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July 21, 1959

*Thompson*  
*July 20*

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH RAILROAD LABOR?

Remarks Prepared for Delivery

by

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D., Minn.)

37th Convention of the  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen & Enginemen  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
Monday, July 20, 1959

A little less than a month ago, I spoke in the United States Senate on "What's Right with American Labor?". Some of you have been kind enough to express your hearty approval of that speech and to tell me that you thought it had been helpful to the cause of the American labor movement.

I hope that has been the case. What helps the American labor movement helps not only organized labor but all Americans -- farmers, unorganized workers, even business itself.

As I told the Senate, I am proud to be considered a friend of labor. I am proud of my friends in the labor movement, and I am proud, too, of the kind of people who stand with me as friends of organized labor.

It is too easy to forget, when headlines in the press are focused on the doings of the small number of corrupt elements which have wormed into certain parts of the labor movement, that the friends of labor are, after all, the overwhelming majority of the American people, who know that a strong and honest labor movement is an essential part of a democratic society.

I was prompted to make my Senate speech because for two years now we have been hearing a great deal about what's wrong with the American labor movement. It is in the nature of news that it singles out, and thus overemphasizes, the negative and the sensational.

But I strongly believe that the public should also have the full story of the American labor movement, and not merely that of a small group of gangsters and racketeers. And so I undertook to try to describe the positive side of American labor by pointing out what decent, honest, devoted trade unionists are doing day by day for their fellow workers, their communities, and their country, as well as for the cause of freedom throughout the world.

Today, I want to narrow my topic just a bit. I want to discuss briefly with you "What's Right with Railroad Labor?". I am prompted to select this topic because I am fully aware that, over the last year, the railroad workers of this nation have been made the target for one of the most unfounded and expensive propaganda attacks that the "perfume and soap" boys of Madison Avenue have ever launched against any part of the American labor movement.

All of you in this room know -- because your union is a primary target of that attack -- that I am referring to the campaign to picture railroad labor as greatly overpaid and unproductive "featherbedding."

Well, what's the real truth behind this propaganda campaign?

The real truth is contained in official government figures -- figures which show that despite the fastest-rising productivity in America, railroad wages have lagged behind those in other industries.

Now, of course, this is by no means the complete picture about railroad union work rules. I am happy to note that in his opening remarks to this convention, President Gilbert declared that in your forthcoming negotiations with the railroads your work rules must be revised and modernized to reflect the locomotive fireman's current contribution to the industry.

That is a positive approach, and it puts the subject of work rules where it properly belongs -- in the arena of collective bargaining, where experience has shown reasonable men of good will can always work out the fairest and most mutually satisfactory arrangements.

I must confess that I have been somewhat dumbfounded that the railroad managements today should be proposing that a Presidential Commission should settle this matter.

For railroad management to call upon the government to step in to settle an issue, even before any honest effort has been made to reach an agreement at the bargaining table is somewhat mystifying to me. It is completely at variance with all the protestations of the railroad industry against government interference and meddling in its affairs.

In any event, millions of dollars have been spent in an effort to convince the public that railroad workers deserve the reproachful epithet of "featherbedders." Well, as far as I'm concerned, if there are any feathers connected with railroading today, they're the horsefeathers in this campaign against labor.

So the first thing I want to say about what is right about railroad labor is that it has been responsible labor, realizing that its own advances can be made only with the advance of the railroad industry and our nation itself.

This is in the tradition of the American labor movement as a whole, but responsibility has been particularly a dominant characteristic of the railroad unions and their leaders. This is obvious when you examine the history of railroad labor and note its readiness to bind itself to a complex legal procedure of government mediation before it can exercise labor's sacred right to strike. The Railway Labor Act, which your unions helped to draft, has been pointed to by many experts in the field of labor-management relations as one of our most enlightened labor laws.

Unquestionably, this law imposes a great deal of self-restraint upon your actions when labor disputes arise, and it is a real tribute to railroad labor that it has recognized its peculiar responsibilities as servants of the nation's transportation needs and has abided by this law and its admittedly cumbersome delays.

