

May 9, 1968
Washington, D.C.

PRESIDENT ABEL: I assume all of you noted that our candidate arrived late as usual. As a matter of fact, I was just out back seeing if we could make arrangements for a stand-in, you know, or a new one.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Don't scare me.

PRESIDENT ABEL: Frankly, I guess this is an unforgivable way to start talking about the next President of the United States --

(Applause)

-- but I take advantage of this opportunity because when he becomes President of the United States, we won't be able to talk this way about him. You've got formalities where you just say "Here is the President of the United States," you know, and then go on and sit down. So we will take advantage of many, many years of friendship of the past and I am sure many more years to come to get away from that sort of thing now.

I want the Vice President to know the Board members and I think, Mr. Vice President, you should know, we have had a two-day meeting of the International Executive Board. We have in addition to the Board members some of our key staff people and our technicians, we have a few of our friends from the labor movement here in the city of Washington. I think all of you should know that some time back a few of us thought it would be a good idea along about this time to have a gathering. We first talked in terms of a dinner in honor of our Vice President, and one of the things we wanted to do at that dinner was remind him that, like us, he is starting to get a few years on him and not only remind him but put some words back in his mouth that he tossed at us no fewer years ago than 20. It was 20 years ago come Sunday that the mayor of Minneapolis honored the Convention of the United Steelworkers of America in meeting over in Boston, Massachusetts, and all of us were impressed at that speech, as we are impressed with most of the things if not all the things that he has said and done. And so we had the speech printed. We had it placed in a nice leather binder. Nordie

Hoffman, when he was still with us, took care of that when he was here in Washington, Mr. Vice President, and then in addition to that we have a brief statement on the inside cover which reads: "Presented to Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey by the International Executive Board of the United Steelworkers of America on May 9, 1968, at Washington, D.C., to commemorate 20 years of happy association between a great union and a man who represents the spirit and hope of America." And I am happy to say to you, Mr. Vice President, it carries the signatures of all members of our International Executive Board.

In addition to this speech of yours, we want to present to you, and I am happy to advise you and the American public that this morning in meeting the International Executive Board adopted a "brief" resolution with many thousands of words recounting just a few of your outstanding contributions to the American people and America and the world. And it wound up, and I will just read the last paragraph which says: "For all of these reasons, this International Executive Board of the United Steelworkers of America endorses Vice Presi-

dent Hubert H. Humphrey for the office of President of the United States and pledges the full support of the Union to his candidacy for such office."

Just let me say, Mr. Vice President, it is my privilege, my high privilege and honor, to present not only in behalf of the members of the Board, but all the members of the United Steelworkers of America, a copy of your speech of 20 years ago plus a copy of the resolution that was adopted this morning endorsing your candidacy, and assure you that we will be doing our level best to make this a great victory.

Mr. Vice President.

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

Thank you very much, President Abel.

Now, my dear friend Abe and my friend Walter Burke -- I miss this good Irishman Joe Molony today, but I understand he is violating the President's travel ban and has gone to Europe just to demonstrate his well-known independence, getting over there to touch the old sod once again and to come on back so he can do battle in a righteous cause,

and we miss him.

Abe, I want to thank you in particular for this manuscript you have presented me, a copy of my speech before the Steelworkers in 1948, and I see that it is signed personally by the members of the Executive Board, which makes it all the more precious to me and all the more meaningful. I will cherish it.

They tell me that some day in my lifetime that there will be what we call a Humphrey library, and this will be one of the important documents in that library. We are taking advantage right now, and have been the last few years, gathering papers together from the first days of my public life in the hopes that at the appropriate time they would be made a part of some university library or some library establishment.

But I don't want to be talking about a library right now, I want to be talking about what we are going to do to be worthy of having a library.

I was met outside by Mr. Senior Citizen himself, Jim O'Brien, and he is the youngest

senior citizen that I have ever seen. It made me happy to see him. And I see my friend Al Barkan here from COPE. I want you to know, Abe, how much I appreciate this wonderful help that we are getting out of AFL-CIO COPE. It is very significant, and without it I don't believe that we'd be going very far. With it I think we can go the whole distance, and that is exactly what we plan on doing.

