

has long argued that opposition Labour-run councils, with their more extensive public services and higher rates, should be held responsible for their greater spending. Thatcher's plan is to place such a large tax burden on residents in Labour-run councils that they will oust council members in the next elections and replace them with "financially responsible" Conservatives.

For Thatcher, the eventual results of the poll tax seemed clear. In an address to the House of Commons, she declared, "The lesson will be learned that it is the Labour authorities which are the high spenders and it is the Conservative ones which look after their constituents."

To the government's great embarrassment, though, taxpayers are getting hit the hardest in the Conservative strongholds of southern England, where most of the poll tax protests have taken place. Forced to set rates at more than \$400 per person—much higher than previous government estimates—Conservative council members have in some cases charged more than the Labour-controlled inner-city coun-

cils that are Thatcher's primary targets. To make matters worse, the Labour Party issued a list of 50 Conservative-controlled councils that have exceeded government tax estimates—a list that includes the home councils of Thatcher and other leading Conservative politicians.

Thatcher's goal to encourage outraged voters to kick out high-spending Labour councils seems to have backfired. The anger of demonstrators is clearly aimed at the prime minister and not the local councils, which are quick to point out that it was Thatcher who dreamed up the poll tax.

So far the government's response to the demonstrations has been to blame the whole thing on radical leftists—or Militant—members of the Labour Party. While some Militant supporters have reportedly been involved in a few of the demonstrations, the widespread nature of the protests, as well as the fact that both Conservatives and Labour supporters are involved in the demonstrations, rules out any radical leftist conspiracy theories. Even the queen, a pillar of British conservatism, has

joined the protests by announcing that she will pay her servants' poll taxes.

The question now is: will the protests go beyond demonstrations and into non-payment? If Scotland is a bellwether, the Thatcher government may have a serious problem. Implemented as a test case in Scotland one year ago, the poll tax remains highly unpopular, with a large number of people refusing to pay. Non-payment is reportedly widespread in some parts of Glasgow, while some 700,000 Scots have fallen at least three months behind on their payments.

But Scotland may be more an exception than the rule for the simple reason that the Scots can't be thrown into jail for non-payment. For angry residents of England and Wales, the alternative to jail terms is the ballot box—and with a recent *Daily Telegraph* Gallup poll showing Labour with an 18.5 percent lead over the Conservatives, it seems possible that Thatcher's grand plan to break the opposition may instead lead to her downfall.

—Daniel Pruzin

The Jewish peace movement's new kid on the block

Until last May, the conservative American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) billed itself as the only organization registered with Congress to lobby on U.S.-Israeli relations.

Now there's a new kid on the block.

The Jewish Peace Lobby (JPL), with about 2,000 members around the country, hopes to help guide U.S. policy toward encouraging direct talks between the now-unsettled Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the eventual formation of a Palestinian state.

JPL President Jerome Segal says his group backs U.S. efforts to host talks between Egypt and Israel in Washington, as well as other efforts to bring the Israelis and Palestinians together at some point in Cairo. But, he continues, the JPL has a "much broader vision of U.S. policy."

The U.S., Segal says, should create "an environment in which it is likely that the negotiations are not just started but are successful." Specifically, he says, he wants the U.S. to encourage further PLO moderation, earmark 1 percent of its economic aid to Israel for grass-roots efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians together and strongly oppose the violation of civil rights in the Occupied Territories while remaining sensitive to Israeli security concerns.

The JPL is the youngest of several new Jewish organizations on the left. In 1988, the leftist Jewish magazine *Tikkun* sponsored a forum in New York to mark the emergence of a new movement among Jewish progressives. Conference speakers told the audience that progressive Jews

had both allowed the conservative Jewish establishment to speak in their name and not challenged anti-Semitism on the left.

Although the JPL is less than one year old, the group has already started making a name for itself. It was the only Jewish organization involved in promoting congressional legislation that encouraged Israel to reopen West Bank schools. And when Israeli leader Yitzhak Shamir came to the U.S. last November, the JPL presented him with an open letter signed by more than 200 U.S. rabbis supporting the exchange of land for peace.

Segal, a scholar and former adviser to the Agency for International Development (AID), runs the Washington, D.C.-based JPL on a small budget. He calls the group the "McDonald's of the peace movement—we take on a few tasks in order to do them well." And he's received wide support from many well-known personalities, including backing from Grace Paley, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Gloria Steinem, Nathan Glazer, Adrienne Rich and Stanley Hoffman.

