Franklin D. Roosevelt — "The Great Communicator"

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 2: " You have nothing to fear but fear itself:" FDR and the New Deal

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1938 October 26

New York City, NY –
Radio Message to the Herald Tribune Forum

HERALD TRIBUNE FORUM

RADIO ADDRESS

OCTOBER 26, 1938

No one who lived through the grave hours of last month can doubt the longing of most of the peoples of the world for an enduring peace. Our business now is to utilize the desire for peace to build principles which are the only basis of permanent peace.

It is becoming increasingly clear that peace by fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by the sword.

There can be no peace if the reign of law is to be replaced by a recurrent sanctification of sheer force.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the threat of war.

There can be no peace if national policy adopts as a deliberate instrument the dispersion all over the world of millions of helpless and persecuted wanderers with no place to lay their heads.

There can be no peace if humble men and women are not free to think their own thoughts, to express their own feelings, to worship God.

There can be no peace if economic resources that ought to be devoted to social and economic reconstruction are to be diverted to an intensified competition in armaments which will merely heighten the suspicions and fears and threaten the economic prosperity of each and every nation.

At no time in modern history has the responsibility which rests upon governments been more obvious or more profound.

I speak for a United States which has no interest in war. We covet nothing save good relations with our neighbors; and we recognize that the world today has become our neighbor.

But in the principle of the good neighbor certain fundamental reciprocal obligations are involved. There must be a deliberate and conscious will that such political changes as changing needs require, shall be made peacefully.

That means a due regard for the sanctity of treaties. It means deliberate avoidance of policies which arouse fear and distress. It means the self-restraint to refuse strident ambitions which are sure to breed insecurity and intolerance and thereby weaken the prospect of that economic and moral recovery the world so sadly needs.

You cannot organize civilization around the core of militarism and at the same time expect reason to control human destinies.

For more than twelve years, the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament.

Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbor nations arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must continue to arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared.

We still insist that an armanent race among nations is absurd unless new territories or new controls are coveted. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: The kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it as an ideal of life, we must be prepared to meet with success any application of force against us.

We in the United States do not seek to impose on any other people either our way of life or our internal form of government. But we are determined to maintain and protect that way of life and that form of government for ourselves. And we are determined to use every endeavor in order that the Western Hemisphere may work out its own interrelated salvation in the light of its own interrelated experience.

And we affirm our faith that, whatever choice of way of life a people makes, that choice must not threaten the world with the disaster of war. The impact of such a disaster cannot be confined. It releases a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living. That statement applies not to the Western Hemisphere alone but to the whole of Europe and Asia and Africa and the islands of the seas.

In all that I have said to you I have reaffirmed the faith of the American people in democracy. The way of democracy is free discussion -- as exemplified by the objectives of the Forum to which I am speaking. Free discussion is most greatly useful when it is restrained and relates to facts. It is not useful to suggest either to the American people or to the peoples of other nations that the American Government, its policies, its practices and its servants are actuated by motives of dishonor or corruption. To do so is, of necessity, an attack on the American system of constitutional representative government itself.

Let us work with greater unity for peace among the nations of the world, for restraint, for negotiation and for community of effort. Let us work for the same ideals within our own borders in our relations with each other, so that we may, if the test ever comes, have that unity of will with which alone a democracy can successfully meet its enemies.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

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By radio - Original reading copy.

HOLD FOR RELEASE HOLD FOR RELEASE HOLD FOR RELEASE

October 26, 1936

CAUTION: This address of the President, to be broadcast by him from the White House, MUST BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE until released.

NOTE: Release to editions of all newspapers appearing on the streets NOT EARLIER than 10:50 P. M. o'clock, Eastern Standard Time, Wednesday, October 26, 1936.

Care must be exercised to prevent premature publication.

STEPHEN EARLY
Secretary to the President

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First Draft

No one who lived through the grave hours of last month can doubt the longing of most of the peoples of the world for an enduring peace. ~~In no country was there~~ a sign of ~~any~~ will to ~~war among the masses. But they had a profound sense of their impotence to determine the issue of war or the nature of peace.~~

Our business now is to utilize that ~~sense of danger~~ to build principles which are the only basis of ~~the real~~ peace ~~that comes from the heart. For~~ peace by fear has no higher or more enduring quality than peace by the sword.

