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## The Politics of Revenge?

Jim Farley's acrimonious exit from the Roosevelt administration in 1940 by no means marked the end of his political career. In New York State, he stayed on as chairman of the Democratic State Committee until 1944, using the position to retain tight control over the party organization. At the national level, his skills in party management and his experience as a campaign manager would be missed by an administration facing the relatively familiar challenge of an increasingly recalcitrant Congress and the more profound problem of the global conflict into which the United States would soon be drawn. After 1940, far from fading quietly into the background, Farley was as determined as ever to influence the future course of American politics.

In the early 1940s, Farley was itching to do two things. First, he wanted to find a way of contributing to the war effort, preferably in some sort of official capacity. Second, he was eager to maintain his influence within the Democratic Party. Amid rapid war mobilization and with the likelihood of American military involvement increasing by the day, the challenge for Farley was how to achieve his objectives without being perceived as a divisive and disruptive figure. It was a difficult game to play. As early as March 1941, he stated that American involvement in the Second World War required the complete suspension of party politics. He did so at a time when the pressure on politicians to make a public display of putting their differences to one side to unite behind the cause of victory was acute. Such rhetoric reflected a genuine desire for a coordinated, bipartisan war effort. But the cease-fire was merely rhetorical: as

Farley well understood, party politics was alive and kicking during the war, and he wanted to be in on the action.<sup>1</sup>

The Second World War did not represent a lacuna in American domestic politics: it was more than an epilogue to the New Deal or a mere prelude to postwar prosperity and superpower status. War itself brought rapid social and economic change—women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, salaries and wages more than doubled, union membership rose by 50 percent, two million African Americans moved out of the South. But it also brought sharp political rivalry, both within and between the main parties. The fortunes of the Republican Party revived, leading to more closely fought presidential contests and the resurgence of congressional Republicanism in the 1942 midterm elections. At the same time, New Dealers competed with one another to shape the future course of liberal reform, battling for supremacy in debates over war mobilization, full employment, and how best to construct a regulatory state. Since Farley was no longer national party chairman, he was spared the difficult task of representing the Democratic Party's interests during the war. Instead, he positioned himself as a discontented outsider, though an outsider with sufficient friends and influence both inside and outside the Democratic Party to become an important focal point for anti-New Deal sentiment.<sup>2</sup>

One effect of the unprecedented governmental involvement in the economy precipitated by the war was the provision of a guaranteed supply of ammunition to the New Deal's conservative critics. In late December 1941, Ohio senator Robert A. Taft called for the abolition of three of the most durable New Deal agencies, the Works Progress Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Youth Administration. In March 1943, he predicted that the country would "be ruined long before the war is over" if it adopted the fiscal policies proposed by the National Resources Planning Board. Sure enough, before the war was over, the WPA, CCC, and NYA had been abolished, and the NRPB's budget had been slashed. Increasingly, Congress was fearful that the new wartime agencies were eroding their control over the legislative process. Conservative legislators were encouraged by the resurgence of business confidence produced by the substantial profits and productivity gains being made from the war economy. But conservatism's onslaught

against the New Deal was only part of the story. Despite the best efforts of Taft and his anti–New Deal allies (both Republican and Democrat), the war years did not bring an end to reform, at least not entirely. Nor did they bring to a halt the dynamic interaction between Roosevelt’s reformist ambitions and the demands of party regularity that had so profoundly shaped the course of Farley’s career—and American politics—in the previous decade.<sup>3</sup>

Histories of the New Deal era suggest that the New Deal ended in 1941, with Pearl Harbor; in 1940, with Roosevelt’s election to a third term; or in 1939, with the coalescence of congressional conservatism. There are also those who prefer to think not of a single New Deal but of multiple New Deals, each with their own characteristics and agenda. First, Second, and Third New Deals were identified by contemporary observers, such as Raymond Moley of the Brains Trust and the economist Alexander Sachs, who spoke of a “Third New Deal” as early as August 1937. Later, they became embedded in the development of New Deal historiography. By 1960, with the publication of the third volume of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s *Age of Roosevelt* trilogy, the idea that there were First and Second New Deals and that, as Moley had argued, 1935 was the watershed year had become the orthodoxy. The idea of the Third New Deal has proven especially useful to historians and political scientists whose interests lie primarily in the institutional and administrative reforms of 1937–40. Perhaps there is even scope for arguing that there was a Fourth New Deal during the Second World War.<sup>4</sup>

In some respects, the New Deal did extend beyond 1941—and not just in terms of its legislative and institutional legacy. Taking the New Deal through to 1945 has the advantage of acknowledging how intimately the New Deal was allied to President Roosevelt’s personal leadership and political following. It also helps to break down the artificial and not necessarily useful separation of prewar from postwar America. Further, it permits historians to give due recognition to elements of the New Deal that remained constant or even came to fruition during the Second World War. The New Deal’s commitment to infrastructural development and regional planning, particularly in the South and the West, is important in this respect. Consider also how such administrators and politicians as Henry Wallace, David Lilienthal, Adolf Berle, Jesse Jones,

and Lyndon Johnson hatched plans for exporting the New Deal as a form of international economic development—to Mexico, China, India, Africa, Brazil, and Southeast Asia—both during and after the war. As Alan Brinkley has pointed out, the New Deal's example of government activism played an important role in sustaining and informing the ideas of future generations of reformers.<sup>5</sup>