(Applause)

I am doubly thankful for the endorsement that I have received this morning from the United Steelworkers of America and the Board and Officers. I am sure you know that that is a note of reassurance to me but it is also a very important commitment on the part of both of us. When I accept that endorsement I commit myself to this battle, to this struggle, to carry on the kind of campaign that you would like me to do, that you can be proud of, and to carry out the kind of campaign that will result in victory. And that is what we are going to do. And your endorsement today is just what I needed at this particular moment. It just adds that extra lift that a fellow needs as he goes along during these

hard-working days.

Now, I didn't come here to orate with you today. I was told that I should drop over and just visit. They even told me it ought to be brief, and I said, "Don't be ridiculous." I thought possibly that I could just come in as a member of the family, and just about the time that I get ready to go any place -- and I mean it -- I think there must a very, very well-concealed network around here -- I generally get a call from across the street. It says "You ought to check into this," or "Check into that." And it takes a little longer than sometimes I plan on. In fact, I'm due to go back there in a very short time. And that is one of my duties.

I tried to level with you earlier here. I am still the Vice President, and I simply must fulfill those duties. I think that if I didn't, our critics would be on my back, and rightly so. And what is more is, I wouldn't feel right. This morning I had a meeting with a number of key leaders on our youth program again all across this country. I also was meeting this morning with some of our people that are deeply concerned about the

action that was taken of over six billion dollars cut in our budget. And, in fact, one of the prominent union leaders was in to see me about this.

You know, I have a schedule that they give me. It has no relationship to what is going to happen at all, because how can you turn down a man that comes in that represents thousands of government workers, for example, and says, "I want to see you." Particularly when these are the people that you have been working with for years. How can you turn down a delegation that comes to you from a city and says "Mr. Vice President, our neighborhood youth corps allotment for our city just isn't what it was last year and we've got to do something about it, and I can't go home empty-handed."

I spent 45 minutes trying to get that worked out today so that that particular city could have its youth program underway. And my office staff just gives me unsugared cain. They say, "You just will not live by that schedule." I said, "You know, the trouble is that you live in these rooms and I've got to live with the people. You prepare the schedule and I've got to listen and

work with the people that have some problems. And that's what happens to you."

But that's what I think is the best politics in the best sense of the word, doing your job, having people know that you can do the job and that you are willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to do that job.

Now, let me get down to what we are up against and what we are going to try to do. The first thing I want to say is what you already know. You didn't build this union overnight, and you didn't build it in what it is today without some sacrifice and without some hard fighting. And you didn't get this kind of leadership that you have here easily either. I think that one of the greatest achievements in recent years is the high quality of leadership that the United Steelworkers of America has in this wonderful friend of ours, I. W. Abel and his staff.

(Applause)

And I mean it from the depths of my soul. It is a tremendous boost for the American labor movement.

Now, I carry today the endorse-

ment, at least the personal endorsement, of a number of leaders of organized labor. And I am very proud of that endorsement, very, very proud of it. And I want it out in the open just exactly like this resolution. I hope you publicize this from the housetops.

I also have the good fortune today of having some help from the business community, and it is not in conflict because the truth of the matter is, and you men know this better than I do, that whatever we seek to do in this country we are going to need the help of everybody. Now, we are not always going to see it all the same way but we are going to have to try to mobilize the resources of this country for the jobs that lie ahead, and I am going to be specific. I have given you all the generalities that you need.

You know, you said here is a document 20 years ago when I spoke to your Convention. And I was just told by Walter and by Abe that we said then much of what is coming to pass since, that it was a forward-looking speech, -- long and forward-looking both. I think that is what the people want

now, they want a forward-looking speech. They don't want it so long, but they want it forward-looking, and they don't want just a speech, they want a forward-looking program.

I am very proud to have been a part of the Kennedy-Johnson administration. I helped John Kennedy when he was President of the United States, and I worked for him hard. I have tried to be a helpful Vice President to President Johnson. I think that these last seven years have been some of the most dynamic and dramatic years of our national existence. Tremendous changes have taken place, changes in our life's pattern, changes in the world. Just take a look at what is happening in Europe today. Just take a look at Czechoslovakia, Romania; take a look at the morning headlines where even the Soviet Union this morning says their press is going to print the charges of the Czechs. There's a kind of emancipation that comes about, there is a restlessness and a busting out.

