ROOSEVELT'S PURGE

How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party

SUSAN DUNN

The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England
2010

Contents

1. Getting Ready to Fight 1
2. The Nonpartisan Leader 34
3. Favorite Son of the South 60
4. Southern Insurgents 81
5. The Partisan Leader Takes His First Steps 94
6. Rolling Westward 120
7. Marching through Georgia 152
8. "Cotton Ed" 179
9. The Maryland Shore 191
10. New York Streets 202
11. The Dynamics of the Purge 213
12. From the Purge to Realignment 236

Epilogue 269

Notes 279

Acknowledgments 339

Index 341

Getting Ready to Fight

IT WAS PAST MIDNIGHT on March 31, 1938. Franklin Roosevelt was asleep in the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia. It was a modest getaway, a one-story cottage with a combination living and dining room, three small bedrooms, and the refrigerator on the back porch.

While the president slept, his appointments secretary, Marvin McIntyre, was still working. A former newspaperman from Kentucky whose friendship with Roosevelt went back twenty years, McIntyre sent out word to the reporters covering the president in Georgia that he had breaking news. Most of the reporters were still awake, playing bridge or ping-pong or attending a carnival in nearby Manchester. When they assembled, McIntyre handed out copies of a statement written by the president himself. "A. I have no inclination to be a dictator," it read. "B. I have none of the qualifications which would make me a successful dictator. C. I have too much historical background and too much knowledge of existing dictatorships to make me desire any form of dictatorship for a democracy like the United States of America."[1]

The reporters looked at one another in astonishment. What had caused this remarkable announcement? Why had the president taken the trouble to officially deny the ludicrous and tired charge that he had dictatorial ambitions? It was extraordinary, mused Senator Edward Burke, a Democrat from Nebraska, that things had gotten to the point where the Roosevelt had to refute such accusations. "If the President

says he doesn't want to be a dictator," Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan dryly remarked, "it makes it unanimous as far as I am concerned."[2]

There had been omens. Just a few weeks earlier, FDR's critics in the press and in Congress had railed about his sinister designs. Crying out against "Dictator Roosevelt," they accused him of seeking nothing less than to topple constitutional government.[3] Sparking the firestorm was a bill he had proposed that called for the reorganization and streamlining of the executive branch of the government. But how could such an innocuous proposal, the product of decades of pressing need and thoughtful suggestions, have set off such a squall of protests? Did it forecast even a bigger battle in the months ahead?

In his first term in office, the president had sailed through relatively smooth waters, able to pass landmark New Deal legislation that helped the nation recover from the abyss of the Great Depression. Americans welcomed the economic emergency measures of 1933, the Agricultural Adjustment Act that increased farmers' incomes by controlling crop production, the Tennessee Valley Authority that provided low-cost power, and the transformational programs of 1935, the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act.

Little by little, an astounding, historic revolution was taking place, turning the traditional role of American government upside down. Coming after decades of inert government and especially after the laissez-faire, passive presidencies of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, Roosevelt's administration took the bold step of expanding and harnessing the power of government for the many, not for the few.

The goal of the New Deal was to increase Americans' prosperity, to set fair labor standards for workers, to provide help for the unemployed—a quarter of the total workforce—and security for the elderly. "Necessitous men are not free men," Roosevelt declared at the 1936 Democratic National Convention, explaining that true freedom meant more than political freedom, more than the right to vote, more than the right to

express oneself freely, more than the right to practice one's religion. "Liberty," FDR said, "requires opportunity to make a living—a living decent according to the standard of the time, a living which gives man not only enough to live by, but something to live for." To truly secure for citizens the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Roosevelt put the national government to work on their side. No longer would it be small, frugal, and responsive only to the needs of big business and concentrated wealth; no longer would an American president be deaf to the desperate needs of the nation's citizens.[4]

In November 1936, every state in the union—except Maine and Vermont—had joined in a collective vote of confidence in Roosevelt and the New Deal. Only in four states did Landon garner more than 45 percent of the vote.[5] At home in Hyde Park, New York on election night, the president could hear the Associated Press and United Press tickers in the dining room clattering out the returns. To relieve the tension of waiting, Roosevelt kept his own tally as party operatives reported results from across the country. As the astonishing results came in, he leaned back in his chair, blew a ring of cigarette smoke at the ceiling, and exclaimed, "Wow!" He had beaten Republican Alf Landon of Kansas by a vote of 27,752,309 to 16,682,524 and by 523 electoral votes to 8.[6]

In that critical election of 1936, a majority of voters had not merely registered a protest against Hoover's anemic response to the Great Depression, as they had in 1932, but were expressing their wholehearted approval of FDR's economic and social policies and ensuring the durable shift of party strength to the Democrats.[7] Americans gave Franklin Roosevelt a stupendous, unequivocal mandate to fulfill the promises of the New Deal. After all, there remained so much more to be done, as the president acknowledged on a cold, rainy day in January 1937 in his second inaugural address. "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished." Americans, he said, as the rain poured down, splattering the pages of his speech, "insist that every agency of popular government use every effective instrument to carry out their will." His

vision, determination, and leadership, he promised, would ultimately help establish "a morally better world."

Franklin Roosevelt embodied the hopes of tens of millions of people.

Seated around their radios, families listened in rapt attention to the president's reassuring, intimate fireside chats. They felt that he was with them in their homes, confiding in them, talking out their problems with them. He carefully explained his plans, appealing to their understanding as well as to their emotions. This master of the techniques of communication knew how to comfort Americans with his warm voice, his deliberate inflections and slow cadences. People were excited and inspired by his calls for collective action and even by his reminders that sacrifices would have to be made by all. For millions, he was their hero, their savior—they hung his portrait in their living rooms, often next to pictures of Jesus Christ.

But soon after that earthquake election the political winds seemed to change. By the spring of 1937, Roosevelt's long honeymoon with Congress was over, and by 1938 things had fallen apart. Not only had the country slid back into recession, but the Supreme Court had struck down key legislation and Congress was voting down the administration's new bills. The overwhelming mandate Roosevelt received in 1936 proved to be anything but shatterproof. An eighteenth-century, horse-and-buggy Constitution—designed by the Framers to fragment power, pit the branches of government against one another, thwart a popular majority as well as a domestically bred tyrant, and ensure stability (read inertia and deadlock) rather than energy—was effectively preventing the president from making the transformational changes that he had promised and that voters continued to support.

But it was not only checks and balances that frustrated Roosevelt; he also confronted the problem of a serious cleavage within his own party. Political parties had evolved in the 1790s to the consternation of many of the Founders themselves. But parties would prove to be highly effec-

tive, allowing an organized majority of citizens to overcome James Madison's constitutional system of majority-pulverizing checks and balances. Only a national party, capable of winning presidential as well as congressional and senatorial elections, could capture the reins of government and mobilize support for a national agenda.

