

10

Mr. Democrat

The fight for the 1942 New York gubernatorial nomination was Farley's last major skirmish with Roosevelt and the New Deal. Increasingly, after 1942, he looked beyond the politics of elections and party organization to score points against his former boss. Initially, this meant corralling the opposition to Roosevelt's bid for a fourth term. Once that halfhearted campaign had failed, it meant using his fame, his prominent position in the business world, and his autobiographical writings to mount a critique of the New Deal's impact on American party politics. His critique was not wholly persuasive, but it was more or less consistent. As he aged, his defense of the old-style party politics he had learned as a young man in Grassy Point, pursued with such keenness in rising through the ranks of the New York State Democratic Party, and exercised with such skill as national party chairman in the New Deal came to be inflected less by bitterness and more by nostalgia. By the 1960s and 1970s—the era of Vietnam, Watergate, and the rise of the New Left—the Democratic Party coalition Jim Farley had helped assemble was crumbling, and the profession of politics that he held in such high esteem was in disrepute. Through it all, Farley was there as a reminder—to some at least—of better, bygone days.

Having thwarted Roosevelt in November 1942, Farley immediately turned his attention to the national arena. His mission in 1943 and 1944 was to prevent Roosevelt from running for a fourth term. It was a cause that attracted a motley group of the politically defeated and disaffected, ranging from former victims of Farley's own campaigning prowess, such

as former president Herbert Hoover and the 1936 Republican Party nominee, Alfred Landon, to the disenchanted diplomat Bill Bullitt and former Democratic National Committee chairman Clement Shaver.¹

As in 1940, when Farley became the figurehead of the movement to block Roosevelt's third-term nomination, those protesting a fourth term were hampered in 1943–44 by lack of effective leadership and by disagreements over strategy. Farley was happy to talk tactics with his allies, but he was reluctant to lead them—he felt that he had made his point in 1940. To Farley, there seemed no good reason to run the risk of tarnishing the memory of what he considered to be his principled stand against the third term at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. In his private memoranda, he fulminated against “Hopkins and that crowd” but still decided that the best way to proceed was to “let things ride along.”²

On January 2, 1943, Farley spoke to Herbert Hoover to exchange criticisms of the war administration and to discuss the political situation more generally. Farley and Hoover both kept suites at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, where they visited each other frequently until Hoover's death in October 1964. In a private memo, Farley recorded that he had told Hoover that there was every chance that Democratic insurgents—such as southern senators Harry F. Byrd (Virginia), Josiah Bailey (North Carolina), and Walter George (Georgia), along with numerous sympathetic congressmen and governors, principally in the South and West—would be able to tie up the nomination for an anti-New Deal Democrat. In the next three months, Farley had a series of meetings with such anti-fourth-term friends as John Nance Garner and Carter Glass, at which he discussed ways of persuading southern delegations to the 1944 national convention to oppose Roosevelt. But these talks were insubstantial, gossipy affairs and certainly did not lead to any plan of action.³

In 1943 and 1944, Farley predicted that if Roosevelt decided to run, he would lose. In November 1943, for instance, Farley confided to his diary that the situation had worsened since 1942. He thought that he might be able to get delegates instructed for himself in 1944 in Montana, Minnesota, and possibly even California. These states would add to the bloc of anti-Roosevelt states about which Farley and his allies fantasized. His overall prediction in the event of Roosevelt's renomination was

extremely pessimistic. He thought that the president would win only six or seven states: Rhode Island, Maryland, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and possibly Montana. As late as August 1944, after the convention at which Roosevelt was renominated, Farley told Lord Beaverbrook, the British press baron and a former member of Churchill's war cabinet, that Roosevelt would lose all the states west of Pennsylvania until Utah. He moderated his November 1943 prediction in stating that the president would win California, Washington, and Montana and that the election hinged on the outcome in the eastern seaboard states.⁴

