
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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1929 June 8

**New York City, NY -
Women's Trade Union League**

[June 8, 1929]

I feel that it is indeed a great honor and a very high compliment for the New York Women's Trade Union League to celebrate its Twenty Fifth Anniversary at the home of the Governor of their State. To have earned the confidence, to have deserved the friendship of an organization such as yours, is an achievement of which I am very proud. I am prouder still that this friendship and mutual understanding between us dates back to my first entrance into public life, when as a new Senator in the Legislative Halls I found myself fighting shoulder to shoulder with your body, for better conditions, for fairer treatment of labor in this State.

I remember well our bitter struggle and eventual triumph for a shorter working day, and as I look back I think we can both feel that much real progress has been made and that even greater progress will be made in the near future.

One thing I think has been triumphantly demonstrated during the last twenty-five years, and that is that ~~the~~ organizations of workers, wisely led, temperate in their demands and conciliatory in their attitude, make not for industrial strife, but for industrial peace. The whole tendency of our modern civilization has been towards

cooperation. Employers and employees alike have learned that in union there is strength; that a coordination of individual effort means an elimination of waste, a bettering of living conditions, and is, in fact, the father of prosperity.

There were many mistakes made in the early days on both sides. There was a period when every combination of industry was designated as "a trust," and the word "trust" was considered an opprobrious term. And there was a time when organized labor was too prone to strike first and negotiate afterward; that period is rapidly passing. Capital is realizing that without the friendly and intelligent co-operation of labor it cannot exist, and labor has learned that without the aid of capital it cannot earn its daily bread. Indeed, so successful has ~~been~~ this new principle of arbitration, of calm discussion, and a willingness to look fairly at the arguments on the other side proved in our industrial affairs as to lead to a general demand for its adoption between Nations as the surest guarantee for the peace of the world.

There has been also a growing realization on the part of our people that the State, itself, is under obligations to those who labor, that the citizen who contributes by his toil to the wealth and prosperity of the Commonwealth is entitled to certain benefits in return

which only the Commonwealth can give. This principle, so far as it affects the healing of the sick, the amelioration of the sad lot of the insane, the care of the orphan and the education of the child, has been, I am proud to say, more clearly recognized, more firmly established in the State of New York than in any other political division of our country.

It is my feeling, and the feeling I think of a majority of our citizens, that the time has now come to take a still further step, that we should forever banish the black shadow of ~~the~~ ^{WAAAT} old age want. ^{for} those who may no longer earn their daily bread, through some swift falling accident, or slow incurable disease, we have provided, and we are providing, hospitals, sanitariums, and institutions where, so far as possible, they may be restored to useful life, or, if that is ^{and our parts} not possible, receive care. But how about those whose bodies ^{stricken} are not ~~stricken~~ by sudden ~~disaster~~ disaster, ~~of~~ who work hard and faithfully, through long years, until time lays his heavy hand upon them? Is there no obligation on the part of the State to look after these? It is through no fault of theirs that they cannot continue to add to ~~to~~ our prosperity or to labor for the good of the whole State. And yet, what answer have

we made, except the creation of that gloomy institution that haunts, like some horrible nightmare, the thought of every aged worker, the Poorhouse.

I do not believe it necessary, nor do those who have studied *this matter* long and thoughtfully, believe, that it is an economic necessity that we must herd our aged workers, dependent on their toil for their daily bread, in institutions of this character. It is not even an economic solution of the problem; it is the most wasteful and extravagant system that we could possibly devise; it belongs *to* that past barbaric age when we chained our insane to the walls of our madhouses.

By a proper system of Old Age Pensions this dark blot on our modern civilization can be eliminated. I want New York to take the leadership in this matter, as it has in other things.

