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# Kentucky's New Dealers: An Interview With James A. Farley

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## Kentucky's New Dealers: An Interview With James A. Farley

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*William Cooper, Jr.*

The following is edited from an unrehearsed interview with James A. Farley conducted by William Cooper, Jr. at Mr. Farley's office, 515 Madison Avenue, New York, New York on 19 May 1976. Although at times during the interview Mr. Farley suggested confidentiality, at no time did he request that the recorder be stopped. He signed an unconditional release to be effective upon his death. Mr. Farley died on 9 June 1976.

Mr. COOPER: Mr. Farley, first of all, I would like to ask you just a few things about Fred M. Vinson. I know you said that your recollection was not specific there, but if we could get some general impressions it would be helpful to our project. Do you recall when you first met Fred Vinson?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I don't know. I don't know whether I met him at the convention in Chicago or not in 1932. If I didn't meet him then, I undoubtedly met him after I became postmaster general on March 4th of 1933, because I know at the time I went down there, the congressmen were coming to see me, and senators, too, about appointments as postmasters and other appointments in the Post Office Department.

Mr. COOPER: Do you have any general impressions of the type of fellow that Vinson was?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, he was a good congressman and a good Democrat. Naturally, being a Democrat myself and interested in the success of the Democratic Party and its nominees for Congress and the Senate and governorship and state offices, I undoubtedly had many conversations with him. But, you must remember, I had more conversations, and so far as the Congress and the senators were concerned, with the chairman of the Post Office Committees in the Senate and the House.

Mr. COOPER: Vinson was first elected to the House in 1924 and served continuously until 1938 with the exception of one term. He was defeated for re-election in the Hoover landslide of 1928, and



in that particular campaign, he was also serving as the vice-chairman at the Democratic Regional Headquarters in St. Louis for Al Smith's presidential campaign.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I think Mr. Hull was chairman of the Democratic National Committee in those days, wasn't he?

Mr. COOPER: I believe so, right, but I was wondering if, as a result of that 1928 campaign, did Vinson attract any attention among the national Democratic leadership as a man who was willing to place party loyalty above his own personal advancement?

Mr. FARLEY: There would be no way for me to answer that question. I wouldn't know. Much to my regret, I wouldn't know.

Mr. COOPER: In 1934 you wrote members of Vinson's county Democratic committee in Kentucky urging them to insure Vinson's re-election. As a matter of fact, I believe there was an editorial in the *New York Times* in October of 1934 concerning this. Was this something which you did for all Democratic candidates for Congress?

Mr. FARLEY: I did that for all Democratic candidates for Congress and the Senate, and I did it for all the Democratic candidates for governor.

Mr. COOPER: I see.

Mr. FARLEY: It was a policy of mine. I did that in my county when I was county chairman, and I did it in my state when I was state chairman, and I followed that policy when I became national chairman.

Mr. COOPER: Vinson was really relatively unknown in Congress until about 1932. At that time he became a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

Mr. FARLEY: Which is a very important committee, of course.

Mr. COOPER: Right. Supposedly, he became a member of that committee with a fairly powerful assist from John Nance Garner of Texas.

Mr. FARLEY: Garner, of course, had been Speaker of the House, and naturally he was close to every member of the Congress, and he did everything he could in the years that followed when Mr. Roosevelt was elected president to be helpful to them. He was on a first-name basis with not only the Democrats but the Republican congressmen, as well.

Mr. COOPER: Then in 1936 Vinson became chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Taxation. In fact, he was jumped



over six other Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee!

Mr. FARLEY: Well, Garner probably had something to do with that. I would have thought that Garner's influence would have—he was no longer Speaker, he was vice-president, but he had been speaker for so many years, and that influence that he had with the House still hung over, so to speak, even though he was vice-president. He, of course, was over acting as vice-president, but he was over roaming around the House talking to congressmen about legislation that the president wanted, that he was interested in having go through both houses. And, where it was necessary, I'm sure that many of these bills—some of the congressmen would vote against them, see, and some of the senators would vote against them, because of local reasons. They felt it might hurt them personally. So when that thing happened, they'd appoint what they called a conference committee in the House and in the Senate, and what Mr. Garner would try to do was to get members in the Senate and in the House friendly disposed to the legislation, so he undoubtedly would worm his way over to the House and talk to the Speaker who succeeded him—I don't know whether it was Jim Byrns or Joe Byrns of Tennessee, or whether it was Henry Rainey [of Illinois, Speaker 1933-1935], I've forgotten. And he undoubtedly would talk to them about the House membership on those conference committees.

Mr. COOPER: Did you have any contact with Vinson while he was chairman of that subcommittee that was considering much New Deal tax legislation?

Mr. FARLEY: I have no recollection. I have no recollection. No, I have no recollection at all.

Mr. COOPER: For the most part, Vinson was the Roosevelt regular in Congress, but upon two occasions he broke with the president. He fought the Economy Bill of 1933 because it reduced veterans' pensions, and he helped pass a Bonus Bill over Roosevelt's veto in 1936.

Mr. FARLEY: I don't remember that, frankly. I mean I . . . no, I don't remember action on those bills.

Mr. COOPER: Some Vinson scholars have credited him with being the chief architect of the Social Security Act of 1935. Have you ever heard this?

Mr. FARLEY: Could have been. I do know that one of the persons most active in that type of legislation was Frances Perkins, who was secretary of labor. She was in the middle of all the talks and



conversations and work in connection with that type of legislation, but what congressmen she conferred with and what senators she conferred with, I wouldn't know.

Mr. COOPER: In 1937 Vinson managed Sam Rayburn's successful bid to become House Majority Leader over John O'Connor.

Mr. FARLEY: Yes, and I was for O'Connor.

