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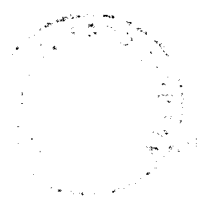
Meany Throws a Party:

Many Top Labor Chiefs Believe Splintered
Democrats Will Draft Kennedy in '76

WASHINGTON -- Some of us insiders believe that labor's chief of chiefs, George Meany, is the nation's most powerful, even most astute, political leader.

As a fully qualified Meanyologist I rush to explain that what he refers to as a "party," the Committee on Political Education (COPE), has what the other major parties don't. And that's a comparatively unchallenged central leader with whom few inside labor wish to break -- namely, Meany himself. And despite what you hear, he has a unified party behind him -- the sprawling AFL-CIO with instant touch-button political machinery in virtually every precinct, unknown anywhere else in the free world.

None of this is realized by those observers who release their hostile amateurishness by dubbing him an octogenarian. In Bal Harbour (Fla.) recently, he chewed his quota of cigars and played three rounds of 18-hole golf; ran the 35-man Executive Council with that calloused iron hand; argued long distance with the White



House; ate heartily and made merry with his friends. Not to mention slipping quietly into the bar to listen, alone, to a stand-up Irish comic. (Meany chuckled out of sheer loyalty to the Old Sod.)

Now his political maneuvers. Most observers -- more accustomed to covering the social circuit -- believed he retreated when he directed COPE not to get into delegate selection operations of any party -- meaning the Democrats. Thus he unified the high command, some of whom are for the quota system of affirmative action to make certain that each state delegation has the proper proportion of blacks, women, youths, Indians, Chicanos, Spanish-surnamed and other minorities.

Any other action by Meany would have ripped the labor movement wide open for more than 18 months. This would have hurt the movement's other activities, i.e., collective bargaining, influence in the White House in the various labor and social welfare departments, etc.

Furthermore, by telling the other labor chiefs they and their affiliated unions could do what they wished, Meany simply withdrew COPE and all 900 or so local and state central labor bodies from the civil war

exploding inside the Democratic party.

Analyze this: there will be between 27 and 30 state primaries. And even after the election of convention delegates, there will be almost endless court actions challenging this delegation selection process (as did the Chicago Daley group in 1972). The Kansas City Democratic mini-convention, during which Meany and his political trumpeteer, Al Barkan, believed Democratic National Chairman Strauss double-crossed them, voted there must be affirmative (quota) action in every state. Thus there will be duels within battles inside a national political war.

By sitting on the sidelines, Meany, COPE and company can watch the tournament cut-rate. COPE, meaning the national AFL-CIO office, just won't be spending any money in futile primary contests which probably will be won by the new politics crowd, meaning McGovern and his alter ego, Al Baron.

And saving money these days is vital. COPE will suffer as the economy suffers. Unemployed members don't pay dues. The moneys of local and national unions flow out for relief and help -- not in. So COPE will be collecting a lot less in 1976 than it did in 1968 and

'72. So why waste funds on the primaries?

COPE knows it will be short of money. It's new fund raising drives are being "Madison Avenued." The central COPE office here has dispatched glossy proofs including, for example, a picture of armless Venus de Milo saying: "All I said was I'd give my right arm to be able to give \$2 to COPE." And there's one of Henry VIII saying, "My six wives? Oh, they refused to give \$2 to COPE."

Or Whistler's Mother: "I wish James would give \$2 to COPE instead of sitting around painting dumb pictures of me." The big COPE million-dollar drive is on.

COPE will have the money after the Democrats,
perhaps the Republicans, will have clobbered each other
into financial and even physical exhaustion -- and have
come up with presidential candidates. Then Meany's
"party" will decide behind whom to throw its dollars,
its computers, its telephone banks, its doorbell ringers,
its baby-sitters, its fabulous precinct machinery. Much
will depend on the economy as well as the nominees.

Who will be the Democratic candidate? Who will lead the party which is ripped wide open? Who will head its splintered forces? There are a dozen hopefuls. But

the consensus among the most powerful and best informed national labor leaders, many of them Meany's intimates, is that "the man who..." will be Sen. Ed Kennedy of Massachusetts. The "guesstimate" is -- Ted will be drafted.

Who will Meany go for? It depends on who will rival Kennedy. Meany wants a winner. Above all else he wants a winner who'll be labor's friend in the White House. When he decides who he believe can win (barring a George Wallace, of course) Meany's political party will throw in its fresh troops and money behind that candidate. And on Meany's terms.

If Meany finds his own high command is split, then the AFL-CIO's party will go officially neutral as it did in '72. And that would keep COPE and the network of AFL-CIO state and local central labor bodies neutral too. And I believe no Democratic candidate can win without a united labor movement behind him.

Meany, really, is veto-proof.

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