

# "For What Should We Apologize?"

Speech delivered by Mark Etheridge, publisher of the Courier-Journal and The Louisville, (Ky) Times before Oklahoma Democratic State Convention May 15th, 1944

## Liberal—By Accident Only

The plain truth is that only twice in the entire history of the Republican party has the liberal element prevailed. In both instances presidents representing that wing came to power entirely by accident. Abraham Lincoln represented political reform and the expression of human rights. He was elected because the Democratic party was hopelessly split. Theodore Roosevelt represented political reform and the re-assertion of human rights over the property rights and exploitation of the robber barons. He came to power through the assassination of McKinley and through the fortuitous circumstances that he was made vice-president because Boss Pratt wanted him out of New York state.

Every other liberal movement within the Republican party has been choked off. When Lincoln was killed the party slipped into the reaction of Thaddeus Stevens and stayed there until Roosevelt came. When LaFollette challenged the reaction of Harding and Coolidge in 1924, the price of wheat suddenly went up and his movement was choked off. The Willkie of 1944 was a John the Baptist crying in the wilderness of a Republican reaction. The same thing happened to Willkie that happened to John the Baptist.

When it is normal, the Republican party is always reactionary. The Republican party is the natural home of privilege seekers such as Joe Grundy; of labor baiters like Sewell Avery; of Liberty Leaguers, of American Firsters, of Roosevelt haters like John L. Lewis, Gerald L. K. Smith, Clarence Kellington, and Col. McCormick; of isolationists like Nye.

There are of course a great many decent and nice people in the Republican party, but they are in such bad company. Unfortunately, the bad company is in the ascendancy and apparently in the driver's seat in the Republican party this year.

## They Get No Farther Than "Being Against Roosevelt"

Without too much justification, as far as I can see, but because they hate that man in the White House, because they yearn for the days of the twenties, because they want to be "rid of bureaucracy," because they want to smack labor down and go back to the good old days of goon squads, the Republican Old Guardsmen have undertaken to bund a pretty fair governor—and nothing more, and nothing more, nothing less—into a monu mental intellect, into the white hope of the Republic. It is not that they are for Dewey; it is that they are against Roosevelt and all that he and his party stand for. They care no more for Dewey as a person than they do for Roosevelt; it is that they recognize in him, an instrument for the destruction of the New Deal.

This, then is a year of major decisions. This is not the year for a choice, between personalities; a choice between a dashing young gang buster who has made the grade as governor and a charming president. It is not a choice of commanders in chief to carry on the war. I shall discuss Mr. Roosevelt and the war later, but it is not as commander in chief, as good as he is in that role, that he has primarily claim upon the affections and respect of the people of this country.

## The Real Choice

The real choice the American people must make this year is between philosophies, between ideas that lie deep in their conflict. This year is the year of referendum upon the attitude toward the function of government and the works of the New Deal for the past twelve years. Domestically, the choice is between the destruction of the New Deal and the eradication of its emphasis, which is all the Republican party has so far offered, and the preservation and implementation of the central idea of the New Deal, which is that the person is more important in a civilization than property; that government itself must and should be used to make freedom the expanding force it can be when the individual has the opportunity to develop his own soul.

In the international field, I believe the choice is between a good peace and a bad one.

I have no shame in confessing that I am and have been a New Dealer for years. Yes, I'd like to see the budget balanced and always have felt that in normal times, we should tax what we spend. Yes, I get irritated by a good many things about the administration and with a good many people in it. Yes, I'd change a great deal of it. But I can say in all honesty that I'd infinitely rather have had Franklin D. Roosevelt for the past twelve years than Harding Coolidge and Hoover, and their twelve years. In theory I didn't like third and fourth terms, but I'll take a fourth term of Roosevelt with thanks to God for the chance in preference to a first term for Dewey with all the forces that are behind him.

I sense every now and then a note of apology in Democratic voices. I'd like for somebody to tell me what the hell we should apologize for; or, since Mike Monroney is an Oxford graduate, for what the hell should we apologize.

## We Saved the Banks

Is any Democrat ashamed that we took a banking structure which had had 5,770 failures in the four years of Hoover, with a loss to depositors and stockholders of more than three billions of dollars, and restored confidence, virtually eliminated failures and insured losses?

## We Saved the Home Owners

Are Democrats ashamed that the H.O.L.C. has saved some 3,000,000 homes from foreclosure by an investment, in ten years, of only \$65,000,000—with no net cost in the long run—when we had been willing to put a billion dollars into it?

Are we Democrats ashamed that in the process of bailing out home owners, we rescued banks and trust companies, savings and loans associations, finance, mortgage and insurance companies and individual mortgagors?

Are we ashamed that we lent public credit to rescue homes, to build new homes through the FHA, to rescue farms, to buy farms, to reduce tenancy, to stimulate cooperatives—things that cost the government nothing, but meant everything to

the individuals who received benefits they could not otherwise have received because credit sources were paralyzed by fear?

