
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 302

1929 January 2

Speech to the Democratic State Committee

302

XIII

ADDRESSES

Before Democratic State Committee, Albany, January 2, 1929

Party Responsibility—Good Government—Development of Democratic Press

FELLOW DEMOCRATS.—I have already addressed the people of the State of New York regardless of their party affiliations; and also the Legislature of the State of New York as required by the Constitution. It seems fitting on first entering into my new duties that I should also address you who, in one capacity or another, officially represent the Democratic party of this State. For your valiant support I am profoundly grateful. Nothing that I can do can adequately compensate for the time and energy and enthusiasm that you have given during the recent campaign. The confidence, however, which you showed in my ability to serve you in this high office perhaps I may be able to reward somewhat, but only if I constantly have your support and cooperation during the two years to come.

I have already pledged myself to consider and to act upon all public business with a single view as to what is good for the State, and without partisan consideration. And, first of all, I want to urge upon you, the representatives of the party in whose fundamental beliefs I have such abiding faith, also to support, and to bring others to support, all wise and just legislation, regardless of whether it originates with members of our own party or with those who differ in their conceptions of the fundamental principles of government. If anything which is for the good and for the progress of the State fails during this coming session because of partisan obstruction or because of a desire to obtain some fancied political advantage, let the responsibility for such failure rest on other shoulders than those who hold the Democratic faith.

Have no fear that our willingness to stand behind what is right and good will not be appreciated and remembered by all the voters of this State. If any doubt of this exists in your mind, I beg you to study recently published the table showing the steadily increasing Democratic vote in all those counties—so long regarded as Republican strongholds—that lie north of the great City of New York. This gain began in 1926, was continued in 1927, and was accelerated in 1928. It is no mere coincidence that this encouraging increase has followed a Republican policy of obstruction and of open defiance to the progressive measures of our great Governor, a policy which their own platform adopted last Fall, gives us hope to believe has been definitely and wisely abandoned.

However, to refuse to let partisan considerations stand in the way of our support of wise public measures should not in any way hamper our constant and untiring efforts, as individuals and as an organization, to make known to every voter in this commonwealth the great fundamental principles, the essential points of differences between the two major parties, and the reason for our belief that such differences are more than sufficient to warrant, for the good of our State and for the good of our nation, unceasing organized activity on our part to convince and to convert the voters to our standard.

If we do not really believe in our own party, if we repeat the Democratic creed with our lips, but hold it not in our hearts, we are hypocrites. If we do so believe, but make no effort to convince others of the soundness of our faith, we are cowards. And while we have had many harsh things said about us in the heat of political campaigns, our bitterest opponents have never called a Democrat a hypocrite or a coward. It is a moral duty upon all of us to spread the Democratic gospel. It is particularly our duty, beginning now, to proceed upon a far more efficient and organized program

of educational publicity than we have used in the past. Through publicity in the public press, through constant individual effort on the part of our State, county and district leaders, through frequent public meetings of Democratic organizations in every town and city of the State, at which those trained to speak can make clear our beliefs to gatherings of voters, irrespective of their party affiliations, and in all the many other ways which an organization can devise, we must work constantly for new converts to our cause.

The Democrats of this State are peculiarly handicapped outside of our great cities, and in many of those cities themselves, by the pitiful lack of a Democratic press. The more scattered the population of a district, the smaller the size of its towns and villages, the more important becomes the need of the daily or the weekly paper presenting our side of the case before the voters, for in great cities there is easy communication of ideas and a far more general discussion of political issues than is possible between widely separated hamlets or isolated farms. Science has given us a new method to reach the scattered individual rural homes, but not yet can it be boasted that every farmhouse has its radio, and a very large number of families in this State still depend for their news and political information on the paper which the rural carrier drops in the mail box just outside the gate.

I want to urge upon you more careful study of the method by which we as an organization can encourage and strengthen our Democratic press, and I want to urge on each one of you, as individuals, to support your nearest Democratic publication. If the Republican paper is larger, if its news is more varied, if its features are more interesting, it is because it has a larger clientele of subscribers and advertisers to pay the bill. That is your fault, and not by any means the fault of those who so tirelessly and bravely struggle against what is sometimes almost overwhelming odds to keep the local Democratic paper on its financial feet. If you do not, as readers, subscribe to your Democratic organ, if you do not, as business men, give it your advertising support, you are failing in your duty as sincerely convinced Democrats, to help elect those, who believe as you believe, to executive positions, locally, statewide or national, where they can direct the course of our governmental machinery, from its lowest unit to the Capitol itself along the road which we, as Democrats, are profoundly convinced is the right path and the wisest way for the future of our nation.

