

REMARKS OF HUBERT H. HUMPHREY  
INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR REISEL  
OCTOBER 30, 1968

MR. REISEL: Mr. Vice President, there has been so much discussion and within these last few hours of the campaign so many major questions have been answered, but in one field, the nitty-gritty of earning one's daily bread, there is a great deal of interest by 20 million trade unionists and their families meaning 60 to 80 millions of people. They are interested in what would your position be as President of the United States if it came to a drive for a guaranteed annual income, the reverse income taxes sort of thing, for all those who work for a living and those seeking jobs.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, the first thing I would want to do is to expand our programs of training and development of our manpower resources, so that every person that wanted to work could have the skill and the training that made it possible for him to work and, secondly, that we would redouble our efforts to make sure that these trained workers would be given the jobs and job placement. I believe that most people really would rather earn their living and would prefer to have an opportunity to work at a job of their own choice in a plant in private industry.

However, for those who are incapable of working, in other words, those cases of the handicapped or the needy that cannot for family reasons or personal reasons or mental reasons fulfill the responsibilities of a worker, then we must improve their income maintenance. We must have a form of income maintenance that will see to it that they can live a decent life and that they will have the income that is necessary to provide for their families and for their wants.

So my program would be two-fold: First, the emphasis upon training, education in skills, in work habits, working with industry, but with the government and industry and labor partnership, placing people on jobs, really working at it to see that the job is done, and for those that cannot work, to see to it that they have an adequate amount of income to take care of themselves and do it with dignity.

MR. REISEL: Well, Mr. Vice President, one of your earliest supporters, but not the earliest, but mutually a very good friend of both of us, George Meany, went before your party's program, platform committee, and urged several things, and here again we get down into the home, we get down into where they earn a living. One of the things was a statutory cutting down of the work week to 35 hours, 35 hours instead of 40 hours. I was wondering what you thought of that as president of the United States, sir.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, this is -- one of the things that our friends in the labor movement do is to stake out objectives and aspirations a little bit ahead of what the public is ready for, to be quite frank about it. The labor movement fought for the 40-hour week when there was a 48-hour week. It fought for the 48-hour week when there was the 54 or the 60-hour week. The labor movement recognizes that with automation and modern technological advance that the work week will be shortened, that is for what we call regular time, and what Mr. Meany was pointing out to the Democratic Party was to be thinking in those terms, to look to the future.

In some of the industries already the contracts are at a 35-hour week, and he was just reminding us in the Platform Committee that the time will come when the political officers of government will have to face up to this issue, and I am sure that we will be having hearings on the shorter work week in the Labor and Public Welfare and Labor and Education committees of the House.

I am not sure at this time in light of our manpower needs that we can fulfill that statutory requirement, but surely it is something we ought to be driving at and looking forward to.

MR. REISEL: Mr. Humphrey, you don't think the time is yet?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: No, I don't.

MR. REISEL: Well, could we then go to another, well, of the program points of our friend, Mr. Meany, the new minimum wage to be \$2 an hour instead of \$1.60. Here we get down again to the bread and butter of the lower income groups, whether in factory or field or farm; that is would you as president vote for, veto or vote for, a \$2 an hour minimum raised from \$1.60 an hour?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, Victor, that is something we -ill have to take under advisement and that the Congress will be working on. I can't say right now. I do think the minimum wage will have to be raised. Whether we can get to that figure at this time, immediately, I am not at all sure. I have learned in government that you do what is called the art of the possible, but surely we have come a long ways in the last few years, and with the rise in the cost of living as we know that has taken place, obviously that minimum wage is going to have to go up.

But once again I think it is fair to say that what we expect of our leaders in labor is to look far into the future, to point the way, to break the new ground and to try to build the public opinion that is necessary to get favorable congressional and executive action. Mr. Meany is a far-sighted labor statesman, and what he has outlined for us is, I am sure, something that will be coming. But whether or not we are ready for it now in the congressional process is something that I doubt. I don't think we could make it quite that fast. But I am sure the minimum wage will go up and I will be prepared to recommend it.

MR. REISEL: Well, would you recommend it for those who work on the farm and in the field and amongst the agricultural arenas of our society, too?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I have always included the agricultural workers in my field in minimum wage.

