

U.S. Department of Labor.

Address of Secretary of Labor Maurice J. Tobin
before the
Massachusetts State Industrial Union Council
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MANPOWER FOR DEFENSE

The significance of the current crisis has been put in a nutshell: "We must hope and strive for the best while we prepare for the worst." All we know is that we face a threat to our survival. It is plainer than ever, as President Truman said last Wednesday in his letter of greeting to the 17th conference on labor legislation that "never more than now is the cooperation of all the people needed."

The President also said that manpower for defense production "is one of our Nation's most vital needs in our great effort for peace and against aggression." As a matter of fact, manpower is the key to our defense effort. Unemployment fell to 1.9 million in October. By the same token, employment has risen markedly, reaching an alltime high in September of 45.5 nonagricultural workers. Job placements by our department's Bureau of Employment Security in October were the highest on record. It is interesting to note, as a sort of preview, that among the 2,200,000 thus placed was the largest number of handicapped workers in the history of the public employment service.

The best opinion is that, within a framework of partial mobilization, our labor market is capable of meeting the demands of the situation. But it is obvious that, as our armed forces expand and our resources are canalized for defense, we will have to leave nothing undone to match the challenge. Our civilian economy is operating at the highest level in our peacetime history. Our labor force is the largest we have ever had. Yet it must be expanded if we are to measure up to requirements.

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That can be done, of course, although we do not have today the reservoir of 8 million unemployed which meant so much 10 years ago when we were mobilizing our industrial manpower. But our labor supply is much more flexible than is generally realized. It can be enlarged by roughly 2 million within a year. We will have a normal growth in the labor force of a half million. We can draw in teenagers, housewives, the handicapped and older persons to the extent of at least $1\frac{1}{2}$ million. Something like 100,000 veterans will be out of school and ready to go to work. Should it become necessary, the average workweek can be lengthened by an hour. That would be the equivalent of 400,000 new workers in the factories and mills of the country.

There will be shortages in some occupations and areas. There will be an increased turnover, as workers shift from civilian to defense jobs, and as others go into uniform. But, for the current fiscal year, manpower requirements for national defense can be met without a serious disruption of our economy. Nevertheless, to make sure of this, we must have expanded programs of labor recruitments, training and utilization. It is at this point that the Department of Labor has stepped into the picture. Our department has been charged by President Truman with a major responsibility in the solution of the manpower problem.

Within the authority vested in me by an executive order from President Truman, I have set up in the Department of Labor an Office of Defense Manpower, which will be headed by Robert C. Goodwin, director of the Bureau of Employment Security and formerly executive director of the War Manpower Commission. Within the scope of policies laid down by me, in consultation with labor and management, the Office of Defense Manpower will direct the manpower program of the country. It will have among its resources our Nation-wide public employment service, with its 1800 local offices. It will

be backed up by the bureaus of the Department of Labor, and it will enjoy the cooperation of other Federal departments.

But even with a substantial growth in the labor supply—a growth probably sufficient for foreseeable needs—the situation will be tight. In such circumstances, we must be careful to conserve our human resources and at the same time resolute to avoid yielding to pressures, which are bound to be more and more urgent as time passes. We must keep in mind the experience of World War II. We simply cannot afford to relax unduly the sound standards built up through the years.

It is generally agreed that current defense production does not justify any relaxation of hours laws. Should that point be reached later on, we will have to work out operating procedures, at once sustaining basic labor laws, and taking care of real emergencies for brief periods and under limited conditions. I can assure you that if and when all-out production is at hand, the Department of Labor will have prepared, in advance and in cooperation with all interested Federal agencies, a national policy on hours for optimum production, which will do no violence to established standards.

We must be on guard against a rise in child labor. During World War II, many boys and girls deserted school in order to go to work, or they tried to do the impossible through a combination of work and school attendance. Child labor laws were often ignored by employers. Whatever else may be said about the motives of child workers, it is clear that this flocking to war jobs was not good for them in the long run. We must see to it that children are kept in school. They should be free of the scars of early toil. They should have the education needed for larger service in the future.

