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Briefing: Labor roundup



In June the Supreme Court ruled against Steelworkers dissident Ed Sadlowski.

After Ed Sadlowski lost his race in 1977 for president of the Steelworkers union—relying heavily on outside liberal donations to combat the strong staff support for Lloyd McBride—the union voted to prohibit candidates from accepting money from anyone outside the union. Sadlowski successfully challenged the rule in court, but in June the Supreme Court ruled that "reasonable" restrictions on campaigns within unions do not violate a candidate's free speech.

Herman Benson of the Association for Union Democracy argues that the rationale adopted by the 5-to-4 majority undercuts the intention of the Landrum-Griffin act to guarantee free speech in unions. He expects other unions to enact rules, such as requiring publication of donors' names, that would intimidate potential supporters of dissidents, especially in unions like the building trades, where a member could lose work for being in the opposition.

"They say you have to get money from members, but to get money you have to be a credible candidate, and how do you appeal to members if you don't have the money to travel?" Benson asks.

Over the long run, he expects other court cases may restrict the implications of the Supreme Court ruling. Some union reformers, including

Sadlowski attorney Joseph Rauh, are now advocating new legislation to protect union democracy and, among other things, restrict staff influence.

Ironically, in the Mineworkers (UMW) union, where outside money first played a major role in support of Miners for Democracy, the challenger, Richard Trumka, is criticizing incumbent Sam Church for taking money from other non-UMW union officials, lobbyists and politicians. Trumka says he will support restrictions on campaign contributions.

Steelworkers local presidents voted 263-79 on June 14 to permit President McBride to begin discussing problems of the steel industry with the companies. Despite reported strong sentiment against concessions at the meeting, McBride is expected to return in a few weeks to report industry demands for reopening the contract a year early.

In the auto industry, leaders of a number of large General Motors locals are attempting to organize a battle against further concessions in their local contracts. In some cases, GM has unilaterally changed work rules—such as eliminating the rotating personal relief system in favor of a mass break—and then negotiated. Local leaders

efforts by student and resident delegates to endorse the ERA. The house also refused to go on record opposing handguns, even though last year sentiment was strong for handgun control. A physician who sells handguns successfully moved to table the motion. And in a step backwards, the AMA called for the withdrawal of funding for a project aimed at improving health care in the nation's penitentiaries.

At this year's meeting, the AMA—despite the growth of a strong, mass-based disarmament movement and the emergence of medical groups like Physicians for Social Responsibility—stuck to its conservative posture and refused to take a political stand on the question of nuclear war.

The house adopted a report of the AMA Board of Trustees saying that the AMA "is not participating in the political issues involved in national defense and the politics of nuclear war."

The delegates did, however, grant time to Air Force Lt. Gen. Paul W. Myers, M.D., who made a blatantly political speech decrying the "Soviet threat," saying, "Satisfactory negotiations with a formidable adversary can only happen when you are strong. We must do more than just try to counterbalance menaces that stare us in the face."

Joseph Boyle, M.D., chairman of the Board of Trustees, recently said that "The major activity of the AMA is to promote the science and art of medicine." He made that statement at the opening of the AMA's new 12-story, \$12.5 million office building in Washington, D.C., which houses \$1 million in commissioned art work and two floors of AMA lobbyists enthusiastically working to defeat any form of socialized medicine.

With all that money for art and science, the AMA, because of expense, recently discarded regional medical seminars designed to bring updated information to doctors and ceased publication of some scientific journals while allowing the quality of others to decline.

—Charles-Gene McDaniel

Missiles and the Mafia

ROME—On his visit to Rome, Ronald Reagan heard an unexpectedly sharp condemnation of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon from his host, President Sandro Pertini. After accusing Begin's government of applying "barbarous tribal law against a whole people," Pertini said that Israel had its own homeland and should respect the homelands of others. Reagan changed the subject and started praising Italy for taking on greater responsibility in NATO.

This snatch of dialogue illustrates how, if the NATO machine is turning inexorably, the alliance's mental gears do not mesh. A major part of the new responsibility that Italy is taking on in NATO has to do with what Caspar Weinberger calls "defending Alliance interests outside the NATO treaty boundaries"—notably in the vaguely

vast region that the Pentagon now labels "Southwest Asia" and that seems to include the Middle East. Faster than any other NATO ally, Italy is letting itself be dragged into plans to enable Rapid Deployment Forces to intervene in North Africa, the Arab world and even Iran. In particular, the biggest NATO base in Europe is to be built at Comiso in Sicily, for forces pointing not so much East as South.

