

# "Let Us Now End American Colonialism"

A Speech by

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**We meet to validate the most basic of American principles**, the principle of "government by consent of the governed." We take this historic step because the people of Alaska who elected you, have come to see that their long standing and unceasing protests against the restrictions, discriminations and exclusions to which we are subject have been unheeded by the colonialism that has ruled Alaska for 88 years. The people of Alaska have never ceased to object to these impositions even though they may not have realized that such were part and parcel of their colonial status. Indeed the full realization that Alaska is a colony may not yet have come to many Alaskans, nor may it be even faintly appreciated by those in power who perpetuate our colonial servitude...

...Today, in 1955, sorely tried through 88 years of step-childhood, and matured to step-adulthood, Alaskans have come to the time when patience has ceased to be a virtue. But our faith in American institutions, our reverence for American traditions, are not only undimmed but intensified by our continuing deprivation of them. Our cause is not merely Alaskans'; it is the cause of all Americans. So we are gathered here, following action by our elected representatives who provided this Constitutional Convention, to do our part to "show the world that America practices what it preaches."

These words are not original with me. But they remain as valued and as valid as when they were uttered five years ago. They remain no less valid even if their noble purpose is as yet unfulfilled. We are here to do what lies within our power to hasten their fulfillment.

We meet in a time singularly appropriate. Not that there is ever a greater or lesser timeliness for the application by Americans of American principles. Those principles are as enduring and as eternally timely as the Golden Rule. Indeed democracy is nothing less than the application of the Golden Rule to the Great Society. I mean, of course, democracy of deeds, not of lip-service; democracy that is faithful to its professions; democracy that matches its pledges with its performance. But there is nevertheless, a peculiar timeliness to this Alaskans' enterprise to keep our nation's democracy true to its ideals. For right now that the United States has assumed world leadership, it has shown through the expressions of its leaders its distaste for colonialism. And this antipathy to

colonialism--wherever such colonialism may be found--reflects a deep-seated sentiment among Americans.

For our nation was born of revolt against colonialism. Our charters of liberty--the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution-- embody America's opposition to colonialism and to colonialism's inevitable abuses. It is therefore natural and proper that American leadership should set its face against the absenteeism, the discriminations and the oppressions of colonialism. It is natural and proper that American leadership should lend such aid and comfort as it may to other peoples striving for self-determination and for that universally applicable tenet of American faith--government by consent of the governed. Indeed, as we shall see, we are pledged to do this by recent treaty commitments.

What more ironical, then, what more paradoxical, than that very same leadership maintains Alaska as a colony?

What could be more destructive of American purpose in the world? And what could be more helpful to that mission of our nation than to rid America of its last blot of colonialism by admitting our only two incorporated territories--Alaska and Hawaii--to the equality they seek, the equality provided by the long-established and only possible formula, namely statehood?

America does not, alas, practice what it preaches, as long as it retains Alaska in colonial vassalage.

Is there any doubt that Alaska is a colony? Is there any question that in its maintenance of Alaska as a territory against the expressed will of its inhabitants, and subject to the accompanying political and economic disadvantages, the United States has been and is guilty of colonialism?

Lest there be such doubt, lest there be those who would deny this indictment, let the facts be submitted to a candid world.

You will note that this last sentence is borrowed from that immortal document, the Declaration of Independence. It is wholly appropriate to do this. For, in relation to their time, viewed in the light of mankind's progress in the 180 years since the revolt of the thirteen original American colonies, the "abuses and usurpations" --to use again the language of the Declaration--against which we protest today, are as great, if not greater, than those our revolutionary forbears suffered and against which they revolted.

Let us recall the first item of grievance in the Declaration of Independence:

"He has refused assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good."

"He," of course, was King George the Third. Put in his place, in place of the "he", his contemporary equivalent, our ruler, the federal government.

Has it, or has it not, "refused assent to laws most wholesome and necessary for the public good?"

We Alaskans know that the answer is emphatically, "Yes, it has."

He, or for the purpose of 1955, it, the federal government, has "refused assent," although requested to do so for some forty years, to the following I most wholesome and necessary laws:"

First. A law transferring the control and management of Alaska's greatest natural resource, the fisheries, to the Territory of Alaska, as it transferred the corresponding resources to all other Territories in the past.

Second. It has "refused assent" to a law repealing the thirty-five year old discrimination in the Maritime Law of 1920, the "Jones Act," a discrimination uniquely against Alaska.

Third. It has "refused assent" to a reform of our obsolete and unworkable land laws, which would assist and speed population growth, settlement and development of Alaska. It alone is responsible for over 99% of Alaska being still public domain.

Fourth. It has "refused assent" to a law including Alaska in federal aid highway legislation.

Fifth. It has "refused assent" to a law abolishing the barbarous commitment procedure of Alaska's insane which treats them like criminals and confines them in a distant institution in the states.

Sixth. It has "refused assent" to placing our federal lower court judges, the United States commissioners, on salary, and paying them a living wage.

One could cite other examples of such refusal to assent to "laws most wholesome and necessary for the public good."

But let us instead pass on to the second item for complaint, which is similar to the first, in the Declaration of Independence:

"He has forbidden his Governors to pass laws of immediate and growing importance. . ."

