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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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**Milwaukee - Campaign Speech**

FROM SPEECH OF HON. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
MILWAUKEE, WIS., AUGUST 12, 1920

I am not afraid of the League of Nations Issue. I believe it is the Old Guard reactionary Republican Leaders who are trying to befuddle this issue. It is natural for them as reactionaries in home affairs to be reactionary also in international affairs. In the same way progressives, whether they are Republicans or Democrats, will, if truly progressive, wish to see international affairs continue to reach higher levels instead of going back to the methods of old-fashioned diplomacy.

Here is a simple parallel. In the old days, when civilization was young, feuds between individuals existed, and the community paid little attention thereto. In new communities gunmen committed murders and the rest of the community paid but scant attention. Almost everybody went armed. Gradually law and order among individuals asserted itself. The beginnings of community spirit came into existence. Fights between individuals were stopped by the community until it became safe for people to go about their business unarmed. Today the community does not assume a neutral attitude towards the gun-toter or the man who tries to control things by

physical force.

Up to three years ago international law had failed to develop and progress in the same way that the law of the community and of the individual State had developed and progressed. Gun-toters and pirates among nations could still carry on their nefarious business without calling down upon themselves the wrath of the civilized world. Under the old theory of international law it was presumed that when one nation attacked another the rule for all the other nations to follow was the rule of neutrality. Countless examples of this exist in history.

As a result of the great war, the chief gain - I like to think - an even greater gain in the long run than the actual winning of the war, has been a complete change in the theory of international law. At last international law seems to be catching up to the law of the individual or of the separate State.

The League of Nations is but an expression of the new law of nations.

Under the League of Nations the presumption of neutrality

is completely reversed, and the nation which plans to attack another can assume with fair probability that all the other nations will be against it - not neutral as in the old days, but on the contrary, hostile. The other nations will now demand that the attacking nation shall show cause why it did not observe the law of nations, the law of decency, the law of twentieth century morality.

The principle applied to the present occasion may easily be read. In 1914 Germany, instead of thinking and perhaps assuming that England and Italy and the United States would remain neutral while she attacked Belgium and France, would have known beyond question that she could not count upon such neutrality. Germany would have realized that before the Court of the World and that of public opinion she did not have clean hands and could not hope to gain a victory. Who can doubt that such a clear front presented by the civilized world would not have caused the strongest power to hesitate? Who can doubt also that sane commonsense would not have triumphed long before it did?

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There can be no neutrality as between right and wrong! We, in the United States, honestly tried to walk the path of neutrality because it was the tenn law of nations, but finally, and at enormous cost, the whole American Nation joined in condemning that law.

Shall we then not learn by experience? Must we continue a policy which men and women of courage and sanity have rejected, regardless of party? Surely not.

The plan for the League of Nations, the pleas which so far only Russia, Mexico, Turkey and the United States have failed to heed, is that we discard the old policy of dangerous neutrality and adopt the same principle which has long been the cornerstone of common law and of man's relations with man. It is the principle that the man who starts a fight must show cause, that the presumption is against him, that his hands are not clean, and that others will not stand by and be neutral and indifferent, but will assist in every way to maintain the right of the attacked.

Men and women understand that it is toom much to hope that

the broad policy of the League of Nations will, without exception, abolish all wars in the future, but they believe, nevertheless, in the great principle because it will tend more and more towards permanent peace.

The old policy has broken down. The world is crying for an extension of the law of the individual and of the State to the law of international relations. Our soldiers and sailors, our men and women who did their share to bring this war to a speedy and glorious end are demanding that some progress toward a saner plan shall be made. They are tired of objectors. They are tired of the men who condemn one thing after another, and offer us nothing. What we want and what we shall have, is progress in our world relations, because without that progress at home will surely come to an abrupt and dangerous halt.

The Heart of America goes out to the Polish Nation. Our hands are tied. Because of the obstructionist methods of Senator Harding's group of Senators, the United States is still technically at war. It is not a member of the League of Nations. All it can

do is from time to time to offer its advice and sympathy. Action is impossible while our hands are tied.

If America had been a member of the League of Nations, the Polish Nation would not today be fighting bolshevism with its back to the wall. If America had been able to throw into the scale the splendid moral force of its hundred millions of people the Bolshevik Armies would not be where they are now. The events which led up to the present deplorable situation would never have occurred. Do not let us forget the moral force of the United States is such an undertaking. It would not have been necessary for a single American soldier to cross the seas. It would not have been necessary for America to become entangled in any way in European politics. Ours would have been the quieting and steadying hand in a League which without America is incomplete.

History will lay a great share of the responsibility for the plight of the splendid people of Poland upon those little narrow men in the United States Senate, those little narrow men who today control the machinery of the Republican Party. But for their desire

to satisfy a personal spite, the Bolsheviks would not be knocking at the gates of Warsaw.

We pray it is not too late. We pray that the United States may do its full share in helping to build up again in the future that independent nation of Poland which has always been our friend, and to pay back in some slight measure the splendid help given us at the time of our own War for Independence by the Polish patriots and lovers of world wide liberty, Kosciusko and Pulaski.