

LABOR

AFL-CIO meet to consider new coalition

By Sam Kushner
LOS ANGELES—AFL-CIO leaders, at their biennial convention here Dec. 8-13, are paying homage to the necessity of reestablishing a liberal-labor coalition in order to beat back the big business attack on people's needs. But there is little expectation that this convention will actually advance that coalition, since the gap between the high-sounding words and the existing policies and positions of the AFL-CIO is still very apparent.

AFL-CIO president George Meany in his prepared report to the convention declared, "No group—not in the labor movement, not in the civil rights and women's organizations, not in the churches—can by themselves match the raw political and financial might of big business. But together, these groups represent millions of people, and people, not money, are what this nation is all about."

California's top AFL-CIO executive officer, John F. Henning, in an exclusive interview with *IN THESE TIMES*, added, "Just as the liberal movement cannot dismiss the importance of the labor movement if it would know success, labor cannot go it alone. We must be in coalition with liberal groups of like mind and purpose, the black community, the brown [Chicano] community, youth groups, women's organizations. We have to move in concert on a broad liberal front."

Conflict over Carter and Brown.

When it comes to the administrations of Jimmy Carter and Jerry Brown, however, these statements seem to fall by the wayside.

Nationally, the AFL-CIO appears to be fully committed to a picture of a Carter administration that, in the words of Meany, has "brought into office [of the presidency] a sense of hope and a spirit of inspiration that has brightened the land. He has shunned the negativism of the past two [Nixon and Ford] administrations, choosing to present to the Congress and the American people major programs."

And in California, with the second largest state AFL-CIO organization, Henning views the two-year-old governorship of Jerry Brown, which has come under fire from many liberal sources, as the best in the state's history.

Evidence of the gap between traditional liberal and labor forces was seen the week-end before the AFL-CIO convention when the California Democratic Council, a powerful grass-roots-oriented organization, and the Americans for Democratic Action each sponsored conferences here that leveled sharp attacks at both the Carter and Brown administrations. The spokesman for the AFL-CIO, on the other hand, remarked, "We have faith in Gov. Brown that he will help us."

The political conflicts deepened around particular issues like immigration. Alberto Juarez Jr., executive director of the One Stop Immigration Center, said at one conference that "the administration knows very little about immigration problems and Carter hasn't done a damn thing about the situation."

At the 59th convention of the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Dept., which immediately preceded the AFL-CIO convention, on the other hand, construction union representatives heard Undersecretary of Labor Bob Brown place the blame for unemployment largely on the presence of undocumented workers in the U.S. The delegates vigorously applauded this statement and several of them took the floor to tell their own tales about "illegals" on jobs.

Other events at the three-day building trades convention also illustrated the dif-

The grand hopes for a new liberal/labor coalition may founder on the question of support for the Carter and Brown administrations, as that is where the gap between the coalition rhetoric and the actual political orientations of the two groups is most visibly seen, with labor taking a more sympathetic view to the two administrations and the liberals a more critical view.

ferences between labor and those who should be their natural allies. The meeting was overwhelmingly white—a single black delegate was present out of 400—and all male. When one speaker said that "You've got to find ways of opening up business opportunities and jobs for minorities and women," he was given a lukewarm reception, at best.

Jobs and organizing.

The building trades play a particularly important role in the AFL-CIO. Meany comes out of the Plumbers union and is very much a part of the building trades hierarchy, as are many of other top AFL-CIO leaders. Henning says that the 300,000 building trades workers in California "are in a very real way the sinew of our movement."

The building trades convention served as something of a preview for the full AFL-CIO convention. Predictably, jobs and organizing were primary concerns in an industry that has almost one-fourth of its workers jobless or partially employed.

Robert A. Georgine, president of the

Mineworkers strike nationwide

After two months of bitter and fruitless negotiations between the United Mine Workers union and coal industry representatives, about 130,000 miners embarked on a strike Dec. 6 that will test the union's internal strength and may determine the nature of coal field labor relations for decades to come.

