
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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**New York City, NY -
Organized Labor Luncheon**

ORGANIZED LABOR LUNCHEON

HOTEL COMMODORE GRAND BALLROOM

New York City

October 30, 1928.

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Mr. Chairman, my friends: This is a good deal like old times. You know, I have been somewhat out of the game during the past eight years, except when I have been nominating Al. (Laughter.)

It carries me back a good long ways -- back to that session of 1911 that Peter has been talking about, and I think that if we go back in the history of our State we are going to date a great many things from 1911. Curiously enough, that year was the first year in a whole generation that the Democratic Party had had the Governorship and the Legislature, and from that year practically all of the great achievements that have taken place date, and brought us up to our present high standing.

That legislature was dominated by young men. Peter was young himself in those days. (Laughter) Al was young, Bob was young, Jim Foley was young, so was I,

and so on. They had a young men's crowd and people wondered very much all through this State what these young Democrats were going to do. Well, you have heard of some of the things that were started at that time. You know, in those days we were regarded as socialistic. We were called Reds, and if they had had the word "Holshevik," they would have called us that too.

I remember particularly one of the first things I got into awful hot water about up in my country district -- and mind you, I come from an unfortunate district up there on the Hudson River where organized labor had mighty hard sledding, and still has, in the City of Poughkeepsie. It is one of the spots that we can make some headway with, I hope, in the days to come. (Applause.)

And one of the first measures that we started up there was the Fifty-four Hour Law for women and children in industry, and in those days a fifty-four hour law was considered the most radical thing that had ever been talked about. It shows the progress that our civilization is making. That is only seventeen years ago, but that was started, and I don't think we got that

law through until 1913 -- fifteen years ago that that law was put on the statute books. And you have heard the history from then on down. It all goes to point out one perfectly definite fact in my mind, and that is that in this State the Democratic Party has had a kind of human vision that the other side has lacked.

Peter Brady has talked about amusement over the Republican State Platform. It is a mighty good thing to have a sense of humor when you are a candidate for State office (Laughter), because that Republican State Platform is the greatest human joke that has ever been perpetrated, and if that could be spread around all through this State, they would say it was the best joke since Tom Marshall talked about the five cent cigar being the greatest thing for the American people. (Laughter.)

Those three years were mighty interesting years and I learned a lot, and I think that it was those three years spent up there in Albany that made it possible for me to go down to Washington in 1913 with some understanding at least of the problems of the Federal end of things.

I remember when I got down there -- I hadn't been there more than about a week when a delegation from the Brooklyn Navy Yard came down and said, "Mr. Roosevelt" -- they had not gotten to call me Frank -- they did in about another week -- "there is one thing that we want you to do. You know, you, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, have got charge of all labor matters." I said, "That is fine; I did not know it." "Will you do something to change the present method of working out the wage scale paid in the Navy Yard?" I said, "Fine. How is it done?" "Well," they said, "do it yourself." I said, "Why hasn't it been done by the Assistant Secretary in the past?" "No, it has been done by the officers," and then they went on to tell me how bad the wage scales in all of the Navy Yards on both coasts and the Gulf of Mexico had been arranged each year by a special board of naval officers.

I have nothing against naval officers on naval matters. None of us has; but we have got a lot against naval officers when it comes to handling labor matters, about which they know nothing. (Applause.) And the result was that after I had been there I think three

days longer, I got Joe Daniels to sign an order making it the duty of the Assistant Secretary to fix the wage scale each year, and I am very proud of one simple fact, and that is that during the seven and one-half years down there in Washington, we did not have one single major dispute, no strike, no walk-out, no serious trouble in all of the Navy Yards all over the United States during that whole period. (Applause.)

We established, in other words, a perfectly practical example of the practice of collective bargaining, and it worked, as it always will work, if both sides come to the table in the right spirit. They came in the right spirit and we were not only able to settle wage matters, but we were able to do something else that no Republican Administration -- National Administration -- in the past has ever thought of doing.

As you know, during the previous years, before 1913, in every Navy Yard in the United States there were tremendous fluctuations in employment. The naval officers were thinking only about the needs of the military side of things. The entire Atlantic Fleet would be brought to the Navy Yards for overhauling.

We would take on ten or fifteen thousand additional men during a period of a month or six weeks. Then the Fleet came out again as a whole, and ten or fifteen thousand men would be laid off.

The result was great hardship. The Republicans also in previous years had taken the point of view that the Government did not need to manufacture anything in the Navy Yard, on the theory that with their fancy system of keeping accounts private materials could be bought a great deal cheaper than they could be manufactured by the Government themselves.

Well, we started investigating, and we put on that investigating committee mechanics from the yards themselves, as people who knew the most about it. The result was, first, the establishment of a system of costs that proved that in a great many years of work in the Navy Yards the Government made material more cheaply than we could buy it. Then, of course, came the second belief, and that was an arrangement and schedule so that the schedule in employment could be maintained on a fairly even basis throughout each year.

That was maintained during seven and a half

years, and the result was that employment in the Government service became a true opportunity for permanent service.

I am sorry to say that in the days that have elapsed, and since 1920, they have reverted largely to the old methods of doing it, taking on and laying off, of cutting out practically all manufactures in the Navy Yards themselves, even when those manufactures could be made more cheaply in the Navy Yards, and the result has been a return to the old condition. That is one thing that I want to have something to say about when Al Smith goes down to Washington. (Applause.)

I am not going to talk about my own record up in Albany or down in Washington, any further. There was one little matter that seems to have been omitted from the booklet, and that is the fact that just before I left Albany to come down to Washington in the spring of 1913. I, as the original author of the one-day-rest-in-seven bill, passed that bill through the State Senate and sent it over to the Assembly where it was passed the following month. (Applause.)

I said something about the fifty-four hour law.

I had been going around this State - chiefly up-State so far - talking about the Republican record on the forty-eight hour law. I don't have to tell you about that. Most of you know about it. Most of you know of the continued series of broken promises. Most of you know of the delays of referring that whole matter to so-called commissions, of long and costly hearings, after both party platforms had declared in favor of the forty-eight hour law. You know, finally, of the law which was brought out and passed - mislabeled the forty-eight hour law, but which actually was a forty-nine and one-half hour law -- and then some. You know that the Governor signed that law under protest, as the best that he could get. We propose to carry through the promises of the Democratic Party for a real forty-eight hour law. (Applause.)

In other words, I am perfectly convinced that starting back there in 1911 we have made steady progress in this State until, as Mr. Brady says, we have had an outstanding record among all States of the Union for our labor legislation. That is just the reason why we can't stop. We cannot afford in this State to stand still

because conditions are constantly changing to such an extent that what is today a modern enactment will be out of date tomorrow.

I want your support in keeping our legislation up to date, and I can assure you, you will have mine. (Applause.)

I notice from the card of this luncheon that there is one gentleman whom it wasn't considered even necessary to ask -- a man who doesn't need introduction here today. And I take it from that that the Governor of this State is going to have not ninety percent., but a hundred percent. of the support of organized labor. (Prolonged Applause.)

I have not only had just pleasant relationships -- that is not the word -- I have had real friendships in these past years with organized labor, with the individuals and with the movement as a whole, and I have been proud of it for the very simple belief that I hold, that organized labor in America, more than any other single factor, has been responsible during our lifetime, more than any other, for the advancement of the standard of American living. (Applause.)

That record must be maintained. We have got a dozen different things to go ahead with in the next two years, and I want you all individually and collectively to feel that after I go to Albany on January first, the latch string will be open. (Prolonged Applause.)