In 1944, despite his belief that Roosevelt would be defeated, Farley and his anti-fourth-term friends failed to mount a serious challenge to the Roosevelt campaign. They were rudderless and divided. One indication of their lack of cohesion was the bid by a number of southern delegations to push for the reinstatement of the two-thirds rule. This move had little appeal to Democrats outside the South, and it was more than a little embarrassing to Farley, who had led the Roosevelt team's abortive attempt to get rid of the rule in 1932 as well as the successful bid for abrogation in 1936. For this reason, when Farley was approached at the 1944 national party convention by delegations from Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, all of whom wanted to vote for him in the event that Senator Harry F. Byrd decided not to let his name go before the convention, he turned them down. In any case, Farley had already determined that he would not become embroiled in the presidential and vice presidential nominations as he had in 1940.⁵

As a "sentimental gesture," Farley considered voting for his old friend Cordell Hull, but showing characteristic respect for "the rules of the game," he gave his presidential vote to Senator Byrd. He explained the grounds for his decision in a memorandum: "as long as Byrd was willing to let his name be used as a protest he was entitled to that courtesy from me for I felt as he did about the situation." A similar form of reasoning guided Farley's choice for the vice presidential nomination. Farley had great sympathy for the incumbent, Henry Wallace, who he thought had been shabbily treated by the president; but Farley would of course not vote for an ardent New Dealer. Instead, he chose Kentucky senator Alben Barkley, who in Farley's view was entitled to receive the presi-

dent's backing "by virtue of his leadership in the Senate and his devotion to Roosevelt's policies."⁶

The rigidity of Farley's political perspective was evident in his terse postconvention statement.

I have been opposed on principle to a third or fourth Presidential term. For that reason I voted for the nomination of Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia. Having participated in the proceedings of the convention I accept its decision and will support the party nominee.⁷

These words, issued immediately after the close of the convention, were designed both to head off any criticism from those who thought Farley might not support the Roosevelt-Truman ticket and to ensure that Farley was "part of the convention story," meaning that he wanted his statement to be recorded the following morning, when the final results of the convention would be published. It was essential to Farley that he reinforce the impression that his stand was not about any feelings of personal animosity toward the president but an act based on political principle. He emphasized his duty, as a loyal servant of the Democratic Party, to "reconcile the warring elements in the party" and to "go along with my party once the convention or primary is over."⁸

Farley kept his distance from the postconvention presidential campaign, turning down the overtures of the DNC chairman, Robert Hannegan, who wanted Farley to join him and possibly the president in a radio appeal to encourage voters to register. Farley liked Hannegan but as he told John Nance Garner in a letter of August 23, 1944, he thought the chairman was out of his depth, since he had "not been around the country enough to get the national picture and judge the good and bad reports." He later noted in a memo that he had told Hannegan that he had "lost complete faith in one who I had honored and revered." He then recalled his involvement in the 1942 Bennett nomination saga, suggested that the president had the wrong advisers around him, and launched into a critique of the handling of the vice presidential nomination. He also attacked Hannegan's predecessors Ed Flynn (1940–43) and Frank Walker (1943–44)—neither of whom had been comfortable in Farley's old job—for not consulting Farley on patronage matters in New York State. Clearly, he was in no mood to be conciliated.⁹

Uncharacteristically, Farley's predictions for the 1944 election result proved to be way off the mark. Though in terms of popular votes cast, the 1944 presidential contest was the closest since 1916, Roosevelt still won over 2.5 million votes more than his opponent and an electoral victory of 432 votes to 99. Farley believed that there had been massive defections from Democratic ranks due to high taxes, discontented "nationalistic groups" (he specified Italians, Poles, and Finns), economic dislocations, and "war nerves," but he determined that these had been offset by Republican and independent voters who thought it would be unwise to oust Roosevelt in the middle of a war.¹⁰

Once again, Farley had underestimated Franklin D. Roosevelt's vote-getting prowess and allowed his opposition to his former boss to obscure his judgment. Perhaps his constant exposure to the criticisms and biases of his anti-New Deal allies had affected his judgment. Further, by 1944, Farley's contacts with the Democratic Party's state and local organizations were less frequent than they had been in his heyday. His political intelligence was not half as good as it had been in the three previous presidential elections, when he had enjoyed access to regular reports from the network of Democratic Party scouts spread throughout the nation.