Mr. COOPER: Why did Rayburn pick Vinson for his manager?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, he probably thought he would be more influential with the congressmen in getting them to support Rayburn over O'Connor than anybody else. That had to be the reason. He didn't probably appoint him just because he liked him. He probably liked him, but the fact that he felt that he could be more helpful. . . . That was a rather bitter fight, you know, and just between us, John O'Connor was entitled to that place.

Mr. COOPER: That was about the third time he had been considered for it.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, he was entitled to that place, and I disagreed with Mr. Roosevelt on that, and I disagreed with Mr. Roosevelt when he put a candidate named Jimmy [James H.] Fay in here to take the nomination away from O'Connor, which he succeeded in doing. O'Connor, who with Champ Clark—or Bennett [Champ] Clark—were wholly responsible in a large measure for the passage of the abolition of the two-thirds vote in the Philadelphia convention. Now, he was a very sincere fellow, John was. His brother, Basil O'Connor, was a law partner of Mr. Roosevelt, you know. And I have thought it was an outrage, frankly, to remove him from that place, but the president didn't want him because he figured John wouldn't go along with him on his legislation. He figured that Rayburn was with him, so he was for Rayburn.

Mr. COOPER: But apparently Vinson had by that time acquired a reputation as being a pretty skillful—

Mr. FARLEY: Apparently! Well, that's obvious. That's obvious.

Mr. COOPER: Vinson was appointed to the U. S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in 1937, late in 1937, but President Roosevelt asked him to remain in Congress until he had helped steer a new revenue bill through that was in the works at that time. The administration was heavily criticized for this, especially by the columnist David Lawrence, first because Vinson as a justice on the Court of Appeals would be hearing many cases which would be dealing with the new tax law that he was just helping to steer through the Congress, and secondly because the



Constitution prohibited a person from holding a government office and being a member of either house of Congress at the same time. Vinson had been confirmed by the Senate to the new appointment several months before he actually—

Mr. FARLEY: But he hadn't actually assumed it.

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: Yeah. I don't remember that at all. But, as I say, David Lawrence was a very darn good newspaperman and a very frank man, and undoubtedly there was an objection raised at that time. But Mr. Roosevelt paid no attention to that. He felt that Fred could be helpful to him. He kept him there, and he undoubtedly was. I don't remember the incident at all.

Mr. COOPER: You were not consulted on it?

Mr. FARLEY: I don't know a thing about it. I probably knew all about it, but I have long since forgotten!

Mr. COOPER: One story alleges that Henry Morgenthau, Jr. was responsible for putting Vinson on that court, because Vinson was giving Morgenthau's tax proposals too close scrutiny.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I just want to say that Morgenthau's influence wouldn't be that important.

Mr. COOPER: Wouldn't be that important?

Mr. FARLEY: No! The president appointed him to that court at the time. That influence certainly had to come—was Barkley around? Barkley's influence and the influence of other men in the state and in the Congress—maybe Garner, maybe others. Henry Morgenthau's influence had nothing to do with that, in my judgment.

Mr. COOPER: I see, right. That's what I was going to ask. Did you see much of Vinson in his wartime post? He was director of Economic Stabilization.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I wasn't there during the war. I left there, you see, on August 31st in 1940.

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: By the way, I was only back to Washington three or four times. I only saw Mr. Roosevelt four or five times after I retired.

Mr. COOPER: Oh, is that right?

Mr. FARLEY: Yes. I'm sorry about that. We had a friendship that was broken as a result of my opposition to the third term, and it bothered him very much, and it annoyed him very much that I let my name go before the convention as a candidate for president,



see? We had a fine relationship, while we disagreed on many things. I disagreed with him on the court fight, and the purge, and many other things, but I was hoping that we could at least preserve the friendship that existed. But it got rather cool, and I saw him very little after. I'm sorry to say that. That's between us, you see.

Mr. COOPER: In one of the wartime positions that Vinson held, he replaced an old friend of yours, Jesse Jones, as Federal Loan Administrator in March of 1945.

Mr. FARLEY: President Roosevelt made Jesse retire, didn't he, from the RFC—no, or was it from the cabinet? Jones was at that time secretary of commerce, and he asked him to retire.

Mr. COOPER: Yes, right, he'd held both positions.

Mr. FARLEY: Yes, so he asked him to retire so he could appoint Henry Wallace.

Mr. COOPER: Right. And Wallace took half of Jones's job, or he took the secretary of commerce position. Vinson was given the other part of Jones's job, the Federal Loan Administrator who handled the RFC funds, and so forth.

Mr. FARLEY: I'd forgotten that. I'd forgotten that. Yes.

Mr. COOPER: But apparently you and Jones never discussed this?

Mr. FARLEY: Not to my knowledge. We may have, but I have no recollection. I know I did discuss with Mr. Jones the time that we went and saw Mr. Roosevelt, and Mr. Roosevelt fired him. That's really what happened. He just asked him for his resignation, and they had rather a heated discussion in the president's office in which Jones was very critical of the president. But I have no comment on that beyond that.

Mr. COOPER: Some regarded Vinson, when he was secretary of the treasury in 1945 and 1946, as the ablest man in President Truman's post-war cabinet. Now, there were a good many people in that cabinet that you had known—James Byrnes, Harold Ickes, Henry Wallace, Tom Clark, Robert E. Hannegan. Do you feel that Vinson was the ablest?

Mr. FARLEY: I wouldn't say. I wouldn't be able to make an honest observation on that, except for this: to say that he was a damn sight more able than some of the names you mentioned. I never thought that Clark was a great man. And Ickes I thought—I don't want to be profane, and won't be—but he. . . . I met two terrible men in my lifetime, and he was on top of the list—an impossible person! Everybody else was dishonest except Ickes! This



is all, you know, between us, as we say. Don't write this. I sat alongside of him for six months without talking to him, because he would tap my wires, and he denied that he tapped them! And I accused him of tapping my wires in the presence of Mr. Roosevelt, and he denied it. But I put it right down his throat and insisted that he did. He was the only honest man in government, but. . . .