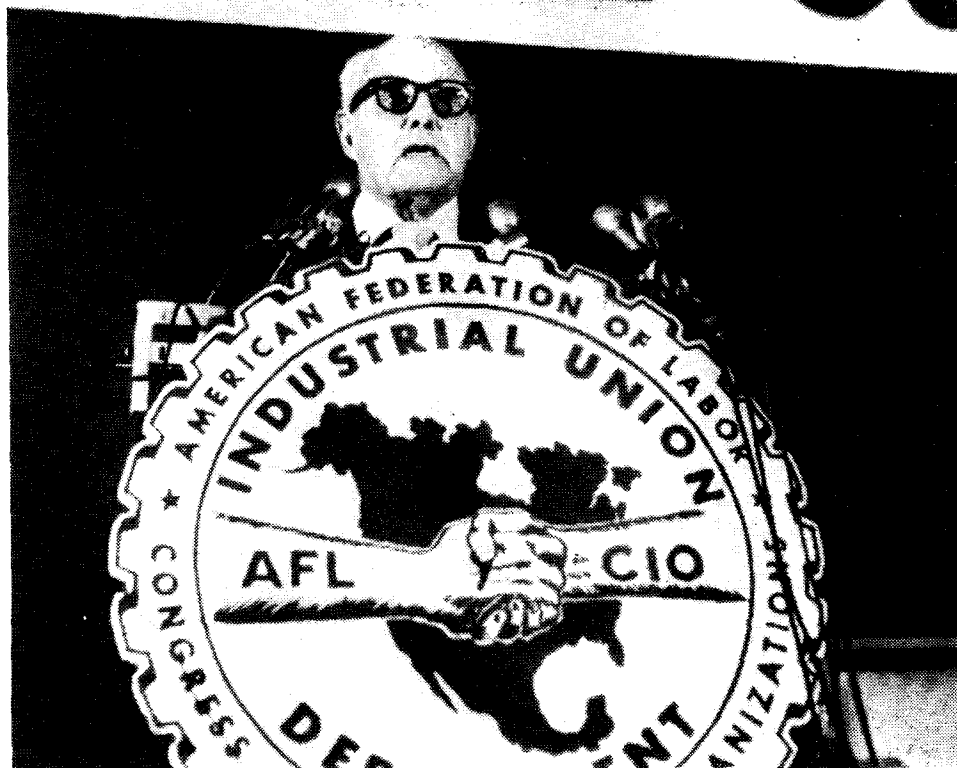
The strike, which will cut the nation's coal production in half, is not expected to seriously affect the economy for several months since utility and steel companies have record stockpiles of coal.

After issuing the strike call, UMW president Arnold Miller expressed outrage that the Bituminous Coal Operators Association negotiators "have been so unyielding" and charged that they were trying to "break the union."

The prime issue separating the two sides is the limited right to strike, a contract provision that would enable a local union to strike by majority vote of its members. The union claims that this would help to quell unauthorized walk-



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Setbacks in achieving labor's legislative agenda have lead George Meany to make the call for a new coalition.

Building Trades Council pointed out to the delegates that during most of the post war period construction was 11 percent of the Gross National Product, but that in 1974 it was down to 9.6 percent and last year it fell to 8.7 percent. In his opinion, he said, "there is not much cause for optimism." Overall employment in the building trades has decreased by 600,000 and although there was a small resurgence last year the number of building trades workers is at its lowest point since 1973-74.

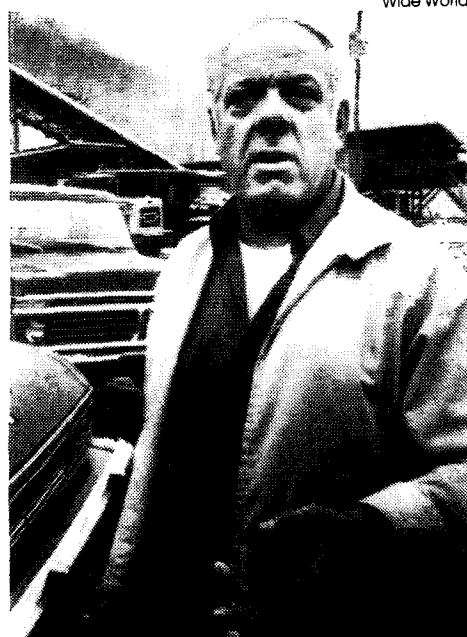
There was near unanimous support at the gathering for a campaign to organize unorganized building trades workers—something that hasn't been aggressively pursued for many years—but there was considerable disagreement over how that campaign should be waged.

Georgine, who was given a boost in salary at the convention to \$65,000 annually, and a majority of the Executive Council favored an additional three cents per capita dues assessment and keeping the organizing effort in the present leadership framework. The Sheet Metal Workers

and other unions favored a special ten cents per capita assessment earmarked for a separate organizing department. Georgine won after a desultory debate.

