

IN THESE TIMES



Walter Mondale scrambles for unity

By David Moberg

SAN FRANCISCO

FEW MYTHS ARE AS POWERFUL, protean and persistent as the American dream, that catch-all imagery of a land of ever-faithful individuals scrambling upward, counting on pluck and luck to "get ahead" of wherever they have been. True enough to inspire hope, vacuous enough to encompass all goals, it encourages those who fail to blame themselves, not the rules of the game.

It is an old and a popular story. But it is no more accurate for being venerable and loved. Now, with plastic flags aflutter in San Francisco's Moscone Convention Center, the Democrats and Walter Mondale have offered this muddled dream as their vision of the future, attempting to fight Ronald Reagan for the White House over who can tell the old tales more convincingly.

The real dream is just that: winning the presidency. Despite polls showing him far behind Reagan, Mondale may realize his own personal version of the American dream, but if he does it will not be because of who he is. More likely it will occur in spite of him. If there is any unity to the Democratic constituencies, it is the artificial unity of opposition to Reagan. If there is any passion to the campaign, it will come from that antagonism and from the excitement generated by many movements—of blacks, women, Hispanics, environmentalists, peace advocates, union members and others—who find Mondale an acceptable vehicle for their own issues and interests.

There was more excitement at the con-

vention about vice-presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro than about Mondale himself. She was the perfect symbol to fit the campaign theme. A daughter of Italian immigrants, raised by her mother under modest circumstances, Ferraro worked to put herself through law school before marrying a successful landlord and raising a family, then launching a political career from the "Archie Bunker" district of Queens. This may be symbolic politics, representing the theme of opening locked doors.

But symbols can have power. Democrats from all over the country hoped that as both symbol and as an energetic, down-home campaigner she would in-

spire not only women but other groups—certainly Italians and other European ethnics, maybe young people and blacks—to gamble on voting for the Democratic ticket.

As a liberal member of Congress who has managed to combine traditional female roles with a career and holds a generally feminist outlook, Ferraro also legitimates women candidates and women's issues, giving them a new seriousness. She may also nudge women's groups more toward the economic and political concerns of working-class women.

But the reality behind the American dream is that most progress for ordinary Americans has not come by pluck and luck, individual hard work and merit, and all the other traditional values invoked by Mondale, Ferraro and others—as well as Ronald Reagan, whose version of the story was derided as social Darwinism by New York Gov. Mario Cuomo. It has come from social movements, often originating outside routine political processes, and challenging the rules, not simply following them as Ferraro said in her acceptance speech.

Jesse Jackson's candidacy is more obviously a product of long, continuing social pressure. Twenty years ago blacks were beating on the door of the Democratic Party to have the Freedom Democratic Party seated for Mississippi. Despite the continued racial blinders that kept many whites from voting for him, Jackson's presence was testimony to a truer version of the American dream: organized political struggle can bring change, however slow it may seem, however incomplete it remains.

The irony is that Mondale has chosen

as the central theme of his campaign an attractive mythology that is so at odds with the message of the movements that may ultimately bring him his own individual success. Yet much as he depends on a renewed black political movement, a broad women's movement, the nuclear freeze movement, new stirrings within the labor movement and opponents of U.S. overseas military adventures that represent the popular left in the country, his rhetoric is largely conservative.

That is not necessarily an utterly damning quality. Often radical change is brought about in the defense of traditional values. In any case, it is a disaster for the left to permit images of family, patriotism and faith to be appropriated and interpreted by the right for its ends.

Troubling questions.

But there are some more troubling questions raised by Mondale's rhetoric. Practically, will his conservative American dream theme pose a sufficiently strong contrast to Reagan's own version to motivate the voters he needs? More substantially, does his invocation of the old values bring along many of the old policies—or perhaps no clear policy at all?

