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PRESENTS

"A MESSAGE FOR CANADIANS"

By

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"MESSAGE FOR CANADIANS"

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Paul Robeson

MR. ROBESON: I can't tell you how pleased I am to be speaking again to a Canadian audience. I was just in Vancouver, and Mr. Roy Dunlop was very insistent that I speak to you again. I am very glad that he was. On this tour of Canada I have had a chance to see the remaining parts that I haven't had the chance to see before. I was in the Maritime provinces in the early part of the year, and I had a chance to strike Edmonton and Calgary for the first time, and had certainly lovely concerts in both places.

Last year I spoke to you about this time, and as I said then, I don't want to make a speech. I just want to say "hello" and chat about a few things. I was recently in the European theatre of the war singing to American troops for the U.S.O. I had a chance to see France in its desolation, Czecho Slovakia; I was in Bavaria and many sections of the occupied areas. I read the papers again today. I see the nations of the world in conference, and one must still be disturbed. I said last year something that I had prepared very carefully - that the struggle for human freedom has been a long and bitter one, for the progress and the conceptions of the divine right of kings, through feudal serfdom, domination of middle groups, to a world of freedom of all men, has taken centuries of human suffering. It could be a historical achievement of our civilization to chart a new course of varied, peaceful commonly shared life for the many peoples of this earth, with a minimum of suffering.

Now since that time we have won a war. We have presumably smashed Fascism, and I said then what Fascism meant and what its victory would mean to all of us. That it would mean the domination of one people over all the remainder of mankind. In brute terms, the great industrial life of the world would have been Nazi-controlled and the rest of the people factory and agricultural serfs.

I asked you to sketch quickly over the picture of feudal times, to look at the horrors of the industrial revolution, to review the history of the slave trade and to see what has happened in history to all peoples, white, colored and hitherto great nations and colonial peoples, and that under Fascism we would return to that kind of condition with even more horrible suffering.

Being in Germany, being in Dachau, being in Buchenwald - this was not just any kind of idea. I looked at the ashes of the victims of Dachau. It was a present fact, and according to Mein Kampf, instead of the Jewish people, it could have been the Negro people who could have been wiped out in one stroke - in just one stroke of Mr. Hitler's pen. I said that on the other hand our victory suggests that we do understand that we point to another kind of world; the entrance to a new period in human history as all-embracing as the change from feudal to modern times. And I asked, what is the essence of that change? Let's think of that again.

To me the two important things in the world that strike my own people - that strike all oppressed peoples, all under-privileged peoples (in Mr. Roosevelt's terms) are poverty and the lack of freedom.

When one looks at the Negro problem in America, one sees in the end that they are a laboring, poor people, poor share-croppers in the south, in the lower ranks of labour in other parts of the nation; and the Negro problem must not be looked at as being solved through whatever gifts or talents of the few - of the Carvers, of the Andersons, of the Maynors, of the Richard Wrights. This is not the solution.

There can be no real solution until this whole people is raised to a much higher level. This, it seems to me, was the essence of the whole struggle against Fascism, because when I was in England, I saw Welsh miners who live at the same level as the Negro share-cropper in the south. I saw the peasants in many lands of Europe who lived at that same level. I saw the serfs in Egypt who live below that level - an incredibly low level for a human being on this earth. And if the struggle against Fascism means anything, it means that these kinds of people will be raised and have a chance to live a much more decent kind of life.

The second point was one of freedom. Of the same freedoms as other citizens in the nation. This is not yet the privilege of Negro Americans for example. It is not yet the privilege of many peoples within the commonwealths of the Anglo-Saxon association of nations either. It is not the privilege of many peoples within the power of many other European nations. I would go further and say it is not the privilege of many sections of the poorer classes in many of the nations of the world, including my own. This is the essence of the struggle of labour today for much more say in the destiny of their different societies. It was very clear what the Fascist methods were. What

about today, with nations who are now victorious? I would suggest that the policy of my own government today does not in any way follow as it should the directions of the late President Roosevelt who saw clearly that there should be full employment. That there should be full opportunities for all minorities to work, with a Fair Employment Practices Act; that there should be a raising of the level of life among all groups, and that certainly big business and the industrialists were willing - were able to take that level - that raising of the level, because of their profits during the war, and because of the possibility of expanding markets.

Now another thing has happened in the world. It seems as though a small minority as before feels that the majority can go on and suffer and live on a level close to subsistence or even below it, while the whole financial and whole economic system is built still upon the profits of the few.

In most countries of Europe today lying in ruins, how have they decided to solve their problems? During the war we had to sort of tighten our belts and allow a lot of interference from what we called our centralized government. We had to allow some planning in our production. Now the countries of Europe have decided that in order to restore their way of life, they will have to plan a great deal and not leave much of the economy to the football of hit or miss - of what we call our private enterprise. So in England, so in France, so in Scandinavia, so in Czecho Slovakia, so in Jugoslavia. So in many other parts of the world we see a centralization in planning, a taking of the main means of production under government control. Call it what we will, nationalization, socialism, call it what you will, this is the direction in which these people are working. By free elections they have chosen so to do. I would suggest that powerful forces in my own land and in other lands do not like this kind of solution, and that they would like to break this kind of government and this kind of approach. What could be the alternative? In France, for example, the only alternative could be returning these industries into the hands of the people of Vichy who became Fascists. This could only be done in Italy. This could only be done in the other countries, because the great industrialists were the great source in these countries of Fascist support. We fought a war to destroy it. The people of France, of Czecho Slovakia, of England, have decided that they want a different kind of approach. I think it rests upon every Canadian,

every American citizen, to see that their governments do not let the influence be used to thwart these hopes of the peoples in foreign lands. So again the question of liberty of Colonial peoples. President Roosevelt suggested that one could now approach these peoples not as backward peoples, but as potential citizens like anyone else with a tremendous capacity for advancement and looking at their needs, as well as the needs of the people for example, investing in these many lands. This is not being done today in many sections of the world, and I would suggest that this is a very great danger to the peace of our world. A lot of this is done in the name of a fear of what is happening in the East of Europe; what is happening as far as the Soviet Union is concerned. I would suggest the Soviet Union is in the direct line of the way history is moving. This kind of solution of the problems of poverty and the freedom of peoples within the border of this society was begun long ago. They are much further along this road. The danger no more lies with the Soviet Union today than it did in the days of Munich. The danger still lies with the remains of Fascism in many lands. I believe the Soviet Union wants only to live in a world where Fascism is destroyed, and where there is an extension, a real extension of democracy to include all peoples.

I was struck often in my travels, as I said before, by the unity of many cultures.

I remember one kind of likeness through the negro preacher. We sang "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" in my church, and the minister would begin, "and now we are here on bended knee"...

SONG: "SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT"

I was either singing or speaking like the chant, very much for example, of the Jewish Rabbi.

Now one song that I sang called KADISH, a negro preacher might chant in Hebrew.

I remember talking once to Nehru, also about this likeness of culture, and I recited a Persian prayer which went: (PERSIAN PRAYER) And a negro preacher might say it this way (NEGRO VERSION) showing that peoples were really very much alike.

Again I would just like to finish with a little song from one of my favorite negro spirituals.

SONG: "MOUNT ZION"