The consistency of President Roosevelt's rhetoric represents another field in which evidence of the persistence of the New Deal after 1941 can be traced. It is true that the president's public language periodically shifted emphasis in response to economic crises, campaign strategies, and wartime exigencies; but during the war, Roosevelt repeatedly returned to New Deal themes in articulating his political vision. The goal of achieving economic security for all represents a case in point. Rather than abandoning this idea during the war, Roosevelt chose to extend and elaborate on it, arguing in his 1944 State of the Union address that world peace was dependent on maintaining economic, social, and moral security in the United States. This address might then be interpreted either as representing the culmination of a single, unbroken New Deal or as characteristic of a separate Fourth New Deal that foreshadowed liberalism's postwar shift toward a preoccupation with government's role as a guarantor of economic and civil rights. It might also be thought of as showing how important the Roosevelt administration's efforts to implement domestic reform were in shaping its response to the challenge of war.<sup>6</sup>

In an influential essay, William Leuchtenburg wrote that the New Deal was the "analogue of war," that it harnessed models, memories, and metaphors borrowed from the First World War to gain moral and political authority in the struggle against the Great Depression. The 1944 State of the Union address suggests that in the years from 1941 to 1945, the reverse was also true, that to some extent the war became the analogue of the New Deal. Once, New Deal agencies had been teeming with staff who had gained their political education in government agencies created during the First World War; now, the Second World War agencies were full of New Dealers and were headed by such ardent liberals as Harry Hopkins and Fiorello La Guardia. Seeing these men in major administrative posts was particularly galling to Farley, who considered that his business experience and proven organizational abilities meant that he was far better qualified for such posts than they were.<sup>7</sup>

Roosevelt's 1944 State of the Union address had rhetorical and intellectual antecedents in previous statements of New Deal intent. It was strongly influenced by the NRPB reports that Robert Taft had denounced, but its roots can be followed back to the 1936 Democratic Party platform, which included a section stating the government's "inescapable obligations to its citizens, among which are: (1) Protection of the family and the home; (2) Establishment of a democracy of opportunity for all the people; (3) Aid to those overtaken by disaster." In turn, as Sidney Milkis has shown, the ideas that informed the 1936 platform and 1944 State of the Union address were substantially anticipated in a speech Roosevelt gave before the San Francisco Commonwealth Club during his first presidential campaign, in September 1932. In this speech, crafted mainly by Columbia economist Adolf Berle, Roosevelt articulated government's vital role in aiding "the development of an economic declaration of rights, an economic constitutional order."<sup>8</sup>

Tracing the ancestry of Roosevelt's rhetoric in this way suggests a degree of continuity in New Deal thinking that sits uneasily with the idea that there were discrete, multiple New Deals. Analysis of Farley's career reinforces the point, because the course of his career was shaped not by the putative shifts from emergency, to structural, to administrative reform that have been ascribed to the first three New Deals or by the impact of a Fourth New Deal lurking somewhere beneath the surface of wartime America. Rather, it shows the extent to which the New Deal as a whole was shaped by struggle between the various programmatic ambitions of reformers and the Democratic Party apparatus. The Second World War added new constraints to this relationship—and opened up new possibilities. But the argument did not stop, and despite his departure from the national scene, Farley was still, from time to time, caught in its cross fire.

In 1940, numerous unavailing attempts were made to persuade Farley to lend his name to the third-term campaign and to stay on as party chairman, even if only in an honorary capacity. Once the breach had been made, however, Farley felt there was no turning back. The best he could do was to declare publicly, two weeks before the 1940 election, that he would vote the straight Democratic ticket. His statement made no mention of Roosevelt's name, stressing, rather, his commitment to party loy-

alty and to the “principles and objectives” of the Democratic Party. Throughout the campaign, anti–New Deal Democrats advised Farley to follow this line. On October 15, Millard Tydings dropped by Farley’s office to urge that if Farley were forced to make public comment, he should not mention either Roosevelt or vice presidential candidate Henry Wallace. Farley made only one appearance with the president during the campaign, on October 29 at Madison Square Garden, and he was more or less forced into it, having already agreed to attend the event in his capacity as New York State party chairman.<sup>9</sup>

In the months immediately after his defeat at the 1940 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Farley showed more interest in his business affairs than in the presidential campaign. Since January, he had been involved in negotiations with a consortium of bankers who were intent on purchasing the New York Yankees, a deal he was pursuing with the assistance of Roosevelt’s former law partner Basil O’Connor. If completed, this deal would have enabled him to retain his high public profile without affecting his political options. Following a year of talks, however, the Yankees deal collapsed. Predictably, Farley laid the blame on Roosevelt, whose prevarication over whether to run for a third term had, he claimed, compromised his negotiating position in the first six months of 1940.<sup>10</sup>

In the course of the 1940 campaign, Farley considered a number of lucrative business propositions, some of them with strings attached. In mid-October, a man walked into his office promising to underwrite the Yankees deal on condition that Farley declare his support for Wendell Willkie, the Republican presidential candidate. Farley turned down this offer and an offer to succeed Walter Chrysler as a trustee of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad. By this time, though, he had already accepted a position as an executive salesman for the Coca-Cola Corporation, a job with no overt political connections, but one that would allow him to travel widely and maintain his political and business contacts.<sup>11</sup>

During the 1940 campaign, Farley was disillusioned with the president, but there was never a chance that he would bolt the party. He was convinced that the country would be better off under Roosevelt than under Willkie. He told Roy Howard, chief of the Scripps-Howard news-

paper chain, that what he most wanted was for the Democratic Party to perform well. He was confident that the Democrats would retain control of the Senate and that this would help to keep Roosevelt in check. Very occasionally, he gave advice to national headquarters, but he concentrated his energy on New York State, where he worked with his aide, Vince Dailey, to maintain the Democratic Party's upstate presence.<sup>12</sup>