The second thing I want to say about what is right with railroad labor and that is that it has proved itself today to be probably the most productive of any group of workers in the world. Its gains in productivity in recent years have outstripped those of the workers in any other industry.

That's what official figures of the Bureau of Labor Statistics tell us, and I might add that those figures were supplied to the Bureau by railroad management itself.

Actually, the output of railroad workers has been increasing at a rate approximately twice as fast as that of the entire non-agricultural part of the American economy. That's some "featherbedding," let me tell you! Railroad workers in this respect surely have set an example which management should hold up as a goal for the workers of all other industries.

Still another thing that railroad labor can be proud of is the unceasing fight it is waging to keep our railroad transportation system strong in order that it will always be ready to meet the national defense, as well as peacetime, needs of the nation.

In this respect, railroad labor has exhibited enlightened self-interest at its best, for I have noted that on several occasions the railroad unions took their stand in support of management-sponsored legislation even though management, at the same time, was bitterly opposing legislative measures sought by the brotherhoods for the benefit of railroad employees.

In the present session of Congress, I have been particularly impressed by the efforts of the railroad legislative representatives to secure the enactment of measures designed to relieve the current freight car shortage, as well as their efforts to protect the public from the unjustified abandonment of passenger train service.

I am sorry to say that many railroads have taken advantage of the new law enacted last year which permits them to terminate passenger service virtually whenever they like. One federal judge has called this law a "strange dismaying law" since it places in the hands of the railroads themselves the right to determine the extent to which they will serve the public by providing passenger train service.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I regard myself also as a friend of the railroad industry, and I acknowledge that I voted for the Transportation Act of 1958 which was intended to help the railroads and make them stronger.

But such a situation as I have just described in regard to the elimination of passenger trains is clearly intolerable. To rectify this situation, a bipartisan group of Senators has introduced a bill which would again protect the public by requiring the railroads, before they could take off trains, to prove that there no longer was a genuine need for these trains they propose to eliminate. I want you to know this measure has my wholehearted support.

Another thing that is right about railroad labor is its concern about railroad safety and its determination to do all in its power to halt the steady rise in railroad accidents.

Almost from the very beginnings of the railroads, rail management seems to have been afflicted with a peculiar blindness in regard to accidents. I am sorry to say that the efforts of the Railway Labor Executives' Association to establish a joint labor-management committee on safety were turned down by railroad management. It seems to me that by this action the railroads clearly are inviting Congress to enact new laws to force them to meet their obligations in this regard.

I am happy to see that the railroad unions, recognizing their responsibility in this area, have not been deterred by management's indifference on this issue and have set up a Committee on Safety in the RLEA.

I believe in this objective, and I will support the railroad safety measures which are endorsed by railroad labor. They are necessary in the public's, as well as the workers', interests.

Before I leave this subject of safety, I want to comment about one of the railroads' "featherbedding" charges which concerns the members of this organization directly. I refer, of course, to the claim by railroad management that "firemen who tend no fires" no longer are necessary on modern, high-powered Diesel locomotives.

What management is doing is to exploit and misuse a label that is not well suited to modern day railroading, in an effort to make the public believe it's the men and not the label who are outdated.

Admittedly, the locomotive fireman, today, "tends no fires". A better way of describing them would be to call them skilled Diesel helpers--or, to use a term the public understands--a sort of co-pilot. In a sense, the fireman is another set of eyes and ears for the engineer. His duties are those of safety lookout, assistance and trainee to the engineer, and supervisor of the production of power. In performing each of these functions the fireman still remains one of the most valuable safety elements available to the railroads.

Hardly a week passes but what the newspapers report how some accident has been averted because a locomotive fireman, as co-pilot, has spotted some danger ahead not seen by the engineer from his vantage point on the other side of the cab, and has brought the train to a halt to avert calamity. Locomotive firemen, sitting on the left side of the cab and calling out wayside signals and speed zones, spotting obstructions on the track or hot journal boxes and other dangerous conditions, are literally one-half of the vision that guides and directs the movement of mile-long trains hurtling at ever-increasing speeds through the blackness of night or the blind spots caused by track curvature and grade throughout 24 hours a day.