Substitute for the "He", then the British royal executive, the present American federal executive, and substitute for "his governors", his party leaders in Congress, and recall their vote in the House of Representatives last May 10, killing a law "of immediate and growing importance"--the statehood bill.

Let us go still further down the list of our revolutionary fore- fathers' expressed grievances, again quoting the Declaration of Independence:

"He has obstructed the administration of Justice, by refusing his assent to laws establishing judiciary powers."

"He", is today the whole federal government. It has for a decade "obstructed the administration of justice" in Alaska by refusing assent to establishing additional judiciary powers, where they were needed, namely in the Third Judicial Division, while repeatedly increasing . the number of judges in the "mother country," the 48 states. And although the population of Alaska has more than tripled in the last forty-six years, the number of federal judges established in Alaska in 1909 remains unchanged. And federal judges are the only judges this colony is permitted to have.

Let us look still further in the Declaration of Independence:

"He has affected to render the military independent and superior to the civil power."

Is there much difference between this and the recent presidential declaration that the defense of Alaska, that is to say the rule of the military here, could be better carried out if Alaska remains a Territory?

One could go on at length drawing the deadly parallels which caused our revolutionary forefathers to raise the standard of freedom, although, clearly, some of the other abuses complained of in that distant day no longer exist.

But Alaska is no less a colony than were those thirteen colonies along the Atlantic seaboard in 1775. The colonialism which the United States imposes on us and which we have suffered for 88 years, is no less burdensome, no less unjust, than that against which they poured out their blood and treasure. And while most Alaskans know that full well, we repeat:

"To prove this let the facts be submitted to a candid world."

To begin at the beginning, the Treaty of Cession by which Alaska was annexed, contained a solemn and specific commitment:

"The inhabitants of the ceded territory ... shall be admitted to the enjoyment of all the rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States. . . "

That was the pledge. The United States has not kept that pledge. Yet a treaty is the highest law of the land. And it is made in the clear view of all mankind.

The United States has broken that pledge for 88 years. It has not admitted the inhabitants of Alaska to the enjoyment of "all the rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States.

"All the rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States" would entitle us to vote for President and Vice-President, to representation in the Congress by two

Senators and a Representative with a vote, and would free us from the restrictions imposed by the Organic Act of 1912, and the Act of Congress of July 30, 1886. Obviously we have neither the vote, nor the representation, nor the freedom from restrictions.

We suffer taxation without representation, which is no less "tyranny" in 1955 than it was in 1775. Actually it is much worse in 1955 than in 1775 because the idea that it was "tyranny" was then new. Since the Revolutionaries abolished it for the states a century and three-quarters ago, it has become a national synonym for something repulsive and intolerable.

We are subject to military service for the nation--a privilege and obligation we accept gladly--yet we have not voice in the making and ending of the wars into which our young men are drafted. In this respect we are worse off than our colonial forefathers. King George III did not impose conscription upon them. They were not drafted to fight for the mother country. Therefore there was no revolutionary slogan "no conscription without representation." But it is a valid slogan for Alaskans today.

The treaty obligation of 1867 is an obligation to grant us the full equality of statehood, for which Alaskans did not press in the first 80 years of their subordination, but which now, overdue, they demand as their right.

But that is only a small part of the evidence of our colonialism under the American flag. Let us submit more facts to a candid world.

First, let us ask, what is a colony? And let us answer that question.

A colony has been defined in a standard college text-book by a Columbia University professor as "a geographic area held for political, strategic and economic advantage."

That, as the facts will show, is precisely what the Territory of Alaska is--"a geographic area held for political, strategic and economic advantage."

The maintenance and exploitation of those political, strategic and economic advantages by the holding power is colonialism.

The United States is that holding power.

Inherent in colonialism is an inferior political status.

Inherent in colonialism is an inferior economic status.

The inferior economic status is a consequence of the inferior political status.

The inferior economic status results from discriminatory laws and practices imposed upon the colonials through the superior political strength of the colonial power in the interest of its own non-colonial citizens.

The economic disadvantages of Alaskans which in consequence of such laws and practices redound to the advantage of others living in the states who prosper at the expense of Alaskans--these are the hall-marks of colonialism....

...We are agreed that there is only one form of self-government that is possible for Alaska. And so we are drawing UP the constitution for the State that we fervently hope will soon come to be. That hope, it is encouraging to note, is shared by the great majority of Americans. If our 88-year experience inevitably leads to strictures of the colonialism that has ruled us, let us remember that it is a course not sanctioned by American public opinion. The Gallup polls, which last recorded an 82 per cent support of Alaskan statehood, the endorsement of virtually every important national organization, demonstrate clearly that the forces in and out of government which would deny Alaska statehood--in fact the government itself--do not represent prevailing American sentiment.

It may be regrettable-or not-but every generation must fight to preserve its freedom. We have twice in a life-time participated in our nation's fight to preserve them. In Alaska we still have to win them.

This Constitutional Convention is an important mobilization. But the battle still lies ahead, and it will require all our fortitude, audacity, resoluteness--and maybe something more--to achieve victory. When the need for that something more comes, if we have the courage--the guts--to do whatever is necessary, we shall not fail. That the victory will be the nation's as well as Alaska's--and the world's--should deepen our determination to end American colonialism.

<http://www.alaska.edu/creatingalaska/convention/speeches/gruening.xml>