

AMERICA HAS NOT BEEN DISAPPOINTED

delivered by Franklin D. Roosevelt, on September 23, 1944

I am actually four years older -- which seems to annoy some people. In fact, millions of us are more than eleven years older than when we started in to clear up the mess that was dumped in our laps in 1933. We all know certain people will make it a practice to depreciate the accomplishments of labor -- who even attack labor as unpatriotic.

They keep this up usually for three years and six months. But then, for some strange reason, they change their tune -- every four years -- just before election day.

When votes are at stake they suddenly discover that they really love labor, and are eager to protect it from its old friends.

I got quite a laugh, for example -- and I am sure that you did -- when I read this plank in the Republican platform adopted at their national convention in Chicago last July:

"The Republican party accepts the purposes of the National Labor Relations Act, the Wage and Hour Act, the Social Security Act, and all other Federal statutes designed to promote and protect the welfare of American working men and women, and we promise a fair and just administration of these laws."

Many of the Republican leaders and Congressmen and candidates, who shouted enthusiastic approval of that plank in the convention hall, would not even recognize these progressive laws if they met them in broad daylight.

Indeed, they have personally spent years of effort and energy -- and much money -- in fighting every one of those laws in the Congress, in the press and in the courts, ever since this Administration began to advocate them and enact them into legislation.

That is a fair example of their insincerity and their inconsistency.

The whole purpose of Republican oratory these days seems to be to switch labels. The object is to persuade the American people that the Democratic party was responsible for the 1929 crash and depression, and the Republican party was responsible for all social progress under the New Deal.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery -- but I am afraid that in this case it is the most obvious common or garden variety of fraud.

There are enlightened, liberal elements in the Republican party, and they have fought hard and honorably to bring the party up to date and to get it in step with the forward march of American progress. But these liberal elements were not able to drive the old guard Republicans from their entrenched positions.

Can the old guard pass itself off as the New Deal? I think not.

We have all seen many marvelous stunts in the circus, but no performing elephant could turn a handspring without falling flat on his back.

I need not recount to you the centuries of history which have been crowded into these four years since I saw you last.

There were some -- in the Congress and out -- who raised their voices against our preparations for defense -- before and after 1939 -- as hysterical war mongering, who cried out against our help to the Allies as provocative and dangerous.

We remember the voices.

They would like to have us forget them now. But in 1940 and 1941 they were loud voices. Happily they were a minority and --fortunately for ourselves, and for the world--they could not stop America.

There are some politicians who kept their heads buried deep in the sand while the storms of Europe and Asia were headed our way, who said that the Lend-Lease Bill "would bring an end to free Government in the United States," and who said "only hysteria entertains the idea that Germany, Italy or Japan contemplate war upon us."

These very men are now asking the American people to entrust to them the conduct of our foreign policy and our military policy.

What the Republican leaders are now saying in effect is this.

"Oh, just forget what we used to say, we have changed our minds now -- we have been reading the public opinion polls about these things, and we now know what the American people want. Don't leave the task of making peace to those old men who first urged it, and who have already laid the foundations for it, and who have had to fight all of us, inch by inch, during the last five years to do it -- just turn it all over to us. We'll do it so skillfully -- that we won't lose a single isolationist vote or a single isolationist campaign contribution."

There is one thing I am too old for -- I cannot talk out of both sides of my mouth at the same time.

This Government welcomes all sincere supporters of the cause of effective world collaboration in the making of a lasting peace. Millions of Republicans all over the nation are with us -- and have been with us -- in our unshakeable determination to build the solid structure of peace. And they, too, will resent this campaign talk by those who first woke up to the facts of international life a few short months ago -- when they began to study the polls of public opinion.

Those who today have the military responsibility for waging this war in all parts of the globe are not helped by the statements of men who, without responsibility and without knowledge of the facts, lecture the chiefs of staff of the United States as to the best means of dividing our armed forces and our military resources between the Atlantic and Pacific, between the Army and the Navy, and among the commanding generals of the different theatres of war.

