
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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St. Paul, MN - Campaign Speech

SPERCH OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
ST. PAUL, MINN. AUG 13th [1920]

I am particularly pleased with the news that comes this afternoon of the ratification of the women's suffrage amendment by the Tennessee Senate. From all I have seen so far of the sentiment of the Northwest there is no question they are counting almost unanimously on the ratification of suffrage.

This seems a particularly appropriate moment to call attention to the suffrage record of the Republican nominee for the Presidency. This record is typical of his record on almost every other important piece of legislation in his whole public career.

In his reply to the delegation of suffragettes who interviewed him on June 24, 1915, he gave this illuminating answer: "Believing as I do in political parties and government through political parties I had much rather that the party to which I belong should in its conferences make a declaration than to assume a leadership or take an individual position on the question".

A few months later he again told the suffragettes that it would be presumptuous for him to dictate to his Party. During 1916 he had still not succeeded in taking a position for or against. In 1917 he said "I shall do the thing when the final test comes which best answers my conviction of the righteous attitude".

In April 1918 Senator Harding said that he had given his pledge to vote as Ohio decided and that as Ohio had voted twice against suffrage he felt that he should also do so but he qualified this statement by adding, - "I feel that many things have changed since their vote was cast". It must be remembered that at this time the House of Representatives had already passed the suffrage amendment.

Things went on in this way until late in 1918. He was absent and did not vote except through a pair when ~~the~~ the amendment came before the Senate. I want to emphasize that it was not until the final successful ballot was taken in the Senate on June 4th, 1919, that Senator Harding finally climbed on the band wagon and voted "Yes".

A record of this kind speaks for itself. All the rest of

his record while in the Senate follows this example. The distinguished Senator from Ohio is apparently careful to wait until the last moment before committing himself to any definite policy. This is borne out by his stand on the League of Nations' question during the past year and a half. He was supposed to be in favor of mild reservations. He was then supposed to be in favor of the Lodge reservations. He was later supposed to be in favor of the Republican platform as adopted at Chicago. But no one knew what this meant until his speech of acceptance. The result of that speech is shown by the absolute divergence of opinion as to what he meant by Republicans and others all over the Country.

The spectacle has been seen of two great Republican dailies in New York, one of which immediately after the speech of acceptance expressed its delight that Senator Harding had so clearly come out against the League of Nations and in favor of the position taken by the irreconcilables under Senator Johnson. The other newspaper during the same period has taken delight in its understanding that Senator Harding so fully accepted the League of Nations with the Lodge reservations.

Apparently in this campaign the Republican offer is this: "You can pay your money and take your choice". To use a homely old expression - The Republican attitude is as clear as mud.

Furthermore, an effort is being made to persuade business men that Senator Harding is safe and sane and will restore something known as normal conditions. I wonder very much how an attitude of mind as exemplified by his past record on suffrage, on the League of Nations, and on every other public question can possibly maintain business confidence.

If that attitude is carried out in regard to our foreign relations we should still be at war for years hence. Business would still be wondering when the war started on April 6, 1917, was at last to end.

The same thing applies to every other action of the Federal Government. We need definite action, clear policy. It is only through those that the business of the country, whether it be that of the manufacturer, the banker, the farmer or the laborer, can remain stabilized.

It is true that a few of the "Old Guard" crowd who would get in on the floor of the new coterie method of conducting the Presidency so excellently described today as the "syndicated presidency", would gain by

the election of the Republican candidates. The Country, however, has passed that sort of thing.

I am glad that so many representatives of labor are here tonight. I do not need to tell them what have been the relative records of the Republican and Democratic Parties with respect to friendship for the workingman during the past ten or fifteen years. It has been rather not a question of friendship on the part of the Democracy of America, but it has been something more fundamental. It has been a matter of fair play and a square deal.

What I want to say tonight relates to the needs of a class of labor which has so far been grossly and inexcusably overlooked. I refer particularly to the pay of the school teachers of the nation, men and women. The future happiness of the next generation is, after all, dependent on the education which the children are receiving at this moment. We cannot expect that education to be up to American standards unless those who impart that education are paid and live according to the highest American standards. In cheating our children out of the best of education we are taking away from them something which can never be replaced in years to come. The same thing applies in a large measure to other professions of learning in the community, especially those in Government, State or Municipal employ. Thousands of splendidly trained men and women, the best brains in the Nation, are needed today to carry on public work of all kinds.

I know from my own experience in Albany and in Washington, the Capital of a State and the Capital of the Nation, that Government business, and therefore business of the public, suffers severely from the fact that we are unable to obtain or to retain the services of the best professional men and women to be had in the Country.

All of this is a definite need set forth by the Democratic Party. It is not merely high-falutin' language. We propose, if given the authority, to take remedial action thereon.

I want to emphasize once more the real danger before the Country in relation to the influx of the population from farm to city.

Unless the nation is to suffer from higher prices and a curtailed production of food supplies, definite assistance must be given by the Federal Government to restore the balance between the farm and city life.

As Secretary Lane has so ably put it, the slogan shall be not "Back to the Farm", but "Forward to the land".

In every speech I make, I propose to call attention not only to the record of the two parties in the past, but I want to draw the deadly parallel between the two platforms. There is no question at all that today the Democratic Party is the party of progress. There is no question at all that the present Republican leaders have forced the official position of that party into the ranks of reaction, -- back to the days of Government by the good old "Spoils" System, back to the days of Government by the few and for the few.