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The Death of the Broker?

In his hugely influential *Age of Roosevelt* trilogy, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. claimed that Jim Farley was “the last and one of the greatest of the classical school.” By this, he meant that Farley represented a species of politician rooted in the pre–New Deal era, that he used the techniques and operated under the codes of political conduct associated with traditional party bosses, and that he was essentially a broker politician who was happiest when working with patronage-based, service-oriented party organizations rather than with issue-driven coalitions. Such politicians were immune to ideology, preferring to trade jobs for votes than to engage with ideas or with the demands of the voting blocs and interest groups—organized labor, African Americans, and women—that bound themselves into the New Deal, changing American politics decisively and, in Schlesinger’s view, very much for the better. For Schlesinger, the New Deal sounded the death knell for politicians of the old school, making obsolete those, such as Farley, who were unable to respond with open arms and a receptive mind to the rising tide of American liberalism. In a typically vivid portrait, Schlesinger painted Farley as a necessary victim of the New Deal’s transformative power, an unwitting dupe, “majestically oblivious to the new political conceptions rising about him.”¹

In a schematic sense, Schlesinger’s sketch of Farley is extremely valuable. It points to an important and enduring shift in the political environment, a shift that is largely attributable to the New Deal and that did serve to undermine both Farley’s career and the mode of politics it

embodied. The character of national politics did change in the 1930s, as an older kind of party politics—the kind that Farley had grown up with, first in upstate New York and then under the aegis of Al Smith, in New York City—ceded ground to the New Deal's nationalizing tendencies, its embrace of large-scale organizations, and its relative openness to the use of national interest groups (rather than local machines) as the building blocks of party strength.

A weakness of Schlesinger's perspective, however, is that it so determinedly denies Farley any agency whatsoever in bringing about the changes that were transforming politics in the age of Roosevelt. Schlesinger was adamant that Farley was utterly baffled by the new politics. This new politics, about which Schlesinger wrote with great eloquence and enthusiasm, required a new army of helpers to articulate its message, and its ranks would consist not of party regulars in their organizations but of men and women who were, in fact, very much like Schlesinger himself—progressive intellectuals committed to the New Deal cause.

That Farley might have played a key role in aiding the transition from the old politics to the new was, to Schlesinger, unthinkable. But that is what he did. He was less a hapless victim of change than its Trojan horse. He helped to bring the Democratic Party into a new era by negotiating a safe course, for a time at least, between the conflicting imperatives of two competing political forms—one rooted firmly in the pre-New Deal era, the other associated with the New Deal order that came to dominate the middle third of the twentieth century.

The impact of the changing politics of the New Deal was keenly felt within the Democratic Party's national organization. As party chairman, Farley oversaw the expansion of the Democratic National Committee's special divisions for women, African Americans (the Colored Division), and labor. He therefore presided over the consolidation of the influence of interest groups and individuals whose first commitment was not to the Democratic Party but to using the party as a vehicle to further their various programmatic concerns, a process that weakened the positions both of party regulars in the state organizations and of their practical political representatives in the administration. This, then, was one nail

that Farley hammered into his own coffin. A second was his cooperation—or at least acquiescence—in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s overtures to non-Democratic progressives in the states, notably during the campaigns for the 1934 midterm elections. These overtures discomfited Farley considerably, and he complained about them. But despite the bitter complaints of party regulars who felt they had been slighted by these overtures, he nonetheless did nothing about them. A third nail, as we shall see in the next chapter, was Farley’s role as a prime mover behind the abolition of the two-thirds rule in 1936, a change that, by effectively ending the South’s veto on the election of presidential nominees, further marginalized party regulars in some of the nation’s most powerful state organizations.

Though Farley was partially responsible for the changes just outlined, it is important not to overstate the case. He was relatively powerless in the face of long-term trends affecting the relationships between politicians, parties, and the state. Among these is what has been called, in the context of a study of national party conventions, “the nationalization of presidential politics.” As used here, this phrase is not intended to imply that local factors ceased to be a significant force in the period during which Farley was at work. That was not the case: numerous studies have demonstrated that the New Deal provoked a variety of responses in the politics of the nation’s cities, states, and regions; that its effects were far from homogenizing; and that the politics of post–New Deal America remained diffuse and fragmented, as it had been before. Reference to “the nationalization of presidential politics” here also does not mean that there was anything inevitable or irreversible about the processes involved. Rather, the phrase refers more narrowly to changes in the way that presidential nominees were chosen and to the impact those changes had on the influence and roles of regular party officials at both the state and national levels.²

The 1930s and 1940s saw a continuation of the gradual shift—first given impetus by the reform agendas set by late nineteenth-century progressives—toward the weakening of state party conventions and the decline of party officials in influencing political decisions. The bulk of the scholarly work on the decline of party regulars has focused not on the New Deal but on the postwar era, especially the years 1968–72, when

the Democratic Party's traditional party machinery was undermined by the comprehensive overhaul of its nominations apparatus. Yet one of the more important aspects of Farley's career is that it illustrates the extent to which many of the forces that provoked the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s were powerfully at work in the 1930s, when he was at the helm of the Democratic Party. For this reason alone, Schlesinger's portrait of Farley demands revision. Farley did indeed struggle to adapt to the political environment that the New Deal created, but he participated in that creative process, actively contributing to and helping to bring about the transition between the worlds of pre- and post-New Deal politics, even as that politics rendered him impotent.³

If broad-based shifts in the American political environment played a part in determining the trajectory of his career, so did Farley's own character, values, and ideas. The set of assumptions and beliefs Farley possessed regarding the proper conduct of politics profoundly influenced his relationships with his colleagues and adversaries. His was a rigidly rule-bound world in which an individual's moral worth was measured in terms of his or her adherence to a more or less fixed code of values. As we have seen, this outlook, which was governed by the idea of party regularity and by a commitment to loyalty to one's colleagues and to absolute honesty in matters personal and political, first took shape during Farley's childhood in Grassy Point. It was reinforced by his Catholic faith and by his early exposure to the highly localized and service-oriented politics of New York State in the 1910s and 1920s.

