

6

“As Maine Goes . . .”

By the end of Roosevelt’s first term, Jim Farley had amassed a knowledge of the Democratic Party’s nationwide operations to rival his mastery of New York State politics in the 1910s and 1920s. His productive campaign work, patronage dealings, telephone networking, and prodigious correspondence had helped him to achieve this position of command. His western trip in the summer of 1931, his role at the 1932 national convention, and his management of the 1932 presidential campaign had made him a prominent figure in the nation’s politics. His patronage dealings as postmaster general in the early New Deal further consolidated his fame, attracting substantial press and public attention. By 1936, Farley had established his reputation as a political operator of the first order.

By the mid-1930s, stories about Farley’s extraordinary memory for names and faces were legion. When he correctly predicted the outcome of the 1936 presidential election, the Farley legend was secure. He was now a prophet as well as a memory man. Typical of the many stories about Farley’s memory is that told by an Iowa man who was on the reception committee that greeted the postmaster general and national chairman on one of his campaign stops as he toured the Midwest. Three years after their brief meeting, the man appeared in Washington, offering to bet that Farley would not remember him. Farley, the story goes, welcomed the challenge, greeted the man by his first name, reeled off the names of the other members of the reception committee, remembered the hotel where they had eaten lunch, recited the menu, gave an account

of who the speakers at the lunch were and what they had said, and then asked the flabbergasted visitor how his children were, naming each of them in turn.¹

What matters about such stories is not whether they are true in every detail—on the face of it, that seems unlikely—but that they were in circulation and had wide currency. Seeking an explanation for Farley's position at the helm of one of the most formidable party organizations ever assembled in the United States, people ascribed to him extraordinary—almost supernatural—powers. How else could they account for the range of his influence?

But those who knew Farley well knew better. Charles Poletti, who worked with Farley at close quarters in his capacity as lieutenant governor of New York between 1932 and 1942, pointed out that the explanation for Farley's famous memory was really quite mundane; it owed as much to his meticulous method of record keeping and his single-minded determination always to create a good impression as it did to any innate gift.

Well, I think Jim was a very good politician. He could sense situations. He was excellent as everybody knows—it's been heralded—at remembering names of people. Yet some people don't realize how much work went into permitting him to know these names. I know the elaborate file system he had for every community, and all the people he met would then come back into a file system, and if he found out that so-and-so had a son named Bill, that went on the card, and on his next trip into a community the cards of the whole community were handed to him, which he studied before he went in, and when he went in he could rattle all this off. Besides having a retentive mind he had this elaborate system that permitted him to display his retentive mind, and he had two girls that worked on this all the time in his office, keeping up-to-date in this file system and card indexes on everybody he ever met.²

It was an essential part of Farley's job to know who tens of thousands of people were. His memory for names and faces was so good because his entire approach to politics was based on keeping in touch. He simply had to know.

The best-selling author Dale Carnegie admired Farley’s method. In fact, in some editions of his classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Farley’s contact-making tips feature in the chapter called “If You Don’t Do This, You’re Headed for Trouble.” Carnegie advised readers to follow Farley’s advice: get people’s names right, fix information about their friends and their family in your mind, then send them a complimentary letter a few days after your first meeting.³

In 1936, Farley applied his systematic, meticulous approach to political organization to the campaign to reelect Roosevelt. Though he played an important role in the creation or expansion of the party’s special divisions and oversaw the emergence of Labor’s Non-Partisan League and other independent, auxiliary campaign structures, Farley’s principal task in the 1936 campaign lay on what was for him more familiar terrain: the business of gauging the extent of the president’s popularity, dealing with the press, ensuring that the Democratic Party’s campaign apparatus was in full working order, and seeing that the morale of the party’s officials and activists was high.

Farley maintained a voluminous campaign correspondence, using his network of trusted party officials and other contacts to monitor the situation on the ground. Two weeks before election day, for instance, he received 306 letters from his observers, each of them offering a prediction of the likely outcome. He trusted these reports better than he did the pioneering polls conducted by his colleague Emil Hurja. He made sure that he kept the press happy, giving twice-daily press conferences on campaign issues. From early August, he also held a series of face-to-face meetings with state leaders. He would give them a tour of the campaign setup at national headquarters, in the hope that similar methods would be adopted at the state level.⁴

When Farley spoke to state leaders, wherever they came from, he tried to persuade them to adopt the methods and principles that had helped him to succeed in New York State. He told them the value of frankness in dealing with the press, of efficiency and attention to detail in administration, of being on friendly terms with colleagues, of having a detailed knowledge of organization right down to the most local level. Most of all, he told them that there was no substitute for personal contact with voters. This was Farley’s creed.⁵

