
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 12

1911 December 23

Buffalo, NY

December 23, 1911

[Buffalo, NY]

FD R Speech File

F.D.P. Longhamed

1911 Dec. 23

Speech before The Saturn
Club, Buffalo N.Y.

Type, with notations in
hand of F.D.P.

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TUESDAY
DEC. 1943

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363— WEDNESDAY, DEC. 29, 1943 —2

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Before Saturday Club, Buffalo - Dec. 23rd 1911

Few legislatures ~~which~~ ^{have} contained as many men without previous legislative experience, as last year's, ~~has ever~~ ~~existed~~. Few legislatures have contained so many men who did a certain amount of their own thinking. All the old-timers will tell you this, and it cannot exactly be called a ~~complimentary~~ ^{But} ~~comment on the~~ previous legislatures. ~~And~~ in spite of this independent thinking I can truthfully say that it has not been necessary to be in Albany more than a week before discovering that the Government of the State of New York was not what the history books said - ^{The} a Democracy; that our laws were not made by representatives of ^A voters. The form was there, the display (Roses)

and the decorations. All this was to be seen, but if you got very close and put your ear up to that form you could hear the clock-work ticking inside, and if you were very clever you could find out who had the key. 2

No one man had the keys, but a very small body of men did, and those men knew each other well and were pretty good friends, and those men could wind up the legislative figure to go through all the motions so cleverly that ninety-nine people out of a hundred thought it was alive. In reality it was made up almost entirely of wheels, cogs within cogs, each part dependent on every other, and the whole dependent on those jealously

garded keys. 54

One thing must, however, must in fairness be said -- that machine has not been running very well lately. There seems to be a lack of oil, and last winter it came very near going out of business entirely; so much so that the men who held the keys had to call in mechanics from far and near to tinker with it, and if there is one thing certain in this life it is that this dead form is worn out, and that from its ruins the people are going to have a living organization which will more nearly conform to what the history books call our "democratic form of government."

Who is to blame for a legislature run by a handfull

of outside men? Do you blame the senators and assemblymen who
are cogs in the wheels? Well, a little perhaps, but not much.
Some of those men, most of them, have been brought up and educated,
and trained, for just that work, by the few who hold the keys.
They see how easy it is to let others do their thinking, and
they know that if they are faithful they will get their reward.

It pays to take orders -- let me remind you of that;
and also of the fact that we are all human. To do so means a
livelihood; not much ~~good~~^{work}, pretty good pay all their lives, and
the possibility that some day they may hold the keys themselves.

Others of these men want to think for themselves; but
after one or two ^{attempts} ~~tries~~ they find that thinking is useless;
that a stone wall blocks their object.

Can you wholly blame the man who has a local bill of
great importance to his constituents, who is told he cannot
have it passed unless he is good? And, being good means that
he must be willing to become a cog in the wheel.

Can you wholly blame those men from Buffalo who last session
~~year~~ were led to support measures they thought ^{thoroughly} bad ~~without question,~~
on the promise of support for the Buffalo Charter Bill? And,
let me add, they did not get ^{what was promised,} ~~it~~ -- they met with the usual fate,

the men who held the keys made the wheels go around and then calmly and quietly laid the Buffalo Charter on the shelf. 6

Can you wholly blame the men who protest and fight for long weary weeks, if they listen in the end to the honeyed words about "party harmony" and "good fellowship", and the flattery and visions of reward that are held before their eyes?

No, we cannot wholly charge it up to them. We must go back to the masters -- back to the men who hold the keys, and I will say specifically that this applies not to one party only, but to the two great parties -- to Republicans and Democrats alike.

