

SECOND ANNUAL LABOR HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD DINNER
NEW YORK HILTON HOTEL - 10 DECEMBER 1968

ZIMMERMAN: It is indeed a great honor for me and a great pleasure to introduce the next speaker. He was charged with being yesterday's liberal. Yes, he's yesterday's liberal. He fought all his life for human rights, for social justice. He is today's liberal because he is still in the fight for human rights and for social justice. He will be tomorrow's liberal and continue these battles until we will attain our objectives. (APPLAUSE)

We have supported him yesterday. We support him today. And we will support him tomorrow. And we'll stand side by side with him. Vice President Hubert Humphrey. (APPLAUSE)

HUMPHREY: Thank you very much. Thank you, our dear friend, Charley Zimmerman. President Meaney and our - the recipient of the high honor of tonight, our good friend, I. W. Abel. First may I just say to Abe and Bernice how very proud I am of this evening, and how pleased I am that I can be here with you.

I'm going to give the benediction, and I know what

the ground rules are for benedictions. You've had a full evening, a wonderful evening, and I suppose that it is proper and at least I hope you will permit me to give an observation or two about this evening and about our guest of honor.

First I am here for threereasons. I'm here because I wanted to be here. I think I almost invited myself because I wanted to come and be with I. W. Abel. (APPLAUSE) I wanted to come and join with you in paying honor to a fine man, to a great trade unionist, to a good citizen, and indeed a great American. And that's what we've done as we honor I.W. Abel tonight. (APPLAUSE)

I wanted to come and pay my tribute to Abe who is respected by his adversaries, admired by his associates, honored by his government. And I'm proud to say, has given me one of the most precious gifts of my life, his friendship. And that's why I'm ~~xxx~~ here. I'm also here to salute the Jewish Labor Committee for its great work in what has already been so beautifully and eloquently stated tonight by Lou Stolberg, President Meaney, Bayard Rustin and others who have spoken from this podium. And I wanted to come here to thank my friends, to thank you not only for what you have just recently been doing in my behalf, but a much belated thanks for what you've been doing for me for about 25 years at least in public life. (APPLAUSE)

I think the theme of this evening's meeting is that there is so much more to be done. I believe it's been said that we can't spend too much time on the yesterdays, that we need to look ahead. Somebody once said, Those who seek to justify the past, lose their opportunity for the future. And the theme of tonight is there is work yet undone, miles yet to be walked, cities yet to be built and rebuilt, children yet to come and worlds yet to make better.

An(?) old(?) _____, during the crisis in the great world war number two, Winston Churchill, there's a story, was confronted by a group of ladies that were a bit upset by his imbibing. He was often accused of occasionally having a little scotch. And some of them thought he had a little too much. So they called on him and they protested, and he received them graciously. Despite the fact that he was troubled as the war prime minister with the burdens of his nation and of the heavy requirements and burdens of - as one of the great wartime leaders.

But he listened and they came in and they presented their petition, and then the spokesman for the temperance group said, Why, Mr. Prime Minister, we have judged that if all of the whiskey that you had consumed could be put in this room, it would come up to here. And he listened patiently, and then he said in his own inimitable manner, Yes, but my, my, there is so much more to do. (LAUGHTER)

Yes, so much more to do. And that's what we've been talking about here. So much more to do. I want to say to Bayard Rustin that you have proven yourself tonight to be a Jew and a good Jew because you are a prophet. You've been studying Isaiah. I only hope that what you ~~had~~ had to say here tonight can be written in a book, and I hope that everybody here will read it and reread it.

(APPLAUSE)

This man is a prophet but he's held with honor in his own country, and he spoke here tonight the voice of reason, but also the voice of courage, and he spoke here tonight as the voice of a genuine patriot, a real liberal with a capital L, the kind I like. (APPLAUSE)

Something's been said tonight about an election. I have spent very little time talking about the election. It isn't exactly the happiest moment. But I have resolved that I shall spend very little or no time talking about what could have been, what should have been, or ~~what~~ what might have been. But I do want to say this to my good friends - and you are my friends, and I know it; that's one of the reasons I am here. And I'm going to be around; I just want you to know. Wherever you are, I'm going to be around. (APPLAUSE)

My candidacy, which you made possible, and which you surely gave whatever strength it had, my candidacy may

have come at a time when it could not be rewarded. But I believe it came at a time when it may very well have been needed for this country, for this that we've talked about here tonight, because it came at a time when we need to learn what's on this plaque that I. W. Abel has received tonight: Brotherhood, understanding, trust. (APPLAUSE)

And it came at a time too when we need to remember what's been said here ~~xxxx~~ tonight in many ways, and what our forefathers said in the Constitution, building a more perfect union, not just a trade union but the great union of people, the great union of states, the great union of nationalities, and has been said, you have to build it; it doesn't come by just reaching up and taking it from the sky or hoping that it's going to fall in your hands. You build it.

