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June 13, 1947

The President
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

In recent years, the course of national economic developments has been greatly influenced - indeed, at times determined - by industrial stoppages and by decisions reached as a by-product of labor-management disputes. In view of the great importance labor-management relations have assumed in influencing general economic conditions, I am deeply concerned about them, as I am about other economic influences which affect our ability to maintain a high and stable level of employment and national income. For this reason, I am taking this opportunity to indicate to you my views about the Taft-Hartley Bill.

The Taft-Hartley Bill presents you with an exceptionally difficult decision because parts of the Bill are highly desirable while other sections are undesirable. The Bill is loosely written; it will be exceedingly difficult to administer; it requires too much Government intervention into the details of collective bargaining; and in some instances, it infringes, more than is desirable, upon the cherished rights of working people. Nevertheless, if fairly and ably administered, as I am confident it will be, its potential inequities and excessive restraints can be avoided. Since the inequities are largely potential and can be avoided, they should not be controlling in your decision in view of the positive benefits to the public and, in the long run, to workers to be obtained from the Bill.

My reasons for urging you to sign the Bill are primarily these:

1. By abolishing the closed shop but permitting the union shop, opportunities for racketeering and uneconomic union practices are greatly reduced without losing the advantages to employers and unions to be obtained from a reasonable measure of union security.

2. In making secondary boycotts illegal, a major irritation to the public and employers is removed without materially harming the rights of workers. Before the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, secondary boycotts sometimes served the desirable purpose of eliminating sweat-shop conditions and unfair wage chiseling. The legitimate need for the use of secondary boycotts is no longer great and the damage to legitimate business and the public which results from its use now warrants its elimination as a union weapon.

3. The economic basis for the intense feelings of insecurity which developed among workers during the depression and which underlie jurisdictional strikes has largely disappeared. Since the Government is committed to a policy of full employment and prospects are generally favorable for a high level of employment for a long time, there is no longer much excuse for the kind of outright conflict among workers over rights to particular jobs which results in jurisdictional strikes. Jurisdictional strikes are never morally justified and they frequently result in serious damage to the public and to employers who can do nothing to correct the situation. The time is now favorable to the elimination of this form of conflict.

4. In forbidding featherbedding practices, the Bill should be helpful in eliminating abuses which have become very serious in some lines. It should be possible to draw a reasonable line between featherbedding of an outright racketeering nature, and those justifiable limitations on output which are needed to avoid excessive speed-up of workers and to assure safe working conditions.

5. The restriction upon bargaining by unions whose officials are communists is an awkward way to accomplish the goal sought, but nevertheless it should prove helpful to most workers and union leaders who because of a sense of responsibility and a belief in democratic processes are frequently placed at a serious disadvantage in preventing irresponsible elements from obtaining undue power in union affairs.

6. The delays and the procedures involved in calling strikes affecting the national health or safety provide the Government an opportunity to protect the public against capricious and unreasonable disruptions. It is unfortunate that this section of the Bill does not provide for Government seizure of the business so as to place responsibility for settlement more evenly upon both parties, but in practice, this omission may not be too important. If it proves to be important, the Bill can be amended later. The Government obviously must have some means to protect itself and the public in the case of such an emergency as developed from the coal strike last year. The power granted to the Government in this Bill is about the minimum that could be expected to be effective. Without it, the Government will be completely helpless to protect the public interest against the actions of irresponsible union leaders.

I realize the Bill has great symbolic significance to organized labor and I suspect that this is a much more important factor influencing union opposition to the Bill than the actual contents of the Bill. In my judgment, the Bill will not affect adversely the legitimate functioning of unions in their efforts to protect the living standards and rights of their members and it will provide greatly increased protection to the public and to workers against abuses and short-sighted practices of union leaders. For this reason, I strongly recommend your acceptance of the Bill.

Yours respectfully,

M. S. Eccles
Chairman