In *Behind the Ballots*, Farley argued that political success came as the result of hard work, decency, and, above all, honesty. "If there is one man who can't succeed in politics," he claimed, "it's the man who habitually lies." In his view, differences of opinion could be overcome not so much through reasoned analysis or by a careful dissection of the complexities of any given issue but through good intentions and a willingness to engage in straight talk.⁴

Farley gloried in and was fascinated by the macho world of political bargaining. Consider, for example, the language he used to describe the 1922 New York State Democratic Convention.

I learned that the plain-spoken individuals were usually the men who came out on top. The business of pretense and shamming is tossed overboard when strong and realistic politicians meet together behind closed doors and get down to cases.⁵

Party regularity was the keystone of Farley's political thinking and decision making. For him, manliness and trustworthiness went hand in hand. He considered those who departed from these values to be passive, weak, and effeminate. He thought patronage was the appropriate means of rewarding the party faithful and that political problems would take care of themselves if everyone played by "the rules of the game"—that is, if party members were loyal, efficient, hardworking, and honest.⁶

For Farley, "the rules of the game" determined where the boundaries of appropriate political conduct lay, but what did his day-to-day work consist of? His daily business was largely devoted to keeping and maintaining contact, whether through face-to-face talks, phone calls, or correspondence. Unfortunately for the historian, only the latter form of communication left physical traces in Farley's private papers. He kept a record of his private meetings and phone calls, but beyond a few important exceptions, even his personal memos reveal little of the substance of his exchanges. Nevertheless, the sheer volume and range of Farley's contacts is abundantly clear, and his correspondence and the observations of his colleagues demonstrate the extraordinary breadth of his knowledge of the Democratic Party's membership and tell us much about the importance of Farley's role in the Roosevelt administration.⁷

Farley positioned himself at the heart of a vast communications network covering party organizations, scouts, newspaper editors, and businessmen in every state in the nation. In a sense, he merely extended and expanded the political model he had used in Rockland County during his upstate apprenticeship and applied it to his new situation, thus making a form of politics originally designed to serve local needs function on the national stage. His dedication to maintaining this network ensured that he was continually aware of where political problems might flare up, and it provided him with privileged access to political intelligence. He worked extremely hard at keeping open the lines of communication

between the Roosevelt administration and party members and officials in the states.

Farley was not afraid of hard work. He typically worked a seven-day week, subjecting himself to an arduous schedule. An average day involved meetings with the president, agency chiefs, or congressmen, as well as bouts of dictation to maintain his correspondence. He made liberal use of the telephone, usually making in excess of fifty and sometimes more than one hundred phone calls a day.

Every letter Farley sent had his signature in green ink, a treatment that became his trademark. By signing his name in this way, Farley gave each of his letters a personal touch, “a little distinguishing mark that would induce the receiver to remember me as an individual, something that would stick in his mind perhaps long after the contents of the letter had been forgotten.” He also gave journalists, hungry to add color to their portraits of the men around Roosevelt, something to write about.⁸

Jim Farley commanded the apparatus of the Democratic Party like no one else before him. In part this was due to the political circumstances. The pent up demand for patronage that accumulated in the twelve years between Woodrow Wilson leaving the White House and Franklin Roosevelt moving in gave Farley tremendous clout. Further, Roosevelt’s enormous personal popularity helped to stimulate interest and activity in the party at all levels. But Farley’s ability to market himself to the party and the wider public was also significant. Signing his letters with green ink was part of this, as was the way he latched on to the growing sophistication of communications technology—especially the increasingly widespread ownership and use of the telephone—to extend his personal influence.

Farley’s career coincided with the introduction of numerous technological innovations that had political applications. Roosevelt’s fireside chats, both as governor of New York State and as president, played an important role in shaping the president’s persona, bringing hundreds of thousands of Americans into a new, more immediate and intimate relationship with their state or national leader than had previously been possible. Louis Howe had pioneered the use of mobile movie theaters in the 1930 New York State gubernatorial campaigns. But it was the telephone

that most dramatically transformed the daily practice of deal making and political persuasion that was Farley's stock-in-trade. The telephone allowed for a faster form of long-distance communication that was more secure, convenient, and informal than the telegram. It enabled Farley to maintain a nationwide communications empire from the comfort of his office desk, a feat beyond the means of any previous party chairman or presidential adviser. It made the politics of personal contact—the politics Farley had practiced since his days as a lowly town clerk in Rockland County—possible on a national scale.⁹

With this in mind, it is interesting to compare Farley with another presidential aide, Woodrow Wilson's adviser Joe Tumulty. Tumulty's official title was secretary to the president, but as his biographer John Morton Blum explained, he, along with Thomas J. Pence, was *de facto* party chairman. Nine years Farley's senior, Tumulty was born into a family of Irish Democrats in New Jersey. Though better educated and more successful in gaining electoral office than Farley was (Tumulty trained as a lawyer and spent four terms as a New Jersey assemblyman), Tumulty went on to perform many of the same tasks for Wilson that Farley did for Roosevelt. Indeed, the range of Tumulty's work was even broader than Farley's, involving not only press relations, patronage, party organization, and assessing the state of public opinion but also speech writing and policy formation.¹⁰

