

Retail Clerks Intl Assn.
24th Convention
Chicago, Illinois
June 1963

From Official Proceedings

RCIA 24TH CONVENTION

please be assured that every effort will be made to cultivate that stereotype unless you speak out with the collective voice of conscience decrying such practices and demanding that the house of labor be cleansed.

The problem, of course, is not only peculiar with labor but cuts across all groups and all regions. But you in labor have a distinctive interest because you are committed to the cause of social and economic justice which you have so widely, and justly, publicized. Forget this commitment, and you will automatically give license to all those who are only too eager and willing to tarnish the image of labor.

From what I have said, there appears to be no better antidote for the spread of the malady of anti-laboritis than a healthy dose of facts and figures. This is the most effective prescription which can be administered by anyone interested in the health and well-being of our country.

Those of you in the Retail Clerks International Association are in an especially favorable position to counter the effects of such misinformation. In your almost daily contacts with the public you can seek to dispel the image which has been wrongfully created. You can do this simply by studying facts and figures which are readily available through organizations such as the Department of Labor and your own research department.

I need not tell you of the consequences that may derive from a neglect of this essential responsibility. When public tolerance of any institution decreases, either through valid appraisal of facts or through clever distortion of them, then a situation is created which eventually leads to restrictive legislation. I am certain that you can rise to the occasion, as you have done in the past, to man the ramparts of labor.

It has been a great pleasure being with you this afternoon, and if I may I would like to close my remarks in a way we always do in Hawaii. In Hawaii, whenever we have the privilege of addressing a group, we close by saying, "Aloha." It is a very beautiful word. It means "Hello." "Aloha" means "Goodbye;"

but, most important, "Aloha" means "I love you." And especially to the ladies, Aloha!

(The audience arose and applauded.)

PRESIDENT SUFFRIDGE: Thank you very much, Danny, for your wonderful talk and for the very interesting information and statistics you've furnished. I know I will read those statistics many times in the near future, and I imagine our organizers and our Public Relations people throughout the nation will be going into these minutes quite frequently to not only pull those figures out but many of the other fine things that you have said as well. Thanks very much.

I understand that our friend Senator Hubert Humphrey has arrived. If so, will the Escort Committee, composed of Murray Plopper, Jerry Richgels and Elmer Foster, kindly bring him forward.

(The audience arose and applauded.)

PRESIDENT SUFFRIDGE: Fellow Delegates, it is a pleasure to have with us again, at another convention, one of our very dear and old friends, Hubert Humphrey. Most of you will recall hearing him address our conventions previously. I think the first one was in 1951. At that time he told us of being the son of a druggist, living over the drug store, being a retail clerk in his earlier days, and we, of course, are very familiar with what he has done since he left the drug store.

We are very happy to have you with us today, Senator Humphrey. I know that our delegation will enjoy hearing from you and I would like to introduce you at this time, for whatever you may have to say. (Applause.)

**Address by
The Honorable Hubert Humphrey
Senator, Minnesota**

SENATOR HUMPHREY: Thank you, very much, President Suffridge. And may I express my thanks and appreciation to the escort committee, those that met me out at O'Hare Field and those that escorted me to the platform. I saw Elmer Foster out in the hallway. I said he was one of the lucky ones. He got a good start in life—he was born in

FIRST DAY (AFTERNOON SESSION)

Minnesota. He has done all right ever since. You see, I didn't have that chance. I was born in South Dakota. I had to struggle. There are a few South Dakotans here, too, I see.

I am very pleased to be with my friends from Minnesota, from your respective locals. I want to pay tribute in particular to Local 1116 in Duluth, Local 789 in St. Paul, and of course, there are others. There is the Minneapolis local. But, we have got a lot of organizing work to do up in Minnesota yet and particularly do I want to salute Jerry Richgels and Elmer Foster and Ray Allen. Ray Allen has been doing so much campaigning work for me in the past, I sometimes wonder who is senator, but he lets me draw the pay and for that I am very grateful. (Laughter.)

