

Kirkland, O'Neill plan Democratic split

by Lonnie Wolfe

On Dec. 8, AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland, Democratic House Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, Vice-President Walter Mondale, and Sen. Edward Kennedy held a private meeting to discuss the "future direction of the Democratic Party."

The previous week, Kirkland had met with both O'Neill and Mondale.

Well-placed sources in Washington, D.C. report that behind the series of meetings is a plot by Trilateral Commission member Kirkland and O'Neill, along with members of the Socialist International, to take over and wreck the Democratic Party as a viable constituency-based institution.

Their goal, which has reportedly been the subject of the meetings, is to force mainstream party leaders either to the sidelines or out of the party completely. This would leave the party apparatus in the hands of social-democratic allies of Kirkland and O'Neill who aspire to turn it into a British-style social democratic party.

Liberals versus the mainstream

At this moment, however, the battle for the Democratic Party is a real scramble, with no one in control. The election landslide displaced the entire McGovern wing of the party. It also opened the door for the conservative and moderate elements of the party to challenge the McGovernite leadership on policy questions. In recent weeks this battle has spilled into the open, as Democrats in Congress, responding to consti-

tuency pressure, have attacked the devastating high-interest-rate policies of Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker.

Party insiders confirm that the election debacle has in fact left Kirkland and O'Neill in seriously weakened positions. Their actions represent an effort to recoup lost power and influence before the mainstream has a chance to consolidate its gains.

Kirkland and O'Neill are moving to shatter any potential for collaboration between the progrowth factions of the Democratic Party and the incoming Reagan administration on matters of bipartisan concern in economic and foreign policy. Key members of the Reagan team are said to be quietly working to accomplish a Thatcherization of the new President—saddling Reagan with the same failed economic policies of the British Thatcher government, which have tripled inflation and doubled unemployment. If that happens, the U.S. economy will deteriorate, promoting the kind of social crisis that Kirkland, O'Neill, et al. need to give their operation a chance.

It is no accident that the big guns of Eurosocialism gathered in Washington this week as the Kirkland-O'Neill operation began to take shape. Willy Brandt, Olof Palme, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, and the other European leaders arrived to give the marching orders for the social democratic transformation of the Democratic Party. The conference provided a cover for this purpose.

As our on-the-scene report indicates, the speeches by the Eurosocialist leaders hammered away at one theme: Reagan will be Thatcherized. The American social democrats will then use this as their rallying point to build a "mass party" out of the shards of the Democratic Party.

As pieced together by our Washington staff, the Kirkland-O'Neill strategy involves three specific areas: 1) a grab for congressional power, using the full weight of O'Neill's speakership to break resistance and enforce policy; 2) the reorganization of the labor movement to more effectively deploy the left-wing social democratic networks like the United Autoworkers; and 3) the enforcement of rigid party discipline through accountability statutes which will allow O'Neill to control debate and demoralize and stifle mainstream elements. The O'Neill-Kirkland deal to wreck the party has already been openly denounced by former Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, Jr., now chairman of the advisory board of the National Democratic Policy Committee, a group committed to rebuild the party on its traditional constituency base.

The congressional power grab

Tip O'Neill as Speaker of the House is uniquely positioned to play a key role in the transformation. He has been identified by several social-democratic-linked Democratic Party sources as the "leader of the parliamentary party." In this sense he has been and is intended to function as the chief enforcer of party discipline. It is well known that O'Neill has files on all congressmen and their voting records. It is his stated policy to reward the faithful and to punish the unworthy, as determined by how members line up on particular issues.

O'Neill is known for his vindictiveness and his willingness to go to extremes—including political blackmail—to get his orders carried out. Tip, himself a well-known sot, does not initiate policy, but merely implements it. As our sources report, the saying goes, "When Kirkland talks, O'Neill walks."

O'Neill has been ordered to do one thing. Through the use of his powers as Speaker and his "files" and other assorted weapons, he intends to adopt an "obstructionist" posture to thwart bipartisan congressional action around an alternative economic policy to Paul Volcker's.

If O'Neill is not removed as Speaker or politically checked when Congress convenes next year, he remains in a position to bottle up both Reagan and mainstream Democratic legislative initiatives. As one leading social democratic conspirator put it, "We need a real nasty Tip O'Neill to hold things in place, to make us the 'opposition' party."

While O'Neill handles the "parliamentary party," executive board member of Social Democrats USA Lane Kirkland is reshaping the labor movement and deploying the forces under his control for the operation.

Last week, UAW President Douglas Fraser leaked to the press that the union's executive board was going to act within a week on a motion to reaffiliate the 1.5-million member union with AFL-CIO. If all goes as planned, the UAW will re-enter the AFL-CIO by some time next year, and Fraser will be given a seat on the AFL-CIO executive board.

Once that occurs, negotiations on a merger between the UAW and William "Wimpy" Winpisinger's International Association of Machinists are expected to be quickly concluded. In addition, there is also talk of a possible UAW-IAM merger with the United Rubberworkers, though this is slated for the more distant future.

