LABOR'S ROLE IN A PERIOD OF MOBILIZATION

25 September 1952

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Mr. Joseph Daniel Keenan, Assistant Administrator of Defense Production Administration, was born in Chicago, Illinois, 5 November 1895. He was educated at St. Jarloth's School, Lewis Institute. He enrolled as an apprentice in Electrical Workers Local 134 in 1914. In 1923 he was elected inspector of Local 134 and in 1926 was made recording secretary. He was elected secretary of the Chicago Federation of Labor in 1937 and appointed by Governor Horner as a member of the Drafting Committee of the Administrative Procedure for Unemployment Compensation and served as a member of the Advisory Committee until 1945. He was appointed by the President of the American Federation of Labor as its representative on the National Defense Council in 1940 and served as assistant to Sidney Hillman. He served in the same capacity in the Office of Production Management and at the setting up of the War Production Board was made associate director serving under Donald Nelson and Wendell Lund. Later he was appointed vice-chairman, Labor Production in 1943. In 1945 he was appointed labor adviser to General Lucius Clay and served intermittently for a little over two years in Germany, his principal responsibility being the reorganizing of trade-unions of Germany. In 1948 he was appointed director of Labor's League for Political Education; in 1951, he was elected secretary-treasurer of the Building and Construction Trades Department, A.F. of L. and that same year was made Assistant Administrator of Defense Production Administration.

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COLONEL VAN WAY: Gentlemen: Today we will have the third in our series of the labor aspects of our Manpower Course. You will recall that last week we had Dr. Chamberlain who talked to us on the historical background of our labor relations. We then had a talk by Mr. Fred Mett, a rather provocative one, I think you will agree, on "Management Responsibilities in Labor Relations." Today we move into the field of "Labor's Role in a Period of Mobilization."

We feel most fortunate to have been able to secure for our discussion today the services of an important official in a large labor union and a man who also has had considerable experience in high governmental positions. Mr. Joseph D. Keenan is our speaker today. I take great pleasure and considerable pride in introducing Mr. Keenan to you and to this platform.

MR. KEENAN: Colonel Van Way and friends: I assure you it is a high honor to come here today to talk to this very distinguished group of Americans on a subject that I think is probably one of the most important and probably one that has more distortion than any one single subject in the country today.

First of all, American labor is very conscious of its role in our whole way of life; I think down through the years it has been one of the prime contributors in developing our way of life to its present standards.

The American labor movement was organized out of necessity, necessity because of the conditions that existed shortly before the turn of the century. Hours were long, wages were low, and it was almost impossible for a man to raise a family in a manner that he would have liked. I can only take my own case in the city of Chicago. I happen to come from a neighborhood where they were all working people, many of them day laborers and truck drivers. In that area also there were Irish and Italians and there were large families. It was quite difficult to make ends meet.

Now in those days it was a rare thing for a boy or a girl in our neighborhood to get a grammar school education. The great concern of most of the people was, when would Johnny or Mary become 14 years of age--when they became 14 years of age, they got a working certificate that allowed them to go out and go to work. If they happened to be in the sixth or seventh grade, they left school and in most cases they never returned.

Because of labor in this country working people organized and were able for years to hold a nucleus of the very skilled crafts. They were able to drag the rest along so today the average working man can with the salary he receives see his children through high school, they can go to college, and, if necessary and they want to sacrifice a bit, they can send them through law or medical school the same as anyone else.

Also instead of working 10 and 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, they are working 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, and they get a chance to spend some time with their families, take an interest in them. I think out of it all there has developed better citizens and better understanding.

In the last few weeks I have attended meetings or gatherings such as this one and have discussed "Labor's Role in Religion" and "Labor's Role in Education." I believe that labor's role in both cases contributes maybe not directly but indirectly. I think if labor can see to it that families have enough to eat and can enjoy the simple necessities, their minds won't drift into stealing and doing other undesirable things.

Years ago in our neighborhood kids didn't have the ordinary things they would like to have had and they started to take something here and take something there; they wound up in trouble, possibly in the penitentiary. But if you give children what they need, give a family what it needs, I think it contributes to the over-all results.

On this great business of war mobilization, American labor is fully conscious of its responsibilities. Contrary to what the newspapers would lead you to believe, we know that if this country should ever fall, it means that we all fall. We in the labor movement are ready at all times to make the contribution necessary in order to get the materiel and get you the people that are necessary in order to build the plants, to man the plants so the equipment is at hand any time you need it.

