

# 'Government by committee': building a bipartisan consensus for fascism

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Nineteen eighty-eight, the first year of the U.S. Constitution's third century, may well turn out to be the last time that the republican forms of government which have served the United States since 1787, will have been in force.

It appears increasingly likely that, within the next year, the American constitutional system will be scuttled, replaced with a virtual one-party dictatorship, similar in many respects to Mussolini's corporatist state. The President will serve as little more than a figurehead, and Congress as a rubber-stamp. Real power will be wielded by small committees of experts—all non-elected, and answerable only to the Eastern Establishment elite whose policies they represent.

Some elements of this apparatus have already been put in place, the most conspicuous example being the National Economic Commission, a bipartisan group composed predominantly of private sector bigwigs who have been mandated to come up with a deficit reduction plan for the next President.

Whatever this new entity calls itself—a "bipartisan consensus," "government of national unity" or "government by commission" are the current labels of choice—it will be committed to a program of harsh domestic austerity, and appeasing the Soviet Union. As proponents of this new order freely admit, junking the current system is necessary precisely because the policies they intend cannot be implemented otherwise. The existing system, tattered though it may be, remains too susceptible to constituency pressure to allow for the horrors now in the works. Voters would revolt when hit with the kinds of policies coming down the tubes. Thus, the system must be changed so as to make it as unresponsive as possible to any patriotic revolt. Various thinktanks, public policy institutions, and other organs of the Eastern Establishment have been working overtime to design a system that will minimize political opposition to their program. The worsening of the country's economic collapse, coupled with the Establishment's near-unanimous decision to sell out to Moscow lock, stock and barrel, have accelerated the process.

## The Kissinger-Vance proposal

A key signal that a drastic change in the nation's governing institutions is on the drawing boards, came in June, from the New York Council on Foreign Relations. It took the form of a call for a bipartisan consensus, authored by former Sec-

retaries of State Henry Kissinger (an alleged Republican) and Cyrus Vance (an alleged Democrat), in the summer issue of the CFR's journal *Foreign Affairs*.

Dictating policy for the United States is nothing new to the Council, which ranks as the most influential grouping of the American elite. It was the CFR which, through its mid-1970s program called the *1980s Project* (which called for the "controlled disintegration of the world economy"), drafted the blueprint for the Jimmy Carter administration and, together with the Trilateral Commission, supplied most of Carter's cabinet and other top personnel to make sure that their blueprint would be followed to a tee.

Entitled "Bipartisan Objectives for Foreign Policy," and excerpted in *Newsweek*, the Kissinger-Vance piece represented the culmination of a special project the CFR had set up over a year ago on "National Objectives and Priorities in American Foreign Policy." According to the organizations' 1987 *Annual Report*, the project's purpose was to see "if a bipartisan group can reach broad agreement on national foreign policy goals and on the means by which they may be achieved." The CFR has refused repeated requests for the names of the other members of the group, which is chaired by Vance and Kissinger, on the grounds that a number of them are still in government service.

Kissinger and Vance begin their piece with a declaration that the times demand "a restoration of bipartisan consensus in American policy. . . . In this year of political transition," they say, "it is vital to identify several crucial bipartisan objectives for the next administration, whether it be Republican or Democratic."

The rest of the article lays out what those objectives should be. Underneath the rhetoric about keeping America militarily strong and economically healthy, two key themes emerge:

- First, the U.S. must resign itself to the fact that it is no longer the world's leading power, and cut back its international commitments concomitantly. "[D]espite our vast military power, our ability to shape the world unilaterally is increasingly limited. Even with strong domestic support, we can no longer afford financially to do as much internationally. . . . [W]e would anticipate that the American role in some areas of the world may become less conspicuous."

● Second, deep cuts in Americans' standard of living must be enforced. "We must face the fact that our economy and consumption have become so overextended in recent years that the remedies will involve sacrifice and slower growth in our standard of living. . . . Convincing economic discipline" and "equitable budget reductions" must become the order of the day.