And Elmer Foster is one of our stalwarts, working with us throughout the year. So Jim, you be good to him. And Eugene Johnson and Elwood Haynes. By the way, I don't know if you folks know Elwood Haynes, but Elwood is the man who has gained more distinction in Minnesota outside of our Governor, than anyone else. We had a recount in Minnesota. You may recall in our state you vote in November and we count all winter. It is rather cold up there. You've read these ads about travel, that say, "Travel now and pay later." Well, we just vote now and pay later.

We had to do a lot of work in our state for several months before we got a good, honest count and finally in the latter part of March, we were able to elect a governor on the Democratic Farm Labor ticket, a fine, upstanding man by the name of Carl Rolvaag, one of our truly fine people in the State of Minnesota. And we elected him with an overwhelming, smashing majority of 91 votes. And out of those 91, Elwood was able to count 14. So he is quite a man.

And I want to say that we are most grateful to you, Elwood, that you were also so good in arithmetic in school. Your teacher told me you were mighty good in addition, thank goodness, because we needed a few at that time.

Let me just pay my respects here to my colleagues who are present today. There are more members of Congress here than I have seen for some time. (Laughter and applause.)

I know that you have heard a stirring message from one of the truly great men of the government of the United States and of this country, and one whose friendship I have been privileged to share and to have as a gift for these many years. And I can think of no man that more honorably and faithfully and courageously represents the ideals of democracy and the commitments to freedom than the Senior Senator from the State of Illinois, Senator Paul Douglas.

And then just to make sure that you were in the Promised Land and that nothing could go wrong, and that you would have all the blessings and benefits of now and eternity, you were able to bring to this platform one of our new Senators, but not new in the service of his country, and not new in the service of the Congress, the great Senator from the fiftieth state in our Union, Senator Danny Inouye. Danny, I heard you did a great job. (Applause.)

I want to say that I am not sure I like Danny too well. He is too young and too good looking. But I guess I ought to overcome those narrow-minded shortcomings. Aren't you running for anything right now, Danny? He will, don't worry. (Laughter.)

Then I hear too, that your Congressman here from the City of Chicago in the great State of Illinois, a gentleman I have been associated with on other platforms and one that has done very well for his constituency and his district and his country, Roman Pucinski, has also been with us and I want to salute him. (Applause.) Roman, that touch of gray there gives you a statesmanlike look.

It is grand to be with you. I mentioned all these gentlemen because some of you may be asking right now, "What did you come for, Humphrey?"

Well, the real truth is that I just got invited. Chuck Lipsen said, "Take your choice. What would you like to do—a film that will run 30 seconds or a speech that will run 30

RCIA 24TH CONVENTION

minutes?" And I didn't hesitate a minute. I took the speech. (Applause.)

But I want to disavow any intentions, any political ambitions other than the fact that I am here. Somebody said to me, "What are you coming down here for? Do you think it is going to do you any good?"

And I said, well, it reminded me of that story about the fellow that entered his mule in the Kentucky Derby. Some fellow came up to him and said, "Good grief, don't you know that at the Kentucky Derby they have the finest horses in the world, the finest bred, the top runners? Why that mule of yours hasn't got a chance. For goodness sake, what are you entering that mule for?" The fellow said, "I will tell you. I know he doesn't have much of a chance, but I thought the association would do him some good." (Laughter and applause.)

Now I just thought the association with the Retail Clerks would do me some good. So I thought I would come down here and be with you. (Applause.) And I want to pay my respects right now to one of the truly great men, one of the outstanding leaders, one of the most gifted leaders of the American labor movement, and I am sure you know that I refer to none other than the President of this great International Union, Jim Suffridge. (Applause.)

He is a great man. Jim, we have worked with you through the years; it has always been a joy, and you have been a great help to every one of us who walks in what we think is the liberal tradition, in the path of progressive government. I want to express now my personal thanks and appreciation to the President and the officers of this great International, one of the largest and indeed, one of the finest and greatest of all in the labor movement. And I want to thank you not only for your generous assistance in the campaigns—and I am one that recognizes that you have been generous and helpful—but I want to thank you and express my appreciation for the program that you espouse, for the stand that you take on the great issues of our times, for your basic decency and your sense of fair

play and your dedication to democratic principles in the labor movement of the United States. We are deeply indebted to you. Thank you very much, Jim. (Applause.)

