

ELECTIONS

L.A. activist pushes "public enterprise"

By Lawrence Swaim



L.A. activist Burt Wilson is trying to parlay his leading role in CAUSE into a seat in the State Assembly.

A heated electoral contest is shaping up in Los Angeles' 46th assembly district, a primarily working-class and multi-racial area just west of downtown, with a high percentage of senior citizens. A special election May 24, called to fill the vacancy created when President Carter tapped assemblyman Charles Warren to head the Council on Environmental Quality, pits three machine liberal Democrats against Burt Wilson, a former advertising man turned activist.

Wilson's program centers around the struggle against unfair utility rates and related grassroots issues, with a long range perspective for community control over California utilities, insurance companies, banks and gas and oil companies.

The Los Angeles chairperson of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, Wilson is best known as a founder and chief strategist of CAUSE (Campaign Against Utility Service Exploitation), which now includes 30 consumer, labor, ecology, senior citizen and community action groups.

The Wilson campaign will stress past CAUSE victories. "We'll use that as a lead-in to the issue of putting communities in charge of decision-making that is now in private hands," Wilson told *IN THESE TIMES*.

"The public interest movement raises an important question—what is the alternative to private enterprise? For us the alternative is what we are calling public enterprise," Wilson says. He targets four areas where public enterprise is most needed in California:

- **Utilities:** Private ownership results in unreasonable rates and environmental havoc because the regulatory process is pegged to the utility's investment and profit priorities. Public control through democratically-elected community boards and commissions is the only way to put the paying public in charge.

- **Banks:** Banks should be run by com-

munity-elected boards. They should supply venture capital to help cities and neighborhoods in need, initiate solar energy programs, benefit the building trades by providing low-cost loans for home improvements, insure home mortgages, end redlining, help fund socially productive programs, and finance a statewide retrofitting program to make homes more energy efficient. Profits from public capital would go to reduce property taxes.

- **Insurance:** Insurance rates are not predicated on actuarial assumptions, but on investments made by big insurance companies. There should be a state insurance agency, administered by an elected citizen board of directors. The agency would supply life insurance to seniors, and would use its accumulated capital to keep premiums low and reduce taxes.

- **Oil and Gas Corporations:** A public oil and gas corporation could develop state resources for state consumption, while getting an accurate picture of exactly what our resources are—information the big corporations refuse to give out publicly. It would meet people's energy needs first, and put private profit second. Once again, it would be administered by boards and commissions elected by the communities, *not* by appointees of the governor or state legislature. Like the other systemic reforms, it would seek to take the state out of the revenue consuming business and put it in the revenue reducing business, using its capital to keep taxes down.

Tom Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy has endorsed the Wilson campaign, as has DSOC, Los Angeles New American Movement (NAM), CAUSE and Rep. Ron Dellums. Also endorsing are the Concerned Clergy, the black ministers' association in the district, and SEIU Local 660. Further community and labor support is expected as the campaign progresses.

Lawrence Swaim is a former union official, now a full-time writer. His first novel, *Waiting for the Earthquake*, has just been published (See Mike LaVelle's review, *ITT*, April 27).

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Building trades decline

Nixon created CISC in 1971 as part of this strategy. His efforts paid off in the '72 elections. The AFL-CIO Executive Council remained neutral in the presidential race, while some unions actively supported Nixon. In 1973 the president returned the favor and appointed Peter Brennan as Secretary of Labor.

After the Nixon imposed wage-price controls expired in 1974 wage increases and strikes again shot upward, prompting unions and contractors to agree that "it is timely for labor and management to explore... a more viable and practical framework for collective bargaining."

►Common site and collective bargaining.

When President Ford appointed John Dunlop as Labor Secretary in March 1975 that exploration crystallized into the Construction Industry Collective Bargaining Act, a law that would institutionalize the wage/strike restrictions of CISC.

"The bill is an attempt to come to grips with the basic problem that the building trades locals have too much power," an administration official told *Business Week*. "It is, in effect, transferring power from the locals to the internationals."

When the AFL-CIO proposed a common site picketing bill, Ford demanded that it be combined with the Collective Bargaining Act. It was. Ford then promised to sign this "acceptable" version of common site picketing and Dunlop pushed it through Congress.

Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO was maintaining its stand-offish attitude toward the Democratic party. In early 1975 the Executive Council decided not to actively intervene in Democratic primary battles, thus leaving open the possibility that they would again remain neutral or support

the Republican candidate outright.

►Old Guard's power at low ebb.

A group of liberal unions that had supported McGovern in 1972, on the other hand, formed the Labor Coalition Clearinghouse to get a maximum number of labor delegates to the Democratic convention. Coalition unions were instrumental in several of Jimmy Carter's primary victories. Leonard Woodcock of the UAW became his first big-labor backer.

George Meany and the construction unions supported Carter reluctantly, only after he had the nomination sewed up. They were more concerned with opposing Ford who had broken his word and vetoed common site picketing.

Compared with previous Democratic administrations, the influence of the AFL-CIO old guard is considerably reduced. Their economic punch has declined after years of unemployment and industry attacks. Their political strength has been diluted through years of playing with the Republicans. Even their public image has faded, as the media depicts them as a bunch of crusty old men, more concerned about their own selfish interests than about the welfare of the whole country.

Carter has rejected the AFL-CIO's advice to appoint John Dunlop as Labor secretary, to increase job creation in his economic stimulus program, and to up the minimum wage to \$3 an hour.

►An answer to open shop.

Common site picketing was the construction union's attempt to beat the open-shop movement. According to a 1975 Wharton School study, the "greatest threat" to the continued expansion of the open

shop would be new rules "which would permit the construction unions the right to use secondary boycotts to drive open shop constructors and non-union employees off jobs." Common site picketing would have done exactly that.

"The impact on open shop growth would be immediate and profound," the study concluded, making it impossible for them to operate in many areas.

The fact that it was first on the AFL-CIO legislative agenda does attest, however, to the continued prominence of construction union interests in the AFL-CIO hierarchy. At the same time it is clear that its passage would not have benefitted industrial unions, service unions, public employees or the bulk of the working class. In fact, its unexpected defeat may have jeopardized legislation in the interests of these groups.

►Upside-down priorities.

William Winpisinger, who will become president of the Machinists' union in July, bluntly told the *New York Times*: "There is no question in my mind that Meany made the order of priorities, and putting the construction picketing bill ahead of everything else in our program was certainly an upside-down priority if you're talking about legislation that is in the best interests of the whole country."

In addition, while common site picketing would have put the economic screws on non-union contractors, some local union leaders believe it would have done more harm than good by taking jobs away from construction workers and generating more chaos in the industry.

"As it was proposed, situs picketing would have created chaos in the construction industry," comments William Martin. "Let's say I popped a big power plant because there were three non-union operating engineers working there. Pulling all the engineers and shutting down the entire job is certainly *not* going to make me

a hero with all those guys that lose work. I would also place a fantastic monetary liability on this local. I may organize the three men, but in the process lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages."

►Miscalculated strength.

The immediate reason for the defeat was that the AFL-CIO miscalculated in approaching the Congress and overestimated its own power. They figured that votes in the House were wrapped up and concentrated their lobbying on the Senate. As the assistant to Robert Georgine, head of the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department, said: "We were over-confident.... We started to believe our own press clippings."

The bill's narrow defeat was especially hard to take because it was spearheaded by forces that represent small business interests, like the National Right to Work Committee. Non-union contractors played a prominent role.

For Martin, a local construction union official, the defeat illustrates how out of touch the national leaders are with their members, the new Congress, and the mood of the country. "I think their political clout has diminished. The Congress, like the unions, is now made up of a younger element of people. But the hierarchy is still attacking problems like they did 25 years ago."

"We can never have a viable labor movement when the heads of these unions are well past retirement age," he concludes. "They have not come up with a progressive idea in 25 years. How many times have members of the Executive Council sought advice from someone working on an assembly line, or a bulldozer, or digging a ditch for a sewer contractor? When you lose touch with the rank and file union member, the labor movement is not going to move forward. Unless you can generate enthusiasm there, you're not going anywhere."