Yet Italian public opinion sees no need for armed "defense of Alliance interests outside the NATO treaty boundaries," is unlikely to agree with U.S. policy in the Middle East and is overwhelmingly opposed to war in general and to war by advanced Northern countries against the less developed South in particular. The general feeling here is that the government has gone along with the U.S. plan to build a big NATO base because there is money in it. In this case, much of the money will go to the Mafia, which, in turn, will help protect the base from a hostile public.

Gangsterism has recently turned uglier and more murderous in Southern Italy. Last April 30, top Communist leader Pio La Torre, who had recently stepped up his crusade against the Mafia, was gunned down in a Palermo side street. The next day, he was to have led a big May Day protest against construction of the Comiso nuclear missile base. At 54, he was a veteran foe of the Mafia and the leading member of the Italian parliamentary commission investigating Mafia activities.

Before he was assassinated, La Torre had been warning that the NATO base would make Sicily a crossroads for Mafia dealing, espionage and crime, bringing massive infiltration of foreign agents. He had also said that parliamentary investigation had revealed that Italo-American Mafia banker Michael Sindona had been in Palermo around the time certain Mafia adversaries were assassinated, and that the Sicilian-American gangsters accompanying Sindona had claimed they were supposed to carry out some sort of "anti-communist political mission."

La Torre had then plunged into building a broad peace movement that is well on its way to reaching the goal of one million signatures collected in Sicily alone petitioning the Italian government to suspend construction of the Comiso base. (The next step will be a nationwide mobilization against the base throughout Italy.)

La Torre's successor as Italian Communist Party regional leader in Sicily, Luigi Colajanni, told *In These Times* that "the peace movement has aroused broad opposition to the [Comiso] base, and this does not please the secret services and certain, shall we say, reactionary circles—Italian and international. We cannot rule out the possibility that the Mafia [may have] killed La Torre also—not solely, but also—to silence one of the main leaders of the peace movement."

—Diana Johnstone

report that the international union simply has advised filing grievances.

Angry local officials complain that GM is playing one local against another as well as against foreign competition. The relief changes, they say, not only force as many as several thousand workers to line up at the same time for rest rooms or coffee machines but also eliminate as much as 10 percent of the jobs in many plants by axing relief workers.

Often workers make concessions to save their jobs only to suffer plant closings later. Recently a U.S. district court judge ruled that in such circumstances workers may be able to collect damages for breach of contract. The decision came in a suit filed by the Electrical workers (IUE) against Singer Co. of Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Last year the 600 workers at the plant that once employed over 9,000 agreed to concessions in exchange for a company promise to modernize the plant and pursue defense contracts. But a few months later management stopped looking for new contracts and in February announced the facility would close by the end of the year, and action the judge labeled "grossly unfair."

Joel B. Hopmayer, attorney for the union, said that the union lost its contention that the company was obliged to keep the plant open for the duration of the contract but is appealing that aspect of the decision. The judge will also decide later on damages based on the value of the givebacks, estimated at \$2 million by the company and \$28 million by the union.

For the first time in U.S. history, a new state law clearly sets out the legal framework for establishing worker cooperatives. In late May, Massachusetts enacted legislation pushed by the Industrial Cooperative Association (249 Elm Street, Somerville, MA 02144) that not only makes it legally simpler to establish cooperatives but also establishes a solid, democratic model. With their legal status more firmly secured, industrial cooperatives may find it easier to arrange financing and may be more likely to be taken seriously by legislators in economic development plans.

Although the AFL-CIO executive council did not endorse the nuclear freeze at its spring meeting, it did reaffirm support for ratification of SALT II and for its plan to reduce nuclear arms. Four presidents of big unions (Gerald McEntee of AFSCME [public workers], William Wynn of Food and Commercial Workers, Murray Finley of Clothing and Textile, and William Wimpfinger of the Machinists) were dissatisfied with the resolution's restraint and voted "no."

—David Moberg

By Alan Snitow

NEW YORK, JUNE 20

WHEN WILL THERE BE AN end to the arms race through disarmament? "There's a lot of complexity to it," responds Ambassador Louis Fields, a U.S. delegate to the UN Second Special Session on Disarmament now underway in New York. "I have some disquietude about time frames and I would ascribe that as well to whether or not disarmament can be achieved in this century."

To his credit, Fields said he would not rule out disarmament by the year 2000 if "some miraculous thing occurred." However, President Ronald Reagan, in a speech at the UN, made it clear that the upcoming U.S.-Soviet strategic arms negotiations—the START talks—are not likely to be the miraculous "something" that will "convince us of Soviet sincerity."

