

You Have Very Little Time To Change Your Thinking

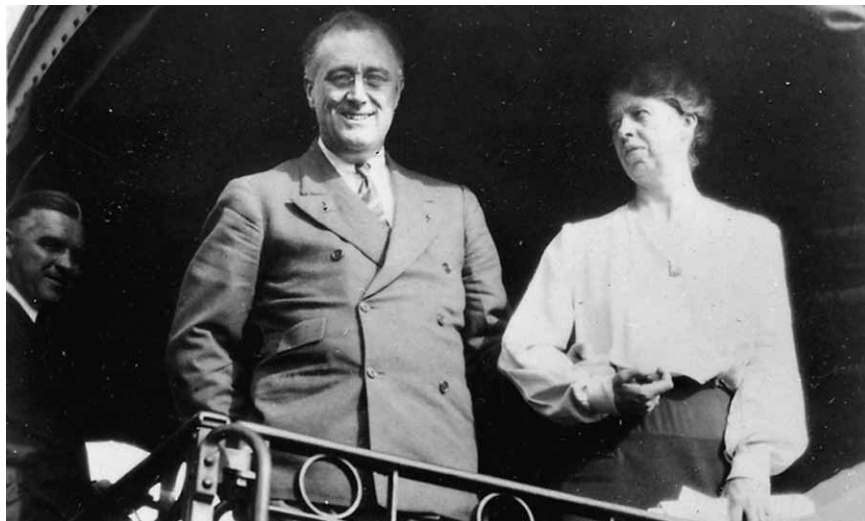
Dec. 2—Bob Wesser interviews Phil Rubinstein on Roosevelt's struggle with polio.

In an Emergency Nationwide Fireside Chat on Nov. 25, Thanksgiving eve, when the world stood on the brink of war after Turkey had downed a Russian bomber, Lyndon LaRouche said that the American people have to mobilize to educate themselves, and to grasp that the values that they have been taught to adopt, have actually corrupted them. It's not just a question of cleaning up people in general, but that people have to be brought to understand that there are certain diseases with which they themselves have infected their own minds. But how can you ask them to do that if you haven't done it yourself? You can't.

Wesser: Recently Mr. LaRouche, in a discussion with associates, addressed the question of the required leadership today. And in this regard, the example of the shift in thinking of Franklin D. Roosevelt was brought up, and I understand you have a few comments on that.

Rubinstein: Yes, I think that FDR is a very interesting case, because the matter must be seen from the standpoint of leadership; because he was part of a patrician class, if you want to call it that, in the United States, and he was a political person from the time he was in his late twenties. He was elected to office; he was a State Representative and so forth. And he thought of himself as being a leader with a potential leadership in the future.

But he had a certain level of illusion,—and in fact, in the early part of the Twentieth Century, the country was going through some of the worst leadership possible in Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, both of whom were Confederate sympathizers, or even Con-



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Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor aboard a campaign train during his 1932 run for the Presidency.

federates themselves,—and the country was headed into a great crisis. FDR was political, was against corruption, and was not a bad person, but I think he was limited. He owed a great deal to his reasonable appearance, his background, a quality of intelligence,—and some ambition. He had the ambition to be a political leader. But he certainly was not prepared for the crises that the country was about to face. Not only going through World War I, but of course, the collapse of the economy into the Great Depression, much of which was already underway in the mid-1920s in the farm sector, which he was aware of.

Now, what was it that made Roosevelt the leader that he became, which came to fruition in his Governorship in 1928,—what made him capable of taking on Wall Street in 1932 and 1933? As he uniquely did, and said so specifically, which is something like the kind of courage that we need from ourselves and from political leaders today, with respect to Obama and Wall Street. They have to be removed! We have to have people with the courage to say, “We don’t need these people, we don’t need this leadership, this is evil.”

What gave Franklin Roosevelt, a relatively, shall we

say, somewhat superficial political figure when he was first elected to political office, and when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War I,—he may have done some good things, but he was far short of being the unique leader that led the world through the Depression and the War, and to this day remains the legacy, the point of reference,—not of imitation simply, in the sense of formal imitation,—but in the sense of imitating his courage. And I think what we know about this situation is the crisis that he went through on contracting polio at the age of 39, where he had just run for Vice President; he was an up-and-coming politician, etc., and now, his entire life was undermined.