An example of how this worked in practice concerns Farley's meeting with North Dakota national committeeman William E. Glotzbach. Fearing that William Lemke's Union Party would make inroads into the farm vote in North Dakota, Farley told Glotzbach that the thing to do was to have party workers in his state meet face-to-face with farmers to persuade them that a vote for Lemke was really a vote for the Republican candidate, Alfred Landon. Farley stressed that it was important, too, that farm women should have a "personal call made on them."⁶

There were no major conflicts over the conduct of the campaign, though there were occasional minor disputes. In late August, for instance, Farley advised Harry Hopkins not to make a speech on the subject of federal relief. He recommended this because he had been bombarded with complaints from party regulars about how Hopkins's Works Progress Administration was being run. "I told him," Farley wrote in a private memo, "that if the President wanted him to make addresses on relief, he should do so of course, but that I, personally, thought it unwise." Such disagreements were the exception rather than the rule: the campaign plans and organizational setup were finalized in July 1936, through meetings and correspondence between a committee consisting of the president, Eleanor Roosevelt, Farley, Charlie Michelson, Stanley High, Steve Early, and Molly Dewson.⁷

Farley attracted some criticism from his New Deal colleagues and, on one notable occasion, from Franklin Roosevelt. In May 1936, speaking to Michigan Democrats at their state party convention, Farley referred to Roosevelt's opponent, Alfred Landon of Kansas, as the governor of a "typical prairie state." Seizing his chance, Landon responded by distributing a picture of Abraham Lincoln with the message "He, Too, Came from 'A Typical Prairie State.'" It was a crass miscalculation on Farley's part, and it prompted the president to send him a terse memorandum: "I thought we had decided that any reference to Landon or any other Republican candidate was inadvisable." Roosevelt suggested that any future mention of a particular state or region should be preceded by a well-chosen, laudatory adjective. "The word 'typical' coming from any New Yorker," the president noted, "is meat for the opposition." When Farley followed up with a speech in which he called Landon a "synthetic" candidate, Roosevelt called in Farley and his speechwriter, Charles

Michelson, and told them, in no uncertain terms, that no more references to Landon would be made without White House clearance.⁸

Throughout the campaign, Farley was convinced that efficient organization would guarantee electoral success. He believed that as long as campaigners told the “story” properly and ensured a high turnout of Democratic voters (rather than the undecided or independent voters targeted by the likes of Molly Dewson), the Democrats would win. He opened one of his press conferences accordingly.

I want you to know we feel this election can be won if the state leaders and the local Democrats in every state put forth their best efforts. We think it is just a case of organization and of seeing that the voters are thoroughly informed of what President Roosevelt has accomplished. If that story is put across and you see to it that your Democratic voters get to the polls, there will be no doubt about the outcome.⁹

Farley was especially confident about his own state, New York, where his aide, Vince Dailey, had taken care of upstate organization, continuing the work Farley started in the 1920s and early 1930s. He was a little concerned at Mayor La Guardia’s activities—on one occasion suggesting, off the record, that La Guardia might try to build up a personal following in the nation’s Italian American communities and that he was not trustworthy (“I will give him to the Indians any time . . . I don’t think he plays fair . . . He will take a side swipe”). But the tone of Farley’s New York press conferences was upbeat.¹⁰

During the campaign, Farley asserted that “the entire organization is functioning more effectively . . . than ever before.” But in New York, the Democrats were unable to capitalize on the gains they had made upstate in 1930, when Roosevelt won the upstate vote, or in 1934, when they carried the New York State Assembly for the first time in living memory. In 1936, as in 1932, the Democrats relied on a strong showing in New York City to overturn upstate deficits. Turning executive victories into a position of permanent party strength was proving difficult.¹¹

The 1936 result in New York State demonstrated the resilience of the Republican Party upstate. It showed that while Farley and Roosevelt had made progress upstate, there was still a lot of work to do. The crusade

they had begun in the late 1920s to reshape the political landscape of upstate New York had only been a partial success. But at least by 1936, thanks to Farley, the upstate Democrats had a well-drilled organization, even if his suggestion in a preelection press release that the “fifty seven [upstate] counties taken as a whole are no longer Republican” proved an empty boast.¹²

As in 1932, Farley’s presidential campaign work focused on communication, organization, and administration. He made speeches defending the New Deal’s economic and legislative achievements, but these were not his main concern. Farley’s flat, neutral tones worked wonderfully well in one-to-one conversations and in small groups, but they made him an unimpressive orator before an audience of any size, so he was never one of the New Deal’s strongest speakers. His main role was not to expound or devise the campaign message but to ensure that the national party apparatus and the organizations in the states were motivated, understood what was required of them, and could be counted on to expend every last ounce of effort on behalf of the Democratic Party.

