

Mr. Gray and Mr. Meany: Old Quotes Remembered

by John Herling

What looked like a political romance between President Nixon and AFL-CIO President George Meany now is subject to additional strain. The strain grows out of the controversial nomination of L. Patrick Gray III to be director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Just about a year ago (on March 24, 1972), Gray, then assistant attorney general, hit Meany with all the rhetorical clout at his command. Because Meany and other union leaders had walked off the Pay Board, Gray pronounced this verdict on Meany:

"Not since the so-called Robber Barons of the 19th century has a special interest group demonstrated such blatant contempt for the public interest."

[Several other quotes from Gray follow.]

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Quite obviously Gray was faithfully reflecting the orthodox anti-Meany line of the Nixon administration at that time. How could he have known that his indignation against the "potentates of labor" would in a very short time be considered indiscrete?

In June, the President names Gray acting FBI director. How could Gray have known that in July, Meany would pronounce his "non-endorsement" policy in the presidential campaign or that by the end of the year, the political bedfellowship of President Nixon and Meany was reaching its greatest intensity?

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By this time, of course, President Nixon may have already decided that Gray is expendable because of his unsettling candor. The White House may have concluded that dropping Gray would, therefore, bestow a fringe benefit upon Meany and his associates, which could produce dividends of gratitude for the administration in the legislative struggle ahead.