



Unions representing more than half of the AFL-CIO oppose contra aid.

## Hot contra debate may trip AFL-CIO's Cold-War stance

By David Moberg

**W**HEN THE AFL-CIO HELD ITS BIENNIAL convention in Anaheim, Calif., two years ago, delegates witnessed an unprecedented spirited public debate on one of organized labor's most tangled issues: foreign policy.

U.S. policies in Central America brought the issue to a head. The AFL-CIO, through its notorious American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), has been especially active in the region, usually working to support government foreign policy aims. Often collaborating with the CIA, AIFLD has attempted to promote limited unions and peasant associations and to fight leftist parties and unions. But a growing number of big, liberal unions have been critical of both the Reagan administration and much of AIFLD's work in El Salvador and throughout the region.

**The contra conflict:** The battle will continue at this year's convention in Miami Beach, opening October 26, but it may be limited to the back rooms. Constituent unions disagree on a variety of foreign policy issues with the biggest battle expected over whether the AFL-CIO policy will be to oppose aid to the contras in Nicaragua. Unions representing slightly more than half the AFL-CIO are already on record opposing contra aid. Many of them participated in the large labor contingent at an April Washington demonstration against U.S. policy in Central America and South Africa. These unions have also lobbied against contra aid this fall, both on their own and through grass-roots groups like Countdown '87 and Neighbor to Neighbor.

Only three unions—the Teachers, Bricklayers and Seafarers—officially support contra aid. The AFL-CIO's current policy is

that there can be no military solution in Nicaragua—a stance that is interpreted by both foreign policy factions as victory. President Lane Kirkland, though in no way sympathetic to the Sandinistas, has dyspeptically criticized aid to the contras on the odd grounds that the U.S. always abandons its anti-communist allies.

The Cold-War hawks who dominate the AFL-CIO foreign policy apparatus are clearly on the defensive, but the convention is their turf. Most delegates see it as Kirkland's party, and don't want to spoil the celebration. So the battle will have all the overtones of international diplomatic haggling about nuance of language, as the pro-contra forces try to maintain their position. For example, the AFL-CIO's official draft resolution on foreign policy expresses support for a position taken by a small conservative Nicaraguan union federation supported by the AFL-CIO. The position would link an end to contra aid to the withdrawal of Cuban and Soviet military advisers from Nicaragua—a linkage anathema to liberal unions because they say it is designed to scuttle the peace plan.

Liberal unions would also like to strengthen support for the regional peace plan initiated by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias and drop some gratuitous Sandinista-bashing from the draft. Some liberals were outraged that the draft's brief mention of the Iran-contra affair said the scandal involved only "former" Reagan administration officials. Liberal unions also want to strengthen the resolution on South Africa.

David Dyson, director of the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador, argues that a number of events have strengthened the liberal unions' hand. The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to Arias, while his plan is gaining momentum both internationally and in

Central America. And leading Democrats are lining up against contra aid.

Many liberals' objections may be negotiable, but the desire to repudiate contra aid will not be easy to fudge. If the issue is not resolved behind closed doors, two state federation resolutions opposing contra aid could precipitate the open debate many leaders want to avoid.

**Providing a rationale:** Pressure from the left and center has forced the Cold-War labor establishment to accommodate its critics. The tired rhetoric of a '50s mind-set still dominates the AFL-CIO resolution. ("At the center of our world stands the grim reality of a divided Europe," the document asserts early on, making clear the center of the authors' vision, if not the world.) But the draft also pays greater attention to workers' rights, to the self-interest of U.S. workers in raising incomes in poor countries, to the need for international worker solidarity and to criticisms of regimes such as South Korea.

Increasingly the AFL-CIO has tried to justify its foreign policy positions as a uniform defense of the right to free association—including the right to organize unions—that criticizes governments of both the left and right.

