

***“A Common Interest”***

***Franklin Roosevelt, Frank Hague, and the Presidential Election of 1936 in New Jersey***

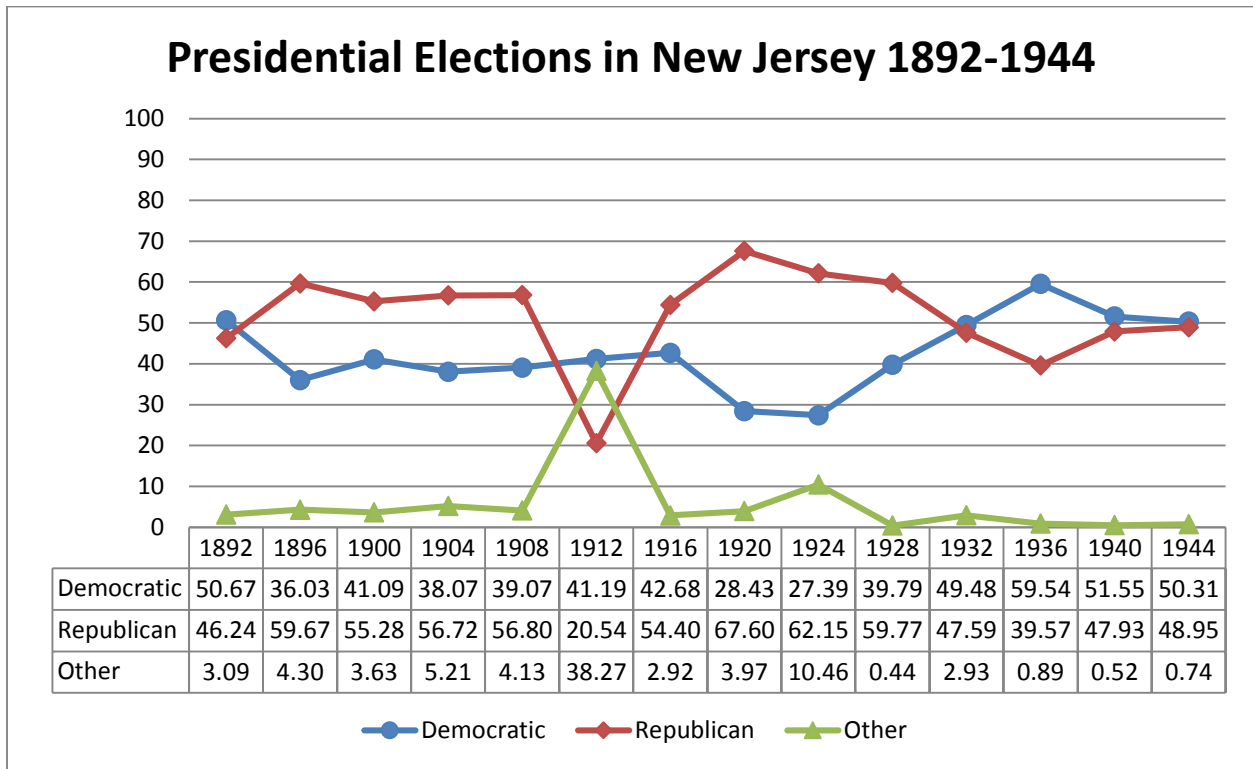
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*The Great Depression and the New Deal forged a mutually beneficial alliance between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Mayor Frank Hague of Jersey City. Each needed the other. Hague benefited from the federal funds he was allocated by the New Deal relief agencies. Channeling this government assistance through his political machine in Jersey City enabled him to consolidate his control over Hudson County and ultimately become the dominant figure of the Democratic Party in New Jersey. In return, Hague pledged to secure New Jersey for Roosevelt in his reelection campaign. Ironically, Hague got the better of this arrangement. Roosevelt's personal popularity would have ensured his reelection in 1936 regardless of Hague's level of commitment. But by entrenching Hague's authority, as the New Deal tide ebbed over the ensuing years, and elections in New Jersey became more competitive, the President became ever more dependent on the capacity of the Mayor to deliver the votes he needed. This necessitated a policy of willful indifference towards Hague's increasingly autocratic and corrupt maladministration.*

New Jersey today is a loyal “Blue” state, having delivered its electoral votes to the Democratic Party's candidate for President in every election for a generation. That was not always the case, however; when Franklin D. Roosevelt ran for reelection in 1936, New Jersey was considered a key “swing” state. Keeping it in his column required the President to forge an alliance with a local power broker who could deliver votes, but only at a price. Ironically, in accepting this bargain, Roosevelt did more to entrench the administration of Jersey City Mayor Frank Hague than he did his own.

The Democratic Party’s nominees for President had always been competitive in New Jersey, winning it more often than not, until 1896. That year the free silver, free trade candidacy of William Jennings Bryan succeeded only in handing an institutional majority to the Republican Party (see Graph 1).



Woodrow Wilson was the only exception to this rule over the next thirty years, but, the fact that he had taken office as president of Princeton University in 1902 and been elected Governor in 1910 notwithstanding, even he only carried the state as the Democratic presidential nominee in 1912 because the Republican vote was hopelessly split between the rival Taft and Roosevelt candidacies; he won barely more than four out of ten votes that year, and was embarrassingly badly beaten when running for reelection in 1916.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wilson’s Republican opponent, Charles Evan Hughes, while losing nationally, won his second highest percentage of the vote and enjoyed his third greatest winning margin in percentage terms in New Jersey.

The GOP went on to completely dominate New Jersey at the presidential election level throughout the 1920s. In three successive elections – 1920, 1924, and 1928 – the Republican candidates – Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover – had carried every single one of the state’s twenty-one counties. Hoover had crushed the Democratic nominee, Al Smith, by a record-breaking 925,285 votes to 616,162, a 59.77% to 39.80% margin. The Great Depression had turned that around in 1932, but it was no landslide; most counties stayed Republican, and Roosevelt’s 806,394 vote edge over Hoover’s 775,406 gave him New Jersey’s sixteen electoral votes by a mere plurality, 49.49% to 47.59%.

The Democrats did not perform much better at the state level. Aside from three years during the Wilson era they were the minority in the state Senate from 1893 to 1965. They were typically also the minority in the state Assembly, from 1893-1905, 1907-1909, in 1911, and from 1914-1930. The Democrats won control of this House 34/26 in 1931, but the Republicans, in the teeth of the Roosevelt landslide that year, wrested it back, 38/22, in 1932. The Republican margin shrank to 33/27 in 1933, expanded to 34/26 in 1934, and blew out to 42/18 in 1935.

The GOP also elected the Governor, rising star Harold G. Hoffman, in 1934, but any satisfaction from this triumph proved short-lived.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Hoffman had, over the course of his career in public office, looted the state of hundreds of thousands of dollars only came to light decades later. His tendency to respond to criticism with his fists and his disastrous intervention in the Lindbergh baby kidnapping case had already made him a laughing stock before a crisis over the state budget cost him whatever political capital he still retained.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hoffman seemed destined for great things. In his mid-twenties when elected City Treasurer of South Amboy, an office he held from 1920 to 1925, he also served in the state Assembly in 1923 and 1924. Elected Mayor of South Amboy in 1925, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1926 and 1928. Hoffman was not a candidate for renomination in 1930, having been appointed motor vehicle commissioner of New Jersey, where he served until taking office as Governor.

<sup>3</sup> Hoffman granted convicted murderer Bruno Hauptmann a thirty-day reprieve and asked Burlington County’s eccentric chief of detectives, Ellis Parker, to seek out the “real” killer. Parker abducted a disbarred Trenton lawyer,

In November 1935 the Federal Government withdrew from the direct relief picture, shifting the burden of paying for the “unemployables” back to the states in the hope that work-relief and private industry would provide for the “employables.” Hoffman alienated his own party by imposing a sales tax to help carry the relief load, relying on Hague Democrats for the votes he needed in the state legislature, but the public backlash forced its repeal within four months.

Far from being an asset, therefore, Hoffman had become a significant liability for the Republican Party by 1936. In February, the New Jersey Republican Committee, voting to “assume its rightful place of leadership,” stripped him of his titular role as state party spokesperson. While this was considered a positive step, the Newark *Ledger* warned, “The Republican Party can not hope to clear itself merely by disputing the question of patronage with the Governor.” It could not “redeem itself before the disappointed electorate unless it meets candidly and courageously the two issues upon which Governor Hoffman has outraged the feelings of those who elected him. These issues are the Governor’s conduct in the Hauptmann case, and the scuttling of the economy program.”

