

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963)

## Address in Miami at the Opening of the AFL-CIO Convention

*given on December 7, 1961*

Mr. Meany, Reverend Clergy, Governor Bryant, gentlemen, ladies:

It's warmer here today than it was yesterday!

I want to express my pleasure at this invitation. As one whose work and continuity of employment has depended in part upon the union movement, I want to say that I have been on the job, training for about 11 months, and feel that I have some seniority rights in the matter.

I'm delighted to be here with you and with Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg. I was up in New York stressing physical fitness, and in line with that Arthur went over with a group to Switzerland to climb some of the mountains there. They all got up about 5 and he was in bed--got up to join them later--and when they all came back at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, he didn't come back with them. They sent out search parties and there was no sign of him that afternoon or night. Next day the Red Cross went out and they went around calling "Goldberg--Goldberg--it's the Red Cross." And this voice came down the mountain, "I gave at the office."

Those are the liberties you can take with members of the Cabinet. But I want to say it's a pleasure to be here. This is an important anniversary for all of us, the 20th anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

I suppose, really, the only two dates that most people remember where they were, were Pearl Harbor and the death of President Franklin Roosevelt. We face entirely different challenges on this Pearl Harbor. In many ways the challenges are more serious, and in a sense long-reaching, because I don't think that any of us had any doubt in those days that the United States would survive and prevail and our strength increase.

Now we are face to face in a most critical time with challenges all around the world, and you in the labor movement bear a heavy responsibility. Occasionally I read articles by those who say that the labor movement has fallen into dark days. I don't believe that, and I would be very distressed if it were true.

One of the great qualities about the United States which I don't 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. It's no accident that Communists concentrate their attention on the trade union movement. They know that people--the working people--are frequently left out, that in many areas of the world they have no one to speak for them, and the Communists mislead them and say that they will protect their rights. So many go along.

But in the United States, because we have had a strong, free labor movement, the working people of this country have not felt that they were left out. And as long as the labor movement is strong and as long as it is committed to freedom, then I think that freedom in this country is strengthened. So I would hope that every American, whether he was on one side of the bargaining table or the other or whether he was in a wholly different sphere of life, would recognize that the strength of a free American labor movement is vital to the maintenance of freedom in this country and all around the world.

And I am delighted that there are here today, I understand, nearly 150 trade union leaders from nearly 32 countries around the world. I believe--and I say this as President--that one of the great assets that this country has is the influence which this labor movement can promote around the world in demonstrating what a free trade union can do.

I hope that they will go back from this meeting recognizing that in the long run a strong labor movement is essential to the maintenance of democracy in their country. It's no accident that there has not been a strike in the Soviet Union for 30, or 35, or 40 years. The Communists who in Latin America, or Africa, or Asia say that they represent the people, cannot possibly--under any rule of reason or debate--say that a labor movement is free when it is not able to express its rights, not only in relationship to the employer but also to speak out and recognize the limitations of governmental power. We are not omniscient--we are not all-powerful--this is a free society, and management and labor, and the farmer and the citizen have their rights. We did not give them their rights in government. And I hope that those who go from this hall to Latin America, to Europe, to Africa, will recognize that we believe in freedom and in progress in this country, that we believe that freedom is not an end in itself, but we believe that freedom can bring material abundance and prosperity. And I want you to know that I consider this meeting and the house of labor vital to the interests of this country and the cause of freedom in the coming days.

What unites labor, what unites this country, is far more important than those things on which we may disagree. So, gentlemen and ladies, you are not only leaders of your unions but you occupy a position of responsibility as citizens of the United States; and therefore I felt it most appropriate to come here today and talk with you.

First, I want to express my appreciation to you for several things. For example, I appreciate the effort that those of you  
50 who represent the interests of the men and women who work at our missile plants have made. The fact that you have  
given and that the men and women who work there have lived up to the no-strike pledge at our missile and space sites  
has made an appreciable difference in the progress that we are making in these areas--and the country appreciates the  
effort you are making.

Secondly, we have for the first time a Presidential Advisory Committee on Labor-Management Policy which for once  
55 did not break up on the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935, but instead meets month by month in an attempt to work  
out and develop economic policies which will permit this country to go forward under conditions of full employment.  
And I want to thank you for the participation you have given that.

