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The quotable, and likable, Calvin Coolidge

By Jared Rhoads

Recently I read David Pietrusza's book, *Silent Cal's Almanack: The Homespun Wit and Wisdom of Vermont's Calvin Coolidge* (self-published through Createspace, 2010; 208 pp). Mr. Pietrusza is an author and writer on 1920s American history.

Silent Cal is a nostalgic jaunt through the life and career of Calvin Coolidge. In full disclosure, I have always been partial to our 30th president. He is my favorite president of the modern era, and I believe he belongs in the top five of any objective presidential ranking that recognizes the preservation of liberty as an important achievement. At various times, Coolidge has been called "Silent Cal" and "the Do-Nothing President." For advocates of laissez-faire, that is praise, not damnation.

This book has nothing to do with healthcare but plenty to do with individual rights. In these pages, readers see that Coolidge advocated for smaller, less-intrusive federal government on a fairly consistent basis. He fought the regulatory apparatus, and put great stock in individuals and individual character.

This self-published book is a good starter volume on Coolidge. Like a sampler, it is easy to flip through and read in whatever order you please. It is part biography, part lexicon, and part photo scrapbook. For more, I recommend Coolidge's own autobiography or simply reading more of his speeches online.

Some quotations in the book could have benefited from additional context. For example, Coolidge once said: "No man has a right to place his own ease or convenience or the opportunity of making money above his duty to the State." In isolation, that sounds like Coolidge was anti-industrial and that he was making a call for individuals to sacrifice to the state. Not so. With a little follow-up, one finds that it was directed at government workers, namely the policemen who in 1919 went on strike while Coolidge was Governor of Massachusetts. They *did* have a duty to the state, in the sense that they were employees bound by a contract.

I also noted a couple of minor typos and some unnecessary repetition. For example, one quotation, "There can be no national greatness which does not rest upon the personal integrity of the people," appears under the heading *Greatness* and then again three pages later under the heading *Integrity*.

Here are some brief quotes. Page numbers are provided for reference.

- "...One of the most important accomplishments of my administration has been the minding of my own business." (p45)
- "There is no surer road to destruction than prosperity without character." (p46)
- "Many times I say only 'yes' or 'no' to people. Even that is too much." (p50)
- "If we give the best that is in us to our private affairs, we shall have little need of government aid." (p67)
- "It is much more important to kill bad bills than to pass good ones." (p76)
- "Fiat prices match the folly of fiat money." (p91)
- "It is not possible to repeal the law of supply and demand, of cause and effect, or of action and reaction." (p91)
- "[The people of the United States] ought not be burdened with a great array of public employees." (p93)
- "Property rights and personal rights are the same thing. The one cannot be preserved if the other be violated." (p94)
- "There is no justification for public interference with purely private concerns." (p98)
- "[Let us shrink] government bureaus that seek to regulate and control the business activities of the people." (p98)



Silent Cal is a pleasurable read, and I recommend it to anyone with an interest in that time period in American history. And on a related note, I also highly recommend visiting the Coolidge Historic Site in Plymouth Notch to anyone traveling through Vermont.