For those who marched into Central Park on June 12 (see story page 12) the 800,000-strong throng was something miraculous. But the massive event at the UN seemed, if anything, to have less impact on the U.S. stance and rhetoric than earlier and smaller European demonstrations.

"No Surprises," headlined the *Disarmament Times*, the peace movement's daily publication at the special session, the day after Reagan's speech. The newspaper called it "a speech marked by the absence of any substantive new proposals," while other disarmament advocates were less kind, calling his proposals "non-starters" or "booby traps."

"President Reagan was contemptuous of the peace movement," said Robert Johansen, president of the Institute for World Order. In their "arrogance of power," he continued, "Reagan and his team did not feel it was necessary to provide a conciliatory speech" for either the Soviets or the peace marchers.

Indeed, Johansen said he was surprised that the Soviets didn't walk out after being peppered with rhetorical shots.

The peace movement itself merited no attention as a significant force. It was mentioned only in the context of "...the Soviet Union is trying to manipulate the peace movement in the West."

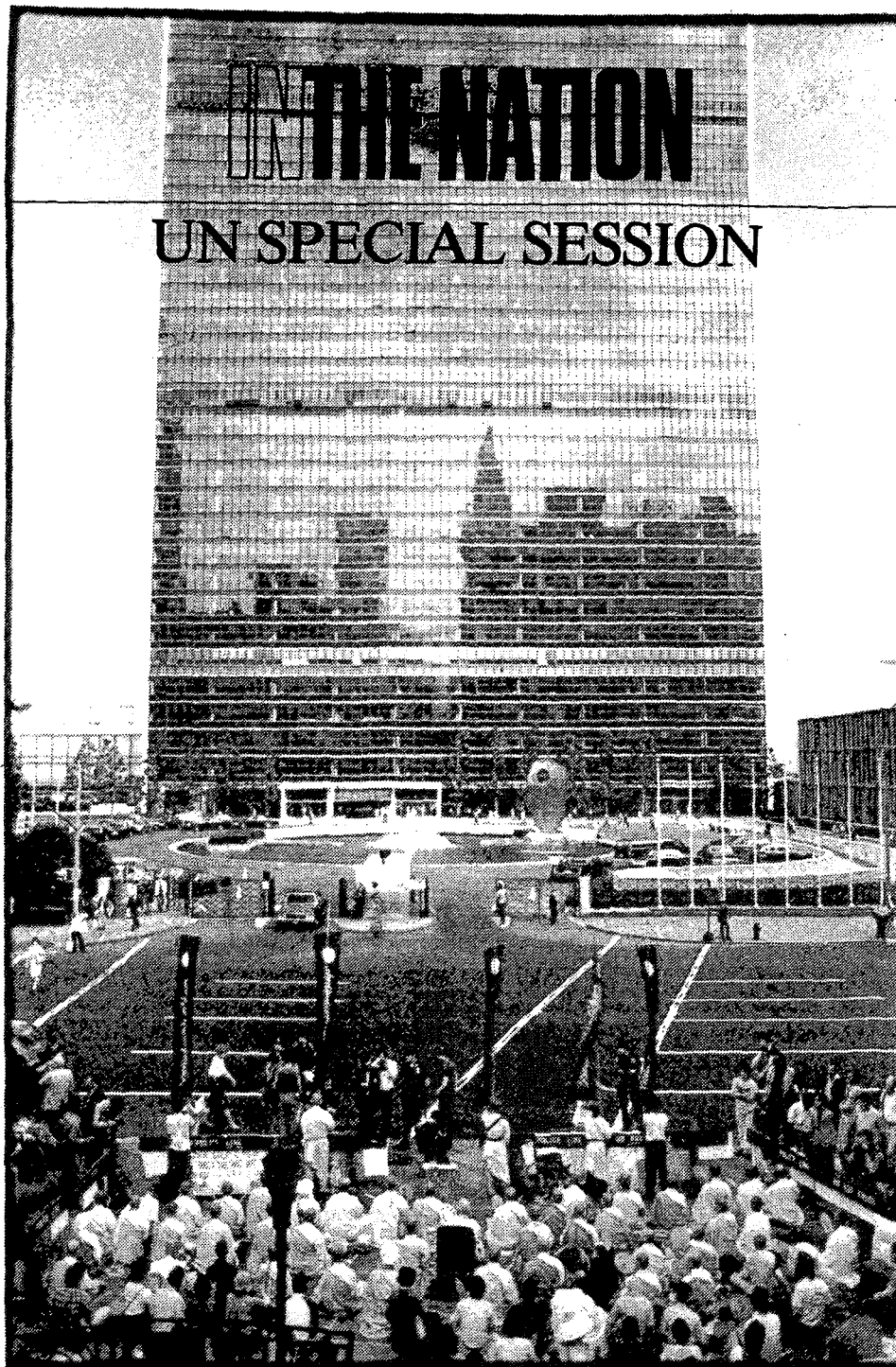
For those who are observing and analyzing the process at the UN Special Session, there is an additional constituency to be considered—the representatives of more than 150 countries, many of them so small that maintaining a UN delegation is a considerable sacrifice and commitment. Reagan's message to those delegates could not be called encouraging; even though Alex Liebowitz, a member of the U.S. Mission to the UN, said the president's attendance "demonstrates that we take the UN seriously."

