

CONGRESS

Morrison learns to make dissent sound patriotic

This is the fourth in a series of articles following Rep. Bruce Morrison during his first congressional term.

By Paul Bass

NEW HAVEN, CT

RONALD REAGAN'S WASHINGTON hasn't changed Bruce Morrison's mind about the nuclear freeze or the not-so-covert war against Nicaragua's government. But it has driven home a rhetorical lesson: when you knock the president's military policies, do so in the name of Uncle Sam.

You can hear it in Morrison's speeches or read it in his public statements. Freezing the arms race, the Third District Democrat says, is essential for our national security—lest Americans find ourselves at the mercy of "trigger-happy" Soviets. Yet unlike many Congress members who voted for the freeze to placate constituents, Morrison hasn't turned around and voted for new weapons systems. Nor has he toned down his criticism of U.S. Central American policy or the stationing of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe.

Those issues are central in this year's bitter rematch between Morrison and former Republican Rep. Lawrence DeNardis, who is a staunch Reagan supporter. Morrison announced his bid for re-election on February 13.

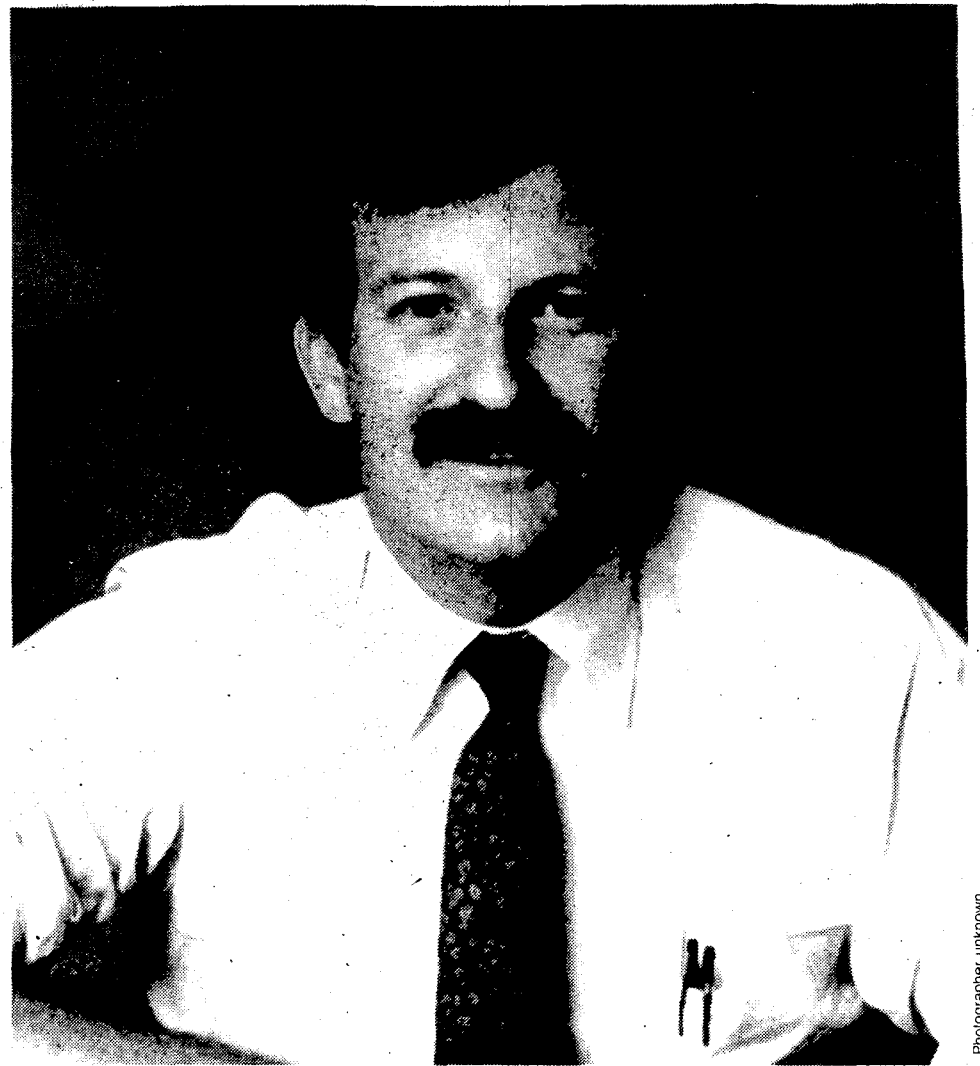
President Reagan and his supporters have called such opponents as Morrison Communist dupes. In turn, the opponents have tried to make dissent sound patriotic—an important and delicate task that Morrison has mastered, according to Greg Weaver, who monitors foreign policy issues on Capitol Hill for the watchdog group Americans for Democratic Action.

