

## AFL-CIO's endorsement of Gore: a Pyrrhic victory

by Stuart Rosenblatt

Using a brazen display of threats and intimidation, the Department of Justice and other friends of Al Gore and George W. Bush steamrolled a divided and confused AFL-CIO National Convention to endorse Al Gore for the Democratic Presidential nomination on Oct. 14.

The purpose of this endorsement was to jump-start the otherwise flagging Gore campaign, for the ultimate benefit of George W. Bush. Without Gore as the Democratic nominee, Bush stands little chance of being elected President. Hence the bludgeoning of the AFL-CIO in Los Angeles.

This desperate victory came with a steep price: Two major industrial unions, the Teamsters and United Auto Workers (UAW), refused to endorse Gore, and at least one other union, the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), also withheld their support. After the vote, most Teamster delegates, who comprised the single largest voting bloc, staged a stormy walkout from the convention floor to protest the outcome.

The fallout also could be seen from within those unions which had grudgingly climbed on the bandwagon. Many of those polled before and after the vote still said they would prefer to withhold support until a later date.

The vote itself came against the backdrop of a tough mobilization waged by campaign supporters of Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, who fought to gain the endorsement of the AFL-CIO for his campaign. The LaRouche mobilization polarized the convention and brought a sense of hope to delegates being asked to swallow a candidate who directly opposes their interests.

The strong vote against Gore was conditioned by two factors. He was rightly seen by a substantial percentage of

labor officials and normal Americans as an enemy of traditional values and as an avowed enemy of labor. His outspoken support of free trade in general and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in particular, his ludicrous plan to "reinvent government," and his commitment to New Age lunacy, have eroded what little support he ever had among sane people. However, it was the sustained educational drive by the LaRouche campaign that galvanized the anti-Gore revolt. Without LaRouche, the delegates would have grudgingly "gone along to get along."

### LaRouche campaign sets the agenda

Prior to the convention, associates of LaRouche contacted hundreds of union locals throughout the country to endorse LaRouche's campaign and demand that LaRouche be invited to address the Los Angeles national convention. More than 150 high-ranking union officials, including a significant number of union presidents and statewide officers, signed a letter to this effect, which was hand-delivered to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney.

Additionally, 5,000 copies of a videotape, "LaRouche Speaks to Labor," were delivered to union halls all over the country on the eve of the convention. This tape was an excerpt from a longer interview conducted by LaRouche in September with a group of state legislators and union officials on the critical issues facing the nation (the transcript of the full interview was published in *EIR*, Oct. 1). The ideas in the tape are setting the agenda not for only labor, but for the year 2000 campaign as a whole. Most delegates in Los Angeles acknowledged receiving the tape, and a number had already viewed it and discussed it with their membership.

When delegates began arriving on Oct. 9, the only visible campaign was that of LaRouche. There was no presence of candidate Bill Bradley at all, and that never changed. The Gore campaign operated largely in the shadows. Dozens of LaRouche supporters greeted the convention-goers with banners and large amounts of campaign literature. Copies of LaRouche's campaign book, *Road to Recovery*, could be seen tucked away by numerous attendees.

In addition, a mass petition drive was conducted to enlist more active support of LaRouche's candidacy. Over a hundred participants signed the "Appeal to President Clinton" to appoint LaRouche his economic adviser. More importantly, dozens of people endorsed LaRouche's candidacy on the spot.

Throughout, campaign volunteers engaged delegates and other participants in an intense, far-ranging debate on the key issues, which were otherwise noticeably absent from the convention. On Oct. 10, LaRouche issued an open letter to the AFL-CIO to "Bring an end to what has become lately 'politics as usual.' Replace news-media run politics with mass movement politics. Wall Street, which controls the mass media, will do nothing good to or for the people. Therefore the people must muster their forces to bring in a President and Congress who will represent the vital interests of the nation, not the special interests which presently control the mass media, and use the mass media to control what is called 'public opinion.' . . .

