
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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Address of Franklin D. Roosevelt
(Asst. Secretary of the Navy)
Banquet of the Democratic National
Committee, Chicago, May 29, 1919.

It is always politically dangerous to make a political prophecy but I am willing to take the chance; We have gone through a period of twenty five years in this country during which in both the Democratic and Republican parties conflicts have been going on over fundamental principles. In both parties that conflict in the final analysis lay between the forces of safe conservatism on the one side and sane liberalism on the other. In both parties the die has been cast, the decision made. And so ^{my} ~~our~~ prophecy is that by next year it will be clear to the American people that the Republican party is the conservative party of the United States and that the Democratic party is the progressive or liberal party. In the years following 1901, the succession of Theodore Roosevelt to the Presidency brought a ~~large~~ rude jolt to the small reactionary group which controlled the Republican party. For eight years the contest raged, ending in the triumph of the ~~the~~ Old Guard under Mr. Taft's administration. The Progressive party of 1912, born in this very city, was the expression of revolt against this return to conservatism. Party disaster and confusion resulted, and in 1916 the old time leaders made a desperate attempt to bring back the Progressives by the nomination of Mr. Hughes. It would have succeeded but for the fact that hundreds of thousands of voters looked behind the candidate and saw the old sinister shadows in the back-ground.

The Progressive movement within the Republican Party has been dying ever since 1916 - yesterday it died, and this session of Congress, under the lead of the Old Guard, will give it a simple funeral without flowers and lay it to rest forever. The alleged effort of Borah and seven other Senators to keep Senators Penrose and Warren from the important chairmanships, and the so-called revolt against the Mann forces in the House, these were the dying spasms of the liberal spirit within the republican frame.

From henceforth let the people of this country look closely to the Republican party; let them go behind the window dressing of the individual candidate in 1920 and they will find a party devoted to the policies of conservatism and reaction, to the principles of little Americanism and jingo bluff, to the old hypocrisy of Penrose and Mark Hanna and Blaine.

The new Republican Congress has only commenced its work, but is already clear that on matters of internal policy, it has reverted to type, as dog breeders say; it is deeply concerned over the restoration of the old form of preferential tariff for pet groups of manufacturers; it will surpass itself in noisy adulation of and truckling to the returned soldiers; and then do very little; it will revise the Income Tax so as to lighten the burden of those unfortunate individuals who have incomes of \$1,000,000. a year or more; and it will ^{spend} ~~spend~~ the rest of its time in attempting to discredit every act of every Democrat who has done things during the past six years. It will make a record of mudslinging, of slander, of misrepresentation, of destructive and not constructive criticism; it will do anything

and everything with the sole noble and patriotic object of winning the Presidency next year.

This too is the obvious objective in the foreign policy of the Republican party. I asked a prominent member of that party who happens to be an intimate personal friend of mine what is the purpose or policy of Senator Lodge as Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations. He said "That changes from day to day. When Mr. Lodge reads his morning paper at the breakfast table and sees what the President has said or done, his policy for the next 24 hours becomes the diametrical opposite." You could not get two Republican Senators to agree on a definite foreign policy along constructive ~~alines~~ lines, but you can get a majority to oppose anything put forward by the President of the United States. To the Treaty of Peace and the proposed League of Nations, the Republican Senate bears the same relation that the amateur strategists around the stove in the village store bear to the officers and men of our armies fighting at the front. They would lose sight of the great ideals for which we have fought this war; they would have this nation return with only half its work accomplished; they would fail to give any assurance that a repetition of this great world convulsion may not come again.

But it is right to ask What is there on the other side? The Democratic Party has also gone through a struggle between conservatism and liberalism. It was swept too far in one direction perhaps in 1896 and in 1900, but we must remember that many of the ideals and principles enunciated by Mr. Bryan and his associates of those days are now the law of the land, principles considered visionary then but accepted whole-heartedly to-day.

