
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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1928 October 20

Buffalo, NY - Campaign Speech

electorate to BROADWAY AUDITORIUM - BUFFALO are the
chance for the Saturday Evening (Applause.)

October 20, 1928.

...d, but I am very
glad that it so came about, that I seemed to be on the
trail of Mr. Ottinger in this State. (Laughter and

I am very grateful to the City of Buffalo for
this very splendid meeting. But I know, and I know
that you will know with me, in the thought that this
great gathering tonight has come here not merely to pay
tribute to the Democracy of the State of New York, but
that it understands that we have with us, perhaps not in
body, but at least in spirit, the great leader of the
democracy of the nation, our next President, Alfred E.
Smith. (Applause) the history of this State. Somewhere

And as I have gone about this State during
these past few days I have found the same spirit of mili-
tant democracy. In hard-shelled Republican counties of
the Southern Tier we have had great meetings. We have
had increased registration. We have had interest on
the part of men and equally on the part of women in the
great issues of this campaign, and from a somewhat long
experience I am certain that the more interest the

electorate takes in any campaign the better are the chances for the Democratic Ticket. (Applause.)

It was not deliberately planned, but I am very glad that it so came about, that I seemed to be on the trail of Mr. Ottinger in this State. (Laughter and Applause.) I had planned to talk about a lot of things, national issues and various others tonight, but when I read that in Buffalo my old and good friend Mr. Ottinger had had the nerve to talk about what the Republican Party has done for labor, I decided that that was my chance. (Laughter and Applause.)

And so tonight I am going to tell you all about it, tell you the facts, go back in my own mind and in your mind into the history of this State. Somewhere in a pigeon hole in a desk of the Republican leaders of New York State is a large envelope, soiled, worn, bearing a date that goes back twenty-five or thirty years; printed in large letters on this old envelope are the words, "Promises to labor" (Laughter.) Inside the envelope are a series of sheets dated two years apart and representing the best thought of the best minds of the strengthened Republican leaders over a succession of years. Each sheet

the effective strength of the Labor Department.

of promises is practically the duplicate of every other sheet in the envelope. (Laughter.) But nowhere in that envelope is a single page bearing the title "Promises kept." (Applause.)

I ought to know something about it, from personal experience, because I had the good fortune to be a member of the State Senate in that famous year of 1911, when the Democratic Party aided by an almost solid delegation in the Senate and Assembly from the City of Buffalo, came into control of the State Government for the first time in a generation and started on its way a program, not of promises, but of accomplishments. (Applause.)

Now, the set-up in 1911 was exactly the same as it is in 1928. The Democratic Administration, the Democratic leaders in the Legislature began at that time a series of practical measures in the interest of the men and women of this state who work with their hands. That session of the Legislature was the God-father of the Workmen's Compensation Law, of the first law limiting the hours for women in industry, of the factory investigating committee, and of a series of important measures strengthening the provisions of existing labor laws and building up the effective strength of the Labor Department.

conservative. It is worth while to go as far back as 1911, because we get at that time a definite picture of the attitude of the leaders of the two parties, an attitude that has continued down to the present day. I remember well that the attitude of the Democratic Party at that time was severely criticized, criticized by the reactionary element in this State. We were called socialistic and radical, and if the term "Bolshevist" or "Red" had then been in existence, it would undoubtedly have been applied to Assemblyman Alfred E. Smith (Applause) and Senator Robert F. Wagner (applause), and many others, including myself, because of our ardent support of the whole program. (Applause.)

Arrayed against us on the other side was the silent, powerful pressure of the old school of thought, which held the theory that when an employer hired a working man or a working woman, that employer became the master of the fate of his employee; that when a worker entered the factory door it was nobody's business as to how he worked, how long he worked, or how much he was paid.

It is very difficult, seventeen years later, for this generation to understand the attitude of the old.

conservative element towards employment, back in 1911. But it is a fact that this attitude was subscribed to, sometimes silently sometimes openly, but always definitely, by the Republican leaders of this State at that time. During the years 1911 to 1915, the splendid record of definite accomplishment made by the Democratic Party of this State was fought and blocked and criticized at every turn by the Republican legislative leaders, and I am simply telling you bald facts. The best example of the difference in attitude between the two parties is the fact that during the four years of Governor Whitman constructive labor legislation in the State of New York came to an end. The progress was not resumed until Governor Smith went back to Albany as the Chief Executive in 1919. (Applause.)

Now, in the present year of 1928 it would have been perfectly possible to forecast, away back last spring, the exact words, with an absolute certainty of what the Republican leaders and the Republican candidates would say during this autumn campaign. First of all they trot out the old worn envelope, dust it off, and copy into their platform the same old

words that have been used every two years for a generation back. (Applause.) Let me read you the labor plank of the Republican platform. It is grand. (Laughter.)

