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SPEECH FOR CONNECTICUT LABOR MOVEMENT

The word "union" brings goose bumps—I guess I had it implanted in me the minute I was born. My father was a Russian Jewish revolutionist and he came to the United States in 1913. He sold blankets from a pushcart and to me he was one of the most successful people ever. One thing enriched his life and that was the unions.

Truthfully, he wasn't always a member because with a pushcart, those poor folks didn't have a union. That's one reason they were poor. He would wake me every morning with these words from Das Kapital—"Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains."

We lived in San Antonio and there in the public park across the street from the Santa Rosa Hospital, I'd carry a soapbox for him and he would exhort those that would listen. He'd tell them in Spanish that they would always be poor unless they would form or join a union.

The word "union" wasn't just a word with Papa; it was a way of life. I remember somebody walking into our house one day with a package of Camel cigarettes which were not union-made. Papa took the package of cigarettes and tore them up and I was embarrassed and said, "Papa, why?" He said, "Because this company does not deserve the business of those of us that believe in unions." When he expressed his attitude about unions it was "one for all and all for one."

them are increasingly limited because this lust for power, this lust for money, this misunderstanding of the WHAT and the HOW, the WHAT one wants to achieve is not nearly important as HOW they achieve it. The Enron's, the WorldCom's, the Adelphia's and the number of other companies that can be cited didn't care about workers. They didn't even care about the product they were selling. They had one concern—gobbling up everything for themselves. I say to you that this is a society that is not sustainable and you and those of you that are members of a union are the only real hope there is for ameliorating the quality of life for an increasing number of Americans.

I salute you for having the good sense for having that card in your pocket. I only hope that your numbers will increase and increase and increase. I don't know any better insurance for a better world than for this to occur.

So, I close with the credo of the great novelist, Thomas Wolfe: "To every man his chance, to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining golden opportunity, to every man the right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever his vision and manhood can combine to make him. This seeker, is a promise of America."

It's difficult to comprehend in this ever-increasing avariciously greedy society in which we reside. I love stories about unions in the old days where there was more spirit, fraternity and, yes, concern one for another. I'm reminded of the story that Hank Brown, who was president of the AFL-CIO in Texas for many years, relates. He was a plumber's apprentice and would go out every day on the job and left pretty much with the same crew and there was a union member in charge of this particular team of plumbers. Every day at noon, Hank would have to go out and get eight schooners of beer for the journeymen—none for him because he was an apprentice. About a year and a half later, the lead plumber for the group said, "Hank, I want you to listen carefully, boy. Get nine." Hank brings back nine and the leader says to him, "It's no longer "boy," it's man. You're now a journeyman." Well, Hank, as he tells the story, said that of all the great things that happened to him in his life, that moment is the one that is most remembered. He had the same exhilaration as someone who was receiving a Ph.D. at a university. That is, of course, was unionism at its best.

Well, unions are made up of people and the fact is that people today do not have the sense of community that existed in preceding years. I don't know who is to blame, but I know this: working people today do not have the same chance as workers did in those days.

In our hometown paper just a few weeks ago, the headline was, "38 ½ million Americans in poverty." Here we are, the richest nation in the world and one out of eight

Americans are in poverty. And it's going to get worse. No, I'm not a pessimist. You see, capitalism is really a good system provided it is regulated to the extent that there are limits. In days up until the '90's, a CEO might make 40 times what the wages of the lowest employee was. But now, the greed is such and the de-emphasis on integrity in the boardrooms has reached a point where whatever these so-called leaders want, there is within them a self-justifying mechanism that denies meaningful opportunity to millions and millions of Americans. There is only one antidote that I can see that can be helpful and that's the unions. I remember when I started American Income Life Insurance Company in 1951. There were the giants: the Metropolitans, the Prudential's and the New York Life's, etc. They weren't bad companies, but they were gigantic. We couldn't compete against them. My belief in brotherhood and unionism compelled me to be *the one* insurance company that would be union from top to bottom; from the CEO to the newest employee. And we prospered and prospered in an appropriate way. We didn't have any problems as far as our employees were concerned. Why? Because I understood what advantages there were for an employer to have a union. If there was a problem, I knew about it immediately, because there was a grievance procedure. As a result of that, we had a cohesive workforce that was invigorated, dedicated and had the assurance that the unions would ensure that they had equal opportunity.

What I love most about unionism is that it is not only concerned about the worker, but about the plight of the underdog; of those who are not in position where they can be a member of a union because of the restrictive laws that we have, such as Taft-Hartley and

so many other legislative actions that act as firewalls against the interests of working folks.

Yes, “one for all and all for one.” Tell that to 400 people with whom this story is applicable. I knew the owner of a small factory that produced shorts and these workers did not have a union and were middle-aged to older women, not particularly well-educated but hard workers. Their livelihood really depended on their jobs. A few months ago I saw this particular owner and I said, “Well, how are things going?” He said, “We’re making more money than we’ve ever made before!” I said, “How’s the factory doing?” He said, “Well, we closed the factory. We’re having them made in China.” I looked at him and I almost had hateful emotions. I hope I didn’t show them. But I did. How is that possible, I said to myself, that these 400 people are now out of a job? Were they incompetent? No, they weren’t. Were they honorable? Yes, they were. Was the product that they were involved in making useful? Yes it was. Somehow there’s something wrong within our system that allowed this to happen. The union is the most protective institution within our society that fights, organizes to preclude, to try to stop the frightening events emerging in our society where too few have too much and too many have too little. I am proud to tell you one thing—in the history of American Income, from the day we started in 1951, we have never had a lay-off. We have a sense of responsibility to the people that got us to where we were. I’m close to so many of the great labor leaders of our country and I feel their pain and I sense their pain. The way things are today, where money comes first and people second, the leaders’ responsibilities are recognized by them, but their opportunities to do something about