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

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New Bedford, MA - Campaign Speech

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH OF HON. F.D. ROOSEVELT
NEW BEDFORD, MASS., SEPT. 16, 1920

The best proof of what a Party will do is what it has done. I want to tell you a little story of what we have done for you people right here in (New Bedford) (Fall River). It is a story with a real point to it because it shows the difference between the Democratic idea of Government and the Senatorial idea as proclaimed by Senator Harding.

Last Spring the Navy Department took up the matter of securing oil for next year. Most of our ships, you know, burn oil now a days. We had contracts for oil to last us through this Fall, but we were politely told by the great oil interests which were making fabulous profits in selling commercial oil to mills and private establishments generally, that they could not renew contracts except at figures which were prohibitive. We advertised for bids not once but three times. The best we could get was promise from the great oil combinations of a little - a very little - not 10% of our total needs, at a price of over \$4.00 per barrel. These companies controlled practically all of the oils which the Navy had always used and which had only been obtained in the past from the oil wells in the United States. They felt they had us because it had always been assumed to be impossible to use the heavy oils from Mexico on Navy ships, and as they controlled all of the kind of oil we did use, it was perfectly apparent that they expected to feed us from hand to mouth at exorbitant profits and on terms of their own making. It was a delightful situation for the oil interests, and they evidently enjoyed our discomforture.

Now this is what the Navy did. Our experts worked out a way to use Mexican oil - a way which required extensive refining apparatus.

There was plenty of oil in Mexico, but all of the refineries on the East Coast, controlled by the great companies, were busy turning out gasoline at fat profit and oil at fancy figures for private customers. We had to hunt around to find a company not connected with the big interests, with skill and energy enough to accept our plan and to furnish us with refined Mexican oil. Our plan was put up to every plant of this kind. There were not many of them, but we finally found one - and as you people will probably say, quite naturally, found it here in New England. I say "quite naturally" because New England has more progressive businessmen and manufacturers who will refuse to allow themselves to be absorbed by trusts than in any other section of the Union.

So while the big combinations were laughing in their sleeves, the Department entered into a contract after public advertising in order to give the other companies one more chance to help the Navy out, by which this company manufactures this oil for us at a plant not far distant from this city (New Bedford) (Fall River), at a price of \$3.25 per barrel for the first year and a little over \$2.00 for the second.

That was good business for the Navy, but now I am going to show you how it was good business for you. This company had contracts to supply fuel oil for your mills right here in New Bedford, where they have a branch plant. They told us about these contracts and asked if we demanded that they supply the Navy exclusively, or whether they could be allowed to continue to supply your mills. Now because we believe that the Government should help every citizen and because we knew that if we cut off this supply your mills would be hard put for the oil for their fires, -we said it is not good Government policy to let the Navy profit at the expense of the manufacturers of (New Bedford) (Fall River)

We will not only allow you to keep your contracts, but any surplus which you can make for the mills above the needs of the Navy you can continue to produce.

Now, as a result of this policy, New England has an independent refinery which, when entirely completed, will represent Ten Millions of dollars of investment, and your mills right here in New Bedford are going to get no inconsiderable amount of oil for your furnaces - coal shortage or no coal shortage.

Every tax-payer in the United States gained by the saving the Navy made in buying oil this way, because, of course, it was not the Navy which paid for it, but your people here in New Bedford, whether mill owners or mill workers, gained by having an assured fuel supply.

Now that is what the Government has done right here to help you - I think I might almost say what I have done to help you, because this whole matter came under me as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. But I want to ask you, particularly such of you as remember certain letters known as the Archibald Letters, whether you think the big interests who control those who control Senator Harding would ever let a proposition of this kind, so painfully unpleasant to those companies which hoped to profit tremendously by the Navy oil necessities, go through. I think you will agree with me there would be about as much chance of that happening as there would have been a chance under the old Republican Administration of any independent steel mill beyond those who subscribed so generously and regularly to the Republican Campaign Funds, being allowed to complete for armor plate for our battle ships - and if you know the history of that scandal you will know that it is equivalent to saying there would have been no chance at all.

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EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH OF HON.P.D.ROOSEVELT
NEW BEDFORD, MASS. SEPT. 16, 1920

There was plenty of oil in Mexico, but all of the refineries in the
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The best proof of what a Party will do is what it has done.
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We had contracts for oil to last us through this Fall, but we were polit-
ely told by the great oil interests which were making fabulous profits in
selling commercial oil to mills and private establishments generally,
that they could not renew contracts except at figures which were
prohibitive. We advertised for bids not once but three times. The best
we could get was promise from the great oil combinations of a little -
a very little - not 10% of our total needs, at a price of over \$6.00
per barrel. These companies controlled practically all of the oil which
the Navy had always used and which had only been obtained in the past
from the oil wells in the United States. They felt they had us because
it had always been assumed to be impossible to use the heavy oils from
Mexico on Navy ships, and as they controlled all of the kind of oil we
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There was plenty of oil in Mexico, but all of the refineries on the East Coast, controlled by the great companies, were busy turning out gasolene at fat profit and oil at fancy figures for private customers. We had to hunt around to find a company not connected with the big interests, with skill and energy enough to accept our plan and to furnish us with refined Mexican oil. Our plan was put up to every plant of this kind. There were not many of them, but we finally found one - and as you people will probably say, quite naturally, found it here in New England. I say "quite naturally" because New England has more progressive businessmen and manufacturers who will refuse to allow themselves to be absorbed by trusts than in any other section of the Union.

So while the big combinations were laughing in their sleeves, the Department entered into a contract after public advertising in order to give the other companies one more chance to help the Navy out, by which this company manufactures this oil for us at a plant not far distant from this city (New Bedford) (Fall River), at a price of \$5.25 per barrel for the first year and a little over \$2.00 for the second.

That was good business for the Navy, but now I am going to show you how it was good business for you. This company had contracts to supply fuel oil for your mills right here in New Bedford, where they have a branch plant. They told us about these contracts and asked if we demanded that they supply the Navy exclusively, or whether they could be allowed to continue to supply your mills. Now because we believe that the Government should help every citizen and because we knew that if we cut off this supply your mills would be hard put for the oil their fires, -we said it is not good Government policy to let the oil profit at the expense of the manufacturers of (New Bedford) (Fall River).

We will not only allow you to keep your contracts, but any surplus which you can make for the mills above the needs of the Navy you can continue to produce.

Now, as a result of this policy, New England has an independent refinery which, when entirely completed, will represent Ten Millions of dollars of investment, and your mills right here in New Bedford are going to get no inconsiderable amount of oil for your furnaces - coal shortage or no coal shortage.

Every tax-payer in the United States gained by the saving the Navy made in buying oil this way, because, of course, it was not the Navy which paid for it, but your people here in New Bedford, whether mill owners or mill workers, gained by having an assured fuel supply.

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Now this is what the Navy did. Our experts worked out a way to use Mexican oil - a way which required extensive refining apparatus.

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That was good business for the Navy, but now I am going to show you how it was good business for you. This company had contracts to supply fuel oil for your mills right here in New Bedford, where they have a branch plant. They told us about these contracts and asked if we demanded that they supply the Navy exclusively, or whether they could be allowed to continue to supply your mills. Now because we believe that the Government should help every citizen and because we knew that if we cut off this supply your mills would be hard put for the oil for their fires, -we said it is not good Government policy to let the Navy profit at the expense of the manufacturers of (New Bedford) (Fall River).

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