

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

**I**N THE LATE '70S, LEFT-WING Democrats were a distinct faction demanding to be heard. They had organizations—the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee's Democratic Agenda and the United Auto Workers' Progressive Alliance, to name only the two most prominent—and they had conferences. In Washington, hardly a month would go by without one.

Ronald Reagan's landslide victory in 1980, the AFL-CIO's attempt to achieve consensus politics within its ranks and the eclipse of the Democratic midterm convention cast a pall over the Democratic left. Both Democratic Agenda and the Progressive Alliance were folded, and plans for new national organizations were set aside. No more conferences were convened—the last that I attended was a conference on "progressive economics" in January 1984.

But the Democratic left has returned to Washington. Last month, the Rev. Jesse Jackson assembled his Rainbow Coalition in Washington; and last week, Michael Harrington's Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the successor to the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, attracted more than 1000 Democrats to a conference on New Directions. Jackson's conference was intended to provide him with an organization for his next presidential bid, but the purpose for the New Directions conference was less evident.

### Back on the map

According to Harrington, co-chairman of DSA, the group organized the New Directions conference in order to "get the Democratic left on the map again." It also wanted to revive DSA's diminished presence. "I have no illusion that we are going to lead the left wing of the Democratic Party," Harrington said, "but I wanted to show that we existed." Noting that both the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* had written articles on the conference, Harrington believed that these purposes had been accomplished.

The conference, held May 2-4 at Washington's cavernous Convention Center, was highlighted by the appearance of Jackson and several prominent labor leaders. Some of these labor leaders like American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees' Gerald McEntee and the Communications Workers of America's (CWA) Morton Bahr had not identified themselves previously with the kinds of causes espoused at the New Directions conference. Steelworkers President Lynn Williams, who spoke on Friday night along with Jackson, is a veteran of Canada's New Democratic Party, but his union had previously hewed to the center-right of AFL-CIO politics. The enthusiastic participation of these unions—in Washington, the conference was organized out of the CWA president's office—indicated that the labor movement is once again becoming receptive to left Democratic politics. It also suggests, conference organizers admitted, a desperate search for allies.

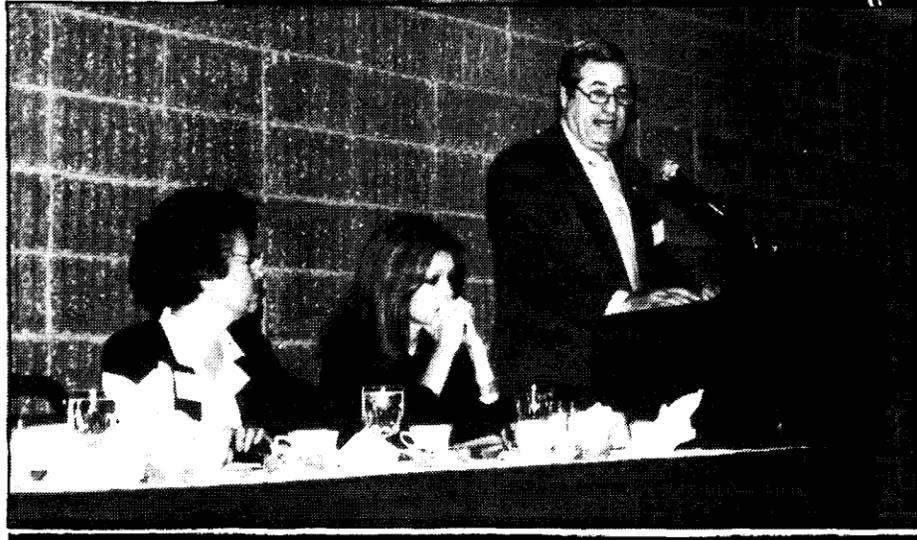
Many of the participants at the conference were enthusiastic. Joe Schwartz, a Harvard graduate student and DSA leader, thought that a Friday meeting between Jackson and the Steelworkers' officials, held after Jackson's talk, itself justified the conference. Jan Rosenberg, a sociologist from Long Island University, was excited by the "new consensus on domestic issues" that she detected at the conference. But there was also some grumbling. One East Coast Democrat, who spoke at the conference, complained that New Directions was the "worst of two possible worlds. There was no political strategy, on the one hand, and there was no real intellectual discussion on the other."

