

Accent on Youth

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WHEN a man with the shrewd political acumen of President Roosevelt addresses his first campaign speech to the young men and young women of the nation, there must be a good reason for it. Nor is that reason one of mere sentimental concern for the welfare of the younger generation.

The President delivered his address on Monday evening. Tuesday morning, Postmaster-General Farley, with due slyness and ceremony, announced the launching of a "Roosevelt First Voters League, which aims to win 5,000,000 of the 9,000,000 who, it is estimated, have come to age since the last Presidential election." According to Mr. Best, one leader of the new organization, 1,000 local chapters are planned throughout the country, since "young people are bound to do their bit for President Roosevelt in November because of the many things he has done for them."

Not to be outdone by the New Deal camp, the Republican Party is launching a counter-offensive of its own. Hoover has issued a statement to the Young Republicans in answer to Roosevelt's speech. Paul Block, wealthy publisher, rushed into print with a long editorial attack on Roosevelt, entitled, "The Youth of America Will Decide Next Election."

Why this sudden accent on youth? It cannot be explained exclusively by the large number of first voters. There has been no such shift in the age composition of the nation as to warrant a belief that the percentage of eligible first voters this year will be appreciably greater than in 1932. The appeal to youth is due to something else: For the first time in its history this country is confronted with a youth problem of no mean proportions and a militant youth movement of growing import.

That Roosevelt understands the nature of this problem is shown by his Baltimore address. Speaking to youth, he said:

You have felt the rough hand of the depression. You have walked the streets looking for jobs that never turned up. Out of this has come physical hardship and, more serious, the scars of disillusionment.

Roosevelt knows that, according to the estimates of his own administration, from five to eight million young people are out of school and out of work. The youth problem of today is the problem of a *surplus generation*.

In 1932 there was also a large number of young unemployed. But something has changed since then. Three years ago the country was in the throes of its worst economic crisis. Production was still plunging downward at headlong speed. The plight

of youth was certainly great, but was looked upon as a temporary one. With Roosevelt would come recovery, with recovery would come employment, and with employment would come prosperity and renewed opportunity for youth. This is what a majority of the people thought.

Today, industrial recovery is an established fact. According to the latest Times index of business activity, production stands at 98.7 of the estimated normal. Yet, despite this fact, *unemployment is as great as ever and unemployment among young people greater than ever*. Thus, large masses of youth are beginning to realize that their problem is a special one of a permanent nature, that so-called prosperity is not returning and whatever little opportunity there existed in the period of a rising and expanding capitalism has completely vanished in the period of decline.

This has resulted in the birth of a militant youth movement such as this country has never before witnessed. The American Youth Congress unites scores of important youth organizations behind a progressive program. The American Student Union has become the organized expression of the progressive and radical student body. America's youth refuses to take it lying down.

Anxious to corral the growing discontent of the youth back into New Deal channels, Roosevelt in his Baltimore speech did his best to play up to the youth and to their militant sentiments. He said:

The temper of our youth has become more restless, more critical, more challenging. Flaming youth has become a flaming question. And youth comes to us wanting to know what we propose to do about a society that hurts so many of them.

But that is not all. Roosevelt wants to convey the impression that he sympathizes with the restlessness of youth.

There is much to justify the inquiring attitude of youth. You have a right to ask these questions—practical questions.

Here Roosevelt goes back to his old tricks. With a few high-sounding phrases he places himself on the side of inquiring youth. He conveniently forgets that the "practical questions" which young people ask are first of all directed *to him and his administration*.

"No man who seeks to evade or to avoid deserves your confidence," said Roosevelt, and then proceeded to evade and avoid. When speaking of raising the school-leaving age, why did not Roosevelt say something about the child-labor amendment which has been buried all these years, especially in the Southern states controlled by the Democratic Party? When speaking of the responsibility of the federal government in aiding the

youth, why did he not speak about the inadequate National Youth Administration program and of what he intends to do on June 30 when the N.Y.A. expires? Why did he not say something about the American Youth Act (Benson-Amlie Bill) which is supported by the largest and most important organizations of American youth and which alone aims at providing jobs and educational facilities for young people?

It is true that the Baltimore speech was most vehemently attacked by the Liberty-Leaguers. This, however, does not change the character of the speech itself. Roosevelt's Right opponents fear that his beautiful, alluring demagoguery may become a double-edged sword. Roosevelt tells youth they should be critical, that the federal government has a responsibility towards them, that they should nurture their dreams of a more just social order. Today these phrases may temporarily sway masses of youth to Roosevelt. But what of tomorrow? These same young people will more and more insist upon their birthright, will demand the realization of their dreams.

Paul Block in his editorial attack on the Roosevelt speech tells youth: "Every young man and young woman coming out of school or college, knows there can be no jobs unless business is making some profit." In this manner he tries to deny that which can be proven by facts and figures, namely that business profits have grown by leaps and bounds and that in the past year, alone, profits increased by 40 percent. He makes a big issue over the need for balancing the budget and attacks increased government expenditures. But what Paul Block fails to tell youth is that the budget can easily be balanced by increased taxation of corporate wealth and profits.

The concerted drive of both capitalist parties to win the youth represents more than an election struggle between these parties. American capitalism is becoming alarmed over the growing movement of youth. They fear that the seven to nine million first voters may in large numbers turn from the old parties and join forces with labor in the creation of an anti-capitalist farmer-labor party. They realize that this would only be a first step in the direction of revolutionary struggle for socialism.

Declining American capitalism cannot show youth a way out of its blind alley. Neither will the Democratic nor the Republican Parties be able to stem the rapidly growing movement of youth towards militant united action, especially in behalf of the American Youth Act. Roosevelt may try to dodge the "practical questions" today, but they will confront him at every turn, for the depression generation has come of age.