

PRESS RELEASE

September 20, 1959

From: Trade Union Leaders Meeting with  
Nikita Khrushchev, Prime Minister, U.S.S.R.

IMMEDIATE

POINTS AMERICAN LABOR LEADERS  
WILL RAISE WITH KHRUSHCHEV

SAN FRANCISCO--

The following statement was issued Sunday evening by Walter P. Reuther, UAW president, and member of the group of AFL-CIO leaders meeting with Nikita Khrushchev, Russian premier, Sunday evening, September 20, 8 p.m., at the Mark Hopkins Hotel:

As I said in part, in a statement issued August 20, 1959:

"There is room for honest disagreement between people of good will over the forthcoming visit of Mr. Khrushchev. There is no disagreement whatsoever about the basic immoral character of communism and the brutal suppression and denial by the Soviet dictatorship of human freedom and the democratic rights and values that we as a free people cherish."

"During his visit Mr. Khrushchev ought to have contact with every segment of American life. Since Soviet dogma and propaganda are essentially built around the myth that communism is the liberator of the working class, it is essential that American trade union leaders, who represent millions of the working people of America, ought to have the opportunity of telling Mr. Khrushchev straight from the shoulder that the workers of America through their trade union movement, are irrevocably committed to the cause of human freedom and no amount of communist propaganda will succeed in deluding or diverting us from our total dedication to our system of human freedom and our firm opposition

to communism. No one in America has better credentials to do this essential job than do American trade union leaders, and if they fail because of an attitude of isolation, they do America and the cause of human freedom a great disservice."

At the meeting of the trade union leaders with Mr. Khrushchev during the evening of September 20, 1959, we intend to have a full and frank discussion unhibited by diplomatic niceties so that the Soviet Premier will hear at first hand from representatives of America labor of the total dedication of the American labor movement to the cause of human freedom and its unalterable opposition to communism and all forms of totalitarianism.

It is our intention to convey to the Premier the devotion of the American people to the cause of peace and our desire to see the governments of the world take steps to relax tension and to relieve the people of the world from the crushing burdens of armaments under conditions that will provide adequate safeguards to insure a just and lasting peace.

Members of our group met late Saturday afternoon to discuss among ourselves our meeting with Mr. Khrushchev. Each member of the group listed topics he was particularly interested in and questions he wanted to ask.

Out of that discussion we formulated the following list of principal subjects and points of discussion which we intend to raise with Mr. Khrushchev:

1. PEACE

We share the belief that the question of peace transcends all other issues.

We base our attitude on the subject of peace on the compelling fact that we are at the point in human history where science and technology have given the two great powers weapons of such total destructive power that war would mean they would destroy each other and the rest of humanity. War as an international policy is impossible. No one can win. The maintenance of peace is essential to the survival of the human race and this fact transcends all questions of ideology.

The only war that American labor and the American people want to wage is a war against poverty, hunger, ignorance and disease.

It is easy for the Soviet Union and America to agree on the general principles of peace, but the test of sincerity and good faith does not rest in how eloquently or frequently we make such general declarations but rather in their practical implementation.

As American trade unionists we shall tell Mr. Khrushchev that there is a serious gap between the professions for peace by the Soviet leaders and their creation of crises and pressure points as they attempt to manipulate the cold war for tactical advantage.

a. Berlin

The recent aggression in Tibet and Laos, like the Berlin situation, are specific examples of the gap between communist peace propaganda and communist performance. We intend to tell Mr. Khrushchev that all representative groups in the United States, including

labor, consider the government of East Germany a puppet of the Soviet Union and that the Berlin crisis was created in the Kremlin by Mr. Khrushchev and his associates in the Politburo, and that the Soviet government is trying to exploit the Berlin situation and the division in Germany for tactical reasons in the cold war in order to advance its expressed and historic goal of world domination.

We intend to ask Mr. Khrushchev how he can reconcile the Soviet Union's professed desire for peace with the fact that time after time it continues to create new pressure points and the very tension that today threatens the peace of the world.