### Economic program

If there was a substantive purpose of the conference, it was to outline an economic program for the Democrats in 1986 and 1988. To some extent, it succeeded in doing so. Many of the best left-wing economists were present, including Harvard's Robert Reich, *New Republic* columnist Robert Kuttner, and Jeff Faux of the Economic Policy Institute. Faux spoke for many of the



Roger Robinson



Roger Robinson

## POLITICS

# New Directions for the Democratic left

conference participants when he said, "I think we ought to stop beating our breasts and saying we don't know what to do. We've got the building blocks of a new economic program."

The conference's economic platform could be summed up in a foundation and five planks. The foundation, stated repeatedly by the speakers, was that, in Robert Reich's words, "the only way we can achieve economic growth is through social justice." This Keynesian assumption—borne out, in the speakers' opinion, by the experience of Western European social democratic governments—runs counter to the prevailing Republican and Democratic view that there must be a trade-off between social justice and economic growth.

The four planks of the conference platform were something like this:

- The economy should be stimulated, and jobs created, by rapidly increasing the money supply. If inflation develops, price controls should be introduced in order to stem it.

- To prevent a rush of imports at the expense of exports, the U.S. should control investment through an "industrial policy" designed to protect beleaguered industries like steel and to encourage industries to become competitive.

- To help stimulate the economy and improve the lot of the poor, the minimum wage should be increased, a progressive income tax should be reinstated and spending should be shifted from military to social uses.

- To increase productivity, greater worker participation and ownership should be encouraged.

While the speakers expressed scorn for "neo-liberal" and "new Republican" economics, their own proposals clearly bore the mark of the Reagan era and of the failure of Francois Mitterrand's initial economic program. No one proposed nationalizing industries. Instead, they

talked like Faux of "managing" the economy or like Reich of obtaining "quid pro quos" from business in return for subsidies. Speakers who proposed stimulating the economy also noted—with a nod toward France—that in doing so the U.S. would have to avoid a flood of imports. Few speakers called for elaborate new welfare programs like national health insurance. Instead, they focused on increasing the minimum wage. And except when stated by Harrington himself, the demand for full employment became a rhetorical goal rather than an extensive government jobs program.

The central assumption of the left Democrat's program could be mistaken. The Keynesian strategy of economic growth through social justice, whether in the U.S. or Western Europe, may have depended upon a rapidly growing world market for Western goods. But it is an assumption that can, and probably will, be tested by the next Democratic administration.

The only serious flaw in the discussion was the emphasis to the point of obsession on the Frost Belt and heavy industry. Every speaker rose to protect America's steel industry—a stance with which there should be no disagreement—but no speaker in the plenary sessions discussed the kind of industries that could make the U.S. competitive in the world economy. On this score, the speakers might have learned something from the neo-liberals or even Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-GA). When I asked one of the conference organizers why Fred Branfman, who runs Gary Hart's think-tank, was not speaking, she said without blinking, "This conference is about economics. And he wanted to speak about high technology."

### Silent majority

Some of the conference was also devoted to an assessment of the left's political prospects. There were two competing views of

*Top: United Steelworkers President Lynn Williams, Jesse Jackson and DSA Co-Chairman Michael Harrington. Below: Americans for Democratic Action National Director Ann Lewis, Gloria Steinem and Communications Workers of America President Morton Bahr.*

the present political situation—one wildly optimistic and the other deeply pessimistic.

Many speakers at the conference, citing recent polling data, insisted that the U.S. had not turned to the right over the last decade. Sociologist Frances Fox Piven found that Americans have become "increasingly hostile toward business" and that "Americans understand the roles of the public sector in humanizing the rapacious capitalist system." Ms. editor Gloria Steinem one-upped Piven by declaring that according to her data Ronald Reagan's popularity was a "myth."

Piven, Steinem and others concluded that the majority of Americans supported the same programs that they did. Steinem thought that the Democratic left's program could remain intact if the rhetoric were changed. Casting doubt upon the inherent unpopularity of busing, Steinem exclaimed, "It's a privilege for white children to be bused."

Piven had a more complex theory of why American public opinion had not asserted itself. Piven's answer was that "American electoral arrangements make voting more difficult." Against any evidence I have ever seen, Piven suggested that if those who did not vote voted the results of elections would vindicate the left Democrats. Piven's program for getting rid of the Reagans and the Kemps is, therefore, to register voters.

