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# FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

XXXII President of the United States: 1933-1945

## 141 - Address at the Democratic State Convention, Syracuse, N.Y. September 29, 1936

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Ladies and gentlemen:

From force of long habit I almost said, "My fellow delegates."

Tonight you and I join forces for the 1936 campaign.

We enter it with confidence. Never was there greater need for fidelity to the underlying conception of Americanism than there is today. And once again it is given to our party to carry the message of that Americanism to the people.

The task on our part is twofold: First, as simple patriotism requires, to separate the false from the real issues; and, secondly, with facts and without rancor, to clarify the real problems for the American public.

There will be—there are—many false issues. In that respect, this will be no different from other campaigns. Partisans, not willing to face realities, will drag out red herrings as they have always done—to divert attention from the trail of their own weaknesses.

This practice is as old as our democracy. Avoiding the facts—fearful of the truth—a malicious opposition charged that George Washington planned to make himself king under a British form of government; that Thomas Jefferson planned to set up a guillotine under a French Revolutionary form of government; that Andrew Jackson soaked the rich of the Eastern seaboard and planned to surrender American democracy to the dictatorship of a frontier mob. They called Abraham Lincoln a Roman Emperor; Theodore Roosevelt a Destroyer; Woodrow Wilson a self-constituted Messiah.

In this campaign another herring turns up. In former years it has been British and French- and a variety of other things. This year it is Russian. Desperate in mood, angry at failure, cunning in purpose, individuals and groups are seeking to make Communism an issue in an election where Communism is not a controversy between the two major parties.

Here and now, once and for all, let us bury that red herring, and destroy that false issue. You are familiar with my background; you know my heritage; and you are familiar, especially in the State of New York, with my public service extending back over a quarter of a century. For nearly four years I have been President of the United States. A long record has been written. In that record, both in this State and in the national capital, you will find a simple, clear and consistent adherence not only to the letter, but to the spirit of the American form of government.

To that record, my future and the future of my Administration will conform. I have not sought, I do not seek, I repudiate the support of any advocate of Communism or of any other alien "ism" which would by fair means or foul change our American democracy.

That is my position. It always has been my position. It always will be my position.

There is no difference between the major parties as to what they think about Communism. But there is a very great difference between the two parties in what they do about Communism.

I must tell you why. Communism is a manifestation of the social unrest which always comes with widespread economic maladjustment. We in the Democratic party have not been content merely to denounce this menace. We have been realistic enough to face it. We have been intelligent enough to do something about it. And the world has seen the results of what we have done.

In the spring of 1933 we faced a crisis which was the ugly fruit of twelve years of neglect of the causes of economic and social unrest. It was a crisis made to order for all those who would overthrow our form of government. Do I need to recall to you the fear of those days—the reports of those who piled supplies in their basements, who laid plans to get their fortunes across the border, who got themselves hideaways in the country against the impending upheaval? Do I need to recall the law-abiding heads of peaceful families, who began to wonder, as they saw their children starve, how they would get the bread they saw in the bakery window? Do I need to recall the homeless boys who were traveling in bands through the countryside seeking work, seeking food—desperate because they could find neither? Do I need to recall the farmers who banded together with pitchforks to keep the sheriff from selling the farm home under foreclosure? Do I need to recall the powerful leaders of industry and banking who came to me in Washington in those early days of 1933 pleading to be saved?

Most people in the United States remember today the fact that starvation was averted, that homes and farms were saved, that banks were reopened, that crop prices rose, that industry revived, and that the dangerous forces subversive of our form of government were turned aside.

A few people— a few only—unwilling to remember, seem to have forgotten those days.

In the summer of 1933, a nice old gentleman wearing a silk hat fell off the end of a pier. He was unable to swim. A friend ran down the pier, dived overboard and pulled him out; but the silk hat floated off with the tide. After the old gentleman had been revived, he was effusive in his thanks. He praised his friend for saving his life. Today, three years later, the old gentleman is berating his friend because the silk hat was lost.

Why did that crisis of 1929 to 1933 pass without disaster?

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The answer is found in the record of what we did. Early in the campaign of 1932 I said: "To meet by reaction that danger of radicalism is to invite disaster. Reaction is no barrier to the radical, it is a challenge, a provocation. The way to meet that danger is to offer a workable program of reconstruction, and the party to offer it is the party with clean hands." We met the emergency with emergency action. But far more important than that, we went to the roots of the problem, and attacked the cause of the crisis. We were against revolution. Therefore, we waged war against those conditions which make revolutions—against the inequalities and resentments which breed them. In America in 1933 the people did not attempt to remedy wrongs by overthrowing their institutions. Americans were made to realize that wrongs could and would be set right within their institutions. We proved that democracy can work.

I have said to you that there is a very great difference between the two parties in what they do about Communism. Conditions congenial to Communism were being bred and fostered throughout this Nation up to the very day of March 4, 1933. Hunger was breeding it, loss of homes and farms was breeding it, closing banks were breeding it, a ruinous price level was breeding it. Discontent and fear were spreading through the land. The previous national Administration, bewildered, did nothing.

In their speeches they deplored it, but by their actions they encouraged it. The injustices, the inequalities, the downright suffering out of which revolutions come—what did they do about these things? Lacking courage, they evaded. Being selfish, they neglected. Being short-sighted, they ignored. When the crisis came—as these wrongs made it sure to come—America was unprepared.

