

*Return to J. Higgins*

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE MOST REVEREND BERNARD J. SHEIL, AUXILIARY BISHOP OF CHICAGO, TO A MASS MEETING OF THE GREATER NEW YORK INDUSTRIAL UNION COUNCIL (CIO), Madison Square Garden, New York

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The defenders of the Taft-Hartley Bill claim that Congress has a mandate from the people to pass restrictive labor legislation. As proof, they point to the 1946 elections. Certainly, those elected in 1946 have a mandate from the people, because every legislator has such a mandate. But the only mandate they have is to legislate wisely, for the common good. They have received no popular command to enact laws that interfere with that justice which must be given to every man. If the supporters of the Taft-Hartley measures think they are responding to the desires of the people, they have seriously misjudged the temper of the men and women who put them in office. It is rank self-deception for them to speak of a mandate in this sense.

Before the war, we were well on our way to an era of labor-management cooperation, which promised to bring American life to new heights. But, since the war, for various reasons, the split between labor and management has grown greater until today the relationship is very delicate. Several small but powerful groups have worked busily widening the chasm between labor and capital. I believe that the Taft-Hartley Bill is the deadly fruit of this pernicious effort. It contains some of the most unintelligent proposals that have come out of our legislative halls in many years. It is an open bid to industrial chaos. More than that it is unnecessary and dangerous.

The Taft-Hartley Bill is unnecessary because the Wagner

Act is more than adequate to resolve the present differences between labor and management. It is true that the Wagner Act has not entirely prevented strikes; but a strikeless nation is not a free nation. However the Wagner Act has generally enabled labor and management to arrive at mutually satisfactory solutions freely. In the past 15 years, labor and management have, as a matter of record, been increasingly animated by a spirit of responsibility and mutual respect. Because they realize they are natural partners in our industrial system, they have cooperated for the well-being of the nation. Therefore, they do not need legislation like the Taft-Hartley bill to regulate their relationships. What they do need is greater mutual respect and greater effort at mutual understanding. But this sort of atmosphere cannot be effected by legislation; certainly not by laws of the Taft-Hartley type, which are designed to increase antagonisms and to decrease the probability of lasting solutions to the problems facing both labor and management.

These plans for labor are dangerous, because they are a major threat to American internal peace. The Taft-Hartley bill is aimed exclusively at hamstringing labor. The alleged interest in preserving freedom of the individual worker is merely a smoke-screen covering a death-blow at all unionism. The manifest purpose of this legislation is to cripple unions, not to remedy their abuses. It is a clear case of the cure

being worse than the disease. If these proposals are not vetoed, they will mark the opening shot in industrial civil war; and the whole nation will be the victim of one group's short-sightedness. The Taft-Hartley bill is an invitation to that economic barbarism from which we are barely emerging.

The bold and unfounded assumption of this bill is that management is the sole offended party, the innocent victim of labor's so-called evil machinations. It is filled with the echoes of those good old days when labor spies were rampant in industry; when men were hired for the smallest possible wages; when men were fired without notice or explanation. It reminds us of those very good old days, when justice was only a word, that had no relation to our industrial practices; when unscrupulous employers hired professional strike-breakers and assassins to defend what they mockingly called "Free" enterprise. It is full of wistful nostalgia for the time when these same unscrupulous employers indulged in tactics no labor union has ever dared employ.

The men who favor this bill are largely the men who opposed every social advance this country made in the past 15 years. They opposed the forty-hour week; they opposed workmen's compensation; they opposed the Wagner Act; they opposed social security; they opposed and killed OPA; they were wrong then. They are wrong now. Without in any way doubting their personal integrity, I say they have been misguided in the past, and they show no improvement in the present.

We hear a great deal about strikes; but very little about the thousands of industries that do their work peaceably; We hear still less about employers who strike by obstinately refusing to arbitrate disputed issues. We hear much about monopolistic labor practices; but precious little of the alarming increase in industrial monopoly. It is a cynical joke to speak of monopoly in labor, while at the same time efforts to check real monopolies are circumvented.

We shall not serve the best interests of America by crippling the labor unions. The whole country has benefited by the achievements of labor unions. Higher and fairer wages; decent working conditions; stability of workers in industry: these are some of the accomplishments of the labor unions. Labor-management relations are reaching a more mature and stable level. All this is gravely threatened by the Taft-Hartley bill. And the bitterness and distrust that will result cannot be measured.

The Taft-Hartley bill does grave wrong to that growing number of employers who are sincerely trying to establish fair and decent relations with their employees. There are thousands of such employers, who will unjustly suffer as a result of this legislation. We might all wish that our congressmen had used their energy with similar devotion to maintain price control, to provide decent housing, and to eliminate race discrimination.

These proposals are also dangerous to the United States in her role as the leading democracy in the world. They are certain to produce disastrous disunity at a time when we as a nation must be united, if we are to perform the duties history demands of us. Yet, the Taft-Hartley recommendations are sure to foster only tension, strife and suspicion.

It is not alone a question of disagreement between labor and management. It is a question that intimately and immediately affects all America. If we want an America that is wholly devoted to justice and liberty for all, we will oppose this type of legislation. We cannot preserve free enterprise in America, unless we also preserve free labor. Seldom has any legislation so richly deserved the presidential veto as does the Taft-Hartley bill.

Today there is a conspiracy to degrade the human being. It is not alone the communists who have entered into this conspiracy. It is every man in this world who denies to another human being what God Himself has granted to all men: personal liberty; the right to full justice; and a very sacred dignity. When Christ told us to love one another, He was proposing the only terms on which we could make this world worthy of the sons of God. Because we have ignored these fundamental laws of life, we stand on the brink of disaster. If we really lived up to our ideals of Christianity, and of patriotism, we could in time solve the problems now baffling us. We have a race problem, a social problem, an industrial

problem; we have a Taft-Hartley bill, because we do not really love one another. And I insist that no lasting solution to our difficulties will ever be found until we start with the love of God, which leads inevitably to the love of man for man.