
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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FDR Speech File

SPEECH OF HON. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Mr. Toastmaster and Gentlemen: I am surprised that I was not introduced by the usual stock story I am generally introduced by, so I will have to tell it on myself.

When I arrived in Albany a year ago last January, a certain gentleman by the name of William Barnes, Jr., and another gentleman by the name of Dan Cohan (who, for the benefit of the western gentlemen here, is the first lieutenant of General Murphy) were standing together in the Hotel Ten Eyck, and they saw me across the lobby. Barnes turned to Cohan and said, "I see you caught one too". Cohan said, "Yes, that is right, but we caught him young". Barnes' reply was, "You may have caught Lim young, but let me advise you to drown him *while* young."

Gentlemen, I did not get a chance tonight to prepare anything to say, because I have been attending a so-called Democratic State Convention all day. I use the word "so-called" with a certain amount of forethought. I only got through college eight years ago, which was the year the League started, and one of the men who started the League was, as it happens, a man who went to the same school I did. So I have known for a good many years all about the League, through my friend Bayard Cutting. I cannot say how strongly I feel about the good work this League is accomplishing in the country as a whole. It may be a selfish way to look at it, but I cannot help feeling that the college man who goes into politics or public life starts off with the betting odds in his favor. If you dig out the statistics of college men who have undertaken political work, I do not believe you can say necessarily that they are endowed with more inborn brains, or more talent than other people. But, you will find out, I believe, that a very much larger percentage of college men who go out into active civic work make good—far more than the men who have not had the opportunities of a college education. I say it is a selfish way of looking at it, if you like, but even if selfish, it is an added incentive for college men to remember.

Report of the
Convention of
the Intercollegiate
Civic League, 1912.

Speech delivered
at the City Club,
New York, N. Y.,
Apr. 11, 1912.

The Toastmaster has referred to the fact that we are today confronting certain problems in the State and in the Nation, which are probably bigger than any we have had to confront since the days before the Civil War. They are problems that, whichever way you look at them, must be settled by men with a certain amount of training, knowledge, and education. For that reason, also, there is an added incentive for the college man to put his shoulder to the wheel.

I happened to be the permanent chairman of our class at college and so am in touch with the records of most of the class. I think there were seven hundred and one men who either graduated or were to graduate with the class of 1904 at Harvard. Of these seven hundred and one men, as far as we have records, only six up to 1910 had ever run for any office, national, state, municipal or anything else. That is all. I do not believe that you will find a much higher percentage of men running for office, as a general thing, among college graduates six years out. I imagine you will find about the same ratio among college men all over the country. That is a pretty small percentage. Take another example. As far as we can make out from our records, only about seventy out of seven hundred—in other words, about ten per cent—are taking an active part in any way. I once took a poll in New York City at a meeting of young college graduates, men who lived in New York City and the vicinity. I asked them one question: "Did you vote last election?" Out of seventy-one men present only forty-seven had voted. I asked them another question: "How many of the seventy-one attended a primary or a caucus last year?" And only seven or eight had attended their caucuses or primaries. I confess I was surprised and I confess I was very much disappointed. And especially so because those men have got the chance—I think you have got the chance, you men right here, as a body, to do more effective work in this Nation in the next ten years than any other body of this character that I know of, taking you as a national organization, because this League today is a national organization.

LEADERSHIP NECESSARY

We have got, of course, all sorts of new problems. I do not believe with some people that the rule of the pure democracy as opposed to representative government is going to accomplish the

result. We are always going to have leaders; we always must have them. Don't let them be bosses; make them leaders, even though sometimes there is a pretty small distinction between a boss and a leader. The people who are against the leader are very apt to call him a boss. It does not necessarily make him so, although as a matter of fact, in most cases today, it has that effect. Isn't that so, Congressman?

CONGRESSMAN PARSONS: Yes. (Laughter.)

