

Speeches and messages: 1963-1964: Labor's stake in '64

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

Speeches, Speeches and messages, Box SP2, Folder 2

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1964 is, of course, a Presidential year. This may be to our advantage. The polls show that the President's popularity is high, and the prospects for his re-election are more than good. But popularity is hard to pin down and we are all aware that any number of things -- a temporary foreign policy reverse, the failure of the economy to respond to the stimulus of the proposed tax cut, and so on -- could change the complexion of the contest overnight.

Even more important, however, the popularity of the President will not assure the success of his party in the Congressional elections. Coattails are out of style. Mr. Eisenhower was one of the most popular Presidents in our history, but he never pulled his party into power behind him. And, in terms of your interests, the Congressional contest is both just as important and involves a fight just as great as the Presidential election. Further, the outlook for the Congressional contest is far less optimistic.

In 1964, twenty-five Democratic Senators face re-election. Only eight Republicans must stand a similar test. Fourteen of these Democrats are from states which President Kennedy did not carry in 1960 -- California, Indiana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Ohio and so on. It is difficult to predict gains in such a heavily-weighted contest.

Among these twenty-five you will find many of labor's staunchest supporters and firmest friends. Philip Hart of Michigan, Clair Engle of California, Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, Gale McGee of Wyoming, Ralph Yarborough of Texas, Vance Hartke of Indiana and Harrison Williams of New Jersey are but a few. Twenty of these twenty-five voted for the Administration's Medicare program. Nineteen had ratings of more than "80% Right" according to their votes on eleven issues selected by COPE. And, they are almost unanimously in favor of such programs as aid to education, housing, area redevelopment and minimum wage.

Thus, labor's stakes are high. Many of your friends are on the firing line, and the odds are not in your favor. But in 1964 labor's stakes are higher than even this might indicate. Labor has a real investment in supporting their candidates in 1964, for labor, itself, has been on the firing line of late.

At a time of general prosperity in this nation, when our fears and concerns are centered on foreign rather than domestic problems, public sympathy for labor seems to be on the wane. In the early days of the movement, organized labor was viewed as the underdog fighting for its fair share of the American wealth. Today, with many of its original aims achieved -- with such concepts as collective bargaining and workman's compensation everyday words in the American vocabulary -- the labor movement has lost much of the idealistic impetus upon which it rode.

This is not to say that the programs and principles for which labor fights today are any the less necessary or valid. They are, however, less pressing. The need for medical care for the elderly and aid to education is great indeed, but it is not the urgent and immediate need for compensation of a critically injured worker and his family, nor the need for bread felt by the hungry. And while it is widely recognized that labor can and should ask for its fair share of the profits of prosperity, there is wide disagreement as to what constitutes that fair share, and how it is to be secured. Similarly, while it is widely recognized that labor must look after its own interests, there is wide disagreement as to what those interests are, and how they are to be related to the national interest. Moreover, the sympathy engendered by a fight for survival no longer adds its force to labor's ammunition.

Today, the survival of organized labor is assured. As a power group in American society, the voice of labor is equal to all others, and because it is an organized voice, it is often louder. For these reasons, there is inevitable fear of labor's influence and power. This has been with us for many years. Of late, however, that fear has found an increasingly apparent point of focus.

During the past few years we have had a series of long and laborious strikes, some of which have been considered greatly injurious to the national interest. Among these was the recent dockworker's strike, which, despite the use of the Taft-Hartley injunction could not be settled behind the scenes, and tied up the nation's shipping and commerce for several weeks. Only the intervention of a Presidential Board brought about agreement.

Other strikes, while not involving the national interest, and thus precluding the use of government machinery to speed settlement, have involved direct and personal inconvenience and

injury to individuals and businesses caught in between the labor and management groups involved. The most outstanding example, of course, is the current New York newspaper strike.

I am not about to discuss the issues involved in either strike, or the merits of either position. For however right or wrong labor or management may be in each instance, the fact remains that the public has little sympathy for those who are striking. I do not think I am being unduly dire in predicting that it will take but one more strike of national import to bring public pressure for restrictive legislation, beyond the scope of the Landrum-Griffin Bill, to the point where it is irresistible. And may I remind you that when the Landrum-Griffin Conference Bill was voted upon by the House of Representatives in 1959, only 52 members voted against passage. Over 350 voted for passage. I was one of the lonely 52.

