

SPEECH BY MAYOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY OVER W.T.CN. JUNE 3, 1947

As Mayor of Minneapolis I am grateful for the opportunity to give my views on the pending Taft-Hartley labor legislation. Having worked in the labor relations field as a consultant, and having served as mediator in disputes, I have had some experience in labor relations, and naturally have some opinions on such matters.

I do not speak as an expert but I do speak as a citizen who has a burning desire to see and make freedom--personal freedom-- a reality in our lives. I am strongly opposed to the Taft-Hartley bill, and I hope President Truman vetoes it.

I oppose it because I consider it unsound legislation. It strikes at the heart of American industrial democracy and our economic system. The Taft-Hartley bill threatens the gains made by labor in the past fifteen years, and threatens to destroy our well-established system of free collective bargaining which has been the cornerstone of our industrial relations.

The American enterprise system can exist only if the balance is kept between free management and free labor. When this balance or equality of bargaining power exists, decisions which affect both parties can be made jointly at the bargaining table. Such decisions are voluntary, satisfactory to both parties, well adapted to the needs of industrial productivity. To give anti-union managements the power to cripple or destroy unions is a first step away from this voluntary process. It is a step toward compulsion and government regimentation. It is a step towards the destruction of faith and confidence which has been created between management and labor--a faith and confidence which has produced the practical demonstration of American economic power such as we know it today.

Legislation such as this, conceived in the emotions of a post war era, may well set a pattern for American economic life that will produce endless confusion and ever increasing regimentation for industry and management, as well as trade union organizations. Management should remember that the strenght of our economic system has not rested upon capital alone. The arsenal of democracy was a reality because of the ingenuity of management and the skill of workers. Our high standard of living is a testimonial to the effectiveness of the free collective bargaining process.

Legislation aimed at crippling labor and destroying the voluntary joint decisions of labor and management is a double-edged sword. It strikes at our whole system of enterprise. Bureaucratic boards will be brought between management and labor with elaborate machinery for making and enforcing decisions. There will be hearings, orders, court actions, trials, punishments. Decisions of economic policy will pass from the hands of management and labor, to the detached bureaucrats and courts who know little or nothing about the important technical details of industrial relations.

Once started, this process of arbitrary dictation, with its elaborate bureaucracy of boards and rulings, of necessity feeds upon itself and expands. More and more boards, specialists, enforcement agencies are needed to handle the huge volume of cases. Labor and management well remember how the War Labor Board expanded from a mere handful of persons to approximately 2500 employees. If the voluntary process of labor-management negotiations is sabotaged by the Taft-Hartley bill, regimentation will soon reach to other fields. Rulings which limit wage increases must be followed by rulings to control prices, production, and profits.

Many employers do not want to destroy unions or abolish free collective bargaining. They respect the rights of their employees and find that dealing fairly with a responsible union brings industrial peace, and high morale. Many negotiated with unions long before the government guaranteed the rights of union membership and collective bargaining. On the other hand, employers accustomed to unrestricted authority and workers with new rights, are both likely to commit excesses. The important responsibility of government is to penalize excesses and administer justice promptly and equitably. A democratic government will not restrict the rights of all because of the inexperienced or undisciplined few.

Legislation to promote industrial peace should facilitate union membership as necessary to labor initiative and responsibility. It should provide the information and services needed for successful collective bargaining. It should not undermine democracy by authorizing bureaucratic intervention in voluntary agencies, or by restricting the rights of individuals, whether exercised individually or collectively.

Surely the law makers of the world's leading democracy understand these basic principles of freedom: (1) the rights of the individual to make decisions which determine his own life; (2) the right of individuals to join together to promote their welfare; (3) justice grows out of government by law. The use of court orders of injunctions in labor disputes has deprived workers of their constitutional rights and subjected them to government by judicial decree.

Abuses of freedom can be cured only by constructive measures which develop character and responsibility. Both management and labor in America have been learning the fine art of labor-management relations through experience and common understanding. No law can be a substitute for responsible action, integrity and honesty of purpose.

No law can guarantee collective bargaining in good faith. This can come about only when those responsible for management and trade unions have recognized their public responsibilities.



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