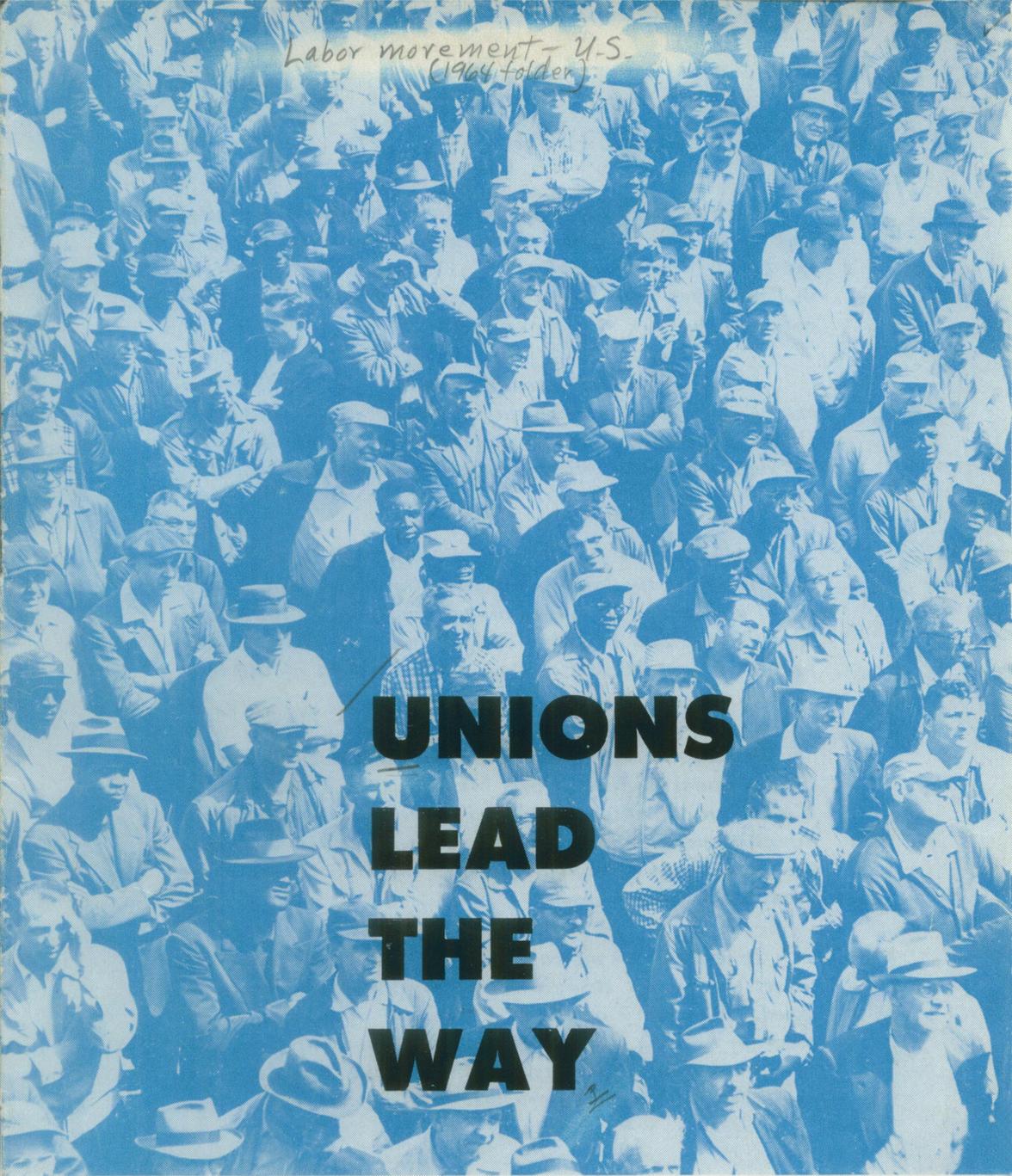


Labor movement - U.S.
(1964 folder)



UNIONS LEAD THE WAY

By

GEORGE BURDON

International President
URW, AFL - CIO

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ABOUT GEORGE BURDON:

George Burdon, a pioneer in organizing the United Rubber Workers is now in his second term as President of the URW International Union. Elected to the Presidency in September 1960, he was reelected at the union's 1962 convention.

