

Sept. 25-71

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Press Conference - Sacramento, California

September 24, 1968

I'll make my opening remarks very brief and take any questions you may have. I'm not here for the meeting of the State Federation of Labor - I spoke to them this afternoon and in connection with some remarks which I guess had some political overtones, did speak about the fact that it now is clear that this is going to be a year in which there will be no foreign contract labor in California. This of course goes back to 1965 when the 1964 public law of 78 was entered - there was a substantial reduction in the number of braceros that year. That number has steadily diminished so that this year there wont be any. That means that 1968 is the first year I believe since 1942 that there have been no foreign contract workers in the State of California. The story is familiar to everybody here - I simply note that the outlines of it are that in these four years the employment of domestic workers has gone up very substantially; the production of virtually all of the crops has increased very substantially; there has been a significant increase in wages; profits have gone up; prices--well we all know that you don't compare readily prices of agricultural products from year to year because it all depends on the supply, the season and so forth. It's at least illustrative that wholesale price index for all fresh and dried fruits and vegetables in July of this year is just about exactly the same--in fact it's slightly lower--than it was four years ago. I think it's fair to say that this has not resulted in any significant price increase. I do believe that the result of this program has been, or the cutting out of the Purcell ? program has been a very significant contribution to the meeting of the migrant worker problem. I know that more of it is

left, I hope very much that we can next do with respect to the green card carrier problem involving the commuter. We can do the kind of thing that has been done with respect to the Purcell programs so that problem too can be eliminated. I believe I'll just stop and take your questions.

Q: Mr. Secretary, as one member of the Johnson Administration do you believe that Mr. Humphrey will be able to drastically change the policy on the Vietnam issue or has no choice

MR. WIRTZ: You mean when he is President because I note you suggested he said it and it seems to me very rightly it doesn't do any good for him to play or pretend to be president during this period. My answer to your question as far as the future is concerned is that first there is the question of whether this matter can be brought to a head--and I hope it can as does everybody in the country--before the change in the presidency. If there is a change in the presidency the first of the year, yes, I would expect to see changes of one kind or another irregardless of who is elected.

Q: Do you expect to see more members of the Administration coming out now to campaign for Mr. Humphrey?

MR. WIRTZ: Yes, prior to the conventions, we were very properly it seems to me under the injunction that we should not participate in it, but now since the convention there is no hesitation on anybody's part to speak his piece completely and fully and I would expect to see that.

Q: Mr. Wirtz, (inaudible)

MR. WIRTZ: O'h I've made that clear for some little time now. I've been there some eight years - six years as secretary - two years before that as under-secretary. I think for anybody to occupy a cabinet position for that long is for him to exhaust most of the ideas and a lot of the energy he has. I'm the oldest living Minister of Labor in the western hemisphere except for one fellow, Homero Blanco ? , in Mexico has more seniority than I have, but all the others have changed. There have been four Secretaries of Commerce in this country during this period of six years and I don't have more than six years' ideas.

Q: Mr. Secretary, do you think that this year there will be no foreign contract labor developed?

A. Right.

Q: However, isn't it true that the green have been raised so much that it's going to be nearly -- how many foreign workers will there be in here ...

A. Of course there is a whole of a difference between their coming in on a contract basis which means there is no exercise of bargaining of anything of that kind which was true of the braceros. And on the other hand, the green carder coming in -- now I want to, whenever I mention green-carder, I'd like to make it clear this time because I didn't once before -- I'm talking about the commuter who comes back and forth across the border and your question has good basis in its suggestion that there is enough of that to affect the situation very materially, to complicate in my judgment--although I know others view it differently--to complicate the situation in the grape harvest and so forth. There are a substantial number of green card carriers.

It's very hard to give you a precise figure on that. I can't. Because I've got to distinguish between those who are here more or less permanently who present a different situation. Those commute either on a daily or on a weekly or a seasonal basis and that latter number fluctuates so that I have no confidence in my figures.

Q: Let me ask the question differently and maybe you can answer it. Has the total number of foreign workers in agriculture increased?

A. Yes, very substantially, it has. You see in 1958 or '59 the number of contract workers was -- well in the United States, there were more in Texas California was second -- up about 40,000. Now it's down to virtually zero in California. My recollection is that in 1962, 63, at one time or another during the year it approached 200,000, someplace in that area. And so the answer to your question is yes there's been a very substantial number.

Q: Agriculture organizers in the Valley can canvass sufficient numbers of green-card workers can be brought in as strike workers that it is totally almost ineffective their organizing efforts in the Valley.