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The organization of human living around the autocracy of military strength alone is simply no longer compatible with the plain necessities of human living. You cannot ~~have~~ civilization ~~and refuse to let~~ reason control human destinies. You cannot replace reason by the power of inflamed passions to drag men into conflict; which in its turn transforms vicious persecutors -- men who would prefer to be decent and humane.

Not the least of the causes which have led the American people to their faith in democracy -- a faith we cannot too constantly reaffirm -- is the understanding that the way of democracy is the way of free discussion, and the way of free discussion is the way of creative peace. Free discussion means the sole possibility of settling wisely by negotiation differences which, however profound, will never be rightly settled if the alternative to agreement so achieved is conflict.

For more than twelve years, the United States has been steadily seeking disammament.

Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament ~~for itself~~ while ~~the~~ nations neighbors arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must ~~promptly~~ continue arm. It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons capable of aggression, ordinary rules of national prudence

and common sense require that we be prepared. We ~~shall~~ still insist that an armament race among nations, ~~becomes~~ is absurd ~~and futile~~. ~~indeed no new acquisitions are sought by nations~~ New territories or new controls are not sought. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: ~~The~~ the kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permanent necessity the idea of force, and reject it ~~absolutely~~ as an ideal of life, we must ~~always~~ be prepared to meet with success any application of force against us. ~~which threatens our liberty with even greater force.~~

We in the United States do not seek to impose ~~upon~~ on any other people either our way of life or our internal form of government. ~~Because~~ But we are determined to maintain and protect that way of life and that form of government for ourselves, ~~and for the whole~~

Good will are determined & necessary endeavor in order
that the Western Hemisphere ~~we recognize that these are matters upon~~
which every other nation ~~is entitled to~~ may work out its own sal-
vation in the light of interrelated its own experience.

But we are compelled to affirm our faith ~~that~~, whatever
choice a ~~people~~ people makes, ~~it cannot legitimately be a choice~~
~~the implications of which~~ threaten the world with the disaster
of war. The ~~incidence~~ impact of such a disaster cannot be confined.
~~It debases the international currency of good faith.~~ It releases
a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living.

For good or ill, the interdependence of the modern world is
a stark fact the recognition of which is the necessary starting
point of good international relationships. We are members one
of another. We have to discover the institutions and the methods
appropriate to the unity our safety requires.

No doubt it is a difficult task to achieve. No doubt the
road to its achievement is long and hard.

But I do not think I misinterpret the faith of the American people when I insist upon their determination to march steadfastly upon that road. There is no difficulty great enough to impede that determination. Those whose feet have lain so near to the abyss must find in that grim experience the call to reconstruction while there is time. They will not find America wanting if they embark wholeheartedly upon that effort.

D R A F T

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

(Data for speech of October 26th. Subject: The Coming Struggle for Peace.)

I suppose that in dealing with foreign affairs the highest duty is that of complete frankness. A statesman can only serve his country well by setting forth, completely and straightforwardly, its point of view. Failure to do this can produce nothing but trouble. Peace and friendship in world affairs is promoted only when everyone knows where everyone else stands. For this reason I speak bluntly tonight.

Our first and greatest national interest is peace itself. This we share with the peoples of the entire world. When, a few days ago, a world crisis was solved without general war, there was universal celebration. Not of victory, but because nations had solved a problem without recourse to war.

This was, indeed, the objective, and the only objective, of the diplomacy of the United States during that period. Plainly ~~we were not concerned with the terms of any particular settlement~~ in that exigency we were not called upon to pass in any words upon the matters of difference. Still less did we assume

to

to sit in judgment on other nations. We did undertake to say that the world would sit in judgment on all of us, if the combined intelligence of the world could not find a better way of solving its difficulties than through mass slaughter.

