Franklin D. Roosevelt — "The Great Communicator"
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945
Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 245

1920 Not dated

Unidentified Campaign Speech
Speaking in Marion, Ohio, yesterday, Senator Harding declared - "The Constitution....

The edition
In elaborating
In this same letter...safeguarding reservation...
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jul 6, 1970</td>
<td>Marion, Ohio</td>
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<td>Jul 14,</td>
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<td>Jul 17,</td>
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<td>Sep 18,</td>
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I am somewhat curious, in view of the blindness of the professional partisan leaders of the Republican Party to the obvious sentiment in favor of the League of Nations, as to just what evidence would convince them that a desire for this League is unquestionably the sober sentiment of the great majority of our people. Inasmuch as they have attempted to prove that such is not the sentiment, from a round-robin statement of a minority of Senators, it would seem fair to assume that a mandate of Congress, passed by a practically unanimous vote by both houses, directing the President to do all in his power to create such a League, might answer even their fastidious requirements. Let us see, for a moment, how such legislation could be drawn up and make a guess at their attitude toward it. First, naturally, would come a preamble of the policy of the country. Let us start it out something like this:

"It is hereby declared that it is the policy of the United States to adjust and settle its international disputes through mediation or arbitration, to the end that war may be honorably avoided."

This should be followed by a direction to the President
to take the practical steps to carry out the policy.

We might well put it this way:

"In view of the premises, the President
is authorized and requested to invite, at an appropriate
time, not later than the close of the war in Europe, all
the great Governments of the world to send representatives
to a conference which shall be charged with the duty of
formulating a plan for a court of arbitration or other
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This would seem to cover the situation pretty thoroughly,
for, of course, if these questions are to be referred for
adjudication, power of some kind must be given to make the
deliberations of the World Council effective. To this
we might add further details as to the constitution of
the Tribunal, and by no means neglect the vital item of
appropriating sufficient money to carry out the proposed
plan.

What would you say, from reading the
superheated eloquence of the political leaders of the
opposition in regard to the Monroe Doctrine, our sacred
duty to remain incased in our own shell, after the fashion
of China, irrespective of the progress of the rest of the
world, and other much trumpeted objections, would be the votes of these gentlemen on such legislation? If they are sincere, if this is not a political attempt to discredit the President at any cost, if this is not an effort to create political advantage where none exists, would not these gentlemen not only vote but speak loudly and violently against such legislation? If, on the other hand, they voted for it unanimously, might we not fairly charge them with political duplicity?

Gentlemen, what I have read is not a fanciful sketch of a proposed piece of legislation. It is a law of the United States of America, now on our statute books, passed by these gentlemen in 1916. I give you the full text, which you may verify for yourselves by reading the Naval Appropriation Act, approved by the President of the United States on August 29th, 1916:

"It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States to adjust and settle its international disputes through mediation or arbitration, to the end that war may be honorably avoided. It looks with apprehension and disfavor upon a general increase of armament throughout the world, but it realizes that no single nation can disarm, and that without a common agreement upon the subject every considerable power must maintain a relative standing in military strength.

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hereby appropriated and set aside and placed at the
disposal of the President to carry into effect the
provisions of this paragraph.

"If at any time before the construction
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render unnecessary the maintenance of competitive arm-
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pended, when so ordered by the President of the United
States."

May I call your attention to the fact that
several of the most distinguished Republican leaders of the
Senate, including Senator Lodge, voted for this law, not only
once but twice; the first occasion being as members of the
Naval Committee and the second as Senators of the United
States. Is it not amazing that with such evidence of
their insincerity written on the statute books of the
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this step, which they, by their votes, directed be taken, is un-American, improper and against the sentiments of the country? Let us see the temper of the Republican minority towards this particular piece of legislation when it was up for passage — a year, you will remember, of sober, hard thinking on the part of our citizens, with no political, Presidential campaign in sight, and with an earnest desire to unitedly seek some way out of the troublesome days ahead. I find, from the records, that this bill was passed in the House by a vote of 360 in favor, with four opposing. In the Senate, by a vote of 71, with eight only in the negative. This would seem to be a fairly conclusive test of the sentiment of Congress. Nor can it be said that this bill was sneaked through as an amendment to the bill. Never did a bill receive more scrupulous attention, clause by clause, than this same Naval Bill of 1916. Many motions were made to strike out this or that, opposing one provision or another. Not one single word was spoken against this particular clause, nor was it overlooked. The records show speeches, some of them by Republicans, some by so-called Progressives, if they still count themselves as Republicans in view of the reactionary attitude of the Republican leaders during the last two months. It was eulogized, applauded, and
made, by this overwhelming vote, an integral part of our law. It cannot even be claimed that Congress was
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There is no one but what feels a certain admiration for an honest fighter, even if his cause be wrong, but for a man who fights foul, a man who is willing to barter his honest conviction for a mess of political pottage, do we not have an equal contempt? I am reminded of a picture which made a great impression on me in my youth. A frontier settler's hut, a band of wolves leaping hungrily against the cabin door; the mother and the children crouched in terror around the fireplace; the bar broken and the father's arm thrust through the staples all that stands between them and a horrible death. Now if my dear friend, Senator Lodge, had been in that cabin
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"No, no, you must not do this. You are a Democrat, and when word of this deed passes among the borders it will hurt us Republicans at the next election, because any credit which you may gain is a political loss to us."

Yet that is our situation. It is the situation of all civilization at this moment. Sweeping down from the Russian steppes, threatening to engulf fallen Germany, beating on our very doors, are the hungry wolves of Bolshevism. With all the Governments of Europe weakened by this terrible war, with starvation staring many nations in the face, they have appealed to America in their hour of need. As the head of our nation, I do not think it over fanciful to compare our President to the man whose arm is barring the door, and yet, for petty, personal, political ambition, there are men willing to swallow their words and their votes of yesterday in an effort to tear away this last barrier and to let the wolves of social ruin in. It is difficult to talk of such men with patience, to speak of them with the courtesy one naturally uses. I have no doubt as to what the people of this country will say about it all. I am glad and proud to be at this moment a member of the party which is
seeking to save, seeking to rebuild, and not of the party whose blind leaders are seeking only to tear down and destroy.
I am somewhat curious, in view of the blindness of the professional partisan leaders of the Republican Party to the obvious sentiment in favor of the League of Nations, as to just what evidence would convince them that a desire for this league is unquestionably the sober sentiment of the great majority of our people. Inasmuch as they have attempted to prove that such is not the sentiment, from a round-robin statement of a minority of Senators, it would seem fair to assume that a mandate of Congress, passed by a practically unanimous vote by both houses, directing the President to do all in his power to create such a league, might answer even their fastidious requirements. Let us see, for a moment, how such legislation could be drawn up and make a guess at their attitude toward it. First, naturally, would come a preamble of the policy of the country. Let us start it out something like this:

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"If at any time before the construction authorized by this Act shall have been contracted for there shall have been established, with the cooperation of the United States of America, an international tribunal or tribunals competent to secure peaceful determinations of all international disputes, and which shall render unnecessary the maintenance of competitive armaments, then and in that case such naval expenditures as may be inconsistent with the engagements made in the establishment of such tribunal or tribunals may be suspended, when so ordered by the President of the United States."

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