Now, I just took off my watch. It doesn't mean a thing. It was just hurting my wrist. Somebody asked me one time, "Why do you do it?" I said, "Well, it does two things; it sort of terrifies the audience and it reassures me, and both of those on some occasions are helpful."

I want to talk to you just a little while about matters which I am sure everybody discussed in a much more intelligent and forcible manner than I can, but repetition is a part of the process of education. These great conventions are not only for the purpose of bringing together the leaders of unions and locals for the purpose of discussing union business, but the fact that you have invited to this platform men of public life indicates to me that you are full citizens in every sense of the word; that you are interested in your country, you are interested in the world of which we are a part and the world that requires our leadership, at least our friendly cooperation and assistance. And I would like to talk to you, not about your union business, because you know more about that than I will ever know, but I would like to talk to you about our business as citizens and as Americans and as people who have a great responsibility today in a very difficult period of human history.

Everybody in Washington is well aware of what we call deficits. The columnists write of deficits. They speak of budget deficits. They speak of the problems of financing our government and of the possibilities of inflation. The word deficit has a very definite meaning to most Americans. It generally relates to a deficit in cash or in income, and in the instance of government, it relates to a deficit in the Federal treasury or a budgetary deficit.

I am not here to say that a matter of this nature is of no concern, even though I must say that for a growing nation and for a nation that faces the problem of expansion and employment such as we do, a deficit is not

FIRST DAY (AFTERNOON SESSION)

something to be unexpected. Indeed, it is something that we may well face for several years to come.

But I want to talk to you about deficits that we ought to be thinking about even more seriously or at least as seriously as we do the fiscal deficit. I would like to speak about the deficits in education; the deficits that relate to our elderly and their needs; the deficits that relate to our youth; and the deficits that exist in our employment; and the deficits that exist in the fulfillment of the promise of the Emancipation Proclamation. These are the real deficits. (Applause.)

Until the people of the United States understand that these deficits must be overcome, then we will never have this nation on the high road to prosperity and progress that it so richly deserves and which it must have to maintain world leadership.

Let me first speak to you of the deficit of education. Two out of every three people who are unemployed today, two out of every three who are on the unemployment rolls today, are people that have less than a high school education.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I don't say that it requires a college or even a high school education for a person to succeed. But, on the average, if you take the big picture, and if you remove from that picture just those who are so talented and gifted by God Almighty with innate talent, who maybe could get by without a formal education, if you remove them, then I think it is fair to say that in the period ahead, in the decade ahead, education is as essential to job opportunity, to holding a job, to progressing and growing on that job, as the breath of life itself. Two out of every three people today without work are people who have less than a high school education. And of those with a college education, the percentage is so insignificant that it is hardly measurable.

I don't say that if you have a college education you necessarily are a better man. I simply say that your opportunities for your children—now, I am speaking about our chil-

dren, my three sons, my daughter, your sons and your daughters—I am simply saying if they are going to do well in the generations ahead and the decades ahead, we must see to it that they have a better education. It is just that plain and simple.

There is no ignoring it. And I say to you that the American educational structure today, despite tremendous efforts that have been made at local levels of government and by individuals and by corporations and by private gifts and by churches, despite all those efforts, my fellow Americans, our educational structure is in deficit. It falters.

There are too few teachers, too few good teachers; too few facilities; too few schools; and a tremendous population moving into the university and college area, the likes of which we have never known. As of this day, the 24th day of June, there are one million more sixteen-year olds in the United States than ever before. The war babies are now of age. Next year there will be one million, four hundred thousand more sixteen-year olds than there were this year.

What are you going to do about them? They want to go to school. They are in high schools and the schools are already bursting at the seams and they want to go to the junior college, community college, regular colleges and the universities, and we haven't prepared for it and you know it. Now, population growth is here and it is going to be here in the foreseeable future and we had better start making up our mind that we have to do something about seeing to it that the youth of this land is given an opportunity for the best that modern education can provide.

