

LABOR

Rank and file challenge in IBEW

By Dan Marschall
Staff Writer

Chicago. Everyone figured that this would be no ordinary union meeting. The date was April 19, five days before voting would take place in the most highly-publicized and hotly-contested election in the 40 year history of Local 1031 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). About 250 union members nervously milled around the Guild Hall, campaign buttons blazing, anxious for the meeting to begin. If there was a time for the candidates to exchange verbal blows, this was it.

Weeks of bitter electioneering had drawn sharp contrasts between the opposing slates. On the one side were the current officers, appointed by the local's retiring head and lacking any working experience in the electrical shops. On the other side was the United IBEW Workers, a rank and file caucus of shop workers demanding a greater degree of union democracy.

Routine union business topped the meeting's agenda. Then Dick Deason, interim business manager, talked about the impact of foreign imports on members' jobs. The hall came alive. Several members proposed that the union adopt other measures to save jobs—besides petitioning the Carter administration for import quotas—and the meeting rapidly turned into a partisan display of clapping, booing, screaming, foot-stomping, and gavel-pounding.

►BINGO to the rescue.

But the ruckus didn't last for long. Within five minutes, the leadership introduced its time-tested crowd-pleaser—BINGO. The numbered ping-pong balls began bouncing, the BINGO board flashed, and union members pulled out their cards. Before long everyone was engrossed in their individual chances for victory. So much for the debate of controversial issues.

Monthly Bingo games are just one of the techniques employed by union officers to stifle discussion and discourage participation in union affairs, say supporters of the United IBEW Workers. With 16,000 members their union is one of the largest in the country. Maurice Perlin, the president/business manager for 12 years, is closely tied to Chicago's Democratic machine. After being elected to Appellate Court Judge last year, he is leaving his \$79,000-per-year union post.

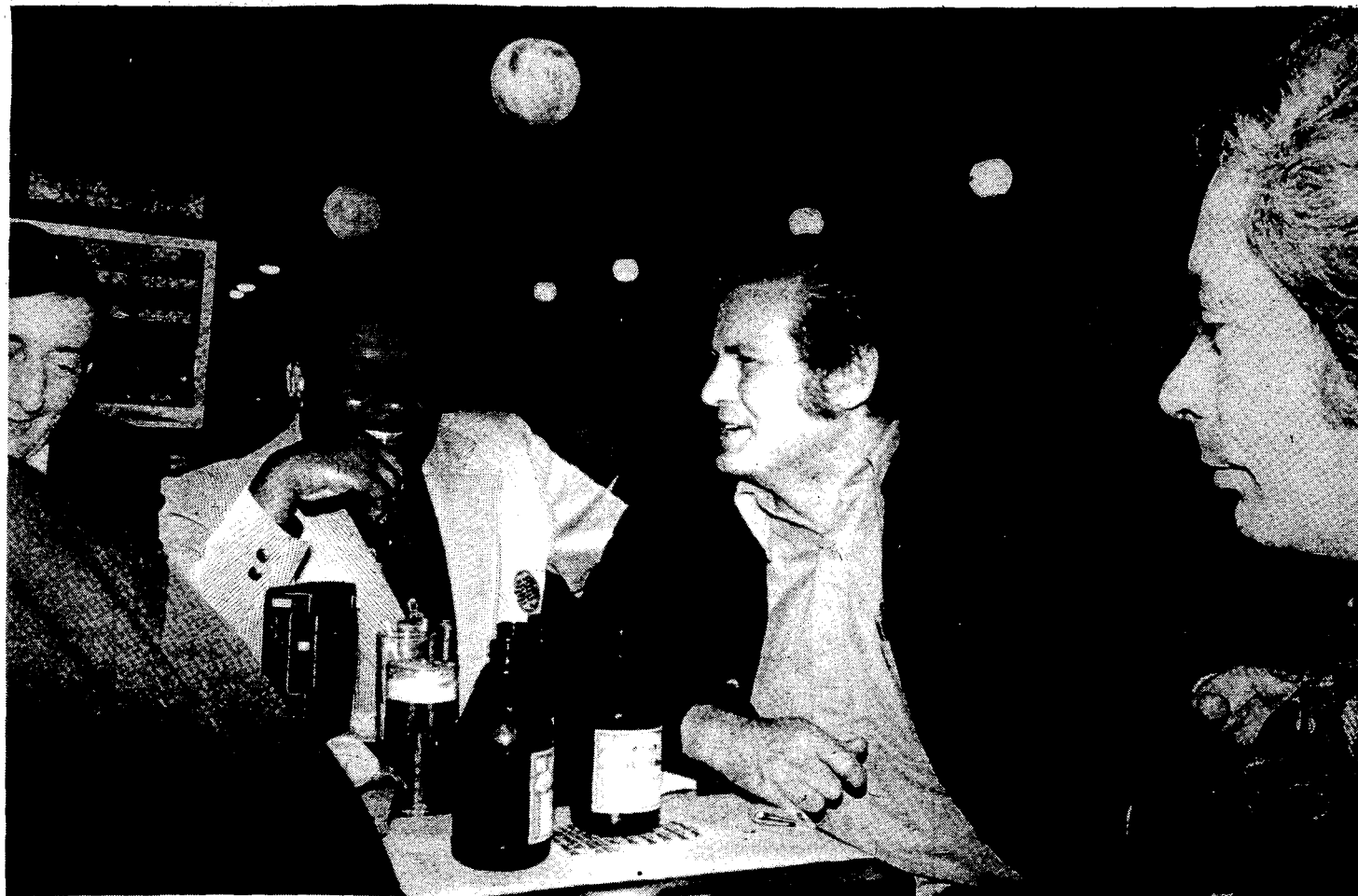
IBEW Local 1031 is an industrial oddity in a craft-oriented international union. About 70 percent of the local's members work at unskilled production jobs like fabricating parts, assembly and testing. These lower paid workers are predominantly black, Latino and female, with Spanish-speaking workers becoming more prevalent in IBEW-organized shops.

