

Editorial

The test for labor unions

Many people will be struck by the words of Pedro Rubio, a leader of the Conservative Party-oriented UTC trade union federation in Colombia, at the founding conference of the Club of Life in Rome Oct. 20. Rubio proposed, as part of the Club, a "North-South Labor Committee" dedicated to "winning the support of workers and labor unions throughout the world . . . to fight for the founding of a new humanist world order." Among the squirmers, we expect, will be Lane Kirkland, head of the AFL-CIO in the United States. We also expect a healthy uneasiness among Kirkland's counterparts in that other former industrial powerhouse, West Germany.

In what pass for normal times, organized labor has a fairly good reason for its existence: Trade unions help ensure that the workforce has a decent standard of living and working conditions—so that a nation's economy can be more productive. In a time of crisis, organized labor represents the strongest potential for the political mobilization of a nation. Labor was crucial to the coalition which not only elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt as president, but also mobilized American power to win World War II. To make the point negatively, the same labor movement had no answer to the depression of the 1930s, and failed to stop it. And the physical destruction of the German labor movement in 1932 removed the last obstacle from the path of a certain Adolf Hitler.

With U.S. unemployment at its most severe since the depths of the Great Depression, with half the auto-workers out of a job, with a third of all steelworkers and nearly a third of all Teamsters unemployed, Lane Kirkland has been running a protection racket for the policies of Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, while the AFL-CIO tells steelworkers—and anyone else dumb enough to listen—to blame the Japanese.

Despite some militant rhetoric, the unions have obediently gone for wage reductions, benefit give-backs, worker plant-buyouts, and other varieties of "necessary sacrifice." But by now it is obvious that many of the laid-off workers will never be rehired or retrained—and that their country's economy is a wreck.

And what has happened to the celebrated "German economic miracle"? It went kaput, even before the

union-backed Social Democratic (SPD) government of Helmut Schmidt was brought down Oct. 1 by demands for austerity from the liberals and Christian Democrats. The West German unions promised mass demonstrations against austerity for Oct. 23 and 30, and Nov. 4 and 6. But the national union federation program—a hodgepodge of housing construction, energy conservation, and something called "ecological balance"—is a useless compromise.

The reality is that the two strongest economies in the West are being pulled down by the collapse of the post-war monetary system. Beyond the AFL-CIO's anti-Japanese racism and tunnel vision, beyond the "realistic" fantasies of Schmidt and the West German unions, there is a response to this reality: It is represented by the call of Pedro Rubio, and by European Labor Party Chairman Helga Zepp-LaRouche, in her seventh Open letter to West Germans in September, telling the SPD and the unions that they "must launch the demand for the New World Economic Order, force a change in the Kohl government . . . mobilize to destroy the IMF, World Bank, Bank for International Settlements and GATT, or the fascist policies of these institutions will plunge us into catastrophe."

As the AFL-CIO schemes to replace Ronald Reagan with a Fabian Democrat, and the SPD digs in to lead the unions in a "long opposition" to austerity, they should consider that the reality represented by the LaRouches' fight for world economic development is being acted upon by leading forces in the labor movements of Colombia and Mexico—perhaps to be joined by other developing nations.

That is the significance of the full support that Mexican President López Portillo is receiving, in his battle with the international banks, from the giant CTM labor federation of Fidel Velásquez. Eleven thousand unions are preparing to strike for a 52 percent wage increase on Nov. 1, and the anglophile elements in the Mexican press smell a plan to thereby "block negotiations with the IMF," coordinated with the Andean Pact nations, who are preparing joint debt renegotiation.

Labor has arrived, with the rest of us, at a unique moment in history in which to account for its existence—or permit the destruction of everyone.