

By John B. Judis

PHILADELPHIA

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI WAS THE FIRST political philosopher to understand the tension between utopia and reality—between what is ideal and what is historically possible. Machiavelli, a republican as well as a nationalist, recognized that only a prince could unify the feuding Italian city-states. The republican became a monarchist.

After losing the last five of six presidential contests, Democrats are faced with a similar tension between their social and economic ideals and their desire to win back the White House. Democrats are asking whether they can win as liberals, or whether they have to abandon part of the liberal agenda in order to get into a position to attain any of it. This question underscored the vigorous debate at the Democratic Leadership Council's March 9-11 conference in Philadelphia.

The DLC was organized in March 1985 to move the party toward the center after former Vice President Walter Mondale's landslide defeat. But while the organization is home to conservative Southern Democrats like Senators Sam Nunn and John Breaux, it has also attracted post-New Deal liberals like Rep. Richard Gephardt, Rep. Bill Gray and Sen. Barbara Mikulski. For the conference's main event, a panel discussion on building a presidential majority, the DLC invited a political cross section of party leaders from Rev. Jesse Jackson to DLC founder Sen. Chuck Robb. It was at this panel that the party's differences about future direction most clearly surfaced.

The premise of the panel, stated by organization chair Nunn in his opening address, was that the Democrats cannot remain content merely with congressional majorities; they must regain the White House. "If we only control Congress, we will be the mechanics but not the architects of national purpose," Nunn said.

Participants in the conference warned that if the Democrats continue to lose presidential elections, they will eventually lose Congress, too. In 1992, for instance, 20 of 34 Senate seats up for election are Democratic seats. In 1986, 10 of the Democrats won with 55 percent or less of the vote.

Myth and reality: The panel was organized around a paper given by William Galston, Mondale's issues director in 1984 and now a political scientist at the University of Maryland. The liberal Galston, chastened by Mondale's defeat, has moved steadily toward the kind of strategy espoused by DLC moderates.

Galston thinks the Democrats must "regain competitiveness" among the white middle-class voters who defected to Reagan in 1980 and 1984 and Bush in 1988. He dismisses as myth the view that Democrats can win merely by "mobilizing their core constituencies." "The reality is Dukakis got a higher percentage of the black and liberal vote than Jimmy Carter in 1976, but lower percentages of the white and conservative vote.... Dukakis did as well among the poor, but far poorer among middle class. If only voters who have incomes of \$50,000 or less had voted, Bush would still have won. If minorities and poor had voted at national averages, Bush would still have won."

Galston believes that the middle-class defectors could be won over by the Democrats' "progressive economic program." "A large majority of Americans still identify the Republicans as the party of the rich and the Democrats as the party of fair treatment for



Sen. Richard Gephardt: trying to get a lift for '92 out of national decline.

Democrats go to class, but miss all the lessons

all people," Galston says. But he contends that the Democrats are prevented from reaching this group by their lack of credibility on other issues. "Credibility on defense, foreign policy and social policy is the threshold our candidates must cross to gain a fair hearing for their economic case."

Galston argues that to be elected, Democratic presidential candidates must earn the voters' respect in these areas. "If our next nominee isn't credible as the commander in chief, he won't be elected. He won't be credible if he has no record in defense and foreign affairs," Galston says. "If our next nominee can't deal credibly with personal and family security, he won't be elected president. The American people overwhelmingly believe that the death penalty is appropriate for certain heinous crimes. Will our next nominee agree or be on the defensive again?"

Galston's criteria appear designed for DLC stalwarts like Robb and Nunn, both of whom enthusiastically endorsed his paper. They rule out not only Jackson and "former tank commander" Dukakis, but also an entire generation of Democratic governors, including New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, who is against the death penalty and has little experience in foreign affairs. This suggests that while Galston's analysis of the Democrats' dilemma may be correct, his prescription for the Democratic Party is unnecessarily rigid. It leaves no room, as Jackson later noted at the DLC conference, for the intangible personal qualities of the successful politician.

