

88

AUGUST 9, 1967 - 6:40 p.m.

Meeting with Labor Leaders

MEMORANDUM

37

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

August 10, 1967

7:00 p. m.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting with labor leaders held in the State Dining Room August 9.

The meeting began at 6:40 p. m. The meeting ended at 7:55 p. m.

Attachment.

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Meeting began: 6:40 p.m.

Meeting ended: 7:55 p.m.

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH
LABOR LEADERS
in the
State Dining Room

August 9, 1967

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The President:

I called you here today for several reasons:

- (1) You're always welcome here.
- (2) I know of no single group which has the patriotism or love of country that you have.
- (3) I wanted to personally thank you for your achievement. I appreciate your comfort, your support, energy and drive in helping me to do my job.

We have passed 100 far-sighted measures of vision that apply to people. This is largely because of you and your support.

This is a political year. Jerry Ford is making a lot of charges and has a lot of political committees at work. Only this week he recommended an anti-missile missile. I have had two Science Advisors tell me that we can't have a missile which will be completely effective. Even if we did, the Soviets would get something better. We prefer to talk with the Soviets to try to get them to realize what a waste of resources a missile race would be. Last night Ford charged there are many targets which haven't been hit.

Well, I want you to know that I believe in civilian government, and we will have civilian government as long as I am President. (Loud applause.) Second, what Ford has said is untrue. We don't want to hit targets near China or targets in civilian areas or targets in ports. We get over the China border now even though there is a buffer zone. It doesn't take long when jets fly at 1200 miles per hour.

We have hit two ships. You know how emotions run in this country when ships are hit. Remember the Lusitania. We do not want to get the Soviet Union and China into this war.

I constantly get statements from Ford and other people like him. You get more press play from complaints than you do from compliments. Some of these attacks have hurt our social programs. Our greatest domestic problem is the cities; our greatest foreign problem is Vietnam.

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Some people tell me that some of the unions you represent discriminate. I hope you will put an end to this. It's just not American.

Some people tell me I should remake the nation quickly. I know that cannot be done. I had more sense than that 30 years ago. We can't remake America with ghetto labor alone, just as we can't do good construction work without good construction workers.

In Detroit, four out of five people arrested had jobs with salaries of over \$120 per week. So you see it is just not a matter of jobs. A lot of it is hate and bitterness which has been developing over many years. It is also a matter of rats and poor housing. And we are concerned about it. Pending before Congress are half a dozen bills which would alleviate these problems. We have worked on them for weeks and months and years. And there were severe cutbacks in our recommendations for the model cities program. We have asked for rent supplements, but the Ford group killed the proposal. We asked for a rat bill. Although we spend millions to eradicate screw worms, the Congress wasn't willing to spend \$20 million to eliminate rats which are eating on our children.

The food stamp program was proposed to make it easier for the poor people to get food. It's tough to tackle the problem of getting teachers in the slums. What we have there now are largely left-overs. The House struck out the Teacher Corps.

So what we really need is to get some of our programs moving that we have there now.

A family in adversity has to pull together. I have always had good relations with your leaders. You have helped me pass Medicare.

Some people feel that American democracy is on the ropes, but I don't feel that way. We have an amazing vitality. Just look at our employment figures, our jobs, and our personal income.

The predictions of catastrophe are a standard American fare. We have always had prophets of doom. Some say that it is a matter of foreign assistance versus domestic growth. I believe we have a responsibility for a war against aggression abroad and a war against poverty at home.

Indonesia is a fine example of a country which has thrown off Communism. It is one of the benefits of our presence in Vietnam.

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I believe we can do both. We are a country which was built by pioneers who had a rifle in one hand and an ax in the other. We are a nation with the highest gross national product, the highest wages, the highest corporate profits, and the most people at work. We can do both and as long as I am President we will do both. (Applause.)

I am tired of hearing about people who talk about "sick societies" when they themselves have voted against many of our social programs which were designed to prevent many of these problems.

Our country is being tested. It is a war on two fronts -- a war on poverty and a war against aggression.

We would have some foreign flags flying over Israel, the Dominican Republic and Indonesia without our help. We want no more Hitlers in this world.

I have and always will give a careful ear to the voice of labor. You do not want to surrender to our ancient enemies of hunger and disease or to aggression. (Applause.)

We have got a long ways to go, and we are going to make it.

I spent an hour with bankers today to get them to loan money to kids who don't have the funds to go to school. We have a million children in college now who wouldn't have been there were it not for our federal programs.

There will be differences between Labor and the Congress. Labor and the President may not always agree. I know we did not over a proposal for a Department of Labor and Commerce. But we didn't let our disagreement develop into disillusionment. To dissent never means to destroy.

All we want to do is what is right. (Applause.)

I know labor has done some things I don't approve of. I know I have done some things labor doesn't approve. But all of you know there is not a man here who can't put on his coat and come over and see his President anytime he desires. I have never had anything against labor. I just want to do what is right. But, as all of you know, the buck stops here. Only the tough ones get to me. If they are not tough they stop at the Secretary level or the Assistant Secretary level.

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I went through a tough period when I had to decide two years ago about what to do in Vietnam. After two weeks of deep thought and discussion with my advisors and two trips to Camp David, I decided that we either would put in men to resist aggression or we would pull out. Finally, I made a decision to put in men. We have been there two years. It took the first 18 months to build a logistical base. Now we have to put in enough people to do the job.

Some people say that we should turn the bombers loose. But I can't do that. Some people say to pull out. But I can't do that either. And some people say stop the bombing, but I can't tie General Westmoreland's right arm behind his back right now.

I would be glad to stop the bombing if they wouldn't take advantage of it. I have told them that if they will give me assurances that they will not take advantage of the bombing halt we will stop tomorrow. But I can't take a chance that those divisions which are located above the demilitarized zone would come in and wipe out 30,000 Marines because they failed to get the support they need. I wish everybody would stop saying what President Johnson should do and spend a little of their time trying to get Ho to do something. Don't put all the heat on me. I'm doing everything I can. And I know that everything we are using is not enough. We have tried five bombing pauses. We have sent Goldberg to 37 countries and Ambassador Harriman to 50 countries. The Communists are determined to take Southeast Asia. I don't want to invade North Vietnam. I don't want to bomb population centers. I don't want to get China into a war. All I want to do is to show them they can't take Vietnam by force. If they would stop coming across into South Vietnam, there would be no war.

But Ho is not interested in anything. Don't sympathize with those people. We have got 500,000 of our boys out there. Stop and think a little bit. There is no man in this White House who wouldn't want to stop the shooting tomorrow if we could. Ho won't talk to anybody. He wouldn't even listen to Kosygin. I'm the guy who's got to ride with this thing. The first thing that comes to me each morning is the list of how many of our men died out there the day before. Remember that every time you criticize me it is just another sack of cement that I must carry. So I ask for your help in the future and I thank you for your help in the past.

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