The organization has not, however, received an endorsement from the much larger and more powerful AIPAC. AIPAC spokeswoman Toby Dershowitz declined to comment when asked about the JPL, although it appears that AIPAC is watching the JPL's growth. AIPAC, Segal says, is keeping a "fairly fine-grained track on what we're doing" and adds that he's heard that the group has taken note of which rabbis have endorsed the JPL.

The attitude of the Jewish establishment can be gleaned from a press release on the JPL issued by B'nai B'rith International, which bills itself the "world's largest Jewish organization." B'nai B'rith Executive Vice President Thomas Neumann

says in the release that Segal "began his involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict not as an advocate of Israel but of an independent PLO state. Given the goals of this fledgling organization, no one should be deluded into thinking that the new Peace Lobby is a voice of any significance in the Jewish community."

Although the JPL and the Jewish establishment differ on some major issues, Segal says he doesn't want the group to define itself as "anti-AIPAC." And the two groups agree on several issues, such as preventing the sale of sophisticated U.S. weapons to countries at war with Israel.

The two groups also don't want to see the U.S. use aid to Israel as a lever to get Israel to the negotiating table—but for very different reasons. The JPL view is that such efforts would likely push Israeli politics and policy to the right.

Working toward a secure Mideast peace may seem quixotic given the level of violence in the *intifada* and the political stalemate within Israel. But Segal believes that unexpected change can occur. Segal was one of the first American Jews to open a dialogue with the PLO, and he met with PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat for the first time in June 1987. In 1988, he urged Palestinians to unilaterally declare their independence and wage a campaign for peace. At the same time, Segal played a role in getting the PLO to renounce terrorism.

Now Segal and the JPL are turning their attention toward fostering the conditions necessary for a political settlement. To this end, the JPL is developing a piece of model legislation called the "Israeli-Palestinian Peace Environment Act of 1990." One supposes that this will be the Big Mac on JPL's lobbying menu this year.

—Mark Feinberg

senior administration official told *Newsday* that the White House then asked Bernard Aronson, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, to sign a letter endorsing UNO's fundraising efforts. The State Department, however, refused the request. So on January 13 National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft had Sununu sign a letter that said private contributions to UNO were legal and would provide "greatly needed support" for its campaign. And on January 15, the White House dispatched the president's son Jeb, a board member of a Miami-based group that raised money for UNO, and William Pryce, a special assistant to the president for Latin American Affairs, to Houston for a private meeting with Chamorro. A White House official told *Newsday* that the three discussed campaign strategy and finances.

Give that UNO may live: Around the time of this Houston meeting, Scowcroft received attorney Sofaer's warning that White House fundraising for Chamorro "does raise legal concerns." On January 23, Scowcroft wrote and inaccurately advised the president that the State Department believed that this fundraising raised "policy rather than legal concern[s]." He also said that the State Department "cautions about possible adverse congressional reaction." In an apparent effort to defuse any such reaction, Scowcroft then recommended that Bush write and invite both the Republican and Democratic parties to contribute to UNO, which Bush did the next day. Democratic Chairman Ron Brown refused the request, but Republican Chairman Lee Atwater sent UNO \$25,000 in party funds.

Teflon legacy: Bush's contra-funding scheme, more subtle than the Iran-contra conspiracy, appears to have come off without a hitch. Once again a Republican administration turned to private money to promote a policy that a Democratic Congress had refused to fund. Don't expect to read all about it. These days nobody is as kind or as gentle as the national media when it comes to the political indiscretions of a president who's riding high in the polls.

The Republican International, II

UNO was not the only rightist political party in Central America that Washington Republicans were greasing wheels for. On February 4, Rafael Calderon Fournier was elected president of Costa Rica, rolling to victory with the help of hundreds of thousands of U.S. taxpayer dollars. Calderon, the godson of former Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza, was a vocal opponent of former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias and his Central American peace plan. Calderon, a contra backer, has said that he would like to militarize his country by creating a "police force" trained by U.S. military advisers. The money to support his candidacy originated in the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a "private" organization founded in 1983 "to support democratic traditions, strengthen new democracies, open closed societies and sustain democratic possibilities in countries in crisis"—none of which apply to Costa Rica. The NED is funded by Congress through the U.S. Information Agency. Last year NED received \$15.8 million. It doles out money for democracy through a network of "core grantee" organizations. One of those is the National Republican Institute for International Affairs, which from 1986 to 1989 provided \$434,000 to the Association for the Defense of Costa Rican Liberty and Democracy, a front group of Calderon's right-wing Social Christian Unity Party. In an excellent report Vicki Kemper of *Common Cause Magazine* relates that Republican Institute President Keith Schuette told her: "The association was created to receive the grant; it was not a pre-existing institution." The Republican Institute in effect managed the Association for the Defense of Costa Rican Liberty with the help of Calderon, who, having lost the 1986 election to Oscar Arias, was named the association's executive director. For his labors the Republican Institute paid Calderon \$20,000 in 1986 and \$29,500 in 1987. He resigned from the association in 1988 to run again for president. Republican Institute funding made it possible for the association to hire and train 200 political organizers and to fund the creation of an anti-leftist labor union. Republican Institute money also helped support the Association for the Defense of Costa Rican Liberty and Democracy's publication, *The Forge of Social Christian Thought*. In the magazine's September 1986 inaugural issue Calderon called Arias's peace plan "a deformation of masculine values" that was "impugning the national virility" of Costa Rica.

