



## Jack Kemp, this HUD's for you

By Salim Muwakkil

During a news conference called to announce his selection as the new secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Rep. Jack Kemp (R-NY) decried the "appalling tragedy" of homelessness and declared he would wage war on poverty. The federal budget would not be balanced on the backs of the poor, he insisted. That rhetoric echoes the kinder, gentler themes of president-elect George Bush, but it also characterizes Kemp's political style. The nine-term congressman from Buffalo, N.Y., and former presidential candidate is noted for promoting what might be called "conservatism with a human face." He tirelessly advances the notion that a low-taxed, high-growth "opportunity society" has as much to offer minorities and the poor as it has well-to-do Republicans.

But Kemp's distaste for the tragedy of homelessness is not reflected in his voting record. The 53-year-old legislator has voted consistently to gut the budget of the agency he will soon lead. He even voted against the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, an initiative supported by Bush. In fact, had Kemp's arguments prevailed in the House, the HUD budget would have decreased even more drastically than it did during Ronald Reagan's tenure: from \$30 billion in 1980 to \$12.8 billion in 1989.

**New visibility:** Despite Kemp's dismal voting performance, housing activists generally are optimistic about his appointment as HUD chief. There are differences of

opinion about the value of Kemp's ideas, but most housing advocates agree that the former Republican presidential candidate's presence alone will bring much needed attention to housing issues. "Kemp's appointment is a real opportunity for the problem of housing to gain the kind of visibility it needs," says Andrea Hill, associate director of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. "By appointing someone as energetic and politically ambitious as Kemp, Bush obviously wants to give housing a high priority. After all, just about anything would be preferable to the silence and inactivity of the agency under Samuel Pierce's leadership."

Pierce was Reagan's only African-American cabinet officer and the only one to last throughout the president's two terms. Widely called "Silent Sam" because of his extraordinary lack of visibility in the Reagan administration, Pierce presided over the ravaging of HUD.

Kemp's voluble personality may resurrect the agency, but some observers don't expect much, even if he revitalizes HUD. "Kemp's appointment presents more dangers than opportunities," says John Atlas, president of the National Housing Institute, a research and advocacy group for low-income housing. "Bush won't be able to devote any new resources to HUD, so what are we left with? ... Wisdom from the Heritage Foundation."

**Conservation agenda:** Atlas predicts Kemp will push four major programs of the right-wing housing agenda: providing poor families with vouchers to pay rent in private housing instead of building new housing; developing free-enterprise zones, where the government gives tax breaks and regulatory relief to businesses that locate in blighted areas; allowing tenants to buy their apartments at reduced prices and interest rates; and cutting off federal housing funds to communities that have implemented rent control.

"There may be value in some of those approaches, but not very much," Atlas adds. "That conservative agenda has been tried and failed. But with Kemp at HUD we are going to go over it again. I think he will use HUD as a bully pulpit to push his right-wing ideology, just like William Bennett used the Department of Education. And for me that's not a reason for optimism."

A senior aide to Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA) agrees with Atlas. "Kemp is not talking about new funding for new construction. He's talking the same old tune we've been hearing for eight years." In 1987-88 Dellums introduced in Congress the National Housing Act (see *In These Times*, Nov. 9, 1988) that promotes the conversion of private homes into various forms of social ownership. Both times the legislation failed.

But now, after years of Reaganomic inaction and a considerable shrinking of the low-income housing stock, Congress appears ready to finance new housing construction. The Bush administration, however, seems no more favorably disposed to that prospect than was its predecessor. Indeed, Bush has already ruled out any massive federal home building program. "You don't show your determination to solve a problem by simply increasing federal

spending," he told reporters at the news conference where he named Kemp secretary. "There are other ways to skin a cat." But Kemp hinted he would fight any further budget cuts at the agency. "I want it known that you cannot balance the budget off the backs of the poor (or) the housing budget."

**Canny politics:** Rep. Charles Schumer (D-NY), who regularly criticized Reagan's housing policies, says Kemp's statements give him hope. "I think an activist conservative will do more to help inner cities and poor people than a do-nothing moderate. We have had eight years of neglect."

