

JOHN HERLING'S LABOR LETTER

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THIS WEEK WE REPORT ON:

VIET NAM AND LABOR: Behind the scenes last week at the AFL-CIO convention in San Francisco an intensive battle was fought on the issue of the Viet Nam war.

As is true today in practically every sector of American life, the war in Southeast Asia has raised considerable concern and worry in the ranks of organized labor. The national debate on the subject this week has been stepped up due to rumors of offers to negotiate and their rejection and now the cease-fire.

Because the AFL-CIO convention represented about 13 million union members and families, the Administration's most important spokesmen, led by President Johnson himself, addressed the assembly. The President phoned the labor gathering from his ranch, emphasizing the significance of the Viet Nameese struggle to the 1,000 delegates whose rank and file constitute the industrial power of this nation in peace and war.

There was no question that the AFL-CIO has stood early and strong behind the Administration's Viet Nam policy. Over the past few months this position has been stressed by the labor leadership. But the Johnson Administration was taking no chances in these fluid times of appearing either to neglect or take for granted labor opinion and its community impact.

Both Secretary of State Rusk and Vice President Humphrey appeared in person. Both made impressive statements, with the Vice President rallying labor support in more hawk-like tones.

Secretary Rusk, no frequenter at labor gatherings, gave a stellar performance. He caught -- perhaps helped create -- the mood of the convention's attitude toward the whole Viet Nam complex. Speaking freely and directly to the delegates -- and without appearing to recognize the presence of some student demonstrators in the balcony -- he delivered a poised and sensitive analysis of the stakes in the Viet Nam war. While asserting the war's necessities, he stressed the U. S. willingness

to negotiate and the concern for social and economic development of Southeast Asia.

In the meantime, a resolution on Viet Nam had been drafted by Jay Lovestone, the learned head of the AFL-CIO International Affairs Department. Distributed to members of the powerful Resolutions Committee, it almost immediately created a steaming reaction. For two days, it was discussed back and forth. Taking the lead in opposition, Auto Workers President Walter Reuther argued behind the scenes that the Lovestone resolution gave the impression of an American objective to encourage expansion of the war and to goad the Chinese and the Russians rather than to limit Communist aggression against South Viet Nam.

To avoid an undesirable open conflict on the floor, AFL-CIO President Meany and Mr. Reuther got together and agreed on a resolution which gave prominence to organized labor's support of the Administration's "persistent efforts to hasten the end of military operations in Viet Nam and to speed the inauguration of a vast program of social and economic reconstruction in the entire Indo-China peninsula."

What finally emerged from the convention with combined Meany and Reuther backing, was a shorter and more positively worded resolution, emphasizing negotiation rather than escalation. A considerable amount of what was regarded as "chauvinistic" language in the Lovestone version was eliminated. This was considered by some delegates a setback for Mr. Lovestone who, in recent years, has exercised considerable influence in formulating AFL-CIO policies in foreign affairs. A Communist leader in this country for twenty years until 1939, he has now become known as one of the most rigidly militant of anti-Communists. His own early doctrinaire Communist position and his personal knowledge of Communist conspiratorial tactics seemed to some critics to have left him with an active chemistry of suspicion toward anti-Communists possessing a more flexible attitude in international relations. On the other hand, those who know him best consider him far from being fixed in his posi-

tions. His selfconfidence, they say, rather is the product of unique experience and unusual position. The complaint of such people is that his vocabulary, as revealed in policy statements, is often obscurantist when it is not polemical.

AFL-CIO STRESS ON PLANNING: For the first time, the organized labor movement has spelled out a full program of planning on a national and regional basis. Heretofore, organized labor's demands were usually listed as a separate if coordinate series of links, but this is quite different from planning as such.

In this convention, almost passed unnoticed, the AFL-CIO passed three resolutions which embody the concept of planning in specific programs: The National Economy; Public Investment to Meet America's Needs, and Urban America. They reinforce each other.

These planning programs were passed by the AFL-CIO during the week that American astronauts made their rendezvous in space -- a triumph of planning to yet another stage on the way to the moon. Somehow the concept of planning seemed no longer alien to earth-bound people in this age.