Jackson's response to Galston suffered

from the tension between the ideal and the possible. He wants to reconcile his own ambitions and the concerns of his constituency with the realities of presidential politics; but to do so, he has to slight the realities. In Philadelphia, Jackson argued that Democrats could win by mobilizing their core constituencies. Black voters had made the difference for Democrats in the 1960, 1964, and 1976 election victories, he contended, and then he criticized Dukakis for neglecting Democrats' black base. "We lost 10 states with 160 electoral votes by less than the margin of African American voters in those states alone," Jackson said.

Politics and morality: His historical argument has some basis. In 1960 and 1976 black voters did play a crucial part in the Democrats' presidential victory. But it could be equally argued that white racism played an important part in Republican victories in 1968, 1972, 1980, 1984 and 1988. And Jackson's scenario for a Dukakis victory is without any basis. He has to assume that under certain circumstances 100 percent of blacks would have gone to the polls (which no group in American politics has ever done) and that under these same circumstances the amount and composition of the remaining white vote would remain constant. In other words, there would be no counter-mobilization or backlash, as occurred in the 1983 Chicago mayoral contest or the 1984 North Carolina Senate race.

Jackson is on firmer ground when he lays aside his own ambitions and appeals morally

to other Democratic leaders not to abandon blacks or striking machinists in the course of trying to win back Reagan Democrats. If issues like sanctions against South Africa "are morally right," Jackson said, "we should stand for them. If we don't care about being morally right, let's join [Louisiana state legislator and former Klansman] David Duke and say we support him."

Gephardt took a different tack from Jackson and Galston. He argued that Democrats can, in effect, jump over Galston's credibility threshold by clearly articulating a "populist" program around economic decline. "The American people understand instinctively that strength is not just military.

POLITICS

They are way ahead of us in understanding that America's economic strength is in decline," Gephardt blamed Dukakis' defeat on his unwillingness to adopt this kind of approach until the very end of the campaign.

Like Jackson, Gephardt has already begun campaigning for 1992, and his presentation suffered from an unwillingness to explore candidly the obstacles that he faced last year and will face again in 1992. His approach was successful in the American heartland, but not among the eastern or western seaboard Democratic elite who finance campaigns and dictate much of the national press coverage. In Philadelphia, for instance, Washington super-lawyer and former Lyndon Johnson aide Harry McPherson chided Gephardt for advocating a divisive strategy.

Gephardt also sidestepped Galston's warnings about Democratic credibility on crime and other social issues. In practice, Gephardt has given considerable attention to this problem, having flip-flopped from anti-abortion to pro-choice before the 1988 primary, only to vote last summer against the District of Columbia being able to perform Medicaid abortions. But his economic populism nonetheless holds out the best hope for winning back the Reagan Democrats without having to abandon the foundations of liberalism.

Political paralysis: Almost nothing was said over the weekend about U.S.-Soviet relations—a highly curious omission within a group whose leaders are known for their Cold War strategizing and posturing. Nunn explained that the conference was primarily concerned with domestic and political issues, but U.S.-Soviet relations can have the most direct and significant bearing on the American economy and on the ideological underpinnings of American politics.

The end of the Cold War could not only free up resources for economic and social programs, but also diminish Americans' concern about their president being a military commander. Like the Bush administration, Democratic leaders appear perplexed and paralyzed, rather than encouraged, by these prospects. Equally, none of the Democrats, except for Gephardt, considered how the changing world economy can make opinion polls irrelevant and alter the basic assumptions of American politics.

In all, the DLC conference was a reminder of how confused and disoriented the Democratic leadership remains. It is still torn between ideal and reality—between Jackson's left-wing idealism and the DLC's centrist opportunism. It is still concerned primarily with 1988 opinion polls rather than the volcanic changes in the late 20th century. Neither Machiavelli nor his prince has come to the fore.

IN THESE TIMES MARCH 22-28, 1989 7

By Diana Johnstone

WEST BERLIN

RED-GREEN IS COMING TRUE IN WEST GERMANY. Social Democrats and Greens have won governing majorities first in West Berlin, followed by Frankfurt and other cities in the state of Hesse. A new left politics centering on ecological, social and civil libertarian themes is about to be put to the test of power.

Postwar West German politics has been dominated by a conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a small but influential swing party, the Free Democrats (FDP) and a Social Democratic Party (SPD) that in office has always had to compromise with a more conservative partner. Now for the first time, the SPD has a partner to its left.

