

REMARKS OF VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY TO THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COMMITTEE  
AGAINST POVERTY - WASHINGTON, D. C. - JANUARY 18, 1966

I want to express the thanks of the President, of myself, and I am sure of the Congress for your deep and abiding interest in this all important problem of poverty in our nation. May I express a special note of thanks to the six gentlemen who are here with me today and to all the others who have come and joined in this Inter-Religious Committee Against Poverty. To Doctor Blake, to my old friend, Archbishop Lucey, to Mr. Stern, Bishop Gallagher, Rabbi Cohen, and Dr. Baugher, a personal note of appreciation for your leadership and your dedication and commitment.

We welcome this demonstration of effort and of commitment to the War on Poverty. I have frequently said this is a war in which everybody can join. We recognize no conscientious objectors. And this is a war in which all the nations of the world can join, as well as the people in our republic.

The action that has been taken by the Inter-Religious Committee Against Poverty is a manifestation of the most fundamental belief of the three great faiths represented here today. Throughout the Old and the New Testaments one encounters frequent passages relating to our moral obligation to assist our less fortunate brethren.

Now, I suppose only a man in political life would venture to quote Scripture in the presence of such distinguished members of the clergy, but this

is a time for daring and a time for bold action.

In the Book of Ezekiel you will find these words: "Thus sayeth the Lord unto the shepherds, woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves. Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed but ye feed not the flock. And ye, my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men and I am your God, sayeth the Lord God." That doesn't need any interpretation. It imposes responsibility upon each and every one of us.

In the new English version of the New Testament, in Second James, we find an even more explicit directive in more contemporary language -- "Suppose a brother or sister is in rags without enough food for the day and one of you says 'good luck to you -- keep yourself warm and have plenty to eat', but does nothing to supply their bodily needs. What is the good of that? So with faith, if it does not lead to action it is in itself a lifeless thing."

We really didn't need Congress to prepare a preface to the Economic Opportunity Act. That preface was written thousands of years ago and all we needed to do was to put faith into action -- and that is what this Inter-Religious Committee Against Poverty is doing. Your meeting demonstrates the depth of your faith and your determination to take action against the age-old curse of poverty. It demonstrates your determination to see that your faith is not a lifeless thing but a force which can be vitally

important in making every American a full participant in our national prosperity -- a first-class citizen in a first-class country. That's really what we are working to obtain.

Your seriousness of purpose is demonstrated by the people representing your denominations here today and the others who are not able to be with us. It is indeed heartening to me and to the President. I spoke with him this morning about this meeting and he wanted me especially to convey his thanks for this initiative on the part of the religious leaders.

From the very beginning of the War on Poverty President Johnson has realized that this could not be a war fought only with the weapons supplied by the Federal Government. The battles in this war would have to be waged in thousands of local communities across the length and breadth of this land of ours. Support would have to come principally from those local communities and from the various private groups working in these local areas. In other words, this isn't a war that can be fought in the tents of the high command. It is on the battlefield where the struggle must be waged. The President has made clear this government's determination to do its share. And yesterday he asked Mr. Shriver to work overtime as the Director of the War on Poverty exclusively, and no longer have the two responsibilities - the OEO and the Peace Corps.

During the past year we have been trying to fashion at the Federal level an instrumentality of government action that would do a job that has needed doing for a long time. Some people have been critical of our

slowness in getting started. But we must remember: we are now dealing with the hard core of poverty, not the little cold and sniffles that comes along when people just occasionally don't have a job. We are down with the malignancy of poverty, that which has been with us for centuries, and we are trying to find the cure for it. I have said a number of times that if all we are trying to do is make poverty more acceptable, then the effort is not worthwhile. You do not cure malignancy with aspirin. You may temporarily remove pain but you don't get at the cause of the disease. We are trying to get at the root causes now of the disease called poverty.

We must not delude ourselves, therefore, into believing that this victory can be won quickly, easily or cheaply. Unless there be any doubt about it, we are prepared for the long-term battle and unless there be any doubt about it, this war will be properly funded.

But I repeat that the war on poverty will not be won with just money out of the Federal Treasury. It is going to be won by the commitment of thousands and thousands of people in this country--in local communities, in private groups, in industry and labor and education and every conceivable area of our national life. Too many people think that all we need is a big appropriation. Now we need enough money to supply ammunition, but the will to win this war must be in the soldiers who fight it. And we are the soldiers who must win this struggle.

