He must serve America, America must not serve him. He is no American who cherishes prejudices whether they be social, racial or religious. Not America for Americans, but Americans for America, and America for the world".

Maine's Political Influence

The influence of Maine is small; we occupy a minor position in national affairs. Due to our September election preceding that of the Nation the results here are given undue prominence. The political barometer is sensitive, however, and the outcome here carries considerable weight in other states of the Union. In a very close contest the prestige of a Republican victory in Maine, or lack of it in defeat, might determine the results in the nation.

Sectarian issues that endanger the Republican State and National administrations should be unthinkable. Can we not rise above these local matters and show the country that Maine Republicans in their loyalty to President Coolidge ignore all minor, personal and religious differences? Consider the embarrassing position of the national Republican organization if Sectarianism, Klan or Anti-Klan, not Republicanism, is the issue in Maine. Could President Coolidge, Cabinet or leading Republicans from other states come and assist us in such a campaign? Could the National Committee come here and help us? If they did so what would be said in other states where the vote is close? Let us not raise these unfortunate sectarian issues in Maine in 1924, and thereby jeopardize our position in National Councils. Let us not risk losing our State to the Democracy by a blunder similar to that fatal one of "Rum, Romanism and Rebellion," that excited religious antagonism and lost the Presidency to Maine's favorite son.

No Distinction of Race or Creed

I plead for the restoration of harmony within Republican ranks; for old time Republicanism where no distinction of Catholic, Protestant, Hebrew or Klansman ever was thought of. The time has not arrived when the Republican Party in Maine needs the stinging lesson of defeat. Our record at Augusta is above reproach, and should not be imperilled by intra-party warfare. Let us settle our troubles among ourselves, and not call in the Democrats to do so for us.

United Democracy

The Democrats are united. Their organization work begun months ago, especially among their women. They have an able candidate for United States Senator. He was trained in the Republican Party and in 1917 Mr. Redman and I were friends and members of the House. For Governor their leading candidate is a resourceful man who will not overlook anything that makes for his success. Face these facts, and let us not, like the ostrich, bury our heads in the sand!

In 1922 we carried this State by 30,000. 15,000 dissatisfied Republicans could have swung us to Democracy. The Republicans of Maine dishonor themselves unless they give President Coolidge an overwhelming majority. A Senator and four Congressman also are at stake. We must rally around them all for our majority in Congress is too small to be endangered.

Republicans Arouse!

Unless we arouse ourselves, our party will be broken in Maine; years will pass before the wounds are healed. Let all Republicans, whether Klansmen, Knights of Columbus, or B'nai B'rith, whether Protestants, Catholics, or Hebrews, forget racial and religious differences, forget the hard things said on both sides, and let a reunited party come out from the dark places of distrust into the sunshine of certain victory.

Let all these American brothers who fought side by side in War, now do so in Peace. Let them work first for the welfare of the State and Nation, and last for the advancement of their separate orders. Let public servants be chosen on their merits as citizens and Republicans, and not because of race or creed. Let all recognize honest differences of opinion, to be argued out in a Republican Legislature after a great Democratic defeat. Unless this be done disaster threatens and the Democrats are likely to have cause for rejoicing.

Let all un-American challenges be withdrawn! Let no organization boast that it will elect "its" governor. Far better and more "American" is it to elect the "best" Governor, of the "best" party. Let clergymen of all denominations refrain from inciting sectarian strife and preach tolerance and goodwill from their pulpits. Let the newspapers echo it, and the people practice it.

What is at Stake?

President Coolidge is a great leader, placed in the executive chair by the hand of Providence. He is a man of destiny and the future of this country is in his charge. He deserves the support of every loyal Republican. Consider the questions that confront our nation and the issues at stake, our foreign relations, with world affairs unsettled, chaotic; with nations across the seas and to the south looking to us for unselfish leadership. At home, the great problems of finance and tax reduction, the encouragement of shipping, enforcement of law, transportation, immigration, tariff and the rehabilitation of our disabled soldiers. Principles not prejudices should decide these issues.

There is no man in this Nation who holds and deserves the confidence of the People as does Calvin Coolidge. In the distressing oil scandals that confront us we have implicit confidence that, unmoved by partisanship or prejudice, he will punish all wrong doers and protect the people's interest. Like Theodore Roosevelt, his "sword knows no brother".

Maine's Leadership

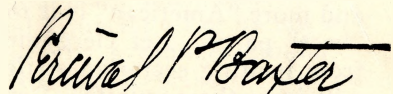
Shall the State of Maine hold her place in national leadership and as of old point the way, or, absorbed in petty jealousies suffer from sectarian strife? I want to see the faces of men, to know with whom I speak, and whence they come. I deplore mystery and concealment. The measure of a good citizen is not the badge of any secret order. All have the right to enjoy fraternal associations if good citizenship is their goal. Each should take pride in, and be true to his own faith and by his life and example justify his faith before his fellowmen.

Loyal Republicans never should forget that the success of our party is of vastly more importance to the nation than the satisfaction of radical grudges and sectarian prejudices. Again I plead for Tolerance and Republicanism.

My remarks have been addressed to you as Republicans upon a great Republican anniversary. I however am Governor of all the People and my appeal for tolerance and true Americanism is not confined to the members of any single group. My message embraces all; regardless of sect, race or party, it is addressed to every man, woman and child in the State of Maine.

What would Lincoln say if he came to Maine today? What counsel would he give? Surely his immortal words are a plea for harmony and for the highest welfare of the Nation: "With malice toward none, with charity for all".

(Signed)



Governor of Maine.