Next week: More on the National Republican Institute for International Affairs.

By Salim Muwakkil

More are going back to the future with Farrakhan

LISTEN TO A RAP RECORD THESE DAYS AND you're likely to be startled by a stern sermon from Nation of Islam (NOI) leader Louis Farrakhan. Rap music's recombinant aesthetic encourages the use of "found" sounds, and the controversial leader's soaring rhetoric has become a staple sample in the rap-music subculture. Indeed, many African-American youths received their first exposure to the Black Muslim message on the dance floor.

A traditional message: Those who condemn the NOI leader as a racist demagogue worry that his appeal to disenchanted youth could eventually foment racial turmoil. For most of the NOI's tumultuous 58-year history, in fact, that view served as conventional wisdom in the black community. But an increasing number of African-Americans are beginning to question that wisdom. Farrakhan's message may be tinged with a strident black nationalism, they allow, but it differs little from religion's traditional message.

His fiery oratory urges self-discipline, family reverence, ethnic solidarity, hard work, honesty, civility and all the other virtues held dear by Judeo-Christian culture. Unlike other religious leaders, however, Farrakhan is a hit with the young. For those African-Americans who bemoan black youth's growing estrangement from the values of their religious heritage but seemingly are powerless to stop it, this is a welcome development. Maybe Farrakhan's unlikely youth appeal will allow him to succeed where the black church has failed, they reason.

What's more, that reasoning is beginning to strike some responsive chords in mainstream America. Both the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times* accorded Farrakhan treatment befitting a visiting head of state during respective luncheon interviews with editorial board members and key editors at both publications. The edited transcripts were prominently featured, and the NOI leader's words were presented without the cut-and-paste distortions that have typified much of his media coverage.

Later, the *Post*-owned *Newsweek* magazine carried a story expressing grudging recognition of his value to a black community in crisis. "Farrakhan's underlying message is hard to ignore," it concluded. But his "tendency toward apocalyptic ranting makes it all too easy for white Americans to ignore the power of his message to the economically distressed, drug-ravaged neighborhoods of the inner city." The article detailed how the NOI has succeeded in eliminating drug dealing and drug violence from a Washington, D.C., housing project and the group's support among community groups "desperate for some solutions."

Such generous assessments of his message would have been unimaginable only two years ago. Yet despite his recent openings to the media, Farrakhan's program hasn't changed. What has changed is a widespread acknowledgement that a growing segment of the African-American community is in the midst of a precipitous decline. "Farrakhan is saying that drugs and the war on drugs are destroying the very fabric of black America," *Newsweek* noted, "and he may be right."

His new media thrust is also an attempt to capitalize on the sense of exasperation at



Many blacks don't believe the hype—they say Louis Farrakhan has gotten a bad rap.

large in the land. The incremental racial progress provoked by the civil-rights movement is reversing itself, and there's little hope that things will improve anytime soon.

BLACK AMERICA

Moreover, many white Americans appear increasingly disenchanted with the concerns of their fellow black citizens, impatient with what they consider African-Americans' slow assimilation process.

Tragic statistics: Compounding the damage caused by the government's retreat from racial justice are the contemporary assaults of crack, crack-related crime and AIDS that are accelerating the decay of communities already reeling from a host of social dislocations easily traced to slavery's legacy.

All of this may mean little to most white Americans and, accordingly, the mainstream media has tended to downplay them. But to many black Americans, it shouts a story of impending doom and raises serious questions about the very survival of many black communities. The word "genocide" is being heard in the most unlikely places these days. The situation obviously requires desperate measures and, in such an atmosphere, even some of Farrakhan's prescriptions sound reasonable.