Mr. COOPER: Were you surprised when Vinson was named chief justice in 1946?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I wouldn't say I was surprised. I was pleased to see him, because I knew he was a good man. And he had considerable experience in the Congress and in other positions that he held. President Truman had a high regard for him, or he wouldn't have appointed him. No, I never knew—and this is no reflection on him—I never knew anything about his legal capacity at all. There would never have been any way for me to have known that. I don't know anything about his records as a practitioner before the bar. There would be no way of my knowing that. But the fact that he was in the Congress for so many years, of course, made him knowledgeable on federal legislation. I think every court, like his court and all the courts, of course, have cases before them that have to do with legislation in a large measure passed by both houses and acted and made laws by virtue of the president's signature. Now, I think it's important that some men of that character, or that men of that ability, are on the bench, rather than some of them that come just out of the practice of the law, without any previous knowledge of legislation. I don't think they would be as proficient. And so, undoubtedly, by virtue of his experience he, I assume, made a good judge. I have no way of knowing.

Mr. COOPER: In 1952 President Truman took Vinson on a yacht trip off the coast of Florida and announced to him that he was not going to be a candidate for re-election and urged Vinson to seek the Democratic nomination. Vinson, of course, refused—one of the few refusals that he gave to either Truman or Roosevelt. Do you have any reason to believe that he would have not made a satisfactory president if he had sought the nomination?

Mr. FARLEY: Undoubtedly. Undoubtedly. Undoubtedly, he would have made a good president, but I question very much—that's the time Kennedy got it, wasn't it?

Mr. COOPER: No, 1952 was Stevenson and Eisenhower.

Mr. FARLEY: Yeah, well, I don't think anybody could have beaten





*National Democratic Party Chairman James A. Farley and Gov. Albert B. Chandler of Kentucky at the 1956 Democratic national convention in Chicago. (A. B. Chandler Papers, Modern Political Papers Collection, University of Kentucky Libraries)*

Stevenson for that nomination at that time. With all due respect to the president.

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: Of course, the outgoing president can't always elect his successors. Truman undoubtedly was sincere in that, because I would think that Truman would be a damn sight more satisfied with Vinson than he would have been with Stevenson. There would be no question about that.

Mr. COOPER: Right. Do you know much about the Vinson-Chandler relationship?

Mr. FARLEY: No, I don't.

Mr. COOPER: One associate of Vinson says that he, Vinson, considered Chandler a "lightweight."

Mr. FARLEY: Well, everybody did, I think, except Happy himself.



Mr. COOPER: I see, I see.

Mr. FARLEY: Happy got a little bit annoyed with me. He came to Chicago and wanted to be nominated for vice-president, and I said, "How in the hell can you expect to get that when Barkley is a candidate, see?" And I don't know whether Barkley was named then, or whether Barkley was still the vice-president, I've forgotten. But he got a little bit annoyed with me. Sam Conner—no, there was somebody else there, not Sam Conner—somebody else active in Kentucky politics, a great friend of Happy's, he told Happy that he didn't have a chance. But Happy came on—he got very much annoyed with me because I wasn't for him, of course. I said, "Barkley is the fellow, and you ought to be for Barkley. You have no chance here." For a long time after that he was a little bit cool to me. In the years that followed he cooled off, and I haven't seen much of him recently, but whenever I did, he was always friendly. As a matter of fact, Mildred for a long time wouldn't speak to me, but she cooled off, too. Time takes care of some of those things.

Mr. COOPER: Right. Do you recall when you first met the irrepressible Happy Chandler?

Mr. FARLEY: No, I don't. No, I don't.

Mr. COOPER: Chandler, of course, acquired a reputation for running political races in opposition to the regular Democratic Party in Kentucky. He's been blamed for much of the factionalism in Kentucky Democratic politics.

Mr. FARLEY: I think that's a fair observation. I don't want to get involved in it, but I think that's true. He ran against Barkley once, and he jumped in the car with Mr. Roosevelt in Covington . . .

Mr. COOPER: I was going to ask you about that.

Mr. FARLEY: . . . much to Mr. Roosevelt's annoyance, I guess. And he waved his hand along the line of procession. I think the president, from what I heard about it, was very much annoyed. But that wouldn't bother Happy.

Mr. COOPER: No, no, no. You also knew a very close political associate of Chandler's—Dan Talbott.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, that's the one I was talking about—Dan Talbott. Dan is the fellow who came up in Chicago and told me Happy was coming up and wanted to see me.

Mr. COOPER: Yes.

Mr. FARLEY: Dan didn't agree with his viewpoint, then. He was for him, but the thing he wanted done couldn't be done, and Dan



told him that. And he didn't like that. Happy didn't like to have you disagree with him!

Mr. COOPER: Did people like Talbott, for instance, make Chandler a successful politician?

Mr. FARLEY: You can't say that he made him, but I think he was a close personal friend of his, and probably one of his closest friends. I don't think there's any question about that. I don't know how long that relationship lasted and where it started, but there isn't any doubt that it was a close relationship. And I think it could be truly said that Dan was closer to Happy than anybody else in the political field.

Mr. COOPER: Chandler was elected governor of Kentucky in 1935, and I believe I read somewhere where you attended his inauguration.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I'd forgotten, but I probably did. I attended a lot of them, but I've forgotten about it. Happy and I were on good terms personally during that period and in the years that followed, except the incident I told you about.

