
“Old” Democrats and New Deal Politics: Claude G. Bowers, James A. Farley, and the Changing Democratic Party, 1933–1940

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Claude G. Bowers's career as a writer, scholar, and diplomat has been well documented by historians. Born in Westfield, Indiana, in 1878, Bowers distinguished himself for four decades as a historian—his classic works included *Jefferson and Hamilton: The Struggle for Democracy in America* (1925) and *Beveridge and the Progressive Era* (1932)—and as a journalist who wrote for the Indianapolis *Sentinel*, Terre Haute *Star*, and Fort Wayne *Gazette* before moving to New York City in 1923 to work for the New York *World* and later the New York *Journal*. Bowers was an ardent Democrat, and his service to the party in the 1920s and his support of Franklin D. Roosevelt earned him an appointment in 1933 as ambassador to Spain and in 1939 as ambassador to Chile, where he was considered “among the most popular and successful envoys in Latin America” despite not being a professional diplomat and not speaking Spanish.¹

Bowers's role in Democratic politics prior to his appointment as ambassador in 1933 has also been highlighted in a number of studies, but his contribution to the party during the 1930s while serving

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¹ An overview of Claude G. Bowers's career and life can be found in his autobiography, Claude Bowers, *My Life: The Memoirs of Claude Bowers* (New York, 1962), and in Holman Hamilton and Gayle Thornbrough, eds., *Indianapolis in the Gay Nineties: The High School Diaries of Claude G. Bowers* (Indianapolis, 1964), 1-14. Other phases of his career are treated in Bowers, *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York, 1954), and *Chile through Embassy Windows, 1939–1953* (New York, 1958); Oliver Knight, “Claude G. Bowers, Historian,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, LII (September, 1956), 247-68; George C. Roberts, “Claude G. Bowers: Hoosier Historian and the Politics of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences*, XVII (1982), 61-69; Sabine Jessner and Peter J. Sehlinger, “Claude G. Bowers: A Partisan Hoosier,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXIII (September, 1987), 217-43. See, too, “The Reminiscences of Claude G. Bowers,” interview by Louis Starr, August 29, 30, 1959 (Columbia University Oral Research Office, New York City). A brief overview of Bowers's career to 1933 can also be found in the New York *Times*, April 4, 1933, p. 9. The assessment of Bowers as a diplomat is from Frank B. Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. IV, *Launching the New Deal* (Boston, 1973), 362.

as ambassador in Spain and Chile is less well known and detailed. Of special significance during these years is the close personal and political friendship that Bowers established with James A. Farley, Democratic national committee chairman and postmaster general from 1933 to 1940. At Farley's request Bowers continued to play an important part in party affairs as an advisor, speechwriter, and publicist while carrying out his duties as ambassador. The lengthy and revealing correspondence between these two men spans twenty years and documents Bowers's vital role in the Democratic party in the early 1930s, his frustration with the administration's policy toward the Spanish Civil War, and his close and candid friendship with Farley. More importantly, the correspondence provides a unique perspective on the changing nature of the Democratic party during the New Deal years. Loyal Democrats, Bowers and Farley belonged to a party that in 1932 was welded together by partisanship, patronage, and a commitment to party regularity. By 1940 politics and policymaking were altered under the far-reaching changes brought about by New Deal programs and Roosevelt's commitment to forging a new, liberal Democratic coalition. Bower's and Farley's letters reflect the significance of this New Deal realignment and reveal the frustrations of two men who often found these changes difficult to perceive and even harder to accept.

At first glance it is difficult to imagine two men such as Bowers and Farley developing a close friendship. Bowers's background as a native Hoosier, gifted scholar, and successful journalist contrasted with Farley's life as a part-time businessman and professional politician from Rockland County, New York. Yet the men were similar in personality and political background. Both were personable, humble, hardworking, and ambitious; and both were ardent Democrats who toyed briefly, but mostly unsuccessfully, with elective office: Bowers failed in a bid for Congress in 1904 while Farley served one term as a state assemblyman in New York before losing reelection. Most importantly, they shared a love of politics and a mutual admiration for Franklin D. Roosevelt, with whom their future careers would become intertwined.²

Roosevelt recruited Bowers and Farley for his 1932 presidential campaign. Longtime Democrats well known among the regular party faithful at the state and local levels, the two men provided experience vital to FDR's election hopes. Equally important were their unique talents and abilities—Bowers as a prolific writer and Farley as an organizer. Bowers had met Roosevelt after coming to New York in 1923 to write for the *New York World*. FDR admired the Hoosier's writings on Thomas Jefferson, his astute political

² Background on James A. Farley's early career can be found in his autobiographical account, *Behind the Ballots: The Personal History of a Politician* (New York, 1938), 3-57.

advice, and his devotion to the Democratic party. As a result of Roosevelt's lobbying, Bowers delivered a speech at the traditional Democratic Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in 1928 and later was selected to be a keynote speaker at the 1928 convention.³

Farley's contacts with upstate leaders and his reputation for honest and hard work were the principal reasons that FDR chose the New Yorker for the 1932 campaign. A well-respected county chairman from Rockland County, Farley became a staunch ally of Governor Alfred E. Smith who appointed him to the New York State Boxing Commission in 1924. When Smith decided to run for president in 1928 and convinced Roosevelt to run for his vacated governor's chair, Roosevelt selected Farley as his campaign chairman.⁴ When Roosevelt opted to run for president after two successful terms as governor, it was not surprising that both Bowers and Farley were chosen to play significant roles in his campaign.

