

THE LIFE AND WORK OF WILLIAM L. HUTCHESON

JOHN R. STEVENSON, *Vice-President*

United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners
of America

In my lifetime I have drawn many assignments. Each of them I have tried to fulfill to the very best of my ability. Some were satisfying and others were chores. The task I have before me today transcends in personal pleasure and pride anything which has befallen me to date.

Man never stands quite so near to God as when he stands in the woods, for in the woods the handiwork of God is everywhere. It is in the surge and rejuvenation of spring. It is in the hum and the splendor of summer. It is in the mysterious and awesome transformation of autumn, which turns summer's glory brown and sere, as a prelude to winter's long sleep. Everywhere in the woods the drama of creation is being enacted over and over again—birth, life, death, and rejuvenation.

The drama being played out today is exactly as it was in the beginning of time. Here in this tiny patch of woods the ebb and flow of creation have gone on unmolested for eons beyond number. They were at work when Thrace and Macedonia were in their prime. On this spot Indian eyes may have watched them unfolding long before the white man dreamed of the new world.

And now we are here today to insure that they will continue as long as civilization endures. Here in this tiny island of unspoiled nature the cycle of existence will be repeated over and over again long after those of us within the sound of my voice are gone and forgotten. I cannot help but feel that we are here and now standing as close to immortality as it is possible for mortal man to stand.

Before I do anything else, I want to express my profound admiration for all the Mettler heirs who, through years of varying fortunes, resisted all economic pressures to sacrifice these woods for personal gain. There must have been many times when the temptation was real and pressing.

We also express our deep appreciation of the work performed by the Citizens' Scientific and Historical Committee for the Preservation of Mettler's Woods and to all groups and individuals participating in this worthy project, and to our colleague, Raleigh Rajoppi, for his splendid cooperation in bringing this undertaking to the attention of the General Executive Board of our United Brotherhood, which resulted in our being here today to participate in this program.

Individually and collectively, many sincere and dedicated people worked long and hard on this project. Out of busy lives they allocated time to campaign for the preservation of these few acres of unspoiled nature. To all of them we say, "Well done," and "Thanks."

Now it is the privilege of an organization whose historic roots are embedded deeply in the forest lands of America to place the capstone on this superstructure of common effort.

It is particularly fitting that these woods should be dedicated as a memorial to a man whose origins and accomplishments are linked closely with the wilderness areas of the nation. Throughout his lifetime he worked unceasingly for conservation and wise management of all our natural resources—particularly those of a renewable nature.

William L. Hutcheson was born in the deep woods of Michigan on February 7, 1874. He grew up in the woods. Before he could read or write he could translate innumerable signs that forests unfold to the practiced eye. To him a broken twig meant a bear had passed this way, or a muddy stream meant a deer had slaked its thirst here. In all the years of a rich and fruitful life, William L. Hutcheson never lost the deep love and respect for unspoiled nature he developed as a boy in Michigan.

As a boy Mr. Hutcheson began working in the woods. He started by cutting and framing timbers for ships. Therein he followed his father's footsteps. He was apprenticed to the carpenter trade, became a journeyman, receiving 20 cents an hour and working ten hours a day, 60 hours a week.

In those days the lot of the worker was hard. The hours were long and the pay meager. There were no protections against the woes of illness, accidents, or unemployment. The evil slings of misfortune rained heavily on those who had to work with their hands for their daily bread.

Against these many injustices the soul of young William L. Hutcheson rebelled. In May, 1902, he helped organize a local union at Midland, Michigan, and was immediately elected its first president. Shortly thereafter he transferred to Local Union 334 at Saginaw. For the next half century he devoted all of his time and his talents to the upbuilding of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America and the perpetuation of the American way of life.

Gradually he rose through the ranks of his organization until, in 1915, he assumed the presidency of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America.

Under his inspired leadership the United Brotherhood grew and prospered. From a membership of 200,000 he built his organization to over 800,000 members in the 36 years he was at the helm. He stabilized its financial structure and spearheaded the move which culminated in the erection of the splendid Home for Aged Members at Lakeland, Florida, where carpenters 65 years of age and with 30 years' continuous membership can spend the remainder of their lives in comfort and security.