In later life, Madison himself came to believe that his system of checks and balances was hindering majority rule and stalling the wheels of government. "The vital principle of republican government," he wrote in 1833, "is the *lex majoris partis,* the will of the majority."[8] At the age of eighty-two, he demanded from government not fragmentation of power or even, as he had stressed in his *Federalist* essays, protection for minorities, but rather protection for the majority and the assurance of its ability to wield power. But with his constitutional system now written in stone, it was only through political parties that the will of the majority could override checks and balances.

But the party system called for internal unity and discipline among congressional party members. And in 1938, even though the Democrats held staggering majorities of nearly four-fifths of the seats in both chambers of Congress, that huge Democratic majority was deceptive, for a real division in the vast Democratic ranks had existed for several years.[9]

From the beginning of the New Deal, there were five Senate Democrats who wanted nothing better than to maul and cripple FDR's legislation: Carter Glass and Harry Byrd of Virginia, Millard Tydings of Maryland, Thomas Gore of Oklahoma, and Josiah Bailey of North Carolina.[10] Later, more Democrats—men such as Walter George of Georgia, Ellison "Cotton Ed" Smith of South Carolina, Robert Bulkley of Ohio, Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri, Burton Wheeler of Montana, Tom Connally of Texas, Pat McCarran of Nevada, Guy Gillette of Iowa, and others—joined the obstructionist crew. And yet, when FDR ran for reelection in 1936, none of them had the courage to criticize him. On the contrary, they gave lip service to the New Deal—and

then, insisting that they were only voting their consciences, proceeded to knife it. Allied with Republicans, they were succeeding in wrecking the New Deal.[11]

Stymied, Roosevelt would fight back—impulsively, haphazardly, emotionally, boldly—by seeking to drive his conservative foes out of the Democratic Party. His plan was to take them on at the ballot box in 1938, by intervening in Democratic primaries and backing liberal challengers to the wayward incumbents. He was determined to pit his popularity and policies against their objections to New Deal programs. It was a highly risky venture that had danger signs written all over it. Reporters branded his tactic a "purge"—and the inflammatory label stuck.

The goal of FDR's attempt to oust conservatives from the party, in fact, made utter sense: he believed that the nation should have two effective and responsible political parties, one liberal, the other conservative, each ideologically consistent and united, each supporting its leaders and offering voters meaningful choices about the direction the nation should take. Roosevelt would spend the summer months of 1938 traveling across the country and campaigning in Democratic primaries against conservative incumbents. But in the end, his effort to "purge" those conservatives from the party would fail, at great political cost to him. It was one of the few glaring political miscalculations in his long career.

"I expected the punishment to be much rougher than it was"—words that might have been pronounced by FDR in the aftermath of the purge—but that were spoken by Douglas Corrigan, the genial, carefree young pilot who gave Depression-weary Americans something to laugh about when he flew across the Atlantic from New York to Dublin that same summer of 1938. "Where am I? I intended to fly to California!" he said to astonished Irish airport workers on landing at Baldonnel Airport without landing papers, passport, radio, instruments, or even a map. "My compass went wrong," he fibbed, wearing his good-natured, ever-present grin. Newspapers—and Hollywood, too—ate up the story.

During the summer of 1938, Roosevelt, like "Wrong Way Corrigan," found himself, if not merrily heading on purpose in the wrong direction, then trying to maneuver through the political skies without adequate instruments, papers, and maps.[12]

And yet the whole episode of the "purge," though dramatic, flawed, and fueled by anger and resentment, was the product of Roosevelt's deep, principled conviction that it was critically important to forge ahead with New Deal programs and create lasting change in the nation; and that to do so, he needed the solid support of the members of his own party.

But the purge represented even more than a scheme to restart the New Deal. It was also the precursor of a historic transformation of American political parties. In the aftermath of the purge, the momentum for the kind of party realignment Roosevelt had sought in 1938 through the eviction of the Democratic Party's conservative wing would gather steam, first with the "Dixiecrat" rebellion of conservative southern Democrats in 1948 and then, over the decades that followed, with Lyndon Johnson's Civil Rights Acts and then with Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan's appeals to right-leaning Democrats to join the Republicans. By the end of the century, the irreconcilable tensions within the Democratic Party had exploded, transforming the nation's traditional political landscape—and the once solidly Democratic South was solid no more.

Roosevelt's purge was a valiant if premature and mismanaged plan to remedy a complex political dilemma. Unlike Douglas Corrigan, Roosevelt would not be hailed for his feat by a million cheering New Yorkers lining lower Broadway for a ticker-tape parade. But the legacy of the purge colors American politics to this day.

In the spring of 1938, Roosevelt's bill for executive reorganization should reasonably have mustered strong bipartisan support. Not only had

Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson called for reorganization of the executive branch, but so had FDR's predecessor Herbert Hoover. In the summer of 1937, FDR had voiced the hope that the Democratic Party would finally answer that call and "accomplish something which so many previous Administrations and Congresses have failed to do at all."[13]

A committee of nonpartisan reformers and political scientists, chaired by Louis Brownlow, an expert in the field of public administration, had crafted Roosevelt's bill. They recommended expanding the White House staff, adding cabinet departments of Social Welfare and Public Works, reorganizing the civil service under one administrator, and introducing a merit system for federal employees. By reducing the clutter and lack of coordination among various agencies, the president explained, the government would become more efficient and businesslike. But not even Hoover's approval of Roosevelt's executive reorganization plan quelled the storm of allegations against the "dictator bill."[14]

In the late 1930s—an epoch infamous for power-driven dictators erecting their miserable totalitarian regimes—some Americans were frightened by the idea of increasing executive power. "I am not willing, in the search for efficient management," cried Nebraska's Senator Burke, "to establish one-man rule in this country!"[15]

Over a hundred protesters, all dressed up as Paul Revere, paraded up Pennsylvania Avenue in April 1938, waving banners that denounced "One Man Rule." Father Charles Coughlin, the demagogic priest who used his radio programs to pummel FDR, chimed in, exhorting his followers to defend their liberties against Roosevelt tyranny.[16] All the wild dictator talk was a bit irrational, admitted Senator Burton Wheeler, a progressive Democrat from Montana and a great White House friend who was evolving into one of Roosevelt's most spirited foes. Still, Congress would be unwise, he added, to strengthen the executive branch of government "at this particular time, when a certain form of *hysteria* is sweeping over the United States." Indeed, a flood of 330,000 telegrams protesting the bill poured into Congress.[17]

