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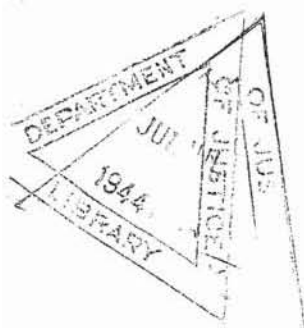
ANNUAL COUNTY CONVENTION
NEW YORK COUNTY ORGANIZATION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

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I shall talk tonight briefly on a subject which seems to me particularly important to emphasize at this time. I mean the unity of soldiers and of workmen during the war.

For two and a half years our country has been fighting beside its allies, first in defense and now at last for some months in an offensive attack against the enemy in many lands and on many seas. Ultimate victory seems assured. Yet our foes are resourceful and still strong. Vast spaces on the land separate our arms from the final thrust against the German Reich. And great reaches of the Pacific, though the horizon shrinks, still stretch between our guns and our bombers and the embattled islands of Japan. We have, ever increasingly, the tremendous problem of supply, as the arc of our attack spreads farther from the huge base of production here at home. The end cannot be in sight, and the time before the enemy lays down his arms will be far longer than many of our optimistic speculators would have us believe; far longer and far bloodier.

We are caught inevitably, therefore, in a dilemma where we know that we shall win the war, but we cannot say when, and can therefore make only in general outline our plans for peace. The temptation is strong to let down our unswerving concentration on the war. We can not afford the terrible risk. The talk of early victory, the assumption that the war is practically over, becomes a menace to our success. Such speculation weakens the scale of our production and divides the immediacy of our determination to get this gigantic struggle over swiftly and completely. We must not let up. We must not let ourselves be caught in the complacency of success. Our armies and navies will strike surely and swiftly only if we at home bend every

energy we have in us -- daily, hourly -- to keep them supplied with what they must have -- arms and food and the drugs that will bring so many more of our boys back alive.

The home production line is the base from which the fighting fronts draw their life blood. In this modern war, time and space no longer condition the uninterrupted flow from American factories and fields to the harbors and the broadening beaches behind the offensives. Our successes during these two and a half years since we entered the war -- at first slow but now more sure and swift -- have come not only because the Germans and Japs were unable to effect a permanent breach in our far-reaching lines of supply but also because the tremendous production behind that supply, though it may have fluctuated now and then, has really never faltered.

The Canadian, British and American navies swept the submarines from the seas or nullified their worth. Our Merchant Marine bridged the oceans of the world with tankers and cargo ships. Today those life-lines are safe from the enemy and are supplying our own armies as part of the great invasion -- Africa, Sicily, Italy, the beaches and the fields of France -- and part of the ever-tightening noose around the throat of Japan.

War is carnage, and facing death, and the suffering of loneliness no less than the agony of physical pain. But war, too, is the slow patient determination and effort of the men behind the front, the men and women of the production end, working day in and day out in the blast furnaces, in the shipyards, in the factories and behind the desks, tied to their jobs. There is not much high adventure on an assembly-line, except what the heart holds and the imagination brings to make the work a part of the fighting with the soldiers in the foxholes and along the bloody beaches.

The men at home must share that unity of purpose with the men at the front if we are to finish this job as swiftly as possible. It is not hard to understand the bitterness of the soldiers and sailors reading of strikes at home while they fight and die abroad. Why should strikes be permitted, they ask. We weren't given any choice, we were drafted; and if we didn't obey orders, we went to the guard house. Why should these guys be allowed to do what they please in the midst of a war? We'll show them when we get back!

Such talk is not easy to answer because, for the most part, the soldiers are right. And yet it is largely founded on a misunderstanding of the domestic economy. The broad picture of industrial production during these past two and a half years is not discouraging; far from it. To judge fairly, results must be held steadily in mind; and the results are found in the magnificent production in every field which has steadily sustained our armies on a scale incredible in its proportions.

For this achievement the leaders of organized labor and the leaders of industry, acting in concert under the no-strike, no-lockout agreement made with the President on December 15, 1941, immediately after war was declared, have been responsible. Both sides have stuck to the spirit of the agreement; and, on the whole, neither has taken advantage of the other and both have striven to a common end to get on with the war.