►Umbrellas and diamonds.

The story of Local 1031 goes back to the mid-1930s when the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) set out to organize large numbers of unskilled electrical workers. Threatened by the mushrooming membership of unions like the CIO's United Electrical workers (UE), the IBEW chartered its own "B" local in Chicago. "The 'B' designation meant that the local did not have the policy-making power of the journeyman's local. It had only one vote at IBEW conventions," explains Dick Criley, a former union organizer.

"The head of Local 1031 for years was 'Umbrella' Mike Boyle. He got his name because he carried an umbrella and when he would go to various bosses for payoffs, he'd walk into their offices, open the umbrella and the guy would throw money in. Boyle became quite rich, with race horses and all kinds of enterprises," says Criley.

When the IBEW created 1031B in 1936, Boyle appointed his bodyguard, Michael Frank Darling, as first president/business



Everett Biegalski, Tom Gresham (left) and Neil Burke (far right), United IBEW Workers' candidates for union offices, chat with Mike LaVelle (center), labor columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

manager. Darling relied on other techniques to build the local he inherited—seducing women and fighting communists. "Mike Darling was a very special kind of guy. He wore diamond rings on both hands and hand-painted ties that he'd pay fantastic sums of money for," explains Criley.

"One woman told a story about working with Darling on an out-of-state organizing drive. They all stayed in the same hotel. Mike would systematically make the rooms of all seven women in a night. Their organizing equipment included a trailer with a bed inside that he would use as a trysting place to rendezvous with female workers," Criley remembers.

►The Flo Ziegfeld of labor.

During WWII and soon thereafter, organization of the electrical industry proceeded at a rapid pace. Most of it was done by the UE, which developed a reputation as a militant, democratic union. IBEW Local 1031 reportedly helped to undercut the UE in Chicago by offering sweetheart deals to electrical companies.

By the late 1940s, IBEW Local 1031 grew to 47,000 members. To counter the "communists" in his own union, Darling transformed union meetings into musical extravaganzas that earned him the title, the "Flo Ziegfeld of American labor." He once explained his reasoning to a reporter: "One night some guy got up and made a 20-minute speech on why we ought to protest President Roosevelt's participation in the Tehran conference. Then another guy got up and talked for 20 minutes on why we shouldn't, and so on, back and forth.