Kissinger and Vance's appeal for a bipartisan consensus around the twin policies of conceding world supremacy to Moscow and putting Americans through the economic wringer didn't drop out of the clear blue sky. It has been clear for some time that policymaking circles had reached near-unanimous agreement upon them. These circles have now focused their attention on how to get them implemented, including designing the specific institutional vehicles which will ensure their success.

Although the Kissinger-Vance article did not address this issue *per se*, sources familiar with the work of their CFR "bipartisan" group say that detailed proposals put forth by two other influentials, former White House counsel Lloyd Cutler and ex-JFK adviser Ted Sorensen, are being used as models, and that elements of each will likely be utilized in whatever institutional vehicle for enforcing the "bipartisan policy consensus" eventually emerges.

Cutler and Sorensen's approaches differ, but only slightly. The former is more inclined toward "reforming" the Constitution permanently, while Sorensen's proposals deal primarily with "emergency" measures that don't require constitutional amendments. But their objectives are the same, and they cohere exactly with those put forward by Kissinger and Vance in *Foreign Affairs*.

## Junking the Constitution

It's no fluke that Cutler's proposals first appeared publicly in the Fall 1980 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Written while he was still acting as Jimmy Carter's chief counsel, Cutler's article called for the United States to move toward a parliamentary form of government, because it is much less oriented toward the electorate than is the American system.

Cutler made no bones about the fact that his objective was to ensure that the oligarchs' policy agenda, specifically, the imposition of drastic levels of austerity on the domestic economy, and selling out U.S. national security interests to the Soviet Union, could be implemented with an absolute minimum of political opposition.

The crux of Cutler's argument was that the United States was inexorably entering a period of economic contraction, which would require adoption of harsh economic policies. Because these would be so politically unpalatable, the constitutional system, with its inherent constituency orientation, would have to be replaced with something less susceptible to popular pressures.

"During the second half of this century," Cutler wrote, "our government has adopted a wide variety of national goals.

Many of these goals—checking inflation, spurring economic growth, reducing unemployment, protecting our national security, assuring equal opportunity, increasing social security, cleaning up the environment, improving energy efficiency—conflict with one another, and all of them compete for the same resources. There may have been a time when we would simultaneously pursue all of these goals to the utmost."

But, "that time has passed," and now one of the "central tasks of modern government is to make wise balancing choices among courses of action that pursue one or more of our many conflicting and competing objectives. . . . A responsible government must be able to adapt its programs to achieve the best balance among its conflicting goals. . . . For balancing choices like these, it is almost impossible to achieve a broad consensus. Every group will be against some part of the balance. If the 'losers' on each item are given a veto on part of the balance, a sensible balance cannot be struck."

Cutler cited the Senate's failure to ratify SALT II as another major reason the United States has for tossing out the Constitution: Its treaty ratification procedures stood in the way of ramming sellout arms pacts through the Senate.

Several years later, Cutler set up the Committee on the Constitutional System (CCS) to lobby for his proposals. Comprised of such people as former Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon, ex-CIA director William Colby, the Aspen Institute's Douglass Cater, former Defense Secretary Robert "Body count" McNamara, and Sens. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) and Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.), the group published its first set of formal recommendations in January 1987.

These included:

● "Relaxing" the present constitutional requirements for treaty ratification, to avoid a replay of the SALT II fiasco. "The present constitutional requirement that treaties require the approval of two-thirds of the Senate has been a major barrier to the use of treaties and has led to evasion of the treaty process by way of executive agreement." Instead of two-thirds of the Senate, the CCS suggested a simple majority of both Houses, or 60% of the Senate alone.

● Instituting a four-year term for House members, and an eight-year term for senators, with federal elections every four years. CCS's rationale was that such a change would foster closer policy coordination between the executive and the legislative branches, as happens in a parliamentary system, and enable both to implement politically unpopular measures without being encumbered by the political constraints of midterm elections. "Presidents and legislators could join to enact necessary measures . . . without having to worry about an imminent election."

