
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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Port Jervis, NY - Campaign Speech

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH OF HON. F. D. ROOSEVELT
PORT JERVIS, N. Y., OCT. 23, 1920

All during the campaign the Republican leaders have been guilty of a series of deliberate misrepresentations. Starting out serenely confident that this was a naturally Republican year and that the people wanted a change, they gradually waked up to the fact that the race was not such a one-sided affair as they had supposed. As the real issues of the campaign developed and the sentiment throughout the country for the League of Nations slowly crystallized, the confidence of these Republican leaders oozed out, and during the past two weeks fear and panic reigned in its place.

In a desperate effort to stave off the inevitable, these misrepresentations and unfair campaign tactics have been resorted to with even greater frequency. It is just one of these deliberate misrepresentations that I want to discuss with you this morning, for this particular one has been scotched. I refer to the deliberate attempt to deceive the people of America into believing that Governor Cox demanded the acceptance of the Covenant of the League of Nations as drafted at Versailles absolutely without change. Even such eminent Republican supporters as the Honorable Elihu Root stooped to this, in spite of the fact that Governor Cox and I repeatedly throughout the campaign have made it clear that we did not take this attitude.

Now another step has been taken in the campaign and another attempt of the Republicans to befuddle the issue cleared up. Thursday night in Baltimore Governor Cox outlined his position in English so plain that there can be no chance for misunderstanding it. It will be very embarrassing for Mr. Harding, Mr. Root, et al. to continue their attempts to deceive the people into believing that

Governor Cox is against any reservations to the Covenant.

Governor Cox states that - "It is this League with reservations or it is no League, and it is this League with reservations that I favor going into".

The issue is now more clearly defined than at any time during the campaign. It is either the League of Nations with reservations acceptable to the New Senate and the American people, or it is a flat rejection of the League. In the final analysis there can be no other construction placed upon the Election Nov. 2nd. Governor Cox's straightforward statement of his position leaves nothing that can becloud the clean-cut issue.

Those who have been favoring the League, but conscientiously believing that certain reservations were essential, now have no excuse left for not coming out, regardless of their party affiliations, in support of Governor Cox and the League of Nations, for he pledges himself to consult with the New Senate and the best minds of America and to secure a ratification of the Covenant with such reservations as after due deliberation are found necessary.

From personal observations I have found that there are thousands upon thousands of Independents and progressive Republicans who believe in the League of Nations, but who, made fearful by the campaign of poison propaganda of the past year, have not been willing to vote for it without some further assurance that the rights of America should be thoroughly safeguarded.

I am confident that this tremendous part of the electorate will swing into line and join the other thousands who have already

put aside temporarily their party affiliations in support of the great moral issue of the campaign. This tremendous swing to ~~the~~ Governor Cox which has been going on for the past two weeks will receive a fresh impetus from this clean-cut statement from him. That this swing has been in progress for sometime past, even the most skeptical now admit.

The signs multiply. I cannot take up a paper in big towns or little towns without finding more lists of people, Republicans, Progressives and Independents, who are switching from Harding to Cox. The new slogan, based on this tremendous overturn in sentiment, is going to be from now on - "Everybody is doing it".

The nation has caught on. Readers in every community joyously pick up the morning paper and improve their appetite for breakfast by reading of the latest "flip-flop" executed by the distinguished gentleman who is running for the Presidency on the Republican Ticket. Bets are being made as to whether each day will be a "now you see it" day, or a "now you don't" day.

~~The biggest issue remains~~ A new and very serious issue has been added to the campaign. The biggest issue remains, of course, the one of whether we shall join the forty-one nations in the League or remain outside in a position of isolation. What voters are beginning to realize is the tremendous danger of electing to the Presidency of the Nation a man who has conducted a campaign like that of Senator Harding.

A prominent Republican in Marion, Ind., said to me the other day: "I have become thoroughly convinced that a man who is weak and vacillating in one thing is apt to be weak and vacillating in everything. Senator Harding's 'facing both ways' policy on international affairs means that he would face both ways on domestic questions also. The big issues of reconstruction, or labor, of transportation, or marketing, of reclamation, all demand a clear eye and a firm hand in the coming years. We need a leader in the Presidency. I am wholly satisfied that Senator Harding has not the

clear eye & firm hand necessary to help the nation in solving these great problems. No man can be a successful President who tries to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare at the same time".

That thought must be in the minds of hundreds of thousands of voters. All except those who vote a party ticket blindly will be influenced by this new issue in the campaign. Most voters are really patriotic enough to put the good of their Country first, and it is because of this we are getting more strongly marked evidence every day of the definite turn of the tide in opposition to a man who would be a thoroughly weak chief executive for the nation.

Frankly, I wondered two weeks ago whether the voters of the Country would wake up in time to the true situation. I wondered if we had sufficient time left before Election Day to make the great issue of the League of Nations clear. But these two weeks have convinced me that during the early part of the campaign, when the voters were not talking very much, they were still doing a tremendous amount of quiet thinking. The concrete expression, the result of this thinking, is now coming to light. It is being demonstrated at every meeting and in every newspaper throughout the Land. If the Election were tomorrow, Senator Harding would be defeated, and yet the tide is by no means at its flood. The next week will see its culmination. I am more confident than at any other time in the campaign, not merely that Governor Cox will be elected, but that the voters will literally overwhelm the candidacy of Senator Harding, first of all on the great issue of

the League of Nations, the carrying out of the basic purpose of our participation in the war, and secondly as an expression of their determination to avoid placing in the White House a man of weakness and vacillation.

The responsibility now rests with the individual. Each voter in the United States must take his position squarely for or against the League. Each one of you, it seems to me, should feel the full import of the responsibility which rests on you. By your vote on November 2nd you will help to decide what the America of tomorrow will be. One course leads us toward a national isolation, the hermitlike existence that for countless years to come will keep us from the full development of friendly relations with other nations of the globe, that will include a handicap to our ever growing business and an impairment of our standing as one of the great nations of the world.

In direct contrast, the election of Governor Cox means the opening of a new and better era for America - it means an honorable peace in which our allies have a part, and not a separate peace, the stigma of which will cling to the fair name of our Country after your children and your grand children have passed beyond. It means that our beloved country will take her place again where she was on November 11, 1918, at the very forefront of all the great nations, the acknowledged leader of the World.

A year ago the people of this country were practically unanimous in favor of our going into the League. During that year a constant stream of poison propaganda has been poured into their ears by a partisan Press. We have been trying to correct some of

the erroneous ideas and the misconceptions of the League made by people who have been either misinformed or who are ill-informed.

I wonder, my friends, if you realize that this Fall you are actually writing history and that on your decision at the polls hinges the whole future of America. It is for you to decide whether your children and your children's children are to live their lives free from the titantic tragedy like that the world has just undergone.

It is up to you men and women alike individually to face the issue so clear-cut between the two parties: a vote for Cox is a vote for the League: a vote for Harding is a vote against it.