Despite the appeal of this theory, there are problems in its application. The National Right to Work Foundation could, for example, easily justify its campaign against union shops on the grounds of "free association." AFL-CIO foreign policy officials still reserve their real zeal for denunciation of leftist governments. For example, the draft resolution, after a weak nod to the Central American peace plan, strongly denounces the Nicaraguan system as a "totalitarianism [that] promises only new forms of enslavement of the people," but says modestly, "to be sure, there are imperfections in El Salvador's democracy." Whatever the failings of the Sandinistas in dealings with unions (see *In These Times*, Sept. 23), union leaders there aren't killed the way they are in El Salvador.

As for the right of association, why has AIFLD twice within a few years worked to start a new labor federation in El Salvador after its former creations turned out to be too critical of President Duarte? "We don't recognize the right of foreign workers to join radical unions," argues Paul Garver, an anti-contra Service Employee official deeply involved in foreign policy issues. "When [AFL-CIO foreign policy architects] talk about 'democracy,' it means allied to the U.S. We don't apply the theory to our own operations. If we only accept foreign unions when they accept our foreign policy, that hardly respects rights of association. And when we criticize state-sponsored unionism, we should look at our own foreign operations that are almost entirely funded with government money," mostly from the Agency for International Development.

"Genuine unions are not...tools...of political parties," the AFL-CIO says. It's a line used to attack decisions of French, Italian or other workers to associate in that way. But neither Israel's Histadrut nor Mexican unions are criticized, even though they are closely tied to political parties. Even China, no model of trade union rights but a "card" to play against the Soviets, escapes criticism most of the time. But Nicaragua is continually assailed. And, of course, many radical unions in the Philippines and other poor countries are routinely written off as illegitimate even

though workers freely choose them.

But there has been some progress. The influence of the United Auto Workers, as well as unions like Clothing and Textiles (ACTWU) and public employees (AFSCME) has made a significant difference, especially on trade and worker-rights issues. "There's still the frantic anti-commie language in the report," one union foreign policy official says, "but the recommendations are much more reasonable. I think it reflects the realization [at AFL-CIO headquarters] that they're in the minority. Overall, I feel the institution is slowly edging toward sanity. It's a glacial movement, but it's important."

Maybe it's worth taking careful note of one of the report's conclusions: "The future does not belong to the tired, stagnant and repressive bureaucracies but to the mass-based democratic movements, in which free trade unions play a central role." Anybody recognize this shoe?

**Alternative visions:** The labor left has not yet systematically offered an alternative foreign policy vision. When it does, it should be sure it really has a consistent standard and is not tainted by any vestiges of *apologias* for Soviet-style states and their unions. But it should also recognize the possibilities in Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov's reforms, something the AFL-CIO resolutions virtually reject. ACTWU staffer Daniel Cantor and Harvard professor Juliet Schor offer a good start to such a new vision in their new small book from South End Press, *Tunnel Vision: Labor, the World Economy and Central America*.

At the center of the world, they suggest, stands not a divided Europe but "Wall Street Internationalism"—a global regime of free movement of trade, capital and currencies long dominated by U.S. multinationals and banks and buttressed by Cold War anti-Sovietism. Labor, especially its conservative leaders, increasingly became a supporter of this power structure and partial beneficiaries of a postwar social accord.

But the system that led to overseas flight of U.S. capital, a strong dollar, heavy Third World debt and generally low commodity prices is working less and less well for American workers. "The irony is obvious," Cantor and Schor write. "The labor movement helped to create Wall Street Internationalism. Now that system is doing it in. Labor stayed national, while capital went international." U.S. policy in Central America, the authors say, is largely designed to support this system that works against U.S. workers.

There are two political options for the labor movement, argues Dan Gallin, secretary-general of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers. The conservative view divides the world between East and West. The traditional labor view is that the important struggle is not between East and West but "between those below and those above, the exploited and their exploiters, the workers and their enemies," according to Gallin.

In support of that traditional labor view, Cantor and Schor outline nine principles for a new labor foreign policy that stresses international solidarity, acceptance of anti-corporate and socialist ideas, as well as a challenge to corporate power and the free flow of capital. It's a worthy contribution to the rethinking of labor foreign policy already underway. □



## By Salim Muwakkil

RALEIGH, N.C.

