**“I A Socialist Trust You”: Americans Support FDR’s Legislative Agenda**

President Franklin D. Roosevelt made a total of 31 Fireside Chats, from the initial days of his first administration to the dark days of World War II. He used these opportunities to explain his hopes and ideas for the country, while inviting the citizenry to “tell me your troubles.” The combination of the novelty and intimacy of radio with the believability of his message made a powerful force that enabled him to pass a sweeping set of legislation in the first 100 days of his presidency and then go on to many other accomplishments in the following 12 years of his presidency. In his second Fireside Chat, eight weeks after the first, FDR urged Congress to pass several major pieces of legislation as part of his “well-grounded, well-rounded program.” His listeners included five citizens who sent him letters, representative of his many listeners who ranged from conservatives to socialists; most wished the President well in his efforts, but some feared he might go too far in his interventions into business while others felt that he did not promote equality among Americans far enough.

May 8, 1933

My dear Mr. President: —

I have just listened to your broadcast over the radio and feel that I have to write to you. I must tell you what effect your address to the people has had on me.

I am a member of the graduating class of the Abraham Lincoln High School of Brooklyn, New York and am not eighteen yet. Things aren’t as nice at home as they might be. Bills keep coming in and Dad has to scrape up every cent he can get hold of to pay up. I see the way the world is treating him. With this staring me in the face I was a bit gloomy about my future. However, after listening to your speech, I feel as if there is a silver lining to every cloud. I feel inspired. I feel that if I go to college for more education I will not lose any opportunity that I might find during the four years to go to work. If, I, a high school student, am so affected by your speech you can very well realize how the rest of this country stands behind you.

When the next Election Day rolls around you may rest assured that many of this nation’s youths will march to the polls for the first time and vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt a second term in office of President of these United States of America.

I am now going to go to bed with a fervent prayer in my heart for you, try and God. May God bless you!

Yours sincerely,  
Jack Hamovitz   
Brooklyn, N.Y.

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May 8, 1933

My Dear President:

For 25 years, I have been an ardent Socialist, the soap box, the lecture platform, the class-room are the means that I have used to further the Cause. I have been in jail for it at times.

Since your inauguration, I have withheld judgement — for once in my life I have not used the expression "He is only a Henchman of the Capitlast classes” I have faith in you and the people I meet every day in the business world have faith in you. I hardly think that you realize the power that you really have over the American people. You don’t half realize what faith they have in you and they are willing to follow you blindly. If I a Socialist trust you, I can see why they worship you.

Your speech to-night was magnificent — and remember when a soapboxer admits the other fellow speech is good — thats something Mr. President, this economic distress that we are suffering from is getting too much for us all to stand. If you will help alleviate some of the suffering I see every day well let the historians of the future draw the conclusion Well its a pleasure to listen to you — and Mr. President — I have a suspicion that you know your Karl Marx pretty well.

Good Luck to you and my best wishes to your family — who knows I am liable to call up my friend & comrade Norman Thomas three years from now & tell him I am out working for Franklin D. and I am going to vote for him and the party can throw me out if they want to.

As a former officer of the U.S.A. I salute the Greatest President since Lincoln.

Sincerely yours,  
Harry N. Perlmutter   
Brooklyn, N.Y.

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Eastern Sales & Export Dept.  
Niagrara Searchlight Co.  
May 16, 1933

My dear Mr. President:

It is with genuine pleasure that I refer to your radio talk of Sunday night of May 7th. Dictators dictate, Mr President, Democrats discuss. The important difference is not so much in what they do, as the spirit in which they do it.

The dictatorship myth, woven so industriously about your excellency, was knocked over the fence on Sunday night. And it was all so simple. You took advantage of the radio and the great American Sunday evening at home, and for the second time talked over the problems of the day as a fam¬ily matter with the families of the nation. You talked as easily and as infor¬mally as a neighbor who had just dropped in to visit the folks. There was no more authority, mystery or pose about your talk than in the old time political arguments around the stove and cracker barrel of a country store or in the old fashioned wooden Indian city cigar store. Truly Mr. Roosevelt you revived the modes and manners of the primitive forums of American democracy. The old town meeting is now a nation’s meeting.

The simplicity of your language was matched by the clearness of the thought. The democracy of your good self was reflected in your use of a baseball term to make it plain to everybody. The value of the great American game in teaching men and women how to visualize social, economic and political set ups and conditions was forcefully demonstrated when you said “I have no expectations of making a hit every time I come to bat —what I seek is the highest possible batting average, not only for myself but the team".