Take a look at what is happening to students all over the world. I don't know what all the reasons are, but there is a student

revolt. Some of that has been misdirected. Some of it has gotten totally out of hand, but underneath it what it's all about is that young people today, as the poor people today and as other people today, are following what you set as a pattern, namely participation in the decision-making process. They want to be counted in, not counted out. The old university patterns where the administration just set down the rules and the professors were aloof, it's all over. The young people today are saying, "Listen, we want to have a little something to say about this, too."

Now, it will most likely go to excess, too far for awhile, but it will balance out, providing that some of us who are deeply concerned about the values of this country participate and take our stand.

And this is also what is happening in some of our great cities today. There are a lot of militants running around. Now, the labor movement knows a little bit about the militants. You know, I am just talking to you as a member of the lodge, so to speak. And some of these militants are

not bad at all. There's always a few that are off on the deep end, and you have had them in the labor movement. You have had communist infiltration at time in the labor movement. You have had other people that weren't too good, but you got rid of them, you cleaned house. But the real militant labor leader that stood up there and fought, sometimes even was jailed, he was a good citizen. There are some militants today that are fighting hard for their day and trying to help their people. They're not bad. Our job is to help them come and work within the system and change the system where it needs to be changed.

I keep calling this broadening the base of participation in American democracy, the new democracy. That is what you have done in the labor movement. The management of a company no longer just gets its own way. You bargain with him a bit, and quite a bit, and you will bargain with him more.

Now, whoever is President of the United States must understand these things. He has to be with this generation and the one yet to come. He cannot rest just on the laurels of yesterday. I find that most people really don't even remember what

did yesterday, and that's a fact. And I suppose it's just as well that they don't. I hope they have forgotten the bad mistakes that I made, too. And I will settle with them. If they will forget all my mistakes, they can forget all my accomplishments. I'll make a deal with the whole public and we will start all fresh, because really what counts is what you have pledged and what you are going to do.

That is what you are talking about here on this Board. It isn't the contract that you had; that's just something on which you build. Old Sam Gompers said once, "What does labor want?" He said, "More." And he understood that you get more by earning it; you get more by bargaining for it; you get more by fighting for it.

What do Americans want? They want more of what America should be and could be. They want a chance, an opportunity. Young people want an education. The poor people want to live a little better life. You can't have that television camera showing them all the good things on earth and showing them what it could be without arousing in them

a desire to have a little of it. Now, some of them want it so quickly they go out and grab it. Our job is to help them go out and earn it. That's what I'm going to try and do.

Now, what is the role of the President? To be a good leader like I. W. Abel; to be a leader, to get people to go with him, to get people to march with him, to persuade, to educate, to inspire, to lift, to mobilize. And if he feels strongly about something and he knows in his own heart that he is really on the right track, then he even has to stand alone sometimes and be willing to take all the arrows and all the stones and all the blows that may be leveled at him. But leadership is essentially getting other people to march with you.

I said right in this room to another union there was a time when Franklin Roosevelt was ridiculed for saying "Clear it with Sidney." Do you remember? Well, let me tell you something, that was the beginning of a new era because you're not going to get anything done in this country today unless you start to clear it with a number of people, -- at least talk to them, get their advice. And that is

what President Johnson has been doing. This is what he has been teaching me. I have been trying to learn as your Vice President. Believe me, I have. I have been trying to learn about our executive, about our foreign policy, about the world in which we live and how to run the government. And believe me, it's quite a job. It's hard enough to run a union. And I'll tell you, I'm one fellow that can use a lot of advice, and I don't mind admitting it.

But with all of that, you still have to take your stand, you must understand what you are for.

Now, what are we for? Well, we are for making the benefits of this economic system of ours and this political system of ours available to the largest possible number of people. That is what we are for. We are for adding real meaning to the concept called human dignity. And you don't have much dignity if somebody can tell you all the time what to do. The union gave a worker dignity. That's the greatest thing that a union can give a worker. Then he got some extra money in fringe benefits, but first of all he got some dignity. Nobody could shove

him around any more.