Third, as I said, I want to thank the labor movement for what it is doing abroad in strengthening the free labor  
movement, and I urge you to redouble your efforts. The hope, as I have said, of freedom in these countries rests in  
60 many parts with the labor movement. We do not want to leave the people of some countries a choice between placing  
their destiny in the hands of a few who hold in their hands most of the property and on the other side the Communist  
movement. We do not give them that choice. We want them to have the instruments of freedom to protect themselves  
and provide for progress in their country, and a strong, free labor movement can do it--and I hope you will concentrate  
your attention in the next 12 months in that area--in Latin America and all around the world.

65 The fact is that the head of the Congo-Adoula--who has been a strong figure for freedom, came out of the labor  
movement. And that's happening in country after country. And this is a great opportunity and responsibility for all of  
us to continue to work together.

And finally, I want to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the AFLCIO for the support that it gave in the  
passage of our legislative program in the long session of the Congress. We did not always agree on every tactic. We  
70 may not have achieved every goal, but we can take some satisfaction in the fact that we did make progress toward a  
\$1.25 minimum wage, that we did expand the coverage for the first time in 20 years; that we did pass the best housing  
act since 1949; that we did, finally, after two Presidential vetoes in the last 4 years, pass a bill providing assistance to  
those areas suffering from chronic unemployment; that we did pass a long-range water pollution bill; that we did pass  
increased Social Security benefits, a lowering of the retirement age in Social Security from 65 to 62 for men,  
75 temporary unemployment compensation, and aid to dependent children.

And we are coming back in January and we are going to start again.

The Gross National Product has climbed since January from \$500 billion to an estimated \$540 billion in the last  
quarter, and it's a pleasure for me to say that the November employment figures received this morning show not only  
two million more people than were working in February, but we have now an all-time high for November, 67,349,000  
80 people working. But, more importantly, unlike the usual seasonal run in November, which ordinarily provides for an  
increase in unemployment of about a half a million, we have now brought the figure for the first time below the 7  
percent where it's hovered down to 6.1 percent, and we're going to have to get it lower.

I would not claim we've achieved full recovery or the permanently high growth rate of which we are capable. Since  
the recession of '58, from which we only partially recovered, and going into the recession of 1960, too many men and  
85 women have been idle for too long a time and our first concern must still be with those unable to get work.

Unemployment compensation must be placed on a permanent, rational basis of nationwide standards, and even more  
importantly those who are older and retired must be permitted under a system of Social Security to get assistance and  
relief from the staggering cost of their medical bills.

The time has come in the next session of the Congress to face the fact that our elder citizens do need these benefits,  
90 that their needs cannot be adequately met in any other way, and that every Member of the Congress should have the  
opportunity to go on the record, up or down, on this question--and I believe when it comes to the floor--as I believe it  
must--they are going to vote it up and through before they adjourn in July or August.

Now there are six areas that I believe that we need to give our attention to if the manpower budget is to be balanced.  
First, we must give special attention to the problems of our younger people. Dr. Conant's recent book only highlighted  
95 a fact which all of you are familiar with, and that is the problem of those who drop out of school before they have  
finished, because of hardships in their home, inadequate motivation or counseling or whatever it may be, and then  
drift without being able to find a decent job.

And this falls particularly heavily upon the young men and women who are in our minority groups. In addition to that,  
26 million young people will be crowding into the labor market in the next 10 years. This can be a tremendous asset  
100 because we have many tasks that require their talent. But today there are one million young Americans under the age  
of 25 who are out of school and out of work. Millions of others leave school early, destined to fall for life into a  
pattern of being untrained, unskilled, and frequently unemployed.

It's for this reason that I have asked the Congress to pass a Youth Employment Opportunities Act to guide these hands so that they can make a life for themselves. Equally important, if our young people are to be well trained and skilled labor is going to be needed in the next years, and if they are to be inspired to finish their studies, the Federal  
105 Government must meet its responsibility in the field of education. I'm not satisfied if my particular community has a good school. I want to make sure that every child in this country has an adequate opportunity for a good education.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "If you expect a country to be ignorant and free, you expect what never was and never will be." It's not enough that our own home town has a good school, we want the United States as a country to be  
110 among the best educated in the world. And I believe that we must invest in our youth.

