

## LABOR PERISCOPE

### Like Lemmings over the cliff

People around the AFL-CIO headquarters were all smiles last Monday morning, the morning after President Carter's so-called energy message. As one aide to AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer Lane Kirkland put it, "this is our energy program, with only minor adjustments." The aide wasn't exaggerating: The emphasis on breaking the OPEC oil cartel, the call for "energy independence" through massive multibillion dollar synthetic fuel boondoggles with heavy emphasis on coal, the call for "sacrifice" and conservation—all are found in the AFL-CIO Executive Committee's resolution on energy passed last winter as a reaffirmation of earlier resolutions.

Kirkland and fellow Trilateral Commission and Committee on the Present Danger member Martin Ward had been among the 130 odd fellows who climbed the mountain to meet with Carter during his Camp David reclusé. It is known that both Kirkland and Ward, the Plumbers and Pipefitters president, "urged" Carter to push forward on a massive synthetic fuel program and, according to another Kirkland aide, found "Carter and his staff already tuned in to our wavelength." Kirkland and Ward had other, more extreme anti-OPEC suggestions, including the long-standing AFL-CIO proposal to set up a national oil purchasing agency, according to sources; they were told to "be patient."

When it was pointed out to an

AFL-CIO spokesman that Carter's Sunday night speech had neglected to mention "nuclear energy," the spokesman had a ready reply: "We have received assurances from the White House that the administration remains just as committed to nuclear now as they were before the speech. ..." The spokesman took Carter's lip service to nuclear power in his July 16 speech in Kansas City to mean "nothing has changed on nuclear, just like we were told." The assurances reportedly came directly from the White House to Lane Kirkland.

No one at AFL-CIO headquarters cared to interpret what Carter's "having the same policy on nuclear as before" might mean to the industry. That policy has seen a virtual cessation of nuclear plant construction in the U.S., with an accompanying loss of tens of thousands of jobs in nuclear and related industries. In recent months, it has seen the shutdown of dozens of operating nuclear plants for "safety reasons" in the wake of the Three Mile Island incident.

Nothing, however, was going to deter the AFL-CIO leadership from slobbering over the program: it could have been announced by anyone. Within hours after the speech, Kirkland's office had drafted a short statement and released it under George Meany's signature. This is not to imply that the 84-year-old, enfeebled Meany would not support the Carter program—he has consistently sup-

ported calls for an energy autarky—but to simply indicate what everyone in Washington already knows: Lane Kirkland is in full charge of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. He is expected to formally take charge of the federation upon Meany's equally expected retirement later this year.

Kirkland and the AFL-CIO bureaucrats in Washington have a well-earned reputation for being totally out of touch with the thinking of secondary trade union leaders and rank and file members. Thus, while Kirkland and company were singing paeans to the "new" Carter energy program, initial reports from around the country found steelworkers at the plant gates, building trades members at construction sites and at union halls expressing disgust with the president's program, especially his call for "greater sacrifice," and energy conservation.

Few workers had heard of the Kirkland-Meany statement, but when told of its existence, they would comment, "it figures." The general consensus is: "if this is what they are saying in Washington, then Kirkland and Meany don't speak for me ..."

Several building trades leaders contacted after the speeches on Sunday and Monday, were appalled that the Carter administration is "walking away from nuclear." One East Coast local leader commented, "they are selling out the whole nuclear program. ..." Such leaders did not seem willing to accept the assurances by Carter officials of union-scale jobs in the synthetic fuels industry.

The AFL-CIO leadership in Washington appears willing to follow Kirkland over the cliff on energy "sacrifice." The rest of the labor movement may not, however, be willing to follow.

—L. Wolfe and M. Moriarty