

LABOR PERISCOPE

Taking a walk around Davis-Bacon

For months now attention has been focused on the battle by organized labor to defend the Davis-Bacon Act, which guarantees the payment of prevailing wages on federally funded construction projects, from attacks by antilabor, "right-to-work," and allied groups. Early last month, the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters mobilized sufficient support on the floor of the House to beat back an effort to have certain programs exempted. Some AFL-CIO leaders, armed with assurances from the Carter administration that it will not tolerate a repeal or significant amendment of the near 50-year-old legislation, smugly say that "things are well in hand."

But while labor battles their overt "enemies," some of their "friends" are preparing to knife them in the back.

Sources in Senator Jacob Javits's office as well as among Senator Paul Tsongas's (D-Mass.) staff report that they are prepared to lead "a walk around" Davis-Bacon, without fanfare and initially without any conflict.

Javits's staff feels certain that the building trades in particular might be convinced by someone like former Labor Secretary John Dunlop, now at Harvard, to make certain deals on the issue.

It is normal for the Labor Department which oversees the act to order payment at prevailing wage rates for "similar types of work" when someone claims that there is a prevailing wage scale for

a "solar reflector constructor." But sources in Javits's office indicated that "this practice can be changed" and that the Labor Department is now "willing to look and act differently ... after all the energy crisis is a national emergency...."

Similarly these sources report that large numbers of CETA workers—paid below Davis-Bacon levels—will be working on many new energy development projects. "We'll ask the unions how many they want to take and we'll work out a number ..." said the source. "This gives them [the unions—ed.] a sense that they are at least being consulted... The name of the game is cooperation."

And what if the unions refuse to cooperate?

"Well, we would have our energy program on the books and we have the power through executive action to make sure that it is carried out," said an aide. "But we rather walk around a fight..."

The Industrial Research Unit of the Wharton School here is conducting a major study on methods of undermining and destroying trade-union organizations in the United States.

The project, which sources describe as "very secret," involves extensive profiling of individual unions for weaknesses as well as proposals for antiunion "counterstrategies." The various profiles will be published in a book under the byline of Dr. Northrup, the project coordinator and the direc-

tor of the unit. The proposed book has been described by individuals involved in the project as a "union-busting handbook."

A major part of the project is devoted to the Teamsters union, or more precisely to anti-Teamster counteroperations, under a project subheading of "Teamster tactics."

The Teamster investigation was conducted by John Brinker, who described himself as a former graduate student at the unit "with six years' experience as a Naval Intelligence officer." Brinker claimed to have coordinated "extensive fieldwork" involving several Teamster locals. He refused to state under what pretext he had approached Teamster leaders or who his informants were. Brinker further refused to acknowledge whether he was working at any point with federal or other law enforcement agencies.

Spokesmen for the Wharton School refused to divulge who was funding the project. Investigators for this news service learned, however, that the project is being funded by the Arlington, Va.-based "Foundation for the Advancement of the Public Trust." The foundation is a component of the funding network of the so-called right-to-work, open shop union busting machine, generally linked to the "right-wing" machine of Richard Viguerrie and such organizations as the National Right to Work Foundation.

Wharton has a longstanding relationship with these union-busting outfits. For example, a Wharton School study on the alleged inflationary character of the Davis-Bacon Act, which guarantees payment of prevailing wages on federally funded projects, serves as the "bible" for the anti-union forces advocating repeal or dilution.

—L. Wolfe and M. Moriarty