I was first called to Washington in 1940. I was called by Mr. Hillman shortly after the National Defense Council was set up; I suppose all of you remember back to those hectic days. We started a program from scratch; everything was needed; we couldn't single out one item that we could center on. The draft was just passed.

Cantonment camps were needed; they had to be built. Then we had to have airplanes and we had to build airplane plants. We needed ships; we had to build shipyards. We needed ammunition; we had to build ammunition plants. We needed shell loading plants and all the rest. Then there were chemical plants and many other different types of plants, all wanted in 1940, 1941, and 1942, into 1943.

They called us in. We had gone through a long period of depression and the skilled trades which were necessary to do a lot of this work and been dissipated because the men left their ranks. They couldn't find work and had to look for something else. The labor movement of this country took on the job of trying to find those old members, retrain them, give them refresher courses, and move them to the different sections of the country where they were needed.

I traveled all over the country in those days. I suppose many of you men were on some of the construction jobs at the start where the people were actually living in packing boxes; they were living in their cars. The plants in those days were far removed from the cities. There were 30 or 40 miles to travel every day if they lived in town. If there weren't facilities in town, then they got as close to the cite as possible and got set up as best they could.

That was an obligation that we felt we were duty bound to carry out. I think we were builders in that particular case and we had done it before. I never heard anybody complain. They probably griped at the job but they stayed there and built these big plants, shipyards, and all the rest in a minimum of time and with a minimum of distrubances.

Now in 1942 and 1943, after we had the plants built, we got into the special jobs. First of all there was the landing-craft program, the high octane program, the rubber program, and then the Manhattan Project. I can well remember going around the country recruiting people to go out to Hanford, Washington, and to go down to Tennessee in order to man the plants so that we could get the bomb on its way.

I remember being out in Hanford during a few of the bad days when they had sand storms. Anyone that worked out there worked at a great sacrifice because there was plenty of work back home. (They were satisfied to live in barracks, separated from their families.) Then, of course, we had people all over the world doing work for the Army, Navy, and Air Corps.

I think one of the great contributions was made by our members who were up in years--40, 45, 50--who joined the Seabees, and I am only taking the report of the Navy as to the job the Seabees did. They were all over the world. They built our air strips in conquered countries and in general they made a name for themselves.

I think that most people in the Government and most people in the services have a feeling that we in the labor movement can't assume the same responsibility as a businessman or a citizen in taking over important jobs in the services and in the Government generally. I think we are just the same as any other human, that if we become an employee of the United States Government, we recognize the terms and we are

willing to accept the terms and, of course, under the conditions. I also know that, where we are taken in, we can contribute.

I don't say that every person coming out of labor is A-1, just the same as everyone coming out of business is not A-1. They have to find their level. But I know that labor men who have reached the top in their international union or in their local union just followed one of two choices. We can read in the papers everyday about great men in industry who started at the bench and got to a point where they had a choice to either stay with the employer or move with the union. In the cases where they stayed with the employer, many of them became presidents and vice-presidents of these big corporations; and of the men who stayed with the labor unions, many became local officers and national officers.

The point I want to make is that both kinds of these men have the same know-how in the business they come from. They know more because many times they serve their apprenticeship and they work on all the jobs in the plants. When you talk about a condition in a plant, they know offhand what you are talking about.

I think we can contribute in every phase of mobilization. We have the men who build the plants; we have the men who outfit the plants; we have the men who operate the machinery. I know that in the Air Forces, in the Navy, and in the Army the equipment made today is beyond anyone's imagination; and as long as we keep this practical ability out of the scheme of things, I think we are missing a bet. I am sure--and people just have to be practical--that a lawyer or a banker cannot contribute as to the production and the manufacturing of the complicated items that are being developed these days.

I think that if we can only get the impression throughout the Government that these labor men have no horns, they will contribute just as much as anyone sitting here and probably will have a greater knowledge than many of you on the things that concern you.

I have been around the Government off and on for 12 years and I think I know the feeling in most cases. I hate to say this but I think many of the people in high places in the Government feel that they have to take on a few labor people because they have a certain amount of nuisance value; and because they are being pressured they are willing to pay for that. I want to say that so far as American labor and so far as the people we represent are concerned, we don't care to go into the Government on that kind of basis. We want to go in only on one basis and that is this one: We want to go in for what we can contribute, what we can do to help do the job that you are assigned to do; I know very well that we can do it.

I happened to spend five years with all the agencies making up the War Production Board (WPB) and had occasions to meet with the top men of the services during that period. Day after day we were called upon to do certain jobs for General Somervell, Admiral Robinson, General Clay, and the rest. We were always on to try to get more men on a job or try to get more production--go out and try to get the things that were needed.

