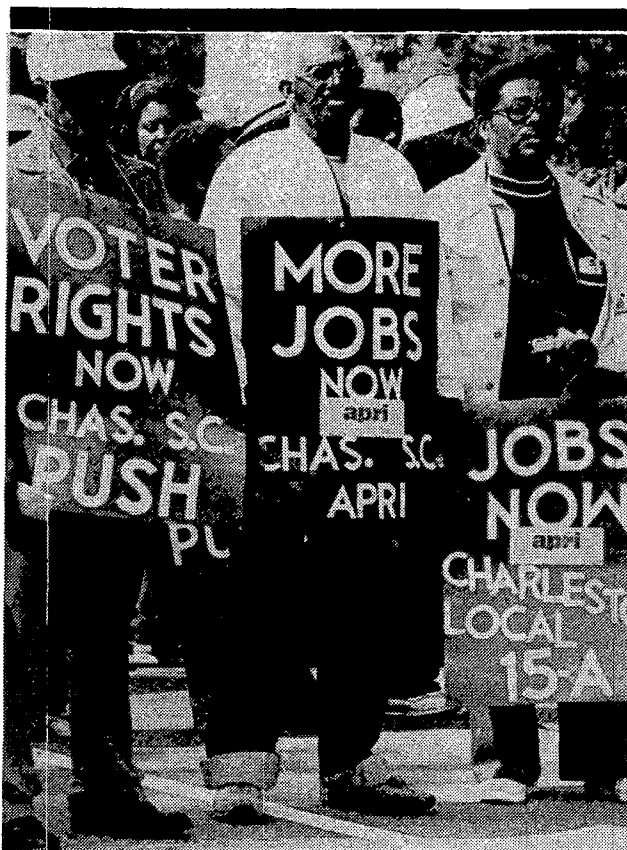


THE INSIDE STORY



Labor officials want the Democrats to present an alternative to Reaganomics.

Labor ponders what is to be done

By David Moberg

Bludgeoned in the face by recession at the bargaining table and whacked on the backside by the Reaganite rule in Washington, the labor movement quite predictably, albeit slowly, is trying to strengthen its political muscle. From the top it is bolstering and adding sophistication to its centralized operations. From the bottom, there are vigorous new strategies for broad coalitions and greater local labor political power. Although not inherently at odds, the strategies at times diverge and even conflict.

The new director of the political arm of the AFL-CIO, The Committee on Political Education (COPE), is John Perkins, who is described by nearly everyone as a good technician and a loyal staff man who has made few enemies and has no ideological ax to grind. With \$3.5 million at his disposal, in addition to contributions to candidates channeled through COPE, he wants to conduct more extensive polling of union members, analyze district political trends more carefully, churn out personalized mailings that hit special "parochial concerns" of members rather than relying on broad-brush appeals and take advantage of drivers license lists to locate additional members of union households for mailings.

But beyond such technical improvements, there are signs that the labor movement will try to make its influence felt more forcefully within the Democratic Party, even though it will hold back from the kind of intimate connection that British unions have with the Labour Party.

COPE, for example, may work with state federations to recruit candidates and to give new contenders limited training before it pulls back from any day-to-day involvement in the campaign. At the national party level, where 34 AFL-CIO members make up nearly 10 percent of the Democratic National Committee, labor hopes to exert more influence not only through numbers and money but also by changing the party convention rules along the lines recommended by the Hunt Commission. Generally those changes lessen the role of activists and pressure groups and strengthen the hand of elected officials and party functionaries. Many labor leaders think that with this arrangement they can exercise greater discipline over officials and thus over the nominating process by the power of their purse strings.

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Most labor leaders want more Democratic Party discipline, so that even when out of power the party could act as a "shadow government," in the words of Communications Worker president Glenn Watts, rather than a squabbling and confused chorus. But "we're not looking to own the party," Clothing and Textile Workers president Murray Finley says. "I doubt if we'd do best to take it over. If I look around the world, I'm not sure [a labor party] is good or bad. We've made a lot of progress [with the existing party arrangement]. Let's go back to what's been working."

Besides discipline, most labor officials want the Democrats to present an alternative to Reaganomics, such as those offered by the AFL-CIO, the Machinists or the public workers (AFSCME). "I would hope for the party to go to the left," Finley says, pausing for a moment over his choice of words, "yeah, to the left."

