

VICE-PRESIDENT HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
TEXT OF IRC FREEDOM AWARD DINNER
HONORING GEORGE MEANY

Ambassador Duke, our good friend Angier Biddle Duke and his Robbin, Mr. Meany, Secretary Wirtz, and our friend Leo Cherne and many distinguished guests here this evening; Ambassadors, leaders of labor and industry. First of all George, I want you to know it is a true privilege for Mrs. Humphrey and myself to be here tonight as you receive this great award. And all one has to do to know the meaning of this evening is to take a look at that program that you have with you at your table. And if you start on the first page and go through you will see that this is a memorable evening. And too, it is a historic evening. It is an evening where we honor one who has carried on the good fight for freedom to this very moment. Even as the world tonight pays honor to one who stood almost alone in the fight for freedom only 25 years ago, I am privileged tonight, Mr. Meany, to bring with me a message to the International Rescue Committee and to you.

It's good to have some duties as Vice President, and I'm beginning to find out what they are. Last night it was that I could appear with my friend Secretary Wirtz at a wonderful dinner entitled "Plans for Progress," down in Washington, D. C., where we once again outlined the efforts and the programs of our country, business and labor and Government in the great effort of Equal Employment Opportunity. It was a wonderful evening. This morning I find that I have been appointed the Chairman of the Advisory Council for the Peace Corps, and I had an early morning meeting with that Council. Each day the President gives me some new surprises. And what a wonderful, exhilarating experience this is. And now that he's back in the White House, thank goodness--well on the way to recovery, I expect a new surprise every day. I am sure, Mr. Meany and my fellow Americans, that you agree with me that it is good news when we

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know that our President is feeling much better and is in good health. But I have a message and it reads as follows:

"The most vital and crucial conflict in the world today is one between freedom and oppression. Between democracy and totalitarianism. It is therefore most appropriate that your organization--long a champion of freedom and a defender of the victims of tyranny, is presenting its Freedom Award to George Meany. This illustrious American has devoted his life's work to fighting for social justice and freedom for all men. Even as your Committee helped the cause of human liberty by assisting the refugees from fascism and from communism, George Meany has been at the helm of a national effort to keep alive the heartbeat of freedom in the trade union movements of the world. Mr. Meany richly deserves your distinguished Award."

Lyndon B. Johnson

George, I think you ought to have this for your memoirs. Or maybe I should give it to Mrs. Meany..... I am sure she will take good care of it.

Now let me just tarry with you for just a few moments. I realize that the hour is late. You've had a rich program this evening and Mrs. Humphrey and I were delayed due to a previous comitment but I wanted to be here very much. Quite frankly I was concerned and worried lest we wouldn't be here in time to share in this important event. There are many dear friends here as I look across this room and as I walked to my place at this table and noticed the champions of freedom and liberty that are here with us tonight, I couldn't help but feel that this once again is a memorable moment in the history of this City and our Nation. We're engaged in the continuing process of emancipation and freedom, because democracy's business and freedom's business is never done. What is most important, above all others, is that we get on with the business, that we started. And that we never lose faith in our capacity and our ability to achieve the goals of freedom and social justice. Any speaker can carry on for sometime in long dissertations upon the meaning of democracy. But the International Rescue Committee has told us the meaning of freedom. It is the

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value of human life and the difference between the totalitarian and the democrat with a small d. The difference between freedom and tyranny is the respect for human dignity that is found in societies based upon free institutions. Is it any wonder that trade unionists should contribute of their dues and their assessments in helping to build free labor movements in other parts of the world? Many is the time that I have spoken out about the contributions of the labor movements in this great fight for freedom because a worker knows that without his free and voluntary organizations, without his right of association, his privacy too, that there is no freedom. And, therefore, it's no wonder at all, for those who have studied freedom as a philosophy and freedom as a system, that a trade unionist who is truly a trade unionist is one of the first to detect the evil of fascism, or communism, or the virus of totalitarianism.

But we have problems not only abroad we have them at home. The true test of a strong society and a good and free people, is when they can be self-critical, when they can take a look at their own shortcomings. It is only the man that is weak and insecure that constantly parades himself as perfect. It is only the society of the political system that is without the faith and trust of the people that constantly shouts of its many achievements. Those of us that live in a society or a system where there is respect for individual rights, and in a society or a system where there is basic strengths in people, we can run the risk if you please, in fact, not only run the risk, but we can engage in the exercise of looking at our own face and occasionally finding it a bit dirty and wanting to do something about it. I've often said, and its nothing original with me, that if you ever want to find out what's wrong with America just ask somebody. You'll get a full dissertation and lecture upon our shortcomings. This is not a sign of weakness I repeat, it is a sign of strength, and the fact that the President of the United States has reminded this--the

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mightiest nation on the face of the earth, the richest nation that has ever been known in all of the chapters of history--has reminded us that in our wealth and our affluence that there are pockets of poverty is not an indication of weakness or even of shortcoming--it's an indication of strength and of dedication to principal and the fact that we have recognized that we have all too often violated this concept of equality.

