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Libby re: Organized Labor

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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It is a real pleasure to be with my friends in Kalispell and particularly with my brothers in the organized labor movement. I still recall with pleasure my contacts with you last spring and summer and, more important, the friendships made on those occasions.

Seeing you meeting like this - with the right to organize and freely assemble - makes me realize the privilege of living in a democracy such as ours. That's what we have fought for in the past; that's what we will continue to fight for in the future. To us labor and democracy are synonymous because organized labor has been the driving force behind almost every worthwhile advance in this country. As a teacher I can say truthfully that nobody can claim a greater degree of credit for establishing our present public school system than can labor. Labor was also the driving force behind the woman suffrage movement, and it was also responsible for the 17th amendment to the Constitution which gave the people the right to vote for their senators and took away the privilege of appointing them from the state legislatures.

Labor has accomplished all this and much more and that is why I repeat that labor and democracy are synonymous. Democracy means the rule of the people, not the rule of a single individual or a relatively few. Of course democracy is not perfect; but contrast this country of ours with other countries in the world today, and you will agree, I am sure, that despite our present difficulties we are infinitely better off than are the totalitarian states.
Nothing is perfect, nothing ever will be perfect; but as long as man lives he will continue to strive for perfection. It is the goal toward which all our energies are directed and through a process of education and cooperation we will keep working toward that end.

In this flight for perfection we have used the mechanism of organizing labor for the purpose of accomplishing the greatest good for the greatest number. We are going to succeed in our efforts but only through evolutionary methods and not through revolutionary ones. We must examine our own house - the house of labor - and keep it, as far as possible, in good working order.

Let no one fool you into the belief that too much freedom for labor presages ill for our country. On the contrary, the opposite is true. Only as long as we have democracy will labor advance, and only so long as organized labor is a vital, driving force will democracy remain. List the European countries today and note the subservient condition of labor in all of them. Contrast that with our democracy and thank God for our fortunate position. We can sit down at a table and discuss our problems in a friendly way; we have a National Labor Relations Act which is fair to both employer and employee, and allows, at long last, the right - and not the privilege - of collective bargaining.

In spite of the difficulties confronting us today in America we are still a fortunate people. How different this is from the situation in so many of our neighboring countries. We are not regimented and told what to do and what not to do. The law we live under is not the law of a dictator, but the law of the people. There is no prohibition of gatherings, such as this Trade and Labor meeting, because we are and will continue to be a free people.