Another reason Farley got it wrong in 1944 was that he did not understand that political campaigning had changed. In August 1944, he told his old friend John Nance Garner that he feared for the future because the party's campaign managers might not maintain the kind of day-to-day personal contact that he thought essential to electoral success and because the party might not be able to attract the backing of wealthy donors. He did not realize that for campaigning purposes, it was no longer necessary to emulate a model based on the kind of politics that Farley had absorbed during his upstate apprenticeship in the 1910s and 1920s. Consequently, in 1944, he failed to acknowledge the important fund-raising and campaigning work of the newly established Political Action Committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, asserting that "Hillman's PAC" would lose more votes than it would gain. He did not grasp the significant fact that the Democratic Party's fund-raising base had, under his own jurisdiction as DNC chairman, undergone a profound shift as a consequence of organized labor's embrace of the New Deal.¹¹

In 1943, realizing that he was never going to get the call from Roosevelt to return to government, Farley left Washington. With Bess, he moved back to New York permanently, taking a suite of rooms in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. From here, it was no more than a five-minute walk to his office at 515 Madison Avenue, where Farley conducted his work for the Coca-Cola Corporation, took care of any political business, and dispensed the wisdom he had accumulated over the years to all comers. Every year, he held a press conference at which he reminisced about the great days of the New Deal and indulged his reputation as a political prophet by predicting the result of any elections on the horizon.

Farley's office, reporter William Longgood wrote, was "so perfect that it ought to be reproduced for the ages, with a figure of him in wax, presiding behind that big desk, peering impassively at visitors, talking in that flat voice, and the whole thing set up in a museum." There, Farley was surrounded by Roosevelt portraits and New Deal memorabilia. His split from Roosevelt had not made him any less proud of his personal association with the man who reinvented the presidency. Over time, Farley added to his collection, eventually displaying pictures of the six other presidents—from Hoover to Nixon—he came to know. There was a large picture of Winston Churchill, another of Cardinal Spellman, and portraits of the three popes he had met, Pius XII, John XXIII, and Paul VI. There were pennants, posters, and all manner of political paraphernalia covering the walls, as well as souvenirs from his travels. Piled up on the floor were his scrapbooks, the albums of Farley-related clippings that had been meticulously compiled by his assistants since the 1932 campaign.¹²

Farley's work for Coca-Cola—traveling the world touring bottling plants and extolling the virtues of American business culture—took up most of his time, but he also took on several public roles in his postwar career. Most notably, between 1953 and 1956, he sat on the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of Government, headed by his Waldorf-Astoria neighbor Herbert Hoover. He used that position to make the case that government had grown too big and bureaucratic. He traced the problem back to 1940 and to what he regarded as Franklin D. Roosevelt's selfish bid for a third term. In February 1951, Farley issued a public statement on the passage of the Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution, limiting future presidents to two terms. He said it was

“only natural that I should be gratified” by the amendment—not least because of the “rather harsh criticism” he had received in 1940, when he had contested the presidential nomination. Anticipating the allegation that he was acting vindictively, he defended his decision to make the statement, explaining, “to have held back would have meant that I was not faithful to the principles which governed my public life—namely, that it was my duty to give my honest opinion on matters of public interest, regardless of how it would effect [*sic*] me personally.”¹³

It would be misleading to give the impression that Farley’s immersion in the business world and friendship with Hoover had turned him into an out-and-out conservative by the 1950s. In 1955, when the Hoover Commission voted (by a margin of eight votes to four) to call on Congress to ban government construction of steam power plants and forbid the building of federal power lines where private utilities could provide transmission, Farley was one of the dissenters. Perhaps recalling that public power was one of Franklin Roosevelt’s lead issues in the 1928 and 1930 gubernatorial campaigns, Farley accused the commission of coming “dangerously close to inviting an abdication by the Federal Government of its responsibilities to insure the proper development of this country’s natural resources.”¹⁴