Tumulty displayed many of the personality and character traits that were often attributed to Farley—generosity, geniality, honesty, and loyalty. Also like Farley, he was frustrated and disillusioned by his president's unwillingness to declare whether he would run for a third term. Wilson's prevarication on this latter question in 1920 left him vulnerable to the accusation that he was using the impasse over the ratification of the Versailles Treaty as a pretext for his overweening personal ambition, a situation that paralleled attacks in 1939–40—by Republicans and by Democrats against Roosevelt's third-term candidacy—asserting that Roosevelt was using the war in Europe as a means of creating a personal presidency.¹¹

Earlier in his career, Tumulty had sidestepped Democratic factions opposed to Wilson by helping to build a separate Wilson organization in New Jersey, as Farley had done for Roosevelt in New York State in the

late 1920s and early 1930s. However, Tumulty found that he was unable to extend the range of his influence in New Jersey and the neighboring northeast states to the national level. In contrast to Farley, who was able to build a nationwide network, Tumulty's "black book," a log of political contacts, contained relatively few references either to southern states, which were of fundamental importance to the Democratic Party's electoral fortunes, or to the West, where traditional party organizations tended to be weakest.¹²

It was not only communications and technological advances that altered the political terrain for Farley in his role as a fixer for the Democratic Party. In the generation between the beginning of Wilson's presidency and the end of Roosevelt's, major organizational changes within the Democratic Party, in addition to a set of related structural shifts in the political system, profoundly affected American politics. Of particular importance here were Farley's relationships with the various groups that constituted the New Deal coalition, specifically those that were to some degree institutionally embedded within the party's organizational apparatus. This was true, for instance, of the key constituencies of organized labor, women, and African Americans, each of which had a special division devoted to maintaining and increasing their support, especially during election campaigns.

It was only in 1913 that the Democratic National Committee established a party headquarters in Washington, D.C. Even then, it was a weak and ineffectual body. The DNC chairman, W. F. McCombs, was hostile to Joe Tumulty, who had much more control over the distribution of patronage and far superior access to President Wilson.¹³

The DNC's impotence during the Wilson years was at least in part a reflection of the fact that the Democratic Party was not a national party and that many of its state organizations were chronically weak, if they existed at all. Winning against a split Republican Party in 1912, Wilson captured the solid South and most of the western and midwestern states, but despite accumulating ten states in the Northeast, his impact there was only superficial. In 1916, by which time he had embraced much of Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 Progressive Party platform and attracted three million more votes than in 1912, he lost all the major industrial states (except Washington, Ohio, and California) and was defeated in

the nation's ten largest cities. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt fared worse in the Northeast than in any other section and had little support from the big city machines, yet he was still able to win six of those states. In 1936, he lost only Maine and Vermont.¹⁴

Wilson's narrow victory over Charles Evans Hughes in 1916 demonstrated not so much the successful formation of a proto-New Deal coalition but the fragility of the forces Wilson had cobbled together and, by extension, of the party he led. While he had support in 1912 from socialists, single taxers, some independent progressives and intellectuals, the American Federation of Labor, the railway brotherhoods, midwestern farmers, and the majority of women, he was unable to maintain this shaky alliance. In 1916, he held only three of the twelve states from Maine to West Virginia and five of the twelve from Ohio to Kansas. In the Congress under Wilson and in Wilson's cabinet, the Democratic Party was dominated by a single region, the South. The Wilson coalition collapsed into mutually antagonistic factions before the end of Wilson's second term and left no permanent organizational legacy. Despite Roosevelt's calls for an organizational overhaul in the 1920s, no noteworthy progress—excepting John J. Raskob's resurrection of the party's finances in the late twenties—was made until Farley and Roosevelt began to reward Roosevelt's supporters in the wake of the 1932 victory.¹⁵

Jim Farley's relationships with the Democratic Party's special divisions provide a fascinating insight into how organizational changes instituted after 1932 and subtle shifts in the distribution of power between contending elements within the party helped to shape the politics of the New Deal. They demonstrate that New Deal politicians deployed a variety of conflicting coalition-building strategies. They also show that Farley's control over campaign tactics, personnel, and budgetary decisions was far from absolute.

The Women's Division, which became a full-time operation in the spring of 1933, was the most dynamic of the Democratic Party's special divisions, not least because of the energy and influence of its leader, Mary W. "Molly" Dewson, and her friend and political accomplice Eleanor Roosevelt. Farley had close and complex working relationships with both women. Their correspondence shows how Farley's wide-rang-

ing political powers were compromised by the Democratic Party's recognition and incorporation of issue-oriented groups and individuals within the traditional party apparatus.