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## 2. RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION FREE OF INTERFERENCE

In public statements in America, Mr. Khrushchev has repeatedly expressed his belief in the right of self-determination of all people free from outside interference. We, too, believe in this principle, but here, too, there is a serious gap between Mr. Khrushchev's pronouncements and the Soviet Union's performance.

The unification of Germany is the most important unresolved problem in Europe.

The American people are just as determined as the Russian people to prevent Germany from again threatening the peace of the world. On this issue we are together. Our difference appears to turn on the question of how the problem of a divided Germany can be resolved by peaceful means.

We in America are prepared to let the German people make that decision by free and democratic vote under the supervision of an impartial agency of the United Nations.

We intend to ask Mr. Khrushchev how he squares the continued refusal of the Soviet Union to let the German people make this decision by a free and democratic vote, with his professed belief in the right of self-determination.

We shall tell Mr. Khrushchev that the Soviet's unwillingness to agree to a free vote in Germany, we believe, arises from the Soviet Union's knowledge that the people in East Germany, now under Soviet domination and control, would reject the communist system if given an opportunity to express their free and democratic will. If Mr. Khrushchev were

confident of the superiority of his communist system and the support of such system by the people of East Germany, as he would have us believe, then he would willingly agree without hesitation to the opportunity of testing his system by a free choice of the people of East Germany.

We shall advise Mr. Khrushchev that while we support every effort to find a peaceful solution to the problems of Berlin, he should know that the American workers stand united with all the American people in support of the position of the United States Government to defend the freedom of the people of West Berlin.

In connection with the overall question of the right of self-determination, we intend to discuss the Hungarian situation in some detail, and here again we shall be pressing Mr. Khrushchev to explain how he reconciles the brutal suppression of the Hungarian freedom fighters by Soviet military power with his pronouncements about the right of all nations to self-determination and peaceful co-existence.

3. KEY TO DISARMAMENT - UNIVERSAL INSPECTION AND EFFECTIVE CONTROL

The people of the United States and Russia, as do the people of the whole world, share the hope that the crushing burden of the arms race can be reduced and that an effective system of inspection and control can be negotiated so as to permanently cease nuclear testing, which is contaminating the world's atmosphere, and so that a workable disarmament program can be implemented, tension reduced and the peace made secure.

It is generally recognized that the key to any program for the continued cessation of nuclear testing and for the implementation of a general disarmament program is the acceptance of a system of universal inspection and effective control.

We intend to ask Mr. Khrushchev why the Soviet Union, despite a prolonged and extended period of negotiations, still continues to refuse to agree to a system of universal inspection and effective control that would in no way obligate the Soviet Union to do anything that the United States would not be equally obligated to do in the cause of peace.

4. FACTS ABOUT AMERICA VERSUS COMMUNIST FICTION AND PROPAGANDA

As representatives of American workers, we intend to tell Mr. Khrushchev that he and his associates in the Kremlin do not remotely understand America or the attitude of American workers. Their concept of American capitalism and our free enterprise system is completely antiquated and is based on the kind of capitalism about which Marx wrote more than a hundred years ago.

We feel that Mr. Khrushchev should hear direct from the spokesmen for American labor that no American worker takes seriously communist propaganda that American workers are the victims of capitalist exploitation, that they are wage slaves and that they have nothing to lose but their chains.

In addition to advising Mr. Khrushchev of the tremendous progress which American labor has made in terms of wages, better working conditions and a fuller measure of security and dignity, we will attempt to get Mr. Khrushchev to understand that our great material progress is not the end product of our civilization.

American workers, as citizens, have a full measure of political and spiritual freedom and that this is the essential difference between the status of workers in our free society and their status under communism.

We have not achieved perfection in America and there are still many problems that need solution, but under our system of freedom workers have an opportunity to find solution to these problems as economic citizens through collective bargaining, and as political citizens through legislation and governmental action.

In our free society we achieve unity in diversity, while in Mr. Khrushchev's communist society they achieve unity by rigid conformity as dictated by the one-party state.

(We will give Mr. Khrushchev an attachment of statistical data showing the earnings of U.S. workers in terms of real purchasing power.)