"It's more a matter of style than anything else," Weaver told *In These Times*. "He's done it in a very careful and responsible way. He doesn't sound un-American or in favor of increased Cuban influence. He said the MX is stupid on its own merits."

As a result, Weaver said, Morrison has already emerged in his first term as one of Reagan's most consistent and effective foreign and military policy foes in Congress.

The debate over the MX last fall provided a good example of Morrison's approach. In his October newsletter sent to Third District constituents, he linked the upcoming vote on the MX missile to the Soviet downing of Korean Airliner flight 007—much as Reagan himself did in a national address, when he successfully made a vote for the MX seem tantamount to a vote against the downing of the airliner.

Morrison picked up on Reagan's strategy. The section in his newsletter began



Photographer unknown

by excoriating the "Soviets' brutal attack. ...Americans are angry, shaken, frustrated. Some say the tragedy shows that we need to 'get tough' with the Soviets by building newer, bigger weapons systems," he wrote. But, he continued, further development of first-strike nuclear weapons will make a nuclear war seem winnable: "Surely trigger-happy Soviet pilots and military leaders are the last people we want to have first-strike weapons, with only seconds in which to make a decision to launch them."

Similarly, Morrison had Reagan's tactics in mind after last fall's U.S. invasion of Grenada. While most Democrats supported Reagan's invasion in fear of taking an unpopular stand during a "crisis," Morrison condemned the action at a rally on the New Haven Green the same week.

"There are those who will say, 'These are times to stand with the president,'" he told the 300 demonstrators present that day, referring as well to Reagan's commitment of troops in Lebanon. "But it is our obligation to speak out when we think the country is on the wrong path."

One of those people "standing behind the president" was, as usual, Lawrence DeNardis. While Morrison still has almost \$40,000 in campaign debts to pay off from 1982, DeNardis has aggressively sought Republican support and has repeatedly painted Morrison as unpatriotic in the hopes of winning back his seat in November.

Morrison's re-election bid has also been plagued by a slow start. As of last week he still had no campaign manager. And although the Democratic Party establishment is firmly behind him this time, it's unclear how hard the grassroots groups that enabled him to capture his seat in 1982 will work for his 1984 campaign.

Even Reagan himself, in claiming that the Soviet Union runs the freeze movement, has shown more restraint than DeNardis has. DeNardis has released a statement accusing Morrison of "knee-jerk criticism of everything the U.S. is doing abroad to protect itself and the free world from Soviet-Cuban-Arab/PLO-generated terrorism, subversion, sabotage and violence that threatens to undermine the open societies of the world."

DeNardis went on to say: "The major conflict of our age is the struggle between aggressive totalitarianism and the free way of life. And Bruce Morrison will invariably attack the U.S. for having the will, determination and patience to resist our adversaries, who in our absence would make their own arrangements in ways that would make the world a more

Freeze Voter '84 considers his re-election one of the nation's most crucial races.

dangerous place."

For his part, Morrison downplays attacks on his patriotism. He says he does consider it "important to remind people" that democracy entails the right to express disagreement with government policy, since opponents such as DeNardis have questioned the patriotic nature of such dissent. But despite the Reagans and the DeNardises, Morrison maintains that the American public has grown much more receptive over the years to challenging notions of national security and national interests.

"Since 80 percent of the people agree with the freeze, Reagan has a hard time calling them all unpatriotic," Morrison says. "So he calls them dupes. We remember that from the '50s. Some people may be swayed by McCarthyist tactics—but I don't think most people will."

Marta Daniels agrees. A nuclear freeze campaign coordinator in Connecticut, Daniels believes Reagan has made the "McCarthyite tactics" of a few seem more legitimate now but that freeze advocates like Morrison have succeeded in convincing most people that "peace is patriotic."

"Anybody—let alone Bruce Morrison—who has those opinions and is articulate about them, will be attacked," Daniels says. "And the attack is always on patriotism. But Bruce has been very consistent in advocating sane policies to prevent nuclear war."