Secondly, we need a program of retraining our unemployed workers. All of you who live so close to this problem know what happens when technology changes and industries move out and men are left. And I've seen it in my own State of Massachusetts where textile workers were unemployed, unable to find work even with new electronic plants going up all around them. We want to make sure that our workers are able to take advantage of the new jobs that must  
115 inevitably come as technology changes in the 1960's. And I believe, therefore, that retraining deserves the attention of this Congress in the coming days.

And the third group requiring our attention consists of our minority citizens. All of you know the statistics of those who are first discharged and the last to be rehired too often are among those who are members of our minority groups. We want everyone to have a chance, regardless of their race or color, to have an opportunity to make a life for  
120 themselves and their families, to get a decent education so they have a fair chance to compete, and then be judged on what's in here and not on what's on the outside. And the American labor movement has been identified with this cause, and I know that you will be in the future.

And we are making a great effort to make sure that all those who secure Federal contracts--and there are billions of dollars spent each year by the Federal Government--will give fair opportunity to all of our citizens to participate in  
125 that work.

Fourth, we want to provide opportunities for plant re-investment. One of the matters which is of concern in maintaining our economy now is the fact that we do not have as much re-investment in our plants as we did, for example, in 1955, '56 and '57' And we want this economy and this rise to be continuous. And I believe we have to give as much incentive as is possible to provide reinvestment in plants which makes work and will keep our economy  
130 moving ahead.

And therefore I have suggested a tax credit, which I'm hopeful the American labor movement has not placed on its list of those matters yet that it has not supported, but it will consider this proposal as a method of stimulating the economy so that this recovery does not run out of gas in 12 months or 18 months from now, as the 1958-59 recovery, after the recession of 1958, ran out in

135 Fifth, to add to our arsenals of built-in stabilizers so we can keep our economy moving ahead, it's my intention to ask the Congress at its next session for stand-by authority somewhat along the lines of the bill introduced by Senator Clark of Pennsylvania, to make grants-in-aid to communities for needed public works when our unemployment begins to mount and our economy to slow down.

Sixth and finally, we must expand our job opportunities by stimulating our trade abroad. I know that this is a matter to  
140 which the labor movement has given a good deal of attention. Mr. Meany made an outstanding speech on this matter several weeks ago, and it's a matter which is of concern to this administration. I'm sure you wonder, perhaps, why we're placing so much emphasis on it, and I would like to say why we are, very briefly.

The first is, this country must maintain a favorable balance of trade or suffer severely from the point of view of our national security. We sell abroad now nearly \$5 billion more than we import. But unfortunately that \$5 billion goes  
145 abroad in order to maintain the national security requirements of the United States.

We spend \$3 billion of that in order to keep our troops overseas. It costs us nearly \$700 to \$800 million to keep our divisions in Western Germany, and \$300 million to keep our troop establishments in France. And what is true in France and Germany, which are outposts of our commitments, is true in other areas.

So that if we're not able to maintain a favorable balance of trade, then of course we will have to do as the British have  
150 had to do, which is begin to bring our troops back and lay the way open for other actions. So that this is a matter which involves very greatly our security, and unless you believe that the United States should retreat to our own hemisphere and forget our commitments abroad, then you can share with me my concern about what will happen if that balance of trade begins to drop.

Now the problems that we face have been intensified by the development of the Common Market. This is our best  
155 market for manufactured products. What I am concerned about is that we shall be able to keep moving our trade into those areas; otherwise what we will find is that American capital which cannot place its goods in that market will

decide, as they are doing now, to build their plants in Western Europe, and then they hire Western European workers--and you suffer, and the country suffers, and the balance of payments suffers.

So this is a matter of the greatest importance to you--in fact, to all Americans. It is, for example, of the greatest  
160 importance to American farmers. They sell \$2 billion of agricultural commodities to Western Europe. We bring in \$80 million of agricultural commodities from Western Europe. In other words, we make almost \$2 billion of our foreign exchange from that sale of agricultural commodities, and yet Western Europe has great agricultural resources which are increasing, and we are going to find it increasingly difficult unless we are able to negotiate from a position of strength with them. So this matter is important.

165 The purpose of this discussion is to increase employment. The purpose of this discussion is to strengthen the United States, and it is a matter which deserves our most profound attention.