MR. REISEL: Could we get to what is really agitating a great many people? I don't think it has hit the news as it should have, and that is mostly because of this tremendous campaign you have been waging against the field, the headlines which have covered you and have sort of obscured this fight of the agricultural workers in California. Richard Nixon has come out against the grape boycott about which so many Mexican-Americans feel so strongly. I was wondering had you taken a position, do you endorse the grape boycott, the organization of the farm workers stoop labor in the grape and fruit arenas?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: The first thing, I have endorsed is the right of those agricultural workers, these migrant workers, to organize. Secondly, the Labor Relations Act, the National Labor Relations Act, should be amended so that they have all the protections that come under that act, and, thirdly, I have told the growers that their choice is either to negotiate and bargain or face a boycott.

Now, that is just what it amounts to, and I have offered my good offices to try to help settle some of those disputes because I really believe that the best way to handle it is through the processes of collective bargaining -- in other words, through the bargaining and negotiation process. But if the growers won't bargain, then the only thing that the worker has left is to boycott, and I have stood with them.

MR. REISEL: As against the position taken by your opponents, one of your opponents, Dick Nixon.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Yes, indeed, and I have met out there with Caesar Chavez and his workers and let them know full

well that I back them 100 percent in their right to have a decent wage, to organize and bargain collectively, and to have the protections of the National Labor Relations Act, and I am going to offer that as a proposal to the Congress when I am president.

In the meantime, if these growers do not want to bargain, they are going to just have to face the consequences of the only thing left that the worker has, and that is a boycott.

MR. REISEL: Well, could we get to the last point on this program which George Meany urged upon your party, Mr. Vice President, and that was the O'Hara's bill to create one million new jobs. It would really be a latter day WPA, the kind of jobs which would have young people working in the libraries or in the parks or really in the image of the old Works Progress Administration, and I think George estimated that would cost originally about a billion dollars. Would you be for the bill or the program as I have outlined it?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: That is the Clark-O'Hara --

MR. REISEL: O'Hara.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Yes.

MR. REISEL: I am sorry.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: That is the one that provides employment for persons in vital services, municipal and state governmental services, where jobs are not available. I support that legislation.

MR. REISEL: Well, Mr. Vice President, we get a little more political now because these few questions are the ones I know literally some 80 millions of people will be interested in because it is the money they take home and the bread on the table, and, as our late good friend Phil Murray used to say, carpets on the floor, music in the room, pictures on the wall.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Yes, sir.

MR. REISEL: You remember that one.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I sure do.

MR. REISEL: Yes. But, Mr. Vice President, if we could get to your opponents, I wonder if you could analyze for me in these few minutes the hold that George Wallace seems to have on what would be the labor movement ordinarily which should be with you. The UAW, Autoworkers, Walter Reuther's followers, the others across the country, how could, in your estimate, could George Wallace in your estimate, gain such a percentage support inside the labor movement?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, first of all, you have to remember that in many of these areas these workers have come recently from the South where some of the old prejudices of the old days still hang on, race prejudices quite frankly. Mr. Wallace appeals to racial prejudices.

Secondly, there are just a large, substantial number of people in the country that have got a few gripes that they don't know quite how to answer, and they have been able to find in George Wallace a way to express their protest, express their feelings of concern, of unhappiness, of -- well, of just bitterness about some of the things that are happening in our country. I don't think these workers, however, when it comes down to election day, are going to vote for George Wallace. I think this is a way for them to vent their feelings, to sort of shake up the establishment, as we say, to let people know that they can't be taken for granted, that there are things that we would like to have changed, and they, when they are polled, when people pass out those buttons, they say, "Give me one of Wallace's buttons." It is the way to kind of show the leadership that they don't like everything that is going on.

But when it comes down to election day, they have got to think of their family. They have got to think of their jobs, and George Wallace has nothing to offer that family. He has no economic program, he has no knowledge of foreign policy or national security, he has a

very poor record in education, his state has one of the lowest per capita investments in education, and the working man knows these things, that when he comes to that voting box, he is going to vote Democratic just as surely as I am seeing you tonight.

MR. REISEL: Well, I hope so. I suppose I am supposed to be a neutral, but on this point I am not.

Mr. Vice President, one question on Dick Nixon. In the last few days he has been meeting with some labor leaders. He is making quite a concentrated drive to get them, his people are going to plants. Do you think some of the Wallace -- I don't mean some, but a substantial part of the Wallace protest vote will go to Richard Nixon and the Republican Party, or are you confident they will swing to you and your labor supporters and your ticket?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I cannot assume because labor has endorsed me that every person that carries a union card is going to vote for me. I can't assume that, but I would like to assume that every man has got enough good sense to know what is good for himself, and the Republican administration has never been good for the working man. It has always ended up where they used higher unemployment as a way to sort of balance out the economy, as they call it, rather than using fiscal policy -- that is, tax policy or monetary policy. They have always put the responsibility or the burden for leveling off the economy, as they call it, upon the worker. They say a little, a few more unemployed. You noticed Mr. Nixon recently, his chief economic adviser said we could take a little more unemployment. He thought that in the short run this would be good for the country. Well, I don't think it is good for the country. I think we ought to have learned by now that unemployment is a 19th century method of trying to deal with the problems of the economy. We have other ways of doing it now. We need an expanding economy, a growing economy. We need jobs in this economy. We need investments in this economy, and we need to train more workers for this economy.

