

Statement by James B. Carey, President,
International Union of Electrical,
Radio & Machine Workers AFL-CIO, at
Labor Union Leaders' Meeting with
President John F. Kennedy, June 13, 1963.

President Kennedy's speech to the people of the United States and his call for Federal civil rights legislation places him in the forefront of the greatest moral crusade in America today. In 1948, President Truman asked Congress to implement the Report of his Committee on Civil Rights, on which I was privileged to serve. Since then and until President Kennedy's speech to the nation on June 11, 1963, no President has spoken out so forthrightly and boldly. The temper of the times commands a legislative response and new laws. The brave and selfless action of Negroes and whites, particularly the youngsters, has written indelibly on the pages of history that second class citizenship will no longer be tolerated in the United States. The struggle for civil rights has moved from the courts to the streets.

There is a desperate urgency that there be a legislative approach devised and enacted to provide for stable and rapid progress. Moreover, the legislative response must be as broad as justice and decency demand.

Most of us in the ranks of organized labor have long fought against employment discrimination without regard to the identity of the enemy. We have fought employers, employment agencies and even those small segments in the ranks of the unions that deny equal employment opportunity. Our success has been limited and the failure to move further is more important than the gains we have made.

We support broad-gauge effective legislation in the field of public accommodations. However, it would be a tantalizing fraud to tell a Negro that the color of his skin will no longer be used to

prevent him from buying a meal or renting a hotel room if we do not guarantee to him the opportunity to earn money so that he may use these facilities. We believe that it is as urgent that the President include equal employment opportunities in his civil rights legislative proposals as that he include other elements of a program adequate to meet the needs of the nation.

We commend President Kennedy for his enforcement of the Constitution in accordance with the interpretation handed down by the Supreme Court. However, as he himself pointed out, legislation is necessary. We believe that the U.S. Attorney General should have both the responsibility and the authority to undertake lawsuits whenever any of the civil rights of an American citizen is jeopardized or denied. We believe that the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, finding that segregated schools violate the Constitution, should be implemented and that legislation be enacted that will guarantee prompt and certain integration. The right to vote is an indispensable need of any free society. Limitation on this right has been demonstrated. We support legislation to protect that right including displacement of local registration officials by Federal registrars where it is demonstrated that the local officials are embarked on a policy of obstructing the right to vote.

We are proud that we have participated in every arena in which has been fought the fight for the equality of man. We earnestly hope that the struggle may be diverted from the streets to the halls of Congress. We will be in either place or both places as the needs may arise. We hope and pray that under President Kennedy's leadership a free and decent society will be achieved now.