Theodore Roosevelt, from "The New Nationalism," 1910

In this speech, delivered at Osawatomie, Kansas, in 1910, Roosevelt outlined the ideas that would become the basis of his 1912 presidential campaign. He expounded on his vision of a “new nationalism,” which recognized the inevitability of economic concentration and called on government to regulate the new economic structures and to become the “steward of public welfare.”

Practical equality of opportunity for all citizens, when we achieve it, will have two great results. First, every man will have a fair chance to make himself all that in him lies; to reach the highest point to which his capacities, unassisted by special privilege of his own and unhampered by the special privilege of others, can carry him, and to get for himself and his family substantially what he has earned. Second, equality of opportunity means that the commonwealth will get from every citizen the highest service of which he is capable. No man who carries the burden of special privileges of another can give to the commonwealth that service to which it is fairly entitled…

Now, this means that our government, national and state, must be freed from the sinister influence or control of special interests. Exactly as the special interests of cotton and slavery threatened our political integrity before the Civil War, so now the great special business interests too often control and corrupt the men and methods of government for their own profit. We must drive the special interest out of politics. That is one of our tasks today…

The true friend of property, the true conservative, is he who insists that property shall be the servant and not the master of the commonwealth; who insists that the creature of man's making shall be the servant and not the master of the man who made it. The citizens of the United States must effectively control the mighty commercial forces which they have themselves called into being…

It has become entirely clear that we must have government supervision of the capitalization, not only of the public service corporations, including, particularly, railways, but of all corporations doing an interstate business. I do not wish to see the nation forced into the ownership of the railways if it can be possibly avoided, and the only alternative is thoroughgoing and effective regulation, which shall be based on a full knowledge of all the facts, including a physical valuation of property…

Combinations in industry are the result of an imperative economic law which cannot be repealed by political legislation. The effort at prohibiting all combination has substantially failed. The way out lies, not in attempting to prevent such combinations, but in completely controlling them in the interest of the public welfare.

Document Analysis

1. How did Roosevelt propose that the nation's business sector should be managed?
2. What role would the federal government play under Roosevelt's new nationalism?
3. What was Roosevelt's proposed approach to combinations?