

cut *and* a balanced budget. We are suffering the consequences of this "voodoo economics." But he is now advocating what he once denounced, saying no, just like Reagan, to any tax increase or defense cut. His only concrete contribution to the economic debate is a proposal to cut capital gains taxes, a supply-side snake oil that would add to the deficit in order to refuel speculation. This is like trying to stem drug addiction by cutting the price of narcotics.

The United States needs a dose of austerity as surely as do Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. But the International Monetary Fund does not dare scold us as it does them. Nor do we hear any clear voice from the Democratic candidates. They remember too well what happened to Mondale when he dared utter the dirty word "taxes" in 1984. Already Treasury Secretary Baker is suggesting that the stock market had started to crash because Democrats in Congress had proposed a few nickel-and-dime additions to corporate levies and a curb on takeovers. Reagan reverted to his old language as a sportscaster and offered as argument against new taxes or defense cuts only the word "nuts!" Only after a Black Monday and a Wild Tuesday was he prevailed upon to hint, though still Delphically, at a possible compromise on the deficit. The vocabulary itself is enough to scare foreign investors. Any cuts must come out of civilian expenditures. But if you set aside interest on the debt, entitlements (like Social Security and Medicare) and the great untouchable of "defense" (which is really the cost of maintaining worldwide empire), even shutting down the rest of the government entirely wouldn't erase this year's deficit. The total bill for all departments other than defense as proposed in the Reagan budget for 1988 is almost \$118 billion. The 1988 deficit is now projected to be \$185 billion. So you could abolish civil government altogether and still be \$67 billion in the red. Reagan has been hoping to stave off the deluge of debt until after he leaves office and then blame Congress and the Democrats—and by implication constitutional government itself—for the gigantic mess Reaganomics has created. The Profligate Era is ending with a deliberately created gridlock. This could breed a new fascist mentality.

Let us imagine for a moment what would happen if the two parties in Congress escaped from the blighting shadow of Reagan's veto power and reached agreement on a really radical cut in the deficit. It could begin to restore confidence worldwide. True it would mean some bitter medicine at home, but that may be the one way to avoid a crash recalling 1929. But that improbable scenario may already be too late as stock markets gyrate frantically everywhere.

It is frightening that the economic crisis coincides with escalation in the Persian Gulf, where classic fears of appearing weak drag the United States and Iran closer to the brink of another and more unsettling Vietnam. We may be at a new chapter in human history when economic distress and war fears exacerbate every regional quarrel on the planet and darken the prospects for superpower accommodation.

I.F. Stone has been writing for The Nation from Washington off and on since September 1940.

Labor & Nicaragua

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sánchez was welcomed by friends of peace and democracy in Central America. Their number includes many of the delegates to the biennial national convention of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., meeting in Miami this week, and we hope they will take the occasion to add organized labor's backing to the Arias initiative. The prize provides implicit recognition of the fact that regionally led initiatives, rather than directives from the United States, offer the greatest hope for peace in Central America.

The Reagan Administration refuses to recognize this principle, however, as its continued lobbying for an additional \$270 million in aid to the *contras* makes clear. The promise of a regional solution to conflict remains threatened by U.S. action. The war at home about who will decide U.S. policy continues, and labor can play an important role in that struggle.

At the last A.F.L.-C.I.O. convention, the Central America issue sparked the first floor fight over a foreign policy question in the federation's history. To the consternation of the leadership, representatives of a range of unions demanded an explicit condemnation of aid to the *contras*. Their resolution did not succeed, but the one that finally passed called for a negotiated solution to Central American conflicts rather than a military one, and left individual unions considerable freedom to interpret what the requirements of peaceful negotiation are. Moreover, the partial victory over the language of a single convention plank was dwarfed by the political significance of the floor discussion itself.

Since the 1950s, organized labor's internal debate has been stifled by the leadership's dual commitments to the cold war and to the pursuit of a murderously interventionist foreign policy in the Third World. That policy has hurt working people. As investment flowed from the United States to repressive military regimes abroad, many workers lost jobs. And as the leadership applauded or assisted in countless U.S.-sponsored wars, coups, assassinations and other forms of terror abroad, organized labor became increasingly separated from its natural allies within progressive communities in the United States—as well as potential allies within foreign labor movements that suffered U.S. aggression. By breaking silence on Central America, as Martin Luther King Jr. broke silence on Vietnam a generation ago, those who spoke up at the last convention suggested a radically different vision of labor's domestic and international role. They showed that organized labor need not be, as its critics maintain, a "special interest" group, single-mindedly bent on achieving material gains for its (dwindling) membership and indifferent or hostile to everyone else. It can be a genuine popular voice for democracy, if it recognizes that democracy at home requires democracy abroad and an end to the destructive U.S. policies in which the A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership remains complicit.