"The Republican Party in this State has done more for labor than any other party. The Labor Law and the Workmen's Compensation Law, conceded by labor to be the best in all the states, almost every line has been written in this law by and with the approval of our party." (Applause.)

Now, how dare they say that? How do grown up and ostensibly sane political leaders perjure themselves that way, for a statement of that kind is so openly and flagrantly dishonorable that it comes pretty close to the border line of perjury. These same leaders know perfectly well that the Republican Party has constantly fought against almost every progressive measure in the interest of labor, that the State of New York has added to its Statute Books during the past seventeen years. Is it not dishonorable to talk about the writing of laws by or with the approval of the Republican leaders, when every man or woman who reads the newspapers knows that our present laws were either written by a Democratic

Legislature or were forced through a Republican Legislature because the Democratic Governor of this State has been able on occasion after occasion to appeal so strongly to public opinion that it became too dangerous for those Republican leaders to block the wheels of progress any longer. (Applause.)

The best proof is to go and get the opinion of any man or woman in this State who has been working in the interest of social betterment and the improvement of conditions of employment during all these years. You will find a definite substantiation of everything I am stating in regard to the relative attitude of the Republican and the Democratic leaders.

Let us take a practical example of the principle of limiting the hours of work for women and children in industry. Back in that session in 1911 the Democratic leaders brought forward what was then regarded as a radical socialistic proposal limiting the hours of women and children to fifty-four hours a week, and that is only seventeen years ago. The record shows that opposition came from the Republican leaders, many of them the same individual men that we have got today. But after a

long fight that proposal became law. its of the demand for
 When Alfred E. Smith went back to Albany as the
 Governor in 1919, by that time progressive thought had
 advanced to the point of demanding a further limitation
 for women and children to a maximum of forty-eight hours
 a week. During six years that demand for action in-
 creased and at last, although the Democratic platform
 had been for it year after year, at last in 1924, four
 years ago, the Republican State platform for the first
 time came out definitely in favor of the forty-eight hour
 week. It is almost needless to say that the Democratic
 platform had it in that year again as it had before.

It seemed, therefore, that the fight had been
 won. Both parties were for it. It seemed that the work-
 ers were definitely assured by both parties of the passage
 of the proposed law; definite assurance was given to the
 voters of this state by Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., who,
 as I remember it, was a candidate for Governor (Laughter),
 and by the Republican leaders, that they would carry out
 that pledge. law. (Laughter.) Because that was obvious-

Well, what happened? The Republican Legislature,
 wholly in their control, in the spring of 1925 failed
 the simple statement to the people of this State that it

utterly to carry out this plan in spite of the demand for it by every Democratic member, and by the Governor of the State. As a deliberate subterfuge the Republican Legislature passed the so-called Joyner Bill, which was unanimously denounced by labor and was criticized by the Governor Smith as a fraud upon the people of the State -- another promise gone bad. (Applause.)

Well, that brings us nearer home. In order to create further delay the Republican leaders in the spring of 1926 appointed a so-called industrial survey commissioner and hoped that they would by that action take the minds of the voters off the broken promises of 1924, and in the 1926 platform they merely referred in glowing terms to what this condition was going to do. The Democrats on the other hand, again stood squarely by the pledge for the forty-eight hour week.

In 1927 this Republican Commission made a report recommending a half-way measure, and the Legislature enacted not a forty-eight hour law but a forty-nine and one-half hour law. (Laughter.) Because that was obviously the best that it could get from a reactionary and hostile Legislature, the Governor signed this law with the simple statement to the people of this State that it

did not carry out the pledges hitherto made by the Republican Party. He signed it on the theory that sometimes it is better to have half a loaf than none at all. (Applause.)

Well, that brings us down to date. What is the situation this year? That same old Republican Commission, the smoke screen commission, is still in existence, and the Republican platform this year pledges -- I will read the wording -- "pledges our party to give full consideration to the recommendations of this commission."

Well, what do we Democrats say? Compare the two. Compare the thought behind the two. We say, "We pledge ourselves to complete Governor Smith's labor and welfare program, including an eight-hour day and forty-eight hour week for women and children in industry." (Applause.)

That pledge is definite, and the record of the Democratic Party is also definite. We are in the habit, as is shown by the record, of carrying out our pledges. The Republican leaders of this State have not yet formed that habit.