When I addressed you four years ago, I said:

"I know that America will never be disappointed in its expectation that labor will always continue to do its share of the job we now face, and do it patriotically and effectively and unselfishly."

Today we know that America has not been disappointed. In his order of the day, when the Allied armies first landed in Normandy, General Eisenhower said: "Our home fronts have given us overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war."

I know that there are those labor baiters among the opposition who, instead of calling attention to the achievements of labor in this war, prefer the occasional strikes which have occurred -- strikes which have been condemned by every responsible national labor leader -- every national leader except one. And that one labor leader, incidentally, is certainly not among my supporters.

Labor baiters forget that, at our peak, American labor and management have turned out airplanes at the rate of 109,000 per year; tanks, 57,000 per year; combat vessels, 537 per year; landing vessels, 31,000 per year; cargo ships, 19,000,000 tons per year, and small arms ammunition, 23 billion rounds per year. But a strike is news, and generally appears in shrieking headlines -- and, of course, they say labor is always to blame.

The fact is that, since Pearl Harbor, only one-tenth of one per cent of man-hours have been lost by strikes. But even those candidates who burst out in election-year affection for social legislation and for labor in general still think you ought to be good boys and stay out of politics.

And, above all, they hate to see any working man or woman contribute a dollar bill to any wicked political party.

Of course, it is all right for large financiers and industrialists and monopolists to contribute tens of thousands of dollars -- but their solicitude for that dollar which the men and women in the ranks of labor contribute is always very touching.

They are, of course, perfectly willing to let you vote -- unless you happen to be a soldier or sailor overseas, or a merchant seaman carrying munitions of war. In that case they have made it pretty hard for you to vote -- for there are some political candidates who think they may have a chance if only the total vote is small enough.

And while I am on the subject of voting let me urge every American citizen -- man and woman -- to use your sacred privilege of voting, no matter which candidate you expect to support. Our millions of soldiers and sailors and merchant seamen have been handicapped or prevented from voting by those politicians and candidates who think they stand to lose by such votes. You here at home have the freedom of the ballot. Irrespective of party, you should register and vote this November. That is a matter of good citizenship.

Words come easily, but they do not change the record. You are old enough to remember what things were like for labor in 1932.

You remember the closed banks and the breadlines and the starvation wages; the foreclosures of homes and farms, and the bankruptcies of business; the "Hooverilles," and the young men and women of the nation facing a hopeless, jobless future; the closed factories and mines and mills; the ruined and abandoned farms; the stalled railroads and the empty docks; the blank despair of a whole nation -- and the utter impotence of our Federal Government.

You remember the long, hard road, with its gains and its setbacks, which we have traveled together since those days.

Now there are some politicians, of course, who do not remember that far back, and some who remember but find it convenient to forget. But the record is not to be washed away that easily.

The opposition has already imported into this campaign the propaganda technique invented by the dictators abroad. The technique was all set out in Hitler's book -- and it was copied by the aggressors of Italy and Japan.

According to that technique, you should never use a small falsehood; always a big one, for its very fantastic nature will make it more credible -- if only you keep repeating it over and over again.

For example, although I rubbed my eyes when I read it, we have been told that it was not a Republican depression, but a Democratic depression from which this nation has been saved -- that this Administration is responsible for all the suffering and misery that the history books and the American people always thought had been brought about during the twelve ill-fated years when the Republican party was in power.

Now, there is an old and somewhat lugubrious adage which says:
"Never speak of rope in the house of one who has been hanged."

In the same way, if I were a Republican leader speaking to a mixed audience, the last word in the whole dictionary that I think I would use is that word "depression." For another example, I learned -- much to my amazement -- that the policy of this Administration was to keep men in the Army when the war was over, because there might be no jobs for them in civil life.

Why, the very day that this fantastic charge was first made a formal plan for the method of speedy discharge from the Army had already been announced by the War Department -- a plan based upon the wishes of the soldiers themselves.