Is such a man needed? Well, I suggest that every person in America be asked this question: How would you like to ride on an airplane today without a co-pilot? How would you like to ride a train, knowing that because the fireman had been eliminated, every time it swung around a curve to the left at speeds of 60 to 100 miles an hour it was going around that curve absolutely blind? The fact is that the airlines are now adding still a third man to insure greater safety.

And I needn't remind you that the number of lives at stake on a train is many times that on an airplane.

I want to assure you that so long as I am in the Senate I will do everything in my power to see that a co-pilot is maintained in the cab of every locomotive in order that the public--and the railroad companies as well--will have the protection they deserve.

Finally, and in summary, what is right about railroad labor is that it has a strong solidarity with the rest of the American labor movement and typifies the best of all the things I have said about organized labor as a whole.

Because from the outset railroad workers were able to organize strong and responsible unions in their industry well in advance of the workers in most other forms of employment, the railroad brotherhoods have been able to contribute strong leadership and significant aid to other workers in building the labor movement as a whole.

Fortunately, from the very beginning, the leaders of railroad labor have been men of integrity, and railroad labor organizations have always been clean organizations. Today, after nearly two years of the McClellan Committee's searching investigation of American labor organizations, not a trace of corruption has been found in any of the 23 Standard Railroad Labor Organizations affiliated with the RLEA. Even railroad management, despite its other attacks upon your unions, has had to acknowledge publicly that this is the case.

Railroad labor is clean, because railroad workers have built strong, democratic organizations, and they are determined to keep them that way.

Because the railroad unions were built and run to reflect the democratic faith of the railroad men and women who comprise them, they typify all that is right about American labor. So if I were to tell you all that is right about railroad labor, I would have to also repeat all the things I said in my June 24th speech in the Senate.

Time will not permit such repetition. But everything I said about the great contribution to our society of trade unions can be said with underscoring when it is applied to railroad labor unions like your own. You have not only brought dignity and security to workers in your industry, but you have fought for the general welfare of all Americans, to aid small business and farmers, to promote civil liberties, to advance the interests of all of our citizens.

You have joined the international labor movement in exerting a constructive, democratic influence upon workers in other lands. Through the participation of the RLEA in the International Transport Workers Federation, you have helped extend the benefits of democratic trade unionism to workers in the transportation industry throughout the world, and in doing so you have done as much as any segment of the American labor movement to stem the tide of Communist tyranny and aggression.

What's right about railroad labor is that it is enlisted in a cause which is right, and it is fighting for that cause in the right way--the democratic way. That's about the highest tribute I know that can be paid to any man or group of men.

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Pres. Gilbert  
(X) Pres. Emeritus

D. B. Robertson

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(X) Retired President - Asst President  
Carl Goff.

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(X) Associate Officers

(X) Mrs Lillian Kemp  
(Ladies Society, Pres  
& officers!

(X) Chub Lamplsey  
Ernie Clarkson  
Min (State Legial Chr)  
+ Min Delegates,

<sup>HF</sup>  
President Hubert  
Chub Lamprey

100,000 ~~men~~ <sup>women</sup> and  
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WHAT'S RIGHT WITH RAILROAD LABOR?

Sen McCarthy

Women's Auxiliary

Remarks of Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D., Minn.) at the  
37th Convention of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and  
Enginemen, St. Paul, Minnesota, Monday, July 20, 1959.

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States Senate on "What's Right with American Labor?" Some of  
you have been kind enough to express your hearty approval of  
that speech and to tell me that you thought it had been helpful  
to the cause of the American labor movement.

I hope that has been the case. What helps the American  
labor movement helps not only organized labor but all Americans  
-- farmers, unorganized workers, even business itself.

As I told the Senate, I am proud to be considered a  
friend of labor. I am proud of my friends in the labor movement  
and I am proud, too, of the kind of people who stand with me as  
friends of organized labor.

