

PRIME MINISTER

TRYGVE BRATTELI

Speech by Prime Minister Trygve Bratteli
at the Banquet i Nordmanns-Forbundet, Duluth,
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Mr. President,

On behalf of my wife and myself I want to extend to you our most sincere thanks for inviting us to this splendid banquet tonight. Last week we were travelling through the Upper Midwest to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Norwegian immigration into the United States. Everywhere we got a warm and most cordial reception by Americans of Norwegian heritage and by other friends of Norway. Permit me here to express special thanks to Mayor Beaudin of the City of Duluth, and to the Norwegian vice-consul in this City, Mrs. Elsie Melby, who has worked so hard to prepare a program for us.

As you will know, His Majesty the King of Norway, is presently touring the United States to attend observances of the 150th Anniversary of the Norwegian Immigration. The King would have liked to visit all centers of Americans of Norwegian heritage. But he was soon forced to conclude that he could not do so

without spending several months in the United States.

However, the King has instructed me to bring to you here tonight his best personal greetings and his congratulations on the 150th Anniversary of the Norwegians in America. To this, I am happy to add the greetings and the congratulations of the Government of Norway.

I would like to offer some comments on the situation which caused some 800 000 Norwegians to emigrate to the United States between 1825 and the 1920's.

In absolute numbers European nations sent many more emigrants to the New World. But in proportion to the size of the population Norway gave more citizens to the United States than any other country except Ireland.

The Norwegian people in 1850 counted less than 1,5 million. Thus, the country was very thinly populated, and still is. Nevertheless, it was at that time overpopulated when considered against the primitive economy of the country and the opportunities it gave the majority of men and women. In certain ways, Norway was in the same position as the poor and the overpopulated countries of the modern world. Also for poor nations of today the principal problem is to broaden the economic base of their countries in order to enable them to support the population at a decent level. Norway of the 19th Century, like most of the rest of Europe, did, however, have an escape route which is closed to the poor developing nations of today, namely the escape route of emigration.

The first group of Norwegian emigrants in 1825 crossed the Atlantic aboard the small sloop "Restauration". At first the movement was slow. But it soon picked up speed as the American frontier was moved westwards over the Wide and unexplored continent.

In the 1840's nearly one thousand Norwegians emigrated to America each year. In the 1850's it had increased to more than four thousand. By the outbreak of the Civil War a total of some 70 000 Norwegians had left for the United States.

The Civil War meant a set-back for immigration. But as soon as the War ended Norwegians started to stream by the thousands into the farm land of the Midwest. In particular, the regions of Wisconsin, Minnesota and the Dakotas became the home of many Norwegians as they were opened up for free settlement by the Homestead Act of 1862. Norwegian emigration reached its climax in 1883, when more than 28 000 Norwegians left their homes to settle in America. As late as in 1903 emigration still amounted to some 19 000. But at that late time the nature of the migration had changed fundamentally. By the end of the 19th Century, the best land in the Midwest had been taken. An increasing number of Norwegians settled in the big cities, like Brooklyn, Chicago, Minneapolis and Seattle.

The end result of the free immigration by the 1920's, was the settlement in America of about 800 000 Norwegians. This was a great number of people to lose for a small country, where the population amounted to slightly more than one million in 1825. But even with

the large-scale migration, Norway's population continued to increase during the 19th Century. In 1890, it reached the two million mark; by 1920 it had exceeded 2,5 million, and today there are 4 million of us.

Norwegian emigration to America was to a large extent a migration from the poorer classes. America needed exactly what Norway offered: land-hungry farmers and job-hungry artisans. It is typical, in a way, that the established society in Norway at the time warned strongly against the adventure of emigration. In their view it was an unpatriotic act. On the other hand, leaders of the common people advocated emigration for those who were unable to create a decent life for themselves and their families in Norway. The society was stale in its economic and social structure and dogmatic in its political philosophy.

From a Norwegian point of view, the emigration of 800 000 of our citizens meant a loss of human resources. To the new world it meant a significant contribution to the building of America. The existence in America of a sizeable group of people of Norwegian origin, has meant so much for the development of close and friendly relations between our two nations. In fact, Norway has enjoyed more intimate ties of family bonds and personal friendship with the United States than with any other country in the world.

At a time of history when our two nations have been brought into closer cooperation than ever before in the fields of economy, security policy and in cultural exchange the innumerable ties of family and friendship have taken

on added importance. Americans of Norwegian origin may very well see a reason for observing the 150th Anniversary, in that it gives an opportunity to reaffirm your common heritage. Good Norwegians have become good Americans. They have remained good Norwegians in the sense that they have contributed the best of Norwegian values to the building of America.

The wish of Norwegian-Americans to cultivate their common heritage has the understanding and the encouragement of the Norwegian people. A token of this support is the decision of our Storting to grant money for a 150th Anniversary Scholarship Fund to bring American scholars and students of Norwegian descent to Norway.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to the many who have been so active in preparing the celebrations of the 150th Anniversary here in Duluth.

On behalf of all Norwegians, I extend my most heartfelt thanks to all of you.