I believe generally that everyone drifts with his own people. You men in the Army know one another. You went to school together and when you talk about a person, you know him personally. You at least know him and you can call him; you have some basis of getting to him. I think one of the great mistakes in the services is that they don't bring in labor people who know the leaders throughout the United States.

I think if you have trouble in San Francisco, there are people in the labor movement who can call the people in San Francisco. They can lay out the importance of what is going on and why they should help us accomplish what we are trying to do--that is very important and should be considered all the way down the line.

I don't think you can bring in outsiders. Sure, our people will be courteous to them. They will listen to their story, but generally speaking you must have someone who knows his way around in the different cities, knows his way around in the international unions so that when you talk to them they will listen to you, and if they don't deliver in a few days, you know you are getting the business and you will have to do something, keep the heat on, in order to accomplish whatever you are after.

We had many matters we were called upon to do. I remember in the high octane gasoline program there was Admiral Morrell; I forget who was with the Army. We sent two or three men traveling all over the country, meeting with these people because we didn't feel we were getting the production necessary in order to get the program accomplished. These men visited every job, they called meetings in order to bring them up to date as to the importance of that high octane program. It was the same on rubber; the same on 8-inch guns.

Then after the war many of our people went to Europe. I happened to be the labor adviser to General Clay. My job at that time was to try to find the old leaders who were in power prior to Hitler's taking over. These men were being sought out to reorganize unions so they could be used for re-establishing a democracy in Germany.

We had to have labor people in order to meet with these men. The Army had conquered them and it took a long while for them to thaw out and even deal with us. But after the labor men had been there a year or so and after they got to understand us and came to know that we

were there for one purpose only--to try to reorganize their unions, to help them to re-establish themselves--then only did we get their confidence and their support.

I am happy to say that the officers and members of the unions that we organized in Berlin are today one of the most militant groups against the Communists and the Russians. They have taken a stand. A few of them have been taken away and have disappeared and the others are in constant fear, but they are standing up and are fighting the Russians right straight down the line. Their lives are daily in danger, but I think that group will stand up until the end.

Also the unions that we organized in our own zone in Germany have come through and have demonstrated that they are willing to support our program down the line. Of course, there is a lot of politics over there and many of our unions are tied up pretty closely with the political parties, but generally speaking those trade-unions have come through and we are using them as a force against the Russians.

Now we realize in labor that wherever totalitarian government has been set up and has taken over one of the first groups it destroys is the trade-unions. That was the first official act practically of Hitler after he came into power on 1 May 1933. In one day he destroyed the trade-unions which had been a force in Germany for almost 100 years. That was the case in Argentina; it was the case in Italy; and it was the case in Russia. And it will be the case anywhere attempts are made to set up totalitarian governments because as long as we can keep the trade-union strong, we will have a force that will fight this kind of reaction.

Now in the last year labor has been quite active in the mobilization program. We probably haven't been so active as we should have been. We probably haven't put enough people in the Government. But there have been a number who have gone in and they have contributed. I believe we haven't devoloped an urgency in this particular emergency that we did in the last war and I know that there has been a kind of holding back of our people going in. I think that the interest diminishes every day, but I am sure that if this thing should change, our people are ready and willing to devote all their time in a program that you men here will develop.

American labor has a responsibility. We have 15 million members and if we are to do our job, we will have to get in and support you in every way possible.

In closing I just want to leave this thought with you: I am sure that the people in our movement are as concerned in the whole program as you are, and I hope that ways and means will be found so we can take men and put them into the parts of your program which have to do with

developing manufacturing and production. We also have the building construction and that part of your program which has to do with the building and manufacturing of the items that are necessary to carry out an all-out war.

President Green, George Meany, Dick Gray, Jimmy Brownlow, Bob Gritta, and I happen to be the men here in Washington who work the closest with you--Dick Gray and I are on construction; Jimmy Brownlow and Bob Gritta are on building ships and on procurement; and George Meany and William Green are on the over-all policy level. They are all anxious to do what they can.

I know there is a breach between us. I hope that by getting together we can narrow that gap and sit down together, then lay this whole program on the table so that we can get our teeth into it and help you get the men necessary to do the job. I think that up to now that hasn't been the case. We get disappointed. We feel that we are not wanted. Maybe it is just imagination on our part.

In all my dealing with the military people, with the Defense Department, I find that if they get to know us, there is nothing that is kept from us; but it takes a long time to develop that confidence. If you can see your way clear to bring in our people, don't be afraid. Let them know everything because their reactions are the same as yours.