With the state legislature refusing to countenance any measures to raise revenue, on April 15, its funds for feeding its hungry exhausted, New Jersey left the task up to its towns and cities. For nine days after that an army of unemployed camped in the Assembly Chamber at Trenton to dramatize their demands. Only a twelve-and-a-half percent cut in the fortune of the late Camden soup manufacturer John T. Dorrance eased New Jersey’s relief worries. The inheritance tax on the \$120 million estate put \$15 million into the state treasury; legislators dipped into the fund for \$8 million to bail out the municipalities.<sup>4</sup>

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Paul Wendel, and beat a confession out of him. The only result was that Hauptmann went to the electric chair and Parker went to prison. Jon Blackwell, “1954: The Governor was a Thief,” *The Trentonian*, <http://www.capitalcentury.com/1954.html>.

<sup>4</sup> “State Relief,” *Literary Digest*, Vol. 121, No. 26, June 27, 1936, 7.

Subsequently, not only did Hoffman fail to keep New Jersey's delegation to the Republican national convention unpledged in the May primary, he finished dead last among the four at-large delegates elected to represent the state. The big winner of the primary was Governor Alf Landon of Kansas, who bested his main rival, Idaho Senator William Borah, in a bid for the state's thirty-two member delegation. The outcome was seized on by Landon's supporters as proof he could be competitive against Roosevelt outside of the country's rural and Western heartland. According to the Coffeyville, Kansas, *Journal*, "the New Jersey primaries spoke the grassroots sentiment of the industrial East... that Landon is the man to pilot the nation out of the worst crisis that has overtaken it in two generations."<sup>5</sup> Landon would go on to clinch the Republican nomination at its convention in Cleveland, setting the stage for his clash with Roosevelt.

The presidential contest in New Jersey would be decided on the ground by the local party bosses, the men whose political machines could deliver blocs of votes to one candidate or the other. On the Republican side, the key player was Enoch "Nucky" Johnson, Treasurer of Atlantic County.<sup>6</sup> For the Democrats there was only one man to do business with; Frank "I am the law" Hague, Mayor of Jersey City (see Image 1).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Fighter Hoffman," *Literary Digest*, Vol. 121, No. 22, May 30, 1936, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Alexander, "Boss on the Spot: A Case History of Nucky Johnson," *Saturday Evening Post*, Vol. 212, No. 9, August 26, 1939, 5-7, 49-52. For background on the Republican machine in Atlantic City see Nelson Johnson, *Boardwalk Empire: The Birth, High Times, and Corruption of Atlantic City* (Medford: Plexus Publishing, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Steven Hart, *American Dictators: Frank Hague, Nucky Johnson, and the Perfection of the Urban Political Machine* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013). For additional background on Hague see Richard J. Connors, *The Local Political Career of Mayor Frank Hague* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Columbia University, 1966); Richard J. Connors, *A Cycle of Power: The Career of Jersey City Mayor Frank Hague* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1971); "Hague's Hundred Thousand," Chapter 4 in Charles W. Van Devander, *The Big Bosses* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 90-116; Matthew T. Raffety, *Hague-iography: Political Ethics, Self-Representation and the Development of Political Style in the Early Career of Frank Hague of Jersey City* (MA Thesis: Columbia University, 1997). Leonard F. Vernon, *The Life & Times of Jersey City Mayor, Frank Hague: "I am the law"*, (Charleston: History Press, 2011). For contemporary perspectives on Hague, see E.E. Smith, "Frank Hague: Mayor-Boss of Jersey City," *National Municipal Review*, Vol. XVII, September 1928, 514-521; Alfred H. Hirsch, "Scab City, New Jersey," *The Nation*, Vol. 139, No. 3617, October 31, 1934, 509-511; Alfred H. Hirsch, "Scab City II: Making Jersey City Safe," *The Nation*, Vol. 139, No. 3618, November 7, 1934, 538-540; "Jersey City's Mayor Hague: Last of the Bosses, Not First of the Dictators," *Life*, Vol. 4, No. 6, February 7, 1938, 44-51; Jack Alexander, "King Hanky-Panky of New Jersey," *Saturday Evening Post*, Vol. 213, No. 17, October 26, 1940, pp. 9-11, 119-124; Dayton McKean, "The Worst American City," *American Mercury*, Vol. LII, February 1941, 211-218.



Image 1: Frank Hague in 1920, during his first term as Mayor of Jersey City.

(Image Credit: The Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog)

The son of immigrants from County Cavan, Ireland, Hague had worked his way up from the rough and tumble street politics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward to be elected Mayor of Jersey City in 1917, a post he held until 1947. “In Jersey City nothing happens of which I am not apprised,” he could

boast, his untrammelled authority based on the finely tuned organization of his machine.<sup>8</sup> If other machines were horizontal – merely superimposed upon their communities – the Hague organization was vertical, pervading every institution in Jersey City, from the Chamber of Commerce to the Bar Association.<sup>9</sup> This was maintained through an effectively feudal system of government. Each precinct captain was governed by a ward lieutenant, the lieutenant by a ward leader, and each ward leader by the Mayor himself. “We deliver for those that deliver for us,” Hague explained. “And as the district men and ward leaders make good, we move ‘em up.”<sup>10</sup> There was no job security under such a system; Hague shuffled ward leaders from office to office and level to level, from City to County and back again, balancing the demands of the various ethnic constituencies and deliberately playing rivals against each other to ensure their only loyalty was ultimately to him.<sup>11</sup>

In Hague’s view, “Politics is a business.” Accordingly, “You got to have *organization*, and not just for a few weeks before election, but all year ‘round... an organization that reaches into every home in every block, so that the district worker knows every man, woman and even the children like he knows his own family.”<sup>12</sup>

The machine took the lead in meeting the political needs of its constituents, registering new voters and naturalizing immigrants.<sup>13</sup> But just as importantly, it also met social needs, sponsoring

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<sup>8</sup> Donald F. Wickets, “Why Most Reformers Fail,” *Liberty*, May 26, 1934, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Dayton David McKean, “Frank Hague: ‘Belligerent Suspicion,’” Chapter 27 in John T. Salter (ed.), *Public Men In and Out of Office* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 440-454.

<sup>10</sup> George Creel, “The Complete Boss,” *Colliers*, Vol. XCVIII, October 10, 1936, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Fleming, whose father, Teddy, was Hague’s man in the 6th Ward, describes the machine as “a churning mix of ambition and resentments and inertia, over which leaders presided only by constant effort.” Thomas J. Fleming, *Mysteries of My Father* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 195.

<sup>12</sup> This was important because “A full fifty percent of voters have got to be coaxed or dragged to the polls.” George Creel, “The Complete Boss,” *Colliers*, Vol. XCVIII, October 10, 1936, 13.

<sup>13</sup> And in return, on election day, “why shouldn’t the new citizen be guided by his friend, who gently reminds him not to forget the ticket?” A Hague lieutenant commented, “As if we’d let him!” William R. Clark, *Newark Evening News*, December 11, 1937, 6.

boys clubs and athletic teams, running block parties, picnics and boat rides, and handing out tens of thousands of Christmas baskets every Yuletide season. “A truly representative organization functions three hundred and sixty five days a year,” Hague explained:

It never sleeps. Its district leaders are in touch with every voter and his family... The leaders of our organization are constantly in intimate touch with our people. When Christmas comes, it brings to the families of the unemployed toys, food, clothing, and coal, as from one good neighbor to another. The organization is there not only on holidays; it is there all the time. A voter knows this, and he rewards us with his confidence.<sup>14</sup>

The reach of the machine extended far beyond the limits of Jersey City. Two Representatives in Congress, Mary T. Norton (the 13<sup>th</sup> District) and Edward J. Hart (the 14<sup>th</sup>) owed their careers to Hague, whose machine was so powerful it not only eliminated rival Democratic Party factions in Hudson County, it effectively sustained the remnant of the Republican Party too; “if we didn’t vote Republican now and then, the poor suckers would have to call off their primaries on account of poor attendance,” Hague boasted.<sup>15</sup>

Roosevelt and Hague were far from natural partners. In fact, Hague had served as floor-manager for Roosevelt’s arch-rival, Al Smith, his predecessor as Governor of New York, at the 1932 Democratic convention in Chicago.<sup>16</sup> In a desperate bid to spike Roosevelt’s nomination,

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<sup>14</sup> Donald F. Wickets, “Why Most Reformers Fail,” *Liberty*, May 26, 1934, 35.