It would be a mistake to conclude that because Farley was not a man of ideas, he did not shape the politics of New Deal reform. On the contrary, as Roosevelt discovered to his cost during his second term, the New Deal’s legislative agenda could not be enacted or implemented without party backing. Farley’s ability and willingness to placate, cajole, and persuade reluctant party regulars and congressmen to go along with New Deal measures were vital. One way in which Farley—ostensibly a nonideological politician—helped reshape American politics was by taking a lead role in the abrogation of the two-thirds rule. Having been forced to back down in humiliating circumstances at Chicago in 1932, the Roosevelt team tried again at Philadelphia in 1936, only this time from a position of great strength.

The two-thirds rule was first adopted in 1832. It stated that Democratic presidential and vice presidential candidates required two-thirds of delegate votes in order to make a nomination. Defenders of the rule argued that it afforded minority interests a necessary protection that was entirely consistent with democratic principles. Its southern proponents also believed that given their long-standing loyalty to the party and the fact that other regions were far less dependable, the rule was the least

that they deserved. By 1936, Roosevelt was sure of the presidential nomination and much less reliant on the South for support than he had been four years earlier. The move to eliminate the two-thirds rule can be seen as symbolizing an ongoing shift in the bias of the forces supporting Roosevelt, to the advantage of the constituencies of organized labor and the immigrant communities in the cities of the Northeast and the Midwest and to the detriment of the less urban, more politically conservative Democratic Party heartlands of the South.¹³

Roosevelt chose Farley to lead the campaign for abrogation, perhaps thinking that this would assuage the fears of party regulars in the South. From late 1935, Farley worked quietly behind the scenes, persuading state parties to pass resolutions against the rule and changing the membership of the party’s rules committee so that it would favor abrogation. Senator Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri, whose father had been denied the presidency in 1912 because of the two-thirds rule, was selected to chair the committee.¹⁴

Farley’s views about his role in the abrogation shifted over time. In *Behind the Ballots*, Farley gave the impression that he was wholeheartedly on Roosevelt’s side. He described the two-thirds rule as “undemocratic” and, perhaps thinking of the 1924 convention, a “monster, blocking the path of party success and causing bitter deadlocks that ended in disaster for everyone.” But in his reminiscences in his later years, he expressed reservations. Pointing to the fact that southern senators felt threatened by the rule change, he distanced himself from the decision by saying, “That was a job completely engineered by Mr. Roosevelt. I did it under his direction.”¹⁵

It is not surprising that in interviews in the 1950s, Farley voiced doubts about the wisdom of revoking the two-thirds rule. Though he continued to cherish his association with Roosevelt (his office was filled with FDR memorabilia), he had by this time been through the experience of alienation from the Roosevelt administration described in *Jim Farley’s Story*, where he expressed his bitterness toward the course the New Deal took in Roosevelt’s second term and beyond. After Farley left Washington in 1940, his closest political friends included Virginia senator Carter Glass, one of the men most implacably hostile to the abrogation in both 1932 and 1936. Wherever his sympathies lay, there is certainly irony in the fact

that Farley spearheaded the move to eliminate a party rule that, for a century, had substantially bolstered those very elements within the party—the established Democratic Party machines of the South—that turned out in the long term to be his strongest supporters. Shortly after the 1936 election, Farley received a telegram from Carter Glass in which the old Virginian described him as the Roosevelt cabinet member for whom he had the greatest “respect and personal devotion.”¹⁶

On the eve of the election, after attending a final rally at Poughkeepsie, near his Hyde Park home, Franklin Roosevelt called Farley to ask where Farley’s preelection report was. It was on its way, Farley said, and sure enough it arrived within a few minutes. It came in the form of a book containing letters from state leaders across the nation. Farley wrote his own summaries for each state. He told the president that he was still in the business of gathering information, calling people to garner their last-minute impressions, but that on the basis of what he knew, having already telephoned every state leader north of the Mason-Dixon Line that same afternoon, he was “still of the opinion” that Roosevelt would “carry every state but two—Maine and Vermont.” He expressed some doubt about New Hampshire, Connecticut, Michigan, and Kansas, but he thought that, on balance, they would end up in the Roosevelt column.¹⁷

Farley stuck to his opinion when he entered the press poll sweepstakes. Pennsylvania senator Joseph Guffey and *New York World Telegram* journalist George Morris went with Farley’s electoral prediction, scrawling “523–8” on scraps of paper that went into a hat. To Farley’s delight, Emil Hurja, the pollster whom Farley saw as a rival, opted for a margin of 376 to 155. This was similar to Roosevelt’s prediction of 360 to 171 made at Hyde Park in Farley’s presence on election eve. On this occasion, Farley’s old-fashioned methods proved superior to the more scientific approach adopted by Hurja, the geologist turned statistician who pioneered the polling techniques that have become a staple of the modern campaign manager’s craft. Farley was never impressed by polling. “Polls go wrong,” he said, “and that’s all there is to it.” To Farley’s mind, number crunching was no substitute for firsthand contact with informed scouts and party leaders.¹⁸

