

George Meany Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 08/16/1964
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Biographical Note

George Meany (1894-1980) was the president of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization from 1955 to 1979. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's [JFK] trip to Germany and Ireland and the international community's reactions to JFK, among other topics.

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THIS PORTION WAS TAPED AUGUST 16, 1964

GOLDBERG: This is Justice Goldberg interviewing President George Meany -- President of the AFL-CIO. George, during our last session you spoke quite at length about your experiences with the President in a business-like way in relation to problems of the labor movement and certain political relationships. You had many personal experiences with the President, I know. I remember, for example, that you accompanied him to Berlin and, as a matter of fact, if I remember correctly, he spoke at a Berlin labor rally at your invitation. I would hope that you would have something to say about some personal recollections of President Kennedy.

MEANY: Well, for one, I vividly recall the Berlin trip in June of 1963. Of course, I had many personal contacts with the President in the years before that. When he was in the Senate, on a number of occasions I would go to his office and have lunch with him and discuss legislation and problems. Of course, those were always very nice occasions and to me, very, very nice memories of him. And he visited, of course, with our conventions. I recall in San Francisco, in 1959, he came in before our convention and he had a tight schedule and I had a pretty tight one too and we finally wound up having breakfast together. As I say, those were always very, very delightful occasions. Now on the Berlin matter, how that came about, I was at the White House for a conference one morning and I had read in the paper that he was planning this Berlin trip and had noted the dates. I said to him casually, "Say, I'm going to be in Berlin the same day you are." And he said, "Well, that's fine." He said, "Will you be in Europe

before that?" I said "Yes, I'll be at the ILO meeting and I'll have to go up there from Geneva." He said, "Well, why don't you fly up with me. You can meet me and you can fly up on the plane with the rest of us."

GOLDBERG: Fly up from where, George?

MEANY: From Weisbaden. You see, the way his trip was planned, he was going to be in Bonn and Weisbaden and those places like on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday and then Wednesday he was due in Berlin. That was the day that I was due in Berlin. I said, "I would be delighted to do that, be tickled to death." And he said "If you want to, when we get through in Berlin," he said, "you can fly over to Ireland with me." I said "Well that will be fine too." So a little while later I said to him, it just sort of occurred to me, I said, "Say, you know I'm going to attend a building trades workers convention in Berlin on the 26th of June." I said "I'm quite sure that they would like for you to talk to them." He said "Well, if we can work it out, I'll be glad to." So when I left the White House I came back to the office and I promptly wired the building trades workers of Western Germany who were having this convention and told them to send an invitation to the President. They did that and about three days later they wired me that they had got a very prompt reply which said the President couldn't possibly be there. He couldn't possibly fit it into his schedule and so forth.

GOLDBERG: This must have been a little disconcerting to you.

MEANY: So, anyway, the next time I was over to the White House I mentioned this to the President and he said "Well, that's funny. I didn't even see that invitation," which, of course, we understood. He said "I'll find ten minutes or so to go there." So, of course, we worked it out and he went. He got into Bonn on Sunday, I think he flew over on Sunday, and then he spent a day or so in Bonn and then he moved down to Weisbaden. On Tuesday evening, I flew up from Geneva to Weisbaden and I met the President. I was invited to a reception at what they called the city cultural center which is a great big building where they have a theater, opera house and reception hall -- a very beautiful building. That evening, I went over to this reception, given by the Mayor of Weisbaden, and here was a great big room decorated with flowers and I would say maybe 700 or 800 people there, leading citizens of the town and I rode over with General Clay, we went over together. We got to wandering around the room and all of a sudden the President spotted me and, called me over and I spent quite a bit of time with him then going through the crowds with the Mayor and, of course, he introduced me to everybody there. That was a very, very pleasant occasion. This was one of the most striking things about President Kennedy -- his love for people -- his love to be with people.

GOLDBERG: He obviously enjoyed them.

MEANY: There was no question about that. He enjoyed it very, very much. He was just delighted to be with people, to mix with people. The next day -- Wednesday, the 26th of June -- this is

the day that I will never forget. We flew up from Weisbaden that morning. Left Weisbaden about 9:00 a.m.

GOLDBERG: This was on the Presidential jet, Air Force 1.

