

December 14, 1935

[Shindoren Club Dinner]

FDR Speech File

#1584

Gridiron Club
Dec 14-1935

President Bell, members of the Gridiron Club and fellow guests:
 At the end of another evening of the semi-annual ^{Hagitation} ~~evening~~ which falls
 to the lot of Presidents of the United States on the occasion of Gridiron
 Dinners, I suppose I should be in a mood of appropriate ^{humility} ~~humility~~ and
 contrition for all the sins I have committed and all the wise statesmanship
 which I have failed to ^{display} ~~give account~~. I do not feel depressed, however,
 because, sitting here in "buggy-drivers' row", it is obvious to me that
 as long as the Gridiron Club is in general supervision of our Government,
 there is a final ^{appeal to that Gridiron Court of Patriots} ~~source of perfect~~ judgment, to which all of us can ~~appeal~~ ^{appeal} ~~resent~~.
~~should need cry.~~

One of the features of the evening that appealed to me most was
 your magnificent motion picture entitled "A Newer Deal". I suppose that
 picture was meant to suggest that the inauguration of ^{my good friend Norman Thomas} ~~a Socialist~~ as
 President of the United States would mean a turn to the right, a movement
 in the direction of conservative principles of Government, as compared with
 policies in effect under the present Administration. Alas! I am afraid
 that few guests at this dinner realize the inroads that ^{so-called} ~~Socialistic~~ prin-
 ciples have been making on American Government for a long time past.

This afternoon I went back and read some of the planks of the
 national platforms of the Socialist Party and its predecessors, the Social
 Democratic Party and the Socialist Labor Party, from 1892 to 1932. I have
 some of them here and I am going to describe what happened to them.

The first one I ran across was the plank carried in the Socialist platforms from 1892 to 1932, advocating reduction in the hours of labor in proportion to the progress of production. This plank ^{was similar to what} Congress wrote into law under the Administration of President Andrew Johnson in 1868, 24 years before ^{this} ~~the first~~ Socialist platform was written, and again under the Administration of President Wilson in the Adanson Act in 1916.

In the Socialist platforms from 1892 through to 1932 I found a plank providing for a progressive income tax and a tax on inheritances, small incomes to be exempted. Congress wrote this plank ^{to} in the law in the Administrations of Presidents Cleveland, Taft, Wilson and the incumbent. The Socialist platform of 1900 contained a plank recommending that labor legislation should be national instead of local or international, when possible, and this plank was written into law under the Administrations of ^{in fact, Smt} Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Coolidge, Hoover and the incumbent.

The platforms from 1900 on recommended insurance against accidents, sickness and lack of employment, and pensions for aged and exhausted workers. ^{They were in part} written into law under Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Coolidge and the incumbent.

In the Socialist platform of 1896 and thereafter I found a recommendation for immediate Government relief for the unemployed by building schools, by reforestation of cut-over and waste lands, by reclamation of arid tracts, by the building of canals and by extending useful public works; also that the Government should loan money to municipalities ^{many of these loans were made} without interest for this purpose. ~~This act was~~ written into law in the Administrations of President Hoover and the incumbent.

The Socialist platforms from 1896 on recommended legislation forbidding the employment of children. Under President Wilson child labor was restricted in Puerto Rico. Under President Coolidge a proposed Amendment to the Constitution was adopted by the Senate and House of Representatives, and under President F. D. Roosevelt in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 the Secretary of Agriculture was given authority to regulate child labor in the sugar industry. I will not mention in this connection the codes of fair competition drawn up under the N. R. A., no longer in existence. *You know why!*

The Socialist platforms of 1908, 1912 and 1916 proposed that official charity be abolished and that there be substituted compulsory insurance against unemployment, illness, accident, invalidism, old age and death. This plank was written into law under the Administration of the incumbent when Congress enacted the Social Security Act of 1935. *I may note that this Act is still in existence.*

The Socialist platforms from 1896 on recommended unrestricted and equal suffrage for men and women, ^{*the same*} written into law under President Wilson when the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was adopted. The Socialist planks of 1908 and 1912 recommended the separation of the Bureau of Labor from the Department of Commerce and Labor and the establishment of a Department of Labor, ^{*This became*} ~~written into~~ law under President Wilson in 1913.

The Socialist platforms from 1892 on recommended the further conservation and development of natural resources for the use and benefit of all the people, ^{*and progress towards this was made*} written into law under Presidents Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, Coolidge and the incumbent. From 1912 on the Socialist

platforms recommended at intervals the establishment of minimum wage scales, ^{This has}
written into law under the Administration of the incumbent in the Agricultural
Adjustment Act, which authorizes the establishment of minimum wage scale in
certain instances and in the Tennessee Valley Authority Act requiring a
minimum wage scale in all contracts. ^{This Act has fortunately remained}
~~And again I might mention that the codes~~
^{never went to the point}
~~of fair competition contained minimum wage scales.~~

In the Socialist platform of 1928 I found a recommendation for a
publicly owned ~~and~~ power system under which the Federal Government should
cooperate with the States and municipalities in the distribution of electric
energy to the people at cost. This plank ^{was} written into law under President
Harding in the Salt River Project Act of 1922 authorizing the Secretary of
the Interior to sell surplus power, giving preference to municipal purposes;
under President Coolidge in the Boulder Canyon Project Act of 1928 authoriz-
ing the Secretary of the Interior to contract for the generation of electrical
energy and delivery at the switchboard to States, municipal corporations,
political sub-divisions and private corporations upon charges that would in
his judgment cover expenses of operation; and under the Administration of
the incumbent in the Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 ^{providing} for
the equitable distribution and sale of surplus power at Muscle Shoals among
States and municipalities.]

