
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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1928 January 17

"Important Presidential Elections..."

SPECH
BY
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
FOR TUESDAY EVENING, JANUARY 17, 1928

IMPORTANT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THEIR RELATION TO 1928

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Therefore, you are at perfect liberty to bear in mind the fact that try as we like, Mr. Hilles speaks more or less as a Republican and I speak more or less as a Democrat. There is one remark often heard, I am sorry to say, from well informed people which always makes my blood boil - that is the suggestion that "after all there is very little difference between the Republican party and the Democratic party."

Even though President Washington was elected without opposition and the administration was non-partisan, yet the Congress of the United States in his day divided almost immediately into what became the beginnings of the Republican and Democratic parties. The elections of 1796 and 1800 clearly marked out a fundamental difference which has lasted ever since. That was when Hamilton and Jefferson were the principal exponents of two methods of Government under the same constitution.

We are apt to forget that in those days, a century and a quarter ago, there was far more class distinction in America than there is today. In many places voting was limited to the owners of real property. Education was by no means universal and the control of property and trade was in the hands of a small percentage of the population. Hamilton frankly took the stand that the control of the

Government should properly rest with the merchants, lawyers and land owners, and that stability and permanency were dependent on these classes. He had, of course, a holy horror of everything that had happened in France during the French Revolution.

Jefferson on the other hand lived in what was then a pioneer part of Virginia and had tremendous sympathy with the men and women of no wealth and little property, who were carving out homes for themselves and building up the America of the future. He stood for universal education, for universal interest in Government affairs and for an extension of the franchise to include rich and poor alike. He had a real fear, possibly somewhat justified, that Hamilton's leanings would bring this country either to a despotism or under the rule of an aristocracy; and while he abhorred the deeds of violence of the French Revolution, he felt great sympathy with the overthrowing of the French Monarch and the efforts being made to establish a Democratic form of Government.

Jefferson lost out in the election of 1796 to John Adams but four years later was elected, and he and his friends controlled the Federal Government for twenty-four years.

As is usual when any one group of leaders remains too long in power, the successors of Jefferson came to be regarded as having too much control, and in 1824, although John Quincy Adams was elected as a Democrat, he represented more nearly the beliefs of the old Federal party of Hamilton. The result was a reorganization of the Democratic party under Andrew Jackson, a tremendous personality, who spent eight stormy years in office, fighting, as he thought, for the interests of the plain and average citizen against the banking and mercantile element of the eastern seaboard. That election of 1828 brought out once more many of the original differences between the two schools of thought called "political parties." The following period, from 1828 down to the Civil War was marked by the development of the political

campaign into an organized effort by party leaders and during this period, election orators, marching processions, red fire and symbols such as the cider barrel and the tomahawk reached their zenith. The campaign most famous for oratory and partisan heat was the one in which General Taylor was elected. This was a victory for the Whigs and a defeat for the Democrats of the day. The former followers of "Old Hickory", as Andrew Jackson was called, were defeated by the slogan of "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too."

During this time also the slavery question and with it the questions involving state rights were brought to the front.

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In 1860 the lines had been sharply drawn on the slavery question and on this question the Democratic party split hopelessly. Three Democratic tickets were put in the field with the natural result that Lincoln, running on the Republican ticket, was elected. It must be borne in mind, however, that the issue which precipitated the Civil War was a sectional issue rather than one arising from the fundamentals of party differences. Thousands of Democrats in the north and west voted either for Lincoln or for one of the Democratic candidates opposed to the possibility of secession. In the same way thousands of old line Whigs or Republicans south of Mason and Dixon's line voted for southern candidates willing to carry the slavery issue as far as seceding from the Union. This sectional difference rather than party difference lasted, roughly speaking, down to 1876. By that time the war issues were being superseded by economic issues - in other words, the parties were returning to some of the basic questions on which they have always differed. The election of 1876 gave to Tilden, the Democratic

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by nominating the Palmer - Buckner ticket, and President McKinley was elected that year and reelected in 1900. The Republican party remained in power until the famous year of 1912, when the tables were reversed and a split occurred in the Republican party. The more conservative therein united in the renomination of President Taft while the Progressives joined in the nomination of Theodore Roosevelt.

As had been the case in other years, where splits occurred, the United Party won by a large plurality in the electoral college and Woodrow Wilson became President for two terms.

The campaigns of 1920 and of 1924 are too fresh in everybody's mind to need further mention. I would like to make only two points that apply to Presidential elections. The first is that in many campaigns one party or another has either split or has got away in the issues from the fundamentals that separate the two parties.

Fortunately the example of many countries in Europe, where there are a half dozen or a dozen different parties, is not followed here. In Europe for instance, a new party is often organized on the spur of the moment if some individuals within the old party disagree with that old party on even one out of many of its principles.

In the United States western Republicans may differ with eastern Republicans on several important questions of the day, just as southern Democrats may often differ with northern Democrats on the solution of pending measures of legislation.

The point I would make is that there still exists in the United States a basic difference between Republicans and Democrats - a difference which will undoubtedly come out in the campaign of 1928. It is the same difference in point of view which separated Hamilton from Jefferson.

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Let me put it this way, in the year 1800 the followers of Alexander Hamilton and federalism honestly believed that the country would be better served by keeping the control of the Federal Government in the hands of a carefully selected few - representatives of wealth, of business and of birth. The Democratic followers of Jefferson believed rather in the rule of the average citizen - making the Federal Government serve as a cross section of the whole population, and not a mere part.

Many people today believe that there is the same difference of purpose between the present leaders of the two great parties. It is after all in the last analysis a question of how you approach any given subject. The last few years have, I think, demonstrated that Republican leadership tends to an approach of any given subject from the point of view of how the solution of the subject will affect the economic structure of the country, (and especially the financial success of those in the party council who are most responsible for party success.) There is a greater tendency in the ranks of the Democratic leaders to approach a given problem rather from the point of view of how its solution will effect the lives of the great mass of the population.

It would not be a fair statement to say that the Republican party has during these past few campaigns thought only in terms of property, while the Democrats have thought only in terms of humanity. It is fairer to say that the Republican leaders have given more thought and emphasis to property values than they have to the social good of the country, and that the Democrats have emphasized and are emphasizing the good of the average citizen, while, at the same time, they do not seek any course which will injure a normal measure of prosperity.

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great Presidential elections of a generation or more ago. Red fire and soap box oratory are things of the past. First came the advent of the daily newspaper into almost every home throughout the land, followed by the present method of campaigning through the air. In 1920, when I was running for Vice-President on the Democratic ticket, I toured the United States almost continuously for three months. I made an average of ten speeches a day, nearly a thousand in all. Assuming that I spoke on the average to five hundred people, this meant that I had faced only a total of half a million Americans. Many of these were not voters. Most of them probably were Democrats any way. So that at a most optimistic estimate, I could not have changed by my own personal efforts more than 50,000 to 100,000 votes - a mere drop in the bucket out of a total of more than twenty million.

Newspapers, movies and the radio bring Presidential elections to every home and this growing familiarity with the subject ought to result in a larger interest and a greater popular vote.

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