MEANY: Air Force No. 1. Secretary Rusk was on the plane, General Clay and the military commander of our forces in West Berlin and secretarial staff, of course, and a good many of the White House assistants to the President. We flew up from Weisbaden -- left there about 9:00, few minutes after 9:00 -- got into Berlin just before 10:00 I would say, about a quarter of ten. It was a very beautiful day. It had looked like it would rain but as we got to Berlin the sun came out.

Mayor Brandt met him at the airport along with Chancellor Adenauer and, after I had greeted them and the other party, I left the President to head for this building trades meeting. I spoke at this building trades meeting and, as we had arranged in advance, I then met the President at the entrance to the Congress Hall where this convention was being held with the President of the German trade union movement, Ludwig Rosenberg, with the President of the Building Trades Workers, George Leber of Berlin, and with Walter Siekert who was the President of the Berlin combined group, something similar to what we would call a central labor union. We met him at the entrance of the Congress Hall. When he got out of the car, Konrad Adenauer was with him and Mayor Willie Brandt, and I recall this little incident. When he got out of the car I explained to him that the building in which this meeting was being held, known as Congress Hall -- it's in the park there not

more than 150 yards from the Brandenburg Gate, or in other words 150 yards from the east sector -- that this building where the meeting was being held, this great big meeting-hall with all sorts of facilities for conventions, had been erected through money donated from the Benjamin Franklin Society of the United States. In other words, an American society had donated this building to the people of West Berlin. And on the entrance wall of this building was a saying by Franklin and I can't recall the exact wording but I remember that it struck me very forcibly. The gist of it was that Franklin said he hoped that he could see a world where a philosopher could go any place in the world and find freedom and therefore could say this is my home, this is where I belong, where freedom is. Well, anyway, before the President got there I had taken a little slip of paper and had copied this quotation from the wall and gave it to the President. I said, as we were walking in and as I gave him this slip of paper, now this is the saying and this building was erected by funds donated by the Benjamin Franklin Society and so on and so forth. He took that little piece of paper and he stuck it in his pocket. I don't think he looked at it again. But when he opened his address he quoted from it. He had some notes that he didn't use; he had them and they were in front of him but he never even looked at them. He made about a 12-minute talk and it was the most effective talk I think I ever heard on the question of freedom. And he related it to workers -- to workers' unions -- the fact

that where workers could get together and form unions and use the unions, of course, to improve their conditions, that this was one of the very essentials of freedom. That where there were free trade unions, then there was freedom. He paraphrased the Benjamin Franklin thing and did it very beautifully. Then we left there and, of course, they had this motorcade going through the city and we came back to what they call the Rat-Haus Square, which to us would mean the City Hall Square in front of City Hall in West Berlin. And this great long rectangular building facing this square and five or six streets sort of converge at that point so that you get a great big open space and I would say, without exaggeration, that there were 100,000 to 120,000 people packed in that square. And you would look up each street leading back a block or two -- just from wall to wall, humanity just packed in there -- and the Germans with their usual efficiency and detail, had provided ambulances and stretcher bearers and nurses to take care of the people who fainted -- and they were fainting. People stood out there in the sun -- by our standards it was not a real hot day but it was about 75, which in Berlin is considered quite warm. Their temperature rarely gets that high. And people were fainting every two minutes. And then, of course, the President made his speech there which he started off by saying, "Ich bin ein Berliner," which of course, made a great hit with the crowd. And I must get into this record something that happened there that amused me very much. Willie Brandt

is the Mayor of West Berlin, of course, and I know him quite well and like him very much but he is typical of what you would call a city politician, very much like the type that we have in this country and this was a great opportunity. Here was the very popular President of the United States in Berlin and Willie, of course, was going to play a large part in the show. Well, he started off with a long-winded, very long-winded, introduction of the President and he was speaking only about 2½ minutes when there was a chant from the crowd -- all in unison -- they just kept saying, "Kennedy, Kennedy." In other words, we want Kennedy. Now, they had been standing there since 7 o'clock in the morning, it was then about quarter to one -- the middle of the day -- and they didn't want to hear Willie Brandt; they wanted to hear President Kennedy. And, of course, Willie finally had to cut short his introduction and the President then made his speech, which was received most enthusiastically.

