

## Democrats scurry in all 'directions'

by Nicholas F. Benton

The fractured Democratic Party scurried off into four or five different directions in early May, depending on whether you count walking out of the party altogether, as former Illinois Sen. Adlai Stevenson did.

The other four directions included: 1) a trade union-based "New Directions" amalgam of McGovern-era holdovers protesting the right-leaning trends in the party which gathered in Washington D.C. on May 3-4; 2) the "Democratic Policy Commission," which met in Atlanta the same weekend under the leadership of Democratic National Committee chairman Paul Kirk for another contentless display of party "unity"; 3) the "Coalition for a New Democratic Majority," which gave its Henry M. Jackson Friend of Freedom Award to former Virginia Gov. Charles Robb May 6, and 4) the "Populist Forum," which convened in Washington on May 9, a grouping of radical libertarian elements.

● In Washington, 10 trade unions spent \$50,000 to gather about 1,000 liberal Democrats to protest what they feel is a "shift to the right" in the party. Bringing together the unions with old feminist, homosexual, anti-nuclear, environmentalist and related "special interest" groups that arose under the 1972 McGovern party reforms, the "New Directions" group heard from Jesse Jackson and Michael Harrington, co-chairman of the Democratic Socialists for America. Jackson complained that "the Democratic Party is producing schizophrenic leaders who want to look like John Kennedy with hair flowing to the left and act like Ronald Reagan with behavior flowing to the right."

Anne Lewis, national director of Americans for Democratic Action, a vintage ultra-liberal organization, warned against what she saw as the party's growing neglect of minorities, feminists, and organized labor by saying, "History tell us that no political party moves forward by penalizing its most consistent supporters." "One Republican Party is more than enough," asserted Harrington. "We are all profoundly disturbed by the rightward drift of the Democratic Party."

The United Auto Workers, the International Association of Machinists and Communication Workers Union were the key among the 10 unions that pitched in to sponsor the event, which drew fewer than 1,000 at the same time that evangelist Billy Graham was drawing over 20,000 to a different area of the same convention center.

● In Atlanta, DNC Chairman Kirk was elated with what he called "the peaceful and upbeat nature" of the Democratic Policy Commission meeting. There was "scarcely a ripple of dissent" in the gathering—just the way Kirk says he likes things, even if less than half the elected members of the Policy Commission bothered to show up. The meeting was supposed to begin drawing up a detailed policy agenda for Democratic candidates for national office. Task force leaders presented the commission with draft reports that generated "little discussion or feedback," according to reports.

Kirk hailed the lack of "special interests" at the meeting, implying that the party would no longer be "pressured" by the demands of its constituency base, and he seemed particularly pleased that he was introduced to speak by Georgia Gov. Joe Frank Harris, a conservative Democrat who in 1984 snubbed the Mondale-Ferraro ticket.

Although their task was to draw up a policy document, the Policy Commission's chairman, former Utah Gov. Scott Matheson, said the group was determined, in the name of unity, "not to get involved in current issues on the legislative agenda in Washington," such as the Gramm-Rudman budget, or the radical Packwood tax reform. "It is not our business," Matheson said.

● Virginia's Governor Robb told the right-leaning Coalition for a Democratic Majority that the Democratic Party "must adopt a strong and assertive foreign policy" as he received that group's Scoop Jackson award. Robb, married into the Lyndon Johnson family and reportedly backed by the *Washington Post's* Katharine Graham as a presidential hopeful, said that the party "has to abandon the neo-isolationism that has dominated the party since the McGovern nomination in 1972." Ben Wattenberg, chairman of the Coalition, and head of the American Enterprise Institute, praised Robb who, he said, with Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), are "three major figures who are sounding the most like" the late Scoop Jackson on foreign policy. Despite this pro-defense posturing, Nunn and Aspin are calling for decoupling the U.S. from Western Europe and slashing funding for the SDI in Congress.

● The "New Populist Forum" in Washington, D.C. on May 9 drew from both parties, ranging from Texas Agricultural Commissioner Jim Hightower on one side, to right-wing zealot Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) on the other. Hightower is the founder of the operation, which is based on simplistic "little guy versus the big interests" rhetoric. A particularly noxious figure to anyone who recalls how he metamorphosed from a mousy Ralph Nader "raider" into a Will Rogers caricature, complete with cowboy hat, boots, and a twang, Hightower has become a driving force for a bi-partisan reactionary movement that has former Heritage Foundation operative Paul Weyrich tinkering behind it. It encompasses the "sun-belt realist Democrats" like Colorado's Sen. Gary Hart and Gov. Richard Lamm, and, on the Republican side, TV evangelist Pat Robertson.