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EXCERPTS FROM SPEECH
by
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BEFORE
TWENTY-SEVENTH CONVENTION
of the
INTERNATIONAL LADIES' GARMENT WORKERS UNION
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We have a great responsibility this year. The future of our domestic economy hangs in the balance as we face increasing unemployment over all the United States. At the same time on the international scene millions of people all over the world wait to see whether international conflict can be avoided and whether they can feel free and secure to live their lives without war and without destruction.

To a large extent what you and I do as American citizens will determine the answers to these questions. To a very significant extent what you as members of the organized labor movement do will answer these questions for ourselves, for our children, and for the people of the world.

This is true because we live in a political democracy. We live in a country where the people have the responsibility to make the decisions. We live in a country, also, where increasingly the people are affected by political decisions.

There was a time not so long ago when it was possible for most Americans to live their lives and except for occasionally paying some taxes -- and not too much of that -- they had very little to do with the government in Washington. Today, however, the situation is quite different.

I need not tell you that labor's rights are no longer secure merely through the process of collective bargaining with employers. Today the rules of collective bargaining and the rights and privileges of organized labor are the object of political determination.

Politics, effective political participation, must go hand in hand with the growth and the development and the maintenance of a strong labor movement in America.

We seldom ask one another any longer "Are you interested in Politics?" The simple fact is that if we do not take an interest in politics we might as well make up our minds that our freedom and our very being becomes endangered.

The Taft-Hartley experience in one major respect has taught us a very important lesson. You and I know that the free labor movement can never achieve its objectives when the rules of collective bargaining are stacked against it and when the umpire and the referee operate onesided rules and regulations.

The Taft-Hartley Act has destroyed the neutrality of government in labor-management relationship. The Taft-Hartley Act says to every American worker that no matter how you may fight, no matter how just is your cause, the orders are stacked against you and you haven't got a chance to ultimately win.

There is a volume of evidence coming to Washington these days demonstrating that the Taft-Hartley Act is crippling the growth of the union movement, particularly in the South and in some of the other areas of this country where union membership is not as strong as it is in the industrial East and in the industrial centers of the Midwest and far West.

I say this without fear of any successful contradiction, there will not be any labor-management peace in this country until this grossly unfair anti-labor legislation is removed from the statute books. There can be no labor-management peace until the economic relationships between labor and management are no longer settled by the general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board, but are settled around the conference table between employers and employees.

I want to say one more word about the problems of organized labor in the South. If democracy means anything, if freedom means anything, it means that working men and women have a right to organize and form unions of their own choosing. If our American heritage has any significance, it means that the right to bargain collectively must be protected and preserved.

Today many hundreds of thousands of American men and women -- yes, many hundreds and thousands of garment workers -- are denied this inherent right.

Organized labor in the South today faces problems very similar to those that the organized labor movement faced all over America in the late 1920's and the early 1930's. It faces threats of violence, coercion, flagrant brutality, and an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

The economy of America not just the economy of the South; in fact our very democracy depends on bringing to the attention of the American people the true facts of industrial anarchy which exists in so many sections of the South.

That is the way we in America face our problems. That is the way we in America dealt with industrial anarchy in the 1930's. The LaFollette's Civil Liberties Committee of that day brought to light the true facts of collective bargaining and the American people acted to correct these evils.

Again today the American people must be told the facts. Enlightened citizenry and an informed public opinion is our objective. I hope that the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee and its sub-committee on labor-management relations can help achieve that objective.

For the labor movement and for American working men and women to fulfill their responsibilities, however, they must be concerned with more than just the Taft-Hartley law or the minimum wage law -- important as these may be.

American democracy needs and welcomes an aggressive instructed political action program on the part of organized labor.

At this point, however, we must understand ourselves. Political action does not mean top level strategy. Make it crystal clear in your own minds that elections are not won in Washington, D. C. They are frequently lost there, but they are not won there.

Elections are won by hard work and by active participation in every voting precinct in this country. The essentials of a successful political campaign -- the essentials as I see them are the following: A program, and I put program first -- a program that meets the needs of the people, and one that is worked out cooperatively with the rest of organized labor and the liberal movement. Secondly, candidates willing to fight for the people. We have got too many candidates where you have to fight for them. We need candidates who are willing to go out and fight for you, to fight for the American people.

Thirdly, there is a need of political organization that belongs to and is controlled by and managed by the rank and file of the people.

Finally, a clear-cut statement of the issues in language, in the simple language that is understandable by all of the people.

Now, my friends, if you have those ingredients, if you have a program that meets the needs of the people, candidates willing to fight for the people, if you have a political organization that belongs to the people and they are a part of it, and if you have a clear-cut statement of the issues in language that is understandable by the people, I submit to you no one can beat you, no one. There is the essence of success.

Today as we face the acid test for American democracy, the 1950 elections, there are disturbing signs. One of the most significant of these disturbing signs is the frantic efforts by the Republican Party. It is engaging in a smear political campaign rather than discussing the issues which face the American people. The Republican leaders are attempting to frighten the American people by repeating false charges and by waving the red flag. I know that the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union is well aware of the Communist danger in America. I know that the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union was in the lead among the labor unions in America to remove the Communist menace from within its ranks. Those of us who really oppose Communism, however, and who have had the opportunity to oppose them and fight them and to defeat them know that the cause of anti-Communism suffers when it is made into a political football and when the charge is recklessly bandied about.

The liberal movement for democracy in America faces a dangerous coalition. Never in our history has there been a greater propaganda barrage against the American workmen and against the interest of the American people than there has been during the past year. Ever since the miracle of November 2 the soothsayers have been con-

cocting some kind of a new witches' brew to pour out to the American people. While we were celebrating and while we were patting each other on the back the old rear guard was in there plotting and planning every day of the week, getting their machinery ready again for the onslaught.

There is a dangerous coalition, a coalition that distorts public opinion, a coalition that defies the truth, a coalition not interested in the presentation of the truth.

This Dixiecrat - GOP coalition under the leadership of the Tafts, the Wherrys, and the Byrds has lost faith in America. They condemn our policy at home and abroad with the same wild irresponsible charges. At home it is the welfare state that they oppose and abroad it is our aid to Great Britain and western Europe.

I would not deny that there is some merit to the Republican claim that the Fair Deal Program seeks the Welfare State as an objective. The welfare state is a legitimate objective -- one that is perfectly consistent with our traditions and with the current wishes of the American people. A state which is devoted to the welfare of its members, a state which looks upon man and his welfare as an end in itself, is one I support and urge you to support.

The United States began as a Welfare State when its Constitution charged the government with the responsibility of the "general welfare" of its people. In a sense this was one of the great differences between this new country which was born and the tired nations of Europe in the 18th Century.

From that day until this day the history of the American development has been a history of providing greater welfare for its people.

The political leadership exemplified by the Tafts, the Wherrys, and the Byrds refuse to accept the fact that two world wars and a major worldwide depression have changed our world.

We are not the America of 1800 nor of 1900. We are the America of 1950. We are the America which is the greatest financial power the world has ever known. We have to act with a sense of great social responsibility. We are the greatest industrial power in the world. We must learn to use that power maturely.

The American labor movement which represents the essence of democracy in our economic life must recognize it has a responsibility for international leadership. If democracy is to prevail in the world we in the United States must help it prevail. If we fail -- we fail with it.

The liberal and social democratic forces of the world are our friends in Europe. They look to us for friendship and for assistance. We must respond to them with our own friendship and with our own helping hand.



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