GOLDBERG: George, I have been curious about that speech. I have seen pictures of it, the Kennedy library has the reel and they show that picture and it is a marvelous picture. How did the crowd understand the President?

MEANY: There was simultaneous translation. A translator whom I knew quite well -- in fact, he had been here in Washington many times with Konrad Adenauer, I don't know his name but ...

GOLDBERG: They could hear Kennedy's voice and they could hear the simultaneous translation?

MEANY: Yes, and it was done very well. And as I say, he made this speech and the basis of it, of course, was that Berlin was a symbol of freedom. He made some very, very telling comment in the speech about Communism. I remember him saying those who believe that Communism is the wave of the future, let them come to Berlin, let them see for themselves, let them see what exists on one side of the wall and what is on the other. It was very, very effective. Then when he finished, Willie Brandt, of course, had to say a few words of appreciation and again he decided this was his opportunity to make a speech and again the crowd started to chant, "Kennedy," and he had to stop again and the President had to come forward, and take a bow. And now, at the conclusion of that speech we went into the City Hall -- the Rat-Haus they called it -- and they had this very lovely luncheon attended by, I would say, 100 members of the city council and city officials and the President made a very nice talk there. We left there somewhere around 2:30 and he went to the free university and as we left there this tremendous crowd was still hanging there, just waiting for a glimpse of him. We went through streets, the free university, I would say, would be a couple of miles away -- as near as I can recall -- and the streets were packed with humanity all the way -- just packed solid. Down at the free university there must have been 20,000 people packed in an area there on part of the campus and the President made a talk there on education and, this of course, was a talk that was written and he followed the written talk pretty much. And he was received there with tremendous

enthusiasm. Then we left there and went to the headquarters of the American troops in West Berlin. He reviewed the troops and spoke there. And then we went on to the airport. Now, the airport is in the French zone of Berlin and it is approximately, I would say, 12 to 13 miles from downtown. It is like our big cities, it is way out in the outskirts. And it was amazing that every foot of that way people were jammed in the sides of the road.

GOLDBERG: What time of day was this?

MEANY: It was then about 5:00 in the afternoon. And every street was jammed and when we got to the Autobahn -- there were places where the Autobahn runs depressed a little bit below the surface -- there is, of course, an area on each side of the roadway and then a railing and people had been standing there for hours, just to get a glimpse of the President. They must have been 75 or 100 feet away but had stood there all day just to get a glimpse of him. The Autobahn was packed 12 to 13 miles from downtown. And when we got to the airport in the French zone, which borders one of the other zones, there were at least 5,000 people behind the fence at the airport but -- this is the significant thing -- they were 3,000 feet away from the airport and they couldn't possibly even see the President. But they were there just to wave and cheer and to show their appreciation.

Of course this was a highly emotional experience and there was an air of great emotion there because, after all, Berlin is in the front line of the fight for freedom and they are surrounded

by the Communist forces and they have shown great courage. And, of course, President Kennedy represented security. They feel as long as the American people back them up that they will be able to retain their freedom. And this was a tremendously interesting experience. We flew, from Berlin -- we left there about 6:00 in the evening -- and flew over to Dublin in Ireland. It took about two hours. It was a beautiful flight. When we got to Dublin we went through the reception there and then the motorcade from the airport into the city.

GOLDBERG: George, may I inquire what part of Ireland your ancestors come from?

MEANY: My ancestors come from the central part of Ireland.

GOLDBERG: And the President's?

MEANY: The President's come from what you would call the Southeast corner of Ireland, Wexford, which -- well, if you would compare the United States, it would be the Florida corner on our map. In other words, the Southeast corner and his people come from the county of Wexford down there.

GOLDBERG: Would your people have come over here about the same time?

MEANY: As I understand it, President Kennedy's great grandfather came about 1850. My people -- both my mother's people and my father's people came in 1853. So it would be, relatively about the same time.

GOLDBERG: Was this after the Great Famine?

MEANY: This was really after the Great Famine but it was when Ireland was still suffering from the effects of the famine. The famine was actually 1847, 1848, 1849, when the potato crop failed and, of course, caused tremendous hardship and the great exodus really started around that time. People really wanted to get away because there was nothing but starvation.

