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Speech at Machinist Conference

Edmund S. Muskie

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REMARKS BY

SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE

AT MACHINIST CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 1, 1971

*One kind of pollution
one hasn't been seen
E. S. -
indicated out
talk*

MANY YEARS AGO, THERE WAS A MILL OWNER IN MAINE

WHO HAD A HABIT OF FLICKING HIS WHIP AS HE DROVE ALONG THE

ROAD -- SPLITTING A HORSEFLY IN TWO -- OR SLAPPING A BUMBLEBEE

TO THE GROUND.

ONE DAY A FRIEND HAPPENED TO ASK WHY HE REFUSED TO

USE HIS WHIP ON A NEST OF HORNETS THAT WAS HANGING BY THE

ROADSIDE.

"WELL, I'LL TELL YOU," THE MILL OWNER REPLIED,

"THEY'RE JUST TOO DAMNED ORGANIZED."

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

IS A SUCCESS BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN "TOO DAMNED ORGANIZED"

FOR THOSE WHO WOULD SNUFF OUT THE RIGHTS AND HOPES OF

AMERICAN WORKING MEN AND WOMEN. BY BEING ORGANIZED YOU

HAVE GAINED JOB SECURITY, DECENT WAGES AND WORKING

CONDITIONS, AND THOSE NECESSITIES OF LIFE -- HEALTH

INSURANCE, RETIREMENT INCOME, GROUP INSURANCE, AND

VACATIONS -- OFTEN CALLED FRINGE BENEFITS.

TRADE UNIONS ARE MEASURED BY THEIR SUCCESS IN
RESPONDING TO AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF THEIR MEMBERS. THAT
SAME TEST APPLIES TO OUR SOCIETY AS A WHOLE; AND BY THAT
TEST THERE ARE MANY AREAS WHERE OUR SOCIETY IS FAILING ITS
MEMBERS.

WOULD ANY UNION SETTLE FOR LESS THAN A SUBSISTENCE
WAGE FOR ANY OF ITS WORKERS?

WOULD ANY UNION SETTLE FOR A HEALTH INSURANCE SYSTEM
THAT COVERED MEMBERS ONLY AFTER THEY RETIRED?

WOULD ANY UNION ACCEPT A CONTRACT THAT OFFERED NO
REAL REDRESS FOR WORKERS' GRIEVANCES -- AND OFTEN NO WAY EVEN
TO REGISTER A COMPLAINT?

NO AMERICAN LABOR UNION WOULD ACCEPT SUCH CONDITIONS
IN 1971.

BUT OUR SOCIETY TOLERATES SUCH CONDITIONS FOR MILLIONS
OF AMERICANS: FOR AMERICANS BARELY SURVIVING WITHOUT JOBS --
FOR AMERICANS WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO SEE A DOCTOR OR GO TO
A HOSPITAL -- FOR AMERICANS CHEATED OR OVERCHARGED FOR
USELESS GOODS OR INADEQUATE SERVICE, WHO HAVE NO WAY TO
MAKE EFFECTIVE COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE GOODS AND SERVICES THEY
CAN AFFORD.

IF OUR SOCIETY CANNOT RESPOND TO THESE AND OTHER
NEEDS, WE HAVE FAILED TO ACHIEVE THE PURPOSES OF OUR DEMOCRATIC
SYSTEM.

A FREE SOCIETY IS BASED ON A CONFIDENCE THAT THE SYSTEM WILL WORK TO INSURE FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE, TO GUARANTEE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOBS, TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTS OF EVERY CITIZEN TO HIGH QUALITY HEALTH CARE, TO PROTECT EVERY CITIZEN AGAINST POLLUTED AIR AND WATER, AND TO SEE TO IT THAT CONSUMERS WILL NOT BE CHEATED IN THE MARKET PLACE.

TRUST IN SOCIETY HAS BEEN DAMAGED WHEN UNEMPLOYMENT STANDS AT SIX PERCENT -- WHEN MEN AND WOMEN MUST STAND IN LINE -- WEEK AFTER WEEK -- UNTIL THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE EXPIRES . . . WHEN THE SAVINGS OF A LIFETIME ARE WITHDRAWN FOR THE NECESSITIES OF CLOTHING AND SHELTER AND FOOD. . . AND WHEN MEN AND WOMEN ARE DEPRIVED OF THE DIGNITY OF WORK.

CONFIDENCE IN SOCIETY ERODES WHEN HIGH QUALITY
MEDICAL CARE IS A PRIVILEGE ONLY A FEW CAN AFFORD. . .WHEN
HOSPITALIZATION ROBS A FAMILY OF ITS SAVINGS, AND WHEN THE
COST OF DRUGS CLIMBS OUT OF REACH OF THE AVERAGE CITIZEN.

TRUST IN SOCIETY ERODES WHEN WE LOSE \$10 BILLION EACH
YEAR IN WASTED OR USELESS AUTO REPAIRS, \$45 BILLION EACH
YEAR TO MONOPOLISTIC PRICING, AND \$8 BILLION EACH YEAR TO
THE OIL IMPORT QUOTA PROGRAM.

TRUST IN SOCIETY IS BROKEN WHEN COMPANIES FAIL TO
ANSWER CONSUMER'S QUESTIONS AND DO NOT RESPOND TO HIS COMPLAINTS.

WHO HAS COME TO THE CONSUMER'S DEFENSE?

