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

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1930 October 23

Utica, NY - Campaign Speech re Social Welfare

ADDRESS OF GOV. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT.

UTICA, N. Y.

October 23, 1930.

Before I proceed into the main topic of my talk tonight, I want first of all to pay a tribute as the leader of my Party in the State, and also my own very personal tribute to my old friend and comrade, M. William Bray. I think that it is a fair statement, and at the same time a conservative statement when I say that no man in the State has done more than he during these past few years to spread into every nook and corner of the State a better and more honest understanding of the high purposes and definite accomplishments of the state Democracy. He has been indefatigable during these years, not only in Utica, and Oneida County, but throughout the length and breadth of the State in lending encouragement to and infusing enthusiasm in men and women of both great parties for the furtherance of good government, and great social reforms.

Here, in Oneida County, and in this Congressional district, Mr. Bray and his associates have presented to the electorate this autumn, candidates of the highest quality for the Congress of the United States, and for the Senate and Assembly of our State. I feel very strongly that the sending of Mr. Loftis to Congress will help in the great purpose of reestablishing in Washington more sound and more sane economic policies for the solution of our present serious difficulties. By the same token, I can assure you that if you will send a Democratic Senator, my friend Mr. Miller, and the candidates for the Assembly, Mr. Kelly, Mr. O'Brian, and Mr. Gurley to Albany this coming winter, they

will make it far easier for a Democratic administration to carry through the progressive legislation which we all advocate.

There are many extravagant claims made in the Republican Platform this year which I expect to discuss during the balance of the campaign; but one of the most extravagant is the claim which the Republican Party takes for labor legislation in this state. I am sure that the legislative representatives of the various labor organizations at Albany cannot help but be amazed by the claims made by the Republican Party as to what they have done for labor. It has been truly stated that New York State practically leads the Union in its present set-up of labor legislation. It serves as a model for many other progressive states and for many nations.

Where did it all begin? About 20 years ago there were, in the legislature at Albany, a small group of young men, who had become convinced that the time had long since arrived in this state when the legitimate rights of the working man and the working woman must be recognized. Most of those young men have since become nationally famous. Two of the most prominent were the then Senator Robert F. Wagner and Assemblyman Alfred E. Smith. The Legislature was Democratic. The Governor was a Democrat. I remember those days very well, because as a young Senator from Dutchess County, I was able to witness them at first hand. That year, and the following two years saw the establishment in this state of a code of labor laws, of factory inspection laws, of laws for the benefit of labor in general, which marked a definite break away from the past. The neglect which the previous Republican administrations had given to the needs and demands of the working men

and women in this state was definitely and effectively wiped away. Those years marked the advent of a new attitude toward labor. The example of those years has ever since been felt in this state, and the Republican Party, under the same type of unprogressive leadership it had in 1911, has continued to be the trailer, towed by the Democratic motor.

And then when the young Assemblyman, Alfred E. Smith eventually became Governor Alfred E. Smith, in 1918, the good work continued. Liberal appropriations were made to build up the efficiency of the Labor Department, the Workmens Compensation Bureau, the staff of factory inspectors.

During those two years of 1919 and 1920, when Alfred E. Smith was first Governor the progress in general legislation for the advancement and protection of labor was resumed. But this was followed by two years of Governor Miller and everybody who knows anything about the subject at all is aware of the fact that the Miller administration did more to hamper and hamstring the Labor Department of this state than any other administration in history.

It was not until January 1st, 1923, when Alfred E. Smith came back to Albany that the Labor Department was completely rebuilt from the wreck which had been made of it by Governor Miller. Year by year, since then, the Labor laws and their administration have been strengthened and it is a simple fact of history which can be readily checked up that this improvement came in one way, and one way only. If you look into the record of any single piece of labor or social welfare legislation you will find that the first demand for it has

come from the Democratic Party, and from the two Democratic Governors who have been in office since 1923.

In almost every case the suggestion for strengthening the laws affecting labor and social welfare have appeared in the Democratic State Platform. Then has followed a message from the Democratic Governor asking the legislature to enact the law. That has been followed by the invariable rule of a definite refusal by the Republican legislative leaders to have anything to do with it. The first year sees no bills to carry out the governor's suggestion introduced by any Republican. Bills are in this usual routine introduced by Democratic leaders in the Senate and Assembly. These bills are promptly pigeon-holed by the Republican Committee Chairmen, and a motion is made by the Democratic introducer to discharge the committee from consideration of the bill so that it can be brought out on the floor and every member put on record. The motion is voted down by the Republican majority, and that's the end of the attempt for the first year.