While Roosevelt was the catalyst for the Bowers-Farley friendship, it was soon apparent that the two men had a deep admiration for each other's talents and abilities. In his memoirs Bowers described Farley as a "man of attractive personality and political tact, combined with rare organizing ability," one who "was to become perhaps the greatest campaign manager in our history." Bowers felt Farley's success and popularity were based on his frankness and openness, something he, as a newspaperman, could well appreciate.⁵

Farley considered Bowers, too, to be a man of many talents. During the campaign he relied upon Bowers's astute political wisdom and as campaign manager and party chairman he made the most of the journalist's ability as an effective speaker and writer. The 1932 campaign was traditional and partisan and well suited to Bowers's talents. Initially, Bowers preferred to work behind the scenes so as to avoid conflict with his newspaper, which was owned by staunch Republican William Randolph Hearst. He counseled Roosevelt privately on Republican strategy and warned him about Republican attempts to create the false belief that the Depression would soon be over and that "prosperity was just around the corner." Roosevelt labeled Bowers's advice as "right on the money." In

³ Jessner and Sehlinger, "Claude G. Bowers," 224-30; Alfred B. Rollins, *Roosevelt and Howe* (New York, 1962), 222; Frank B. Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*; Vol. II, *The Ordeal* (Boston, 1954), 205-208.

⁴ Rollins, *Roosevelt and Howe*, 221; Bowers, *My Life*, 176-98; James A. Farley to Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 7, 1925, Box 9, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, 1920-1928 (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.). Farley's role at the 1928 Democratic state convention is highlighted in Memo, 1928, Private File, Box 37, James A. Farley Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.); Benjamin Moore to Farley, March 31, 1938, Private File, Box 42, *ibid.*; and Harlan Rippey to Farley, April 1, 1938, *ibid.* His role in the campaign is detailed in Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Ordeal*, 259; and Rollins, *Roosevelt and Howe*, 257-58.

⁵ Bowers, *My Life*, 237-38.

August, when Bowers was asked by reporters to comment publicly about Roosevelt's statement regarding the need to regulate Wall Street, he found it difficult to maintain his low public profile and went on record as supporting the president's statement.

Then, as the campaign moved into its final months, he assumed a more active and public role. When asked to substitute for Roosevelt on a nationwide radio speech, he did so and delivered what Farley called "one of the best speeches in the campaign." He also visited his native state of Indiana to deliver an address to party workers in Terre Haute, where he found, much to his amazement, that Farley, who had been through Terre Haute only briefly, was already being referred to by party leaders as a "next door neighbor." Bowers also delivered campaign addresses to small groups in Syracuse and Buffalo where he denounced manufacturing interests who tried to intimidate their workingmen.⁶

Roosevelt's overwhelming victory on November 8, 1932, virtually guaranteed Bowers some type of position in the new administration. It would be with Farley's assistance that he would obtain it. Shortly after the conclusion of the campaign Bowers contacted Farley and stated that his contract with the Hearst organization was about to expire and that he was interested in a possible position as ambassador to Spain. Farley noted in a memo that he was "more than happy" to recommend him to Roosevelt, who was reportedly pleased with Bowers's ambition. Farley cleared the matter with newly appointed Secretary of State Cordell Hull and had presidential advisor Raymond Moley tender the official offer, which Bowers quickly accepted.⁷

Bowers's appointment was a reward for his loyalty to Roosevelt and his longtime service to the party. During the early Roosevelt administration loyalty and party regularity were considered time-honored principles. The term "For Roosevelt Before Chicago" was one used by Farley in determining who should receive positions in the new administration. Ambassadorships were a convenient way to reward loyal party members for their service. In addition to Bowers, other longtime Democrats such as Breckinridge Long (Italy), William C. Bullitt (Russia), and John Cudahy (Poland) also received appointments. So concerned was Roosevelt in distributing patronage throughout the party that he asked Bowers if he could formally submit his name to Congress as a resident of Indiana. Conscious of how many appointments he had already made from his home state of New York, FDR hoped Bowers could qualify as a midwesterner. When Bowers told the president that he owned no property in Indiana and had had no residence there in the past

⁶ New York Times, May 16, 1932; Frank B. Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*; Vol. III, *The Triumph* (Boston, 1956), 293, 326; Farley, *Behind the Ballots*, 107; Bowers, *My Life*, 255-56.

⁷ Memo, May 1, 1933, Private File, Farley Papers; Bowers, *My Life*, 260-62.



JAMES A. FARLEY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1932, WAVING FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S TRAIN INTO SAN FRANCISCO

Bettmann Archive, New York City.
Print provided by The Franklin D. Roosevelt
Library, Hyde Park, New York.

eight years, Roosevelt said he would send his name in as coming from both Indiana and New York.⁸ The concepts of loyalty and regularity would soon give way to a more nonpartisan approach to party affairs that made loyalty to the liberal New Deal program tantamount to loyalty to the party organization.

While in Madrid, Bowers maintained his friendship with Farley and remained active in party affairs. Through Farley he kept

⁸ Farley's explanation on loyalty can be found in Proceedings of the First Meeting of the Democratic Coordination Council, June 16, 1933, President's Personal File 603 (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library); and Memos, January 29, February 3, May 27, April 25, 1934, Private File, Farley Papers. Bowers, *My Life*, 262. Many of the ambassadors and representatives in Europe were political appointees. See Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York, 1979), 125.

abreast of political developments and continued to play an important role as advisor and speechwriter. The correspondence between the two men, beginning in early 1933, indicates that Farley relied upon Bowers for political advice and speeches, while Bowers gleaned from Farley a revealing look at political issues, personalities, and events that he could not obtain elsewhere. Bowers likewise provided Farley a candid view of diplomatic developments overseas.