GOLDBERG: Do you still have relatives there, George, as the President does?

MEANY: Not that I know of. I suppose if I had time to search around in the area where my people come from, I could undoubtedly find relatives but I don't know of any. And, of course, in Ireland the reception the President got was quite different from Berlin. I mean it was just as enthusiastic and just as warm but it lacked the intensity of the Berlin thing because the people of Ireland are not under this same nervous tension. I would imagine everybody has, more or less, who lived in West Berlin. And we flew down from Dublin to New Ross in the helicopter -- I went along with the President in helicopter that day with Mr. Aiken, the foreign minister of Ireland and Matt McCloskey, our ambassador. We rode together in the front compartment of the helicopter.

GOLDBERG: What was the President's mood in Ireland?

MEANY: Oh, his mood was just as happy and just as delightful as could be. He just felt really at home. He had a rare sense of humor and he had the type of humor that the Irish understand. He was always poking a little fun at himself, which the Irish are very good at, and his visit there was, I am quite sure, one

of the most pleasant days he ever spent because he felt right at home. He visited New Ross which is a little town on the river, up from Wexford, where the boats used to leave for America and it was at this town -- as far as they know -- this was the town from which his great grandfather sailed for the United States. And he also visited a place called Duganstown which is approximately 10 or 12 miles from New Ross where the family homestead is. And we visited there and, of course, we met Mrs. ^{Ryan} Lyon, who is a cousin of President Kennedy, and her daughter. And this is out in the real farm area and it was really an old farm house and a barn but they had everything fixed up and they had cake and tea and all these things to entertain. Then we went from there to the town of Wexford, which is a harbor town and this is the town where Commodore ^{Barry} ~~Perry~~, the famous American naval hero, came from. And President Kennedy laid a wreath on the statue of Commodore ^{Barry} ~~Perry~~ and then he addressed the town -- now, let's see what you would call it, it would be similar to a town council, I guess, but they were all dressed in their robes of office and they conferred on the President the title of free men of the city.

GOLDBERG: A kind of honorary citizen.

MEANY: Yes. And I think this was in the history of this town which goes back 400 years or so. I think this was the 7th or 8th time that this has happened that they conferred the title of free men as they call it. It is like conferring the freedom of the city on a person. And, of course, he made a talk there and all of these talks were in a very delightful, friendly vein, and were very, very well received. Then that evening there was a reception at the foreign minister's home right in the heart of Dublin. And while I didn't go to the reception, I did go there late that evening and I had dinner with several of the labor leaders who had contacted me when I got into Dublin. But I did get over to the reception at the very end of it and was there when the President left and this was right in the heart of Dublin, right by this park -- I forget the name of it now -- it is right where the Shelburne Hotel is and this home of the foreign minister is known as Ivy ^{EAGH} House. It is a great big mansion on the other side of the park. And I was there and talked to the President and talked to Mr. Aiken and then the President left. And there must have been a couple of thousand people at 11:30 at night just waiting there. And, of course, the Secret Service men were there to protect him. But when he got outside the door, instead of getting in his car, he walked around the car and walked into the crowd. And he just got swallowed by the crowd and he was there shaking hands. Finally the Secret Service men just had to go in and sort of carry him out because the people gathered all around him and there was a tremendous affection shown, I would say.

GOLDBERG: George, how do you explain this phenomenon of people all over the world having this affectionate regard for this President. It is not only his assassination because you are talking about the regard that was displayed before he was assassinated.

MEANY: No, No, No. This is an amazing thing and it is something I have tried to figure out. I would say one of his attractions was youth. This, I think, is always attractive. He was a relatively young man with this position of tremendous responsibility. But another thing is, I think people everywhere became very quickly aware of what I mentioned before that this man really loved people.

GOLDBERG: His compassion for people.

MEANY: And his way of greeting, his way of -- almost boyish way of meeting people was tremendously attractive. And, as I say, I have seen it in Berlin, of course I have seen it in many other places where people were attracted. They just flocked to him. I remember a picture in one of the papers not long before he went to Ireland, he was out in California and he stayed overnight, I think at his sister's home, and he went down for a dip in the morning and I saw a photograph of people walking into the water just to shake his hands. People who were not in bathing suits, who were just so anxious to shake hands with him, they actually walked into the water as he was coming out on the beach. And I have tried to figure out just what was the secret of this. There is no question that he had this tremendous personal hold on people -- attraction to people -- pretty hard to explain.

