

## IN THESE TIMES



By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

FOR THE LAST DECADE, THE American left has been convinced that it has a reasonable program to cure the society's ills, but that it lacks the political means to put that program across. Not only does it lack organization and numbers, but it also lacks a hookup to what people really care about. Over the last years, the programs have changed—for example, one does not hear much about the Humphrey-Hawkins bill any more—but the gulf between programs and politics has barely narrowed.

This gulf was apparent at a January 13-15 conference of left-wing organizers, politicians and intellectuals held at Washington's posh Shoreham Hotel. The 200 participants, who were invited by the Economic Education Project and included such veterans of left conference-going as Machinists President William Winpisinger, economist Gar Alperovitz and Texas Agricultural Commissioner Jim Hightower, came to discuss "America's Economic Agenda."

Two issues dominated the conference: first, what program the left, or "progressives," should adopt to cure the economy's ills; and second, how that program and the rest of the left's agenda could become the basis of a majority politics in the mid- or late-'80s, if not in 1984.

Speakers who focused on either economics or politics and ignored the other fared best. Those who tried to synthesize the two stumbled into incoherence.

### Baby-boom generation.

There was little disagreement about the state of the economy or about the left's program for its improvement. Most participants agreed that the current recovery is taking place in the context of steady economic decline, which began in the early '70s and has been characterized by the "deindustrialization" of much of the Midwest and East and the impoverishment of the blue-collar middle class. Most expected that 1985 would see a return to recession.

The overriding goal of the left's economic program, as articulated by economist Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison or by *New Republic* contributing editor Bob Kuttner is full employment. The means to achieve it are massive public spending on public works, to be paid for by progressive tax increases and by reductions in the military budget. There was some disagreement at the conference about specifics like the corporate tax, but not about these general points.

To assure long-term growth, the participants favored some form of industrial

## Left grapples with development of a political program

policy. Many of the conference's panels and workshops were devoted to explaining the left's version of industrial policy. Robert Reich, the author of *The New American Frontier*, distinguished between the "corporatist" economic planning favored by New York financier Felix Rohatyn and AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland and a "democratic industrial policy."

Besides insisting that democratic industrial planners extract a *quid pro quo* from industries they aid, Reich did not spell out how a democratic model would be different from Rohatyn's fantasies. But other participants spoke, or have written of having an elected board or a board appointed and subject to recall by elected officials and having local and state components of the national board.

The major political speeches at the weekend were given by Pat Caddell, Jimmy Carter's pollster and political adviser, and Alan Baron, editor of the *Baron Report*. Both Caddell and Baron have been associated with the center-left rather than the left of American politics. It wasn't clear whether their participation at the Shoreham boded well for left Democrats or poorly for Caddell and Baron.

Caddell's speech was easily the most controversial and widely discussed at the

### Washington conference tries to find a socially responsible and politically viable program for a new left politics.

conference. He contended that the key group in American politics is now the baby-boom generation, born during World War II. This group, which he characterized as "fiscally conservative and socially liberal," has yet to decide where "it fits" in American politics.

After the 1980 election, Caddell said, the baby-boom generation helped the Republican Party close the gap on the Democrats in party preference polls, but once it saw that Reaganomics was not simply anti-big government, but also pro-James Watt and the Moral Majority, it signed off the Republican ticket.

According to Caddell, the gender gap, the growing interest in politics among minority voters, the effects of the Reagan recession on the Republican Midwest and the shifting allegiance of the baby-boom generation could cause problems for Reagan in 1984. So could low inflation, which makes the voters think about the future rather than the past or present. "If you had a genuine campaign on the future in 1984," Caddell said, "Ronald Reagan would be very vulnerable."

### Left-wing buzzwords.

Caddell cited several themes that he thought pertained to a campaign on the future: "revitalizing the national economy" ("the future is in jeopardy"), deficits ("the future is being stolen from our children"), "revitalizing community life" and the "national interest" in contrast to the "special interests." But Caddell warned that neither the Democratic Party nor the leading presidential candidates were set to wage such a campaign.