Some in the DSA and Democratic left leadership do not buy Piven's or Steinem's analysis. They sketch a darker view in which neither a Democratic Senate victory in 1986 nor a presidential victory in 1988 is assured. In the political hopes they place on the next recession, they appear to envision the present on the model of the '20s, when it took the Great Depression to undermine Republican hegemony and to provide the Democrats with new leadership. As Jeff Faux stated in his speech, they see themselves developing an economic platform so that the next Franklin Roosevelt will "know what to do." Joe Schwartz suggested that the Democrats would be better off losing in 1988. "Then the Republicans can be in office when the structural economic crisis occurs," he said.

but it encourages an unwarranted passivity toward politics. Where Piven and Steinem are correct is that among active Democrats—those most likely to vote in local and state elections and in primaries—left-wing Democratic views are highly representative, if not in a majority. After all, in 1984, each of three main Democrats, Mondale, Jackson, and Hart, had been identified with the party's left and accepted most of its program. Democratic moderates like Ohio Sen. John Glenn were knocked out of the primaries after New Hampshire. The Democratic left, if organized properly, stands a chance of influencing Democratic

*Continued on page 8*

By Dennis Bernstein &amp; Connie Blitt

**A** TUCSON, AZ  
MIDNIGHT BULLET IN THE HEAD of her pastor was Sister Darlene Nicgorski's first taste of justice Guatemalan style. The Milwaukee-born Franciscan fled Guatemala, where she had established a pre-school, and crossed the border to southern Mexico, working for a year in refugee camps crowded with Guatemalan Indians and peasants. During her stay, Nicgorski heard and recorded the stories of a people whose suffering often transcended words. "It's sad I can't remember the specific stories anymore," she said. "After a while, one story melts into the next. The army came and killed. The army came and burned our animals, our crops and our people."

In 1982 she returned to the United States and began to speak out against U.S. sponsorship of the military in Guatemala and El Salvador, and she was given her second taste of justice, by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), which had indicted Nicgorski and 10 other clergy and lay church workers on charges of harboring, transporting and conspiring to smuggle undocumented Central Americans into the U.S.

Their tense, six-month trial culminated on May Day. Eight of the 11 defendants, including Nicgorski, were convicted of 16 felony counts and two misdemeanors. Some of them face jail and \$18,000 in fines.

"Our government has called us criminals," said Nicgorski to reporters and hundreds of supporters at a press conference, "yet it is this administration that violates the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 and the U.N. Protocol Accords of 1967. Our government indicts us for conspiracy, yet our government conspires to suppress the right of Central Americans to determine their own future. Our government has found some of us guilty of transporting, yet our government has transported 30,000 refugees in three years back to their homelands to face possible torture and death."

After the verdict was announced, Michael Altman, attorney for Sister Darlene Nicgorski, was furious. He asserted that the judge had taken away "every defense we had in the world."

Words like "torture" and "refugee" were two of the many initially forbidden from use in Judge Earl H. Carroll's courtroom. "We couldn't even use the word 'life' at some points," explained defense attorney Karen Snell, "because that was considered too close to 'death,' and then you were talking about something horrible that you couldn't talk about. So it got to be almost a joke where the attorneys would have to say 'did something awfully bad happen to you' instead of 'were you imprisoned and tortured.'"



James Corbett, a sanctuary movement founder, was cleared of alien-smuggling charges.

## SANCTUARY

# Justice scaled down in Tucson verdict

"The only thing we could do in this non-sanctuary trial," declared Altman, a University of Arizona law professor, "is present a non-sanctuary defense and appeal to the basic good spirits of the jury." According to Altman, the defense's decision to call no witnesses was based on the hope that the jury would find what he believed were serious flaws in the prosecutor's case, or that the jury would discover independently their power of jury nullification. Jury nullification is the power of the jury to apply their own sense of morality and disregard the letter of the law if they decide a crime was committed for a higher good.

While prosecutor Reno held a press conference in which he thanked God for the jury, several jurors were expressing mixed emotions. "We didn't walk out of there feeling good," said one juror, who asked to be anonymous. "I think it was unanimous that we didn't want to find these people guilty."

Juror David McCrea commented, "I think we did follow the laws, but if there was justice done or not, I'm not sure."

### Political motivations

When the indictments were first handed down in January 1985, refugee advocates hoped that the INS's discriminatory asylum policies would have their day in court. But before opening arguments began in Tucson, Judge Carroll barred a defense based on refugee or international law, or any mention of religious beliefs and humanitarian motives that may have inspired the 11 defendants to shelter refugees. The only question the judge wanted discussed was whether these people conspired to break immigration laws.

"Many judges," said noted attorney William Kunstler, "want to restrict a trial that is politically motivated to the bare bones of a criminal prosecution. That's always the device."