I have always thought that you must affiliate more or less with party organizations or with some kind of an organization, even if it is the Citizens' Union or the Prohibition Party! The man who sits at home and writes letters to *The New York Times* or to *The Evening Post* accomplishes a certain amount along his line. We have to have that class of individual in the community; but if everybody were to sit at home and write letters to *The Times* or to *The Evening Post* we should not get very far. This rule of the Pure Democracy; the people initiating everything, deciding everything, being the sole judge of party platforms without the help of organized parties and carefully chosen representatives, is all very lovely in theory. I am called an independent Democrat and an Insurgent Democrat, and every other kind of Democrat, and a few people don't call me a Democrat at all; but I am enough of a Democrat to believe that you have got to have an affiliation with some organization which will have the power to go before the people with its particular propositions and policies and that this kind of organization is necessary to put those propositions and policies before the voters. There is a tremendous danger in lack of organization: there is the danger of chaos.

Somebody was just telling me about the delegate from the West who was enrolled in the Republican party and voted at the Republican primaries and was the President of the Woodrow Wilson Club. That may be all right in changing conditions. It may be a good thing. It is a necessary thing, perhaps, to go a little too far along certain lines in order to get what you want. The ex-President once said that one of the secrets of his getting anything was because he always asked for twice as much as he wanted. We often have to do that; but I believe that today, in this country, we cannot, as conditions are, leave all problems of government to the man with the

pickaxe. They need education or training, and you are the people to educate them. A negro up in one of the brickyards on the Hudson River was asked one day after election which ticket he had voted. He said, "Why, I voted the Democratic ticket." Well, that was surprising in itself. And he was asked, "Why?" And he said, "Well, it was this way. The Republican boss, he comes to me and he gives me five dollars to vote the Republican ticket." "And why didn't you vote the Republican ticket?" "You see, it was this way. The Democratic boss comes along a little later and he gives me two dollars to vote the Democratic ticket and I figures it out the Democratic party is the more honest of the two."

BLIND PARTISANSHIP DISAPPEARING

Now that fellow showed real discrimination. That fellow had more political honesty, if you choose to put it that way, than a great many people who do not sell their votes. He didn't go in blindly and vote one ticket because his great-grandfather had voted that ticket. We are getting over this not only in New York City but through the West and through the South. We have passed the time when every Democrat believes that every Republican is a black Republican and crook and where every Republican believes that every Democrat is a thief and an anarchist. We have got beyond that. People to-day are thinking along broader lines.

Take another example of the need of education. We put through a direct primary law last year in this state, a so-called direct primary law, that is; it bore the title of "Primary Law," and under it people were required to enroll. A man on the farm next to my farm was not enrolled. From the early part of December up to the first two days of January you can enroll by mailing a slip. I knew that a slip had been sent to him to sign and I went to see him after Christmas and asked him why he had not enrolled. This man was the owner of three hundred acres of land. He had a public school education. He was a well-to-do farmer. He said, "Enroll? What do you mean?" I said, "Didn't you get a little blank to sign and send in, to enroll yourself in the Democratic party?" He said, "Why, I got something." I said, "Well, what did you do about it?" He said, "Well I took it to Mr. Cunningham down the lane." (Mr. Cunningham was another prosperous

farmer.) He said, "Mr. Cunningham told me it was some kind of a game to put you on record for your choice for President for next year; have nothing to do with it."

We are not going to have the millenium to-morrow. We all know that, whether we are in colleges or whether we are fifty years old. But, nevertheless, as Mr. John Hay said to me when I was quite small, "When you are around eighteen or twenty, my boy, you will have as high ideals as you will ever have in the world. If you can keep the ideals of your boyhood and of your young manhood through your life, you will be an honest and an efficient citizen in this Republic and I can only hope for you that you will always hitch your wagon to the star of your boyhood ideals." (Applause.)

THE TOASTMASTER: I do not know whether this story that I am about to tell has relation to politics or whether or not it will serve as an introduction to the next speaker. A little girl was once asked what a lie was. "Oh," she said, "I know what it is. I read in the Bible that it is an abomination in the sight of the Lord and an ever present help in time of trouble."

With this introduction I am going to ask the Reverend Doctor Melish of the Church of the Holy Trinity to speak on the ethics of politics.

SPEECH OF REV. JO

Mr. Toastmaster and gentlemen. The only degree that is conferred is one bestowed upon me in my borough, called When I first went to Brool "The Rev. John Howard

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