In private, Farley was critical of the way his successor, Ed Flynn, managed the 1940 campaign, but it was really only after the election that Farley began to feel free to assert himself once more by painting himself as the champion of Democratic Party regularity. He achieved this through a campaign of constant carping aimed at the administration's handling of patronage, relations with Congress, and policy on war mobilization. He also started to seek ways of using his chairmanship of the New York State Democratic Party to obstruct and frustrate the administration and its allies.<sup>13</sup>

In the field of congressional relations, Farley had good cause to argue that the Roosevelt administration would pay a heavy political price for the loss of its most skilled and experienced party leader. According to the president himself, even senators and congressmen usually considered friendly to the administration were complaining by September 1941 that communications between Congress and the administration had broken down. Roosevelt wrote a memorandum to his appointments secretary, Marvin McIntyre, suggesting that he "create a medium" for congressmen to register their complaints. Without Farley to pick up and smooth over problems, there was a vacuum that had to be filled. The president stated that some congressmen were saying that the only way to gain the administration's attention was to vote against it. Though Roosevelt insisted that he did not want McIntyre to be "a liaison man with the Hill," the president claimed that he wanted McIntyre to "be the man in the White House whom Senators and Congressmen can talk to," which amounted to the same thing. The president even had to explain to McIntyre how to build up a network of contacts through a series of friendly telephone calls.

I think the way to get this started is to do it in a very casual manner. If you could start telephoning two or three of your Congressional

friends a day just to ask how they are and what they know, word will soon get around that Marvin McIntyre will listen to them. In a few weeks or so, the casual phone call will soon develop into an iron-clad system.<sup>14</sup>

The creation of new government agencies to manage the wartime economy and aid war mobilization provided numerous opportunities for the New Deal's critics within the Democratic Party to kick up a storm. Farley had always chafed against Roosevelt's practice of appointing or supporting Republicans, progressives, and liberals over the heads of Democratic Party stalwarts. During the war, Farley found himself on the receiving end of this policy when he failed to secure a position in one of the new war agencies.

Farley was characteristically optimistic in his belief that he would receive an official wartime post despite the fact that his recent political activities called his loyalty to the administration into question. He thought that his political skills, business experience, and long years of service to the Democratic Party made him an ideal candidate for some sort of role in civilian defense or defense transportation. Not surprisingly, given his recent public opposition to Roosevelt, he was repeatedly rebuffed.

Farley wrote to the president immediately after the United States entered the war, but despite persistent lobbying and having his name discussed on numerous occasions, he never got the call to duty. One correspondent, endorsing Farley for a government post, suggested that the only way to placate "the disgruntled ones in the Democratic party" was to give Farley an important government job. Evidently, however, Roosevelt calculated that regardless of his merits as an administrator, it was best, from a political point of view, to avoid giving Farley and his supporters a foothold in Washington.<sup>15</sup>

Farley elaborated his views in a memorandum dictated in May 1941, in which he stated that competent businessmen, like himself, were being neglected because Roosevelt and Hopkins wanted to hog the limelight and that he was also being ignored because the administration feared his popularity. He blamed labor strife, the strength of popular isolationism, and the country's general lack of preparedness on the president's failure



to adopt recommendations he had made in 1939 concerning the organization of defense and industrial programs. He repeated these concerns in February 1942, adding that the best way to improve the organization of the war effort would be for Roosevelt to put ideological and partisan considerations to one side by bringing himself, John Nance Garner, Bernard Baruch, Al Smith, and Herbert Hoover into the administration.<sup>16</sup>

Farley confided to his diary that he considered Roosevelt to be dishonest. Cordell Hull, he opined, would have made a better president and, what is more, would have won more votes than Roosevelt if he had been the candidate in 1940. This latter statement shows just how much Farley's political judgment had been distorted by his bitter divorce from Roosevelt and his subsequent chastening defeat at the 1940 Chicago convention. He persisted in underestimating the president's personal popularity, failing to grasp the extent to which the New Deal had transformed the Democratic Party in ways that made Hull a weak candidate. He wildly exaggerated the national appeal of his anti-third-term ally.<sup>17</sup>

Born only a decade after the start of the Civil War, a child of the Tennessee frontier, Hull was in many ways a remarkable figure in the nation's politics. But by the 1940s, he was an anachronism in the new Democratic Party. He was neither a racial progressive, nor a noted supporter of organized labor, nor a friend to the immigrant communities of America's big cities. Unlike Roosevelt, at least in his pomp, Hull did not possess either the personal charm or the political dexterity to enable him to reach out to these core constituencies while also maintaining the allegiance of the party rank and file. He might have picked up more votes from alternative sources of support—small farmers and businessmen, for example—but probably not enough to form a winning coalition. Given that he was also an uninspiring public speaker, it seems most unlikely that Cordell Hull could have outstripped Roosevelt's vote-winning performance in 1940. It is more likely that his nomination would have handed the presidency to Wendell Willkie.

Farley insisted that he was glad to leave national politics and throw himself into his business affairs. There is no doubt he was pleased to be making money and traveling widely in his work for Coca-Cola. Similarly, he was relieved and liberated by the knowledge that he was no

longer part of an administration whose practices and principles did not match his own. However, it is clear that Farley never freed himself entirely from politics and that this was never his intention. He did promise to Coca-Cola boss Robert Woodruff that he would not seek the governorship of New York and that the only additional post he might try for would be the presidency in 1944, but apart from that, he was permitted freely to pursue his political interests in New York, where he was still party chairman.<sup>18</sup>

Farley continued in the early 1940s to view business and politics as more or less inseparable spheres of personal and professional interest. As early as January 1941, when his humiliation at Chicago was a recent and decidedly unpleasant memory, he was still prepared to combine a business trip to South America's Coca-Cola bottling plants with a survey of the continent's political leaders. On his return in March, he even went so far as to report his observations to President Roosevelt in person, warning him of the strength of Axis influence in many of the countries he visited. Just as a business trip might lead to a survey of political leaders, so might Farley's political contacts lead to lucrative business opportunities. For instance, it was "Chip" Robert, secretary to the Democratic National Committee under Farley and then a manager of his bid for the presidential nomination, who first suggested that his former boss join Coca-Cola.<sup>19</sup>

Farley's private memoranda for 1941 reveal a man deeply frustrated with the course of political events and eager to find ways of making life difficult for the administration. He was on the lookout for a chance to inflict damage on the New Dealers who had stymied his presidential bid. Through most of the year, this meant making sniping attacks on policy matters or patronage decisions. Later, when the New York mayoral campaign began, he was able to use his political muscle in New York State to block Roosevelt's efforts to further the cause of progressive politics.

