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Address by Rep. Gerald Ford (R.-Mich)  
before the  
AFL-CIO Legislative Conference

Willard Hotel  
Washington, D. C.  
January 11, 1960

President Meany, my colleague, Representative John W. McCormack, the Democratic majority leader, other distinguished guests and representatives from the various unions of the AFL-CIO. It's a great privilege and a high honor for me to have the opportunity to be here this morning and to participate in these activities.

I do wish to apologize for Charlie Halleck's absence. President Meany has indicated that he had been invited to speak for the Republican Party but unfortunately it was necessary for him to go to Pennsylvania to attend the funeral of one of our fine colleagues, Congressman Simpson of Pennsylvania. Charlie Halleck would have given you a fine address, humorous, substantive and I think one well worth listening to.

I come as a substitute, I've done that quite a bit in my life in the past. I only ask your indulgence because I will give my own views and those I believe that Charlie may have been ready to give you as a representative of the Republican Party.

In looking over rather hurriedly over the weekend the news release in reference to the conference, I was glad to note that four principle points seemed to be mentioned. One, there was a recognition of certain very serious and basic national problems such as the competition with the Soviet Union, the ideology and philosophy of Communism, a need for a growing and prosperous America, a necessity for greater freedom and justice for all of America.

The announcement also indicated that there were certain facts that had to be admitted. Such as the posterity of our people at this time in the length and breadth of our country. Of course this fact must be admitted because it's true. In the last six or seven years, the average hourly wage has gone up substantially in our country. In this same period of time, the average weekly wage has gone up substantially. During this same period of time, the total compensation or total national income has moved forward for all our citizens.

Now this improvement isn't what all of us would have liked, but nevertheless it has taken place and I believe very firmly that if we work together even greater improvement in these areas can be before us all in the days ahead.

The news release on this conference also indicated that certain challenges would be issued to the two great political parties of our country. Challenges and competition are good for all of us. They're good for me, for you, for my political party and for yours, and I can say without hesitation or qualification that I believe this challenge will bring greater results for your organization and for our country as a whole. In this same release also, and I am very appreciative for it, you gave to me and to a representative for the Democratic Party an opportunity to be here with you this morning. As a

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Republican and as a representative of the Republican Party, I re-emphasize my gratitude for this invitation. Historically, America believes in and has operated under, I believe successfully, a strong two-party system. This great tradition I hope and trust will prevail in the future. Historically, our two great political parties have been made up of citizens of all walks of life. Both Democrat and Republican have found their places in the minds and the hearts of people from Maine to California and from the North to the South. We, as Democrats and Republicans have intellectuals from the college campuses. Both Democrats and Republicans have representatives from business, both big and small. The two political parties have in their rank working people, production workers, skilled craftsmen, and both political parties have farmers carrying their banners. Republicans recognize this need for a broadly based Republican party and I say sincerely and completely honestly that as a Republican I welcome anyone or all of you into the ranks of the Republican Party now or in the future.

At times in the past I might say it has seemed to some of us in the Republican Party, particularly in a state like my own, Michigan, that the leaders of this organization and similar organizations have cast their lots one hundred per cent with the Democrat Party as a practical matter from your point of view. I doubt the wisdom of such a policy. This attitude may well have been the outgrowth of the old theory of the class struggle, the issue of capital versus labor.

Fifty years ago perhaps the GOP in the minds of some people may have well represented capital, but today modern Republican philosophy has a far broader impact, both philosophically and practically. Perhaps the best and most recent evidence of this is, I believe, the recent good work of Vice President Nixon and Secretary of Labor Mitchell in working with one of your own fine leaders, Dave McDonald, in a solution of a difficult and tough problem for over five hundred thousand Steelworkers. Today, I challenge the theory and the practice if it does exist, that the best interests of labor can be achieved by this organization or any other of supporting only the Democratic Party.

I might say parenthetically that the election of more Democrats and fewer Republicans in 1958 has, as for now, not brought the reward that many in your organization envisioned.

May I say, also, it takes more than a political party label to make a good ally. In my judgment the policy that this organization, or any other, should support only one political party is outmoded, is outdated by history. The theory of the class struggle is dead. Recent world history proves this point beyond any doubt. As times improve, as the good things of life become more abundant, and more available to your members and to other Americans, as our overall standard of living improves generally throughout the United States, the advocates of this one-party affiliation may find themselves in the position of a moored ship that finds itself high and dry, stranded and inoperative when the tide of time changes its level.

This conference has challenged the Congress to certain specific actions in the legislative field. On specific legislative proposals, your organization has endorsed certain bills, has advocated the enactment of certain proposals. During the course of this session, the reputable groups, representing other citizens of this country, will come forward with their answers to the problems that we all have. The President, for the Administration, recognizing certain areas that need action will come forward with his recommendations for our approval. From this melting pot of ideas, will come solutions of the problems that need attention, and I am confident that this Congress, both Democrat and Republican, alike will assume and meet their responsibilities in these areas.

For myself, I believe that the problems that concern you, and that concern Americans as a whole, can be achieved within the framework of a balanced budget, by controlling inflation, and by maintaining a strong flexible, modern and ever-alert national defense policy. One thing that I have always felt very deeply about can be summed up in a very few words, and it may be appropriate to say it here this morning: sometimes as I look at legislative proposals I become somewhat apprehensive because I realize and I hope you do too, that a government big enough to give us everything we want is a government big enough to take from us everything we have.

Now, in conclusion, may I say that this conference and rightly so, recognizes the broad challenge presented by the Soviet Union, the ideology and the philosophy of communism. This challenge is broad, the competition is tough, it will include a forthright challenge to our educational system. It will challenge the strength of our economy, both as to quality, quantity and competitive prices.

The Soviet challenge will meet us in the field of military posture. I, as one American, have no doubt that we can come out the winner. However, in the process, I respectfully suggest that we re-dedicate ourselves to the Republic (and we have a Republic here) that we re-dedicate ourselves to a representative form of government and thank God we have it, that we re-dedicate ourselves to our democratic way of life, and I say that you can't make footprints in the sands of time sitting down. This is not the time, my friends, for sunshine soldiers and summer patriots. We have the brains, the determination, the leadership, and if we put these all together and make a maximum effort with God's help, we will prevail. Thank you.

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