Of course, I realize that there are too many localities where there is no Democratic paper whatever, places where one of the local sheets, utterly controlled and obedient to the Republican organization, hoists the fair ensign "Independent" at its masthead in the hope of luring Democrats to subscribe in the belief that their party side of public questions will be given a fair show. I have the most profound contempt for such publications. Their ethics are those of the pirate who flies a neutral flag and hides the "Jolly Roger" in the locker in order to lure the unsuspecting merchantmen within range of the guns.

For the really independent paper that fairly presents both sides in matters political and throws its editorial influence to that party which it thinks most deserving of support on the issue involved, I have an equally profound respect and admiration. Indeed, we should be deeply grateful to the truly independent papers of the State, for almost invariably they have stood for progress, and their powerful influence was the most potent single factor in arousing the voters of this State to the necessity of standing behind the forward-looking program of Governor Smith. But the class of papers to which I refer are a very different breed; we may search vainly in their columns for news favorable to the Democratic party, and what is worse, you will find political news not only suppressed but twisted, distorted and unfairly presented, which is an unspeakable crime against the ethics of all true newspapers.

In such cases there is but one of two things to be done, either to go down in our own pockets and provide the necessary support for a really Democratic paper of our own; or else, when this is practically impossible, to arouse all the papers' Democratic subscribers to demand, by letters and by personal interviews, either that our party be treated fairly or that the paper cease

to solicit subscriptions on the ground that it is independent and non-partisan in its presentation of news. If all the Democrats in these districts get together and as a matter of party pride and party duty agreed, by advertising and subscriptions, to support a Democratic paper, and to stand loyally by it during its struggling infancy, it would be possible to establish and maintain a surprisingly large number of rural Democratic papers, through which we could educate the voters in these areas.

We must also have, as an organization, an efficient publicity service of our own. We must not expect the rural editor to be able to keep in close touch with the progress of our party at Albany or at Washington, or to be able by some kind of intuition to understand fully what important Democratic achievements and policies have been deliberately misrepresented or suppressed by a partisan Republican press.

So far as this State is concerned, you, as the State organization, must immediately set about to provide the Democrats, the Republicans and the independent voters of this State with fair and accurate information of the State's business, and of the reasons for the stand we, as a party, will take on this issue or the other, as it comes up from time to time.

To do this, adequate financial resources will be necessary, and that is the second thing which we must now proceed to provide through a systematic and continuously operating financial organization.

We must do more than rely on a few good friends of the party. It is not only unfair to these men to make them carry all our burden, but it results in an apathy on the part of our whole organization and in a lack of interest among our rank and file. The inclination to set back and let others provide the ways and means invariably goes hand in hand with an inclination to let others do the actual work as well. The man who gives to his party will have a deeper interest and will take a more active part in his party's progress, although the amount of his contribution seems small beside the sums of those better able to contribute. Remember, not all the money in the world by itself can arouse party spirit and enthusiasm among the voters, no matter how lavishly it may be spent.

I am convinced that under intelligent leadership we can create a source of steady income from many people of modest means which will be ample to carry out the program of constant publicity I now advocate.

I feel that the enthusiasm aroused in our party over our great Governor as our national candidate has spurred our organization to a new enthusiasm, to a new willingness to follow his example of service to his party, as it has not been stirred for many years past. The very fact that you are here tonight from all parts of the State shows this wonderfully awakened interest, and how his great example and his unselfish devotion to our cause has led all of us to be somewhat ashamed of our own indifference and lack of party interest.

Let us take advantage of this new enthusiasm to go forward until the time will come again when we can not only elect State officers but also a majority of our Legislature. I say this advisedly, because I believe in party responsibility, and am confident that the State will have more progressive and efficient government, if the Legislature and the Governor hold the same beliefs.

EDITORS: The following speech of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt at the dinner following the meeting of the Democratic State Committee at Albany, Wednesday evening, January 2, 1929, is hereby released when delivered unless otherwise ordered by wire. It must not be quoted from, referred to, or commented upon in any manner prior to that time.

FELLOW DEMOCRATS:

I have already addressed the whole people of the State of New York regardless of their party affiliations; and also the Legislature of the State of New York as required by the Constitution. It seems fitting on first entering into my new duties that I should also address you who, in one capacity or another officially represent the Democratic party of this State. for your valiant support I am profoundly grateful. Nothing that I can do can adequately repay the time and energy and enthusiasm that you have given during the recent campaign. The confidence, however, which you showed in my ability to serve you in this high office I may perhaps reward somewhat, but only if I constantly have your support and advice during the two years to come.