Mr. COOPER: Right. Did Chandler ever relate to you his version of what happened in that 1938 incident when Roosevelt came to Kentucky to speak for Barkley? His version is somewhat different from what most of the other accounts are.

Mr. FARLEY: I would have no opinion on that.

Mr. COOPER: Of course, as a result of that 1938 primary in Kentucky, charges of corruption were leveled against both candidates and their supporters. Barkley was accused of his supporters' using WPA funds in order to influence the election. Chandler was accused of forcing state employees to work for his campaign, contribute to it, and eventually a Senate investigation . . .

Mr. FARLEY: I don't think that's unusual in Kentucky, is it?

Mr. COOPER: I doubt that it is, no. But as a result of this a Senate investigation was launched, and . . .

Mr. FARLEY: I didn't know that.

Mr. COOPER: . . . an investigation which damned both sides, and really placed responsibility with neither side.

Mr. FARLEY: Was it a Senate investigation?

Mr. COOPER: Right, the United States Senate investigated it, and in the report they found violations on both sides.

Mr. FARLEY: I see. They took no positive position on it?

Mr. COOPER: No, no.



Mr. FARLEY: I see. I'd forgotten.

Mr. COOPER: It was a rather equivocal report, but I was wondering if you recall whether or not the administration and the Democratic Party were somewhat embarrassed as a result of that primary?

Mr. FARLEY: I don't remember. [Laughing] There were so many of those things of that kind of a greater or lesser importance that you couldn't get embarrassed. All you do is the best you could and try to be helpful. Now, I can remember a lot of things that happened forty years ago. Some of these things you brought up of course I recall, but most of them I don't.

Mr. COOPER: Chandler talks about a visit to Roosevelt at the White House in May or June of 1940, and, at that time, he says the president indicated to him that he was not going to run for a third term and that he was looking for a candidate to sponsor. Happy suggested you as a candidate, he says. Did he ever discuss this meeting with you?

Mr. FARLEY: He might have. He might have. He might have. I don't . . . I won't . . . I won't admit that he did, but if he said . . . I'd take Happy's word for that, if he said that, because he was not unfriendly to me personally in those days you know, no doubt about that.

Mr. COOPER: Did he ever . . .

Mr. FARLEY: As I say, Roosevelt wasn't for any candidate except Roosevelt.

Mr. COOPER: Chandler relates that he didn't get much enthusiasm as a result of that.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, of course he wouldn't, you see. Along about that time Roosevelt made this statement, that I couldn't be nominated for vice-president, because I was a Catholic. My nomination would damage the party in the South. He was not an intolerant man, you see, and there isn't any doubt that he was friendly to me personally. But he was a candidate. I realized in 1938 he was a candidate himself, and if he was a candidate for president, he couldn't have another New Yorker on the ticket with him, so he wasn't against me as a Catholic; he was against anybody from New York being mentioned for it. This statement got out. He sent it to a number of people who related it to me, and I didn't pay any attention to it. And finally Ernest Lindley of the New York *Herald Tribune* and *Newsweek* wrote the story. It was an accurate story, and I met Ernest a few days after, and he



said, "What do you think of my story?" Well, I said, "That's a true story, a sound story, because I said he made the same observation to others. But," I said, "you know that he's a candidate himself." Lindley didn't comment on that, but I was supposed to make a speech in Pittsburgh on the 17th of March, and I asked them to let me out of it before the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. I asked to speak in Washington, and Joe Tumulty who had been Mr. Wilson's secretary was running that organization then, and so the switch was made, and I took the speech I had prepared for Pittsburgh, and I delivered it in Washington on a Saturday night, and I inserted this sentence, as near as I can remember: "I hope I never live to see the day when the mother of a newborn son would look down into the cradle and realize that her son couldn't be president of the United States because of a religious or an ethnic background." I threw the ethnic thing in there. Well, that appeared on the page of every newspaper in the United States the next morning, on Sunday morning, you see, and Monday morning I went to Washington, and Steve Early told me that the president heard my speech the other night, and he thought I did a good job.

I said, "Did he like it all?," and Steve said, "Hell, no!" "He says he's going to hold a press conference this morning and deny it." Steve was profane, but not vulgar, and Steve said, "He's going to deny it, but," he said, "you know goddamn well he said it." I said, "Of course, I know he said it, Bob Donovan and a number of others told me he said it, but I said "I have no feeling in the matter." Do you know, he had a press conference that morning, and they asked him about it, and he denied it, and he said it was a lot of hogwash. That's all public, I'm not telling you anything that isn't. And you know, that happened on March the 17th of 1940, and I stayed with him until the end of August when I retired. And do you know, I never mentioned it to him, because if he said he didn't say it, I'd have to call him a liar, and I didn't want to do that. I wanted to get out of there as gracefully as I could. I didn't want to get into a position where he'd ask for my resignation, see? So I stayed, and I determined when I was going to leave, much to his regret, but I did.

Mr. COOPER: Was Chandler an effective senator, or was he somewhat overshadowed by Barkley, who . . .

Mr. FARLEY: Well, there isn't any doubt that his presence was well recognized there, even though he was overshadowed by Barkley, because Barkley was the senior. But



there isn't any doubt that everybody knew that Happy was a senator, and they probably listened to him. I don't know whether they approved of all he said or did, but undoubtedly when he was on his feet, he always said something; whether you agreed with him or not, he always had something to say. And he'd say it most of the time with a smile.

Mr. COOPER: Right. As a person with more, I suspect, than just a passing interest in baseball, how good a job do you feel that Chandler did as baseball commissioner?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, from what I know about it, I think he did very well. I think he was responsible for this pension program, and he probably had some other innovations. To be very frank about it, I would say that Happy made a good baseball commissioner. Now, I don't know of anything that he may have done that he was criticized for; I have no recollection. But I would say that in the main, I would have said he made quite a satisfactory commissioner of baseball.

