

Labor Day

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Labor Day - 1947
Sparks*

I join with you in celebrating this 65th anniversary of Labor Day. Labor Day 1947 has taken on new significance to the men and women who work in our shops and factories, fields and mines. This great national holiday affords us an opportunity to review the struggles and the accomplishments of a great section of our people working within the framework of democratic social order.

65 years ago the American labor movement was a small, loosely organized, but militant organization endeavoring to bring into its ranks the ever increasing number of industrial workers. In that period of American life we were just on the threshold of an industrial development. With industrialization, mass production, and the machine age, our human resources were often sacrificed and destroyed in the process of building our material wealth. It is to the honor of those early trade union leaders that labor organizations were established which delivered the working men from their bondage—and a bondage it was to the machine and to the exploitation of human and physical resources. It was the unions which acted in defense of human rights and set in motion the process of economic justice. For these things along unions deserve the support and the loyalty of freedom loving people. Through the processes of collective bargaining and union organization, millions of our working people have tasted economic justice and have enjoyed the fruits of our prosperity and our economic freedom.

No single group of individuals nor any other organization is more patriotic or more devoted to the ideals of political freedom and American enterprise than the great organizations of labor. The record of loyalty during World War II is a living testimonial to the leadership and the fidelity of our men and women in the industrial life of America. We have proven to all cynics and the skeptics that the American economic system can out-produce all of its competitors. We have demonstrated that where there is a common cause universally accepted by those in management and labor

alike, miracles can be performed.

Lest we forget in this period of our history when trade unions are being critically analyzed and viciously attacked, it would be well to review the record. It was organized labor that first took up the challenge of public education. It was organized labor in the late 1800's that fought against the exploitation of our natural resources. It was from the councils of the labor movement, weak and small as it was in those early days, that came the call for public health protection, decent housing for the great mass of our people, control of the grasping monopolies, and extension of the helping hand of government.

In these later years, the labor movement of America, working through the ballot and in the halls of the legislature and Congress, has brought to the attention of our government and our people the need of broad social legislation such as we now have in the beginning of a social security program, workmen's compensation laws, child labor legislation, industrial safety, and others too numerous to mention. I ask those who are the critics of labor, is it a crime to be interested in the welfare of your fellowman? Is it contrary to the spirit of democracy to emphasize human values beyond the adoration and love of property and material values? It is to the eternal credit of the labor movement that in the dark days of the 1930's it quickly saw the menace of Fascism and the danger of totalitarianism. Had the voice of labor been heeded, Hitler and his barbarians would have been stopped in their tracks, and possibly stopped without the need of bloodshed. Labor Day in 1947 cannot help but bring memories of these great achievements and sacrifices.

All of this is within the American tradition. The key to the interpretation of American history is the persistent struggle to keep alive the ideals of freedom and justice. There has been a long-run interest in and concern over the general welfare of our people. The great men of America are those who have emphasized human values. The great men of this nation are those who have had a fervent belief in the rights of men. Our America is based upon the belief that man is the foundation

and the end of the state. Man is the maker, not the tool of the state. We have a faith which tells us that each generation of Americans must not only protect and guard the hard-won gains of the past, but it must move forward by making the terms "freedom" and "justice" living forces in every sphere of our life for an ever increasing number of our people. As the late Governor Floyd B. Olson stated, "The rights that labor has won, labor must fight to defend." Today we must go even further. The rights that labor has won must be but the spearhead of an advance for new and greater opportunities.



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