
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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The Chairman (Col. John Temple Graves). * * *

The first speaker upon this program to-day would have been, but for the intervention of Providence, the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, Mr. William Gibbs McAdoo. He is called from Washington to attend the funeral of a near member of his own family, and but for that he would have been the first man to represent the national administration in this occasion here to-day. I am glad to say to you that we have letters from the Secretary of War, not perfunctory, but strong, earnest, and enthusiastic, endorsing the spirit of this movement and giving us his best wishes and expressing sincere regret that conditions over which he has no control prevent his presence here to-day. We have letters from the late President of the United States, one whose whole martial spirit has been in touch with the spirit of this hour, regretting that unavoidable conditions keep him away.

I am glad to say that the President of the United States is with us here in heart and spirit on this truly American occasion. The President of the United States is not less loyal to the spirit of a greater navy than any one of those who stand for it or who speak for it here to-day. If the President of the United States has been careful and cautious in committing himself upon this great question, if he has been slow to align himself with those who have made a stand for a greater navy, it is at last the mark of his catholic spirit and the mark of his courage of conviction that when he has become convinced by the conditions of universal note which surround us that the welfare and the safety of the Republic demand a greater and a larger preparedness,

that with the courage that is a part of his inheritance and the inherent expression of his disposition, he stands to-day not half-hearted but whole hearted in favor of a greater navy and a national preparedness in every phase of the Republic. (Applause.)

As the President of the United States cannot be here to-day, and as his Secretary of the Navy is detained by circumstances which are of common report throughout the country in a disaster in which this whole country will sympathize with him, it is my great pleasure to present to you one who represents all that they would represent in spirit, in lineage, and in conviction here to-day; one who comes from a fighting race, the peaceful son of a fighting stock; one who stands for peace; one who loves peace, but one who, because in his veins flows the blood of a heroic ancestry and of a splendid fatherhood, stands to-day for a navy great enough to stand against the navies of the world, not offensively, not to make war, but to insure and perpetuate peace to the Republic.

I present to you one whose name is the guarantee of his loyalty to the better navy for which we stand, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt. (Applause.)

ADDRESS OF
HONORABLE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT,
Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

Mr. Roosevelt: Mr. Chairman; Ladies and Gentlemen:
This is a very solemn moment to me. This is the first
meeting in favor of adequate national preparedness that I
have had the pleasure of attending since last spring; since,
in other words, the Government of the country has come out
four-square to all the winds in favor of adequate prepared-
ness. (Applause.)

I think we have come in this year of grace, in this
country, to the parting of the ways. It seems to me that
as the years have gone by, the years of peace, we have put
the issue away from us; we have laid it aside to be taken
up "next year." And when the next year has come we have de-
cided to let our children answer for us. But today the part-
ing of the ways is actually before us.

The time has come when the people of the United States
are going to be called upon to declare in no uncertain terms
whether they believe in passive resistance or whether they
believe in the security of the nation. Many of the people
who will declare for passive resistance are very estimable
citizens. Many of them have very high ideals. Most of them
have very high ideals. We can even go so far as to pay them
that compliment.

The question to my mind is not one of ideals, one of
moral ideals, or even of biblical texts. (Laughter.) Most
of us are very much in favor of seeing some day, or having

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our descendants to the n-th generation see, a world in which there will be no war, a world, perhaps, in which the brotherhood of man will have come about, where the barriers of nations even will have been broken down. But unfortunately we do not happen to live in that day. We still have nations, and as long as we have nations the question before us is, Are we, as citizens and citizenesses (laughter) of a nation, going to uphold the integrity and the security of that nation? Or are we going to believe in the old-fashioned and very estimable Quaker doctrine of non-resistance or of passive resistance?

The Navy itself, I hardly need tell you, has had this question before it for a good many years. The Navy has known for a good many years that it was not an adequate navy. It has said so, and it has not been believed. Every officer of the Navy has been laughed at for making wild statements in the past about what would happen in case we went to war with our Navy. They have been called pessimists; they have been called alarmists.

This kind of gathering---and there are many of them of a similar nature, I am glad to say, going on all over the country---is of the greatest value to me in that it is going to help the country decide this coming year which road it is going to take. There is no such thing as a road midway between the two; either we want adequate preparedness, or we want none. Half a navy is worthless. Unless we have an adequate navy it would be cheaper, it would save more lives, it would be better for us all to have no preparation at all and to let anybody

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that wishes comes right along and take from us whatever they choose, and, in the very Christian spirit of which we ought perhaps to have a little more than we actually do have, to turn the other cheek. But I do not believe we are going to do that. (Applause.)

I have been asked particularly to say a few words about a naval reserve. Well, that does not sound much like my actual work from day to day, which has to do with the Navy itself and not the naval reserve. I have mentioned the fact that officers of the service have been called alarmists and pessimists when they talked about their service and the adequacy of it. I am an alarmist and a pessimist also---not in regard to the material we have, for that is good---the material of whips, the material of officers, and the material of men. And it is not the statement of an alarmist when I tell you that if we were to go to war in two weeks, if I were to get word when I return to my desk this afternoon that we were going to go to war in two weeks, I could not get the Navy ready for war in two weeks, or in two months.

Of course, all these facts have come out time and again. They have come out in official reports; they have come out in the hearings before Congress. This is not new that I am telling you; it is stale, but it is a fact. If we were to go to war in two weeks we could only put one-half of the number of ships that we actually possess to-day into the firing line with full crews, with an adequate number of officers, and with a proper preparation of target practice and of drill. We have not got the men. We don't know where to go for the trained men. We don't know the addresses and the names of

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the men who have been in the service and whose enlistments have expired.

