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W. Willard Wirtz, Secretary

AS DELIVERED

Address By
Assistant Secretary of Labor George L-P Weaver
Centennial Celebration
Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church, Akron, Ohio
October 14, 1966

To have been invited to deliver the Centennial Address to this historic and venerable body is an honor of the highest order.

As many of you know, this is my home state, and although my work frequently takes me to other continents, I consider my roots to be here in Ohio. And to be with so many old friends and see so many familiar faces is most pleasant indeed. It's good to be back in Ohio again.

A century of service. This is a proud claim for any institution in this relatively youthful country of ours. But for the Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church to be able to look back upon a century of service -- of work and worship -- is, in itself, a community milestone of significant importance.

One needs little imagination to realize what challenges and discouragements, what trials and victories, what difficult and exalted

periods this House of God has experienced. The mere fact of survival as a stable and functioning body is a source of great pride and inspiration for your denomination, for your community, and for christendom everywhere.

The first one hundred years in the life of this distinguished church have witnessed a veritable flood tide of sweeping social, political and economic changes in the life of your country, your city, and in the status of the American Negro. Many of these changes you have contributed to -- especially insofar as the Negroes of the Akron area were affected.

Looking back on the history of the Wesley Temple, it seems most appropriate that this church came into being in the year 1866. The Civil War had ended the previous year, the bitter institution of slavery had been destroyed in the South with the ending of the rebellion, and this strife-torn nation began to realize a fact which only today is finally gaining nationwide acceptance: that the words of the constitution declaring all men to be created equal and to possess certain inalienable rights were meant to apply to all Americans, regardless of color.

In the entire century of activities of Wesley Temple, I am informed, there have been 20 Pastors beginning with Rev. Cypert and his abandoned school building church and the 15 or so original members

to Dr. Morgan today and the impressive House of God in which some one thousand of you now worship, you have much indeed to be proud of.

The wisdom, courage and persistence this body has exhibited in the past efforts to survive as a viable institution in behalf of your people have had a profound effect on your community. I believe, too, that it has had a profound effect on our struggle for full civil and human rights as well.

We have reached another plateau in America's civil rights struggles, and it is this I would like to discuss with you this evening.

We are reminded each day that the civil rights movement is fragmented. More and more we are hearing sloganeering and even some demagoguery in place of the strategy of reason that brought us to the pinnacle of progress during the past decade and a half.

Our country has suffered a temporary setback this year with the defeat in this session of Congress of the Administration's latest Civil Rights Bill. And it suggests even more problems in the future, even some major reversals, unless our efforts on the national, state and local levels are able to rebuild a new coalition of conscience.

This reaction which has set in, I believe, can be traced to a growing conflict in strategy which besets us today. The dramatic progress I referred to during the past decade and a half has been achieved by the simple but effective strategy of utilizing the law and public opinion as the primary instruments of social change.

This resulted in the original Supreme Court decision on desegregation of public schools. It led to the Civil Rights Act of 1957 with its guarantee of the right to vote, use of public facilities and transportation. It resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which spelled the end to discrimination in public places and which established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, backed by law, to end discrimination in employment.

Utilizing the law as the vehicle to correct social and economic injustice, and supported by non-violent, brilliantly-conducted protest activities, we achieved the necessary court decisions and legislative enactments to provide the framework for improving the status of the American Negro.

Never before in the history of this country has a President -- as well as the total Federal Government -- been so committed to the attainment of this goal. The principle of equal opportunity under law is inherent in all the major domestic legislation passed since 1961.

Legally, therefore, our Government has largely created the machinery for the implementation of equal rights and opportunity. But at the same time, we recognize that the creation of machinery is only the first step - we must make this machinery work.

Perhaps, the most important task facing us today is to make certain that the civil rights laws we have fought for and won do not wind up, in the classic phrase of Anatole France, merely assuring "The rich and the poor alike the equal right to sleep under the bridge at night."

In other words, the next plateau in our struggle for equal rights demands that a distinction be made between the right to hold a particular job and the right to be able to get the job in the first place. What I refer to, of course, is the right of the disadvantaged person to overcome any handicap of training and learning that prevents him from competing for and holding the job of his choice.

For some, perhaps, this is a difficult distinction to make. For others, it comes through loud and clear. Saying that we subscribe to an end to discrimination in employment, and believing this covers the matter sufficiently, is a delusion.

So long as our laws regarding employment consider civil rights merely in the sense of prohibiting any overt discrimination, the law will remain substantially incomplete.