The overall condition of the construction trades will largely hinge on the state of the economy and the job-producing actions of the Carter administration, topics that Meany also touched in his AFL-CIO convention report. "It is still too early to grade the Carter administration," Meany declared. "For the pluses, and they are many indeed, are clouded by the continued slack in the economy and the high rate of unemployment. Realistic action to meet these problems has been stymied by the apparent shift of priorities away from the President's number one campaign issue—jobs—and toward the number one issue of the conservative opposition—'balance the budget'."

What the Carter administration has done thus far, the AFL-CIO leader said, "has not been enough... The primary cause of the projected \$60 billion deficit is unemployment, and the only cure is jobs."



Romie Keenan, a UMW member and coal truck driver, remains confident that his union will win—"We always have."

outs, while industry representatives fear that demands won at one mine would ripple through the entire industry.

The BCOA is taking an "extremely hard line" in negotiations, according to *Business Week*, by demanding "unprecedented disciplinary powers" over miners as well as "contract changes that would take away many of the UMW's economic gains..."

The union is demanding a full restoration of health benefits that were cut last July, a question that BCOA bargainers have refused to discuss until the "wild-cat issue" is resolved.

At press time, the first instances of picket-line violence were reported between miners and supervisors in Ohio. Next week in *THESE TIMES* will publish an in-depth evaluation of the underlying causes of the strike, its probable length, and the possibility that it will be undercut by coal shipments from the west.

—Dan Marshall

ELECTORAL

Leftist seeks assessor post

By Dave Lindorff
L.A. Bureau

LOS ANGELES—Left and progressive forces have found it is not easy to get anyone left of center elected to anything in Los Angeles, but Derek Shearer, a veteran of the electoral left here, is trying another route—appointment.

While few observers give him much chance of success in his effort to snare the post of county assessor, he has managed to raise some issues and eyebrows in the area of taxation policy just by trying.

Shearer is one of 20 candidates for the office, which was vacated last September when four-term Assessor Philip Watson retired suddenly with more than a year left on his term of office.

Because Watson had been under investigation by several members of the county Board of Supervisors, as well as the district attorney and the grand jury for allegedly favoring commercial and industrial property in general, and several corporate "friends" in particular, at the expense of the average homeowner, the atmosphere here has been ripe for a discussion of overall property tax policy.

Even before Shearer threw his hat into the ring, the supervisors themselves had begun discussing the problem. With residential property values rising at an average rate of 35 percent a year, while the value of commercial property was stagnating, the board was coming under mounting pressure to "do something." Homeowners were paying an ever-increasing share of the cost of local government.

For the most part, the mood has been reactionary. Homeowners have besieged the board calling for drastic cutbacks in critical areas of human services: health care, welfare, mass transit and the like. But the year-long focus by the local media on the operations of Watson's office has enabled progressive groups like the Coalition for Economic Survival, NAM, the Campaign for Economic Democracy and others to get wide-spread attention with their call for a restructuring of the local tax system.

Watson, by retiring (with a \$20,000-a-year pension) short circuited efforts by the supervisors to have him removed from office, and the grand jury ultimately announced that it would not indict him (many of the alleged misdeeds had statutes of limitation that had expired). But his departure meant the board of supervisors had to appoint a successor for the year. They didn't trust his subordinates, so they put out a call for applicants. Shearer was one of those who signed on.

One of the last candidates to be interviewed in public session by the supervisors, Shearer startled the largely conservative board by making some rather radical tax proposals, and then explaining that several states were already using them.

He said that billions of dollars in assets in Los Angeles were going tax-free while real estate was being taxed heavily, because California and its 58 counties do not tax such intangible wealth as stocks and bonds.

When board member Baxter Ward questioned the political realism of such an idea, Shearer replied that it was already being done—in Kentucky.

Shearer also called for an end to all property tax exemptions—an escape used frequently by church-owned properties. When Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, the board's evangelist, suggested this might be a threat to the separation of church and state, Shearer said various taxing jurisdictions in the nation had simply publicized how much such organizations were escaping in taxes, and then allowed them to make "contributions" in lieu of taxes and embarrassment, on a voluntary basis.