The 1936 presidential campaign marked the high point of Jim Farley’s political career. It was a stunning victory and a personal triumph both for Roosevelt and for Farley. The president won 27.48 million votes (61

percent) to Landon’s 16.68 million (37 percent). Roosevelt won the forty-six states Farley had said he would win.¹⁹

The saying “As Maine goes, so goes the nation” was coined in 1888, when the Republican Benjamin Harrison was elected president. The GOP had won seven of the last eight presidential elections, each time carrying Maine first, because its elections were (until 1958) held in the fall, rather than in November. In the eleven presidential elections from 1888 to 1928, the trend continued, with the Republicans winning Maine and then the nation on eight occasions. The day after the 1936 election, Farley was cornered by press correspondents and asked to comment on the outcome. Sardonicly, he laid the old saw to rest, announcing that it should be revised to “As Maine goes, so goes Vermont.”²⁰

Farley’s famous prediction in 1936 helped him to forge an unparalleled reputation for political prophecy. To his friends, it further reinforced the idea that he was a political genius. To his enemies, it merely confirmed that Farley was a sinister presence in the nation’s politics, whose authoritarian grip on the Democratic Party made him no better than the most corrupt of city bosses.

The notion that Farley was little more than a glorified city boss—or that, because he shared the city bosses’ political outlook and methods, he was always on their side—was held not just by journalists and newspaper editors who enjoyed feeding the public’s hunger for moralistic tales of political malfeasance but also by some of Farley’s New Deal colleagues. Molly Dewson’s memoirs imply that the New Deal was held back by Farley’s obeisance to the city machines, which she assumed to be reactionary, antidemocratic forms of political organization.²¹

Harold Ickes, the chief of the Public Works Administration (PWA), was another New Dealer who was suspicious of Farley’s relationships with city bosses. He was especially worried about Chicago, where he had been involved in efforts to reform city politics for decades. In December 1934, Ickes tried to persuade President Roosevelt to maneuver Chicago boss Ed Kelly out of the city’s mayoral race. Roosevelt told Ickes that Farley was handling the situation. Ickes wrongly took this to mean that Farley had been instructed to oust Kelly. When Kelly stayed in the race, Ickes accused Farley, in no uncertain terms, of “double-crossing the President on the Chicago situation.” Ickes added, “There is no doubt in

my mind that [Farley] is for Kelly and that instead of trying to get Kelly out of the race, he has encouraged him to stay in.”²²

On this occasion, as Farley’s private memoranda show, Ickes let his eagerness to pin the blame on Farley cloud his judgment. Farley’s decision to stay out of the mayoral race was not made unilaterally; he decided to do so only after a series of consultations with Roosevelt. The president did call Farley asking that he intervene to prevent Kelly’s endorsement by the Chicago Democratic organization, but with Roosevelt’s permission, Farley then consulted Cardinal Mundelein, who told him that “Kelly would win regardless” and that “anything the Administration might attempt to do would be disastrous.” On the basis of this information, Farley told Roosevelt, “in my judgment it would be a serious mistake to inject ourselves into the Chicago situation.” Farley concluded, “our interference would be extremely harmful.” The president agreed, saying to Farley that the best policy was to avoid taking sides and to take no responsibility for the outcome.²³

Assessing the true nature of Farley’s relationships with city bosses is no easy task. Part of the problem lies in the paucity of documentary evidence; but the way in which historiographical legacies have affected perceptions of Farley’s role in the New Deal is also a factor. For much of the twentieth century, the progressive critique of municipal corruption spearheaded and popularized by Lincoln Steffens and other crusading writers and reformers was a major influence on the study of urban machines. The progressive critique—which figured the city boss as venal, hostile to reform, and impervious to political reason—also influenced many New Dealers.²⁴

However, the flip side of the progressive critique, the sentimental romanticization of city machines, was equally deleterious to the standing of politicians who worked primarily through traditional party organizations, as did Farley. This romanticized vision of the urban boss was most famously realized in Edwin O’Connor’s *The Last Hurrah*, the story of fictional mayor Frank Skeffington, “a rascal with a heart as big as the state of Kansas and a marvelous way with all kinds of people.”²⁵

