



Governor Dukakis Discusses Impending Exoneration of Sacco and Vanzetti

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Description

On the 50th anniversary of their execution, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts issues a proclamation which will in effect exonerate Sacco and Vanzetti and remove the stigma and disgrace from their names.

Keywords

Exoneration, Sacco And Vanzetti, Nicola Sacco, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Fair Trial, Court, Leftists, Anarchists, Murder, Case, Immigrants, Michael Dukakis

Transcript

Governor Dukakis Discusses Impending Exoneration of Sacco and Vanzetti

Governor MICHAEL DUKAKIS: Well I expect at noon today to issue a proclamation which will in effect exonerate Sacco and Vanzetti and remove what I refer to as the stigma and disgrace from their names. It's something that, as governor, I've thought about doing for some time. I've obviously been acquainted with the case for many, many years, and it seems to me it's appropriate now as we approach the 50th anniversary of their execution here in Massachusetts to do that.

Interviewer: What reasons will you give for doing so?

Governor DUKAKIS: Well, a number of them. I think anyone who is familiar with that case knows that it was permeated with prejudice and hostility. Sacco and Vanzetti were foreign immigrants, they were admitted anarchists, radicals, and most of us, and most of the people who have studied that case, agree that the case, the trial was permeated with prejudice, with a lack of due process, in fact, under our present rules here in Massachusetts today, I don't think there's any question that that conviction would have been overturned by our state supreme court, but under the laws that then existed, they had a very limited scope of review, and were not able or prepared to do so.

Interviewer: You mentioned the 50th anniversary; in fact the 50th anniversary of the execution would be the 23rd of August. Why have you chosen this date?

Governor DUKAKIS: Well, in a very practical way, I won't be here because I expect to be on vacation with my family for a few weeks. But it seemed to me that as we approached that 50th anniversary it might be a good idea to do it a few weeks in advance, and that's why it's being done now.

Interviewer: Does the manner of your exoneration provide any recompense for the families of Sacco and Vanzetti?

Governor DUKAKIS: No, nor I think are any members of the family particularly interested in that in any monetary sense. I think that they feel that what they are looking for is some exoneration and some official recognition that that trial and what happened to those men, apart from the question of guilt or innocence because I don't believe we'll ever know that for a fact, be acknowledged and that some effort be made in an official way to remove what was an awful thing for the families and of course a terrible thing for the men themselves.

Interviewer: You're addressing yourself then to the fairness of the trial, and not to the question of whether a truly fair trial would have found them guilty or innocent?

Governor DUKAKIS: That's correct. I don't think any of us will ever know that or be able to determine it after the fact.

Interviewer: Well, in doing so, you're not only reversing the finding of a court, but you're reversing the finding of a jury, which is constituted to weigh evidence, and decide which side it does indeed have the facts militating for it.

Governor DUKAKIS: Yes.

Interviewer: Does that concern you at all?

Governor DUKAKIS: It concerns me somewhat. On the other hand, I am a lawyer and I am very much aware of the impact on a jury of what a judge does and what a prosecutor does. And if one reviews the record of that case, the rather obvious bias of the judge who from time to time outside the courtroom made it clear that he had no use for these people, and in fact had sat on the trial of Vanzetti for another offense sometime before this trial, as well as the conduct of the prosecutor and the prosecution. You just have to acknowledge that by present day standards of due process, it just wasn't there.

Interviewer: Governor, these men were aliens, they were radicals, they were draft evaders, all of which has some relevance to problems which we are facing today. Do you think you might get a lot of criticism from people who are involved in those problems on the side adverse to those elements?

Governor DUKAKIS: No, I really don't think so, and I think maybe we're at a point in our nations history

where we're big enough and mature enough to do a little forgiving and to acknowledge to some extent our past mistakes. I think for example the president's action with respect to the Vietnam draft evaders, which I think on the whole was accepted rather positively by the people of this country with, as you know, some dissent, is an example of that kind of thing. I'm aware of the fact that President Ford, before he left office, pardoned Tokyo Rose and of course pardoned former President Nixon. One can make his own judgment about that action, but it does seem to me that this is a time for reconciliation in this country, that Vietnam and Watergate are now behind us, I think President Carter has set that tone, and I'd like to think that in doing what I'm going to be doing in connection with the Sacco-Vanzetti case that perhaps we're following here in Massachusetts along that same road that he's charted out for us.

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