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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
WAGE AND HOUR DIVISION  
Washington

ADDRESS SCHEDULED FOR DELIVERY BY ELLER F. ANDREWS, ADMINISTRATOR  
WAGE AND HOUR DIVISION, U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
Before The  
36TH ANNUAL CONVENTION  
Of The  
INTERNATIONAL UNION OF MINE, MILL AND SHELTER WORKERS  
DENVER, COLORADO, AUGUST 10, 1939

A little less than a year ago I went to Washington to become Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division in the Department of Labor, charged with the enforcement of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which had been enacted to put a floor under wages and a ceiling over hours.

Despite difficulties and discouragements, we have made progress in the months that have come and gone since then. We have been able, by means of the Wage and Hour law, to throw a strong flood light upon some slum areas of American Industry which many people didn't even know existed; areas in which men and women and children had been crushed down to the starvation level until the taxpayers had to come to their relief. I could tell you of girls working in a Massachusetts shoe factory for as little as \$4 or \$5 a week, and, in addition, were forced to falsify their payroll records. I could tell you of a woman in Georgia who walked many miles to a factory, worked eight hours and then trudged home at night with 50 cents as the total reward for her day of toil. I could tell you of women working in an Eastern clothing factory for two cents an hour because their employer said they were "learners". I could enumerate scores, yes hundreds, of such instances. If

it is true that the first step in the eradication of an evil is to clearly understand it, then the strong light that has been thrown by the Wage and Hour law upon some of these shady practices must rank as one of the great gains we have made in the last year. We have done and are doing our best to put a stop to such practices.

There have been even more impressive results. We estimate that 11,000,000 workers are covered by the Act--those employed in interstate commerce, or in the production of goods for interstate commerce. When the law went into effect the 24th of last October, 300,000 of these had their pay raised to bring it up to at least the legal minimum of 25 cents an hour. This coming October these and 250,000 additional workers will receive another pay boost, when the legal minimum is raised to 30 cents an hour. These raises are adding and will add many millions of dollars to the mass purchasing power of the Nation. They are going into the pockets of the people who need them most, and who are sure to spend the money for food, and clothing, and shelter, and the other necessities of life.

It is estimated that before last October 1,380,000 wage earners were working more than 44 hours a week. The Fair Labor Standards Act requires that their working hours be cut back to 44 a week, or that they receive time and a half for overtime--not time and a half 25 cents an hour but time and a half their regular rate. In addition, 367,000 others were working more than 42 hours a week--the standard that goes into effect in October along with the 30-cents-an-hour minimum wage. Next year they either must be given the benefit of shorter hours or more pay for their overtime work.

It has been suggested by some that organized workers, thanks to their union contracts, are receiving so much more than any minimum wage contemplated

by the law that they have little interest in this effort to assist those whom the President has characterized as the ill-fed, the ill-clothed, and the ill-housed third of the Nation. But you and I know that all of us are involved; for even if as a mine or smelter worker you are receiving a minimum of 50 cents an hour and working less than 40 hours a week, there may not be a job for you very long unless there are a sufficient number of people able to pay for the goods which you produce. The smelter worker gets his pay from his employer; the employer gets the money he puts into the pay envelope from the people and the industries who need and can afford to buy his product. There is no other place it can come from.

The low wage worker--pecan sheller or textile worker--whose pay is raised, say, from \$8.50 to \$11 a week isn't going to go out right away and buy a copper roof for his house, but he is going to spend more money with the butcher and the baker and the clothing merchant, and they will earn more profits and be able to pay higher wages to their own employees, and they and some of their employees will be able to use the products in the manufacture of which our smelter worker is employed.

That's the way our economic system works. It takes a lot of people with money to spend to keep all the mines and smelters, the auto factories and the textile mills running full time. And when they are all running full time there are enough jobs to go around and we have what is called prosperity. You simply cannot have prosperity when some millions of people can't buy anything at all and have to be fed and clothed by those of us who have jobs, and when some millions of others earn so little that all they can afford is just enough food to keep body and soul together, and just enough clothing to keep them out of a nudist camp.