In the 1930s, Farley’s association with city bosses made him particularly vulnerable to attack from adherents of the progressive school. To some, Farley’s involvement in the politics of patronage and favors, com-

bined with his personal acquaintance with such men as Jersey City’s Frank Hague, Chicago’s Ed Kelly, and Kansas City’s Tom Pendergast, was enough to make him seem beyond the pale. Despite the fact that Farley hailed from a small manufacturing town and gained influence in his state party as a consequence of his knowledge of the predominantly rural and small-town politics of upstate New York, his public image was always tainted by the false assumption that the New York State Democratic Party was dominated by Tammany Hall. This was true even when Farley was pursuing explicitly anti-Tammany policies in New York City, as in 1933–34, when he sought to further weaken Tammany by starving it of federal patronage. His scrapbooks are littered with press cuttings that display this prejudice against him. Take, for example, a declaration from an editorial in the *Pueblo (Colorado) Star-Journal* in February 1936, written in response to a speech Farley had made in Miami attacking the American Liberty League.

Everybody knows that Farley is the product of Tammany Hall, the most high-handed, and cold-blooded political organization we know of in the United States. He was born in its atmosphere, grew up in it, thrived in it, is in it now and depends upon Tammany Hall to put Mr. Roosevelt over in the city of New York in the coming campaign.²⁶

Even in states closer to his home base, such as Pennsylvania, Farley was prone to being portrayed by a hostile press as representative of the worst excesses of bossism. On the eve of the 1934 midterm elections, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* carried a cartoon depicting the Tammany Tiger with the word “Farleyism” branded onto its flank, cornering a fear-stricken Pennsylvania Quaker. The caption read, “Tammany Reaches Out: The Real Pre-Election Contest.” The accompanying editorial described Farley as a man determined to “Tammanize the Nation.”

He is the man who would apply the practices of ward politics to the State and Nation. His present purpose is to add Pennsylvania to the string of States which he now controls on a Tammany Hall basis . . . If he wins [Joseph] Guffey will be the State Sachem for Pennsylvania, a subservient sub-boss for big boss Farley.²⁷

In New York State itself, Farley's arch tormenter, Fiorello La Guardia, almost daily accused him of being in league with Tammany Hall.

Both La Guardia and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, for political and rhetorical purposes, grossly exaggerated the extent to which Farley was able to manipulate the course of the nation's politics, and both neglected the fact that he was a Rockland County man who had learned about Tammany and ward politics from the outside; but the equation they made between Farley's methods and those of the archetypal city boss was not completely unreasonable. There is a sense in which Farley's unprecedented command of the Democratic Party's organizational apparatus at both state and national level, his extraordinary knowledge of the minutiae of local party affairs, the great breadth of his range of contacts, and the resultant quality of his intelligence information gave him a bosslike grasp of the party machine. By the mid-1930s, he had constructed a formidable communications empire, with contacts in every town and city of note. A combination of assiduous use of the telephone, a massive correspondence, use of his scouts and informants nationwide, and regular consultations with the president, agency heads, and leading congressmen guaranteed that Farley always had the inside track on party business. Using these methods, he was able to treat the national organization as a city boss would treat his local turf.

Much of the power Farley wielded in Roosevelt's first term was derived from his ability to act as a broker, using his contacts and know-how to make himself indispensable in a highly decentralized political environment. With the enormous weight of the president's authority behind him, Farley was able to bring people with differing political interests together, thus helping to mold the conditions in which compromises could be struck. This role of enabler and moderator was the key to Farley's importance as a political force in the New Deal. Frances Perkins repeatedly asked him to work through his business contacts to influence strike situations; in the summer of 1936, he used his leverage to bring together opposing Democratic Party factions in troublesome states like Ohio and Illinois; and in August of the same year, Boston boss James Michael Curley called to persuade Farley to have Aubrey Williams investigate the Works Progress Administration in Massachusetts. In all these situations, Farley was in his element.²⁸

A closer look at Farley’s involvement in city politics sheds light on the ways in which the New Deal affected practitioners of the old-fashioned style of broker politics. By forging new kinds of political relationships with some of the most tightly organized political machines in the United States, the New Deal posed a very real challenge to Farley. These relationships—in, for instance, New York City, Chicago, Kansas City, and Pittsburgh—were dependent not simply on the standard forms of federal patronage and party appointments that Farley was able to offer in return for organizational support come election time but also on the provision of funds for public works, housing, and other projects directed by federal agencies. Such government programs as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) offered bosses opportunities to improve the infrastructure of their cities by building schools, bridges, parks, housing projects, and hospitals, while also providing large numbers of patronage positions for party workers. As a consequence, new forms of federally sponsored urban liberalism emerged. Only the more canny and flexible city bosses survived this transition.²⁹

