

Israeli government; they hope to catch a glimpse of the Middle East's future. □

Big Labor

(Continued From Front Cover)

Those who have kept their jobs have also suffered. Average real gross weekly earnings during 1983 for workers in private nonagricultural industries were up from 1982, but were still beneath their 1962 level and were 14 percent lower than their postwar high of 1972. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 1983 collective bargaining agreements for private as well as state- and local-government workers showed the lowest average wage gains on record.

The Reagan Administration has also undermined workers' statutory rights to job safety and health. Occupational Safety and Health Administration enforcement levels have dropped dramatically under Reagan. Comparing fiscal 1980 with fiscal 1983, for example, shows a 60 percent decline in OSHA complaint inspections, an 86 percent decline in follow-up inspections and a 66 percent decline in recommended penalties. Nor is the agency making much law. During the past few years OSHA has stalled repeatedly and even suppressed its own studies of worker risk in issuing standards for such known workplace carcinogens as asbestos, formaldehyde and EDB. Indeed, after nearly four years in operation, the only final standard for a workplace carcinogen that has been issued by the Reagan OSHA is the standard for ethylene oxide issued in June. But the agency crucially declined to include a short-term exposure limit in its ruling on the chemical, to which workers are typically exposed at high but intermittent doses. The omission makes serious regulation of worker exposure to ethylene oxide impossible, and it is being challenged in court.

At the National Labor Relations Board the story is equally gothic. The Reagan Administration has been foiled in its plans to entrench John Van de Water, a California-based unionbusting consultant, in the N.L.R.B. chair, and is at least temporarily delayed in its current drive to replace Carter-appointed general counsel William Lubbers with the woefully inexperienced (and of course antiunion) Rosemary M. Collyer. But Reagan has managed to get more than his share of ultraconservative appointees approved. On the five-member board itself he has left one seat vacant, but has gained approval of Donald L. Dotson (formerly of the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Corporation, and earlier the labor counsel for Westinghouse Electric and Western Electric) as chair, and of Robert P. Hunter (former aide to

Senator Orrin Hatch, a central figure in blocking the Labor Law Reform Bill in 1978) and Patricia Diaz Dennis (formerly of the American Broadcasting Companies and Pacific Lighting) as regular members. The board has also snatched control of agency enforcement litigation from its general counsel and given it to its new solicitor, Hugh Reilly. He comes to the N.L.R.B. after years with the fiercely anti-union National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation.

The effect of the new appointments is obvious. During the first six months of 1984, the Reagan board issued a series of pro-employer decisions, reversing longstanding N.L.R.B. policies in a slew of critical areas. It narrowed the scope of activities subject to traditional N.L.R.B. protection (*Meyers Industries* and *Clear Pine Moulding*); broadened the permissible range of employer conduct in union representation campaigns (*Rossmore House*); lowered the costs of unlawful employer activity during such campaigns (*Gourmet Foods*); and freed employers from the constraints traditionally imposed on work relocation decisions by the collective bargaining obligation (*Milwaukee Spring* and *Otis Elevator*). The N.L.R.B. also announced a broad new policy of deferring cases, whenever possible, to private arbitration (*United Technologies* and *Olin Corporation*), thereby shifting more and more of the costs of dispute resolution to unions, and removing the government as an active player in the enforcement of many statutory workers' rights.

In addition to being the most antiunion N.L.R.B. in history, the Reagan board is also the most inefficient. The best index of board inaction and case backlog, the number of contested cases awaiting decision by the board, has skyrocketed during the Reagan years. As of August, it stood at about 1,450 cases, roughly three times the level it was when Reagan took office; in February it was even higher, about 1,700 cases. That backlog has a huge and geometrically increasing bottleneck effect throughout the board's regional system. It slows the processing of cases at the local level and stretches out the already nearly interminable procedural delays at all different stages of the organizing and bargaining process. This makes it much more difficult for unions to organize new workers, or effectively represent the members they already have.

