

Tip O'Neill out to sabotage the new national mandate

by Barbara Dreyfus

House Speaker Tip O'Neill announced this week that he will make it as hard as possible for the new Reagan administration to get any legislative initiatives through the U.S. Congress. O'Neill did not say that in so many words, but he did say that he will stack the three key House committees, Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means, with twice as many Democrats as Republicans—even though the Republicans will have 44 percent of the House membership in the new Congress.

O'Neill's action, without precedent in the history of the U.S. Congress, would give his largely liberal Democratic appointees a stranglehold over tax programs, the entire budget, and the ability of congressmen to amend legislation on the House floor. Normally, the Speaker apportions membership on committees according to the ratio of Democrats to Republicans in the House.

"Obstructionism has already begun," commented House Republican Policy Committee chairman Rep. Bud Shuster of Pennsylvania on O'Neill's action. "They're laying the groundwork to block the Republican mandate in the House."

As O'Neill moved to block legislation, Rep. Henry Reuss (D-Wis.) moved to forestall bipartisan alliance on economic policy between conservative Democrats and Republicans. Reuss announced Nov. 13 his intention to take over the chairmanship of the Joint Economic Committee and use it to direct Democratic Party policy. An aide to Reuss reported, "He sees the JEC as the rallying point for the party, for economic programs."

Reuss, chairman of the House Banking Committee in the outgoing Congress, has staunchly backed the policies of Federal Reserve Chairman Volcker. By early spring, when Volcker had caused 20 percent interest rates, Reuss pushed through the House the Depository Institutions Deregulation Act which gives Volcker near-dictatorial control of the banking system.

Reuss is in conflict with conservative House Democrats, grouped around the Democratic Research Organization. Many now want to use the group as a focal point for policy making. The group will now be headed by Rep. James Jones of Oklahoma.

"We have to win back the traditional core of our party," says Jones. "If we ignore the mandate of this election, we will become a minority party."

Texas Republican Rep. Bill Archer has announced his intention to work with conservative Dems to oust Tip O'Neill. "If the House is still dominated by the same philosophical leadership that the people rejected, then it will be virtually impossible to have significant changes," Archer told *EIR* on Nov. 14. "We need changes in productivity, capital investment, jobs, and to combat inflation. The American people spoke out as to their wishes in this election." Only 26 Democrats need vote with the Republicans to oust O'Neill.

In an effort to pressure O'Neill, Republican leader Howard Baker, soon to be the new Senate Majority Leader, warned that he could stack the Senate committees with Republicans if O'Neill carried out his threats. "We can do it, too," said Baker. "I hope Tip doesn't pursue that. I don't want Tip and me to get into a fight."

Conservative Democrats are indicating they are willing to work with Senate Republicans. Sen. David Boren (D-Okla.) told a Washington, D.C. energy conference this week, "I foresee a new bipartisan consensus emerging that will discuss the needs of the country."

O'Neill's background

"When a Democratic president working with Democratic advisers comes up with a Democratic program, O'Neill seldom questions it. His job, as he sees it, is to get the bills passed. But to succeed, he might have to call on some of his old political skills and offer rewards here and there." This comment comes from a new biography of O'Neill by Paul Clancy and Shirley Elder, titled *Speaker of the House*. Despite their effort to portray him as a typical old-style, back-slapping Irish politician, the authors reveal a good deal about O'Neill's subservience to the Eastern Establishment.

Even when Tip has had reservations about the policies of Jimmy Carter, he has followed the President's directives, say the authors. When Carter declared the energy crisis "the greatest challenge our country will face" and demanded massive austerity from Americans, "Tip did all he could" to force Congress to pass Carter's programs.

For over 10 years O'Neill has worked closely with Common Cause, the supposed watchdog against special interests which itself represents a special interest—the Anglo-American policy-making elite. O'Neill and Common Cause founder and longtime director John Gardner, a leading member of the Council on Foreign Relations, have been responsible for a series of post-Watergate congressional "reforms" which have undercut Congress as a constituency-based institution.