But when labor gets down to the nitty-gritty details of endorsement, the broader political strategy fades in favor of pragmatism. Bill Holayter, political director of the Machinists, notes that in the final balloting "an alternative is not going to be as important as how many people are laid off, are interest rates still up there, are businesses going bankrupt. Races are run by individuals, who can be helped by issues and positions, but it comes down to individuals."

And when it comes down to individuals, labor has a traditional policy of sticking by "friends" more than seeking out the best—described by one building trades president as "dancing with the gal you brung to the party." That shows up in Connecticut, where many unions, including some liberal ones, are supporting Sen. Lowell Weicker, a moderate and an important swing vote in the Senate Labor Committee, over either his conservative Republican opponent, Prescott Bush, or the aggressive, liberal Rep. Toby Moffett, the likely Democratic candidate. Some unions, like the Machinists, have opted for a strong "advocate" in Moffett over a sometimes friend in Weicker. Despite such splits, the labor movement is moving tentatively toward greater ideological coherence in its endorsements, for example, offering "limited endorsement" in contests where one candidate is only a weak "lesser evil."

Mobilizing the members.

But despite labor's moves toward greater influence, discipline and political consistency, many union political activists on the left fault the AFL-CIO and many member unions for doing too little to involve and mobilize the members. Some officials are also retreating from labor's recent commitment to work in diverse coalitions. They apparently fear the influence of such coalition partners on labor and possible identification of unions with positions on defense, foreign policy and other issues to the left of official labor policy.

The Democratic Party rule changes reveal some of the differing views on rank-and-file activity. Holayter of the Machinists says, "I always thought the rules were okay as they were, except for the delegate loyalty rule. And if we did our job right, I thought we could take more delegates than any other element in the party." Many other unions were not willing to gamble on winning power in the party by this route.

But ultimately even those who favored the rank-and-file approach more than the new centralizing tendencies opted for labor unity rather than fractious infighting. "Ronald Reagan's wreckage is far more important than anything in terms of who gets to go to the Democratic convention," Machinist president William Winpisinger says. For their part, the Machinists have instituted an on-the-job canvass of the members of their union by stewards who solicit opinions and present issues as a way

of getting more members involved in politics.

Although the AFL-CIO pronounced election day 1982 as Solidarity Day II, it is pulling back in some ways from the broad-based mobilization that brought nearly 400,000 people to Washington last year. "There are people who you bring with you into the streets who you wouldn't want to have in an electoral coalition," one building trades political director says.

For many years there has been a strong line of resistance in the AFL-CIO, most prominently associated with departed COPE director Al Barkan, to labor linking itself with other groups as allies. Some go-it-alone proponents fear that labor might become identified with criticisms of the military, opposition to U.S. policies in El Salvador and other policies on such issues as civil rights, women's rights or environmental protection that are common among labor allies but anathema to conservatives within the labor movement.

One indication of this concern was the decision at the February executive council meeting to keep labor endorsements clearly separate from the endorsements made by other coalition members, more of whom are now entering electoral politics. "We don't want anybody confused that if ABC group makes an endorsement and works with labor that necessarily means a labor endorsement," AFL-CIO information director Murray Seeger says.

Yet labor involvement with coalitions is, in the eyes of many local-level activists, the most effective way of gaining strength and encouraging involvement. But the conservatives in labor have reason to worry: such coalition work may challenge some cherished labor positions.

For example, the state AFL-CIO in Iowa took the lead last year in organizing the Iowa Progressive Coalition of 35 labor, community, church and farm groups. "We could no longer only lobby, manipulate and finagle things from the top," federation newspaper editor Mark Belkin said. "We had to reach people out in the field. If we didn't, right-wing and corporate America would turn them against their organizations."

Organized around an economic bill of rights and the theme of "Jobs, Peace, Justice," the Coalition recently mobilized 3,000 people in sub-zero weather to protest at a Reagan visit to Des Moines. Partly as a result of church and peace group influence, the Coalition has argued that "peace is a bread-and-butter issue," Belkin says. "It affects the paycheck and pocketbook of workers just like recession, inflation or taxes." Although the Coalition has taken no position on El Salvador," Belkin says that there is a generally critical view of U.S. policy among members.

The Coalition does not endorse candidates, but state federation president James Wengert this year organized the first pre-primary endorsement meeting for Iowa COPE members. "We felt after the primaries our choices are between Democrats and Republicans," he said. "By starting this, if we support Democrats and they start weakening on the platform, then we will be able to take them on in the primary."

