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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
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**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**Buffalo, NY - State Federation of Labor**

Before the State Federation of Labor, Buffalo, August 27, 1930

*Report on Labor Legislation 1929-1930*

I appear before the State Federation of Labor not to talk politics but rather to make a report on legislation in this State during the past two years and on administrative action on labor problems.

Here is the record.

1. I have for two years asked the Legislature for an honest law guaranteeing an eight hour day and a forty-eight hour week for women and children in industry. A part of this was given when the Legislature this year passed a law which helps to secure a half holiday a week for women working in factories and mercantile establishments.

2. The Legislature has wholly failed to establish an advisory minimum or fair wage board on behalf of women and children.

3. I asked for a law extending Workmen's Compensation to all occupational diseases. The Legislative leaders in 1929 passed a bill adding a small number of diseases to the list and in 1930 added three more diseases to the compensable list. I suppose we should be thankful for these crumbs, but it would have saved time and trouble all around to pass one complete statute to carry out my recommendations.

4. In 1929 I asked for a law prohibiting the granting of temporary injunctions without notice of hearing in industrial dispute, with provision for trial before a jury of any violation of injunctions, when granted. The Legislature did nothing. I renewed the recommendation this year, and I am glad to say that the force of public opinion and the constant hammering of President Sullivan and other officials of the Federation of Labor at last compelled the Legislative leaders to pass a bill carrying out this recommendation.

5. As usual the Legislature has failed to declare by law that the labor of a human being is not a commodity or an article of commerce.

6. You all know the strong fight I started the day I was inaugurated to get some form of Old Age Security against Want. We finally persuaded the Legislature to authorize the appointment of a commission to report a plan and on this commission I took the greatest of pleasure in naming our devoted friend the late James M. Lynch of Syracuse. During his final illness I talked with him on the telephone and I think that it is right that you should know just what he told me about the Old Age Pension plan which the majority members of the commission were about to bring in. He said:

"I don't like this plan. It has three grave defects. First, it smacks too much of being merely a dole or a handout. Secondly, it sets an arbitrary age of seventy before anyone can get relief, and we all know that in these strenuous times many people are too old to work when they are sixty or sixty-five. Third, the plan of almost entirely local administration raises the definite danger that the whole system may be run by politics."

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Jim Lynch was one hundred per cent right, but he and I had to accept the bill as the best that we could get this year. I want your backing and whether I am a public official or a private citizen, I will devote my time and energy to obtaining an honest, non-political law to provide full security for every citizen who, through no fault of his own, needs help in his later years.

Most of the civilized countries of the world have undertaken a government-supervised program to alleviate the distress of fluctuating unemployment. You and I are very keenly aware of two very definite facts. The first is that reckless and deceptive promises that this country would never again have a widespread condition of unemployment have not only not been fulfilled but broadly speaking the unemployment situation in the United States is today more serious than at any time since 1893. Secondly, we are fully aware that the tendency of the present industrial system makes it increasingly difficult for any man or woman, past forty years old, to find a new job.

To meet the first fact the State of New York is now engaged in a definite effort to level, insofar as possible, the peaks and valleys of employment. Already we have obtained the cooperation of several hundred large employers of labor. I am very certain that organized labor agrees with me that it is far better for all of us to have steady employment year in and year out, rather than to have periods where there is a demand for more labor than exists, followed by periods when a large percentage of workers are either entirely out of a job or are receiving pay for only one or two days work a week. The feasts and plenty of yesterday will never dispel the famine and need of today. This effort of the State is, I am glad to say, receiving the hearty cooperation of the more far-sighted employers, and I am confident that further study and further effort along this line will bring real results in the future.

On the second point of men and women who find it increasingly difficult to get new work, after they pass the forty-year mark, we have a definite illustration of why Unemployment Insurance and Old Age Security are very similar problems and ought to be considered hand in hand with each other. I hope that the next administration and the next legislature will take up a practical, definite study of Unemployment Insurance, avoiding, of course, any form of dole and basing their investigations on a sound insurance basis under which the employees, the employer and the State itself will all be premium payers. I have said that the feasts of yesterday do not satisfy our hunger today, but it is wholly possible to set some portion of yesterday's feast aside in cold storage, as it were, to satisfy tomorrow's hunger. It is, of course, worthy of note that one of the largest corporations within the State of New York, has recently, of its own free will set up a plan which, in effect, is Unemployment Insurance.

Let me clear your minds of any doubt as to my attitude towards prison labor, in view of certain grotesque misrepresentations of my position which were yesterday set forth to you. No one more clearly realizes the evil of competition of prison labor with free labor than I. The best proof of how seriously I regard this matter is that I have added to the State-created Prison Commission a Governor's Sub-Committee to consider how we may keep our prisoners employed without competing with the labor of our free workmen. I did this because I felt that otherwise this question, which for years has troubled all penologists, might be ignored or scantily considered as it has been in the past. On this committee I have already named a man and a woman representing organized labor in the State of New York, your President, John Sullivan, and Miss Rose Schneiderman of the Women's Trade Union League and I have asked President Green to nominate to me a representative of the American Federation of Labor as an additional member. It is almost unnecessary for me to add that I am wholly and irrevocably opposed to

letting the State dump its prison-made goods on the free markets of another state.

There is one final request I want to make of you and it applies to every section and community of the State. It was at my suggestion that the Legislature passed a law giving citizens of this State a definite preference on all public works in this State, and this means not only the State's construction program but also public works undertaken by any city, county, town, village or public body. We in New York, the largest industrial State in the Union, must expect that in times of economic distress tens of thousands of jobless workers in other States will gravitate to our State. It is neither right nor fair that we should be made responsible for them. We have quite enough to do to look after our own unemployment problem. The Department of Labor is doing everything possible to see that the law is lived up to but the tasks of the Department will be made more easy, if organized labor throughout the State will remember that the law exists and that the Government wants any information about violations of the law.

In the past the State Federation of Labor has worked consistently and honorably for progressive legislation and the bettering of the lot of the working man. I know that you will continue that fine record.