

1957  
July - Speeches

ADDRESS BY CONGRESSMAN FOGARTY OF RHODE ISLAND

Before

Department of Labor Employees' Meeting  
Celebrating 25th Anniversary AFGE Lodge 12  
August 6, 1957

Introductory remarks (not on tape).

For 26 years now I have been a dues-paying member of a union. For the past 17 years I have been a Member of Congress and I still have kept my dues paid. They cost a little bit more than your dues, but that shows you that I believe in organized labor.

I am also happy to be here because I happen to like the Department of Labor. The Department of Labor came into being in 1913, the year that I was born. Since I have had the pleasure and privilege of representing my constituency in Rhode Island in the Nation's Capital, it has been my privilege to work for and on behalf of the Department of Labor. I have had the privilege of working with some of our great Secretaries of Labor: Miss Perkins, Mr. Schwellenbach, Mr. Tobin, Mr. Durkin, and Mr. Mitchell. I can say without fear of contradiction that no greater Americans have ever served the Government of this country than our great Secretaries of Labor. They have all been great men and women. I remember Miss Perkins when she was the whipping post of many people who did not like the term "labor" in this country. I also remember a little incident, I think it was in 1943, when I was on the old Labor Affairs Committee in the House of Representatives. She was to appear in opposition to a bill that some of our anti-labor people had presented to Congress. It referred to absenteeism - some of you might remember. Three or four lawyers on the committee said, "Ah! wait until she gets up here tomorrow, we are going to tear her apart." She came the next day. They did their level best to carry out their threats, but when she left that evening they had to admit, and they did admit publicly, that she was one of the smartest and brightest women that they had ever come in contact with. From Miss Perkins on - in Schwellenbach - in Tobin - and in Durkin - and now in your present Secretary of Labor, Secretary Mitchell - you have certainly had good representation. I want to say this too, to you men and women who have worked for the Department of Labor, having worked fairly closely with these other Secretaries of Labor, I think your present Secretary of Labor is doing a good job and has represented your Department with distinction and honor, and I think he represents all the people who work for a living in this country when he represents the Department of Labor.

In this past year when the various Chambers of Commerce and National Manufacturer Associations and similar groups of our country had decided it was time for a tax reduction and then, in order to get a tax reduction, decided that government expenditures must be reduced, the first they attacked was the Department of Labor in its annual appropriation request. The request for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare was another target. In my opinion, there have never been two Secretaries like Folsom of HEW and Mitchell of the Department of Labor who had the courage of their convictions and spoke out when

the time was right and defended their Departments as they did. As a result of their speaking out and being willing to stand up and be counted when the going was tough, you have received most of your appropriations request this year. I think they deserve credit because they believe in what they are doing. It is not easy in the Halls of Congress to get these things accomplished, and I only wish that every person in these United States, every taxpayer, and every wage earner could have the opportunity of listening to the heads of your Department appear before the Appropriations Committee justifying their requests. If they did, I am sure they would have a better appreciation of what the Department of Labor means to the welfare of the wage earners of this nation. I am sure if they knew only just a little bit about what the Secretary's Office means; what the Office of Solicitor means; what this small ILO unit means and the wonderful job it is doing in international affairs; if they only knew of the work that is accomplished in finding jobs in the Unemployment Compensation Division and also in the BES, they would be proud. I only wish that every veteran in this country knew of all the good that is accomplished by the Veterans Re-employment Service, the only service in government today that guarantees a veteran anything after he returns from service to his home; and also the wonderful Veterans Employment Service. The things that are being accomplished by the Wage Hour Division to see to it that decent conditions and wages are protected; the BEC; the Bureau of Labor Standards in developing decent workmen's compensation laws throughout every state in the Nation should be known to all Americans. If all the taxpayers and wage earners and veterans in this country could know of the wonderful things that are accomplished for the average person working for a living, I am sure they would not stand for the Department of Labor being cut every year as it is in the Congress of the United States.

I remember my first year on this Committee - in January 1947 - when your Department was cut 25%, you remember that? And then in 1948 they came out bragging again and said, "We are going to cut it another 20%," and they did. Well, in 1949, the first time that I had an opportunity of serving as Chairman of this Committee of Appropriations for the Department of Labor, the Department of Labor received in 1949 every dime it had requested that year. It was the first time in history that happened and since then, because of your friends and the work that has been accomplished, we have been going along and doing the best that we can.