Recognizing that there has been abuse of Civil Rights and then doing something about it is not a display of weakness, or even of cynicism, it's a display of strength and of dedication to justice. And the fact my friends that voices are raised in this land that ask your government to open its gates and open its heart so that families may be reunited, so that people may come into this great area of freedom not because of their birth, not because of their race, not because of where they are born, rather but because of but they are--this is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength and of justice and belief in human dignity.

So Mr. Meany I want to thank you tonight as a former legislator, and now for these few short days as a Vice President, for your work in behalf of equal opportunities of Civil Rights; for the work of the American labor movement and for the work of many others in industry, in the churches, the great spiritual leaders that are so well represented here tonight, for the work of educators and many others, I want to thank you for what you have done to help us set standards in America to make sure that the promise of emancipation in 1863 was realized in the year 1964 in the Civil Rights Act of that year.

And I want to thank you also, for your continuing fight to lift the standards of living not merely the wage rate either, because my fellow Americans the President of the United States has told us that we are engaged now upon a new endeavor and wonderful adventure--the creation of the Great Society. And the Great Society is not just a bigger society--it isn't just a richer society--

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it isn't just a society in which there are more people and bigger houses and bigger businesses, and bigger labor, and bigger banks. Its a society that is not big but great. It's a society upon which we put value. It's a society in which we place the emphasis upon quality and not just quantity. It's a society in which we seek the richness of life rather than just riches and luxury.

And those who fight for freedom know that freedom is never free, and know that freedom is the most precious, priceless possession that mankind can have. We are engaged in a mighty effort today to rid our nation of poverty. All of this is a part really, of the work of the International Rescue Committee in a true sense because the IRC for 31-years has been helping people, rescuing them from poverty, the poverty that comes from oppression, the poverty that comes from tyranny--because there is no richness under tyranny, and there surely can be no fullness of life under oppression. So that everything that this great organization has reached out as it has since the days before Hitler until this very hour, against the fascist or the communist, against tyranny in this Hemisphere or any other Hemisphere--whenever the IRC has reached out to help some refugee come to a place of freedom, it has lifted someone from poverty into the richness and the fullness of life which is freedom itself. And thank goodness this has been the United States of America, at least as one of those harbors of freedom.

Now we're going to win our struggle. I've been accused of being a perennial optimist. Well I have a very simple philosophy of life. I believe in living each day to its utmost--who knows of tomorrow. There are plenty of people that go around and tell you of the terrible things that are going to befall us. The woods are full of the alarmist. Washington is full of fright promoters.

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The nation sometime has far too many who tell us that there are dire days ahead. I don't expect any easy days. I have never known in the study of history that freedom fighters ever had it easy. I have never known or ever read of a nation that gained or maintained its liberty through ease or through comfort alone. I therefore am one who believes that there should be a joy in the building of the common good. There should be a sense of exhilaration on the part of us that are privileged to lift our hand for freedom and for justice. These are not sacrifices, these are opportunities. We're not faced with problems, we're faced with challenges. And if we will start to erase from our memories the word 'problems' and 'difficulties' and except as our vernacular and our language opportunities and challenges, you'll be surprised what we can do. Let others have the problems, let us have the opportunities. Let others have the difficulties, let us accept the challenges. I think that's the way that you gain awards for freedom.

And when I look over those who have received this medal, and they are listed here in your book, may I say that none of them turned back, or was wary, or gave up because of problems and difficulties. Take a look at Winston Churchill at a time when there was no hope, when Britain was defeated he proved for all time that the spirit is mightier than the sword. That's his contribution to our life. Take a look at this name of Admiral Richard E. Byrd, who had the daring and the courage to pioneer, who didn't run away from difficulties, who in fact looked upon the impossible as that which had to be achieved. The stimulus of his life were the difficulties and the problems that gave him challenges and opportunities. Take a look at General William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan. I have talked to the men that served him. He never knew what it was to give up, to look back, or to have doubts, he just charged ahead. That's why I imagine they called him "Will Bill". They didn't call him timid Bill, I'll tell you that! And then take a look at

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that name Mayor Willy Brandt of Free Berlin. Mark my words, were it not for a man like Mayor Willy Brandt and he does not stand alone but he is symbolic, there wouldn't be any Free Berlin because before you could come to the defense of Free Berlin there had to be the spirit of freedom in Berlin. And it was testified too by the living manifestation of Willy Brandt.

So as we honor tonight this recipient of the Freedom Award I say that there wouldn't be the freedom that America knows tonight nor would there be the hope that springs eternal in many areas of the world tonight were it not for the fact that there had been fighters for freedom in this country, and many of them, and not all of them by a long-shot in government, or listed as the political statesmen of our times. Some of them are statesmen in their own right in their letters, in literature, in the arts, in industry, in education and in labor. And tonight I'm happy to be here to salute an old friend that waged a battle long before I ever knew there was one. To salute one who has stood the test of time and who today is stronger in his fidelity to the cause of social justice and freedom in this hour of his life than he was in the earliest moments of his adulthood. And what a wonderful blessing it is to know that as a man grows in experience and as his life moves on-- that he is stronger and mightier--and more dedicated than the first time he took and made his commitment to the cause of freedom. So George, I want to join with the President of the United States tonight and thank you for what you have done. And to say that my life has been enriched by your priceless gift of friendship and by your leadership for our America.

Thank you very much.



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