Now, this business of dignity means something more than just somebody coming out and saying we're all brothers. It means that the people have to be able to earn a living, they've got to know how to earn a living. They have to be trained, they have to be educated. And what is more, they also have to have the privilege of being an owner if they want to be as well as being just a worker, -- complete freedom of choice.

I see an opportunity ahead here for the labor movement that is tremendous. There's a large number of unorganized workers in America that are going to stay unorganized until their appetites are whetted to want a better life. And then they're going to find out two ways to get it. One is through political action and the other one is through economic action. You're not going to organize an illiterate, ignorant, deprived, frustrated bitter fellow. He isn't going to be organized, he's going to be trouble. But when he starts to feel that there is a chance for him to have a job, a good job at good pay and that he can make something out of his life, that he can have a

better home or he can have for the first time a decent home of some kind, he is going to look around and say, you know, "I think maybe the best way to get that is to join the Steelworkers," or join this union or that one; and another way to get it is to get involved in politics. "Im going to start taking a look at these candidates and I'm going to start to work, and I may even run for office and I may even threaten somebody who is going to run for office that if he doesn't deliver, I'm going to run against him."

Political action and economic action. Neither one of them take place with people who are deprived, frustrated, bitter, hopeless. It is when they begin to feel that there is hope, when they begin to sense that there is a better day, then they're looking around for something to join, somebody to stand with.

Who was it that once said the poor never really rise up, they're too weak. It's when they sense that there is hope that they begin to improve things and improve themselves.

Now, that is what I want to help get done in this country. I want to have it done

?? through the orderly process if we can possibly do it,
and I think one of the greatest institutions that is
going to help this is the labor movement. I really do.
The labor movement of America provides an outlet for
tremendous human energy for human benefit. I wonder
if you have even thought about how important you are
to orderly progress in this society. There's a lot of
difference, you know, between a strike and a riot.
There's a lot of difference between honest negotiation
and preaching hate and demagoguery. And if we get
people that are the working people, the unorganized
peoples yet of America in these great trade unions
of ours and these industrial unions of ours, after they
have sensed that there is a better day, we are going
to have orderly progress. Oh, it won't be timid and
soft but it will be within limits, and we will be able
to do it.

?? Now, I'm not going to take any
more of your time except to tell you I'm going to
outline in the days ahead how we are going to get some
of this done. I said to Mr. Reuther's union yesterday
let's take a look after Vietnam. This morning at
6:30 a.m., our negotiators left for Paris. We sent

the best team of negotiators that we can put together. We're going to get peace; I don't know when it is going to come, I can't make any calendar date prediction, but there will be peace. It is inevitable that peace will come. It may come painfully, it may come slowly. I'm sure that these negotiations will test the patience of every living mortal that ever believed in freedom. You can expect every trick in the book to be used against us. But we have to be as patient and as brave and as persevering in negotiations as we are on the battlefield, -- just the same kind of courage, and not be run out of the negotiating room any more than they run us out of a country. And one of these days there's going to be a peace treaty or there will be an armistice or there will be a truce, or there will be a cease fire or there will be something that at least stops the war.

Now, we had this happen in 1953 and it was the end of the war in Korea. And what happened to the country? They cried out for peace, and Mr. Eisenhower said, "I shall go to Korea." Well, President Johnson didn't wait that long. He started things a little earlier. And I think he has

demonstrated to his worst critics that no man in this country is more devoted to the cause of peace than the President of the United States.

(Applause)

But now let's assume that within six months -- this is just an assumption -- let's assume within six months or a year that we can get peace, or whatever time. What do you think this Congress will do? I know what happened the last time. We had three recessions in eight years. And I remember when the Steelworkers were down here talking to me from Minnesota, Glenn. We had more unemployed people up there than we've got pheasants. We had peace in Korea all right, and we had desperation, depression, hunger, unemployment in northeastern Minnesota. We had communities up there that had 30 per cent of their available manpower unemployed. Minneapolis and St. Paul had eight or ten per cent. Now, is that going to happen again? I think that's the question all across the country. I told Mr. Reuther's union yesterday -- I don't know whether they understood it, -- but I said after Korea there was 18 per cent unemployed in Detroit. Let's get to

talking about what we're going to do, let's get the scene set here. And the most important thing is to have the right people at the right time in the right place. That's the important thing.