Every man, woman and child over six knows exactly what it means. How could you say it so well and so plainly, if there was no game like baseball that everybody from president to street sweeper understands. Try to imagine a statement like yours coming from a Stalin, A Hitler, a Mussolini, A Kemal or a Gomez. For a dictator to picture himself as a mere member of a team playing a popular game would shatter the whole “front” of the dictatorship racket. But an American president can say it. It just fits.

You pictured yourself as a captain of a hall team - and we all know that the captain’s success is dependent upon team work. What more perfect summary of the democratic idea and system. And how you caught and breathed the spirit of the hour. “We cannot ballyhoo ourselves back to prosperity” In seven words you summed up the lesson, that we have all learned from this depression, a lesson we have determined to remember.

Finally the clear statement of what you and the people want in the way of control of business. The dictionaries are crammed with long words which describe all the variations and shadings of the possible relations of government and private business. You used none of them. But you told your whole story in one word “partnership” — a word that is almost primer English, and has meant more in America than anywhere else.

On the frontier “pard” and “pardner” meant the whole idealism of men living and working together to solve the problems of pioneering. It is a word that recalls the log rolling, the husking bee, the barn raising - all the primitive co-operation that was woven into the American character when it was needed, and that is also the hope of our own age. Your economics and sociology is shown in the following - "It is wholly wrong to call the measures that we have taken goverment control of farming, control of industry, and control of transportation. It is rather a partnership between goverment and farming, and industry and transportation! - A partnership not in the profits. – A partnership in planning and partnership to see that the plans are carried out.

Partnership and dictatorship are at the two opposite poles of political thought and feeling — and never the twain shall meet. The grumpy men who insist on looking for gloom and who do not realize that America is not chained in slavery to worn-out ideas can sit in the dark corner and mumble the word “dictator” to themselves as long as they please. This country, under your great leadership, is going ahead without them.

It is the writer’s intention to visit Washington at some future date and it will be his pleasure to make the necessary arrangements to meet you.

Very respectfully yours,  
James J. Dunn   
Chicago, Ill.

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May 8, 1933

Dear President:

Listened to your Radio address last night telling about what the National Legislature had done for the “Forgotten Man” Nothing has been done to help him according to my way of thinking.

Everything that has been done is constitutional you said in your address maybe so, but I demand you read the Declaration of Independence as you seem to have Forgotten that there is anything like equality for all the people of this land as all men are created equal. The Bier Bill that was passed does not help the Forgotten Man, it saves the rich from a large burden of income tax and makes the poor pay the millionaires their tax that’s legislation for the millionaire!

Taxes have been applied where they are already too burdensome, far exceeding ability to pay. Why apply more taxes to this class? Are the Farmer and Laborer expected to get a new Deal from the Democratic party but have been disappointed in their expectations. The Democratic party has had a great opportunity to do something for the people but does not seem to care to take advantage of the chance to go down in history as fighting the battle of the Forgotten man.

The Forgotten man will have to fight his own battle alone and without any help from the National Government as his demands are not heeded or listened to. I presume and know that you have the knowledge of the Farmers and Laborer Holiday “or Strike” which date to begin is set for – May 13 – 1933 This holiday has been called because the Farmer and Laborer has not received their demands from the National Legislature.

It is ridiculous for the Mortgage holders of this Nation to demand payment of interest when there is not enough money in circulation to even carry on the exchange of commodities necessary for the welfare of the people. I would write more a lot more but I feel that it is useless as it does not seem to have any effect whatever.

Hawkin Anderson  
Clayton, Wisconsin

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Law Offices  
Sather & Livesey  
Bellingham, Washington  
May 8, 1933

Dear Sir:

I heard your radio address last night and regarded it as encouraging.

I classify myself as a conservative but realize that present conditions required measures that might not be justified under other circumstances. I sincerely hope that an effort will be made to keep the government out of business as much as possible and that we will not have such inflation as to make money and security values doubtful.

I have always been a Republican but desire to say that I am very pleased with your official acts and likewise am pleased to express to you that the general sentiment is ninety per cent in your favor. This is considerably more than the seventy-five per cent that you referred to in your address last night.

I hear very commendatory words about your economy program and particularly your striking from the pension rolls veterans who se condition is the result of non service ailment. You have the commendation of the people of this country and will continue to have it unless your measures become too extreme. At present you are “ace high”.

With best wishes for your continued success, I am,

Sincerely,  
George Livesey