

By David Moberg

THE HEFTY UNION CONTINGENT IN THE APRIL 25 march against U.S. foreign policy in South Africa and Central America made one thing clear: the Cold-War mentality is steadily losing its deathly grip on the U.S. labor movement. Attacks on the march from the most militant anti-communists, who reduce foreign policy issues to East-West ideological battles, largely backfired. Now the forces advocating a more flexible set of policies, less obsessed with fancied U.S. national security interests and more concerned with workers' progress, are in a position to further chip away at the foundations of traditional labor conservatism.

Yet even if union members' sentiment and multinational business realities beg for accelerated change, the pace will probably be slow. Ideological hardliners hold most key AFL-CIO posts on foreign policy, which means more to them and to AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland than to most dissenting union leaders. The federation spends more annually on foreign than domestic affairs, if one counts labor's foreign institutes, such as AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development), that are almost entirely funded by the U.S. government. Also, the deference shown the AFL-CIO president and the desire for labor unity militate against any frontal challenge to Kirkland.

The April demonstrations initiated by a coalition of 24 union leaders and several prominent clergy came under fire from Kirkland, Bricklayers President John Joyce (and his aide Joel Freedman), American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker and others. They attacked the participation in the march by groups sympathetic to "Marxist-Leninist guerrillas in El Salvador and...the Sandinista government," with the most extreme charging that labor unions were being manipulated by shadowy left-wingers as Communists used popular front groups in the past.

Furious reaction: Off the record, foreign policy staff in the unions that endorsed the march—including many of the country's largest—variously described officials in their unions as "furious" and "pissed off" at the "viciousness" of the "crude" and "ludicrous" "redbaiting" attacks. But on the record, they downplayed divisions.

Indeed, nothing about the march and the debate—such as the duel of the *New York Times* ads between Shanker and AFSCME's New York director Stanley Hill—surfaced in the AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting that followed the march. "Everybody has run off to their gopher holes," said National Labor Committee director David Dyson. "There was this terrific bloodletting, and now people are laying low."

But privately some of the march supporters were delighted with the attack—and its failure to dislodge a single union sponsor.

"I think they shot themselves in the foot with their stuff," said Fred Solowey, coordinator of the Washington Area Labor Committee on Central America. "The right-wing lunatic fringe really hurt itself. From what I heard a number of presidents switched from asking what are we doing with some of these groups [in the march] to why are we being attacked."

Ironically, many of the suspect left-wing groups had been welcome participants in labor's big Solidarity Day march. But some of the anti-intervention groups played into the hands of labor's Cold Warriors and



AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland opposed an April demonstration against U.S. policy in South Africa and Central America.

LABOR

Union Cold-War foreign policy stand is thawing

threatened the march by their tactically ill-calculated bid to include speakers with ties to the Sandinistas and the principal Salvadoran labor federation, which AIFLD has been fighting hard to destroy.

The underlying controversy cropped up again shortly after the march within the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), which opposes contra aid. AIFLD director William Doherty, working through his CLUW allies, approached some top officers about CLUW helping to establish a Latin American union women's group. But at their May 1 meeting several of CLUW's 14 officers strongly opposed the move as giving legitimacy to AIFLD's conservative agenda. The issue never came to the full CLUW board, and CLUW President Joyce Miller now says that CLUW will not cooperate with Doherty's plan.

Divisive losers: "When you raise the ante and you don't make it, you're the loser," one major union staff person said of the march opponents. "That's what happened here. There's a weakness the Social Democrat, USA, forces have shown. If I were them, I'd be very nervous. They've made careful use of their leveraging of their power in the past. The other thing it says is that under Tom Kahn [the new AFL-CIO international affairs director, a Social Democrat who served as Kirkland's aide before] they're going to tend to take greater risks and make foreign policy a potentially divisive issue at a time when a lot of people would like to see the Federation playing a unifying role."

The attack has focused new attention on the key role in union foreign policy of the small network of Social Democrats, the conservative splinter of the old Socialist Party, that overlaps labor and a variety of neoconservative fronts, such as Prodemca. A pro-contra lobbying group with Joyce and Doherty on its board, Prodemca received a grant from fundraiser Carl "Spitz" Channell's National Endowment for the Preservation of

Liberty—and later returned it.

