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**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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**File No. 410**

**1930 November 11**

**Boston, MA - Armistice Day Speech**

Armistice Day Address, Boston, Massachusetts, November 11, 1930

*Fighting the Battles of Peace Times*

Armistice Day is becoming by custom an anniversary which celebrates the termination of the world's greatest war and even more than that gives to us and the other nations of the world an opportunity in the review of the wars of the past to search our hearts and our minds on the ever present theme of human conflict. In my own life, though I have not reached the half century mark, I have witnessed two armed conflicts in which our own Nation was engaged as well as a half dozen lesser combats in which we Americans have taken part on foreign shores. And in addition to this American participation in armed strife the rest of the world in this less than a half century has witnessed wars in every one of its continents and in all of its climes.

That these past twelve full years have produced for the world as a whole fewer conflicts than any like period is a matter for which civilization should give thanks. Nevertheless, in spite of all of the brave resolves of twelve years ago, we know to our sorrow that thirty millions of men even at this moment constitute the armed forces of the world. We cannot yet say that the high purposes that followed that memorable November 11, 1918, have been even remotely attained.

Tonight, however, I speak not of the physical conflict known as war but rather of those wars within civilization itself which continue year in and year out in times of what we often erroneously call peace.

Of you, veterans of many far flung contests, who have upheld the honor and glory of our flag on many distant fields, because this is Armistice Day and because an armistice marks the first acknowledgment of surrender by the vanquished, I want to ask your powerful aid in bringing about other armistices in these other wars in times of peace.

If it be true that peace has its victories no less than war, it also follows that what we call peaceful times, when guns are silent and military forces

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idle in their barracks, are nevertheless the times of conflicts not fought with guns or material weapons, conflicts wide of front, pitiless, devastating and dangerous to the safety of the State. These are the wars where we who believe in progress, who believe in bettering the safety, security and happiness of every individual in the Nation move forward in perpetual assault on the forces of conservatism, of selfishness, of greed and of entrenched tradition which belong to a past generation rather than to this twentieth century of ours.

You, at one time or another, have risked life itself for your Country's honor or your Country's safety. Where more certainly can I look for help in ending these wars of peace-time which also endanger your Country's security and check your Country's advance?

First, there is the warfare against the grim tradition that every man must look out for himself, that he must fight against his fellow men from the cradle to the grave, for his bread, for his livelihood, for everything that makes life worth living, no matter how handicapped by misfortune or circumstance, and that he must wage this fight without a helping hand from the State to aid him, if he falters or to rescue him from absolute starvation, if he fails. To the State he must give his allegiance, his life even, if called in its defense, and a yearly tithe of all he earns. And yet, according to this ancient theory, from the State he must not look for help in case misfortune, utterly beyond his control, should overtake him in his declining years.

What I emphasize, what I plead recognition for, is the fact that in the thirty years of the twentieth century more vital changes in the whole structure of civilization have taken place than in the three hundred years which went before. It is not so many generations ago, for example, that society accepted the motto of "the devil take the hindmost" and an equally cruel theory of "the survival of the fittest." In those days civilization was wholly willing to let its old people who dropped out of the line of march lie in the ditch to die of starvation or exposure. Then came another era where at least the stragglers from the ranks were picked up. But they were not kept with the army. They were bundled into a cart and taken away to perish miserably, removed from friends and family, away from all the comforts of home, in the "County Almshouse." Only in our own day and generation have we recognized not only the thought that the State has an obligation to these old people but also the thought that these old people have a right to demand of the State itself that it be made possible for them to live to the end of their days in their own homes and by their own firesides.

This particular war within our civilization is being won and we are approaching its armistice day, because of the millions of men and women who recognize this new relationship of the State to the individual. We understand, at last, that these old people who have fallen on evil times have in their day given of their service, of their wages and of their support to the State itself.

Then there has been the war carried in our own day and generation in behalf of the physical safety and the health of our working men and women and our children, and when we speak of this element of our population we include of necessity the great majority of all the people. The long battle for adequate compensation to those who are injured in industry, the long battle for decent factory conditions, the long battle against child labor, the long battle to protect the lives of the mothers of the State; on all of these fronts we have made and are making steady progress, and yet we have not pierced the final line of defense.