That is a pretty good illustration; and I have today as radical, as socialistic, or as my conservative

gone into it a good deal, in detail; an illustration of the history of all legislation affecting the working men and the working women, that has been going on for the past twenty years. For the State of New York to give definite

I want to go on with the consideration of what the two parties are offering to the electorate this year. Other than the quotations which I have made from the platform of the Republican Party, that party offers nothing further for social and labor legislation. The Democratic party in its platform goes on as follows, and it is worth while for me to give the principle points, because there are mighty few people, probably not more than one man or woman in a thousand, whoever bothers to read through the whole length of any party platform. I myself had to do it this year because I am a candidate. The Democratic Party goes on very simply and pledges, first, a law prohibiting the granting of temporary injunctions without notice of hearing (applause), and trial before a jury for any alleged violation of injunctions. Declaration by law

Secondly, we pledge a consideration of the subject of old-age pensions (applause), and I might add now right here that this is a subject that may be regarded today as radical, as socialistic, or as my conservative

friends would say, "Red", just exactly as Workmen's Compensation and factory inspection were regarded as radical twenty years ago. But I believe that the time is definitely at hand for the State of New York to give definite study to the great humanitarian question of preventing destitution among the thousands of our citizens who become too old to maintain for themselves the adequate standards of life to which as Americans they are entitled. (Applause.) We pledge further the establishment of an advisory minimum wage board on behalf of women and children. Fourth, we pledge the extension of the Workmen's Compensation Act to give the greatest protection to injured workers and the dependents of workers killed in industry and to extend the law to cover all occupational diseases. (Applause.)

We pledge, fifth, the further liberalization of the laws relating to the welfare of mothers and children. (Applause.)

And, finally, we pledge a declaration by law that the labor of human beings is not a commodity. And that this I received tonight the last bulletin of the New York State Federation of Labor. I want to read two or three short sentences; "The State Federation of Labor says:

"An analysis of the Democratic and Republican State platforms as they relate to labor shows positively that the Democratic platform is by far the most favorable to the wage earner. The Democratic platform plainly pledges to support legislation to require hearings in court before an injunction can be issued against wage earners; to provide for jury trial of persons accused of violating such injunctions, the paramount legislative reform asked for by organized labor. The Republican platform ignores organized labor's request." (Applause.) And then, in a very naive or a very sarcastic way, they go on and say: "The Republican platform is very indefinite on improvements in the labor laws and ignores all of organized labor's proposals stated above, which were presented to the Republican Convention by the committees representing organized labor of the State of New York."

I ask tonight the simple question of the people of this State; are they in favor of continuation of progress in our laws relating to labor and social welfare; and, further, I ask whether on the record they think that this end can be best obtained by reliance on a Republican Governor and a Republican Legislature, or by

reliance on a Democratic Governor and a Democratic Wagner
Legislature. (Applause.) nepotism and conspiracy laws so

And now I have got to say something about my-
self. (Applause.) The Committee told me I had to. (Laughter.) In regard to the candidates for Governor,
I am more than willing to have a comparison made between
the records of my friend, Mr. Ottinger, and myself. Both
of us have served in the legislature. I am proud and
always will be to have been the sponsor of the "One day
of rest in seven law" (Applause), and I am proud to have
worked to secure, with its introducer, my old friend
Senator Sammy Ramsperger of Buffalo, the passage of the
law that my friend over there in the corner has referred
to, the Full Crew Law (applause). And I am proud, too,
to have taken an active part in that great program ini-
tiated and put through by the Democratic Party when I was
a member of the State Senate. over of more than 20,000

It was later, after I had left there to go down
to Washington, that my friend Mr. Ottinger became a
member of the State Senate. But ^{it} is a matter of record
that in 1917 he voted in favor of the Senate Bill sus-
pending the operation of the Full Crew Law. It is a

matter of record that in 1918 he voted against the Wagner Bill amending the anti-monopoly and conspiracy laws so as to provide that they should not apply to labor unions; and it is a matter of record that in 1918 he voted against the Wagner Bill to create State Regional Boards to inquire into wages paid to women and minors in industry, and to recommend minimum standard wages for those employees in employments where wages were below a living standard. That bill was defeated in the Senate in Albany by the lack of one vote. Senator Ottinger's vote would have passed it.

I want to add only one fact about myself, and this is on orders, too. For seven and a half years after I left Albany, when I was Assistant Secretary of the Navy, I had full charge of all matters relating to the subject of labor in the Navy Yards of the United States. The Navy was the direct employer of more than 20,000 civilians during the peace period and of more than 100,000 civilians during the war period. Up to 1913, under the Taft administration, relations between the Government and its civilian employees had been precarious and filled with constant disputes. I shall always be

glad of the fact that from 1913 down to the time I left the Navy Department in 1920, the United States Navy never had a single strike or a single serious dispute with the civilians in the Navy Yard, and the whole system of Navy Yard civilian employment was brought up to a far higher standard than ever before. (Applause.)