Burdon also serves as a member of the AFL-CIO General Board, a vice-president of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union department and as a vice-president of the International Federation of Industrial Organizations and General Workers' Unions.

Born in Los Angeles, April 30, 1909, Burdon has been active in the labor movement for more than a quarter of a century. He began his union career by helping to organize the Los Angeles Goodyear plant in 1936 and the following year he was elected first president of the local union.

He has served in a wide variety of capacities for the International Union before being elected President—as West Coast education director, field representative, district director and organizational director. Since his election to the presidency Burdon has served on numerous government and civic groups.

In writing this message George Burdon said he wanted to set the record straight about the labor movement he loved. The story of the idealism and dedication to the cause of helping people on the part of tens of thousands of active unionists throughout the country is a story that should be told to all Americans.

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“Pharoah said . . . wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, loose the people from their work? Get you unto your burdens . . . Let the heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor therein; and let them not regard lying words . . . Ye are idle, ye are idle.”

Here was the Pharoah of Egypt in the fourteenth century, B. C., denouncing two Jewish strike leaders. The strike was recorded in the Book of Exodus. He used about the same language some employers use today. He asked the Jews to get back to work, to work harder, and not to listen to the “lying words” of those agitators, Moses and Aaron. Then he shouted at them that they were lazy.

There is a French saying that the more things change, the more they remain the same. In all these centuries there are still workers and there are still employers and there are still men chafing under bondage and there are still strikes.

But not everything is exactly the same. Before this modern era, about the only way a worker had of expressing himself against an injustice was to go on strike. There was one other way. He could burn inwardly and slow down his production or turn out poor materials. Before a union this was all he could do, for he had no voice and no method of righting a wrong.

The union brought civilization into the industrial jungle. It brought

a "grievance procedure" where a worker with a complaint against management could go to his shop representative or "steward" with his grievance and this would set a formal procedure into motion where attempts would be made to settle the complaint all the way up through management echelons until, if the problem remained unresolved, an impartial arbitrator would be called in to decide the justice of the case.

The grievance procedure and arbitration are two modern labor developments. They have brought a large measure of peace, increased production, and human justice into our economic society.

While strikes may make the headlines, we must remember that newspapers feature the unusual. The multitude of peaceful daily agreements and friendly relations between labor and management are seldom mentioned.

Unionism Has Ancient Roots

Modern unions come partly from the guilds which are as old as recorded history. We hear of them in ancient India and China. Organization of workers has been part of the human experience. Our other ancestor is man's spirit of rebellion against any system which degrades man, which stultifies him or holds him in bondage. The guild system and the revolts of the underdog against the topdog are the roots of modern unionism.

When someone asks me why I am a unionist, I answer that I believe in the intrinsic worth of the working man and in his right to dignity and self-development. To achieve his self-respect, he has to combine with his fellows in a union.

The idea of a union is as old as Aesop's fable about the father who asked his sons to break a twig. They easily broke it. Then the father gave his sons a bundle of sticks and try as they might they could not break the bundle. The lesson was obvious. In union there is strength.

Both labor and management have distinct contributions to make. Certainly, managers have created a number of profound revolutions in production of which automation is only the latest. The tremendous might of the economy is partly the result of those who helped create mass production techniques. This tremendous increase of productivity which began in the 18th century with the Industrial Revolution testifies to man's genius as a creative technician.

But stress upon material creations led to festering slums, to oppressive factory sweatshops, to an industrial jungle where man devoured his fellow man. The enthronement of the dollar replaced human and spiritual values.

It wasn't until working people organized into unions and into political movements that conditions began to change. Working people organized behind a banner of "human rights before property rights." People must come before profits.

Unions represent the social inventiveness in man. We are not experts in building great factories or making huge killings on the stock market. Our role as unionists is to serve our fellow man. Sounds too pious? Of course, we have shortcomings and failures and breaches of our principles. We're human. But observe this record:

Labor's Contributions

The First Continental Congress met at Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia in 1774. Our nation was born in a guild hall.

