

Nixon the Campaigner, at His Best With a Controversial Target,
Is Focusing on George Meany for 1972

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 24—Richard Nixon has always been at his best as a campaigner when he had a controversial target to attack—whether it was officials “soft on Communism” in 1946 or opponents lax on law and order in 1968. The President has now found another target in George Meany, the crusty, 77-year-old president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, who

applied a freeze to the President’s appearance before the federation convention last Friday in Florida. And most political observers here would not be surprised if he remained a target well into the 1972 political campaign.

Despite White House assertions that Mr. Nixon was unruffled by the chilly reception Mr. Meany arranged for him at the A.F.L.-C.I.O. convention, White House officials have been attempting ever since to assure that the public would characterize Mr. Meany as a villain.

Within an hour after the President spoke to the convention, Devan L. Shumway and Alvin Snyder, assistants to Herbert G. Klein, head of Mr. Nixon’s communications apparatus, had been “briefed”—they will not say by whom—here in Washington on what the White House regarded as discourtesies to the President. And they quickly telephoned news service and television network bureau chiefs in Washington to make sure their correspondents in Florida had not missed these aspects of Mr. Nixon’s appearance.

Mr. Shumway and Mr. Snyder pointed out that Mr. Meany had declined to provide an orchestra to play “Hail to the Chief” when Mr. Nixon entered the convention hall in Bal Harbour, had reportedly instructed the convention delegates to sit on their hands during the speech, had countenanced derisive laughter during the address and had gavelled the audience to order while the President was still mingling among the delegates.

The public denunciation of Mr. Meany on the grounds of “arrogance” and “boorishness”

made Monday by John B. Connally, Secretary of the Treasury, appeared to represent merely another step in an effort to establish Mr. Meany, organized labor and its Democratic supporters in Congress as potential blame-takers if the economy should fail to revive by Election Day, 1972.

Mr. Nixon withheld a decision on whether to address the labor convention until the day that Mr. Meany sharply criticized the Phase Two system of controls on the economy and brought about a convention mandate for the three

A.F.L.-C.I.O. members on Mr. Nixon’s Pay Board to adopt a policy of noncooperation. The President pointedly reminded the convention that he knew it represented a hostile audience whose members “may be against me politically.”

Find Incident Exaggerated

Mr. Meany’s explanation that the federation had short notice of the President’s decision to address the convention and his defense of the delegates’ conduct—nobody, after all, booed or jeered, he noted—failed to mask the discourtesy inherent in his refusal to accord Mr.

Nixon the musical honors and personal obeisance customary when a President is the guest.

But a number of observers here thought the incident had been blown out of proportion, and they found worthy of consideration Mr. Meany’s charge that the President hoped all along to provoke an encounter that might win for him the sympathy of the public and the support of some in labor’s rank and file.

This theory was enhanced by Mr. Nixon’s abrupt and unusual decision to return to the White House on Friday rather than

spend the weekend in Florida. Hardly anyone accepted as a likely rationale his reported eagerness to attend the performance of a Cambodian ballet troupe in Washington.

What the change in schedule did clearly accomplish was to heighten the impression that Mr. Nixon was disturbed by the treatment afforded him by the labor leaders.

At the same time, the insistence of his spokesmen that Mr. Nixon was “not upset” enabled the President to assume the attitude of a statesman, above brawling with Mr. Meany.