The large majority of non-aligned and non-nuclear nations represented at the Special Session want just that: to be taken seriously by the major powers. They want to play some role in the disarmament process, to be consulted and, most of all, respected. But when Reagan spoke before the General Assembly, the delegates did not miss the fact that the speech was aimed more at staving off the growth of the peace movement in Peoria than it was at responding to their concerns about the arms race.

Perhaps the most telling moment came just after Reagan's speech when delegates crowded around the podium to examine the newest model in presidential teleprompters. Unlike previous speakers, Reagan read his speech without looking down at a text. Television viewers across the country saw him appear to be looking at the delegates as he delivered a tough, earnest, seemingly off-the-cuff statement that lasted 26 minutes, leaving just enough time for a quick network wrap-up and a commercial.

But gadgetry alone no longer wows the Third World.

All other major speeches have been read without the benefit of the teleprompter, and they have been considerably longer than 26 minutes. Although TV-trained Americans may blanch at the thought of listening to a halting translation of Soviet



Soviets score a diplomatic coup

foreign minister Andrei Gromyko's oration explaining his country's position on disarmament, the UN delegates sat through and saw through a different message from the Soviet Union: They were being treated without condescension by one of the superpowers.

Although there was no major breakthrough in Gromyko's speech, the Soviet foreign minister did indicate a softening of his country's opposition to on-site verification, a past obstacle in negotiations—particularly over chemical weapons.

He indicated that the Soviet Union would be willing to open some of its nuclear reactors and research facilities to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency, something neither superpower permits at this point.

Winning the gesture war.

The big diplomatic coup came from Leonid Brezhnev himself in a letter read by Gromyko. Before the multitude of non-aligned and non-nuclear states, the Soviet Union swore a solemn oath "not to

be the first to use nuclear weapons." The move was "unilateral," said the foreign minister, and "becomes effective at the moment it is made public from the rostrum of the General Assembly."

For the first and last time so far in the session, a speaker's statement was interrupted by applause from the delegates. In an organization built on protocol, on gestures and on words, the Soviet Union is winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the delegates without even a fight.

On the contrary, Reagan's speech—while appealing to some fanciful Middle American beliefs—dismissed the UN process as frivolous. The only response to Brezhnev's no first-use pledge was in direct: "We need deeds, not words." But the UN, when it is successful, is so because it substitutes words for deeds of war.

"Simply collecting agreements," Reagan said, "will not bring peace."

Such statements are not likely to boost sagging morale here at the Special Session. In spite of the size and message of the June 12 march, the delegates are isolated in their own world. They are trying to write by consensus a document that outlines a "comprehensive program for disarmament" even as one of the leading nuclear states is saying in public briefings that disarmament won't happen in this century.

After a hundred speakers, including dozens of presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers, the final result could be a stalemate—a session unable to arrive at even a statement of principles for disarmament. This would be a resounding silence from the world body.

At best, the more hopeful people at the UN think the session will come up with just another well-phrased, idealistic final document that is observed only in the breach of its intent and of its every provision. That has already been the fate of the much-honored, but little respected "final document" of the First Disarmament Session in 1978. One way or the other, the reward for the delegates' diligence is likely to be a decade of occasional briefings about the most secret strategic arms talks between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

When those secret bilateral talks begin at the end of June, the peace movement in the U.S. and Western Europe will have a more difficult time "keeping its eye on the target" as Reagan appeals for unity and promises eventual results.

"For 30 years," said Robert Johansen, "we had governments claim that they were doing all they could to reduce arms without a single weapon being dismantled as a result of negotiations. If we want peace, we must never take government statements at face value."

Alan Snitow is chair of the West Coast advisory board of *In These Times*.

Above, Buddhist monks from Japan gather in front of the UN. Below, New York police remove a demonstrator from a sit-in at the U.S. Mission to the UN.