A silversmith, Paul Revere, gave the alarm that the redcoats were coming in 1775. He was leader of a workers' political action organization.

The first labor party in the world was founded in Philadelphia in 1828. It fought successfully for free public education and abolition of imprisonment for debt.

Our present-day educational system and credit system are largely products of labor's early political victories.

And labor has long fought for the extension of the right to vote for more Americans. While the moneyed interests generally fought against free public education, the credit system, and extending democracy, labor and its liberal allies pushed American freedoms steadily ahead.

Consider labor's interests of today. They are broad of vision and thoroughly in keeping with unionism's function as an instrument of social reform. They include:

- Medical care for the aged
- Soil and water conservation
- Aid to education
- Civil rights
- Full employment
- Urban redevelopment
- Decent housing
- Extension of democracy

Labor Breeds Democracy

American labor was praised by the late President John F. Kennedy who said:

“One of the great qualities about the United States which I do not think people realize who are not in the labor movement is what a great asset for freedom the American labor movement represents, not only here, but all around the world.”

A labor advisory committee was picked to work with the Alliance for Progress because, the **New York Times** explained, “Officials believe that this type of movement can overcome the ‘monolithic’ party domination now imposed on the working class in many Latin American countries.”

American unions are affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions which has 57 million members in over one hundred countries. Only unions which are “free,”—not under the domination of government or the employer,—are eligible to join.

In the emerging countries of Africa and Asia many of the leading political figures were union trained because unions were the only training ground for democracy under European colonialism. And labor governs in more established countries like Sweden, which has solved its unemployment problem and has one of the highest standards of living in the world.

Throughout the world unions have been democracy’s strongest bulwark. No wonder Hitler first had to destroy unions before he took power in Germany.

Corruption in Unions Is Minor Compared to That of Business

You might ask that if unions are so democratic, why the hullabaloo over “labor bosses”?

Of course, not all unions practice democratic procedures. Three unions were expelled from the AFL-CIO for practices unbecoming good unionism.

A few unions are engaged in questionable practices largely because of the apathy of the rank and file member who does not attend meetings or who never questions union officials. In a union such as the Rubber



American unions have helped to bring democracy to workers in other lands.

Workers, we have mechanisms to keep members informed and our union honest and democratic.

For many years our financial figures have been periodically sent to both our affiliated locals and to the public through libraries. In addition to this, URW local unions and the International spend approximately \$150,000 a year on summer schools and institutes to discuss union problems and ways of strengthening communications, member participation, and other systems so vital to a functioning democracy. All members of our union are encouraged to know what is in their contract, and to make their contract with the company a useful, living document.

Why then so much talk about limiting labor's "power"? Because vested moneyed interests have a stake in trying to instill a fear of labor. For example, during the height of the McClellan investigations into union misdeeds, the **New York Times Index** for the year showed 10 columns on labor racketeering, 3 columns on union "Reds," and only 16½ columns on all other labor stories, including strikes! Yet, during this same period, Robert Kennedy, serving as the Committee's counsel, said that less than one-half of one per cent of labor's 430,000 leaders were guilty of any wrongdoing whatsoever.

Such news distortions paint a grossly unfair picture of unions in America. While the press played up a few crooks in labor, it played down thievery in business which was far more prevalent.

From 1958-60, for instance, 152 bank presidents stole from their own banks. There were 1,771 thieves reported who were members of the banking industry. But there were no outraged editorials demanding special punitive laws against banks.

During this same period not a single AFL-CIO union was cited for violating the "faithful discharge of duties" provisions of the Landrum-Griffin Act.

In one year alone America's employers stole \$10,115,676 from 102,082 workers by not paying them what the minimum wage law required. And 29 electrical companies were convicted of price-fixing in violation of the law. When the president of one large electrical company shrugged his shoulders and said such law violations were just good old "private enterprise," no newspaper suggested that something might be amiss in today's corporate morality.

Modern Office Procedures magazine asked business executives whether a man can move up through the ranks of management solely through honest, decent methods. All but two of 103 executives answered with a resounding "no."