In histories of women and the New Deal, the 1930s are often represented as a period when, despite the assertive networking of an elite group of upper-class and upper-middle-class women, feminist politics were more or less subordinated to the pressing demands of economic recovery and national renewal. That is a view, however, that should be balanced against proper recognition of the extent to which Molly Dewson and her female colleagues in the Democratic Party extended women's influence in and access to established political institutions.¹⁶

Dewson was one of a generation of women activists—others included her New Deal colleagues Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins—whose political careers peaked in the generation that followed the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1920, but whose ideas were strongly marked by nineteenth-century conceptions of womanhood. She believed, for instance, that women were more deeply concerned than men with issues of humanitarian reform, economic security, and peace. During the 1920s, she gained valuable political experience in voluntary reform organizations dedicated to protective legislation, such as the National Consumers' League, which promoted the national minimum wage and other forms of labor legislation.¹⁷

Dewson had the sort of organizational skills, interest in patronage, and political savvy that would have made her a great political boss of the old school; but her commitment to the Democratic Party was always conditional on the extent to which she judged it to be a potential vehicle for the kinds of progressive reform she favored. Unlike Farley, Dewson—who first took part in Democratic politics in the 1928 presidential campaign, when she was fifty-four years old—thought party harmony to be, at best, a secondary consideration. Foremost in Dewson's mind was the placement and promotion of women who supported New Deal programs. Dewson was especially keen to find party jobs for professionally trained social workers, regardless of whether they had any previous affiliation with the party. In addition, by helping to secure high-profile appointments for Frances Perkins (secretary of labor), Ruth Bryan

Owen (minister to Denmark), and Florence Allen (in the Circuit Court of Appeals), she increased the visibility of women in the nation's political life.¹⁸

For the most part, Farley and Dewson's working relationship was marked by mutual respect and a shared interest in the business of political organization. In June 1938, in words that captured the ambivalence inherent in a relationship between two people using similar organizational means to achieve divergent political ends, Dewson wrote: "I think one of the reasons we get on so well together is that I believe in organization just as you do. You have one kind of busy work for the men and I have another for the girls. That is the only difference." In an interview in the 1960s, Frances Perkins, who worked closely with both Dewson and Farley, suggested that Farley did not know quite what to make of his colleague—who combined the manners of "a New England spinster of the blue blood" with an easy informality and liking for off-color jokes—but that Farley "liked her enormously" nonetheless. Perkins also observed that Dewson's superior breeding and education appealed to Farley's craving for social advancement. Farley approached both Perkins and Dewson with a view to getting his daughter educated at the elite Wellesley College, of which both were alumnae. It was no surprise, then, that when Farley spoke at Wellesley in March 1940, by which time he was seeking his party's presidential nomination, he reiterated his view that women were better party workers than men ("They have an intense interest which never lags and they have less inclination to shirk the small tasks upon the performance of which so much depends"). He then asserted, "In all my political life, I have never met a person who had a finer talent for political organization and administration than Molly."¹⁹

Frances Perkins praised Farley for his willingness to "talk to women about any subject." He refused, she said "to patronize them and pat them on the head, saying 'There little girl, I'll look out for you.'" He was comfortable working with women who were older than him and his social superiors, such as Dewson and Roosevelt. His political apprenticeship in New York State had accustomed him to working with such women. However, though he believed women had an important organizational role and an affinity for issues of humanitarian and welfare

reform, he was distinctly uncomfortable when women in general—and Dewson in particular—tried to use the DNC as an instrument of progressive reform.²⁰

A persistent theme in the Farley-Dewson relationship was Dewson's frustration at Farley's reluctance to appoint women to fill party posts. When Farley did appoint women, Dewson chastised him for picking the wrong sort. In a letter to state leaders purporting to come from Farley but in fact written by Dewson, she explained what sort of women she wanted to bring into the Democratic fold.

I mean, women whom the people know on account of their work on unpaid state boards of welfare, education, etc.; in organizations like the Federation of Women's Clubs, the League of Women Voters, etc.; in farm extension work; as leaders in their professions, such as presidents of colleges, popular professors, writers, heads of settlements, etc.—in short, women who have forged ahead and obtained public standing and confidence.²¹

To Farley, it must have seemed that wherever he turned in the early years of the New Deal, he was met by Dewson's refrain "Name me a woman worker, Jim!" As she explained in a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt on August 18, 1933, she wanted "workers not drones," by which she meant motivated, reform-minded women, rather than party officials who happened to be female. Dewson's exasperation at Farley's reluctance to play ball was evident in a letter she wrote him three days later, in which she asked that "Mary Ann Reynolds (colored)" be placed as a clerk in an employment office.

You know, Jim, you have told me at least bi-monthly since November to leave my short list of women workers for the national ticket to you and that you would look after them. So I have not done anything for any of them except nag you which I must have done so pleasantly you have hardly noticed it!!!

At the bottom of the letter was a handwritten note to Eleanor Roosevelt that read: "Really these boys are too wonderful. What in heck was I supposed to do?"²²

Eleanor Roosevelt's friendship was central to Dewson's chances of gaining leverage over patronage decisions. When Farley was slow to act, Dewson would persuade Eleanor either to twist Farley's arm or to bypass him altogether by going directly to the president. One especially revealing letter between Dewson and Eleanor Roosevelt was passed on to Farley by Louis Howe, with pertinent paragraphs marked. Dewson described Eleanor as "the 'key' woman" and then wrote: "I hope you are not held back by being the President's Wife. Otherwise it's quite an awkward situation for the handful of women who did the outstanding work." She complained that the only woman Democrat appointed thus far was rewarded as a sop to William Gibbs McAdoo and that that woman had "crystallized the opposition" to Roosevelt and "come closer to spilling Franklin's beans" in California than anyone else.²³

In fact, Dewson need not have been so worried about Eleanor Roosevelt's willingness to cooperate. The First Lady frequently wrote to Farley with lists of deserving women and the posts they should fill. Moreover, she was not above using her influence to seek to have her relatives placed. In August 1934, she wrote: "Have we a Democratic postmaster appointed at Newberry, South Carolina? A distant cousin has turned up."²⁴

