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A Regular Guy

The collapse of the American economy, the Great Depression, and the Roosevelt administration's response to it in the form of the New Deal represents one of the most appealing, fascinating, and intensively interrogated episodes in the history of the United States. The sources of conflict in New Deal historiography have shifted many times in the three-quarters of a century since Franklin Roosevelt was first elected to the presidency, but there has never been a time when the New Deal was not in some way controversial. In the 1950s, for example, Edgar Robinson charged that the New Deal was a failed experiment in state socialism, while others argued that the New Deal was a precious affirmation of democratic values at a time when dictatorships threatened to engulf the world. Historians broadly appreciative of the New Deal have nevertheless been critical: Rexford Tugwell, himself a New Dealer, bemoaned the fact that early enthusiasm for economic planning was not pursued; James MacGregor Burns argued that Roosevelt blundered in putting political expediency before the noble objective of fashioning a truly liberal Democratic Party.¹

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and William E. Leuchtenburg, both of whom were liberal activists as well as historians, produced canonical works that—for their narrative grace and synthetic authority, respectively—are unlikely to be bettered. After them came historians in search of alternative interpretations. New Left scholars argued that the New Deal was a species of corporate liberalism; labor historians debated whether the New Deal stifled rank-and-file mil-

itancy; Paul Conkin, Barry Karl, and others observed the persistence of localism in the face of federal action.²

More recently, there have been lively exchanges about the New Deal and the judiciary and debates about the welfare state and its relation to race, gender, and sexuality. In various ways, scholars have probed the nature and potential of the liberal state and the constraints acting on it. Political scientists, pursuing an agenda mapped out by Theda Skocpol and other neoinstitutionalists in the 1980s, have made substantial contributions to this rich historiography, which is still developing.³

As the principal mediator between the Roosevelt administration and the Democratic Party, Jim Farley operated at the heart of New Deal politics. Farley's career offers historians a window through which to view this complex—and very often fraught—relationship. As campaign manager, postmaster general, and chairman of the Democratic National Committee throughout the New Deal years, Farley's essential task was to bridge tensions between Roosevelt and the New Deal administration, on the one hand, and Democratic Party organizations, on the other. Fault lines in this relationship were an inevitable feature of Farley's work, both nationally and in his home state, where he continued to be active as party chairman until 1944. At first, these fault lines demanded careful handling. Nothing if not a skillful politician, Farley navigated the first term with considerable aplomb. By the middle of Roosevelt's second term, however, he was under huge pressure. Conflict between elements of the traditional party apparatus and the New Deal was beginning to dominate him. Eventually, it would overwhelm him entirely.

In asking why the reformist thrust of Roosevelt's first term was slowed to a virtual standstill by the middle of his second, historians have placed particular emphasis on the late New Deal, focusing on Roosevelt's political miscalculations over the plan to reform the Supreme Court in 1937 and the attempted purge of congressional conservatives in 1938. They have also considered the impact of the 1937–38 recession, the coalescence of a powerful conservative opposition in Congress, and the ascendancy of a form of liberalism that avoided direct assaults on the infrastructure of American capitalism.⁴

Jim Farley's story poses a challenge to this set of interpretations by showing how very early the conflicts between the Democratic Party and

the New Deal manifested themselves. It was not until the second term that these conflicts became chronic—so chronic that they forced Farley out of the New Deal altogether. But they were there from the beginning, and managing them was Farley's principal task in the New Deal's heady early years.

The day after the 1932 election, Farley was invited over to Louis Howe's office at 331 Madison Avenue for an afternoon meeting. Howe then told Farley that, in all probability, the latter would be asked to go to Washington to join the Roosevelt cabinet as postmaster general. "If F.D. had gone to Washington without me," Farley later wrote, "I would have died, and the same was true of Louie." Farley never received official notification of his appointment, but before he knew it, he was riding the Roosevelt Special train to Washington and the inauguration, with Bess and his three young children at his side.⁵

It would be wrong to say that Farley's only role in the cabinet was to report on the state of the party and to determine who was to fill minor federal posts; he also occasionally offered his opinions on policy matters. He spoke up in support of Frances Perkins, secretary of labor, when she argued for public works; he argued against the government spending its way out of the 1937–38 recession, stating that the key issue was the restoration of business confidence. But these pronouncements were the exception rather than the rule, not least because Farley's knowledge of many areas of policy (particularly agricultural and foreign policy) was limited. Farley's operations were largely confined to what contemporaries referred to as the "purely political." His basic assumptions were those of the archetypal party regular, for whom programmatic concerns would always be subordinated to the priorities of party unity and organizational strength.⁶