The Legislature last year provided for the appointment of a Commission to study and report as to how this could best be done and I am sure that Commission will consist of men in thorough sympathy with the object and with a broad and comprehensive viewpoint, as well as practical experience in the handling of the financial problems involved. They will, I confidently trust, have a very definite and practical plan

to present at next year's session, and I beg of the Women's Trade Union League something more than a mere lukewarm support ~~in~~ *towards* enacting ~~recommending~~ their recommendations into law if they meet with your approval. You of all ~~organizations~~ organized bodies should feel a deep responsibility, a duty that lies on each one of you, personally, to see that this step forward is not blocked by stubborn stupidity, by incomprehensible refusal even to discuss it or to argue it fairly in our Legislative Halls. Make it clear that this particular thing will not be allowed to sink silently into that slimy morrass called "Politics," as has been the fate of so much Labor Legislation in the past. If by your own industry, if by your own thrift and diligence, you have provided an Old Age Pension of your own, do not, I beg of you, forget those less fortunate ~~workers~~ to whom each birthday means a drawing near of ~~the~~ a penniless old age, too horrible to calmly contemplate.

And there is one other thing that I would like to urge upon you, and that is a better understanding and a closer cooperation between you who as workers are organized, and those who work quite as laborously, quite as tirelessly, with hours that know no legal limitation

and ~~have~~ for wages which are often pitifully inadequate. I am speaking now of those who toil in the fields, as compared with those who toil in the shops. There should be the deepest sympathy, the greatest willingness to work together, between the farmhand and the shophand. Too often has there been a mutual distrust and a mutual misunderstanding. They cannot live without the products of your industry, and you would starve without the products of their toil. Because from the very nature of their occupation they may not organize as you have organized, because the only capital on which they can make demands is the capital which they, themselves, possess, is no reason why they are not as truly workers as yourselves. I hope for a better understanding of their problems on your part and of a more sympathetic interest in your problems on their part than as existed in the past. We are all citizens of the same State and the State is created to help its citizens, to make life a more pleasant thing for all of us, to provide its protection and to prevent the unscrupulous and the powerful from oppressing the weak and the helpless. I beg of you to take the lead in promoting this better understanding, this closer relationship, between our City and our rural life, so that we may all, City and country, alike, work intelligently, harmoniously and

sympathetically to solve the problems of Government which still

lie before us.

Mrs. Sidney Borg
Bishop McConnell
James M. Lynch

Sen. Mastick
" Hafstrader
Crescencio N. Rios

Gov. Frank Bernhard
John T. Train
Thomas F. Farrell.

95-1-100-
Organization
State Activities
Old Age Sec.
Connecticut
Hester - Thomas

Before Twenty-fifth Anniversary Meeting of the New York
Women's Trade Union League, Hyde Park, N. Y., June 8, 1929

Old Age Security

I feel that it is a great honor and a very high compliment for the New York Women's Trade Union League to celebrate its Twenty-fifth Anniversary at the home of the Governor of their State. To have earned the confidence, to have deserved the friendship of an organization such as yours, is an achievement of which I am very proud. I am prouder still that this friendship and mutual understanding between us dates back to my first entrance into public life, when as a new Senator in the legislative halls, I found myself fighting shoulder to shoulder with your body for better working conditions, for fairer treatment of labor in this State.

I remember well our bitter struggle and eventual triumph for a shorter working day, and as I look back I think we can both feel that much real progress has been made and that even greater progress will be made in the near future.

One thing I think has been triumphantly demonstrated during the last twenty-five years, and that is that organizations of workers, wisely led, temperate in their demands and conciliatory in their attitude, make not for industrial strife, but for industrial peace. The whole tendency of our modern civilization has been toward cooperation. Employers and employees alike have learned that in union there is strength, that a coordination of individual effort means an elimination of waste, a bettering of living conditions, and is, in fact, the father of prosperity.

There were many mistakes made in the early days on both sides. There was a period when every combination of industry was designated as a trust, and the word "trust" was considered an opprobrious term. And there was a time when organized labor was too prone to strike first and negotiate afterward. That period is rapidly passing. Capital is realizing that without the friendly and intelligent cooperation of labor it cannot exist, and labor has learned that without the aid of capital it cannot earn its daily bread. Indeed, so successful has this new principle of arbitration, of calm discussion, and a willingness to look fairly at the arguments on the other side proved in our industrial affairs as to lead to a general demand for its adoption between nations as the surest guarantee for the peace of the world.

There has been also a growing realization on the part of our people that the state itself is under obligations to those who labor, that the citizen who contributes by his toil to the wealth and prosperity of the commonwealth is entitled to certain benefits in return, which only the commonwealth can give. This principle, so far as it affects the healing of the sick, the amelioration of the sad lot of the insane, the care of the orphan and the education of the child, has been, I am proud to say, more clearly recognized, more firmly established in the State of New York than in any other political division of our country.