Mr. COOPER: He was commissioner, of course, when blacks broke into the major leagues for the first time—Jackie Robinson of Brooklyn, and Chandler takes a great deal of credit for that.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I think he was entitled to that. I think he was entitled to that.

Mr. COOPER: Do you recall the name of a fellow, Louis Arnett, of Kentucky?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I remember the name, but I can't place it.

Mr. COOPER: You had a considerable amount of correspondence with him. He seemed to be keeping you informed in the 1940s about what was going on in Kentucky politics, particularly in reference to Chandler and Talbott. Talbott was running for Congress in 1943. He was defeated.

Mr. FARLEY: Dan was?

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: I'd forgotten that.

Mr. COOPER: And I was wondering if this interest in Kentucky politics, which you seemed to have in the early 1940s, after you had ceased to become national chairman, was as a result of your personal friendship with Chandler and Talbott, or were you just interested in politics?

Mr. FARLEY: No, no. I was interested in politics in every state. Undoubtedly the fact that I knew Happy so well, that might have brought about—I remember Arnett, but I can't place him, see? I



remember correspondence with him. Frankly, I've forgotten what his activities were, I mean, what position he held, if any.

Mr. COOPER: At that time he was simply an attorney in Frankfort. He had previously been a national committee member.

Mr. FARLEY: Is that so?

Mr. COOPER: Right, and there is a small collection of papers which we have at the University of Kentucky, and I was noticing in it a considerable amount of correspondence between him and you.

Mr. FARLEY: *Exactly.* Well, I'm sure of that, but I just can't place him in my mind's eye. But the name rings a bell, though. My correspondence is all over the United States, thousands and thousands of letters.

Mr. COOPER: Right, right. May I ask you just a few things about Barkley?

Mr. FARLEY: Go ahead.

Mr. COOPER: Alben Barkley delivered the keynote address at the 1932 Democratic National Convention. He had previously been a prohibitionist. As a matter of fact, one time he ran for governor of Kentucky, and the whiskey element united against him, defeated him; but in the 1932 national convention he came out for submission of a Constitutional amendment to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment. He didn't say that he was for such an amendment, but he was for it being submitted, *to test* public opinion.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, we had a plank in the platform, you know.

Mr. COOPER: Right. And, reportedly, after he had said that, a forty-five minute demonstration broke out. Do you recall that 1932 speech of Barkley?

Mr. FARLEY: No, no.

Mr. COOPER: He wrote that you criticized it as being too long.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, all his speeches were too long; I told him that.

Mr. COOPER: I think that President Roosevelt also believed that Barkley . . .

Mr. FARLEY: So was Humphrey's. He spoke too long. Barkley always did; he had no terminal *facilities!*

Mr. COOPER: Yeah.

Mr. FARLEY: I used to tell him that, and he laughed like hell. Yeah, I used to tell him that no souls were saved after thirty minutes.

Mr. COOPER: Right, right. I think President Roosevelt one time remarked something to the effect that he felt Barkley was a little



long-winded.

Mr. FARLEY: Oh, sure. He'd get wound up, and he couldn't find a stepping-off place. I don't think he was looking for one!

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: But he was a good speaker. He'd make the welkin ring. He spoke well and interestingly. I have no criticism of what he said, but it would take him too long to say it.

Mr. COOPER: Right. He also made the 1936 keynote address at the convention.

Mr. FARLEY: That's in Philadelphia.

Mr. COOPER: Was he the most effective orator in the Democratic party at that time?

Mr. FARLEY: I wouldn't say he was the most effective, but I'd say this: there were very few his peer. And at the moment I can't tell you any; I'd have to hear the names mentioned.

Mr. COOPER: I was wondering why he was chosen at the time.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, his position in the Senate. He was a national figure, you see. You see, I was against him when he beat Pat Harrison for majority leader of the Senate, you know. Roosevelt did that, he deliberately forced Ed Kelly to get W. H. Dieterich of Illinois to switch his vote from Harrison to Barkley. And he promised Harrison, and that broke Harrison's heart, between you and me. Harrison was entitled to that place. That's no reflection on Barkley. You see, Roosevelt asked me to get hold of Kelly, to get hold of Dieterich, and ask Dieterich to change his vote, and I refused to do it. And he just said, "I wish you would do it for me." Well, I said, "I won't do it for you, Mr. President." I said I came back from former Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson's funeral, and Barkley and Harrison sent for me, and they had Joe Guffey and Jimmy Byrnes in the drawing room in the train, and they asked me if I would keep hands off as national chairman in the fight for the leadership of the Senate. I said yes, it's none of my business; that's the Senate's business. Well, they both asked me what I would do if the president asked me. I told them I wouldn't do it. And I went to the White House when I got off the train and told Roosevelt. I issued a statement, as I recall it, stating that as chairman of the National Democratic Committee I wouldn't interfere. But that night when he called me he wanted me to break my word, and I said, "I wouldn't break my word, Mr. President, for you or anybody else." And he got hold of Ed Kelly, and Kelly got hold of Harry Hopkins, and they got Dieterich, and Dieterich,



who had promised to second the nomination of Harrison, went up and told Jimmy Byrnes that he wasn't going to second the nomination. Well, Byrnes said, "That's all right." And he said, "Further than that, I'm not going to vote for him," and it was his vote that turned the tide. And Roosevelt forced that.

Mr. COOPER: One vote was the difference.

Mr. FARLEY: That's right. Yeah. You see, I wouldn't lie for anyone, not even the president. And he was very much annoyed at me for that, but I wouldn't do it.

Mr. COOPER: As I recall . . .