The following summer and autumn witness generally an increased public interest in the proposed legislation. The interest results in demands being made on the next legislature by civic and social organizations as well as by organized labor itself. The second legislative session usually sees the same procedure as the first -- complete refusal by the Republican leaders to stand for any of the proposed legislation. But, during this second session, men and women all over the state take an interest in the proposals and make themselves heard.

Then we come to the third session, and by that time the Republican leaders recognize the fact that something has to be done by them. They take the Democratic bills of the previous two years, dress them up with the same titles, but amend them and weaken them in every possible way. They tell the public, however, that they are Republican bills and they tell the public how much the Republican party loves this kind of legislation.

Amendments strengthening the bills so that they will have real teeth in them are offered by the Democratic legislators. The amendments are duly voted down, and the emasculated Republican measures are put through.

When this happens, the Democratic Governor invariably finds on his desk a bill which, to be sure, is a step in advance. It is not like the bill which he and his party have been advocating for the past three or four years, but it is at least better than no bill at all. Naturally, and rightly, he signs the bill and it becomes a law of the state.

Then comes the final step in the campaign of the following autumn: The Republican party leaders carefully avoid any mention of the history of the legislation. They carefully avoid reminding the electorate that for two or three years, they had bitterly opposed the legislation. They carefully avoid mentioning that the legislation itself is but a shadow of the reforms originally asked for. This was for instance the history of the 48-hour bill for women and children in industry. Year after year an honest 48-hour bill was introduced by Democrats in conformity with the Democratic platforms. Year after

year it was pigeon-holed by Republican leaders. At last public opinion got so strong that they had to do something, so they passed a 49-1/2 hour bill and called it a 48-hour bill.

They point with pride to the fact that they passed the bills at Albany. They claim credit for the legislation and, by this form of political dishonesty, hope to deceive the voting public.

Now, as a matter of simple fact, that is the true history of the way our labor legislation has got on the statute books during the past twenty years. Nobody who is interested in labor or social legislation is in the least bit deceived by the claims of the Republican leader. They are, on the face of them, so obviously at variance with the record that they never have gained, and never will gain any votes for candidates for state office on the Republican ticket.

Because during my three years in the State Senate in 1911, 1912 and 1913, I had taken very great interest in labor and social legislation, it gave me a particular happiness to interest myself in the same subject again when I went to Albany in January, 1929. Here is a brief summing up of the record of the past two years which ought to be read by every socially-minded person in this state, every person who thinks of the welfare of the workers, who after all makes up the great majority of our population.

1. I asked for a real eight hour day and 48-hour week for women and children in industry. This has been consistently and constantly refused by the Republican legislature for many years past, and was again refused by the Republican legislature in 1929 and 1930. There is one reform which still remains to be accomplished.

2. I asked the legislature for the establishment of an Advisory Commission or Fair Wage Board for women and children in industry. Here again nothing has been accomplished, but I venture the prediction that both of these demands will be heeded at the next session of the legislature.

3. I asked for the extension of Workmen's Compensation to give its benefits to all occupational diseases. The Republican legislative leaders refused to pass or permit the consideration of bills introduced by Democratic members, bills which would have included all occupational diseases within the protection of Workmen's Compensation. But they did pass bills partially carrying out the Governor's suggestion by adding to the list of compensable diseases, without however, including all occupational diseases. This is an excellent example of how the Republican legislative leaders, after terrific pressure, gave only half of what is asked.

4. For years, the Democratic platform has asked for a law prohibiting the granting of temporary injunctions in individual disputes without notice of hearing, and provision for trial before a jury on any alleged violations of injunctions. This was refused in 1929 and for many years previously by the Republican leaders, but an aroused public opinion forced it through the 1930 session. Here is an illustration of the final reluctant yielding to public opinion.

5. The Democratic Platform of 1928 advocated, and I asked the Legislature for, a commission of experts to study the subject of old age security against want. In the Legislature of 1929 there was a very distinct feeling on the part of the Republican Leaders that

this was too radical a proposal for them to go along with; nevertheless an immediate and marked public interest forced their hands and they did go along with the creation of the Commission I had asked for. This Commission brought in recommendations during the past session and here again public sentiment forced the hands of the Republican Leaders and the first Old Age Security Law was enacted and goes into full force and effect on January 1st, next.

Personally, I regard this legislation as one of the greatest accomplishments of the past two years. It puts New York State by the side of half a dozen other states which have enacted similar laws. More than that, it represents the establishment of the important principle of protection for our old people who, through no fault of their own in most cases, have difficulty in making both ends meet when they are unable any longer to engage in active work.