The Socialist platform of 1900 recommended treaties outlawing war
and the substitution of peaceful methods of international disputes. This
plank found expression in the Naval Appropriation Act of 1916 advocating
international disarmament and declaring it to be the policy of the United
States to settle its international disputes through arbitration or mediation;

in the Briand-Kellogg Peace Pact of 1928 under President Coolidge providing for the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy, and in the Neutrality Resolution of August 31, 1935 under ^{the incumbent} ~~President F. D. Roosevelt~~.

The Socialist platforms of 1916, 1928 and 1932 advocated the independence of the Philippines on terms agreed upon in negotiations with the Filipinos. This plank was written into law under the Administration of President Hoover in the Philippine Independence Act of January 17, 1933.

^{and has been written into law}
The Socialist platform of 1932 recommended Government aid to farmers and small home owners to protect them against mortgage foreclosure and this was written into law when the Federal Farm Loan Board was established in 1916 under President Wilson, when the Federal Farm Credit Administration was established in 1933, Home Owners' Loan Act in 1933, the Rural Electrification Administration and the Resettlement Administration in 1935 under the incumbent.

The Socialist platform of 1932 recommended increased Federal and State subsidies to road building, educational and social services for rural communities, and this plank was written into law under the incumbent ^{in the} T.V.A. Act, the establishment of the Electric Home and Farm Authority and the Public Works Administration, all in 1933. And in conclusion I might mention that in the platform of 1928 it was set down that the Socialist Party believes that the farmer is entitled to special consideration of the importance of Agriculture because of the farmers' present economic plight, and this plank was written into law under the Administration of the incumbent.

^{of the incumbent}
I could go on with further citations of the inroads that Socialist principles have made on American life, at least from the time of the Administration of President Andrew Johnson in 1865. Congress has often succumbed

to them. Even such ^{radicals} ~~conservatives~~ as Ulysses S. Grant, Grover Cleveland and Calvin Coolidge were unable to resist them. Therefore, if the present Administration is to be charged with turning to the ^{right} ~~left~~ and with following the false gods of ^{Tory} ~~Socialism~~, how could mere theorists, such as we ~~are~~, be expected to detect fallacies that such practical, hard-headed men as Theodore Roosevelt, Taft and Hoover, fail to resist, and who even went so far, and with such outstanding success, to urge upon the Congress ^{this thing} ~~for enactment into statute?~~ ^{principles?}

Gentlemen, I feel ^{very strongly} that the inauguration of Norman Thomas as President of the United States in 1937 would be a terrific anti-climax. Of course, I ^{must admit} ~~need not point out~~ that you will find some of the Socialist planks that I have read in the Democratic and even in the Republican platforms of the period. We all realize that certain, broad, fundamental social, humanitarian and economic objectives are not the exclusive possession of a single political group, and that with the development of a more tolerant and more enlightened public thought on these subjects it is possible in ever greater degree to put them into effect.

If some of the measures that the present Administration has sponsored for the relief of Agriculture, for the social protection of the infirm and the aged, for the protection of bank deposits and investments, be considered Socialistic then all I can say is that some of the Republican gentlemen gathered at this board are going to suffer a profound shock when they read the Republican platform for 1936.

Let us not deceive ourselves with tags, titles and labels. Let us not attempt to argue with epithets. Public opinion, political candidates and platforms will differ from time to time on the degree to which the broad

principles of human betterment can be translated into practical application. But I do not believe that even the most conservative person present would desire to have most of the legislation which I have described, common to all parties and going back to the period of our rebirth as a nation in the sixties, stricken from the statute books. These principles are part of American life, most of them accepted as commonplaces of Government.

I am not one of those who fears for the survival of our political institutions, or of the broad structure of our national economic life. I believe that part of the genius of our form of Government is its adaptiveness to the needs of changing times. The wise and sound general principles upon which our Government rests, and from which our peace and happiness are derived, were not intended to become rigid formulae, inflexible, resistant to the stresses and strains, to the greater inter-change of opposing forces and different tensions, out of which true progress arises.

If you wish proof of that statement you have but to compare the present conditions of life in the United States with those existing in some other parts of the world. Let me read you a brief quotation from a recent book:

"By and large Americans have had great liberty of speech and press. But the apologist for either Communism or Fascism who cites certain notable and shameful abridgments of liberty in America as proof of the utter hypocrisy of our Democracy and the complete similarity of conditions here and" - - I will omit the names of the countries - - "talks nonsense. The very meetings at which he makes his statement, if conditions were reversed, would, as a matter of course, be suppressed in these countries."

The author of that statement is Norman Thomas.

At the close of your motion picture I noticed a caption "America Goes Back To Work". You saw a rather remarkable collection of Americans sliding down toboggans, bathing in the sea, attending the races, and otherwise diverting themselves, even to the extent of granting interviews to the press. And that is what is happening. America is going back to work, going back to its sports, diversions and normal occupations. We still have millions of unfortunates who are without jobs, but the currents of trade are swelling, industries are resuming large scale production, profits are increasing and even the Gridiron Club has begun to smile again.

I cannot tell you who will be inaugurated President of the United States at that first mid-winter inauguration in 1937. But of course I have some ideas on that subject, and even a certain preference. Whoever the man turns out to be, of one thing I am certain - - that the United States will continue in the future, as it ever has in the past, to solve its own problems in accordance with its own democratic traditions, and that so long as that tradition controls and guides our destinies, the progress of the American people will be irresistible.