The Catholic scholar, Father Raymond Baumhart, said that 68 per cent of the business executives who answered a questionnaire he sent them replied that business generally accepts practices which they consider unethical. Twenty-three per cent said they would like to eliminate bribes and call girls which they believe to be frequent business practices.

Yet, no business, no matter how guilty of illegal or unethical practices, has been expelled from the Chamber of Commerce or the National Association of Manufacturers. The AFL-CIO, on the other hand, expelled a number of unions not just because their racketeering gave labor a bad name, but because, in President George Meany's words, "they were doing wrong."

Corporate Power and Poverty Are Twin Threats

Labor's alleged "power" is nothing compared to that of big business.

U. S. Department of Labor figures show the total combined assets of all unions in the nation are equal to \$1.5 billion. But one company, Stand-

ard Oil of New Jersey, has seven times (\$10,500,000,000) the assets of the entire labor movement!

20 corporations **each** have assets worth more than all the unions in the country. These twenty companies are worth \$65.8 billion.

Too, one per cent of the population holds 28 per cent of the nation's wealth, according to a study made by University of Wisconsin Professor Robert J. Lampman.

The rich one per cent owns 76 per cent of all corporate stocks outstanding. This represents a steady increase of concentration of corporate control into the hands of a few.

On the other side of the tracks one-fourth of our nation is still ill-housed, ill-clothed, and ill-fed. There are between 40 and 50 million poor people still barely existing in America. There are the marginal farmers who earn between \$500 and \$1,000 a year, the migratory workers who pick this country's food and who have barely enough to eat themselves. There are eight million senior citizens living in squalid poverty, unable to pay their medical bills or to afford decent places to live in their bleak winter years. There are the victims of automation—three million lost their jobs in seven years. There are despair-ridden people in the depressed areas who are the victims of a Congress which refuses to pass needed public works legislation to give them a chance to work.

Labor is the only mass-based force with a broad program to tackle the question of the concentration of power into the hands of a few and to do battle against the degrading specter of poverty. Because labor cares about people, it has a concrete program for a better America.

Labor's Program for Full Employment

We would create bold, imaginative public works to build needed schools, hospitals, and roads. We would fill the needs of conservation of our natural resources, recreation, irrigation, navigation and inexpensive electricity through TVA type valley developments. This is one way to put America back to work.

How much will this cost? It will cost our country much more in lost work hours and paying out relief than it would cost to create work projects. In 1939 this country spent 44 per cent of its budget for welfare. Today it only spends 7 per cent. Eighty cents of our tax dollar goes for purposes connected with war. Certainly, we can afford to invest a little more in building a better life for our citizens.

Another part of the program is to put more money into circulation and therefore stimulate the economy. This is why labor favors a tax cut and wage increases.

Contrary to the myth of wages being "too high", the plain fact is that they are not high enough. Walter Heller, Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisors, says that labor productivity has risen at a faster rate than wages. With working people unable to spend more money to buy more goods, production piles up in factory warehouses; then production is cut, people are laid off, and the nation enters another all too frequent recession. With over five per cent of all American workers unemployed, we cannot afford to keep going as we are going now. A more realistic figure would be about eight per cent if we took into account those who have despairingly given up the search for a job because no jobs are available in their locality.

With fewer jobs and more people entering the labor market each year, unemployment threatens to overwhelm us. We must take positive action now!

Yes, we sometimes strike for wage increases and other benefits. But listen to Professor James Kuhn of Columbia University who speaks on the subject:

"The Union's ability to stop production when others wish it to continue is not unique. Only public resentment of union stoppages is unique. Managers stop production and reduce output for months on end despite the readiness, willingness and desire of workers to work. Few question the throttling down of factory production, though unemployment probably is a lingering, wasting cancer more destructive than the clean, swift wound of the strike."

A strike is used only as a last resort after every effort at peaceful negotiation has failed.

Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz recently put the strike issue in its proper perspective when he said that more workdays were lost in one year through unemployment than through strikes during the past 35 years.

