

Address delivered by Hon. John E. Fogarty, MC at the Semi-annual Convention of the R.I. State Branch of the A.F. of L. at the Narragansett Hotel, Providence, R.I. Sunday - April 28, 1946

I have attended quite a few conventions of the American Federation of Labor - in Rhode Island and elsewhere. I have also attended some conventions, and I have read of others, conducted by industrialists and Chambers of Commerce. I have been struck by one outstanding difference between Labor conventions and those which are conducted under the auspices of members of the National Association of Manufacturers. In the latter type of convention there is always a slogan ~~a~~ catch-phrase - which is advertised as an expression of the real purpose of the convention - the key to the thought behind the holding of the meeting.

Since this semi-annual convention of the American Federation of Labor in Rhode Island apparently has no slogan I would like to suggest one.

In view of what has been happening during recent weeks I think your officers might well adopt as your ~~slogan~~ slogan here, the question - "Where do we go from here?"

I remember well your last convention. It was held in this same hotel during the first week in October of last year. I am sure you delegates remember it too. We met ~~here~~ during a period which the newspaper~~s~~ editors liked to refer to as a time of industrial strife. Labor unions all over the country were being lambasted for actions which, according to ~~the~~ ^{some} editors, would seriously retard reconversion. We were being told that labor unions threatened the future of private enterprise.

Organized labor stood condemned because its members sought wage increases which would help to bring them somewhere near even with the current cost of living. Organized labor was condemned because its members sought a humane plan of unemployment compensation to tide their families over the uncertain period of industrial reconversion, and because its members opposed the enactment of legislation which would strip them of their last weapon in the arena of economic conflict.

Six months have elapsed since then and since you are meeting as representatives of various locals it is only proper that you should check up on what has happened in that ~~time~~ period. It is right that you should inquire "Where do we go from here?"

In your check-up on what has transpired - you will be forced to the conclusion that you may soon be worse off than ~~you~~ you ever were. In deciding the answer to the question - I think you will be forced to the conclusion that you must become more active, more determined than you have ever been in the past.

Those who criticised Organized Labor six months ago have demonstrated within the last few weeks that Labor doesn't know anything about organized activity - that Labor hasn't begun to understand the power involved in pressure politics.

I have grown up in a family of men who worked for a living. My intimate associates are still men whose hands are calloused and whose brows sweat because of a day spent at honest toil.

I think I have a fair idea of the kind of lives they live - of the kind of families they raise. I think I understand a little bit ~~about~~ what they expect from life - what they must have if they are to survive in this complex economy of ours.

Because this is so I think I can speak with a certain amount of authority when I say that the recent action of the lobby-ridden GOP in the House of Representatives - when they scuttled Price Control - was the most vicious betrayal of the American family man in the history of the country.

Six months ago labor unions were violently condemned because they interfered, so it was said, with production and reconversion. Today, their critics ~~scratch them~~ scrape the bottom of the barrel to find fallacious excuses for the action taken by the men who destroyed price control and in effect stripped you and your fellow workers of every increase in pay you have been able to obtain through the orderly processes provided by our democratic system.

Months ago the National Association of Manufacturers carefully and skillfully directed public attention to the conduct of union affairs. No mention was ever made of the millions of A.F. of L. members who obtained wage increases ~~throughout~~ without resort to a strike. No mention was ever made of the thousands who work for employers who believe in genuine profit-sharing - where strikes are unheard of. To mention those things would be folly - would threaten the carefully prepared program which was under way.

The attack was on labor unions everywhere because it was necessary to fan public opinion into a feeling of hate so its attention would be away from the real point of attack.

When the opportunity presented itself - when the time was ripe - what did this great champion of private enterprise do to the American people - Look at the record.

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The self-same group ~~that~~ held up the Federal Government when it sought to convert to the production of the needs of National Defense - took out the gun and again refused to cooperate in the reconversion to peace-time production until all its terms were met.

And if the action of the GOP in the House of Representatives stands as the final decision - then you can say with absolute truth - that the knife that was plunged into the heart of the American home - was engraved in gold - and the letters on its handle were NAM.

It's easy enough for some of the papers, tongue in cheek, today there were others involved. But the blame rests squarely on the shoulders of the GOP who sought first - service to the National Association of Manufacturers.