"I propose that the majority of the citizens of this nation unite around a single theme, the same theme President Franklin Roosevelt defended against his Wall Street enemies back then. That theme is to promote the general welfare for us and for our posterity. Labor and the so-called minorities represent the core of the natural constituency to be rallied for unified political action around that cornerstone of our republic's fundamental principle of constitutional law."

LaRouche's call permeated the entire event, provoking countless debates on the economy, American culture, the need for an FDR solution to the crisis, and other issues. One highlight was a public exchange on the night of Oct. 10, at a press conference called by United Steelworkers of America (USWA) President George Becker and AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka, on the organizing perspective of the Steelworkers.

Angela Vullo, a representative of *EIR*, asked the speakers, and a packed house of more than 70 primarily USWA officials, to comment on LaRouche's open letter. She read relevant sections and then posed the challenge. There was a pregnant moment of silence, finally broken by Becker muttering, "Yes," in agreement. He was followed by Trumka, who found nothing disagreeable in the statement and commented on the need for "union solidarity." Sensing that the USWA was in some way endorsing LaRouche, USWA Secretary-Treasurer Leo Gerard blurted out, "We

support the statement, but not the candidate."

This led to a spirited discussion, after the public portion of the panel concluded, with all those present. One of the leaders of the LaRouche contingent, Melvin Muhammad, Nebraska state president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), got a chance to engage several high-ranking union officials, including Becker, in debate on the issues, and most people there were brought into the dialogue.

### **NAFTA issue brought into the open**

Despite attempts to push it under the rug, Gore's abysmal record on labor, including his support of free trade, could not be swept aside. Just as Gore pretends to be an advocate of civil rights and cloaks himself in his father's horrendous civil rights record (see Dennis Speed, "Al Gore, Jr. Caught in Another Lie; Gore, Sr. Opposed Civil Rights," *EIR*, Sept. 10), so Gore has the chutzpah to present himself as a friend of the working man.

Delegate after delegate was visibly shaken by the crucial paradox of the convention: They were being asked to endorse a candidate whose attacks on their self-interest were a direct threat to their own survival, and that of civilization. In many cases, they just couldn't swallow it, and turned to LaRouche.

Numerous stories spilled out on the disastrous consequences of NAFTA. One needle trades union official from southern California, who endorsed LaRouche on the spot, described the deprivations of free trade in San Diego that have recently closed six factories in the area and moved them out of the country. A steelworker president from the Midwest also endorsed LaRouche after recounting the disastrous results of free trade in the auto and steel industries in his state.

On Oct. 11, the Steelworkers convened a forum against free trade and *maquiladora* labor—the slave labor factories just across the U.S. border in Mexico. Despite various problems with the forum, the ultimate irony was exposed by LaRouche representative Ted Andromidas, who intervened amidst a packed house to expose the duplicity of the moderator Ed Fires, president of the IUE (electrical workers).

"In light of the horrifying conditions which you exposed in the tape shown to the audience," said Andromidas, "and in light of your stated commitment to ensure that these conditions are brought to a justifiable end, how can you possibly justify the endorsement of the one Democrat who is most responsible for creating these conditions, Vice President Al Gore?"

Fires did not respond, but Steelworkers President Becker did. "You are asking that question because you have a political agenda," was all he could say.

On the afternoon of Oct. 12, the Teamsters held their own press conference on the impact of NAFTA on cross-border

truck traffic with Mexico. Teamster Western Region Director Chuck Mack laced into the free-trade package, but went to the heart of the matter in answer to a question from this news service, on the impact of the trade issue on the Teamster non-endorsement statement that had been released earlier in the day.

“Trade is a big issue,” said Mack. “Are workers’ views going to be taken into consideration on this or not? We are waiting for Gore or Bradley to separate themselves from the President on the trade issue. We are also concerned about the WTO [World Trade Organization] and China.

“The media and the campaigns are trying to sweep the trade issue under the rug, and make it a non-issue. If Gore had to stand for election in the Teamsters, and speak to our unions like our candidates do, he’d be in real trouble. We are going to make this an issue. For the Teamsters, this is crucial.”