I would like to thank you for your comment on the maximum feasible

participation of the poor. This is a new concept -- a concept born of need. The institutions we had designed to eliminate poverty were not strong enough or good enough to do the job -- so we are expanding those institutions.

This is not a theory now. It is a fact in every community across America that has a community action program. We have participation of the poor on these local committees averaging out to about thirty per cent of the participants on the local community action committees.

I am happy to tell you that the results have been excellent. In the beginning there were some problems as there are in any beginning. You get a new airplane, design it, and you have some problems. You build a new house and you spend the next two years tinkering with it and adjusting it and fixing it. You have some problems. You get a new car and you have to take it back for its thousand mile checkup. You have some problems.

Well, we had some problems in the beginning with this concept call the maximum feasible participation of the poor, but after more than a year of determined effort, this concept is working. What is so impressive today is the real leadership demonstrated by those persons from the areas to be served. They are keeping us on our toes. They are telling us the truth and they are making a vital contribution to the war-on-poverty. So I thank you for your reaffirmation of the importance of maximum feasible participation of the poor.

It is not possible to untangle easily the complex web of unemployment, poor education, inadequate housing, insufficient public services, prejudice and discrimination which bind millions of our fellow Americans in the hopeless cycle of poverty. It can never be just a question of jobs or education or better housing or equal opportunity. It must be all of these things simultaneously, and at a level of intensity heretofore unimagined.

It would be very comfortable to say that this year we will talk about education, and two years from now we will be interested in the housing of the poor, and a year from now we will talk about the employability of the poor. But we must do everything at once.

What we are facing is a problem like the one faced by a doctor when a person has been in a car wreck and has sustained abrasions, concussion, broken bones and internal injuries. You can't take that person to the hospital and say you are just going to spend time now on the cuts and wounds.

You have to treat the whole patient. And that is what we are required to do in this effort. Therefore, we are profoundly grateful for the statement of action that you have made to us today.

I look forward to learning of your plans in more detail as you translate your faith into resounding action that will be heard throughout America. I can say that this is a very important day for the well being of this

nation, when we can have the mobilization of the great religious faiths in America to do battle, to do justice in the name of the poor.

####

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

JANUARY 18, 1966

Interreligious Committee Against  
Poverty

Transcript

BLAKE:

We have adopted a statement which has some concrete positions which we found we were already able to take on consensus and I would just like to call those to your attention. We feel that the recent Federal legislation marks a great stride forward in the efforts to achieve the purpose of eliminating poverty. We are not speaking merely of the Office of Economic Opportunity but of the whole widespread numbers of programs including manpower development, vocational rehabilitation, etc. These programs, we feel, do require understanding and support and we believe that this has been a stride forward. Many of these programs are ~~admitted~~ already demonstrating their value but many of them have just begun and can hardly be assessed until later. Now we are concerned that there are some people in our country who very sincerely believe that military commitments in Vietnam suggest that we must hold the line or reduce the war on poverty. Now, we as a committee reject such proposals as a major retreat in this war on poverty and a major defeat for our country. We believe that since there are now hundreds of thousands of the poor participating in government anti-poverty programs, their opportunities must not be wasted or thwarted and those being assisted and the millions not being assisted must be helped to escape from poverty and to make their contribution to the strengthening of our society and of our nation. We urge, therefore, increased appropriations to be provided to strengthen and broaden the nation's programs to eliminate poverty. Now, we mention two specifics in the programs that are national programs. One has to do with community action which on the whole has been the most controversial of the efforts to combat poverty and we say flatly that we urge the continuing and increased support for community action programs. In this, we are emphasizing that this is the only way where the poor themselves can participate in this elimination and so we have a final statement that we have agreed upon about the maximum feasibility of the participation of the poor. And we believe that one of the most challenging aspects of the community action programs is the requirement and I quote "that they be developed, conducted and administered with the maximum feasible participation of residents of the area and members of the group served." This basic

BLAKE:  
(CONT.)