Perhaps the finest compliment that has been paid to Lieutenant Governor Lehman and to me is in the dedication of a most interesting book on the subject of Old Age Security called "The Challenge of the Aged," by Mr. Epstein who has long been recognized as an authority on and an ardent advocate of Old Age Relief. Here is what he says:

"To Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor, and Herbert H. Lehman, Lieutenant Governor, who by their intellectual leadership and passion for social justice have succeeded in awakening America to a realistic appreciation of old age want."

This old age legislation accomplishes two things. First, it works for the abolishment of the Poor House by making it possible

for old people to remain in their own homes instead of being dragged off to an institution. I hope to see the day when there are no more poor houses.

Secondly, it applies to old people in every walk of life and in every part of the state — not merely industrial workers, not merely the farm population, but all men and women in cities and villages and towns and on farms. Frankly, I am not yet satisfied with the law as it stands today. I have repeatedly said that it must be extended and amended. First, by taking care of many old people who have not yet reached the age of 70, but who, through the pressure of modern industrial life, have come to a precariate old age. Secondly, I have advocated and still advocate an extension of the law so as to provide a contributory system for all workers from the very moment when in their late teens they start out in life. This would insure not merely a roof over their heads and food to keep them alive when they get to be old, but would enable them to live in comfort, in the way in which they have been accustomed to live and in accordance with the best standards of modern American life.

6. In 1930, I signed a law compelling landlords to keep tenants' apartments in New York City in decent repair, thus protecting tenants from the greed of those occasional landlords who would make them pay high rents for uninhabitable quarters. This was supplemented by a bill affecting New York City permitting municipal court justices to grant discretionary stays to tenants who are about to be dispossessed.

7. I renewed both last year and this the demand which the

Democratic party and all those interested in labor and social welfare have been making for a generation past — a declaration by law that the labor of a human being is not a commodity or an article of commerce. This was refused as usual by the Republican legislature, even though it would seem to represent a maxim which is a very sacred part of our American beliefs.

8. This year, impressed by the abuses in many of the privately owned fee-charging employment agencies, I asked the legislature for a law placing these agencies under regulation by the state. It was the first time that this suggestion had been made to the Republican leaders, and therefore, in accordance with their usual custom they refused to have anything to do with it.

9. One of the most important pieces of legislation was the direct result of the severe unemployment situation this year. I found early in the winter that thousands of people who were out of work in other states were drifting into the State of New York, thus adding to our problem. It seemed to me then this was an unfair burden on our state in that our first duty lay to our own citizens. I therefore asked the legislature for a definite statute giving preference to citizens of our own state in employment on the public works of the state and its municipalities — in other words, that so far as possible, employment on our public works within the state be given to our own citizens before the employment of outsiders. The situation in this case was so serious that the legislature actually passed the bill, and it is doing much in many localities of the state to prevent the situation from being even worse than it is today.

10. Here is a brief list of other labor bills that were signed by me this year:

(a) A bill providing additional protection to employees on the work of demolishing buildings; (b) a bill requiring seats for operators of passenger elevators; (c) a bill providing for study of unemployment problems by the industrial commissioner; (d) a bill requiring an eight hour day and the prevailing rate of wages for all workingmen on railroad grade crossing elimination; (e) a bill insuring a half holiday in addition to Sunday for women in factories and mercantile establishments; (f) a bill providing one day of rest in seven for moving picture operators; (g) a bill insuring further protection to window cleaners; (h) a bill prohibiting the importation into New York State of convict-made goods of other states.

It is significant to me that practically every labor body in the State of New York has gone on record endorsing the administration of Lieutenant Governor Herbert H. Lehman and myself, and standing for our reelection.

The same holds true of many of the social service leaders throughout the state. I think that the following telegram which I received last Monday sets forth clearly the attitude of organized labor in this campaign in the State of New York:

NEW YORK NY 20 OCT

HON. FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT

LAFAYETTE HOTEL BUFFALO NY

THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE NON-PARTISAN CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE OF THE NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR IN REGULAR MEETING ASSEMBLED THIS