I do not believe it is any exaggeration to say that this Home for aged members, built and maintained by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, is one of the showplaces of Florida. Situated on the shores of beautiful Lake Gibson, a few miles out of Lakeland, it is approached by paved drives which meander through vistas of lawns, flowers, and venerable moss-draped live oaks. A thousand acres of prime citrus groves surround the Home. In addition to providing fresh citrus fruits for the tables of the Home, these groves go a long way toward making the Home self-supporting for they make the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America one of the largest single producers of citrus fruits in Florida. A large herd of blooded dairy cows insures a plentiful supply

of milk and milk products for the occupants of this Home. The Home is an empire of its own. Every conceivable form of recreation, including an 18-hole golf course, is provided for the enjoyment of Home occupants without cost. A complete hospital is maintained to guard the health of retired members living there.

And the moving spirit behind all this was William L. Hutcheson. He spearheaded the drive which established the Home. He drove the first survey stake when the land was a wilderness. He supervised the actual planning and erection of the Home. In addition to being General President, he served as manager of the Home from its inception in 1928 until he passed away in 1953.

Thus we find that Mr. Hutcheson's duties and talents were not confined to labor matters. As manager of the Home, he became an authority on the raising and marketing of citrus fruits. He successfully combined the occupations of luxury hotel manager, dairyman, truck farmer, and hospital supervisor. But the Home for aged members is only one of the monuments he left behind him. The United Brotherhood's pension plan is largely his brainchild. He manned the laboring oar in the drive which established the Union's pension plan. As of today, some 20,000 old-time members of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America are receiving pensions from the union.

The Home and the pension plan have been in effect for over 30 years. They are truly dreams brought to reality by the initiative and inspiration provided by William L. Hutcheson. I need not dwell on what a boon they have been to thousands of old-time members.

In his lifetime, Mr. Hutcheson saw the organization he headed for so many years elevate wages from dollars per week to dollars per hour. He saw it cut hours from 60 and 70 per week to 40 and 37. He witnessed an improvement in the welfare of the families of carpenters who became better fed, wore better and more appropriate clothing in winter and summer. He saw their children grow up and go to college and become leaders in the sciences, arts, and professions. He had the satisfaction of knowing that all these things were made possible by the efforts of the organization he headed.

The contributions Mr. Hutcheson made to human welfare were not confined to the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. For years he served as a vice-president of the American Federation of Labor. On many occasions he attended conferences in Canada, Europe, and South America. Over the years his friends and admirers throughout the world became legion. When death ended his long and fruitful career, there was mourning in teeming cities and tiny hamlets in many climates and lands.

In a message of condolence at the passing of this distinguished citizen, President Eisenhower concluded his telegram with the sentence, "He was a true American." No words could more aptly sum up the life of William L. Hutcheson. He was indeed a true American.

Year in and year out, for over a half century, Mr. Hutcheson waged unrelenting war against the radicals and communists who tried to use the very freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution to destroy both the Constitu-

tion itself and the government maintained under it. As early as 1926 he and the members of his General Executive Board issued a circular letter warning all members that communism and true trade unionism had nothing in common and that no man could practice both at the same time.

In all the years since then there has never been a known member of the Communist Party in the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. William L. Hutcheson was fighting communism skillfully and doggedly when it was only another word in the dictionary to many Americans. I shudder to think what the situation might be today if Mr. Hutcheson and fearless men like him in the American labor movement had not stood up to the communist threat years ago.

For their efforts William L. Hutcheson and his colleagues in American labor were vilified and slandered by the communists and their fellow travelers. Particularly was this true of Mr. Hutcheson. Because he fought them so effectively they heaped ridicule and abuse on his head. All the techniques of character assassination and smear which they used so skillfully were brought to bear against him. But not once did he ever take a step backward in his personal fight to keep America free and strong. No more unyielding foe lived in our time.

