Carey address at
Rutgers Labor Education
Center, October 20.

For the American labor movement this gleaming structure that we dedicate here today is far more than a sanctuary of learning composed of mortar, brick and stone. It is far more, too, than a memorial and a tribute to the leadership of labor past and present; and it is far more than trade unionism's contribution to the opportunity of future generations to learn and understand.

This edifice, we believe, represents all these things and much else.

To us this building is the consummation of an ideal, a monument of proof that labor and education, down through our country's history, have been synonymous words and synonymous concepts.

The burgeoning of democratic education and the burgeoning of democratic labor in the United States have been inseparable. One has been nourished upon the other.

This has been part of the uniqueness of the American labor movement.

Alone of the great labor movements of the world, American trade unionism was not born primarily out of an economic dogma or economic demands. It was not born out of a limited political creed or political demands as were so many labor movements of other lands that have both preceded us and followed us.

Uniquely the American labor movement was actuated in its origins more by the ideals and potentials of free universal education than by any other inspiration.

In the American dream that labor shared with all other sections of the populace in the early 1800s, education was to be the instrument that would change the world.

Education would be the wandering paths and highways of achieving a bright democratic world undreampt of in the past.

Education would be the weapon of reform; education would be the seminal inspiration of economic change and political progress.

Man must first have knowledge, said the leaders of the early American labor movement;

he must have facts and access to more facts -- through education, through reading, through public libraries and through a free press -- before he can change the world.

That was the philosophic soil from which the American labor movement began to grow in the early 1800s when groups of unions and crafts federated to create the first national labor body. Not wages, not hours, not working conditions or the right to organize were the labor movement's first goals; but rather free universal education.

When American labor's first political organization, the Workingmen's Party, was formed in 1829 the initial and most emphatic point of its platform was free universal education.

> "We seek," the platform stated, "a system that shall unite under the same roof the children of the poor man and the rich, the widow's charge and the orphan, an educational system in which the road to distinction shall be superior industry, virtue and acquirement without reference to descent."

Similarly, labor newspapers which sprouted and bloomed with surprising frequency in that period, almost always listed the labor movement's goals on their mast-heads or on their editorial pages, and almost always the goal of free public education led all the rest.

The early American labor movement, one might say, anticipated the revolutionary concept of a great American educator who was born 103 years ago today. The labor movement of the early 1800s would have staunchly agreed with John Dewey when he asserted:

> "Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."

In short, the labor movement was at first primarily an educational movement. The goal of free democratic education was far more labor's goal than it was the goal, for example, of the churches or of political parties.

But history permits us to go beyond the mere statement that free public education was the labor movement's ideal and its goal and the subject of its agitation.

Free public education was chiefly the labor movement's achievement, in the view of many historians. Labor historian Herbert Harris, for example, tells us that:

> "It has always been one of the more popular superstitions that our free school system somehow 'just growed' like Topsy, or was somehow forevisioned and blueprinted by the Founding Fathers. The more erudite may even mention something about Horace Man and Henry Barnard. But, as a matter of fact, our free school system was almost wholly the result of unceasing agitation by the wage earners who, with the introduction of power-driven machinery, were beginning to be divorced more and more from their tools and to congregate in the mushrooming factory cities and towns.

"Free schooling was then available only to the 'pauper poor,' a state of affairs which, in the worker's view, knocked the catchwords of liberty and democracy into a cocked hat. His new concept of himself as a citizen who had inalienable rights didn't dovetail with the idea that his children could learn how to read and write only by means of what was really a charitable handout.

"'Free, equal, practical, non-sectarian, republican' education became a slogan around which rallied the new hosts of labor. At conventions and meetings of workingmen's parties countless resolutions were adopted, varying the theme that 'equality among men results only from education; that 'the educated man is a good citizen and the uneducated an undesirable member of the body politic ..."

Other historians confirm this primary role of labor in the winning of our free educational system. Historian Foster Rhea Dulles declares:

> "Never have a people had a greater faith in education -- 'the greatest blessing bestowed on mankind' -- than this generation of Americans. The workers could not have been more determined in demanding it for their children as a right to which they were morally entitled."

The workers were both determined and successful, in state after state, starting in 1834 in Pennsylvania where the legislature enacted the country's first free, tax-supported school system.

The immigrant workers who made America "the great melting pot" also played an important role in the spread of free, democratic education, as Charles and Mary Beard pointed out.

> "Swarming thousands of men, women and children," the Beards wrote, "were arriving in America from foreign lands. Many of them were unacquainted with the English language and with the arts of self-government. In this situation it was argued that free schools were needed to start the children of immigrants on the way to citizenship in the Republic and offset the feudal heritage brought from Europe."

So more than any other labor movement in the world the American labor movement was born out of the crusade for free public education and itself, in turn, contributed more than any other section of society to the fulfillment of that ideal.

