

Bush faces a hot autumn of strikes and protests

by Marcia Merry

While all eyes were on Moscow in mid-August, the feet of thousands of Americans hit the streets in protest against the Bush administration's domestic policy disaster. This fall promises to be even hotter.

The common element in the protests is revulsion against the economic collapse, though separate protest actions have had various immediate causes. Demonstrations have ranged in size from 36,000 who filled a stadium in Wichita, Kansas over the abortion issue, to a farm wife and her five children holding placards against the Farmers Home Administration's bankruptcy policy in Bismarck, North Dakota. This comes at a time when protests against Bush's foreign policy atrocities occur every day somewhere in the country.

"It's like Lyndon LaRouche's dream come true," was the description of the present situation in an opinion column in the Sunday *Los Angeles Times* Aug. 18, written just before the coup events in Moscow. Called "Putting Oomph in the Campaign," author William Schneider commented on the scenarios that might give President Bush a run for his money in the 1992 elections, including the matter of his health and the health of the economy. Schneider, who is the expert on voter trends for the American Enterprise Institute, wrote, "If things get bad enough, the voters are bound to take it out on Bush. . . . Right now Bush's strong suit is foreign policy. . . . Suppose something happened to Mikhail Gorbachov. Bush made it clear when he visited the Soviet Union that we have cast our lot with Gorbachov. If he fails, he could take Bush with him."

Schneider added, "Is there anything else that could go wrong? Sure. There's always the possibility of a scandal. The collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International is already being labeled the worst financial scandal in history. The CIA is involved. The Justice Department is involved. In fact, at some time or other, BCCI seems to have involved

every person in a position of prominence in business or politics in every country in the world."

The details of these scandals may emerge at the congressional hearings scheduled for September. But regardless, there is protest mounting across the country.

Growing unrest in labor movement

September began with the Labor Day weekend "Solidarity Day" in Washington, D.C. sponsored by the United Auto Workers, the AFL-CIO, the National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and others. Far from any kind of "commemoration-as-usual" of labor, this year's action took place as disgust mounts over such policies as the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While AFL-CIO head Lane Kirkland has done nothing effective to oppose the treaty, many union members want blood. The NAACP joined the Aug. 31 protest march fresh from its announcement of disapproval of the Bush nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court; the nomination is also opposed by the American Federation of Teachers.

This protest mood is not limited to the target of George Bush, but is also against the Democratic Party, and anyone else seen to be going along with the Washington policy insanity. Over the first six months of 1991, on issue after issue, Congress posed no alternative to Bush on economic program: ruinously low farm prices, a housing crisis, mass unemployment, a barbarous human and civil rights record, etc.

Now the Democratic leadership has vowed to come back this fall and counter Bush on the issue of unemployment benefits. In August, the President agreed in principle to a congressional measure to extend unemployment relief for 26 extra weeks, but he then refused to allocate the money. His reason? It would be a "budget buster." The Democrats say they will pass a new measure to put Bush against the wall,

and be sure that it has no loopholes. But the public tolerance for this parrying is all but gone.

On Aug. 20, the Texas AFL-CIO Executive Committee voted unanimously to halt the practice of blanket endorsement of Democratic candidates in general election campaigns. The committee said it may want to run labor union members as independent candidates against Democrats. "Too many Democrats are trying to out-Republican Republicans," said an AFL-CIO spokesman. "There's a long list of people who have been disappointing to us." Local labor leaders state that they have been taken for granted by the Democrats whom they have continually supported. "Some of the Republicans give us a better voting record than some of the Democrats," said state AFL-CIO President Joe Gunn. "We're going to reward our friends." In particular, Texas labor leaders are upset over Texas Democrats' support for NAFTA.

During the two-day Texas AFL-CIO convention in August, speaker after speaker warned the Democratic candidates that they cannot expect support, after they have ignored the wishes of organized labor. Sen. Lloyd Bentsen and Gov. Ann Richards came in for special criticism because of their backing of NAFTA. Bentsen was roasted because he had told a delegation of Texas labor officials in December that he would oppose the "fast track" procedure to approve NAFTA, and then reneged.

A panel of three speakers reported to the labor convention on the miserable living and working conditions of the *maquiladoras*—the low-wage assembly plants along the Mexican border with the United States, which will expand tremendously if NAFTA is implemented. *EIR*'s Houston correspondent Harley Schlanger then briefed the gathering on the need to shut down the *maquiladora* system altogether, defeat NAFTA, and introduce Lyndon LaRouche's "Operation Juárez" plan for high-technology trade and investment for the Western Hemisphere.

While the Texas labor activists are blaming their own inaction, the Democratic Party apparatus, and other factors for the political crisis, one Communications Workers of America member reflected a deeper concern. The *maquiladoras* "have been here for 15 years," she said. "Why are we suddenly so concerned? Because now, it is affecting us directly. Isn't that a horrible thing to say about our country? That we only care when it directly affects us?"

On Aug. 26, the labor activists staged a picket line at the hearing convened on NAFTA in Houston by the office of U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills.

Pro-life rally in Wichita

Some 36,000 people gathered in a stadium in Wichita, Kansas, on Aug. 25, for a pro-life rally. This came after two months of intensifying protest activity and hostile national media coverage. Many attended the weekend occasion as their first-ever act of protest, impelled by dismay at the state of the nation.

Many speakers at the rally told the audience to fight for life, just as the Russian people fought for democracy, and likened the moral significance of the Wichita Summer of Mercy to what was happening in the Soviet Union.

The most savvy contingent in the crowds were the farmers, who drove 300 vehicles in tractorcade through town on the morning of Aug. 24. Some of them had run for office, or run others' campaigns, and they are on the prowl for a political fight. The banners on their tractors and cars included such feisty slogans as, "We Need More Consumers."

Milk strike looms

Dairy farmers in the Northeast have started a movement for a national milk strike, tentatively scheduled to begin on Oct. 1. Farmers in Wisconsin, California, Texas, and other states are also expected to participate, with support actions likely by consumers in several large urban areas. One hundred farmers in the Syracuse, New York area on Aug. 23 dumped milk to dramatize the low milk prices they are getting.

Twice this year already, Congress readied remedial action for dairy farmers—minimal, but at least something. But when the Bush administration opposed relief efforts of any kind, Congress laid back and did nothing.

In Bismarck, North Dakota in August, a dairy farm wife took her five young children and staged a protest on the steps of the capital building to plead for relief from the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA). The agency has garnisheed the monthly check from the purchaser of her farm's milk, so that she does not have even the means to feed her family, let alone care for the animals. The children carried signs: "FmHA—Release Our Check! Why Are You Starving Us?"

School strikes

The opening of schools in September is another venue for mass action. The week of Aug. 26 saw thousands of Illinois teachers out on strike. School districts are hard hit for operating funds—for staff, lunch programs, and basic needs. Many states spent much of July and August in crisis management sessions over their budgets, after the July 1 turning date of the fiscal year. State employee protests took place in Maine, Pennsylvania, and many other locales. But whatever was pasted together by state and local lawmakers this summer, nothing will hold under the collapsing economy this fall.

At the same time as the economic protests proceed, there is a demonstration almost daily in some part of the United States over Bush's foreign policy atrocities.

In Los Angeles, nearly 1,000 people turned out for the Black Ribbon Day rally to mark the Aug. 23 anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Under flags representing Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Croatians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Russians, Vietnamese, and Chinese, were signs demanding freedom, independence, and an end to the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Several young Balts started the chant: "Bush, Bush, get off your tush!"