##### 5. BREAD AND FREEDOM

We are aware of the fact that with their tremendous technological progress the Soviet people will be able to achieve higher and higher living standards. We rejoice with them in this accomplishment. We, too, will continue to make progress in terms of higher living standards.

But the unanswered question which disturbs us is: Will the Soviet people -- while they get more bread -- get more freedom? For it is an increasing measure of personal, political and spiritual freedom that gives meaning and purpose to material progress.



How, we intend to ask Mr. Khrushchev, will the Soviet people secure an increasing measure of personal, political and spiritual freedom and how do you intend to relax the rigid controls which have characterized the Soviet system?

Specifically, will workers be permitted to exercise freedom to secure redress of their grievances by the only test of industrial democracy, the right to strike, the right collectively to withhold their labor power?

My knowledge of the problems of Soviet workers is not academic since I worked as a foreign technician for approximately 18 months in a Soviet automobile factory. (This was the Gorki Automobile plant, which was built under contract between the Soviet government and the Ford Motor Company for the production of Model A Ford cars and trucks.)

We shall tell Mr. Khrushchev that we are familiar with the communists' rationale that workers under the Soviet system are working for themselves and therefore there is no need for them to strike against themselves. This theory breaks down completely in practice when the government is the employer and the worker has exhausted the procedures established by the government without getting redress of his justifiable grievances.

We intend to ask Mr. Khrushchev what does a Soviet worker do to get relief since he is denied the right to withhold his labor power?

We are appalled by the new Soviet penal code published in Pravda December 26, 1958 which authorizes sentences up to 15 years for the organizing of strikes.

We shall reject, if Mr. Khrushchev offers it, the explanation that since under government ownership the people own the factories there is no exploitation. History has proved beyond doubt that government can be the most ruthless exploiter.

We shall point out to Mr. Khrushchev that he has personally and openly criticized the excesses and oppression during the period of Stalin. However, Stalin was the product of the Soviet system and we will ask Mr. Khrushchev what assurances are there that the same system that created Stalin will not again create another in his image and again inflict exploitation and oppression upon the people. Should these abuses continue, is the only hope of relief to await the demise of the oppressor?

6. FLIGHT FROM COMMUNISM

The Soviet Union and the world communist movement profess to be the liberators of the working class. Here again we shall sharply point out the gap between communist propaganda and communist practice.

The most convincing and demanding refutation of this claim is the mass exodus of workers and other citizens in countries where communists have seized power. It can be no simple coincidence that the traffic between communist and non-communist countries since the end of World War II has been all one-way.

I personally have seen the refugee camps in West Berlin which to date have housed three million German citizens fleeing from communist-controlled East Germany. Three million North Koreans went to South Korea to escape communism. Two hundred thousand Hungarians, most of them workers and students braved arrest or death to slip through the border to freedom.

Our question to Mr. Khrushchev will be why is it that the workers, whom you profess communism will liberate, always flee a country in great numbers when the communists get control. We shall ask further whether he can tell us a single situation where, following the communists' seizure of power, there has been a mass influx of workers from surrounding non-communist countries into the communist-controlled country.

7. DECLINE OF COMMUNIST VOTE IN BERLIN

Closely related to the "flight from communism" is the decline of the communist vote in West Berlin.

I was in Berlin during the tragic days leading up to the seizure of power by Hitler in 1933 and worked in the German underground with the people in the labor movement in the struggle against Nazism.

Recently, on May 1, 1959 I spoke at a Freedom Rally in Free Berlin to more than 600,000 people who had gathered to demonstrate their joint dedication and determination to defend their common freedom against the threat of communism.

We intend to raise with Mr. Khrushchev the question of the sharp decline of support for communism on the part of the workers in Berlin. Specifically, we will ask him to explain the decline in the Communist Party vote from 55% in the heavy working class sections of Berlin received by the Communist Party in the last free election in Germany before Hitler destroyed political freedom, to the less than 2% vote for the Communist Party in the election held in Free Berlin in the spring of 1959.

