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Press release on Thurmond speech before Camden Chamber of Commerce, 1959 April 3

Strom Thurmond

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CAMDEN, S. C., April 3--Sen. Strom Thurmond (D-SC) served stern notice on two labor union leaders tonight that threats or verbal attacks by them will not deter him from his efforts to end "exploitation of the workers and the public by union bosses, the spending of Southern union dues to promote racial mixing and other socialistic programs."

The South Carolina Democrat made these remarks in a speech delivered before the Camden Chamber of Commerce. He was answering two union leaders -- Sinway Young and Joseph Keenan -- who called last week at a Charleston labor rally for his defeat in 1960 because he was not "liberal" enough in his voting record.

Remarking that the attacks came as no surprise, the Senator charged that they were timed to dissuade him from again taking a strong stand in the Senate this month to obtain an "effective labor reform bill" instead of the committee bill, which he described as containing "rubber teeth." He said union leaders are supporting the committee bill because the 'reform' part of the bill is riddled with loopholes and the remainder is loaded with provisions designed to strengthen the hands of the union bosses by weakening the Taft-Hartley Act." He pledged his full support to Senator McClellan's announced plans to try to strengthen the bill on the Senate floor.

Thurmond said the union leaders were mad with him not so much for his opposition to "socialistic" legislation as for his campaign last year to require union leaders to account to the workers for the expenditure of their dues funds for purposes which the workers opposed. In further developing this point, he said:

"In particular I pointed out (to the Senate) that many international union treasuries were contributing heavily to advance integration. I cannot believe that any substantial number of union members in South Carolina are willingly contributing to such efforts. I, therefore, supported vigorously an amendment (to last year's reform bill) which would make union leaders accountable in court to dues paying union members for the expenditure of union dues. It is still my belief that union members everywhere should be able to prevent their dues from being spent for purposes other than collective bargaining and to which they are opposed, and I will attempt again this year to give the union member the right to call his officers to an accounting for these funds."

The Senator charged further that the leaders of the international electrical workers, one of the unions attacking him, had tried last year to get the NLRB to help them cover up their integration activities but that the NLRB had refused. "Certainly," he said, "the worker who is contemplating voting for a particular union to represent him at the bargaining table has the right to know whether his union dues will be used against his will to promote the mixing of the races and other alien ideologies."

Emphasizing that he favors the States having the power to enact right-to-work laws, Thurmond said, "I believe a working man should have the right to either join or not to join a union, as he prefers, without any compulsion." He denied that such laws impede the union movement. The Senator listed as factors which do restrict union organization efforts "the expenditure by labor bosses of union dues for purposes to which the workers are opposed; racketeering; exploitation of workers and the public by unscrupulous union heads; and most important -- the refusal of labor leaders to put the real interest of the working man before their own selfish interests."

Thurmond stated that his position was with the "working man and the public" and not with "wealthy labor bosses" or "wealthy business barons." "No one group, or combination of groups, regardless of their identity or association, must be permitted to serve themselves at the expense of the average citizen."

Most of the speech was devoted to a review of the legislative record of the new 86th Congress, which the Senator described as "leaning far to the left." He said the most alarming feature of the 86th Congress is the "apparent unconcern for the fiscal condition of the Federal Government."

The Senator advocated the reduction and elimination of certain non-defense items and the expenditure of more funds for an adequate defense program above the "bare minimum" proposed by the Administration. In doing so, he outlined how this could be accomplished within the bounds of a balanced budget.

The speech was concluded with a pledge to "continue to fight vigorously for a return to Constitutional and fiscally sound programs, and to preserve the inalienable rights of individuals which can best be protected by fostering States Rights; and to oppose just as vigorously those socialistic influences which seek to destroy the South and, ultimately, America itself."

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