In New York City, Farley was shut out of power by Fiorello La Guardia, who, on defeating both the Tammany Hall Democrats and Farley’s Recovery Party candidate, Joseph McKee, in the 1933 mayoral election, found a stream of WPA funds pouring into his coffers. Farley’s efforts to bolster the Democratic Party in New York City were further frustrated by the American Labor Party, which often held the balance of power in city elections. Bronx boss Ed Flynn had more influence among the Democrats in New York, and Brains Truster Adolf Berle, not Jim Farley, was Roosevelt’s premier ambassador to the New York City leadership during the New Deal. Berle worked to attract the support of progressives to La Guardia’s nonpartisan administration, making a substantial contribution to La Guardia’s reelection on a Republican ticket in 1937. While Berle viewed this outcome as a triumph for liberal values and as proof that city politics need not be infected by the spoils system, Farley, recognizing that the locus of patronage had merely shifted from the party organizations to a coterie of liberal reformers, was furious that New Dealers had handed victory to the Republicans.³⁰

The situation was not quite so bad for Farley in Chicago, where he was

on good personal terms with boss Ed Kelly. But Farley was not as important to Kelly as was WPA administrator Harry Hopkins. Through Hopkins's beneficence, Kelly was able to control around two thousand WPA jobs and to use this leverage to spread his influence out from his Cook County base. Kelly carried out an extensive program of federally funded building projects and gained further favor with the Roosevelt administration when he persuaded the Illinois legislature, against the wishes of Illinois governor Henry Horner, to increase taxes in order to raise the matching funds required before WPA monies were granted.³¹

Throughout Roosevelt's first term, Farley did sterling work in an effort to maintain Democratic Party unity in Illinois. This was no easy task, because Kelly was in more or less continuous conflict with Governor Horner. What is more, both Kelly and his coleader, Pat Nash, complained that they were not receiving sufficient party recognition. As the 1936 election approached, Farley conferred with Kelly and Nash frequently in an effort to smooth things over.³²

Farley and Roosevelt spoke often about Chicago politics, but in his dealings with Kelly, Farley was scrupulous in keeping the president's name out of his negotiations, presenting patronage squabbles in the context of the need to ensure party unity. Typical of communications between Roosevelt and Farley on Chicago politics was a memo Farley received in January 1936.

There is a rumor that Ed Kelly does not intend to renominate Tom Courtney, the State's Attorney in Chicago, or Judge Sonsteby, the Chief Judge of the Municipal Court. One or two of our friends tell me that if he goes through with this it will mean a combination between these two and Horner in the primaries and that with the strength of Courtney and Sonsteby on the same ticket with Horner, it will make a real and lasting split, even if they do not win. Perhaps it would be a good idea to talk to Ed Kelly about this but don't bring me into it.³³

But Farley's work, though valuable at the time, was not at the heart of the Kelly-Nash machine's love affair with the New Deal. Farley had the requisite political know-how, but unlike Harry Hopkins, who could offer WPA bounty, Farley could no longer deliver the goods.

For Farley, the implications of the new relationship between Chicago's Democrats and the New Deal were spelled out unequivocally by Kelly's behavior in 1939–40, when the Chicago boss played a key role in the campaign for Roosevelt's third term. Kelly's preference for the promise of New Deal funds over Farley's claims to represent the true interests of the traditional party organization was most starkly demonstrated on the floor of the Democratic National Convention at Chicago in 1940. This event, which Kelly stage-managed down the last detail, saw Farley sent to an ignominious defeat in his bid for the presidential nomination.

Of all the city bosses Farley dealt with in the 1930s, he was perhaps fondest of Kansas City's Tom Pendergast—or "T. J.," as Farley sometimes called him. Farley thought Roosevelt was slow to give deserved recognition to Pendergast and those associated with him. When Pendergast was ill following a heart attack in the autumn of 1936, Farley, on more than one occasion, urged Roosevelt to call or visit the Kansas City boss, who was being treated in New York at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Farley's papers contain only a few letters and one or two scattered references to Pendergast, but the surviving material suggests that the two men were on the best of terms. They shared both an Irish ancestry and a political creed, believing that the Democratic Party was the epitome of everything that was good about American politics and that hard workers should be rewarded through the spoils system. In a 1957 interview, Farley, who, since his old friend's conviction in 1939, had known of Pendergast's penchant for fraud, prostitution rackets, and collusion with gangsters, described their relationship as "perfectly satisfactory," adding, without a trace of irony, that Pendergast's "word was as good as his bond."³⁴