And yet, if the government was ever to be modernized and made efficient, some restructuring was necessary. Even Arthur Krock, the chief political correspondent of the *New York Times,* who usually relished his daily exercise of skewering Roosevelt, approved of the bill. Though a week after Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933, Krock was already hammering the new president with an article headlined "Roosevelt Gets Power of Dictator, All Protests Are Stilled," in 1938 the *Times*'s man conceded that the executive branch was full of duplication, waste, and disorder.[18]

For his part, Roosevelt recognized the possibility of an American dictatorship. At the bottom of the Depression in 1932, with so many extremist groups appealing to the underprivileged and unemployed, the United States, FDR later reflected, "might have had a dictator if the New Deal hadn't come along with a sensible program." But he considered the chatter about himself as a potential dictator nothing short of "stupid and ridiculous"—though some of it amused him. "Thank the Lord I have not decided to become a Dictator," he commented tongue-in-cheek when residents of Connecticut besieged him with pleas to halt construction of a power plant that was spoiling the Saugatuck River. He was delighted to pass the buck, he happily added, to Governor Wilbur Cross, the "Sovereign Dictator of the Independent State of Connecticut." When one Englishman wrote to Roosevelt in 1938, asking him to send five hundred airplanes to Great Britain for its defense against Nazi Germany, the president could only laugh. "Almost it makes me feel like a dictator!" he wrote, imagining the stricken, irate faces in Congress if he asked for such authority.[19]

Despite the demonstrations of the Paul Reveres on Pennsylvania Avenue, few Americans shared the fears of a Roosevelt dictatorship. When asked by the pollster George Gallup in April 1938 if the president should have more power or less, 47 percent of those polled answered that he should have the same amount of power, and 18 percent said he should have more. In another Gallup poll, 63 percent of Americans favored a New Deal candidate for the presidency in 1940 over a conservative. And

a majority of Democrats polled wanted Franklin Roosevelt to be that candidate—for an unprecedented third term.[20]

When the executive reorganization bill finally came up for a vote in the Senate on March 28, 1938, visitors poured into the galleries above the chamber. It was standing room only. Even the president's daughter-in-law, the wife of James Roosevelt, FDR's eldest son, had to sit on one of the steps in the family gallery. Hundreds more, unable to get in, milled around in the corridors of the Capitol. After two hours of maneuvering and voting on motions to recommit the bill to committee, senators finally called out their votes.[21]

The reorganization bill squeaked through the Senate. Although Democrats held a huge majority with seventy-six seats, the vote was close: 48 to 42. Predictably, some of FDR's conservative Democratic foes—Walter George of Georgia, Harry Byrd and Carter Glass of Virginia, Josiah Bailey of North Carolina, Millard Tydings of Maryland, and others—voted against the legislation. It was more surprising, however, when New York's Senator Robert Wagner, Roosevelt's staunch ally and the author of key New Deal bills, switched sides at the last minute and joined them in voting against the legislation. Still, the unrelenting pressure mounted by the White House had paid off—at least in the Senate.[22]

It had been too close a vote, fretted Jim Farley, the postmaster general and chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who had worked with Roosevelt since 1928. "If this thing doesn't go through the House, you are going to lose control of your party," he warned the president, urging him to join him in some personal arm-twisting. Roosevelt's close advisor, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, agreed; the bill's defeat in the House, the pugnacious and prickly Ickes wrote in his diary, would be a "major catastrophe." Ickes felt that the loss of prestige to the administration would be so devastating that he would have little choice but to pack his bags "and move away from Washington."[23]

When reporters trooped into the Oval Office on April 5, they saw a gold-handled, seven-inch saber on the president's desk—a *yataghan* presented to him by the sultan of Muscat and Oman. "I can put it in the wall at thirty paces," Roosevelt boasted, waving it above his head. "How far down Pennsylvania Avenue can you throw it?" asked one sly reporter.[24] But the more troubling question was whether members of the House would throw a knife of their own back up the avenue to the White House when it was their turn to vote on the reorganization bill.

The Speaker of the House, William Bankhead of Alabama, should have been in an impregnable position to get the legislation passed: Democrats held 334 seats compared to only 88 Republicans. And yet Bankhead had to struggle to wrest the bill from the powerful Rules Committee, which directed traffic on legislation. The Committee's defiant chairman, a New York City Democrat named John O'Connor—the brother of Roosevelt's old friend and former law partner Basil O'Connor—was determined to bottle up the bill. "The fact is, there hain't goin' to be no dictator in this country," O'Connor barked, "not as long as some of us have a voice and two strong hands."[25]

On April 8, after days of raucous debate, punctuated by boos, laughter, and sarcastic comments, the House was finally ready to vote. Majority leader Sam Rayburn of Texas pleaded for party unity and urged the members of the House not to deliver a "lethal blow" to FDR by sending Americans "the message that tonight Democrats voting with Republicans have said in effect that our President is no longer the leader of his country."[26]

In a dramatically hushed chamber, representatives called out their votes on a motion to recommit the bill to the hostile Rules Committee—the euphemism for legislative burial. When the final tally was announced and they heard that the motion had won by an eight-vote margin—with 108 Democrats and all the House Republicans voting to

recommit—the victorious opponents of executive reorganization broke out into a visceral roar of spiteful cheers. One representative from Pennsylvania ran across the floor and raised O'Connor's arm, shouting, "Here's our leader! Here's our leader!"[27]

The next day the *Chicago Daily Tribune* celebrated Roosevelt's stunning defeat with the headline "KILL DICTATOR BILL: 204–196." That same day, the stock market soared, with reporters attributing the rally to the House vote. The real reason for the bill's defeat had nothing to do with fears of dictatorship or concerns about the powers of Congress, judged Representative Lindsay Warren, a Democrat from North Carolina. It had been killed, he said, by Republicans and Democrats who "hate Roosevelt." Louis Brownlow, the architect of reorganization, concurred; the opposition was "just anti-Roosevelt."[28]

The emboldened members of the anti-Roosevelt and anti–New Deal coalition had just dramatically demonstrated their power. Suddenly they were the *real* dictators, Roosevelt's allies maintained, for they had no national support and were acting contrary to the wishes of the American people.