TWENTIETH DAY OF OCTOBER NINETEEN THIRTY HAVING EXAMINED AND CONSIDERED THE OFFICIAL LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS OF GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR HERBERT H LEHMAN AND THE PLEDGES RELATING TO LABOR LEGISLATION AND RELIEF OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE LABOR LAWS CONTAINED IN THE STATE PLATFORM ADOPTED BY THE DEMOCRATIC STATE CONVENTION ON WHICH GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR LEHMAN HAVE BEEN RE NOMINATED TO SUCCEED THEMSELVES HEREWITHE DECLARE THAT WE ADVISE THE SUPPORT AND REELECTION OF GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR HERBERT H. LEHMAN IN THE INTEREST OF THE WELL BEING OF THE WAGE EARNING CITIZENS OF NEW YORK STATE. WE SO ADVISE FOR THE REASON THAT THE RECORD OF HUMANITARIAN AND REMEDIAL LABOR LEGISLATION PROPOSED AND ENACTED UNDER THEIR SUPERVISION AND DIRECTION HAS BEEN UNSURPASSED IN THE HISTORY OF OUR STATE. WE HEREBY DIRECT THAT THESE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS BE TRANSMITTED BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF THE NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR TO ALL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS IN THIS STATE

JOHN SULLIVAN PRESIDENT

JOSEPH P RYAN VICE PRESIDENT

JOHN M CHANLON SECRETARY NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR

If this were not enough I have been highly honored and gratified in receiving a letter from President Green of the American Federation of Labor in Washington, in which he says:

"You deserve the support of labor and of all classes of people who seek to perpetuate our free institutions and who are engaged in preserving our principle of free government through the advancement of the highest and best interest of the masses of the people. I express the earnest hope that all the working people and their friends in the

State of New York may give you their undivided support in your political and social reform policies so that you may be permitted to give to the people the benefit of your service."

I want to make it perfectly clear that I do not take this approval and these endorsements to myself for the purpose of gaining any personal credit. The credit belongs to a school of thought to which I and the other leaders of the Democratic Party in this state have always belonged.

On the other side is a different school of thought -- not, I am sure, the school of thought of hundreds of thousands of good citizens who call themselves Republicans -- but a school of thought which is a past and present attribute of the Republican leadership in this State. This other school of thought not only has never taken the lead in any legislation effecting social welfare or the improvement of the working classes, but it has definitely and through the succeeding years, blocked all such efforts just as long as it consistently could do so. It is the policy of blockage which I have referred to before. It is con-

History of Labor and Social Welfare Legislation

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS

UTICA, October 23, 1930

p. 795

Before I proceed into the main topic of my talk tonight, I want first of all to pay a tribute as the leader of my Party in the State, and also my own very personal tribute to my old friend and comrade, M. William Bray. I think that it is fair to state that at the present time a conservative statement when I say that no man in the State has done more than he during these past few years to spread into every nook and corner of the State a better and more honest understanding of the high purposes and definite accomplishments of the State Democracy. He has been indefatigable during these years, not only in Utica, and Oneida County, but throughout the length and breadth of the State in lending encouragement to and infusing enthusiasm in men and women of both great parties for the furtherance of good government, and great social reforms.

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Then we come to the third session, and by that time the Republican leaders recognize the fact that something has to be done by them. They take the Democratic bills of the previous two years, dress them up with the same titles, but amend them and weaken them in every possible way. They tell the public, however, that they are Republican bills and they tell the public how much the Republican party loves this kind of legislation.

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to go along with; nevertheless an immediate and marked public interest forced their hands and they did go along with the creation of the Commission I had asked for. This Commission brought in recommendations during the past session and here again public sentiment forced the hands of the Republican leaders and the first Old Age Security Law was enacted and goes into full force and effect on January 1st, next.

Personally, I regard this legislation as one of the greatest accomplishments of the past two years. It puts New York State by the side of half a dozen other states which have enacted similar laws. More than that, it represents the establishment of the important principle of protection for our old people who, through no fault of their own in most cases, have difficulty in making both ends meet when they are unable any longer to engage in active work.

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6. In 1930, I signed a law compelling landlords to keep tenants' apartments in New York City in decent repair, thus protecting tenants from the greed of those occasional landlords who would make them pay high rents for uninhabitable quarters. This was supplemented by a bill affecting New York City permitting municipal court justices to grant discretionary stays to tenants who were about to be dispossessed.

7. I received both last year and this the demand which the Democratic Party and all those interested in labor and social welfare have been making for a generation past—a declaration by law that the labor of a human being is not a commodity or an article of commerce. This was refused as usual by the Republican Legislature, even though it would seem to represent a maxim which is a very sacred part of our American beliefs.

8. This year, impressed by the abuses in many of the privately owned fee-charging employment agencies, I asked the Legislature for a law placing these agencies under regulation by the State. It was the first time that this suggestion had been made to the Republican leaders, and therefore in accordance with their usual custom they refused to have anything to do with it.