There is, furthermore, what is miscalled the war against crime; it should be known by the better term of the war to prevent crime. In this conflict we face great odds. We are only just beginning to make headway. At last the public conscience is being aroused to the fact that punishment alone does not cure crime, that while punishment may in many instances and in many circumstances be a deterrent of crime, crime itself is individual and those who are guilty of lawlessness must be thought of in the first instance as human beings and not as mere prison numbers. At last we realize that

out of every hundred men and boys who go to prison ninety or more return eventually to our communities to live in our midst again. During all these years many and probably most of these who return come out of prison more hardened, more criminally minded, more certain to go wrong than when they entered. Today we are beginning to learn that these prison conditions and their inevitable results are not a necessity and that by classification, segregation, education, useful occupation, vocational training and parole we can salvage to civilization and to useful life thousands of shattered lives.

Another great war of peace times is that which we are waging in behalf of mental and physical health. It is within our own lifetimes that science and education have made it possible not only to halve the rate of infant mortality, but even to lengthen the average span of life by many years. In our own generation we have undertaken the cure of mental ills and of epidemic disease. Within a month I have visited one of the great hospitals for the mentally ill in my State and have been told by the Superintendent that of the hundreds of new cases which were admitted within the past year, forty-five per cent have been returned to their families and their homes, either wholly cured or so vastly benefited that they could be taken care of by their own families. And within a few days the Commissioner of Health has reminded me, first, that the dread scourge of tuberculosis, which stalked through all of our communities only a generation ago, is today well in hand and on the road to gradual extinction. Furthermore, he reminded me that the other scourge of diphtheria is today almost an unknown visitor in our midst. We are winning this war.

Finally, I would say a word to you of another war which does not affect our bodies or our minds, but affects very intimately the lives we lead and the comfort and happiness, not only of our own, but of future generations. Here again the struggle is of our own generation. The strides of science have made necessities of luxuries and have brought new services into our homes. The electricity which was the new found wonder of our fathers and mothers has become the household drudge, or to be more accurate, can become our household drudge if our pocketbooks can afford that luxury.

Certain elements which enter into the daily needs of a people have long been recognized as bearing a character which differs from that of the ordinary commodities of barter and trade. These are the group of services which we list under the broad heading of public utilities. In their essentials they are often monopolistic and the State, for many generations past, has recognized the distinction between them and the other products of industry. Today in this field of war two armies are drawn up, the one seeking to break down the distinctions between the utilities and the other forms of industry, seeking to free the utilities from all limitations of profit for personal gain, and on the other side, that more modern army which seeks the development and distribution of those utilities at lowest cost for the primary good of the great mass of the people who must have them if they are to maintain the standards of their neighbors and of the civilization of today. We of this newer army may well extend the motto—"Public office is a public trust"—to apply to the thought that "Public service itself is a public trust." If the electricity and power and telephones of our homes, if the transportation which takes us to and from our vacations have the element of a public necessity, then they must not be made the instrument of unreasonable profit to private individuals who numerically represent only a very small percentage of the users of the service. This particular war will continue without question until general recognition is accorded to the fundamental principle that "Public service is a public trust." Considering how recently this conflict has begun, we have made, I think, greater progress than along the entire rest of the battle front, for I read the general verdict of the public press that events of only a few days past have shown emphatically, in all parts of this Country, that the people as a whole are determined to insist that the control of our Government be placed in the hands of those who believe in the proper and fair regulation and ordering of our public utilities.

Twelve years ago there were lined up across the face of Europe a series of great armies. There were many battle fronts and many areas of conflict. Terrific drives and serried attacks were made from time to time against isolated points in this long line. It was not until the armies of which we were a part began a unified movement along the whole of the battle front that victory became a possibility.

So it is with the battles of peace times. It is not enough for us to concentrate our attack at one point and one point only. There must be concerted action by the forces of progress all along the line; there must be a unity of simultaneous attack on all the fronts.

To you, veterans of so many conflicts, we look for understanding and unity of action in this great struggle of today. In the course of the centuries this war of peace time is as vital to the safety of our Nation, to the safety of Americans yet unborn, as the wars that are fought with guns and gas and high explosives. You did not fail your country when she called you in her hour of need. I know you will not fail her now.