But while Reaganite attacks on workers and unions have surely contributed to the labor movement's current weakness, they by no means tell the whole story. Nor is the usual litany of changes in the larger economy—demographic trends and structural alterations, the rise of automation and the transition to services, the much-advertised end of "Fordism" and the collapse of traditional industries beneath the pressures of international competition—enough to round out the explanation. Nor, even, is notice of the pre-eminent role played by revived business organization and opposition throughout the 1970s. Important as all those factors are, the truth is that at least some of labor's wounds are self-inflicted, and labor's friends do not help the movement by ignoring this ugly fact.

Everyone agrees, for example, that unions must organize more aggressively than they have in the past and that their

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organizing must target the economy's service sector, which has the greatest employment growth. Even granting the extreme adversity of labor's legal environment, however, it is telling that the number of N.L.R.B. representation elections—in which unions seek to become bargaining representatives for workers—continues to decline and is now less than half what it was as recently as the late 1970s. In 1984, for the third year in a row, the number of union members gained as a result of such elections will be less than 100,000. And while service workers are obviously receptive to unionization (as the success of such unions as the Service Employees International, United Food and Commercial Workers, Hotel and Restaurant Employees and National Hospital and Health Care Workers shows), they have yet to be targeted effectively by the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s national leadership. In its big Houston organizing campaign, for example, the federation has spent more than \$4 million since 1981, but unions participating in the drive have netted only about 14,000 members.

Everyone agrees that democratizing unions is critical to igniting their mass base. During the past few years, however, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. has continued to turn the screws on union dissidents. It supported the United Steelworkers' old guard against insurgent Ed Sadlowski in a lawsuit whose Supreme Court resolution upheld funding restrictions on dissident groups that virtually immobilize them in bids for national union office. And despite some recent gestures toward women and minority groups, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership remains largely a white male gerontocracy in which top slots turn over only upon death, disability or indictment.

Everyone agrees that unions must learn to recognize and defend worker interests in areas other than wages and cash benefits. But the A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership continues to lag in its attention to noncash issues. At a time when workers' safety and health is under fierce attack, for example, the federation has only one staff person monitoring OSHA full time.

Everyone agrees that trade unions need to reach out and make contact with allies outside the labor movement. But repeatedly over the past few years, obvious possible alliances have been refused. At a time of mounting public concern about nuclear weapons, military buildup and U.S. intervention in Central America, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership has barely reconsidered its longstanding commitment to High Cold War. With Hispanic workers up in arms about the Simpson-Mazzoli bill, the federation joined (until the last moment, two days before the House vote) some of the most reactionary and xenophobic interests in America in endorsing the measure. And while industry and the military have beaten a steady trail to universities—lured by developments in electronics, biotechnology, computer science and robotics—the A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership has made virtually no attempt to communicate with potential friends there.

Finally, everyone agrees that labor desperately needs to increase its political influence. But how has the A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership gone about doing that the past few years? By hyping vast Solidarity Day demonstrations which were

never followed up. By quietly resuming secret negotiations with the corporate elites of the Labor Management Group—negotiations which had broken off in the late 1970s amid noisy labor protest of business's new "class war." By collaborating on rule changes in the Democratic Party that exclude the rank and file and make it harder for average Americans to influence the leadership. By changing the primary system to give an advantage to early front-runners handpicked by a small group of labor leaders, party regulars and top business figures. By essentially abandoning the fight for full employment in favor of a national industrial policy centered on trade protection and other massive subsidies for a handful of powerful unions. By endorsing Walter Mondale for the Presidency only days before he repudiated the clear implications of that industrial policy in a public letter. By spending millions of dollars to help Mondale squeak through the primaries, only to have him shoot himself in the foot by naming Bert Lance, an infamous foe of labor in the Carter Administration, to head up his campaign.

In short, faced with grave challenges and a hostile environment, the leadership of the labor movement, if not its rank and file, has responded to labor's current predicament in a desultory and ultimately self-defeating way.

What this means for the average American worker is only more bad news and bitter ironies. For example: Fifty years after the teamster-led Minneapolis general strike helped lift labor from the wreckage of the 1920s, Americans are faced with a \$512,000-a-year teamster president, Jackie Presser, who will probably support the incumbent Republican President, and a Democratic nominee from Minneapolis in rapid flight from his already feeble commitments to working people and the poor.

Happy Labor Day, everyone. □