Though she was openly engaged in patronage politics, Dewson insisted on making a clear distinction between her kind of work and Farley's. She thought there was a big difference between the methods used by her women's organization and those of the masculine world of "personal politics," which she saw as being dominated by the unseemly practice of glad-handing, a sport in which Farley excelled. In her unpublished memoir, "An Aid to the End," Dewson asserted that whereas Farley, the bosses, and the "stalwarts" were concerned only with keeping people in line and making sure Democrats registered and voted, the women's organization focused on the issues and on "sowing ideas."²⁵

There was at least some hypocrisy in Dewson's point of view. She herself had risen to a position of influence not only through hard work and the determined application of her talents but also through her association with and cultivation of powerful and well-connected women, one of whose number, Eleanor Roosevelt, enjoyed relatively unfettered access to the president of the United States. Meeting and greeting women on her travels throughout the country, Dewson was a formidable glad-hander. Yet her sex, status, and upper-class sensibilities pro-

tected her, for the most part, from being labeled as such by others and perhaps prevented her from acknowledging to herself that she was one of the most practical of practical politicians.

The most significant aspect of the Farley-Dewson relationship was the extent to which Dewson was successful in carving out a more or less independent role for the Women's Division within the structure of the DNC. Her desire for autonomy was clear from the beginning. In October 1933, following a meeting with Farley and Eleanor Roosevelt, she wrote to Farley confirming the terms of her employment as director of the Women's Division, reminding him that she was "free to take off any time" at her own expense and, most important, that her "main duty" was "to build up the organization of the women, not to speak in behalf of the party."²⁶

Dewson's alliance with Eleanor Roosevelt gave her an alternative route through which to influence appointments and bend the president's ear. She would also often conduct business through cooperative department heads—such as Henry Morgenthau at the Treasury or Frances Perkins at the Department of Labor—rather than going through Farley. The main issue around which Dewson's desire for greater autonomy crystallized, however, was control of the budget for the Women's Division.²⁷

As Sidney Milkis has explained, at the heart of the disagreements between Farley and Dewson over the budget of the Women's Division were conflicting views about the DNC's role. Dewson's issue-oriented approach required a permanent campaign based around voter education. This was consistent with the Reporter Plan that Dewson and Eleanor Roosevelt launched in January 1934, a scheme aimed at teaching women how New Deal programs aided their communities and at encouraging women to spread the gospel to friends and neighbors. Farley was hard put to understand why large sums should be spent between campaigns when funds were low, especially as this money was not, in his view, being put to good use. But Farley was forced to concede defeat to Dewson when the president gave her thirty-six thousand of the forty-eight thousand dollars she had asked for and allowed her to control the division's budget and strategy.²⁸

Remarkably, by 1936, Dewson was dictating terms to Farley, remind-

ing him, among other things, of his responsibility to provide extra rooms for the Women's Division at party headquarters and to "tune up the headquarters staff to campaign efficiency through greater cooperation through regular staff meetings." In the midst of the 1936 presidential campaign, Dewson warned Farley not to knock her budgetary calculations "into a cocked hat" by charging the distribution of "men's literature" to the Women's Division. In that campaign, the Women's Division was responsible for 80 percent of the Democrats' written campaign material.²⁹

The expansion of the Women's Division and the extent to which it helped to embed an issue-oriented approach to campaigning within the heart of the DNC contributed significantly to the erosion of Farley's control over at least one element of the party apparatus. DNC special divisions had previously been a convenient way of mobilizing groups of activists and voters on a temporary basis for the purposes of a particular campaign. But the Women's Division demonstrated how, given strong leadership and substantial political leverage (in this case, through the political drive of Molly Dewson and the ministrations of Eleanor Roosevelt), an arm of the DNC could fashion itself into a permanent programmatic force.

Farley's relationship with the DNC's Labor Division offers interesting points of comparison and contrast with the story of the Women's Division. Under Farley's watch as party chairman, the DNC lost its status as the primary institutional channel for labor's support for the Democratic Party. This happened not because labor achieved a greater degree of autonomy within the official party but because its independent organizational and financial capabilities increased dramatically as a consequence of the rise of mass industrial unionism and the burgeoning partnership between the New Deal and the Committee for Industrial Organization, later called the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The Labor Division remained an active part of the DNC. But by the 1936 presidential election, it was already operating in the shadow of more powerful extraparty campaign organizations, particularly labor's Non-Partisan League, which, with the formidable financial and organizational strength of the CIO behind it, drew support not just from most

of the major trade unions but also from Farmer-Laborites in the agrarian Midwest.³⁰

The existence of such auxiliary structures was not new, but the scale of their role in the 1936 election was. Molly Dewson established the Committee of Independent and Republican Women as part of the Women's National Democratic Club; Robert La Follette Jr. led the Progressive National Committee; and Stanley High took charge of the Good Neighbor League, though only on condition that he be answerable solely to the president, not to Farley's DNC. The mere existence of such organizations—especially the Non-Partisan League, which was seen by some as a prototype for a full-fledged independent labor party—testifies to the inability of the traditional structure of the DNC to absorb the new constituencies that were shaping the Roosevelt coalition.³¹

In the period during which Farley presided over the DNC, organized labor made itself indispensable to the Democratic Party's future financial and political health. Before the New Deal, organized labor had only intermittently shown any commitment to partisan politics. In 1916, Woodrow Wilson forged a partnership of sorts with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), but the arrangement was halfhearted and short-lived. Though Franklin D. Roosevelt's personal devotion to the cause of organized labor was equivocal, the enactment of New Deal legislation—most important, the support for collective bargaining provided by Section 7(a) of the National Recovery Administration Act and its subsequent consolidation through the National Labor Relations Act—convinced both of the two major labor organizations (the AFL and CIO) that support for the Democrats represented their best chance of achieving their programmatic goals.