Mr. FARLEY: No one, and I say to you very modestly, I never lied to any individual in my life, and I never took a dollar. And I wasn't going to let that reputation that I'd earned by telling the truth go overboard because the president of the United States wanted me to go back on my word.

Mr. COOPER: I don't blame you. And, as I recall, the president really owed a great deal to Pat Harrison.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, what the hell, Pat Harrison kept the Mississippi delegation . . .

Mr. COOPER: . . . in 1932. [Refers to Harrison's prevention of the Mississippi delegation's defection from FDR in the Chicago Convention]. Sure I told him that. See, I said, "You owe. . . ." I was mad as hell! "You owe a damn sight more to Harrison than you do to Barkley." He prevented that delegation slipping away that night. He really did, and he was the fellow that I talked with that morning after the third ballot. He and I sat down with Rayburn. We got a hold of Garner, and Garner agreed to get out of the race, and he didn't want to be vice-president, but he agreed to take it. Harrison was a party to all that. Barkley wasn't in on any of that.

Mr. COOPER: I think Harrison actually got up out of bed. He was sick at the time, and called the delegation.

Mr. FARLEY: Yeah, that's right, that's right. No doubt about that.

Mr. COOPER: You and Barkley both supported President Roosevelt in his plan to reform the Supreme Court in 1937.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I wasn't a strong supporter of that. I didn't know anything about that until it appeared in print. I made only one speech for it, I think. I made a speech in North Carolina. I was against that.

Mr. COOPER: I see.

Mr. FARLEY: But at his request all the other cabinet members



made a speech, all those who could, and I was national chairman, and I was being criticized. Everyone around said, "What's the matter with Farley?" So I had agreed to make a speech. I made one speech. There was no chance for that to go through.

Mr. COOPER: Right. And then you refused absolutely to go along with the ill-fated purge of those people who had opposed Roosevelt. [Refers to FDR's 1938 attempt to defeat Democratic candidates opposed to him.]

Mr. FARLEY: That's right. That's right, I wouldn't let my picture be taken with him or the candidate who was opposing him. I just refused to do that.

Mr. COOPER: Do you know if Barkley played any role in the attempted purge?

Mr. FARLEY: I have no way of knowing.

Mr. COOPER: Do you recall that "Dear Alben" letter that created a great deal of . . .

Mr. FARLEY: That's on the Senate.

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I told the president he was wrong on that. Well, he said he had to do that. Barkley was the acting leader at the time. That was just an excuse; he didn't want Pat Harrison, you see.

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: I told him he made a mistake. He had no right doing that.

Mr. COOPER: Then do you think he . . .

Mr. FARLEY: He didn't like for me to tell him that, but I always told him what I thought. I never "yessed" him.

Mr. COOPER: Do you think the interpretation, then, which was placed upon that letter at the time was a correct interpretation?

Mr. FARLEY: No doubt about it. No doubt about it.

Mr. COOPER: Barkley in later years said that that letter caused him to be depicted by the press as sort of a rustic, amiable, errand boy for the White House.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, it didn't do him any good in the public mind and the press, of course.

Mr. COOPER: Was Barkley indeed that, or was Barkley his own man?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, that's hard to answer, and I would think that Barkley wouldn't stand up as . . . well, I shouldn't . . . this is an honest observation, maybe unfair; I don't think Barkley would



have stood up as strongly as Harrison would under a strong . . . well, *situation* is the only word I could use. I think he'd be more amenable to listening, to bowing to influence, than Pat would be. That's an honest observation of the two men, and no reflection on either one of them. All my life, you know, if I couldn't make an honest comment, I wouldn't make it.

Mr. COOPER: Right. Barkley wrote in his memoirs, concerning the fight over selection of a majority leader in the Senate, he wrote that the White House kept hands off in the contest between Senator Harrison and himself. Why would he write such a thing?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, he knew goddamn well that wasn't true.

Mr. COOPER: I was going to say, could he have been unaware of such blatant intervention on the part of . . .

Mr. FARLEY: He had to know that. What the hell, you can bet the people from the White House were talking to him. Roosevelt may have been talking to him, because Roosevelt himself got into it— and lied about it; he said he was going to keep his hands off. Barkley had to know.

Mr. COOPER: How effective was Barkley as majority leader?

Mr. FARLEY: I would think a very effective leader. I would say so. He had a big majority to work with, you know.

Mr. COOPER: We talked something a moment ago concerning the 1938 challenge that Chandler posed to Barkley in the Democratic primary in Kentucky. Three years before that . . .

Mr. FARLEY: Did Barkley beat Chandler then?

Mr. COOPER: Right, by some 70,000 votes.

Mr. FARLEY: I'd forgotten the details.

Mr. COOPER: But three years earlier in 1935 Barkley had cancelled a trip to the Philippine Islands in order to campaign for Chandler in Kentucky, who was running for governor. Chandler was running for governor.

Mr. FARLEY: I don't remember that.

Mr. COOPER: Apparently Barkley never talked to you about what he must have felt was a lack of gratitude on Chandler's part for what he had done for him.

Mr. FARLEY: There's a lot of that in politics. "What have you done for me lately?"

Mr. COOPER: In January of 1938 Chandler had a conference with President Roosevelt in which he proposed that Senator M. M. Logan, the junior senator from Kentucky at that time, be appointed to a federal judgeship so that he, Chandler, could then



be appointed to the Senate to fill Logan's place, and this could be done without a contest with Barkley. Senator Logan refused to have any part of such an agreement. Did either Roosevelt or Chandler ever discuss this incident with you?

Mr. FARLEY: I have no way of remembering. I don't remember.

Mr. COOPER: Do you feel that Roosevelt would have gone along with Chandler's plan if Logan had been agreeable?