I can well remember in the WPB days when we received the casualties every morning. When we received the reports from the Pacific and after the landings in Europe, you couldn't help but get into the work and do everything possible to speed up the program.

I think the only way our people can do any good is to know what is going on, know what the casualties are, know what is happening every day. If they have that knowledge, they can keep it a secret; they can use the information to enlist all-out support.

I am happy to be here this morning. I hope that out of this we will develop a closer relationship so that we can do for you what is necessary in order to get your programs done as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Keenan, in your talk and in several other talks that we have had, it has been pretty strongly brought out that one of the big items in this over-all problem of labor and management is human relations, getting it solved that way. We have, prior to this, discussed John L. Lewis and Mr. Bridges. Say, for instance, you are afflicted with them for 35 years and they tie up the country over a long period of time, what do you do about that condition?

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MR. KEENAN: I suppose those particular cases would come in the category of a national emergency. Up to now I believe you feel the same as we do; we are against compulsion. We believe that--and you might as well and I know you understand-John Lewis is a person and so is Bridges. I think there are people in American labor who have far more power but they probably handle it a little differently.

I think that labor generally is opposed to any tie-up of the country. I think that we have a responsibility and we should assume that responsibility. I think we are coming of age.

In my experience in the WPB we had a number of serious problems in the early days, but one of the most important was after the landing at Omaha, Utah, and the "Red Ball Express" was set up. I think that was the term. I remember they were using tires at a great rate. Then, of course, you increased your operations in the Air Corps and the number of tires that went out was tremendous. It was necessary for us to try to get more production back here in the United States.

General Knudsen and I were assigned to Akron for about two weeks, talking to these men there and trying to get them to see the picture. We would go along fine until we got to a certain point and then they would always come up with this one: "You remember what they did in 1930; you know what they did in 1931; you know what they did in 1932," and that history is there.

Although all the men who were in charge of those concerns are dead, there are new people running the concerns--in this particular case there are four or five new executives in management and they are far more liberal than the old men, the rugged individualists who ran those companies 30 or 40 years ago--that is the history. It is the history of the mines. Everybody knows the condition that prevailed in the mines prior to the passing of the coal act, it was very bad.

I hope that time will change it; I think it is changing. We don't have that relationship in the new industries, one example such as airplanes. In the aircraft industry they are all young men who have come up. They got into industry since 1925 or 1926 and they have a better understanding. But in coal, in rubber, in auto, in steel industries--not so much in steel--and a number of others we have a bad history that time only can correct. I think the statements in the last few days are an indication of what is happening.

Another thing about coal that most people don't understand is that generally it was never an industry of more than 100 days. It was only during the war that the coal people had full employment. They had a strike every year, but a strike didn't mean anything because if they didn't strike in April and get off, they were off in September anyway. There were only so many days of work and they could strike and call it

a strike because they knew at sometime during the year they would be out of work for three or four months.

We feel the effects of the coal strikes today because of full employment and also we are shipping coal all over the world. But I understand they are now back to a three-or four-day week. Of course in metallurgic coal and in the coal they use for making steel, they work the year round and a strike would affect them. But even then, I think they have a 90-day supply of coal above ground. I hope that answers your question.

QUESTION: In view of the importance of utilizing our manpower during an emergency, do you think it is feasible or practical and do we have an organization to take a census of all our labor skills throughout the country now or in the near future so that labor can really be utilized and fill its important role in case of emergency?

MR. KEENAN: Yes, I think the Labor Department through its Bureau of Labor Statistics has all that information. In the National Resources Board I think there was a section set aside to try to develop the skill and know-how of the working force of this country; also to try to develop a program to disperse them in case of emergency and set up factories out of what they call the danger area and make arrangements for shifting if the emergency ever comes.

QUESTION: Has there actually been a registration or canvass of everyone between the critical ages, and, if so, is that on file and being maintained?

MR. KEENAN: No, I don't think so. I think the Bureau of Labor Statistics probably works through the trade-unions where they have the membership and they know their skills--not to an Nth degree--but they have a general over-all knowledge. But nothing has been done along the lines of the question you asked.

QUESTION: In the matter of settling labor disputes, it appears to me that we have at one end of the table representatives of management and at the other end the representatives of labor. Then there is a third element which represents the public or the Government. We have heard a lot of criticism about this third element being partial either to management or to labor. Do you have any suggestions or ideas on how we can strengthen that third element--that public element, such as the Government man or the college professor--to insure more impartial decisions on their parts?

