

INSHORT

By Beth Maschinot

Hungry generals

The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC) estimates that from 10,000 to 20,000 citizens won't be filing U.S. income tax this year—not because they don't have to, but because they refuse to pay. Larry Bassett, a Long Island peace activist, has been a tax resister since 1980 because, he says, "60 percent of our taxes goes to the Pentagon," and he doesn't want to help the Reagan administration build more nuclear bombs or aid Central American dictatorships, writes Susan Jaffe. He has refused to comply with a court order issued by Federal District Court Judge Jack Weinstein requiring Bassett to submit financial information to the IRS.

The IRS wants to know where Bassett's savings account is. And where to find any other assets so they can take the money he owes—\$1,300. If Bassett is found guilty of violating the court order, he could be sent to jail indefinitely for being in contempt of court until he agrees to cooperate or until the judge decides his imprisonment serves no purpose.

Bassett realizes that \$1,300 is not a lot of money, but that's not the point. "No general is going to bed hungry because I didn't pay my taxes," he says. "I'm aware of that. But it's a political statement that the government can't ignore. And they are obviously not ignoring it." Instead of sending his money to the IRS, Bassett contributes an equivalent amount to peace groups and needy friends, often victims of Reagan's budget cuts. So even if he hasn't inconvenienced the Pentagon, Bassett says, "it makes a difference to the people I've helped with my tax resistance money. And it also makes a difference to me: what I'm doing makes me feel that my life is more consistent with what I believe. I'm living what I believe in as many ways as I can: this is one of them."

Tax resistance is also his job. He is a staff member at the NWTRCC. So instead of being intimidated by the IRS and the courts, Bassett issues press releases about his case and organizes supporters to send letters to the judge and demonstrate at the courthouse. For more information on tax resistance, contact the NWTRCC at P.O. Box 2236, East Patchogue, NY 11772; (516) 654-8227.

IRS hits jackpot

The IRS didn't have too hard a time locating war tax resister Karl Meyer's assets: late last month they seized a small trailer he owns and a station wagon he leases, both parked in front of his Chicago home. Then they handed him a bill for \$20,000 in penalty fines—and Meyer informed them that their figures were way too low because he had already received notices in the mail for \$135,000. Meyer, a 10-year tax resister and long an innovator in tax resistance circles, was being penalized for what he calls his "Cabbage Patch resistance." Every day in 1984 he sent a return to a different IRS office somewhere in the country (see *In These Times*, March 13). He included a handwritten statement of his resistance to military buildup on each and an invitation to IRS officials: "I invite each of you to resign from the collection of military taxes and to join in working for a disarmed world. If you want to talk about this, call me evenings at...."

Though Meyer's scheme has not netted any converts among the IRS, he sees it as a way of shaking up a complacent public. Some of his earlier tax resistance innovations have taken hold across the country, including the boycott of the telephone excise tax that he helped popularize and the practice of claiming large numbers of dependents to beat the employee withholding tax.

Meyer refuses to pay a cent of the penalties he owes and may soon be summoned to court. The threat of jail doesn't deter Meyer—he's already spent months in jail for tax resistance and for civil disobedience. And though he misses using the trailer and the station wagon for his mobile demonstrations, his pragmatic side allows that the wagon was "only worth \$75 anyway"—a lot less than the monthly upkeep has cost lately.

Lone Star allegiance

The Texas National Guard will send 450 of its members to the Honduran-Nicaraguan border April 1



to join the U.S. and Honduran military in Big Pine III exercises. The Guardsmen will play the enemy in a simulated anti-armored invasion exercise. Fifty-seven percent of the Texans are Hispanic.

The participation of that many members of a National Guard in a Big Pines exercise is unusual—the only precedent was in 1983 when Puerto Rico sent members of its National Guard. It's reported that California Gov. George Deukmajian was also approached by the military—the California National Guard has 2,107 Hispanics—but he turned the offer down and will not comment on the request to the press.