One of Bowers's biggest contributions to the party and to Farley personally was in the form of political advice; in addition, he wrote many of the speeches that Farley would deliver during his tenure as party chairman, especially during the 1934 congressional campaign. Partisanship was still a major part of Democratic strategy in 1934, and both Farley and Bowers were well versed in this tactic. One of the many roles Farley performed as postmaster general and chairman of the party was that of presidential spokesman. Between 1933 and 1937 he promoted New Deal policies and supported administration measures across the country, delivering over 260 major addresses at the dedication of post offices, testimonial dinners, or Democratic gatherings. Bowers's proclivity for writing and his interest in party affairs made him one of Farley's favorite "ghostwriters."⁹

As early as June, 1933, Bowers was already offering suggestions about Democratic publicity, and by the fall of 1934 Bowers and Farley were communicating frequently by mail and telephone concerning the upcoming congressional campaign. Despite political problems generated by civil unrest in Spain, and his diplomatic responsibilities, Bowers was only too happy to oblige his friend's requests for speeches. In one particular letter to Farley he wrote: "You fixed upon a lovely time to ask me to think and write of politics. As I write the guns are booming and an occasional bomb goes off." Despite writing behind closed steel shutters and answering the telephone every five to ten minutes, Bowers sent Farley speeches that, he noted, "you can improve upon or maybe get some idea of your own from."¹⁰

A common theme in Bowers's speeches was Republican responsibility for the Great Depression. The ambassador counseled Farley that the Republican "reactionaries" would be on the offensive during the campaign and that the best way to handle them would be to put them on the defensive. In one particular speech that Farley

⁹ A list of speeches given by Farley can be found in *Speeches of James A. Farley*, November 6, 1932–March 27, 1937, President's Personal File 309 (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library).

¹⁰ Farley to Bowers, June 2, 1933, Claude G. Bowers Manuscripts II, 1930–1935 (Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington); Farley to Bowers, October 5, 1934, Box 3, Farley Papers; Bowers to Farley, October 7, 1934, *ibid.*

delivered in Worcester, Massachusetts, in June, 1934, Bowers labeled prominent Republican leaders such as Ogden Mills, Andrew Mellon, and others as "wells without water and cupboards without bread" when the country had been facing catastrophe several years earlier. He called them the "directing brains of Hoover's period of suicide and soup." A year later the same theme was present in Farley's speech to Young Democrats in Louisville.¹¹

Bowers wrote several more speeches for Farley during the campaign. In October Farley told Bowers that he had a half dozen speeches to give before election day and asked if Bowers could write an address comparing Roosevelt and Andrew Jackson. The result was a speech entitled "The New Deal and Old Hickory," which Farley delivered in Scranton, Pennsylvania.¹²

The Democrats scored a significant victory in the 1934 elections, increasing their already favorable margin in both houses of Congress by thirteen seats in the House and nine in the Senate. Farley was quick to give Bowers much of the credit for the victory. In a lengthy letter following the election Farley thanked Bowers for his help, noted how useful the material sent for speeches proved to be, especially in Pennsylvania, and praised him for his contribution to the campaign. He added, "I want you to feel that you played your part in the campaign in a very substantial way."¹³

Bowers was delighted with the results of the campaign. He was especially pleased to hear that in his home state of Indiana Republican Senator Arthur R. Robinson had been defeated, but he shared Farley's regret that Indiana Democrat R. Earl Peters, a staunch Roosevelt supporter since 1931, had lost in the Democratic primary to Sherman Minton. Farley told Bowers that he liked Peters personally and thought of him as an "ardent" Roosevelt supporter, but he had advised the president against any public support in the spring primary for fear of involving the administration in a bitter dispute that might further divide the party. The fact that Minton was supported by Paul V. McNutt, head of the Hoosier Democratic Club, which had contributed \$12,000 to help pay off the Democratic party deficit, may have also helped convince Farley to maintain his neutrality. Farley confided to Bowers that he was sorry about Peters's defeat. Bowers was particularly happy to receive Farley's detailed letter because, he noted, most Americans received their news from the *Paris Herald*, which in turn received it from the *New York Herald Tribune*, a "rank Republican" newspaper. He noted,

¹¹ Farley to Bowers, June 2, 1933, May 17, 1934, October 2, 12, 1935, Bowers Manuscripts II. Highlights of Farley's speeches can be found in the *New York Times*, June 14, 1934, October 6, 1935.

¹² Farley to Bowers, October 5, 29, 1934, Bowers Manuscripts II; *New York Times*, October 27, 1934.

¹³ Farley to Bowers, November 10, 1934, Bowers Manuscripts II.

too, how the Republican press was attacking Farley and stated that it was "reassuring since it showed Farley was doing his job."¹⁴

Despite the partisan nature of the victory in 1934 there were already signs that Roosevelt was moving toward forging a more liberal coalition of voters. Especially frustrating to Farley, although he failed to note it to Bowers, was the president's support of several progressive Republicans including Robert M. La Follette, Jr., in Wisconsin and George W. Norris in Nebraska, support that caused many traditional Democrats to wonder whose side the president was on. Farley's frustration over Roosevelt's support of La Follette was 'summed up best in a letter to presidential advisor Louis M. Howe which stated, "There isn't much I can say and there isn't much you can say either, he wants to see him reelected."¹⁵ It was the first sign that partisanship was eroding.

