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

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 196

1920 October 4

St. Louis, MO - Campaign Speech

I want to preface my speech tonight with some good news to every lover of this Country; - Whichever party is elected they can be assured that whatever may happen to the Country itself, something which in the minds of most of us symbolizes our Country will be safe. Senator Harding has at last made the first definite statement that I have been able to detect in all his speeches. I read it to you to show that I am always willing to give him credit for any definite thing which he may say at any time. Here it is - Senator Harding announcement, with all due solemnity befitting such a statement, that under no circumstances will he suffer any change which will affect the American flag or any substitute therefor.

I will confess that I have been secretly much worried since Chairman Hayes some time ago appropriated the American Flag as the exclusive property of the Republican Party. I have wondered what they would do with it after they got it. I feared that they would symbolize the confederation which they advocate by making it a flag combining our own colors with the Crescent of Turkey, the Snake of Mexico and the Bear of Russia, thus symbolizing the tri-party agreement of those who prefer to remain outside, ~~but~~ I am glad to learn that more conservative counsel has prevailed ^{not}

I know the Senator too well /to know he has not made such an important announcement without long and serious consultation with Senator Penrose and Senator Lodge. I feel sure that in thus speaking he expressed not only his individual determination but that of the Senatorial Syndicate which he has so frankly stated will govern this Country in case of his election.

As to what else he will do I await anxiously for an answer to the question /which I have already put to him

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH OF HON. F.D. ROOSEVELT
ST. LOUIS, MO., OCT. 4, 1920

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American voters hate a man who says one thing and does another, but they hate something worse than that - a man who says one thing one day and another thing the next. There is a good old word that has not been used yet in this campaign - the word "Trimmer". Before November 2nd the voting public is going to know who that word fits and they will vote against all that it implies.

If we look back in our history we will see that all our great Presidents have been the opposite of Trimmers - they have stood for clear-cut, definite policies - they have been above partisanship for the mere sake of partisanship - they have used language which could only be taken one way - they have carried through great measures for the good of the Nation because they have been simple, direct and brave. Above all, they have never been caught seeking the support of people on both sides of the same fence. It is these qualities which have made them great.

On the other hand the weakest of our Presidents have lacked these essentials. They have played politics. They have considered party or victory above the Nation's good - they have tried to run with the hare and trail with the hound, seeking to gain the support of opposite factions at the same time.

To attempt to carry water on both shoulders at the same time means necessarily an insincerity of thought and speech. It means a deliberate attempt so to frame one's words that they may be construed as having opposite meanings. It means either a complete lack of convictions, or of purpose or of policy, or else a trickery of language.

In our daily associations with men and women we run across this type, and we end by holding them in contempt. Do we respect the man who agrees with us today and a moment later with someone holding the opposite view? Do we look up to the man who has no definite convictions about any subject but seeks merely to avoid argument? That type of individual not only never gets very far in this world,

but contributes very little of good to this world as he passes through it. He is a mill-stone round the neck of progress. He is a "Trimmer".

This year the managers of the Republican party have mapped out a campaign of "Trimming". I do not speak of the rank and file of Republicans who held definite convictions. The difficulty which Will Hays encountered more than a year ago was that of reconciling irreconcilable differences. He planned to do this by forgetting the differences. He did this by attempting to divert attention from these differences, and this could only be done by creating false issues.

Things went well for him for a time. At Chicago, by the use of "Trimming" language, a platform was devised by the "Trimmers" which a Hottentot or an Esquimaux could equally well swallow. It meant everything and it meant nothing.

~~A candidate was found to carry out the plan, and from then on began the real task of trying to "Trim" the American voters up to November 2nd.~~ It was a difficult thing this running of a campaign of "trimming" for four months without spilling any of the water from either shoulder. It went along fairly well on the surface, but all the time the voters, men and women, were reading and thinking and watching. For awhile they wondered about the "Front Porch" campaign, then they found out the reason. For awhile they thought the generalities, the flag waving, the set speeches were just preliminaries - then they discovered that there was nothing behind it all.

The straw that broke the back of a patient public was the admission in Baltimore by the Republican candidate that he had no specific constructive programme on foreign affairs. It became clear that, of course, this had to be so, because to have had a program of definiteness would have spoiled the whole theory of keeping discordant elements together in the same bed.

Of course it was bound to come.

bound to be seen through by the reading and the thinking public. They have realized that in foreign affairs the Republicans are against the League because it was organized when a Democrat was President. They realize that in domestic affairs the campaign of the Will Hayes' organization is merely destructive - that it is based on hate of anything accomplished for the Nation by any Democrat.

So they have "trimmed", and criticized and slandered, but it will not be for long. In four weeks this Nation will decide to keep on going forward to rebuke "trimmers" and to sustain men with clear-cut, definite opinions, leaders who are not afraid.

Finally, I want to call attention to two things: Senator Harding's attitude on the League of Nations and that of Governor Cox. First, in regard to Senator Harding - there was an important statement in this morning's paper. Senator Harding is quoted as saying - "I approve what Senator Borah has said in his public addresses." In the same paper is this statement from Senator Borah - "I will fight against any effort by any one no matter who to put over a League of Nations in the next session of Congress. I shall speak just as I have been speaking against the League".

