CONFIDENTIAL
Press Conference #380
Executive Offices of the White House,
July 9th, 1937 - 10.50 A.M.

Q We estimated last night, Mr. President, that you must have had your picture taken ten thousand times on Constitution Avenue.

THE PRESIDENT: I think everybody I saw had a camera.

Q There were at least four out of every five.

THE PRESIDENT: Those snapshots will be going all around the country. If it had not been the Boy Scouts I would have charged for it.

Q You could have made a small charge and come out way on top. Between the Boy Scouts and the Congressmen with cameras, Eastman stock is pretty good.

MR. DONALDSON: All in.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there is any news. I will go down the river tomorrow and come back Sunday afternoon.

Q There have been two or three stories purporting to set forth the Administration's attitude towards unions in the Federal Government, and I would like to ask you a question as to whether you favor Government

employees joining unions to the extent of collective bargaining with Government. Do you care to discuss that or say anything about it?

THE PRESIDENT: I will tell you a story. Way back in 1913, when I went to the Navy Department, one of my jobs under the law was to set the Navy wage scale every year under a Congressional Act which provided, I cannot remember the exact language but the effect was that the Navy should pay, in each Navy Yard, the scale for the work of the particular character that was paid in private employment in the vicinity.

Up to that time, as I remember it, the time I got there, this had always been done by local Navy Yard Boards, in each case composed mostly or entirely of Naval Officers -- am I right, Kirk, you remember that?

Q (KIRK SIMPSON) Perfectly right.

THE PRESIDENT: And I changed that in this way: I had the recommendations made by the Yard Boards, but they were brought to the Assistant Secretary and the Assistant Secretary thereupon notified the workmen in all the Yards that he would hold hearings in relation to a question of fact: What was the average pay in the

vicinity?

So we held, I think it was a three- or four-day session, and representatives of the employees in the different Navy Yards presented all of the facts that they had. They stated wherein they disagreed with the Naval officers' findings and they made certain requests as to working conditions. I remember one of the first ones that came up was the toilet facilities at the Norfolk Navy Yard, and we got on extremely well, and I changed, in certain minor particulars, the findings of the Navy Boards in the different Navy Yards and then, under the law, announced a schedule of pay for the coming year.

That same year there came up the question of whether we would enter -- whether the Government, with its civilian employees, would enter into an agreement, an agreement with, as I remember it, the Draftsmen's Union, and I made a very simple and obvious ruling: The Government does not engage -- of course, the words "collective bargaining" were unheard of in those days -- the Government does not make contracts with any Government employee. The administrative executive officers operate under a

law. They have no discretion. The pay is fixed by the Congress and the workmen are represented by the members of the Congress in the fixing of Government pay. They ought to have the privilege always of coming and laying their case before the administrative officer who is in charge of their department.

That ruling, made, I think, in 1913, is just as good today as it was then. The pay of Government employees is fixed by the Congress. We people who run the Executive Department of Government as a whole are bound by the law. Every workman has a full opportunity to be heard. They can lay the case before the Congress if any change is contemplated in the law. That is where it is made.

Q In 1913, were you following the rule of a predecessor or did you establish this policy then for the first time?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know whether -- so far as I was concerned it was original on my part, but there may have been precedents for it.

Q You said that every workman has a right to appear before this Board?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Would they also have the right to select their own representatives without any interference with anyone?

THE PRESIDENT: At that time I laid down the rule, it was a simple one, that an individual workman could come in and state his own case; he can state it through a shop committee, he can state it as a representative of a minority within a shop or a Yard, or he can choose officers -- I would say representatives -- who are not working in the Yard.

You will remember our old friend, Al Berris, he was a grand fellow, he was chosen, as I remember it, unanimously by the machinists -- wasn't he a machinist?

MR. EARLY: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: In all the Navy Yards. He was not a machinist in the Navy employ; he was an official of the Machinists' Union.

Q Mr. President, do you think that Government employees should have the right to strike to enforce their demands?

THE PRESIDENT: No, the Civil Service rules cover that. That is very simple.

Q Do I understand you, by this story, to mean that there

are certain things left within the discrimination of the administrative officers that might properly be dealt with back and forth between representatives of the employees and Government officials?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, let them all be heard. Like the example of the toilets at the Navy Yard. When the condition of the toilets was called to my attention I had enough funds that were within my discretion and we improved the condition of the toilets.

Q Mr. President, do you think that a union would destroy this ability under the present system for all employees to be heard?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, they can join any union they want. There is no prohibition against that. They can join ten unions.

Q But on the question of wages and hours, what latitude do the workers have since the amount is fixed by Congress?

THE PRESIDENT: It is up to the Congress. Congress lays down the method today of fixing compensation and always has.

Q Then, in other words, you would not have the representatives of the majority as the sole bargaining agents?

THE PRESIDENT: Not in the Government, because there is no collective contract. It is a very different case. There isn't any bargaining, in other words, with the Government, therefore the question does not arise.

Q Mr. President, can you tell us whether you are considering the sponsorship of a Constitutional amendment on the compulsory retirement of Judges at seventy-five?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

Q Or for limitation of terms of the Supreme Court Justices?

THE PRESIDENT: Same answer, same thing.

Q No, you could not tell us, or, no, you are not considering?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I am not considering.

Q Mr. President, have you any comment yet on the published report that there is a break between the Administration and John L. Lewis?

THE PRESIDENT: That is the same old story, press reports.