In April 1941, Farley privately recorded his dismay at the failure of Roosevelt and Ed Flynn to consult the New York Democratic State Committee over the appointment of John Bright to a federal judgeship in his home district. According to Farley, Bright's appointment was contrary to a verbal agreement Farley had made with the president before he

left the administration. Farley was convinced that he had secured the position for a Rockland County man, Al Bryant. He then told New York senator James Mead that he also objected to a judicial appointment given to Mathias F. Correa, on the grounds that Correa was a protégé of Tom Corcoran and that, if the rumors were right, Corcoran's brother would be made Correa's first assistant.<sup>20</sup>

Farley interpreted these appointments as evidence that Roosevelt was making a personal attack on the Democratic Party organization in New York State. He had of course always been disturbed by Roosevelt's willingness to disregard "the rules of the game," whether it be by supporting independents or Republicans against party regulars, ignoring seniority in making appointments, or bypassing the usual political channels in order to prevent opponents from obstructing his favored course. Now that Farley's assigned role was no longer that of bridging and smoothing over conflicts between New Deal aspirations and the demands of party regularity, he was free to take sides. Even on the delicate subject of the administration's conduct of foreign policy, Farley's stance was one of studied noncooperation. Though he tried, for the most part successfully, to ensure that he was not portrayed by politicians or by the press as anti-British—a charge to which Farley, as a Roman Catholic of Irish descent, was particularly vulnerable—he stubbornly refused to advocate administration initiatives openly. He declined offers, for example, to make speeches designed to persuade the Irish Free State to allow Great Britain to use its naval bases.<sup>21</sup>

Farley's presidential prospects were not best served by a policy that combined noncooperation with the Roosevelt administration with a laundry list of relatively minor complaints about patronage. The worsening war situation in Europe and his conspicuous lack of expertise in foreign policy made it difficult and dangerous for Farley to criticize the government's diplomatic and military initiatives. Instead, Farley bided his time and waited for the election season to return to New York—city and state—so that he could concentrate his fire on the administration from a position of knowledge and strength. The mayoral and gubernatorial elections in 1941 and 1942 represented Farley's two major opportunities to inflict serious, lasting damage on the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal. Electoral politics was Farley's specialty, and his stran-

glehold on the state's party organization was firm, especially upstate. If ever there was a chance to place the traditional party apparatus back at the center of the Democratic Party's affairs—at least in New York State—this was it. If the ploy worked, then Farley might launch himself for the presidency in 1944, something that he had thought about and planned for since his failure to win the nomination in August 1940.<sup>22</sup>

Farley might have chosen a showdown for the New York mayoralty against his old foe La Guardia, with whom he had clashed in the 1933 and 1937 contests. In July 1941, national party chairman Ed Flynn conferred with Farley to establish whether he wanted to run. Through the spring and summer, there had been a concerted movement promoting Farley for mayor. In March 1941, while he was in South America, the *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that his friends were promoting him for either the mayoralty or the governorship and that none of the Republican contenders were strong enough to defeat him. On his return, Farley insisted that he was not a candidate, but that did not stop the clamor. By the end of June, with a subway strike further eroding La Guardia's support, the committee promoting Farley for mayor had collected ten thousand signatures for a petition asking their man to make the race. Only in early July, when he repeated that he was not interested in the mayoralty, did the movement to draft Farley finally die.<sup>23</sup>

Farley was wise to avoid the mayoral contest. Labor unrest, economic dislocation, fuel shortages, and racial tensions exacerbated by the process of war mobilization were not a good recipe for a trouble-free mayoralty, especially for a man positioning himself for a presidential bid in 1944. Avoiding the mayoralty allowed Farley to keep his options open for 1942, when, despite his promises to the Coca-Cola board, the governorship just might be an option. The situation in 1941 was not, then, like 1938, when he had turned down Roosevelt's suggestion that he seek the gubernatorial nomination. The earlier decision represented a genuine missed opportunity for Farley to bolster his chances of gaining the presidential nomination in 1940. But after his anti-third-term stand at the Chicago convention, he felt that obtaining elective office was even less important to his future credibility as a presidential candidate than it had been previously. Given his preeminent status in New York State politics, he could quite easily maintain his public profile and increase his popular support while running other people's campaigns.

