

Congressional Closeup by Kathleen Klenetsky

Melcher hits post-industrial drift

Sen. John Melcher (D-Mont.) injected one of the few notes of sanity into the nonsense which has dominated the Hill's response to "Black Monday."

Melcher reminded his colleagues Oct. 29 that "the strength of basic industries forms the base of the U.S. economy. . . . Ignoring them is perilous."

"Solid markets"—including stock markets—depend ultimately on the solidity of the underlying economic base, Melcher pointed out, and the problem now is that that base has been dangerously eroded.

"The god-awful truth," he said, "is that too many people have been lulled into believing that it is not significant when our own producers and their industries go down the tubes because we were shifting all of that economic strength to something called a 'service-oriented' economy."

"If a service-oriented economy is identified as one providing communications, health care, medicines, insurance, financing, computers, and so forth, who is producing the wealth out of the ground to pay for all of that? If we are not going to take coal and metals and produce steel, aluminum, and copper to put into finished products, where does the money start? If we downgrade farmers as being too productive, will we not ignore our basic economic strength?"

The answers to these questions are obvious, said Melcher, but nobody wants to listen. "We have had too many people following a pied piper of a changing U.S. economy to meet modern trends. . . . Somebody has to pay the piper and the only way to pay it is to produce basic commodities that are turned into products and profits upon which the economy is built. . . ."

"What is needed now is a reawakening that basic industries and their products are not passé; that these industries create the jobs and economic activity that can really make the U.S. economy sound."

Senate backs independent counsel law

The Senate voted overwhelmingly Nov. 3 to extend for five years the law authorizing appointment of an independent counsel to probe government wrongdoing. The House passed a similar bill last month, and final action on the measure is expected to be completed before the original legislation's expiration date of Jan. 2.

Eighty-five Senators supported renewal of the law; and only ten opposed it, despite an administration threat to veto the measure.

Sponsored chiefly by Sens. William Cohen (R-Me.), and Carl Levin (D-Mich.), the legislation curbs presidential control over the independent counsel's activities, including his ability to fire the counsel under the "good cause" standard in the existing legislation.

But the Senate was quick to protect its own, rejecting an amendment offered by Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.) to expand the law to make members of Congress subject to investigation by the independent counsel.

Bumpers protests Trident missile tests

Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.), a member of the Harriman family's personal political stable, has rounded up 40 of his colleagues to protest the Pentagon's plans to test the Trident 2 mis-

sile with 12 warheads.

Bumpers and his pals dashed off a letter to President Reagan Oct. 30, objecting to the decision, on grounds that it violates the unratified and defunct SALT II agreement. Bumpers's main concern seems to be that the projected tests would upset the Soviets, and could interfere with current arms-control talks.

Will Senate reject the INF treaty?

The treaty on intermediate-range weapons which President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachov are expected to sign at the Pearl Harbor summit Dec. 7 faces rough sledding in the Senate, and there is a good chance that it will ultimately be rejected.

At least, that was the claim of leading senators from both parties, within 48 hours after the Reagan administration announced that the summit would take place.

Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) discussed the ratification prospects in an interview on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press" Nov. 1. Announcing that he plans to lead the fight for Senate approval of the accord, Cranston went on to predict, "There could be problems" with ratification. "There are 156 to 200 very conservative Republican senators who are very likely to take on the treaty directly," said Cranston, plus others who would add amendments or reservations to the accord "that would in effect kill it."

This means that there could emerge a sufficient number of senators who "go along with amendments or reservations that would prevent a two-thirds majority from approving it, and it's defeated."

Cranston said that, while he "didn't think" this would necessarily tran-

spire, it "could happen," and thus, treaty supporters must be "very vigilant. . . . We have to plan a strategy to get the treaty through the Senate that will work."

The same day, Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), former chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said in an interview on ABC-TV, that the combination of outright opponents and those senators who have reservations about the accord, forms a "critical mass that's difficult," and predicted a serious ratification problem.

The INF was apparently in political trouble long before announcement of the summit. The depth of antipathy toward it was suggested during the Republican presidential candidates' first debate Oct. 28. Four of the candidates attacked the prospective treaty outright; Sen. Bob Dole said the Senate would have to take a long, hard look at it. The only candidate to support it wholeheartedly was Vice President George Bush.

On the Hill, opposition to the accord comes primarily from a small, hard-core group of pro-defense senators, mostly Republican. But, as Cranston and Lugar indicated, there are a significant number of members who have reservations about aspects of the treaty, or who want to use it to wrest concessions from the Soviets on conventional weapons, human rights, Afghanistan, etc.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), in remarks on the Senate floor Oct. 30, noted that SALT II had to be withdrawn from Senate consideration after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, because trying to secure ratification at that point was a "hopeless task."

The Soviets are still in Afghanistan today, said Byrd. "There will be serious talk on this floor about Afghanistan when this treaty hits the

fan [sic!]," he said.

In addition, Byrd hinted that he and others may make ratification of the INF contingent on the administration's agreement to push for Senate ratification of two other arms treaties with Moscow, one limiting underground nuclear weapons, and the other relating to peaceful nuclear explosions (PNE).

Byrd is not alone in viewing President Reagan's inordinate desire for an accord as the perfect opportunity to force the administration into adopting various other arms-control proposals. Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), for example, has been talking for months now about linking Senate ratification of the INF treaty to limits on the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Thus, it is not too difficult to envision a situation in which the treaty's critics on the "left"—Nunn et al.—along with the conservative opposition, form a de facto coalition which will prevent the treaty's ratification.

Rep. Porter submits 'debt-for-nature' bill

Illinois Republican Rep. John Porter has submitted a bill with a new twist on the "debt-for-equity" schemes being pushed by international financial circles. Instead of having Third World debtor countries hand over parts of their infrastructure or industry to their foreign creditors as partial debt payment, Porter's bill would have these countries give up entire portions of their land.

In a letter to the editor published in the Nov. 2 *Chicago Tribune*, Porter explained that his bill, "The Tropical Forest Protection Act of 1987," calls on the World Bank and other multilateral development banks (so-called) to allow developing countries to help

"manage" part of their debt with conservation programs—a "debt-for-nature swap."

Specifically, wrote Porter, the bill commissions projects by the World Bank to assess the feasibility of allowing developing countries to establish "conservation easements" to protect tropical forest and wetlands, in return for suspension or rescheduling of some or all of their debt payments.

In addition, a conservation easement could also be used by commercial banks as an alternative to forgiving debt.

Porter's proposal mimics those emanating from Prince Philip's World Wildlife Fund and various other neomalthusian outfits, which want to stop development in the Third World under the guise of "protecting nature." Indeed, Porter says his bill is necessary because the Third World is destroying its tropical forests—one of the WWF's favorite themes. "Forests suffer most because they are the sole resource of the poorest people. Forests are disappearing to support landless farmers practicing slash-and-burn agriculture and to provide fuel for half the world's people who use wood for cooking and heating."

Since Porter is nowhere proposing alternatives to these practices—helping developing-sector countries build a nuclear-power industry to replace the burning of wood, for example—one wonders what he thinks is going to happen to that half of the world's population, once his bill deprives them of their last source of fuel.

Porter probably doesn't care: A liberal Republican who represents Chicago's ritzier suburbs, the congressman has earned a reputation as a die-hard defender of the eco-freaks' cause, and has been honored by the League of Conservation Voters, among others.