It is my feeling, and the feeling I think of a majority of our citizens, that the time has now come to take a further step, that we should forever banish the black shadow of old age want. For those who may no longer earn their daily bread, because of some swift falling accident or slow incurable disease, we have provided, and we are providing, hospitals, sanitaris, and institutions where, so far as is humanely possible, they may be restored to useful life or, if that is not possible, receive care and comforts. But how about those whose bodies are not stricken by sudden disaster, who work hard and faithfully through long years, until time lays his heavy hand upon them. Is there no obligation on the part of the State to look after these? It is through no fault of theirs that they cannot continue to add to our prosperity or to labor for the good of the whole State. And yet, what answer have we made, except the creation of that gloomy institution that haunts, like some horrible nightmare, the thought of every aged worker, the poorhouse.

I do not believe it necessary, nor do those who have studied the matter long and thoughtfully, believe that it is an economic necessity that we must herd our aged workers, dependent on their toil for their daily bread, in institutions of this character. It is not even an economic solution of the problem. It is the most wasteful and extravagant system that we could possibly devise. It belongs to that past barbaric age when we chained our insane to the walls of our madhouses.

By a proper system of "Old Age Pensions" this dark blot on our modern civilization can be eliminated. I want New York to take the leadership in this movement as it has in other humane efforts.

The Legislature last year accepted my very strong recommendation for the appointment of a commission to study and report as to how this could best be done, and I am sure that commission will consist of citizens in thorough sympathy with the object and holding broad and comprehensive views, as well as practical experience in the handling of the financial problems involved.

I am glad to take this occasion to make the first public announcement of the three members chosen by me to sit on this commission as representatives appointed by the Governor. They are: Mrs. Sidney Borg, whom all of you know as a great leader in every good work connected with the social welfare; Bishop McConnell of the Methodist Episcopal Church, whose wide study of the whole field of old age security against want makes him one of the two or three leading experts; and Mr. James M. Lynch, whose fine record as State Labor Commissioner and member of the State Industrial Board has made him known to all.

The President pro tem of the Senate has appointed Senators Mastick and Hofstadter and Mr. Cornelius N. Bliss of New York.

The Speaker of the Assembly has appointed Assemblyman Frank Bernhard of Buffalo, Mr. John T. Train of Utica and Mr. Thomas F. Farrell of New York. Mr. Farrell, as you know, is deservedly one of the leaders of the Catholic charities throughout the country.

They will, I confidently trust, have a very definite and practical plan to present at next year's session, and I beg of the Women's Trade Union League something more than a mere lukewarm support in the effort to be made to enact their recommendations into law, if they meet with your approval. You, of all organized bodies, should feel a deep responsibility, a duty that is incumbent upon each one of you, personally, to see that this step forward is not blocked by stubborn stupidity, by incomprehensible refusal even to discuss it or to argue it fairly in our legislative halls. Make it clear that this particular thing will not be allowed to sink silently into that slimy morass called "politics" as has been the fate of so much labor legislation in the past. If by your own industry, if by your own thrift and diligence, you have provided an "Old Age Pension" of your own, don't, I beg of you, forget those less fortunate, to whom each birthday means a drawing near of a penniless old age, too horrible to contemplate calmly.

There is one other thing that I would like to urge upon you, and that is a better understanding and a closer cooperation between you who, as workers, are organized, and those who work quite as laboriously, quite as tirelessly,

with hours that know no legal limitation and for wages which are often pitifully inadequate. I am speaking now of those who toil in the fields, as well as those who toil in the shops. There should be the deepest sympathy, the greatest willingness to work together, between the farmhand and the shophand. They cannot live without the products of your industry, and you would starve without the products of their toil. By reason of the nature of their occupation they may not organize as you have organized. The only capital on which they can make demands is the capital which they, themselves, possess, but this is no reason why they are not as truly workers as yourselves. I hope for a better understanding of their problems on your part and for a more sympathetic interest in your problem on their part than has existed in the past. We are all citizens of the same State and the State is created to help its citizens, to make life a more pleasant thing for all of us, to provide its protection and to prevent the unscrupulous and the powerful from oppressing the weak and the helpless. I beg of you to take the lead in promoting this better understanding, this closer relationship, between our city and our rural life to the end that both city and country alike may work intelligently, harmoniously and sympathetically to solve the problems of government which still lie before us.