"I recognized them as Commies and knew their strategy. They wanted to bore the members to death at every meeting," Darling remarked. "They intended to keep it up until the regular members would get disgusted, quit coming to meetings, and stop voting in the elections. That's how 20 or 25 Communists can take over a union..."

For the next 20 years, local union meetings became monthly theatrical productions. There was always a chorus line—affectionately labeled "Darling's Darlings." Union members who tried to raise questions about working conditions, speed-ups, or plant shutdowns were silenced by shouts of, "Aw, shut up, we

want to see the entertainment!"

While Darling nurtured his image as master showman, the curtains were slowly closing on his once-gigantic union. By 1964, when he died in office, he had allowed his union to slip to 30,000 members. Dozens of Chicago electrical factories had fled overseas in search of cheap labor. The union then passed to Maurice Perlin, Darling's lawyer for 17 years.

►Apathy and disillusionment.

This historical background is important to grasp, say supporters of the United IBEW Workers, since it explains why an overwhelming sense of apathy and disillusionment still pervades the union. Only once, in 1968, did Perlin face any serious competition for the top office. Only 15 percent of the local's 30,000 members voted in that election and Perlin won easily.

At Perlin's last union meeting in December, the top posts were divided into president and business manager. The officers also pushed through changes in the local by-laws that further decrease union democracy. The changes remove the right to elect stewards and make it very inconvenient for all members to vote.

Perlin then passed the union to his trusted associates—Dick Deason and Mort Getzov. In the tradition of Mike "Ziegfeld" Darling, Deason immediately accused certain sinister forces of trying to take over the union and pledged to uphold its decent image in the face of "attempted mob rule" and "Communism."

But the six candidates on the United IBEW slate are bonafide rank-and-filers who eschew leftist rhetoric in favor of common sense appeals to union democracy. Despite small voter turnout in the past and the rules changes, observers say they have a good chance to win.

When it formed three years ago the caucus focused on filing charges against racial and sexual discrimination. Their program now includes drastic cuts in officers' salaries, training sessions for stewards, the election of stewards, and having copies of the contract in Spanish and English.

►Not "young revolutionaries."

After the recent United Steel Workers

election, a reporter telephoned Everett Biegalski, caucus candidate for business manager, about an article on "young revolutionaries" in labor unions. "I talked to him for about 20 minutes," Biegalski told IN THESE TIMES, "before letting him know that I'm not exactly the kind of young revolutionary he had in mind. I'm 60 years old and have enough experience to know what's a good union and what's a bad union. The people in 1031 are being intimidated and kept down and they don't have strong enough leaders to back them up."

Biegalski's union experience includes serving on the negotiating committee at Continental Can and editing the union newspaper at a United Auto Workers' plant. Neil Burke, candidate for president, is a chief steward who represents more than 2,700 members. Both are skilled workers with years of on-the-job experience "fighting for the people."

But the United IBEW Workers also reflects the union's changing membership and varied occupational structure. Two of the candidates are women production workers and three are black. Tom Gresham, a black candidate for treasurer, charges that union stewards fail to adequately represent workers and that negotiations are a hollow joke where the "company people come in and tell the union representatives what the company is going to give and that's it."

Gresham also resents professional types who think they can defend electrical workers without ever experiencing the conditions under which they work. "A lawyer over a union is in the same position as management over the employees. Management doesn't work in the shop and neither have the lawyers who are running our union," he says.

►Lots of encouragement.

If the United IBEW slate triumphs, the feudal kingdom of Local 1031 may finally see the light of union democracy. "In my plant, I've heard a lot of encouragement," comments Gresham. "When people have a beef, they come to me instead of going to a steward. Even some of the old-timers are beginning to come around. They used to take the leaflets and throw them on the floor. Now you see them walking around looking for the paper to find out what's going on."

