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Perspective

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Labor and the Candidates

by Raymond Moley

THE following is an account of a meeting between candidates Kennedy and Johnson and Sen. Harry Byrd in August. In the main, it is based upon an article by a responsible reporter, Frank van der Linden, published in Southern newspapers, including The Nashville Banner and The Greenville (S.C.) News. The account did not come from Byrd, but apparently from the Johnson people.

In late August, Kennedy and Johnson had a meeting of Southern senators to win their support for the national ticket. Byrd was a conspicuous absentee. Thereupon, Kennedy and Johnson asked to come to Byrd's office to explain things. Byrd told the two candidates that he disagreed with most of the Los Angeles platform, especially the pledge to repeal that section of the Taft-Hartley Act which permitted states to enact "right-to-work" laws. Byrd was assured by Kennedy and Johnson that such a repeal "won't necessarily be enacted if they are elected."

Byrd then confronted Kennedy with a bill (S. 1269) introduced in 1955 by Senators Kennedy, Clements, Douglas, Lehman, Pastore, Murray, and McNamara which proposed exactly what the 1960 platform promises about "right-to-work" laws. Kennedy answered that he "did not press its passage." Kennedy could have done so because he was a member of the Labor Committee and could have insisted upon hearings. There were no such hearings, and the bill died.

KENNEDY TO MEANY

Byrd made it clear then, as he did in the Senate in a speech, that he considered such a repeal an unwarranted invasion of the right of a state to enact such a law. Twenty states have it, and in nine, "right-to-work" is in the state constitution because of a vote of the people.

In the AFL-CIO News for Oct. 1, 1960, there appears a lengthy interview of Kennedy by president George Meany:

"Mr. Meany: Senator, I believe that kind of strong labor movement is made impossible by measures such as 'right-to-work' laws. What do you think?"

"Senator Kennedy: Let me make

it clear once again, as I have in the past, that—whatever office I shall hold—I shall always be unalterably opposed to so-called 'right-to-work' laws at any level, Federal or state ... To achieve that goal [preserve and protect the legitimate rights of legitimate unions] now means the elimination of some anti-labor sections of the present labor laws. To that end, I am unequivocally committed."

Nixon opposes the repeal of that section of Taft-Hartley.

FACING BOTH WAYS

While the great majority of the leaders of the big unions are committed to the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, the millions of members who have elected them and supported them with their dues should consider seriously the foregoing accounts of what Kennedy and Johnson have said—in one case to the South, and in the other to the unions through their official publication.

The wisdom and effectiveness of "right-to-work" laws is not the issue here. The issue goes to the validity of a party platform and the pledges of party candidates. That is a matter for union members to consider.

It also goes to the constitutional right of a state to legislate on a subject which concerns its internal affairs. If the Federal government can invade a right of a state, validated by the courts, to pass these laws—and twenty states have exercised that right—there will remain little in a state's province that cannot be taken away by a triumphant, powerful majority in Congress backed by a President who believes in such invasions. That is a matter for citizens of the South, indeed for all Americans, to consider. This goes to the essence of the kind of government we shall have in the United States.

It is well known that the Southern States are bitterly opposed to most of the provisions of the Los Angeles platform. Texas Democrats made that position official in their state platform.

Johnson said recently on "Meet the Press" that he had not calculated what either platform would cost. Thus, he has endorsed a platform which to him has no meaning in terms of money or taxes.