"I was completely surprised," stammered Harold Ickes. He was more than surprised: he was also enraged. And he was exasperated that the president seemed to be taking this loss "lying down."[29] Shortly after the bill's defeat, Ickes walked into the office of Missy LeHand, FDR's devoted secretary, and picked up an unmailed note the president had written to Rayburn. In the note, Roosevelt thanked the Texan for his leadership and stressed that there was "no occasion for personal recrimination." A postscript was addressed to Speaker Bankhead, indicating that the president did not intend to fight any more for the bill. Soon after, Ickes saw the president and greeted him with a verbal blast. "I hit him with words," the abrasive interior secretary boasted in his diary, "telling him that he couldn't accept such a defeat; that if he did this Administration was through."[30]

For the president, the fate of the executive reorganization bill was the last straw in his battle against conservative Democrats. That battle had begun in May 1935 when the Supreme Court struck down the National Industrial Recovery Act—the heart of the New Deal—declaring its codes for competition, prices, wages, and work hours were unconstitutional. FDR's reaction? He fought back hard against right-wing conservatives—with the most radical, far-reaching and enduring legislation of the New Deal. He was not going to play dead, he declared, and let the high court turn back the Constitution to the "horse-and-buggy" days. Throughout the summer of 1935, he launched bill after bill—the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, the Banking Act of 1935, the Revenue Act of 1935, and the Works Progress Administration—all the transformational legislation of the "Second New Deal."[31]

But then in 1936, the Supreme Court struck again, this time judging that the Agricultural Adjustment Act was unconstitutional and that the government had no authority to regulate agricultural production. Out of touch with conditions in the mid-1930s, reactionaries on the high court were second-guessing Congress and substituting their own judgment for that of elected legislators and the president.

Roosevelt considered it an ominous failure in American government that nine unelected, elderly men could thwart the New Deal and block the will of the popular majority. Nowhere in the Constitution did the founders give the Supreme Court the power of judicial review, the power to veto legislation and act as a policy-making body. "Again and again the Constitutional Convention voted down proposals to give Justices of the Court a veto over legislation," the president declared in a scorching Constitution Day speech in the fall of 1937, blasting those who cried "unconstitutional" at every effort he made to improve the condition of the American people.[32]

Roosevelt's remedy for the situation was his court reform bill, immediately dubbed by opponents a "court-packing" scheme. The bill did not tackle the underlying issue of the power of judicial review. Instead, the president proposed adding justices to the Supreme Court when justices declined to retire after reaching the age of seventy, a plan that, in 1937, would have given him six new Supreme Court appointments. The tradition of nine Supreme Court justices, after all, was not written in stone—or even in ink. The Constitution does not specify the number of justices—and the number has varied over the years. The original Court had just six justices. Under President Jefferson, it was increased to seven, under Jackson to nine, during the Civil War to ten, and then reduced back to nine after the war.

Roosevelt's idea of increasing the size of the Court was hence neither unprecedented nor radical. But the normally sure-footed president stumbled politically. He failed to lay the groundwork with Congress and presented the legislation deceptively—as an "efficiency" measure, concealing his real goal of liberalizing the reactionary Supreme Court. Representatives and senators felt blindsided.

"Boys, here's where I cash in," said Hatton Sumners of Texas, chair of the House Judiciary Committee, to Vice President John Nance Garner, William Bankhead, and a few others after FDR had sprung the proposal on them in a private White House meeting just before he announced it to the press. In the Senate lobby, Garner—a Texas conservative who was no political friend of the president or the New Deal—expressed his own opinion of the bill by holding his nose with one hand and making a thumbs-down sign with the other.[33]

Archconservatives blasted the bill. Virginia's Carter Glass, the oldest member of the Senate, pronounced it a "frightful proposition" that was "utterly destitute of moral sensibility" and would destroy the "purity" of the Court. Surmising that a more liberal Court might very well move against racial segregation in the South, he pledged "implacable antagonism to the dangerous and fool things that are being done in

Washington."[34] But even some reliable, loyal, and usually liberal senators like Joseph O'Mahoney of Wyoming, Tom Connally of Texas, George Norris of Nebraska, and more than a dozen others washed their hands of the "court-packing" plan. Montana's Wheeler, who had supported the president up until 1936, organized and orchestrated the battle against the bill on the Senate floor, warning that it represented "the temptation to a President to make himself a dictator." If the court bill was passed, chimed in Senator Josiah Bailey of North Carolina, "the road to an American dictatorship will be cleared of all obstacles."[35]

One of the few supporters of the bill was Roosevelt's friend and confidant Josephus Daniels, the ambassador to Mexico. Daniels had been secretary of the navy and FDR's boss when he served as assistant secretary of the navy under Woodrow Wilson. For Daniels, the president's plan was really one to *un*pack the Court, which had been packed, he sneered, since 1860 with men on the side of privilege.[36]

At the Gridiron Club's semiannual dinner in Washington at the Willard Hotel in April 1937, the Court bill provided juicy material for Roosevelt-roasting. In a musical skit, a tribunal of fifteen timid judges sang—to the tune of Cole Porter's 1935 hit "It's De-lovely":

> You can tell at a glance
> What this Court will decide in advance
> You can hear Brother Franklin murmuring low:
> Let yourself Go! . . .
> It's delib'rate, it's deceptive . . . it's de-lousy!

Then the chief justice called the others to order: "Gentlemen of the court, let us go to work! Get out your rubber stamps!"[37]

On Broadway, too, court-packing made an appearance. In the 1937 Kaufman and Hart play *I'd Rather Be Right,* the Supreme Court justices, made up to look like nine copies of the chief justice, Charles Evans Hughes, emerged from the park shrubbery to shout "No" at the Presi-

dent and declare that everything except the Court itself was unconstitutional.[38]

Month after month, from February through August 1937, Roosevelt spent precious political capital trying to persuade senators and congressmen of the benefits of the legislation—and when that didn't work, he poured on the charm.

Franklin Roosevelt had always prided himself on knowing how to work with friends and adversaries alike. While governor of New York, he had once explained that he had to deal with people he neither liked nor trusted—"but I have worked with them and through them, in order to obtain the ultimate goal." His greatest political strength in obtaining that "ultimate goal" had always been his dexterity in tacking with the wind.[39]

Far from acting the part of a rigid taskmaster who whipped his team into line, during his first term as president he was a flexible, engaging ringmaster, adept at charming, managing, and reining in an unruly circus of Democratic beasts. He lavished his natural and profuse talents for flattery, wheedling, horse-trading—and even his talent for deception—on Senate and House leaders. Almost always finding ways to reconcile opposing interests, he won the support of politicians North and South, East and West.[40]

And so, just days after the Senate Judiciary Committee slammed his court reform bill in June 1937, calling it "an invasion of judicial power such as has never before been attempted in this country," an amiable Roosevelt invited all four hundred Democrats in Congress—well, except for the five women in the House of Representatives and the one woman in the Senate, Hattie Caraway of Arkansas—to be his guests at the Jefferson Islands Club in Chesapeake Bay. Good fellowship and a splendid island picnic, he hoped, would dissipate at least some of the friction in the party and perhaps smooth the way for the passage of the court bill the following month.[41]