Farley wrote, in *Behind the Ballots*, that his aim during these years was not to implement any policy or have his ideas make any lasting mark but, rather, to "turn over to my successor the best functioning political party in the history of this country." We should not assume, though, that Farley's impact on the New Deal was confined to this narrow sphere. On the contrary, Farley's decisions about the distribution of federal patronage, his interventions in the race for the New York City mayoralty in

1933, and his ambivalence toward progressive politicians and parties in the states during the 1934 midterm elections all placed him in a position to influence the future of New Deal reform.⁷

As Roosevelt's chief dispenser of federal patronage and, in his capacity as postmaster general, as the cabinet representative for Democratic Party regulars in the states, Farley's position in the new administration was pivotal. His major short-term task was to set about the business of allocating thousands of government jobs to a party whose members had been starved of federal recognition since the end of Woodrow Wilson's second term, in 1921. In the first few weeks of the new administration, job hunters swarmed to Farley's office by the trainload. First, they looked for him at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee. When they could not find him there, they headed for the Post Office Department. There, in a large room set aside to cope with the crowds, Farley and his assistants struggled to dole out jobs to those considered worthy; the rest were sent packing, even if they had traveled from as far afield as Idaho. Looking back on those hectic days, Farley reflected that he felt so hounded by job aspirants that he "had to slip back and forth to the office like a man dodging a sheriff's writ."⁸

In the longer term, Farley had to contend with a far more troublesome problem than distributing patronage: how to operate effectively in a political environment that was changing fast—and not necessarily in ways congenial to him. As the New Deal progressed, Farley increasingly found himself wrestling with the implications and consequences of Roosevelt's willingness to bring extraparty progressives and programmatically inspired interest groups—especially those representing women, labor unions, and African Americans—into the New Deal fold. This, not Farley's patronage dealings, would prove to be the greatest test of his political skills.

Farley's private memoranda, which he dictated to his secretary after work each day, show that the president closely monitored even relatively minor appointments. Farley's control of New Deal patronage was never absolute. Roosevelt's keen interest in and encyclopedic knowledge of the nation's political terrain would always act as a check on Farley's ability to wield independent political power. In any case, there was never any like-

likelihood of Farley having a determining influence over the most important appointments: he expected to be consulted over cabinet posts and Supreme Court judgeships, for instance, but only as a courtesy.⁹

On the evening of May 1, 1933, in a memo dictated shortly after a meeting with the president, Farley recorded the thinking behind some of the administration's major appointments. He was keen to take credit for appointments that he influenced, but these were either appointments within his own department (the Post Office Department) or appointments of less than the very highest importance—for instance, the placing of John W. Troy as governor of Alaska. It is telling that Farley was keen to distance himself from any hint of personal responsibility for the appointments of Brains Truster Rexford Tugwell and non-Democratic progressive Harold Ickes. Farley's suspicion of these men is evident in his guarded statement that Tugwell was chosen as undersecretary for agriculture because “[t]he President seemed to think he would be a good man to assist Wallace” and that Ickes became secretary of the interior because “[t]he President felt the Progressives were entitled to consideration.”¹⁰

Another appointee who failed to gain Farley's immediate and unequivocal approval was Frances Perkins, the new secretary of labor and the United States' first female cabinet member. Farley's memo noted that “her appointment . . . was entirely a personal one on [Roosevelt's] part.” He continued with unreserved praise for Daniel Tobin, the Teamsters Union president who had headed the 1932 campaign's Labor Division. He then suggested that Tobin was overlooked in favor of Perkins due to the influence of “Mrs. Roosevelt and all of the women.”¹¹

What was remarkable about Farley's handling of patronage in the early months of the New Deal was the avoidance of any major scandal—despite newspaper cartoonists' depictions of Democrat donkeys feeding at the federal trough. Payoffs in the form of jobs to congressmen and party activists were made with quiet efficiency and were carefully recorded in Farley's memos, whether they concerned the requests of such major figures as Mississippi senator Pat Harrison or the filling of relatively minor secretarial posts. Previous historians have noted that Farley did much to formalize the appointments procedure, making public the process by which applicants were to gain “clearance” from their

congressmen or local organization. If applicants were both capable of doing a job and in possession of the appropriate endorsements from local party leaders, Farley gave preference to applicants whose allegiance was to Democrats who were "FRBC," that is, "For Roosevelt Before Chicago." This helped to whittle down the number of eligible applicants for the many new unclassified positions created by the emergency agencies, and it helped to funnel federal patronage toward factions of the Democratic Party that were sympathetic to the aims of the New Deal.¹²