I think that the record is proof that both industry and labor have played the game fairly; that in spite of the sudden increase in the ranks of organized labor the men and women in labor's ranks have responded to discipline; and that union leaders, except for a wilfull and selfish few, have insisted on discipline.

Of course there have been strikes and there still are strikes, largely of the unauthorized or wildcat variety. Such strikes, and I say this as emphatically as I know how, are completely and thoroughly unjustifiable. And yet it is a tragic and shameful fact that strikes have been on the increase. Immediately before the invasion of France the figures showed a greater number of strikes and stoppages of longer duration. During the month of May, according to statistics compiled by the Labor Department, there were 610 strikes involving 290,000 workers and resulting in 1,400,000 man-days of idleness. Two months earlier, in March, there were only 360 strikes involving 115,000 workers and 415,000 man-days lost.

It is hard to say whether any single cause or what reasons lie behind this situation. It is not, I believe, lack of responsible union leadership. The leaders of the unions have never been more determined or more insistent than now on holding to the no-strike pledge. It may be due to a number of undetermined causes, now more frequently coming to the surface -- increased industrial fatigue and weariness with the war effort; a revolt against the monotony of labor which is new to many war workers; in particular cases, a protest against real or imaginary unjust wage treatment or personnel handling; in other cases, an attempt to force a prompt decision of some government agency before which a dispute is pending; or, more likely, a reaction to the often staggering difficulties inherent in working and living in war-crowded communities with inadequate housing and recreation services.

But whatever the causes, the results are selfish -- unthinkingly selfish, perhaps, but none the less selfish. And whatever the causes, they do not justify work stoppages, however short; for every strike, every

interruption in production is a very real and a very dangerous impediment to our war effort and postpones our ultimate triumph. While they undoubtedly are contributing factors, none of these causes of strikes are enough to account for what seems to be some slackening of our national effort. I can account for that only, as I mentioned earlier, by the existence of a totally unwarranted and very dangerous assumption that the war is practically over and that we can, therefore, lie back and stretch ourselves and take things easy for a while.

Well, let's get this much straight: We cannot take things easy so long as American boys are fighting and being killed! This is one job nobody can afford to loaf on.

Tonight I am suggesting that you consider how greater unity of purpose and of spirit can be achieved between these two fronts, the worker in the factory and the soldier on the field of combat. In every war there is a tendency for a gap to widen between the men who fought away from their homes and the workers who have been kept in the mill and the mine to supply their needs abroad.

If strikes impede the war effort -- and every strike is a tank-trap in the path of our invading armies -- the resentment against strikes, already so marked among soldiers today, will not die down when they return. They will not be able to understand why they were let down at home; they will remember the suffering and the destruction of their buddies; and they will be bitter. Returning when the peace comes, they will blame -- fairly or not -- organized labor and the leaders of the unions for the interruptions in production which hampered their victory and endangered their lives.

The very future of organized labor, whose success is always dependent on public opinion, is today at stake. Nor am I alone in this belief.

Early last month in a passionate denunciation of the workers of one of his locals who had gone out on a brief wildcat strike, R. J. Thomas, president of the United Auto Workers, declared:

"Any person who sets up picket lines is acting like an anarchist and not like a disciplined union man.... Our union cannot survive if the nation and our soldiers believe that we are obstructing the war effort...."

And yet, I do not believe that the men at home will let down the men at the front who are fighting our battles. Factory workers are no different from other Americans. They too have sons and brothers and buddies in the thick of the fighting.

And if the peace is to be won after the war is over, we must not allow any rift in the solidarity of the millions of the workers with the millions of the soldiers. You of the American Legion can greatly help and influence those soldiers when they return. You too were soldiers and you will understand the soldiers' point of view and their desires. You can be a liaison between them and the men who were kept at home to supply their needs -- a liaison of patience and understanding, to help iron out prejudices on one side and mistakes on the other. You can do much to bring about that unity of spirit which is so necessary in the peace that is to come, as well as in the war that it follows. We can never forget the heroism of the men at the front; but they do not want to be remembered as heroes. They want to be fitted back into work and life at home, into the normal life that they have been thinking of and longing for during all these dangerous and lonely days.