The friendship between Bowers and Farley grew stronger in the year following the election. Bowers praised Farley's speeches as "meaty and effective" and complimented him as having "developed into a real speaker." He added, "I am not a courtier and not given to flattery," but "you have developed the knack so soon." Farley on the other hand appreciated the advice and recommendations on publicity and confided in the ambassador candidly on sensitive political matters. Farley was most concerned about the opposition that Roosevelt's proposed Public Utility Holding Company Act was receiving from the utility companies. Bowers predicted that the utility companies would undoubtedly mount a massive letter-writing campaign to Congress on the part of workers and stockholders in an effort to defeat the bill and geared some of his speeches and recommendations on publicity toward countering such propaganda. Despite intense opposition and the "one million dollar fund" that Bowers claimed was spent to defeat the bill, the Public Utility Holding Company Act became law in 1935.¹⁶

At Farley's request Bowers continued to act as a publicist throughout 1935. In June the ambassador asked Farley to send him information before the first of September concerning what the administration had done for farmers and how farmers had fared during the Hoover administration. He also requested statistical information on bank failures during the period from 1929 to 1933, facts concerning unemployment and taxes, and speeches and addresses the administration had made on New Deal topics. By

¹⁴ Bowers to Farley, November 12, 1934, Box 3, Farley Papers; Farley to Louis M. Howe, July 1, 1931, Box 52, Louis M. Howe Papers (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library); Farley to Howe, April 14, 1934, Box 18, Official File 300 (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library); Deficit Drive Contributors, \$100.00 and Over, Box 80, Frank C. Walker Papers (University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Ind.); Farley to Bowers, July 7, 1934, Bowers Manuscripts II.

¹⁵ Farley to Howe, August 15, 1934, Box 34, Official File 300 (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library).

¹⁶ Bowers to Farley, March 27, 1935, Box 3, Farley Papers.

October Bowers had prepared several speeches and statements that Farley labeled "great stuff." He told Bowers they were planning to use the material in Maryland and Connecticut and in press releases from Democratic headquarters.¹⁷

It was not surprising, given Bowers's contribution as a speechwriter, advisor, and publicist, that both Roosevelt and Farley hoped his services could be obtained on a full-time basis for the 1936 campaign. As early as June, 1935, Democratic Committeeman and Senator from Pennsylvania Joseph Guffey asked Bowers if he might be interested in returning to the United States to work as an editorial writer for either the *Philadelphia Record* or New York *Evening Post*, two papers owned by Democrat J. David Stern. Guffey also inquired about Bowers's accepting some publicity work for the Democratic National Committee during the forthcoming campaign.¹⁸

Although flattered by the offer, Bowers was reluctant to leave his post as ambassador. He told Guffey that he had accepted the ambassadorship to get away from what had been a twenty-year grind of writing editorials and to help his daughter who was then enrolled in college in Spain. He confided that it would not be fair to "deprive her of the pleasure she is finding here." Most importantly, he boasted, "I have accomplished more toward resolving the misunderstanding of our two nations than any of my predecessors and I want to finish the job." He added that Spanish editorials referred to him as "the most sympathetic and understanding envoy sent by the United States since Washington Irving," who was idolized in Spain. He did not rule out doing some work on the committee, however, and said he would discuss it with Guffey when he returned to the United States for a brief visit during the summer.¹⁹

The question of Bowers's participation in the 1936 campaign did arise again during his visit home during the summer of 1935, but Bowers remained reluctant to give up his post for politics. Roosevelt was hopeful that he and several other ambassadors would resign their positions to return home to work on the campaign. When stories surfaced later in the year that Bowers's resignation would be forthcoming, Bowers became upset and wrote National Committeeman Daniel C. Roper a blistering letter stating emphatically that "there was no agreement about my resigning." He noted that he had agreed to return shortly before the convention to work on publicity for the campaign but that he had "no intention of resigning." He stated that his appointment was the "only recogni-

¹⁷ Bowers to Farley, June 29, July 12, September 24, October 2, 1935, *ibid.*; Farley to Bowers, October 21, 1935, *ibid.* A sample of Farley's speeches focusing on these themes can be found in the *New York Times*, November 10, 24, 1935, January 14, February 23, 1936.

¹⁸ Bowers to Joseph Guffey, January 18, 1935, Box 3, Farley Papers.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

tion I have received from the party for thirty years of service and I never expect another" and added that the story of his resignation had upset him and had been like a "sword hanging over my head for a year."²⁰

It was Farley who reassured his friend that he would not have to resign his position but instead could take a "leave of absence" to avert any charge that he was campaigning while on the government payroll. Farley reiterated that "the President would do whatever you want to do." This satisfied Bowers. He received a sixty-day leave of absence from the state department and purchased a ticket to return to the United States in August to participate in the campaign, but the outbreak of the civil war in Spain made it impossible for him to leave.²¹

Farley's letters to Bowers during the 1936 campaign kept the ambassador abreast of developments and strategy, but they are equally significant for what they failed to tell Bowers about the campaign, Farley's role in it, and the changing direction of the party. By 1936 Roosevelt's strategy for reelection had shifted from one that stressed partisanship and the regular party organization to one that rarely mentioned the Democratic party and recruited traditionally nonpartisan and formerly Republican groups who had a vital stake in New Deal relief and recovery programs. As early as December, 1935, Roosevelt noted that it would be a New Deal rather than a Democratic party that was submitted to the electorate in 1936. He wanted special emphasis put on attracting such groups as organized labor, farmers, black Americans, young people, women, and independents, all of whom had a stake in New Deal policies. The campaign to attract these voters would be less partisan and would operate in many instances through auxiliary and nonparty committees outside the regular party structure.²²

The less partisan nature of the campaign and the effort to attract traditionally non-Democratic groups led Roosevelt to diminish Farley's role as chairman of the national committee. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes and Presidential Secretary Stephen T. Early both expressed reservations about Farley's ability to direct such an effort given his lack of commitment on many issues at Cabinet meetings and his belief in party loyalty and regularity. Eleanor

²⁰ Bowers, *My Life*, 285, 289; FDR to Breckinridge Long, February 22, 1936, in *F.D.R.: His Personal Letters*; Vol. III, 1928-1945, ed. Elliott Roosevelt (New York, 1950), 560; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 125; Bowers to Daniel C. Roper, November 19, 1935, Box 3, Farley Papers.