concept, we believe, is an integral part of the religious and democratic commitment to help people help themselves. We deplore any attempt, national or local, to dilute the concept of maximum participation of the poor and we affirm our faith in the fact that their involvement is feasible and should be viewed as a creative utilization of the natural human resources found in the community of the deprived who are themselves dedicated to ridding the nation of poverty. The commitment to our anti-poverty programs, we believe, therefore, sir, must not only be maintained but must be increased to achieve its noble purpose, the development of a just society. We hope that our major contribution may be to lift into new focus the moral and spiritual aspects of the attempt to eliminate poverty. We believe that the American people must understand that this is not simply an economic question, is not simply a question of one political party or another political party. We believe it is a moral question and we make it perfectly clear that we think any allowance of the indefinite continuance of poverty in our society is one which cannot be morally justified. I might say one other thing in protection. We are in this committee aimed at the elimination of poverty in the United States. Each of the religious groups would want to make it perfectly clear that we are concerned about poverty wherever it is anywhere in the world and in that point we happen not to be the committee that is aimed at that although we would not want anyone to take the idea from this focus of the attention of this committee that our churches and synagogues were any the less concerned with foreign aid programs and all of the efforts of ~~the~~ nations to help those who need development.

Mr. Vice President, we thank you for coming and would be glad to hear from you in terms of anything that you would like to say to us.

Blake

HUMPHREY: Thank you very much. First, Doctor ~~Bishop~~ Blake, may I express the thanks of the President and of myself and I am sure of the Congress for your deep and abiding interest in this all important problem of poverty in our nation and throughout the world and may I express a special note of thanks to the six gentlemen that are here with me today and to all the others who have come and joined in this inter-religious committee against poverty. To you, Doctor ~~Bishop~~ Blake, and to my old friend, / Archbishop Lucey, and to Mr. Stern and to Bishop Gallagher and to Rabbi Cohen and ~~Doctor~~ Doctor Bower and others, a personal note of appreciation for your leadership and your dedication and commitment. I want you to know that we welcome this extra demonstration of effort and of commitment to the War on Poverty and I am delighted to hear of your rather impressive plan of action for mobilizing the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant communities in our national effort or our national war on poverty. I frequently said this is one war in which everybody can join. There can be no conscientious objectors in this one and I would hope that this was a war in which all the nations of the world could join as well as all the groups of people in our own great republic. The action that has been taken by the Inter-Religious Committee against poverty is a manifestation of the most fundamental belief of the three great faiths that are here represented. Throughout the old and the new Testament, one encounters frequent passages relating to the moral obligation that we as individuals have or that we as human beings have to assist our less fortunate brethren. You can look at almost any chapter or scripture and find a strong admonition. Now, I suppose only a man in political life would venture to quote scripture in the presence of such distinguished members of the clergy but this is a time for daring and a time for bold and at least bold if not creative action, so I asked one of my staff members, I said, "now you find a good passage in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament that will more or less give us the scripture lesson of the day and this is the time for the layman to do the preaching now, you see." So in the Book of Ezekiel you will find these words, gentlemen. "Thus sayeth the Lord unto the shepherds, woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves. Should

HUMPHREY:  
(CONT.)

not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye~~a~~ eat the fat and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed but ye feed not the flock. And ye, my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men and I am your God, sayeth the Lord God." That doesn't need any interpretation, it just imposes social responsibility upon each and every one of us. And in the new English version of the New Testament, in Second James, we find an even more explicit, at least in contemporary language, directive, not a suggestion but directive, "suppose a brother or sister is in rags without enough food for the day and one of you says good luck to you. Keep yourself warm and have plenty to eat but does nothing to supply their bodily needs. What is the good of that. So with faith, if it does not lead to action it is in itself a lifeless thing." You see we really didn't need any preface to the Office of Economic Opportunity Act by the hand of Congress. That preface was written many, many hundreds and yeah, thousands of years ago and all we needed to do was to put faith into action and that is what this Inter-Religious Committee against Poverty is doing and we are most grateful. Your meeting demonstrates definitely the depth of your faith and my faith and your determination to take action against the age-old curse of poverty. And ~~man~~ poverty has been the curse of mankind throughout the centuries. And it demonstrates your determination to see that your faith is not a lifeless thing but a force which can be vitally important in making every American a full participant in our national prosperity. A first-class citizen in a first-class country. That's really what we are working to obtain. Your seriousness of purpose is demonstrated by the people representing your denominations here today and the others that are not able to be with us. And it is indeed heartening to me and I am sure it is heartening to the President because I spoke with him this morning about this meeting, I was with him at the White House from nine o'clock this morning and he wanted me especially to convey his thanks for this initiative on the part of the religious leaders. From the very beginning of the War on Poverty President Johnson has realized that this could not be a war fought only with the weapons supplied by the Federal Government. The battles in this war would have to be waged in thousands of local communities across the length and breadth of this