IN THE WORLD

SOUTH AFRICA

The space for compromise narrows

By Robert A. Manning

Stalemated UN Security Council talks on South Africa appear to reflect the failure of the first major test of the Carter administration's Africa policy and suggest that American efforts to attain compromise solutions in southern Africa may be outpaced by heightening conflict and rapid polarization in the region.

UN ambassador Andrew Young has led frantic behind-the-scenes maneuvers to head off resolutions sponsored by the African members of the Security Council to impose a mandatory arms embargo, economic embargo, halt foreign investment and declare the apartheid regime a threat to international peace subject to intervention under the UN charter.

When the talks began last month Young drafted a compromise declaration urging South Africa to end apartheid, grant immediate independence to Namibia, and end support for Ian Smith's minority regime in Rhodesia, while making no mention of any UN enforcement. African delegates described Young's alternative as "toothless" and refused to compromise for what they see as another empty gesture.

The U.S. and its NATO allies on the Security Council oppose total sanctions against South Africa and have vetoed similar resolutions in the past (Carter and Young describe economic sanctions as "counter productive"). If no compromise method of pressuring South Africa is found, Young will be forced to veto the resolutions.

►Vorster resists UN rule.

Young kicked off the Carter administration's attempt to avoid a UN confrontation with his Africa shuttle last February. In mid-March he met secretly for two and a half hours with P. W. Botha, South African ambassador to Washington. According to leaked reports, Young gave Botha blunt warnings of what may be in store



S. AFRICAN PRIME MINISTER
JOHN VORSTER

The Vorster government's refusal to relax its apartheid policies and to end the occupation of Namibia has created a dilemma for American policy-makers who have been seeking a compromise solution.

if South Africa resists American pressure for moderate change.

On April 16 in what appeared to be a last-ditch effort, the American, British, French, and West German ambassadors met with South African Premier Vorster to urge him to grant Namibia, which South Africa is illegally occupying, immediate independence and to hold free elections under UN supervision. Vorster, who has stage-managed a plan for "independence" in Namibia along ethnic lines, has resisted any UN role.

South Africa's plan for Namibia's independence is embodied in a constitution that is believed to have been drawn up by a New York lawyer who has represented Clemens Kapuuo, a tribal chief hand-picked by Pretoria as the first president.

While there would be local self-rule within the designated white and Bantustaan areas, the national parliament would be based on ethnic lines with foreign affairs and defense under white control. In addition, the proposed constitution would ban SWAPO, the Marxist or-

ganization that both the UN and the Organization of African Unity have recognized as the "sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people." The U.S. has said that SWAPO should be included in any government "along with other political forces."

South African intransigence has limited American policy options. Carter has found that the space for compromise that Henry Kissinger was trying to fill has grown narrower.

►The Atlanta model.

In the top-level review of African policy currently being conducted, one alternative being considered is to apply more economic pressure to force change from above. Young envisions exporting to South Africa the "Atlanta model" where civil rights activists persuaded corporate interests to desegregate for their own self-interest.

In an interview with the South African *Financial Mail*, Carter expressed his optimism about using the power of American investment, which totals nearly \$2

billion, to force these changes.

Among the immediate measures being considered—short of an economic boycott—are ending tax credits to American firms in South Africa, pushing American firms to upgrade opportunities for black employees and ending nuclear energy and intelligence sharing.

But while some white businessmen like Harry Oppenheimer, the head of huge Anglo-American mining conglomerate and organizer of the Progressive Reform party, favor an end to apartheid, the Vorster regime has continued a hardline course since the Soweto rebellions last June. In fact, the more Carter has prodded Vorster, the more his political constituency has feared a sell-out and has increased pressures on Vorster for total intransigence.

The Parliament dominated by Vorster's National party, with its conservative base among Afrikaner farmers, recently bolstered the pattern of repression by tightening police and judicial powers and raising the defense budget 21 percent to a record \$1.8 billion. Vorster also announced that a second bantustaan, Bophuthatswana, would follow the Transkei and gain "independence" in December.

Many observers, recalling the American "destabilization" waged against the Allende government in Chile through financial and political pressures view a similar course as the only way clearly to place the U.S. on the side of African liberation aspirations. But even congressional liberals such as Sen. Dick Clark (D-Iowa) and Charles Diggs, (D-Mich.) who have Carter's ear, would not go that far, although they urge stronger measures than Carter and Young.