Mr. FARLEY: He might have, but there's no way of my knowing, see? There were some things that Logan was agreeable to, and if Roosevelt was willing to appoint him on the bench, he might have been interested. Now, that I wouldn't know. That's one of these "iffy" things.

Mr. COOPER: Right. Did President Roosevelt consult with you concerning his trip to Kentucky in July of 1938 in behalf of Barkley?

Mr. FARLEY: He might have, he might have. I don't recall that. My memorandums would show that. For your information, I had over 800 meetings with Mr. Roosevelt, and they were all recorded in the memorandums which I have. Now, that could be in them. I couldn't recall that.

Mr. COOPER: You don't recall whether at the time you felt it was a good thing for him to do, or it would be a mistake to intervene . . .

Mr. FARLEY: I undoubtedly had an opinion, but what it was, I can't recall.

Mr. COOPER: It seems to me that prior to this he had made some statement to the effect that he would not become involved in Democratic primary races, but then he proceeded to do so.

Mr. FARLEY: He said that before, but he became involved. I urged him against the purge, told him he didn't have a chance. The only verdict he won in the purge was beating John O'Connor in New York, and Ed Flynn and Ben Smith got the money together—I don't know, thirty-five, forty, fifty-thousand dollars—to beat John O'Connor. That's the only one he won.

Mr. COOPER: Yes, yes. And you recall that the president's reaction . . . you met with him, I think, a month or so after he came back from Kentucky, and you recall . . .

Mr. FARLEY: After who came back, Roosevelt?

Mr. COOPER: Right. You had a conference in August of that year, I believe, with him in which the trip to Kentucky was discussed. But you recall Roosevelt as being particularly infuriated



over the incident in which Chandler jumped in between him and Barkley. That was at Covington. They had come by train to Covington, then they were going by car out to Latonia race track for a rally, and Chandler apparently . . .

Mr. FARLEY: Oh, yeah, no doubt about that. Was he governor at the time?

Mr. COOPER: He was governor at the time. Now, one story allegedly goes that Marvin McIntyre, the president's secretary, asked Chandler to restrain himself on the platform.

Mr. FARLEY: Mac would do that. Mac would do that. I don't know that to be true, but knowing Mac, Mac would do that, and he could talk frankly to Happy, you know. Mac came from Kentucky himself, you know, and Mac could tell Happy what he thought—you know, good or bad, he'd tell him.

Mr. COOPER: So you feel that that story is possible?

Mr. FARLEY: If it's recorded. I'm sure there would be an element of truth to it, yeah.

Mr. COOPER: Chandler's version, of course, of the incident is somewhat different.

Mr. FARLEY: Well, now, it would be, of course!

Mr. COOPER: He insists that President Roosevelt instructed him and Barkley where to sit. He also insists that, as the governor of the state, he had the option of sitting where he pleased. He outranked Barkley while they were in the state of Kentucky . . .

Mr. FARLEY: Barkley.

Mr. COOPER: Outranked Barkley, right.

Mr. FARLEY: That's right, that's right.

Mr. COOPER: And this, I think that he may be on more solid ground there than in the other . . .

Mr. FARLEY: I think so, I think so, yes.

Mr. COOPER: But I can hardly imagine Roosevelt insisting that Chandler sit next to him when he had come to Kentucky to campaign for Barkley.

Mr. FARLEY: Oh, yeah. Roosevelt could be pretty tough, you know, when he made up his mind.

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: I used to say to him in the old days, I said, "My God, I never want you to get mad at me. You're a terrible person when you get mad," and he looked at me and twisted his chin up and laughed, you know. He did get mad at me at that third term. Let me go back to the third term. Don't write this, forget all about



it. In those days, these polls that were taken then by Gallup and others, not as important as the polls now, but those polls showed Cordell Hull always leading. This was all on the presumption that the president wouldn't be a candidate. Hull led in all the Southern states, but I was always second. I was ahead of Paul V. McNutt and ahead of everybody, but in the north of the line, so to speak, in New Jersey and New York and New England states, the states across the country, I was the top. I was higher on the poll than Hull was, because he wasn't known. My name in a way was a household word by that time, you know. I'd been all over the country, spoken in every state, and corresponded with the leaders, you know. The delegates knew me. I knew all those fellows by their first name, and there isn't any doubt that if Roosevelt hadn't run, Hull would have been the nominee at the convention, and I would have been the nominee for vice-president. But, if it came to a showdown in the convention, that I was a candidate, you know, really a legitimate candidate, I'd have won that nomination, because I had more votes in the convention than Hull would have had. That's no reflection on him, or nothing to be said in favor of me, but that was true. All of the Northern states would have been for me, all of them. Now, I say to you with all the sincerity at my command, I'm damn glad that didn't happen. I wouldn't be talking to you today if it had!

Mr. COOPER: Right.

Mr. FARLEY: Oh, I didn't mind. I was grateful for the compliment and the knowledge and all that. At the Chicago convention, when I made the final motion to make the nomination for Roosevelt, Roosevelt was nominated, you know. There was a pretty damn lot of bitterness in that convention, you know, bitter as hell, because of the way they treated me, he . . . at least the way he treated me. He lied to me. And do you know, when I made that [inaudible], everybody in that convention hall stood up and cheered for ten minutes? It was a hell of a reception, you know. And it was genuine, too. They weren't trying to be nice to me. I had a hell of a time containing myself during that period. I didn't say a thing unkindly about anybody. It was a terrible strain to be under. Wouldn't want to go through a thing like that again. I said nothing unkindly about anybody. And I played the string out, according to the rules. He begged me to stay as national chairman, you know. So did she and so did his mother.

Mr. COOPER: Mrs. . . . Mrs. Roosevelt, I know, also. Yeah. Yeah.



Mr. FARLEY: They all did. They all did. And she was on the level about it. She was a great lady.

Mr. COOPER: Right, right.

