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THE PARTY AND THE NATION, 1940

Address

by

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Solicitor General of the United States

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at

Jackson Day Dinner

- - -

Hotel Statler

Cleveland, Ohio

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I begin to feel that Andrew Jackson needs an attorney -- to defend his memory from his followers. These \$25 and \$50 and \$100 dinners are turning this man of the people into our most expensive Democrat. What a politician he must have been! His name is still our best money-raiser -- a century after he has lost all power to appoint anybody to anything. His creed has a strong appeal to us tonight. He had a fighting faith in a republican form of government -- completely controlled by Democrats.

But Andrew Jackson's policy rose above mere party expediency. He was the first American political leader to seek his support among all the people and to shape his policy for the needs of all the people.

But Andrew Jackson know better than to think a party can serve itself alone. I know what it was that attached families to his cause with an intensity which has lasted for generations. My own people, pioneering not far from here, in debt to eastern land speculators, hailed him as the champion of humble men -- the ill-clad, ill-housed, and ill-nourished of his day. This faith kept us "regular" Democrats. We looked always for another such leader of the people, and found him in Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Forces are gathering for a fight in 1940 that in many ways resembles the line-up for Jackson's great battle of New Orleans. We are holding lines for democracy today as truly as he held them a century and a quarter ago.

Our scouts would report today, as did his, that advancing against us are the "regulars" of a standing army -- well drilled, well-fed and perfectly equipped.

They have the artillery of the press, the machine guns of the big interests and the best commissary that money will buy. And regulars are unlike volunteers -- they fight from training and interest rather than from the inspiration of a leader.

So the first principle of our campaign is that we Democrats should waste no energy worrying about what the Republicans may do. Who their candidate is, and what their platform is -- will not much matter. They are a party of money and organization, not of enthusiasms. There probably is not a million popular votes difference between their best candidate and their worst one. This is apparent from the fact that their best leadership and performance in office has produced for them but relatively few votes more than their poorest leadership and performance. Their vote has become remarkably unresponsive to either their record, their promises, or the personality of their candidates. Let me read you cold figures of their vote in the five Presidential elections since the great war. Notice how steady and dependable it has been.

1920	Harding	16,000,000
1924	Coolidge	15,700,000
1928	Hoover	21,000,000
1932	Hcoover	15,700,000
1936	Landon	16,600,000

This is a significant consistency in the light of the vicissitudes of twenty years.

The Harding record, so bad it produced a third party movement, could not drive its 1924 vote below 15,700,000. A rare combination of prosperity and bigotry could not lift it above 21,000,000 in 1928.

Four elections out of five indicate that we should begin our calculations by conceding any candidate they name, on any kind of platform, an all-weather, dependable vote of around 17,000,000, which they are pretty powerless to much increase and on which we are not likely to make any inroads.

Great transitions in politics make their sign so simply we often miss the meaning. For generations the Republicans met in convention ahead of us, and appropriately so. The real leadership of the country was in their affirmative program.

Today they are openly afraid to lead, and if they do meet first it will be because of a greater fear of being known to be afraid to lead. Whatever of leadership the Republican party had has passed, and today it admits it must wait to see what we do so it may know what to be against. Its policy is to wait, and then say "no" whenever we say "yes." That, of course, is not statesmanship, it is not leadership, it is not helpful to the country. But do not forget that whatever it is, it is good for about 17,000,000 votes. And don't forget that those 17,000,000 are at least a couple of million more than any Democrat ever got-- except Roosevelt.

17,000,000 regulars for the Republicans -- how many for us?

Our following shows, in the same elections, no such steadiness or consistency. On the contrary it is extremely sensitive to our party attitudes and leadership. Look at our volatile vote:

1920	Cox	9,150,000
1924	Davis	8,300,000
1928	Smith	15,000,000
1932	Roosevelt	22,800,000
1936	Roosevelt	27,400,000

One important fact is clear; it is the fluctuation in the Democratic vote which has decided the last five elections. Our standing army has at times dwindled to less than 9,000,000 votes -- approximately one-half the standing army of the Republicans. We can only win by calling to the aid of our regulars the volunteer militia who join our campaigns because they feel they are fighting for something dear to them-- as the frontier militia fought for Jackson at New Orleans.