Such tough-minded grass-roots activism combined with broad coalition work is sprouting up all over the country—for example, in Connecticut's Legislative and Electoral Action Project, in an effort by Steelworkers in Gary, Ind., to form a labor caucus in the county Democratic committee, in a political education and action program among federal workers organized by AFGE (American Federation of Government Employees) to link their jobs and clients' needs in fights against budget cuts. The changes at the top in labor's political machinery could encourage this strength if conservative fears do not prevail and bring national COPE into conflict with the emerging local-level political activism.

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Will real conservatives step forward?

By John Judis

WASHINGTON

IN THE PAST, THE ANNUAL CONSERVATIVE Political Action Conference (CPAC), sponsored by the American Conservative Union (ACU) and the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), has provided a forum for the right to debate its assault on the citadels of power. But having won power, the conservatives must now decide how to use it and consolidate it. That was the subject of this year's conference, held Feb. 25-28 at Washington's Mayflower Hotel.

The conference was attended by 350 conservative leaders from around the country—current and aspiring public officials, lawyers active in the "Sagebrush Rebellion," political consultants and various single issue crusaders—and was addressed by most major administration officials, including the president.

Reflecting the "old right" orientation of the ACU and YAF, which were organized in the early '60s to combat communism and the welfare state, social issues were given short shrift. An opening session on Thursday afternoon allowed Jill Gerstenfield of the National Federation of Parents to display her collection of drug paraphernalia, and a closing, sparsely attended Sunday morning workshop was devoted to right-to-life politics. But the political questions about the role of social issues in building a conservative majority obtruded continually during the conference and revealed serious strategic differences among conservatives as they go into the 1982 and 1984 elections.

While all the participants expressed their love and admiration for Ronald Reagan, there was also considerable grumbling and debate about the administration's foreign and economic policy, which was centered on its soaring budget deficits and its policies toward Western Europe and the Soviet Union.

Toward 1982.

In the wake of the 1980 Reagan landslide, many conservatives had visions of a new Republican majority on the order of the Democratic majority Franklin Roosevelt helped create during the '30s. After his 1932 victory, Roosevelt's party increased its congressional majority during the 1934 elections—the last time a party in power has done so in midterm elections. With 435 House seats, 33 Senate seats and 36 governorships up in this year's elections, Reagan administration officials were hoping to win the House and increase the Republican margin elsewhere. Such a victory would demonstrate that a Republican realignment had indeed taken place.

But some Republican strategists have now scaled back their predictions of victory and of realignment. The prospect of the recession lasting through this fall has dimmed their hopes. The swing toward Republican identification among voters, which climaxed during the November 1980 election, has abated significantly. And in Iowa, Minnesota and Michigan, previously popular Republican governors have opted for retirement rather than face voters during the Reagan recession.

At the CPAC conference, several prominent conservative strategists were pessimistic about 1982. Charles Black, a consultant who worked in the Reagan campaign and is now running Robert Dornan's Senate bid in California and Prescott Bush's campaign for Senate in Connecticut, cautioned conservatives not to hold the Reagan administration to the 1934 standard of achievement. "The standard Republicans should keep is not whether they win control of the House but whether they can match the average loss of 15 seats that a party in power suffers or beat it," Black said. Black added that in the Senate, where 21 of 33 contested seats are invitingly held by Demo-

crats, "The real challenge in 1982 is can we make some modest gains—two, three, four, or five seats."

But Black's pessimism was not shared by John "Terry" Dolan, the head of the National Conservative Political Action Conference (NCPAC), which helped defeat George McGovern and other Senate Democrats in 1980, and new right pollster Arthur Finkelstein. Dolan predicted a House takeover and six Senate seats, including that of West Virginia's Robert Byrd, the Democratic Minority Leader.

Finkelstein thought that the 1980 election had climaxed a two-decade trend toward a Republican majority. "Conservatives, who are in an overwhelming majority, are now residing in one party," Finkelstein said. "Now people who call themselves conservatives no longer call themselves Democrats but Republicans." If the GOP could retain its conservative image, Finkelstein guaranteed it a long-term three-to-two edge nationally.

But there was an important "if" in both Dolan's and Finkelstein's predictions: The party and administration will win only if they take a conservative direction. "If the Republican party fails to build a majority in 1982, it will be because the Reagan administration is not conservative enough," Dolan said.

Social issues.