## We Fought the Slums

Are we not proud that through housing projects all over this country, we have taken people out of the squalor and filth of rat-infested slums and given them a chance to breathe good air and their children a chance to be something better than gutter rats?

## We Electrified the Farms

Are we ashamed that through the stimulus we have given to REA twice as many farms have been electrified in the past eight years than were electrified in the fifty years before that? That the work of farm housewives everywhere has been lightened?

## We Rescued the Land

Do we apologize for the fact that we did tackle the problem of the Dust Bowl? That we have provided water facilities for more than 3,530,000 acres of arid land? That through soil conservation measures we have rescued eroded, depleted and abandoned land to the extent of more than 30,000,000 acres that are now in production in this war effort?

## We Helped the Small Farmer

Are we ashamed that the cankerous growth of farm tenancy has been checked and that through the Farm Security Administration's effort's 950,000 small farmers have been fed out of despair and back into useful, productive and happy lives?

Are we ashamed that we took people off sub-marginal land and re-settled them upon good lands?

## We Reforested the Nation

Are we ashamed that we have given encouragement to the reforestation of lands that had been denuded in the ruthless exploitation of timber barons? Or that a good deal of reforestation work was done by CCC boys who took off the blind baggage of railroad cars—boys who were prowling the country for jobs we could not give them?

## We Built the Great Dams

Are we ashamed of TVA and its twenty-one dams—Of Grand Coulee, Roosevelt, and other great dams that have been built under this ad-

Today, the gross cash farm income, because of the war, is almost twenty billion, or four times more than in the darkest Hoover days, but again, I shall not take war figures.

## We Made Wall Street Honest

Did we do any injustice to the Truth-in-Securities law, under which the honest broker is given a virtual certificate that his stocks and bonds are honest and the crooked broker is driven out of business with the crooked promoter? Do we have any apology for the holding company laws? For utilities regulations? For our attack upon monopolies and cartels that have as their purpose gouging the consumer?

## We Gave Labor Its Rights

Have we any apology for what we have done for labor? Let us face that question honestly. Of course war-time strikes have irritated us all; the only wise thing that Coolidge ever said was that nobody has a right to strike against the public safety anywhere, anytime. I have no defense of any war-time strike, but I do want to point to the report of the Truman committee that strikes in mining, manufacturing and construction in 1943 resulted in a loss of manpower of less than one-fourth of one percent of manpower actually used. In the same year, total manpower contributed by labor exceeded that used in 1939 by 76 percent. The strike picture has been exaggerated deliberately to discredit labor. But it is not the strike picture that primarily irritates enemies of labor. It's that they can not reconcile themselves to the fundamental principles of the Wagner act; that labor has as much right to organize for bargaining as capitalists have to pool their money to conduct a business. When the Sewell Averages, the Tom Girdlers and the Ernest Weirs learn that, this will be a happier country.

Of course we need new labor legislation; I advocate federal chartering and federal regulation of labor unions, particularly when they enjoy national power. I advocate legislation that will bring them under common anti-trust laws; that will drive out the racketeers; that will make them thoroughly democratic and responsible in every way. I have no hesitation in saying that I want to see the labor code of rights and charter of responsibilities written by a friendly even if sternly insistent administration, not by one determined to destroy organized labor itself.

Labor's advances have been bloodily won or grudgingly granted by the opinion of the country. We have translated them into fundamental law.

## Teammates for Teamwork!

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Roosevelt and Truman  
Smith - Mahoney - Dover  
Teammates for Teamwork

ministration? But particularly of TVA with the blessings it has bestowed upon the people of that 650-mile valley?

Do we apologize for the fact that its influence has reduced electricity power rates all over the country? That it has provided flood control and opened new lands to farmers? That it has provided in this war 12,000,000 kilowatt hours of electricity without which our war production could not have approached what it has been? Do we apologize for the fact that its research department has opened up new means of livelihood for the four and a half million people on an area as big as Scotland and England? Do we apologize for the fact that a once desolated, flood ravaged, poverty stricken valley is now not only one of the great demonstration laboratories of the earth, but one of the happiest places in which to live? Do you people of Oklahoma apologize for that? Certainly the people of the valley do not?

## We Added Wealth

Are we ashamed of our more enlightened treatment of the Indians under John Collier? Of our new national parks and national monuments? Of the public works program which added permanent wealth in the way of roads, bridges, dams, stream control public buildings, play grounds, parks, swimming pools—recreational centers of all kinds?

## We Helped the Unfortunate

Are we ashamed that we fed the poor and the unemployed—Are we ashamed that because of us, old people are drawing pensions all over the country and businesses and employees are jointly setting up more retirement funds and more unemployment funds? Are we ashamed that through us, the crippled and the blind receive aid from the government? Do we dare apologize for the fact that we have enlightened child labor laws, or minimum wage and maximum hours law?