Yet it would be wholly unreal to minimize the fact that fear of force-politics prevails in much of the world. We should be stupid not to recognize that this fear has compelled a race in armament; that the race appears only to have begun; that it is becoming increasingly intense; and that peace by fear has much the same quality as peace by the sword. Wars today may be waged without the existence of actual hostilities. No struggle for peace will be successful until that condition is ended.

This is why, for more than 12 years, the United States has been steadily seeking disarmament.

Yet we have consistently pointed out that neither we, nor any nation, will accept disarmament for itself while its neighbors arm to the teeth. If there is not general disarmament, we ourselves must promptly arm.

It

It is a step we do not like to take, and do not wish to take. But, until there is general abandonment of weapons, ordinary rules of national prudence and common sense require that we be prepared. We shall still insist that an armament race among nations, becomes absurd if indeed no new acquisitioms are sought by nations. We are entitled, I think, to greater reassurance than can be given by words: The kind of proof which can be given, for example, by actual discussions, leading to actual disarmament. Not otherwise can we be relieved of the necessity of increasing our own military and naval establishments. For while we refuse to accept as a permenent necessity the idea of force, and reject it absolutely as an ideal of life, we must always be prepared to meet any application of force to us with even greater force.

We in the western world know that peace is possible. No nation on this hemisphere lives in perpetual dread that the airplanes coming across its borders carry loads

of

of explosives, or that a neighbor's troops may invade over night. We have had a spacious development, with a minimum of international fear. We like that life. We propose that it shall continue; and in this regard the interest of the 21 western republics is common. At Buenos Aires two years ago the American nations unanimously resolved that events threatening a breach of the peace anywhere in the hemisphere were of concern to all of them; and these events might include, not only dissension within, of which happily there is little; but also threats from beyond the seas. A duty lies upon us and our colleagues in the New World to safeguard this peace. Not for the Western World the paralyzing process of armed diplomacy, of balance of power, of alliances and counter-alliances. We do not accept as necessary, the crushing psychological burden of continuous fear. Within, we are in agreement. If threatened from without, we know how to defend.

It is easy to be despondent about world affairs at the present time. We appear to be at one of those moments in history when nations think they are prisoners of uncontrollable forces; and that these lead eventually to a world catastrophe. Yet I think it is time to offer a sincere word of hope.

Within the past few weeks we have had a supreme demonstration of what the millions of plain people ~~throughout the world~~ really wanted. ~~There was~~ No plebiscite taken to determine the emotion of the entire world when war was avoided three short weeks ago. Every individual breathed a silent prayer of thanks that war was averted, ~~and that~~ this common human feeling became ~~for a moment~~ the most powerful unifying force, perhaps, which we have seen in our time. ~~That was the~~ It is the true guide for statesmen; ~~the~~ a plain indication that the keys which can loose us from the inevitability of war lie in our own hands. If the governments of the world accurately translate into action the universal sentiment of their own peoples, the problem disappears. We already know and have at our command peaceful methods

by

by which economic problems can be solved. We are beginning to understand how prosperity of individuals may be approached. We are coming to realize that war does not find the answer any problem; and that victor and vanquished at the end are alike destroyed. Once this is adequately realized, and particularly where nations are articulate in their chosen ways, it should never be impossible to solve difficulties. Judgment by the common feeling of peoples, our war-like organization becomes merely unnecessary.

This is why, it seems to me, the struggle for peace is primarily a struggle to permit the inherent wisdom and kindly instincts of the plain people everywhere to guide their governments. For while individual statesmen in history have occasionally been willing to commit national suicide, peoples have rarely, if ever, shared that strange emotion. War as a threat of war is today a convention only; first-rate statesmen are able to break through and discard it, and only in doing so do they attain the fullest measure of triumph.

Two years ago at Buenos Aires I said: "We cannot now, especially in view of our common purpose, accept any defeatist

defeatist attitude. We have learned by hard experience that peace is not to be had for the mere asking; that peace like other great privileges can be obtained only by hard and painstaking effort. We are here to dedicate ourselves and our countries to that work."

It is the principal task in the world today. Its difficulty is a challenge; but we do not know the existence of the word "impossible".

DRAFT

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