

# A RENEWED ATTACK ON LABOR

By Bayard Rustin

America's labor movement has rarely received a square deal from the press. Therefore it should come as no surprise that trade unions are currently being subjected to a consistent barrage of criticism. What is surprising, however, is the particular vehemence with which the trade union movement is being criticized at a time when it is attempting to move in directions which would increase its involvement in the political process and begin to offer a response to the Reagan Administration's economic proposals.

Press criticism has come from all corners. From the left, Stanley Aronowitz writing in "The Nation," has lashed out at "entrenched leaders" who "not only control the mechanisms of power, but sit astride bureaucratic structures that work to defuse opposition." "Business Week's" view, is the labor leadership's un-

willingness to address questions of labor productivity and job performance. A labor reporter for the New York "Daily News" has suggested that "labor is losing its grip." And President Ronald Reagan has accused organized labor of being out of step with its rank-and-file.

Let's take a look at these charges one by one. Critics charge that labor is controlled by entrenched bureaucrats. The fact of the matter is that labor's leadership is democratically elected and elections are often close and hotly contested. Critics accuse labor of being uninterested in productivity. In truth labor is not only worried about American industry losing its competitive edge but there is statistical evidence which shows that in manufacturing, productivity of unionized workers is substantially higher than that of unorganized workers. As for the charge that organized labor is politically ineffective, the evidence of the last

election shows that union members and their families voted for Jimmy Carter by a higher percentage than any other segment of the population with the exception of minorities.



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No one can deny that there was a shift away from Democratic candidates in the last election, but the blame for this shift must rest squarely with the Democratic Party which has minimized the input of labor leaders in its highest councils. And finally, President Reagan's suggestion that labor is out of step with its members is simply untrue. Union members are deeply concerned about such

issues as plant relocation, workplace safety, job security, the minimum wage, and unemployment. It is Mr. Reagan's stand on these questions that is out of touch with worker needs and desires and not the labor leadership's.

The recent spate of poor press and President Reagan's criticism is not only illfounded but it has obscured the fact that the labor movement is moving forward in a number of innovative directions. This March the AFL-CIO was involved in a series of regional conferences at which the Federation's President Lane Kirkland and Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Donahue sat down with local and state trade union leaders as part of an effort to "help strengthen state federations and local bodies."

The AFL-CIO is also moving forward in an attempt to get the United Auto Workers to rejoin the fold. The federation has embarked on an effort to abandon its

neutrality in party primaries and to take part more directly in the nominating process for national office. The Service Employees have launched an ambitious attempt to organize office workers. The clothing and Textile Workers have won a major victory against the J.P. Stevens Company in the South by utilizing innovative techniques which involved consumer boycotts, pressure on the Stevens Company's business partners, demonstrations, and shareholders' proxy fights. And the labor movement has had tremendous success in increasing the levels of participation of black unionists, who today account for over 17 percent of the AFL-CIO's membership. Moreover, a recent study has found that black union members are far more active in the political process than white counterparts.

With several exceptions, these new courses have been given short shrift by the press, which for the most part

treats labor unions as an anachronism or an obstacle to progress and productivity. A mythology has arisen about trade unions which portrays the labor movement as an amalgam of special interests led by "cigar chomping" bureaucrats.

What the labor movement is really about, however, is a national network of 60,000 union locals. Each of these involves scores and often hundreds of union members in voluntary administrative, political and community activities. For the most part, local trade union unionists are part-time unpaid volunteers who hold down full-time jobs outside the labor movement and who have roots in their own communities. While the activities of the Moral Majority and conservative political action committees are given extensive play in the media, the wide-ranging activism of the union local is ignored unless a strike erupts.

## CHECK

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true national security is as dependent upon a strong economy and a united people as it is upon a well-stocked arsenal.

Congress should raise some tough questions, starting with a reassessment of what our military's mission should be. Obviously, there is a big difference between a military's establishment charged with defending our territory and vital allies and one prepared to intervene anywhere on the globe.

Defining our defense posture should come first, followed by underwriting defense capabilities to fit that posture. Being the world's policeman is an ambition no nation can hope to achieve and that means gearing military power to realistic goals.

Intervention in El Salvador, for example, would be a horrible mistake, a repeat of the disastrous Vietnam adventure that could set all Central America aflame. We should overcome the tendency to look to

military solutions for problems that are best settled by political means.

A look at all the new weapons budgeted for the military suggests this budget is politically designed to give each of the services what it wants, rather than an integrated budget derived from a cool assessment of total defense needs.

For example, with a new strategic bomber slated to come on stream in the early 1990s, does

produce an "economic calamity."

Stepped-up arms purchases mean funneling scarce supplies of money and skilled labor to produce things people cannot buy. That is the classic prescription for runaway inflation.

It is no accident that the industrial nations with the highest levels of economic growth are also the ones whose defense budgets take a smaller share of national spending.

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it make sense to spend billions on an interim plane that won't be ready until 1987 or so?

Congress also has to determine what effect its decisions will have on the world and on our economy. An increase of the magnitude asked by the Administration could just set off an arms race that leaves us less secure than before.

The impact on the economy could endanger national security even while our defense installations are bulging with new weapons. A Nobel-prize winning economist says the defense program could

And there are opportunities to squeeze waste out of the present military establishment. The comptroller general recently reported that Pentagon mismanagement costs the taxpayer some \$4 billion a year. Cost overruns regularly double costs of new weapons systems.

This is a dangerous world and we should be under no illusions about the threats to our nation from Russian expansionism. But the world will not be made safer by throwing money at the Pentagon or endangering our fragile economy.

## Legal Services On Shaky Ground

# REAGAN Vs REAGAN

By Norman Hill

While President Reagan's budget cuts will eliminate a number of vital programs, few of the cuts will have more far-reaching consequences than the proposed elimination of the Legal Services Corporation.

Created in the '60s in the context of the Great Society, and the War on Poverty, the Legal Services Corporation has been the most significant instrument the poor possess to insure adequate representation before the courts. A number of President Reagan's ultra-conservative advisers have suggested that the federally-funded legal aid program is a hotbed of radicalism and leftist politics. In truth, the program's 6,000 lawyers who serve 330 communities throughout the U.S. are involved most often in such critical issues as landlord-tenant relations, welfare rights, and civil rights.

Over the years millions of poor and working poor have benefited from this legal

aid network. The poor have used the system to challenge improper dismissals from work, landlord harassment and building-code violations, and discrimination in employment.

An important instrument by which millions of Americans have indirectly benefited is the class action suit. In such suits, often brought by legal aid lawyers, judges do not simply resolve a single dispute but impose remedial orders which have the effect of improving the lives of large numbers of Americans.

Today, with the increased complexity of government regulations and laws, access to informed legal advice and legal aid is an absolute necessity. If the poor are to challenge eviction orders, or learn how legally to withhold rent from a landlord who refuses to supply heat or hot water, the advice of a lawyer is indispensable. Moreover, if the poor seek to dissolve a marriage through divorce such procedures are often so complicated and costly as to be beyond the means of low-income Americans.

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The elimination of the legal aid program will result in fewer such suits being brought to the courts and in fewer direct benefits to workers and minorities.

In the distant past lawsuits were relatively straightforward matters and the legal system was turned to only as a matter of last resort.

The legal aid program has also intervened in behalf of unemployed workers denied welfare benefits, illegitimate children, and Social Security recipients who couldn't get cases reopened for government hearings. This list of issues hardly suggests that legal aid

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