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Reuther-Meany Feud and the CIA

WASHINGTON—There will be less cloak and more dagger in the upcoming escalation of the CIA saga. The ramparts are quiet now in the private war of Walter and Victor Reuther against labor's elder statesmen. But not for long.

The Reuthers are continuing their barrage of charges that the nation's number one labor leader, George Meany, and his AFL-CIO International Affairs Dept. were the conduit of CIA cash being funneled to anti-Communist forces abroad. Now it can be expected that the charges will reverse—perhaps boomerang.

These elder statesmen are wise. Their private intelligence networks—without which no leader succeeds—report that the accusers themselves may have been conduits for an extraordinary flow of cash to favored foreign leaders, especially in Germany and Italy.

There's no doubt that the CIA-Reuther story will get a full treatment during the AFL-CIO's high command session here shortly.

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THERE MUST BE a review of the CIA "story." It is momentarily out of the headlines—but not out of this world. The underground battle for labor leadership continues across the world. Tough forces which reflect Meany's immovable opposition to accommodating the Communist lands are battling against the accommodationists inside every international labor secretariat—and fight fiercely inside every national labor movement across the world.

They fight because they know that the labor leader of yesterday quite frequently becomes the prime minister of tomorrow. He who leads labor abroad frequently leads his nation.

Meany, just back from Germany, believes the U.S. should be getting something for its "bridges to the East." Like the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. Value for value,

says he. And in these background battles, the forces and philosophers of Meany's tradition have been hurt by charges that they front for the CIA.

The Meany forces are not quite certain just why the Reuthers unleashed the CIA saga. The record shows that the CIA was told bluntly to "Keep its hands off American labor."

That occurred early in '53 in the office of the late Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, then CIA Director. This never has been reported, but Meany, David Dubinsky, Jay Lovestone and the late AFL vice president, Matthew Woll, creator of the federation's global Free Trade Union Committee, visited him in his office. They told him to keep CIA agents away from labor and not to harass the committee or its officials, nor to attempt to use it as a cover. Smith agreed.

True, a few unions did run "cover" for CIA ten years later. But some were units of Walter Reuther's own CIO. And, as of the moment, at least one of them has not yet been publicly exposed.

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THE REUTHERS have long been active on foreign fronts. They spent considerable cash in the early days of the German Federal Republic, building a man named Otto Brenner into a power in that country's Metal Workers—now the world's largest union—of which Brenner is today president. Also, the Reuthers spent heavily of time, money and manpower in France and Italy. Generally they back forces to the left of those supported by Meany.

Today the Reuthers are active in the Spanish labor and youth underground. They have also shifted their concentrations from the European mainland to Africa, Latin America, and even to Japan.

It is an understatement merely to say that this war within a war is vital. A world's at stake. Remember, the labor leader of yesterday is the prime minister of tomorrow—from Singapore to Kingston, from Conakry to Caracas.