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

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Speech "The National Importance of Clean Elections"
before the National Council of the Common Council
Club, Washington, D. C., February 25, 1914.

RLJ

The Assistant Secretary of the Navy spoke to-day before the Common Counsel Club on "The National Importance of Clean Elections." He said, among other things:

"At a time when our thoughts are turned to the great constructive problems of American civilization and to the legislative and other governmental action necessary to carry into effect our solutions of those problems, it is sometimes a good thing to pause for a moment and consider the basic principle of representative government -- the principle that every citizen is entitled to a free expression of his opinion through the ballot. We must, unfortunately, admit that, in reading our political history, we come across incident after incident of the crooked counting of ballots, of the purchase of elections, of the influencing of votes by illegal or unmoral means. And while it is probably fair to say that the conditions under which the votes of the country are cast to-day are vastly cleaner, vastly more honest, than during many periods in the past, yet no man would be so bold as to say that there is not room for distinct improvement. It is necessary only to mention such incidents as the campaign of Tilden and Hayes and the campaign of 1896, when, as far as we are humanly able to judge, the defeat of Mr. Bryan was made possible only by the flood of money which poured into the coffers of the Republican party, to realize that the ballot box has failed in our own day and generation.

to give the true expression for which it was intended, and any man who is active in political life to-day, no matter what his party, must, if he is candid, admit to himself that abuses still exist and will continue to exist unless the problem is brought boldly forth before the eyes of the people and a demand is made by the leaders themselves that an end be put to practices that are not and can never be consonant with the good government of the country. Many men in public life - men who have occupied positions of honor and respect in the eyes of the nation - have hesitated to look the facts squarely in the face. No greater service could be done to the country by any party than the accomplishment of placing our elections once and for all upon an honest, clean and unquestionable basis.