In the final analysis the voters of this State who are interested in the progress of social and of labor legislation and the improvement of conditions from year to year must go back to the question of responsibility. On the one side they have the dirty envelope of the Republican Party trotted out every two years; but their leaders only place in it another sheet of glittering generalities and of claims for things that the Republican Party did not do. It is the same old story, a record of broken promises, a record of stalling off action, a record of frank hypocrisy by people who have no honest and personal interest in the subject at all. (Applause.)

On the other side you have a perfectly definite record of things done, the record of a program offered by the Democratic Party and honestly and faithfully adhered to through a long series of years. When the Democratic

Party has had control only of the executive branch of the government the progress has been less rapid. But what has been accomplished has been due to the great personal sincerity and ability of Governor Alfred E. Smith. (Applause.)

Most Governors would have been unable even to get the small crumbs of comfort which recent Republican legislatures have given. But Governor Smith has been able at least to consolidate public interest behind his position and the position of his party.

If I am elected Governor, it will of course be difficult to carry out the present splendid program of the Democratic party, unless at the same time our party is in control of the legislature of the State of New York. (Applause.) At least, you can feel very certain that I will use every effort to obtain legislation from a hostile legislature. How much better it would be if the people of this State could, at the same time they elect a Democratic Governor, give me the much needed assistance of a Democratic Senate and Assembly as well. (Applause.) That is a practical matter. That ought, by this time, to be understood by every voter. We can, at

least, be sure of the definite fact that the Republican party has a record of promising glittering generalities with its tongue in its cheek, and of forgetting about them the morning after election, and the Democratic party has an opposite record of making its promises honestly and of carrying them out whenever they are given the opportunity so to do.

There are just one or two other little points that I would like to speak about very briefly. My friend, Mr. Ottinger, has been talking about the Department of Labor. I want to give a very brief history of that. The last Republican Governor in this State deliberately, with his legislature, reduced the appropriation for the Department of Labor to such an extent that this great department was entirely demoralized and practically unable to function.

When Governor Miller went out of office on January 1, 1923, thousands of compensation cases had accumulated, and thousands of claimants were in desperate straits due to long delays. When Commissioner Shientag succeeded the Republican Commissioner in 1923, he found 3245 compensation claims undisposed of in the Buffalo

office alone. Injured workmen in this city had waited six months after injury in order to obtain a hearing, even on cases that were uncontested.

Within a month after taking office, Governor Smith in the winter of 1923 sent a special message to the legislature and procured an emergency appropriation of \$150,000 to appoint additional referees and examiners to clean up these thousands of neglected cases.

And it might be just as well to direct attention to the fact that Mr. Ottinger as Attorney General has absolutely nothing to do with the functions of the Labor Department. By virtue of his office his deputies are obliged to appear as counsel for the Labor Department in the prosecution of the Labor Law, of Labor Law violations; but those violations, together with all the evidence, are assembled solely under the supervision of the Industrial Commissioner. So also in compensation cases, the Attorney General has no other function than to act as counsel for the Industrial Board in the preparation of findings and in the argument of cases before the Appellate Division.

My friend Mr. Ottinger in his speech in Buffalo

refers to certain liberalizing amendments of the Compensation Law which "we" -- that was the word he used -- "we recommended." Evidently he meant by that to include Mr. Ottinger and the Republican Legislature; but perhaps I am mistaken, because with the exception of a very unimportant one, none of these amendments were passed by his own Republican Legislature. So perhaps when he uses the word "we" he is talking about himself and Smith (laughter and applause), and if he meant that, he is right -- 99 per cent. Smith and one per cent. Ottinger. (Laughter and Applause.)

As a matter of fact, of course you all know that the Compensation Act was passed by a Democratic Legislature, signed by a Democratic Governor, and it is a further fact that practically every important liberalizing amendment or an addition to that Compensation Act was recommended and forced through a reluctant Republican Legislature by Governor Smith himself. (Applause.)

And then there is just one other matter. I understand that when my friend was in Buffalo he talked about -- I am not sure if he was here or not -- he may have kept off the subject here -- of how much Mr. Hoover

had done to help the Poles. I am not quite certain, because I have been reading different kinds of newspapers, as to whether he did talk about Mr. Hoover in Buffalo or whether he did not talk about Mr. Hoover in Buffalo. (Laughter and Applause.)

But anyway, on one part of his trip Mr. Ottinger did a great deal of talking, hoping to secure the votes of Polish-American citizens, about what Mr. Hoover had done to help feed the Poles in the emergency at the end of the war. I want to tell you a little story that I don't think has ever been told before in regard to Poland. I don't think anybody was ever told this before - I know I have never told it publicly - and I don't think the other gentleman concerned did, either.