Labor's support had numerous consequences for the DNC, one of which was to diminish its hold on the party's fund-raising operations. Among the DNC's established roles was that of channeling funds into the party's coffers by attracting and coordinating donations from wealthy businessmen. Indeed, the post of DNC treasurer had traditionally gone to wealthy individuals, such as Farley's predecessor, John J. Raskob, who had helped to bankroll the party through the Hoover presidency and beyond. (Raskob was still owed forty thousand dollars in June 1935.) A deficit statement from May 1933 shows that a number of

wealthy donors, including Vincent Astor and W. K. Vanderbilt, were underwriting the party to the tune of ten thousand dollars each and that Joseph P. Kennedy was owed forty-five thousand dollars. At this time, in the wake of the 1932 presidential campaign, the party's debts were in excess of five hundred thousand dollars.³²

The New Deal brought about a significant shift in the sources of the party's income: organized labor became the largest single contributor to campaign funds, with the CIO's United Mine Workers, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and International Ladies Garment Union being especially prominent. The decline of business support for the New Deal was further reflected in the defection of many of the party's bigger donors (including W. K. Vanderbilt) before the 1936 election. Donations from big business were still important to the party's financial well-being. However, bankers and stockholders supplied 25 percent of Democratic spending in 1928 but only 3.1 percent in 1940. Joseph P. Kennedy continued to be one of the party's biggest creditors, but by July 1937, the United Mine Workers organization was owed three times as much as Kennedy.³³

Under Farley's stewardship, the DNC's Labor Division was outgunned and overpowered by the CIO's ability to wield independent political influence. The Labor Division's director, Daniel Tobin, who led the AFL-affiliated International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Chauffeurs, was unable to compete with his CIO foes, John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman. In 1940, when Lewis announced his support for Republican presidential nominee Wendell Willkie, it was Hillman, not Tobin, who became the president's main link to labor. The contrasting fortunes of the DNC's Women's Division and Labor Division are illustrated in stark terms by a comparison of their campaign budgets for 1932 and 1936. The campaign budget of the Women's Division's rose from forty-two to ninety thousand dollars, reflecting the expansion of its organizational role; the Labor Division's fell from thirty to twenty-five thousand dollars, despite the fact that labor was becoming more, not less, central to the party's electoral success.³⁴

In his autobiographical works, correspondence, and speeches, Jim Farley paid little attention to organized labor's new role in the Democratic Party. Farley's absence from the vanguard of labor radicalism might, however, be inferred from his assertion, in *Behind the Ballots*, that

New Deal labor legislation was nothing more than an extension of the “humane policies” and protective legislation that had been a feature of New York State’s government since the turn of the century. Farley was better connected to the world of businessmen and employers than to that of organized labor: his bookkeeping and salesmanship skills, his long-standing connections with the Elks, his personal investment in the building trade in New York State, and his relative ignorance of shop-floor issues and of labor unions in general all made him more sympathetic to the world of business than to that of labor. An illustration of his probusiness inclinations is the fact that at a time, in August 1934, when acrimonious wildcat strikes were sweeping the country, Farley’s main concern, recorded in a private memorandum, was that the administration was not doing enough to reassure industrial and business leaders. He made this point to the president of U.S. Steel, Myron Taylor, during a meeting at Franklin Roosevelt’s Hyde Park home. In June 1935, Farley, in his capacity as postmaster general, initially opposed proposals for the introduction of a forty-hour week for postal employees, many of whom had already endured payless furloughs and wage reductions. He backed down only at President Roosevelt’s insistence.³⁵

Far from hindering the New Deal, the perception that Farley was a friend of business was a great boon to the administration, especially to the secretary of labor, Frances Perkins, who was able to use Farley and other probusiness members of the New Deal administration, including Jesse Jones, to negotiate with employers in several major labor disputes. As Perkins later explained, Farley was an invaluable middleman in times when employers often refused point-blank to engage in direct talks with unions.

Jim was the greatest possible help to me. I would talk to him about the situation, tell him what the situation was. I asked him over and over again to interpose through his connection, never publicly, and nobody ever knew that I did it. He never made it known that I had asked him. He was a good sport that way . . . He would call up somebody in Texas for instance who was a good scout on the Democratic side . . . and say to him, “This oil strike is terrible. These employer fellows should listen to reason. They should meet with the union. I’m reliably informed that that’s all that’s necessary.” He got the Ohio politicians to come around

and help out on the Akron Strike, quietly, to bring the employers around. He was really wonderful in things like that.³⁶

Though Perkins's recollections are short on specifics, they do give a flavor of Farley's technique and of the value she placed on his considerable brokering skills. In the General Motors sit-down strike of 1936–37, Perkins asked Farley to use his political connections in Michigan to influence management, while Tom Lamont of J. P. Morgan sought the same goal through friends in the world of finance. According to Perkins, Farley cleverly avoided making direct contact with General Motors chief Alfred Sloan, preferring to work on people "lower down the line" who might then sell their ideas to their superiors.³⁷