While it is probably true that, in 1933–34, Farley had more patronage power in his hands than any previous Democratic Party national chairman, perhaps more significant in the context of a study of the relationship between the Democratic Party and the New Deal is the extent to which Farley's room for maneuver was limited. In addition to Roosevelt's continual scrutiny, there was the political scheming of agency chiefs to whom Farley was forced to cede power, as well as the demands of Democratic congressmen at federal, state, and local levels. There were government agencies that Farley kept out of altogether, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Farley met TVA chief Arthur Morgan shortly after he had been appointed, and it did not take him long to fathom that Morgan was not the kind of man he could do business with. When Morgan asserted that he did not want to have any involvement with political appointments, Farley retorted, "if we weren't interested in politics Roosevelt would never have been elected." Farley decided there and then never to write to Morgan or ask him to appoint anyone to office.¹³

Patronage problems most often arose as a result of uneasy power-sharing arrangements between Farley and the heads of newly created government agencies (notably Harold Ickes, head of the Public Works Administration, and Harry Hopkins, who was in charge of the Works Progress Administration) or when independent-minded department heads (notably Henry Wallace, secretary of agriculture) appointed Republicans to departmental posts ahead of Democratic loyalists. At first sight, these problems might seem insignificant, but they serve to highlight the basic tensions between the two contrasting and competing kinds of politics that were wrestling for ascendancy in the New Deal years.

The first, older kind of politics was local in orientation, based on per-

sonalized party organizations, and framed more around the provision of services than around issues or ideology. This was the kind of politics with which Farley and Democratic Party regulars in the state and local parties felt most comfortable. The New Deal, however, fostered the rise of a second, newer kind of politics that was more national, more driven by issues, less dependent on traditional party bosses, and more attuned to the political needs of interest groups and large-scale organizations. In the early years of the New Deal, Farley was able to use his considerable political skills to ameliorate substantially the conflicts that arose when these two forms of politics clashed. Later, when the influence of the structural causes of stress—the expansion of the Democratic Party’s special divisions, the growing importance of urban voters to the New Deal coalition, and the rise of organized labor’s role in financing campaigns and generating support for Roosevelt—became more profound, Farley increasingly found himself out on a limb, involved in conflicts that he was unable to smooth over. Consequently, his place in the administration became untenable. Though he proved to be an adaptable—in some ways, even visionary—party boss, he was unable fully to make the transition from the politics he had grown up with to the politics that he helped to create. Farley’s eventual alienation and departure from the New Deal was part of the fallout caused by these broad processes of political change.¹⁴

Henry Wallace and Farley always maintained a healthy respect for each other’s separate areas of expertise. Farley admired Wallace’s “frank manner in Cabinet meetings” and his “thorough knowledge of his subject.” In mid-October 1933, Farley dictated a memo stating that Wallace was “a real, strong member of the Cabinet” and—in a comment showing Farley indulging his bent for political prophecy—“a fellow who will grow in the years that are to follow.”¹⁵

Farley liked Wallace, but his admiration was tempered by exasperation at the appointment of Republicans to key positions in the Department of Agriculture. (Wallace himself only became a formal member of the Democratic Party in 1936.) For example, in early August 1933, Farley received a letter from Molly Dewson, head of the Democratic National Committee’s Women’s Division, complaining about the decision to

place Iris Calderhead Walker, whose father had been a Republican congressman, in charge of “women’s work” in the Department of Agriculture’s Trade Agreement Section. Dewson described Calderhead Walker as “one of the rankest republicans I ever knew,” adding, in prose that epitomized her forthright political style, that “all through the last campaign she was simply nasty about Roosevelt and the Democrats and now she slips into a strategic position, while women who slaved their heads off are warming their heels.” Farley’s response was to do all he could to distance himself from such decisions. He expressed sympathy for Dewson’s position, made clear that his powers were limited, and threw in a dose of anti-intellectualism for good measure, writing, “This is another one of the ‘highbrow’ appointments by the administration—the Secretary of Agriculture is entirely responsible for it—I had nothing whatsoever to do with it, and I shall look into it when I get back to Washington, but I doubt if it will make any difference.”¹⁶

Farley was subjected to further pressure on the appointments question from Claude Bowers, the U.S. ambassador to Spain. Writing from the embassy in Madrid in May 1934, Bowers told Farley that the only criticism of the administration he had heard came from “two or three senators and a few politicians out in the sticks,” who thought “too many Republicans are left in office and too many are being given jobs in the N.R.A.” Bowers thought Woodrow Wilson had been too trusting of Republicans and that Roosevelt might be similarly susceptible.¹⁷