<sup>15</sup> George Creel, “The Complete Boss,” *Colliers*, Vol. XCVIII, October 10, 1936, 14. Although a protégé of Hague, whom she called her “political foster father,” Norton carved out a significant political career in her own right, chairing four House committees over the course of her twenty-six years in Congress. As chair of the House Committee on Labor she played a critical role in the passage of key New Deal legislation, the Fair Labor Standards Act, in 1938. See David L. Porter, *Mary Norton of New Jersey: Congressional Trailblazer* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013); Maureen Rees, “Mary Norton: ‘A Grand Girl,’” *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries*, Vol. XLVII, No. 2, December 1985, pp. 59-75; [http://www.njcu.edu/programs/jchistory/pages/N\\_Pages/Norton\\_Mary.htm](http://www.njcu.edu/programs/jchistory/pages/N_Pages/Norton_Mary.htm); [http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/N/NORTON,-Mary-Teresa-\(N000153\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/N/NORTON,-Mary-Teresa-(N000153)/).

<sup>16</sup> “Hague Leads Campaign for Governor Smith,” *Journal News*, June 8, 1932, 10; “Hague’s Anti Roosevelt Work Extends into Penna,” *Journal News*, June 21, 1932, 1; “Hague Blast at Roosevelt Seen as Compromise Bid,” *Journal News*, June 24, 1932, 1.



Hague went on record as asserting that if nominated, Roosevelt “has no chance of winning at the election in November... he cannot carry a single state east of the Mississippi and very few in the far west... Why consider the one man who is weakest in the eyes of the rank and file?”<sup>17</sup>

Having backed the wrong horse, and ridden it to the end, Hague had to scramble fast to make amends. He did so with characteristic shamelessness; as soon as it was announced Roosevelt would fly to Chicago to accept his nomination in person, Hague got himself appointed to the committee to welcome the nominee on behalf of the convention.<sup>18</sup> Afterwards, while maintaining “I have no apologies to make for the battle conducted at the Democratic Convention in Chicago,” he publicly urged the Hudson County Democratic Committee to disregard any of his preconvention statements uttered in the “white heat of political conflict” and fall into line behind FDR.<sup>19</sup>

But Hague was only too aware of being kept at arm’s length by the nominee of his party. Accordingly, Roosevelt’s campaign manager, James A. Farley, while taking a much-needed post-convention vacation at Atlantic City, was approached in person by the Mayor, who explained, “there was no soreness on his part over what had happened, that he was whipped in a fair fight, and that if Governor Roosevelt would come to New Jersey to open his campaign, he would provide the largest political rally ever held in the United States.” Farley accepted the offer, and Hague threw everything into this opportunity to demonstrate the political power at his disposal. The sheer scale of the turnout to greet Roosevelt on August 27<sup>th</sup> at Sea Girt on the Jersey Shore impressed even Farley; “chances are that the newspaper estimates, which varied from 100,000 to 115,000 people, were not far wrong... If it wasn’t the biggest rally in history up to that time, it must have been very close to it.” Hague’s newfound dedication to their cause, Farley recalled, “brought a

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<sup>17</sup> Dayton D. McKean, *The Boss: The Hague Machine in Action* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 96.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur S. Henning, “New Jersey’s 16 Votes Placed on List for Landon,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 27, 1936, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Gerald Leinwand, *Mackerels in the Moonlight: Four Corrupt American Mayors* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004), 91.

smile to those of us who accompanied the presidential nominee.”<sup>20</sup> But the Mayor had made his point. As far as the spectacle at Sea Girt went, Roosevelt enthused to the press, “only my old friend, Mayor Hague, could have done it.”<sup>21</sup> The Democratic nominee understood politics is ultimately a numbers game, and Hague had proven that in New Jersey, at least, he was the man who could deliver the numbers. Regardless of Roosevelt’s true sentiments towards his “old friend,” that made him a man to do business with, a point reinforced by the mere plurality by which Roosevelt carried the state in November. That narrow margin actually emphasized Hague’s utility to the incoming administration; without a massive turnout in Hudson County, Roosevelt could not carry the state and its rich trove of sixteen votes in the Electoral College.

Hague was willing to play the good soldier as the New Deal era dawned; “the Democratic Organization of New Jersey is ready to rally to the support of your policies,” he wrote the President. “Your recognition of our State Organization has been substantially manifested and in return I feel we owe you this pledge of loyalty. Should the occasion ever arise when New Jersey need be counted, I am yours to command.”<sup>22</sup>

Where the machine counted, so far as Roosevelt was concerned, was in providing relief to those dispossessed by the Great Depression. A typical example is the case of a Mrs. Remeno of Madison, New Jersey; with her husband unemployed and owing six months’ rent she wrote the White House on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1933, telling Roosevelt she had named her new baby after him and asking the President to send a letter to someone so her husband could find work. Two days later,

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<sup>20</sup> James A. Farley, *Behind the Ballots: The Personal History of a Politician* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938), 158. Roosevelt’s campaign manager was less cynical in public: “Farley Lauds Hague’s Work,” *Journal News*, October 12, 1932, 2.

<sup>21</sup> “Frank Hague,” Chapter 4 in Ralph G. Martin, *The Bosses*, (New York: Putnam, 1964), 133.

<sup>22</sup> Mayor Frank Hague to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 12, 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, PPF BOX 1013.

Roosevelt's right-hand-man Louis Howe wrote to Hague asking that if possible something be done for Mrs. Remeno's husband.<sup>23</sup>

As the New Deal progressed, the relief agenda became more systematized in terms of a partnership between the federal government and the states. Concrete evidence shows that from the outset of the New Deal, Frank Hague was in complete control of all federal patronage in New Jersey. Deluged with appeals for government jobs, Governor A. Harry Moore pointed out to one Newark man in August, 1933, "I do not have the power to appoint to these Federal positions. They are made upon the recommendation of the local organizations to Mayor Hague, who, in turn, sends them in... I would suggest that you also get in touch with the mayor."<sup>24</sup>

Public Works Administration (PWA) funding to Hudson County alone amounted to \$1,760,343 in grants and \$4,069,400 in loans in 1933 and \$3,831,136 in grants and \$2,430,000 in loans two years later. That was only a prelude; from July of 1935 through the end of 1939, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) spent \$47,003,759 in federal funds in Hudson County. This total does not include figures from other agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), and Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC).<sup>25</sup>

Hague's pride and joy was the monumental Jersey City Medical Center, built largely with loans and grants from the PWA. This gigantic complex, composed of seven buildings (the highest of which has twenty-three floors) with two thousand beds, was at the time of construction the third

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<sup>23</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, Box 3294, "Frank Hague, May 6, 1933."

<sup>24</sup> Lyle M. Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1977), 102.

<sup>25</sup> Ralph G. Martin, *The Bosses* (New York: Putnam, 1964), 133. Between 1936 and 1943 the WPA expended \$404,826,420 in New Jersey; only seven states received more. The WPA constructed 6,018 miles of roads in the Garden State, 661 bridges and viaducts, 37 schools, and 1,071 new buildings or additions. It funded 388 new or improved parks, 600 new or improved playgrounds and athletic fields, 76 swimming pools, 1,019 school improvement projects, and 2,793 renovations of existing public buildings. Maxine N. Lurie and Marc Mappen (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of New Jersey*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

largest hospital in the world.<sup>26</sup> The cost was astronomical but, given, the federal government was picking up most of the tab, Hague could afford to be blasé about it. “Yeah, I reckon we could have done it cheaper,” the mayor breezily admitted, “but what of it?”<sup>27</sup>

Some of this federal largess flirted with outright illegality. After a plea from Hague, Administration Relief Director Harry Hopkins decided to stretch the letter of the law and induce the New Jersey State Director of Relief to release WPA funds earmarked for labor costs and use them to buy seats and plumbing for Jersey City’s new baseball stadium. Hague knew he was asking Hopkins to violate the terms of his mandate, but assured him it was for a good cause, inasmuch as the facility was to be named Roosevelt Stadium and the President was going to be there for the grand opening (see Image 2).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> First proposed by Hague in 1921, the original 10-story neoclassical building, the Margaret Hague Maternity Hospital, named after the Mayor’s mother, officially opened its doors on October 12, 1931. It later included an Eleanor Roosevelt Nursery. Hague’s boast that “Politics will not enter into this building, either in the selection of its staff or in the admittance of its patients, for this building is dedicated to Motherhood,” was a hollow one. Leonard F. Vernon, *Jersey City Medical Center* (Charleston: Arcadia, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> George Creel, “The Complete Boss,” *Colliers*, Vol. XCVIII, October 10, 1936, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Lyle W. Dorsett, “Frank Hague, Franklin Roosevelt, and the Politics of the New Deal,” *New Jersey History*, Vol. XCIV, No. 1, Spring 1976, 23-36.