²¹ Farley to Bowers, December 17, 1935, Bowers Manuscripts II.

²² Farley to Bowers, July 13, October 23, 1936, Bowers Manuscripts II. Discussions concerning the nature of the 1936 campaign can be found in James A. Farley, *Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years* (New York, 1948), 59; Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship . . .* (New York, 1971), 579-80; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston, 1988), 574-76.

Roosevelt, always a supporter of Farley, expressed similar concerns. Negative reports about Farley's preparation for the campaign from Eddie Roddan, an experienced newspaperman whom Roosevelt assigned to the Democratic National Committee to help with publicity, contributed further to Roosevelt's belief that Farley's involvement should be curtailed. As a result, Farley, while still chairman, remained backstage with limited speeches and public appearances. It is doubtful that Farley realized at this point that the strategy was a clear indication that the traditional party organization was being supplanted in importance by the recruitment of constituencies which Roosevelt believed would bring about a more liberal Democratic party. Farley's letters to Bowers in July and October spoke only of a busy campaign and predicted, with amazing accuracy, Roosevelt's landslide reelection.²³

The years immediately following the election were critical ones for both Bowers and Farley. The eruption of the Spanish Civil War in July, 1936, and the approaching war in Europe occupied most of Bowers's time and led him into a number of disagreements with State Department officials about the course of American foreign policy, while political controversies and philosophical differences over the way the Democratic party should be run ruptured the once close relationship between Farley and Roosevelt. Events both at home and abroad dramatized the fact that politics and policymaking as Bowers and Farley knew them had changed. If the two were aware of such changes, they did not explicitly state them to each other; but the tone of their letters reveals the frustrations of men whose influence was lessening and whose counsel was no longer sought on a regular basis.

Between 1937 and 1940 Bowers wrote Farley several letters in which he detailed the fast-moving crises in foreign affairs. Because he trusted Farley, the letters were candid and often revealed emotions he did not spell out in more normal diplomatic correspondence. Much of what Bowers had to say concerned the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that pitted the incumbent Loyalist government against a rebel force led by Francisco Franco. Bowers was adamant in his opinion that the war was not a civil war at all but a case of fascism versus democracy. He noted that as early as 1934 the rebels attempting to overthrow the Spanish government had entered into an agreement with the Fascist government in Italy led by Benito Mussolini and the German Nazi government headed by Adolf Hitler. Bowers claimed that Franco had come more and more to rely upon Rome and Berlin and had gone over to their side "bag and baggage." He estimated that the Italians had an army of 70,000 to 80,000 troops in Spain while the Nazis had anywhere from 12,000 to 20,000 soldiers fighting with the rebels. He credited the fall of

²³ See note 22 above.

Barcelona in early 1939 to those "detestable bastards." Bowers added, too, that what started out as a rebellion against the Spanish democracy had under the stress of war developed into a social revolution. He noted that he had just forwarded to the State Department a book written by the head of universities and secondary schools in Franco's government, José Pemartin, which he argued would do for Franco's Spain what Hitler's *Mein Kampf* did for Germany. He stated that the Franco program, as noted in the book, called for the taking over of the landed estates and the nationalization of industry and banking and the church.²⁴

Bowers was equally candid in his criticism of Allied policy in the face of impending rebel takeover in Spain, a policy that he believed aided the Nazis and the fascists but hindered the forces of democracy. He added that the majority of the Spanish people were "with the Democracy" but had not been permitted to buy arms due to the neutrality policies established by Great Britain, France, and the United States, policies that prohibited such arms sales but that did nothing to stop Italy and Germany from continuing to help Franco. He was caustic in his criticism of the Munich Conference in 1938, which led to a policy of "appeasement" with the Nazi regime; and he labeled British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, architect of the policy, as a "colossal ass—or crook" for giving Hitler and Mussolini everything they wanted. In 1939 he concluded one five-page, confidential letter by stating that these were only his impressions, but "I have guessed right for two and one half years when most of my colleagues have fundamentally guessed wrong and I think the survey of the scene here is reasonably correct."²⁵

Bowers expressed these same views, in a less dramatic tone, in his letters to Secretary of State Hull and Roosevelt. Although supportive of the Spanish cause and at odds with the State Department over their support of the Franco forces, Bowers exerted little influence on American policymaking during the period. Roosevelt's desire to preserve Spain from fascist rule was either small or nonexistent at the time, something Bowers failed to perceive. The president's principal objective was to keep the conflict from escalating into an all-out European war. Since the proof of German or Italian involvement was not overwhelming, Roosevelt was reluctant to impose an embargo against either country. He was willing to accept

²⁴ Bowers to Farley, July 19, 1937, Box 5, Farley Papers; Bowers to Farley, February 9, 1939, Box 8, *ibid.* For more detailed background on Bowers's assessment and role in the conflict, see *My Mission to Spain*. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 126-80, provides some analysis and background on American decision making relative to the Spanish conflict and its place in European foreign affairs. See, too, Richard P. Traina, *American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Bloomington, Ind., 1968).