"At this moment, the special interests have got the Democratic Party by the throat," Caddell said. Clearly referring to the AFL-CIO, Caddell warned that "if it goes on, the Democrats run the risk of becoming like the British Labour Party."

Caddell did not talk about any of the presidential candidates, but he clearly had Ohio Senator John Glenn and former Vice-President Walter Mondale in mind when he warned of the Democrats adopting "neo-Reaganism" (Glenn) or running on "nostalgia" (Mondale). "If

the choice is between a genuine and an ersatz conservative, the genuine always wins," Caddell said. "If the issue is our past versus his, our interest groups versus his, we will lose."

The conference participants seemed captivated by Caddell in spite of his thinly veiled attack on the AFL-CIO and his vagueness about program. Perhaps they liked him because he convinced them that Reagan could be beaten in 1984. Perhaps they also liked him because Caddell, in talking about the baby-boom generation, was talking about them—in his analysis, they were no longer detached individuals looking for a constituency but the vanguard of a political generation.

But Caddell's speech left some questions unanswered: first, who precisely belongs to the baby-boom generation? Is it only the white college-educated "bean sprout eaters," as Hightower phrased it, or are 35-to-40-year-old blacks and blue-collar whites also included? If so, is it correct to characterize the generation as "fiscally conservative"? Is it even correct to characterize the bean-sprout eaters, who grew up during the war on poverty and the civil rights movement, as fiscally conservative?

Second, is the AFL-CIO a "special interest" and does its participation in the Democratic Party threaten that party with marginality? Is Caddell, who is understandably obsessed with 1984, focusing too much on initial public relations effects of labor's politicization?

Third, what is a campaign about the future? Was Reagan's 1980 campaign, in which he promised to stem America's decline, about the future or the past? Caddell's themes suggest one politician above all—former California Gov. Jerry Brown sloughing through the New Hampshire snow in 1980 talking about deficits as a lien upon the future and the promise of space. But Brown, original though he was, got nowhere.

Caddell's eloquence was achieved partly by avoiding fact and policy and dwelling in the realm of political appearance. But other conference participants tried to find a way in which their analysis and programs—full employment economics and industrial policy—could be sold politically. The results were not pleasant. Men and women of mature minds suddenly found themselves mouthing clichés and buzzwords.

Alperovitz, the left's unofficial economist in Washington, typified the dilemma. He called for a "five-year economic plan that would be taken to the public as a vehicle that can be talked about." (One imagines Bukharin on the hustings.) To make it palatable or interesting, Alperovitz urged that the program be adorned by a "common vision" and that it be "engendered by and rooted in a set of values rooted in community" and that it contain a "longterm vision of community."

But neither Alperovitz nor any of the other speakers indicated what a long-term vision might consist of. Some speakers suggested that full employment might help "communities" in the Midwest, but no speaker that I heard discussed what the concept of community might mean outside of Youngstown. Do suburbanites live in communities?

The only attempt to define a political philosophy appropriate to the left's program came in a paper written for the conference by economist and political consultant Richard Parker. It was filled with useful economic analyses, but his attempts to relate these analyses and programs to "values...embedded in the long course of our human past" were sometimes painful to read.

Like an advertiser trying to bend popular concepts to private purposes ("The Pepsi Revolution"), Parker construed freedom as the freedom to have a job, community as "global community" and efficiency as what "enhances or diminishes equality." Parker's analysis seemed to beg the question it set out to answer—namely, how the left's program speaks to

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# IN SHORT

## The other Chavez

Despite declarations of its independence, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is quickly becoming the newest bulwark for Reagan's domestic program. The recently-reconstituted panel first cancelled a study tracing the effect of budget cuts on federal student aid to black and Hispanic colleges and then stopped the release of a study showing the income and educational disparity between blacks and whites in Alabama. As Chairman Clarence Pendleton succinctly put it: "This is not a commission to deal with the problems of the poor. It is not a commission to deal with minorities. It is a commission to study civil rights problems of people, irrespective of pigmentation, gender, fiscal condition or religious persuasion."