The concerns of Dewson and Bowers matched those of hundreds of Democrats who felt that “deserving Democrats” were being consistently passed over in favor not only of Republicans but also of the intellectuals, scientists, and social workers who had come to Washington to pack the growing federal bureaucracy. The traditional beneficiaries of federal largesse—party regulars, campaign contributors, and lobbyists—were being marginalized by the deluge of expertise. Service intellectuals were not a new phenomenon in American government—they had been a visible feature of Washington politics from the Progressive Era, at the very latest—but the scale of the influx of experts and administrators in the early New Deal years alarmed many party activists, who looked to Farley, as party chairman, to represent their interests. When, in January 1934, Farley, in the company of the president, attended a meeting of the

congressional Federal Patronage Committee, many of these concerns came to the surface. According to Farley, each of the twelve congressmen present criticized the administration's handling of patronage, saying that there were "only two places in the government service where they received courteous service and assistance." Not surprisingly, given that Farley and Roosevelt were in attendance, these places were the president's office and the postmaster general's office. The principal complaint was that there were "too many Republicans holding positions and not in sympathy with the aims of the Administration." Later that same day, in a cabinet meeting, Farley, who endorsed the congressmen's views, found support from Dan Roper, secretary of commerce, and from Vice President Garner. Farley told the cabinet that "many had received places in the government service through personal influence and otherwise, without party affiliations, and did not have the proper interest in assisting the Senators and Congressmen." He suggested, without providing any evidence, that these factors explained the frequent leaking of information from government departments.¹⁸

As postmaster general, Farley was, in theory, responsible for approving all federal appointments, but some agency chiefs were ferocious in defending their authority and exercising their autonomy over the turf they controlled. Harold Ickes and Harry Hopkins were strongly antipartisan in their attitude toward the staffing of their agencies. They resisted Farley's attempts to use the emergency agencies for party-building purposes, a strategy made possible by Section 3 of the Federal Emergency Relief Act, because it exempted the employees of emergency agencies from civil service laws.

Ickes's first impressions of Farley were favorable. On April 20, 1933, commenting on his patronage dealings with Farley, the self-styled curmudgeon confided to his diary that he "could ask for nothing fairer or more considerate." A month later, Ickes noted approvingly that Farley had "never shown any disposition to press for the appointment of any one not fit." Farley's first assessments of Ickes were much less generous: he saw Ickes as "somewhat opinionated" and as proceeding "on the theory that everyone else is dishonest." There was a good deal of tension between the two men. When Ickes joked to Farley in a cabinet meeting that the two of them were capable of doing all the New Deal's work

between them, Farley, whose sense of humor for once deserted him, dictated a memo saying that Ickes's comments "seemed . . . assinine" [*sic*].¹⁹

Ickes was satisfied with Farley because the former was convinced of his success in defending his jurisdiction over appointments in public works. On June 21, 1933, after a meeting with Farley, Senator James Byrnes of South Carolina, and "Chip" Robert, the assistant secretary to the Treasury, Ickes wrote, triumphantly, that a discussion on the selection of state administrators for public works had ended with an agreement that he was to have "full power to make recommendations in order of my preference to the President." He added, "We are not only anxious to keep these appointments outside of partisan politics, but we want to avoid the appearance of politics."²⁰

Farley's ideas about patronage policy were quite the opposite of Ickes's. Farley thought that a partisan approach to federal appointments was the only surefire way of guaranteeing the loyal service of government workers. "The most important thing in any organization—industrial, governmental, or political—is the loyalty of its workers," Farley believed. He argued, "We are more likely to get that loyalty for the Administration if we appoint Democrats than if we appoint Republicans." Ickes was not concerned about his appointees' party loyalties as long as they supported New Deal reforms and were willing to accept his leadership.²¹

During Roosevelt's first term, there were several clashes between Farley and Ickes over federal appointments. One example that attracted considerable media attention and that soured relations between the two men concerned the appointment of John W. Finch as director of the Bureau of Mines. Ickes chose Finch, an Idaho Republican, for the position and told Farley of his intentions at a cabinet meeting in July 1934. A few weeks later, Farley received a call from the White House asking for official approval, a request that was blocked, according to Farley, because the president agreed with him that Finch's background should be investigated. Farley's role in stopping the appointment found its way into the press—Farley was convinced that Ickes's aide, Louis Glavis, was leaking information—and was presented as evidence of a personal feud between Ickes and Farley.²²