MR. KEENAN: No, I don't think so. I think you have human relations there. Generally speaking, the impartial man is there mostly to keep them together. Now if we can keep them sitting down at the table, there is always a chance for a settlement. Once they break off you get into a stalemate; then the job is bringing them back together.

I think an impartial man, whether he is a college man or a lawyer, who gets involved in the disputes, is useless. I think they ought to take him out and bring in a new one. I think the only thing that an individual contributes is this: First of all, that both sides trust him; with that, then it is his job to keep them together. If we can keep them together, 9 times out of 10, we will settle the dispute. It is only when they break off and go different ways that we get into trouble.

QUESTION: Toward the end of World War II, there was proposed a national service law which would presumably have directed people with various skills to various areas of industry. Do you think, assuming the emergency became great, such a service law would be desirable or would labor support it?

MR. KEENAN: I think it is a point that bears on what I said before. If we have labor people in high places who know first-hand how conditions are, how grave they are, and if we get to that point and they understand the whole problem, they would go to their people and recommend any kind of an act in order to protect our welfare. But I don't think you can get labor or anybody else to support anything that they don't know anything about. You can't give the American people a bill of particulars without their taking part. That was one of the dangers of the national service act. Labor was never brought in. You had all the cards in your hands. We didn't know anything about it. I think our people will support any act that is necessary in an emergency, if they are in on it. But I don't think they will support it without a lot of kicking if it is just handed to them.

QUESTION: Specifically what is labor's criticism of the Taft-Hartley Act?

MR. KEENAN: First of all the Taft-Hartley Act was developed in an era of, I think, when they were out to get us, so to speak. Prior to 1935, business in this country generally had all the cards; it controlled. It was difficult to organize. We could only organize skilled people. Generally speaking, we had the local government against us, the State government. We had the judges who were issuing injunctions, and there was never a major strike in this country that lasted over three weeks that we did not lose because of this interference.

It was difficult to organize; if men were caught organizing, they were discharged. They had no redress. I think it would be well for you people to read the La Follette report on his findings as to the operation of labor spies prior to the passage of the Wagner Act.

No matter where you went in the country, you found that people who had taken part in the organization of unions before and gone on strike were blackballed, so it was difficult to get people in. They passed

the Wagner Act. Probably the Wagner Act was an advantage to labor but not too much, in my opinion. There were some sections that should have been amended prior to 1947.

During the period of the Wagner Act we were able to organize in this country about 11 or 12 million people. Many of the big industries in this country never accepted that. They always felt that they were going to get their day in court; they would get a change of administration; and they would pass a law that would practically nullify the gains that labor made.

In 1946 the voters elected the Eightieth Congress, and it seemed to be the feeling in this country that labor had become strong and that "It ought to have its wings clipped." Two or three committees were set up and they started developing a program. There was a Labor Committee in the House and a Labor Committee in the Senate. They had hearings lasting for months and there were quite a number of complaints. Both Hartley and Taft tried to write a law correcting all the complaints of the people of this country and out of it they passed the Taft-Hartley Act.

The most important thing in the act, as labor sees it, is the injunction feature. In 1930 we passed the Norris-LaGuardia Act which outlawed injunction; the Taft-Hartley Act put it back.

In my opinion on many of the features of the act, labor was driven to its actions because of conditions.

The second important thing, so far as labor is concerned, is the secondary boycott. That is the only means we have of getting ahead, by helping one another. I come from Chicago and I remember in my early days in the Chicago Federation of Labor, the building trades were fairly, strong. We had a ladies' garment workers and millinery workers' movement to organize their manufacturing groups. They would organize a plant and sign an agreement and shortly thereafter these firms would pick up and move out of town.

I don't know whether you know Indiana and southern Illinois, but I can remember going into Elkhart, Marion and other towns. In the center of the city I remember they had a placard saying, "Move to Indiana. We will furnish you manufacturing plants and guarantee you labor at 35 cents an hour." When these people moved out, we would ask our members not to buy what they manufactured, a boycott against their products.

Control and all the administration have been taken from the officers. In the old days if we found Communists in the organization, we chased them out of the union. Today the only way we can discipline a member or remove him from the union is for nonpayment of dues.

There are four or five other features. The closed shop has been banned. The closed shop was brought about by the labor and management people together. A building contractor or a printer or anyone who works on a contract basis or on a job basis has ups and downs. With the closed shop--take the building industry which I know best, I am a contractor--I have nobody working; today something happens in this building. It is gutted and you need to have it restored right away. You call me on the phone and say, "I want you to get started. We want this building repaired immediately." You may need 100 electricians. Now I can call the union. I can get 100 men and I can figure that job on a lump-sum basis because I know the union has qualified mechanics to do the job.