In Ancient Greece the rule of mighty men of war gave

place to a pure Democracy; the pure Democracy gave way, in its turn, to the rule of Oligarchs, and in the end a tyrant usurped the functions of the Oligarchs. To-day we have repeated the first part of the process; this State from a Democracy has come to be ruled by Oligarchs; men ruling for their own good and in their own way. Not long ago their names were Barnes and Sherman and Woodruff and Payne, and Platt, and Depew. To-day their names are Murphy, and Fitzpatrick, and McCabe, and McCooley, and Cassidy. No, not Cassidy -- poor fellow -- he ~~did~~ ^{let the} ~~politically~~ ^{Staggan slide} last week, and one does not like to speak ill of the dead.

It matters not, however, what their names are, for
the mark of the beast is on them all. 8

Here is the point in a nutshell. A political party exists for the purpose of getting the majority of voters to endorse its views, and elect its candidates to carry on the government. Does anyone suppose that a majority of the voters of this state want to have a Platt Oligarchy, or a Barnes Oligarchy or a Murphy Oligarchy, enunciate principles or carry on their government?

There is talk of unrest on every hand; disgust with old parties, a ready welcome for demagogues, and it is no wonder.

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The voter has had but little to say, for if he is disgusted with Republican rule, and seeks a change, he has been equally displeased with Democratic methods, and yet he knows there is no use putting Republicans back in power again. Hence the Socialist Mayor of Schenectady, and other wonders of the day.

But we are seeking the blame; we know where the present blame lies; it is at the door of the Oligarchs of yesterday and to-day; it is at the door of Platt and of Barnes; of Murphy and Fitzpatrick; but the ultimate blame is on those who submit; on those who go seeking after strange gods. It is on you, the voters, because the remedy lies in your hands. You have the weapon beside you; if you have weeds in your garden which

are choking your flowers to death you do not plant new flowers
in the hope that they will grow; you pull out the weeds. 10

There is no question that the great majority of Democrats
in this state are disgusted with the so-called state leadership of
C.F.Murphy. There is only one remedy, and the Democrats have it
ready to hand. C.F.Murphy ^{and his kind} must, like the noxious weed, be
plucked out, root and branch. There is no question that the
great majority of Republicans in this state will not stand
contented with Old Guard leadership. They too have the remedy,
and the Old Guard must likewise be rooted out if the Republican
party is to endure.

The good work has begun, and it gathering momentum
with each succeeding day. Cassidy ⁱⁿ ~~and~~ Queens County went out
from the toe of a boot last week. McCooley is hanging on by
the skin of his teeth. ^{in Brooklyn} The Bronx has thrown off Mupphy
domination. Lou Payne and Odel ~~on~~ the Hudson River are losing
their grip on the Republican Machine. McCabe in Albany will be
succeeded in the spring by a young Democrat who can defeat
the Republican machine of Boss Barnes. Cornelius Collins has
lost his grip on Troy, and finally, the Democrats of this city
have an excellent opportunity to rid themselves of that man who
was referred to last year in Albany as "Murphy's tool."

Last October we passed a direct nominations law; it

was not perfect by any means, but it was a step in the right
direction. Next month we are going to try to improve it, and we
will succeed unless the Old Guard Oligarchs of both parties
combine to defeat us; but even if we do not succeed, you have a
weapon more powerful than before. You have got rid of strong arm
caucuses and crooked primaries forever, and next spring if Buffalo
they can
Democrats want to get a man as leader who will lead in a manner
worthy of the fair name of this city. We have made it easier
for the young man who thinks politics is dirty business; ^{easier} for the
busy man of affairs, and for the lazy man, too, to take up his
duty as a citizen.

(Story of nigger

For those of you who are fond of hunting, ~~I would say~~ 13
~~that~~ it is no longer necessary to go to the Canadian Rockies
or the Jungles of Africa for sport; there is bigger game and
better hunting right here in New York State; right here in
Buffalo; right here in your own ward. The hunt is on, and the
beasts of prey have begun to fall. The American citizen is
again fighting for his freedom; he is confronted by Oligarchies
and tyrannies on the one hand, and by Anarchy on the other, and
those of us who have the old abiding faith believe that the
American citizen will triumph again as he has done in the past.