Bush's choice of Kemp to head HUD was a canny political move. The president-elect was under fire from so-called "movement" conservatives for his Cabinet's moderate tenor, and Kemp's appointment cooled that protest. What's more, the former professional quarterback's idiosyncratic approach also has gained him fans from among groups that normally consider Republicans out-of-bounds. Thus Kemp's appointment also seems to reflect Bush's stated desire to be more responsive to minority communities. Kemp has co-sponsored tenant-ownership legislation with Rep. Walter Fauntroy (D-DC), enterprise zone legislation with Rep. Robert Garcia (D-NY), as well as tax reduction legislation with Sen. William Roth (R-DE). His political reach is considerable, and even those who disagree with his ideas respect his belief in them.

"He's got real ideas, and it will be interesting to see how they play out," says Chester Hartman, a housing policy expert at the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Policy Studies. "In the context of a conservative Republican administration, Kemp is about the best we could hope for. And although I have problems with some of his programs, there's no doubt he will improve on Pierce's performance," Hartman said.

**Kemp's challenge:** Last spring the National Housing Task Force—formed at the request of Sens. Alan Cranston (D-CA) and Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY)—released a report

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urging a renewed federal commitment to increase the availability of decent affordable housing. The report found, among other things, the following:

- Since 1973, 4.5 million units of low-income housing have disappeared from the nation's inventory. The homeless are the most visible manifestation of this extraordinary loss of low-income housing stock.

- The private sector alone can't provide the poor with adequate housing, so federal housing assistance is a necessity.

- Public housing projects are afflicted by the "domestic terrorism" of drugs, crime and neglect of the infrastructure.

- Some existing housing programs are effective and can be expanded and made even more efficient.

"These issues alone are more than enough to fill the agenda of the secretary-designate," wrote David Maxwell, vice chairman of the National Housing Task Force in a recent Op-Ed article in the *Washington Post*. "Kemp can rest assured as he tackles his new job that he'll have many allies who view his appointment as a signal that housing will count in the Bush administration."

Hartman believes Kemp's political ambitions and intellectual conceits will fuel a much more activist HUD—"he wants nothing but successes on his resume"—and may surprise those who see nothing but gloom ahead in the Bush years.

## White House and greenhouse

Next week *In These Times* continues its special three-part investigation into the greenhouse effect with Part Two: the Reagan administration's scorched-earth policy. The series, by noted environmental writer Dick Russell, began in last week's issue.

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By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

**L**AST WEEK'S INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON chemical weapons here was a milestone in the shift from an East-West to a North-South division of the planet. It was designed by the Reagan administration, which came up with the idea, not so much to advance the outlawing of chemical weapons as the outlawing of Third World states the U.S. does not control.

The accusations against Libya for building a chemical weapons plant—whether true or false—were part of that design.

The significance of the Paris conference was related to the following major developments in the chemical weapons problem:

- the U.S. program to build binary chemical weapons as part of its "Airland Battle" strategy for missile-borne chemical weapons against Third World adversaries;

- ongoing Geneva negotiations on a worldwide ban of production and stocking of chemical weapons that only recently seemed close to success; and

- the recent massive use of chemical weapons by Iraq.

All three developments were obscured by the Paris conference. The U.S. used the Paris conference to divert attention from a comprehensive ban to stopping "proliferation" of chemical weapons. Certainly, the Iraq example raised the problem of getting everybody to adhere to an eventual agreement. However, the U.S. raised this problem in a discriminatory way, putting it in terms not of the necessary universality of a worldwide ban, but of depriving a particular category of countries of chemical industry.

**A message for the media:** The Paris conference, unlike the Geneva negotiations, was a media event. The U.S. is more skilled at setting the agenda for the media than at constructive diplomacy. Even though most journalists try to write honest reports, the tone is set by insider editorialists and columnists who play up the themes provided by the administration.

In his Paris speech, Secretary of State George Shultz stressed preventing the spread of chemical weapons to "terrorist groups" or to governments "known to sponsor terrorism." He also referred to President-elect George Bush's statement that guilty nations must "pay a price." The U.S. Navy fighters that shot down two Libyan planes off the coast of Libya demonstrated what he might mean.