These election returns therefore should convince us that the elections of 1940 will turn on the Democratic convention, not on the Republican convention.

And they also ought to convince us of the futility of trying to nominate a candidate to please Republican editors or to get Republican votes. We do not win elections by converting Republicans, and whenever the country has to choose between two of a kind, it takes a Republican.

This is now well understood. I no longer fear, therefore, as I did a year ago, that we Democrats might try to compete with the Republicans

in naming a conservative. Life among the majority is still dear to conservative Democrats, and they are not going to a convention hell bent for suicide. We will recognize the real conservative voting strength to be what it was in 1936 - about 17,000,000 - and recognize that no substantial part of it ever did or ever will vote for a Democrat.

Our problem is to keep the volunteers we have twice had under the leadership of President Roosevelt. Our strength is only equal to winning when the most people vote. The voters who stay at home decide these elections, and every stay-at-home vote is a help to the Republicans in the doubtful states. We are always defeated when the country feels there is not enough difference between the two parties to be worth the trouble of voting.

It is plain that our chances depend on a candidate and a program that will reach down into the precincts with an appeal to the average man and woman strong enough to overcome all lethargy and bring them to the polls. We cannot get more than 17,000,000 votes, and, therefore, we cannot win, unless we have a candidate who reaches votes which cannot be organized and can only be reached as Franklin Roosevelt has reached them, - through the heart: the vast army of quiet, unassuming people who have followed Roosevelt since 1932, in the teeth of organized ridicule, social ostracism, and political chicanery, because they believed in what he said he believed.

Of course a strong affirmative character who can rally our allies like that to the side of our outnumbered regulars always offends some timid persons. Always we have some groups "taking a walk".

But there are few men who can bolt the party without bringing in others to take their place, just because those others like a man who has enemies -- if they are the right enemies.

The great walk was in 1936: that was the year we had the most votes.

Give the Democratic party the usual stay-at-home voters and we can let the Republicans have all the "walkers" - both left and right. If you add all of the Smith vote of 1928 to all of the Davis vote of 1924, you count all dyed-in-the-wool conservative Democratic strength twice. But the aggressive liberal of 1936 had more votes than both of them put together - and on top of that some four million more to throw away. Every Democrat knows that we have not won Republicans to our side and that the only problem is to get our votes from the same people who gave them to us in 1936. This can only be done if those same people feel that our party's success has some deep meaning in their lives - if they feel we are still fighting for them and for their homes.

Under these circumstances it is inevitable that we should first turn to the one leader who has this loyalty and devotion in the humble homes of the nation whence cometh our help. Of course I do not know what his answer will be. But I do know what the rank and file of Democrats and of citizens generally hope it will be.

Whether President Roosevelt ultimately will allow or will not allow his renomination, I am one who earnestly hopes that he will not announce to the public or even make within himself any decision at this time.

Why should President Roosevelt become the one man in all public life now committed to accept or not to accept a nomination?

What public good would be served by binding him when all others remain free?

Of course it would serve the convenience of other aspirants if Mr. Roosevelt would tie himself up to some commitment so they could lay plans of their own. But why not let Mr. Roosevelt know the other fellows' plans before he decides, instead of letting the other fellows know his plans so they can decide?

We don't want the greatest asset of the Democratic party put in hock. We enjoy the President's making fun with those who use the hunter's strategy of trying to "smoke out" his game. The American people want Mr. Roosevelt, before he decides on whether he will retire, to know such important things as: the state of the international situation; what issues arise in this session of Congress affecting his program and the public welfare; and more than all, what would the consequences of his decision be in terms of party policy and leadership.