There are important strategic differences between new right leaders like Dolan, Howard Phillips and Paul Weyrich, and Reagan political consultants like Richard Wirthlin and Roger Stone. They all agree that to preserve the Reagan majority, the Republicans will have to retain a coal-

Most of the delegates at the conference gave Haig and Reagan low grades for foreign policy...

ial issues are critical. "The social issues allow us to unite the hard-working blue-collar workers with Republicans. They bring you the extra 6 or 7 percent it takes to win," Weyrich said. Weyrich, who made much of his blue-collar boyhood in Racine, Wisc., derided the Reagan administration's inability to appreciate this. "The social issues aren't big in the country clubs. People sailing down the Potomac sipping champagne don't worry about them," he said.

Weyrich blamed moderate Republican Mary Estil Buchanan's 1980 loss to Colorado Sen. Gary Hart on her support for the ERA and abortion rights, and warned that if Republican candidates steer away from conservative social issues, they will be defeated in 1982. "The rural people in West Virginia don't understand Reaganomics. And frankly if they did, they wouldn't like it," Weyrich said. "If they aren't being told about prayer in the schools, Bobby Byrd is going to be back in the Senate."

But new right leaders, as well as more traditional conservatives, are skeptical about supply-side economics, as evidenced by Weyrich's quip that if the rural poor of West Virginia understood Reaganomics, they would not like it. Weyrich, Phillips and representatives of the Heritage Foundation called for achieving a balanced budget through more cuts in social spending—including social security, Medicare and Medicaid. While Kemp and Stone believe the majority coalition can be preserved through Reaganomics, the new right leaders believe it can be preserved in spite of Reaganomics.

Administration barely passes.

During the conference, *Conservative Digest*, which is published by new right leader Richard Viguerie, polled the delegates about their evaluation of the administration. The administration received a "C—" for its abandonment of the goal of a balanced budget and a "C" for its unwillingness to take a strong stand on "social issues." It received its lowest marks for foreign policy. It was awarded a "D—" for its refusal to declare Poland in default on its loans. Haig was rated the worst cabinet member, and a slim majority favored his being fired. (Defense consultant Seymour Weiss and U.N. Representative Jeane Kirkpatrick were mentioned in conversation as suitable replacements.)

Rep. Phil Crane (R-Ill.) summed up the feelings of most conference participants when he declared that Caspar Weinberger's Defense Department was the administration's "only major success" in foreign policy. "In other areas, the voices in the choir are not singing on



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...and reserved their praise for Caspar Weinberger's Defense Dept.

tion that includes previously Democratic Catholics, blue-collar workers, Southern whites and Jews. Wirthlin, Reagan's pollster, and Stone, who ran the Northeast for Reagan in 1980, argue that the administration's close identification with social issues like abortion and with the Moral Majority's Evangelical Protestantism will hurt it among these constituencies. "It wasn't the evangelical Christian vote that made the difference for Reagan in New York or New Jersey," Stone said in a recent interview.

But the new right leaders think the soc-

The new right leaders acknowledge that the coalition between social and economic conservatives is potentially unstable, but compare it to the Democratic coalition that dominated the South from 1932 to the present. "You had bigots and blacks in the same party," Finkelstein told *In These Times*. "It wasn't comfortable, but they stayed in the same party."

What underlies this difference between new right leaders and other GOP strategists is a difference about policy as well as politics. Stone, for instance, thinks that Buffalo Rep. Jack Kemp's supply-side populism is the key to uniting country club Republicans with blue-collar workers. At the conference, Kemp repeated his faith in the ability of the Reagan tax cuts to achieve prosperity and cautioned conference participants not to become "mesmerized" by budget deficits. "People want to work in this country, and it is up to us to find answers," Kemp said. "I am not in favor of deficits, but I don't worship at the shrine of balanced budgets. The shrine I worship at is full employment."

key," he said.

Crane attacked American compliance with SALT I and II, and American participation in the ongoing Geneva and Madrid talks with the Soviet Union. "These international criminals should be quarantined by the West. You can't negotiate with them," he said. Crane also thought that the U.S. should compromise less with its Western allies. "Consensus is worse than useless if it doesn't meet our interests. If we ruffle a few feathers, then so be it."

Crane attacked the administration's refusal to sell advanced fighters to Taiwan and to support actively Jonas Savimbi's rebel troops in Angola. "Either communism is a threat or it isn't," Crane said. "We can't confuse our allies by making distinctions between good and bad communists."

Many conference participants found even Haig's hardline stance on El Salvador insufficient. There was much talk of a need for blockade of Cuba to stop arms shipments to the rebels. North Carolina

Continued on page 8.