Pendergast was the first of the major city bosses to back Roosevelt in 1932, and that was something Farley never forgot. According to Molly Dewson (who was not remotely impressed), Farley bragged that he was solely responsible for getting Pendergast's support. In assessing the nature of the Farley-Pendergast relationship, it should be remembered that even before the forces of law and order began to catch up with Pendergast, the Kansas City boss's hold on power did not compare with that of, say, Frank Hague in Jersey City or Kelly in Chicago, both of whom, in

their prime, were able to deliver their respective states into the Roosevelt column more or less single-handed. Pendergast had to contend with strong Democratic factions in Saint Louis and in Missouri's rural regions, a factor that might have made him especially keen to cozy up to the national party chairman, given the amount of patronage at stake.³⁵

Farley's willingness to aid Pendergast emerges from his private memoranda and from his correspondence with Roosevelt. In September 1935, Farley wrote to the president urging that he consider giving Walter Maloney of Kansas City a place on the Guffey Coal Commission, which had just been created by the Guffey-Snyder Act to regulate coal prices and maintain labor standards. Both the insistent tone of the letter and the fact that Farley felt moved to put his recommendation in writing suggest that Farley believed very strongly that Pendergast deserved better treatment from the administration.

I had a long talk with Thomas Prendergast [*sic*], the Democratic leader of Kansas City, and he of course feels, as does Senator Clark, that Missouri has been neglected insofar as major appointments are concerned . . . Very frankly, I think consideration should be given to [Walter] Maloney for a place on the Coal Commission . . . This is one of the few cases where I should like to bear down on the recommendation, because I honestly feel that Missouri is entitled to a lot of consideration for reasons I have previously discussed with you.³⁶

Two years earlier, in October 1933, Farley had helped Pendergast by forcing Frances Perkins to withdraw her choice of a Republican to fill the position of Missouri director of federal employment. The replacement candidate was Harry S. Truman.³⁷

Undoubtedly, Farley's favors for Pendergast and frequent visits to Kansas City gave the Pendergast machine a significant boost, but, as in Chicago, Farley's involvement in the city's affairs was not, in the long run, as important to the city's future as were the New Deal's federal relief programs, which transformed the Kansas City skyline and infrastructure in the space of a decade. Through the WPA, PWA, and CWA, Pendergast was able to control tens of thousands of jobs. Admittedly, Farley was instrumental in ensuring that Kansas City gained a disproportionate allocation of WPA largesse, but once the initial deals were struck, Farley

faded from view. When the Pendergast machine began to unravel under the weight of the investigations prompted by Missouri governor Lloyd Stark, Roosevelt was quick to spot that Stark was the coming man. Much to Farley's annoyance, the president switched his allegiance, cutting off Pendergast's access to federal patronage. After August 1938, when Stark's candidate, James M. Douglas, beat Pendergast's man in the contest to nominate a candidate to the state supreme court, Farley was powerless to help his old friend.³⁸

There is another parallel between Pendergast's and Farley's careers: both reached the peak of their powers in 1936. Farley's decline was not as spectacular as that of his friend (who was headed for the penitentiary), but by the end of 1936, it was well underway. Roosevelt was happy to destroy the Pendergast machine, not because the Kansas boss was corrupt, but because the president recognized that Pendergast could not deliver the votes anymore. It was unfortunate for Farley, therefore, that the city boss with whom he had the greatest affinity and for whom he was willing to do almost any favor did not have the political clout to make himself indispensable to the Roosevelt administration.

In contrast to Pendergast, Pittsburgh boss David Lawrence understood how to thrive in the world of city politics made by the New Deal. In Pennsylvania, the state Democratic Party, which had been feeble before the New Deal, used the Roosevelt administration's federal relief programs as a springboard toward the creation of a formidable party organization, which stayed more or less intact until the 1970s. An impression of the scale of the federal commitment to Pennsylvania can be gleaned from the fact that in the period 1935–37, the WPA was spending seventy million dollars on Lawrence's Allegheny County alone. In the years 1935–40, nearly all of the state's three thousand WPA administrators were Democrats. By 1940, half of the Democratic state committeemen and most of the ward chairmen in Allegheny County were on the government payroll.³⁹

The story of Lawrence's rise through the ranks of Pennsylvania politics provides a number of telling comparisons with Farley's career and points to some of the ways that the political environment changed for urban bosses working in the 1930s and beyond. Like Pendergast and Farley, David Lawrence was an Irish American who used politics to raise himself from humble beginnings to positions of power and respectabil-

ity. Born one year after Farley, in 1889, Lawrence shared Farley's ambivalence toward his lowly origins, displayed a ferocious work ethic, and maintained an unswerving faith in the merits of the two-party system.⁴⁰

In the early part of his career, Lawrence perfectly fitted the mold of the archetypal boss. Like Farley, Lawrence began by building up his county organization. He got his break when Joseph Guffey was made a Democratic national committeeman as a reward for his early support of Roosevelt. Lawrence stepped into Guffey's shoes as leader of Allegheny County's Democratic organization. Then, in 1934, Guffey was elected to the U.S. Senate, and Lawrence seized control of state patronage.

