

AS WE SEE IT
AFL-CIO Public Affairs Program

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SUBJECT: "Labor's Role in the Peace Corps #2"

PARTICIPANTS: Senator Hubert Humphrey (D.-Minn.)
Joseph A. Beirne
Cornelius J. Haggerty
Harry Pollak

MODERATOR: Harry W. Flannery

Time: 13:22

FLANNERY: AS WE SEE IT.

HUMPHREY: The Communists are always looking for their old allies, and their old allies are misery, poverty, unemployment, frustration, fear, despair, hopelessness and ignorance. This is where the Commies make their headway, you know.

FLANNERY: Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, discussed the role of labor in the Peace Corps in an interview on this ABC radio network and AFL-CIO program last week. Senator Humphrey talked with three AFL-CIO advisors to the corps: Joseph Beirne, president of the Communications Workers; Cornelius J. Haggerty, president of the AFL-CIO Building Trades Department, and Harry Pollak, of the AFL-CIO Department of International Affairs. The broadcast is from Senator Humphrey's office in the Senate Office Building here in Washington. Harry W. Flannery, your moderator.

Last week, the point was made that the public has heard mostly about the participation of young college people in the Peace Corps, and little of the need for experienced trade unionists -- men who can help show the people abroad how to build homes, roads and operate machines.

Among those needed, said Beirne, is:

BEIRNE: The retired worker who has spent a lifetime building his community, building his home, building his family and who knows the ideals which have brought America to the high pinnacle of success that it is.

FLANNERY: Such men can lead teams of skilled Peace Corps members in the same way that university professors will lead student volunteers.

Senator Humphrey warned that Peace Corps members will be going into the peace-time foxholes. They will be today's freedom fighters.

HUMPHREY: The real enemy of everything you men stand for and the real enemy of what our country stands for is ignorance, human degeneration and human poverty. Poverty is the real enemy today and if we can help people lift themselves out of their misery, out of their poverty, out of their sense of hopelessness, I think we have won half the struggle.

FLANNERY: Mr. Haggerty, I believe the unions have been informed of the participation by their members in the Peace Corps.

HAGGERTY: Yes, Harry, they have been informed, but not in detail. I think that we require more information circulating down to our state and local levels where we expect to recruit these people. We intend, just as soon as we possibly can, to find ways and means of having these people interest themselves who want to take part in this program.

I was very much encouraged by the senator's statement that this is just another test for Americans. They have stood the test of many years in all kinds of conditions and under bad situations. As long as these people understand -- I am thinking now of not the younger person but the mature person who wants to take part, the skilled mechanic, the school teacher, the tradesman, who will want to take part in the program. They must understand what is going to happen, how they must live in those countries. Once that is understood, I

am sure only those will qualify who have a firm determination to carry out the program, live as local people do, within their squalor or whatever it might be. They must know that. Once they know that, they can meet the test.

HUMPHREY: Mr. Haggerty, I am sure you recall very vividly the Seebees. They were the craftsmen. They were skilled men. They didn't have a lark and a picnic. I think they were the miracle workers of World War II.

HAGGERTY: The Senator had a part in organizing the Seebees in 1940. I know something about its basic foundations, intent and purpose and then again at that time, I have compared this program on just one angle to the Seebees because, at that time, the Navy waived a number of infirmities; a man could have two fingers off a hand, he might have a hernia, the Navy would then correct that hernia. They started off with 75,000 as a quota and wound up with 475,000 total enlistments. So, I think this has, in a way, a comparison to it. It is again carrying out your statement that no American has yet to fail to live up to a challenge once it is issued.

POLLAK: Senator, a number of people that I have written to in other countries -- trade union leaders -- and a number of people who are interested in foreign aid programs of one kind or another are trying to get us to emphasize the people-to-people aspect of this program rather than government-to-government aspect. How can that be accomplished in the Peace Corps?

HUMPHREY: Well, I would say that one of the ways it could be accomplished is by direct contact with groups and individuals that we know something about. For example, you men are trade union people. I think one of the greatest things that has happened in our so-called foreign aid program is the aid that the free trade union movement of the United States has given to other unions around the world. This is people-to-people; this isn't government-to-government. I noticed for example, when the President of Tunisia was in our nation's capital, how many labor leaders were present. He knew of them and they knew of him. And I gather the reason is that some years ago you did some good work in Tunisia and are continuing to do it.

I see you have something to say about this, Joe.

BEIRNE: Well, the Premier of Tunisia was one of us. He was a trade union leader. That's what Tom Mboya is in Kenya, that's what Nkrumah is in Ghana. These fellows come from the trade union movement and, I believe, have learned a lot of the democratic processes that they are putting into practice in the under-developed countries through their trade union experience. But, will there be in our standards, some way in which the United States itself can control the priority of emphasis so that our work through the Peace Corps will not be building factories but rather will be, let us say, building schools.