Farley told Ed Flynn that the Democrats had a wonderful opportunity to oust Fiorello La Guardia in 1941. In the mob-busting attorney William O'Dwyer, the Democrats had a strong candidate. Although La Guardia was still popular, he was also attracting mounting opposition among businessmen, real estate interests, and the mugwumpish Republican progressives who previously had backed the mayor despite their distaste for his earthy, unpredictable political style. The American Labor Party, which previously had held the balance of power in New York City and had strongly supported La Guardia since its creation in 1936, was an increasingly fragmented and fractious body. Further, La Guardia's work for the Office of Civilian Defense in Washington left him open to the charge that his time-consuming war duties meant he was unable to give his mayoral work proper attention.<sup>24</sup>

The 1941 campaign was an unedifying and vitriolic affair in which neither of the candidates managed to stake out a consistent and coherent position on the economic and social issues that most concerned New Yorkers. The campaign was unsatisfactory for Farley, because while it gave him a chance to attack his bitter rival, La Guardia, it proved difficult to land any significant blows on the New Deal and its supporters within the Democratic Party. New York City's politics was too messy and convoluted to allow Farley to make an unambiguous, principled stand against the administration on the issues that he cared about most—party organization and defending party regulars against the encroachments of the New Deal. President Roosevelt endorsed La Guardia, but both national party chairman Ed Flynn and long-serving New York governor Herbert Lehman opposed him. Flynn called La Guardia a “demagogue of demagogues, the greatest faker on the American political scene, the most super-colossal hypocrite in the political life of this country.” Farley agreed with that assessment. Rather than criticizing La Guardia's policies or New Deal connections, Farley campaigned, on O'Dwyer's behalf, on character issues (contrasting the “cad” La Guardia with the “gentleman” O'Dwyer) and employed red-baiting.<sup>25</sup>

In the last week of the campaign, Farley made five major speeches assailing the mayor's character and seeking to slur him as a Communist. Farley painted La Guardia as a morally repellent figure, a “liar,” a man “temperamentally unfit to be mayor.” La Guardia's opponents focused their attacks on a statement the mayor made insinuating that the New

York State Court of Appeals, whose chief judge was the governor's brother, Irving Lehman, was corrupt. La Guardia had been angered by the court's decision to call void the recent election for a new state controller and had responded by taking to the airwaves to make a speech in Yiddish, during the course of which he referred to the governor as a "goniff," a term of abuse meaning "thieving scoundrel." In exaggerated terms, Farley described La Guardia's words as "the vilest, the most depraved, that have ever been, to my knowledge, used by anyone, in any time, in all the years that I have lived." It seems that Farley, whom La Guardia had already called a "cabbage head" and "Farley the Flop," allowed his personal enmity for the Little Flower to cloud his judgment.<sup>26</sup>

Farley's failed attempt at character assassination was linked to his argument that La Guardia's candidacy was a front for Communism. Anti-Communist red-baiting was a new weapon in Farley's political armory, but he did not hesitate to use it. He began his speech on November 1, for example, by stating bluntly, "Fiorello La Guardia is the candidate for Mayor of the Communist party." Farley explained that La Guardia's adviser, Vito Marcantonio, was a Communist and that Paul Kern, whom the mayor had appointed to the Civil Service Commission, had "been shown to be identified with nearly every communist cause in the past six or more years." In an equally tendentious statement, Farley asserted that La Guardia was stacking the City Welfare Department with Communist sympathizers, that he had failed to counter the threat of Communism in the city's schools and colleges until the state legislature stepped in, and that he had allowed Communist union locals to exhibit at the Civilian Defense Exposition.<sup>27</sup>

Farley's opportunistic campaign of moral indignation on William O'Dwyer's behalf was an ignoble failure. La Guardia's combination of liberal principles, support for organized labor, rhetoric of good government, and carefully crafted ghetto populism worked its magic one last time, and the Little Flower was returned to city hall for an unprecedented third term. William O'Dwyer was forced to wait until 1945—when La Guardia decided not to run—to win the mayoralty. During the war, La Guardia relied on the force of his personality, on his association with the president, and on evoking nostalgic memories of past reform-

ing crusades to maintain his motley and increasingly divided coalition. He failed to leave a lasting institutional legacy or to make major structural changes to the politics of New York City. However, he did demonstrate that despite—or perhaps even because of—his rather undisciplined and idiosyncratic brand of progressive politics, he could defy the established parties in the nation's most populous city. What greater affront to Farley's party-driven political convictions could there possibly be?<sup>28</sup>

The answer, as it happened, was not long in coming. The complexity of New York City's politics, with its wide variety of political organizations and multitude of crosscutting alliances, had substantially diluted Farley's chances of gaining revenge on the New Deal by thwarting Fiorello La Guardia's mayoral bid in 1941. The predominance of questions of personal character and moral fitness represented further distractions from Farley's political cause. Even if he had succeeded in masterminding La Guardia's defeat, that would have been only an indirect blow to the New Deal's prestige. Farley's prime concern, after all, was the Democratic Party, and his mission was to prevent any further erosion of the powers and prerogatives of the party's local and state organizations.

The contest for the Democratic nomination for governor of New York in 1942 contained all the ingredients that the 1941 mayoral election lacked. In this direct struggle for control over the future of the New York State Democratic Party, the forces of New Deal liberalism were arrayed more or less unequivocally against Farley's loyal supporters in the state and local party organizations. Consequently, the battle for the 1942 gubernatorial nomination and the election campaign that followed transcended New York State politics and took on a greater national significance. In this sense, the 1942 campaign bears comparison to Richard Nixon's victory over Helen Gahagan Douglas for a Senate seat in California in 1950 or Ronald Reagan's equally successful gubernatorial campaign against Pat Brown in the same state in 1966. But whereas, in hindsight, these latter examples are important because they pointed dramatically and unambiguously to the flowering of the careers of future presidents and the emerging political forces they represented, the 1942 contest instead marked the end of an era, the era in which Jim Farley, a

failed presidential nominee with a political style redolent of the pre–New Deal period, dominated party politics in New York State.<sup>29</sup>