Ferried to the island by a flotilla of navy patrol boats, the congressmen found the president seated in a chair near the water's edge; they saw a man with a massive head and torso that dwarfed his shrunken legs and poignantly pristine shoes. Casually dressed in an open shirt, relaxed and welcoming, FDR was a display of nonchalant showmanship at its best—a most unusual pose for him. "With Roosevelt, you could never forget the majesty of the office and in a sense the majesty of the person," Roosevelt's old friend and chief speechwriter Sam Rosenman later remarked. The president was "always cordial, affable, but he was never really familiar, except on very rare occasions when he'd go on picnics or when he'd be off on the boat."[42]

It was an all-male weekend of nude swimming, skeet shooting, fishing, Senate-House softball games, and poker, at which the president usually won. With politics and serious talk banished from the menu, the men lunched on crabs, potato salad, and apple pie and drank iced tea. In the late afternoon, they sat in the shade and enjoyed cold beer. The president had done himself a "world of good," cheered the *New York Times.*[43]

But the *Times* had it wrong. Four weeks later, seventy senators voted to recommit the president's court bill to the hostile Judiciary Committee. They included conservative Democrats like Bailey, George, Smith, Tydings, Wheeler, McCarran, and Gillette. But some liberals, too, voted against court-packing—the majority leader, Alben Barkley of Kentucky, along with Robert Wagner of New York, Claude Pepper of Florida, James Pope of Idaho, and William McAdoo of California. Among the twenty who sided with Roosevelt and against the motion to recommit were some New Deal loyalists: Hugo Black of Alabama, Hattie Caraway of Arkansas, and Harry Truman of Missouri.

"The Supreme Court thing," gloated Vice President Garner, was "out the window." Barely eight months after one of the most triumphant electoral victories in the history of the American presidency, the presi-

dent's court reform plan lay in abject tatters. It was one of the most humiliating defeats a president had suffered since the Senate rejected Woodrow Wilson's League of Nation's covenant in 1920. In late August, an emasculated court bill was finally passed, and the dejected president signed it into law. A few minor administrative reforms had come at an enormous price: his fight for court reform had seriously weakened and fractured his own coalition, leaving his liberal base in Congress in alarming disarray and a bitter taste of defeat in his own mouth.[44]

Suddenly feeling the thrust of their power, the conservative bloc in Congress reveled in its newfound ability to foil the president. Gleefully they banded together to sabotage the rest of the New Deal, voting down Roosevelt's progressive tax measures, abolishing the graduated tax on capital gains, killing his proposal for seven regional agencies patterned after the TVA, tearing apart his executive reorganization plan, and burying in committee his Fair Labor Standards Act. Vaunted presidential power was slipping through the president's fingers. Opposition to his proposals was developing into "blitzkrieg" proportions, wrote Sam Rosenman.[45]

Outwardly, Roosevelt appeared as confident and captivating as ever, but inwardly, Jim Farley noted, he was seething at the swaggering politicians who had double-crossed him. For weeks and months after the court-packing debacle, wrote Farley, "I found him fuming against the members of his own party." Roosevelt had been "completely humiliated," agreed Rosenman. In meetings with congressmen, the president let it be known that those who had opposed him had better be on guard. "I've got them on the run, Jim," he gloated prematurely to Farley. "They have no idea what's going to happen and are beginning to worry. They'll be sorry yet."

"Boss, you're a hard man," Farley replied half in jest and half in earnest. "I hope you never get angry at me."[46]

* * *

Just one year into his second term, Roosevelt already seemed a lame duck. And it was all the more galling to him that opposition was coming not just from anti–New Deal Republicans, as he could reasonably have expected, but also from members of his own party. Some of them were Roosevelt's old friends, Democrats who had been his supporters and allies during his first term in office, happily running for office on the president's coattails, adroitly milking the magic of the Roosevelt name for all it was worth. And yet, once in office, they veered to the right and found every excuse to block or gut his New Deal legislation. It made his "blood boil," wrote Josephus Daniels to Roosevelt, that legislators who were elected on a pledge to "stand back of the President" were standing so far back "that it would require a telescope to see them!"[47]

Roosevelt felt special animosity toward those who were willing to run with him on a liberal party platform and then vote against the very pledges on which they had been elected. The "shenanigans" of turncoat Democrats disgusted him, for he believed that they were wreaking permanent injury on the nation. The tough-talking Harry Hopkins, one of FDR's closest advisors and the head of the Works Progress Administration, also railed against certain Democrats "who tricked the voters by wearing our insignia, only to turn against us as soon as they got in office."[48]

So this president was not merely frustrated and tired of endlessly compromising with these saboteurs who ran under his banner: he was indignant, outraged, infuriated—and desperate. As Congress debated and buried the executive reorganization bill in the spring of 1938, Roosevelt's "hatred," wrote Jim Farley, "glowed as fierce as ever under the ashes of the past six months." The president "took no pains to hide his anger," remarked George Creel, a newspaper man and Roosevelt critic who had served in the government under Woodrow Wilson. His "resentment crystallized into the desire to crush all who conspired against the throne."[49]

Roosevelt's "Dutch" was up, blared a headline in the *New York Times* in early April 1938, referring to the president's famous temper. He would sorely need, the *Times* reporter concluded, "all the dogged persistence he is supposed to have inherited from that Claes van Rosenvelt who nearly 300 years ago took up residence on Manhattan Island." Dogged persistence—perhaps. But after the defeat of both court-packing and executive reorganization, Roosevelt instinctively felt that the situation required more than that: it demanded some form of retribution—if not revenge.[50]

His head tilted back, his cigarette holder tipped at a jaunty angle, his face lit up by a joyful smile, Roosevelt had given Americans the invaluable gift of his buoyant, energizing, enchanting personality—self-confident, forward-looking, gloriously sunny. That combination of his seductive charm and contagious optimism had restored hope to a broken nation. Was he capable, too, of feelings as dark as hatred, of impulses as destructive as revenge?

Two years earlier, Americans had encountered his fighting side. "We have earned the hatred of entrenched greed," the president exulted in his state of the union speech on January 3, 1936, denouncing the selfish few who "spread fear and discord among the people" and "gang up against the people's liberties." He had told Raymond Moley that he wanted that January 1936 message to be a "fighting speech," and it was that and more.