In the short term, the Finch affair was settled when Roosevelt told

Farley the appointment would have to be accepted because the president had promised Ickes he would allow it. In the longer term, resentment continued to simmer through the winter of 1934. It was exacerbated by Ickes's conviction that Farley was secretly double-crossing the president by backing Ed Kelly in the race for Chicago mayor. Ickes, who began his career as a Bull Moose Progressive staunchly opposed to Chicago's Democratic machine, did not trust Farley's political instincts. The feeling was mutual: Farley thought Ickes had unfairly forced the president to give his word on the Finch appointment before the necessary checks had been carried out.²³

The controversy over the Finch appointment was not simply due to a clash of personalities or a breakdown of communication between two government departments—though both those factors were undoubtedly involved. It was typical of a series of incidents—most of which were the cause of minor embarrassment to the administration—in which Farley battled with agency chiefs and cabinet colleagues for control of patronage. These battles were symptomatic of the tensions between the code of loyalty and of party regularity that dominated Farley's politics, on the one hand, and the ideological commitment of many New Dealers to reform agendas and progressive ideals that were quite independent of party affiliation, on the other.

Throughout 1933 and 1934, press reports of differences between Farley and prominent cabinet members over appointments were common. Those said to be involved included not just Ickes but also Harry Hopkins, Frances Perkins, Dan Roper, Henry Morgenthau Jr., and Hugh Johnson. Taken individually, these disputes—some of which were exaggerated by journalists striving to make a major story out of a minor disagreement—were of little import, but their cumulative effect, combined with the political context in which they occurred, gave them a greater significance.

By mid-1934, as a consequence of the constant rumors about appointments and with the midterm elections only a few months away, Farley was coming under increasing pressure to relinquish one or both of his jobs. George Norris, the venerable Republican progressive, persistently attacked Farley for being both party chairman and postmaster general. Henry Wallace—a fellow westerner and a former Republican with pro-

gressive sympathies—appealed to Norris to stop his tirades, but it was no use.²⁴

The impression that Farley ran a sinister spoils operation—that “Farleyism,” as the newspapers had it, was rife—lent credence to the notion that there was a rift between New Dealers and the party politicians who oiled the wheels of the political process. These political pressures came at a time when the nation’s economic crisis showed few signs of easing, the preponderance of business interests remained opposed to the New Deal, and the revival of labor radicalism, in the form of a series of wildcat strikes, appeared, to some at least, to pose a direct threat to the established political and economic order. In these circumstances, it was conceivable that a formidable conservative coalition could have coalesced both in Congress and in the nation long before 1937–38, when southern Democrats and conservative Republicans joined forces to stymie the New Deal. That this did not happen was a reflection of the enormous investment Americans made in Roosevelt’s character and abilities and of the fact that the Republican Party, still reeling from its 1932 defeat and intimately associated with economic failure, was in no position either to present alternative solutions or to organize a concerted opposition. It was also related, however, to Farley’s prodigious efforts on behalf of the traditional apparatus of the Democratic Party. Through a constant stream of communications with Roosevelt, cabinet colleagues, congressmen, governors, mayors, state leaders, and party workers of every stripe (communications made face-to-face, by letter, over the telephone, and through intermediaries), Farley helped to “straighten out” countless conflicts and misunderstandings. In these ways, Farley helped to bridge the dangerous gulf between his party’s foot soldiers in the state organizations and the New Deal administration in Washington.²⁵

Many of the problems Farley encountered in national politics in 1933–34 were replicated in his work at the state level, where he sought to continue the process he and Roosevelt had begun in the 1920s to strengthen the New York State Democratic Party. As both national and state party chairman, Farley was in an immensely powerful position, with patronage powers that would enable him to consolidate control of weak organizations and attack the remaining pockets of independent Democratic

machine opposition, principally Tammany Hall (which, in any case, was rudderless and divided) and the O'Connell brothers in Albany.

As early as January 1933, Farley was engaged in a fierce battle with the O'Connells over control of the distribution of state senatorial patronage, forcing the Albany machine to withdraw the names of twenty-two appointees they had named in defiance of Farley's leadership. Farley was well aware that the O'Connells represented the most serious threat to party harmony in his home state, though he always knew that he held all the trump cards, in the form of a generous supply of federal patronage. In November 1933, after appointing a collector of internal revenue to the Albany district, Farley dictated a memo stating that the appointment would placate the O'Connells, "the one group Up-State which if ever they become definitely against our wing of the party would be the most dangerous of all."²⁶

Farley's political strategy in New York State after Roosevelt's victory in the 1932 presidential election was based on the same principles he had followed when Roosevelt was governor; the only difference was that the volume of Farley's work on the national stage led him to delegate more authority to his aide, Vincent Dailey. Speaking at Binghamton to six hundred guests of the Broome County Democratic organization, on February 22, 1933, Farley made clear that he would not resign the state chairmanship after leaving for Washington, reiterating his belief that the key to electoral success for the state party lay in efficient organization at the local level. A month later, the *New York Times* reported that Farley and his associates were working to oust from their posts five uncooperative county chairmen, all of whom had opposed Roosevelt's nomination in Chicago.²⁷