In Berlin he was greeted by these people as if he were a God. Now, I really mean this. It was one of the most amazing demonstrations

I have ever seen. After all, while Berlin is a large city, it is a divided city and the population of West Berlin is approximately 2 million people.

GOLDBERG: It is a sophisticated city.

MEANY: I will tell you what General Clay said. I said to the General, we were riding in a car going out to the airport, I said to the General, "Where do all these people come from? I didn't think there were this many people in Berlin." He said, "Well, I would say there is a little over 2 million people and that every single person -- every man, woman and child that is not bedridden -- is out on the streets today to greet President Kennedy." And I think this was true. It was a very amazing demonstration of his hold on the people. Of course, to the Berliners, he represented more than an individual, he represented the future security. This was the man representing the country that was. . .

GOLDBERG: The identification with the United States.

MEANY: Identification with their future, with their future security.

GOLDBERG: George, did you leave Ireland with him or did you go by yourself?

MEANY: No, I had to go to London from there and the second day he was in Ireland I was not with him. I was only with him the first day, I left the following morning for London. He flew from there to Rome and then flew back in a day or so.

GOLDBERG: You were with him on many social occasions that I can recall myself, and you were on many that I cannot recall. At the White House for dinners, lunches and so on. Can you recall any of the events there that you would like to pay particular note of?

MEANY: Well, I recall, with a great deal of pleasure several luncheons that we had and I think you were at all of them -- about 3 or 4 luncheons we held in 1962 and early 1963 -- where we had approximately 30 to 35 people around one great big table. And it is hard to think -- and you were there, of course -- to think that we were lunching with the President of the United States.

GOLDBERG: Wasn't it informal?

MEANY: It was so completely informal. He made it his business -- he knew most of the people -- but he made it his business before the lunch to know just where each one was sitting. And he adjusted the conversation back and forth about all sorts of problems and I can't ever recall any President -- and I have known a great many of them -- where there was this real informality. I mean we discussed very openly all sorts of problems and, as I say, you just got the feeling, well, this couldn't be the President. This is just a good friend sitting around chatting with us.

GOLDBERG: Isn't it remarkable how he could keep his dignity without being stuffy? This is the thing I remember so well. Wouldn't you agree that that is an accurate description?

MEANY: Very accurate because he never lost his dignity, he always was completely the President and still he was not stuffy. He had a rare sense of humor and he also had a way of putting people completely at ease.

One of the things that impressed me most about President Kennedy was the fact that he knew where he was going; he knew where he wanted to go. That he had a vision of the future that was not going to be upset. I can recall when legislation didn't go well, while he would

be disappointed, he would never be discouraged. And I can recall talking to him about legislation that was not going well and you just got the impression from his talk that he was so positive that the legislation that he was advocating was right, that sooner or later, despite opposition, it would be enacted.

GOLDBERG: There would be another day.

MEANY: That's right. He had absolute faith in the ultimate consummation of these things that he advocated, that were coming about. And, of course, there was no question, listening to his talks and things that he said in his messages to Congress and so forth, that his view was a long-range view. That he was looking way down the road to an America that would be a great deal better than we have it today.

GOLDBERG: George, can you recall the last occasion on which you saw him?

MEANY: The last occasion I saw him, of course, was at our convention in New York.

GOLDBERG: When was that?

MEANY: That was in November of 1963 and he spoke at our convention on November 15, on a Friday. That was just exactly one week before his assassination and, fortunately, we have a very good recording of his visit. We, of course, at our conventions, have the news cameras there and we have cameras taking pictures and sound track of everything that is going on, but sometimes these films don't turn out too good, but in this particular case, we have a very, very good film and recording of the President's speech. We have had it edited and brought down to about a 28-minute film and we have it now, of

course, in our film library. We presented one copy to Mrs. Kennedy which undoubtedly will be in the library in Boston. But we have it in our film library and it is being used now all over the country in our meetings and some of our unions have arranged to put it on local TV stations. Actually, it is a well-rounded speech in which, I would say, his whole labor philosophy and his philosophy in regard to production and the economic and industrial future of the country is all wrapped up.