Why? Partly because of appearances. The appearance of weakness, the inability to walk,—and of course, this was deeply depressing. We know that Franklin Roosevelt went through deep depression. Like many people, he tried to convince himself he was going to walk again. He struggled to make himself somewhat mobile. There are some things that almost make you wince even hearing them. Once I went out to Hyde Park, and he described dragging himself down the road to the entrance of Hyde Park,—I think it was a mile or more,—and he literally dragged himself down that road to build strength, thinking that eventually he could walk. Much of this is well known now,—the heavy metal braces he had to wear later on. In fact, this is part of why the British knew that eventually he would die at a relatively young age,—because of the consequences of being a paraplegic.

But what he did during that period, was he recognized that his physical presence was not the essential nature of his being. He was a human being. He had a mind. Other human beings had minds. And so, he went through, not just a reflection on himself, but he began to recognize what he had to be, to be a real leader to lift people out of weakness.

An Optimistic View

His Labor Secretary, Frances Perkins, was one of the few people who worked with him through the Gov-



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Three years after being stricken by polio, FDR begins to re-enter politics. Here he greets New York politicians, including Gov. Al Smith (to FDR's right), in August of 1924.

ernorship, the whole period, knew him during this entire period. She had been herself very significant in New York, and she said, later on, that he didn't really like people very much (this is as a younger man). She said he had

a youthful lack of humility, a streak of self-righteousness, and a deafness to the hopes, fears and aspirations which are the common lot. The marvel is that these handicaps were washed out of him by life, experience, punishment, and his capacity to grow. He once said to me when he was President, "You know, I was an awfully mean cuss, when I first went into politics."

She goes on to say that Franklin Roosevelt underwent a spiritual transformation during the years of his illness.

I noticed that he came back, that the years of pain and suffering had purged the slightly arrogant attitude. The man emerged completely warm-hearted, with humility of spirit and with a deeper philosophy. Having been to the depths of trouble, he understood the problems of people in trouble. He believed that Divine Providence had

intervened to save him from total paralysis, despair and death.

So, that is one reflection.

Eleanor Roosevelt talks about the way in which he became a deeper person. He had a more open sense of other human beings. And I think there was an intellectual development. Things that he may have believed somewhat, an orientation through some of his family ties to Alexander Hamilton,—this became deeper. He studied the history of the United States, the founding of the United States. He even began a book, which I do not think he got that far on, but he did a lot of work on it. He began to understand what the founding of the United States was about. So, when he was the President and earlier Governor, he, like Hamilton, took on the financiers,—and, in fact, even more, Roosevelt took on Wall Street, which had destroyed the United States.

So it was both. These are not separate: it was an emotional development, it was a reflection on himself, and an intellectual development, bringing together the courage to fight for certain ideas. And that really was the unique development of a leader in the Twentieth Century who saved the United States, who saved the world from Fascism and its consequences. This is the kind of depth that is required to effectively challenge the presumptive leadership today, which has failed to remove Obama, and failed to shut down Wall Street,—and there are other examples of this in history, which I think are similar.

Wesser: To follow up on this. This is quite fascinating, because the whole discussion came up in Mr. LaRouche's emergency [Fireside Chat](#) of last Wednesday, in response to a gentleman enquiring, "How are we going to get the American people to rise up and demand Obama's ouster?" And LaRouche said, "Well there is no systemic principle inherent in anybody that is preventing this." So this is quite an optimistic view, and I guess what you are getting at here is that this is something that is universal.

Rubinstein: Right, and in fact, I will give you a very interesting other example, which is the case of Beethoven. Whereas, people know, he lost his hearing,—actually he lost his hearing in the late 1790s, when he was probably in his mid-20s. He wrote a famous statement called the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, which he kept for himself,—he wrote it to his brothers,

but I don't think he ever actually sent it to his brothers, and he writes this in 1802, when he is in his early thirties. But he says his hearing had been deteriorating for seven years, and then he says that it was "only my art which held me back," and he means from ending his life. "So it seemed it was impossible to me to leave this world before I produced all that I felt capable of producing. So I prolonged this wretched existence."

Now, what did he do in prolonging his existence? I mean, he was already a virtuoso, but now he was dedicated to developing musical art to the level of inspiring populations to making the necessary political changes,—to bring forth the development of other human beings like himself, for he was, as they would say in those days, a commoner. And, of course, he did, and much of his great work was produced, in his case, later in his life, after this. For him it was art, he lived for art.