Jim Farley described the contest for the 1942 New York gubernatorial nomination as “the most important political fight I was ever engaged in, not excepting the third term.” He regarded his success in securing the nomination of Attorney General John J. Bennett over the New Deal candidate, Senator James Mead, as “one of the greatest demonstrations of democracy and loyalty ever seen in this country.” It was a contest that reaffirmed his conviction that local state party organizations operating in the context of a two-party system and abiding by the precepts of party regularity were the best guarantors of democracy in the United States. Farley had held these beliefs since he first entered New York State politics in the 1910s; by 1942, they were reinforced by the specter of dictatorship, both abroad—most prominently in the form of fascism in Europe and Communism in the Soviet Union—and at home, where Franklin D. Roosevelt was approaching the ninth year of his presidency.<sup>30</sup>

As Farley explained in *Jim Farley’s Story*, Roosevelt’s sin in 1942 was his violation of “the cardinal political tenet of non-intervention in local matters.” He castigated his former boss for repeating the mistakes of the 1938 purge campaign. In self-righteous fashion, Farley compared his own conduct in 1940 with the president’s in 1942.

Even though the contest was in [Roosevelt’s] own state, he should not have interfered, particularly in time of war. As in the case of the unsuccessful purge, he did not do what party regularity demanded—support the candidate of the convention at once. Instead he sulked, as he had after the purge defeats, and withheld prompt support from Bennett. The result was that the Democrats lost New York State, not only that fall but again in 1946.

The evils which have beset the party in New York, like those which plagued the party nationally, may be traced to the violation of the rules of regularity. After the 1940 convention, in which I was a participant, I bowed to the will of the party and supported the third term, even though I had no sympathy with the precedent breaking and was



certain that it would be harmful in the long run, not only because it was shattering American tradition but also because it was denying other men within the party their chance to come to the top.

Farley concluded his lesson by asserting that the Democratic Party's survival depended on continued adherence to "the rules of the game."<sup>31</sup>

The rules of the game looked very different from the perspective of Roosevelt's New Deal supporters. Bennett may have been a workmanlike attorney general, but he was not regarded as an outstanding liberal; his ties to the American Legion and to anti-Roosevelt party stalwarts, such as Farley, made the president's supporters suspicious of Bennett, especially as he was not widely recognized as a supporter of organized labor. As early as January 1942, the *New York Times* was criticizing Farley's advocacy of Bennett, asserting that Bennett was a weak candidate with a shallow base of support. This assessment was unfair to the extent that Bennett had outperformed Governor Herbert Lehman in both the 1936 and 1938 gubernatorial elections, a point that Farley strenuously made to Roosevelt in a letter written in early June of 1942, shortly before Senator Mead was introduced into the fray. The New Dealers' criticisms of Bennett were also undermined by the fact that Bennett would almost certainly have been the gubernatorial candidate in 1938 had Farley not managed to persuade Lehman to run again.<sup>32</sup>

The real issue for Roosevelt Democrats was denying Farley the opportunity to control the New York State delegation to the 1944 Democratic National Convention, since such control might enable those against a fourth term to obstruct Roosevelt's renomination or to prevent the president from choosing his successor should he decide to stand aside. Some, including the assistant secretary of state, Adolf Berle (anticipating the Dixiecrat revolt), thought Farley might even opt to split the party by throwing his support behind a breakaway bloc of southern conservatives. Farley himself hinted that such a split was a possibility in a private memorandum written in February 1942.

I think that no matter how bitter a partisan a man may be he thinks of his country first, and a situation may develop in 1944 if the President attempts to run again which will bring about a big split in the Demo-

cratic Party and there is no way of telling what kind of coalition will be formed.<sup>33</sup>

In an earlier, more party-driven era, Bennett's nomination would not have been contested. By 1942, however, the New Deal had helped to create a political environment in which Roosevelt's supporters rejected and confronted Farley's argument that Bennett should claim the prize of the nomination merely on the basis that, in terms of seniority, he was next in line and, as such, the inevitable choice of the state party leaders. The national Democratic Party leadership, having shed, in Farley's form, the last vestiges of its association with pre-New Deal party politics, was in thrall to a new set of political imperatives, which informed the decision to challenge Bennett. Why should Bennett take precedence over a proven liberal, such as James Mead? Surely the fact that the New Deal was in retreat in 1942, battered by accusations of economic mismanagement, only served to strengthen the case for giving an out-and-out New Deal liberal the chance to prove the detractors wrong.

It would of course be foolish to argue that the ferocity of the power struggle over the New York State Democratic gubernatorial nomination was purely the product of the clashing of abstract political forces. Undoubtedly, the contest was permeated by personal enmity, as much between Roosevelt and Farley as between the actual candidates, Mead and Bennett. On Farley's side, this emerges very clearly from a conversation with *New York Times* journalist Jim Haggerty, recorded by Farley in his diary in mid-April 1942. Haggerty told Farley that he had heard that Roosevelt wanted Owen D. Young to be the gubernatorial candidate. Farley responded by saying that "there would not be a chance for Young" and that "all Bennett had to do would be to announce his candidacy." He added, "the Democrats are sick and tired of having someone [Lehman] in Albany to whom they cannot go." Farley told Haggerty "that Bennett had always been 100 percent with the Democratic leaders and that I was going to be for him and that the party organization was for him—that I was for him win, lose or draw." Farley concluded by gleefully informing Haggerty that "Roosevelt had always been peeved because he could not control New York State." He explained that Roosevelt "could not prevent twenty or thirty fellows from voting for me for

the Presidential nomination,” adding, “I could have had more if I had forced it, and he knows now that our crowd is in control of the State organization.”<sup>34</sup>

