

September 1942

[Labor Day Message]

FDR Speech File

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devotion with which they have met the demands of the present crisis.

[If our production is not yet enough, it is not the responsibility of the men--or the women--with the dinner pails.] They know what it is to work until muscles ache, [until feet are sore from too much standing.] They know what it means to be weary when the whistle blows at the end of the ~~day~~ *shift.*

They know, too, that democracy has made labor's advances possible. They know just what stake they have in America, just what they are fighting for. [This is the fifty-fifth anniversary of the official observance of Labor Day. It may be enlightening to go back fifty-five years to compare the pay check of 1887 with the pay check of 1942.]

Let's choose a few industries at random. In 1887 an iron or steel worker earned \$2.50 for an eleven or twelve hour day; in 1942 he averages about \$8.50 for an eight hour day. In 1887 a worker in the cotton goods industry earned \$1 for ten and a half hours; in 1942 he averages \$4.25 for eight hours. In the woolen goods industry he earned \$1.20 for ten hours; he averages \$5.75 for eight hours now. In the boots and shoes industry he earned \$1.75 for ten hours; he averages \$5.25 for eight hours now.

It is true that the dollar bought more in 1887 than it buys in 1942, but it is a statistical fact that the worker in industry today is able, in most cases, to buy with his daily wage not less than twice as much as he could fifty-five years ago. That,

*omit*

however you look at it, is economic, bread-and-butter progress. Social progress has been even greater. All workers in the United States today are free to organize, to engage in collective bargaining, to elect such representatives in collective bargaining as they choose. This is a right, not a privilege, and it is protected by the law of the land.

A considerable part of this progress has been made in the last ten years through an ordered government program. It has affected not only the working man in the factory but the working man on the farm. During the first six months of 1933 the farmers' cash income in the United States, exclusive of benefit payments, was \$2,057,000,000. During the first six months of 1942 it was \$5,773,000,000. That's the story of agriculture. During the first six months of 1933 the total paid in wages and salaries was \$13,866,000,000. During the first six months of 1942 it was \$36,088,000,000. That's the story of labor and industry. Between 13,000,000 and 14,000,000 of these workers are engaged in war industries. ]

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There are certain to be stormy days ahead. Laborers, farmers, industrialists, all of us, are pledged to the war effort. We are certain to be asked for sacrifices. These may be sacrifices of wage increases, crop price increases, profit increases, bodily comforts. All this is little enough for free men to sacrifice in a world where freedom is imperiled.

When I think about Labor Day I like to think about my old friend Samuel Gompers, who fought so long and so doggedly for the working man's cause. Sam Gompers acknowledged his debt to democracy. Beginning as an obscure cigar maker, he rose to be the leader of the American labor movement of his time.

I am content, on this meaningful anniversary, to rest the country's case and the people's case on Sam Gompers' statement of loyalty and belief:

"Labor Day stands for freedom. For freedom attained and freedom demanded."

"Speeches"

By - Typed -

Excerpts from the President's Labor Day Address, 1942,  
for the newsreels: (#1)

If the vicious spiral of inflation ever gets under way, the whole economic system will stagger. Prices and wages will go up so rapidly that the entire production program will be endangered. The cost of the war, paid by taxpayers, will jump beyond all present calculations. It will mean an uncontrollable rise in prices and in wages which can result in raising the over-all cost of living as high as another 20% soon. That would mean that the purchasing power of every dollar you have in your pay envelope, or in the bank, or included in your insurance policy or your pension would be reduced to about eighty cents. I need not tell you that this would have a demoralizing effect on our people, soldiers and civilians alike.

(No. 2)

I have asked the Congress to pass legislation under which the President would be specifically authorized to stabilize the cost of living, including the price of all farm commodities. The purpose should be to hold farm prices at parity, or at levels of a recent date, whichever is higher. The purpose should also be to keep wages at a point stabilized with today's cost of living. Both must be regulated at the same time; and neither can or should be regulated without the other.

At the same time that farm prices are stabilized, I will stabilize wages.

This is plain justice -- and plain common sense.

I have asked the Congress to take this action by the first of October. We must now act with the despatch which the stern necessities of war require.

I have told the Congress that inaction on their part by that date will leave me with an inescapable responsibility to the people of this country to see to it that the war effort is no longer imperiled by the threat of economic chaos.

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(No. 3)

The responsibilities of the President in war time to protect the Nation are very grave. This total war, with our fighting fronts all over the world, makes the use of executive power far more essential than in any previous war. If we were invaded, the people of this country would expect the President to use any and all means to repel the invader. The Revolution and the War between the States were fought on our own soil but today this war will be won or lost in other continents and remote seas. I cannot tell what powers may have to be exercised in order to win this war. The American people can be sure that I will use my powers with a full sense of responsibility to the Constitution and to my country. The American people can also be sure that I shall not hesitate to use every power vested in me to accomplish the defeat of our enemies in any part of the world where our own safety demands such defeat. When the war is won, the powers under which I act will automatically revert to the people -- to whom they belong.

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(No. 4)

I think I know the American farmers. I know that they are as wholehearted in their patriotism as any other group. They have suffered from the constant fluctuations of farm prices -- occasionally too high, more often too low. Nobody knows better than farmers the disastrous effects of war time inflationary booms and post-war deflationary panics.

I have today suggested that the Congress make our agricultural economy more stable. I have recommended that in addition to putting ceilings on all farm products now, we also place a definite floor under those prices for a period beginning now, continuing through the war, and for as long as necessary after the war. In this way we will be able to avoid the collapse of farm prices which happened after the last war. The farmers must be assured of a fair minimum price during the readjustment period which will follow the excessive world food demands which now prevail. We must have some floor under farm prices, as we have under wages, if we are to avoid the dangers of a post-war inflation on the one hand, or the catastrophe of a crash in farm prices and wages, on the other.

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(No. 5)

I have told the Congress once more that all net individual incomes, after payment of all taxes, should be limited effectively by further taxation to a maximum net income of \$25,000 a year. And it is equally important that corporate profits should not exceed a reasonable amount in any case. The nation must have more money to run the war. People must stop spending for luxuries. Our country needs a far greater share of our incomes. For this is a global war and it will cost this nation nearly one hundred billion dollars in 1943.

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(No. 6)

We Americans of today bear the gravest of responsibilities. All of the United Nations share them. All of us here at home are being tested -- for our fortitude, for our selfless devotion to our country and to our cause. This is the toughest war of all time. We need not leave it to historians of the future to answer the question whether we are tough enough to meet this unprecedented challenge. We can give that answer now. The answer is "yes".

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