This callous and brazen falsehood about demobilization was an effort to stimulate fear among American mothers, wives and sweethearts. And, incidentally, it was hardly calculated to bolster the morale of our soldiers and sailors and airmen fighting our battles all over the world.

Perhaps the most ridiculous of these campaign falsifications is the one that this Administration failed to prepare for the war which was coming. I doubt whether even Goebbels would have tried that one. For even he would never have dared hope that the voters of America had already forgotten that many of the Republican leaders in the Congress and outside the Congress tried to thwart and block nearly every attempt which this Administration made to warn our people and to arm this nation. Some of them called our 50,000-airplane program fantastic.

Many of those very same leaders who fought every defense measure we proposed are still in control of the Republican party, were in control of its national convention in Chicago, and would be in control of the machinery of the Congress and the Republican party in the event of a Republican victory this fall.

These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks upon me, or my wife, or my sons -- they now include my little dog, Fala. Unlike the members of my family, he resents this. Being a scottie, a soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers had concocted a story that I had left him behind on an Aleutian island and had sent a destroyer back to find him -- at a cost to the taxpayers of two

or three or twenty million dollars -- his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since.

I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about myself -- such as that old, worm-eaten chestnut that I have represented myself as indispensable. But I think I have a right to object to libelous statements about my dog.

But we all recognize the old technique. The people of this country know the past too well to be deceived into forgetting. Too much is at stake to forget. There are tasks ahead of us which we must now complete with the same will and skill and intelligence and devotion which have already led us so far on the road to victory.

There is the task of finishing victoriously this most terrible of all wars as speedily as possible and with the least cost in lives.

There is the task of setting up international machinery to assure that the peace, once established, will not again be broken.

And there is the task which we face here at home -- the task of reconverting our economy from the purposes of war to the purposes of peace.

The peace-building tasks were faced once before, nearly a generation ago. They were botched by a Republican Administration. That must not happen this time. We will not let it happen this time.

Fortunately, we do not begin from scratch. Much has been done. Much more is under way. The fruits of victory this time will not be apples to be sold on street corners.

Many months ago, this Administration set up the necessary machinery for an orderly peace-time demobilization. The Congress has now passed legislation continuing the agencies needed for demobilization -- with additional powers to carry out their functions.

I know that the American people -- Business and labor and agriculture -- have the same will to do for peace what they have done for war. And I know that they can sustain a national income which will assume full production and full employment under our democratic system of private enterprise, with Government encouragement and aid whenever and wherever it is necessary.

The keynote of all that we propose to do in reconversion can be found in the one word -- "jobs."

We shall lease or dispose of our Government-owned plants and facilities and our surplus war property and land on the basis of how they can best be operated by private enterprise to give jobs to the greatest number.

We shall follow a wage policy which will sustain the purchasing power of labor -- for that means more production and more jobs.

The present policies on wages and prices were conceived to serve the needs of the great masses of the people. They stopped inflation. They kept prices on a stable level. Through the demobilization period, policies will be carried out with the same objective in mind -- to serve the needs of the great masses of the people.

This is not the time in which men can be forgotten as they were in the Republican catastrophe which we inherited. The returning soldiers, the workers by their machines, the farmers in the field, the miners, the men and women in offices and shops, do not intend to be forgotten.

They know they are not surplus. Because they know that they are America. We must set targets and objectives for the future which will seem impossible to those who live in and are weighted down by the dead past.

We are even now organizing the logistics of the peace just as Marshall, King, Arnold, MacArthur, Eisenhower and Nimitz are organizing the logistics of this war.

The victory of the American people and their allies in this war will be far more than a victory against fascism and reaction and the dead hand of despotism and of the past.

The victory of the American people and their allies in this war will be a victory for democracy. It will constitute such an affirmation of the strength and power and vitality of government by the people as history has never before witnessed.

With that affirmation of the vitality of democratic government behind us, that demonstration of its resilience and its capacity for decision and for action -- with that knowledge of our won strength and power -- we move forward with God's help to the greatest epoch of free achievement by free men the world has ever known or imagined possible.