GOLDBERG: Was it delivered extemporaneously?

MEANY: Yes. Now, when I say that, I must explain here that President Kennedy -- and, of course, I sat alongside of him on a number of occasions when he spoke at our convention -- he would have notes typed out in large type on cards and he would have a whole package of them and I suppose if he followed them they would add up to a pretty good speech. But, he never followed them. He had a way of shuffling them around and it would be amazing; he would pick out one and sort of push it to the bottom of the pile. But actually he was filled up with his subject matter.

GOLDBERG: He knew it.

MEANY: He really didn't need these notes and he did not follow them.

GOLDBERG: Did you have any opportunity at that point, in the midst of a busy convention, to visit with him socially on that occasion?

MEANY: No, not that time.

GOLDBERG: He came in, you introduced him, he made a speech and. . .

MEANY: That's right. He came in, I met him and escorted him up to the platform and we had a model there of these homes that are being

built by the workers of Mexico City that are being financed by American trade unions and, incidentally, those homes will be opened and they are going to dedicate them this year. We had the model there, just outside the platform at the convention hall, and I showed him this model and he was quite pleased to see it and I told him this, of course, was part of work in furthering the Alliance for Progress. I told him we were financing this with \$10 million of American trade union money for the benefit of the graphic arts workers -- that is the printing trades workers of Mexico City -- and he was quite pleased. He had his picture taken alongside the model.

Now, when he got through at our convention, I just walked down the little flight of stairs with him and said goodbye and that, of course, was the last time I saw him. I didn't really have a chance to talk to him. And he was quite busy.

Incidentally, these homes that we are dedicating in Mexico are opening up and people are moving into them next month. They have named them the John F. Kennedy homes.

GOLDBERG: I saw that in the AFL-CIO NEWS, I think last week.

MEANY: Yes, they were named the John F. Kennedy homes. Of course, he left us that day and he went, I think he went down to Delaware, he stopped off to open up that new parkway and then, of course, that was on Friday. On Saturday, I don't know if he stopped in Washington or not, but I know that he went to Florida on Sunday and then went over to Texas early in the week.

So, my recollection of him on a personal basis was an extremely warm individual with great dedication to the work that he was doing.

I don't think anyone ever enjoyed being President more than he did. I think he enjoyed the job, I think he enjoyed the opportunity that the office gave him to do good and to plan for the good in the future.

GOLDBERG: George, you have been an outstanding American in the field of international affairs. You know the field very well, you have led the labor movement in this area long before you became the President of the AFL-CIO. It is a field which you have been interested in as secretary-treasurer and even before. Would you like to make some observations about the President and international affairs?

MEANY: Well, I would say, of course, as you say, I have studied this whole question and have been living more or less with it for many years, and we, back in the AFL days and, of course, since we have had the AFL-CIO, we study all these international situations. We have a real interest in them. We feel that every American has a stake in the foreign affairs of our country because, frankly, in the world we live in, what America does is going to affect practically all of the free world and so we do have this interest. I have the feeling that President Kennedy, when he first became President, still had some way to go to really get a grasp on the international situation. I don't say this critically, I say this is because while he was in the Senate he was familiar with things that were going on. Actually no one can get as close to this as the President, because by the very nature of his office, he has got to make the decisions, he has got to know what is going on. And I got the impression that, after his first 18 months in office,

