

Speech to be delivered by Congressman John E. Fogarty, 2d Rhode Island Congressional District, at the C. I. O. Convention, at the Narragansett Hotel, Providence, Rhode Island, on Sunday, December 5, 1943.

File copy

Since early in the Seventeenth Century - men and women have been gathering at such meetings as this - to consider their relations to their employers, and to examine the effect on their organizations - of legislation already enacted - and to look into the future if possible - to learn what might be expected from the attitudes of their Government and their fellow countrymen.

In those early days of trade unionism - men met secretly - and under threat of losing their ears - should their illegal conspiracy be discovered. They were pioneers in the long march to industrial democracy - and for the sacrifices those early day laborers made - we of the present day are truly grateful.

We have seen the arrival of the day - when trade unionists can meet in public convention - to examine what progress has been made in the past - and to lay their plans for future conduct.

Such an examination of their progress is truly an inspiring thing. But as we consider the position of organized labor - in this era of industrial democracy - we are apt to fall prey to the false sense of security which comes from the belief that we have won these heights - against the most formidable foes - and hence we might feel secure from attack. We are in danger of losing all our gains through a lack of vigilance - and a failure to discharge the responsibilities which are ours as union men and women.

Upon the outbreak of war we heard the clarion call of the Republic - summoning all its sons and daughters - to expend the last ounce of energy in arming the nation for the conflict and in driving into the bottom-most pits of Hell - the enemy that foully attack our land. How the sons of toil responded to that call is best attested - by the stupendous records of accomplishment they have amassed in this world-wide clash of industrial machines. From a dead standstill - in a few months - the industrial might of

Those who foster this insidious campaign - are the leaders in industry - who have at their leash-end many so-called leaders of the daily press.

They are not crude in their methods - nor are they willing to risk success or failure on an open, above-board decision by the masses of American working men and women.

NO! - their plans are as well made and their actions as carefully attended - as their purpose is foul. They seek to gain their selfish ends while we rest seemingly secure - in the knowledge that social justice is a fixed and stable part of our Democracy.

Recent months have seen two outstanding strides in this program. Both actions have been, at least to date, completely successful.

First we saw the enactment - over the veto of the President - of the Smith-Connally Bill. A vicious, miserable piece of so-called legislation - which its sponsors alleged would prevent strikes - but which in actuality prompted strikes, sanctioned strikes, and pointed out a proved method for inaugurating strikes.

Do I need to say this foul bit of chicanery was intended to bring from labor unions a thunderous denunciation? Need I explain to you men and women the effect which that protest had on public opinion?

We were branded - all of us - as opponents of America's war effort.

The press took up the cry - and labored dilligently to fan to white heat the misguided and misdirected anger of the unorganized, who were told by the press and radio commentators that we of the trade union movement - were their sworn enemies - that we were of necessity set in absolute opposition to all the wants and interests of the so-called white collar class.

This Smith-Connally Bill - in conception a model for Star Chamber activities - in legislation an example of wild passion given its head - and in actual operation a contemptible bust - a travesty on law - was the first open evidence of the concerted

program to bring contempt and ridicule down on the heads - of the members of all labor organizations.

Is it necessary for me to tell you it has accomplished its purpose thus far? Is it not evident that this modern day Penal Law was worth the trouble its sponsors were put to - to get it on the books?

The facts shout the answers to the heavens!!!

The other outstanding development in this program was the scalp attack on the administration's Subsidy Program. This attack was nursed along carefully - hidden from public view - until labor organizations publicly declared that subsidies must be assured - in order to hold the rising cost of living. Then this brutal, heedless assault broke on Congress with all the fury of which labor-haters alone are capable. Foul charges of Fascism, Communism - and every other "ism" - were hurled at the administration by the front-line assault troops of these campaigners for higher and higher prices for food. At the psychological moment all the tricks in the pack were pounded out and the men's families in America were told there would be but one guide to determine the cost of maintaining their homes - and clothing their children - and that guide - - - "all the traffic will bear"!!!

And upon whose head is dumped the responsibilities for this rising cost of living?

On the heads of organized labor!!

Read the great oratorical efforts of those who supported this "Anti-American Home" legislation. Read their frantic efforts to cover their tracks. Read also their insistence that the arbitrary Little Steel Formula must be maintained - maintained despite the fact that the cost of food had risen 40.5% from January 1941 to September 15, 1943.

You say, perhaps, "these are but isolated instances in the economic life of the country, and cannot be identified with an anti-labor campaign".

In the press - over the radio - in the pages of the nation's periodicals - we see and hear of constant declaiming of plans for post-war reconstruction by industry.

Big business is insiting that it - and it alone - must plan out - and put into operation - the reconverstion of American Industry. The same Big Business that ran riot from the inauguration of the ill-starred Harding - the the last farewell of Hoover - demands it must be given full reign - with no Governmental interference - with no Governmental concern.

The Big Business of World War I scandals - the Teapot Dome - the Wall Street plunging - the great depression - again clamors for a full head of steam - no engineer at the throttle - and a mad, headlong rush of "rugged individualism" again - while American homes - families - characters and lives, are once more scattered along the right of way.

These are the same great industrialists - who point with pride at every increase in War Production - and who view with alarm - screaming vilifications of Labor - whenever the index shows a failure to meet the goal of any given month.

These are the same industrialists who now swarm around the Capitol - demanding repeal of the Renegotiation laws - lowering of taxes - more and more concessions - in order that they may be bribed to accept the job of reconverting their factories to peace time production - to providing jobs for returning soldiers and sailors.

6

They chant their theme -- the American Way of Life -- but the lyrics don't fit the words. They expose their selfish purpose - by demanding the imposition of a sales tax -- by insistence on the continuance of the Little Steel Formula - by throwing the Subsidy Program in the Ash-can. Put another five cents on the family man's loaf of bread -- make him pay more for his butter and his potatoes - But - in Heaven's name - take off the restrictions on our profits.

"Hold the line" they shout --- Hold the line! - for everybody but me.!

And where does this leave us? It leaves us with a gigantic job on our hands. A job that can no longer be neglected.

If we would hold our position. -- If we would continue to enjoy the gains we have won over the years -- to say nothing of going on to greater heights -- then we must put forth a greater effort than we have yet known -- to organize the unorganized -- to educate those who do not know labor unions -- and of equal importance -- to educate our own members to the full import of the meaning of Labor and the consequences of failure to be vigilant.

We must -- we shall -- counteract the evil efforts of those who - in seeking the advancement of their own selfish purposes -- would destroy faith in labor organizations.

We must -- we shall -- show to the general public who are not of our ranks - that in fighting ~~the~~ for the cause of union men and women -- we also fight for the economic freedom of the white-collar class. We shall convince them they should join us in winning new heights of economic security.

We must show to them that the story of the trade union movement is in itself the story of democracy on the march- through the centuries.

We shall prove to them that trade unionism has been identified with every liberal progressive advancement - since its very inception.

7

By educating our own members - to accept their responsibilities -- by planning our contribution to the future -- by guaranteeing our fighting men a job - at a decent wage - under decent conditions - with a reasonable hope for security in old age - we can discharge our responsibility to the history of trade unionism and to the most blessed of all the creatures of God - the American man and woman.

COPY

Copy mailed 11/29/43
to :

Prov. Journal
Prov.

The Labor News, 17
Federal St.,
Warcester, Mass.

John C. Minkins
Box 660, Prov., R.I.
(R.I. Free Press)

C.S.