

Where it will go

'Small is beautiful' unpopular in Wisconsin

Milwaukee's incumbent conservative Democratic Mayor Henry Maier in his 1980 re-election bid is facing "his first serious challenge in 20 years." That is how observers characterize environmentalist Dennis Conta.

Conta has the support of Rep. Henry Reuss, a closet Kennedy supporter, and the pro-Kennedy United Auto Workers regional leadership. Maier first won election as Mayor in 1960 in a bitterly fought contest against Henry Reuss himself.

Conta has been attacking Maier on several manufactured issues such as "police brutality." More to the point, he is on record as proposing the slashing of the city budget, large-scale layoffs and the shutdown of city construction.

Conta claims his campaign is based on local "grass roots" support for community control and environmentalist opposition to Maier. In actuality, it is being carefully nurtured by Milwaukee's northside Congressman Reuss, and Jane Fonda's Mobilization for Survival. Reuss and the Wisconsin MFS, with Conta form the center of support for the Wisconsin Democrats for Change, the state's Draft Kennedy movement.

Indications have surfaced that Conta may already be learning that alliance with the Kennedy campaign could be more of a disaster than a free ride. Sources close to Reuss admit that not only are the mainstream German-descended Catholic Milwaukee voters "too moral" for Kennedy, "These are the same kind of people who think Conta doesn't stand a chance with his far-out program," the same source said.

Conta's campaign was kicked off this past summer by a series of public rallies against nuclear power by Fonda and the MFS, which has together with the Federal regulatory apparatus already succeeded in shutting down two nuclear plants near Milwaukee. The Wisconsin MFS in Milwaukee has already formed a Labor Task Force to try to break sections of the city's heavily unionized conservative Democrat working class vote away from Maier and into the Conta camp. Roy Majerus, head of United Auto Workers Region 10 (Milwaukee) and a Democratic National Committee supporter of Ted Kennedy, addressed a June MFS rally

calling for an end to nuclear power. "It's only a matter of time until we openly endorse Conta at these rallies," an MFS spokesman said.

On Labor Day, Sept. 7, Reuss personally organized a "Small Is Beautiful" festival of the Park West Redevelopment Task Force in the heart of Milwaukee's black ghetto, where the Maier administration and the Building Trades have been trying to construct the modern Park West Freeway for several years.

The Task Force is the umbrella group of "community activists" which constitutes the Conta campaign. It includes Chairman David Hoeh, his wife, Alderman Sandra Hoeh, Milwaukee Common Council President Ben Johnson, and Milwaukee State Assemblyman Mordecai Lee. These local liberals are also avid supporters of Reuss and Kennedy.

At the fest, Reuss and the Conta machine joined to pledge that the freeway would never be built; they also pledged to "stop Milwaukee's growth," according to Conta campaign organizers. On the spot of the proposed freeway construction they erected a block of solar energy transformers, biomass toilets, and other environmentalist exhibits.

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"Conta will have trouble for the same reason as Kennedy," agreed a source close to Reuss. "I'm for Kennedy; Reuss is for Kennedy; he's the only place for us to go now. But Milwaukee and the rest of the state are Catholic and it's the voters who won't go for Kennedy—they're too moral."

The Wisconsin Democratic contingent in Washington, led by Reuss, Sen. William Proxmire, Rep. Robert Kastenmeier, Rep. Les Aspin, and other liberals of national stature, personally favor Kennedy, said the source. "But," he added, "their perception is that the voters might go for him tomorrow, but not by election day, after he's been dragged through the muck. It's a very moral state."