Image 2: On Thursday, April 18, 1946, Mayor Hague throws out the first ball at Roosevelt Stadium as the Jersey City Giants host the Montreal Royals. Playing for the visiting team, Jackie Robinson that day broke organized baseball's color line; to get the stadium built ten years earlier, the Mayor may have broken the law.

(Image Credit: The Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog)

Although prepared to indulge Hague in this one specific request, Hopkins was concerned enough to dispatch two field representatives to monitor relief operations in New Jersey. One of them, Lorena Hickok, reported on February 11, 1936, that Hague had Camden County's WPA

director fired for being “the wrong kind of Democrat,” even though she rated him as the “fairest relief administrator Camden County ever had.” Hickok also confirmed the charges of Hague’s politicizing the WPA and noted that most of the state’s WPA funding went to areas directly or indirectly under the mayor’s control. Finally, she informed Hopkins that the situation had progressed to the point that in one county WPA office personnel answered the telephone with “Democratic headquarters,” and in another, supervisors tried to get job recipients to become dues-paying members of the party. This issue brought consternation to New Jersey’s WPA Director, William Ely, who opposed the investigation and begged Farley to end or at least postpone it “until after election day.”<sup>29</sup>

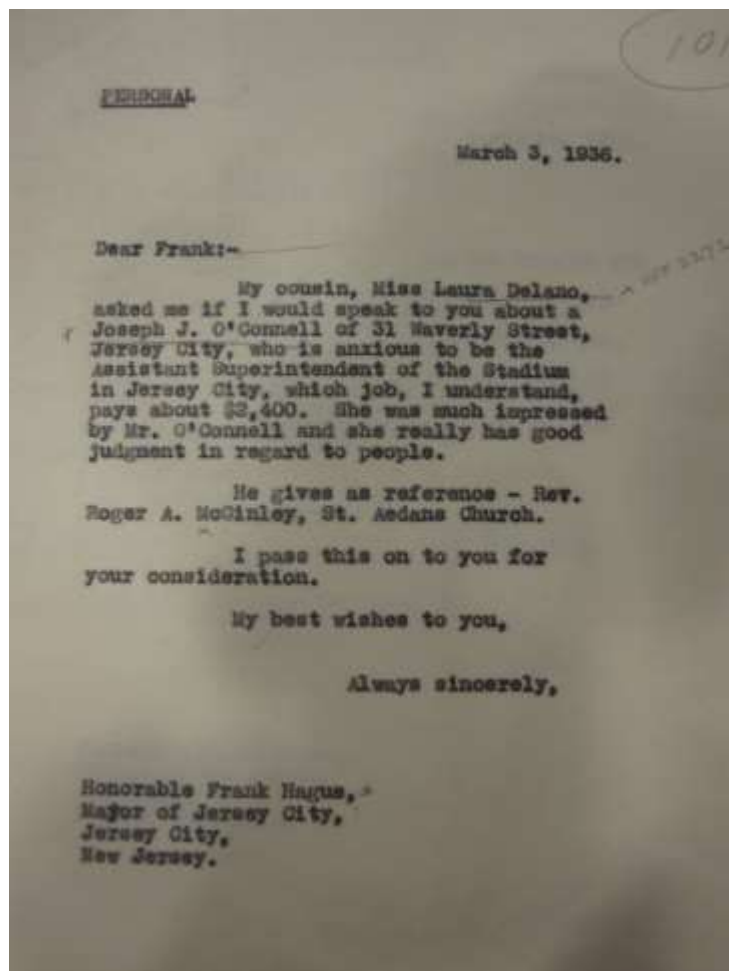
Belatedly, New Jersey Republican state campaign chair Walter E. Edge initiated a legal case against the WPA. His petition to the Federal District Court of the District of Columbia contended that Congress had illegally delegated legislative authority for the expenditure of relief funds to the executive branch. As a result, those funds “are not being used solely for the purpose of relief as intended,” but are monopolized by “a vast administrative machinery whose experiments were dictated by political consideration.” However, he could not get a ruling on his accusations of WPA waste and favoritism locally and concealment of expense statistics at the federal level before election day.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Edward H. Michels, Jr., *New Jersey and the New Deal*, Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1986, p. 335.

<sup>30</sup> Arthur S. Henning, “New Jersey’s 16 Votes Placed on List for Landon,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 27, 1936, 7. According to this report, the Democrats were sanguine that the WPA, “having pulled the Negro vote away from the Republicans, is worth all the trouble Mr. Edge can possibly make with it.”

The fact the New Deal worked through, rather than in competition with, Frank Hague heightened the dependence of Jersey City families on his organization during the Depression decade. The Roosevelt administration proffered strength to the Hague machine, expanding its aegis as a vast employment and relief agency.<sup>31</sup> Even Roosevelt was not above availing himself of the machine to secure small favors, as in his letter to “Dear Frank” on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1936; “My cousin, Miss Laura Delano, asked me if I would speak to you about a Joseph J. O’Connell of 31 Waverly



Street, Jersey City, who is anxious to be the Assistant Superintendent of the Stadium in Jersey City, which job, I understand, pays about \$2,400. She was much impressed by Mr. O’Connell and she really has good judgment in regard to people.”<sup>32</sup> Needless to say, the Mayor was only too happy to oblige (see Image 3). Such log-rolling had to be done discreetly. Not only did Roosevelt need to keep Hague at arm’s length for the sake of his patrician public image, maintaining the mayor’s support necessitated carefully balancing New Jersey’s rival factions within the Democratic Party. In a letter

Image 3: Letter from FDR to Hague, March 3, 1936.  
(Image Credit: The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, PPF Box 1013.)

<sup>31</sup> Lyle M. Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 1977), 130.

<sup>32</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, Box 3294, “Frank Hague, March 3, 1936.”

to the President referred to Farley on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1933, Samuel Silverman, state chair of the Roosevelt for President Association of New Jersey, described the state home loan situation in his state as “nothing but a political racket.” He warned of Hague being in “absolute control” of all state patronage and urged that all “original Roosevelt men receive proper recognition.”<sup>33</sup> On August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1935, Silverman wrote again to the President complaining about the political situation in New Jersey, calling attention to the fact that Hague controlled federal patronage and as a result all but five of the PWA employees were Hague Democrats.<sup>34</sup>

On August 28<sup>th</sup>, Meyer C. Ellenstein, Mayor of Newark, wrote drawing the President’s attention to the fact organization Democrats in Paterson ignored the use of the President’s name in their party designation when they filed their primary ticket the previous day; the Mayor cited this as an indication of conditions in Paterson under the control of Hague, and warned, “Works Progress Administration positions are now being given to those who are controlled directly or indirectly by Mayor Hague.”<sup>35</sup>

All of these issues were subsumed by the overwhelming desire shared by every faction to see Roosevelt reelected.<sup>36</sup> No one had a greater personal stake in this than Hague; a Republican in the White House would mean not just an end to government patronage, but possibly greater federal

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<sup>33</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, Box 3294, “Frank Hague, September 11, 1933.”

<sup>34</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, Box 3294, “Frank Hague, August 5, 1935.”