An indication of this growing pressure is already available. One of the nation's leading publications, "Business World," -- not known as a friend of labor, to say the least, put it this way: "... union power remains a potentially explosive issue in Congress where demands continue for anti-strike legislation of some kind ... Kennedy still hopes to keep a lid on new labor legislation this year. But the unions themselves may blow the lid off before summer." There was a time when we could dismiss such warnings as scare-tactics on the part of an unfriendly publication, but today there is more than a measure of truth in this report.

More and more in the corridors of the Capitol one can hear talk of "what can be done about labor." Several Senators have introduced and advocated legislation designed to apply anti-trust laws to labor unions. Even Mr. Wirtz, the Secretary of Labor -- who above all is NCT an enemy of labor -- has mentioned the possibility of compulsory arbitration. In a speech last week before the National Academy of Arbitration, the Secretary warned, "... neither the traditional collective bargaining procedures nor the present labor-dispute laws are working to the public's satisfaction ..." He continued, "it doesn't matter anymore, really, how much the hurt has been real, or has been exaggerated. A decision has been made. And that decision is that if collective bargaining can't produce peaceful settlements of these controversies the public will."

In the face of this mounting sentiment, the interest of labor in electing spokesmen who are sympathetic to their views should be apparent. For if the showdown now impending should prove unavoidable, it will not be by a landslide, but by a close and carefully-waged contest that the issue is decided. One or two votes on either side could prove crucial and the deciding votes will be won or lost now.

I believe that this mounting anti-labor sentiment is real and immediate, and that its impact on the Congressional elections of 1964 can be immense. Further, there is another developing disposition on the part of the American public which is similarly acting against your interests. That is an increasingly apparent anti-spending sentiment. As in the case of the public's fear of the power of unions, this anti-spending sentiment is not new to the American scene; however, in a year in which taxes and the economy have been made a major issue by both parties, "spending" as such, is taking its place as a hotly contested factor on both sides.

An indication of the amount of attention which this issue is attracting is afforded by the press. Pick up any major newspaper or magazine in this country, any day of the week, and you are bound to find mention of Federal spending. There will be articles and editorials on -- federal spending and foreign aid; federal spending and education; federal spending as it affects the individual and his freedom; federal spending as it affects a balanced budget, and so on -- until federal spending as it affects every segment of and situation in our society has been carefully scrutinized and often stigmatized.

Again, because of our general prosperity and our increased concern over foreign rather than domestic issues, there seems to be a growing annoyance at greater domestic spending. True, the bulk of our budget is expended for defense and space exploration, and few would advocate reductions here. Thus, the relatively small amounts which go into domestic programs come under exaggerated fire.

Without the immediate and painful reminders of growing unemployment, bank and business failures and falling prices, we find it easy to forget that there are still those who are deprived and denied in this nation. Similarly, while most of us enjoy an unparalleled prosperity, it is easy to forget that the potential of this nation for providing adequate education, housing and medical care for all of its citizens remains unrealized.

Such easy forgetfulness is a ready weapon for the opponents of education, medical care, housing and other programs. While few are reminding us of the reality of these needs, many are warning us of the dangers of deficits and the beauties of a balanced budget. And, as I pointed out a moment ago, this point of view has found many advocates in the nation's press, and has received a great deal of publicity of late. Such a calculated campaign cannot fail to make some impression.

Once again, I am not here discussing these issues, per se. For whether we cut our taxes and initiate reforms or maintain the status quo, whether we balance or unbalance the budget, these domestic needs will remain. And labor will continue to be the group most directly aware of and concerned with these needs.

You have always been the strongest supporters of these domestic programs. But if your efforts of the past are to meet with success -- if programs such as medical care for the aged and aid to education are to be enacted -- your increased efforts in the future, in the face of ever more vocal anti-spending sentiment, will be called for. Here, once again, it is in the Congress that these issues will be decided. Again, a few votes will make the difference. If you are going to have those votes when they are needed, you must seek and secure them now.

The interest of labor in every Congressional election is great, for your members are many and your role in our society is a vital one. But the challenges to your interests are not often as great as they will be in 1964. There is a great deal to lose and it will take some effort to merely hold our own.

I might have spent these few minutes advising you of the merits of medicare or the advantages of aid to education. But I am not here to sell you a program. Rather, I am here to urge YOU to sell that program, because it is imperative to your interests that you do so. Thus, I can but point out what I believe is the real and immediate importance of early action and the equally real importunity of inaction.

If you are going to be successfully able to combat public pressure for anti-labor legislation and decreased domestic spending -- if the twenty-five Democratic Senators who must face the electorate in September of 1964 are to return to the Senate in January of 1965 -- and if labor is going to hold the trump in 1964 in order to take the trick in 1965 -- you must do your bidding now.