So to correct the havoc wrought by the previous commission that tried to take into consideration the messier factors of race and sex in the civil rights quotient, staff director Linda Chavez recently proposed two new studies: one would review the "radical" idea of comparable worth with an eye to the "possibility that white men are being discriminated against in the workplace" and the other will "study the general decline in academic standards that coincide with the advent of affirmative action in universities." All of these studies are to further the commission's goal of a "colorblind nation"—one that is enlightened enough to realize that "economic and social disadvantage among minorities are not necessarily the result of discrimination" but could be due to "other social factors."

## Reading the color chart

While the Commission on Civil Rights was busily devising ways to protect whites from discrimination, the Chicago Urban League published a report last November that reinforced the "unenlightened" notion that to be black or Hispanic in a major U.S. city still means less income, less chances to finish high school and a greater probability of unemployment. While no surprise to anyone (perhaps even Linda Chavez, *et al.*), the statistics painted the income disparity between these minority groups and whites in sharp relief. At \$12,716, the average black income in Chicago is half that of the average white. San Francisco-Oakland and Washington, D.C., follow closely on Chicago's heels with income differences in the \$11,000 range. Although in general Hispanics fare slightly better than blacks in the income category, in Boston they have the lowest average income (\$9,586) and the highest differential (\$13,661). Apparently life in the Northeast is especially cruel for Hispanics, with New York and Philadelphia capturing second and third place in the income gap.

## Too high a price...

Two weeks ago the Justice Department also lined up against comparable worth by supporting a recent Washington State court appeal of Judge Jack E. Tanner's momentous comparable worth decision last December (see *In These Times*, Jan. 18). Judge Tanner found that the state practiced "direct, overt and institutionalized" discrimination against its women employees and directed the state to pay its women workers up to \$1 billion in back pay. William Reynolds, assistant U.S. attorney general for civil rights, objected to the decision because of the difficulty of assessing the value of jobs and the difficulty of equalizing salaries for jobs determined to be equal in value.

"Ending discrimination costs money," acknowledged Winn Newman, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) lawyer in the Washington state case. "But no one would dare raise that as a reason for continuing to pay blacks less than whites." Although still reviewing the case, Reynolds promises that the Justice Department will fight Tanner's decision, if necessary.

## Full coverage

On January 19, 10 days after the Board of Supervisors approved two rent-control ordinances for San Francisco (see *In These Times*, Jan. 18), Mayor Feinstein vetoed the more controversial vacancy control measure that would have imposed rent control on vacant apartments. The San Francisco Housing and Tenants Council (SFHTC) is aggressively lobbying the board for a veto override—only one vote is needed but success seems unlikely given the three intransigent boardmembers who voted against the ordinance. In the meantime, the SFHTC has proposed a short-term legislative program to strengthen eviction protection and serve as a stop-gap until a full vacancy control can be won. One group in the SFHTC coalition, the Affordable Housing Alliance, is taking another tack: they're suing Feinstein for "conflict of interest," hoping that her veto will be judged an "improper political practice." Feinstein owns a residential hotel that would be affected by the vacancy control ordinance, which doesn't wash well with the California Fair Political Practices Act. In any event, the tenacious San Francisco tenants groups seem to have all the angles covered in their fight for fair housing.

—Beth Maschinot

## Barbarians hold Chicago Sun-Times captive

CHICAGO—How long will it take Rupert Murdoch to bring sleaze to the Chicago *Sun-Times* was the unstated question of *In These Times*' Inside Story of January 18. The resounding answer: no time at all.