The Bennett-Mead contest provided a forum in which Farley and Roosevelt’s disagreements over the 1938 purge campaign and the 1940 third-term election were continued. Even after Bennett had won the nomination, Farley did most of the campaigning. Bennett barely said a word. Through much of the second half of 1942, Farley and Roosevelt’s supporters tore each other to shreds at the Democratic Party’s expense; the result was a comfortable victory for Thomas Dewey. The Farley-Roosevelt dispute dominated the campaign, completely overshadowing the issues that most concerned New York State’s voters—how to alleviate war shortages and ensure administrative competence in state and national government war agencies. The Democratic National Committee only discovered this in early 1943, when they conducted their campaign postmortem.<sup>35</sup>

It is tempting to portray the 1942 battle in purely personal terms, as Farley’s attempt to inflict revenge on Roosevelt for Farley’s defeat at the 1940 national convention. Certainly, Farley’s private memoranda show that he was very consciously working to secure control of the New York State Democratic Party in 1942 with a view to challenging Roosevelt or an alternative New Deal presidential candidate in 1944. Indeed, in accounts of the 1942 contest, both Warren Moscow, in the 1940s, and William Shannon, in the 1960s, offer this revenge thesis as the best explanation of Farley’s motives. Shannon described Farley’s performance at the Brooklyn convention as an act of “ruthless and irresponsible bossism.” Similarly, John Syrett, writing in more measured tones in 1975 (a year before Farley’s death), challenged the sincerity of Farley’s argument that Bennett deserved the nomination because of his past contributions and popularity with the party rank and file.<sup>36</sup>

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss Farley’s position out of hand, as if it were no more than the product of personal enmity. In 1942, both Roosevelt and the New Dealers, on the one hand, and Farley and his supporters in the state party, on the other, acted in accordance with their political principles and with the broader political forces informing them. The Mead candidacy reflected the commitment of Roosevelt and the

New Dealers to sustaining the future of liberal reform. It represented a politics that was driven by ideas, dependent for its success on support from interest groups (especially from organized labor), and conceived of as part of a national campaign. In contrast, as with his bid for the presidential nomination in 1940, Farley's opposition to the New Deal was bloody-minded, shortsighted, and probably, in the long run, futile. But it was no joke and should not be written off as simply a case of an entrenched party leader calling in his chips. Farley's belief in adherence to the code of party regularity and the due recognition of party seniority was more than a convenient pose. The belief that state parties should be free to choose their own candidates and that they should at all times function without presidential interference was central to Farley's largely nonideological and locally oriented political creed. The 1942 gubernatorial race, therefore, was as much a battle of competing political styles, assumptions, and practices as it was a battle of revenge-fueled personalities.

Farley's insistence on Bennett's candidacy wrecked any chance the Democrats might have had of defeating Thomas Dewey and more or less ensured that there would be a Republican governor of New York for the first time since 1922. Bennett's defeat marked the end of a political era. Not only did it reveal that, after more than a decade of political preeminence, Farley's political power in New York State was gravely weakened, but it also demonstrated that the localized, party-driven politics that Farley had learned during his upstate apprenticeship in the 1910s and 1920s had lost its place at the heart of American politics.

In the 1942 campaign, Dewey's strength and Bennett's lukewarm relationship with organized labor were not the only problems for anxious New Dealers. Adolf Berle, who was instrumental in promoting Roosevelt's candidate, James Mead, and in liaising between Democratic New Dealers and the American Labor Party, was convinced that the Bennett-Farley campaign would attract damaging support from the radically isolationist Christian Front. "You cannot," Berle wrote in a letter to the president, "make the ALP and the independent Democrats swallow an isolationist ticket." Neither Bennett nor Farley, it should be said, made any isolationist statements in the course of the campaign. Farley was critical of the way the war was being managed and administrated, but both men were broadly in favor of Roosevelt's military and diplomatic initia-

tives. This did not, however, prevent the liberal press, notably the *New Republic* and the *Nation*, from printing articles arguing that a large proportion of Bennett's support came from isolationist and Coughlinite groups. While some such extremists would undoubtedly vote for Bennett, it was also true that Mead's strategy, if he won the nomination, would to some extent rely on extremist support in the form of ALP Communists.<sup>37</sup>

In analyzing the relative vote-winning merits of Bennett and Mead, it is difficult to give a plausible counter to the Roosevelt loyalists' view that it was impossible for Bennett to win in 1942. In 1938, Thomas Dewey, calling himself a New Deal Republican, came within sixty-five thousand votes of defeating Herbert Lehman for the governorship. A total of 4.7 million votes were cast, and only the ALP's 420,000 votes tipped the balance in Lehman's favor. Surely, then, Bennett, who was without ALP support, would be defeated. What the New Dealers omitted to mention, as Herbert Lehman conceded many years later, was that it was equally difficult to see how James Mead could have won.<sup>38</sup>

Dewey was a formidable opponent with a strong organizational base in New York State. By 1942, Dewey's recent conversion to internationalism had served to disassociate him from his party's isolationist wing, thus further broadening the base of his potential support. Even if Mead had been the Democratic candidate from the start and had received unequivocal backing from both the state party organization and President Roosevelt, it is quite probable that Dewey would still have won.<sup>39</sup>

In any case, Mead's belated candidacy bitterly divided the Democratic Party, causing tremendous resentment among the party rank and file. The strength of this feeling was clearly demonstrated at the Brooklyn convention, in the middle of August 1942, when Senator Robert Wagner and Governor Herbert Lehman were booed during their speeches on Mead's behalf. Pandemonium broke out several times during one of the convention speeches for Mead, in which Albany party leader Bill Byrnes argued that the only sensible course was to select the candidate who could attract ALP support. Only Farley's repeated interventions and insistence that Byrnes was an old friend enabled him to complete the speech, the end of which was drowned out by derisive laughter.<sup>40</sup>