By, Shearer proposed a "split-roll" property tax system—an

While few observers give Derek Shearer, a veteran of L.A.'s electoral left, much chance of being appointed county assessor, his effort has managed to raise some issues and eyebrows in the area of taxation policy. It may also lay the foundation for a full-fledged election campaign for the office sometime in the future by Shearer or others.

some form by a number of the candidates before and after Shearer, and one endorsed by supervisor Ward. The idea is to establish assessed values for all property, residential and commercial, and then to tax commercial property at a higher percentage of that value. The result is to compensate for the higher inflation rate of residential property. For instance, a home valued at \$50,000 might be taxed at 2 percent and pay \$1,000. Under current practices a business of similar value would pay the same tax, but in a "split-roll" system it might be taxed at 4 percent and would pay taxes of \$2,000.

Shearer noted that this idea too is not new and is in use in Illinois, Minnesota and several other states. But he added a new twist. He proposed that such a split roll be "progressive"—graduated so that

small firms would pay a lower rate than giant corporations.

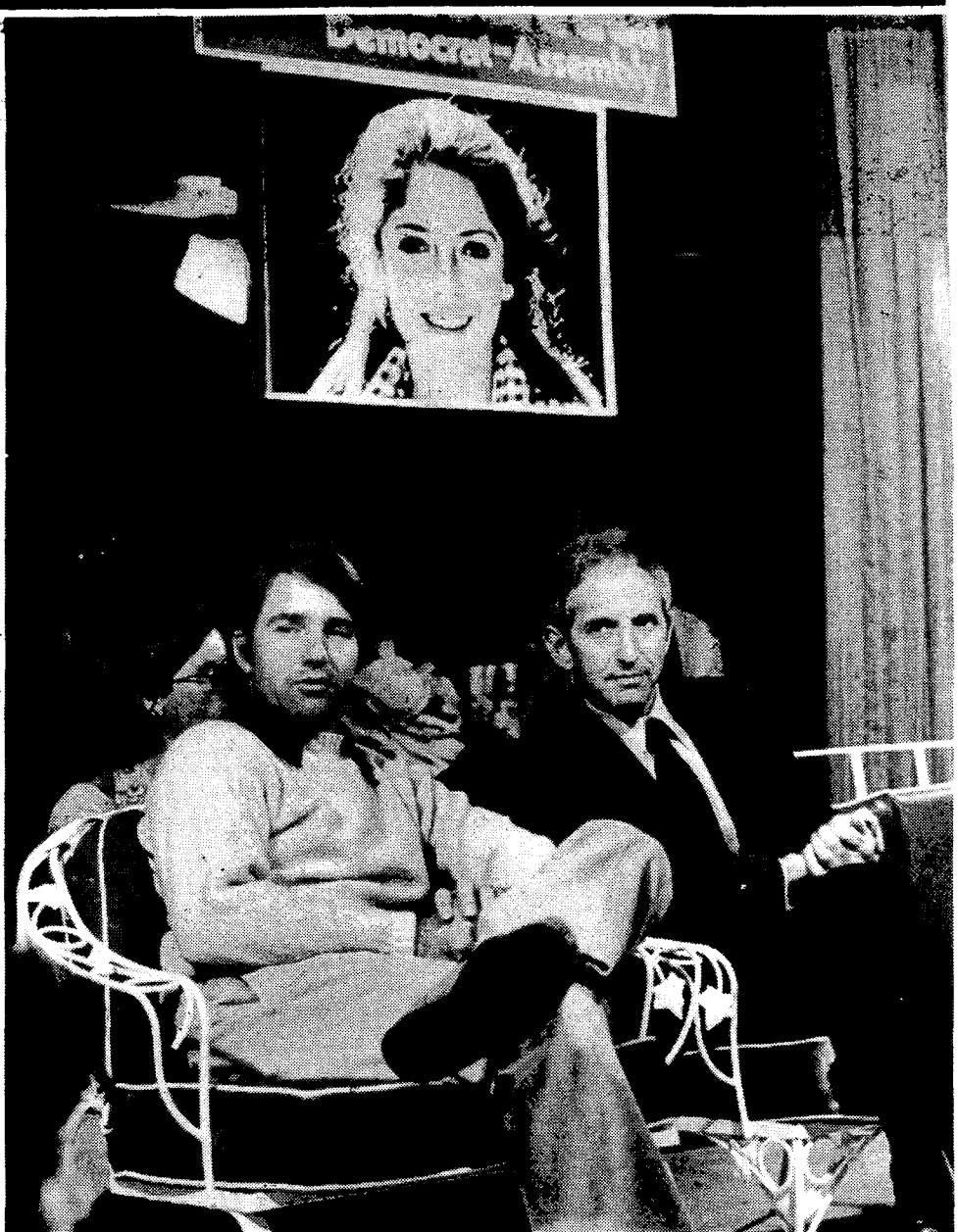
Traditionally, the office of assessor has been a kind of straw man for county supervisors and other local government policy-makers to attack at tax time. These officials usually criticize the assessor for higher assessments, when these are really the result of market forces and real estate inflation, for the most part. They shrink from explaining that with higher overall assessments they could simply have reduced the tax rate.