"White people want us to hate Minister Farrakhan, but all he's trying to do is get us to love ourselves," said Demetria Clark, a senior at Hampton Institute, a traditionally black college in Virginia. Like thousands of other black collegians who turn out in huge numbers to hear the NOI leader speak, Clark is attracted to his message of self-affirmation. And she, like many others, is bewildered by Jewish groups' fierce denunciations of him.

"I've heard Farrakhan many times, and I never heard him focus on Jews except in a positive way. I just couldn't understand why they started harassing him and calling him anti-Semitic," she said. "In fact, he used to urge black people to follow the example of the Jewish people by sticking together for group benefits."

Jews and the NOI: When the late Elijah Muhammad, NOI patriarch and Farrakhan's mentor, spoke of Jews, it was often favorably and in the context of a biblical parallel comparing America's treatment of its black population to ancient Babylon's treatment of Jews or to the Israelites' 400 years of captivity in Pharaoh's Egypt. He made few specific references to contemporary Jews other than to condemn them as "devils"—which he said of all whites. His racist doctrine was not partial to ethnic distinctions and, until Jesse Jackson's 1984 campaign, neither was Farrakhan's.

When the violence-prone Jewish Defense League threatened to harm Jackson—whom it had disliked since publication of the photograph showing him hugging Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat—Farrakhan offered to provide security during the early days of Jackson's campaign. The Secret Service had denied Jackson its protection, so Farrakhan's offer was right on time. Tensions increased following a speech in which Farrakhan warned Jews in particular to lay off Jackson.

Next came a speech in which the NOI leader called Adolph Hitler a "wickedly great" man. Subsequent media reports dropped the word "wickedly" however. The notion that a black leader could venerate a racist as notorious as Hitler was ridiculous on its face, but somehow it stuck. It was also ironic. Farrakhan often used the story of the Nazis' rise as a

cautionary tale to blacks about the hazards of integrating with whites: just as Jews were lulled into thinking they were Germans, blacks are being lulled into thinking they're Americans.

Later, his widely reported "Judaism is a dirty religion" quote contextually referred to Zionists' use of religion to justify their theft of Palestinian land. Once again, Farrakhan was misquoted and misconstrued in the media. The NOI leader simply was not prepared for the intense media scrutiny occasioned by his links to presidential candidate Jackson.

But he also tapped into the deep anti-Jewish prejudices that do exist in certain quarters of the black activist community. This, combined with a kind of circle-the-wagons sentiment provoked by the attacks from Jewish groups, enhanced his standing as an uncompromising advocate of black rights, and he skillfully exploited that new eminence.

By 1985, his popularity had soared. He attracted nearly 35,000 people to New York's Madison Square Garden that October. By then his notoriety had forced a break with Jackson. It had always been an awkward relationship; the leader of a multiracial "rainbow coalition" and the country's leading advocate of black supremacy would seem to have little in common.

Yakub's creation: Farrakhan has followed Elijah Muhammad's teachings religiously. Black activists who treasure Farrakhan's charisma and intelligence but gag on his belief system have long hoped he would reject the more outrageous aspects of NOI doctrine—e.g., white people were grafted out of black people by a "big-headed scientist" named Yakub and created specifically to bedevil the planet, unidentified flying objects are actually manned satellites of a mothership that will rescue only righteous black people from the upcoming apocalypse, black people will need no weapons in the inevitable race war because God will attack white people with natural disasters like earthquakes and tornadoes—in a bid for wider acceptance.

And therein is Farrakhan's dilemma: his legitimacy as NOI leader is based on his strict adherence to Elijah Muhammad's fundamental doctrine, yet that adherence has cost Farrakhan some of the international acclaim he seeks. The orthodox Islamic world rejects as heresies many aspects of the Black Muslim message. The chief heresies are the NOI beliefs that Elijah is the "last messenger" (and not Muhammad ibn-Abdullah, Islam's founder), that God can be manifested as a man and that spiritual character is genetically determined.

During Farrakhan's 13-year stint as NOI leader, he has inched it toward orthodox practices. No longer do NOI members disparage some well-grounded Islamic practices as mere rituals of Arabic culture. For example, the group now observes the Ramadan fast during the period officially authorized by Islamic authorities instead of during the month of December, as it did under Elijah's leadership.

Although the NOI message is as conservative and as anti-sensual as that of the most rigid Christian fundamentalist sect, it nonetheless attracts the interests of the most licentious segment of the African-American community—young men. How is the NOI able to transform irresponsible drug addicts into functioning members of society while other programs fail? What lessons can be learned

Continued on page 10