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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. 230**

**1920 October 27**

**Baltimore, MD - Campaign Speech**

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH OF HON. F. D. ROOSEVELT  
BALTIMORE, MD., OCT. 27, 1920

This morning we have read two remarkable documents - final pre-election statements by Senator Harding and Governor Coolidge. I have read them with care.

That of Senator Harding is a repetition of the high sounding words and phrases to which we have become so accustomed during his campaign. A fair and careful analysis of the speech resolves it into the following three elements.

First - A general attack on everything done in the past by any Democrat. Criticism unsupported by evidence.

Second - A glorification of the Republican Party based principally on the allegation - "The Republican Party fought the Civil War and afterward restored and unified the Nation". The only reference to modern times is an attempt to justify the present Republican Congress which, as all the world know, played politics for party advantage so hard that it failed to pass any reconstruction legislation excepting the so-called Railroad Law. I do not even except the Budget Bill because any sane President would have vetoed that bill as a usurpation of executive functions by the Legislative Branch of the Government.

Third - Senator Harding's statement in regard to foreign policy is best characterized by a repetition of it:

"The Republican Party purposes \* \* \* such an association of nations as will most effectively further the aspiration for worldwide and permanent peace without sacrificing any part of the independence of the American nation".

The only surprising thing is that nowhere in Senator Harding's speech has he said that he is opposed to murder and as a general thing in favor of law and order. It would be equally applicable as a campaign issue.

My chief hope is that every thinking American will read Senator Harding valedictory. If they are wholly inspired and satisfied by it and believe that the gentleman who wrote it would a strong and able President of the United States, they had better vote for him.

But it is in the other speech - that of Governor Coolidge, that there appears a definite line of demarcation between two broad policies of government. Governor Coolidge speaks much of the Constitution as the ark of our national faith. That is true, but he states that - "The issues\* \* \* have been condensed into one - that is the question whether our government shall or shall not be \* \* \* a government of laws and not of men".

I take positive and definite issue with Governor Coolidge on this statement. He believes in a government of laws, and not of men. I do not. A government of laws only has never succeeded, and can never succeed. The best illustration is the very Constitution, which Mr. Coolidge so often refers to. The Constitution in itself is incomplete and always has been. It depends for its success on the interpretation of that document and its application to existing circumstances by human beings. The Constitution changes year after year, not merely by amendments but chiefly by the construction given to it by the judges of our courts. In other words, the Constitution as the fundamental law of the land would be wholly ineffective were it not for the fact that it is administered to suit the needs of the time by men. Every legislator knows that in the drafting of a new law language must be used which will clearly state the general, broad intent, and that it is impossible by a mere fitting together of words and phrases to cover every possible contingency which may

arise under the law. After a law goes into effect it depends for its usefulness upon executive, administrative and legal authorities - in other words, again a case of men.

Mere laws bear to government as a whole about the same relation that rules do to the game of baseball. Players and an umpire are necessary in an actual baseball contest.

My conception of government must be very different from that of Governorat Coolidge for I think of government as a living thing and not just as a mass of written statutes. Government to be successful cannot become automatic - it must be human. A President or a Vice-President, when a problem of government arises, cannot succeed by merely touching a button and take a law book down from a shelf, to decide the new case merely by the written statute and precedent. If a dispute arises between the United States and say Iceland, the State Department cannot decide by a mere citation of the American Constitution.

Government is not a ~~phonograph~~ phonograph. A mere government by laws would make it possible to play the tune by bringing out the record and turning the handle. Unfortunately the complexity of human affairs and the differences in human nature are such that government must go hand in hand with men - must be administered by men, and must in the long run be successful or unsuccessful in accordance with the ability ~~of~~ and high purpose of the men connected with it.

Given a series of weak statutes and a wise and able administrator, ~~and~~ you will always get a better government than under the best laws in the world administered by a weak and incompetent official.

No person in America views our Constitution with more

eneration and devotion than I do, but I differ from Governor Coolidge in this. I believe that the President of the United States should be a strong, unselfish, fearless man, especially one who has already had training in an administrative position. In other words, he believes in a government of laws and not of men - I believe in a government of laws and of men - the two working together with the single-minded purpose of giving a clean, definite and efficient administration to the whole people of the country.

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