WOMEN

Sterilization abuse on the rise

In response to a court order HEW has stiffened its sterilization regulations, but a recent survey of 42 large teaching hospitals across the country found 64 percent in gross violation of the regulations; 14 did not even know the regulations existed.

By Kathy Mallin

Lupe Acosta entered Los Angeles County Hospital in the final stages of labor one August evening in 1973. The 35-year-old Chicana's nightmare began as she was being examined by two physicians who began to push down hard on her stomach, causing her immense pain. She managed to push one of them back, whose response was to punch her in the stomach and remark, "Now lady, let us do what we have to."

Seven days later she learned that her baby had died; at a check-up one month later she learned she had been sterilized. Lupe Acosta still suffers pains and nervousness as a result of her tubal ligation and her common-law husband of eight years left her because of her sterility.

Incidents of medical abuse such as this are not uncommon in a health care system based on profit, teaching, and research priorities at the expense of good patient care. Women, who comprise 70 percent of all patient visits, are the major victims. Forced sterilization is a blatant example.

►Abuse when there is no consent.

Sterilization should certainly be an option available to women who have seriously considered its risks and benefits as compared to other methods of contraception. But sterilization abuse occurs when there is not freely given, informed consent; as when women are threatened with deportation or loss of public aid benefits if they refuse the operation. More subtly, it occurs when sterilization is suggested in stressful situations, such as childbirth, or without adequate counseling.

Sterilization is not only permanent, it is also one of the most risky forms of contraception available to women. Tubal ligation, where the fallopian tubes are tied, blocked or removed to prevent the passage of eggs, is considerably more dangerous than the I.U.D. or diaphragm, and is not necessarily any safer than the continued use of oral contraceptives. Serious complications per million women are as high as 15,000 for tubals, 600 for the pill, 400 for the I.U.D., and virtually none for the diaphragm. Some of the common side effects from this operation include bleeding, uterine perforation, accidental burning or bowel trauma, abdominal pain, or pain during menstruation.

Yet this most risky method of contra-

ception is also the fastest growing in the U.S. today. Female sterilization has increased 350 percent from 1970 to 1975. An estimated one million women now undergo sterilizations each year.

Some of the recent increase in sterilization incidence is undoubtedly due to increased demand on the part of women who were given the opportunity to make an informed decision. But there is ample evidence that many women are not even given the opportunity to make a decision.

Sterilization abuse first gained national attention in 1973 with the case of two black sisters, aged 12 and 14, who had been deemed "mentally incompetent" and sterilized by an Alabama physician. Since the physician was reimbursed with federal funds, the lawsuit that followed resulted in a federal judge ordering the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to stiffen its sterilization regulations.

►No enforcement of new regulations.

The improvements in the new regulations included a prohibition on the sterilization of women under 21, a 72-hour waiting period between the time of consent and the actual procedure and written notification that refusal to undergo the procedure would not result in the loss of any public assistance. HEW, however, has no means of enforcement and a 1974 survey of 42 large teaching hospitals across the country found 64 percent of them to be in gross violation of the regulations. The report found that 14 of them were not even aware that such regulations exist.

The absence of regulation produces victims like the ten Chicanas who recently sued L.A. County Hospital after having been deceived or coerced into sterilizations. Or the 28 black women sterilized in six months by one South Carolina physician, the only doctor in his county, who refuses to deliver the babies of black welfare patients with two or more children unless they consent to sterilizations.

The Child Welfare Services outside Pittsburgh not long ago persuaded doctors to sterilize a 32-year-old Native American, without her knowledge, and took custody of her newborn son. The official medical reason for her sterilization was "socio-economic"—in other words, she was sterilized because she was poor.

Most victims of abuse are poor and non-white. In Puerto Rico, 35 percent of all women of childbearing age have been sterilized, many through Rockefeller-funded family planning clinics. And in the U.S., 20 percent of all married black women have been sterilized, and 14 percent of all Native American women, as compared to 7 percent of all married white women.

The enforcement of HEW regulations would stop abuse only in cases reimbursed

by federal funds. Unnecessary surgery will continue to occur as long as economic incentives to perform surgery exist. Federal employees under pre-paid group health plans, for example, have a 16.8 percent probability of having a hysterectomy by age 70. The odds of getting this operation under largely unregulated Blue Cross plans is about 35 percent.

