

That Reuther Meany Split

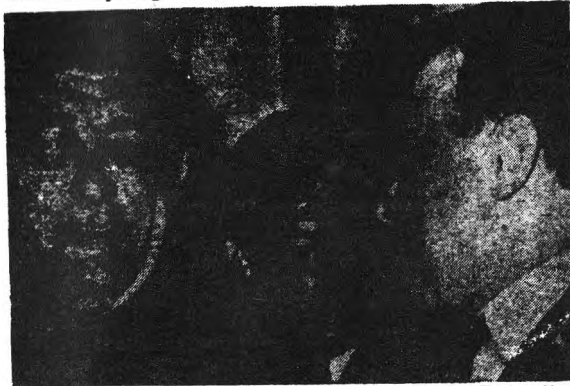
By WALTER LINDER

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Is Walter Reuther "soft on the war" or just hard on the workers. Is there really a "split" between the UAW president and AFL-CIO head George Meany? Or is it shadow boxing with fancy footwork to confuse workers grown angry over years of sell-outs? Let's take a closer look at just what this "dispute" is all about.

For 11 years the foreign policy of the AFL-CIO has been one that "has allied itself with...rightest dictators, espionage groups, corrupt labor leaders, and feudalistic politicians..." (New Republic, 6/25/66) After the AFL-CIO's executive council with Reuther absent had endorsed every aspect of that policy at their Nov. 14 meeting, "Mr. Meany (was) asked...whether this meant that the council felt it had made 'no mistakes whatsoever' in the last 11 years." He replied, "No, we can't find any mistakes." (New York Times, 11/15/66)

The logic of that insanity leads directly to Meany's conclusion the next day, that he foresaw the "possibility of a compulsory arbitration law to prevent 'defense' plant strikes"—but "if such a law was passed, it should be accompanied by wage-price controls to be equitable and effective." (!) (New York Times, 11/16/66) On the one hand this mis-leader supports the U.S. bosses' and government's policy of allying itself with foreign dictators. And then, to prevent that policy from being upset, he



LBJ winks at Walter Reuther at rally in Detroit accepts compulsory arbitration—a traditional boss-inspired club against workers—as well as a wage freeze at current, sky-high price levels. This is what is called a democratic trade union movement!

Is this what Reuther is "splitting" with? Hardly. At the last AFL-CIO convention, when Meany demanded a step-up in the war of aggression in Vietnam, Reuther "fought" it and "won" a resolution "leaving it all up to Mr. Johnson." (New Republic, 6/25/66) Which means that the exact same policy will be pursued, helped along by several million dollars from union members' dues that the AFL-CIO is pouring into its efforts to split workers abroad.

What Reuther further objects to in that resolution is that "There is no real distinction between Soviet and Communist Chinese policies." (New Republic, 6/25/66) Reuther wants the AFL-CIO to "take a more flexible attitude toward Communism and a more conciliatory tone on the Vietnam war." (New York Times, 11/15/66) Now we're getting closer to the heart of the problem. The UAW president is saying, just like the Rockefellers, Kennedys and Johnsons, that the leaders of the Soviet Union are no longer enemies; that it is the Chinese Communists that are the "bad guys." All Reuther wants to do is support those "communists who are coming over to capitalism's side."

The root of this attitude and of a desire for

"a more conciliatory tone on the Vietnam war" does not stem from any wish to serve the workers' interests but flows from years of selling them out. The root of the "split" is growing right in Reuther's own auto union.

Consider the fact that:

*In the 1964 UAW convention "the delegates forced him to take more job security demands to the bargaining table than ever before. (Fortune magazine, Nov. 1966);

*In the last two years, strikes, both "authorized" as well as wildcats, having been growing at an increasing pace in the auto plants. The reasons are usually the unbearable speed-up, the compulsory overtime, the arrogance of the bosses in allowing grievances to pile up without even a pretense of settlement;

*Skilled workers recently demanded a dollar-an-hour increase to bring them up to the level of their brothers in other industries;

*At the 1966 UAW convention 60% of the delegates were new, reflecting a high rate of change in officialdom at the local, plant level;

*At this same convention Reuther had to slap down a demand by delegates for a break with the Democratic Party and the launching of a labor party:

*Many young men, returning from Vietnam and going to work in auto plants, are convinced that the war is "wrong"; and finally

*In Dearborn, Michigan—a city that is the main base of Ford's world-wide empire—14,000 voters, mainly auto workers, recorded themselves "in favor of an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam so Vietnamese people can settle their own problems." That figure was 41 per cent of the total voting, in a campaign in which the entire press and Michigan's Congressmen propagandized for a "No" vote.

If you were Walter Reuther, who has sold the auto workers out by refusing to strike on the very issues the workers have been wildcatting on, you'd be worried too. After all, the Steelworkers' MacDonald and the Electrical Workers' Carey were turned out of office on some of the very same issues. Reuther's "conciliatory" moves on Vietnam may be partly based on the increasing disenchantment of the workers with that war and the refusal to accept it as the basis for a wage-freeze "in the national interest."

The Reuther-Meany "split" is really a disagreement on how best to split the workers of this country from their brothers around the world. Reuther wants to cooperate with those so-called communists (in the Soviet Union and elsewhere) who are selling out their own workers by accommodating themselves to the policies of the very same U.S. bosses to whom Reuther has been selling out the auto workers for years. Meany wants a hard line while Reuther wants "flexibility"—but they're both dancing to the same old Cold War tune.

What Reuther is facing as UAW contract discussions near are rank and file demands for a healthy wage increase (and a special differential for the skilled workers); settlement of local grievances, control over speed-up and "production standards" BEFORE any national settlement is signed; and relief from the autocratic company control of overtime, suspensions, firing, etc.

It remains to be seen whether "splits" with Meany or cozying up to "socialist" sellout artists will cut any ice with an increasingly rebellious rank and file.