**R**EV. JESSE JACKSON'S DECISION TO LAUNCH his second presidential campaign from the convention floor of an organization launched by his first one is just the kind of poetic justice the candidate relishes. But it's also evidence that the fervor inspired by Jackson's 1984 candidacy has finally found an organizational home.

The National Rainbow Coalition's (NRC) second convention held here October 9 demonstrated that the group has transcended its sycophantic origins and come of age as an independent organization dedicated to social and economic justice. "It's beginning to dawn on many people that this coalition offers the greatest prospect for this country to fulfill its destiny," said Ron Daniels, the NRC's recently appointed executive director.

Daniels, a seasoned organizer who is well known in black political circles for his work with the National Black Political Assembly in the '70s, was chosen by Jackson to help institutionalize the grass-roots movement. Many coalition members credit Daniels' energy and organizational skills for the group's growing status.

**A prison of marginality:** During the upcoming political season, Jackson's campaign will be the NRC's major focus. But since the group is registered as a non-profit corporation, legal barriers prevent a direct relationship between the coalition and the campaign. Activities like voter registration drives and political education projects are permissible, however, and Daniels said the coalition has set a goal of registering one million voters by the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday January 29, 1988.

Although the official NRC line stresses that Jackson can be elected, most delegates seemed to view the campaign more as a spur to voter registration and NRC recruitment than as a gilded road to the White House. "Jesse's popularity can help this country's progressive forces break out of the prison of marginality," said Lawrence Hamm, chairman of the NRC's New Jersey chapter. He maintained that any positive changes in the political landscape are directly attributable to Jackson's first run and NRC activity, and he challenged those critics who argue that the Rainbow is merely a vehicle for Jackson to reassess their view to accommodate new political realities.

"It's a dialectic," Hamm added. "We need Jesse and he needs us. He'll really need us if he wins the presidency and tries to implement the peace and freedom programs he enunciates."

The need to separate Jackson's campaign apparatus from the NRC has presented some problems. Many of the group's most able organizers have joined the campaign staff and there have been isolated complaints of emerging turf rivalries. But Daniels insisted that those problems exist more in peoples' minds than in reality.

**Economic violence:** Jackson's October 10 announcement of his political intentions was shadowed by rumors that the *Atlanta Constitution* was poised to publish a series of articles detailing his alleged extramarital romantic exploits. Several speakers who preceded Jackson on the podium at the announcement urged followers to steel themselves for the expected negative media onslaught. Such rumors are familiar to those who've covered the 46-year-old Baptist minister over the years, but in the current political climate they have become more pronounced. As *In These Times* went to



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# Pot of gold at end of Jackson's Rainbow?

press, the threatened articles have not yet appeared. Jackson didn't address the rumors in his fiery announcement speech. Instead, he blended radical and mainstream themes into a mix that blurred the difference. Blasting the "economic violence" of Corporate America, he nonetheless affirmed the essential goodness of the country. While condemning the lingering traditions of U.S. racism, Jackson conceded that "only in America" could a black man born of a teenage mother aspire to the nation's highest office.

He issued a strong denunciation of the Reagan administration's foreign policy and accused it of using "a military fig leaf" to cover its weaknesses and lack of vision. "We have the strongest military in the world, but weak leadership. We have guided missiles and misguided leadership. That's why President Reagan invaded Grenada—a nation with 110,000 people and no standing army—when he was really mad at Cuba."

**The Jackson Doctrine:** He made a strong plea for a non-interventionist foreign policy and outlined a new foreign policy plan he called "the Jackson Doctrine." Its three principles are:

- To strengthen and support the rule of international law, including the role of the International Court of Justice;
- to lend support to the principles of international self-determination and human rights; and
- to lend support for international economic justice.

Nothing earthshaking there. Jackson sounded his favorite themes and did it with the rhetorical flourishes for which he's noted. His speech's most noteworthy aspect was the increased emphasis on drug abuse. Rather than sending mine-sweepers to the Persian Gulf, he proposed more Coast Guard "drug-sweepers" to interdict the flow of drugs into this country. Although he's long been a vocal partisan in the fight against drugs, this new emphasis has the hollow sound of a sop.