Today, a man who is turned away from the factory gate because of the color of his skin has a clear-cut legal case. But another who is turned away from the factory gate because he is untrained has no legal case at all, even though the reason he is untrained is that he was born in a ghetto and his education was as unequal as it was separate.

The fact is inescapable that this situation is wrong.

The two cases of job discrimination I described are the same - except that an employer did the discriminating in one case, and society did it in the other.

If an individual suffers from unemployment or under-employment because of the disadvantage that accompanied his race, this is as much a matter warranting redress as if he is denied a job through overt discrimination.

The primary problem facing us today is the realization that any meaningful law of employment involving civil rights cannot be limited to simply the prohibition of discrimination. It must include provision for a substantial degree of affirmative action.

Therefore, the capstone of all this legal and legislative work, I believe, was the administration's transition to the war against poverty. Here is where we logically moved toward the heart of the problem - jobs, economic security, a genuine opportunity for improvement in the basic areas of existence.

But now, differences in strategy are apparent. The cry of black power is threatening to drown out the calm and reasoned philosophy of nonviolence, of intelligent protest, of the wise use of the law and public opinion. Impatience and hotheadedness too often have been substituted, where heretofore the strategy of reason led to progress.

This is not to say that many of the flareups that have caught the headlines have not been provoked by ill-conceived acts of certain law enforcement officials. This is not to say that these flareups cannot be easily traced to long neglected poverty, humiliation, oppression and exploitation.

All of this is true, but the fact remains that you cannot substitute violence for reason. You cannot substitute black chauvinism for white chauvinism. When you attempt this, you alienate the broad community support of all groups which have been forged together in a common pursuit of justice through the technique of nonviolence.

It is precisely this departure from the philosophy and practice of nonviolence that has caused the fragmentation of the civil rights movement today.

What is sorely needed today is a redefinition of priorities, a restating of goals, a strategy to meet change. Is it the Negro's goal to overthrow? Absolutely not. It has long been the goal of the American Negro to participate, not overthrow. The goal is an equitable share in the American economy, in housing, in education and in social opportunity. This is the real goal, and it will not be achieved by substituting a "molotov cocktail" for reason and negotiation.

In seeking a better job, one does not burn down the place of employment. In seeking better education one does not physically assault the teacher and principal. In seeking a better home, one does not tear down, but rather builds up. Physical destruction of person or property is self-defeating and serves only to embitter and deny us the goals we seek.

Nonviolent protest has done much for our country's image throughout the rest of the world. It has accomplished much for the Negro in bringing him ever closer to the attainment of his full civil and human rights. But in the final analysis it is not enough to simply protest. Modern man must participate, and this participation involves building new structures, new rules and new human relations.

The American Negro is in the crucial process of growth and development. He is undergoing profound changes. He is building a life independent of his old life which had been constricted by prejudice and frozen by neglect. He is beginning to understand the value of ability and talent and skills. In short, he is developing an entirely new sense of identity. And this is the freedom he seeks.

So when I speak of redefining our priorities, I think specifically of education and jobs. And I think you will find that it is impossible to separate the two. The one is the key to the other.

Here we have the crux of the problem: The major emphasis of the human rights battlefield is shifting from the Congress, the statehouse, the city Council and the courts to our communities in the fields of education and jobs. No amount of sloganeering or cries of Black Power can change this historical fact. And what is needed so

desperately today is not more heat on yesterday's inequities but rather more light on tomorrow's solutions. These are the two areas where we must concentrate all our efforts and energies. This is the time to evolve a new strategy for change.

We gather here this evening, remembering the long and historic role of the past century, hopeful that your judgment, your wisdom, your leadership remains constant for the years ahead.

An ancient philosopher once wrote: "Not by years but by disposition is wisdom acquired."

I would venture to say that never before have we been so disposed to acquire wisdom. And I would further venture to suggest that groups such as the Wesley A. M. E. Zion Church, with a century of work and worship behind them, are the repository of an inordinate amount of wisdom.

Your record of the past hundred years, coupled with the moral suasion you are able to bring to any problem, means you have a special responsibility today.

This is a responsibility to assume the moral and political leadership in your community to build a life not constricted by prejudice and neglect, but rather a life of spiritual, economic and social fulfillment. The influence of this congregation in your community can do much to guide and lead along these lines.

It is a responsibility to lead us, in the words of the book "To the Rock that is Higher than I."

May I wish for you and those who follow, another century of inspired work in praise of God and man.

Thank you for allowing me to spend this evening with you during your momentous centennial celebration.