Back there in the Navy Department, I think in the closing months of 1917 or the very beginning of 1918, my messenger in the Navy Department came in and said, "Mr. Roosevelt, there is a foreign gentleman outside, a gentleman with quite long hair, and I could not understand his name, and his hair was beautiful, like golden color." And I said, "Why, that must be M. Paderewski. (Applause.) He came in -- I had known him for many years --

and as you know, during all those years of the war, then Paderewski had been devoting his time and his fortune to the cause of Poland. He came in and said, "Mr. Roosevelt, I have an unusual request to make of the United States Navy." He said, "You know, when the Kerensky Government fell in Russia and the Bolshevik Government came into power, there were in Russia a great number of Polish troops, some of them troops who had been levied to serve in the armies of Russia; others, Polish troops who had been levied to serve in the armies of Austria and had been captured by the Russian Army, and there were twenty thousand of them, and when the Bolshevik Regime came in, these twenty thousand or more -- and at that time there must have been nearer thirty thousand -- unable to return to their fatherland, were driven slowly eastward into Siberia, retreating before the onward march of the Bolshevik Army."

These Polish soldiers, under terrific hardships, half-naked, half-fed, had retreated all the way across Siberia, and at last had come out upon the Pacific Ocean, and, said Mr. Paderewski, "There they are. There they are in the port of Vladivostok, and unless help comes

soon, the Bolshevik Army will capture them or drive them into the sea. But what they need most is clothing and food. Can the American Navy help them?"

I said, "Under the law there is no provision. Poland is not a nation today," not yet, for the war was still on. "But I will do what I can, and it may be possible to do it by an executive order of the President of the United States," and I knew that over there in San Francisco I had an Army transport filled with clothing and shoes and food and hospital supplies, and I called up the people in the Navy Department and the Marine Corps, and I said, "Could I borrow that shipload on the chance that you will never see it again?" And I told them what it was for. And they said, "Yes, go ahead, we can get other supplies." And I went across to the White House and I laid the matter before President Wilson, the President of the United States. (Applause.)

I didn't have to go through the whole story. He sensed it. He knew what was wanted. He gave me an executive order, and within twenty-four hours that ship sailed out of San Francisco Harbor, went to Vladivostok, and with other ships that were rushed up there, took the

Polish Army on board, took them down to civilization for a while, and in the end every man of them was restored to his home in Poland. (Applause.)

And they talk about Mr. Hoover feeding Poland. How did he do it? Let me give you the facts that made the actual feeding possible. Back there on the 7th of January, 1919, it was a Democratic Congressman, Scherer of Kentucky, who introduced the bill providing for the relief of the starving population of Poland. When that bill came to a vote it was a bill authorizing the President to use American funds for this great humanitarian purpose, and when that bill came to a vote, here is how they voted in Congress.

In the lower House, for the relief bill, 154 Democrats, 9 Democrats against it; for the relief bill, 87 Republicans, 64 against it. (Applause.) And when it got over to the Senate, here is how they voted for the relief bill: 34 Democrats, and 3 against it. For the relief bill, 19 Republicans, and against it, 15 Republicans.

And when that bill was up there in Congress the President of the United States had gone abroad, but he

kept in touch with things back home, and here is what he cabled, cabled it to the Congress of the United States:

"I cannot too earnestly or solemnly urge upon the Congress the appropriation of food to the solution of peace. Bolshevism is steadily advancing westward. It cannot be stopped by force, but it can be stopped by food (Applause), and all agree that concerted action in this matter is of immediate and vital importance. The money will be spent for financing the movement of food to our real friends in Poland, and to the people of the liberated units of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and to our associates in the Balkans. (Applause.) I beg that you will present this matter with all possible urgency and force to the Congress. I do not see how we can find definite powers with whom to conclude peace unless this means of stemming the tide of anarchism be employed."

That, my friends, is another little statement of fact, and it is just as well to have a few more facts in this campaign. The Governor of this state has educated the people of this State to ask for facts, and one reason why he has always been re-elected by such enormous majorities, is because he told the plain, unvarnished truth,

to a people who wanted truth, and today as he goes around these United States, he is educating the people of the United States along exactly the same lines. Compare his speeches, a fact in every sentence, with the generalities of his opponent (Applause). Compare his speeches made right out in public, with a handful of notes on paper, largely unprepared, talking what he has got in his heart on the spur of the moment with the people that he comes in contact with. Compare that with the method of the other gentleman who is writing out today a speech to be delivered ten days from now, in order that what? That it may be edited, come back and be revised, sent over there to be edited and come back and be revised, be submitted to the best minds, and finally, after everybody has had a crack at it and they have taken out all the juice and the meat from the speech, then he will read it to his audience. (Applause.)