Kunstler's assertion is substantiated by the phone call INS special prosecutor Donald M. Reno received from D. Lowell Jensen, second in command at the U.S. Justice Department, immediately following the sanctuary verdict and before Reno announced at a victory press conference that "this is the precedent-setting case, it goes right to the heart of the movement."

The trial was conceived by the Reagan administration, said Peggy Hutchison, one of the convicted defendants, to tie up resources with a lengthy legal battle, and to criminalize the work of the sanctuary advocates in the eyes of the public. "People think we must have done something wrong for the government to send informants into the churches, to do this long undercover operation and to bring an indictment and call a grand jury," Hutchison said. Nominated by *Good Housekeeping* as one of America's 100 most promising young women in 1985, she now faces five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

### Refugees take the stand

When the Central American refugees were called by the government to testify about aid the 11 defendants gave them, the prosecutor and judge found that ordering them to separate the mechanics of getting to this coun-

try from the violence they had suffered in El Salvador and Guatemala was like attempting to pull an atom away from its nucleus.

Guatemalan Miriam Hernandez and her one-month-old baby were arrested in defendant Wendy Le Win's apartment by the INS when the indictments were handed down. Hernandez told her lawyer she was afraid to testify because she could be deported or her family in Guatemala could be identified and harmed. On the stand, she broke down under questioning from the prosecutor. The jury was hurriedly dismissed and emergency medics were called to the scene.

The looming possibility of deportation put the refugees under great pressure to testify against the sanctuary workers. Prosecutor Reno's recommendations in an individual's file weighs heavily on INS deportation decisions.

In order to secure refugee testimony for the government, sanctuary infiltrator Jesus Cruz lied to some prospective refugee-witnesses. After he transported them from Tucson to Phoenix, Cruz maintained contact with refugees, dropping by for a meal or an offer to drive them on errands. Before they were to testify he asked them to come to INS headquarters where he would arrange for them to get a work permit. They were given instead an "order to show cause" form, the first step in the deportation process. Not knowing how to read English, many of them believed they had signed a work permit until informed otherwise by defense attorneys.

Jose Ruben Torres of El Salvador testified that he had been promised a work permit if he would take the stand as a government witness. He said INS agents told him all he had to do was "tell the truth." And that he would be shown papers, supposedly transcripts of INS interviews with him, to guide his testimony. When defense attorneys asked him if the government had shown Torres the transcripts, he answered, "They showed me papers, the thing is they haven't shown me any papers with the truth on them."

Defense attorneys were prevented from comparing Torres' testimony in court with his original statement to the INS, because the tape and transcript of his initial interview were missing from INS files. Defense attorneys charged this was one of six tapes and transcripts of witness interviews that suspiciously disappeared from the hands of chief INS investigator James Rayburn. Concluding a special hearing on the missing information from Torres' file, Judge Carroll called the government's actions "inattentive and negligent," but no punitive measure was taken.

"If they're going to indict Mexican nationals and have most of the trial in Spanish, which this one was," commented defense attorney James Brosnahan, "you really do need someone who is open-minded on the subject of Hispanic people. I think the judge has a very serious problem in that regard."

Brosnahan listed numerous examples of what he termed the judge's "cultural perception problem," which others labeled racism.

During the testimony of the first refugee-witness, Alejandro Rodriguez, Judge Carroll found Rodriguez' refusal to limit his responses to one-word answers and his references to torture frustrating. The judge commented in an aside with the lawyers, "I think people from Latin America perhaps have a difficulty in just answering 'yes' or 'no'." The defense filed a motion asking Judge Carroll to step down from the case because of bias. He denied their motion.

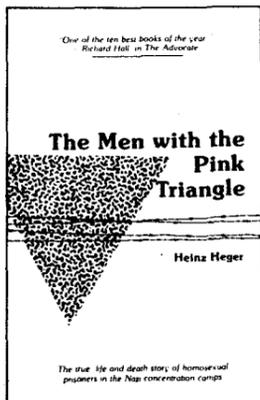
Yet the "hidden agenda" of the U.S. government to "discredit and silence" the sanctuary movement through the use of covert investigations and federal indictments has already backfired in the court of public opinion and is creating martyrs for the cause.

Quaker James Corbett—a founding member of the sanctuary movement, and one of three acquitted by the Tucson jury—said that "we will continue to provide sanctuary services openly and go to trial as often as is necessary to establish the legality, or more directly, to actualize the Nuremberg mandate that the protection of human rights is never illegal."

Dennis Bernstein and Connie Blitt have covered the Tucson trial for *In These Times*.

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