● In another recommendation geared toward encouraging a shift toward parliamentarianism, CCS called for allowing members of Congress to serve in the cabinet. Removing the constitutional barriers to this arrangement would encourage "closer collaboration" between the branches of govern-

ment and help prevent a "stalemate."

- The report also stressed the necessity of strengthening the two parties, giving them far greater powers to discipline their office-holding members, in order to guarantee that they will not break with the policies the parties' leaderships agree upon as part of the new bipartisan consensus. CCS suggested several measures for accomplishing this, including public financing of congressional campaigns, funneled at least in part through party officials, to accomplish this. In practice, this would mean that a Democratic candidate could be cut off from election funds if he were to oppose, say, his party's position in support of terminating SDI.

- Allowing the President or Congress, or both, to call new elections. Adopting this hallmark of parliamentary systems, CCS argued, would serve as a "mechanism for resolving deadlocks of fundamental policy issues."

### Grand coalition for fascism

An even more detailed blueprint for transforming the U.S. system of government, and one that would not require the lengthy process of constitutional amendment, comes from Ted Sorensen, the former key adviser to President John F. Kennedy. A lawyer with the New York law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind (one of whose partners, Simon Rifkind, helped create "Big MAC," the bankers' dictatorship that ran New York City into the ground in the 1970s), Sorensen recently drafted the exceptionally vague, say-nothing 1988 Democratic Party platform,

But in 1984, while acting as presidential contender Gary Hart's national campaign manager, Sorensen published a book that was a lot less vague. *A Different Kind of Presidency: A Proposal for Breaking the Political Deadlock*, called specifically for a "grand coalition"—a "government of national unity"—to inflict the "painful" economic and other measures that no party or individual alone would dare take responsibility for.

"Which political party, which branch of government, which President," Sorensen asked rhetorically, "wants to be held responsible for cutting expansion of our eligibility for the middle-class entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare, or the funds for repairing our crumbling infrastructure, or the pay or pensions of those who serve in our armed forces? . . . The obvious answer is that neither political party, neither Congress nor the President, wants such responsibility."

Sorensen got to the nitty-gritty of his proposal toward the end of the book, where he discussed the supposed need for subjecting the United States to the same International Monetary Fund conditionalities which have wreaked such havoc on the Third World. "Many governments borrowing from the IMF, including Britain and Italy as well as scores of developing nations, have as a condition for those loans accepted temporary restrictions, some of them vastly unpopular, on their economic conduct. The United States and other industrialized nations, if they recognize the potential economic

disaster inherent in merely perpetuating the status quo, should similarly be able to accept some self-discipline for the common good."

In addition to economic fascism, Sorensen identified "halting the nuclear arms race" through a series of arms treaties that would place the United States at the mercy of Soviet forces, as another top national priority.

Achieving these objectives requires a radical change in the U.S. government, Sorensen argued. "The time has arrived in this country for a temporary bipartisan, 'grand coa-

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lition' of national unity. . . . It would go beyond anything previously attempted or seriously considered in the United States." It would include:

- A President and Vice President of opposite parties, each agreeing in advance to serve one term only and to decline all partisan activities;

- A cabinet and sub-cabinet equally divided between the two parties;

- A small, but experienced bipartisan White House staff acting as a unifying force in government;

- A Presidential Advisory Council of Elder Statesmen, which would be established through an Executive Order. This would include "our retired Presidents, Secretaries of State, Speakers of the House and Senate Majority Leaders—roughly a dozen experienced individuals from both parties, to be convened regularly by the President and Vice President in person, for both briefings and consultations. No votes would be taken, no decisions would be delegated, no joint statements would be expected. But this largely untapped pool of wisdom could be an invaluable source of advice."