<sup>35</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, Box 3294, “Frank Hague, August 28, 1935.” Turning a blind eye to Hague’s abuse of power persisted for the duration of Roosevelt’s long term in office. “Are you a genuine lover of liberty?” Dan R. Wilborg of Jersey City asked in a hand-written letter to the President on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1937; “If you are you will not close your eyes to the conditions prevailing here in Jersey City. You failed in your duty when Huey Long reigned. Will you do so again? The people of Jersey City need assistance – help rid them of the Hague menace!” “You may be interested in this,” McIntyre wrote to Farley on December 18<sup>th</sup>; “I am not replying.” Farley was dismissive; “Of course there is nothing we can do about the New Jersey situation,” he wrote back to McIntyre on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938; “Hague is going to run it his own way. He has been reelected for four years and there is nothing we can do.” Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, Box 3294, “Frank Hague.”

<sup>36</sup> Eugene Pharo, “Doubtful New Jersey,” *Washington Post*, October 6, 1936, X9.



oversight of exactly how he managed his fiefdom. Accordingly, the Mayor threw every asset at his disposal into the campaign of 1936.

At a meeting of the Democratic National Committee on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1936, Hague had sponsored a resolution asserting “the coming campaign will be a struggle for the principle that the first duty of Government is toward the welfare of all the people” and “a battle between a small and powerful minority representing the forces of greed and privilege and the mass of our people who ask for a fair field for their enterprises and for their right to a decent living.”<sup>37</sup> However, during the campaign, Hague emerged as a somewhat unlikely advocate for business interests, and was constantly urging Roosevelt to tone down his class war rhetoric.

During a campaign conference chaired by Farley, Hague was aggressive enough towards the Republican ticket: “don’t fight them with cream puffs if they are using ice picks on us.” But he urged the President to take the have-not vote for granted and offer an olive branch to the haves:

The small business man is being scared, the white-collared man is being scared... Everybody feels [Roosevelt] is going to have a big stick and crush business. The President can clear it up. He can convey to the public that he is interested in business, that he is for business to prosper and re-employ the unemployed... Labor is with him, why try to attract them? Get into the column where we are weak... You want the small business man – the white collar man... I have been raised and educated among the working people. The working people today are with this man. What more does he want?

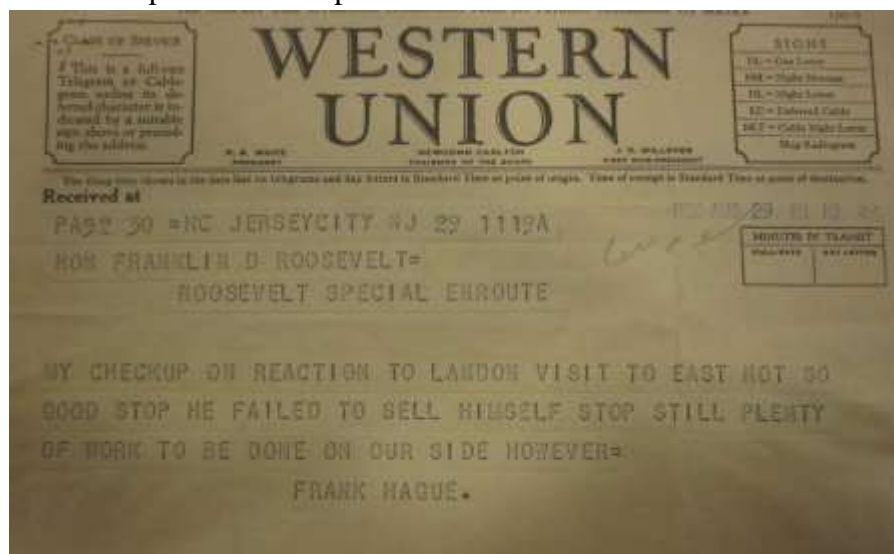
Farley was dismissive: “Half of these big fellows are men he has saved, and they would murder him now. There is not a thing he can do to get these fellows for him.” But Hague persisted. “The attitude of the President has been such that he has been playing into their hands. Don’t let

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<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the Democratic National Committee meeting, January 9, 1936, James A. Farley Papers, Library of Congress, Box 53.

these bums walk away with that.” If Roosevelt would adopt the stance Hague insisted on, “he will murder them.” The Mayor demanded Farley set up an audience between Roosevelt, “[Pennsylvania Senator Joseph] Guffey and myself. We are the fellows in the trenches... practical men.”<sup>38</sup>

Farley did no such thing. However, Roosevelt himself made a point of staying in personal contact with Hague throughout the campaign. In a telegram on August 29<sup>th</sup>, Hague assured Roosevelt that Landon had “failed to sell himself” over the course of his first campaign swing to the East (see Image 4).<sup>39</sup> “I was delighted to get your telegram,” Roosevelt replied, “as it gives me a check-up on Eastern opinion as to the Landon visit. Out in the West it seemed to be the same –



a failure to say anything inspiring or to arouse enthusiasm. Even though no definite ‘bad breaks’ were made the net result seems to be colorless and, therefore, not so good.”<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the campaign, Farley was pessimistic about the

Image 4: Hague telegram to FDR, August 29<sup>th</sup>.  
(Image Credit: The Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, PPF Box 1013.)

<sup>38</sup> Democratic Party Campaign Conference, Biltmore Hotel, New York, August 26, 1936, James A. Farley Papers, Library of Congress, Box 54.

<sup>39</sup> Mayor Frank Hague to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 29, 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, PPF BOX 1013.

<sup>40</sup> “Do send me a line to give me your slant on the effect of my Western trip,” the President concluded. President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Mayor Frank Hague, September 8, 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, PPF BOX 1013.

President's chances of carrying New Jersey.<sup>41</sup> This was informed by the feedback he was getting from party operatives. James A. Tirrell, state chair of the Democratic Party in New Jersey, wrote that it was his opinion "from general observation that it will be extremely difficult for the Democratic party to win over New Jersey... There is a good deal of anti-New Deal sentiment in the State, especially in those areas which are suburbs of metropolitan New York and Philadelphia... mainly because of the large expenditure of public moneys, the increase in public debt, the lack of coordination, progress and the wastefulness of the W.P.A. projects, [and] the political control exercised in [the] dispensation of federal and relief agency jobs."<sup>42</sup> In a similar vein, "It is my feeling that today we would be unable to carry New Jersey for Roosevelt," David T. Wilentz wrote from Perth Amboy; "the great majority of the army of commuters" and "a great number of the men having fairly decent jobs in industry in this State – the 'White Collar' class – are opposing the administration."<sup>43</sup>

Adding to his headaches, Farley was constantly being needed to do something about the ongoing factional issues in New Jersey. Newark lawyer John A. Matthews warned his city, "which ought to be Democratic by 30,000 is a commission governed city, and both the Democratic Mayor, Ellenstein, and the Commissioner of Public Safety, Duffy, are not in the good graces of Frank Hague. They are up for election themselves next May, and if Frank is not going to have them supported they won't be hot to see Frank carry the State for the President."

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<sup>41</sup> Democratic Party Campaign Conference, Biltmore Hotel, New York, August 27, 1936, James A. Farley Papers, Library of Congress, Box 54; Transcript of Press Conference, September 17, 1936, James A. Farley Papers, Library of Congress, Box 54; Transcript of Press Conference, October 3, 1936, James A. Farley Papers, Library of Congress, Box 54.

<sup>42</sup> James A. Tirrell to James A. Farley, September 10, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

<sup>43</sup> David T. Wilentz to James A. Farley, July 24, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

“You know, Jim, it is hard to tell Frank that Essex is different from Hudson,” Matthews continued; “It is vastly so. If we had City control in Newark like Frank has in Hudson, our job of off-setting the suburban vote would not be so difficult.”

“I want you to believe me when I say that I think Frank Hague is whole-souledly with you,” Matthews concluded. “But Frank is inclined to look at a national election with Hudson County and Jersey City eyes. If he does the President won’t carry New Jersey.”<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, there were those prepared to give Hague his due. Edward L. Whelan, chair of the Union County Democratic Committee, in his report to Farley, was confident “of course, you will agree with me that there is no better Leader or a more astute Leader than Mayor Hague our National Committeeman who is in charge of the campaign in this State and I am sure there will be very little he will overlook.”<sup>45</sup> “In Essex County, the County in which I live, there are too many factions in the Democratic Party,” a correspondent from South Orange wrote. However, “I am convinced that Frank Hague will, without a question of doubt, come through in Hudson County, bigger and better than he ever has.”<sup>46</sup>

One area where Hague was working hard to expand the Democratic coalition was with African American voters, historically a Republican constituency. Democratic state central committeeman J.F. O’Donnell noted that the “Negro vote in [the] state [is] a considerable factor.