If the English language means anything at all, it means that Senator Harding is at last being driven into a corner - it means that the American public have received from him a direct approval of Senator Borah's opposition to our going into a League of Nations, not merely "the" League but "a" League.

Secondly, I want you to contrast this with the definite statements of Governor Cox and myself. We favor going into the League of Nations which thirty-nine or more countries have already joined, and, furthermore, we are wholly willing that it be made clear to every American that nothing in our going in shall take away in the slightest degree our existing rights under the American Constitution, including the right of the Congress of the United States to declare war or sent our troops over-seas. It seems to me that that is pretty plain English, and I trust that from now on there will be a noticeable falling off.

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I will confess that I have been secretly much worried since Chairman Hays some time ago appropriated the American Flag as the exclusive property of the Republican Party. I have wondered what they would do with it after they got it. I feared that they would symbolize the confederation which they advocate by making it a flag combining our own colors with the Crescent of Turkey, the Snake of Mexico and the Bear of Russia, thus symbolizing the four-party agreement of those who prefer to remain outside, but I am glad to learn that more conservative counsel has prevailed.

I know the Senator too well not to know he has not made such an important announcement without long and serious consultation with Senator Penrose and Senator Lodge. I feel sure that in thus speaking he expressed not only his individual determination but that of the Senatorial Syndicate which he has so clearly indicated will govern this Country in case of his election.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR SPEECH at St. Louis,
October 4, 1920

Ironical congratulations to Harding on his determination to preserve the American Flag unchanged. For press extract would use what Sullivan has - marked "I".

Swing at once into League of Nations, and suggest you preface by saying the Republicans are worrying. You insist on talking on that as it is the last thing on earth they want to talk about and because it is the most important thing in the world, to this Country and every other Country, in fact to civilization itself - so you intend to keep on talking about it whether Mr. Harding likes it or not.

Your League of Nations speech this noon was all right, but would condense. Would use for Press copy the Switzerland matter, ^{Sullivan} Marked "II" which he has ready to insert.

^{World} Then I want say after giving the pledge of yourself and Cox not to let the boys go over: "This is where we stand. Where does Senator Harding stand? It is absurd for him to declare that he is in favor of any League unless he wishes us to understand that his statement made this morning was untrue and intended for Senator Borah's ears only. This is what Senator Harding says this morning:

"I approve what Senator Borah has said in his public addresses. He will continue to make speeches for the Republican Ticket, and I am sure I shall approve also what he says to the voters in the future'

If the English language means anything, this means that Senator Harding has publicly and solemnly declared that he stands with Senator Borah, so to find out where he really stands it is only necessary to find some clear expression from Senator Borah himself. Oddly enough, we find this in the same paper that contains Senator Harding's speech. This is Senator Borah's position as given by himself:

'I will fight against any effort by any one no matter who to put over a League of Nations in the next session of Congress. I shall speak just as I have been speaking against the League'.

How can we possibly conclude anything but that either Senator Harding is wilfully ~~misstating his~~ misrepresenting his own attitude or that he is opposed and intends to find against any effort by any one to put over a League of Nations, and notice that this refers to any League of Nations and not the particular League of Nations which is now under discussion. So out of senator Harding's own mouth we are able to positively state that unless Governor Cox is elected President, there will be no League of Nations of any kind."

Be sure to use the War Mothers' extract, and I think perhaps a word or two about the Farmers' Loans might pay.

I

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On the other hand the weakest of our Presidents have lacked these essentials. They have played politics. They have considered party or victory above the Nation's good - they have tried to run with the hare and trail with the hound, seeking to gain the support of opposite factions at the same time.

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Things went well for him for a time. At Chicago, by the use of "Trimming" language, a platform was devised by the "Trimmers" which a Hottentot or an Esquimaux could equally well swallow. It meant everything and it meant nothing.

A candidate was found to carry out the plan, and from then on began the real task of trying to "Trim" the American voters up to November 2nd. It was a difficult thing this running of a campaign of "trimming" for four months without spilling any of the water from either shoulder. It went along fairly well on the surface, but all the time the voters, men and women, were reading and thinking and watching. For awhile they wondered about the "Front Porch" campaign, then they found out the reason. For awhile they thought the generalities, the flag waving, the set speeches were just preliminaries - then they discovered that there was nothing behind it all.

The straw that broke the back of a patient public was the admission in Baltimore by the Republican candidate that he had no specific constructive programme on foreign affairs. It became clear that, of course, this had to be so, because to have had a program of definiteness would have spoiled the whole theory of keeping discordant elements together in the same bed.

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[St. Louis, Mo., Oct. 4, 1920]

[Extracts from Speech of
Hon. F. D. Roosevelt]

American voters hate a man who says one thing and does another, but they hate something worse than that - a man who says one thing one day and another thing the next. There is a powerful word that has not been used yet in this campaign - the word "trimmer"; Before Nov. 2 the voting public is going to know who that word fits and they will vote ~~for~~ ~~against~~ against all that it implies.

If we look back in our history we will see that all our great Presidents have been the opposites of Trimmers, they have stood for clear-cut ~~and~~ definite policies, they have been above partisanship, they have used language which could only be taken one way, they have carried through great measures for

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On the other hand the weakest of our presidents have lacked these essentials. They have played politics, they have considered party or victory above the nation's good, they have tried to run with the hare and the tortoise with the hound, ~~and~~ seeking to gain the support of opposite factions at the same time.

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