²⁵ Bowers to Farley, July 19, 1937, Box 5, Farley Papers; Bowers to Farley, February 9, 1939, Box 8, *ibid.*

a Franco victory rather than risk a bigger and wider war, a fact Bowers found hard to accept.²⁶

When the Franco forces finally succeeded in taking control of the country in 1939, Bowers was recalled. His opposition to Franco and support of the Loyalists, coupled with the impending U.S. recognition of Franco, made his presence in Madrid diplomatically impossible. Recalled in the spring, he had some satisfaction in knowing that he had indeed been right in his assessment of the Spanish situation during the past several years. A seemingly down-cast Roosevelt told him upon his return, "I have made a mistake. You have been right all along. I have been imposed upon by false information from across the street [State Department]."²⁷

There is some evidence that Roosevelt may have deceived Bowers by leading him to believe that the decision to recognize Franco was generated more by the State Department than the oval office when in reality it may have been Roosevelt's decision all along. Perhaps an effort to pacify Bowers and prevent him from writing publicly about American policy toward Spain, the president offered him the post of ambassador to Chile. If this was the motive for Bowers's appointment, or if Bowers did blame Roosevelt for the fall of Spain, he did not confide it to Farley or in his memoirs. Still, his frustration with the way events turned out in Spain lingered. He expressed his displeasure to Farley at the way the American press portrayed him as "red" because "I stood and still stand for Democracy in Spain against the Nazi-Fascist conspiracy to destroy it as a preliminary to the beginning of the war to Nazise Europe."²⁸

Following Bowers's appointment as ambassador to Chile, a post he would hold until 1953, his correspondence with Farley continued to highlight the approaching war in Europe. Although he hoped his new position would take him far from the European conflict, he soon found that South America was also caught in the impending world cataclysm. Bowers confided to Farley that the Nazis were out to limit American influence in South America and to destroy the Monroe Doctrine. He spent much of his time combating Nazi and fascist propaganda and dealing with the "many problems" regarding the American neutrality policy. A major concern as well was the large German population living in Chile. Bowers would not be surprised, he said, if the Nazis launched a coup to "take over the government for Hitler."²⁹

Farley's friendship and Bowers's trust in it led the ambassador to express his assessments more candidly to Farley than he did to

²⁶ Jessner and Sehlinger, "Claude G. Bowers," 237-40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, quotation p. 240; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 127.

²⁸ Bowers to Farley, July 31, 1940, Box 11, Farley Papers; Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: Into the Storm, 1937-1940* (New York, 1993), 432.

²⁹ Bowers to Farley, January 19, 1940, Box 9, Farley Papers.

his colleagues in the State Department or government. He was especially critical of Republican leaders whom he described as "making royal asses of themselves." Senator Robert A. Taft, Bowers explained, is "playing to the Germans," while "Little pee-wee [Thomas E.] Dewey clearly has no conception of American sentiment and puts his foot in his mouth every time he opens it." Always the professional, Bowers admitted to Farley that it was not up to the United States to get into the European war, but he remained concerned that the Axis powers were seeking to limit U.S. influence in South America and to shut the U.S. "out from the markets here." He noted that if any attempt was made to "smash" the Monroe Doctrine the United States must defend itself and added, "it looks more and more that we will have to fight."³⁰

As busy as Bowers was with diplomatic crises, he still found time for politics, and it was apparent that his friendship with Farley was as close as ever. On more than one occasion he asked Farley to "send him the news," and he continued to write speeches and offer political advice. Farley, for his part, had plenty of news to send Bowers, for following the 1936 election a number of political controversies arose in the administration.

One of the most controversial issues in Roosevelt's second administration concerned the president's proposed plan to reorganize the Supreme Court. According to this proposal, the chief executive would be given the power to appoint additional justices, up to six, for every judge over seventy who did not retire. Roosevelt's "bombshell" announcement in February, 1937, was in response to a number of rulings from the high court, which had invalidated several pieces of New Deal legislation including the Agricultural Adjustment Act and National Industrial Recovery Act. Believing that the court had become too old and conservative and opposed to the will of the people, Roosevelt proposed legislation that many referred to as the "court packing" bill.³¹

Farley's chief tasks were to court traditional Democrats and deliver speeches to various groups around the country to drum up support for the court reorganization measure. Again, however, his responsibilities were limited, further demonstrating the president's reservations about the party chairman's political effectiveness. Farley was not made part of the initial "strategy" group organized to lobby for the bill; indeed, he was not even notified about the plan until just before it was announced publicly. Still, Roosevelt realized that Farley's contacts with party leaders would be important in

³⁰ Bowers to Farley, June 21, 1940, *ibid.*; Bowers to Farley, July 31, 1940, Box 11, *ibid.*

³¹ A good analysis of the background of the court-packing affairs can be found in William E. Leuchtenburg, "Franklin D. Roosevelt's Supreme Court 'Packing' Plan," in *Essays on the New Deal*, ed. Harold M. Hollingsworth and William F. Holmes (Austin, 1969), 69-115.



AMBASSADOR CLAUDE G. BOWERS AT HIS TYPEWRITER
SANTIAGO, CHILE

Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

helping to pass the measure, and he enlisted his chairman's services. Although initially perturbed at not being notified beforehand, Farley loyally backed his president.³²

Despite the controversy and debate Farley optimistically informed Bowers that the bill would pass. He was confident that the administration had fifty-two key votes in the Senate, which would enable them to defeat any attempt on the part of the opposition to offer compromises or amendments. He was convinced that the public favored the president and the "battle would be won." Bowers concurred with Farley and was equally optimistic. He noted

³² Farley, *Jim Farley's Story*, 73; on the makeup of the strategy board see Joseph P. Lash, *Dealers and Dreamers: A New Look at the New Deal* (New York, 1988), 296.

that the opposition was "much like the fight on the policies before the election. The same people, the same reason." He added, "it cannot be done and probably should not, but if one were to merely publish the pre-bench history of the majority of the Justices, showing that they were corporation employees in most cases, the country would be enlightened."³³