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<sup>44</sup> John A. Matthews to James A. Farley, September 11, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38. For additional perspectives on the factional issues in Essex County, see William H.J. Ely to James A. Farley, September 10, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38, and Mayor Walter B. Savage to James A. Farley, September 29, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

<sup>45</sup> Edward L. Whelan to James A. Farley, September 10, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

<sup>46</sup> William Freiday to James A. Farley, September 8, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

Our State leader, Mayor Hague, knows this well. He has made or is planning to make several appointments that should corral that vote.”<sup>47</sup>

This outreach bore immediate fruit. “Over 80 percent of the Negro voters in New Jersey were Republicans in 1932,” stated Oliver Randolph of Newark, an African American who served as a Republican member of the New Jersey Assembly before being appointed an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the New Jersey District. “Now, however, the ratio is 65 to 35 in our favor.”<sup>48</sup> Some Democrats hoped for better. “I do not believe the sentiment is as strong for President Roosevelt as it was in 1932,” wrote Charles I. Lafferty, chair of the Atlantic County Democratic Committee; “however, I do think there is a greater opportunity to do some good work among the negro voters in Atlantic City and County... I believe we can poll at least sixty percent of these votes for President Roosevelt.”<sup>49</sup>

Even more than race, class was the dividing line in New Jersey presidential politics, as it was nationally in 1936. The white collar/blue collar divide was the critical fault line of partisan loyalty. Representative Edward Kenny was confident Hudson County would deliver a massive vote for the President, and Essex County “will hold its own, Newark offsetting Montclair, the Oranges and other suburbs.” However, Bergen County, “my county, at the moment seems lost to us. An effort should be made to keep the Republican majority down to 10,000 if we are to carry

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<sup>47</sup> J.F. O'Donnell to James A. Farley, September 10, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur S. Henning, “New Jersey’s 16 Votes Placed on List for Landon,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 27, 1936, 7. Henning came to a conclusion that would have been unimaginable just four years earlier but which has a very contemporary ring today: “The Democrats are relying largely on the colored vote to save New Jersey for Mr. Roosevelt.”

<sup>49</sup> Charles I. Lafferty to James A. Farley, September 9, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

the State... The bitterest opponents of the administration are the Wall Street men of whom we have many in Bergen County and their influence is against the Democrats.”<sup>50</sup>

Mayor John V. Hinchcliffe of Paterson informed Farley “the county of Passaic can be made to go Democratic for the reason that three of the major municipalities of this county are manufacturing cities: viz. Paterson, Passaic and Clifton. Both Passaic and Clifton are Republican cities,” but like Paterson have a heavy manufacturing base and substantial immigrant communities, largely employed in the textiles industry. “Labor for the most part in this locality, I might say, is entirely in accord with the President’s program.”<sup>51</sup> The same class divide split the state across its length and breadth. Ominously for the Landon campaign, “One does not have to be long at some of the large industrial plants at Red Bank and elsewhere to find that 90 to 95 percent of the employees are pro-Roosevelt,” a local newspaper reported. “Pictures of the President are posted in various places in such buildings despite the fact that in some instances the owners are strong for Landon.”<sup>52</sup>

Many Democrats stressed the benefits accruing to the state from the relief agencies should be highlighted. Frederick J. Gassert, the Mayor of Harrison, urged that “the tremendous help given by the Administration to New Jersey in the form of assistance in the WPA and the PWA should be stressed.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Representative Edward Kenny to James A. Farley, August 17, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

<sup>51</sup> Mayor John V. Hinchcliffe to James A. Farley, August 12, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

<sup>52</sup> “Campaign Drawing to Conclusion with Numerous Conflicting Cross Currents Indicating Close Result,” *Red Bank Register*, October 29, 1936, 1. The class divide was not an absolute. While big business, in banking and industry, was decidedly anti-New Deal, Arthur L. Walsh, Assistant Administrator of the FHA, found “a great many small business men – haberdashers, owners of shoe stores, cigar and stationery store owners, etc., who voted for Hoover in 1932 but who are for Roosevelt this year.” Arthur L. Walsh to James A. Farley, September 14, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38. Walsh also assured Farley, “Frank Hague is working aggressively and will do a magnificent job for you in this State.”

<sup>53</sup> Mayor Frederick J. Gassert to James A. Farley, September 29, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38. Gassert concluded: “Of course, I need not point out that our local

Edward B. Balentine wrote from Irvington, “a typical municipality in this part of the State... of middle class people most of which are trying to earn their own homes. In this regard I might suggest that there are a great many HOLC [Home Owners Loan Corporation] mortgages in Irvington and if it is possible to hold in abeyance any foreclosures until after [the] election it no doubt would help us a great deal.”<sup>54</sup>

However, some Democrats in fact complained the relief agencies were too riven by factional interests to be useful, or had even fallen into the hands of the Republicans. HOLC “have done us, I fear, irreparable damage,” one of Farley’s correspondents lamented, singling out a federal government appointee “who while drunk stated that he was sent into New Jersey to drive Frank Hague out of the Democratic Party.” Meanwhile, “They have Harry Newman of Lakewood handling legal matters for them in Ocean County. Mr. Newman is a Republican candidate for Freeholder. They also employ Howard Roberts, attorney for the Republican Board of Freeholders for Monmouth County, and the political leader in Middletown Township. Likewise, they employ John T. Lawley, the Republican Committeeman for Middletown Township.”<sup>55</sup>

By the time Summer turned to Fall it was increasingly apparent Landon had failed to measure up to Roosevelt, and the President, sensing his moment, finally hit the campaign trail. Thelma Parkinson, committeewoman from Vineland, reported in mid-September “there is a decided swing toward the President... There is a feeling of enthusiasm and confidence that was not apparent three or four weeks ago.” She conceded the commuter vote of suburban north and

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organization is a unit of the Hudson County organization so strongly and efficiently organized under the extremely capable leadership of Mayor Hague.”

<sup>54</sup> Edward B. Balentine to James A. Farley, September 29, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

<sup>55</sup> Representative William E. Sutphin to James A. Farley, August 4, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38. Representative Edward Kenny also complained “The job situation of course bobs up to haunt [us] and under the set up it is necessary for applicants for WPA work to pass through Republican hands.” Representative Edward Kenny to James A. Farley, August 17, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38.

south Jersey would “naturally feel the bitter reaction of the bankers and stockbrokers” towards the New Deal; “However, I feel our labor votes and our rural ‘small truck farmer’ vote of southern Jersey will make up for this.” Her confidence was bolstered by trends at the local level. “My County of Cumberland is small, but ten years ago we could not fill a Democratic ticket and now nearly every County officeholder is a Democrat.” Feeling the pinch, the Republicans “are waging their most strenuous campaign of a decade in this county. In fact they have opened [a] County campaign headquarters [for] the first time in history. It is interesting to note they have opened the headquarters in a bank in Vineland that was closed during the Hoover Administration.”<sup>56</sup> In another boon for the incumbent, the cobbled-together Union Party of Charles Coughlin, Francis Townsend, and Gerald L.K. Smith failed to get its candidate, William Lemke, on the ballot in New Jersey.<sup>57</sup> Above all, in line with the national trend, the economy in New Jersey continued to recover from the trough of the Depression. In thirty-eight surveyed communities relief rolls dropped from 12,706 in June 1935 to 4,690 in June 1936. Monthly direct relief costs fell from \$318,548 to \$65,438 across the same period.<sup>58</sup>

The highlight of the campaign in the Garden State was an appearance in Jersey City by the President himself on October 2<sup>nd</sup> to dedicate the new Medical Center. Hague declared a public holiday for the occasion and, as Marquis Childs recalled it, “turned the town and half the State in an imitation of a Roman triumph.” From the moment the procession of cars rolled out of the Holland Tunnel the thunder of fireworks assaulted the ear, and the whole city under a cloudless

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<sup>56</sup> Thelma Parkinson to James A. Farley, September 14, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38. See also the files listed at: <https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/sharp/sharp.shtml>.