- A "National Council of Economic Cooperation and Coordination," which the Coalition President would set up, also by Executive Order, to handle the difficult decisions that

will have to be made for the U.S. economy, which is now in "a crucial state of transition." Modeled on the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Act, Depression-era corporatist measures to cut back production, themselves lifted directly from Mussolini's corporatist state, the National Council bears a remarkable resemblance to the National Economic Commission created by Congress late last year. According to Sorensen, this corporatist body would be composed of "private-sector members . . . drawn not only from industry and labor but also from finance, agriculture, education, consumer and public-interest organizations, including those representing the poor. Its public-sector members would be drawn from the Coalition Cabinet, the federal Office of Management and Budget, the Federal Reserve Board, the President's Council of Economic Advisers, the Congress, and state and local governments."

The most urgent task facing the new Council, said Sorensen, would be to make "deep reductions" in the federal budget deficit through raising taxes and cutting expenditures: "No one's sacred cow or traditional pork barrel will be safe." (Sound familiar?) The Council will have to "face the painful task of strengthening the tax base and reducing the federal tax deduction and spending programs benefiting every group represented around the table." Sorensen listed a slew of measures the Council would likely consider: wage freezes, real-locating tax and credit policy to fit the rapid changes in the economy, and incomes policy, import quotas, etc.

The coalition government would deal with international affairs with the same disdain for the electorate it exhibited in economic matters. The Coalition President, after discussions with Congress and after "quiet and informal talks between the two superpowers," should initiate a series of unilateral arms control measures, including a weapons freeze, that would mean a total halt in the production testing and deployment of strategic nuclear weapons (including the MX and the B-1), the production of plutonium, and the testing of anti-satellite and other space weapons, and establishment of a "U.S.-U.S.S.R. Commission on Reduction of Tensions" to deal with issues ranging from conventional force reductions to environmental matters in the Pacific. In addition, the new President should immediately work toward reaching an agreement with Moscow that would greatly expand U.S.-East bloc economic relations.

It is no doubt tempting to dismiss Sorensen's and Cutler's outrageous suggestions as idle fantasies with no chance of ever being realized. But, unfortunately, that would be a big mistake. The handwriting has been on the wall for some time: The U.S. Establishment has rejected all sane options for rebuilding the economy and strengthening U.S. defenses, in favor of a craven appeasement policy toward the Soviets, and economic fascism at home. They are now casting wildly about for the means to do so. With two total zeroes vying for the presidency, the possibility of government by committee looms large. As one Washington insider put it, "The stakes are so high now, that anything goes."

## Drive to impose fascist austerity

by Kathleen Klenetsky

The "bipartisan consensus" on economic policy which the Council on Foreign Relations and other elite institutions are forging, will lead to utter disaster for the United States. That is apparent from the way the issue is dealt with by Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance in their *Foreign Affairs* article (see page 30). Speaking on behalf of the Establishment, the two call for a regime of painful austerity at home—"shifting from a consumption to a savings society," is the favorite euphemism—through a combination of deep spending cuts and steep tax hikes, and a radical diminution of American strategic power abroad.

Although Kissinger and Vance present these proposals as both inevitable and essential, they are neither. The United States doesn't need austerity; it needs a technologically vectored economic boom, fostered by a combination of government tax and credit incentives, and international monetary reform. Were such an approach adopted, the United States would be able to afford the economic and military measures needed to maintain its presence abroad, and keep the Soviet Union in check.

Despite their fundamental insanity, the proposals suggested by Vance and Kissinger represent a clear Establishment consensus. With frighteningly few exceptions, the country's political leadership in both parties has already embraced the substance of these policies, which, it should be stressed, are already well on their way to implementation.

That a political agreement to put the country through a period of grinding austerity has already been struck, was underscored in June, when the House of Representatives voted down Rep. Claude Pepper's bill to secure long-term health care for the nation's elderly. The most politically significant feature of the affair, was the instrumental role which liberal Democrats, including such prominent ones as Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.), played in defeating the Pepper measure. The vote was hailed by such Establishment outlets as the *Washington Post*, as a watershed event in U.S. politics, a sign that the "Pepper era" was over, and that Congress was finally beginning to develop the "guts" to say no to the country's senior citizens and their allegedly insatiable demands