As I said before, that is not news; that is stale. That has appeared in report after report, and in almost every Congressional hearing during the past ten or twelve years. It was not new to the last administration; it is not new to this administration. And yet a year ago when, after using a pencil and a piece of paper for fifteen minutes, I stated that we were eighteen thousand men short of the number necessary to man the ships we had at that moment, the papers carried it on the first page with large headlines as a startling fact. It is not giving away any particular secrets of the department when I tell you that at the present time we have, under the law, fifty-one thousand men--- we are recruited up to the legal limit all the time --- that we have seven thousand more men in the naval militia of the several states, and we have ten thousand men in the Marine Corps, a total of about sixty-eight thousand men, and that the prosecution of almost any war, large or small, would call for thirty thousand or forty thousand more men in the first line, and another fifty thousand in the second line, a total of one hundred and fifty thousand. That is no particular secret, because that information has appeared in those reports which have been filed away, like most government reports --- reports written by men who knew, written by the officers of the service who were charged with the duty of telling the truth, and who told the truth --- thank God! (Applause.)

We are going to develop. Steps are being taken, in the first place, for the development of a national naval reserve.

That national naval reserve will be divided, very roughly into four divisions. I think I can put it in a very simple way, so that when you go home and have a chance to talk about this in your own districts you will be able, like the naval officers, to tell the truth and to spread the knowledge of the truth.

The first division of this national naval reserve relates to the retired officers and the former enlisted men of the Navy. I have been told that the Navy League is already interested especially in getting the former enlisted men to come in under the new plan that was passed last year. That plan provides for the possibility of any ex-enlisted going back into private life and offering his services to the government in case of war. He would then be called on to serve possibly a few weeks every other year, a very short period, simply to keep him in touch with the service. He would also be paid a small sum by the government every year. That sum would vary with the length of time which he had served in the Navy. In other words, if he had only served one enlistment the sum would be small; if he had served two, three, or four, the sum would be correspondingly greater. That is a matter in which all of you can help. You can help to bring back the former enlisted men and to get them to take part in the national naval reserve.

The second division relates to the bringing together of the various functions of the government which would form a part of the naval defense in time of war. You probably all know that in the Spanish-American War the revenue cutters of the government, for instances, were turned over to the

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Navy. They were turned over almost entirely with their officers and crews. No provision had been made for that before the outbreak of the war. It took sometime to find out what these revenue cutters could do, how they would work in with the operations of the Navy. They did very good work, but it took a long time to find out what they could do and to put them in the way of doing it.

At the present time the Treasury Department has under it the Coast Guard --- that is to say, the Life Saving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service. They would both be of great use to the Navy in time of war. The Department of Commerce has under it the Light-House Service with a number of vessels. Then there are various government divisions, such as training ships belonging to the various states, and such as the Harbor Police of New York, which has quite a fleet at its command. The second division will include all government functions which are not in time of peace directly under the Navy. It is an extraordinary thing, but it is a fact, that no definite steps have ever been taken in time of peace to put our own government house in order so that we can use all of our facilities at a few months notice in time of war.

The third division relates to the volunteer civilians. It is planned to hold next summer at least one --- and more, if it proves a success --- training "camps" aboard ship in some locality which would be fairly central, and to ^{ask} ~~seek~~ come to that training camp any men who wished to join the national naval reserve. Frankly, the idea is stolen from the Army, and we are glad to make this acknowledgement to the

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Army. It is modeled on Plattsburg. (Applause.) We hope that a great many men who love the water --- yachtsmen of various kinds, motorboat enthusiasts, and others with a bent for any special kind of work --- will come to this camp. The proposition is that they will have three weeks or a month of training, and that they will become proficient and expert in some one definite line of work, such as signaling, or the work of a machinist, or in running a motorboat engine, or in pilotage --- there are fifty different kinds of specialties that they can train in. They will be given credit in the form of a certificate by the Government for the actual work they have done. They will then be under the obligation --- the serious and difficult obligation --- of keeping the Navy Department informed at all times of their addresses. That is all. And the Navy Department will, we hope, in a very few years have a large body of men in a card index system who will know upon receipt of a telegram just what to do, where to go, and where they will fit in when they get there.

The fourth and last subdivision relates to auxiliary ships. I am sorry that Secretary McAdoo could not be here to tell you about auxiliary ships. I am quite unconcerned as to the method by which we shall build up a merchant marine, whether the government shall build the ships or whether the government shall operate the ships. The Navy viewpoint is this: We need auxiliary ships in very great numbers.

Not so very far back in the history of the Navy Department --- I am not giving away any definite dates --- it was found that the Navy Department had a list of one hundred American merchant steamers which the Navy Department proposed

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to take over as auxiliaries in time of war. Somebody had the bright idea of going over to the army side of the building and asking them whether they had ever made such a list of American merchant ships for use as army transports in case of war. They said they had. The two lists were compared, and it was found that ninety-eight vessels out of a hundred were the same on both lists. (Laughter.)

It is going to take years to develop proper government efficiency, and it is going to depend on whether the people of the United States want an adequate navy and an adequate army or not. It does not matter about the details of the scheme; it does not matter much whether we get four battleships or five out of this particular Congress, but it does matter whether, when we come to the parting of the ways, we speak as a people in favor of the integrity of the nation whether we say, "No, we don't think we need to take that up yet." The value of the Navy League, the value of it collectively and individually lies in that same fact, that you can go back and spread among the people the simple, plain truth. After all, we know that one hundred and fifty years ago we saw the truth, and it was the truth that made us free. Now are we going to see the^{truth?} If we do, I take it that the truth will keep us free. (Applause.)