

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Budget Committee hears calls to end depression

In Senate Budget Committee hearings Jan. 9, trade union leaders called for a government program to combat the depression, urging Congress to scrap the idiotic debate over reducing the budget deficit. AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland said that a "recovery program should not be constrained by the multi-year budget agreement."

Although Kirkland said that reducing the federal deficit was "important," any progress toward stimulating the economy "requires immediate government action." If no action is taken, warned Kirkland, "the deficit will continue to grow."

Kirkland, who is playing election-year politics, is stronger on rhetoric than he is on effective action or program these days. He is caught between a labor movement increasingly enraged at the government's economic policy, and, on the other side, his neo-conservative cronies, the "free trade Democrats." Although he wrote fiery newspaper commentaries against the North American Free Trade Agreement, for example, the AFL-CIO did nothing to prevent Congress from passing its pro-NAFTA "fast track" resolution last year. Now, some political analysts believe that Kirkland is trying to find a covert way to back Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton, who is pro-NAFTA and anti-labor.

"Urgently needed public investment in health care, child development, housing, and infrastructure have been held hostage to the largest and longest string of federal budget deficits in the nation's history," said Kirkland. The deficit-cutting debate, he added, has been used as an excuse "for denying government the use of fiscal policy, one of its most potent tools for stimulating the economy to combat the depression."

Kirkland called for a stimulus package of \$60 billion, primarily to be used for improving highways, bridges, airports, schools, and housing stock. He expressed opposition to any cut in corporate income taxes, including the revival of the investment tax credit (a key element in the Kennedy recovery program of the 1960s), which he categorized as a corporate tax cut.

In other testimony to the Budget Committee, Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, urged Congress to take "emergency action" and allocate \$15 billion to state and local governments to augment the grants-in-aid they currently receive. McEntee recommended that the funds be used primarily in the areas of public safety, health, education, social services, and environmental services.

Specter makes 'Freudian slip' on JFK probe

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Penn.) has been a bit discombobulated since the release of Oliver Stone's film "JFK." On Nov. 26, in an interview with C-Span, Specter, when asked by commentator Brian Lamb to explain what the Warren Commission was, said: "The Warren Commission was the presidential commission to assassinate the investigation of President Kennedy."

Specter, who was assistant counsel to the Warren Commission in 1964, is credited with having concocted the "magic bullet" theory to justify the hypothesis of a lone assassin in the murder of President Kennedy, a theory which was held up to ridicule in the film.

Aspin seeks force for Third World conflicts

In statements made to a meeting of the Atlantic Council on Jan. 6, House Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.) called for redefining the role of the U.S. military forces in light of the Persian Gulf war, and restructuring them accordingly. Aspin said he wants a "leaner, meaner" military power capable of meeting the type of "threat" supposedly represented by Third World countries like Iraq.

With the demise of the superpower conflict, argued Aspin, there exists a "larger inventory" of new threats. Among them, Aspin listed the spread of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, new regional powers, drug trafficking, and economic threats.

Previously, the United States "relied primarily on diplomatic means" to stop the proliferation of mass destruction weapons, said Aspin. But the Gulf war, which aimed, in Aspin's view, not only to liberate Kuwait, but also to "destroy Iraq's capacity for developing and using mass destruction weapons," was an example for Aspin of how the U.S. military will be used in the future.

Dems lambast Bush's failure in Japan

Democrats have begun attacking President Bush for his failure to bash the Japanese sufficiently, and called for more stringent reprisals against them.

Sen. Donald Riegle (D-Mich.), chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, on Jan. 10 characterized the Bush trip as a "flop." "The Japanese business and government leaders sitting there in their closed market are laughing at our government for its

weakness and unwillingness to confront decades-long systematic pattern of trade cheating," Riegle raved. "Since 1980, Japan has drained \$460 billion from the U.S., taking millions of our best jobs to Japan and destroying entire U.S. industries."

Riegle announced that he and other Democrats would introduce a bill on Jan. 21 which would "confront and stop the trade cheating by Japan." The bill would require the Japanese to reduce their trade surplus with the U.S. by 20% per year for the next five years.

On the same day, Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) called the Bush policy a "voodoo trade policy." "U.S. trade policy is weak because dozens of barriers to American products continue to exist," he said. "Europe has acted to control its economic destiny by placing a 16% limit on Japanese auto imports until the year 2000. . . . We should act in our own economic interest in the same way."

Bush urged to attend eco-fascist Eco-92

Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.) has introduced a sense of the Congress resolution which urges the administration to "place the highest priority" on the success of the Eco-92 conference, to be held in Brazil in June, "by participating actively, particularly through the personal participation of President Bush."

The resolution also calls for the U.S. to work with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean "to address environmental concerns in the Western Hemisphere." Such collaboration would include supporting countries to become more energy efficient; slowing deforestation; and reducing

land-based sources of marine pollution.

Torricelli plans to hold hearings on his resolution and on Eco-92 when Congress convenes on Jan. 21. The Torricelli efforts are an attempt to breathe new life into attempts to impose austerity measures, under the cover of "ecological considerations," on the nations of the Third World.

Did Lantos, Porter help fake 'Iraqi atrocities'?

A scandal erupted when it was revealed in a commentary in the Jan. 6 *New York Times* that the chief witness at hearings held by the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, who claimed to have observed an incident where Iraqi soldiers allegedly took Kuwaiti infants out of their incubators, was in fact the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the U.S., and was lying. The testimony helped to sway the vote of the Senate in support of the Persian Gulf war.

The chairman of the committee, Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), knew of the girl's identity but did not reveal it, claiming that he did so in deference to the wishes of the Kuwaiti ambassador, Saud Nasir al-Sabah, according to the report.

In the January issue of *Harper's* magazine, publisher John R. MacArthur criticized the panel for not demanding proof that the young woman had indeed witnessed the atrocities she described. MacArthur suggested that Lantos and Rep. John Porter (R-Ill.) did not choose to verify the accusation partly because of their close connections to Hill and Knowlton, a public relations company hired by Citizens for a Free Kuwait, a Kuwaiti-financed lobby group. According to

Harper's, the Congressional Human Rights Foundation, a private group founded by Lantos and Porter in 1985, had its offices in Hill and Knowlton's Washington headquarters and the public relations company provided a \$3,000 rent reduction to the foundation. The Citizens for a Free Kuwait had also donated \$50,000 to the foundation.

Boston's plight laid before committee

In testimony before the Senate Budget Committee, Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn attacked Congress for "an abandonment of the cities." Flynn said that the cities have been hit by the "triple whammy" of federal withdrawal, state cutbacks, and the continuing national recession.

"Over the past 10 years," said Flynn, "Boston's total federal assistance has been cut from \$150 million to about \$70 million—an \$8 million a year reduction." Over the past three years, Boston lost over \$160 million annually, which was more than 12% of the current city budget.

Flynn expressed support for the emergency plan proposed by Sens. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.) and James Sasser (D-Tenn.), which calls for an anti-recession package of \$35 billion in grants and/or loans to state and local governments for creating jobs and in order to prevent destructive cuts in education, infrastructure, and public safety programs. But Flynn said that many cities would be incapable of capturing any of the revenues generated by this stimulus.

Flynn is also asking the government to empower cities with new revenue-raising capacities, including a constitutional amendment to allow for local sales and payroll taxes.