

WSM  
July 3, 1949

Good morning, friends:

A decisive victory for President Truman's program was won during the week in Congress and a decisive defeat was suffered. The victory was on the housing bill, the defeat was on the labor bill. As I said last Sunday, the Democratic administration has been trying to pass a large scale public housing bill for more than ten years. It has repeatedly passed the Senate but until last Wednesday had failed in the House. Even then it squeaked by by the narrow margin of ~~four~~ <sup>five</sup> votes.

How to provide decent living quarters for low-income families concentrated in the slum districts of our large cities is one of the most perplexing problems that has been before Congress in my time. A great many people and this <sup>especially</sup> includes me, ~~dislike~~ the idea of government ownership and operation of residential rental properties. Ten years ago two other new members of Congress and I joined together and led a fight that defeated <sup>such</sup> a public housing bill. We felt that private enterprise could do the job and would do the job. The three of us are still in Congress and on many occasions we have discussed our action of ten years ago. One of <sup>the</sup> ~~them~~ <sup>other two</sup> made a speech the other day in favor of the bill saying that <sup>the other of the three some</sup> he was sorry he opposed it ten years ago. I can't say that but ~~but~~ <sup>we</sup> can say that ~~we~~ have been disappointed to see the housing problem grow worse instead of better between then and now. Surely private enterprise was entitled to a chance to do the job. <sup>To say the least of it, our efforts gave a ten year trial period for private builders to provide an answer to this problem. But</sup> Private builders have not only failed to provide new and decent housing for the low-income people in large cities but readily acknowledge their inability to do so. So there we were and there was the problem. Nobody likes the housing problem, <sup>Here it is.</sup> nobody wants it but we've got it, <sup>and</sup> what are we going to do with it?

Government housing raises some deep and fundamental questions.

obligations

For instance, what are the ~~obligations~~ of the government of the people, by the people and for the people? Where are the limits to these obligations? Are there any limits? ~~What are we to do?~~ What are we as a nation to do with the slums of our cities that are rapidly growing worse and larger? But more important, what is to be done with the people who live in the slums ~~and~~ either for lack of income or desire ~~to~~ remain in them and rear their children in such blighted areas? The administration offered its plan. The plan stripped to its naked essentials is no more and no less than the spending of the tax payers money to tear down the slums and build nice new permanent type housing projects in which the low-income people will be allowed to live at a rent so low as to be only a fraction of what a real economic rent for such accommodations would be.

The charge was made that this was socialized housing, that it was State socialism.

The answers came thick and fast. What about subsidies to the airline, what about parity payments to the farmers, what about the tariff subsidies to the manufacturers, <sup>supposedly said.</sup> What is so unclean about subsidies that one class of people can have it and the other not? On the other hand, the danger of where such a program would lead us and the expense of it was viewed with alarm. One Democrat arose and said maybe it was a little socialism but if so he found himself in distinguished company as he went down the socialistic road. In such company, he said, as Sen. Taft, one of the authors of the bill, and Senator Ellender, and he named over an overwhelming ~~majority~~ majority of the United States Senate.

Though the debate swayed one way and then the other, the problem remained before us and the very fact that the pending bill was a positive attack

upon the problem gave it added weight. ~~What we were to do about it was~~

complicated by politics. The bill was one of the principal planks in the

Democratic platform last fall and most assuredly one of the prime issues in

the Presidential campaign. This ~~added its weight with~~ <sup>appealed to</sup> waiving Democrats.

*Then* <sup>persuasion</sup> ~~appeal~~ <sup>made by</sup> But there was the ~~appeal of~~ members of Congress from the large cities both

Democrats and Republicans. They went into the well and said "our constituents

have no particular interest in the farm program but we have voted for the farm

program." They said to me, "Our constituents have no particular interest in the

TVA or its steam plant. We could just as well vote against it as for it.

We voted for it because you said it was needed and vital to the welfare of

your people. Now, we come to you with a proposal that is vital and important

to the people we represent. We want your help." Such appeals were made

across the floor which in their effect reached across the country.

Nevertheless, the basic issues were so deep and so controversial that though

*did*  
the bill <sup>1</sup> finally passed, it survived by only the narrowest ~~of~~ margin <sup>of 5</sup>.

In the United States Senate, Senator Robert Taft of Ohio succeeded in having the Senate adopt his own proposed revisions of the <sup>labor</sup> Taft-Hartley Act. The Administration bill went down to defeat in that body much the same as it did in the House, the main difference being that the Senate proceeded to pass the bill after Senator Taft's amendments were adopted to the bill, while in the House, you will recall, the bill was recommitted to the Labor Committee after the Wood bill was adopted as a substitute for the Administration bill. It is plain to see, perhaps plain enough for the Administration and the leaders of organized labor to see, that no one-sided bill, which makes no adequate provision for dealing with strikes which threaten the nation's economic health and safety, can pass either House of the present Congress.

Predictions are going the rounds in the corridors of the Capitol that no further effort will be made to repeal or amend the Taft-Hartley Act. I hope this is not true. Even the strongest supporters of the Taft-Hartley Act, to wit, Senator Taft himself, acknowledge that experience has demonstrated that the Act needs modification. If such is needed and justified, and I think this is the case, then the present session of Congress ought to proceed to work its majority will to that end. The fact that the Administration cannot get all it wants should not be used to defeat a needed action arising out of justice and public interest. I do not even think it is good politics. Why do I say that? I say it because one of the principal planks in the Democratic platform was repeal or modification of the Taft-Hartley act and surely it is acknowledged by all that it was one of the issues <sup>upon which</sup> that President Truman

and the Democratic Party won ~~the~~ last November. Therefore, to the extent

that a platform can become a pledge to the people, this became such.

I made no such pledges myself nor did many other Members of Congress,

but, nevertheless, most everybody recognizes and concedes at least

some validity and meaning to the platform of our major political parties.

To deny that they have any meaning or value is to deny the efficacy and *very* worthwhileness of our two party system.

We have a Democratic Congress -- an overwhelmingly Democratic Congress. This Congress is unwilling to pass a bill just like the

President wants and I am one of those who is unwilling to do so, but

on the other hand, I believe the majority is willing to enact a bill

*What it considers*  
providing reasonable modification of the Taft-Hartley Labor Law, all

the while paying due regard to the public interest. That is what

we should do and the failure to do so would, in my opinion, be an

abrogation of our ~~very~~ real responsibility.