There is no shortage of labor in America, not if you train the people that are still untrained, not if you educate the people that are still uneducated. We can do a great deal to what we call level off the inflationary pressures in this country by just making labor more mobile, by making it better trained.

MR. REISEL: Could I break in on you, Mr. Vice President. Two very brief questions: One, is the sum total of what you have just been saying the charge that Dick Nixon really then is attempting to come in and create anti-inflation drives by creating unemployment, and that he is anti-labor?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: That is exactly right. I can't imagine a labor organization man voting for Mr. Nixon. Mr. Nixon has never cast a vote in his life in their behalf, not one. He has been an avowed enemy of organized labor. He has never championed the cause, for example, of the minimum wage for the unorganized man. He has always opposed its expansion and its coverage. He has never fought for social security. He opposed Medicare. I can't imagine anybody that loves -- well, that wants a job, loves their family, wants to see the care of their grandparents, the elderly, voting for Richard Nixon. I just can't imagine.

I can see how somebody who gets a letter from him up in the stock market which says that we are not going to regulate you so much will vote for him. But I think the President of the United States ought to be the people's man. I don't think he ought to be the man of the interests.

MR. REISEL: Would you know, you who were first pushed so strongly by George Meany and with the labor movement so strongly behind you, be a people's president, would you -- perhaps the question is disingenuous -- favor the labor people who have done

so much or would you be the president of the people?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I would be the president of the people, but let me say very frankly the labor movement has not asked for things that aren't good for the people. I am very proud of the fact that I have a good voting record with organized labor. Organized labor has fought for the things that I have believed in. Now there are times that people in labor get ambitions that is more than what the public interest will -- more than what serves the public interest. If that is the case, I must be very honest with you, if I am to be president of all the people, then I have got to speak up to them too.

MR. REISEL: Mr. Vice President, for my part, this is a renewal of an old acquaintance that goes back to Minneapolis.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: It sure does.

MR. REISEL: And I would like to put down at the side of the microphone Mr. Furman who is the manager of WEVD who wants to ask one question which will be broadcast to one million Jewish American listeners and to the readers of the Jewish Daily Forward, so Mr. Vice President, thanks, and here is Norman Furman.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Thank you so much.

MR. FURMAN: Thank you, Victor Reisel. You are so right. I should like to bring back a message from you to our million Jewish listeners on WEVD and our Jewish Daily Forward readers. I have a specific question.

When you assume the position of president-elect next Tuesday -- notice I didn't say if.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: I got you.

MR. FURMAN. When you assume the position as president-elect next Tuesday, what will your policy be with respect to the Middle East and especially to Israel?

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Well, I have spoken a good deal about this. The first thing I would say is that I want to be sure that the State of Israel has the means for its adequate defense. It lives in a troubled part of the world. It has been the victim of attack and of constant harassment. I have said unequivocally that I would, as president, see to it that Israel was able to have the means of its defense including Phantom jets, that is the sophisticated supersonic jet. I would hope that we could help Israel obtain guarantees of peace where her borders would be secure, where they would be established, where she would be recognized as a separate independent nation state and where the status of belligerency which has been maintained by the neighboring states would be set aside. I want Israel to have free navigational rights to all international waters including the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba. I hope that we can halt this arms race in the Middle East, because it chews up the resources. It uses them. But in the meantime if the other states are to be armed as they are by the Soviet Union, then the only protection that Israel has is for her own self-defense, and we must help her for that. She is not asking for gifts. She is asking for a chance, that is all she is asking for, for the right to be able to purchase the kind of equipment that will provide for her security.

I am a friend of the State of Israel and very proud of it. Israel represents to me the fulfillment of many of the objectives of American policy, freedom. It represents parliamentary government, representative government. It represents social progress, it represents a great deep and abiding interest in the welfare of people. That kind of a nation state is something that is the kind that the American public and the American government ought to have an interest in and support, and as president that is the way I will do it.

MR. FURMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President. I know that you will make our people very happy with your talk at this time.

VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Thank you.



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)