## We've Made the Farmer Rich

If we have no apology to labor, we certainly have no apology to the farmer. He has been the chief beneficiary of the Roosevelt administration. Before Roosevelt took over, farm mortgages had increased 300 percent in 20 years to \$9,600,000,000; mortgage interest took more than one of every ten dollars (11.4%) of the total cash farm income. More than a million farms had been lost by foreclosure and farmers were forcibly preventing foreclosures in some sections of the country. Farm income had dropped from twelve billion in 1929 to five billion in 1932. Wheat was down from \$1.30 a bushel to 53 cents; cotton from 17.3 cents to 5 cents.

all this restored land, all this created wealth, all these rescued souls of a despairing people to show for it. We have physical resources, human resources and spiritual resources to put unto the asset column and dwarf the liability.

## The Foreign Policy That Saved Our Necks

I have one final question of Democrats: Have we anything to apologize for in our foreign policy? Are we ashamed that long before we knew we should need their friendship the republics on this hemisphere, abandoned imperialism and dollar diplomacy and entered upon the Good Neighbor policy which has been so productive for all of us?

Are we ashamed that Mr. Hull worked unremittingly to tear down tariff walls which surely must come down if the world is to live at peace?

Are we ashamed that Mr. Roosevelt saw so far ahead of the rest of us? That he saw ahead what Hitler had in mind, what Japan had in mind and that from 1936 on, he tried desperately to warn us to prepare while he was trying to stave off what became inevitable?

Have we anything to apologize for, in the light of history, in the whole record of the Democratic party in foreign affairs? For the fact that every major declaration, every major advocacy touching international cooperation for the maintenance of peace has been made by a Democratic president in this century?

## "Talkin' Purty"

The country should take warning at the moment that while the Republicans are "talkin' purty" (as the lyrics writer has you saying in the play Oklahoma) while the Republicans are "talkin' purty" again in international affairs, it is the talk of opportunism. The Republican party is isolationist at heart. It opposed this war until Pearl Harbor made opposition moot. It has made no declaration as a party equivalent to the Atlantic Charter or to Mr. Hull's outline of our foreign policy. Mr. Hannegan was entirely correct when he referred to Governor Dewey as a man who copies down the answers on his slate when the examination is over.

Mr. Dewey was against "deals" with Russia; by two stages he has now come to the idea that maybe Russia and China ought to be let in on the Anglo-American government of the world. Governor Dewey was against Lend-Lease when it was proposed. He told reporters in Philadelphia January 15, 1941, that it "would bring an end to free government in the United States, to abolish Congress for all practical purposes." In his Wisconsin campaign of 1940, his philosophy was to keep away from Europe; in 1944, he wanted to discourage the growth of rampant nationalism.

If Mr. Hannegan is not right that Governor Dewey copies the answers after they are all in—after the polls and state elections tell him public sentiment—then he is, in the words of the song from Oklahoma, just a fellow who can't say no. His corn is high as an elephant's eye. There is not the slightest consistency in his foreign policy because there is no sincerity in it.

## They're Not Good Enough

Domestically the Republican party for most of its life has been the instrument of big business, the exponent of laissez-faire, the protector of the propertied. Internationally it has symbolized isolationism or imperialism rather than the good neighbor spirit, the spirit of mutual security. There is nothing in its present policy or in the roster of its candidates for the presidency to indicate that, having choked off its liberal movement, it is not again at the dead center of normalcy in domestic affairs and in an imperialistic mood internationally.

That is not good enough. Anything short of taking our full place in world affairs is an invitation to another war. Anything short of recognition that what we are going through is in fact a counter-revolution against the tyrannies of authoritarianism and that the trend of the world when this war is over will be toward the greater emphasis upon the dignity of the individual—the trend to the left, if you care to call it that—will put us out of step with the people we fought to save. Anything short of the recognition that there is no turning back in our domestic affairs; that we can not go back to 1914 or even to 1940, is the sheerest stupidity.

## Great Decision Must Be Made

Anything short of the recognition that we can not go back to this will-of-the-wisp thing business men call "free enterprise" which never existed since the first regulatory law was passed by the Continental Congress, will lead us into trouble. We must know in our hearts that there must be full employment for employable and that if private business doesn't provide for it, government must. We must know in our hearts that we will never go back on the standards of fair working conditions or wages that we have set. We must know in our hearts that we will never relax regulations made in the public good—regulations born of the necessity of protecting the individual from the brute power of pooled money or influence.

We must know that the demand for an earned security—particularly for greater medical security in the rural areas—will not die out, but will swell in chorus until the government does what the medical profession can not do. We must know that the standards of health, housing, nutrition and all the other things that make for a good life are not matters to be left lightly to free enterprise, but are matters of concern to all of us as a people who make a government; as a people determined to use their government as an agency to secure the welfare and enhance the happiness of all of us.

A great decision is to be made this year. Both the mind and heart will figure in it. Both of them argue for a Democratic victory.

## Jackson County Democratic Central Committee