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

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 101

1919 August 30

Chautauqua, NY

August 30, 1919

[redacted] [Chautauq, N.Y.]

--0101

SPEECH OF
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
AT A LUNCHEON GIVEN BY
CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION
CHAUTAUQUA, N.Y.
AUGUST 30, 1919.

[Summarized in the Jamestown (N.Y.) Morning Post, September 1, 1919.]

Following the address, Assistant Secretary Roosevelt was the guest of the Chautauqua Institution at a luncheon. To about one hundred invited guests, Mr. Roosevelt spoke intimately of several phases of the naval operations against Germany and touched on the topic of the League of Nations.

Copied:for RLJ by James Prendergast Free Library, Jamestown, N.Y.,
December 1949.

SPEECH OF
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
AT
CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION
CHAUTAUQUA, N.Y.
THE MORNING OF
AUGUST 30, 1919

[Excerpts from the Jamestown (N.Y.) Morning Post, September 1, 1919.]

ROOSEVELT FOR BUDGET SYSTEM
WITH PROPER BUSINESS METHODS GOVERNMENT COULD MAKE
INITIAL SAVING OF TEN PER CENT.

ADDRESS AT CHAUTAUQUA

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY REVEALED INTERESTING
NAVAL OPERATIONS DURING THE WAR -- INTERVIEW WITH THE
PRESIDENT.

Urging the American people to put the affairs of their government once and for all on a business basis, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, in a notable address at Chautauqua Saturday morning cited lessons learned by the war and the part taken by the American Navy in its successful culmination.

Mr. Roosevelt's visit to the Assembly was of extraordinary interest and profit. Two years ago, in an address of which Chautauqua audiences still talk he spoke prophetically of America's future in the war and the part the Navy was expected to take in defeating the submarine menace and the power of the Central Empires. Saturday morning it was the privilege of a Chautauqua audience to hear the same speaker tell what the Navy did; and more than that of how the Navy did it, an angle of the situation which could not be disclosed on the occasion of Mr. Roosevelt's previous visit.

In his quiet, matter of fact way the speaker sketched the activities of the American Navy from the time Von Bernstorff was handed his passports to the signing of the armistice.

"In the summer of 1917," he said, referring to his previous address at Chautauqua, "many thought that I was seeing the hole in the doughnut. But I was seeing things that were making us sit up all night at Washington. We were trying to warn the United States against the great dangers the ^{country} ~~country~~ was entering upon.

"May I now," continued Mr. Roosevelt smiling at the quick response of the audience to his paraphrase of a favorite expression of the President, "talk in a more cheerful vein about what the Navy is doing? We are not worrying about the Navy we had in the war." Here the present manpower being so depleted that many fighting ships are at reduced strength and many laid up at navy yards. In this connection he recounted an incident in which an Admiral caused a certain order to be wig-wagged to the commander of one of his ships. Presently the answer came back:

"Your orders will be obeyed as soon as the crew returns. He is now on shore buying a newspaper."

Narrating events previous to the declaration of war, Mr. Roosevelt resumed.

"The first of February, 1917 I went down to Haiti and San Domingo to see how the Marines were running those two republics. While dining with a party of Marine officers I was handed a cablegram in code, which when deciphered gave me the startling information that Von Bernstorff had been given his papers, and requesting my immediate return to Washington.

"When I returned to the capital I expected to see the nation mobilized for military action. Frankly, I was astonished to see that we were apparently doing nothing. There were reasons, however, why we didn't more obviously get ready for war. The army and navy officials were hard at work making all kinds of plans, but there was no carrying out of those plans.

"I knew of course, that in the event of a declaration of war, our first naval operation would be sending of destroyers over to help the British Navy fight the submarine menace. It occurred to me that it would be a beautiful thing, if on the same day we entered the war, and were asked by the British Admiralty when we would be prepared to send our destroyers over, we might reply. "This afternoon.