The previous generation of Cold War labor foreign policy operatives preferred secrecy, which often led to shadowy ties with the CIA. "But Kahn thinks he can win and persuade people," one craft union staffer commented. Two years ago the international affairs department and AIFLD greatly increased their junkets to Central America for union staff and state or city labor officials, regional U.S. meetings to inculcate the AIFLD worldview and distribution of publications. "I think Kahn is exactly wrong," he continued. "Their days are numbered because people are beginning to notice what they do."

Increasingly, since former AFL-CIO President George Meany's death, international unions have asserted their right to an independent foreign policy—and many not only differ on Central America but also take strong stands for divestment from South Africa (the AFL-CIO supports sanctions but has taken no position on divestment), against

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aid to UNITA in Angola (the conservative union establishment is friendly to Jonas Savimbi) and for military spending cuts and arms control.

Debate continued: Two years ago delegates to the AFL-CIO convention had the first full-fledged open debate on foreign policy in the organization's history on a compromise resolution that criticized the Sandinistas but rejected a military solution. Although the convention this October will be preoccupied with presidential politics, several major liberal unions will push for a stronger position.

AFL-CIO spokesman Rex Hardesty said, "As long as Looney Tunes like Ollie North are in charge of foreign policy, I can't imagine that the [foreign policy] issue won't come up, but I can't imagine anyone would disagree on that." Yet there may be profound disagreement over whether to criticize the procedure or the substance of contra support.

Despite the divisions, unions agree on some foreign policy stands, such as the boycott of Shell for its operation in South Africa. They also agree on trade legislation that would deny trade privileges to countries that violate minimal international union rights. Yet John Cavanagh of the International Labor Rights Working Group that initiated the idea said that for a couple of years the AFL-CIO sympathized with but did not directly support the rights provisos. Then after legislation passed, one of the primary countries the AFL-CIO wanted deprived of trade preference was Nicaragua, even though there was already a trade embargo. Reagan was happy to comply.

Multinational unity: As unions belatedly try to work globally with other unions to confront multinationals, they may find themselves pushed toward a different foreign policy. A staff representative of the Communications Workers, which recently joined a coalition to protest IBM's phony divestment from South Africa as part of its international, multi-union IBM organizing campaign, said, "The more we start to deal with European unions, there will be subtle and not-so-subtle efforts to change AFL-CIO foreign policy."

The bad image of the AFL-CIO in much of the Third World and Europe already hurts. The major South African black trade federation, COSATU, refuses any AFL-CIO aid or ties because of its history of attempting to influence unions. But in most cases big unions will act independently of the AFL-CIO through international federations.

Though Kirkland clearly recognizes that higher wages overseas would help U.S. workers, the blindered anti-communism of AFL-CIO foreign policy has often led to weakening workers overseas, ultimately hurting American workers as well. But a big change in AFL-CIO foreign policy will only come with a new president. And if Kirkland were to step down soon, it is not clear that any likely contender would represent dramatic change. □

Labour Party faces an uphill battle as Britons go to the polls

By Dilip Hiro

LONDON

PRESIDENT REAGAN DID SOME ELECTIONEERING late last month for a close political ally. But it was not U.S. voters that the president intended to influence when he expressed "admiration for the way [British] Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher handles not only domestic but international affairs." And in stumping for the Conservative prime minister, Reagan also made reference to the "grievous errors" of the opposition Labour Party's policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

When the June 11 elections were announced in mid-May it did not appear that any such endorsements would be necessary for the Conservatives. At that time, Labour was trailing by 13-14 points in the polls (see *In These Times*, May 20). Within two weeks it narrowed the gap to 5-8 points, a remarkable feat.

The upbeat mood of the Labour Party was captured by its leader, 45-year-old Neil Kinnock. "We are moving from the foothills toward further heights," he said. "What we have started is a rapid but easily sustainable pace."

The upswing was achieved by a well-planned strategy, a highly professional election machine and a superbly telegenic leader whose youthful passion, vigor and oratory come through so well that Thatcher has repeatedly declined his offer of a face-to-face debate on television.

Election objectives: The main tasks of Labour were to rally party supporters, re-

claim those who deserted its ranks in the last election and capture a majority of the first-time voters. In the 1983 poll many traditional Labour voters switched to the Alliance of the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. The SDP was formed in 1981 by Labour leaders who felt that the party had become too left-wing.