At the same time, the big money for local government officials' campaigns comes from the business community, and in some cases from labor. As a result, few of them want to really change a taxing system that benefits business (and many unions here seem to endorse the

"logic" that what's good for business is good for labor).

For this reason, Shearer is unlikely to get appointed. Board members seem to realize that he would not make a good straw man. They seemed visibly shaken at one proposal he made to hire two full-time economists to "report on tax trends and future revenue problems."

But Shearer suggested to **IN THESE TIMES** that he might consider running for the office in the upcoming June primary, "depending on who they appoint." If he decides on this course of action, he will have already established a solid platform, and given the current uproar over residential taxes, he might even have a shot at becoming the first progressive in local office here, whether the supervisors want him or not.



Derek Shearer (left) with Dan Ellsberg at a rally for Ruth Yannatta's campaign for the California State Assembly.

ORGANIZATIONS

People's Party coalition in trouble

By Jeff Gottlieb

The national convention of the People's party was held simultaneously in New York and Los Angeles over the weekend of Nov. 25-27. About 35 people attended the New York meeting and another 50 gathered in Los Angeles to discuss party issues and to plot its future course. The West Coast meeting was held in conjunction with a meeting of the Peace and Freedom party, the People's party affiliate in California. The gatherings marked the sixth anniversary of the founding of the People's party in Dallas, Texas, and the tenth anniversary of the Peace and Freedom party.

Along with people from New York and California, there was also a scattering of people from Washington, D.C., Maryland, Massachusetts and Michigan.

Both parties were begun by activists who had become disillusioned with the existing parties, principally around the issues of civil rights and an end to the Vietnam war. In recent years both groups have become advocates of socialism.

The People's party has dwindled in recent years. At one time its affiliates had ballot status in many states, now California's Peace and Freedom party is the only affiliate on the ballot.

The People's party has few resources and is financed primarily by lecture fees donated by Dr. Benjamin Spock, the par-

ty's presidential candidate in 1972 and vice-presidential hopeful in 1976.

Because of these problems, the early part of the convention was used to discuss the possibility of disbanding the party. Lew McCammon, L.A. County Peace and Freedom party treasurer, expressed the feelings of several others when he said, "Besides the Peace and Freedom party, the New York group and a few scattered bands around the country, we aren't a party that is going to seize power through the electoral process. We should stop fooling people."

A motion to disband the party failed, however.

Al Sargis, a member of the People's party national leadership and of the Peace and Freedom party, was still pessimistic on the final day of the convention. "I have seen no indication from the body that we are going to become day-to-day organizers," he said, referring to the group's oft-mentioned goal of "organizing the unorganized." "Next year, if we exist we'll be talking about the same things." He later expressed his feeling that the People's party will merge with other groups, such as the Socialist party or the New American Movement.

It has not helped that a certain amount of distrust and wariness has developed between the Peace and Freedom party and

the New York Working People's party (NYWPP), the party's two main constituents.

These feelings revolve around the activities of the NYWPP. Opponents of the group have charged that it uses mind control techniques similar to those of Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, that it was once associated with the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC), a group that has masqueraded as left-wing while forming alliances with conservative Republicans and other right-wing forces. The Peace and Freedom party has asked the NYWPP to respond to those charges.

While the People's party seems in danger of splitting, the Peace and Freedom party has easily qualified for the California ballot, even while its strength has dwindled. From a high of 105,100 registered voters in 1968, the party was down to 12,000 members by January 1975, although since then its registration has more than doubled.

As Sargis observed, "We have fewer registered voters than in 1968, but we get more votes now. I'm afraid it's because people don't know what the party stands for. I've asked a lot of people why they are registered with our party and they just say, 'I'm for peace and freedom'."

Jeff Gottlieb is a free-lance writer in Los Angeles.