As much as Farley related to Bowers about the affair, he failed to tell the ambassador that he was becoming disillusioned with the court battle and equally frustrated with members of the president's strategy group who believed Farley was not committed to the measure and was not doing all he could to get it passed. The group found the party chairman's speechmaking and boastful optimism that the measure would pass ineffective; and when Farley made public an off-the-record remark intimating that patronage and favors might be withheld from Democratic senators not supporting the bill, dissatisfaction grew. It was a further indication that Farley's way of conducting party affairs was considered dated in the new era of liberal politics.³⁴

In July hopes for passing the Supreme Court bill were dealt a severe blow when the Senate majority leader, Joseph T. Robinson, suffered a fatal heart attack. His death, coming at a critical juncture, spelled the end of the measure. Before the bill could be brought to a vote, the Senate returned it to committee, then adjourned for the summer. Farley confided to Bowers that he believed the bill would have passed had Robinson not died. The majority leader's ability to keep Democrats loyal to the measure assured victory, he claimed, but senators deserted their position following Robinson's death. Farley added that the president would likely bring the bill up again at another time and that FDR was taking the defeat in "splendid fashion."³⁵

Following the court-packing controversy, Farley's close relationship with Roosevelt continued to deteriorate. Compounding their difficulties was the fact that Farley's name repeatedly cropped up in public opinion polls concerning who would be the Democratic presidential nominee in 1940. Farley's correspondence with Bowers from 1938 through 1940 reflected the growing tension between the president and his party chairman. Farley sought Bowers's counsel on how to handle the situation, and his letters took on a more personal note. Farley was especially upset over individuals such as Secretary of the Interior Ickes, who had "no regard for party loyalty or what has happened in former days." Farley and Ickes had not

³³ Farley to Bowers, March 6, April 8, 1937, Dated Letters, 1936-1939, Bowers Manuscripts II; Bowers to Farley, March 25, 1937, Box 5, Farley Papers.

³⁴ Charles Michelson, *The Ghost Talks* (New York, 1944), 174-75.

³⁵ Frank B. Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston, 1990), 238; Farley to Bowers, July 30, 1937, Dated Letters, 1936-1939, Bowers Manuscripts II.

gotten along during their tenure in the Cabinet, and their problems worsened as Farley's relationship with Roosevelt declined. Farley noted he was trying to "keep things on an even keel with fellows like Ickes" and that all he could do would be to make the best of the situation.³⁶

The 1938 congressional election was a special source of tension for Farley. Roosevelt's decision to "purge" several conservative Democratic senators and congressmen, who he felt had thwarted his legislation, by campaigning against them in the spring primary did not sit well with Farley who believed such action would damage party unity. Farley refused to take part in the campaigns with the notable exception of the contest in Maryland where he made some effort to try to defeat Millard Tydings. His lack of support for the "purge" distanced him further from the administration.³⁷

The Democrats lost a number of seats in Congress in 1938, and Farley believed the election mirrored the party's difficulties and tensions. He confided to Bowers that the losses of Governor Martin L. Davey and Senator Robert Bulkley in Ohio resulted from their "stupidity." Davey had done nothing to heal the "wounds of a bitter primary battle"; and Bulkley refused to identify with Roosevelt and elected to debate his opponent, Robert Taft, who was noted to be a good orator. Most of all, Farley was displeased with the purge. He was especially frustrated by remarks made by "over zealous fellows who have no knowledge of the activities of our men in the past. Some of the most decent fellows, to my mind are being unfairly opposed." These were some of the same men, confided Farley, who were so helpful to the Roosevelt cause in 1932.³⁸

In June, 1939, Farley told Bowers that he would like to sit down with him and go over the entire situation, especially the still nagging question of the 1940 nomination and his future in the Roosevelt administration. He needed to know what position he should take and "wanted the advice of a real friend." Later that year Bowers and Farley did have the opportunity to talk matters over when Bowers returned to the United States before leaving for his new post in Chile. Farley confided to the ambassador that he had lost the president's confidence, that he was no longer consulted on issues, and that when he brought up the question of the 1940 Democratic nomination Roosevelt was evasive. Bowers counseled Farley not to act hastily. He noted that Farley had the confidence of

³⁶ Farley to Bowers, June 2, 1938, Dated Letters, 1936-1939, Bowers Manuscripts II.

³⁷ Background on the 1938 campaign and election can be found in James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Lexington, Ky., 1967), 250-87, and Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny*, 273-88.

³⁸ Farley to Bowers, November 11, 1938, Dated Letters, 1936-1939, Bowers Manuscripts II; Farley to Bowers, June 2, 1938, Box 6, Farley Papers.

all party workers down to the precinct level and that his resignation would be misinterpreted by party workers. Farley agreed to withhold his resignation until after the 1940 convention.³⁹ Neither Bowers nor Farley realized or discussed the real issue of Farley's problem; namely, that they had become "old Democrats" in a new era of politics which no longer held sacrosanct the time-honored values of party loyalty and regularity.

Farley continued to pursue his dream of securing the Democratic nomination in 1940, but he was continually frustrated by Roosevelt's evasiveness on whether he would break precedent and run for a third term. The principal target of Farley's frustrations was presidential advisor "Tommy Corcoran and that group" who had persuaded him to withhold any statement concerning the nomination until later. Unable to launch an effective campaign until Roosevelt made his intentions known, Farley remained disillusioned. He confessed to Bowers that many viewed a potential ticket of Secretary of State Hull for president and Farley for vice-president as a winning combination but added that "no man ever got anywhere running for Vice President." He also believed that many opposed his candidacy because he was Catholic. He concluded one letter by saying, "very frankly and confidentially Claude, if it weren't for my religion there wouldn't be any question that I would be the deciding factor."⁴⁰ Bowers was supportive of his friend, but he was careful not to say anything that would give Farley false hope. He told Farley that he understood his predicament, but he could also see the president's position in not making his plans known. "Whenever it becomes clear that a man in his second term is out he usually loses all control of the Congress." He did say, however, that if Roosevelt did not run, then "I think you have it right—it would be Hull and Farley."⁴¹