The Democrats at times seem schizophrenic, perhaps suffering from multiple personalities. It is easy to make the case that the party platform this year is at best vague and at worst fairly conservative: even national health insurance has been dropped, military spending will continue to grow and there is little commitment to use public powers to create jobs, let alone share the work through reduced hours. But for all of its limitations, the platform does advocate, beyond a freeze, a long

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CONVENTION

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IN SHORT

Settled in Minnesota

The Minnesota Nurses Association ratified a new contract by an overwhelming 3,014 to 37 vote on July 9, ending their 39-day strike against 16 Twin Cities hospitals, reports Mordecai Spektor. The largest strike of nurses in U.S. history resulted in a contract providing protection against layoffs and hours reductions for senior nurses. The hospitals agreed that new nurses would not be hired until nurses on layoff were recalled. The nurses obtained an 8 percent wage increase over the next two years, with a pay increase to be negotiated in the third year. A few nurses were recalled immediately, but it is expected to take weeks before most of them are recalled, and hospital administrators said that lost business from the strike could result in no callbacks for many nurses.

BRAC branches out

The Amtrak System Division No. 250 of the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks (BRAC) was born July 9 in Rockville, Md. The new Amtrak Division is a landmark victory for 3,500 reservations and station agents, redcaps, commissary workers, office clerks, porters and waiters formerly represented by BRAC's Allied Services Division.

A two-year petition campaign for the more autonomous Amtrak Division succeeded this spring when the BRAC executive board acted on survey results that showed by a 17-1 margin that Amtrak workers were ready for their own division. New general chairman is Mike Young of Florence, S.C., and Joel Parker of Oakland is general secretary-treasurer. Parker and Bill Danby of Chicago are vice general chairmen. But as the union surges, Amtrak management reels. A House subcommittee will hold a hearing July 30 in Chicago on mass charges of irregularities in discipline as well as race and age discrimination. The next issue of *In These Times* will report on these hearings.

Red squad rebuff

Late last month a federal court jury in Chicago found unconstitutional a successful plan by the Chicago Police Intelligence Unit to cripple a Puerto Rican civil rights group, reports Chip Berlet. The jury awarded \$60,000 to the Spanish Action Committee of Chicago (SACC) after hearing evidence that in 1966, Chicago Police "Red Squad" agents had infiltrated SACC, manipulated a split, convinced members to resign and then set up a competing organization in Chicago's Puerto Rican community. The new group, called the American Spanish Speaking Peoples Association (ASSPA), was then provided with a press release that denounced SACC as Communist-infiltrated. The resulting media coverage virtually destroyed SACC with red-baiting.

According to original Red Squad documents provided to the jury, the police implemented a plan to "destroy SACC, its leaders and its community influence." SACC attorney Richard Gutman told the jury the city planned to destroy SACC because it disagreed with its political views, not because it was engaged in illegal activity. City attorney Peter Fitzpatrick argued the police were merely trying to prevent violence in the Puerto Rican community, which had experienced several civil disturbances in the mid-'60s. Fitzpatrick asked the jury if they would rather have police facing rioters running through streets lit by the "glimmer of burning cars," or use the more subtle tactics employed against SACC. But Gutman argued that if the police had evidence of wrongdoing they should have made arrests, not covertly disrupted the group. Gutman added that, in any case, there was no evidence of illegal activity on the part of SACC or its members. The jury agreed and found the city liable for damages, but didn't fine the police officers involved.

Sidewalk intimidation

While the Democrats were inside San Francisco's Moscone Center hammering away at a platform last week, hundreds of people were half a mile away protesting the party's connections to military buildup. Said Kate Raphael of the Livermore Action Group: "We want people to know that Mondale is on the board of directors for Control Data, which makes parts for the cruise missile. And also that banks like the Bank of America—which gives hundreds of thousands of dollars to repressive regimes around the world—gave \$100,000 to the Democrats for the convention." Ninety-five protesters were arrested for blocking a sidewalk, the usual misdemeanor charge for an action of this kind, and for conspiracy to block a sidewalk, which is a felony. Said Raphael, "I guess they could slap us in jail for five years, but somehow I doubt it. It's just one more form of intimidation to keep us off the streets."

