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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**

**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**File No. 132**

**1920 August 11**

**Chicago - Opening the Campaign of 1920**

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ADDRESS DELIVERED AT CHICAGO  
AUGUST 11, 1920 BY  
HONORABLE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

# 132

Tonight we are firing the opening gun of a battle of far-reaching importance, and once again the shots are going to be heard around the World - for the action of the American Nation this year will be watched with anxious eyes by all civilization.

After the San Francisco Convention, I journeyed eastward to pay my respects at once to our great leader, the Governor of Ohio. To my delight almost the first thing he said to me was: "We must carry the issues to the people of the whole Country with all the strength we have."

So the outlines of this campaign were drawn. First of all Governor Cox and I believe that it is the simple duty of the candidates to give to as many citizens as possible, in as many States as possible, an opportunity to see, and hear and form their own impressions of the men they are to vote for. In this connection, too, it is only frankness to say that the great majority of the newspapers throughout the Country are owned or controlled by men affiliated with the Republican Party. It is, therefore, doubly necessary for us to

present our views and our aims in person.

We are opposed to the attitude of placing ourselves in some self-appointed shrine and then asking America to come and worship at our feet.

In the second place, this land of ours is of such physical magnitude, has so many different kinds of problems in different kinds of places, that those who may be called on to exercise national powers of governing owe it to themselves to study, and to study insofar as possible at first hand, the questions before them. If the problems are National, one must be nationally-minded to meet them; one must make every effort to get to know the United States. ~~That is another reason why Governor Cox and I are doing our best in these next months to broaden our point of view, to see beyond the limits of the front lawn.~~

It is in the same spirit that I hope, on this journey to the very waters of the Pacific Ocean, and in all my subsequent travels, I shall have the opportunity to talk, not only to Democrats, but also to those who are normally affiliated with other parties,

and with men and women without party affiliations - the "Independents".

I do not forget that the Government of the United States is intended for every citizen and not only for those of one party faith. If every voter were registered as a party member and voted exclusively as he was registered, there never would be any use in holding a campaign or an election. Thank Heaven that this electorate of ours has brains and knows how to use them!

You remember that Lincoln once said: "You can't fool the people - there's such an all-fired lot of them!" This delightful willingness of the people to do their own thinking is getting stronger and stronger as the education of the Nation progresses year by year. All that any right-minded candidate can ask is that the votes be cast intelligently; all that he can do is to present the issues honestly and honorably as he sees them.

Tonight, I want to address myself particularly to those in this hall who are not Democrats. The day is past, except in the case of old-time, hard-shell politicians or the case of a few narrowly prejudiced newspapers ~~and I need not give names to this audience~~.

- 3 -

when it is either popular or useful to damn everybody and everything connected with the opposition. I willingly acknowledge and praise the fine citizenship which goes to make up the rank and file of the Republican Party. Many millions of voters of the Republican ticket are splendid Americans, just as sincere in their devotion to the basic principles on which the Nation stands as the other millions who vote the Democratic ticket. The Republican Party is one of great traditions, of great patriotism, of great accomplishments. I speak of the rank and file of that Party, even today, with true respect.

But for eight, yes for twelve years, a conflict has been raging within that party - raging not so much among the privates in the ranks as among those in high command. In the first eight years of this century, the Republican Party was in large part under true leaders, men who marched with the times, men who tried to interpret the thought of the body of the party for the better governing of the Country. From 1908 to 1912, a group of selfish men sought for their own purposes, with their eyes on the ground, to

gain the control of the Party machinery. You knew the result.

It was in this very city that these men succeeded in their purpose. It was in this very city that was born the movement of protest that, in the elections of 1912, received the majority of the votes of the old Republican Party. That vote was given to a great American leader, but it was even more than support of Theodore Roosevelt, the man; it was the voice of insistence that the Party control be taken out of the hands of selfish men, of men who had not discovered that the World was moving on. Among those in that year who supported the Ancient Regime, who hurled bitter and insulting attacks at the Progressive Leader, was the present Republican nominee for the Presidency. ~~That is something which thousands of followers of Theodore Roosevelt do~~

Today, eight years later, this same man and his "sponsors", the Old Guard, show no signs of having taken to heart the drastic lesson taught them at that time. Once again, we see them, with their eyes on the ground, unmindful of the marvelous progress around them, wrapped in their selfishness, fault finding and bitterly

- 6 -

criticizing, but offering no real remedies or constructive program to meet the national and international problems we face today. Once again, we see them, making no attempt to interpret the progressive thought now so widespread, but "marking time" with an energy worthy of a better cause, instead of marching forward as the great body of thinking men and women of America today demand.

These men do not represent True Republicanism. Their thought, their control, their interest is the voice of a small and intensely narrow wing of their party. Yet, such has been their skill in manipulation, their playing off of one section against the other, that they still hold the reins of power. Chicago has seen this machinery in motion in 1912, in 1916, in 1920. Chicago can bear witness to the deals -- yes, and to the treachery -- which has left misrepresentative generals at the head of the Republican troops.