The campaign of 1904 was an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the conservative wing of the party, but from that day on, it became evident that the Democracy of the United States was and is and must be a progressive Democracy. Beginning with the Congressional elections of 1910, followed by the triumphal selection of a progressive Democrat to lead the Ticket at Baltimore in 1912, the party has become established on definite principles. During its first four years, it has carried through more great measures for the good of the whole population than any other party in any similar period. During the past two years, it has been responsible for guiding the Nation through the most stupendous war in history. And in so doing, it did not fail to call upon the best brains in the country, irrespective of party. In the crisis, the Democratic Party has remained the party of progress.

So we are approaching the campaign of 1920 - approaching it with the broad principles settled in advance; conservatism, special privilege, partisanship, destruction on the one hand - liberalism, common sense idealism, constructiveness, progress, on the other.

The difficulties that lie before the party leaders are great in this coming year. The opposition has certain campaign advantages which, however can be overcome. It is always easier to tear down than to build up. Have you ever read the Debate on the Federal Constitution? In 1787 and 1788, the great majority of our statesmen and men in public life took a crack at that good old document. Hardly a one was satisfied with it all. They made holes in each and every article and clause and sentence.

They disagreed by pairs and by parties and by States. They fought over it all summer and then all winter. And then at last they took the bigger point of view - that while there might be defects here and defects there, that old Constitution was on the whole, taking it by and large, a pretty good piece of constructive work, and that if they were going to have any country - any United States - at all, ~~they~~ must put it into effect. And you and I are here as living examples that their progressiveness was worth while.

So the Republican Party is starting out on a definite campaign to pick flaws on the way a ~~the~~ Democratic Administration has run things. They will find flaws, lots of little ones, because ~~the~~ human beings are human beings, but they will also find two things if they are honest in their search, first, that any mistake by the men responsible were honest mistakes, mistakes worthy of the heart, or secondly, that they were mistakes done by people brought down to Washington to help run the greatest of wars and that these were mistakes caused by lack of experience. Most of these one dollar a year people were Republicans anyway! But they cannot get away from the big fact that the war was conducted with greater vision, with more complete honesty, with more true Americanism than any previous war in our history; and that the men responsible were thinking and acting along national lines and not party lines. The American people can afford to be well satisfied with the service given them by their government. So it becomes our duty in answering the campaign of picking flaws by the Republican Party to call attention to the great whole of the structure so successfully carried to completion

in two years, to think as our forefathers did when they ratified the Constitution, of the instrument as a constructive work and not by its individual sentences.

The other great difficulty which must be met is that of legitimate publicity. Probably a large majority of the very rich men of the nation are Republicans, and it follows that most of the great newspapers and magazines are owned by Republicans and give a Republican color and Republican comment to the news of national political character. It is safe to estimate that in every debatable State, three-fourths of the press is anti-Democratic. It is an extraordinary handicap to start out again. But it can be met by study and by proper organization. The National Committee can render the greatest possible service by devising legitimate methods for disseminating the truth of Democracy's accomplishment throughout the country and for exposing many deliberate falsehoods circulated by the opposition. We need more newspapers, not forgetting the little local papers in the little local towns. We need a spirit of aggressiveness, not so much to blow our own horn but to tell facts - facts that will live in history as facts - facts of which we are proud and not ashamed.

Deep down beneath the daily actions of a man's life lies a something which is the true man - call it what you like, his principles, his conscience, his spirit. - Nearly always it is possible to see this inner spirit through the facts of his life, through his expressed personality. So it is with parties. "By their acts ye shall know them." Place side by side the two great political parties and judge them by their acts of the

past ten years, in other words by that period during which their present leaders have been to the fore. I see in one of them a soul, hesitating, groping, self-seeking, narrow, material. And in the other, I see a clean soul, clear thinking, straight living, humbly proud to have been and to be of service, unselfish in its devotion to the great ideals of a great people - a soul proven worthy of trust - the spirit of the Democracy of America.