In the 1950s and 1960s, in addition to making occasional political statements, Farley spent much of his time offering eulogies to the peace-making potential of trade, on behalf of Coca-Cola. Against the backdrop of the cold war, he warned of the dangers posed by any retreat into isolationism. He was a strong advocate of the notion that American corporate investment might be a powerful tool of economic development in the world’s most impoverished regions. Poorer nations, he argued, were in desperate need of investment capital, though much more could be done to increase the incentives to invest, especially through changes to the tax laws. For Farley, trade, not aid, was the answer to the world’s ills; in business as in politics, honest dealing between honest men was all that was required to guarantee progress. That some in the developing world might—on ideological or other grounds—resent Coca-Cola’s aggressive expansionism did not occur to him.¹⁵

In 1958, Farley made one last bid to return to the national political scene. At the age of seventy, he announced his candidacy for the U.S.

Senate seat vacated by the Republican Irving Ives. It was a serious effort—and one that, given Farley’s legendary status in the Democratic Party, was difficult for other Democrats to oppose. “There is hardly a Democratic county chairman in upstate New York who is not beholden in some way to Mr. Farley,” the *Watertown Times* observed.¹⁶

Farley, who was the first candidate to put his name forward publicly, was described by the *New York Times* as “an affectionately esteemed, inseparable part of the party.” The *Binghamton Press* perhaps put it best in stating that while Farley’s career had been put on hold for eighteen years since 1940, it was “hard for an old firehorse to stay away from fires.” No newspaper endorsed him outright, but the *New York News* and the *New York Mirror* received his candidacy warmly, the former asserting that Farley was “one of the best men ever to grace the Democratic party,” the latter that “everybody respects and admires Jim Farley and would want him to have all that he desires.” George Sokolsky, who wrote some of Farley’s campaign speeches in 1958, said that “his candidacy suggests regularity and the rules of the game, virtues that have too long been ignored.”¹⁷

Farley’s candidacy was abortive—he withdrew when it became clear that New York City boss Carmine De Sapio was not prepared to support him—but it was a sign that he still felt he had something to give to his party and to his country. During his Senate campaign, he responded angrily when he was characterized as a conservative. When challenged, he aggressively defended his liberal credentials. “Whoever says that I am not a liberal in effect states that in 48 years I have lived the life of a hypocrite,” he told the Putnam County Democratic Committee in July 1958. “To these persons, whomsoever they may be,” he added, “I say you are either grossly and inexcusably ignorant or you are deliberately untruthful, or both.” Clearly, Farley had not lost an ounce of his relish for politics. He was baffled that despite having worked for years at Franklin D. Roosevelt’s side, helping to secure the passage of New Deal legislation by smooth-talking wavering congressmen, he was now seen as a reactionary. “I will not only match my private, I will match my public, liberal record with any man in this State, or for that matter, his country,” he declared.¹⁸

Farley's unswerving devotion to the politics of party organization and regularity affected his view of postwar presidents. That John F. Kennedy was a Roman Catholic descended from Irish stock did not impress him as much as Harry S. Truman's rise through the ranks of the Missouri Democratic Party or Lyndon B. Johnson's mastery of the Senate and flair for face-to-face politicking. Farley liked Truman and, on Truman's death, ranked him as one of the seven greatest American presidents—the others were Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt. But Johnson was Farley's particular favorite. In mid-October 1960, confidently predicting a Kennedy victory, Farley hailed Johnson as "the greatest parliamentarian of the Twentieth Century." Farley maintained that Kennedy would need "a sound and experienced captain on Capitol Hill" and that Johnson, with his "monumental talents," was just the man for the job. Of course, Farley misjudged what Johnson's role as vice president would be. Farley's great friend John Nance Garner, who was a still strong nonagenarian in 1960, had described the vice presidency as "not worth a bucket of warm spit," and that soon came to be Johnson's view, too.¹⁹

Shortly before the 1964 election, Farley penned an enthusiastic letter to Garner in which he correctly predicted a Johnson landslide. Any "white backlash" he said, would be confined to Indiana. He warmed to Johnson's willingness to indulge his political elders and was especially impressed that the new president had taken the time to confer with former presidents Hoover, Truman, and Eisenhower. "He is a very able man," he told General Alfred N. Gruenther in January 1964, adding, "he knows his way around and will always know where to go for advice and wise counsel, and he is big enough to appreciate it."²⁰