HUMPHREY: It will be written in the legislation just as recently in the Latin American aid program -- the special program for what we called social progress. We put the emphasis in that program on schools, hospitals, community facilities, health facilities, co-operatives and low cost housing to get it to the people. I think the point has been well raised here. The American people are sick and tired of foreign aid that only goes to governments and sometimes these governments regrettably, have not been very representative of their people. Therefore, we are attempting now to design programs which, No. 1, will give priority to those governments that are emphasizing social reform and democratic practices. In other words, foreign aid will be used as an incentive and will be used indeed as sort of a premium payment for those who really make social progress for their people. And then, the other emphasis will be upon people themselves -- upon trade unions, upon the cooperative, upon group programs, upon students, teachers, local level activities and, I am convinced that this new dimension of foreign aid where we are going to put our interest upon getting to the individual and not just working down through a hierarchy of governmental structures,

that this new emphasis and this new dimension will stand.

FLANNERY: When do you expect this legislation to go in, Senator?

HUMPHREY: Well, frankly, now that you have asked it, I have been a little discouraged that they haven't hurried up a little more. I am going to lay it right on the line: I think we have had enough publicity about the Peace Corps. What we need is action. I notice there are action programs being contemplated in Nigeria, for example. I know that there are two or three other countries which you could tell us about Mr. Pollak.

I think the legislation should be over here. I have asked for it and I know that Congressman Reuss in the other body has asked for it. We want to get this legislation passed and we would at least like to have the outlines for it so we could discuss with you men and with other groups and individuals whether it meets the tests that we have talked about.

FLANNERY: When it gets into operation, Senator, I suppose it will be necessary to bring all persons who are going into the movement into a session where they will learn about the culture of the country. They will have to learn the language, too, won't they?

HUMPHREY: I should say they will. You know, we are going to need regular staging areas. We have to look at this thing as really a very highly organized activity in one sense, and yet, when it goes into the field and when the worker goes out into the host country of the field then you become a part of a community. But, our people must be prepared. The processes of selection and preparation must be extraordinarily good. We must be sure to select people that are emotionally stable, that have a dedication and a zeal and also some equipment mentally and physically -- for the task.

We ought to expect that there will be some foul balls. Something is bound to go wrong and right away some people will say, "Oh, we never should have started it." You have to be prepared for that. You have to be prepared for some disappointments, but I think, basically, what we need to do is to sort of weed out those that would not meet the standards by a very intensive program of training. First recruitment, selection and then training.

And, I have often thought that just as we had to do with military personnel, we put these people into staging areas so to speak. If they are going into, let's say, the Latin American area or into a sub-tropical area, we should take the Peace Corps people into an area like Puerto Rico for some time and let them get some contact with Latins. Let them come in contact with the weather, with many of the conditions which are not natural to them in their own home.

BEIRNE: One question last, Senator, is it intended that this Peace Corps will be permanent and not just a part of the new frontier which may pass into history as the New Deal and the Fair Deal and the lean years of Eisenhower pass into history. Will the Peace Corps pass into history with the ending of the new frontier some eight years from now?

HUMPHREY: Well, I am more of an optimist than you are, Mr. Beirne. Eight years from now I hope to see that the new frontier is just working its way from one new achievement to another. It took more than eight years to conquer the frontiers of this great nation, and I am of the opinion that it is going to take a few more than eight years to advance what we call the New Frontier to its new horizons. To be more serious about it, I hope that the Peace Corps is an addition to the total educational and technical program and work program of our nation. And, I noticed that one of you gentlemen said that not only do we need this Peace Corps abroad but there are things to be done here at home. In one limited area, we have been talking about the youth conservation corps and, Harry, you have heard me talk about it -- putting our young men, these drop-outs of school age, of high school age, giving them a chance to get out and work in our forests and our parks and our public lands, to preserve these great resources as, if for nothing else, summer employment and

to remove some of these young men from the pressure on the employment force itself, give them an opportunity for education, for health and for a contribution to their community.

FLANNERY: It is also important I should imagine, Senator, that we don't go into this too fast. That we know exactly where we are going, that we have all of the specifications written out and, this includes the participation of labor. Don't you think this is true, Senator?

HUMPHREY: Yes, I surely do. And may I say when we are talking about the participation of labor, I know you men will be very charitable about it, I think we are going to need some of our people from agriculture -- people that really understand a farm cooperative, I mean a producers cooperative, a distribution cooperative. We are going to have to call on people from every walk of life, it appears to me, from labor, from agriculture, from cooperatives, from medicine and the professions to take a very definite hand in the Peace Corps program.

FLANNERY: Thank you, Senator Hubert Humphrey; Joseph Beirne, president of the Communications Workers; Neil Haggerty, president of the AFL-CIO Building Trades Department, and Harry Pollak, of the AFL-CIO Department of International Affairs.

For information on labor participation in the Peace Corps, write the AFL-CIO Department of International Affairs, Washington 6, D.C.

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