The extent to which Farley was able to advance his party's electoral fortunes in New York State was always delimited by the extraordinary complexity of its politics and by the ambiguity of the administration's—and especially of Roosevelt's—relationship with the state party. This latter point is most effectively demonstrated by the contest for the New York City mayoralty in 1933, won by the Republican reformer Fiorello La Guardia against a divided Democratic Party. The election represented a public and personal humiliation for Farley, who harbored an intense dislike for La Guardia, a man whose electoral successes, political style,

and rhetoric were a constant affront to Farley through the 1930s and early 1940s. *La Guardia's* dictum "I would rather be right than regular" revealed his contempt for the political concepts around which Farley's beliefs were organized. The contest also illustrated the New Deal's disregard for party boundaries and exposed fissures in the relationship between Democratic Party regulars and the New Deal.²⁸

The 1933 New York mayoralty presented a dilemma to Roosevelt and his more liberal supporters. The president wanted to avoid a Republican victory—because having a Republican mayor in New York City might hurt the 1934 reelection chances of the man who had replaced Roosevelt as governor of New York State and because it might even weaken Roosevelt's own chances of retaining the presidency in 1936—but he wanted a Tammany victory even less. In the wake of the Seabury investigations, which had spectacularly exposed the Tammany machine's dependence on fraud, bribery, and a multitude of other corrupt practices, New Deal Democrats wanted to pounce on the opportunity to reduce Tammany Hall's influence over the politics of New York City. To this end, Roosevelt and Farley channeled as much federal patronage as they could toward Ed Flynn in the Bronx, Frank Kelly in Brooklyn, and Eddy Ahearn in the Lower East Side, all of whom opposed the leadership of Tammany boss John F. Curry.²⁹

According to Flynn, in mid-September 1933, when it became clear that *La Guardia* would beat Tammany Hall's candidate, John Patrick O'Brien, hands down, Roosevelt called a meeting with Farley and Flynn, where it was agreed that Flynn would persuade a third candidate, Joseph McKee, to enter the race. This version of events, however, is contradicted by a memo Farley wrote on September 21, under the heading "THE REAL STORY OF THE NEW YORK CITY SITUATION IS THIS." Farley stated that "several weeks ago," he and his associate Vince Dailey had independently come to the conclusion that the "only thing to do was to get McKee into the proper frame of mind." Farley asserted that they had seen McKee while Flynn was out of town and that they had prepared the ground for the McKee candidacy. McKee had enjoyed a successful stint as president of the Board of Aldermen before becoming acting mayor after Jimmy Walker was forced into exile by the Seabury exposés. He was regarded as being close to Flynn, which explains why Tammany Demo-

crats refused to back him in 1932 when they used the courts to force an election for the remainder of Walker's term. O'Brien won this election, but in response to a *World Telegram* campaign, McKee, whose name was not even on the ballot, won over 250,000 votes.³⁰

According to *Jim Farley's Story*, Roosevelt gave his word that he would invite McKee to the White House as a way of indicating his support. But if this promise was made, it was never delivered. It should be remembered that *Jim Farley's Story*—a work in which an embittered Farley set out to portray his former boss as untrustworthy and prone to vindictive behavior—was written fourteen years after the events Farley was recalling. There is no mention of Roosevelt's promise in the memorandum Farley dictated on the evening of his meeting with Roosevelt and Flynn. Roosevelt was careful to maintain an air of Olympian objectivity in his public attitude toward the mayoral race. He ignored Flynn's many desperate appeals for some kind of statement of support. Where his private allegiances lay, it is much harder to say. Of the plan to bring McKee into the fray, Farley noted at the time, "The President is delighted and while he will not actively take part the plan has his sanction and approval."³¹

In his unpublished manuscript on Farley's career, Ernest Cuneo asserted that Roosevelt had knowingly double-crossed Farley, that he had deliberately split the New York City Democratic Party in order to weaken the power of party regulars and strengthen the New Deal's identity as a cross-party progressive coalition. But Farley's memoranda, on which Cuneo based his manuscript, show that he was in fact instrumental in the move to create the McKee candidacy. In this instance, it is unreasonable to portray Farley as the hapless victim of Roosevelt's cynical political machinations.³²

Certainly Roosevelt was under considerable pressure from liberal allies in the administration (notably Adolf Berle, who was working on La Guardia's campaign) to remain silent on the mayoral race. There is no evidence, though, to suggest that Roosevelt ever gave outright or even clandestine support to La Guardia at this stage. He did not need to. Roosevelt's politics were sufficiently flexible that he knew he could work with either man.