Still, some Reagan opponents remain worried. Bill Curry, who heads the new national political action committee called Freeze Voter '84, says he considers Morrison's re-election campaign among the crucial races in the country for the freeze movement.

But Morrison may find winning another term almost as difficult as tying military support for El Salvador's government to improvements in human rights. Whether he holds on to his seat may prove in part to be a test of whether attacking a Congressman's patriotism—rather than the substance of his or her views—still works in the '80s.

Paul Bass is an editor of *Cooperative News Service*.

Ferron

Once in a while there emerges a poet whose vision and ability to record life as we perceive it is startlingly on target. When this poetry is set to music, a certain magic takes place which transforms the vision into a universal language. Ferron is such a poet.

The Feminist Renaissance

SHADOWS ON A DIME

a new album from Ferron
produced by Terry Garthwaite
on *Lucy* Records, Ltd.

Ferron

SHADOWS ON A DIME



Distributed by Redwood Records, 476 West MacArthur Blvd., Oakland, CA 94609

ITALY

Fragmented labor splits over Craxi's anti-inflation policies

By Diana Johnstone

P A R I S

WHETHER ON A MILESTONE or a tombstone, Feb. 7, 1984, is a date to stand in the history of Italian labor. On that day, the unity forged in the great labor battles of the late '60s between the three major union confederations was shattered as the CGIL failed to work out a common position with the CISL and the UIL. One week later, the CGIL itself split between its Communist majority and Socialist minority.

Union leaders split over whether or not to approve the Craxi Plan—a package of anti-inflationary measures for reducing labor costs that Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and his labor minister, fellow socialist Gianni De Michelis, were determined to impose on labor and management (represented by the industrialists' association Confindustria) in this winter's tripartite negotiations.

The government plan included deep cuts in the *scala mobile*, a "sliding scale" wage-indexation system designed to keep real wages in line with cost of living increases. Leaders of the Christian Democratic CISL (Italian Confederation of Labor Unions, about three million members) and the social democratic UIL (Italian Labor Union, less than one million) went along, convinced that labor is too weak these days to swing a better deal. Socialist spokesmen warned ominously that if Craxi failed, powerful "economic and political circles" would make Italian workers pay a much steeper price.