The kind of America William L. Hutcheson visualized and fought for was a free America—free both from communism and from strongly centralized government. He looked askance at the gradual encroachment of governmental agencies in labor relations and many other fields. In his career as General President of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, he stood up to many attempts to make American labor subservient to an arm of government. Often he did so at considerable personal peril.

In the 1920's he refused to knuckle under to the so-called American Plan, which sought to reduce unions to glorified debating societies. Against all sorts of pressure he refused to compromise sound union principles. In the end, the American Plan was discarded and organized labor remained a free and independent force dedicated to the common good.

Twenty years later, with his own personal liberty at stake, he defied the effort of the Attorney General's office to impose dictation on labor unions. He fought the matter through one court after another, clear up to the Supreme Court. There he achieved victory for himself and for organized labor. While less courageous labor leaders were pleading *nolo contendere* he was fighting for the right of unions to remain free and untrammelled by direction from Washington. Legal labor history was thereby made.

However, the services of William L. Hutcheson were not confined to labor matters alone. Three Presidents of the United States drafted him for public service. In all three instances he acquitted himself with distinction and honor.

During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson named him to serve on the War Labor Board. Under the joint chairmanship of former President William Howard Taft and the Honorable Frank Walsh, the War Labor Board rendered outstanding service to the nation during the trying

days of World War I. As a member of the Board, Mr. Hutcheson deserves a full measure of credit for his wisdom and experience which helped to guide the Board over many rough hurdles.

In 1935 President Roosevelt appointed Mr. Hutcheson a labor adviser to the Santiago, Chile, meeting of the ILO, the agency created by the League of Nations to work for the betterment of living standards throughout the world. Among the hundreds of delegates there representing government, industry, and labor, Mr. Hutcheson was one of the most eloquent spokesmen for a free enterprise system to increase production and a free labor movement to insure a fair distribution of that production.

President Truman too saw fit to call on the services of William L. Hutcheson. For two years Mr. Hutcheson served with distinction on the Labor Management Panel set up by President Truman to advise him on labor matters.

An ardent Republican all his adult life, Mr. Hutcheson gave much of his time and talents to the party. In the Hoover and Landon campaigns he served as director of the Labor Division of the Republican Party. In the 1951 convention of the Republican Party he was a delegate from Indiana. He was one of the two delegates from Indiana who voted for Dwight D. Eisenhower from the first ballot until his nomination was achieved.

In the brief time allotted to me it is impossible to touch on the breadth and scope of Mr. Hutcheson's activities and interests. He was first and last a great labor leader. But he was also a businessman, an administrator, and a patriot.

It was only natural then that the twenty-seventh General Convention of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, held in Cincinnati last November, should authorize the establishment of a suitable memorial to this able leader whose contributions encompass much of the world.

In searching for an appropriate memorial, the General Executive Board considered and discarded many ideas. Nothing seemed suitable. But when the plight of this tiny island of primitive America was called to the attention of the Board, there was unanimous agreement that this was a fitting memorial. No man loved the woods more. No man did more for the people who earn their living through the harvest of the woods.

In a real sense, William L. Hutcheson was a product of the woods. Like a forest giant he weathered the winds and gales without flinching or yielding. Until my dying day I will never think of William L. Hutcheson without recalling a poem whose authorship I have never been able to establish. It is called "Good Timber" and reads as follows:

The tree that never had to fight
For sun and sky, and air and light,
That stood out in the open plain
And always got its share of rain
Never became a forest king,
But lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil,
Who never had to win his share
Of sun and sky, and light and air
Never became a manly man,
But lived and died as he began.

Good timber does not grow in ease.
The stronger the wind, the tougher the trees;
The farther the sky, the greater the length;
The more the storm, the more the strength;
By sun and cold, by rain and snows,
In tree or man, good timber grows.

Where thickest stands the forest growth
We find the patriarchs of both,
And they hold converse with the stars
Whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and much of strife.
This is the common law of life.

To the many students wherever they may be who have studied nature's wonders in the woods, to the many who will receive instruction here in the years that will follow, to the teaching staff and officials of Rutgers University, and to all of you present here today the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America says, "We wish you well." May Divine Providence take care of you.