Now, one final word, the last time that I expect to speak of it in this campaign. Some misguided people in every section of the land have been violating by written and spoken word the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, that great charter

which forbids any religious test for the holding of public office. I hope and believe that as Election Day approaches this question will be left out of the decision of the electorate; just as I have talked up and down the land that no vote be given to Mr. Hoover because his opponent happens to be a member of another church of God, so I plead that no vote be given to me because my opponent is a member of a different church of God, (Prolonged Applause.)

I go back in my memory ten years. Ten years ago this autumn, and I go back to the days when I saw Chateau Thierry; I go back to the days when I was following up the advance of the American Army; I go back to a day in particular when several miles behind the actual line of contact between the two armies I passed through wheat fields, wheat fields with the ripened grain uncut; wheat fields in which there were patches, little patches of color, something in the wheat, and some of those patches wore a dark gray uniform and others of those patches were an olive drab uniform. As we went through these fields there were American boys carrying stretchers, and on those stretchers were German boys and

Austrian boys and American boys being carried to the rear, and somehow in those days people were not asking what church those German boys or those American boys belonged to. Somehow we got into our heads over there and we got into our heads back here that never again would there be any question of a man's religion in the United States of America. (Applause.)

And I want to say to you very simply, very solemnly, that if there is any man or woman whose mind can go back ten years; if there be any man or woman who has seen the sights that I have seen, who knows what this country went through; any man or woman who knows what Germany, Poland, France, Austria, England went through -- even more than we did -- in those years; if any man after thinking of that, can bear in his heart any motive in this year which will lead him to cast his ballot in the interest of intolerance and of a violation of the spirit of the Constitution of the United States, then I say solemnly to that man, "May God have mercy on his miserable soul." (Prolonged Applause.)

tried to pin that on to us. (Applause.)

Don't be seen silly now, seventeen years later, to talk about people who favored workmen's compensation

ADDRESS OF
HON. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Saturday evening
October 20, 1928.

BUFFALO, N. Y.

MR. ROOSEVELT: In a pigeon hole in the desk of the Republican leaders of New York State is a large envelope, soiled, worn and bearing a date that goes back twenty-five years. Printed in large letters on this envelope are the words "Promises to Labor". Inside the envelope are a series of sheets dated two years apart and representing the best thought of the best minds of the Republican leaders over the succession of years. Each sheet of promises is practically a duplicate of every other sheet. Nowhere in that envelope is there a single page bearing the title "Promises Kept".

I ought to know something about it personally, because I had the good fortune to be a member of the State Senate in that famous year of 1911 when the Democratic Party, coming into control of the State government for the first time in a generation, started on its way a program, not of promises but of accomplishments.

The set-up in 1911 was exactly the same as it is in 1928. The Democratic administration and the Democratic leaders in the legislature began at that time a series of practical measures in the interest of the men and women of this State who work with their hands. That session of the legislature was the "God-father" of the Workmen's Compensation Law, of the first law limiting the hours of women in industry, of the Factory Investigation Committee, and of a series of important measures strengthening the provisions of the existing labor law and building up the effective strength of the Labor Department.

It is worthwhile to go back as far as 1911 because we get at that time a definite picture of the attitude of the leaders of the two parties -- an attitude which has continued down to the present day.

I remember well that the position of the Democratic

Party was at that time severely criticized by the reactionary element in this State as being socialistic and radical, and if the term Bolshevik had been then in existence it would undoubtedly have been applied to Assemblyman Alfred E. Smith, Senator Robert Wagner and many others, including myself, because of our ardent support for the whole program.

Arrayed against us was the silent, powerful pressure of the old school of thought, which held to the theory that when an employer hired working men or working women, that employer became the master of the fate of his employees; that when a worker entered the factory doors it was nobody's business as to how he worked, how long he was worked or how much he was paid.

It ~~seems almost incredible~~ ^{is most difficult} seventeen years later for this generation to understand the attitude of the old conservative element towards employment back in 1911, but it is a fact that this attitude was subscribed to ^{sometimes} ~~silently~~ ^{sometimes openly} but definitely by the Republican leaders of this State at that time.

During the years 1911 to 1915, the splendid record of definite accomplishment made by the Democratic Party in this State was fought and blocked and criticized at every turn by the Republican legislative leaders.

The best example of the difference in attitude between the two parties is the fact that during the four years ^{Governor} ~~of~~ Whitman, constructive labor legislation in the State of New York came to an end. The progress was not resumed until Governor Smith went back to Albany as the Chief Executive in 1919.

