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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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**File No. 171**

**1920 September 17**

**Hartford, CT - Campaign Speech**

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH OF HON. F. D. ROOSEVELT  
HARTFORD, CONN., SEPT. 17, 1920

Day after day as I swing from City to City and State to State in my campaigning, which has already carried me into more than thirty States of the Union, I realize more and more clearly the appalling, may I say, ignorance in the Country at large on one of the most vital issues to be decided by the electorate at the polls on November Second. The more I travel over the Country, the more certain I become that the great majority of our voters have no real knowledge of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

I will go even farther than this by stating that I do not believe that the great majority has even read the Covenant.

Some of the opposition is genuine, but most of it comes from those who are, like most of the irreconcilables of the Senate, jaundiced by political jealousy and are waging their fight against the League solely as a matter of political expediency. This, however, I believe, is a small minority, and that the great bulk of the opposition comes from those who have allowed themselves to be tricked and misguided into a bitter partisanship by the campaign of misrepresentation that the political opponents of the League have waged through a subservient press.

From Coast to Coast, as I have travelled, this has been my appeal - Read the Covenant (it is very brief), study it, and then form your own conclusions, unbiased by the false and misleading statements that are daily printed to deceive.

Possibly the most frequently used lie, if I may use plain English, is that which tells you that our entrance into the League means that your sons and brothers can be sent Abroad to wage wars at the dictate

of foreign powers. The best answer is found in a statement made by Governor Cox recently before an Ohio audience. He said - "If I am elected President, during the next four years no American soldiers will go Abroad unless you direct me to send them." This is plain talk - the sort of plain talk that you and I and each every-day American citizen can understand. It is like his statement defining his attitude toward the League of Nations, which he put tersely thus: "I favor going in."

Another of the bugaboos which have been used to mislead those voters who have not taken the trouble to read and study the Covenant for themselves is the charge that England has six votes to our one in the League. To those who have familiarized themselves with the Covenant, the falsity of this is apparent, for they understand that while England and her dependents have six votes in the Assembly, a huge debating society in which every little nation has its say, in the Council, which is the real governing body of the League, Great Britain has only one vote, just as the United States has one vote. Furthermore, they understand that the Assembly is a place for debate and recommendation, with no power of final action, and that even in the Council, with certain exceptions, all action has to be unanimous. Repeatedly, I have tried to make plain that even in the Assembly we would have rather the best of the argument for while Great Britain had its six votes, the close community of interest and warm friendship between the United States and other Republics of South and Central America would give us an advantage that would more than offset this. I pointed out that our mutual interest and friendship would prompt us to swing together.

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Dear Mr. Melcher,  
I am very sorry to hear of the death of your son. I have known him since he was a small boy and he was always a good boy. He was a member of our church and we will miss him very much. Please accept my sympathies in this time of sorrow.

ing to the people our interpretation of the issues that now confront the Nation, and at the same time of getting from the people a better ~~understanding~~ understanding of the needs of the Nation so as to be better fitted if chosen to serve them.

The Democratic program is a progressive one; the standard bearer of the Party is a Progressive. We are proud of the accomplishments of the Democratic Party during the last eight years, for a tremendous amount of constructive legislation has been passed and the Nation has taken long strides forward. Now the people are called upon to decide whether the Country will continue this march of progress under a Democratic Administration or accept the new leadership offered by the Republicans, who base their claim to support on promises that may all be summed up in two words - "A Change". Their candidate is a reactionary. Their platform likewise holds out no promise of a movement toward better things.

This Fall the people are called upon to pass upon question of tremendous import. Their decision should not be given along purely partisan lines, for the issues are so vital that they should be ~~understanding~~ studied and met along broad, patriotic, national lines. Personally, I believe that never before in the history of our Country has there been so much independent thinking in politics, and so little adhesion to strict party lines as there is now. This viewpoint must be shared somewhat by Senator Harding who, reactionary to the core, shudders with horror at the spread of independence in political thinking. In a statement made a couple of days ago to the Women's Harding Club of New York, Mr. Harding said - "Too much is heard of independence in politics \*\*\* The fashion of parading independence is to be deplored." No doubt this solemn utterance of the Republican candidate for the Presidency, the highest gift in the

hands of the American people, made after due deliberation, must have been read with great astonishment and possibly a touch of disgust by that great body of Independents who, scattered through the Country, have held the balance of power in our political life and have kept the nation true to that idealism which made possible its foundation and its present foremost station among the nations of the World.

Those familiar with the career of Senator Harding probably were not greatly astonished for they naturally would expect from him ~~him~~ open approval of a blind party allegiance. Never in his entire career has he ever shown the slightest indication of independence, either in action or in thought. On the contrary, he has stood side by side with the political bosses, not only in his own State but in the Senate. Alongside of his declaration against independence among the voters, is his telegram of congratulation to your own Senator Brandegree, one of the leaders of that clique which has controlled the Senate of the United States whenever the Republicans have had a majority. Only recently in an interview he stated that the proudest moment of his life was when he nominated Senator Foraker of Ohio, a man whom Theodore Roosevelt proved received \$50,000 from the Standard Oil Company while a member of the United States Senate. Senator Harding not only nominated Foraker for the Senate, but he nominated as delegate-at-large to a Republican National Convention, with falsome praise, the man who has been called the most corrupt boss in America - Boss George B. Cox, of Cincinnati. Under all the circumstances, Senator Harding could hardly be expected to endorse independence among others.

His confession of political faith in so far as independence

was concerned doubtless was prompted by the disquieting reports he was receiving of how the progressive thinking voters of the West and Northwest, whose votes proved so decisive in 1916, are planning to vote again this year.

I do not wonder, after my trip through each of the Western States, that Senator Harding should have been horrified to think that the people of the West are so "independent" that, although normally Republicans, they are going to vote for progressive men and progressive principles this year, and not for a reactionary Senate "Syndicate" which has seized the Republican Party machinery, but which does not represent the rank and file of the Republican Party.

The difference between Senator Harding and ourselves upon this important principle of American political thought is fundamental and vastly more vital than it may sound at first. Governor Cox and I glory in the fact that America is becoming more and more independent in its thinking and its voting. We glory in the fact that the voter who votes a ticket regardless of the nominees or the principles, merely because "grandfather" voted that ticket is fast becoming extinct.

Unlike Senator Harding, I do not think too much is heard of independence in politics, but that not enough is heard of independence in politics. I look with confidence to the day when each party will go before the people and base its appeal solely upon the merits of the issues and the character of the candidates, with a knowledge that there are so many Independents in America that their decision will determine the result. I have faith that this day is not only coming, but that it is here. I believe that it is the Independents who are going to decide

the result this Fall.

Men who call themselves Independents or who call themselves members of either of the great parties or of the lesser parties, will do well to study not only the statement of Candidate Harding that there is too much independence in our Nation, but to study the record of the Candidates themselves for independence in public life. Governor Cox and myself never hesitated to break with the kind of political thought with which we disagreed, regardless of whom we might offend in our party by so doing. Governor Cox proved his independence when he broke with the old organization in Ohio and came out for a new ideal in public life, for a new Constitution and for a new program for popular rule, human welfare and social justice in that State.

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*J. M. C.*

Post

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