When McKee's candidacy began to wither as a result of La Guardia's blistering rhetorical attacks and the discovery of an anti-Semitic article

McKee had written in *Catholic World* in 1915 (more than a quarter of the city's voters were Jewish), the president's noncommittal stance was vindicated. More worrying for many progressives were the long-term implications of Farley's interventions in the city's politics. It was widely reported in the New York press that Farley's involvement in the contest was a threat to Republican progressives seeking reelection in the 1934 midterm elections. What was to stop Farley from intervening in, say, Wisconsin or California to the detriment of Senators Robert La Follette and Hiram Johnson? The *New York World Telegram* reported, "The muttering chorus of resentment against Mr. Farley is rising." It was also suggested, ominously, that Farley was paving the way for a run at the governorship in 1936.³³

The McKee candidacy can be interpreted as a failed attempt by the Roosevelt administration to construct a reformist Democratic Party in New York City. Perhaps, as Sean Savage has suggested, Flynn thought that even if the attempt did not succeed, it might have the beneficial side effect of persuading Tammany Hall to adopt a more progressive platform. Instead, the insertion of McKee split the Irish vote and galvanized La Guardia and his advisers into developing a more comprehensive policy program. Rather than relying on the anti-Tammany slurs and platitudes on good government that were his staple, La Guardia began to articulate a more coherent urban agenda, promising a new charter, a unified transit system, cheap public housing, and slum clearance. The consequence of La Guardia's victory in 1933, much to Farley's chagrin, was that the Roosevelt administration determined to use the new mayor as a means of tapping further support from progressive Republicans and independents, not least by allowing La Guardia to reap the political benefits of the New Deal's relief programs. Funds from the Works Progress Administration were sent La Guardia's way, helping him to build support and extend his influence, just as they had done for Democratic mayors Ed Kelly in Chicago, Frank Hague in Jersey City, and Tom Pendergast in Kansas City.³⁴

The outcome of the election—La Guardia won 868,522 votes; McKee, 609,053; O'Brien, 586,672—suited Roosevelt's liberal allies much better than it did Farley, who had thrown his energy into the McKee campaign. New York City was now in the hands of a man who had demonstrated a

long-standing commitment to New Deal reforms on a variety of issues, from agriculture to child labor. La Guardia, who had formerly been a congressman for the East Harlem district, proved himself a master of the art of combining liberal principles with cleverly targeted appeals to the very groups of voters—particularly Italians and Jews—who would become increasingly important components of the New Deal coalition. Though Roosevelt and La Guardia's political roots and personalities could hardly have been more different, both men pursued a form of politics dependent on attracting support from independents and progressives, a strategy alien to Farley. Bruised by La Guardia's mayoral victory, Farley continued to face the unenviable task of managing the fallout from Tammany Hall's painful and protracted decline. He remained the New Deal's premier whipping boy, especially for those liberals and progressives who believed that if only Farley could be removed from office, the New Deal might be freed altogether from the taint of "practical politics."³⁵

Critics of Farley's interventions in the 1933 New York City mayoralty race were right to suspect that he would involve himself in the 1934 midterm elections. For the most part, though, their fear that Farley would meddle in the national elections as he had in the New York State elections was unwarranted. Though Farley's correspondence and private memoranda from 1934 suggest that he was often uncomfortable when dealing with non-Democrat allies of the New Deal in such states as Minnesota, where the Farmer-Labor Party was powerful, and Wisconsin, where the Progressive Party led by the La Follette dynasty was dominant, he cooperated fully with Roosevelt's requests and sometimes even acted as a mediator between the administration and third-party state leaders.

It is unfair to argue, as Ernest Cuneo did in his manuscript on Farley's career, that Roosevelt hoodwinked Farley by giving "secret aid to the Progressives *against* the Democratic Party in Wisconsin and Minnesota." Farley's memoranda concerning his meetings with the president in 1934 show the two men quite openly discussing the administration's links with the La Follettes in Wisconsin and Farmer-Laborites in Minnesota. At the end of May, Roosevelt asked Farley to "get busy and try to clear up the situation so that [the La Follettes] would not be

opposed.” On June 6, Roosevelt reiterated that he was “quite anxious . . . to take care of La Follette” and asked Farley to contact Senator F. Ryan Duffy in this regard. Farley knew that Roosevelt wanted the La Follettes to prosper and was aware that his was not the only channel of communication between the White House and Wisconsin.³⁶

In another private memorandum, two weeks later, Farley hinted at the divided nature of his loyalties and at the strain the New Deal’s alliances with non-Democratic progressives placed on him as party chairman.