The military's maneuver did not go unnoticed in Texas. State Sen. Gonzalez Barrientos (D-Austin) opposed Gov. Mark White's okay and wondered why the guard selected a majority of Hispanics from those who volunteered for the exercise. "Is it to see how they will stand up against an enemy that looks and speaks like they do?" The Senator and a coalition of church groups, including the Texas Conference of Churches and the American Friends Service Committee, were also concerned that the deployment of the Guard was a not-so-subtle signal that Texans are gung-ho about Reagan's Central American policy. Throughout the controversy, Gov. White assured Texans that the Guardsmen would be safe—apparently, his major concern—and tried to stem the opposition by claiming that the participation should not be seen as a message on Central American policy.

Meanwhile, the Guardsmen are gearing up for the exercise and, according to their public affairs officer, their morale is "sky high." Capt. Ernulfo Esqueda, one of the members selected, waxed expansively about the opportunity: "We look at it as a bonus for being a good unit. We look at it as an adventure." When asked about the political situation in Central America, he said, "Those people aren't happy with the government of

Nicaragua. A lot of their freedoms are being taken away."

Socialist success stories

Once portrayed as a dangerous radical, Jean-Pierre Chevenement is the darling of the French conservatives now that he is championing a return to the three Rs as Minister of Education. Instead of the pedagogic experiments that gained ground after May '68, Chevenement wants schools to get children to do homework and memorize historical dates. This is no switch; Chevenement, whose parents were school teachers, has always had conservative views about teaching. Tough competition in school should prepare the French for the cutthroat international competition threatening France's national independence, according to Chevenement. The former leader of the Socialist Party's left-wing faction CERES no longer talks about socialism but defines his vision of France's future as the "Modern Republic"—the slogan of Pierre Mendes-France 30 years ago.

A more startling success story is that of Regis Debray, who gained world fame by a bungled contact with Che Guevara that landed him in a Bolivian prison and by a tragically erroneous analysis of *The Revolution in the Revolution* in Latin America. After a spell of letting Mitterrand pick his brain in the Elysee Palace, Debray, at age 44, has just been named to the *Conseil d'Etat*, the most ancient of French state institutions which is both the supreme court and an advisory body. Debray's arrival at this summit is not totally shocking: he comes from what is called a good family and has been recently rediscovering his patriotism.

This week's contributors: David Butts and Diana Johnstone

IN THE NATION



Ted Gray

Black Democrats clash on tactics

By Salim Muwakkil

WHEN ROLAND BURRIS WAS running in the Illinois primary as one of four Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate seat of Charles Percy, he made a curious appearance at Louis Farrakhan's Savior's Day 1984 convention. Burris, the Illinois comptroller and one of the few black politicians in the U.S. to hold a state-wide office, seemed decidedly out of place at such an anti-establishment gathering. But the Black Muslims had just announced their involvement in electoral politics and he needed black votes.

In a transparent attempt to engage the predominantly black crowd, Burris employed a speaking style that borrowed heavily from the cadences and inflections of black preachers. The style was altogether ill-suited for the normally staid Burris, however, and his attempt at a kind of ethnic eloquence soon collapsed into mimicry. But he continued unabated and, apparently, unembarrassed; he needed the votes.

Burris' recent speech at a Democratic confab in Atlantic City was, according to reports, much more in line with his natural, low-key style. He had come to the New Jersey resort town to put the Democrats' minds at ease following his election to the vice chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in a controversial contest that pitted him against the former vice chair, Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher (Jesse Jackson's national campaign chairman last year). In sober tones, he assured his colleagues that confrontation would not be his way.

"I'm a coalition builder," Burris told the group, drawing a clear distinction between his style and that of the Jackson-Hatcher wing. "My office is an office of the entire party," he said, "not just the black caucus." Burris' speech warmed the hearts of anxious Democrats everywhere and generated a spate of approving editorials.

"If Burris didn't exist, the Democratic Party would have invented someone exactly like him," one top Jackson aide theorizes.

"You might say he's become the Clarence Pendleton of the Democrats."