The view put forward in the liberal press that all the rancor could have been avoided if Roosevelt had declared his support for Mead in early

1942 was wishful thinking, for it neglected to recognize Farley's pervasive influence and control over the New York State party organization. Farley had too many friends in the state party, and there were too many other Democrats deeply indebted to Farley on political grounds, for the result to go any other way. Roosevelt's liberal critics did not account sufficiently for the extent to which the war restricted Roosevelt's room for political maneuver. The only point on which Roosevelt can be fairly criticized is that he approved Herbert Lehman's decision to issue a statement in May 1942 in which the governor announced that he would not stand for a fifth term. Lehman later described this decision as a "serious political mistake" because it gave a signal to Farley and Bennett that they could start rounding up delegates, thus negating Lehman's ability to influence the choice of his successor.<sup>41</sup>

By the time that Mead formally entered the race with Roosevelt's explicit backing, on July 22, just four weeks before the Brooklyn convention, Farley had already gained pledges of support for Bennett from most of the leading figures in the New York State Democratic Party, including almost all of the major upstate leaders, except those from Albany, Utica, Erie County, and Syracuse. Despite Roosevelt's open advocacy of Mead's bid for the nomination and despite a concerted effort on the part of the president and his backers to sway opinion in Mead's favor, Bennett won the nomination with the overall support of fifty-one of New York State's sixty-two counties and of forty-five of the sixty-two county chairmen. He won the decisive delegate vote by a margin of 623 to 393.<sup>42</sup>

After the convention, Bennett only ever received halfhearted backing from the president. An apathetic electorate, alienated by the Democrats' indulgence in internecine feuding at the expense of the home-front issues that concerned them, handed Dewey an easy victory. Dewey won 2 million votes to Bennett's 1.5 million. The ALP improved on their 1938 showing by picking up over four hundred thousand votes and proceeded gleefully to celebrate Farley's defeat.<sup>43</sup>

If, as Farley claimed, the 1942 gubernatorial nomination battle was a victory for the political ideas and practices that he held dear—political loyalty and party regularity—then it was a Pyrrhic victory in the extreme. From 1942 onward, Farley retained the affection of like-

minded party stalwarts and the respect of those who had seen him operate in his prime—when his political goals had complemented, rather than contradicted, those of President Roosevelt. But despite sporadic, unsuccessful attempts to resume his career, he was, in New York State at least, a much diminished figure whose political influence was rapidly fading. After all, it was difficult to meet the patronage needs of county leaders or operate effectively as a party leader without either presidential or gubernatorial backing. It made little sense to stay on as state party chairman in such circumstances. It came as no surprise when Farley resigned, on June 8, 1944. Resigning at this time, before the national party convention, allowed Farley to avoid the embarrassment of going to Chicago as a party leader voting in opposition to the bulk of his state delegation, most of whom favored the president's renomination for a fourth term.<sup>44</sup>

The 1942 defeat did not signal a fundamental change in voter preferences in New York State. In presidential elections for instance, Roosevelt carried New York in 1944, and though Truman lost it in 1948, that was largely due to the inroads made by Henry Wallace's Progressive Party. Upstate New York, despite pockets of Democratic strength, remained overwhelmingly Republican; and New York City remained strongly Democratic, just as it had been when Farley first entered Al Smith's circle in 1918. Even in 1946, when Dewey won 58.6 percent of the vote in retaining the governorship, the Republicans were unable to win a majority below the Bronx line.<sup>45</sup>

The fiasco of the 1942 gubernatorial convention did, however, signal the beginning of the unraveling of the formidable state organizational apparatus that Farley had built up from the 1920s onward, which had made Farley's name and provided a platform for Franklin Roosevelt's first bid for the presidency. In the three or four years after 1942, there was, in former governor Herbert Lehman's words, "an almost complete change in the county leadership." Farley admitted partial responsibility for this organizational collapse in a private memorandum written at the end of July 1944.

Our county organizations have been upset . . . because of the difference between myself and the national administration and there has

been a let down in the party leadership in the counties, and in the state party organization. There have been a number of changes all around the state.<sup>46</sup>

This organizational collapse did not mean that, due to the workings of some abstract cyclical historical force, the New York State Democratic Party had reverted to the dilapidated state that Roosevelt and Farley had found it in when they first joined forces in the 1920s. On the contrary, New York State's politics, like the nation's, had experienced permanent and irreversible change. Some of this change was due to forces quite beyond Farley's political control. Farley could hardly be held responsible for the suburbanization of New York City or the redistribution of population within the five boroughs that made inevitable the weakening of Tammany Hall. Nor was he responsible for the war's impact on the economic and social status of, for instance, women, African Americans, and other minority groups. But in other ways, Farley did make a significant and lasting contribution to the politics of his home state.

Farley showed that by combining organizational zeal and political skill, it was possible to make the upstate Democratic Party into a potent force. That in itself was an important legacy. Further, for fifteen years, he was the key figure in binding together the disparate elements of the state party, bringing under one umbrella a diverse array of county organizations and city machines and thus giving the New York State Democratic Party an unprecedented degree of organizational coherence. He also managed—albeit reluctantly, imperfectly, and temporarily—to harness the state party organization to the New Deal's progressive goals. This, not his stand against the New Deal on behalf of John J. Bennett in 1942, was Farley's greatest achievement in New York State politics. The tragedy of Farley's career, both in New York and nationally, was that he was incapable of adapting to the new political environment he had helped to create. The marginalization of the predominantly party-driven politics of the pre-New Deal era left Farley stranded. Though he intermittently tried to return to center stage in New York State and though he retained a formidable reputation as a political sage and powerful behind-the-scenes operator, the reality was that, by the mid-1940s at the very latest, his time had passed.