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Speech by Representative Gerald R. Ford Jr.  
Michigan State College Young G.O.P.  
East Lansing, Michigan Oct. 1948

Friends of the Young Republican Club,

It may surprise you to hear me say I'm not here to give a political speech. I'm not going to talk about this specific piece of legislation or that, although later I'd be glad to answer any questions you may like to ask. Rather, I'm going to turn this into a sort of glorified bull-session and shoot my punches as straight as I can aim them.

Freshman - that's what they call me. If I go to Congress in January it'll be my first hitch and I'll be as green as they come. Still, I hope to find my way around before too long and then put into action some of the fundamental thoughts which you'll hear me express tonight.

First of all, I'd like to ask this question. If you're a Republican, why are? If you're not, I'd like to bring out some reasons why I am. Let's just assume for a moment that none of us have any party



affiliation. Let's assume that we're average Americans, interested in the welfare of our country, and the way we vote depends on what we ~~think~~ is right for the nation.

Frankly, I think the day is gone when a man is a Republican or a Democrat just because his father or grandfather happened to vote a certain ticket. Today, I believe that young people make up their own minds - especially college students who have the benefit of all the educational facilities of a great institution like Michigan State.

Therefore, I say let's assume that we're just open minded voters. When we go to the poles in November we're going to cast a ballot for the best man and the best party because after careful consideration that's the way we want to vote.

Now if we are average free-minded Americans there is a great deal we know about the world of 1948. We know that in the past 15 years we have lived through the worst depression in history, the most brutal war, and today we face a threat to world peace that seems to



be even more serious than the one just recently removed. Because we know all this, we won't cast our ballot without a lot of thought. We won't be sold by mere slogans. Whether it's an elephant or a donkey, we won't just let ourselves be stampeded into a decision.

PAUSE  
\* \* \*

For just a moment I'd like to say a word or two about history. Too often we think of history as so many dates in a text-book, isolated facts without any bearing on the problems facing us head on. But what is history after all? History is a river of circumstance whose currents and eddies take us through the present and drive us into the future with irresistible momentum. History is the controlling channel through which the present runs, and its twistings and turnings are bound to affect the plans of our leaders and parties. Therefore, it behooves us to ask first of all, where does our nation stand in the broad sweep of history?

Just for a moment imagine that we are able to get above the commonplace events of each day and view the present in terms of the broader vista of history.



Thinking back a few dozen decades we see the past and present in stark contrast. A hundred years ago society was a simple affair, largely agricultural and only loosely bound together by the slow and laborious transportation facilities of sail-boat and ox-cart. When Adam Smith published the Wealth of the Nations in 1776 he clearly saw some of the trends that were beginning to take shape, but even Smith would be astounded at the extremes to which we have been brought by technological progress. For example, Smith points out how specialization in the nail-making trade had increased the productivity of one laborer many times, but even this great economist was unable to foresee that some day nails would be manufactured so automatically that one man could superintend a dozen machines and nails would be worth scarcely more than the metal from which they are wrought.

Technological progress, then - that is one of the principal currents of the immediate past that effect the present.



Next, we have the overwhelming trend of what I call the integration of society. In less than a hundred years a world which was broken into a thousand parts by mountains, oceans, deserts, and wilderness became integrated into one, and the result is we have all become dependent on one another. This integration of society has taken place so rapidly even today we hardly realize how far it has carried us from the world of yesterday.

Going back for a moment to Adam Smith and his Wealth of the Nations, we are struck by the fact that his famous economic study was published in the very year that the United States declared its independence, 1776. That was a significant year in more ways than one.

So here we are in 1948 in an age which is the product of vast historical changes: from a losely-knit world in which men lived within their own narrow balliwicks to one in which the whole world is our backyard; from a world in which nails were made through tedious application of sweat and muscle to one in which they spew forth from a machine at a rate of thousands per minute. These changes could not have taken



place without presenting us with complicated problems. You and I are the inheritors of both the blessings and the dilemmas of that transformation. In 1948 we are not only reaping the benefits of that vast historical change. We have also been presented with its thorny problems.