I need not go into the details of the convention here this year. I need not recite to you the remarkable document which finally emerged labelled "The Republican Platform". I need not refer to the planks so mysteriously mislaid. But I ask you to read that document, and to read the Democratic Platform, and to make up your own minds.

I will abide ~~by~~ willingly by the result.

I do not claim to be an expert philologist, but I know what straightforward English means, and frankly I do not understand most of the Republican platform. You can read two meanings into its pronouncements on almost every important subject. On only one subject is it definite, that is, in the general, sweeping condemnation of every done under a Democratic administration for seven years. Its framers forgot perhaps that in the general condemnation they were including, of necessity, dozens of Republican Congressmen, <sup>who</sup> with broad patriotism helped the Democratic Administration to pass great constructive legislation like the Federal Reserve Act, the Farm Loan Act, the Eight-Hour Law, and the many other measures which the country is proud of today. They forgot perhaps that they were condemning, too, the hundreds and thousands of patriotic Republicans who came forward to help run the Government in high places and in low places during the war. They forgot that the great struggle was conducted and won as a National War and not as a Democratic War or a Republican War.

On the matters relating to the next four years, these platform drafters were vague and evasive. Their task was difficult,



I admit. Contending factions had to be satisfied, and the cleverest chemists were summoned to mix the ingredients. The result was a new substance, which has lost the good qualities of its basic parts, and as a new composition has no known use.

The attempt to satisfy factions has satisfied none -- only the Old Guard profess contentment, and they do this only in public and not among themselves.

The Republican plank in regard to our foreign relations is interpreted by Senator Johnson and by President Taft in diametrically opposite ways. The plank about labor is so unsatisfactory, so weak, that it is wholly without meaning. The other planks relating to domestic problems are a rehash of generalities and high-sounding words.

Without exaggeration, the only offer of the Republican Leaders is an offer of a change of management. The whole campaign as mapped out by them consists of an offer to put in new men in place of the present administration. Their orators and their papers, will discuss with partisan falsehood the history of the past seven years. They will slur over the great fact, which the voters understand, that

this campaign is to elect men to office for the next four years.

For this future they offer no definite policy; they do not make clear what constructive measures they advocate, nor do they make clear what action they will take in regard to the great laws put on the Statute Books by the administration of Woodrow Wilson.

How, for instance, will Senator Harding, if elected, restore, as he suggests, the market for liberty bonds to par? He can do it in two ways; either by refunding all the billions outstanding at a higher rate of interest -- six per cent or higher, instead of  $4\frac{1}{2}\%$  -- and the taxpayers will pay the difference in interest, a little matter of about half a billion extra every year on your shoulders and mine; or he can pay them off over the counter, anticipating their dates of maturity and raise our taxes even higher to get the necessary cash. No, that like so many others of their promises, was merely a vote-catcher for the unthinking. You and I know that the financing of America's part in the World War was not only the cleverest and soundest, but the most just method ever devised. Our financial system is today sound, sounder than that of any other nation in the whole world. The people of the country know

that, they knew it when they came forward so magnificently with their savings and their thrift during the war. They know that their Government will repay them dollar for dollar when the time of the loan is up. They know that today the Treasury of the United States is running ahead and not behind.

What kind of a change would Senator Harding make in our Federal Reserve System? Does he not know that under it for the first time in our history the control of our national finances is in the hands of the nation and not in the clutch of a handful of private bankers? Would he go back to the plan of the Aldrich Bill, sponsored back in 1911 by these same Penroses and Lodges and Smoots? Yet a few little clever changes of language would sell out the whole Federal Reserve System to the clique of individuals whom Senator Aldrich sought in vain to place in ~~strict~~ control.

What do the Republican oligarchs mean by "a change"? Do they propose to keep the business of this nation waiting for another year or two while they take up some new crack-brained scheme of some new undefined Association of Nations with the twenty-nine nations which are already members of the League of Nations?

Every school child in America knows that a new Administration will come in on the Fourth of March next; that a new House of Representatives will be chosen; that one third of the Senate will be voted for.

The Democratic Party offers not "a" change, but "the" change; its platform pledges a definite program of constructive measures, not a hodge podge of vague compromises; a definite foreign policy for immediate and permanent peace, not an undefined suggestion of new new and unworkable schemes; a pledge that the safeguards of workingmen and women already accomplished under Democratic leadership shall remain; not the fear that "a" Republican change will restore to power the influential few.

We offer a reorganization of the greatly expanded Government business along sound economic and humanitarian lines, not a mere turning over of the taxpayers interests to hungry office-holders.

We offer in short a continuation of progress, of prosperity along sound and not inflated or artificial lines.

To the progressive thought of the rank and file of

Republicanism, I make this appeal. Join with us in a sincere effort to help our beloved land in this year of years. This is truly a fork in the road. Purge your own army of those Generals who vacillate between inaction and retreat. Make possible in the future a restoration of the Republicanism of Lincoln and Roosevelt by striving to defeat those who were responsible for the acts of this Chicago convention. Put the ultimate good of the Republican party ahead of the domination of this little group of misrepresentative men.