►Medical education system involved.

The nature of medical education in this country also makes poor and non-white women prime targets for the surgical knives of interns and residents who need to perform operations to fulfill certification requirements. Many former residents admit they were encouraged to talk women into sterilizations for teaching purposes.

The acting director of a New York municipal hospital has said, "In most major teaching hospitals in New York City, it is the unwritten policy to do elective hysterectomies on poor, black and Puerto Rican women with minimal indications...to train residents.... At least 10 percent of gynecological surgery in New York City is done on this basis. And 99 percent of this is done on black and Puerto Rican women."

Population control ideology supporting sterilization is reflected in the attitudes and practices of many physicians. A 1972 Planned Parenthood survey of 226 physicians, for instance, found that 30 percent of them favored the withholding of public assistance to welfare mothers with three or more "illegitimate" children if they refused to be sterilized.

Community and women's groups across the country have faced enormous resistance from the medical and population control establishments in their fight against sterilization abuse. Sterilization regulations proposed in California and New York City, for example, were actively opposed by local hospital and medical associations.

An important victory was recently won on April 28 when the New York City Council adopted stringent sterilization regulations applicable to all hospitals and clinics performing sterilizations.

Requirements in the new law include counseling in the patient's preferred language, and a 30-day waiting period after consent has been given to prevent sterilizations under stressful situations.

Enforcement of the regulations, however, will require constant monitoring and community support, for forces in the medical establishment are likely to challenge the new law as an infringement on medical practice.

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Kathy Mallin has been active in CESA in Chicago.



LABOR

Atlanta sanitation strike broken by mayor

Atlanta. "Mayor wins" crowed the *Atlanta Constitution* two weeks ago as the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees' strike against the city of Atlanta completed its extended death throes. "The Mayor has won" admitted AFSCME area representative Leamon Hood as he announced the end of a work action that had lasted almost five weeks and that had been doomed from its inception.

The strike, which began on March 28, involved 915 of Atlanta's lowest paid sanitation and water department workers. With their wages virtually frozen since 1974, and with supposedly pro-union Mayor Maynard Jackson disallowing raises in each year's city budget, the rank and file had risen up and against the advice of both local and national AFSCME leadership had called a work stoppage.

From the outset, however, the strike was beset with four major handicaps. First, the statutory city deadline for enacting change in the 1977-'78 budget was March 31, just three days after the beginning of the strike. Although this deadline has occasionally been ignored in the



past, the city stood on solid legal and public relations footing in refusing to negotiate wages after that date.

Second, local union leadership had failed to build alliances with other labor and community organizations. Thus the sanitation workers were easily isolated by the Jackson administration.

Third, the strike unfortunately coincided with a national AFSCME ad campaign vilifying Atlanta as "losersville" and singling out Mayor Jackson for considerable scurrilous criticism. This created a hostile climate among the Atlanta population and split the black community

over the question of support for the mayor.

Most important, however, was the unexpectedly vicious opposition of Mayor Jackson, a liberal who won office with massive labor support. Almost before the strike began, the mayor fired all participants and gave them a deadline to come back to work or be permanently replaced. Since most strikers refused to meet the deadline the city quickly began to hire replacements.

Although Jackson essentially broke the strike in its first week, the rank and file kept up its picketlines until April 26 when

a group of strikers and supporters allegedly trying to force their way into the mayor's office was set upon by police. The strikers were roughed up and charged and bound over for rioting, unlawful assembly and other criminal charges.

That night AFSCME international, whose lukewarm support for the strike had included minimal \$25 per week strike payments, disowned the strike. The next day the local leadership admitted defeat.

Although some of the strikers had already returned to work, the city has hired several hundred replacements for those who kept up the strike. In an apparent attempt to recoup his position with organized labor Jackson announced that since the strike was broken those who so desired could come back to work without loss of seniority. However, when the former strikers tried to take advantage of the offer there were few jobs available. Attempts by the city council to create several hundred CETA jobs to rehire the workers are currently bogged down in red tape.

—Jon Jacobs
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