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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. 185**

**1920 September 30**

**Charleston, WV - Campaign Speech**

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH DELIVERED AT CHARLESTON,  
W.Va., SEPTEMBER 30, 1900 by  
HON.F.D.ROOSEVELT

In view of the fact that the United States Naval Armor Plate and Big Shell Plant is located at Charleston, West Virginia, I want to take the story of the building of this plant as an illustration of the difference in political theory between the Democratic Party and the narrow wing of the Republican Party to which Senator Harding belongs and of which he is the present figure-head. Year after year, for a generation up to 1913, the United States Navy had to buy armor and heavy shells from three big steel companies. Year after year, these steel companies put in identical or nearly identical bids. Naval officers, Secretaries of the Navy, Presidents and even Congresses, tried to get lower prices from these companies. There was no way of obtaining true competition or of getting what the Navy considered reasonable prices. The situation presented a complete monopoly that had the United States Government at its mercy. Immediately after a Democratic Administration came into power at Washington, it found itself held up by the same old combination after vain efforts to reduce the price from this monopoly to a reasonable figure. Secretary Daniels asked Congress for an appropriation to build an armor plate and shell plant. Our purpose was three-fold: to increase the facilities of the Nation for manufacturing its vital war material in case of emergency, secondly, to endeavor to improve the defensive quality of our armor and the offensive power of our shells, and finally, to ascertain the real manufacturing cost, a thing which we had been unable in the past to find out from the private manufacturers. It was not until 1916 that we were able to get through Congress the appropriation under which we have built the magnificent and highly successful plant at Charleston, West Va. The passage of this bill was a splendid illustration of the schools of thought in the Senate of the United States. Senator Harding voted against the establishment of the Armor Plate and Shell factory. He was joined in his vote by the other members of the reactionary group, among them Lodge, Brandegee, Smoot, Sutherland and Penrose.

The issue was clear out. The alignment was in favor of a

continuation of a monopoly living off the United States Government. It was another vote in favor of special privilege, another vote against progress in businesslike methods in our Government affairs, a vote of the same reactionary trend which has characterized all the actions of these Senators. Mr. Harding is one of that group beyond recall. You can tell what sort a man is by the company he keeps.

I am not an alarmist and I have unbounded faith in this nation, but I recognize more and more the serious danger that will come to it if, by any chance, Senator Harding should be elected President in November. For twenty years and more the American people have conducted a fight to take their government, not only their national government but their state governments and their city governments, out of the control of an element in the community which was in politics for its selfish interest. We have but to recall the cities in the nation which were dominated by gas and lighting companies, by street car magnates and by profiteering groups of manufacturers. A great change for the better has occurred in most of these communities, but we are not wholly rid of the evil yet. It has been the same story with state governments. Many of them have been in the control of railway rings, legislatures have been openly owned by a privileged few. Here, too, great strides have been taken by the voters in partly getting rid of these evil influences.

In our own national government the same extent of ~~if~~ these evils has, I am thankful to say, not existed, but at the same time if we go back even twenty years we can find many proofs of the attempts of the same special interests that corrupted towns and states to get their clutches upon the nation as well. We know, for instance, that in the old days when the tariff was a football of politics, certain privileged interests obtained such high schedules as to give them monopolies and enabled them to fix their prices at almost any high level they chose, the people of the United States paying the bill. We know in many cases where Senators of the United States have

been recognized by the public as representing this group or that group among the great trusts. But it has been rather in a negative way that the old-guard in the Senate have helped their privileged friends. It has been through opposition to any legislation of a progressive character, any legislation that would tend to cut down the enormous profits of the selected few, any legislation that would give a squarer deal to the working men of the nations, any legislation that would prevent child labor, any legislation that furthered the cause of social justice. It was this group which stood out against the income tax and against the direct election of United States Senators. These are but samples. If any voter cares to go into the matter further, he will find that the whole record of the Penroses, and Forakers, and Smoots and Hardings, has been consistent in its alignment against new and better things for America. We must choose this year between a man who has consistently favored the great progressive tendencies of the times or on the other side a man whose whole life has been wrapped up in the obstructionist group of which he has been a member.

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N. H.

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Fed. Res. Bd.

Labor

Efficiency of Govt

Cost of War

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