The same message was delivered more clearly by the U.S. No.1 ally, Israel. Foreign Minister Moshe Arens said a final chemical weapons ban might take "several years at the least." For the "interim," he suggested "actions which do not require lengthy procedures." First was a ban on chemical agents—called precursors—that can be used in chemical weapons manufacturing, as well as a "ban on export of know-how."

Arens further suggested strengthening the authority of the United Nations secretary general for on-the-spot investigation so "world public opinion would be able to react." Asked what form such reaction might take, Arens said that "in democratic countries, there is no significant difference between public opinion and the action taken by the government. When informed, public opinion will catalyze the government into action." This sums up the Shultz-Israeli approach. The "democratic countries" with the



Last year an Iranian clergyman (left) and Revolutionary Guard (right) visited the war front investigating purported Iraqi use of chemical weapons.

## U.S. arms formulas brew chemical imbalance

requisite military power—meaning the U.S. and Israel—are to "punish" culprits in response to their own domestic "public opinion." But as the latest uproar over Libya illustrated, "public opinion" is created by the administration, which directs the indignation of the media toward countries it wants to bully.

**And now the history:** Imperial Germany, the leading chemical power of its time, initiated the use of poison gas on the World War I battlefield in April 1915. In pre-nuclear times, gas was the most horrifying weapon of mass destruction. In 1925 the Geneva Protocol banned its use in wartime. But production and stocking were not banned, and many signatories—including the U.S.—"reserved the right" to use gas in retaliation.

This reservation undermines the ban, inasmuch as any country that uses gas can accuse the other side of using it first.

In classical ground battle, poison gas can blow back on the forces that use it. (Which can explain how a few Iraqi soldiers were also apparent casualties of gas in the Gulf War.) This may be why none of the belligerents in World War II initiated battlefield use of chemical weapons. The Nazis reserved the use of gas for secret extermination of civilians, especially millions of defenseless Jews.

Battlefield chemical weapons were nevertheless developed, produced and

stored during World War II. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union inherited stocks of unused German chemical weapons and went on to build arsenals of their own. Laboring under Leonid Brezhnev's delusion that the Soviet Union was as big as its arsenals, the USSR went on making them in the '70s, when the U.S. was stopping. This was a stupid mistake, which the present Soviet leadership acknowledges and regrets.

In the Vietnam War the U.S. made massive use of new kinds of chemical weapons that only indirectly attacked people and therefore, it could be argued, were not the sort of chemical weapons outlawed by the Geneva Protocol. Instead the chemicals used

**At the international conference last week on chemical weapons, the U.S. and France found themselves on the defensive, accused of blocking a possible worldwide chemical weapons ban.**

against the Vietnamese were defoliants that destroyed the ecosystem. They were weapons of ecocide rather than genocide—although the line may be thin, considering the dioxin left behind and the lasting damage to life systems.

After a long pause, the U.S. renewed chemical weapon production in December 1987. The Reagan administration decision to produce a "new generation" of binary chemical weapons seems to have been dictated by two factors: perfection of the technological capacity to make binaries, that is, weapons which keep two relatively harmless substances separated until actual use, thus making them safer to store than earlier chemical weapons; and the development, growing out of the Vietnam experience, of a capacity for long-distance military strikes on Third World countries unable to strike back.

Thus from the start the binaries were probably designed for use in the Third World rather than on the European battlefield. However, to win consent from Congress, the Pentagon had to give two standard justifications: a chemical weapons capacity was necessary to deter enormous Soviet chemical forces, and the new binaries would be "bargaining chips" in negotiations for worldwide abolition of chemical weapons.

Thus promotion of the binary program was coupled with declared efforts to further the Geneva negotiations for a worldwide ban. For a while American binary enthusiasts could count on the Russians to block a successful chemical disarmament agreement by their suspicious reluctance to allow on-the-spot inspection.

The situation changed dramatically in 1987 when the new Soviet leadership under

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