Later that year, in a rousing, polarizing, climactic campaign speech in Madison Square Garden, FDR had pointed to the nation's domestic enemies—speculators, reckless bankers, and irresponsible financial barons, the selfish plutocrats concerned only with protecting their own wealth and safeguarding their profits. "They are unanimous in their hate for me," he exclaimed to the excited, roaring crowd, his voice rising to a crescendo, "and I welcome their hatred!" And after drawing the

battle lines against the saboteurs of the New Deal, he predicted his own victory: "I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second Administration that in it these forces met their master!" One reporter who was present at that rally, Thomas Stokes, later remembered a "vengefulness in his voice when he said it."[51]

Roosevelt's aggressiveness was entirely appropriate in Madison Square Garden—the arena that had long been the mecca for whopping prizefights. In that campaign speech, after underscoring each of America's dire needs—increased wages, cheaper electricity and transportation, home mortgages, an end to child labor—Roosevelt repeated the militant refrain: "For all these we have only just begun to fight!" And if there was any doubt about his readiness to fight or his will to dominate, Roosevelt reminded a crowd in Washington, D.C., a few months after his breathtaking election victory in 1936: "we gave warning last November that we had only just begun to fight. Did some people really believe we did not mean it? Well—I meant it!"[52]

The people in Roosevelt's inner circle were already acquainted with his taste for crushing his opponents and enemies. One of his best speechwriters, playwright and liberal Robert Sherwood, found that FDR could oscillate between the Christian spirit and a "capacity for vindictiveness." Frances Perkins, FDR's secretary of labor, who had known him for decades, also allowed that he may have had "a streak of vindictiveness." She recalled that once, after the president did a favor for someone who had been nasty to him, he was told that he had performed a magnanimous gesture. "I'm not magnanimous," FDR replied. "I'm a mean cuss at heart." Jim Farley explained that people who thought Roosevelt was "weak and vacillating" didn't realize that the key to his whole character was his "battling nature." His easygoing air of affability was only a mask. If he wanted something to be accomplished, he was "ready to fight for it without ever letting up." In the

depths of the Depression, that willingness—that eagerness—to fight was, for tens of millions of Americans, bracing, inspiring, confidence-restoring, uplifting. The president, Farley concluded, was "not afraid of any man in shoe leather."[53]

A few years earlier, Roosevelt had met briefly with retired Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who offered him a lesson in battlefield tactics. "When you are losing a battle," Holmes advised the new president, "you must halt the retreat, blow the trumpet, and charge. And that's exactly what you are doing. You are in a war, Mr. President, and in a war there is only one rule, 'Form your battalion and fight!' "[54]

But in the early months of 1938, Roosevelt had no clear battle plan. He randomly flailed about, spewing his anger and frustration against all those who opposed him—especially editorial writers and journalists. At press conferences in the spring of 1938, he upbraided reporters, accusing them—correctly—of giving more coverage to the few rabid enemies of the New Deal than to the vast armies of its supporters.

The headlines and editorials in 85 percent of the nation's newspapers featured conservative opinion, the president complained. He never received "two-fisted support" from editorial writers, only a "yes, but" attitude: " 'Oh, yes, we are in favor of flood control, but we do not like this way of doing it . . . Oh yes, we are in favor of maintaining good prices for crops, but this bill is terrible. It is regimentation on the farmer.' Period, end of the paragraph, end of the story!"[55]

He even raged against women's magazines that ran full-page ads designed to whip up opposition to his Fair Labor Standards Act, legislation that would set a minimum wage and abolish child labor. "Housewives beware!" FDR exclaimed, parodying the advertisements. "If the Wages and Hours Bill goes through, you will have to pay your Negro girl eleven dollars a week!" "Of course," the president told the report-

ers, "no law ever intended a minimum wages and hours bill to apply to domestic help."[56]

But the president saved most of his burning resentment for the Democratic senators and congressmen who were now thwarting him, foiling his efforts to improve education, raise salaries, create purchasing power, and raise the standard of living—especially in the backward, impoverished South. While most southern senators had been among the most dependable Roosevelt supporters on Capitol Hill during the president's first years in office—like majority leader Joseph Robinson of Arkansas, Democratic whip James Byrnes of South Carolina, and Pat Harrison of Mississippi, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee—a small, intransigent old guard remained. Those senators, FDR grumbled during a press conference in late April, "if they lived in the North, would not be Democrats anyway."[57]

On the one hand, those conservatives had not bolted the Democratic Party completely to join the Republicans—as had embittered turncoats like John Jacob Raskob, the former national chairman of the party; John W. Davis, the Democratic candidate for president in 1924; and Al Smith, FDR's political mentor, predecessor as New York governor, and the party's 1928 candidate for the presidency. Indeed, these three and others went on to found the archconservative American Liberty League, seeking to destroy the New Deal in the name of laissez-faire economics. Nor had even the most conservative southern Democrats completely repudiated the New Deal, as had Raymond Moley, a former member of FDR's Brains Trust, his inner circle of policy advisors, and Lewis Douglas, FDR's first budget director.[58]

On the other hand, the Democratic rebels in Congress were causing far greater harm than those ineffectual malcontents. "The Tydings, Smiths, Georges, Byrds," wrote an irate Josephus Daniels to Roosevelt in 1938, "hurt our cause more than the Fishes and Vandenbergs," referring to conservative Republicans in Congress.[59]

How could the president seize the initiative once again and reestablish his leadership? "Roosevelt must either fight as he has never fought before," the *New Republic* editorialized in April 1938, "or let everything slide. There is no other logical choice." But beyond impotent expressions of anger, the softball tactic of withholding patronage appointments, his appointment of Alabama's liberal senator Hugo Black to fill a Supreme Court vacancy, and his insistence that Congress take up the executive reorganization bill again, what concrete plan of action could Roosevelt and his inner circle devise?[60]

On June 18, 1938, the gavel fell in the House and in the Senate, ending the stormy session. The same day, President and Mrs. Roosevelt left Washington for the resort town of Nahant in Massachusetts Bay and the wedding of their youngest son, John. Under radiant sunshine, the president held court, laughing, clasping hands, chatting, joking with scores of old friends as well as his cabinet members.[61]

But back in Washington some of the president's allies believed that the time had come to wage battle, not to beguile. Four days after the president was seen generously dispensing his dazzling charm in Massachusetts, Senator Joshua Lee of Oklahoma exhorted him to change gears, slug it out—and punish. "What would you think about bearing down on those who voted against your program?" he wrote to Roosevelt on June 22, suggesting that the vote that spring on the executive reorganization bill could serve as a litmus test of loyalty.[62]

The same day, June 22, crowds poured into Yankee Stadium to witness the boxing match of the decade. The "Brown Bomber," Joe Louis, the son of an Alabama sharecropper and great-grandson of a slave, would defend his world heavyweight title in a rematch against the German boxer Max Schmeling, whom the *Atlanta Constitution* called the "Nazi contender." "Schmeling is about as unpredictable in the ring as FDR is in the White House," wrote one sports columnist before the fight.[63]