HUMPHREY:  
(CONT.)

land of ours and support would principally have to come from those local communities and from the various private groups working in these local areas. In other words, this isn't a war that can be fought in the tents of the high command. It has to be out on the battle field where the struggle must be waged. Now the President has made clear this government's determination to do its share and yesterday you may have noted the President ~~invested~~ in Mr. Shriver the one job but asked him to work over time as the Director of the War on Poverty exclusively and no longer the two responsibilities, the OEO and the Peace Corps. I am sure that you know, my good friends, that during the past year that we have been trying to fashion at the Federal level an instrumentality of government action that would do a job that ~~needs~~ has needed so long to be done. Some people have been a little critical of our slowness in getting started. But I want to say that we are now dealing with the hard core of poverty, not the little cold and sniffles that comes along when people just occasionally don't have a job but we are down with the malignancy of poverty, that which has been with us for centuries, and we are trying to find the answer to it. I have said a number of times that if all we are trying to do is make poverty more acceptable, then the effort is not worthwhile. I am a pharmacist and I want to tell you that you do not cure malignancy with aspirin. You may temporarily remove pain but you don't get at the cause of the disease and we are trying to get at the root ~~in~~ causes now of this curse called poverty. We must not delude ourselves, therefore, into believing that this victory can be won quickly, easily or cheaply. Unless there be any doubt about it, we are prepared for the long term battle and unless there be any doubt about it this will be properly funded. There has been a good deal written about that the war on poverty isn't going to have any new money. Well, I can tell you without going into the figures, it is going to have more money than it had last year, you can know that. But I repeat that the war on poverty will not be won with just money out of the Federal Treasury, it is going to be won by the commitment of thousands and thousands of people in this country in local communities, in private groups, in industry and labor and education and every conceivable area of our national life. Too many people think that all we need is a

HUMPHREY:  
(CONT.)

big appropriation. Now we need enough appropriations to supply so as we say the ammunition, to pass the ammunition, but the will to win this war must be in the soldiers that fight it and that's, we are the ones that are the soldiers that must win this struggle. I would also like to thank you for your comment on the maximum feasible participation of the poor. This is a new concept in this effort known as the war on poverty. We are expecting to, we are calling upon more than what we called the establishment. Because the fact is, my dear ~~friends~~ friends, that what we have been doing up to date was not enough and the institutions that we designed thus far were not strong enough to do the job or good enough so we are implementing those institutions. There is what we call the governmental level at the Federal level, the local governmental level, and there is the so-called Red Feather, that is the community agency level, and then there is the poor, the maximum participation of the poor, the maximum feasible participation of the poor, themselves, and this is not a theory now, it is a fact in every community across America that has a community action program and there are thousands of them, we have participation of the poor from twenty-five percent up to an overwhelming majority on these committees averaging out about thirty per cent, about a third of the community action committee that guides the destiny of these programs. And I am happy to tell you that the results have been excellent. That in the beginning there were some problems as there is in any beginning. You get a new airplane, design it and you have some problems. You build a new house and you spend the next two years, as they say, tinkering with it and adjusting it and fixing it, you have some problems. You get a new car and you have to take it back for its thousand mile checkup, you have some problems. Well, we had some problems in the beginning with this concept called the maximum feasible participation of the poor but after better than a year of efforts, it is now shaken down and we now have a working establishment and what is so impressive is the fact that many of those that we just called the poor when they came in are today developing to be real leaders in these community action programs and while they are not always patting the establishment on the back, they do occasionally act as a gadfly stinging the establishment where it needs to be stung into

HUMPHREY:  
(CONT.)

action and we are getting the job well under way. So I thank you for your reaffirmation of the importance of maximum feasible participation of the poor.

Now I want to just conclude with this observation. It is not possible to untangle the complex web of unemployment, poor education, inadequate housing, insufficient public services, prejudice and discrimination which bind millions of our fellow Americans into <sup>the</sup> hopeless cycle of poverty. It just isn't possible to do that easily. It can never be just a question of jobs or education or better housing or equal opportunity. It must be all of these things ~~and~~ all at once, simultaneously, and at a level of intensity heretofore unimagined. It is very comfortable to say well, this year we will talk about education. And two years from now, we will be interested in the housing of the poor. And a year from now we will talk about the employability of the poor. The fact of the matter is we have to do everything at once. What we are facing is like a person that's been in a car wreck that has abrasions, concussion, broken bones and internal injuries. You can't take that person to the hospital and say well, now, we are just going to spend time now on the cuts and wounds. You have to treat the whole patient and that is what we are being required to do in this effort. Therefore, we are profoundly grateful for the statement of action that you have made to us today. I look forward to learning of your plans in more detail as you translate your faith into resounding action that will be heard throughout America. I can say that this is a very important day for the well being of this nation, when we can have the mobilization of the great religious faiths in America to do battle, to do justice in the name of the poor. I think that this means that America the Beautiful takes on even a greater significance than ever before.