The January 22 *Sun-Times* marked its downward slide to *New York Post*-like journalism with blaring headlines of "Rabbi Hit in Sex Slavery Suit" and "Turncoat Royko Disgusting Creep" and replete with colorful teasers ("Katherine Hepburn's New Passion"). Not content to only tamper with headlines, it

also included a fawning four-page spread on Murdoch decrying the way other papers "smugly dismissed" him as if he were "some kind of yahoo." The article (which originally appeared in the January 30 issue of *Fortune* magazine) went on to defend Murdoch's rampaging entrepreneurship as the natural outcome of a man with "zest and a shrewd sense of the bottom line."

Murdoch was also described as a man with "engagingly iconoclastic attitudes" in a profession in which many members "prefer to think of themselves as above

the mere marketplace." A few *Sun-Times* staffers who requested anonymity report that Murdoch has already taken steps to bring those market forces in line: he imported two outside consultants ("barbarians" in staff parlance)—Charles Wilson of the *Times* of London and Roger Wood, editor of the *New York Post*—to shape the paper into one that is "circulation-led" rather than "advertising-led." This means the emphasis is on journalism that sells newspapers to the masses rather than on quality reporting that attracts advertisers.

Because these changes are being made in an autocratic fashion Woods and Wilson have been party to what is rumored to be the second part of Murdoch's overhaul: resignations through intimidation and outright firings. In a January 18 meeting of the cityside staff and Murdoch-appointed editor Robert Page, an insider notes that a reasonable question surfaced: "How will we keep our black readership if the *Sun-Times* goes conservative?" Reportedly city desk editor Alan Mutter wisecracked, "Zone the editorial page"—or, in other words, write it one way for black distribution and another for the more conservative white ethnics.

Later, Mutter asked Page whether it was true that Murdoch, upon reaching the *Sun-Times*, had asked if there'd "ever been a Catholic paper in Chicago?" Page denied the rumor.

Two days later Mutter gave his two-week notice, whereupon Wilson and Wood pressured Page to oust him immediately. Managing editor Gregory Favre stepped in to reason with Page—

## Minority employees are validly alarmed by Murdoch's past hiring record.

arguing that "we can't put a paper out without a city desk editor, in all fairness to others"—and Wilson and Wood had Favre fired.

So far, one source estimates that 27 staffers have departed, and more are expected to leave in the next two weeks. It's likely Murdoch welcomes the exodus, since a staff reduced by resignations gets rid of troublemakers as well as saves money.

Black and Hispanic staffers feel particularly vulnerable to Murdoch tactics, aware that the Murdoch-owned *Post* employs only two black editorial staffers on a paper with 215 employees. When a black reporter quit the *Boston Herald* and wasn't replaced, Murdoch told the inquiring staff that he "couldn't find a replacement."

The chaos at the *Sun-Times* is likely to continue as long as Wilson and Wood retain their "temporary" consulting positions.

As one editorial staffer ruefully jokes, "Since the Murdoch takeover we tick off the days—day 16 of the *Sun-Times* hostage—but everybody who can leave is leaving."

—Beth Maschinot



## Peace letter proliferation

Eight months have passed since the Catholic bishops released their touted pastoral on war and peace (see *In These Times*, May 11, 1983). Unlike many bishop's letters that receive only a cursory reading by pastors or teachers, this one is destined to be read and studied by thousands of grassroots Catholics.

In mid-January, the Education Department of the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) held a four-day symposium for 147 heads of diocesan peace and justice offices and social concerns agencies. The goal of the symposium: to turn theory into practice by first "making sure the nuclear challenge is

understood in the public mind," according to Archbishop Joseph Bernardin, head of the committee that drafted the pastoral. Bernardin emphasized that the pastoral is a tool of study for Catholics: "This is not a document cast in stone."

John Walsh, consultant for a Catholic publishing house, sees the fact that "any single document is taken so seriously and promoted so widely—the USCC is even spending \$30,000 to make videotapes of the symposium to use nationwide—is unprecedented in the history of bishops' social justice statements."

The department is also developing an educational kit on the pastoral. The address for information about the kit and other resources is the Clearinghouse for the War and Peace Pastoral, USCC, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005.