Farley's closeness to Johnson attracted press attention. It was noted that whereas Kennedy had not had much use for Farley, Johnson telephoned Farley regularly and saw him at the White House on several occasions. Farley made speeches praising both Johnson's Great Society program and the Johnson administration's foreign policy. In January 1965, he asserted that Johnson's ambitious domestic legislative agenda was thoroughly in keeping with the "American characteristic of purposeful vision—dreaming, if you will." In May of the same year, he

urged Johnson to continue to use force in Santo Domingo and in Vietnam. "President Johnson can no more abandon South Viet Nam now than President Wilson could have abandoned the freedom of the seas in 1917 or President Roosevelt could have abandoned Hawaii the day after Pearl Harbor," he opined. Farley maintained that Johnson had not created the crisis in Southeast Asia but inherited it and that "the preachments of the theoretical academicians," chief among them Owen Lattimore and Lauchlin Currie, had caused much of the trouble. He argued that any difficulties in the Caribbean resulted from application of too little, rather than too much, force. In a similarly hawkish vein, Farley lashed out at the "teach-inners" who were protesting against the war, stating with approval that when he had met Winston Churchill at Chartwell on his 1947 European tour, the British war leader had said that the Soviets would have been given ninety days to get out of Europe if he had had his way and that the "full atomic arsenal" would have been unleashed on them if they had not complied.²¹

Johnson and Farley stayed in touch after the Texan left the White House, exchanging banter as well as greetings and gifts. Though Farley was twenty years Johnson's senior, they had a common history of heart trouble by the early 1970s. Johnson's 1955 attack had almost ended his career. Farley suffered his first heart attack in April 1972. Up to that point, with the exception of prostate and cataract operations in 1969, Farley's health had been remarkably robust. When, at the 1956 Democratic National Convention, he was hit in the eye by a flying placard propelled by an overenthusiastic Adlai Stevenson supporter, the detached retina he sustained was the first serious injury of his entire life.²²

Farley's 1972 heart attack hospitalized him for five weeks, and he spent another five recovering in his Waldorf-Astoria apartment. His weight, which had been stable at between 205 and 220 pounds throughout his adult life, dropped to 180 pounds. Only now, at the age of eighty-four, did he cut back on his schedule. Commiserating with Farley, Johnson joked that perhaps it was "acute indigestion," rather than organ failure, that had struck Farley down. Johnson, who would suffer a fatal attack nine months later, was referring to the fact that Farley had attended 131 luncheons and 105 banquets in the previous year—an average year for him. In 1970, he went to 120 dinners and 105 lunches, clocked up over

twenty thousand air miles, and attended more than fifty games at Yankee Stadium. On Johnson's death, Farley sent a telegram to Lady Bird declaring that her husband had been "responsible for the passage of more beneficial legislation helpful to every eschelon [*sic*] of our society than any president in the history of this great country." As well as being a genuine tribute to a man Farley had known since the mid-1930s, before Johnson was elected to Congress, that statement was also a subtle attack on the reputation of Franklin D. Roosevelt.²³

Nineteen seventy-two was the first year since 1920 that Jim Farley was not invited to attend his party's national convention. Whether an accidental oversight or a deliberate snub, Farley's omission from the 1972 convention spoke volumes for the changes the Democratic Party and American politics had undergone since he began his career in Grassy Point in the 1910s. In terms of the strength and leverage of state and local party organizations, the Democratic Party in 1972 was a shadow of its former self.²⁴

In his last interview, Farley compared his first experience as a delegate to a national convention, at Madison Square Garden in 1924, to the conventions of 1968 and 1972. He told his interviewer, Beth Fallon of the *New York Sunday News*, that eventually the party's wounds always healed and that divisions had been deeper in the 1920s than in the 1960s. In this case, however, Farley's instinctive optimism was, perhaps, misplaced. The Democratic Party did recover, but it was a slow and incomplete process. In the 1920s, in the form of its shopworn, but still potentially vital, network of local and state organizations, the Democrats possessed the instruments with which to forge a return to political power. In the 1930s, Farley and Roosevelt—first in New York State and then in the national arena—combined to prove the point. But ironically, the New Deal, by changing the relationship between the federal government and traditional party organizations and by eroding the autonomy of its state and local parties, helped to ensure that similar resources were not available to later generations of Democrats. In the 1970s, a different set of political pioneers exploited new organizational techniques, new forms of communication, and new political styles, just as Farley and Roosevelt had forty years before. This time, however, the Republican