I also discussed with him [Roosevelt] the Wisconsin political situation and told him that our fellows were going along and nominate [*sic*] Charles Broughton of Sheboygan as United States Senator in an effort to defeat La Follette. The President told me that he would see La Follette and tell Bob that he and I are for him, but of course inasmuch as the local organization wants to go along with Broughton, there is nothing we can do.³⁷

If Farley was indeed “for” La Follette, he was at the same time sympathetic toward the many Democrats who wrote complaining that the administration was not giving their state party sufficient backing or that New Dealers were covertly supporting third-party candidates, Republicans, or Democratic insurgents. But he made no open stand on their behalf. In the case of Minnesota, it appears that despite receiving several letters from irate Democrats attacking, in the words of one of Louis Howe’s correspondents, “the disastrous communistic platform of the Farmer Labor party” and bemoaning the administration’s reluctance to endorse the state’s Democrats outright, Farley heeded the president’s advice to stay out of the fray. The Farmer-Labor Party’s candidates for senator and for governor—Henrik Shipstead and Floyd B. Olson, respectively—were comfortably reelected against Democratic opponents.³⁸

It is interesting to note the parallels between the 1934 midterm elections and those of 1938, when Roosevelt attempted to purge the party of some of its most conservative elements. On both occasions, Democratic Party workers and organizers in some states were barely recognized by

Washington, while more liberal Democrats and extraparty progressives, such as Robert La Follette in Wisconsin, Hiram Johnson in California, and Minnesota's Farmer-Laborites, used Roosevelt's name to garner support, receiving either outright or tacit White House backing. In both years, party regulars were frustrated by Roosevelt's apparent unwillingness to lend them his unequivocal approval.

For Farley, though, the difference between 1934 and 1938 was that, by the latter date, he had been stripped of any significant powers of patronage or influence over the decision-making process and was becoming more and more frustrated with his increasingly peripheral position in New Deal politics. Midway through Roosevelt's second term, Farley had little to lose, and there was a chance, albeit a slim one, that by siding with alienated rank-and-file Democrats, he might attract the support of party regulars, with a view to the presidential nomination in 1940. In 1934, by contrast, the freshness of the glory of the Democrats' 1932 election victory and the enticing promise of federal pay to potential officeholders kept most of the party's disaffected elements in check. Much of Congress was in step with or even in advance of the administration's legislative agenda. The New Deal's momentum had yet to be halted by the legislative and judicial setbacks of the midthirties, such as the Supreme Court's rulings against the administration's recovery programs for industry and agriculture and the botched attempt at court reform that followed. Consequently, in 1934, buffeted by the complaints of liberal New Dealers, on the one hand, and of his party's rank-and-file loyalists, on the other, Farley bit his lip and played the game.

In the first two years of the New Deal, Jim Farley navigated the Democratic Party with great skill through decidedly choppy political waters, mediating between a complex array of party factions and state organizations, as well as working with and striving to accommodate the demands of the Roosevelt administration. The disparate and divided nature of the Democratic Party and the sheer variety of opinions and interests within it meant that steering a safe course was no easy task. While Farley continued to display the qualities of administrative efficiency and effective communication that had characterized his early career in the politics of New York State, he was unable to prevent alarming incidences of tension and conflict from breaking to the surface on numerous occasions. At

root, these incidences, whether in New York State or national politics, were caused by the fact that the reformist thrust of the New Deal, especially its willingness to court the support of Republican and independent progressives, was often at odds with the expectations and allegiances of the party rank and file.

In this period, Farley's loyalty to Franklin Roosevelt never wavered for one moment, yet he was often frustrated by the stubborn refusal of many of his New Deal allies to play by what he understood to be "the rules of the game." Harold Ickes, Harry Hopkins, and Henry Wallace, among others, appointed Republicans to key positions in their agencies; Adolf Berle was instrumental in La Guardia's successful campaign for the New York mayoralty; and in 1934, the president's support for Democratic candidates in states where there were more progressive alternatives was often withheld. The political problems Farley encountered as party chairman and postmaster general—as he negotiated between the demands of Democratic Party regulars, on the one hand, and the president and his independent and progressive supporters, on the other (and, at a deeper level, between the two competing political models they represented)—indicate the extent to which, even as early as 1934, many of the forces that alienated Democratic Party regulars in the late thirties were already in place and were expressing themselves with considerable force.