It is too easy to forget, when headlines in the press are  
focused on the doings of the small number of corrupt elements

which have wormed into certain parts of the labor movement,  
that the friends of labor are, after all, the overwhelming majority  
of the American people, who know that a strong and honest labor  
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I was prompted to make my Senate speech because for two  
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But I strongly believe that the public should also have  
the full story of the American labor movement, and not merely ~~the~~ *story*  
~~that~~ of a small group of gangsters and racketeers. And so I  
undertook to try to describe the positive side of American labor  
by pointing out <sup>the</sup> what decent, honest, devoted trade unionists  
are doing day by day for their fellow workers, their communi-  
ties, and their country, as well as for the cause of freedom

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Today, I want to narrow my topic just a bit. I want to discuss briefly with you "What's Right with Railroad Labor?"

I am prompted to select this topic because I am fully aware that, over the last year, the railroad workers of this nation have been made the target for one of the most unfounded and expensive propaganda attacks that the "perfume and soap" boys of Madison Avenue have ever launched against any part of the American labor movement.

All of you in this room know -- because your union is a primary target of that attack -- that I am referring to the campaign to picture railroad labor as greatly overpaid and unproductive "featherbedders".

Well, what's the real truth behind this propaganda campaign?

The real truth is contained in official government figures -- figures which show that despite the fastest-rising productivity

in America, railroad wages have lagged behind those in other industries.

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~~Now, of course, this is by no means the complete picture,~~

about railroad union work rules. I am happy to note that in his opening remarks to this convention, President Gilbert declared that in your forthcoming negotiations with the railroad <sup>management</sup> your work rules must be revised and modernized to reflect the locomotive fireman's current contribution to the industry.

That is a positive approach, and it puts the subject of work rules where it properly belongs -- in the arena of collective bargaining, where experience has shown reasonable men of good will can always work out the fairest and most mutually satisfactory arrangements.

I must confess that I have been somewhat dumbfounded that the railroad managements today should be proposing that a Presidential Commission should settle this matter.

For railroad management to call upon the government to step in to settle an issue, even before any honest effort has been made to reach an agreement at the bargaining table is somewhat mystifying to me. It is completely at variance with all the protestations of the railroad industry <sup>as to the industry</sup> against government interference and meddling in its affairs.

In any event, millions of dollars have been spent in an effort to convince the public that railroad workers deserve the reproachful epithet of "feather-bedders". Well, as far as I am concerned, if there are any feathers connected with railroading today, they are the horse-feathers in this campaign against labor.

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characteristic of the railroad unions and their leaders. This

is obvious when you examine the history of railroad labor and

note its readiness to bind itself to a complex legal procedure

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Now, please don't misunderstand me. I regard myself also as a friend of the railroad industry, *and* ~~and I acknowledge~~ ~~that~~ I voted for the Transportation Act of 1958 which was intended to help the railroads and make them stronger.

But such a situation as I have just described in regard to the elimination of passenger trains *needs to be reexamined.* ~~is clearly intolerable.~~

To rectify this situation, a bipartisan group of Senators has introduced a bill which would again protect the public by requiring the railroads, *ultimately* before they could take off trains, to prove that there no longer was a genuine need for these trains.

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*Railway Labor Structures  
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*Important*

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July 17, 1959

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# STEEL UNION ON STRIKE FOR MORE INFLATION

When the leaders of the Steelworkers' Union called half a million of its members out of the steel mills last week, they began a strike for more inflation.

That is the issue . . . the real issue . . . at stake in the steel strike.

Inflation is an issue which affects the future security of every man, woman and child in America — of steelworkers themselves as they compete for jobs against the low-paid workers in steel abroad — of the steel companies and of every other industry in the

Notwithstanding these considerations, the Union continued to press for inflationary increases.

## COMPANIES MAKE PROPOSALS

The companies proposed that the present level of wages and benefits (including the current 17-cent cost-of-living accumulation) be extended for an additional year beyond June 30, 1959. They remain convinced that this offered the best way for the Union and Companies to join with their 177,000,000 fellow Americans in the fight against inflation.