Let me then offer this suggestion—there is something wrong with our educational structure when you have hundreds of thousands of school dropouts every year. And I think union people ought to be asking the educators of America, what is wrong with education when young people find that it doesn't satisfy their needs? And there are thousands and thousands of school dropouts and a million of them today unemployed.

RCIA 24TH CONVENTION

And listen, here is a fact that will sting you.

Of all the young people in America today between the ages of 16 and 20, 18 per cent are without work. And you wonder why they get in trouble? This is tailor-made for trouble.

They can't work in their daddy's drugstore because he doesn't own it any more. They can't work in their daddy's grocery store because daddy doesn't own the grocery store. He works for Safeway or A. & P. They don't work in their father's blacksmith shop—who wants a blacksmith? They don't work in their father's filling station or garage because many of those are not privately owned any more.

This is a different country. I can't remake it, but I know what it is. Most young people don't have a chance for work experience any more and they are going to have to get some of this in school, technical schools, vocational schools, and they are going to have to get some of it on the job. We had better take a look at our whole educational structure, because something is wrong with it or it wouldn't be in the trouble it is in today. And then we had better back it up with the resources it needs.

Let me give you another figure that would be of some interest. We have race problems in the country and, in this connection, we know that thirty-eight per cent of all the Negroes in the country between the ages of 16 and 20 are unemployed and, therefore, I am sure that you can see why some of these boys and girls get into trouble. They are bubbling over with vitality and they have to express it in some way. Therefore, what are we going to do about that?

Also, what are we going to do about the updating of our education, about recognizing this tremendous flow of new people coming into the school system. This also ties in with the other deficit of unemployment.

You know, in the greatest nation in the world we spend most of our time in figuring out how not to do things. We pay farmers not to produce; we try to find out ways we do not have to produce in our factories at a time when the whole world is crying out for goods and services.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not only economically wrong, but morally wrong. I say that a nation lives in sin that cannot find the genius and the knowhow and intelligence to utilize the gift that we have, of technology and science, the true opportunities that we have for good, instead of spinning our wheels and finding out how to slow up what we have created. That is wrong and I submit that more important than getting on the moon is trying to find out how we can move goods and services to mankind to meet the needs of a crying humanity before that humanity destroys itself in anguish and in pain and hunger. (Applause.)

Between now and 1970 some 27 million jobs are going to be affected by automation and here is what this means: that you are going to have to find out how to provide three hundred thousand jobs every month between now and the foreseeable future. It is just that simple. I had hearings of this in Washington but I did not accuse anyone of anything and so they did not make the headlines. (Laughter.)

However, I want to make it clear that we are going to have to build three new General Motors complexes every month between now and 1980 or we are going to be saddled with unemployment. This is the simple fact and, of course, you cannot stop automation any more than you can stop the tides and apparently you are not going to stop the population.

Therefore, people are here. America is a big country, with a lot of room and it seems to me that we ought to be trying to figure out what we are going to do with our people and with our resources.

However, let me again drive this home—that between now and 1965 you are going to have five million more young people between the ages of 16 and 20. What are you going to do with them? And between now and 1970, you are going to have to figure out how to provide three hundred thousand new jobs every month. And, of course, how are we going to do it?

Of course, a shorter workweek is a possibility, but further, it requires investment, it

FIRST DAY (AFTERNOON SESSION)

requires expansion of trade, it requires a whole new idea of economics. It requires the rebuilding of many areas of this country, the expansion of systems of transportation.

People, of course, say, "How can we afford it?" Well, I don't know, but I know that we cannot afford to not afford it. Let me give you the alternatives because I don't think that people ought to be given easy choices. Everyone who asks me, "How can we afford it?", well, I would in turn ask them: "How can you afford not to?" I ask them to think that out and then, when they have the answer to that, then I, in turn, will come back and indicate to them how I think we can afford to do these things.

Of course, if this means that we have to revise our tax laws then, of course, I am for revising them. I say to you that we have to do some real fresh thinking in this country or we are going to find ourselves pinned to the wall by our genius of technology and science.