The question ahead is where will the U.S. stand when the crunch comes? The outcome of the coming Security Council debate on South Africa may be a barometer in that regard.

Robert A. Manning is a Berkeley journalist who writes for *In These Times* on foreign affairs.

White challenge to Vorster splinters

By Bill Gaither

A bitter and divisive split within the English-speaking opposition in South Africa is enabling prime minister John Vorster to maintain his iron rule and repressive policies despite an increase in racial tensions and worsening economic conditions caused by these policies.

Last December, when Parliament recessed, it was widely expected that a moderate coalition of the United party (UP) and the Progressive Reform party (PRP) would challenge Vorster's rule. A growing willingness among white South Africans to moderate apartheid led a joint steering committee of the two parties to agree on a common platform for the reduction of racial discrimination.

But by the time Parliament reconvened in January, the coalition had floundered. UP members had demanded a policy of "separate but equal." The PRP insisted on a common franchise for all South Africans.

In the March 2 Johannesburg city council elections, the coalition dissolved in the scurry for votes. The UP, which had controlled the city for the last 30 years, campaigned directly against its moderate allies, and Vorster's National party carried the day.

Claiming a great victory, Vorster has moved to consolidate his rule and his

apartheid policies. Last month, he called for press censorship. After having put a scare into the opposition, he then agreed to a compromise—a formal liaison between his government and the Newspaper Press Union.

But while Vorster's white opposition is temporarily stymied, it cannot stay still for long. As the South African economy plunges deeper into recession, white South Africans are increasingly drawing a connection between South Africa's economic situation and the maintenance of apartheid.

►Recession hits white minority.

For the first time since the Depression of 1929, large numbers of whites are experiencing real difficulties from the dual impact of 11 percent inflation and a recession now in its third consecutive year. The real national growth rate remains at slightly under two percent in an economy where five percent is considered the bare minimum necessary to avoid massive unemployment and plant shutdowns.

With half a million urban blacks already jobless and an additional 300,000 entering the labor market each year, a national manpower survey found in January that 230 of 1,200 companies polled planned further reductions in their black staff in the coming quarter. The survey

also noted that 15.6 percent of the same 1,200 companies also planned to lay off white personnel. A small percentage of white unemployment throughout the rest of the decade seems certain as even the most optimistic predictions on industrial growth rates show an annual rate of expansion of only five to five and a half percent.

One cause of the slump has been South Africa's racial unrest. According to a Mobil Oil executive, last summer's riots reduced the year's GNP by one to one and a half percent. More important, the riots shook the confidence of foreign investors. There has been little new investment, a recent *Business Week* survey reported, and some American companies are considering leaving.

Some South African businessmen seeing the trend have urged a moderation of apartheid. They are concerned not only with South Africa's short-term ability to attract investment, but also by long term considerations.

►Blacks needed for growth.

White businessmen are belatedly realizing that a narrow affluent group of whites is unable to support domestic production of goods and services in the best of times. Blacks are 75 percent of the population, but only receive 19 percent of national income.

In addition to creating a problem of flagging internal demand, apartheid also potentially can lead to a shortage of skilled labor. With blacks barred from such jobs, the Chamber of Mines recently predicted that a five percent rate of growth would result in a 21 percent shortage of skilled labor by the end of the decade.

The businessmen have been joined politically by substantial segments of the white working and middle classes. A nation-wide survey commissioned by the Afrikaans-language newspaper, *Rapport*, reported in December that a slight majority of the 2.2 million voters favored a moderation of apartheid.

These findings confirm an earlier survey conducted by the *Johannesburg Star* that reported 57 percent of its sample willing to accept direct colored representation in Parliament. The same poll showed nearly 50 percent willing to work under a black promoted on the basis of merit.

But Vorster still retains substantial support among Afrikaans-speaking South Africans who remain opposed to any relaxation of apartheid. Their support, combined with the fragmentation of the opposition, promises to keep Vorster in power for the time being.

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