This realignment of the "left-wing" social democratic UAW-IAM under the AFL-CIO umbrella has been a personal project of Lane Kirkland. Its purpose is properly located by remarks made by a Kirkland aide.

The AFL-CIO president, the aide said, has the following operative strategy for transforming the Democratic Party into a social democracy. Kirkland will himself "hold the AFL-CIO officially neutral" in party matters. This, the aide said, was the meaning of Kirkland's remarks last week at the 25th anniversary of the merger between the AFL and the CIO. "We are playing a double game," the aide said.

By staying out of the Democratic Party fray himself, Kirkland will be free to maneuver inside the Reagan administration through various "channels of influence." Meanwhile, he will privately encourage the left-wing UAW and IAM to "enter the party completely and work as labor's opposition to Reagan." Once the Reagan administration is thoroughly Thatcherized, as Kirkland expects, he will bring the rest of the AFL-CIO fully into a "social" Democratic Party at war with the class enemy.

Both Fraser, who met with European Social Democratic leaders, and Winpisinger, who spoke at the Washington social democratic conference last week, are already playing by Kirkland's rules. Both are talking about class war against Reagan at the first opportunity.

Kirkland is personally committed to bringing a British-style parliamentary system to the United States, an aide said. The AFL-CIO president has said on several occasions that he regards that system as superior to the one specified in the U.S. Constitution. The anglophile Kirkland, aides say, finds a sympathetic ear for his ideas in House Speaker O'Neill. It is through O'Neill, AFL-CIO sources report, that Kirkland intends to dictate his orders to the Democratic Party.

Social dems discuss the party's future

EIR interviewed Jim Chapin, national director of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, on Dec. 9.

EIR: What will happen to the Democratic Party?

Chapin: It depends on what the Republicans do in power. In the English case, one party bucks to the right while the other goes to the left. Reagan is like Thatcher and Begin; he has the same economic adviser, Milton Friedman. We feel the Dems should have different policies. Now left liberalism will emerge—it depends on the Republicans, if they fall quickly people will say we don't have to do anything different in the party.

EIR: Will some sort of social democracy emerge?

Chapin: A social democracy is emerging within the Democratic Party. By the nature of American politics it is decentralized, but a greater party structure is talked about a lot. Accountability to the party platform was passed this time. We supported those moves.

EIR: Should congressmen play a greater role?

Chapin: It is a good idea. But elected officials should play a greater role with the party if the party plays a greater role with elected officials. Membership in an American party doesn't mean anything. Public officials must feel responsible to the party. Since the early part of the century the American parties can't withhold a nomination to a person as they can in England, France, and Canada if the person doesn't go along with the party. The presidential nominee in effect can be without experience in the party. In England, the prime minister has 10 or 20 years working in the party.

Comments by Arch Puddington, executive director of the League for Industrial Democracy and editor of New America, publication of the Social Democrats USA.

The most effectively organized group in the party is the Democratic Agenda, the left around Michael Harrington. But since so many liberals were defeated in the last election it won't carry over to the rest of the party. They will carve out their role. There will be a split in the party. Those that are running for office or hold office are moving to the center. The feminists, blacks, environmen-

talists are moving to the left. This is similar in form to the British Labour Party: the centrists versus the activists who are to the left of the parliamentary party.

The problem in the U.S. is that there is no party discipline. . . . The party won't become more disciplined, though, because too many people have a stake in it not being so—they are on the outs. But the direction the party has been moving is the direction of the British Labour Party.

Getting elected officials, congressmen within the party councils makes sense. A lot depends on Reagan and how well he does—if he is a disaster the left will gain influence.

This interview with Morley Winograd, Michigan Democratic Party state chairman and president of the State Chairmen's Association, was made available to EIR.

Q: Where will the Democratic Party go from here?

A: I am not sure where it will go. The debate on the kind of chairman we will have will determine that. We have to rebuild at the local level. Ideologically, we have been offering a majority of the voters something they want instead of giving to each constituency group. The fundamental concern is economic growth with prosperity, not destabilizing growth. People want jobs for their children, education, and decent neighborhoods.

It's a question of redirecting the focus, we have to espouse principles that are of greater concern to the little guy. Our concerns before were not relevant to the electorate, things like environmental quality, government reform, fixing up the bureaucracy. My hope is that we don't split, that the DNC brings congressmen, governors and state officials into the party.

Q: There has been discussion of the party becoming more like the British Labour Party, and thus gaining more power.

A: That is a possibility. We have had lifted the weight of the President taking over the party since we didn't win the election. But since the federal system we have is not a parliamentary system it is difficult to exert that kind of a role. It is better to do it on a state basis than a national level. It's an opportunity now that we don't have the presidency. That situation gives the party freedom and independence to move. Congressional involvement is usually positive.

Q: Who in Congress is interested in this?

A: I think Tip O'Neill. He has decided it's something he has to get involved in. His statement a few weeks ago criticizing the DNC. . . . Congressmen understand the importance of a national party. I have spoken to his office on this. It is fascinating when a party is out of power, the opportunities are limitless.