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Who Killed the Kennedy-Ives Labor Reform Bill?

SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN F. KENNEDY

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Friday, August 22, 1958

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, only the Jimmy Hoffas and the Nathan Sheffermans can find satisfaction in the failure of this Congress to pass the labor reform bill, generally known as the Kennedy-Ives bill. Honest union members, informed business men, responsible labor leaders, law enforcement officers, and the general public—all of these will suffer as the result of this bill's death in the House of Representatives.

Those who voted against the bill and those who lobbied for its defeat must bear a heavy responsibility during the coming months when racketeering and gangsterism in the labor movement continue unchecked. I cannot believe that the American people will accept some technical or procedural argument offered by way of excuse for the defeat of a bill which would have put Mr. Hoffa and his ilk out of business.

No two experts in labor affairs could probably agree on a draft bill in this controversial and sensitive area. Therefore, it was natural that criticism and controversy should surround it. As the Senator from Arkansas [Mr. McCLELLAN] put it during the debate in the Senate:

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Each Senator, no doubt, feels that if he were privileged to write it he could improve on this measure.

In the same colloquy, he expressed what I believe all of us felt, when he said:

I say let us take what we know all of us want, and pass the bill, and then move on.

And the Senate did just that, and passed the bill by an 88-to-1 vote.

That this bill displeases extremists is not surprising, for these same extremists have been the ones who have prevented the enactment of any progressive labor legislation since 1947. But this bill passed the Senate precisely because the members of this body demonstrated, in the words of Business Week magazine, how "wise guidance in the public interest can be substituted for concern over wide apart partisan positions."

The Kennedy-Ives bill, as it passed the Senate, was a strong, bipartisan measure. Whatever may be said about what the Congress might do on some other bill at some other time, this bill represented a real opportunity for effective labor reform in this Congress. The failure to enact it only means that Hoffa and the handful of irresponsible and arrogant labor leaders who plague an otherwise clean labor movement will continue to operate.

Of one thing we may be sure: Next year, there will be more scandals, more racketeering, more abuses by the hoodlums who have infiltrated a tiny fringe of