Party was the principal innovator, and the GOP reaped the rewards, in the form of the Republican hegemony of the Reagan-Bush years.²⁵

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the resurfacing of earlier battles Farley had fought for the “Democratic creed,” that is, for party loyalty and regularity—in 1940 against a third term, in 1942 on behalf of John J. Bennett, and in 1944 against a fourth term. This time, the defeat of the Democratic Party’s old guard was formalized in the shape of new rules introduced as a result of recommendations made by the national reform commission, appointed in the wake of the disastrous 1968 national party convention. The 1968–72 reforms—moving slating out of the hands of party officials, marking the advent of formal proportional representation in state delegations, and introducing ex officio seats for demographic categories—sounded the death knell for the Democratic Party’s traditional party machinery, paving the way for the presidential nominations of George McGovern and Jimmy Carter in 1972 and 1976, both of which were driven not by the party machinery but by independent activists and associated interest groups.²⁶

The politics of the early 1970s was alien to Farley. He bemoaned the “vast sums of money spent in campaigns,” arguing that the cost of campaigning was “shutting the poor boys out.” He attacked the media, too.

The T.V. cameras will focus on a student riot, but I defy anyone to come up with any coverage of the Young Democrats or Young Republicans, giving them the same attention the old Bosses did. The high cost of campaigning is driving talent out of both parties, closing the old doors, and to the immense disadvantage of the Republic.²⁷

At his eighty-fourth birthday press conference, in May 1972, he was in a typically combative mood. He criticized Democratic candidate George McGovern’s preconvention campaign, charging that party regulars had been unduly neglected and that the absence of an invitation for Farley to participate as a delegate-at-large had insulted him and thousands of other loyal party workers. He described as “ridiculous” the sixty million dollars the Republican Party spent on Richard Nixon’s campaign, and he pressed for campaign finance legislation to “restrict the huge expenditures that have been made particularly by Corporations.”²⁸

In newspaper articles, Farley attacked the “noisy New Left,” claiming

that “professionals masquerading as Democrats, such as John Kenneth Galbraith and his associates,” had wrecked Hubert Humphrey’s chances of gaining the presidency in 1968. He called for the prompt sacking of McGovern’s party chairman, Jean Westwood, arguing that if she were ousted and if the new party rules were revoked, the party might then reorganize under new, more enlightened leadership. The new rules, he stated from bitter experience, “prevented many Democrats who ordinarily went to the conventions, influential men and women who helped the party down through the years, from being delegates—denied them the right.”²⁹

But it was too late. The key battles in this war had been lost long ago, and Farley, as DNC chairman between 1932 and 1940, not only had witnessed them but had played a role in determining their outcome. The abolition of the two-thirds rule, the expansion or creation of special divisions to cater to programmatically oriented interests—organized labor, women, African Americans—and, most important, the fruitful, if sometimes tempestuous, marriage of the progressive goals of Roosevelt and the New Dealers to Farley’s extraordinarily efficient management of the Democratic Party apparatus all undermined the politics Farley embodied.

In the 1930s, for a time at least, Farley had managed to graft the party-driven politics of the pre–New Deal era onto the more nationally focused, ideologically driven politics of the New Deal. That was his greatest political achievement. That he himself was not able to survive the journey from pre– to post–New Deal politics intact is indicative of his limitations as a politician. But it also suggests the mutual incompatibility of two very different modes of politics, each organized around assumptions, ideas, and interests alien to the other.