We will ask Mr. Khrushchev whether he thinks that German workers' rejection of communism has anything to do with the fact that communist deputies voted with Hitler's deputies to destroy the Weimar Republic and to pave the road for Hitler's seizure of total power in 1933.

We shall ask Mr. Khrushchev to explain the fact that the more direct contact workers have with communism, such as in the case of the workers in West Berlin, the less support communism gets from workers in a free, democratic election.

How, we intend to ask Mr. Khrushchev, will the Soviet people secure an increasing measure of personal, political and spiritual freedom and how do you intend to relax the rigid controls which have characterized the Soviet system?

Specifically, will workers be permitted to exercise freedom to secure redress of their grievances by the only test of industrial democracy, the right to strike, the right collectively to withhold their labor power?

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10. END THE COLD WAR BY COOPERATION IN A POSITIVE PROGRAM  
THROUGH THE UN TO FIGHT POVERTY, HUNGER, DISEASE AND IGNORANCE

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We shall raise with Mr. Khrushchev the matter of ending the cold war by a joint approach to help the underdeveloped countries of the world by bilateral contributions through an appropriate agency of the United Nations.

We shall remind Mr. Khrushchev that he has stated repeatedly that he believes we ought to try to relax tension so that the two social systems--our system of freedom which he calls capitalism and his system of communism--could compete in a way that the people of the world would be able to make their judgment on the basis of which social system does the best job in terms of the needs of the people.

The people of the United States have no desire to interfere with the right of the Russian people to have the social system they prefer. On the other hand Mr. Khrushchev has stated that neither he nor the people of the Soviet Union have any desire to interfere with our internal affairs nor with our right to the kind of social system we prefer.

But the cold war, however, is not about the question of which system the people of America or the Soviet Union should have. It is a contest about the question of which system the uncommitted peoples of the world will be free to choose.

We shall ask Mr. Khrushchev why, if he is so confident that his social system is superior to ours, and that history will demonstrate its superiority, why he is not willing to end the cold war by the positive approach of giving up the Soviet Union's unilateral approach and join with the United States and other nations in a cooperative effort through the United Nations to help underdeveloped countries meet their problems.

We shall advise Mr. Khrushchev that we believe unilateral action by the Soviet Union is suspect and will be considered an extension of the cold war through a program of economic penetration and political subversion.

We recognize that he may look upon unilateral action by the United States with equal suspicion in the atmosphere of the cold war, and this is precisely why unilateral action should give way to bilateral action through the agency of the United Nations.

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11. CONTINUED ANTI-JEWISH DISCRIMINATION

American labor regards religious, political, ethnic and national equality as one of the paramount freedoms in a democratic society and a democratic world. We are deeply concerned by the information which has been brought to our attention that Jews in the Soviet Union are being discriminated against and are being denied equal opportunities in education, government and other phases of Soviet life.

While American labor is fully aware of the shortcomings of American democracy with respect to civil rights, we have made great progress in this area and labor and other liberal groups are free to continue their efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

We propose to ask Mr. Khrushchev what the Soviet Union is doing or intends to do to end this type of discrimination and what the individual Soviet citizen can do to protest and work against such discrimination within the Soviet Union.

12. POLITICAL AND TRADE UNION PRISONERS

During the meeting of American trade union leaders with Deputy Premier Mikoyan when he recently visited the United States, we raised the question of political prisoners in the Soviet Union. Mr. Mikoyan stated emphatically that there were no longer political prisoners in the Soviet Union, that the situation had changed since the death of Stalin. Mr. Khrushchev has likewise made similar public statements.

There has since come into our possession from trade union and labor political sources in Europe a list of Soviet citizens currently in prison in the Soviet Union because of political differences with the Soviet government. There has also come into our possession a list of political prisoners in Hungary. We are submitting these lists to Mr. Khrushchev in both English and Russian. As spokesmen for free labor, and in behalf of workers suffering this oppression who cannot speak out in their

own defense, we are requesting that Mr. Khrushchev check these lists and advise us of the whereabouts of the people listed. If they are not in prison, we should like full information as to where they are.

(Copies of these lists are available to the press along with this statement.)

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