A few moments ago I mentioned the great depression of the 30's. The depression of the 30's was more than an economic collapse - it was one of the great spiritual crises of all history. For the first time, economic adversity was not merely a problem of one nation. It was a world affair. In the remotest regions men were affected and they turned their heads in bewilderment to ask, "Why? What has happened? Has society become so complicated the machine has become the master of its inventor?"

This question brought a rude awakening. Suddenly all the peoples of the world awoke to the realization that great changes had taken place. They became acutely aware that a new reality had to be faced.



Ideologies that had been for centuries accepted as a matter of fact came into question. Doctrines and creeds were looked upon askance. Panaceas and bread-and-butter theories stemmed from the brains of troubled thinkers and the whole world rocked with the reverberation of the spiritual show-down. Look, they cried, we are hungry in the land of milk and honey! See, they exclaimed, something has gone wrong - our dream is a myth and we know not where to turn!

We may as well face the fact frankly, that our party - the Republican Party, had the misfortune to get caught in this historical dilemma. We were certainly not in any sense the creators of the problem; we were merely the victims of it, and as a result the Democrats rode into power on a wave of protest that was so violent for more than a decade our opponents had a virtual monopoly on the affairs of state. A Republican in Washington was an unhappy man. His voice was not heard above the braying of the donkey and his protests were of little avail. With rare exceptions the New Deal was free to experiment, to err, to spend freely and to fumble along promising a better world





with <sup>out</sup> any accounting either in terms of money or fundamental values.

The "outs" were "ins" and vice-versa. At that time the fortunes of the Republican party dropped to the lowest ebb in history. The Democrats could do no wrong and we could do no right. That was the situation. Those were dark days for party members. They had to swallow their pride and take it.

In times of crisis like those of the 30's, a great deal had to be done in a short time. There was a wild rush to solve all the problems of accumulated history that previously were not apparent. Consequently, we witnessed some of the most radical departures from traditional methods that were ever suggested and we stood by and watched practices that in looking back amaze us by their naivete. But those were times of crisis - again and again we were reminded of the fact - and there was little to be done about it. The world was in a mess and there was no denying that.

Probably the most conspicuous single trend in those years was the tendency of young people to look at the past and say, "Gosh, what



awful mistakes have been made!" The old slogans of freedom, liberty, and equality had a hollow ring because bread became more important than theoretical rights. In some countries this contrast became so exaggerated that sensible people were willing to exchange their political liberties for the ranting and ravings of a Hitler. But lest we forget, let us not overlook the fact that to a lesser degree we did the same thing. We were willing to exchange freedom in economic enterprise for the regulatory theories of the NRA; we were willing to give up many of our states' rights and local authorities for Federal subsidy and the largess of a national hand-out. Fortunately, our desperation was never as great as that of many European nations. That was our good fortune. But the trend was clearly marked even here in the land of freedom. It was a historical fact and there could be no denying it.

Let's be brutally frank. Let's call a spade a spade and let's see this thing in its true historical perspective. It did seem absurd, didn't it, that in a land that was blest with the most lavish resources, men were lined up at soup kitchens and there wasn't a



job to be found? It was paradoxical that in a nation that boasted of unlimited opportunity well-qualified businessmen saw the savings of a lifetime dwindle to nothing and even the most worthwhile investments turned to paper in the twinkling of an eye? This we can't deny. At that time - and I remember it vividly, a college graduate was fortunate if he got a job pumping gasoline at \$15 a week. Many of my friends went out from their universities to walk the streets and pray for a pittance. It wasn't the exception - it was the rule. Those were frightening times and don't ever let anyone tell you differently. They were times of crisis like I never hope to see again.

But despite all this, I still believe that regardless of what political party happened to be in power at that time, certain fundamental problems had to be met. I personally am of the opinion that if fate had been a little less cruel to a man like Herbert Hoover, he too would have brought about basic changes and the world would have come forth radically altered. Those changes were inevitable.



