

FROM UAW-CIO
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Address of Walter P. Reuther, Director of the General Motors
Department, United Automobile Workers of America, CIO, over
the Red Network of the National Broadcasting Company,
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MORE AIRPLANES FOR DEFENSE

Good evening, Fellow Americans.

When knighthood was in flower, it was considered a blot on one's honor to attack an opponent before he was ready. Unfortunately these gentlemanly rules have long since been abandoned. Were Herr Hitler a knight of old he would no doubt be content to call off his Luftwaffe and wait two or three years until British and American plane production were sufficient to enable the R.A.F. to meet him in fair and equal combat.

But there is no chivalry wasted on the present battle between a well prepared Reich and a frantically preparing Britain. When I picked up this morning's paper I read that the three day Christmas truce was over and huge fires were again lighting the London night skies. Britain's need is planes and that need is fierce and urgent. We must supply them, and Hitler will not wait while we pursue the normal leisurely methods of production.

In London they are huddled in the subways praying for aid from America. In America we are huddled over blueprints praying that Hitler will be obliging enough to postpone an "all out" attack on England for another two years until new plants finally begin to turn out engines and aircraft.

Packard has just finished pouring the concrete for its new engine factory and Ford may soon be ready to begin digging the ditches in which to sink the foundations for his. Not until the Fall of 1942, almost two years hence, will these bright shiny new factories actually begin to turn out the engines. This is snail's pace production in the age of lightning war.

Conventional methods will never bring results in unconventional warfare, and the workers of the automotive and aircraft industries for whom we speak propose a bold alternative, quickly applied.

We believe that without disturbing present aircraft plant production schedules we can supplement them by turning out 500 planes a day of a single standard fighting model by the use of idle automotive capacity. We believe that this can be done after six months of preparation as compared to the 18 months or two years required to get new plane and engine factories into production.

This is Labor's Plan, as worked out by the automotive workers of Detroit and presented to President Roosevelt by Philip Murray, President of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Why should labor concern itself, some may ask, with speeding plane production? Labor is concerned because it believes a strengthened defense essential to our country's safety in this era of axis aggression. Labor is concerned because it believes that our country's main defense is the little fortress isle holding off the bombing planes of Nazism on the other side of the Atlantic. Labor is concerned because wherever Nazism is victorious the precious liberties that differentiate free men and free workers from slaves are destroyed.

Had Britain supported the Czechs, had Britain supported the Spanish Republic, it would now have powerful allies in its war against Nazi aggression. Labor believes we dare not make the same mistake the British made. To let the British go under would be to deprive us of our last ally in some future combat with a man who makes no secret of his desire to rule the world.

If it were true that our productive machinery and our productive man power were working at capacity, the task of speeding aid to Britain and quickening our own defense beyond the present pace, would be hopeless. Fortunately, despite the headlines which tell us of unfillable orders and labor shortages, we have a huge reservoir of unused machinery, unused plants, unused skill and unused labor to fall back upon.

The automotive industry, the mass production marvel of the world, over a year's period works at 50 percent of its total maximum capacity. We believe the other 50 percent can be adapted to the manufacture of planes.

The tool and die workers of the automobile industry, the most skillful machinists in the world, the men who turn the production engineering blueprints into the realities of the machine, are also partially idle. A third of them are either

totally unemployed, on part time or working temporarily on ordinary production jobs.

Thus we have idle machinery and idle skilled labor. We propose to bring them together for the mass production of defense planes.

The plane, from certain points of view, is only an automobile with wings. Our greatest need is for plane engines, and the engine of the plane like the engine of the motorcar is a combustion engine, a means of harnessing the explosion of gases. The plane engine is the more delicate and compact combustion engine but it is still a combustion engine, containing the same parts as the automobile engine. Fundamentally they are the same mechanism.

The two engines contain much the same parts and in Detroit, as in other automotive centers, great batteries of machines which can turn out engine parts stand idle. Long rows of gear cutters, of automatic screw machines, of milling machines and grinders are unused fifty per cent of the time.

