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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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**Berkshire Bankers' Association Speech**

In the confusion of thought and readjustment of values which have come in the post-war period, one of the great facts most significant to our national future has been almost wholly overlooked. That is the announcement by the census of 1920 that for the first time in our history more than 50% of our population is now living in cities, and less than half dwell in small villages or on the farms. At the time of the Revolution less than 10% of the nation's people were gathered in urban communities, but since that day every decade has shown an increase in the proportionate ratio of the cities' growth. Today we must ask ourselves "Where will it stop?" and ~~the~~ more important, "How shall we proceed to stop it?"

For the growth of cities, while the country population stands still, will eventually bring disaster to the United States as it has to the life of nations in days gone by. Industrial manufactures are good. They should be encouraged to the point of rounding out the production of this great expanse of territory and population so that we may utilize to the full the wonderful gifts that the God of Nature has given us. Yet the nice balance must be maintained. A hundred million people living in factory towns and with no human beings on the farms is a reductio ad absurdum which we can understand. Yet we have passed the half way mark and are still headed towards that abyss. It is time to stop.

What has been the history of even the past twenty years in the agricultural communities? Here in the East, stagnation, yes, even worse, depopulation. Take any train trip, any motor ride through the Atlantic States. You will see practically no new farm houses, no new clearing of land - on the contrary you will see haphazard tree growth on soil which was formerly tilled or pastured.

I have talked with many foreigners, French, Italian, Belgian, British, Poles, Czechs, Serbs, who have visited us in the past few years, and one and all have commented on the waste of our land. When I tell them that our farms in the East average in size nearly two hundred acres to the family, they tell me that in Europe

twenty or thirty acres are enough. When I tell them that the young people drift away into the cities they answer that there must be something fundamentally wrong.

So there is, and it is that wrong condition that demands the best thought and the concentrated action of the leaders of every community. It is not confined, either, to the abandoned farms of the East. In the Middle West the farming population has for long been at a practical standstill, and since the filling up of the Dakotas and the Pacific Coast the greater part of new farms bought in during the past ten years has been the result of enormous irrigation projects like the Imperial Valley and the Roosevelt Dam. Practically speaking, all the ready made virgin available land in the whole of the United States has been taken up. But though taken up, the vast majority of its acres are not being profitably or economically used.

The Department of Agriculture says that existing farms ~~xxx~~ would support in a few years twice their present population and produce three times their present yield.

From the economic value to the nation then, this offers a tempting goal. In past years the great bulk of our favorable export trade balance has been caused by our surplus crops of grain and cattle and cotton. Yet even before the war conditions in 1914 we were annually consuming a larger share of our own farm produce, and the surplus for export was growing less. In other words the increase of the cities at the expense of the farms was already an economic danger. Today things are worse. Factories begin to feel the competition of Europe and Japan. More people are herded together in the cities, and the farms produce no more than formerly.

This may seem a gloomy picture yet I do not believe that the nation can afford to pass it lightly by, especially must the bankers, those in the community who hold the purse strings for new ventures, approach this subject in a new way. Do you realize that if half the capital which is this year being put into new commercial or manufacturing projects were put into the development

of agriculture, we would be a long way on the road to success?

Let us have done for a while with booms to "Boost Pittsfield" or "Boost Poughkeepsie". Let us have done with Chamber of Commerce campaigns to attract new factories. Let us rather start campaigns to make the existing Pittsfield and Poughkeepsie not larger, but better to live in. That means that you and I must begin outside our cities in the country districts of which they are the centres. Survey our land. If there are idle farms find families to put on them. Help your unemployment problem. Start them by lending your money. If the life on the farm is unattractive head the movement for better country roads, for nearer amusements, for better schools. If the farmer finds it difficult to market his produce, if the city dwellers have to pay two or three middlemen's commissions, get behind an improved system of marketing. If the old Yankee blood will not respond, go to the great centres, go to New York and Boston, seek out Italians and Slovaks and Poles - but if you love your country find the ways to use your land.

It is communities like these in the Berkshires, and like ~~x~~ my own in the Hudson Valley which must put their shoulders to this wheel. Legislation will not do it. Paternalism by Washington or Boston or Albany will give no panacea. We have more than enough laws - what we need is action - action by the people themselves. For many years we have heard about the "Back to the Land" movement. Talk will not provide it.

Once, many years ago, this country side of ours was covered with great forests. Round about us today the virgin timber has gone. A neglected second growth straggles on the land which is not cleared. It is not profitable as it is today. Yet the supply of timber for the United States will come to ~~xxxxx~~ and end before our coal is exhausted.

We know that every foot of land will grow something, and something that with human care can be put to profitable human use. If it be not grainland or pasture it will grow trees.

For generations we have taken from nature without paying back. Her supply is not exhausted, but year by year it becomes less sufficient. I believe in killing two birds with one stone. We can help Nature to give us more and at the same time we can lessen the dangers to our civilization which have come with the growth of the cities. Would you, as a matter of preference, choose to have your boy grow up in a tenement on the East Side in New York? Yet your neighbor's son is doing that very thing. He will be a fellow American with your boy.

Let us think of tomorrow and of what we today can do to prevent that tomorrow from suffering distress and ills. In our own communities we must find the place and the way to start. I have confidence that we shall do that thing.