^{of 1928}
In This year ^A it would have been possible to forecast last May with absolute exactitude what the Republican leaders and the Republican candidate would say during this autumn's campaign. First of all, they would trot out the old envelope, dust it off and copy into their platform the same old words which had been used every two years for a generation back. Let me read you the labor plank of the Republican Party:

"The Republican Party in this State has done more for labor than any other party. The Labor Law and the Workmen's Compensation Law, conceded by labor to be the best in all the states, almost every line has been written in these laws by or with the approval of our party."

How dare they say that?

How do grown up and ostensibly sane political leaders perjure themselves that way? For a statement of that kind is so openly and flagrantly dishonorable that it comes pretty close to the border line of perjury. These same leaders know perfectly well that the Republican Party has consistently fought against almost every progressive measure in the interests of labor that the State of New York has added to its statute books during the past seventeen years.

IS it not dishonorable to talk about the writing of laws by or with the approval of Republican leaders, when every man and woman reads the newspapers and knows that our present laws were either written by a Democratic legislature or were forced through a Republican legislature, because the Governor of this State has been able on occasion after occasion to appeal so strongly to public opinion that it became too dangerous for these Republican leaders to block the wheels of progress any longer?

The best proof is to go and get the opinion of any man or woman in this State who has been working in the interests of social betterment and the improving of the conditions of employment during these years. You will find a definite substantiation of everything that I am stating in regard to the relative attitudes of the Republican and Democratic ~~Parties~~ *leaders*.

Let us take the practical example of the principle of limiting the hours of work of women and children in industry. Back in that session of 1911 the Democratic leaders brought forward what was then regarded as the radical ^{" "}socialistic ^{" "}proposal limiting the hours to fifty-four a week. The record shows that the opposition came from the Republican leaders, but after a long fight the proposal became law.

When Alfred E. Smith went back to Albany as Governor in 1919 progressive thought had advanced to the point of demanding a further limitation for the women and children to a maximum of forty-eight hours a week. Through six years the demand for action increased and in 1924 the Republican State platform for the first time came out definitely in favor of a forty-eight hour week.

It is almost needless to say that the Democratic platform again *and yet* supported that demand.

It seemed, therefore, that the workers were definitely assured by both parties of the passage of the proposed law. Definite assurance was given to the voters of this State by Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and the Republican leaders that they would carry out that pledge. What happened? The Republican legislature of 1925 failed utterly to carry out this plan, in spite of the demand for it by every Democratic member and by the Governor of the State. As a deliberate subterfuge, the Republican legislature passed the Joiner Bill, which was unanimously opposed by Labor and was characterized by the Governor as a "fraud upon the people of the State." Another promise gone bad!

In order to create further delay the Republican leaders in the spring of 1926 appointed a so-called Industrial Survey Commission and hoped that they would take the minds of the voters off of the broken promise of 1924, and in the 1926 platform merely referred to this Commission. The Democrats on the other hand again stood squarely by this pledge for a forty-eight hour week.

In 1927 this Commission made a report recommending a half-way measure and the legislature enacted not a forty-eight hour law but a forty-nine and one-half hour law. Because it was obviously the best that he could get from a reactionary and hostile legislature, the Governor signed this law, with a simple statement to the people of the State that it did not carry out the pledges hitherto made by the Republican Party. Sometimes it is better to get half a loaf than none at all.

What is the situation this year? That same old Republican Commission is still in existence and the Republican platform pledges "our party to give full consideration to the recommendations of this Commission." Let us see what the Democratic platform says: "We pledge ourselves to complete Governor Smith's Labor and Welfare program, including an eight-hour day and a forty-eight hour week for women and children in industry."

That pledge is definite, and the record of the Democratic Party is also definite. We are in the habit, as shown by the record, of carrying out our pledges. The Republican leaders in this State have not yet formed that habit.

I want to go on with the consideration of what the two parties are offering to the electorate this year. Other than the quotations which I have made, the Republican party offers nothing further for social and labor legislation. The Democratic Party is pledged to:

1. A law prohibiting the granting of temporary injunctions without notice of hearing. *and Trial before a jury for any alleged violation of injunction.*

2. The consideration of the subject of old age pensions -- and I might add here that this is a subject which may be regarded today as radical, just exactly as Workmen's Compensation and factory inspection were regarded as radical twenty years ago, but that the time is definitely at hand for the State to give definite study to the great humanitarian question of preventing destitution among the thousands of its citizens who become too old to maintain for themselves the adequate standards of living to which, as Americans, they have every right.

3. The establishment of an advisory minimum wage board on behalf of women and children.

4. Extension of the Workmen's Compensation Act to give the greatest protection to injured workers and the dependents of workers killed in industry and to extend the law to cover all occupational diseases.

