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REMARKS

OF

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

NATIONAL POSTAL UNION CONVENTION

JULY 22, 1970

A strange myth has grown up in certain circles in America, a myth that maintains that the labor movement in America is a conservative force, a force for keeping things as they are, for turning back the clock.

Imagine that! Imagine the gall!

After spending decades talking to each other at cocktail parties in Washington, some of these critics finally put down their martini glasses, surveyed the scene, and said to the labor movement, "do more, do it now, do it our way, or else we'll call you nasty", and then they went back to their cocktails.

Let me tell you what they saw in their brief fling with reality, let me tell you what has happened in America during this past decade:

Soc Security

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Medicare

--- Elderly Americans who used to grieve about health costs are now covered by Medicare --- because the American labor unions went to bat for it.

Civil Rts

--- Three civil rights bills were passed that have finally begun to give America's minority groups a fair shake --- because the American labor unions went to bat for it.

Edu

--- Federal aid to education has gone up from ~~# 2.0 BILLION \$549,000,000~~ in 1960 to ~~\$3,645,646,000~~ **\$10.1 BILLION** in 1970, and schools and school-children all over America in slum and in suburb have been helped --- because the American labor unions went to bat for it and fought with their heart for it, for elementary school education, for secondary school education, for higher education, for pre-school education.

Poverty

--- America declared that poverty is immoral in a land of plenty, that poor Americans have a right to job training so that they can help themselves, and we have spent billions of dollars beginning to right these wrongs --- because the American labor unions went to bat for it.

Cities

000106

Labor - JFK - LBJ
of getting things through Congress

Sum
FDR

Labor
got
Action

That was just a beginning. Every major advance for Americans in the past decade has been either initiated or supported by the American labor movement. I can tell you that as a fact, because I worked hand-in-hand with John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson when they were pushing for these programs, pushing against the do-nothing elements in the Congress. Both Presidents knew that unless labor would lend its support --- there would be no action. And both Presidents got that support when they needed it. The American labor movement was not out sipping martinis. They were out telling America that this can be a better country and that we must get our shoulder to the wheel to make it so.

Better
America

And while the cocktail circuit is still going tsk-tsk about the labor movement --- what is the labor movement doing? They are out working. Just a few days ago newspapers all over America headlined the story that "The Committee of 100" had finished its research and was recommending a new and expanded medical care plan for all Americans --- a plan that would insure the best of

medical care for Americans of every race, of every income, in every region. This is a crucial problem we face, this problem of health care, crucial to all Americans faced with rising medical costs and scarcity of medical services. And, who, you may ask, is the Committee of 100? It was established by the late Walter Reuther, head of the United Auto Workers. It is now headed by Leonard Woodcock, Reuther's successor. And support for an expanded medical care system is also high on the agenda of the AF of L - CIO.

So --- again --- the labor movement is out in front of the pack, working with diligence and responsibility for those policies that can give the little man in America a fair break.

This is what the union movement has always been --- and must always be, the leader for constructive change. This is what the labor movement was when it fought for the minimum wage, for social security, for collective bargaining and decent working conditions in the 1930's. That's what the labor movement was when it fought for civil rights ^{education} and medicare in the 1960's. That's what the labor movement will be in the years to come when it fights for expanded medicare, welfare reform, for pollution control to keep America clean, and for higher social security benefits.

— and quality education
for every american.

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For 8% Pay raise retroactive to April
For Right to Negotiate wages & Benefits
For NLRB to determine appropriate bargaining units

And, I might add, that is what the labor movement is all about right now, right here and right now. The fight by the National Postal Union for decent pay, for better working conditions, for the opportunity for advancement and for on-the-job training and education --- that is a noble cause and a progressive cause in the finest traditions. When a Post Office employee has to work for 21 years before reaching top-scale and then make less than 10,000 inflation-scarred dollars a year, there had better be some good, ~~strong~~ ^{effective} unions to go to bat for the working man. Because if there's one thing the union movement in this country has learned it is this: unless you fight your own battles, no one will do it for you.

#

If, as I maintain, the labor movement has been in the forefront of progress in the United States, lending muscle as well as rhetoric to the cause of reform in America, then why have they been condemned by some critics?

In all candor, there have been some unions that were slow in opening up their unions to men of all races. ~~But~~ these unions are now making a concerted effort to open up the gates to blacks as well as whites --- and ~~I think~~ this is a first priority task. Until and unless unions are open to all equally --- honestly open and equally open --- then unions will be vulnerable to attack.

But the criticism has been deeper, and here I think it is the critics not the unions that have been at fault, have in fact been dead wrong. In the past few years there has been a monumental misreading and misunderstanding of the working men in America.

We have heard a lot recently about a "generation gap" in America but the real gap has probably been a "class gap" or an "understanding gap".

Many American working men have become deeply concerned in recent years about certain situations that they felt have threatened them. Crime and lawlessness has been one issue --- working Americans and their families demand the

right to walk the streets in safety, quite properly, I believe.

↳ Disruption at universities has been another issue --- Americans demand ^{and} quite properly, that their children be able to attend college without the threat of campus anarchy. ↳ Working Americans have become fed up with those who say the system is rotten and the only way to change it is through violence and turbulence. ↳ Decent, hard-working Americans are fed up with the Wallace-ites of the right and the left. And there isn't that much difference: both groups want to ~~shake~~ ^{attack} the system till it totters and most decent Americans reject that solution. We can make change here in this land without chaos.

↳ As middle-class Americans have made their demands, and made them stick by voting their demands, the union-critics have begun to re-assess. Now they are talking --- sometimes with awe --- about people they call "hard-hats" or people they call "ethnics".

↳ But, again, I think they are missing the boat.

The press said that the "hard-hats" who marched in New York were "hawks" who marched against "doves". I don't think so. ~~that~~ ^{many} ~~many~~, if not most, of the hard-hats were for a speedy withdrawal from Indochina --- but they were not prepared to stand by while extremists mutilated the flag, or ridiculed

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the flag, or burned down ROTC buildings. And they were not prepared to be patronized. Their marching chant, you may recall, was not "war" or "hawk" or "racism", or anything like it. All they said was "U. S. A. All The Way" --- which is not such a bad slogan.

And we should remember that in this nation we're all ethnics --- except perhaps the decendants of Cochise and Sitting Bull. It isn't just ethnics or hard-hats that are fed up with ~~violence, crime, and destruction~~ life in the fever zone --- it is almost all Americans.

America is not "going conservative" as some pundits claim. We are ready to move forward again, ~~but not backward.~~ But ~~we must~~ we must move ahead both calmly and firmly. ~~we~~ we must both respect and understand the issues that are bugging Americans.

When we understand each other again, when Americans of every region, in every occupation, in every income class, of every race, can work together for the real causes that make life better and more decent --- then we can move ahead again. I'm ready and I think you are too.

So I call upon the American labor movement to again lead this nation in the work that must be done to improve the quality of life in the United States. The American labor movement must be the front-line soldiers in our battle:

- to clean up the slums
- to open up our society -
- to provide better education for our children
- to clean up our air and water
- to clean up the spiritual pollution of prejudice and bigotry and discrimination.

- *To help the needy, to protect our health*

△ The American working man has led the country before. They can lead again, for their own benefit and for the benefit of the nation. They can make this a land where a man can expect to send his children to the best schools, where a man can expect a decent wage and a decent home, where he sees the beauties of the countryside as God made it, where a man knows his family can expect the best medical care, that modern science can provide, where a man can expect security and safety and peace of mind all over this nation. This is all within our grasp. We can do it, if we all work together. !



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