In his last years, encouraged by his friend, the former New Deal labor advocate Ernest Cuneo, Farley began an attempt to trace the origins of the decline of the traditional party organization back to the Roosevelt era. Using Farley’s voluminous private memoranda and correspondence, the two men started work on a book, provisionally entitled *Roosevelt and Farley*, which was designed to set the record straight and to expose Roosevelt as a man who had launched a savage assault on the Democratic Party, with deleterious long-term consequences.

Cuneo put the manuscript together, but as with *Behind the Ballots* and *Jim Farley's Story*, Farley was to get the author credit. He would also get the advance of fifty thousand dollars that Cuneo had secured from his publisher, Prentice Hall. Privately, Farley and Cuneo had agreed on a fifty-fifty split. But Cuneo's failing health and Farley's death conspired to ensure that this third autobiography never appeared. Farley's estate was compelled to return almost half the advance.³⁰

Even in the mid-1970s, then, the octogenarian Farley was raking over the debris of his life, trying to fathom its significance, and dwelling in particular on 1940, his most traumatic year. In August 1975, he told Eleanor Roosevelt's friend Marion Dickerman about the new book, explaining that he would be "fair, but frank with my references to the President." He wanted his story told, and more than that, he wanted to be painted as an honest man, with the Democratic Party's and his country's best interests at heart. In almost plaintive terms, he urged Dickerman to accept that he had acted honorably. "The Saturday before the election," he wrote, "I sent a wire to over 11,000 Democratic leaders in New York State and around the country urging their whole-hearted support for President Roosevelt."³¹

In the last decade of his life, Farley became an increasingly benign figure in the nation's memory. Perhaps if *Roosevelt and Farley* had appeared in print, Farley would have been treated differently, with less warmth. But as it did not, he was simply "Mr. Democrat," the legendary embodiment of the New Deal's awesome vote-winning power—a reminder of the Democratic Party's halcyon days, when an efficient network of party organizations spanned the nation. He was the bulky Irishman with jowls and a wreath of white hair framing his bald pate and with the amazing memory for a name or a face, the master of politics in its purest form. But for the historian, Farley is important because the trajectory of his career suggests that the New Deal's relative marginalization of party organizations and of the politicians who worked through them came at a price and that the political transformations wrought by the New Deal were resisted, contested, and, by Farley at least, never quite accepted.³²

Six days before Farley's death, Robert Strauss, who was chairman of the Democratic National Committee, had called to tell him that he would be chairman emeritus at the national party convention in July.

That would have been a fitting final curtain call for “Mr. Democrat,” as some now called him. But it was not to be.³³

Having survived all but a few of his political peers, Jim Farley died on June 9, 1976. Of the major players in New Deal politics, only Thomas Corcoran outlasted him. Farley had lived for more than thirty years after the deaths of the two great mentors of his early career, Alfred E. Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel’s security staff found him lying across his bed, wearing a formal shirt and tuxedo pants, in the suite where he had lived alone since his wife Bess’s death, in January 1955. He had suffered a heart attack.³⁴

Farley had been busy to the end. His correspondence was not as vast as it once had been, but in the mid-1970s, he was still sending out as many as one hundred letters a day—all signed in green ink—tracking the achievements of the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of friends and acquaintances and conveying condolences as the numbers of those who had known him in his prime dwindled. He sent Blum’s chocolates to Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. Father Coughlin, the radio priest, sent him obscure, rambling theological tracts. He exchanged warm words with Thomas Corcoran; time and their mutual friendship with Ernest Cuneo had healed old wounds. He told a correspondent asking about the 1976 presidential campaign that there was no way that Ford could win, that “bread and butter” would be the main issue, and that with over seven million unemployed and with the memory of Watergate still fresh in voters’ minds, the Democrats would get back in.³⁵

Jim Farley never stopped striving to keep in touch. He saw his well-earned reputation for political prophecy as a vindication of the brand of face-to-face politics that he practiced with such skill and that his public speeches and writings unstintingly promoted. From his first tentative strides in Rockland County politics (calling on high school friends and baseball fans to help him become Stony Point’s town clerk), through his days working with Roosevelt to revive the upstate party in New York State, to his pomp in the New Deal years (when his name was known in every corner of the United States), that had been Farley’s way. To his mind at least, he had always played by the rules of the game.