The same way with a printer. The printer may not have a job in his plant and he may get a contract of a sizable amount. He will need pressmen. He will need typographical people. He can call the union. He will get qualified mechanics. That was the basis of our closed shop and it was an exchange back and forth.

Now the union had one obligation--it had to furnish skilled mechanics. Between the contractors and ourselves we set up an apprentice program which I think is one of the finest in the world. But that is one of the features which were cut out. You can go on all day.

I think Taft will give you some idea because in the Eighty-first Congress he offered 23 amendments to his own bill. I personally feel that in order to clear the atmosphere they ought to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act. Bring in an outstanding group of employers and labor people and sit down and develop an act that is satisfactory to everyone.

I don't think there is enough time to talk about what is wrong from our point of view. Maybe you won't agree, but we feel definitely that if this act is to remain on the books and is fully applied, it can destroy the unions in this country. That is not idle gossip; that is a fact.

QUESTION: Mr. Keenan, would you like to discuss the specialization within the labor union? I have in mind, for example, a building or a house and your plumbers are not permitted to tie a wire for an electrician; your electricians are not permitted to do anything in the matter of screwing pipes together. Would you like to discuss how you feel, if this acts toward efficiency of things that get done?

MR. KEENAN: I think that is one of the real serious subjects that we must consider, particularly in the building trades, the jurisdictional disputes over things you just mentioned. I think that we are getting to where we are trying to correct some of the things that cause these jurisdictional disputes.

These charter grants to the international unions were issued probably about 1900, 1904, 1905, and today the changes are such that many of these industries are dying out. Many trades are dying out and there is maybe a new process. Although it is not in the foreseeable future, probably someday there will have to be a going over of the charter grants and probably try to work out a program where we can eliminate the things you say.

QUESTION: I understand that about one-fourth of the labor force is unionized in this country. You mentioned a while ago that it was desirable for labor to be conscious of its role in mobilization. We are here studying mobilization. It might be desirable for labor to participate in this course of study. Assuming that that were so, how would you pick the people?

MR. KEENAN: We would try to get qualified people out of the International Unions, probably in the family of the Internationals who were qualified in the general role of the union.

I think where we could be most effective would be in production, in the development of programs of production and here we are closely allied. I don't think we have any right getting into your tactical business. I think that is your job. The manufacturing of tanks, constructing buildings, manufacturing airplanes and equipment, I think, is our field. I think on the other we have no place, only if you wanted to keep us informed as to what was happening. I feel if there is an outstanding labor man, closely associated with you, when he goes before a group, they take for granted whatever he is requesting is necessary or he wouldn't be making the request.

QUESTION: You touched on the subject and we heard it a couple of times prior to this in regard to participation. Assuming that we are approaching a period of mobilization or are in mobilization, is there any organizing going on or planning between labor and management to meet that period? If not, do you think they should get together and at least draw a planning structure of what they need to do to expedite and delineate problems that have existed in the past and unquestionably will exist in the future--the disposition of labor, the movement of labor, the facilities, and many factors that will unquestionably affect labor at any point? How many of those problems could we settle or at least review and eliminate at this time?

MR. KEENAN: No, there is nothing being done along that line. I think probably the building trades are being used to recruit a force for some of this supersecret business, but that is done with the union. I don't think management is brought in at all. I don't think there is any program today where labor and management are brought in with the services to go over programs and make some kind of suggestions and do their bit in trying to develop the over-all plans.

QUESTION: Mr. Keenan, you have mentioned in your talk that there was certainly laxity among labor regarding the period of partial mobilization which we are in now. Would you care to comment on the major cause or causes of that laxity and the remedy for the problem in general?

MR. KEENAN: First of all, they are not informed. I think Al Hayes was the only labor man in the Department of Defense. I am talking now about an outright labor man in the whole Department of Defense, and I think he was working part time.

We don't have the information. If we had 8, 10, 12, or 15 people working in the Department of Defense, we would get together like you officers get together. We labor people have four or five meetings a year and we have our conventions. Naturally, if you are doing a job, you talk about it. The reason that there is a lack of interest is because up to this very minute we have not been taken in at all. We had to fight our way into Wilson's show; we had to beg our way into the National Production Authority and the Defense Production Authority, and then there are just one or two people. We are just stepchildren, so to speak, and I don't know of anybody in American labor today who has any information at all, only what we get out of reports issued to Congress and what we get out of newspapers. I don't think we can contribute if we don't know. I think there is an emergency, but the emergency is here in Washington; 100 miles away from Washington, nobody ever thinks about it.