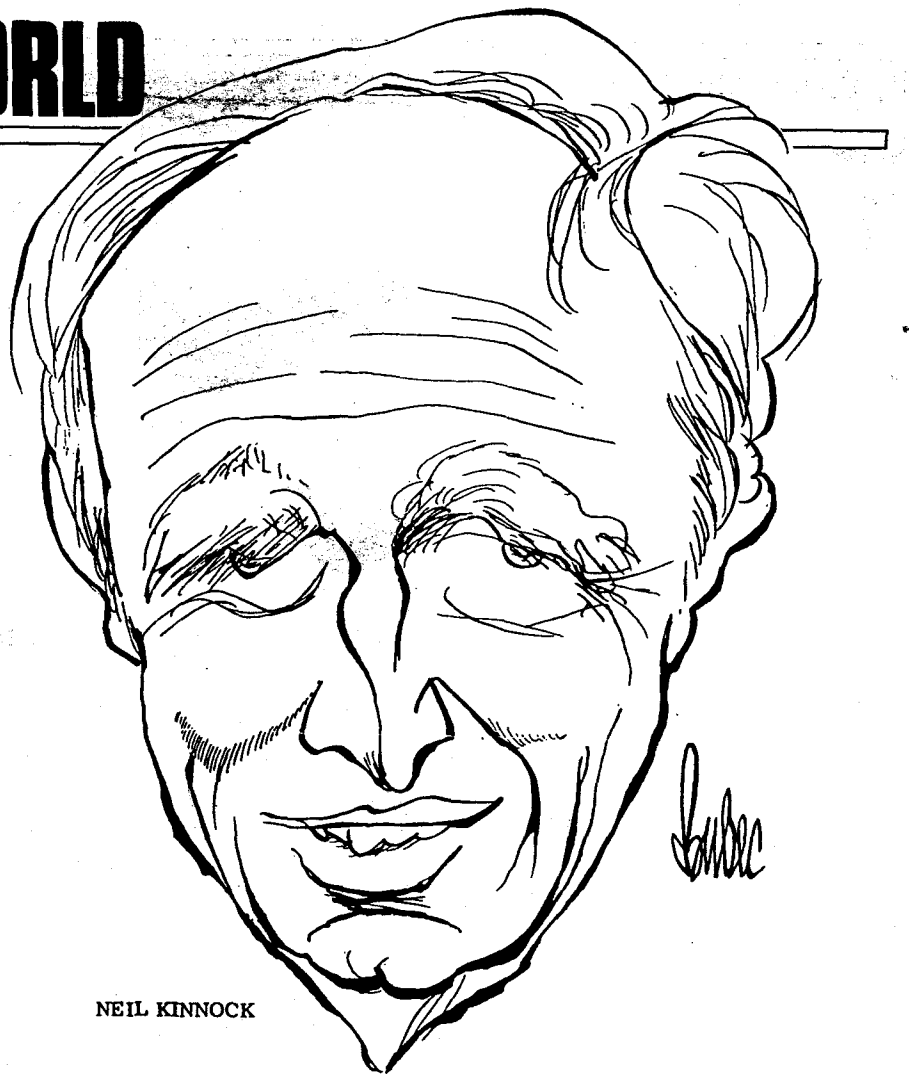
To accomplish these objectives Labour devised a two-track strategy. It launched a concerted attack on the eight-year-old rec-

BRITAIN

ord of the Thatcher government on jobs, health service, law and order and "deindustrialization of Britain." It also presented Kinnock as a future prime minister, confident and decisive as Thatcher, yet, unlike her, warm, compassionate and immensely likable.

During the first stage of the campaign Labour tried to project Kinnock's leadership qualities to the forefront of the party's mass appeal. For this it concentrated on television, partly because Kinnock is a superb performer on TV and partly because the newspapers are predominantly right-wing and anti-Labour.

Labour devoted the first party political broadcast solely to Kinnock. It outlined his humble origins in a Welsh coal miner's home, his university education, his marriage and family. It ended with the assessment of his qualities by past and present party leaders. "Like Gorbachov," said Denis Healey, the party's foreign affairs spokesman, "Kinnock



NEIL KINNOCK

Bubbe/ROTHCO

has a nice smile but steel teeth." The broadcast was so slick and effective that the party's Conservative rivals were left sniping at Labour for stooping to Madison Avenue techniques and introducing "presidential style" into British politics. A double irony.