The most important of their reforms was the rule establishing caucus election of committee chairmen,

ending the seniority system. The seniority system had meant that congressmen with years of legislative experience and close ties to their political base headed committees and formulated policy. "I was always opposed to the seniority system," O'Neill admitted.

What the book does not say is that O'Neill has set the stage for the British-style parliamentary system the Council on Foreign Relations says it hopes to achieve. More and more, O'Neill has been echoing the words of White House counsel Lloyd Cutler, who wrote in the fall issue of the Council's magazine, *Foreign Affairs*, that America must adopt a parliamentary government. In an August 1980 letter to 44 Congressmen who had deserted him on a procedural vote, O'Neill warned them not to deviate from his leadership again.

O'Neill controls the Steering and Policy Committee, which chooses committee assignments for all members and develops policies. He chooses half the members of the committee, and holds veto power over the rest. O'Neill wields enormous leverage with his threats to banish a member to an unimportant committee, while, by placing his toadies on key committees, he can dominate congressional activity.

Bill Archer on O'Neill

The following is excerpted from a Nov. 14 interview with Rep. Bill Archer, a Democrat from Houston, Texas.

EIR: Is it true that you are trying to unseat Speaker O'Neill?

Archer: It is not a personal attack. It is an attempt to get the House in the hands of leadership which is to the right of center in philosophy, that will cooperate with the Senate and White House to redirect the country in line with the majority of the voters. This would involve an alternate Democrat in the Speaker's post, by putting together a coalition of like-minded Democrats and Republicans. There may be 8, 10, 12 Democrats I think would be good leaders with a proper philosophical persuasion. But before I mention any individual it is necessary to see if we could get the necessary votes.

EIR: Have you spoken to Democrats about this?

Archer: Yes. They are keeping an open mind. It is a little early now to say anything, it has not been committed to by the necessary 26. . . .

EIR: What would a conservative majority see as the programs that would be necessary?

Archer: There are so many things in the last 25 years. . . . There will be an effort to improve things along the lines that Gov. Reagan campaigned on—to reduce the role of government, rebuild our defense strength, complete the redirection and thrust of the economic programs that have dominated the nation. It would mean the House would cooperate, not foot drag. It will be difficult to turn the country around anyway, but if the House is still dominated by the same philosophical leadership that the people rejected, then it will be virtually impossible to have significant changes. We need changes in productivity, capital investment, jobs, combating inflation.

EIR: Have other Republicans been involved? What do the Democrats you have spoken to say?

Archer: There has been informal personal contact. There are a number of others working on it and interested, enthusiastic about it. . . . At some point the Republicans meeting in conference will have to vote on this—not before the first week in December.

EIR: If you do not succeed in ousting Tip O'Neill, do you think that you at least will have succeeded in forcing him to be a little more conservative?

Archer: I would hope so. At this point he has shown incredible arrogance with his announcement that he will try to get a two-to-one majority of Dems on three major committees—Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means. The House committees are always organized on the ratio of Democrats and Republicans in the House. Legally the majority party could do that, they could even deny Republicans seats on any committee.

EIR: Senator Boren gave a speech this week in which he said there were some in the Senate who want confrontation and some who want to cooperate with the Republicans. . . .

Archer: Many Dems in the House would desire to cooperate but they don't have the leadership which is sympathetic to reforms. Tip has already telegraphed what he wants to do with the two majorities. He said we will not cooperate, we will resist. Once the leadership of those committees is in the hands of his philosophical troops it doesn't matter—he won't have to intimidate others, he will have control of the committees. The Democratic caucus is overwhelmingly liberal, and in alliance with O'Neill they can select major chairmen on vital committees. They will prevent reforms. If we never get things to the floor our philosophical majority won't matter. And even if we do get things to the floor there will be no chances for amendments because if they control Rules there will be closed rules so no amendments. I think it's a major fight. People have high expectations with Reagan and the Senate and it will be extremely frustrating when we can't get it through the House.