The Berlin and Frankfurt elections announce a more polarized political spectrum, with a marked overall shift to the left, accompanied by the emergence of a small far right. In Frankfurt Green Daniel Cohn-Bendit, star student rebel of the Paris May 1968 revolt, was elected to the city council. Cohn-Bendit is suing the CDU for using anti-Semitic innuendo in its campaign against him. The campaign was in any case a debacle for the CDU, which lost over a fourth of its voters. About half the CDU losses were picked up by the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD), running a "Germany for the Germans" campaign.

In both cities, the FDP fell below the 5-percent hurdle, leaving the SPD practically obliged to seek coalition with the Greens. His own party's disastrous defeat reminded FDP Chairman Otto Lambsdorff of "the Weimar Republic before the Nazis seized power." Such panic on the part of the losers unfortunately gets more international media attention than the promising red-green success.

The Berlin example: If there was a historic turning point toward a "red-green" future, it took place in Berlin.

Contrary to all forecasts, as a result of the January 29 elections, the Social Democratic Party and the Greens found themselves with a majority of the Berlin parliament's 138 seats between them—55 for the SPD and 17 for the Greens.

Walter Momper, a competent but obscure 44-year-old Social Democrat, had been chosen to lose honorably to CDU Mayor Eberhard Diepgen, considered a shoo-in. Momper hadn't expected to be elected mayor, much less to head a red-green coal-



West Berlin Alternative List members enjoying election returns on television.

The new political landscape is vivid with red and green

ition Senate (as the West Berlin government is called) in the politically sensitive city-state, still officially ruled by the three Western Allied Occupation Powers 44 years after the end of World War II. The Americans, British and French would hardly relish seeing "the showcase of the Free World" turn into a red-green experimental center. Would they even allow it? Many thought not.

If the SPD was unprepared to govern with the Greens, the Berlin branch of the Greens—the Alternative List for Democracy and Environmental Protection (AL)—was unprepared to govern, period. Alternative implies opposition to state power, not its exercise. The AL's symbol is the prickly hedgehog—the embodiment of stubborn, isolated resistance. To share government, the AL would have to sacrifice most of its radical program and harder still, a good part of its identity.

The SPD and AL were forced together by the "red-green euphoria" that seized West Berlin in response to the elections. When Momper went before a crowd of Social Democrats on election night, he was drowned out by insistent chanting: "Red-green! Red-green!" Neither party could risk shattering its voters' vague but compelling dream of a partnership between the old "red" left, with its historic commitment to social justice, and the new "green" radical democratic left that has grown out of the political

struggles of the past 20 years.

They were also pushed into each other's arms by a negative catalyst, the 7.5 percent of the vote and 11 seats won by a new nationalist far-right party, the Republicans. Anti-fascism is the most fundamental common denominator of the German left, for obvious historical reasons. Strictly speaking,

WEST GERMANY

the Republicans are not a neo-Nazi party, but a far right-wing populist party with a much less aggressive name and style than the NPD (banned in Berlin by the Allies as neo-Nazi) or even Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in neighboring France. Like other contemporary rightist parties in Western Europe, it got votes by blaming immigrants for social problems.

Growing further apart: The immigrant issue is the main factor in the current political polarization. While the CDU hastened to try to compete with the Republicans by copying them, the SPD reacted with a firmer commitment than ever to equal rights for immigrants, starting with the right to vote in municipal elections. This issue provides a core of agreement between the Social Democrats and the Greens.

The other polarizing issue is "law and order." This is a more problematic area for SPD-AL understanding. The leading Berlin Republican, Bernhard Andres, is a 37-year-old policeman and former Christian Democrat. The SPD is especially sensitive to attitudes inside the police, where the SPD has its own small minority union, and insisted on avoiding any measures likely to provoke right-wing reaction among policeman. Thus, on the advice of its own policemen's union, the SPD vetoed the AL proposal to oblige policemen to wear identifying badges. However, it agreed to disband a special anti-riot union. The AL finally agreed to the SPD approach, based on police training to teach police de-escalation strategies and political means of avoiding conflict.

Right-wing media and politicians immediately raised a hue and cry against "red-green chaos," playing on the AL's defense of extralegal social movements such as squatters, its belief in civil disobedience and its generally progressive libertarian social philosophy. The next militant demonstration

that clashes with police could cause real trouble for the coalition. The CDU is positioning itself to stand back and ride a red-green debacle in Berlin to victory in the federal West German elections in late 1990.