QUESTION: You have gone to considerable length on labor being informed as to what goes on. I would appreciate it if you would give us a little more specific idea of what type of information you are wanting. In the present situation I think everyone, including the general public, knows that certainly we are in a period of partial mobilization. You have your responsibilities in that. What other type of information are you driving at?

MR. KEENAN: Well, I think there is information that you have--take the Korean hostilities--such as reports. You have reports every day as to what is happening, and I know that in the Department of Defense there are hundreds and hundreds of people brought in from business. They are on the inside and get information which they are able to pass on.

I think the things which awaken people are the horrors of war, particularly the casualties and the conditions under which they have to fight, such as is going on in Korea. I also believe that if we have men from organized labor who can get that information, they can use it in the best interests of the program. It would allow us to alert our international officials, who in turn would pass it down to the local union heads and to the rank and file.

I think that is one of the things which touched me in the last war. I read the reports every morning, the casualties in Europe and the Far East, and what was happening to our Navy in the Pacific. It reacted so that you just couldn't go to bed at night feeling contented with your accomplishments for the day. If you want our support wholeheartedly, we should be given the same consideration as the banker, the lawyer, the president of a corporation. I think we can contribute just as much and we can take care of the secrets and protect them just the same as any other citizen. But up to now, I am sorry to say, I don't think we get that kind of consideration.

I know in the WPB when you go in, if you are a labor fellow, they wait to see who you are and how you are going to react. I don't think you will get the full impetus of what is possible in America when you leave this great force out in the cold. They are out in the cold.

QUESTION: I understand in reading that some of the labor unions have the policy of not requiring maximum output by their employees. An example of this would be only 300 bricks being laid today by bricklayers when normally they would have laid 800. Dock workers load only so much tonnage a day and production lines only allow so many articles to pass. Would you care to comment on this policy and if this is the case in partial mobilization, would they change in full emergency?

MR. KEENAN: I think you have some of it. You see there again the labor unions in the last 10 years were operating in an unusual atmosphere. Prior to 1940, in the building trades, for instance, if a fellow worked 100 days, he got a long year and there was a tendency to slow down, especially if he could see a laying off coming. There may be some of it today but in the bricklayers' case, I think there is a different type of construction.

Today you have a course of bricks in the front; they call it veneer. And you have nothing to back it up. In the old days you had a course of face brick and in the back you had maybe two or three courses of common brick. They just threw that in, they just threw a little mortar in and there was no attention paid to it. But today you will notice the way homes are being constructed, they are built with lumber, with a tar paper face, and then they just have the single course of brick and it takes longer to lay brick today than it did 10 or 12 years ago.

I have made a check. I have been in a movement just to check what you are saying, especially about the bricklayer. I find that there is very little loafing, it takes that long to lay the bricks. It will take 8 hours to lay 400 or 500 bricks with the new type of construction and the way buildings are being built today. There may be some loafing.

Another thing you have with bricklayers, you don't get young people into that work. I believe the average age today is 50 among 50,000 members. They are in tough shape. It is the same with plasterers. It is hard to get young people into plastering.

But if we get into an emergency, I am not afraid of the American workman. He will go out and work night and day and he will set these things aside. If and when an emergency comes, it will take all people in labor to get maximum production. It will be the leader's obligation to go out and see that laxity in work is stopped as he will not condone it.

QUESTION: Mr. Keenan, featherbedding is a fairly common term today that describes the results of technological progress in industry. There is bound to be that lag between employment in an industry that has been succeeded by something else that is better and will produce more. Do you have any plans for the orderly transition between one industry and another one to develop something better?

MR. KEENAN: No, we haven't.

QUESTION: Isn't that extremely important and wouldn't that be one of the responsibilities of labor, especially in a mobilization period?

MR. KEENAN: I think that probably in situations such as you talk about we would have to depend on the Government. I am talking now about the Labor Department in order to develop information on what is going on. The unions with the Labor Department could work out a program for making the transition you talk about.

There has been a lot of talk of what must be done in case of an atomic bomb attack here in America if there is another war. We will probably feel the effects of bombing for the first time and I suppose the enemies would center their efforts in the large industrial areas. We must have a program so that if they knock out a steel mill, we will have a secondary factory to which we can move our people. I think such a program as that will have to be worked out with the services, the Labor Department, and the unions; but up to now, I don't think anything has been done on it.