—Beth Maschinot





## FRANCE

By Diana Johnstone

## PARIS

**P**EUGEOT'S TALBOT AUTO FACTORY in Poissy, west of Paris, began the new year by producing the worst scenes of working-class division of the whole current recession. Split along the lines of race, nationality, status and union membership, strikers and non-strikers hurled bolts, tools, car parts at each other in a display of fury. More than 50 men were injured.

As each wounded North African striker was carried out of the factory on a stretcher, non-striking French workers in the parking lot shouted, "To the ovens!" or "Throw him in the Seine!"

Riot police finally separated the combatants and closed the plant.

French industry is in trouble, and massive layoffs are expected this year in automobile manufacture, steel, coal mines and shipyards. Everyone was watching Talbot-Poissy for signs of how the layoffs will be handled by management, the government and the unions. The harbinger could hardly have been worse.

Talbot-Poissy is not a typical factory. It epitomizes the worst in French labor-management relations. But the confusion with which the case was handled is all too indicative of the backbiting rivalries undermining the left government and labor movement in France.

Last July Peugeot announced plans to lay off 2,905 workers and cut back auto production at its Poissy Talbot plant. Talbot has been losing money since Peugeot bought it (then Simca) from Chrysler. Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy and Employment Minister Jack Ralite, a Communist, obtained a six-month delay for a report to be made on the plant's personnel and on possible ways to save the laid-off workers from unemployment, notably through vocational retraining. The French Communist Party (PCF) is particularly keen on vocational retraining, which it sees as the best way to keep the working class intact during the desired transition of French industry to a more advanced level of technology.

The report submitted in October did not encourage those in favor of the retraining solution, since it indicated that the assembly line workers to be laid off were mostly North Africans who did not speak French and were illiterate even in Arabic, only 12 percent having finished grammar school in their own countries. A third were Moroccan. They were mostly men in their 40s who had worked more than 10 years as unskilled assembly line workers and could not readily contemplate retraining.

But Ralite was anxious to work out a social plan that could be a model for future restructuring.

On December 7, hearing of forthcoming layoffs, several hundred assembly line workers went on strike, occupying their shop floors at the Poissy plant. Tension rose rapidly. French factories employ an unusually high ratio of foremen. According to unionists, the reactionary Peugeot family management preferentially hired veterans of the French colonial forces in Algeria to oversee unskilled North African workers. For many years, the atmosphere was reminiscent at times of a barracks and, at times, of a prison, with the bosses' union, CSL (*Confederation des Syndicats Libres*) running the show.

After Mitterrand's victory in 1981, the Communist-led General Confederation of Labor (CGT) succeeded in organizing foreign workers, long intimidated by CSL toughs, in one auto factory after another. Government labor inspectors entered them to supervise elections for factory committees. At Talbot Poissy, CSL and CGT continued to coexist, with the animosity between them continually threatening to flare up. Recent elections showed CSL influence at 45 percent, mostly foremen and technicians, CGT support at 42 percent and 8 percent for the CFDT (Democratic French Labor Confederation).

Scarcely had the CGT triumphantly organized foreign auto workers than it was threatened by layoffs. Employees who began the December 7 wildcat strike had little union experience. CGT leaders, aware of the explosive potential of a clash between a minority of striking foreign workers and a majority of native workers opposed to the strike, sought a compromise.

On December 17 Mauroy's government announced it had reached an agreement with Peugeot to cut the number of workers laid off from 2,905 to 1,905, with a promise that appropriate measures would be taken on behalf of the workers laid off. Ralite called the agreement "interesting," and the head of the CGT metal workers, Andre Sainjon, immediately issued an approving statement.

The guiding concern in CGT and PCF policy is to preserve French industrial capacity, to "produce French." Thus the CGT slogan was to "save Talbot," and Sainjon reacted favorably to indications that Peugeot had agreed to keep producing Talbot cars at Poissy and even to in-

vest in modernizing the plant.