5. The further liberalization of the laws relating to the welfare of mothers and children, ~~and trial before a jury of any alleged violation of injunction.~~

~~6. Hearings before granting of temporary injunctions in labor disputes.~~

~~6.~~ Declaration by law that the labor of a human being is not a commodity. *(SIN 4. Trial before a jury for any alleged violation of injunction.)*

I ask the simple question of the people of this State, are they in favor of the continuation of progress in our laws relating to labor and social welfare? ^{and further} Whether on the record they think that this end can best be attained by reliance on a Republican Governor and a Republican legislature or by reliance on a Democratic Governor and a Democratic legislature?

In regard to the candidates for Governor, I am more than

willing to have a comparison made between my record and that of Attorney-General Ottinger. Both of us have served in the legislature. I am proud to have been the sponsor of the one-day-rest-in-seven law, and I am proud, too, of my support of the Full Crew laws, and to having taken active part in that great ~~education~~ ^{struggle} initiated and put through by the Democratic Party while I was a member of the State Senate.

It was later that my friend, Mr. Ottinger, was a member of the State Senate, but it is a matter of record that in 1917 he voted for the Senate bill suspending operation of the Full Crew Law for steam railroads during the World War, and for six months after peace; that in 1918 he voted against the Wagner bill amending the Anti-Monopoly and Conspiracy Laws so as to provide that they should not apply to labor unions; and that in 1918 he voted against the Wagner bill to create State and regional boards to inquire into wages paid to women and minors in industry, and to recommend minimum standard wages for these employees in employments where wages were below living standards. This bill was defeated in the Senate by the lack of one vote. Senator Ottinger's vote would have passed it.

I want to add only one additional fact about myself. For seven and one-half years, as the Assistant-Secretary of the Navy, I had full charge of all matters relating to the subject of labor in the navy yards of the United States. The Navy was the direct employer of more than twenty thousand ^{civilians} ~~men~~ during the peace period, and of more than one hundred thousand ^{civilians} ~~men~~ during the war period. Up to 1913 the relations between the Government and its civilian employees had been precarious and filled with constant disputes. I shall always be very proud of the fact that from 1913 to the time I left the Navy Department in 1920, the United States Navy never had a single strike or a single serious dispute with the civilians in the Navy Yards, and the whole system of Navy Yard civilian employment was brought up to a far higher standard than ever before.

In the final analysis the voters of this State who are interested in the progress of social and labor legislation and the

improvement of conditions from year to year, must go back to the question of responsibility.

On the one side they have the dirty ~~old~~ envelope of the Republican party, trotted out every two years; but their leaders only place in it another sheet of glittering generalities and of claims for things that the Republican Party did not do. It is the same old story -- a record of broken promises, a record of stalling off action, a record of frank hypocrisy by people who have no honest and personal interest in the subject.

On the other side you have a perfectly definite record of things done, the record of a program offered by the Democratic party and honestly and faithfully adhered to through a long series of years. When the Democratic Party has had control of the legislature, or a part of it, the progress has been rapid, as was shown by the series of laws enacted from 1911 to 1915. When the Democratic Party had control only of the administrative branch of the Government, the progress has been less rapid, but what has been accomplished has been due to the great personal sincerity and ability of Governor Alfred E. Smith. Most governors would have been unable even to get the small crumbs of comfort which recent Republican legislatures have given, but Governor Smith has been able at least to consolidate public interest ^{behind} ~~in~~ his position, and that of his party.

If I am elected Governor, it will of course be difficult to carry out the present splendid program of the Democratic Party, unless at the same time our party is in control of the Senate and of the Assembly. At least you can feel confident that I would use every effort to obtain legislation from a hostile legislature. How much better it would be if the people of this State could at the same time they elect a Democratic Governor, give him the much needed assistance of a Democratic legislature. This is a practical matter which will be understood by every voter. We can at least be sure of the definite fact that the Republican Party has a record of promising glittering generalities with its tongue in its cheek and of forgetting about them the morning after election, and the Democratic Party has the opposite record of making its promises honestly and of carrying them out whenever given the opportunity to do so.

Over

And now our final word - the last time
I expect to speak it in this campaign.

Some misguided people in every
section of the land have been
violating by written or spoken word
the 6th Amendment to the Constitution of the U.S.
that great charter which forbids any
inquiries into the politics of
public officers.

I hope to believe that as election
day approaches this question will
left out of the mission of the statesman.
Just I have dug up and shown the
land that no vote is given to Hoover
because his opponent is a member of
another church of God.
So I feel that no vote is given
to me because my opponent is a member
of ~~another~~ a different church of God.

10 years ago