Ladies and gentlemen, I did not expect to say that much about the Department of Labor. I wanted to say something in behalf of your union. I have been a union member as I told you a while ago for 26 years now. I graduated from High School in 1930 and started serving my apprenticeship as a bricklayer in 1931. I know there are not many present here this morning who can remember back to 1931-32-33. Those were pretty rough days. (I meant to say something about the Bureau of Apprenticeship - I saw Mr. Patterson over there - because I happen to be a product of that kind of an organization in my own State, in my own union.) I signed a contract between my union and the contractor I worked for, for \$17.00 a week the first year, \$22.00 the second, and \$30.00 the third. So, in 1933 I was making \$30.00 a week as a third-year apprentice. And those were the real rough days of this nation and because I had a contract with a contractor I was making about \$10.00 a week more than the average journeyman was at that time because of the conditions that existed. So you can see why I believe in organized labor, because of those days, and that is one of the reasons that I have kept my card paid up until this day. I know of the good that they have done for the average person and I know also in the government

service you need organization too. The government, even though it is good, we brag about it, it is the greatest in the world, they just don't come along and offer you raises and better conditions year after year. The only way you get those things is because you have an organization and because you have someone to speak for you. I had an organization to speak for me. I could not do it alone. No individual can. You cannot speak for yourself. You have to have a group or a person to represent a group in order to make any headway in this way of life that we have that we are living in now. The same goes for the Government of the United States. And one of the reasons that we have been able to get pay raises and better working conditions for the employees of the government is because of the postal employees union in this nation. The only reason I mention that is because they are perhaps 97 or 98% organized in this country. In almost every post office in the nation they have 95 or 96% of their employees organized. And because they are so well organized they generally start the ball rolling in the Congress of the United States. In my union when we want a raise we have a right to strike but you do not. You have a right to go to the Congress of the U.S., because we are responsible for the amount of wages that you receive and for the fringe benefits that are being received at this time. So as a result of the organization of the postal workers, this legislation gets started that way. And this year is another example. We passed a postal payraise bill two or three weeks ago in the House of Representatives by an overwhelming vote. It is now in the Senate and when they get through with the Civil Rights legislation we expect that that will be taken up and passed.

Now you have a bill calling for a raise for your salaries also. That has passed the legislative committee in the House and it now rests in the Rules Committee. I hope that every employee, whether you belong to the union or not, will see to it that the members of the Rules Committee know your feelings. I hope that you will insist that they vote out this rule before they vote on any other legislation that we might take up this year in Washington. If you do that then I am sure that you are going to be successful too.

This morning we are celebrating your 25th anniversary. I fervently hope that within another five years the membership of this union will have doubled - for when your leaders are fighting for wage increases and improved working conditions, they are not fighting for their personal benefit - nor are they fighting solely for those who pay union dues. They are in fact fighting for every government employee. No distinction is made between union and non-union members when a plea is made for more equitable treatment of government workers. I find myself asking, therefore, why shouldn't those who do not belong to the union now join this great movement and help to defray the necessary expenses of waging these constant efforts for improvement.

You have just heard your President plead for the support and cooperation of all employees. It doesn't seem fair that a small percentage of government employees should bear all the expenses and responsibilities which go hand in hand with the struggle for better treatment by all federal agencies. Why should there be such a high percentage of government employees accepting all the benefits of the efforts of their colleagues - yet doing nothing to demonstrate their willingness to share a portion of the load. To me it is highly unfair.

I have noticed in the Congress there are some people who don't thrill over the word "labor." They seem actually to dislike the term "organized labor." Yet

there are many more who deem the term fitting and proper. During my seventeen years in Congress I have had new members ask me, "What are you - a lawyer?" My answer has always been, "Hell, no - I'm a bricklayer!" Acknowledgment of my union background has never done me any harm. I am firm in my belief that it will not do any of you any harm when it is known that you belong to the AFGE. My union affiliation has always been a source of pride to me - and because of my enthusiasm for it I believe I have merited the respect and confidence of most of my colleagues. I am certain the same facts can apply to your association with this great organization of federal employees.

The few dollars your membership will cost is small in comparison to what is to be gained economically and in peace of mind. You will know you are doing your share in your own great national organization. Working together we shall all be better off. Our wages will be more in line with actual need. Our security will be greater. Our efforts for our government agency and our fellow American will be given with more enthusiasm and will produce better results. In such a way can we contribute to a happier team, not only in the Department of Labor, but in every federal government agency with its multitude of branches and stations throughout the country.