The basic machinery in each plant is adapted for the making of parts for the different kinds of motor cars. It can also be adapted for the making of a single standard fighting plane of the latest war tested design. The same thing is true of the machinery now standing idle for forging and stamping. These, too, can be adapted to the making of the planes.

Fundamentally the same machines are needed for mass production of planes as for mass production of automobiles. This machinery, now largely idle, will have to be duplicated and installed in new plants if and when these plants are completed. What we propose is to save precious time and much money which would be needed to duplicate idle machinery and idle plants.

There stand idle in the Cleveland Fisher Body plant toggle presses huge enough to hold and operate a draw or flange die weighing 70 to 80 tons. Such a machine can stamp out airplane parts as well as automobile parts. Aside from the tremendous cost, it would take years to install in new aircraft plants the same type of presses which now stand idle 50 per cent of the time in Cleveland's Fisher Body plant.

Equipment at the Chevrolet Drop Forge Plant in Detroit operates at 60 percent of capacity even at this time, which is a peak period for the automobile industry. The machines and hammers in this plant could produce all the drop forgings required for 500 airplanes a day and still supply the Chevrolet company with sufficient forgings for 1,000,000 cars during the coming year. Labor asks: Why not use this equipment instead of duplicating it?

Why wait for entirely new plants to be built which cannot go into production until almost two years have passed. We believe we can do the job of adapting idle automotive machinery to plane production in six months. The capacity of this idle machinery is greater than the over-all capacity of the motor construction industries of Germany, Italy and Japan combined.

Labor proposes the establishment of a joint aircraft production board representing government, management and labor. It proposes that this board make a survey of the entire automotive industry, determining exactly what unused capacity is available in each plant. It proposes that this board then take the engineering blueprints for a fighter plane, break these blueprints down into its component parts and assign the manufacture of these parts to the various plants in accordance with their idle capacity.

Labor proposes to mobilize all the unused capacity of the great automotive tool and die shops and their workers to the job of making the necessary tools, dies, jigs and fixtures to adapt this automotive machinery to plane production.

The automotive industry contains idle plants as well as idle machinery and idle men. Outstanding among the great idle plants in Detroit is the Hupmobile plant now completely unused. We propose that it be used to assemble the parts of the engine and that other plants be used to assemble the parts for the wings and the fuselage. Huge, cheaply and easily constructed hangars around the Wayne County, Michigan, and Cleveland Airports could be used for final assembly and the complete planes could be flown out of them.

Labor's plan springs from the pooled experience and knowledge of skilled workers in all the automotive plants, the same skilled workers who are called upon year by year in the industry to produce new machine marvels. Each manufacturer has the benefit of his skilled workers. We of the United Automobile Workers, CIO, have the benefit of the skilled man power in all the automotive plants, not just in one of them.

Labor asks only in return that its hard-won rights be preserved. Labor asks

3/ Walter P. Reuther
Dec. 28, 1940 N B C

only that manufacturers like Ford be forced to obey the Wagner Act as have his competitors, General Motors and the smaller companies. Labor asks only that it be allowed to contribute its own creative experience and knowledge and that it be given a voice in the education of its program.

The President of the United States yesterday expressed great interest in our plan, and said that he had asked his new Office of Production Management to investigate it.

No question of policy needs to be settled. The President has laid down the policy. We must have more planes. Postponement of tooling of new automobile models would make available the necessary skilled help for the tooling for mass production of defense planes. No private considerations must interfere. When men are being drafted this is little enough to ask of the automotive industry.

Quantity production was achieved in the Reich and is being achieved in England by the methods labor now proposes to apply to the automotive industry.

The difference and our opportunity is that we have in the automotive industry the greatest mass production machine the world has ever seen. Treated as one great production unit, it can in half a year's time turn out planes in unheard of numbers and swamp the Luftwaffe. This is labor's answer to Hitler aggression, American labor's reply to the cries of its enslaved brothers under the Nazi yoke in Europe.

England's battles, it used to be said, were won on the playing fields of Eton. America's can be won on the assembly lines of Detroit.

Give England planes and there will be no need to give her men.

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