I thank you, Doctor ~~William~~ Blake.

###

mz/fw (1/21/66)

Q. I wonder, Mr. Vice President, in that the Republicans made an issue of the War on Poverty in their State of the Union message last night, if you would answer this question. They said the War on Poverty is filled with waste, controversy and the bad odor of political bossism and they said that very few of the dollars of the over two million dollars that has been appropriated for the war on poverty have found their way into the hands of the poor, themselves. What would be your response to that?

HUMPHREY: I'd say that's quite an obvious political statement that has very little basis in fact, if any, and what we really need now is not chastisement but we need cooperation. I know that that statement does not bespeak the attitude of many Republicans because the War on Poverty is not a partisan matter. I would not think that any national commitment would be a partisan matter. It is, of course, not true that this program has been filled with bossism and corruption. That is sheer nonsense. There is another way of putting it, hogwash. But it is also to be said that this program has already brought tangible results and if you don't believe so, go meet some of the young folks that have come out of our Job Corps camps, see the work of some of the VISTA volunteers. See the work of Project Head Start. There are hundreds of thousands of mothers in America that can tell you by personal testimony that the Project Head Start has been a blessing to their children and to their family or families. I would say that a statement such as has been quoted, and I hope that it will not be requoted because it is not factual, was rather an insult to the people that have been benefitted by this program. This is not to say that there improvements cannot be made and we seek to make improvements every day. There is a constant process of evaluation and re-evaluation and we welcome the help of those who seek to improve the program. But I think the results are rather impressive. And no one can answer these questions better than the Director of this program who has given unselfishly of himself to make this War on Poverty a success or at least a beginning success.

Q. May we ask Mr. Shriver how he would answer the Republican charges?

SHRIVER: Yes, thank you, Mr. Vice President. I think the simplest answer to it is that numerically we can prove that more than a million and a half poor people have been touched, have been reached directly by the War against Poverty in the first twelve months. And that approximately four and one-half million people have been reached directly or indirectly. When you remember that the total number of poor persons in the country is about thirty million, I think it is not an inconsiderable achievement to reach three million or even more of them in the first twelve months directly, not indirectly. When I say directly, I mean with a job, with education, with job training or in some other similar ~~program~~ manner.

Q. Doctor Blake, I wanted to expand on this point. That is what you feel are the real necessities for creating a committee of this kind. For instance, you are a very important official on Walter Reuther's Citizen Crusade against Poverty which in many ways is parallel and others overlapping. I gather Mr. Reuther is on this committee and was meeting with you this morning. What areas do you feel you can help?

BLAKE: The general position of the religious bodies in this, I think, are following somewhat the pattern that they have taken in their cooperation, in their efforts for civil rights. We believe basically that we, as religious bodies, ~~must~~ ought to be visibly concerned. This is for our own health, if for nothing else, that we can do but we do believe that we ought not to think that we can do this separately. Therefore, the inter-relationship between ourselves and the Citizen's Crusade against Poverty, all three of the sponsoring organizations are members of that Crusade and, therefore, we hope to be a visible part of the national effort on the voluntary side and then I can speak, I think, as a member of that Citizen's Crusade too, that it in itself does not suppose that it is replacing anybody else's efforts but wants to both be in a position to help with federal programs and local programs and to supplement and when necessary to criticize, to raise questions and to push in order that that end may be reached. That is the elimination of poverty in our land. So that it is a part and a designed part of the total effort and we hope it

BLAKE:  
(CONT.)

will be a helpful one. I might add one more word to say that we think our part is not to do in an amateur fashion what there are other people to do but to try to do what we are presumably able to do and this would be to persuade our own constituency that this is a moral and spiritual problem and if we can do that job, we believe that there are others who can implement this into the economics, the social policies of our communities as a nation.

# # #



# 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](http://www.mnhs.org)