Above all, let us unite, Democrats, Republicans, Independents, from North and South and East and West, to explode the shams of partisan narrowness, to grasp our true issues, our true problems with broad vision; to insist on progress and action, and to work unceasingly as individuals for the betterment of our Nation.

Copy ~~SECRET~~  
DAY LETTER

WESTERN UNION

Franklin D. Roosevelt,  
National Democratic Committee,  
Grand Central Palace, New York City.

Chicago Aug 9: Wire immediately to D. J. Egan Bailiff Municipal Court City hall giving time arrival here advising him whether you have already arranged ~~for~~ headquarters while in city stop If not he will arrange ~~for you~~ according instructions stop Necessary ~~to~~ have reception rooms some hotel stop No arrangements yet made for this stop Only two speakers stop You ~~forget~~ <sup>first</sup> Senator Lewis second stop Your time unlimited.

Auditorium ~~rent~~ <sup>rented</sup> and overflow meeting promised stop Band will parade streets Wednesday stop Interest manifested by extra ordinary demand tickets and seventy-five ~~thousand~~ <sup>thousand</sup> issued stop

Suggest wire advance to Editors A P, U P and I N S, TRIBUNE, HERALD EXAMINER, POST, JOURNAL, AMERICAN and NEWS inviting their representatives to join your party at Gary or Hammond stop That believed good ball for distribution advanced speeches, interviews, personal touch otherwise afternoon papers get bad break or nothing stop

Best informed of impartial newspaper men say Harding's nomination disappointment Illinois and Northwestern States and has greatly increased chances Democratic victory stop

Chicago black and actually satisfied with supply on hand stop Best you use red stop

Ten is favored by intelligent classes but they decidedly in minority stop Rank and file opposed if not indifferent and also lack understanding issue stop

Leading newspapers vigorously oppose stop

General feeling seventeen is coming down and  
that administration has laid good ground work for decrease  
although has not actually accomplished job stop

Serious coal shortage all Illinois stop Operators  
blame railroads charging car shortage while railroads charge  
conditions due to profiteering thru reconsignment by dealers  
of shipments stop State Public Utilities Commission just  
issued order prohibiting reconsignment coal shipments within  
state boundaries stop Shortage more serious than during war  
or any previous period stop Industrial concerns greatly  
disturbed stop They have enough to prevent suspension  
operations but no surplus stop Neither have people stop  
Threshing machines reported idle ingrain fields else forced  
burns fence rails for fuel stop

Nine conditions are easing up stop No unemploy-  
ment here which is former headquarters army unemployed stop

General belief is that American business world  
has confidence in country and in itself stop Not depressed  
by prevailing conditions and is optimistic as to future stop  
This belief based on report compiled by several thousand  
correspondence Continental & Commercial National Bank who  
gathered it <sup>from</sup> business concerns throughout ~~sixty~~ country stop

Moyn for States Attorney on regular ticket  
with Hearst backing is only seven stop

Leave today <sup>for</sup> Kenosha stop Tuesday Racine and  
Milwaukee stop Address Wisconsin Hotel, Milwaukee stop

EARLY

*Night Letter*  
WESTERN UNION

Milwaukee,  
August 10.

*File*  
2.38

Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Chas D. J. Egan, Bailiff,*  
Chicago, ILLINOIS *Municipal Court,*

For McIntyre colon Kenosha industrial center <sup>labor</sup> & nine  
element predominant chief interest seventeen stop Black locally but  
white outside stop Good review administrations nine recognition and  
help would take well stop Local committee meet you at Waukega. stop  
Five thousand Polacks are four stop suggest reference their good  
citizenship etcetra stop Three Miss Emma Robinson stop

Racine colon Principally nine and similar Kenosha in  
subjects interest except Polacks stop Three immediately W. H.  
Armstrong republican mayor chairman county committee now wearing Cox  
button also W S Goodland editor Journal-News republican stop Four  
request emphasise administrations nine policies and seventeen. stop  
Black stop

Milwaukee colon Three L. W. Nieman proprietor Journal-  
News ~~stop~~ also Mackie Wells Harvard Alumni president University Club  
nonpolitical who plans reception stop Press interest ~~am~~ keen stop  
Seven between racial elements stop City expects ten to be keynote  
dealt with without gloves Stop German German <sup>here</sup> /opposed to ten and  
believe Fatherland does not want membership therein stop City anxious  
for development shipping facilities particularly keen project StLawrence  
International  
waterway for which/Commission ~~just~~ created. stop Italians and Poles  
are four deserve mention thanks war records stop

Absolutely essential that Cochran have literature  
including <sup>acceptance</sup> ~~reception~~ speeches platform poster photographs distributed  
immediately all advance points stop Great demand by local committees  
who entirely without such material stop Wire Cochran that effect stop  
Milwaukee newspapermen meet you Kenosha stop

Early