But the Union leaders rejected this proposal out

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Inflation is an issue which may even affect the security — and the credit — of the American government itself.

Inflation is an All-American issue!

### COMPANIES SOUGHT NON-INFLATIONARY PACTS

During the bargaining the Companies sought non-inflationary labor agreements. They realize that no one industry — no one union — can alone and single-handed stop inflation.

But they also know that another wage increase in steel now would set off similar increases throughout industry, as other unions strive to catch up with the steelworkers. This would force higher prices for everything you buy, even if the price of steel were held at present levels.

For this reason the steel companies recognized that they and the steel union have a compelling responsibility not to add to the deadly inflation spiral. Rising prices have already eaten away half the buying power of your dollar in less than 20 years.

The Union leaders recognized no such responsibility. They persisted to the very end in demands for inflationary increases in wages and benefits. Then, for the sixth time since World War II, they closed down the nation's steel mills.

### NO ONE WILL BENEFIT

No one will benefit from a steel strike. Many hardships will result. But the greatest harm of all would come from another inflationary spiral. This would be the certain consequences of acceding to the Union's demands.

Steelworkers themselves are aware that they gain little or nothing in the end from inflationary wage increases. Their views have been revealed by scores of surveys by leading newspapers and magazines throughout the country.

### UNION CLOSES ITS EARS TO FACTS

Throughout the negotiations the Union leaders have closed their ears to these salient facts:

- Steelworkers are now paid at the highest level of the world's industrial workers — their average earnings are nearly \$25 a day plus benefits of an added \$4.88 a day. This amounts to about \$7 a day more than the average of all manufacturing workers in America.
- Steelworkers' gains in recent years have outstripped those in any other industry.
- Another round of wage and benefit increases now will tend further to price steelworkers out of markets at home and abroad, as they compete with lower-paid workers.

In a final effort to prevent a strike, the Companies then made this offer to the Union:

*"We are willing to negotiate insurance and pension benefits during the first year of a two-year agreement and a modest wage increase in the second year, if the Union will agree to contract provisions which would enable us to generate further economic progress in operations sufficient to offset the cost of such increases."*

Further, the Companies assured the Union that there was no desire to limit the economic progress of steelworkers. They pointed out the wide-open opportunities for each individual employee to improve his own income through advancement on the job, promotion and incentive compensation.

### COMPANIES ASK END OF WASTEFUL PRACTICES

In order to make possible the improved benefits and wage increase which the Companies indicated, these changes were sought in the former agreements:

First, that the so-called local work-practice clauses in the labor agreements be clarified so that managements in cooperation with the Union could take reasonable actions to eliminate waste and improve efficiency and thereby effect savings for the benefit of all; and

Second, that the agreements include stronger measures to discourage wildcat strikes which hurt thousands of innocent workers as well as the Companies.

Despite the obvious fairness and soundness of these proposed measures, they were rejected by the Union. It insisted on an immediate and inflationary wage increase.

In addition, the Companies proposed that the automatic cost-of-living clauses be discontinued, because experience shows that these, of themselves, tend to feed inflation. This, too, was turned down.

### PROGRESS MUST BE NON-INFLATIONARY

Steelworkers have made great economic progress. We want them to make further progress. But another round of inflationary wage increases for them now would only add to the already burdensome living costs of all Americans.

We believe that, in standing firm against the forces of inflation in the great basic steel industry, we are best serving our country, our employees and our companies.

We would appreciate your views and comments on our stand. Just write to the address below.

### THE STEEL COMPANIES COORDINATING COMMITTEE

375 Lexington Avenue • New York 17, New York

Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corporation • Armco Steel Corporation • Bethlehem Steel Company • The Colorado Fuel & Iron Corporation • Great Lakes Steel Corporation • Inland Steel Company • Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation • Kaiser Steel Corporation • Republic Steel Corporation • United States Steel Corporation • Wheeling Steel Corporation • The Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company.

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# Minnesota Historical Society

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