They were in the cards of history and nobody could stack the deck any differently. Inadvertently - and I stress that word because there were very few countrymen, experts or otherwise, who could see the overall historical pattern - we had allowed the cart to get in front of the horse; we had allowed certain principles of individual property to become abusive and exploitative. The human factor was abused. The scale just didn't balance. There was an undeniable discrepancy between the rewards of capital and the just return of labor. Look at it honestly - boil it down to its essence, and why did we have that terrible depression? The truth is that purchasing power of the majority of wage earners had lagged behind their earning power. They could fill warehouses with row on row of goods, but they did not have the money or the credit to consume what they had manufactured. The result was the inevitable plight of too much outgo and too little income. It was essentially that simple, but how to solve the situation was less easy to understand.

Looking at the overall accomplishment of the past few years we see that in general legislation has had one particular aim: the

to bring



about a balance between consuming potential and producing capacity.

I say that regardless of party we cannot deny that this was not only desirable but it was absolutely indispensable if America was to go forward and avoid the pitfalls that trapped many and many a nation of the older World beyond the Atlantic.

But now we are facing a different situation. Let's consider it for a moment and then we come to the essential question of how you and I will vote in November. Today we have passed the crisis when there was an urgent need for experiment and more experimentation. Today the nation is more prosperous than it has ever been in all its long history of privilege and achievement. True, this has come about largely through the negative stimulus of the war and the hold-backs in production which resulted from five years of all-out military production. But the way in which recovery came about is a secondary question - the fact is, we have recovered. Our employment situation is better than it has ever been. Today we are turning out more goods than any economist in his wildest dreams could anticipate. We are a prosperous nation and lucky to be so. Students who go out from



our colleges go out with the promise of good jobs and excellent futures. These are, in an economic sense at least, prosperous days. We can be grateful for the fact.

But remember, and this is the fact I wish to stress, that in going through the crisis of war and depression, we have moved closer and closer toward a centralization of authority. Today our Federal government is the biggest business in the world. It employs over 2 million persons, or one out of every thirty workers in this country today. Its debts and its obligation are so tremendous it is hard to conceive how they will ever be paid - and yet they must be paid. In order to meet the challenges of our age, the necessities of national defense and world recovery, our national government has grown to such fantastic proportions it overshadows the activities of our greatest private business - more than that - it overshadows all the governments of the world. I say that we have now reached the stage when the increasing cost of the government threatens to rob wage-earners of the very gains they have made in the past ten years.

We can have another depression - a kind of depression that has never



before been thought of by our economists and it isn't in the textbooks you study. It will be a depression in which not capital takes too great a share of our earning capacity so that we lack the wherewithal to purchase the goods, but government itself takes too great a share! That is perfectly conceivable. It can happen and it might happen! And that, my friends, would be a much greater tragedy than ever happened in the '30's because we would be totally bankrupt. The national government would itself be without credit, and then where would we turn?

Today out of every dollar you earn, 31 cents of it goes to support, state, local, or federal government. Think of it - 31 cents out of every dollar of national income! Just to take an oversimplified illustration, let's assume that in this way approximately 1/3 of your income is diverted to government. If this increases, how then can wage-earners purchase the goods they produce? Oh, yes, you can say that the 31 cents out of every dollar isn't totally wasted. It comes back to you in terms of services by those governmental units - that is partially true, but that depends entirely on



the efficiency of those governmental functions and we all know that the wastes and dissipations of government are far greater than those of private industry. Eventually the discrepancy will come just as inevitably as the discrepancy of the past between capital and labor came. Yes, there is a new animal in the circus and that animal is the government itself! - a very dangerous breed, to put it mildly.

Personally, I don't think that the Democratic administration has any conception of this threat. They have served their purpose under a philosophy of pump-priming and today with their leadership enfeebled by the loss of Franklin Roosevelt and the derelictions of brain-trusters, they are incapable of understanding the times in which we are now living. Just as other parties have in the past gotten caught in the swim of history, so now have the Democrats. Truman has neither the mental capacity nor the historical perspective to understand what is going on. He continues to talk the language he learned from his predecessor, who is now the subject of history books. The times move ahead, and it's never the danger of the past





that counts - the known and evaluated factors. It's the unpredictable, the unforeseen, and this requires young leadership, vision, and imagination.