But as the years went by and state after state instituted public school systems, the labor movement found that its fight was only half-won.

Free public schools were one thing, but what good were they if they weren't attended? What good were they if children left these schools at ages of eight or nine or 10 and went to work in mills and factories or in the home sweat-shops that disgraced the clothing, textile and other industries?

In mid-century, therefore, the labor movement almost had to start the painful long-drawn-out struggle all over again. This time the goal was summed up in a single word: "compulsory."

Free education was not enough, said the labor movement; it had to be "free and compulsory education."

It proved to be as long and arduous a struggle as was the original achievement of free tax-supported schools, because this time large sections of industry that profited exorbitantly from child labor fought the reform tooth-and-nail.

The battle wasn't even won as late as 1912 when the labor movement pointed out indignantly that "of the 25,000,000 children of school age in the United States, 50% leave school at the end of the 6th grade, at approximately 14 years of age."

This, then, is American labor's heritage of struggle -- a heritage on which it places immense importance today, a struggle that unionism has not only not relinquished but, on the contrary, has intensified.

Today the labor movement continues its fight for higher grades and higher ages for compulsory schooling. The labor movement today campaigns for free compulsory education not just through grammar school but also through high school.

And in an extension of its 130-year-old ideals and aspirations, the labor movement today fights in state legislatures and in Congress and in all the forums of public opinion for more schools and more modern schools, for more teachers and better-trained teachers, for larger appropriations for text-books and technical equipment.

Today the labor movement insists that through subsidies, scholarships or other means college education must be brought within the reach of all young people who are qualified for higher education and desire it.

Today the labor movement stresses, just as it did 100 and 130 years ago, the vital importance of adult education and vocational training.

Today, too, the labor movement is deeply concerned with the issue of equal opportunities in education, with the ending of all forms of racial discrimination in city schools, colleges and universities.

It was for all these reasons that John Dewey, looking back on this 130-year educational crusade by the labor movement, was able to declare:

> "I say without any fear of contradiction that there is no organization in the United States -- I do not care what its nature is -- that has such a fine record in the advance of liberal progressive public education."

This heritage, therefore, this traditional identification of democratic labor with democratic education makes it highly appropriate that the American labor movement today should be building and endowing great labor education centers on the campuses of our universities.

If the labor movement can be said to have a culture and a tradition of its own -- and I believe it can -- then that culture and tradition will be preserved and, I hope, enriched in such centers as this one at Rutgers. Here are the physical facilities that could hardly be imagined at the turn of the century designed for the study of the American labor movement, for the advancement of effective labor-management relations, for the improvement of understanding between employer and union, for the refinement of skills in collective bargaining, grievance handling, organizing, arbitration, and interpretation of labor law.

Here in this Rutgers Labor Education Center will be modern classrooms, seminars, and conference suits; here students will find a spacious auditorium for lectures, debates and forums, for films and the live dramatic presentation of bargaining techniques and grievance methods. Here will be found the latest in audio-visual materials and the devices for their projection. Here will be housed the archives of huge international unions and small local unions.

Here also will be a library, of which I am especially proud, intended to bring together the major historical materials dealing with the American labor movement.

Here will be centered, we hope, the books, the documents, and the records chronicling the progress of American working men and women since the Colonial days when they were indentured servants and slaves to the emergence of the AFL-CIO as the world's largest and most powerful labor movement. Here will be the books, the documents and the records of trade unionism's struggles, through decades of sacrifice and blood and tears, for the right to live, the right to lift the nation's wage earners to new levels of dignity and pride and independence.

The labor movement has pioneered this center as the first unit of a complex of buildings planned for the Institute of Management and Labor Relations, an Institute that will become, we hope, a national center for study and research into the increasingly important field of labor-management relations and the relations between government and trade union and corporation groups. The labor movement, we hope, will endow more and help build more units of this complex.

The Greek word for leisure, I am told, is derived from the term from which we take our word school. Thus leisure can be conceived, as Robert Lee has written, as an aspect of the educational or learning process. "The spirit of leisure is the spirit of learning, of self-cultivation."

This, in part, is what the American labor movement has in mind when it crusades today for the shorter workweek, in the same way that it crusaded a century ago for free public education.

And with the achievement of the shorter workweek and greater leisure, there will come greater utilization by working men and women of our institutions of advanced learning, of centers of labor education such as we dedicate here today.

Therefore, as I have said, this building is for the labor movement a consummation of an ideal, the fulfillment and the result of the democratic labor movement's close identity with democratic education.

Of all mankind's possessions, of all civilization's treasures, none are as precious or as indispensable to humanity's future as are the storehouses of wisdom and experience which we call our institutions of learning.

In these the labor movement today -- as it did at its very beginnings -- places its faith and hopes for man's survival, for man's perfectability, for man's limitless future.

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