Q Would you deny them?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not confirming or denying all of the various stories that I read in the press every morning. That is said in the most kindly way. Obviously I cannot. We would be here for six hours.

Form 2

# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

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HEADQUARTERS
LABOR BUILDING
10 INDEPENDENCE AVENUE S. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

July 14, 1937

Dear Mr. President:

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to extend to you, on behalf of the entire membership of the National Federation of Federal Employees, a cordial invitation to attend our Twentieth Jubilee Convention, which opens at Springfield, Illinois, on September 6, 1937.

Inv. Springfield Ill

As an officer of the Federal Government in 1917, and as one who then as now was keenly interested in the equitable solution of problems affecting public personnel, you may perhaps recall the organization of the National Federation of Federal Employees in September of that year. And, as well, the conditions which impelled thoughtful and forward-looking employees to work together in a pioneer endeavor both to improve their status and to raise the standards of efficiency in the Federal service.

It is naturally a source of very distinct pride and satisfaction to the National Federation of Federal Employees that during the past two decades it has been able to bring about so many fundamental betterments which have redounded to the benefit of the Government and the taxpayers as well as to the employees. The National Federation of Federal Employees not only takes pride in this record but in the manner in which it was achieved, which we have reason to feel reflects credit upon all concerned, and has been in complete consonance with the best traditions of public employee relationships.

On the occasion of our Twentieth Jubilee Convention the National Federation of Federal Employees will review the

past and plan for the future, keeping in mind at all times the high and special responsibilities which rest upon those entrusted with the day by day and year by year transaction of the public business.

Delegates to the Convention will represent every department and agency, rank and type of employment in the Federal Government except the Postal Service, and delegates will be present from every State and the possessions, as well as the Foreign Service.

May we hope that, should you find it possible to be absent from Washington in September, you will accept our cordial invitation to participate in this meeting?

Yours respectfully,

Luther C. Steward

President.

The President,
The White House.

July 16, 1937

My dear Mr. Mitchell:

With the return of the accompanying letter addressed to the President by Mr. Luther C. Steward, President of the National Federation of Federal Employees, will you be good enough to prepare a draft of a letter which the President could send to this organization in connection with its Twentieth Jubilee Convention early in September.

Because the relationship of the Federal Government to its employees is one of paramount importance at this time, it seems to me it would be timely to point out why Government employees have no right to strike and why their right to collective bargaining is greatly restricted by the fact that Congress establishes their wages.

In a press conference the other day the President explained why administrative officials of the Government have little or no lee-way in their treatment of workers; that wages and hours are prescribed by Congress, and that the workers must take their grievances to the Capitol through their Representatives in Congress for any major changes. He emphasized that Federal administrative officers have some discretion in dealing with working conditions; that a Government employee is free to join one union or ten unions if he pleases, subject to anti-strike regulations of the Civil Service Commission.

All in All, it seems that this forthcoming Convention would afford the President an excellent opportunity to say many things which need to be said with emphasis.

Very sincerely yours,

William D. Hassett
Assistant to MR. EARLY

Honorable Harry B. Mitchell,
President,
Civil Service Commission,
Washington, D. C.

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August 16, 1937.

My dear Mr. Steward:

As I am unable to accept your kind invitation to be present on the occasion of the Twentieth Jubilee Convention of the National Federation of Federal Employees, I am taking this method of sending greetings and a message.

Reading your letter of July 14, 1937, I was especially interested in the timeliness of your remark that the manner in which the activities of your organization have been carried on during the past two decades "has been in complete consonance with the best traditions of public employee relationships". Organizations of Government employees have a logical place in Government affairs.

The desire of Government employees for fair and adequate pay, reasonable hours of work, safe and suitable working conditions, development of opportunities for advancement, facilities for fair and impartial consideration and review of grievances, and other objectives of a proper employee relations policy, is basically no different from that of employees in private industry. Organization on their part to present their views on such matters is both natural and logical, but meticulous attention should be paid to the special relationships and obligations of public servants to the public itself and to the Government.

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All Government employees should realize that the process of collective bargaining, as usually understood, cannot be transplanted into the public service. It has its distinct and insurmountable limitations when applied to public personnel management. The very nature and purposes of Government make it impossible for administrative officials to represent fully or to bind the employer in mutual discussions with Government employee organizations. The employer is the whole people, who speak by means of laws enacted by their representatives in Congress. Accordingly, administrative officials and employees alike are governed and guided, and in many instances restricted, by laws which establish policies, procedures, or rules in personnel matters.

Particularly, I want to emphasize my conviction that militant tactics have no place in the functions of any organization

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of Government employees. Upon employees in the Federal service rests the obligation to serve the whole people, whose interests and welfare require orderliness and continuity in the conduct of Government activities. This obligation is paramount. Since their own services have to do with the functioning of the Government, a strike of public employees manifests nothing less than an intent on their part to prevent or obstruct the operations of Government until their demands are satisfied. Such action, looking toward the paralysis of Government by those who have sworn to support it, is unthinkable and intolerable. It is, therefore, with a feeling of gratification that I have noted in the constitution of the National Federation of Federal Employees the provision that "under no circumstances shall this Federation engage in or support strikes against the United States Government".

I congratulate the National Federation of Federal Employees on the twentieth anniversary of its founding and trust that the convention will, in every way, be successful.

Very sincerely yours,

Mr. Luther C. Steward,
President,
National Federation of Federal Employees,
10 Independence Avenue, S. W.,
Washington, D. C.

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