Sitting in the best ringside seats were Hollywood stars—from Cary Grant and Edward G. Robinson to George Burns and Gracie Allen. Political insiders sat next to them—New York governor Herbert Lehman; New York City's mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia; FBI director J. Edgar Hoover; and one of FDR's sons. Also joining them was Jim Farley, the former chairman of the New York Boxing Commission. Thanks to pressure from Farley, Joe Louis had supported Roosevelt in the 1936 election. But four years later, the boxer would come out for FDR's opponent, Wendell Willkie, telling audiences that Willkie "has got punch." "Stick to your boxing, Joe," wrote one reader to the black weekly newspaper, the *Chicago Defender.*[64]

Seventy thousand more, paying a dollar each, passed through the turnstiles and crowded into the grandstands. Not an empty seat in Yankee Stadium. The country seemed suddenly immobilized as millions of Americans—half the nation's population—listened for free on the radios in their kitchens and living rooms. NBC sports announcer Clem McCarthy gave his electrifying blow-by-blow description of Schmeling's first-round collapse under the relentless downpour of Louis's fists: ". . . Schmeling is going down . . . Schmeling is down. The count is 4. It's . . . And he's up. And Louis right and left to the head, a left to the jaw, a right to the head, right to the body, a left up to the jaw—and Schmeling is down. The count is 5. 6. 7. 8. The men are in the ring. The fight is over! Max Schmeling is beaten in the first round!" Two minutes and four seconds—and it was over.[65]

Joyous cheers rang out in the hot Bronx night. At Yankee Stadium and all over America, in taverns, restaurants, night clubs, and homes, people celebrated; motorists honked their horns; in Harlem, thirty blocks were closed to traffic for the party. Everyone was ecstatic. Well, not everyone. "I always feel sorry for the man who is beaten," the contrarian Eleanor Roosevelt wrote plaintively in her newspaper column "My Day" a few days later. After her tortured childhood and her husband's infidelity, she apparently identified with the loser. To the victor,

Joe Louis, she offered condescending advice to "take his money and put it away."[66]

Unlike Eleanor, her husband Franklin, adrenalin surging, loved a fight—and just two days after the historic Louis-Schmeling match, he, too, climbed into the ring.

On June 24, 1938, the president finally announced the plan of action that he and his close advisors had agreed on. Soon to be dubbed in the press the "elimination committee," they were a clever, inventive group: the combative sixty-four-year-old Harold Ickes, a former Bull Moose Republican from Illinois who became FDR's secretary of the interior; forty-eight-year-old Harry Hopkins of Iowa, FDR's most trusted advisor and troubleshooter, whom he appointed Works Progress administrator and then secretary of commerce; Joseph Keenan, a fifty-year-old special assistant to the attorney general who had been assigned the impossible task of lobbying hostile senators to back FDR's court-packing bill; and a closely knit duo, Thomas ("Tommy the Cork") Corcoran, the thirty-eight-year-old master political operator, an engaging, tough Irish lawyer from New England who liked to crack jokes and sing Irish ballads, always ready to undertake any kind of task and completely devoted to the president; and the Brains Truster Ben Cohen, a shy, brilliant legal technician, the son of an immigrant peddler.[67]

This informal inner circle believed that the quickest and most decisive way to remedy the problem of conservative, obstructionist Democrats in Congress was simply to defeat them in the 1938 midterm Democratic primaries. By intervening in the primaries and supporting liberal challengers, Roosevelt hoped to prevent the reelection of at least some anti–New Deal Democrats. And perhaps such hardball tactics might frighten others into falling back in line.[68]

Before it crystallized in June, "purge talk"—ideas for cleaning house and sweeping out Democratic dissidents—had been percolating for over a year. "There has got to be a fight and there has got to be a purge,"

wrote Roosevelt's loyal friend Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau in his diary in 1937. But when an article by a White House insider named Stanley High appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in early 1937, confirming rumors of an imminent crackdown, the White House strenuously denied that anything like that was in the works. The influential syndicated columnist Walter Lippmann insisted that the president's inner circle was upset not that High had misrepresented the facts but rather that he had prematurely let the cat out of the bag.[69]

Denials and obfuscations went on for months. In January 1938, Jim Farley issued a statement declaring that the administration would not become involved in primary fights, though the president had insisted that Farley delete the line "nominations are entirely the affair of the states." And as recently as May 1938, the president had announced at a press conference that he would have nothing to say publicly on state primary contests. Thus Roosevelt would choose when and where to strike.[70]

The president decided to use a fireside chat to explain his intentions to the American people. It was the medium in which he excelled—he knew just how to modulate his tone, time his pauses, and create a sense of the dramatic. On the sultry evening of June 24, he descended into the unventilated soundproof studio in the White House basement, made even warmer by the bright lights of a movie cameraman. Leaning over the microphone, wiping away the perspiration from his brow, he could not resist departing from his prepared text. "The American public and American newspapers are certainly creatures of habit," he said. "It is the warmest night I have ever seen in Washington. And yet this talk will be referred to as a 'fireside talk.' " The fireside was the last place where many Americans on that sweltering evening wished to imagine themselves.[71]

Still, the president was in superb form. His voice had the ring of real conviction, a new vibrancy, the columnist Joseph Alsop remarked. Throughout the previous winter, there had been something dull, flat, uncertain in his delivery, but now Alsop heard an aggressive commander. "All the old magic was there without a flaw," agreed the *New York Herald Tribune.*[72] Calmly, reasonably, Roosevelt laid out the facts. He began by reminding his listeners that the Seventy-fifth Congress had left many things undone, especially in its refusal to provide more efficient machinery for the executive branch of government. But then he went on to emphasize the session's achievements, which were so numerous that a few failures, however significant, seemed to pale in comparison. Congress had established a new Civil Aeronautics Authority; it set up the United States Housing Authority to fund large-scale slum clearance and low-rent housing; it had reduced taxes on small businesses and made it easier for the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to make credit available to all businesses; and it had increased funding for the Works Progress Administration, the Public Works Administration, Rural Electrification, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and other agencies.

All of that might have been reason for celebration. But the president looked through a darker glass. More progress had to be made, he insisted, to finally solve business, agricultural, and social problems. "The great majority of you," he told his listeners, "want your own Government to keep on trying to solve them." Then he came to the meat of his talk—his dual role as president and party leader. As president, he would not ask Americans to vote for Democrats or for Republicans. "Nor am I, as *President,* taking part in Democratic primaries," he added.