Moroccan workers were not at all consoled that losing their jobs might help "save Talbot," and the strike went on. In the factory, CGT militants tried to get control of the situation. The local CGT secretary, Nora Trehel, accepted 1,905 layoffs as inevitable and pressed management to negotiate compensation case by case. But meanwhile, Peugeot was washing its hands of the whole matter, preparing to sell its whole Talbot division for a symbolic one franc to the Orleans Auto Repair Company, SORA, a big garage.

It looked as if Peugeot had successfully passed the buck to Mauroy, who passed it to Ralite, who passed it to the CGT, where the problem ended up in the hands of Nora Trehel. From a working-class family, mayor of Lille, Mauroy is of the old-fashioned Socialist school used to dealing with the CGT. He symbolizes the "union of the left." The PCF is apparently ready to show it can be useful to Mauroy at a time when President Mitterrand is under growing pressure to scrap "union of the left," throw the PCF out of the government and create a centrist coalition. The PCF can best help Mauroy by getting the CGT to back up the deals he makes with industrial management.

National CGT policy is to oppose all layoffs on the grounds (increasingly less convincing) that industrial modernization need not entail job losses and that layoffs are usually not to modernize but to shut down a branch (usually true). So at Talbot Poissy, Nora Trehel abruptly found herself obliged to defend a decision contrary to her union's well-known position.

The CFDT also ended up contradicting itself. On the national level, the CFDT accepts the need for abolishing jobs in order to restructure the economy. But at Talbot Poissy the small new CFDT section, headed by idealistic engineer Jean-Pierre Noual, rejected all layoffs and sided with the minority of foreign workers who carried on the strike. The CFDT local in Poissy is far to the left of national CFDT leadership.

On New Year's eve, the government sent riot police to clear out the factory, but when work resumed on January 3 the strikers were back, occupying part of the plant. Confusion mounted. The union locals were not altogether sure what the striking workers wanted. Trehel's and Noual's speeches at meetings in the fac-

### A striker at Puissy's Talbot car plant in a January 5 confrontation

tory had to be translated into Arabic. The CGT tried to steer the strikers onto demands for job training and recycling to be negotiated with the bosses, but the bosses would not negotiate.

Not all the fired workers were taking part in the militant occupation. Some of those involved were from outside (Trottskyist agitators, said the press) and the majority of the plant's 17,000 employees did not support the work stoppage and wanted to get back on the job. Trehel tried to get the strikers to recognize that they would have to modify their demands to correspond to the unfavorable relationship of forces. She suggested a referendum to decide whether to end the strike.

The CFDT sided with the few hundred holdouts who wanted to carry on the strike until all the layoffs were rescinded. The CFDT's reason was that the government and management had taken a decision over the heads of the workers, without consulting the unions, at least not the CFDT. The CFDT accused the CGT of conniving with the government. The CFDT, in turn, fielded numerous accusations of turning to extremism in an attempt to regain popularity lost in recent elections. The CFDT sensed that its image has suffered from being too closely identified with the Socialists and the government, especially Finance Minister Jacques Delors. Recently CFDT leaders from Edmond Maire on down have begun displaying their independence by loud attacks on the government. In fact, Maire's friends in the Socialist Party are only those who, like Delors and Michel Rocard, are called the "second left," who see no need for the union with the Communists, on which the "first left" insists.

As for the holdout strikers, many apparently felt they had nothing to lose. They may fear that, in a time of deepening unemployment and a mounting rightist campaign against foreign workers, if they lost their job at Talbot they would never find another. Some raised the idea of being paid a bonus to give up their social security rights and return to their native countries. But others wanted to stay.

Amidst this uncertainty, uncontrollable violence broke out in the factory on January 5, between the old bosses' union, CSL, and the strikers. Out in the parking lot, held off by riot police, French workers chanted "We want to work" and sang the Marseillaise. Finally, it was Jean-Pierre Noual—the CFDT leader who had encouraged the holdouts—who, shaken and frightened by the violence, called the riot police. "You should have listened to me," Nora Trehel lectured the strikers. "You fell in all of management's traps."

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