Farley's presidential ambitions and his friendship with Bowers may have impacted Bowers's relationship with Roosevelt as well. Knowing that the two men were friends and frequent correspondents, Roosevelt by 1940 had cooled in his relationship with Bowers. The ambassador noted to Farley that he did not know what the president's ambitions were. "I hear from him very infrequently and then very briefly and impersonally. There was a time when he was more personal in his letters to me, but not during the last two years."⁴²

When the Democratic National Convention convened in July, 1940, Roosevelt successfully secured the nomination for president

³⁹ Farley to Bowers, June 13, 1939, Dated Letters, 1936–1939, Bowers Manuscripts II; Bowers, *My Life*, 296–97.

⁴⁰ Farley to Bowers, December 21, 1939, Dated Letters, 1936–1939, Bowers Manuscripts II; Farley to Bowers, February 8, 1940, Box 9, Farley Papers.

⁴¹ Bowers to Farley, January 19, June 21, 1940, Box 9, Farley Papers.

⁴² Bowers to Farley, January 19, 1940, *ibid.*

for an unprecedented third term. Farley's name was placed in nomination, and he received 72½ votes from the Massachusetts and New York delegations. Graciously, Farley addressed the convention and asked that the nomination of Roosevelt be supported by unanimous acclamation. Despite attempts by both the president and Eleanor Roosevelt to encourage him to remain party chairman, he submitted his resignation as chairman and as postmaster general. He confided to Bowers, "I did what I thought was best and I have no apologies and no regrets. My conscience is clear."⁴³

Bowers did his best to patch up differences between Roosevelt and Farley during the succeeding years. In September, 1943, while home from his diplomatic duties in Chile, the ambassador talked with Roosevelt and mentioned that he was going to New York and was going to see Farley. Bowers was concerned about reports that Farley, who was still Democratic chairman in New York, might bolt the ticket and support the Republican candidate if Roosevelt were the nominee in 1944. Roosevelt encouraged Bowers, who said he would report back to the president on his meeting. Following his talk, Bowers related to Roosevelt that Farley was still upset over Roosevelt's intervention in the 1942 gubernatorial race in New York where both men supported different candidates in the primary. This controversy had led to a divided Democratic party and an eventual Republican victory in the fall election. Bowers added that Farley had told him that "he thought Roosevelt still liked him," to which Roosevelt replied with a smile, "I've always been fond of Jim." Bowers concluded by stating that he was not sure what Farley would do in 1944 but accurately predicted that he would not bolt the ticket. Roosevelt then asked Bowers what he thought of his appointing Farley as director of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, a post that was soon to be vacated by Herbert Lehman of New York. Bowers encouraged Roosevelt to do so, but the position was never offered. A somewhat embittered Farley would later write, "the most cruel thing he did, Claude, was not permitting me to participate in the war effort."⁴⁴

In the years following the war Bowers and Farley continued their close friendship. Farley, who became an executive with Coca-Cola Export Company, traveled to Chile in early 1941 as part of a trip through South America, and he returned there at least two more times in 1947 and 1951. In one letter following his 1941 visit Farley answered Bowers's kind compliments by saying, "I have always considered you one of my real friends." Bowers, in turn, saw Farley on his visits back to the United States, and the two contin-

⁴³ Farley to Bowers [November, 1940 ?], Box 10, Farley Papers. Background on the 1940 convention can be found in Bernard F. Donahoe, *Private Plans and Public Dangers: The Story of FDR's Third Nomination* (Notre Dame, 1965).

⁴⁴ Bowers, *My Life*, 298-99; Farley to Bowers, November 6, 1947, Bowers Manuscripts II.

ued to do each other favors. When the Chilean delegates to the newly formed United Nations gathered in San Francisco, Farley hosted a dinner for them. In September of that same year the president of Chile was honored by the Pan American Society in New York, and not surprisingly it was Farley who was chosen to give the welcoming address. Bowers also continued to act as a speechwriter for Farley. As late as 1952, with the election campaign set to begin, Farley asked his friend, "if between now and then you would have time to grind out a couple of speeches for me that would be satisfactory for a gathering or over the radio." As always, Bowers sent Farley the speeches and graciously offered to do more if necessary.⁴⁵ Although their correspondence was not as frequent as in the 1930s, their letters continued until 1957, a year before Bowers's death.

The frequent correspondence and close friendship between Claude Bowers and Jim Farley during the 1930s reveals the political changes occurring within the Democratic party and the rapidly developing events in foreign affairs which influenced American foreign policy in the years leading up to World War II. The letters portray two older, traditional Democrats, guided by notions of party loyalty and regularity, caught up in a period of political realignment. For Farley these changes proved especially difficult to perceive or understand, and his letters indicate the frustration of an advisor whose influence was waning. Bowers experienced similar frustrations, especially regarding America's role in the Spanish Civil War and Roosevelt's tolerance and willingness to accept a fascist leader in Spain. Moral diplomacy had been supplanted by a more pragmatic and expedient approach to policymaking in the turbulent Europe of the 1930s, and Bowers found this a bitter pill to swallow.

Clinging to their long-established values and principles in a new era of politics and diplomacy, Bowers and Farley found solace in each other's friendship. Two men who helped shape party strategy and lay the foundation for Roosevelt's success in the early New Deal years, they had become by 1940 two "old Democrats," outsiders whose time had passed but whose loyalties and commitment to the party remained as firm as ever.

⁴⁵ Farley to Bowers, August 9, September 25, 1945, August 19, 1952, Bowers Manuscripts II.