But as the head of the Democratic Party, he explained, he had a responsibility, too: that of leading his party in a liberal direction and carrying out the 1936 party platform. Thus, he continued, striking a militant note, it was his right and duty, as party head, to speak out in the upcoming Democratic primaries and support liberal candidates

who stood by him and the New Deal. "Do not misunderstand me," he said, making it clear that he would not oppose candidates who disagreed with him on any single issue, like court-packing or executive reorganization. He would, however, work to prevent the election of "outspoken reactionaries" and hypocrites—the politicians "who say 'yes' to a progressive objective, but who always find some reason to oppose any specific proposal designed to gain that objective."[73]

Although FDR's confidant Sam Rosenman later said that "the basis of the purge arose out of the determination to get rid of the people who opposed [FDR] during the Court fight," in 1938 the president denied that there was any such link.[74] And to defuse the idea that he was out for revenge after the humiliation of that defeat, he noted that although he had lost the battle on court-packing, he had actually won the war. While the bill was still before Congress, Justice Owen Roberts had switched sides on some crucial judicial decisions; the Court ruled in favor of the National Labor Relations Act and Social Security; and Justice Willis Van Devanter retired and was replaced by Hugo Black of Alabama. Thus he now made the case that his real objectives had been attained. The Court's "recent decisions," FDR stated, "are eloquent testimony of a willingness to collaborate with the two other branches of Government to make democracy work."

And yet the president was hardly as sanguine as he wished to appear, for he personalized his quarrel with conservative Democrats, portraying their conservatism as disloyalty to him. Striking out at them for running on his coattails, he bristled that they had dared to make a "clear misuse of *my own name.*" This was not the first time that he personalized politics, playing up his own role in events. "There's one issue in this campaign," he had told Raymond Moley in 1936, "and people must be either *for me* or *against me.*"[75] A few months later, he again placed himself at the center of the great ideological struggle of the decade in his Madison Square Garden speech, when he declared that the economic royalists "are unanimous in their hate for *me!*" Now, in his fireside chat, rocked

once again by his feelings of betrayal and an all-consuming desire to retaliate, his great talents for compromise, conciliation, and charm abandoned him, leaving him vulnerable to committing a major blunder.

The message of the fireside chat was clear: the president would break with precedent as well as with his own calculating and cautious behavior. In the face of the conservative congressional revolt, he would intervene in Democratic primaries and appeal directly to voters. Eager to exploit the precious capital of his prestige and the popular New Deal, he was determined to help his friends and whip his foes. Frances Perkins, his loyal friend and secretary of labor, feared that it was a "reckless" plan.[76]

Right on cue, editorial writers around the nation slammed the president's talk, calling his tactic a drastic "purge." Roosevelt himself obviously disliked the term "purge," dismissing it as an "immature" headline word.[77] But those provocative headlines sold newspapers, especially because they reminded readers of recent grim events in the Soviet Union—Stalin's murderous elimination of senior colleagues in the Communist Party leadership. Just that past March, one of the largest of the Moscow "show trials" had ended with the speedy execution of all twenty-one defendants, Stalin's political opponents. If President Roosevelt succeeded in his own purge, the *Chicago Tribune* editorialized, the only people remaining in the Democratic Party would be "Hitler yes-men or Stalin Communists."[78] The malicious columnist Westbrook Pegler judged that Roosevelt, like Hitler, was demanding "absolute personal power" and a "purely nominal legislature."[79]

A few commentators, however, offered more balanced appraisals. "It's too dangerous," cautioned the *Christian Science Monitor.* "Selection of candidates is left to local powers that be; Presidents grin and bear it." Other papers made similar points, suggesting that it was far too risky to

challenge local candidates who had their own political machines as well as the support of state officials and local newspapers. But a few undaunted spirits sided with the president. Democratic voters had a right to know if the leader of their party regarded certain candidates "as the friend or the enemy of the New Deal," argued columnist Ernest Lindley in the *Washington Post*.[80]

In the White House, anticipating the thrill of battle and the exhilaration of open conflict, people were energized—especially the president. The purge, Tommy Corcoran later recalled, "was all strong food for [the president's] love of political excitement, his feeling for political power, and his satisfaction in promoting the aims of the New Deal without compromise or apology." In the world of politics, as in ancient Greek theater, nothing is more intoxicating than passion, conflict, and vengeance. And no one loved taking on the starring role in a taut, perilous, high-stakes drama more than Roosevelt himself. The president, wrote Lindley, was "aching for a show down."[81]

But who would get trounced that summer? The rebels in the Democratic Party up for reelection—or the president himself? For their part, conservative Democrats were willing to go all out to defend their turf. "Their attempt to pack the Court failed and their attempt to pack the Senate will fail," predicted Burton Wheeler. "The President's message was a *plain declaration of war,*" wrote Josiah Bailey to Harry Byrd, "and whether we wish to or not, we must fight now." Even Roosevelt's friend and ally James Byrnes, whom he would appoint to the Supreme Court in 1941, told the president not only that it was "folly" to purge independent thinkers from the party but that he himself would do everything in his power to prevent his friends from falling "under the ax." Also throwing in with the insurgent Democrats was Walter Lippmann, always eager to deliver a punch of his own. "The purgees must fight!" he wrote in his column. Otherwise, he predicted with a dramatic flourish, the New Dealers would attain dictatorial powers "which no normal

political opposition can hope to check." Warning that Roosevelt sought nothing less than "overwhelming and centralized" governmental power, Lippmann cried, "Now is the time for resistance!"[82]

The tall, bald-headed Jim Farley, who towered over most of the other men in FDR's inner circle, was the one White House insider who wanted no part of the purge. As the chair of the Democratic National Party, his job, he wrote, was "not to take sides or to encourage factionalism but to promote harmony, teamwork, and united action in the interests of party success at the November balloting." The Roosevelt administration represented the first time since the Civil War that the Democratic Party was the undisputed dominant party of the United States, Farley wrote—and he was not about to declare war on a winning formula or do anything to undermine party unity. He was determined to keep out of what he called "dirty party-splitting work." It seemed obvious to him that a broadly based party, one that recruited its members from farmers, laborers, businessmen, and the professions, in every region of the country, could not please everybody.[83]

"To Jim Farley, any Democrat is a Democrat," the razor-tongued Harold Ickes sneered. But Farley was a brilliant political technician—a consensus man, not a conflict man—whose job demanded his own neutrality. And he had his own political aspirations, too, and toyed with the idea of running for the presidency in 1940. As far as he was concerned, the bitter cleavage in the Democratic ranks was nothing but "pure politics, nothing but politics and, to my mind, stupid politics."[84]

A president had to be a fighter, Farley granted. The Democratic chairman had no patience for a "spineless jellyfish" who wouldn't try anything and everything to get his policies through Congress. But Farley had also learned that in politics, nothing was ever gained by vindictiveness. "The man who starts out to destroy another man for revenge," he wrote, "usually winds up destroying himself."

Upset that none of his warnings were heeded, he made up his mind that his role in the purge would be "non-participation."

"I prepared to go to Alaska," he wrote in his memoirs, "where I hoped it would be cooler. As I surveyed the coming primaries, certain that the purgers were headed for trouble, I wondered if Alaska was far enough."[85]