Here is part of the program in summary: The federal government is urged to develop -- as soon as possible -- a comprehensive and coordinated national inventory of needs for housing, community facilities and public service. A detailed inventory of present backlogs and growing needs should be prepared by each state and metropolitan area, as well as a coordinated national inventory, developed by the federal government.

On the basis of such needs, says the AFL-CIO, the federal government should provide plans and programs to meet specified requirements, within specific periods of time -- through financial and technical grants-in-aid to the states and cities and guarantee loans, as well as through direct loans and direct federal efforts.

Such programs, said the AFL-CIO convention, depends on timing. The timing to reach established targets for meeting the various categories of needs should be speeded up or slowed down, depending on changes in national defense requirements and the availability of manpower and productive capacity.

A massive, coordinated national effort to

meet these needs is long overdue, the AFL-CIO says. To maximize the effectiveness of these urgently required expenditures for achieving full employment, such outlays must be coordinated with other economic policies and programs through a national planning agency.

REUTHER NEWS CONFERENCE ON "TODAY": Here, for the record, is the interview with Walter Reuther on NBC's TV program, on Dec. 16, the day after the convention adjourned. It caused considerable comment but was missed by many who are interested. We are making it available at their request.

Q: "Mr. Reuther, there are some critics of the AFL-CIO who say that the leadership is old and stagnant and uninterested in new ideas. Now, is there any truth at all in this criticism?"

Reuther: "Well, I suppose there is some truth in that, but I think that in general the American labor movement is on the march. The very impressive legislative record that was made possible in the last election could not have been possible without the very vigorous support of the American labor movement.

"We could not have gotten the bill on aid to education, the Medicare Bill or the Civil Rights Bill, or the Urban Affairs Department, and none of the other things, which are really the first steps if we are going to move America towards the Great Society.

"So, that I think that while perhaps there are always going to be deficiencies in the American labor movement, like any other institution made up of free men and women, I believe that in general the American labor movement is beginning to move. We are getting younger leadership and I think this is a very hopeful development."

Q: "Well, would you like to see more bright young men on the Executive Council, for example?"

Reuther: "Obviously, I have been pushing for this for a long time and I think when a federation like this comes together and we make a change of 33 and 1/3 percent at one time, that's a very important step. And I think that this gives me great encouragement that in the future we will continue to move in the direction of getting younger, more vigorous leadership."

Q: "Would you like to see more contests for these positions?"

Reuther: "Well, I think a healthy, democratic contest is a good thing. I have great confidence in the democratic process and I believe that in -- in general it will come up with the right answers."

Q: "Mr. Reuther, it's been ten years now since the old American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations merged. At this ten year point, how would you assess the major strengths and major weaknesses of the organization?"

Reuther: "Well, I would start out by saying I think its major weakness is its failure to date to commit the kind of resources essential to the task of organizing the unorganized. The American labor force is growing. Its composition and character is changing in the light of the impact of the 20th century technological revolution. And the American labor movement to date has somehow not been quite able and willing to commit the kind of resources that must be committed to the organization of the unorganized."

"We have the task of organizing workers who are in the general area in which the labor movement historically organized workers. And then we have to deal with the new workers who are coming in -- office, technical and professional people who are becoming a larger percentage of the American labor force."

"And then there are millions of the working poor who are being left behind, who are not getting their share of the fruits of developing technology. And while they may not represent a very attractive investment in terms of trying to get per capita tax and dues payment, I do believe that they represent a great challenge and a moral obligation to the American labor movement. We've got to organize the working poor so that they can begin to get the benefit of the leverage of the labor movement brought to bear upon their economic and social problem."

Q: "How much money do you think should be spent for organizing the unorganized?"

Reuther: "Well, I think enough ought to be spent to do the job. And I'd like to say that while the failure to organize the unorganized is one of the shortcomings, I think that the two areas in which we have made the greatest progress since the merger are two areas which the CIO group were much concerned about. We have made very substantial prog-

ress on the civil rights front. The CIO unions took in all workers regardless of race, or creed, or color."

"Some of the older unions in the AF of L did not follow that kind of policy and we were able to change this and while we have not achieved perfection, and there is still much work to be done in the vineyards, I think we have made substantial progress."

"The other area is I believe that the overall American labor movement now is accepting the concept that you cannot solve the problems of wage earners in a vacuum -- that we can make progress only as we work with the total community and facilitate progress for the total community. And I think this gets reflected in the kind of legislative effort that we made."