Farley's political skills had other uses for Perkins. She frequently had cause to be grateful to Farley for his ability to gain senatorial endorsements for appointees to the Labor Department, even when their Democratic Party credentials were shaky. Perkins probably did not realize how much trouble she caused Farley by failing, at least initially, to appreciate the importance of political clearance for appointments. In his private memoranda, Farley also criticized her for talking too much at cabinet meetings, alleging that this annoyed the president. In a statement that highlighted the limits to Farley's enthusiasm for women's participation in politics, he noted: "She has been in a lot of trouble because of the strikes, and a definite impression prevails that a woman cannot handle a problem as satisfactorily as a hard-boiled man who knows how to deal with labor."³⁸

The rise of mass industrial unionism complicated Farley's work as a party leader, making the task of maintaining party harmony all the more demanding. The southern states continued to provide rock-solid support for the Democratic Party, and the seniority system guaranteed that their representatives would dominate many of the most powerful congressional committees for years to come. Yet the economic basis of the southern Democrats' political ascendancy was substantially dependent on labor practices and wage levels that were abhorrent not only to labor leaders and reformers but also to many of the party's new recruits, men and women predominantly from the urban centers of the industrial north, for whom the Democratic Party represented the best vehicle toward better wages and working conditions. The contradictions between these components of the Roosevelt coalition were significant.

They were at least partially held in check by acceptance of southern exceptionalism and by the related fear that open attacks on southern labor practices might lead to a dangerous and unpredictable unraveling of the South's racial order, but they were still a major problem. Perversely, as the New Deal coalition gathered strength, with Roosevelt and the Democratic Party heading toward a crushing victory in 1936, Farley's job of binding together the constituent elements that comprised the Democratic Party was becoming more, not less, difficult.

Farley's problems were by no means confined to his party's relations with the South. In his home state of New York, Farley was taxed with reconciling his loyalty to the Democratic Party organization he had built up when Roosevelt was governor, on the one hand, with the consequences of the New Deal's embrace of organized labor, on the other. This problem was most apparent in Farley's ambivalent attitude toward the American Labor Party (ALP), the party that he and Bronx boss Ed Flynn helped to set up, against their better judgment, in the spring of 1936.

Farley shared Roosevelt's frustration at the persistence of anti-Roosevelt sentiment among New York City Democrats and had participated in the creation of the Recovery Party for the 1933 mayoral campaign. But the Recovery Party was little more than a convenient, temporary means by which to replace one group of Democrats with another. The ALP was different: it had a ready-made mass base and leadership derived from New York's powerful unions, and as Farley appreciated, it was unlikely to disappear into thin air after 1936. More fundamentally, it challenged Farley's cast-iron faith in the merits of two-party politics. Ernest Cuneo, who argued that the New Deal, by assaulting the prerogatives of party regulars, had a malign effect on American party politics, portrayed the rise of the ALP in New York as an iniquitous development. To Cuneo (and very probably to Farley, too), it represented the threat posed to democracy by the "undue leverage" of "organized minorities."³⁹

The formation of the ALP had been agreed on in the spring of 1936 at a meeting attended by Sidney Hillman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Adolf Berle, and Fiorello La Guardia. Most of its leaders had a background in the unionism and socialism of the New York needle trades, but the ALP rank and file would encompass a much more diverse, polyglot mixture of lower-middle-class and working-class groups. Establishing the ALP was

a complicated business, not least because Hillman, who was partly motivated by the wish to work through an organization beyond the influence of the DNC-AFL axis, needed somehow to collect sufficient signatures in every county of New York State to meet the requirements stipulated for the formation of a new party. Farley's contacts in upstate New York made him peculiarly well suited to this task, and he reluctantly set about persuading every Democratic Party county chairman to get the requisite number of signatures.⁴⁰

Farley did not mention this episode in either *Behind the Ballots* or *Jim Farley's Story*. His comments in a 1957 interview make plain that he was hostile to the ALP from the outset and that he resented having to do this kind of work. Not only did he feel he was betraying Democratic Party regulars by forming a party that would compete with it for votes, but he also feared, reasonably enough, that the ALP would strengthen the hold of his archenemy, Fiorello La Guardia, on the politics of New York City and would propel La Guardia, popularly called "the Little Flower," toward a victory in the 1937 New York City mayoralty contest. Farley was right about that. The ALP went on to provide crucial support for La Guardia in 1941, before contributing to the further fragmentation of the city's politics when, in 1944, it spawned the Liberal Party.⁴¹

Farley and his colleague Ed Flynn understood why the ALP was created. In Flynn's words, "there were many people who believed in what Roosevelt stood for but who, for some reason or other . . . would not join the Democratic party." But both Farley and Flynn thought the ALP was an unnecessary venture, and both men became increasingly jealous of the fact that the ALP often held the balance of power in New York City politics.⁴²

Women and organized labor were not the only elements of the New Deal coalition that gained recognition in the form of a new or expanded special division. There were also permanent divisions for African Americans (the Colored Division) and for young Democrats (the Youth Division). In his assessment of the performance of the DNC's special divisions, Sean Savage argued that each division's success "as an advocate of its constituency's interests and as a mobilizer of its voters on election day" was primarily dependent on "the quality and continuity of its leadership." This perspective gives only a partial explanation of what was happening to the Democrats' internal organization in the 1930s. It is true, for instance, that Molly Dewson was a shrewd political operator

whose energy and drive helped to make the Women's Division a formidable force in Democratic Party campaigning, but her leadership was not the most important factor in explaining the relative strength of the Women's Division. More significant were her proximity to power through her friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt and the fact that, of the permanent special divisions, the Women's Division was established first, in 1922, when national committeewomen from every state and territory were added to the party's membership. The Labor Division and the Colored Division set up permanent headquarters only after the 1932 presidential election, and the Youth Division was formally recognized as late as the 1936 national convention.⁴³