In the middle and late 1930s, the career trajectories of Farley and Lawrence diverged. While Farley struggled in vain to maintain the cohesion of the national party apparatus, Lawrence was successfully courting federal funds to further expand his power base. Both men were great believers in the value of political organization, but unlike Farley, Lawrence was able to countenance collaboration with the Republican Party. This was the only way forward for Democrats in Pennsylvania, where the GOP controlled the state senate and courts. In contrast, Farley, perhaps because he never achieved high electoral office himself, was unable to transcend his dogmatic conviction that the Democratic Party represented the only hope for political progress. Whereas Farley was forced out of national politics by the early 1940s, Lawrence's political horizons continued to broaden: he supported Roosevelt in 1940 and 1944, became Pittsburgh's mayor in 1945, and then began a series of cleverly crafted appeals—aimed at the city's business and civic communities—that enabled him to lead Pittsburgh's postwar economic renaissance.⁴¹

The experiences of New York City, Chicago, Kansas City, and Pennsylvania in the New Deal years highlight a number of points about Farley, the city bosses, and the politics of urban reform. First, though Farley provided a valuable link between the Roosevelt administration and some of the more powerful Democratic city bosses, his was by no means the only—or most important—channel of communication. In New York, Ed Flynn took care of the Democratic side of the operation, while Adolf Berle, as city chamberlain, provided a bridge to the La Guardia regime. Elsewhere, Farley monitored electoral prospects, distributed party

patronage, and banged together the heads of recalcitrant state politicians, but he was increasingly outgunned by Harry Hopkins, who, as holder of vast quantities of WPA funds, held all the trump cards. By 1936, Farley was complaining that Hopkins was undercutting his relations with some of the bosses, including Ed Kelly in Chicago and Frank Hague in Jersey City.⁴²

Second, the Roosevelt administration deployed a wide range of tactics in its dealings with city machines. New Deal programs could be used to bolster party machines, as in Chicago and Pittsburgh, or to build up alternative sources of support through aid to third parties and liberal reformers, as in La Guardia's New York, where the established party machine, Tammany Hall, was deprived of patronage. There was no single mechanism dictating the form of the new relationships between Washington and the cities. Rather, an array of alternative arrangements took shape, often in a more or less haphazard fashion, in accordance with the interplay between local, state, and national political conditions. A common denominator was the transforming potential of New Deal programs. Of course, this was a development whose impact was not confined to the cities. Roosevelt's liberal allies in the South, especially such ambitious young politicians as Lyndon Johnson, worked with the Roosevelt administration to implement federal programs that bypassed local elites. Similarly, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, new kinds of federal-urban partnerships stimulated by the prospect of war in the Pacific were established in the West.⁴³

Third, the growing federal presence in America's cities had repercussions for the way Farley and similar politicians went about their business. Broker politicians, who thrived in highly decentralized political environments, ceased to be in such high demand. To an unprecedented extent, the new federal initiatives linked cities to the programmatic goals of the New Deal administration. Local party machines were forced either to work with the new executive agencies and their professional public administrators or to wither on the vine. Within the Democratic Party, those who benefited from this transition included such people as David Lawrence, who was able to combine the political skills of the old school with those of the new, turning himself from a mediocre city boss into a very successful municipal manager.

Fourth, Farley's influence within the Roosevelt administration waned as the importance of cities to the New Deal coalition waxed. Machine support for Roosevelt in 1932 was measly, coming from only Ed Flynn and Memphis boss Ed Crump and from the independent Irish mayors James Michael Curley (Boston) and Frank Murphy (Detroit). As we have seen, many of the big city machines had fallen into line by 1936. The Democrats won Baltimore, Cleveland, and Detroit by a margin of two votes to one, San Francisco by three to one, Milwaukee by four to one, and Atlanta, New Orleans, Birmingham, and Houston by even bigger margins. By 1940, the big cities, along with organized labor, were the linchpin of the Roosevelt majorities.⁴⁴

Where did these changes leave Jim Farley? In 1936, Farley appeared to be at the height of his powers. He was one of the president's closest advisers; he had successfully managed Roosevelt's reelection campaign; under his leadership, the Democratic Party was attracting new support from organized labor, urban voters (especially various groups of first- and second-generation immigrants), and African Americans; and he was even being touted as a future governor of New York. But in fact, Farley's stock was already falling. To the extent that Farley helped to construct the New Deal coalition—keeping the party organization humming, motivating party workers, and cooperating with the special divisions—he also helped to ensure that he would become an increasingly peripheral figure in the nation's politics.