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Politics and the Labor Bills

by RAYMOND MOLEY

The demands of politics are present in the current labor pains of Congress. The election year 1948 is a reality, and politicians are realists. But the long record of the Senate debate shows less demagoguery than is usual in such important legislation.

As might be expected, the quality of the Senate debate is much higher than that which characterized the passage of the House labor bill. It is exceedingly unwise to ascribe to political strategy all the positions taken by the various parties to the debate.

In fairness to Taft, it should be said that, despite his Presidential ambitions, he is trying to get fair and not punitive legislation on the books. There is something in Robert Taft which suggests his father's honest effort to serve the public interest regardless of unfavorable political consequences. Taft's job is not easy, for he has to contend with aggressive New Deal Democrats, as well as with such pro-labor senators in his own party as Ives, Morse and Aiken. But he is guiding a narrow working majority in the direction of a bill which President Truman will find hard to veto.

The occasional conflicts between Ives and Taft have prompted a good many commentators to say that this is really a political contest between two leading Republican candidates, Taft and Dewey. This is as wrong as to say that Ball's views in the Senate represent the man who made him a senator—Harold Stassen.

While Dewey and Ives have enjoyed a long political friendship, they do not share identical views on labor legislation. Dewey enjoys the privilege of not committing himself on the current bills. It is no secret in New York that Ives is following his own convictions on labor. He has studied the subject prodigiously. He leans toward labor's case on most subjects. He need not worry about politics, because he has a long term ahead of him. It may be assumed that when Dewey expresses himself on labor, he will sound more like Taft than Ives.

While Ives won his fight against the first Taft-Ball amendment to Senate Bill 1126, it must be said that Taft had the better of the argument. The amendment simply attempted to pre-

vent the coercion of local unions by the officers of the industrywide or international federations of unions. There was nothing in the amendment to justify the Ives contention that the amendment would "tear trade unionism apart." This was an exaggeration which hardly belonged in the discussion.

But the big question is whether

President Truman will sign the bill which finally emerges. It is generally believed that he would veto the more drastic House bill, if it were passed. But the House bill will not pass. A less rigid one will emerge. There are those who are urging the President to veto even a mild bill. Their argument is that Roosevelt's strategy was to pacify at all costs the

margin of voters who leaned heavily toward labor. This was because big-city majorities could carry those industrial states which, combined with the South, could elect a Democratic President. These people say that Truman cannot get Republican votes in any event. He cannot carry agricultural states. Therefore, to kill all labor legislation this year will not injure his chances in 1948.

This is bad advice. It overlooks the fact that the city vote in 1946 was not overwhelmingly Democratic. Big inroads were made by Republicans in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit. There are thousands of loyal union members who believe their leaders have demanded too much and have gone too far. Millions who have no union affiliation are fully convinced that labor needs a check rein.

The 1946 election so clearly indicated a demand for comprehensive labor legislation that to reject this demand would cause a tremendous reaction against the President. Truman is not Roosevelt. His Cabinet is far more conservative than that of his predecessor. Finally, he should remember that his present increase in popularity began with his strong stand against John L. Lewis.

Truman's political moves are much more obvious than the subtler ways of Roosevelt. If a fair bill were vetoed, it would be immediately ascribed to a direct attempt to hold the labor vote. In that case, Truman's 1948 chances would be very dim indeed.