But Jackson is reaching out to other constituencies, and his strong anti-drug stance conforms nicely to the "just say no" moralisms that pass for political wisdom these days. What's more, Jackson hasn't perceptively softened any of the left positions that have earned him the everlasting enmity of his many conservative critics.

**Evaluating the first run:** Jackson's 1984 campaign added two million mostly black and previously disaffected voters to the rolls. His candidacy brought an increased focus on the issue of fairness within the Democrat-

ic Party—certainly influencing Walter Mondale to choose Geraldine Ferraro as a running mate—and he forced the media to give unprecedented attention to issues concerning the Third World and South Africa.

Jackson received 3.2 million primary votes—about 21 percent of the total—and 85 percent of the black vote. He won the

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cities of Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C., as well as the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Virginia. But those are just statistics. Even more important, but seldom noted, was how Jackson's campaign altered the psychological climate of millions of African-Americans who are trapped in decaying environments and demoralized by the federal government's Reaganomic abandonment.

But Jackson's effort to bring the races together was spectacularly unsuccessful. His fledgling Rainbow remained overwhelmingly monochromatic. Racial tensions were aggravated rather than alleviated. He confused, embarrassed and disappointed many who shared his professed vision of interracial harmony when he allowed the admittedly racist Nation of Islam to participate officially in his campaign. Jackson's reckless rhetoric brought hostilities between blacks and Jews to a new high and he even managed to stir up some class antagonisms within the black community.

This time around a chastened Jackson has widened his political embrace, and although he's learned the various vernaculars of his far-flung constituency, his theme of economic justice is constant. Commentators from across the regional and political spectrum are marveling at the large, non-black crowds Jackson is attracting.

While Jackson has expanded his base of support, he's grown even stronger in the black community. Black politicians who three years ago were reluctant to take a chance on the brash preacher have flocked to Jackson's campaign. So far 18 members of the 23-member Congressional Black Caucus have jumped on the Jackson bandwagon and campaign strategists insist that more will follow. Black mayors, who like Chicago's Harold Washington waited in the wings for political advantages last time, are also falling in behind the country preacher. And according to the latest polls the general black community is more supportive of Jackson than ever before. If he can pull all of this support together, Jackson's predictions of political success in 1988 become

increasingly plausible.

**Back to the Rainbow:** This convention—dubbed "the first biennial convention"—attracted 641 delegates from 35 states and nearly 1,300 in overall attendance. Although those figures were down from the 800 delegates from 42 states who attended the group's first convention in April 1986, the numbers of states with fully chartered, functioning chapters has grown to 15.

One of the convention's biggest squabbles was over chartering procedures. Although New Jersey was the first state to receive an NRC charter, its delegation also was the most insistent in demanding reforms in the procedure. "We believe that the present procedures for state chartering are too demanding and too cumbersome," read a document the New Jersey delegates presented to the NRC chartering committee. The document included many recommendations that at first sparked acrimonious debate.

"All we wanted to do was facilitate the development of an effective national organization, and we thought our recommendations would aid in that process," said New Jersey State Chairman Hamm. "At first we got a lot of objections, because many people thought we had some kind of agenda. But after the delegates realized that we were attempting to increase the process of democratization, most of those objections disappeared." Most of New Jersey's recommendations were eventually adopted.

But the suspicion of hidden agenda is well-earned. Some members of the NRC also belong to independent political groups with well-delineated ideological lines, and these operatives exploit every opportunity to exert their influence and push their agenda. Since many Rainbow organizers are seasoned veterans of political struggle, they are familiar with the often vicious sectarian battles that took place on the left during much of the '70s. Accordingly, they are especially vigilant for any signs of those self-destructive tendencies arising in the '80s.

Daniels said such suspicions are to be expected. "Many of us find it difficult to cohere with each other," he explained. "The essence of any broad-based coalition is the ability to compromise, and the Rainbow attracts committed, articulate people who tend to think they know everything about progressive struggle. It's very difficult to achieve harmony in such a grouping. That's why progressives have this disturbing tendency to self-destruct. That's also why I say this convention was a truly historic one. We've managed to come out of it in one piece and in good spirits."