Mr. Wright from the Labor Department is sitting here. Has anything been done on that?

MR. WRIGHT: Not definitively. A lot of thought has been given to it.

MR. KEENAN: I know nothing has been done so far as I am concerned.

QUESTION: Figures that you have mentioned this morning and figures that we have heard from other sources also indicate that only about

one-third of the labor force is in organized labor. Is there some logical explanation as to why the other two-thirds are not? Is it because management has succeeded in throwing up road blocks to keep you out? Or what is it? Is it that the individuals don't feel the need for organization?

MR. KEENAN: In the labor force is the agricultural worker and there has never been an effective agricultural union in this country. I don't know but I think the agricultural worker is about half of the labor force. The other 15 or 20 million--I don't know what the figure for agriculture is--we haven't got to them; maybe their conditions are such that they don't feel they need a union. There are a number who belong to independent unions. That will amount to only 2 or 3 million. There are a lot of self-employed--store owners who are in the labor force where they have one, two, or three people for whom we have no organization. But I think the percentage is about the average that you find all over the world. About 25 percent of the workable force belongs to trade-unions. We are increasing our membership all the time. I don't suppose we will ever see the day in this country where we will have 100 percent organization. We don't know what the reasons are that they don't join.

QUESTION: I would like to hear your comments on labor's activities in politics, that is its ambitions, policies, and things along that line either in general or specifically.

MR. KEENAN: That is right down my line. I think that we in the American Federation of Labor have followed a policy that was instituted by Samuel Gompers of so-called reward our friends and punish our enemies. It was just a policy. It was just a policy of words and, generally speaking, we never took a very active part in politics. So up to 1947, so far as the American Federation of Labor was concerned, our politics was just so-so.

With the passing of the Taft-Hartley Act a change was made. At the 1947 convention of the American Federation of Labor, they passed a resolution instructing the officers to set up a political arm of the AFL; they set up Labor's League for Political Education. This League was set up to inform our people as to what our programs are and how the Members of Congress voted on those programs.

Now we started in 1948 and we felt we were successful. We did not know where to put our fingers on whatever success we had, but I think it was Truman going about the country that got our people interested and got them to the polls. We are in politics now to stay.

We have found that we can't compete with the newspapers. First of all, you know the attitude they take toward us, and today we are having a national campaign which they want to settle on mink coats and deep

freezes. We don't feel that those are the important issues in this campaign. I think the important issues are, first of all, our international or foreign policy and we in labor are concerned about social security, housing, and the bread and butter issues that have made America.

I think our concern is that in this country as in other countries there are people who would like to turn the pages of history back 30 or 40 years. They would have us in the bread lines and they would like to have us where they could make us toe the mark.

Our job is to keep people informed. The job of the Labor's League for Political Education is to try to get our people to read issues, read about laws in Congress which are being passed every day. I come from Chicago and we have four or five newspapers out there, and the important laws that are being discussed here in Congress which affect every one of us are never heard of out there--once in a while appears a little space here and there. I think there is a danger in this country because the electorate do not get both sides of the story. I don't know how much influence we will have on our membership. We feel, however, that if we can get our people to read and to start thinking about the laws and can apply these laws to their own personal welfare, I know they will vote right.

On the other hand if they don't get that information, they will depend on the newspapers and on what they hear on the air. But the American people are intelligent and you can't fool them if they know the facts. I think if American labor, not only organized but unorganized, can force newspapers to give the full story not only of this country but other countries, you can't fool the American people. They know where they are going and they know how to vote. We in the AFL have Labor's League and we will develop it through trial and error.

I want to leave this thought with you: The AFL and American labor generally are for the two-party system and for the free-enterprise system; people who think they can run roughshod over the working people of this country are just foolish.

Now they talk about socialism and all this other business. All that we have worked for in this country is a better life for everyone--social security, a minimum wage, the right to join a union, and now health insurance. Those are issues that we feel are necessary in order that a person can have an easier road in this life.

Now I don't know how successful we are going to be, but it is a new venture and we are going to stay with it. I think as we go along Labor's League for Political Education and PAC, contrary to what the newspapers and everybody else says, will be a great contribution to the American way of life.

COLONEL VAN WAY: Mr. Keenan, time makes us close this meeting now; I am sorry. I know you have been attending the convention and have been working very hard, losing your sleep. You are tired, but you have come down and given us a fine lecture. I am sure I speak for Admiral Hague, the students, and the faculty when I say, "Well done." Thank you, sir.

(2 Dec 1952--350)S/rrb