You work for it. And the people that are here tonight know it. That's the way you built your union. And I.W. Abel knows it because he's been in the labor movement for years. He was no comet that came dashing across the sky to burn out in a blaze of glory. He represents the solid substance of what trade unionism is all about. He represents what the labor movement is all about.

Persistence, courage, fearlessness, dedication, decency, respect for workers, respect for people, and unwilling to give up - a fighter: that's what the labor movement

has required, and there isn't going to be any better America, and there aren't going to be any of our problems solved, not one of them, without those same sterling qualities of character for every person that seeks to do anything as decent or good in this country. There are no shortcuts; there are no easy answers. (APPLAUSE)

So if we want tonight to talk about human rights, and we have, and it's been talked about beautifully and eloquently, let me just say that every time that you organize an unorganized worker you do something for human rights; make no mistake about it. You do plenty.

Every time that you help educate, whatever the way may be, an uneducated person, or educate a child, you do something for human rights. Human rights is not just talk; it's not just another phrase. It's not even just a declaration. What's more important about human rights are the ones that we really gain by the sacrifices that we make and the work that we give. Human rights is when you heal the sick, and find ways to do it, and you care for the needy, and you do it nobly and generously, and when you house the ill housed, and when you provide gainful and meaningful work for the jobless, when you help a kid find his way, to make something out of his life, into manhood or womanhood.

Human rights, economic justice for the exploited, as has been talked about from this platform tonight - migrant

workers, just as an example; they are exploited, and it's social justice for the deprived. And we do have deprived in this country, and we even have hungry people, and a human right for those people is a meal, and there ought not to be one American, not one person that bears the title American in this country, that wants to work, is willing to work, but what he should have the chance to work, and should be given an opportunity to gain the skills to work so that he can earn a decent living and can have the food and the substance that he needs. (APPLAUSE)

And with our granaries overflowing, and with our fields - many of them still unplowed - there ought not to be a child or an adult that goes without an adequate diet. So my words to you are this: tire not of these good ideas. You know, one of our problems; we talk to each other a great deal and we get a little tired of hearing each other, but that's not what ought to happen. You can never say the Twenty-third Psalm too often. You can never pray too frequently. You can never have a good idea too often. You can never have ideals too much. And you can never do too many good deeds.

We as people who say we want to build a better nation, a more perfect union, a better society must never become calloused to either ourselves or to others, and I come to you tonight to ask you to be as sensitive to the needs of

your fellow citizen as a child is to the tender love of his or her mother. Never, never become cynical, skeptical or indifferent. The labor movement must be the ringing example in this country of idealism at work in a practical manner.

That's what the labor movement's all about. This is why I wanted to be associated with you. I'm not really interested in far out, way out, extremists or extremist proposals because they've never been anything; the extremists of left or right. This labor movement has stood up against both, because they're wrong.

But I have been interested in the solid substance of wholesome idealism that relates to the well being of God's greatest creation, man. And that's what we are talking about tonight when we say human rights. Human rights are those rights which come because of your birth; your soul, your body, your mind, your spirit. They are not rights given by government or organization; they are rights to be protected, to be guarded by government and organization.

That's why we're here, and that's why we honor one tonight whose organization and whose life has been a constant stewardship and guardianship of that which is most precious, the dignity of man, and I salute I.W. Abel because he is a man of dignity and he deserves the respect

and the honor of his countrymen.

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

END

"SMOOTH-ROUGH" TRANSCRIPTION

Direct from tape recording

No Editing

(?) means-uncertain of spelling.
of word

— means-word omitted because
of indistinctness of sound

... means--first words on tape

Prepared by

TYPEWRITTEN TRANSCRIPTION CO.



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