TRADE UNIONS, COOPERATIVES, RALPH NADER AND OTHER
CONSUMER ADVOCATES, THE CONSUMER ASSEMBLY, AND LOCAL CITIZEN'S
GROUPS ARE ATTACKING SHODDY GOODS, INADEQUATE SERVICES, AND
INFLATED PRICES IN THE MARKET PLACE. WE OWE THEM ALL OUR
SUPPORT. BUT YOU AND I AS INDIVIDUALS OR IN VOLUNTARY
GROUPS CANNOT FINALLY SOLVE SUCH PROBLEMS. WE MUST RELY
ON OUR GOVERNMENT TO ACT IN THE CONSUMER'S DEFENSE.

GOVERNMENT CAN ACT BY ESTABLISHING A MEANINGFUL
PROGRAM OF NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE AND BY INCREASING THE
SUPPLY OF HEALTH MANPOWER AND FACILITIES FOR HIGH QUALITY
HEALTH SERVICES.

GOVERNMENT CAN ACT TO GUARANTEE THE RIGHT OF EACH
CITIZEN TO PURSUE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK -- FREE FROM THE

SHACKLES OF DISCRIMINATION, POOR HEALTH AND LACK OF EDUCATION
OR TRAINING.

WE NEED TO ENACT LEGISLATION TO PREVENT ENVIRONMENTALLY
DANGEROUS PRODUCTS FROM CONTAMINATING THE AIR AND THE WATER.

WE NEED TO END THE HAVOC OF THE OIL IMPORT QUOTA
PROGRAM.

MOST IMPORTANT, WE MUST ESTABLISH EQUALITY BETWEEN
THE BUYER AND THE SELLER BY EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF CONSUMER
RIGHTS AND BY IMPORVING THE ENFORCEMENT OF THOSE RIGHTS.

WE CAN EXPAND THOSE RIGHTS BY CREATING AN INDEPENDENT
OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH.

THAT OFFICE WOULD BE A SPOKESMAN FOR THE CONSUMER

IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. . . WITH FULL POWERS TO
INVESTIGATE AND LITIGATE CONSUMER COMPLAINTS.

WE CAN EXPAND CONSUMER ACCESS TO THE FEDERAL COURTS
THROUGH CLASS ACTIONS, BY ALLOWING CONSUMERS THEMSELVES TO
SEE THAT THESE LAWS ARE ENFORCED WHEN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
FAIL TO ACT.

IN SHORT, TO RESTORE TRUST IN SOCIETY WE FIRST
MUST PUT GOVERNMENT BACK ON THE SIDE OF THE PEOPLE. THAT
WILL TAKE ACTION, NOT JUST WORDS.

IN EACH OF THESE AREAS, THIS ADMINISTRATION HAS
BEEN LONG ON WORDS AND SHORT ON ACTION. REMEMBER WHAT

THIS ADMINISTRATION SAID IT WOULD DO, AND THEN LOOK AT WHAT
IT HAS DONE.

THIS ADMINISTRATION TALKED ABOUT EASING UNEMPLOYMENT
BUT VETOED A BILL THAT WOULD HAVE CREATED JOBS.

THIS ADMINISTRATION TALKED ABOUT IMPROVING HEALTH
CARE, BUT VETOED A BILL TO TRAIN FAMILY DOCTORS.

THIS ADMINISTRATION TALKED ABOUT CONSUMER RIGHTS,
BUT OPPOSED LEGISLATION THAT WOULD HAVE PROTECTED THOSE
RIGHTS.

IT IS CLEAR THAT AMERICANS NEED A CHANGE -- NOT THE
APPEARANCE OF CHANGE. . . NOT CHANGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE. . .

BUT CHANGE THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE. . .CHANGE THAT WILL
REKINDLE FAITH IN OUR SOCIETY AND TURN DISILLUSIONMENT INTO
TRUST.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN AMERICA
SHARE THIS DESIRE FOR RESPONSIBLE CHANGE, AS WE HAVE SHARED
THE SAME GOALS IN THE PAST.

WE HAVE FOUGHT TOGETHER. . .FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
AND WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION AND A FAIR MINIMUM WAGE. . .
WHEN THOSE WERE NOT POPULAR FIGHTS.

WE HAVE RESISTED ATTEMPTS TO DIVIDE US. . .BY MEN
WHO HAVE PRACTICED THE POLITICS OF FEAR AND HATE.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO THINK THAT THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN
WORKING MEN AND WOMEN AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS PASSED.
THEY ARE WRONG.

WE ARE FIGHTING TOGETHER NOW FOR THE RIGHT OF
EVERY AMERICAN CITIZEN TO A DECENT LIFE IN A WHOLE SOCIETY.

WE ARE WORKING TOGETHER. . . TO BUILD A SOCIETY WHERE
EVERY CITIZEN IS SECURE BECAUSE HIS NEIGHBOR IS SECURE. . .
NOT BEHIND BARRIERS. . . BUT IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HIS
GOVERNMENT IS FAIR AND JUST.

DEMOCRATS AND LABOR LEADERS ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY. . .
IN CALIFORNIA AND CONNECTICUT, WHERE I HAVE JUST BEEN, SHARE

A COMMON DESIRE TO WIN THIS FIGHT. . . IN THE LAWS WE
PASS. . . AND IN THE CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
OF 1972.

WE WANT TO WIN FOR THE SAME REASON THAT OUR PARTNERSHIP
HAS ALWAYS WANTED TO WIN -- TO DO BETTER THAN WE HAVE DONE
BEFORE. . . TO REKINDLE TRUST IN OUR GOVERNMENT. . . AND
TO GIVE NEW MEANING TO WHAT JOHN KENNEDY SAID ALMOST TEN
YEARS AGO: "THE BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT IS THE BUSINESS OF
THE PEOPLE."

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