There is still another deficit. I mentioned the elderly. Why in the name of common sense can't the richest country on the face of the earth provide a decent life and a decent means of livelihood for the senior citizens of this country? There are many of you in this audience that have traveled the Scandinavian countries. Countries like Sweden, Norway and Denmark can see to it that their elderly people are well housed, that they have medical and health care, and that they have opportunity for creative service and some opportunities for creative work. If this can be done by these little countries with all the problems that they have, then why cannot America do it?

I think that America, if it is willing to put its values right, can do it, but as long as we pretend that these problems can be shoved aside, just as we are pretending that you can shove the problems of youth aside, then somehow we are never going to get at it.

Let me warn you, modern medicine has made it so that people are going to live longer; they are going to live to an older age and, therefore, you are going to have to do some-

thing about seeing to it that they will not merely survive but that they will live—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—not life merely as an existence—not survival for who desires to merely survive. That is hardly a worldly concept for a human being—but life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, to which this country is dedicated.

However, in spite of this, we still mess and stumble around with our problems such as Medicare. There isn't a person in his right mind who doesn't know that people who reach the age of sixty or sixty-five have a higher rate of illness with a longer duration in the hospital. Most of all, many of them have a lower earning power and some find their earning power directly cut off entirely.

Now, if some people are opposed to Social Security hospitalization and nursing-home care because they feel that it is not good, then what is the alternative? I ask them to give me a program that will suffice as one which will meet these needs of the elderly. After all, these people are with us now and they are entitled to the best that modern medicine and hospitalization can provide. Further, they are entitled to decent apartments and homes in which to live. You know that America can afford it and that we should do something about it. (Applause.)

Let me add that any government that is worthy of the trust of the people of this country will see to it that these things are done. I know of only one way to keep America out of the hands of the destructive radicals, and out of the hands of the extremists. That is for people of good faith, good sense, and good intentions to do the right thing. Somebody once said that evil triumphs when good men fail to act. That has been the trouble all along—we wait too long—we wait until the crisis is upon us and then it costs much more than it would have had we planned a little bit.

Many of us know that you cannot operate this country; that you cannot operate this union; that you cannot operate any business without long-range planning. Therefore, we must look down the road and ask ourselves what we are going to do for our young people

RCIA 24TH CONVENTION

who are coming to us in ever increasing numbers; what are we going to do about our educational systems which seem to be faltering? What are we going to do about our elderly whom we are blessing with long life but with very little living. Then let me ask you, what are we going to do about our unemployed? We know that unemployment is the most deadly cost that any government can have. The cost of unemployment, if it were calculated in lost income; if it were calculated in lost purchasing power; if it were calculated in lost manufacturing and lost business, plus the relief costs, would be fantastic.

Every taxpayer and every community pays through the nose and, worse than that, the individual is insulted by being told that he is not needed. Don't tell me that if countries such as France, Germany and others can provide full employment—nations that were battered to their knees less than twenty years ago—America, with her great industrial complex and the most fantastic and efficient agricultural economy that the world has ever known, cannot provide an opportunity for any individual or person who really wants a job to have it.

Of course, that may mean retraining and, in many instances just training so that these people can work. We have many men and women today coming up here from other areas of our nation, from the agricultural and rural economy where they were never taught anything; people who are coming to our great cities, looking for employment. Many of them are Negroes, our friends and are people of the Negro ethnic group. What do they have when they come here? They come here with nothing but injustice heaped upon them. They come from areas that provide separate but equal schools, neither school systems being up to standard and all too often, if you please, many of them with no education at all.

I submit that the first duty of this government is to see to it that those who have been denied; that those who have been denied the opportunity of an education, be first given the opportunity of catching up and catching up in a hurry and, of course, they can do it if

this government will cooperate, and that also means that you are going to have to cooperate.

