

SPECIAL REPORT IPS INTERVIEW

ICNEP Director: We'll Sneak Humphrey-Hawkins Through

NEW YORK, March 27 (IPS) — The following are excerpts from an interview with Myron Sharpe, executive coordinator of the Initiative Committee for National Economic Planning (ICNEP). The committee which includes among its members United Autoworkers President Leonard Woodcock distributed documents in British-published Challenge magazine calling for "fascism with a human face." Under Sharpe's direction ICNEP last year drafted the Humphrey-sponsored "Balanced Growth and National Planning Act," which was subsequently dropped. The provisions of that act have been reincorporated in the omnibus fascist Humphrey-Hawkins bill (see accompanying report). The interview, which was conducted March 23, was made available to IPS by a student journalist.

Q: In the winter of 1975, ICNEP's proposals for national economic planning were submitted to the Senate in the form of legislation sponsored by Senators Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn) and Jacob Javits (R-NY) How does the current Humphrey-Hawkins bill compare to the original ICNEP measure?

Sharpe: The current Humphrey-Hawkins bill is a merger of the Humphrey-Javits legislation and the earlier form of the Humphrey-sponsored full employment act. The new bill seeks to guarantee full employment with price stability. However, the bill does not call for a separate economic planning board as under Humphrey-Javits. The same purpose will be accomplished under an expanding, more broadly functioning Presidential Council of Economic Advisors. When the legislation is approved by Congress, the President and the Cabinet, the Congress is expected to grant the Council full planning powers under the bill.

Q: Does the Initiative Committee actively support the legislation?

Sharpe: ICNEP no longer officially supports any specific piece of legislation.

Q: But you must have discussed the bill and its provision with legislators and public officials?

Sharpe: Yes, we have gone over the bill in numerous discussions. We now work in an advisory capacity to both Senators Humphrey and Javits, as well as Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) and Rep. Richard Bowling (D-Mich.).

Q: How would you estimate support for the legislation?

Sharpe: As we see it, the AFL-CIO is fully behind it, the

Congressional Black Caucus is strong in support on the basis of its full employment provisions (of course they are encouraged by caucus member Hawkins.) A number of religious groups support the bill for humanitarian reasons. Now, the House leadership is sold in its support but the Senate is altogether more shaky; we're not yet certain what that line-up will be.

Q: With the type of national planning specified in the legislation won't its supporters meet with criticism as fascists from the left and socialists from the conservatives?

Sharpe: Planning per se will not be an issue in the campaign to get the legislation enacted. The focus of the campaign will be solid 'bread and butter' issues like full employment and stable prices. Workers will support the Humphrey-Hawkins bill on this basis. Workers can no more understand planning than they understand (late British economist John Maynard) Keynes, but they will support these issues which they can understand.

Q: What are the bread and butter issues for New York City?

Sharpe: The legislation will provide long-range financing of capital projects. It will put people back to work.

Q: Will these capital projects be similar to those proposed by Municipal Assistance Corporation Director Felix Rohatyn last week (Rohatyn last week proposed that ghetto areas of the city should be razed, black-topped and filled with new industrial parks)?

Sharpe: This is precisely the emphasis of the legislation. There will be no provision for debt-service financing; the approach will be stimulative. Employment opportunities for unemployed urban dwellers can be created outside of the city as well. Many urban unemployed would be happy to relocate if new jobs were available.

Q: How will the planning of specific projects get underway?

Sharpe: Individual cities, and groups like ICNEP, as well as the President and Congress can call for regional and national employment targets. Plans can then be laid for employment projects in cities and in rural areas, auxiliary to the Humphrey-Hawkins bill.

Q: How do you see the strategy for passage of the legislation in Congress?

Sharpe: The bill should make it through both the House and Senate in several months. Should Ford veto it, it will stand as a major issue for Senator Humphrey's own presidential campaign (should he mount one).