(Applause)

That means the President, that means the Congress, and it means some governors and it means some legislators. It means some political education, action, Al Barkan's type, your type. It means voter registration or we are going to have trouble. There is no guarantee that this Congress or the next Congress will convert these resources that could be released from a war into peaceful purposes, not one bit of it. We had more poor people in '58 than we have in '68. We had more poor people in '54 than we have now. We had more illiterates, we had more people that needed Medicare, but we didn't have Medicare, we didn't have federal aid to education, we didn't have a war on poverty and we didn't have the \$1.60 an hour minimum wage, and we didn't have expanded coverage. We didn't have any of it. What we got was nothing. And we lost an election two times in a row for a President, and we barely

squeaked through on having a numerical majority in Congress for the Democrats. And a numerical majority in Congress for the Democrats doesn't mean a thing. You've got to have more than a numerical majority. You've got to have a majority of liberals in the Congress of the United States. That's what counts.

Well, that's my message and that's what I'm going to talk to people about. Some people say old Hubert's lost his fire. Let me tell you something, there ain't any fire departments in this country that will put it out. I just want you to know that. Some people say that Hubert Humphrey's for the organization. I'm for the Steelworkers, too. I know that I've got to get some delegates and I want you to help me get them. And I know, too, that some of them are going to be wooed. Oh, they will be wooed. And there are going to be some people tempted. Temptation didn't happen just in the Garden of Eden, it's been happening all the time. And I want you to stand fast, and I not only want you to do that, I want you to spread the glad tidings. We're going to win this nomination. I'm your man.

(Applause)

So thank you, thank you, thank you. I will work overtime and won't even charge you. Thank you.

PRESIDENT ABEL: Mr. Vice President, I don't have to tell you how much the Board members and our associates appreciate your taking time out to come over and visit with us a little this afternoon. We are deeply appreciative and, as you know, you can count on the Steelworkers to do everything they can. Any place at all that we might render just a little more service, don't hesitate to whistle or have one of your fellows whistle. We're out in the thing to win and we're going to do it with the kind of exuberance you asked for here, because it's just not your fight. We're tickled to do it. You couldn't have made any group in the country happier than when you announced in this hotel just a few weeks ago you were going to be in this thing all the way.

So again thanks for coming over, and we're going to be hitting that trail with you and I'm sure see you many, many times in the months to come.

And so that he can get back to his important work that he has to do, let me remind

you again he wants to take a little more time to have pictures taken with you. I guess we're going to do it back here. Board members first, because the Board hasn't concluded their work. We have to get back in session. We've got important decisions to make, so the Board members will be first. It's now two o'clock, let's say that the Board will reconvene at 2:30.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I want to tell you a story before you go. It will just take a minute.

Everybody's going to be reading about these primaries and everything. I've got to tell you what I told a fellow yesterday. He came up to me and stuck a microphone under my face and he said, "Mr. Vice President, what do you think about what happened in Indiana and in the District of Columbia?"

I said, "Well, first of all, I wasn't a candidate in either election, I want you to know that. I couldn't be. It was impossible to be under the law. That's No. 1."

"Well," he said, "what about

the way one of those men got all the votes in the Negro wards?"

I said, "Well, that's very good, very interesting." I said, "It's always nice to have a percentage that shows you're a winner but," I said, "you know, I want to just recall something to your attention. In 1960 I got 44 per cent of the vote, not 42 but 44 per cent of the vote in Wisconsin and John F. Kennedy became President. In 1960 I carried some of the wards with heavy Negro populations in Milwaukee six to one, and one of them ten to one, and John F. Kennedy became President. I carried the District of Columbia three to one and John F. Kennedy became President." I said, "Now, I don't want to discourage his brother, but that's just the way it goes."

(Laughter and applause)

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