Leisure Time Is an Answer to Automation

What can be done about the tragic problem of unemployment which lies in the wake of the New Technology? A computer system processing

income tax returns has replaced 4,000 people in Martinsburg, West Virginia. An electric salesgirl in New York's Macy's Department Store can sell 36 different items and give you your correct change. Between 1947 and 1962 production in the oil industry almost doubled, but workers declined by 15 per cent. This is true to only a slightly lesser extent in the tire, auto, steel, communications and other industries.

But in addition to automation or "cybernation," where machines can actually talk to and direct other machines by means of an electronic language, there is the population explosion which means that nearly 1,400,000 youngsters a year will be seeking jobs. If they are to get work we will have to create about 80,000 jobs a week.

More people each year looking for work and fewer jobs every year. Here is America's terrifying dilemma. This should explain the recent trend in labor's collective bargaining programs. It helps explain the emphasis on extended vacation plans and the shorter workweek.

President Kennedy said: "As machines take more and more of the jobs of men, we are going to find the workweek reduced, and we are going to find people wondering what they should do."

One hundred years ago the average American worked 70 hours a week. Today he works 39 hours a week. Union-won leisure and wages have been largely responsible for the creation of the \$40 billion leisure time industry, an industry so dynamic that it has doubled in the past ten years. The industry's very existence shows why union gains are good for the economy.

The new leisure enables the well-paid unionized American worker to buy golf and tennis balls or boating equipment. Not too long ago these sports were the exclusive property of the rich.

We have union-won pension programs to protect the retiring worker and we have hospitalization programs so that the assets of entire families will not be wiped out in an inundation of medical bills.

Why Labor Is in Politics

True, these programs do not apply to the unorganized worker, but labor has taken to political action to gain benefits for all the people which strong unions win at the bargaining table.



Union legislative schools bring grass roots leaders from all over the country to study their government in action. Here three URW students are shown visiting their Senator Joseph Clark (D-Pa.)

Yes, labor is in politics to help all the people. The fact that labor spends so much time fighting for an improved minimum wage which helps only those who will not or cannot join unions should be proof enough of our honest intentions.

We have to counteract the moneyed interests which support political efforts to keep the status quo or to go backward into time.

We have to create a political balance to strengthen democracy. For example, in 1960 eighteen families contributed \$628,725 to conservative politicians. All of the contributions to AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) totalled \$796,140.

In the rubber industry one family contributed \$26,000 in 1960 to its candidates. This is more than all workers at this company contributed to liberal candidates who would work in their interest.

But members of this family were pikers compared to the DuPonts who gave \$51,000 to the Republican Party or the Rockefellers who gave the GOP \$90,875.

More alarming than the huge sums of money contributed by a handful of people to political campaigns is a Roper Poll showing only 10 per cent of Americans active in politics. Most people do not even know the name of their two United States Senators.

Labor plays a meaningful role in citizen education by publicizing the votes of elected officials and calling attention to their records. It tries its best to get Americans to discuss the great issues of the day.

My union, the URW, goes further than this. Each year we bring over one hundred and fifty union opinion leaders (from all over the country) to Washington, D. C., to study government and legislation. We don't stop there, for another part of our total program is the study of State and local problems.

Do we have an ulterior motive? Of course. We hope and pray that an awakened citizenry will bring forth a more democratic society and a full employment economy. Politically alert Americans will be able to frustrate the efforts of the John Birchers and Communists who threaten our way of life.