Lesson in incomprehensibility

Last month New York Judge Jack Weinstein ordered the U.S. government to remove the difficult language from Medicare forms so the elderly can better understand why their claims were turned down. Weinstein castigated the language used in the claims as "bureaucratic gobbledygook, jargon, double-talk, a form of officialese, federalese and insurance double-speak. It does not qualify as English." Later in the decision he noted that the writing was "on the level of a college senior."

—Beth Maschinot

New nominee divides IAF

WASHINGTON—There they go again. The Inter-American Foundation (IAF) used to be a development agency with a difference, a little bit of idealism in the knout-and-knuckles world of foreign aid. Its premise was simple: since poverty is an undeniable source of Latin American unrest, put small amounts of money directly into the hands of Latin American poor who are organizing to help themselves—co-operatives, mutual aid societies, even things like theater groups and radio stations (see *In These Times*, Feb. 8).

The IAF was insulated from petty power plays by its part-private, part-government board and by its mandate to stay out of local or international politics.

And then came Reagan.

Last December, the Reagan appointees on the IAF board, now a majority, fired Peter Bell, long-time president and an impeccable administrator. Finding nothing specific wrong with Bell, the board said personal differences made them want to choose their own kind of person.

Congress—including Dante Fascell, now head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and father of the IAF—investigated charges of a coup and ended by asking the IAF board for a unanimous vote for the next president, as has been the precedent.

It's taken until now, but the Reagan-era board members have finally come up with someone they think will fill Bell's shoes.

Her name is Deborah Szekely, founder and president of Golden Door enterprises, dubbed in her resume as "the first fitness resorts since those of the Roman empire." At the Golden Door you can lose unwanted adipose tissue for a mere \$2,500 a week.

The entrepreneur who built a million-dollar empire out of the body fashions of the rich is excited by the challenge. It's time, she believes, to share a little or,



IAF nominee Deborah Szekely runs a fitness resort and has no experience in Latin American affairs.

as she puts it, to give the poor "their dreams."

Szekely claims she's qualified to deal in Latin American affairs because in her indefatigable charity work (which she does, she says, as a "catalyst to her growth") she convinced two foundations to expand their programs "to Mexico and from there to Latin America." She also thinks she'll get along with Latin Americans because "Hispanics are wonderful with older women."

But does she understand the complex world of politics and government, the maelstrom of power through which the IAF's people-to-people projects are threaded? She ought to. In her part-time job at the U.S. Information Agency—one of Reagan's favorite non-military agencies—she heads the private sector programs. And she's a political veteran. Not only did she run (unsuccessfully) for Congress in 1982, she has been a

high-visibility Republican Party activist in every election since 1976. In fact, in 1982 she was regent of the National Federation of Republican Women.

Szekely's candidacy has managed to polarize the board along political lines. Four (of five) Reagan appointees present at a June 15 board meeting enthusiastically supported her. And the two remaining Carter-era appointees thumbed her down.

In the days before Reagan, that would have meant going back to the search committee. But in March, the board majority ruled that if one person dissented, the board would negotiate for 30 days and then vote again, accepting a majority vote. Then at the June 15 meeting the board majority decided that rule would apply if two people dissented. The majority will rule on Szekely's nomination this week.

The IAF's alarmed supporters are looking to Dante Fascell to see if the powerful committee chairman will act to save his own creation. And they are also eyeing the House sub-committee on Western Hemisphere affairs, whose chairman Michael Barnes believes that a majority-vote president "will not be credible to Congress, to the Latin American institutions the foundation supports or to the American public." With the incredible about to happen, Fascell and Barnes are on the spot to rescue the one small dream of inter-American aid that actually came true—for a while.

—©Pat Aufderheide

Contract bid rocks Monitor

WASHINGTON—The office of the *Multinational Monitor* (MM)—the Ralph Nader-owned monthly known for solid reporting on the abuses of multinational corporations—has been ringing with charges of abuse closer to home these past few months. Though the immediate battle is between Nader and ex-editor

