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

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 147

1920 August 21

Tacoma, WA - Campaign Speech

FROM SPEECH OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
TACOMA, WASH., AUG. 21, 1930

There are just two big points which illustrate fully the fundamental differences between the Republican and Democratic campaigns this fall. One relates to the presentation of what this campaign is all about. The Democratic Party considers the San Francisco platform in the light of definite pledges. Both Governor Cox and I in our speeches of acceptance tried to say in plain English what we expected to accomplish if elected to office. We have evaded no issues, and have made no attempt to rack up matters which were issues fifty years ago, but which are no longer of any political concern to the American people.

The leaders of the Republican Party have been taking a diametrically opposite point of view. The Chicago platform itself can be interpreted to suit any individual taste. It is an effort to be - All things to all men - and like most efforts of that kind, whether made by individuals or by parties, will in the long run create more enemies than friends. It is nothing if not vague. We are obliged to admit, however, a certain degree of consistency

among the controlling Republican clique who drew the Chicago platform, because their candidate in his speech of acceptance and subsequently has been equally vague on every real issue now before the American people. People in Western Washington, who are somewhat accustomed to fogs and to the smoke of forest fires, will not ask me, I am sure, to carry this comparison to its logical conclusion.

As a matter of fact, the only clear utterance we have had from the opposition up to date has been the statement from Senator Harding that he proposes to resurrect the tariff from its present non-political position and drag it back into the light of partisanship. I feel perfectly confident that the American people will be merely amused by this kind of campaigning.

The other great difference between the two parties, or rather between the Democratic Party and the present leadership of the Republican Party lies in their point of view and their theory of how government should be conducted. In the first place, the control of the Republican Party still vests in the hands of that little

group which for many years has been in close touch with special interests throughout the Nation and has shown by its whole record that it cares more for ^{its} pockets and domination of the Country by a few select friends than it does for the broad interest of the people throughout the Nation. Most of us had hoped that that theory of governing had passed out of sight, but today we see it revived in the shape of the Senatorial oligarchy, and also in the theory of conducting the Presidency of the United States itself by the aid of a "syndicate" of hand-picked friends. That whole point of view spells reaction because it is a reversion to what we used to have in Washington twenty years ago. It embraces also the old theory of bitter partisanship - the theory that any constructive measures proposed by the opposite party are of necessity bad. For instance, Senator Harding stated the other day that he could not say anything about the Polish situation because he does not know what the foreign policy of the United States is, and yet in the very next sentence he declares that he is going to change that foreign policy, no matter what it is.

The Democratic position all the way through is the opposite. It does not believe that we can go back. It believes that we must view the future with imagination and with a desire to meet new conditions with new actions - to find new solutions of new problems. It is that frame of mind which makes Governor Cox such a splendid leader for the progressive thought of the Nation.

It is this same difference which is carried into the foreign policies of the two candidates. Governor Cox and I say definitely and clearly that we are not afraid of the League of Nations - that we propose to have the United States ratify the treaty of peace and the League of Nations. It goes without saying that we are ready to make clear to the whole world that the Constitution of the United States and the rights of the American Congress shall be in no way superseded by the League. We believe that it is in this way that we can gain a full victory from the war. We believe that it is in this way that future wars can possibly be prevented. We believe that it is a practical way and the quickest way of restoring international peace and of preventing another attack

on civilization.

Senator Harding's present apparent attitude is that he opposes the League of Nations and would replace it, if elected President, by new negotiations looking to some undefined kind of a new association of nations. He must know down in the bottom of his heart that our national honor is pledged not to make a separate peace without our Allies, and that this pledge was given by the whole American Nation when they entered the war and stood shoulder to shoulder for an even bigger cause than a mere military victory; and he must know, too, that aside from this matter of honor, a separate peace by resolution of Congress is unworkable, and that some day we must have the courage to take up in detail the vast number of questions involved with all of the nations of the world.