Women will now be returning to the labor force. They have been described as our greatest unused reservoir. But we must not forget that they are primarily homemakers and mothers. We must, therefore, recruit as many single and older women as possible, that is, women without important family responsibilities. If we have to use homemakers, we must provide adjustments enabling them to carry the double load.

As we face up to the manpower problem, it is obvious that our major difficulty has to do with particular skills and occupations--in areas with a heavy concentration of defense employment. This shortage points up the need for more apprentice training. We must increase our skilled working force. The issue now convulsing the world may yet turn on how well and how much the trained productive force of this country can out-perform the manpower at the disposal of aggressors. We can win only if every American is equipped to give the utmost service.

At the present time, the total number of apprentices in training meets only about 25 percent of the need. We actually do not have enough apprentices in training to take the place of workers who are leaving their jobs because of death or retirement. That's a grave situation in peacetime or in a period of only partial mobilization. It can become downright dangerous if the country has to mobilize totally. We are thus confronted with a very serious shortage--perhaps the most serious of the hour.

But we are already taking steps to correct it. We need a greatly enlarged supply of apprentices to train new workers. We must not repeat the wasteful experience of the last war with its "quickie" training. Instead of that wasteful practice, we should have competent instructors for green hands, and we must train these instructors. That would permit the absorption of new workers without (1) imposing undue strain on industries and workers and (2)

having to face an evil day of broken trade standards and practices.

Obviously, the Department of Labor should be enabled to provide technical and promotional assistance to industry in situations not now covered within the scope of our Bureau of Apprenticeship. Actual training should remain in the hands of management, labor or vocational education experts. But much remains to be done to promote the development and adoption of programs to improve the skills and techniques of industrial workers, to collect and distribute information in this field, to advise and evaluate procedures in industry, and to conduct studies for full utilization of the working force. Legislation granting this authority is now before the Congress.

It should be clear to most Americans by now that the Government is engaged in trying to expand defense production as swiftly as possible while maintaining a high level of civilian production. In the event of total mobilization, our basic need would be plant capacity and adequate trained manpower. What we are trying to bring about at this juncture is a gradual plant expansion by adding defense production to civilian. In that way, we can enlarge our trained manpower enough to permit total mobilization, if and when it becomes necessary. That is surely a preferable course to trying to expand suddenly after a crisis has hit us.

What we have in mind is a series of orderly steps from conditions of today to the potential stringencies of the future. Let me say now what I have said on other occasions, "it will not be easy to expand manpower resources for defense production, for civilian production and for the armed forces, and still get the right people in the right places at the right time." We must plan for future exigencies. We must not let disaster find us unready for any shock.

In the statement issued by President Truman Thursday, the last paragraph was as follows: "This is a time for all our citizens to lay aside differences and unite in firmness and mutual determination to do what is best for our country and the cause of freedom throughout the world. This country is the keystone of the hopes of mankind for peace and justice. We must show that we are guided by a common purpose and a common faith."

I think that this common purpose and this common faith are already evident. The way in which partisan criticism has faded out in Washington is, in my opinion, only a reflection of the attitude of Americans generally. All elements in our population are rising to the height of the great argument of unity at an hour of unprecedented peril, by reason of the recent developments in Korea.

I am sure that labor is woven into the fabric of spiritual solidarity. The same thing is true of management. The same is true of all Americans. Throughout the land, the response to the emergency is that of a people who will not waver in the protection of their rights, who will not give up their inheritance of liberty whatever odds have to be faced.

Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers are all for the early emergence of peace. But even if the hinge of fate turns the other way, we shall be unafraid. We believe that, under God, freedom, justice, righteousness, will yet be made secure against totalitarian aggression. The sanctions of the moral law will prevail in the end.