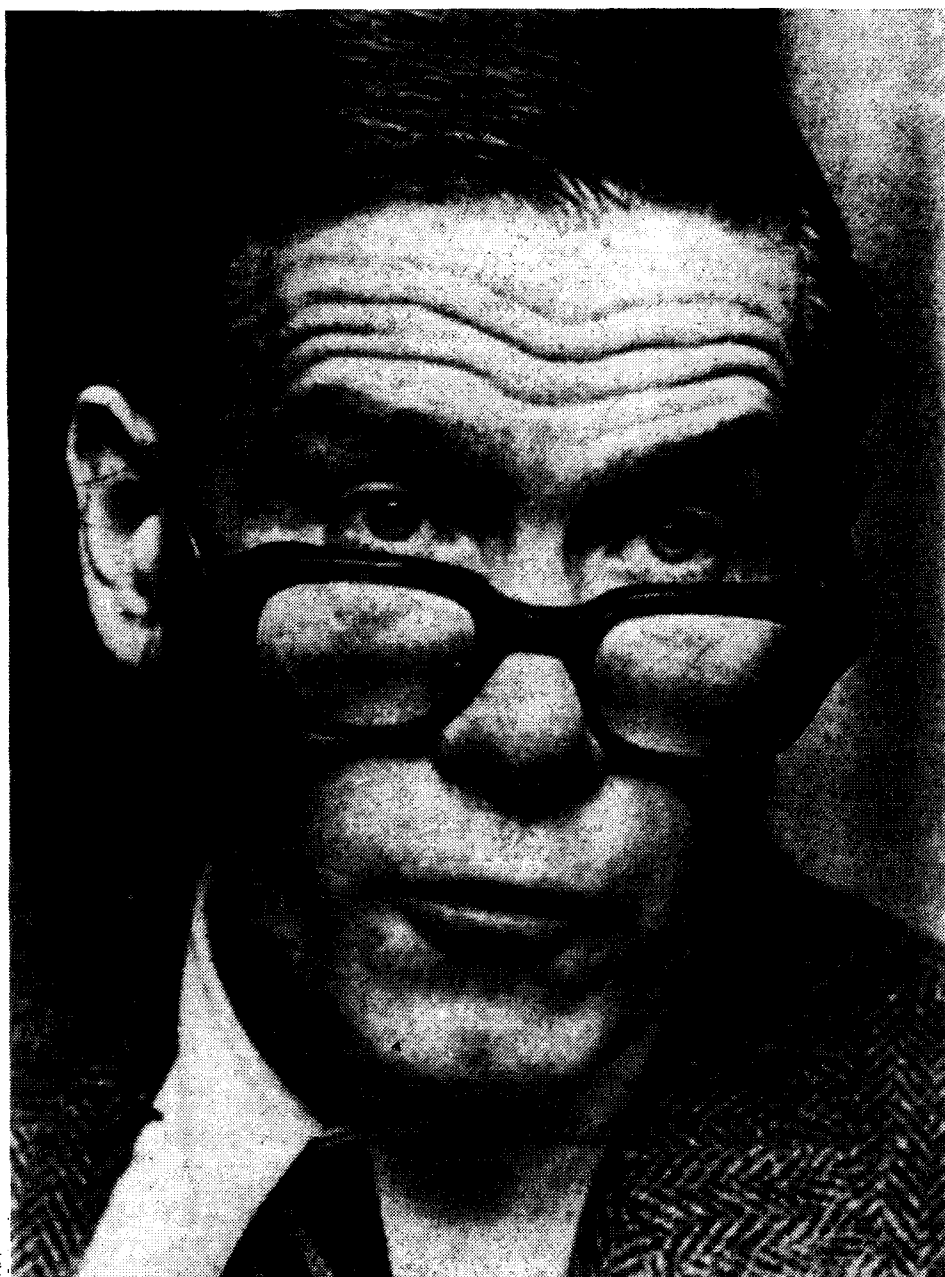
Communist leaders of the CGIL (General Confederation of Italian Labor, close to five million members) balked. General Secretary Luciano Lama said the CGIL would have been ready to sacrifice even more in terms of wages "if they had got something serious in return—the start of a real change in economic policy."

But since in the past Lama had accepted "sacrifices" without obtaining much in return—at a time when the Communist Party (PCI) was supporting the "national unity" government and displaying its "sense of responsibility" in hope of a share of power—the Communist labor leaders were open to accusations of partisan politics when they finally said "no" to further concessions. Most of the media joined pro-government politicians in blaming the labor split on the Communists. The PCI was accused of "self-isolation" in its feud with Craxi. CGIL leaders were accused of following PCI orders.

Lama challenged anyone to say that to his face, recalling indignantly that he was one of those "union leaders who have struggled hardest for union independence from parties, including my own."

Someone who has struggled even harder than Lama for union independence is Bruno Trentin, CGIL national secretary and former head of the metalworkers who led the unitary movement in the late '60s. Yet it was Trentin, more than anyone, who now refused to accept the terms laid down by Craxi. He often repeated that the issue was not the *scala mobile*. He succinctly summed up what the real issue was on February 7: "Today any agreement would be felt as a drama by our rank and file, like lambs being led to the slaughter."

The main reason Communist leaders of the CGIL rejected Craxi's terms was simply that acceptance would have been felt by the rank and file as a capitulation. To avoid this, Lama suggested putting the question to the national membership in a referendum, but CISL and UIL lead-



General Federation of Italian Labor Secretary Bruno Trentin believes "future union unity can only be rebuilt from the bottom up."

ers rejected this idea. CGIL leaders refused to sign an agreement they knew was unpopular.

Old left socialist labor leader Vittorio Foa commented, "The CGIL with its decision saved itself from a break with working people that could have become irreparable. It saved itself in *extremis*...."

If Trentin, the historic champion of unity, sounded almost relieved at the breakup, it was because Trentin is also the historic champion of the factory councils. Finally, the break at the top seemed necessary to try to save the factory council sort of union at the bottom. Saving the roots of the movement took precedence over the top branches.

The decline of unity.

The Federative pact that linked the three confederations in 1972 was the culmination of the labor upsurge that grew through the prosperous '60s and culminated with the labor victories of 1969, 1970 and 1971. New rights won at the workplace made the factory councils possible. Especially among the metalworkers, the dynamic of victorious struggle created a sense of solidarity that swept aside the political divisions created by the Cold War, when the CISL and UIL were set up to weaken the Communist-led CGIL. Revolutionary enthusiasm spread through the whole labor movement, and often far leftists in the UIL or the CISL berated Communist leaders of the CGIL for their conservatism.