### **Department of Justice thugs at work**

By the afternoon of Oct. 12, the convention was sharply divided on the issue of whether to endorse Gore. Many delegates spoken to by *EIR* reporters thought it was “too early,” “not the right time,” or said they just plain disagreed with the move to endorse Gore without any debate or discussion.

The deciding element, however, was the ongoing manipulation of the AFL-CIO leadership by the Department of Justice. Threats of indictment against high-ranking officials emanating from the case against the Teamsters surrounding the election of James Hoffa last year, were swirling around the convention. This was coupled with the imminent DOJ attack on Laborers President Arthur Coia, and produced an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. The ultimate beneficiary would be Al Gore. If the AFL-CIO would endorse Gore, the pending charges would be dropped—or so they said.

This was underscored in an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* on Oct. 12, entitled “The Trumka Card.” The *Journal* said that the delay just granted in the Teamster trial in New York was a *quid pro quo* for an endorsement of Gore by the AFL-CIO Executive Board. Trumka was the key target of the DOJ, and had now become a leading figure in the effort to secure the Gore endorsement by the convention.

Gore desperately needed the backing of labor in order to stay in the race. And George W. Bush needed Gore in order to bolster his chances of being elected President. So, all the stops were pulled out to strong-arm the AFL-CIO into the unprecedented early support, including blackmail.

When presented with this scenario, numerous high-ranking union officials attending the conference concurred. One top official in New York wanted the entire dossier assembled on the DOJ by the LaRouche campaign for his use. A top-level Teamsters officer wanted “everything you’ve got on the Justice Department.”

On Oct. 13, on the eve of the endorsement vote, LaRouche

warned the AFL-CIO leadership not to capitulate to the DOJ blackmail, in a statement circulated to the membership. “All trade unionists considering endorsing Gore because of the blackmail, do not forget that the DOJ will offer you this deal only to double-cross you later. If you think you are safe in making the deal and endorsing Gore, don’t complain when you are double-crossed!”

This statement flooded the floor of the convention, but the fix was in. Security officers for the AFL-CIO began guarding the doors, preventing LaRouche organizers from breaking the controlled environment. At 11:00 a.m., the Executive Board moved the endorsement. Neither LaRouche nor Bradley was invited to address the convention, and the deal was executed.

The Teamsters dominated the floor debate attacking the endorsement, and as the vote was cast, they staged a walkout from the convention. Other delegates also left in a huff. One state legislator, who was also a delegate, told organizers for LaRouche on his way out that he was “disgusted with the whole thing. . . . I have to get out of here.”

The United Auto Workers also refused to endorse, and the American Federation of Government Employees issued their own statement against endorsement, saying in part, “Although Vice President Gore has been an advocate for our positions within the administration, this administration has ended up on the wrong side of the issues on too many occasions.”

### **In conclusion**

While it is true that the demise of Gore’s campaign has only been postponed, it is also true that it was a lack of nerve on the part of a significant portion of the delegates to the convention that allowed the Gore nomination to be ratified. Either that lack of nerve, all too typical of the “Baby Boomer” generation now in charge of the labor movement, is overcome, or this vote will be a harbinger of a coming splintering and further weakening of the labor movement.

The labor movement, like African-American politicians, are being blackmailed into supporting Gore, and, like African-American activists, they must break out of their subservience. In a national press conference on Oct. 13, broadcast over the Internet (see transcript in this issue), LaRouche summed up the approach that must be adopted: “I think that what we have to have in this country is a general popular revolt, by the citizens, who will start behaving like citizens, rather than seeking approval from the mass media, for going along with what they consider public opinion.

“The biggest problem I have in politics is so many people who agree with me, and who I like, will say, ‘Yeah, you’re right. But we can’t go along with you, because we’ll get in a lot of trouble.’ And thus, nobody, or very few of us, stand up and actually fight. I would hope that this time, with this election coming around, that more of us will stand up and fight.”