While the country, along with the rest of the world, is going through a period of tension and danger, the people feel more comfortable if the one man of experience, of great following, and of great power remains a free man.

The cool confidence with which this country today faces the modern clash of social and economic forces, which have been mismanaged in Europe to the point of revolution, dictatorship and war, is fundamentally due to confidence in the competence and good will of this man.

Lincoln had that power - to hold his people's courage to the great moral issues of their time, - to hold them together not only to start, but to finish, after the first flush of excitement was past and the burden became really heavy.

That same magnificent power to give men the steady courage to throw themselves against problems bigger than ever men have faced, - that same power to inspire the trust of millions who trust nothing else, and no one else, in our political and business life, in our common defense and our general welfare - rests in the White House today in Franklin Roosevelt.

He is our Lincoln.

We must not make the mistake of treating lightly the responsibility of our own party in this hour. The very fact that leadership is cast upon our party makes the country doubly critical of our performance - and rightly so. The first concern of the American people at this hour is that no interests, no prejudices, no hates, and no ambitions be allowed to involve us in the war abroad. President Roosevelt's bold, but prudent, foreign policy, keeping the American flag far enough from the fire to keep it from being singed, has in a few months changed the feeling that it was inevitable that we must become involved to a feeling that it is inevitable that we must not, and will not, become involved. The opposition in the coming campaign may be free to play politics with foreign policy, but we in whose hands destiny rests must stand squarely with the President against every pressure to let American policy get into zones of danger.

And the second great concern is much like the first. We do not want America to go to war, but more than that we do not want the war to bring its moral and intellectual consequences to us. We want none of its dictatorship either of a proletariat or of the Fascist kind; we want none of the censorship, the suppression, the ideology, or the hysteria that follows in the train of war. Rather, as one historian, with the perspective of the scholar, has well said: "The real danger, from the liberal point of view, is not that Nazis and Communists will destroy liberal democracy by free speaking, but that liberal democracy, through its own failure to cure social ills, will destroy itself by breeding Nazis and Communists."

That comes close to being the keystone of our liberal philosophy today. We must fight radicalism by removing its provocations. The New Deal must go forward - not perhaps at the same pace, and certainly not without heed to the lessons of its own experience. We must not fall into the error for which we so freely blame others of letting pride or stubbornness prevent us from learning or correcting shortcomings in our own legislation or administration.

But our liberal attitude must always be that unrest in America must be dealt with by remedy of its legitimate grievances. Under such a program dissatisfaction might be noisy, but never dangerous. To this end our program of unemployment insurance, old age benefits, relief, the youth administration, farm recovery and public works must go on, as the need appears, the cost of them far more than offset by the terrible cost of not having them.

On the last day of the old year an outstanding historian, free from the bias of practical politics, called attention to our entrance into the fifth decade of a century whose story already includes among its decades "one of world-wide war; one of anxious, uneven recovery, and finally a fourth decade of renewed collapse, ending again in conflicts that are spreading devastation over two continents and all the seas." It would be a humiliating thought that our country, richest in material things, most resourceful in invention, should leave such a record of itself. But Professor Nevins also points out that we have also had the "Decade of a great rally." He characterizes "many of the now American efforts" as "stumbling and inept" but he proceeds to say:

"But it is also true that the great rally of 1933 and the succeeding years released a new spirit, a fuller comprehension of the interdependent character of the various elements in American economy, and of the need for a firmer social solidarity. It is too much to expect that the first ten years would furnish us with many well-wrought applications of the new attitude. To have the new spirit itself is gain enough."

The country will choose to go forward to better-wrought applications of this spirit. And it will not choose to do so under any leadership that has missed knowing the spirit itself. As the nineteenth century owed the release of its latent spirit of democracy to Andrew Jackson, so the twentieth owes the release of its spirit to Franklin D. Roosevelt. For our country, no less than for our party, this spirit is our greatest heritage and our only hope.