Our lack of preparation for it was best proved by the cringing and the fear of the very people whose indifference helped to make the crisis. They came to us pleading that we should do, overnight, what they should have been doing through the years.

And the simple causes of our unpreparedness were two: First, a weak leadership, and, secondly, an inability to see causes, to understand the reasons for social unrest—the tragic plight of 90 percent of the men, women and children who made up the population of the United States.

It has been well said that "The most dreadful failure of which any form of government can be guilty is simply to lose touch with reality, because out of this failure all imaginable forms of evil grow. Every empire that has crashed has come down primarily because its rulers did not know what was going on in the world and were incapable of learning."

It is for that reason that our American form of government will continue to be safest in Democratic hands. The real, actual, undercover Republican leadership is the same as it was four years ago. That leadership will never comprehend the need for a program of social justice and of regard for the well-being of the masses of our people.

I have been comparing leadership in Washington. This contrast between Democratic and Republican leadership holds true throughout the length and breadth of the State of New York. As far back as the year 1910, the old Black Horse Cavalry in Albany, which we old people will remember, was failing to meet changing social conditions by appropriate social legislation. Here was a State noted for its industry and noted for its agriculture—a State with the greatest mixture of population—where the poorest and the richest lived, literally, within a stone's throw of each other—in short a situation made to order for potential unrest. And yet in this situation the best that the Republican leaders of those days could say was: "Let them eat cake." What would have happened if that reactionary domination had continued through all these hard years?

Starting in 1911, a Democratic leadership came into power, and with it a new philosophy of government. I had the good fortune to come into public office at that time. I found other young men in the Legislature—men who held the same philosophy; one of them was Bob Wagner; another was Al Smith. We were all joined in a common cause. We did not look on government as something apart from the people. We thought of it as something to be used by the people for their own good.

New factory legislation setting up decent standards of safety and sanitation; limitation of the working hours of women in industry; a workmen's compensation law; a one-day-rest-in-seven law; a full train-crew law; a direct-primary law—these laws and many more were passed which were then called radical and alien to our form of government. Would you or any other Americans call them radical or alien today?

In later years, first under Governor Smith, then during my Governorship, this program of practical intelligence was carried forward over the typical and unswerving opposition of Republican leaders throughout our State.

And today the great tradition of a liberal, progressive Democratic Party has been carried still further by your present Governor, Herbert H. Lehman. He has begun a program of insurance to remove 'the spectre of unemployment from the working people of the State. He has broadened our labor legislation. He has extended the supervision of public utility companies. He has proved himself an untiring seeker for the public good; a doer of social justice; a wise, conscientious, clear-headed and businesslike administrator of the executive branch of our Government. And be it noted that his opponents are led and backed by the same forces and, in many cases, by the same individuals who, for a quarter of a century, have tried to hamstring progress within our State. The overwhelming majority of our citizens, up-state and down-state, regardless of party, propose to return him and his Administration to Albany for another two years.

His task in Albany, like my task in Washington, has been to maintain contact between statecraft and reality. In New York and in Washington, Government which has rendered more than lip service to our Constitutional Democracy has done a work for the protection and preservation of our institutions that could not have been accomplished by repression and force.

Let me warn you and let me warn the Nation against the smooth evasion which says, "Of course we believe all these things; we believe in social security; we believe in work for the unemployed; we believe in saving homes. Cross our hearts and hope to die, we believe in all these things; but we do not like the way the present Administration is doing them. Just turn them over to us. We will do all of them- we will do more of them we will do them better; and, most important of all, the doing of them will not cost anybody anything."

But, my friends, these evaders are banking too heavily on the shortness of our memories. No one will forget that they had their golden opportunity—twelve long years of it.

Remember, too, that the first essential of doing a job well is to want to see the job done. Make no mistake about this: the Republican leadership today is not against the way we have done the job. The Republican leadership is against the job's being done.

Look to the source of the promises of the past. Governor Lehman knows and I know how little legislation in the interests of the average citizen would be on the statute books of the State of New York, and of the Federal Government, if we had waited for Republican leaders to pass it.

The same lack of purpose of fulfillment lies behind the promises of today. You cannot be an Old Guard Republican in the East, and a New Deal Republican in the West. You cannot promise to repeal taxes before one audience and promise to spend more of the taxpayers' money before another audience. You cannot promise tax relief for those who can afford to pay, and, at the same time, promise more of the taxpayers' money for those who are in need. You simply cannot make good on both promises at the same time.

Who is there in America who believes that we can run the risk of turning back our Government to the old leadership which brought it to the brink of 1933? Out of the strains and stresses of these years we have come to see that the true conservative is the man who has a real concern for injustices and takes thought against the day of reckoning. The true conservative seeks to protect the system of private property and free enterprise by correcting such injustices and inequalities as arise from it. The most serious threat to our institutions comes from those who refuse to face the need for change. Liberalism becomes the protection for the far-sighted conservative.

Never has a Nation made greater strides in the safeguarding of democracy than we have made during the past three years. Wise and prudent men-intelligent conservatives—have long known that in a changing world worthy institutions can be conserved only by adjusting them to the changing time. In the words of the great essayist, "The voice of great events is proclaiming to us. Reform if you would preserve." I am that kind of conservative because I am that kind of liberal.

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