he had in his own mind developed a plan for dealing with the Communists, dealing with the totalitarians -- a long-range plan. And I am quite sure of this and the basis of it was, number one, I think he was determined that we would be militarily strong so that we could always bargain from a position of strength and I think the record will show that he built up our military strength as President. Secondly, I am quite sure that he felt that the way to deal with the Communists was to deal with them from a hard bargaining position but, at the same time, never refuse to bargain. That he was open to bargain. I think he became a complete realist and I think his reaction to the Cuban situation in October of 1962 -- let's see, in October of 1962 he had been in office about 18 or 19 months or so -- and I think by that time he had evolved in his own mind a method to deal with them. I think what happened was a reflection of a conclusion that was already in his mind, that when he found out that they had deceived us -- that they had planted these missile firing sites in Cuba -- that he reacted very, very firmly and strongly and that what happened proved to him, I am quite sure, that this was the way to deal with these people because, as you know, when they were confronted with the blockade and the possibility of a shooting war that became necessary -- once they realized that -- the Communists immediately became realists themselves. They backed down very quickly. I think this was an indication of a feeling that had developed in his first year or so as President, that this was the way to deal with the Communists, that you could not deal with them on the basis of appeasement or on the basis of reasonable accommodation for both sides. That you had to be just as tough as they were, that if you were tough and they

knew it and they also knew that you had the material resources to defend yourself, that you could get along much better with them. I think that this is the policy that President Johnson will follow. I think the lesson of October, 1962, was not lost on our people and I am sure it was not lost on the people of the world. Now, we, of course -- you don't get the reaction here in the United States -- but we in the trade union movement, with our contacts all over the world we got the reaction and the reaction was simply this: everybody in the world breathed a little easier after those first weeks in October of 1962. Why? Because somebody had finally stood up to the bully. It is just as simple as that. And the bully had done what all bullies do, had backed down. I recall that one of my friends who was in the UN at the time -- around the UN -- said that there was an electric change in the atmosphere at the UN from that day on. That all the little countries of the world who were afraid of this great big octopus suddenly started to breathe a little easier and this friend of mine told me that you could feel the change in the atmosphere. And I think this was due to President Kennedy's determination to deal with these people and to deal with them on the basis of preparedness and strength and firmness, but always to deal with them, always be willing to deal with them. And I think this is the key and I am quite sure that President Johnson feels the same way because President Johnson, as you know, was right in the middle of this dispute of October, 1962. And I think this came about as a result of President Kennedy's first year or so in office -- he realized, you see he had the experience, he met Khrushchev in Vienna, you know -- oh, I guess that was some time in 1961 -- and I think that in that year or so he went through, of course, the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs. This was another side of

President Kennedy's character that came out. His courage. His complete willingness to take blame. I never recall anyone who came out so frankly as he did at the time of the Bay of Pigs and said, "Well, whatever mistakes, they are mine." Although, everybody knew that this Bay of Pigs business had been in preparation long before President Kennedy took the office. This was something that had been planned and prepared under the previous administration. But I think it was very refreshing, instead of trying to evade the issue, he faced right up to it and said, "Whatever blame, it is mine."

GOLDBERG: George, you have had an active public life over many years leading the labor movement here in Washington and before that in New York and then as a local and then a state and then a nation and then the national leader of the labor movement . . . you have worked under many Presidents then. How many Presidents did you hold office under?

MEANY: Well, in Washington here, President Roosevelt, President Truman, President Eisenhower, of course President Kennedy and now President Johnson. Of course, I knew them all.

GOLDBERG: Would you care to make an appraisal as a leader and as a student of American history what you conceive . . . it is always difficult to speculate about the future position of a man in history, would you care to make a speculation as to what the verdict of history would be on this president?

MEANY: Well, of course, this is always speculation, but I think that when you read history from the perspective of many years that the important things really come out. At least I am convinced that

the important things come out and the trivial things are more or less dissipated. I would say that history is going to certainly give President Kennedy a very, very fine mark, I would say, as compared with other presidents, for a number of reasons. Now, the fact that he showed a willingness to immediately help the rest of the free world. His Alliance for Progress will be something that . . . here is a basically good idea, but like a lot of good ideas, the execution becomes difficult and I think the first year or two of the Alliance for Progress was certainly not any great story of success, but the idea is sound, the idea is good -- will come into fruition now, after President Kennedy's death. I think his determination to help the young people, his interest in education. I think his interest in helping people through the Peace Corps, something that was unheard of before this time. I think his standing up to the Russians in October of 1962, I think this is really the turning point in our history. I think it is a turning point in the relations between the Free world and the Communist world. I think all of these reasons and the great vision that he displayed in his speeches for the future, will certainly give him a place in history. I wouldn't want to compare him to any other individual president, but he certainly will have a place in history along with the real great presidents of the United States.