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BRUCE WEST

An old advocate

In The Washington Post, the day after Leonid I. Brezhnev cordially met 51 of the top U.S. industrialists, financiers and businessmen at Blair House last week, there was a fairly complete report on the affair. But it wasn't a really complete report in one important particular. Although several of the businessmen present were named and quoted in the account of the meeting, it wasn't until you went through the extremely fine print of the official guest list that you encountered two of the most interesting names of all. One was Cyrus S. Eaton, chairman of the board of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. The other was Cyrus S. Eaton Jr., chairman of the board, Tower International Corporation. The Blair House meeting must have been, for both father and son, a red letter day in more ways than one. Because, there is probably no man in the United States who has worked harder or longer or with less thanks than Cyrus Eaton to bring about just such an occasion as the historic one that took place at Blair House. Mr. Eaton, who will be 90 next December, has been laboring tirelessly for nearly a quarter of a century to find some kind of common ground upon which the leaders of the two most powerful nations on earth could find at least the beginnings of some form of economic and cultural co-operation. Instead of drifting toward the unthinkable alternative of coming to military grips in a war that would this time probably indeed end all wars.



No egg on his face.

And he preached this theme at a time when it was an extremely unpopular one in the United States. He was even pelted with eggs on one occasion in Cleveland when he came back from one of his frequent visits to the Soviet Union. He was an extremely outspoken critic of the seemingly inflexible attitude of various U.S. governments toward the Soviet Union and his comments often enraged many people in the United States.

The Canadian-born tycoon wryly told me some years ago, during an interview in Toronto:

"At first I thought I would be on fairly safe ground, as a private citizen, in making some friendly overtures toward the leaders of the Soviet Union. After all, as a kind of archetypal capitalist, how could anyone, by any stretch of the imagination, accuse me of being a Communist or a Communist sympathizer?"

But this didn't stiff his angry critics as he sought to open some kind of channels of understanding between the two great nations. Anyway, he was finally able to witness what appeared to be almost a full 180-degree reversal of opinion among U.S. Government and business leaders in Washington last week.

The greatest moment of all must have been when, after accompanying the other U.S. business leaders to a reception over at the White House after the Blair House meeting, he found himself standing there chatting with both President Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev. He told me later:

The President said to Mr. Brezhnev: "For more than 20 years now, Mr. Eaton has been a leading advocate in this country of trade with yours, a belief that I have belatedly come around to myself." Mr. Brezhnev laughed and agreed, adding that it made him extremely happy that my efforts had finally been vindicated . . ."