Why Unions Oppose "Right to Work" Laws

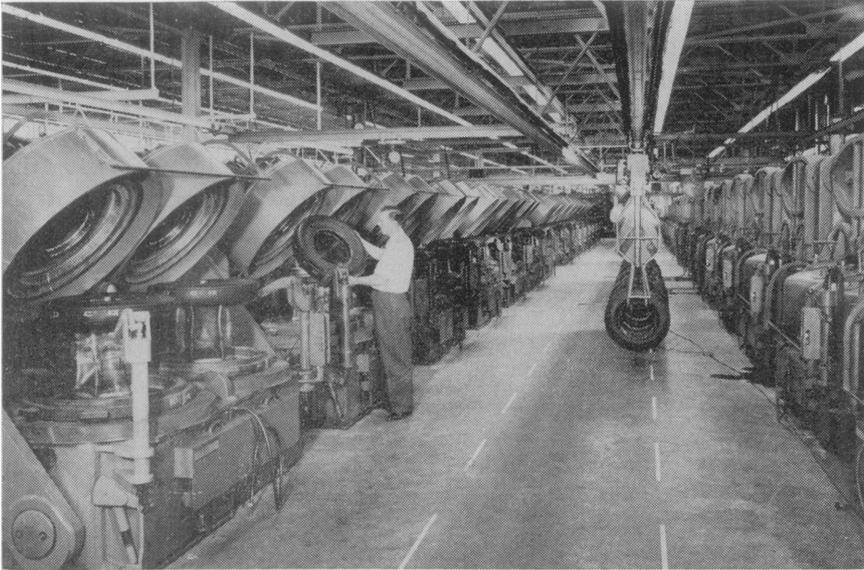
We do fight special battles against "Right to Work" laws, for example. We favor the union shop where, after an agreed upon period of time, a worker has to join a union as a condition of employment in that plant.

By law the union must represent the interests of any worker, union or nonunion, in the plant. We feel it only fair that the worker should pay for his representation and his union-won pensions, hospitalization, vacations, wages and other benefits. Nobody has any respect for the free loader who chisels off his fellows.

Reinhold Neibuhr, a leading Protestant theologian, called supporters of Right to Work laws "either stupid or dishonest in their pretentions." Six Ohio Roman Catholic Bishops said, "It may be desirable for the common good . . . (to) . . . require that he (the worker) belong to a labor union."

Unions Help Build the Economy

That unions do make a difference in the economy can be shown by comparing the Right-to-Work, largely in the nonunion South, with the unionized Northeast.



Automation has increased production enormously but it has also increased unemployment. Unions are committed to solving social problems like unemployment which the new technology has created.

The unionized worker of the Northeast has an annual median income of \$6,191. The worker in the predominantly nonunion Southeast averages \$4,465.

Unionization means a dollar difference of \$1,726 a year!

And anti-union practices are bad for society according to a Tulane University study which concluded that Southern management practices of seeking out cheap, nonunion labor "have done little to bring that area into first-class citizenship." In the last decade a million and a half southerners moved north and the growth of employment has been slower in the South than anywhere else. One expert estimated that unionization could enrich the South by \$46 billion a year.

What Does Labor Really Want ?

But these are cold statistics. What, at heart, does labor really want? What are unions basically after?

And the answer is that unions are after what most people pursue— a full and rewarding life. We want world peace and brotherhood among

men. We want to end poverty, disease, ignorance and prejudice. We want a society in which every individual can freely express himself and fully develop himself. So don't we all!

But labor believes there are a number of practical methods to achieve these goals. If man can fly higher than a bird and swim deeper than a fish and run faster than antelope all because of his brain, there is no reason why he cannot use this God-given intelligence to bring about peace, freedom, and prosperity on earth.

As slow as it seems, fundamental social progress has been made. Human slavery has been almost entirely abolished. Women have the right to vote and with it equality. The colored races, representing the majority of people in the world, are coming into their own as rulers of their own destiny. The machine is now capable of liberating mankind from all routine jobs which have stultified the human spirit throughout history. And the United Nations is a new workable concept in the world and given its limitations, the U. N. has helped millions.

We believe in social progress and we believe in people so much that we know they can overcome their plaguing problems with just a little more vision, courage, and confidence in themselves. If men do not fear to journey into space. why should men fear to remake their social order along morally just and economically sound lines.

And we believe in the goodness and idealism of people because we have seen so much of it at work in the labor movement. There is the shop steward who helps his fellow workers solve their on-the-job problems with no thought of pay. He handles their complaints and fights for their rights before management all because he wants to help people. And there are 40,000 "union counsellors," also unpaid, who help their fellow union members solve their problems outside the plant. We have seen the 75,000 union men and women who give up their leisure hours to serve on health and welfare boards across the nation. And union men and women contribute one-third of the money raised by Community Chests and United Appeals.

How can we help but believe in people when we have experienced all this!

If you are not a member of a union, but would like more information, I urge you to write to us. We don't want to be exclusive. To build a prosperous America and a healthy world, it will take all of us working together in common cause.



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