<sup>57</sup> New Jersey’s election laws provided that prior to the primaries for selection of Republican and Democratic candidates nominating petitions must be filed by others desiring a place on the general election ballot. As the primaries were held in May, before Lemke became a candidate, he was automatically barred from nominating himself by petition and made no effort to do so. Supporters resorted to stickers, as those writing in the names of candidates also had to supply the names of the individual electors.

<sup>58</sup> “State Relief,” *Literary Digest*, Vol. 121, No. 26, June 27, 1936, 7.



blue sky seemed one mass of flag-waving humanity.” Hague, “an iron-jawed master of ceremonies,” rode in the presidential car.<sup>59</sup> Every house along the route was decorated with American flags and bunting; nearly every window displayed a picture of the President, and every few yards a campaign poster was suspended over the street from wires.

According to one observer, Hague had “grasped the opportunity to put on a show that left members of the presidential party gasping. It was a superb exhibition of political efficiency.”<sup>60</sup> The crowd was estimated at 200,000 to 250,000 people, as many as 75,000 at the Medical Center and the rest lining the streets. It was certainly the largest, and possibly the most enthusiastic, mass rally in New Jersey’s history.<sup>61</sup> Most prominent were the seventy thousand school children, “marched to the line of travel like battalions of Mussolini’s child troops” in the words of one hostile commentator. Waving an American flag and wearing a red, white and blue paper cap and a Sam Browne belt in the national colors, they lined the streets, shrilling, “One, two, three, four, who are we for? ROOSEVELT!”<sup>62</sup>

Introducing the President, Hague solemnly intoned, “We of New Jersey worship and honor the name of Roosevelt.” In his address, Roosevelt expressed satisfaction that “the Federal government, through its public works expenditures, has been able to be of assistance to the municipal government of Jersey City” in the construction of “modern facilities surpassed by no other community in America.” This partnership “pointed the way to other communities” around the country.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Marquis W. Childs, *I Write from Washington* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1942), 113-114.

<sup>60</sup> Willard Edwards, “\$10,000 Show is given in Jersey for Roosevelt,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 3, 1936, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Hague “exceeded even the best of his past performances,” another observer confirmed. “Jersey City, N.Y. Turn Out for President,” *Washington Post*, October 3, 1936, X1.

<sup>62</sup> “To the Stump,” *Time*, October 12, 1936.

<sup>63</sup> “President Hailed by Throngs here in Round of Fetes,” *New York Times*, October 3, 1936, 1.

Hague received only a perfunctory tip of the hat from the President. “It is many long years ago that Mayor Hague and I discovered a common interest in the cause of the crippled child,” Roosevelt commented towards the end of his address. “This great medical center is, I know, close to his heart.”<sup>64</sup> The Mayor remained, however, always the loyal soldier. On October 12<sup>th</sup>, Hague cheerfully reported a “Vast improvement in sentiment in this state and other Eastern States” to the President. However, he still wanted Roosevelt to make “that business talk suggested by me over [the] telephone to you at Poughkeepsie last week... I cannot too strongly impress upon you my belief in its importance.”<sup>65</sup> This was advice the President blithely ignored. Far from seeking reconciliation at the Madison Square Garden rally that was the climax of his campaign, he instead promised interests hostile to his New Deal would “meet their master” in his second term.<sup>66</sup>

In his own final campaign rally, addressing the more than 5,000 people overflowing the auditorium of the Dickenson High School, Hague berated the turncoat Al Smith as “this Republican spellbinder” who is now “appealing on behalf of the men who in 1928 instigated a whispering campaign and through the use of undercover methods sought to and did destroy him.” But his main focus was strictly local:

You want to know what the President has done for Jersey City. The President has dumped millions into Jersey City for relief. We have had \$500,000 a month to give food to our hungry and work for our idle. The millions he has dumped into Jersey City have helped us

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<sup>64</sup> “Text of President’s Jersey City Address,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1936, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Mayor Frank Hague to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 12, 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File, PPF BOX 1013.

<sup>66</sup> Hague was also concerned that the extravaganza he had staged on Roosevelt’s behalf might overshadow the President’s Madison Square Garden rally, because “if your visit [to your] home city does not go over with [a] bang [it] will reflect unfavorably” with the tremendous response Roosevelt was getting at other venues, not least Jersey City. Hague was especially “disturbed because [Al] Smith and Landon precede you” at the same venue; “Nothing must be left undone to surpass their reception,” and “time [is] limited to work out [the] details.” Mayor Frank Hague to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 18, 1936, James A. Farley Papers, Library of Congress, Box 35.

improve our hospital facilities, have improved the general health of the city and saved many homes which otherwise would have been lost.

His message to the rate payers was equally blunt: “To property owners who think taxes are high, I say this: If it weren’t for Roosevelt, I don’t know what would have happened to your property.”<sup>67</sup>

Opinion polling in 1936 was still in its infancy. The most credible barometer of public opinion at the time was the write-in straw poll maintained by the *Literary Digest*. Its final tally suggested Landon was at better than two-to-one odds in New Jersey, with 58,677 ballots to Roosevelt’s 27,631. Some commentators completely swallowed this line. “New Jersey this year reverts to Republicanism,” was the blunt prediction of David Lawrence. “The margin will not be extensive, but it will be a minimum of 25,000 and may run much higher.” His assumption was based on the unprecedented registration figures; “There can be no doubt” that in New Jersey, “the increased registration plainly means a widespread protest against the New Deal.”<sup>68</sup>

Others were less sanguine about Landon’s chances. Most informed observers assumed the election in New Jersey would be one of the closest in the United States. It was understood that the urban, blue collar vote would be strongly Democratic. The outcome would be decided on the turnout of this vote in Hudson County, Middlesex and Essex Counties, in Camden and in Atlantic City.<sup>69</sup> “Labor, both organized and unorganized, was never behind a ticket in greater proportion than it is supporting Mr. Roosevelt this year,” wrote Arthur Krock in his pre-election wrap-up. “The Negro vote, very large and usually Republican, is a torrent of defection from that party.” The President was also expected to sweep “districts in which Jewish citizens predominate... The Italian

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<sup>67</sup> “Hague Calls Smith ‘Sorry Spectacle,’” *New York Times*, November 2, 1936, 9.

<sup>68</sup> David Lawrence, “New Jersey to Go Republican,” *Oakland Tribune*, October 31, 1936, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Eugene Pharo, “Doubtful New Jersey,” *Washington Post*, October 6, 1936, X9.

colonies and the small shop-owners are placed in the same category. The Democratic State organization under Mayor Frank Hague was never more unified or powerful... Stories terrifying to the Republicans are abroad about the Democratic majority which Mr. Hague will produce in Hudson County.” Hague also asserted the Republicans would be disappointed in the commuter vote from Essex, Bergen, and the rest of the suburban ring around New York City because of the popularity of the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) with the home-owning and savings class.<sup>70</sup>

In the final analysis, most Democrats in New Jersey were satisfied with the way the campaign had been managed in their state, though there were always exceptions. “I cannot understand why the party is spending so much time and effort, etc., on endeavoring to carry Pennsylvania, the darkest Republican stronghold of the nation,” Democratic Senatorial candidate William H. Smathers fumed, “when one-tenth of the effort exerted in Pennsylvania applied to New Jersey would insure this state for victory.”<sup>71</sup> However, the incumbent Democratic Senator, A. Harry Moore, was quite sanguine about the outcome: “I don’t see how President Roosevelt can lose the country, as this fellow Landon looks to me like a set-up.”<sup>72</sup>

In his final report to Farley, state Democratic chair William H. Kelly was now confident enough to assert, “I believe that we will give our great leader a plurality vote greater than that of 1932.”<sup>73</sup> Hague was even more specific: “during the past two months I have made a half dozen very careful surveys of the situation in New Jersey, county by county, the results of which show beyond any question that the Roosevelt sentiment in 1936 is far stronger and more widespread

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<sup>70</sup> Arthur Krock, “Jersey Vote Held Test of New Deal,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1936, 20.

<sup>71</sup> William H. Smathers to James A. Farley, September 30, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 38. Smathers needn’t have worried; not only was he elected, in addition to New Jersey, Roosevelt carried all but two other states, in the process becoming the first Democrat to carry Pennsylvania in a presidential election in eighty years.

