
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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1920 September 6

New York City, NY - Campaign Speech

For release Monday Evening papers, Sept. 6, 1920.

Mr. Roosevelt, in accepting the silver loving cup presented to him by Mr. James O'Connell, President of the Metal Trades Department, American Federation of Labor on behalf of the employees of the New York Navy Yard, said in part:

"The two hardest sentiments to express in words are sympathy and gratitude, and I am finding it hard at this minute to clothe in language the two uppermost thoughts in my mind. First, the sympathy I have always felt, now feel, and always will feel, with those who have worked so loyally with me in this great navy yard of ours - first through the years of peaceful preparation, and then through the awful two years of war, to make the ships of our Navy so perfect, so splendid in their mechanical detail, so honest in their workmanship as to triumphantly stand the terrible strain which they have been called upon to undergo since 1916. Our wonderful record in sweeping the seas for submarines, in convoying without the loss of a single life that great army, in laying that deadly and stupendous chain of mines across the North Sea which has astounded all Europe and filled our own countrymen with just pride, could not have been accomplished had not your work and your labor been of the finest and best, had you not given the best that was in you, as those who went across under the protection of the ships you built and kept in order gave the best that was in them.

"The second thing I want to tell you is the ~~gratitude~~ that I ~~feel to you~~ ^{know} from this beautiful remembrance that your feeling towards me is as deep in its real friendship and as permanent in its character as my feeling is towards you. I cannot put it into words, but I know you know, and that we understand today, as I think we have always really understood each other. It is my hope that the relations between us these last seven years, I in Washington, and you here in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, will stand as a model, as a guide and inspiration for years to come to those seeking ideal conditions between the employer and his employees. The real test of friendship and of the completeness of mutual

understanding of each other, lies after all more in ones misunderstandings than in ones agreements. It is not difficult to respect and admire anyone who always agrees with you, but when such mutual respect and friendship survives differences, I mean of opinions, then it is, indeed, a real and permanent thing. That test, I think, our relations have triumphantly stood. It has not always been possible for you to agree with what I thought was best, or for me to entirely coincide with your point of view, but I think the feeling we have had, that each was honest in his opinion, has kept the pleasantness of our relations unimpaired. I am prouder of this, perhaps, than of all the other things you men in the Brooklyn Navy Yard have given me just cause to be proud of.

"I have no patience with the phrase "The Labor Question" or "The Labor Problem" - as if in the relations between employers and labor there were some unsolved riddle of the sphinx, hopeless of solution. I have always felt that that was an absurdly false idea. My first experience as an employer of labor came when I entered the Department and found myself, as part of my duties, in charge of the Navy Yards and shore stations, particularly as regards our employees, but I found nothing terrifying in the task because I believed that the men in the navy yards at the bench and the men in charge at Washington - at their desks - were, after all, the same kind of American citizen, and that all that was needed was frankness and justice and square dealing on both sides to insure perfect harmony and co-operation between them. Seven years ago that was only a theory with me, - now it is a tried and proved fact. I remember very well the first instance after I assumed my duties in the Department when I was first called upon to pass judgment on some trifling disagreement between the men in this yard and some of those placed over them. The case seemed perfectly clear to me - there had been hasty action on both sides - both were much to blame in that particular matter, but it seemed clear to any just thinking man that the penalty imposed in this case was far too severe for the fault. As a matter of course, almost without

thought, I overruled the decision and modified the action proposed. To my surprise I was warned with much solemnity that such action would destroy some wonderful thing called discipline, and that right or wrong I was expected to always back up the decision of the man's immediate superiors. My instant reply was that there can be no real discipline except that founded upon just dealing and fairness, and that nothing could so destroy real discipline and efficiency as sustaining a ruling which was obviously unfair and ill-considered. I found the Secretary of the Navy entirely sympathetic with this view, and I think from that time to this all of you men have felt that if you had a real cause and a real complaint you were sure of a real consideration when you laid the matter before me and a decision that would be at least what I honestly thought was right whether you always agreed with me as to what was right or not. I think you men have learned to come to me frankly and to confess honestly your faults and expect that I will honestly admit our faults, and I think there has been no other employer of labor in the country with anything like the same number of employees to be considered who can point to a more constant and uninterrupted period of friendship and sympathetic relationship than can the Navy with its civilian workmen. The employer who insists on having his own way, right or wrong, who tries only to get the most service for the least money will always find a "labor problem" on his hands, but I think that you and I have shown in our relations that the man who tries to be fair, and whom his employees feel intends to be fair and who is willing to talk the matter over whenever a difference arises, can look, as I look, with considerable amazement upon those who hold that employer and employee must necessarily stand in a state of constant conflict and perpetual misunderstanding.