9. One of the most important pieces of legislation was the direct result of the severe unemployment situation this year. I found early in the winter that thousands of people who were out of work in other states were drifting into the State of New York, thus adding to our problem. It seemed to me that this was an unfair burden on our State in that our first duty lay

to our own citizens. I therefore asked the Legislature for a definite statute giving preference to citizens of our own State in employment on the public works of the State. It was stipulated with other demands that no less than 50% as possible, employment on our public works within the State be given to our own citizens before the employment of outsiders. The situation in this case was so serious that the Legislature actually passed the bill, and it is doing much in many localities of the State to prevent the situation from being even worse than it is today.

10. Here is a brief list of other labor bills that were signed by me this year:

(a) A bill providing additional protection to employees on the work of demolishing buildings; (b) a bill requiring seats for operators of passenger elevators; (c) a bill providing for study of unemployment problems by the industrial commissioner; (d) a bill requiring an eight-hour day and the prevailing rate of wages for all workmen on railroad grade crossing elimination; (e) a bill insuring a half holiday in addition to Sunday for women in factories and mercantile establishments; (f) a bill providing one day of rest in seven for moving picture operators; (g) a bill insuring further protection to window cleaners; (h) a bill prohibiting the importation into New York State of certain articles of foreign manufacture.

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NEW YORK NY 20 OCT

HON. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
LAFAYETTE HOTEL BUFFALO NY

THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE NON-PARTISAN CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE OF THE NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR IN REGULAR MEETING ASSEMBLED THIS TWENTIETH DAY OF OCTOBER NINETEEN THIRTY HAVING EXAMINED AND CONSIDERED THE OFFICIAL LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS OF GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR HERBERT H. LEHMAN AND THE PLEDGES RELATING TO LABOR LEGISLATION AND RELIEF OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE LABOR LAWS CONTAINED IN THE STATE PLATFORM ADOPTED BY THE DEMOCRATIC STATE CONVENTION ON WHICH GOVERNOR ROOSEVELT AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR LEHMAN HAVE BEEN RENOMINATED TO SUCCEED THEMSELVES HEREWITHE DECLARE THAT WE ADVISE THE SUPPORT AND REELECTION OF GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR HERBERT H. LEHMAN IN THE INTEREST OF THE WELL BEING OF THE WAGE EARNING CITIZENS OF NEW YORK STATE. WE SO ADVISE FOR THE REASON THAT THE RECORD OF HUMANITARIAN AND REMEDIAL LABOR LEGISLATION PROPOSED AND ENACTED UNDER THEIR SUPERVISION AND DIRECTION HAS BEEN UNSURPASSED IN THE HISTORY OF OUR STATE. WE HEREBY DIRECT THAT THESE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS BE TRANSMITTED BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF THE NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR TO ALL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS IN THIS STATE.

JOHN SULLIVAN, PRESIDENT.

JOSEPH P. RYAN, VICE PRESIDENT.

JOHN M. O'HANLON, SECRETARY.

NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION OF LABOR.

If this were not enough I have been highly honored and gratified in receiving a letter from President Green of the American Federation of Labor in Washington, in which he says:

"You deserve the support of labor and of all classes of people who seek to perpetuate our free institutions and who are engaged in preserving our principle of free government through the advancement of the highest and best interests of the masses of the people. I express the earnest hope that all the working people and their friends in the State of New York may give you their undivided support in your political and social reform policies so that you may be permitted to give to the people the benefit of your services."

I want to make it perfectly clear that I do not take this approval and these endorsements to myself for the purpose of gaining any personal credit. The credit belongs to a school of thought to which I and the other leaders of the Democratic Party in this State have always belonged.

On the other side is a different school of thought—not, I am sure, the school of thought of hundreds of thousands of good citizens who call themselves Republicans—but a school of thought which is a past and present attribute of the Republican leadership in this State. This other school of thought not only has never taken the lead in any legislation effecting social welfare or the improvement of the working classes, but it has definitely and through the succeeding years, blocked all such efforts just as long as it consistently could do so. It is a policy of blockage which I have referred to before. It is consistent with the whole record of lack of vision, of utter selfishness, of decadence and the playing of petty politics which has marked the Republican leadership in Albany consistently ever since the days of the "Black Horse Cavalry" which controlled our legislative halls. Do you wish to go back to the old policies of reaction, or do the people of our State seek two years more of progress under an administration which thinks first of all in terms of helping human beings, in terms of new laws to keep pace with modern thought and modern science—in terms of the present and future well-being of the men and women and children of the State.