"The Atlantic fleet, at this time, was cruising in Southern waters and was not scheduled to return until the first of April. There were repairs and remodelling to be done, and enthusiastic with my idea of getting the fleet home at once I carried my plea into high - very high circles."

"In fact, said Mr. Roosevelt, smiling, "I went all the way to the top. My plan was refused. In response to my request that the destroyers be brought home, I was told by the President that while the act would be an act of war, it would "mean a military move and like the old saying of 'rattling the sword,' The President declared:

"I want history to show not only that we have tried every diplomatic means to keep out of the war; to show that war has been forced upon us deliberately by Germany, but also that we have come into the court of history with clean hands' This statement of Mr. Wilson's explains why more was not done in actually carrying out of army and naval plans.

"The plans of the Navy were laid with the object of restoring the spirit of the offensive in the fight against the U-boats. From small beginnings the destruction of merchant vessels by German submarines had grown to an enormous tonnage. Heretofore the policy had been to protect as far as possible individual ships. It was the part of the American Navy to introduce the method of going after the submarines instead of waiting until they came after the ships.

"The number of craft necessary to patrol the thousands of square miles of sea area in the submarine zone meant the creation of an entirely new navy. Of the work done in this area, previous to America's entrance into the war, over 99 percent, devolved upon Great Britain. From a beginning of 200 ships patrolling these waters, the number grew to 7,000 at the close of the war.

"In the spring of 1917 submarine sinkings had reached the appalling total of 600,000 tons a month. The psychology of the fight against this menace, as stated, had been one of the defensive. They were trying to protect individual ships by throwing cordons around transports and protecting munition and supply ships.

"When we came in the situation changed. The defensive method had proven a failure. No longer a neutral, the United States made available an enormous number of new ships, equipment and possibilities of carrying on a defensive. Between February 1st and April 17, 1917, plans were made, first for manning and putting in service our transports and second, carrying the war into the submarines' own territory. Our escorting system was so successful that not one American soldier was lost while being escorted by American ships."

After speaking in detail of the actual operations of the destroyers, seaplanes, U-boat chasers and the German naval revolution, Mr. Roosevelt continued: "There has come to Washington during the last two years an interesting experience in government. We brought down to Washington a great many experts in various lines, and paid some of them good salaries and some of them a dollar a year. So me of the one dollar men were not worth 50 cents and some of the \$10,000. men were not worth a quarter of a dollar."

"There was not one case in any of the principal departments where a question was asked as to a man's politics. Among the subordinates and also among the men at the top of the departments 60 percent were affiliated with the part that did not happen to be the administration party. Out of that something ought to come. Personally, I hate the thought of our government drifting back to the pre-historic, antediluvian methods that have characterized it since --say, the time of Andrew Jackson.

"The United States government has not been a business success but it had a greater business success during the war than it ever had before. There was a great deal of extraordinary waste but very few cases of actual graft. The errors were errors of enthusiasts, rather than grafters.

"These experts brought to the government good business methods. I believe that with proper business methods in the government we could make an initial saving of 10 percent. That means that we could save \$100,000,000. out of every billion appropriated.

"I hope there will be definite action in the extension of the budget system and toward absolute responsibility of the various department heads in business dealings along this direction. We are slowly coming to a responsible form of government. I have belonged to the Civil Service Reform Association for fifteen years and yet have grave doubts as to whether the Civil Service as it is organized at present is not the most expensive form of inefficiency we have in the nation. People get in government jobs, but in a short time they realize they have no chance to get out and that there is no future for them in their present position.

"I would ask you, how much are people worth as public servants and citizens? Out of all this I hope there will come a public study of all the departments of government. It is ridiculous system in which six departments handle the question of health, for instance, and in which there are six different navies only one of which is under the Navy Department. We must insist that the government be put once and for all, on a business basis.

"We are progressive and things are being run a whole lot better than they were ten years ago. The change started at the bottom, in our home communities and the greater change will come through better citizenship. May the people soon bring this about."

Copied: for RLJ by James R^rendergast Free Library, Jamestown, N.Y.,
December 1949.