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File No. 303

1929 January 16

Address to Committee on Taxation & Finance

Address of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt at the Public Hearing
in the Assembly Chamber, Albany, January 16, 1929, Before the
Legislative Committees on Taxation and Agriculture

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It has been a very short time that I have occupied the Governor's chair, and I am very glad to be able to return, after two weeks, to my capacity as a private citizen of this State, and it is in that guise that I am here today, as one who has had for a great many years, contact with the farm and its problems, having been born and having lived in a rural community. I come here to talk to you very simply about the relationship of taxation to rural community development,

merely to tell you some of my hopes and, may I say, some of my expectations as to how we may remove some inequalities that for years have burdened the man on the farm.

I am glad that this movement has come to a head, because we have been talking about this problem in the State of New York for a great many years. After election day, I invited a few gentlemen representing the more important agricultural organizations of this State to meet with me to discuss the matter very informally in New York. This was the origin of what has come to be known as the Governor's Agricultural Advisory Commission, and these gentlemen immediately sought to get at what might be called the meat of the present cocoanuts. They did not take up those long range questions which I agree with Senator Knight should be the subject of a continued study far beyond this session of the Legislature, but they did immediately outline some very practical questions on which we in the State Government in conjunction with those of the farm organizations of the State could work together to improve conditions this year. When I got to Albany, I stated clearly, both publicly and in private conference with leaders of the Legislature, that I hoped we could take up this whole question from a non-political point of view, and that is why I am sincerely glad that this conference has been called today in the Assembly Chamber, a get-together conference, at which people belonging to all parties, men and women from every section of the State, can have a fair and frank exchange of views.

I do not believe for a minute that every person here present can or will agree on all the details of the recommendations at which we will arrive. That is an impossibility, if you get more than two or three people together. I think, however, that with the hearty cooperation of the Executive and Legislative branches of the Government we can furnish this year some relief from burdens that we know are on our shoulders. In this connection, may I say further, that there is a tendency all over the State for our city-dwelling brothers and sisters to regard the farm problem as one which is not a part of their problem. The farm problem of this State is a part of the city's problem. We in the country, recognize that, and, on the other side of the picture, I hope that we who come from the country districts of the State, will recognize that the continued prosperity of the city communities of the State has a very important influence upon the prosperity of our farms. In other words, it is a mutual question in which we need and expect co-operation.

I am glad, too, that we are going to hear today from an old friend of mine, Mr. Eugene Meyer from Washington. Mr. Meyer knows as much of the farm problem in these United States from the national point of view as anyone. And again, there is a connection between the State of New York and all the other 47 states of the union. Ours is perhaps not the question of the grain states, or of the cotton states in regard to some of the great questions that were raised in the recent campaign and in the recent Congresses. They do not affect us very vitally in the State of New York, but there are a great many ways in which federal experience and federal study, which has been made by experts like Mr. Meyer can be applied to our necessities that we can benefit and in the same way I am certain that the Federal Government in Washington can be helped by constructive action taken by the State of New York.

I am very glad to have heard the very clear and excellent exposition of some of what might be called the details of our own problem from Senator Knight. We must consider, in the question of immediate relief, the whole tax structure of the State. We have to consider how the money can best be raised, whether it by the imposition of some one tax, other taxes should be cut down. We must consider the further question of the assumption by the State of certain burdens now carried by local communities; and further, the rather serious problem of how much the State should continue to do in the matter of returning money to local communities to be spent purely under local management. I am speaking as one who lives in an up-State township, without regard to politics, in reiterating what I have said before, that I do not think any of us who come from the farming towns of this State of New York, are satisfied that we can not make all sorts of improvements in the structure of our local government.

So it all ties in together, and I am very confident that this meeting will hasten our arrival at some kind of a solution, not a perfect one, because we are human, not one on which we can all unanimously agree, but some solution which will be, on the whole, satisfactory to the great majority, and one which likewise will equalize the present unequal burdens, take loads off the farming communities which today they should not bear; and that the entire problem will be considered in two phases, first what we can do this year to obtain practical benefits, and, secondly, how we should go on in the course of the next few years with a further study of the subject to provide for future relief.

And so, please consider that I am here just as a private citizen of New York, and also that after I go downstairs to my desk, you will find an Executive who wishes to go along with you the whole way. Thank you.