

Durkin Row Is Much Ado About Nothing

General Eisenhower's designation of Martin Durkin, an AFL pro-Stevenson Democrat, to be secretary of labor in the new cabinet has created a hullabaloo seemingly out of all proportion to the matter's importance and to the background facts.

The criticism, including Senator Taft's comment that it was an "incredible appointment" and an "affront" to the union members who supported General Eisenhower for the presidency, apparently is centered on the fact that Mr. Durkin worked against the Republican ticket during the campaign and upon the further fact that he is a representative of union labor—general president of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe-fitting International Union.

The latter circumstance is no violation of precedent. Despite the presence of labor secretaries unaffiliated with labor unions throughout the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, the appointment of union leaders to this cabinet post conforms to precedent established in the Woodrow Wilson administration and followed under conservative Republicanism.

The first secretary of labor, William B. Wilson, appointed in 1913 by President Wilson, was a member of the old Miners' Union and helped to organize the United Mine Workers. James J. Davis, a member of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers of America, and William N. Doak, a member of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen, filled this cabinet post in the Harding, Coolidge and Hoover administrations. Not only is there precedent, there is logic in the designation of experienced labor men for the labor post, just as there is logic in the appointment of experienced business men to, for example, the office of secretary of commerce.

There is, moreover, more prestige than authority over labor matters in the post of labor secretary. He has no control over labor-management relations, which is vested by Congress in the National Labor Relations Board. Nor does he have authority over the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, a limitation also imposed by Congress. He does administer the wage and hour law, the

Federal Employment Service, and the field of labor standards and statistics. His office further is a clearing house for suggestions in industrial relations.

Mr. Durkin's most useful service, in the light of precedent, will be his role as a labor adviser to the President. For that service he apparently is experienced, qualified and nonpartisan in the performance of duty, having served as the Illinois state director of labor and under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

As to Mr. Durkin's political background as a Democrat and a supporter of Governor Stevenson, it seems apparent that, instead of seeking to affront any political alignment or labor faction, General Eisenhower has made a strong gesture of good will and has given tacit assurance that bearing grudges has no place in his character and that in seeking competence party affiliations are not a barrier.

General Eisenhower undoubtedly considers Mr. Durkin a competent man, and his record in the Illinois labor department and the comment of his associates bear out this measurement of him. It also should not be forgotten that millions of Democrats, voting as independents, supported the Eisenhower ticket in November. They hardly will be affronted by an appointment from the ranks of their traditional party. Those who did not vote for General Eisenhower must feel that no line of division has been drawn against them, that they have been given recognition in the government, and that their support is invited.

Although Mr. Durkin is a member of the American Federation of Labor, the leadership of the Congress of Industrial Organizations apparently understands and approves his selection and recognizes it as assurance that Eisenhower policy is not aimed at destroying unions but at extending them fair treatment.

The President-elect, if one may presume to read his mind, is seeking above all to restore American unity and confidence in government as the instrument of all the people. That overriding consideration must leave the public with the distinct feeling that the criticism of Mr. Durkin's appointment is much ado about nothing.