Two years later, some things have changed and some have remained the same. In the recently published *Tunnel Vision: Labor, the World Economy, and Central America* (South End Press), Daniel Cantor and Juliet Schor report that unions representing just more than half the total membership of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. have now taken strong anti-*contra* positions, either by resolution or executive action. Even more remarkable, lobbyists for a dozen major unions, including five of the six largest in the A.F.L.-C.I.O., are making their opposition known to Congressional figures who are considered swing votes on *contra* aid.

Back at federation headquarters, however, the tired voices of reaction are still dominant within the international affairs department. While formally supportive of the Arias plan, the top officials are unwilling to oppose further assistance to the *contras*. This position stands to the right of even the mainstream of the Democratic Party, and all Democratic presidential candidates except the bellicose Albert Gore. On the eve of the national convention the leadership again exerted pressure for silence on the question.

Let us hope the silence is again broken, and even more forcefully than the last time. It would be good to see more debate within the labor movement. It would be even better to see the U.S. labor movement back on the side of workers in all the Americas.

More Gay-Bashing

Homophobia is still good politics, especially when it comes wrapped in Bible Belt rhetoric. That is the dismal lesson of the recent Congressional amendment to an appropriations bill that will hamstring safer-sex educational programs aimed at the gay community. The amendment was provoked by a sexually explicit comic book distributed by the New York City-based Gay Men's Health Crisis, which receives Federal funding. Unfortunately, the publication fell into the wrong hands—Jesse Helms's.

On October 14 Helms brandished it on the floor of the Senate and fulminated that it would "promote sodomy." He then introduced an amendment to a \$129 billion labor, health and human services and education appropriations bill for fiscal 1988 that prohibits the expenditure of Federal funds for any AIDS education, information or prevention materials that "promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activities." Taking their cue from Helms, the senators cravenly passed the amendment by a vote of 94 to 2, with Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Lowell Weicker the only dissenters. Last week, after Representative William Dannemeyer had distributed photocopies, the House stated its approval of Helms's measure by a vote of 358 to 47. It now goes to a conference committee.

The vague and sweeping prohibition could be used to penalize groups that attempt to instruct gays on techniques for safer sex. Presumably, only exhortations to chastity will do.

Faced with a public health crisis, Congress stands ready to

enact new-right rhetoric into law. "I am not equipped to pass moral judgments on my neighbors," Senator Weicker said during the debate. "I go by a very simple criterion: If somebody is ill, then they deserve the help of our government. Period, over and out."

Original research by Mark Gevisser.

Yves Volel

Yves Volel, the Haitian presidential candidate who was murdered by plainclothesmen in front of police headquarters in Port-au-Prince October 13, was a man who knew he was living on borrowed time. A few weeks before the fatal attack, he narrowly avoided death by ducking bullets fired from a car that drew alongside his. During the fifteen years that he taught math at the Dalton School in New York City, biding his time in anticipation of the day he could return to his country, there were several attempts on his life. In 1971 a school maintenance man was fired for carrying a gun. We students heard he had been looking for Volel, and our newspaper reported that he had worked for the Haitian government. But Volel never showed fear. He used to talk about practicing "discipline" so that if he was captured by the Duvalier forces, he would not crack under torture.

Like so many others, Volel returned to Haiti under the assumption that with "Baby Doc" Duvalier gone, the country would turn to democracy. When he saw that things were much the same, that the Tonton Macoutes were still active although now described as "plainclothesmen," that the military clung to power, he spoke out angrily. When he went to the Port-au-Prince police headquarters that Tuesday morning, he was seeking to represent a political prisoner who had been arrested without a warrant. Pointing out that the Haitian Constitution guaranteed the right to a lawyer, he offered his services. There are two versions of what happened next. According to the government, he brandished a revolver and attempted to storm the prison. After confiscating films of the assassination, the authorities released a picture of Volel lying in a pool of blood with a pistol at his side—proof, they said, of their story. Witnesses and a tape-recording of his final speech suggest that things happened quite differently. His strong, indignant voice was interrupted by sounds of commotion and gunfire.

After his return to Haiti, Volel was asked by the *Daltonian* if he feared for his life. He replied, "If I have to die, I will die. I am a human being. I don't want to be assassinated. I have children and family I would like to take care of, and I want to live to be helpful to my country. But if this comes in the fight, let this come, and I will go back to my God and He will judge me for what I have done on this earth."

PETER G. MEYER

Peter G. Meyer was a geometry student of Yves Volel at the Dalton School many years ago.

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