The new divisions represented newly emergent constituencies; in 1936, the scope and nature of the contributions they were to make to the party's future was only just becoming apparent, and their relationships with the traditional wing of the party organization were often tenuous. The Youth Division was never a powerful force under Farley's stewardship; his main concern was that the Young Democrats' activities should be restricted to the local level, where they could be channeled through the established party apparatus. As Savage points out, the Colored Division's work was profoundly compromised by the DNC's "deference to southern white racial views."⁴⁴

Just as labor's newfound commitment to the Democratic Party during Franklin Roosevelt's presidency was largely a product of the New Deal's legislative record and the promise of further programmatic benefits, so African Americans' switch from the party of Lincoln to the party of Roosevelt bore little relation to the activities of the DNC. In 1932, urged on by Pennsylvania senator Joseph Guffey, Farley appointed African American newspaperman Robert L. Vann to head the Democrats' Colored Advisory Committee. Vann joined with Mary McLeod Bethune and Robert C. Weaver, members of a group of African American leaders called the Black Cabinet, to lobby hard for an expansion of party patronage to African Americans outside the South, but the notion that this played any significant part in changing individuals' voting preferences is implausible.⁴⁵

In March 1934, Farley recommended that more African Americans should be given patronage positions in New York City, but his private memoranda reveal that this was a narrowly conceived political move based on the assumption that the party might pick up one or two votes

by spreading a few patronage crumbs. Farley's report of his talk with the president, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Ed Flynn shows how carefully the ethnic balance of appointments was weighed.

It was agreed that it would be best to appoint a Jew or a colored fellow as Collector of Internal Revenue in New York, it being understood that if we selected a Jew, we would sell him the idea of appointing a colored man as his First Deputy, and then appoint additional colored people to minor places in the Internal Revenue and other departments to satisfy the colored element.⁴⁶

Perhaps a few African American voters in New York State also remembered Jim Farley's stint as chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission, when he made a stand for the right of African American boxer Harry Wills to fight Jack Dempsey for the world heavyweight crown, despite opposition from other board members and the powerful promoter Tex Rickard. But that was in 1927. Since then, Farley had made few overtures, if any, to the African American vote.

Far from courting the African American vote, Farley chose to maintain close working relationships with such southern politicians as veteran Virginia senator Carter Glass, who was openly hostile to efforts to extend the Democrats' appeal to African American citizens. An impression of Glass's views, which echoed the fears of many of his southern colleagues, can be gleaned from a letter he wrote to a friend in October 1938: "The Southern people may wake up too late to find the negrophiles who are running the Democratic party now will soon precipitate another reconstruction era for us." Shortly after the 1936 presidential election and in anticipation of their future alliance against Roosevelt's bid for a third term in 1940, Glass wrote to Farley thanking him for his support: "Whatever may have been said or done in the past, as whatever may ensue hereafter, I shall always cherish my personal friendship for and association with you. Often have I said that no member of the President's cabinet has a greater share of my respect and personal devotion."⁴⁷

Another of Farley's friends, Roosevelt's vice president John Nance Garner, kept an eye on federal appointments with a view to ensuring that New Deal patronage policy did not upset his fellow southern Democrats. When Garner heard that Harold Ickes was seeking to have

one of his African American assistants made a judge in the Virgin Islands, he wrote to Farley counseling him to prevent the appointment: "Now I want to do what is for the best interests of the party, but I tell you frankly, my dear friend, appointing a colored man to succeed Wilson would surely result in bad repercussions in certain states and this state [Texas] would be one of them. You can imagine what Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama would think as well as the Carolinas."⁴⁸

African Americans changed party allegiance for a whole host of reasons, including the impact of public works and relief programs, the activism of Eleanor Roosevelt and Harold Ickes, the advent of the Black Cabinet, and the general perception that President Roosevelt was more sympathetic to their needs than previous presidents had been. But Jim Farley's work as party chairman was not among those reasons. He was never at the forefront of efforts to bring African Americans into the Democratic Party.⁴⁹

The relationships between Jim Farley, the DNC, and the voting groups that comprised the New Deal coalition were part of a complex web of political connections. Farley's work with the DNC represented only one element of the Roosevelt administration's political strategy—one that, arguably, was declining in importance as the DNC adapted to the rise of an emergent interest-group politics. The New Deal coalition was a fluid, amorphous, and constantly shifting assembly of groups and individuals whose political orientations responded to change in subtle and unpredictable ways. Yet even if Farley and the DNC were losing influence, it would be wrong to dismiss them out of hand. Because the contradictions within the New Deal coalition were real, Farley's position at the helm of the Democratic Party's organizational apparatus was pivotal. It was one of the key sites at which the tensions between the ideological thrust of the New Deal and the competing demands of the myriad local elites in the states were played out. By the mid-1930s, Farley, caught in the cross fire of an increasingly irreconcilable conflict between his party-driven politics and the politics of reform advanced by the New Dealers, was beginning to feel the strain. In Roosevelt's second term, the tensions that Farley spent much of the first term smoothing over would spill out into the open in dramatic fashion.