"President O'Connell has told me that this beautiful cup is intended as a material and visible reminder of the good will of you men, not only as individuals but as united in that great industrial organization known as the Metal Trades Association.

May I, speaking to you not as individuals but as members of this Association, congratulate you on the wisdom of the policy of your leaders, and your own ~~wisdom~~ wisdom in loyally supporting that policy of keeping out of entangling political alliances and leaving yourselves free to judge men rather than party policies. Party policies are supposed to be set forth in party platforms, but after all, the platform is only something to stand on, and the important question to you is whether the man will stand on it or merely hide under it. You may find a good man on a poor platform but you will never find a good platform converting a poor man into a good one. A platform is, after all, only a promise and just as in war the important thing is the man behind the platform. Or you may say that the platform is sort of a promissory note of what a man will do if he is elected. Now you all know that any man can step into a bank and write a note for a million dollars, and you all know that the bank will give only a casual inspection to the note itself but will scrutinize with great exactness the signature. It will consider, not whether it is a correctly drawn piece of paper, but whether or not the man who signs it can and will make good the obligation he incurs, and just as a bank judges by the whole record and past character of a man whether his note is good or not, so should you men judge by the whole record and general character of a man whether he is worthy of your confidence or not - only a man with a bad conscience or who knows that he does not intend to fulfill, or will not be allowed by those who control him to fulfill his promises, need have any real fear of your close scrutiny or try by elusive and ~~evasive~~ evasive issues and false pretenses to distract your attention from thoughtful consideration as to what manner of man he has shown himself to be.

"I have said a great many words - perhaps too many. After all, I think we understand each other so well as to have made it necessary only for me to say, in accepting this splendid remembrance that I want to thank you as you want to thank me for our past seven years of close association".

For release for Monday Evening Paper, Sept 8/20

Mr. Roosevelt, in accepting the Loring Cup, presentation to him
President of the United States, Sept. 8, 1920, for his labor
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binding it

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point of view, but I think the feeling we have had, that each was honest in his
opinion, has kept the pleasantness of our relations unimpaired. I am prouder

of this, perhaps, than of all the other things you men in the Brooklyn Ward have given me just cause to be proud of. ~~Discouragement~~

I have no patience with that canting phrase, ⁴ ~~The Labor~~ ^{Question}, or ~~The Labor Problem~~ - as if in the relations between employers and labor there were some unsolved riddle ^{of the Sphinx} ~~that exists~~ - hopeless of solution. I have always felt that that was an absurdly false idea - ^{by} first experience as an employer of labor came when I entered the department, and found myself, ~~as~~ part of my duties, in charge of the Navy Yard and shore stations, particularly as regarded our employees, but I found nothing terrifying ~~in~~ the task, because I believed that the men in the Navy Yard, at the bench, ~~and~~ the men in charge at Washington - at their desk - were, after all, the same kind of American citizens - and that all that was needed was frankness and justice, and square dealing on both sides ^{to} insure perfect harmony and cooperation between them. Seven years ago that was only a theory with me, - now it is a tried and proved fact. I remember very well the first instance after I assumed my duties ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ the department, where ^{just} I ~~was~~ ^{was} called upon to pass judgment on some trifling disagreement between the men in this yard and some of those placed ^{over} them. The case seemed perfectly clear to me - there had been hasty action on both sides - both were much to blame in that particular matter, but it seemed clear to any just thinking man that the penalty imposed in this case was far too severe for the fault. As a matter of course, almost without thought, I overruled the decision and modified the action proposed. To my surprise I was warned, with much solemnity, that such action would destroy some wonderful thing called discipline, and that right or wrong, I was expected to always back up the decision of the man's immediate superiors. My instant reply was that there can be no real discipline ~~except~~ ^{except} that founded upon just dealing and fairness, and that nothing could so destroy real discipline and efficiency as sustaining ~~such~~ a ruling which was obviously unfair and ill-considered. I found the ^{of the Navy} Secretary ^{entirely} sympathetic with this view, and I think from that time to this ~~about~~ all of you men have felt that ~~you~~ if you had a real cause, and a real complaint, you were sure of a real consideration when you laid the matter before me, and a decision that would be at least what I honestly thought was right, whether you always agreed with me as to what was right, or not. I think you men have learned to come to me frankly ^{and} to confess honestly your faults,

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