Twelve years later, it appears that the 1972 Federation was not, as it then seemed, the beginning of growing unity between the three confederations. Instead, it was the high point from which their unity would start its long decline.

In a February 23 interview in *il manifesto*, Trentin explained that the Federative pact fixed the dichotomy of the labor

movement—"bureaucratic in its leadership centers, participatory at the base." The top and bottom pulled in opposite directions. Trentin suggested that a labor movement like that could not come up with adequate responses to the new challenges of the past decade.

The Unitary Federation engaged in triangular contract bargaining between the state, management and labor that tended to get farther and farther from the rank and file. In entering into this triangle, labor leadership was implicitly looking toward a favorable political change that would make of the state a friendly partner. But such a project, Trentin said, has run out, and it is "the neocorporative pact" between labor and the state that is dying.

The past decade has seen a tremendous fragmentation of the Italian working class. There are workers in secure jobs

Communist leaders rejected Craxi's wage-indexing plan simply because acceptance would have been seen by the rank and file as capitulation.

covered by union contracts, workers in fiscally undeclared jobs with no rights or protection, workers with one legal and one illegal job, organized unemployed, unemployed in *cassa integrazione* being paid most of their wages by the state to do nothing so industry can restructure without them. The union, said Trentin, "responded to growing social segmentation and change by emphasizing its own centralized model."

Two years ago, UIL leader Giorgio Benvenuto said he got a "whiff of terrorism" when he spoke in factories. Confusion and disintegration at the base frightened union leaders, moving them to seek their own salvation in neocorporatist arrangements with the government that would at least save the union bureaucracy and give it a role in the strange new world emerging through unpredictable social and technological change.

No salvation.

Trentin simply considers that such a salvation is no salvation at all, and that a labor movement without a real base would not fool anyone for long and would soon be wiped out. "No labor movement can go back to profiting from a representativity it no longer has because there is not a spontaneous and widespread solidarity between the real people it claims to represent," he said. "Therefore, future union unity can only be rebuilt from the bottom up." What has happened is that in the last 10 or 15 years, "if there has been a worldwide weakening of the natural compromise between wage-earners, it is also true that the world of wage-earners has grown enormously." So it is not historically accurate that the current worldwide union decline is due to sociological decline of the working class. "The problem, I repeat, is how to rebuild solidarity between people who work."

"The union is solidarity, it's a non-competition pact between wage-earners, it's the interest all have in standing together," said Trentin. "Today, the labor crisis lies in the fact that *union* is 'less convenient' for ever broader areas of working people, who do not feel involved in other working people's battles." The *scala mobile*, for instance, he said, is of no concern to either higher paid skilled workers, or to the unemployed, or people with precarious jobs. "In this balkanization of the working world, in short, the old slogan 'union makes us strong' is less true than it used to be." Unity must be rebuilt by a new movement starting from the grassroots that defines unifying objectives and grows by fighting for them.

With the unions split, Prime Minister Craxi put his plan into effect by decree on February 15. The *scala mobile* was reduced by about 30 percent, certain rates and prices were frozen for three months. It was the first time any Italian government had swept aside labor-management bargaining to decide income policy by decree. In all Italy's industrial centers, the factory councils immediately called protest strikes. In Milan, Turin, Venice and other cities, employees crowded into assemblies to discuss what must be done.

The government parties led by the Socialists and Christian Democrats and most of the media hammered away at the theme that the whole dispute was artificially created by the PCI in its partisan war against Craxi. The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) organ *Avanti!* wrote, "A labor union such as the Communists want does not cooperate in major economic decisions, but sees itself as an opponent of the democratically elected government."

In many ways, the labor split looked more serious—and more dangerous—than the Cold War split of 1948. For one thing, at that time the Socialists stood by the Communists in the CGIL. But this time, in the February 14 vote the CGIL executive split 76 to 43 against the Craxi Plan, along party lines. A CGIL Socialist, Enzo Ceremigna, called for a special CGIL congress that could lead to a Socialist walkout or perhaps to their continued presence as an institutionalized minority. Even Socialist Ottaviano Del Turco, the CGIL number two leader who

Continued on page 10