It's easy enough to say OPA made mistakes. Sure it did. Only newspaper editors are free of the failings which afflict human nature. But the fact is the record is full of the attempts OPA was making honestly to correct those mistakes. Adjustments had been made in ~~some~~ many instances. The NAM new there would be more adjustments and it was frantic.

Time was running against it and it demanded that ~~QRA~~ Price control be wiped out. To our everlasting shame there were enough members of our National Legislature who succumbed to the lure of the lobbyists who understand the shortcuts to a Congressman's ear.

They'll attempt to justify their actions by emphasizing the shortages which have existed. But think of the alternative. If the House amendments to the Price Control Act are permitted to stand then there'll be butter and there'll be nylons. But they'll be for sale at prices you and I can't afford to pay. There'll be steaks and chops but you won't be able to buy any. There'll be clothes and homes - but you won't have money enough to enjoy any of them. There'll be the great boom - during which you'll fight with your boss for more pay in order to keep up with prices. And there'll be the great depression - during which you'll suffer - and you'll wonder what happened to your War Bonds - and your only consolation will be reading editorials prattling daily about economic cycles and fiscal policies and how terrible the administration is because it didn't take action to prevent such a horrible ~~xxx~~ catastrophe.

Perhaps you think I'm bitter - I hope you do. Nothing has affected me more. Never have I felt more discouraged than when I saw supposedly intelligent men selling ^{out} themselves and their people ~~out~~ for what they thought was a political advantage. And the most bitter thought comes in the realization that the knives which felled price control were wielded by the hands which profess to be the conservative - the safe and sane - members of our society.

Bitter, too, is the realization that these short-sighted minions of ^{now} the National Association of Manufacturers who are/thumping the tub for economic insanity, are endangering not only the American pocketbook, but the very system under which we function. These disciples of profit before every ~~thing~~ other consideration are the worst possible enemies of the private enterprise which they profess to serve so faithfully.

By their subservience to the lobbyists they have confessed their willingness

to sew the seeds for the social and economic discord which is the only food which nourishes communism. They are the very elements which condemned the New Deal out of hand - yet they invite the country for another ride on the mad merry-go-round which typified the roaring twenties, and which produced the ^{VERY} mild social revolution which followed.

These politicians and newspaper editors have been screaming for years that private enterprise ~~is~~ in danger of being dynamited - but what they apparently fail to realize ~~is~~ is the fact that the dynamite is being planted by those who blindly serve their every whim. Private enterprise is in danger - and that danger comes primarily from the National Association of Manufacturers. Let it be successful in its efforts to scuttle all controls & to destroy the restrictions on monopoly and the American people may find themselves driven into the arms of those who would scuttle the base on which private enterprise rests.

What we need to day is far less viewing with alarm about price control and the efforts of the American people to get over the hump~~x~~ of reconversion - and far more band playing about the job the American people are doing.

We could get along with a lot less of the sickening editorial~~x~~ chuckles every time there is evidence of racketeers and black market operations. There is still the innate honesty of the vast majority of Americans and it deserves some encouragement.

There is a great deal of talk about our responsibilities abroad. It is my opinion that the average American would be more willing to accept these responsibilities if editors would acknowledge what he is already doing - rather than heap abuse on his head because of ~~xxx~~ alleged American failures to meet obligations.

The average American wants no one to suffer. But he realizes, far more clearly than his critics, that democracy must survive here if it is to survive anywhere. It won't survive under the bludgeonings of those who would bleed it

white in order to satisfy their own ends regardless of the consequences to their fellow Americans.

It is right, it is charitable, ~~it is more~~ ^{INDEED} - it is vital - that we make sacrifices in order to alleviate some of the tragic suffering that afflicts the warravaged peoples of Europe. The average American would be more eager to contribute to this noble work if he found at home a sincere interest in his welfare.

Food and money are sorely needed to help other peoples to rebuild their way of life. But we can't ^{bargain} buy - we can't whip - other peoples into accepting our ideals. We can teach them, by example, that our system is best. To do that we have to show them that it works.

Human labor is not a commodity. The arm at the machine is not another tool to be ~~hought~~ bought over the counter for the cheapest possible price. The man who owns that arm is a living, breathing creature of God. He is the fiber of which the country is made. He is the reason why democracy exists. He is the best guarantee that Democracy will survive.

His interests & his welfare - are worthy of at least as much consideration as a bank statement - or a report to the stock-holders.