We are living in an age in which the inevitable trend toward centralization is thrusting us forward at a pace that is breathtaking. Look at your map! See how distance has been whittled down to nothing at all, and whether we like it or not we are rubbing elbows with the Hottentots just as in another era we rubbed elbows with our next door neighbors.

And how may I ask you, in the face of this overwhelming tide of history do the Democrats propose to guard your individual liberty and mine? How do they propose to assure your security and make this a world in which we can hope to live peacefully!

As near as I can see, the Democratic party has only one way to solve any problem: impose regulation and authority from above. They are a lot like the militarists you and I know so well who solve problems by issuing an order or imposing a restriction.



that the kind of world you and I want to live in? I for one say emphatically "No". That is the worst way possible to get at the trouble. It's appealing - I'll admit that because of its apparent simplicity. But I submit that good government never was a simple matter and it won't start now.

The trend toward centralization today is the greatest single problem we face. Now is the time for a real Republican ideology - not an ideology of empty platitudes and threadworn phrases. It is not a time for the old opportunism of the 20's or the laissez faire theories of weary editorial writers. Our nation today must have youthful leadership! It must have men who have lived through the troubled times of the past fifteen years and who understand the tide. Gentlemen, as you all know very well, there's a vast difference between intelligence and wisdom. Today we are in crying need of that rare thing called wisdom in our leadership.

Sometimes amid the clamour of a noisy age, certain facts become completely obscured. Recently I heard Congressman Judd of Minnesota make this statement, and it impressed me as profoundly wise:



"Some people seem to regard the first ten amendments to the Constitution, the so-called Bill of Rights, as guarantees that our government will do this or that for the citizen. Rather they are guarantees that the government cannot do this or that to the citizen. Each is a guarantee to the individual citizen against the powers of his government."

That kind of thinking is refreshing in this day of totalitarian abuse. There is the fundamental distinction in philosophy between our party and the Democrats. They have completely abandoned the principle that there are and should be limits within which good government should operate.

Personally I think it's high time we go back to fundamentals. We go back to the original wisdom of those men who wrote the constitution of the United States. I'm not saying they were oracles. I'm not saying they had some mysterious power to see into the future and to anticipate every technological change that has since taken place.



But they had something which is very applicable in our day and age: they understood one fundamental that we now must take into consideration. They knew that of all enterprises the enterprise of government is subject to the most drastic diminishing returns imaginable. They knew that one private laborer produces ~~three times as much~~<sup>more</sup> in a given period of time as ~~three~~<sup>the ordinary</sup> government bureaucrats. They knew that the dignity of man, the exercise of the sacred right of personal choice, is after all the most valued possession that any man in any age can hope to attain. Economic security? Yes, of course it's important. We must do everything in our power to make sure the present prosperity continues for years to come. But when the stomach is filled and when we have roofs over our heads, what is the next thing that all men yearn for - whether it's in America, or Europe, and even in Russia where for the time being the light of personal freedom has gone out. LIBERTY - that's still a big word, the word that gives meaning to life itself and that means the possible achievement of what you and I are always striving for, namely, personal happiness.

Gentlemen, I wish there were time to go deeper into the philosophy



of modern Republicanism which after all is not the easiest thing to describe because it is not over-simplified like some doctrines which today threaten the very spirit of mankind. True Republicanism never will be a doctrine or a panacea that can be written down in simple phrases or explained in terms of one, two, three. Modern Republicanism is a spirit of living. It is a deep understanding of the times in which we live, of the historical trends that brought us to this age and the patterns which are likely to follow.

You ask me, gentlemen, why I am a Republican? You ask me why I think you should be?

In plain words I can put it this way: I am a Republican because I believe in the essential dignity of mankind. I am a Republican because I believe that out of the traditions of that party alone can come the wisdom and perception that will guide us along the perilous paths of the unwritten history of the future. I am a Republican because to me there is no greater challenge in the world today than to prove to the lost and bewildered peoples of the earth that



FREEDOM is essentially the hope of mankind and the very essence of  
LIFE and HAPPINESS on earth!

That is why I am a Republican! I think that these are reasons  
enough.

Thank you. Goodnight.