A: The number of commuter green cards carriers is sufficiently large to justify that statement so that it does affect quite adversely the possibility of strikes or something of that kind. I think the things that can be done about it include these: There are virtually no new green cards being issued but I would think that the situation is one in which every commuting green-carder ought to have his return, or his entry, into this country reviewed on the same basis on which the green card was originally issued. That requires a finding that his coming in will not have an adverse affect, but the trouble is that now once that green card is issued, it can be used without regard to

the situation when he comes back again so that I would think there are two changes that should be made and one is that the basis under which the green card is issued should be reassessed, reevaluated, every time he comes in, and the second is that the regulations and the administration of the regulations with respect to the use of commuter green-carders on such property should be more rigorously enforced than it is.

Q: (Inaudible)

Vietnam war. . Tell us how you feel about Senator McCarthy's views

A: Well, as Secretary of Labor, I'm not called upon to exercise any judgment in connection with that matter. I made it quite clear today that my speaking was in a different capacity. Let me put it this way, had I been a delegate to the Convention in Chicago -- as I was last time, was not this time -- I would have supported the minority plank. Quite clearly, I think that the difference between the minority and majority planks is less than is sometimes suggested, but it ^{did} seem to me quite important that the very important part of the Democratic Party -- the very important part of the younger America particularly, which felt so strongly about that matter was entitled to more consideration than it received from the majority and I would have hoped that the minority plank would have been adopted.

Q: (Inaudible)

Senator McCarthy

A: I expressed today, as strong as I can the hope that that will come about. I've fought some losers before and sometimes felt that I didn't

have all the choices I wanted. I don't feel that this time of course. I've been for the last 20 years a strong supporter of Mr. Humphrey. I can understand particularly on the war issue people feeling that very strongly, but I would just hope that they didn't vote for somebody who was not going to become president or they just throw their vote away without realizing the consequences of four years of Richard Nixon. As far as I'm concerned I don't like it. I cannot help thinking -- I did use today earlier the story that that kind of action reminds me of Adlai Stevenson's story that he told - I think out here in 1952 under not dissimilar circumstances. As the Governor's story in 1952 was of the wealthy man who said to his chauffeur one day when he was fed up with it all - "Drive over the cliff, James, I want to commit suicide." Well I don't think that the democracy is going to commit suicide by sitting out, by somebody sitting out this kind of thing - it's too enduring for that, but Gemini it seems to me the stakes are so high right now. There must be some better way of protesting on one particular issue than to sacrifice your franchise on all the others. And when I think of all the things that have been done in this country - I just feel so strongly that there has got to be some way of accepting and recognizing that protest and still getting on with what's to be done. I'm sorry to be so political.

Q: Mr. Secretary, Vice Presidential candidate, Mr. Muskie, is going to be in contact with Mr. McCarthy do you know the substance of what they talked about? Is it possible that Mr. McCarthy will endorse ...

A: No, I don't know at all. I should make it quite clear especially

in view of what I've just said that I have not been in touch with either the Vice President or Senator Muskie since the convention. My path crossed Senator Muskie's at the IUE Convention in New York last week, but I don't know the answer to that question. I'm speaking only for myself and in a completely personal capacity.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: No you see that does go to the matter of the present situation - the determination as to whether there is to be a halt in the bombing is right now as it should be with the President. It would be a great mistake for me to make any comment on that, really one way or the other. But when you ask me what my situation or what my position is as far as being a citizen looking to the future is concerned, acting with respect to the kind of thing that was before the convention, I have no hesitation but just as Vice President Humphrey said yesterday that there is just no point in his trying to play President between now and January 20th, clearly there is none for me.

Q: Mr. Secretary, some of Mr. Humphrey's advisors are urging him to resign his office. What is your feeling on that

A: It would be presumptuous of me to have a view as to whether a Vice President should resign and even if I had one, I'd be hesitant about it. But I don't think it ought to be necessary for a Vice President to resign in order to establish his independence of position in this country. And I don't believe that there is any question in people's minds about the independence of his position, when he told, as he did yesterday, on an

international telecast, the Lincoln story, about Lincoln's wartime cabinet in which Lincoln reported that the vote was one yeas and eight nays and the yeas had it. Well it doesn't need to be spelled out much more plainly than that and so I would simply say that - first to answer your question for me to comment on whether the Vice President ought to resign it would be abhorrent to me, and second, it doesn't seem to me that it ought to be necessary to do that kind of thing to establish the fact that Huber Humphrey is an independent man. He has been all his life. I'm convinced of it completely and I keep wondering whether what people want is a pound of repudiation instead of just a declaration of independence. That's too bad if that's true.