Are we going to export our goods and our crops or, are we going to export our capital? That's the question that we're now facing.

And I know that those of you who have been concerned about this know this to be a major problem. Last year, 1960,  
170 we invested abroad \$1,700 million, and we took in from our investments abroad \$2,300 million--which sounded like it was a pretty good exchange. But if you analyze these figures you will see that we took in, from the underdeveloped world, which needs capital, we took in \$1,300 million and we sent out in capital for investment \$200 million. And yet this is the area that needs our investment. While in Western Europe we sent out \$1,500 million and took in \$1 billion. So that if this trend should continue and more and more Western Europe became the object of American investment, it  
175 affects us all and affects the people who work with you.

We are attempting to repeal those tax privileges which make it particularly attractive for American capital to invest in Western Europe. We passed laws in the days of the Marshall Plan when we wanted American capital over there, and as the result of that, there are provisions on the tax book which make it good business to go over there.

Now we want it all to be fair, and we have stated we are not putting in exchange controls, which we will not. But we  
180 recommended in January the passage of a bill which would lessen the tax privileges of investing in Western Europe and which would have given us \$250 million in revenue and in balance of payments.

The tax privileges or the attractions should be in the underdeveloped world, where we have been taking capital out rather than putting it in, and not in Western Europe where the capital is sufficient and which does not serve that great national purpose. So this is a matter of concern for all of us and it is a matter which we must consider in the coming  
185 months.

The Common Market is a tremendous market. It has more people than we do. Its rate of growth is twice ours. Its income is about three-fifths of ours, and may some day be equal to ours. This can be a great asset not only to them but to us--a great strength tying Western Europe, the United States, and Latin America and Japan together as a great area of freedom. And I think that it represents one of the most hopeful signs since 1945. It is one place where the Free  
190 World can be on the offensive. And I'm anxious that the United States play its proper role to protect the interests of our people and to advance the cause of freedom. And I ask the careful consideration of the American labor movement in this area.

One of the problems which we have is to recognize that those who have been affected by imports have received no protection at all for a number of years from the United States Government. When I was a Senator in 1954, I  
195 introduced legislation to provide assistance to those industries which are hard-hit by imports. I am going to recommend in January a program which I hope the Congress will pass, which will provide a recognition of the national responsibility in the period of transition for those industries and people who may be adversely affected.

I am optimistic about the future of this country. This is a great country, with an energetic people, and I believe over the long period the people of this country and of the world really want freedom and wish to solve their own lives and  
200 their own destiny. I'm hopeful that we can be associated with that movement. I'm hopeful that you will continue to meet your responsibilities to your people as well as to the country. I hope that we can maintain a viable economy here with full employment. I'm hopeful we can be competitive here and around the world. I'm hopeful that management and labor will recognize their responsibility to permit us to compete, that those of you who are in the area of wage negotiations will recognize the desirability of us maintaining as stable prices as possible, and that the area of  
205 productivity and stable prices--that your negotiations will take adequate calculation and account of this need for us to maintain a balance of trade in our favor. In the long run it's in the interests of your own workers.

Let me repeat: If we cannot maintain the balance of trade in our favor, which it now is, of \$5 billion, and indeed increase it, then this country is going to face most serious problems. In the last 3 years, even though the balance of trade in our favor has been \$5 billion, we have lost \$5 billion in gold; and if this trend should go on year after year  
210 then the United States, as I have said, would have to make adjustments which would be extremely adverse to the cause

of freedom around the world.

The solution rests with increasing our export trade, with remaining competitive, with our businesses selling abroad, finding new markets, and keeping our people working at home and around the world.

215 And it is a fact that the six countries of the Common Market who faced the problems that we now face, have had in the last 4 years full employment and an economic growth twice ours. Even a country which faced staggering economic problems a decade ago--Italy--has been steadily building its gold balance, cutting down its unemployment and moving ahead twice what we have over the last 4 years.

So what I am talking about is an opportunity, not a burden. This is a chance to move the United States forward in the 1960's, not only in the economic sphere but also to make a contribution to the cause of freedom.

220 And I come to Miami today and ask your help, as on other occasions other Presidents of the United States, stretching back to the time of Woodrow Wilson and Roosevelt and Truman, have come to the AF of L and the CIO--and each time this organization has said yes.

Thank you.

*(4152 words)*

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