Mr. FARLEY: You see, one of the things. I wasn't to blame for it, and neither was he, in a way. You see, I was always referred to as the fellow that made him president. Well, no president liked to have it said that he didn't make himself, you see. Now, the truth of the matter is, and he knew that, too, he would never have been nominated except for my efforts. I went across the country in 1931 for him. Strange as it may seem, most of the leaders in the Western states in those days were Irish Catholic. Now, they were in the minority. The Democratic Party was in the minority in those states, see, but most of the leaders—that was true in Iowa; it was true in the Dakotas, it was true in Montana, it was true in Washington, true in Nevada, true in Wyoming, and in Colorado, see. Except in Colorado the Adams family were in control. So I gave them my word that Al Smith was not going to run. He agreed not to run, so they believed me, you see, and there was a strong feeling of friendship, because I kept my word with them, and I made good on patronage with all of those fellows.

If they came up with a nominee that Roosevelt wouldn't take, by God, I'd get another one. Roosevelt only made one appointment—one—that I didn't approve. One, out of thousands. Now, those fellows had faith in me, you see. They believed me. I never lied to them. I'd say, "I can't discuss it with you," but I never lied to them. So, no one could ever say I did. I always came clean with them. I discovered early in life, my mother told me, never tell a lie. The truth saves a lot of embarrassing explanation. You don't have to remember what you said, which is true. If you tell the truth, you have no trouble.

Mr. COOPER: I was reading an article just recently which listed that as one of your attributes: dependability, honesty. There were a couple of others, and I thought no better attributes could any man have.

Mr. FARLEY: That's right. Well, if you don't tell the truth, then. . . . And you ought to be loyal, loyal to your country, your church or whatever it is, loyal to your family, loyal to your associates. Loyalty and truth-telling and honesty—if you have those, you're all right. If you haven't those, you can get in a lot of trouble. Well, go ahead, sir.

Mr. COOPER: Do you have any idea of why Roosevelt would not



choose Wallace?

Mr. FARLEY: Well, I argued against Wallace. I told him to take Barkley, take McNutt, take Jesse Jones, take anybody, Jimmy Byrnes. I told him that Wallace was a mystic, and he ought not to take him. And he went and told Wallace that, and Wallace came into my headquarters in the hotel, crying. He said, "I thought you were my friend." "Well," I said, "I am your friend." "Well, the president said you said I was a mystic and wouldn't be qualified for president." I said, "Yes, I did." "Well," he said, "I'm shocked at you." I said, "Henry, I like you, I have hundreds of friends. I like you as a friend, but I never want to see you president of the United States. Never!" Roosevelt nominated him anyway. Then, four years later Roosevelt wasn't strong enough to fight, and they convinced him that he couldn't win if he took Wallace, and that might have happened, and he really wanted William O. Douglas, but the leaders put across Truman, and he wasn't strong enough to fight them. He was a sick man, then. He should never have been nominated.

Mr. COOPER: As I recall, the reason Roosevelt gave Barkley for choosing Wallace was that the ticket needed strengthening in the corn belt, but that was a phony reason.

Mr. FARLEY: He didn't want Barkley, and he didn't want Jimmy Byrnes, and the story got around that he was against . . . that I was against Jimmy Byrnes because he had been a Catholic, as a boy, and he drifted away, and he married a Protestant lady, who is incidentally a fine lady and whom I still correspond with. She's still alive—Maude, her name was. Now, that wasn't true, you see, I wasn't against anybody. And I never was responsible for that statement. The truth of the matter is, Roosevelt is responsible for that. He got Ed Flynn—I'm talking to the dead end of the room—and others to go out among the Catholic leaders in the north and say that you can't nominate Byrnes, because he was a Catholic and drifted away from the church, and the Catholics wouldn't vote. Roosevelt did that himself. I know he did it himself, and I told Byrnes that. I said, "Now, God damn it, Jimmy, you're blaming me. He's the fellow who's responsible. He lied to you as he lied to me." And Jimmy finally got around to the point of view of realizing that it was Roosevelt who did it.

Mr. COOPER: In 1944 you again favored Barkley for the vice-presidential nomination, and Roosevelt again opposed him, I believe this time saying he was too old. Do you think that the fact



that Barkley had spoken out rather heatedly against Roosevelt's veto of a tax bill in 1944 had anything to do with this rejection?

Mr. FARLEY: I wouldn't know. No, I wouldn't know.

Mr. COOPER: At that time he actually resigned as majority leader.

Mr. FARLEY: I remember that. I remember that. I remember that very well, and then they re-elected him, see. You see, I was out of touch with Roosevelt in those days.

Mr. COOPER: In that convention Barkley was slated to make the nominating speech for Roosevelt. That was 1944, I believe, in Chicago. Do you recall what Barkley's reaction was when he learned that he had been bypassed?

Mr. FARLEY: No. Who made the speech? I've forgotten.

Mr. COOPER: Barkley made it. He finally made it, but there was some speculation that, once he learned that he had been bypassed completely by Roosevelt for vice-presidential consideration, that he considered actually refusing to nominate Roosevelt.

Mr. FARLEY: I was an innocent bystander then. I was not participating in any of the conferences. I was a delegate. I voted in that convention. I voted for Harry Byrd for president on the first ballot. I voted against the third term at the convention, and I voted against the fourth term in the convention, but before they announced the result, we wanted it made unanimous in our state, and whoever else from my state voted that way, there were three or four of us, I think. I didn't ask anybody to do it. But I was against the third term. And I was against the fourth, which—the fourth was terrible—they nominated a dying man for the presidency!

Mr. COOPER: Well, those are all of the prepared questions I have. Do you have anything that you would like to add?

Mr. FARLEY: No, no, no. Not a thing.