Let me then conclude with regard to the final deficit, the worst deficit of all. One hundred years ago this last January Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the Emancipation Proclamation abolishing slavery. It was a promise to a whole group of people in this country that never again would they be second class citizens; never again would there be two kinds of people, but there would only be one. This government has one citizenship for all. That is, you are a citizen of the United States of America and that, of course, is what our Constitution states—that is what the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments promise. Therefore, how in the name of conscience and humanity and human decency did we tolerate one hundred years of naked prejudice and discrimination? For a century we have had a group that we call white citizens and another group that we call colored citizens, and in various areas of America we have pinned on the backs of those who could essentially least afford to stand the burden the terrible injustice and inequality of second class citizenship.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is all over. I think that 1963 will go down in the annals of history just as 1863 did. The proclamation that was a promise will now be fulfilled. The question is not whether it will be fulfilled, because it will. The question is one of "when," and I am sure that it will be fulfilled this year. The only issue is how the Congress, the legislators, and the city councils and other officials will live up to their responsibilities under their oath of office and under the Constitution in order to see to it that at least equal rights privileges and immunities are given to every citizen in this land regardless of race, color or creed. Further, if the Congress fails, then we will invite disaster; we will invite violence; we will be asking for trouble.

Now, the President of the United States has presented to the Congress a minimum civil rights program—not a radical one—not an extreme program—but a minimal program. Some of us on this platform have worked toward this for years and I say to you in all

FIRST DAY (AFTERNOON SESSION)

humility, and yet in pride, that I sat in on the conferences for weeks to develop the program. I now ask your help—ask that you see to it that the Congress of the United States passes every single proposal that has been presented to it by the President of the United States.

(Applause.)

Surely this union, above all others, can do it because this union has never known prejudice. You have not indulged yourselves in segregation or discrimination; you have lived by the principles of the democratic faith. You can lead because you have proven yourselves. We are going to need the help of the labor movement because all the labor movement of this country is not cleansed of this issue. We cannot tolerate in the ranks of organized labor those who say they believe in the working people, those who say that they believe in those who toil and yet discriminate. We cannot tolerate any form of discrimination or segregation or intolerance and you know it and, therefore, I call upon this union to lead the fight in the AFL-CIO to abolish discrimination.

Sure this may upset old patterns, but this is a time for upsetting patterns. It is already too late. Further, I call upon you in your churches, in your clubs and in your communities to stand up and be leaders—to speak out against the ugly fact of discrimination; to speak out against it every time you have a chance, because then you will be working for your union and your country.

It is not good enough, my friends, just to go along and tolerate this because you want to be a good fellow. The gap in citizenship in this country needs to be closed. Your government is spending millions of dollars to close the missile gap and you voted for it; your government is going to spend \$35 billion more to close the space gap because we are in a world struggle with the Communists. What are you going to do about closing the citizenship gap? When are you going to see to it that every citizen, regardless of his race or faith, whatever his national origin, has full citizenship? May I suggest that each of the fifty states in the Union could do well to

emulate the wonderful example of the State of Hawaii, which has learned how to live with first-class citizenship. (Applause.)

You have been a very gracious, considerate and kind audience. I have come to you to speak about what I believe are the real deficits—the deficits that affect our people—their education, their health, their jobs, their welfare and, above all, their dignity.

We have no right to deny another man that which God alone has given him—his self, his dignity, his own being, his own soul and those who discriminate and practice segregation or prejudice do not only do wrong to a man and human being, but I personally believe that they likewise do wrong to the Infinite power itself.

I believe that the time has now come (as I said fifteen years ago) for the American people to walk out of the shadows of states rights and to walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights and I ask this great International to lead the parade; to carry the standards of humanity and of human dignity, and to carry those standards high.

Thank you very much. (Rising Applause.)

PRESIDENT SUFFRIDGE: Thank you very much, Senator.

I am sure that there is no doubt left in your mind but that we here today have taken advantage of our association with you and so I think that we are all even on that count.

If the delegates will bear with me, I would like to appoint some committees before adjournment.

First of all, I would like to call on the Chairman of the Credentials Committee for a supplemental report.

(The following additional report was presented:)

Supplemental Report—Credentials Committee

Local No. 428, San Jose, Calif.

James P. McLoughlin
Claude L. Fernandez

Local No. 725, Indianapolis, Ind.

Eldena Epler



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org