He Could Bring them Back

I think in the case of Franklin Roosevelt, he knew he was a political leader, a practitioner of what Friedrich Schiller called the "highest form of art," statecraft. That was Franklin Roosevelt's calling. Initially, somewhat from the standpoint of the *noblesse oblige* of a patrician. That was when he was a younger man. Now what he goes through—he couldn't walk—now he lost all the things that were part of his personal appearance. He was six feet two inches tall, good-looking, bright, and so on and so forth, charming. I don't think he was too superficial, but he was limited. What he saw with the polio, was that all those things are ephemeral. What you really are, is not just your mind, but your willingness to take on a mission of producing something for humanity's future.

I think it is interesting, for example, that he was pre-occupied in a different way with Warm Springs. He would go there all the time, and he loved to spend time with the people who came there. He created Warm Springs as kind of a cure place for polio victims, and he would spend the time with them. He called for research into polio, but he wanted to spend time with these people. He made the point that everybody who came to Warm Springs showed signs of improvement.

I think that was something of a way-station in his development, which he always recognized the importance of for him, for himself, for his own development. He was giving to other people, and he saw the need to do that, and he saw what you could get. You could bring people back from despair; you could bring them back from depression, you could even bring them back from

medical illness. And he saw this as a social obligation, so when he became the Governor of New York,—as I said, he always maintained his attachment to Warm Springs,—but when he became the Governor of New York, he was the one who implemented what would become the predecessors of unemployment insurance, of the federal guarantee for banking deposits, ultimately Social Security, and other such related phenomena.

As I said, he took on Wall Street; he basically took over public infrastructure. Now Warm Springs was an exemplification of much of that. It was a very different person, who had a very different sense of identity, but it was a political sense of identity. And this was his mission in life, to which he was dedicated,—and he learned something about what the nature of that mission was; and he dedicated himself to that future.

Eleanor Roosevelt, during his period of—really going through this crisis— she went out and basically represented their political view for the first time in her life, and though I don't think she would have called it that, she was a political spokesperson. She also of course, worked with him,—though it was a very difficult time,—through the poliomyelitis, and this whole experience of Warm Springs. He created the spa,—he created this,—and then he came back and there were ten patients, then seventeen patients, and he went before the Medical Board and said that these people were showing improvement. I mean, he probably hoped for a cure. But this was a powerful statement about a disease that only produced despair.

And what Lyn [LaRouche] was saying Wednesday night, is people say “How do you do it?”—“You can't do it,” “We're impotent,” and they wallow in a certain kind of despair. Well, Franklin Roosevelt faced a certain depth of despair, and answered by, in a sense, elevating himself; teaching himself history, teaching himself elements of economics. And becoming thereby not only a better person, but developing in himself a sense of mission, that gave him the kind of courage to do what no other political leader dared to do. The failure of that quality of leadership is what happened in Germany.

Wesser: So I guess you would say that, in the case of Franklin Roosevelt, not only was he very, very close to death itself,—he barely survived the disease,—but



FDR talks with fellow polio patients in Warm Springs, Georgia, the rehabilitation facility which he funded, and was open to any polio victim in the country.

he then understood also, I believe, that his life was not going to be long. This was not a man who would have longevity, and in a certain sense, then, committed himself, in the way you are posing it, to defeating death, or achieving a certain kind of immortality,—but in a political field,—which at that point was vital to the United States and the entire world.

Rubinstein: Yes, he committed himself to the future of humanity. Later in his life, of course, he ran for a fourth term, I think there is some truth in what you are saying. People did not live long; medical circumstances were quite different; polio itself was often fatal. He was aware, at least, of that. To the very end of his life, he put himself on the line. At Yalta, for example, he was often criticized, but he knew exactly what he was doing at Yalta. And, for example, he knew that he had to negotiate with Stalin; he knew what the Russians had gone through in World War II. He stood as a bulwark against Churchill and Churchill's desire to go to war,—and the fact that he had, at the age of 62, suffered twenty years or more as a paraplegic, did not stop him.

And, of course, had he lived, he had a vision of what the United Nations should be, and so forth, and he had the partnership of Eleanor during all this, despite the slanders against them. And in that sense his mission in life is what guided his leadership beyond all other concerns, including concerns for his simple mortal life.