A man on the top floor of a ten-story apartment house may feel that his position is pretty secure even when a fire is raging in the basement. He is so far from the scene of excitement that he can't smell the smoke or hear the voices of the firemen. But just the same the fire may be eating away at the foundation of his security.

We are all tied up together in our economic system in such a way, with each of us more or less dependent upon everybody else, that when one man benefits we all benefit in some degree, and when hundreds of thousands, or millions, benefit--even by as little as a dollar or two a week--the degree of benefit to the rest of us may be very great indeed.

Now, I call your attention to a significant fact. Whatever may be the differences between the two great branches of organized labor, there is no difference between their stands on the Wage and Hour law. Unions affiliated with both the C.I.O. and the A.F. of L. held meetings, adopted resolutions endorsing the law and then sent representatives to Capitol Hill to fight for this legislation until it was on the statute books.

In a very real sense this was labor's law. It was written on the statute books because you wanted it. I find nothing in the record to show that the United States Chamber of Commerce or the National Association of Manufacturers ever lifted a hand to get it enacted.

We know, of course, that the benefits of the law reach far beyond the ranks of labor. The public will profit through the impetus to prosperity that must follow a more widespread distribution of mass purchasing power. Far-seeing employers--and there are a good many of them--who voluntarily pay good wages and maintain good working conditions, benefit from the fact that their chiseling competitors are prevented from gaining an advantage over them by

destructive wage cutting.

Yet it is still true to say that the social and economic necessity of this law was brought to the attention of the American people by labor. Its objectives are those that the mine, mill and smelter workers of the West struggled for three-quarters of a century to obtain--freedom from oppressive working hours and a larger share in the national wealth.

The very fact that you are meeting here in this convention is evidence that you do not consider the battle over. You know that eternal vigilance is no less the price of social progress than of political liberty. Merely because you have won victories in the past you are not disbanding your locals. What you have won through union you very properly will insist upon protecting through union.

Suppose now it were suggested that your contracts should be abrogated and the eight-hour day laws repealed by the state legislatures; that such gains as you have been able to make through legislation and by organization be wiped out to return you to the situation in which you found yourselves at the opening of the century? What would you say about that? What would you do about it?

What must you say then, if attacks upon the Fair Labor Standards Act are renewed, attacks which would deprive millions of your fellow workers of the modest benefits they have gained within the last year?

Naturally, the enemies of labor do not admit their full purpose. They do not dare to confess frankly that they are out to repeal the law. Oh, no, they are just trying to be helpful! They merely want a few amendments to "improve" the law, "to make it work better". All they want to do is to take about a million and a half workers, remove from them the wage or hour

protection of the Act, and throw them to the wolves. If they have their way these workers, the most helpless in the Nation, will be thrust back into that reservoir of unprotected labor which the union-busters can play off against organized labor, since their situation would be so desperate they would have to work for any wages, however low, and put up with any working conditions, however intolerable, rather than starve.

Thanks to the President's condemnation, the opposition of organized labor, and the action of the House of Representatives, the effort to emasculate the Wage and Hour law at this session of Congress has been defeated. But it would be naive to think that it was dead. Another attempt may be made when the next session of Congress opens in January.

I believe that if the question of amendments to the Act comes up for consideration before the next session of the Congress that it will be possible to consider it more objectively than has been the case during the past few months. More experience with administration will be available; careful and extensive studies of the economic and social effects of various proposals will have been made. Further, the issue has been laid before the bar of public opinion, and I believe that the decision of the American people will not be to take a backward step, will not be a decision to deprive millions of the lowest paid workers in this country of the bare minimum standard of living.

Meanwhile, the Wage and Hour Division will bend all its efforts toward the enforcement of the Act. The Congress has appropriated much needed additional funds for this purpose, which will enable the Division to proceed with its task of turning the objectives of the law into the concrete reality of improved wages and decent working hours for millions of workers.