Q: (Inaudible)

are there any plans along this line

A: I don't think I should and for this reason, it's my bet -- as I don't need to tell you at this point in this conversation to speak my mind pretty bluntly and I don't mean to duck something as important as that strike, which as I understand it is going on now since January - some 2,000 out - all the difficulties about it. I've always got to wonder whether a case of that kind is coming to the Department in one form or another. We don't have a formal mediation function. We do frequently get into matters of that and I'm a little hesitant to comment on it because with it being unresolved, with its being that serious, I never know when by some foolish statement I prejudice the possibility of our being constructive in the future. So - on that basis I'd like not to say anything about that case.

Q: If you were free to speak your mind what would you say?

A: I guess I wouldn't have anything to add on that.

Q: Mr. Secretary, there have been reports that organized labor in force might be defecting to either Mr. Wallace or possibly Mr. Nixon, that California after 1966 with Governor Reagon's election obviously did not support Pat Brown would not support the Democratic candidate

A: No, I don't. I don't believe that labor is getting more conservative. I suppose it's true that more of them -- more of those whom we've considered labor are now making more money than they were before and that whenever your income goes up your inclination to oppose taxes increases commensurately. But I don't believe it is that. I think that there is today in this country a whole reshuffling of attitudes. There is a change rampant in the country. By and large I'm for that and I think that what you see in the ranks of labor is only a reflection of all of the other discontents, frustrations, dissatisfactions and desires for change - not political change I'm talking about at the moment, but a change in positions of one kind of another and so I would answer your question more directly this way. I don't believe that there is a development there that is peculiar to labor. There is unquestionably a consideration today in this country of more candidates than is usually true in an election year. And I guess I think that that's what you have here.

Q: (Inaudible)

A: O'h I think the democratic program -- well I'll tell you

specifically and in terms of your question, there is an approach by Mr. Wallace in terms of law and order. Now law and order mean one of three things. It means preservation of the peace and I think we're all for it, every single one of us. It means preservation of the racial attitudes which Mr. Wallace has and that I think most of us are 100% against, or it means preservation of the status quo that we don't go on and do the things that we want to do because we find some excuse in the name of law and order. I believe the way to meet whatever attraction Mr. Wallace has, and it should be taken seriously, to American labor is to make it clear that the law and order Mr. Wallace is talking about is not law and order to preserve the peace. It's law and order to preserve something that comes very close to racial bigotry, or to preserve the status quo. I think if we can make that distinction that consequential . OK

Q: I'm sure you see the national polls showing

A: Oh, no I've made it perfectly clear I take the present situation quite seriously . I think there's going to be a very significant change. The matter has been dominated -- the campaign has been dominated by personalities a good deal. It was dominated by Chicago which was a catastrophe as far as the convention goes with all kinds of power -- power of the majority in the convention, power of the police, power of some of the media, power of some of those kids in Grant Park -- all of those things being abused. That taste is a nasty, ugly taste. As that gets out of our mouths -- and we've got to clean it out -- as the to get past the personalities, then I think in California and in the rest of the country it will be dead clear that the issues are just as they were before -- the importance

of Vietnam, the importance of peace and law and order -- but also the importance of education, and of health, social security and social opportunity and all of those things and I believe that there will be a change as those issues reassert themselves and as we get over the anger that came with Chicago and with the riots and with some of the other. I have time for about two more and you will understand that I have to leave, I have a

Q: Today you talked about the association of former Vice President Nixon with Strom Thurmond, comments by Spiro Agnew

Are you intimating or saying that

A: Well, Mr. Agnew says its his sense of humor and I don't trust my own because as some of you know, as I mention only timidly, I was Adlai Stevenson's law partner. I loved that man as though he were a member of the family, or I of his family, and he loved his country and my bitterness about what I've heard the last week is its so much like what I heard from Richard Nixon in 1952 when he called Adlai Stevenson and Harry Truman every mannered names, members of the communist cowardly college or something of that sort. I've been here before and now it just looks to me as though Mr. Nixon has somebody new to do that kind of thing for him. With all the people, I don't believe Mr. Agnew is a vicious person. I think he just has a mild case of hoof-and-mouth disease and I don't believe that he's anti-Japanese; I don't believe that he's anti-Polish people because he calls them Japs or Polaks or something of that sort - but when he calls Hubert Humphrey soft on communism, and I hear that word ringing right straight through from 1952 and 1956, and when I hear him say he's sorry and cry in his napkin yesterday

and when I hear other Republican leaders say they're sorry but when I don't hear one word from Mr. Nixon, I've been here before.

Q: What do you feel is an adequate minimum wage in the state of California?

A: I should - I want to beg off that question because the state of California and the state of New York and one or two others have maintained their minimum wages at different levels from the federal minimum wage and they've been higher and I'm for a high minimum wage and so I can't express myself on the California situation without complicating my other situation. Thank you very much.

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