With the Christian Democrats and the right-wing press shouting "chaos," the Allies presumably suspicious and business threatening to move away, SPD and AL leaders saw "red-green Berlin" as an historic opportunity, or an historic trap. To seize the opportunity, they had to walk into the potential trap. They did so with lucid misgivings.

Let's get together: Forming a coalition was a strenuous exercise in political responsibility and compromise for the SPD and, even moreso, for the Alternative List. As the small partner, the AL had to cede to the SPD on most points. The negotiations were tough but honest. The result is the first really serious red-green coalition in West Germany. The coalition in the state of Hesse in 1986 was a short-lived, jerry-built arrangement between militant *Realos* (realists) among the Greens, eager to get into government, and a Social Democratic mayor who couldn't wait to find a pretext to end the uncomfortable partnership.

In Berlin the outcome was not the result of a power struggle in which Green *Realos* defeated *Fundis* (fundamentalists), but of a political transformation involving the whole Alternative List. In the six weeks between the elections and designation of a new Senate, a general commission of seven members of each party, plus 12 subcommissions on various policy fields, negotiated a red-green program. Up to 20 Greens took part in each commission, involving a substantial proportion of the party's 3,000 members. Both Social Democrats and Alternatives spoke of the grueling negotiations as a step into a "new political culture" and a "learning process" in which the two former political adversaries learned to know and respect each other.

Thus in Berlin, the coalition is built to last on the basis of an agreement worked out in intensive bargaining, which runs to 85 pages in its short version. The final text was endorsed by special assemblies of both parties. The coalition's policy objectives are spelled out in detail.

When the coalition question came up in Hesse, the whole Green party was infected with the paralyzing *Realo-Fundi* feud. Berlin shifted the focus and helped the party into a new phase. The Green party congress held in Duisburg as the SPD-AL negotiations were underway confirmed the earlier defeat of the *Fundi* party leadership group headed by Jutta Ditfurth, but also rebuffed the most factional *Realo* leaders. A new balanced leadership based on compromise was elected.

Berlin leader Christian Ströbele, acknowledging that the AL had to cede on most points, nevertheless won over the Duisburg congress to enthusiastic support for the coalition, while leaders of the *Fundi* left—radical ecologist Jutta Ditfurth and Hamburg ecosocialists Thomas Ebermann and Rainer Trampert—looked on in dismay and talked of leaving the party. But *Superreale* Otto Schily was also isolated. Ströbele, who like Schily once acted as defense lawyer for members of the Baader-Meinhof Red Army Faction, reproached Schily for publicly advising the SPD to be "tough" in its negotiations with the AL, especially on the question

Socialist Scholars Conference

Two Centuries of Revolution: 1789–1989

March 31, April 1 & 2, 1989

Boro of Manhattan Community College, CUNY,
199 Chambers St. (nr. Trade Center), New York City

The usual suspects and hundreds more . . .

• Paul Sweezy	• Ernesto Laclau	• Ellen Mieskin-Wood	• Stanley Aronowitz
• Robin Blackburn	• Robert J. Lifton	• Carol O'Cleireacain	• Joseph S. Murphy
• Barbara Ehrenreich	• Paul Robeson, Jr.	• Bogdan Denitch	• Samir Amin
• Paul Berman	• Jonathan Schell	• Frances Fox Piven	• Ralph Miliband
• Irving Howe	• Holly Sklar	• William Tabb	• Edward Herman
• Michael Harrington	• Allen Willis	• Daniel Singer	

1989 Registration Form

Make checks payable to "Socialist Scholars Conference" and mail to: R.L. Norman, Jr. CUNY Democratic Socialists Club, Rm. 800 33 West 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036. (212) 606-4226. Please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope for return of registration materials before conference.

Pre-Registration

_____ \$22.50 _____ \$12.50 (student/low income)

Regular Registration

_____ \$30.00 _____ \$15.00 (student/low income)

Professional childcare available during the day on Saturday & Sunday .

☐ I need childcare for _____ children. Ages _____, _____, _____

Name _____

Address _____

City / State / Zip _____