<sup>72</sup> “With the Prophets,” *Literary Digest*, Vol. 122, No. 8, August 22, 1936, 7.

<sup>73</sup> William H. Kelly to James A. Farley, October 23, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 40.

than the sentiment in 1932. We are better organized, our Party is functioning without any dissension and is hitting on all cylinders... New Jersey will be in the Roosevelt column by a greater majority than in 1932.”<sup>74</sup> His last-minute projection was a victory in Hudson County by a margin “in excess of 131,000 and might go as high as 140,000... Roosevelt, going out of Hudson with a plurality in excess of 130,000, should carry New Jersey by between 40,000 and 50,000” votes.<sup>75</sup> Hague was so confident that, in response to Republican boasts that Landon would carry New Jersey by 250,000 votes, he issued a letter stating he represented a group ready to wager \$50,000 at odds of three-to-one that Landon would not carry the state by that margin, and that the group was in fact prepared to bet \$50,000 to \$200,000 that Landon would not carry New Jersey at all.

The Republicans concentrated the largest force of workers and poll watchers they ever had in Hudson County, hoping to restrict the Hague plurality to 100,000 or less. Two special deputies were assigned by superintendent of elections John Ferguson to each of the 634 voting districts in Hudson County.<sup>76</sup> In a last-minute purge, Ferguson dismissed eighty of them who had been annually assigned to Democratic strongholds in Jersey City; an additional twenty were replaced on election day, “for the good of the service.” Hundreds of lawyers, meanwhile, stood available at their respective party headquarters in Journal Square. Hague himself spent the evening at police headquarters.<sup>77</sup>

Turnout was unprecedented across the state. A record vote of 145,004 was cast in Jersey City, where the total registration was 160,222. In Camden the voting was so heavy the ballot boxes were filled and it was necessary to supplement them with barrels and cardboard containers.

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<sup>74</sup> Mayor Frank Hague to James A. Farley, October 20, 1936, Roosevelt Presidential Library, Official File 300, Democratic National Committee Box 40.

<sup>75</sup> “Hudson Estimate Raised,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1936, 31.

<sup>76</sup> “Jersey’s 16 Votes Safe For New Deal,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1936, 1.

<sup>77</sup> “Hudson Delivers A New Deal Sweep,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1936, 6.

When the counting was done, Roosevelt had won 1,083,549 votes (59.56%) in New Jersey to Landon's 719,421 (39.55%).<sup>78</sup> Only Lyndon Johnson for the Democrats in 1964 and Richard Nixon in 1972 and Ronald Reagan in 1984 for the Republicans have bettered this performance.

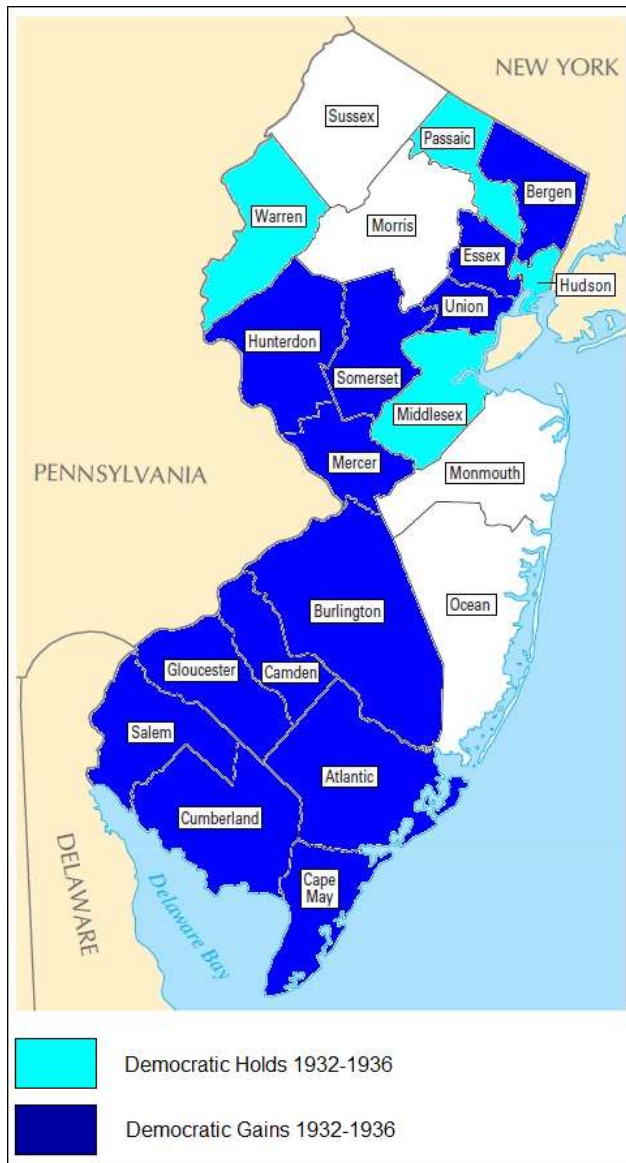


Image 5: Democratic holds/gains 1932-1936 by New Jersey county.

Roosevelt's 168,280 vote margin in Hudson County, where he crushed Landon 233,390 votes (77.65%, his best statewide) to 65,110 (21.66%), surpassed even Hague's expectations of a 125,000 plurality. Roosevelt's triumph was statewide in its breadth. Whereas in 1932 he had only carried only four of the state's twenty-one counties, this time he carried all *but* four (see Image 5). Essex, Bergen, and Union counties handed a majority to the Democratic nominee for President for the first time since 1892; Somerset County for the first time since 1884; Burlington County for the first time since 1876; Mercer County for the first time since 1868; Atlantic, Camden, Cumberland, and Salem counties for the first time since 1852; and Cape May and Gloucester counties for the first time in their history.

<sup>78</sup> Third party candidates managed 16,157 votes (0.89%) between them. Of that, the write-in effort for Lemke netted him a derisory 9,407 votes, barely one half of one percent of the total. In no county did he win more than one percent of the vote.

Roosevelt's appeal had depth as well as breadth, extending all the way down the ballot. Republican Senator Warren W. Barbour was beaten by Democratic candidate Smathers, and the Democrats also picked up three House seats, giving them a majority of the Congressional delegation for the first time in over twenty years. The voters also turned a 42/18 GOP majority in the state Assembly into a 39/21 Democratic margin, and shaved the Republican majority in the state Senate from 13/8 to 11/10.

Although Roosevelt's victory was largely driven by the urban centers, his appeal radiated out through the suburbs to the country beyond. "Down in Atlantic County," the *New York Post* observed, "the juggernaut of [Nucky] Johnson, one the Four Horsemen of the New Jersey Republican machine, appeared to be fast sinking into the sands."<sup>79</sup> Pleasantville, a rural suburb of Atlantic City, and an historic Republican stronghold, elected a Democratic Mayor, Scott M. Long, who defeated the Republican incumbent, Thomas F. Crawford. Atlantic and Camden counties transitioned to Democratic control of County government for the first time. Even in little Raritan township, where Hoover had secured a 174 vote edge over FDR in 1932, Roosevelt swept all six polling places four years later, swamping Landon by 2,771 votes to 1,844. For the record, this margin "was the greatest ever given any candidate of either party in the township's history," the *Raritan Beacon* solemnly noted.<sup>80</sup>

The mutually beneficial Roosevelt/Hague alliance, forged in the campaign of 1932, was thus consummated in the campaign of 1936. In fact, as the New Deal tide ebbed over the ensuing years, and elections in New Jersey became more competitive, the President became ever more dependent on the capacity of the Mayor to deliver votes, and correspondingly less interested in his

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<sup>79</sup> Henry Paynter, "New Jersey Landslide Beats the Others by Tons of Votes," *New York Post*, November 4, 1936, 3.

<sup>80</sup> "Raritan Township Joins Nation in Democratic Sweep for New Deal," *Raritan Beacon*, November 6, 1936, 1.

methods for doing so.<sup>81</sup> Thus it could fairly be said the President served to entrench Hague's power over Jersey City more than the Mayor did to perpetuate Roosevelt's tenure in the White House.

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<sup>81</sup> Roosevelt's majorities in New Jersey shrank to 51.48% to 47.86% in 1940 and 50.31% to 48.95% in 1944. In both elections, the Democratic majorities in Hudson County were decisive to the outcome.