

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF SPEECH

VOLUME XXVII

APRIL, 1941

NUMBER 2

SPEECH IN THE WORLD TODAY*

ALAN H. MONROE

Purdue University

IN opening this Silver Anniversary Convention, I could justifiably point with pride to the accomplishments of our Association and of all teachers of speech during the past twenty-five years. I could catalogue our growth in numbers. I could emphasize the diversity of our interests — in drama, speech correction, debate, and public discussion. I could refer to the confidence and strength which have come to us from the substantial body of knowledge which our research has made available.

I could with equal justification view with concern the many personal and professional problems which face us. I could refer to the tendency always present during a military emergency for people to emphasize action and be impatient with talk; or I might call attention to the occasional conflict of interest between specialists in speech correction, drama, interpretation, and public address. These problems and others will be vigorously discussed in our meetings I am sure.

In this critical time, however, I prefer to emphasize from a somewhat broader point of view the place of speech in the world today, its heritage from yesterday and its possibilities for tomorrow. When the news is filled with stories of battle, misery, and dictatorial domination, of strict censorship, and secret police there is a danger that we may feel that freedom is dying. In our discouragement, we are likely to forget the other black days of humanity.

We forget the days of Nero in Rome when Christians were often violently and tragically purged. We forget the days of Genghis

*Abstract of address by President Alan H. Monroe opening the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention of the National Association of Teachers of Speech at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D. C., December 30, 1940.

Khan and of Napoleon when armies swept west and east burning and destroying life and property and there was no freedom to speak without fear. We forget the days of the Inquisition and the pogroms of Eastern Europe.

But we must not forget the ringing words that broke from human souls throughout all these dark days. We must not forget that force has never quieted the speech of man when his spirit was troubled or aflame. A very humble man once challenged the religious rulers of Israel when he said, "Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." A young man spoke not many miles from here the words, "Give me liberty or give me death." A group of men challenging the authority of a great empire had courage to say, "We hold these truths to be self-evident — that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Another cried, "Millions for defense but not one cent for tribute." And have we forgotten the man who had the temerity to say, "You may be king, Your Majesty; but I am right."

And so I say today, black as the picture is, speech can still ring free. Even in regimented Germany, Pastor Niemoeller has the courage to say, "Not you, Herr Hitler, but *God* is my Führer." And Winston Churchill knows that free men will support him even though he promises them nothing but "blood and tears and sweat." I think it is our peculiar responsibility, as teachers of speech, to maintain the courage of these great spokesmen. I think it is our duty throughout the country to denounce the doctrine of silence and fear, and to preach the duty of fearless utterance "of the right as God gives us to see the right," and it is our solemn obligation when we speak that we insist upon responsibility for reflective thought and careful investigation in order that our speech may be sound and substantial as well as free.

It seems to me that we have another duty also. There is little doubt that in the conflict raging across the world today, the whole philosophy of individual freedom, including the freedom to speak, is being challenged. If that challenge is to be met even in a defensive way, free men must unite, and unity cannot be conjured up by law or regulation. Unity grows from common needs, and even more important, common ideals and common beliefs. In the present crisis, then, it seems to me that our full force should be exerted individually and as a group toward the maintenance of a strong and active national unity. Let us not hesitate to uncover weakness and delay or

to criticize and condemn it, but let this criticism spring as it must from a background of unified and vigorous support.

Nor should we forget that speech in the world today is not alone a matter of public utterance. An operating democracy demands clear and thoughtful speech on the farm, in the factory, and government. *Speech can and must go to work.* Labor controversies must be settled by talk and not by force; farm policies must be coordinated by discussion and agreement; and government policies must gain their sanction from a people who have thought and debated them.

And what of speech tomorrow? If the black days become blacker, and speech throughout the world is fettered as it is in so much of Europe by public chains, we shall be sad; *but we must not be dismayed*,—for speech always has broken and always will break through these chains to speak the challenge of men's souls. And when, once more, peace and freedom come again, then honest speech will speak still louder in justice's name—for we shall have seen again what happens when men's tongues are tied and only power is left to rule.

PROFESSIONAL MATURITY*

J. M. O'NEILL

Brooklyn College

THE basic theme of this our Silver Anniversary Convention has been announced as "Speech in the World Today." Surely those of us who wear conspicuously the outward silver symbol of the lived-out decades, and who have the varied memories of all these years, may be expected to turn back at such a time to our world of twenty-five years ago. It was quite a world. I shall not attempt to analyze it or to catalogue its qualities at length. It would, however, I think, be fitting to point out at least some of the principal ways in which the professional world of the teachers in our field has greatly altered since 1915.

Twenty-five years ago there were no courses and no activities in radio. Commercial radio as we know it was still in the future, and we teachers were unaware of its coming interest to us. There were no departments "of speech;" there were no teachers "of speech." Most departments and teachers were "of public speaking." This Association, when it was founded twenty-six years ago, was named "The National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speak-

*Read at the Opening General Session at the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention of the National Association of Teachers of Speech, Washington, D. C., December 30, 1940.