This broadcast helped to dislodge the Alliance as a serious competitor to Labour. The Alliance had won 26 percent of the popular vote against Labour's 28 percent in the last parliamentary election. So long as Alliance leadership could present Labour as red it was comparatively easy for the Alliance to pose as a serious alternative to the Conservative Party. But when Labour was shown to be led by a moderate, likable family man from the Welsh valleys who scarcely uttered the word "Labour," much less "socialism," then surely there was no room for the Alliance in the mainstream of British politics.

The opinion polls supported this. As *In These Times* went to press Labour had been gaining ground at the expense of the Alliance, which had been pushed below 20 percent. Labour's surefootedness contrasted with the Conservatives' confusion on such issues as housing, education and unemployment.

The defense offensive: Things went well for Labour until both Conservative and Alliance leaders rounded on Kinnock on his party's defense policy. It visualizes a Labour government cancelling the Trident nuclear submarine program, decommissioning the current Polaris nuclear submarine system and asking the U.S. to remove its cruise missiles and other nuclear weapons from Britain.

When Kinnock argued that it was "not tenable" that the Soviets would invade and occupy the free nations of Western Europe Thatcher called it irresponsible to base Britain's defense policy on hopes.

Labour's Denis Healey made the point that "The idea that the Russians would turn Western Europe into a radioactive desert, risking the destruction of a large part of their own population from fallout and radiation, is absolutely ridiculous."

But the question that Labour's opponents have been throwing at its leaders is: "What would you do when faced with a nuclear

blackmail by Moscow?" Healey's reply was that in that case the U.S. would intercede and challenge the Soviets. Defense Minister George Younger retorted, "If Healey is to throw away all nuclear weapons without anything in return, he cannot just leave it in the air that our forces and everybody are out there with nothing to protect them unless he is prepared to go to Washington and say, 'Please, although we threw you out, come and bail us out, and produce some nuclear weapons.'"

Kinnock then tried to dispell such attacks by linking Labour defense policy to the international developments that are pointing increasingly toward a denuclearized Europe.

In any event, it was better that defense, where Labour is most vulnerable, came to the forefront during the second phase of the campaign, and not the last.

The home stretch: In the final stage of the campaign it was up to the Labour strategists to turn the focus on social and economic issues of unemployment running at 13 percent; degenerating national health service; deteriorating schools, colleges and universities; and a soaring crime rate.

When *In These Times* went to press, polls showed the Conservative vote at over 40 percent. Even when the Conservative campaign made a scratchy start—with its smear tactics failing to hit home and its shining new policies on schools and housing falling to pieces—the Conservative column continued to claim the loyalty of over 40 percent of the electorate, a magical figure that Labour had yet to reach.

On top of that the June 11 election date was tailor-made for the Conservatives. Thatcher would be spending the last two days of the campaign in Venice to attend the summit of seven industrial nations. She would be playing the stateswoman to the hilt.

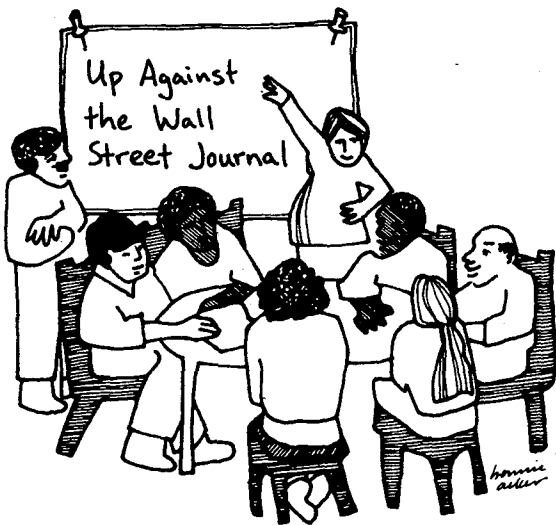
In short, despite the early gains made by Labour, and despite the fact that three Britons out of five are against the Conservatives, Labour faced an uphill task to stop Thatcher from winning a third consecutive term in office.

Dilip Hiro writes frequently for *In These Times* from London.

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