Burris won his DNC post by subverting the traditional caucus system. Hatcher had narrowly defeated Burris in the black caucus vote and in the past the caucus endorsement was tantamount to election. But Burris declined to step down after losing to Hatcher and, defying the caucus, made his pitch for the vice chair before the full committee.

Bitter in defeat, Hatcher called Burris a "Judas" and a "John Wilkes Booth." This prompted *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Vernon Jarrett to question Hatcher's grandiose self-assessment. "When people begin equating themselves to Jesus or to the Great Emancipator, it may just be time for them to step back and reevaluate things," Jarrett notes. "We must keep in mind the fact that Hatcher was no great shakes as a Democratic leader."

But Hatcher's acute sense of betrayal was apparently shared by blacks across the country. A nationwide chorus of denuncia-

"The Democratic Party is involved in a struggle between 'cause men' and bread-and-butter politicians for control of the party."

tion greeted Burris' maneuver.

Jackson himself charged the election of Burris was a "violation of the integrity of the caucus system." That system is important, he insisted, because it gives blacks a means of choosing their own leadership and agenda. He said reserving the vice chair for a black picked by the caucus "allows their views to have a direct pipeline to the party leadership." Jackson accused newly elected DNC Chairman Paul G. Krik Jr. of trying to attract white male voters by undermining the caucus system to "prove they can be tough on blacks." The former presidential candidate has consistently charged that the Democrats' all-out attempt to woo disaffected whites is causing the party to turn away from its most loyal constituency, the black community.

Although most black politicians publicly criticized Burris, many privately concede that his conciliatory style may make the most sense in the current political climate. In fact, the more thoughtful of them realize that the limits of black caucus politics are fast approaching, since most of the legislative districts with black populations large enough to elect black representatives have already done so. Any additional electoral gains blacks make will have to come in areas where whites make up a sizable portion of the electorate.

Some black politicians, like Mayors Tom Bradley of Los Angeles and Coleman Young of Detroit, contend that Burris' election is the wave of the coalition-oriented future, and that the sooner blacks rid themselves of the crusader mentality embodied in Jackson's style of politics, the better off they'll be. Many in this school believe that Jackson's presidential campaign was racially divisive and essentially damaging to black interests. For them, the election of Burris is a clear repudiation of Jackson's strident approach. It's time to lay low, they counsel.

The "cause people."

But pragmatic political considerations don't excite many of the young, aggressive types who were brought into the political arena by the activist tenor of the Jackson candi-

Roland Burris (above), the recently elected vice chair of the DNC. Burris and Jesse Jackson during happier days.

dacy. Some more experienced politicians are of like mind. "If blacks lay any lower in the Democratic Party, we'll be in China," says Georgia State Senator Julian Bond.

"Blacks have gotten far more in this country through agitation than conciliation," read an editorial on the election of Burris in the black-owned *Chicago Metro-News*, "simply because the latter has, in effect, too often amounted to nothing more than capitulation. Those who overly emphasize conciliation are those most inclined to sell out or accept far less than what is due those whom they represent. In the game of power, conciliation more often than not serves the interests of the powerful elite far more than it does the powerless," the editorial read.

"What we're seeing in this Burris-Hatcher thing is an example of the classical split between black accommodationists and black radicals that periodically bubbles to the surface in the struggle of blacks for justice in this country," says *Newsweek's* Monroe Anderson, who's reported extensively on both Burris and Hatcher over the years. He argues that though Hatcher had many problems, Burris was wrong for ignoring the caucus tradition and for shamelessly exploiting the situation. But, he adds, "Burris was the perfect person for the perfect post at the perfect time."

Political analyst Richard Scammon contends that the Democratic Party itself is currently undergoing a similar crises, a basic struggle between what he calls the "cause people" and the bread-and-butter politicians for control of the party. "The great dilemma nationally of the Democratic Party is that it is trying to be a party and a cause at the same time," Scammon argues. "And a party, by definition, is a middle-of-the-road, compromising, let-me-make-you-a-deal-you-can't-refuse type of organization. It has to be to get the 50 million votes you need to elect a president." According to Scammon, "cause people" are not people who are trying to win polit-

Continued on page 22