"We worked just as hard for aid to education, and just as hard for civil rights, and just as hard for Medicare, and just as hard for housing and just as hard for these kind of things as we do for things that can be considered to be purely labor matters. It's because we recognize that essentially all the things we believe in are indivisible and we can get them for ourselves only if we fight to make them universal."

Q: "Let me ask you how you feel about the Johnson Administration's hold-the-line economic policy? Does this mean that unions will have to go slow at the bargaining table -- that they will have to tone down their wage demands?"

Reuther: "I think essentially what we're talking about here in this area is what do we need to do to insure that America can realize its full economic potential and achieve full employment. And then having had access to the tools of economic abundance, how do we share that abundance so that in sharing it we create the dynamics of growth and expansion which are essential to full employment?"

"I believe that if you will look at the facts -- if you take the period from the second quarter of 1960 to the second quarter of 1965, which is the latest measurement of the last five years, you will find that wages in that period moved up 32 percent, but profits went up 43 percent. And American industry in 1965 will make forty-five billions of dollars."

"The General Motors Corporation, a small corporation with whom I have some relationship, made in the first six months of 1965 two billion fifty-four million dollars, or 51

percent return on their investment. General Motors could afford to pay GM workers higher wages, cut the price of every automobile and still make a higher profit than the average American manufacturing concern."

Q: "I'm not sure I heard you answer the question."

Reuther: "And so the question is how do we share in this abundance? And I believe that the Administration's policy will enable workers to get an increasing share. And I do not believe that the Administration is suggesting even remotely that workers should not get a larger share in the increase in the productivity of their labor."

"And this is all we are trying to do. We want the consumer to get a share; we want the worker to get a share; we want the stockholder to get a share. And only as we keep those equities in their proper dynamic relationship will we have full employment and economic growth."

Q: "Let me ask you about the action of the convention in increasing the President's pay to \$70,000 dollars from \$45,000. Do you think that most rank and file union members think a union President should get that much money?"

Reuther: "No, my answer to that is I think they don't think that they should. But I think you've got to recognize that a free labor movement, like a free society achieves unity in diversity. There are all kinds of people in the labor movement."

"I happen to believe that a labor leader doesn't need that much. I think if you want to get that much, you ought to work for General Motors and then you'll get that much and a great deal more if you're in the top leadership. I think there has to be a reasonable relationship. No, my point of view is -- some people differ with me, but this is why we have a free labor movement. This is why we have to live with diversity. I happen to believe one way, other people happen to feel otherwise."

Q: "Did you vote against the pay raise?"

Reuther: "No, I didn't, because I felt that that would be misunderstood. If Mr. Meany wants \$70,000, I think we can afford to pay him that. This is a matter of his individual wish in the matter. I don't think he

took the initiative in this thing. I think other people did. But he has to live with his point of view and I live with my point of view."

Q: "What is your point of view about the convention's total support of the Administration Viet Nam policy?"

Reuther: "Well, I think the American labor movement essentially takes the position that I think represents the position of the great majority of the American people. I think that we support the position that was, I think, enunciated very clearly by the President in his historic speech at Johns Hopkins University in which he said essentially: 'We are going to do what we must do to stop Communist aggression.' We are not going to appease and encourage aggression, because we learned the tragic lessons of Hitler and Mussolini. And the world ultimately because it appeased aggression became engulfed in a tragic world war. On the other hand, this is the first time in history that a great power is fighting a war not for the purpose of winning a war, but for the purpose of disciplining the other side to sit at the conference table."

"And I believe that what we have to do is to resist Communist aggression that exhausts every possible avenue and continue to explore with, I think, commitment and persistence -- finding a way to unlock -- how do you get to the conference table; how do you negotiate a peace? And that's our position."

Q: "Mr. Reuther, could you give me a very quick answer as to whether you personally would welcome the Teamsters back in if Mr. Hoffa were no longer President?"

Reuther: "My position has always been that the Teamsters ought to be back when they meet the basic ethical and moral standards that we think represent the minimum standard of a free world labor movement."

Q: "And that would be without Mr. Hoffa?"

Reuther: "Well, I think that that would be an important contribution."

Happy Holidays

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