It is, I think, obvious to all that the problem of the needy aged cannot be solved by the mere building of vast State institutions in which to place them during their declining years. Modern thought is getting away from institutions. It is a curious fact that in all this talk about the break-down of family life, the tendency is more and more to take care of the individual in the home. For that reason I believe that all will agree that, whatever the details of the plans which will be worked out by the new commission, it is clear that they will not advocate taking our aged poor away from their homes and placing them in hospitals and other public institutions. In the final analysis, good economics as well as a decent sense of humanity dictates that if the State is to aid them in their declining years that aid should be given to them under conditions where they may maintain their independent lives and hold up their heads as citizens of America.

[June 8, 1929]

THE NEW YORK WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration

at the home of

Governor and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt

Hyde Park, New York

SPEAKERS

HONORABLE FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Governor of New York State

MR. JOHN SULLIVAN

President, New York State Federation of Labor

MISS MARY ANDERSON

Director, Women's Bureau, United States
Department of Labor

MRS. HENRY GODDARD LEACH

President, New York State League of Women Voters

MR. JOSEPH P. RYAN

President, Central Trades and Labor Council

MISS NELLE SWARTZ

Member of the Industrial Board, New York State
Department of Labor

MISS MELINDA SCOTT

Former President, New York Women's Trade Union
League

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF LEAGUE WORK

In Fantomime and Song
by
MARY E. DEERER

Cast under the Direction of
MRS. LAURA ELLIOT

7 SCENES

PROLOGUE - Position of Industrial Women before the W.T.U.L. was organized.

- I Factory Scene in N.Y. City in 1927
- II Organization Methods of the League
- III Burning Questions of 1907
To March or not to March?
- IV Public Attitude towards Trade Unions
W.T.U.L. Ball and its Results
- V The Strike of the 30,000
Shirt Waist Makers Strike
1909 - 1910
- VI What Legislators thought of Workers in 1910
- VII Supplementary Activities and Successes (See Signs)
- VIII Triumphant March of the Workers

S O N G S

1. SONG OF THE ORGANIZERS Scene II.

We pass out our handbills and call girls to meetings
And pray that they only may come.
But no, they are tired and fear to be fired,
And so they stay feebly at home.

For we agitators, and very good haters
Are not what you call popular.
The girls will not hear us
Though for them we fuss, fuss
They'll only come out for a star.

So Gompers and Mitchell
And London, Wise, Hillquit
Announce them we do on our call.
And girls come in rushing with eyes and cheeks flushing
To fill all the seats in the hall.

(cont.)

SONG OF THE ORGANIZERS (continued)

Through varied male voices, we show what the choice is
And now we become popular.
The girls now will hear us, and they too will fuss, fuss,
Their wagon they hitched to a star.

We call on their families, and speak to them gently
And give out our handbills galore.
Oh come here on Wednesday and hear how you raise pay
And shorten your hours some more.

2. SONG OF THE LABOR DAY PARADE Scene III.
(Tune - When Johnny Comes Marching Home.)

They say that man's superior
Aha, Aha!
We stay in our place, a subordinate race
We are, We are!
But here we come, on Labor Day
In spite of all that the men say,
Sitting on floats in a brazen way,
Aha, Aha!

3. SONG OF THE GARMENT WORKERS Scene V.

To the Garment Workers we belong,
Hurrah, Hurrah!
Thirty-thousand in our throng,
Hurrah, Hurrah!
In spite of hunger and the like
In spite of thugs, we've won the strike,
And though to jail we had to hike,
We won the strike, Hurrah!

4. MARCH OF THE WORKERS Scene VIII.

We've come through the years
During strife and fears
We were oppressed and trodden.
Now we know our power
Dare achieve each hour
And to triumph in the fray.

Onward, onward, now we know our power.
Forward, forward, we achieve each hour.
Daughters of labor, break her chains and save her
And march on to Victory!