

## LABOR PERISCOPE

### Meany to retire and Kirkland to go for austerity

George Meany has informed the AFL-CIO Executive Council that he will step down as federation president when his term expires at the end of this year.

The announcement clears the way for the federation's takeover by Lane Kirkland, the New York Council on Foreign Relations member who is also Secretary Treasurer of the AFL-CIO. It comes as Kirkland and his cohorts at the CFR were putting the finishing touches on what is in fact a transitional, post-Carter austerity program.

The Meany retirement announcement had been anticipated for some time. Despite press reports, the 84-year-old Meany's failing health was not the primary reason for the expected ascension of Kirkland to power. Sources close to the CFR say that these networks wanted "their boy Lane" in the top position in the AFL-CIO well before the 1980 presidential elections get into full swing. Kirkland is slated to play a major role in the political maneuvering that will accompany the accelerating collapse of the Carter presidency and the deteriorating U.S. economic picture. Meany's physical infirmities merely facilitated the changeover.

#### More than a new president

The maneuvering is already taking place. Meany's announcement that he would not seek reelection as the federation's president this November came at an extraordinary AFL-CIO executive council

meeting. It was called to approve a new anti-inflation austerity program hammered out by Kirkland and members of the Carter administration, including inflation czar Alfred Kahn and Treasury Secretary William Miller.

The centerpiece of the plan is a new 15-member economic tripartite advisory board, consisting of representatives of business, labor, and government that will revise the Carter administration's "7 percent" wage-price guideline proposal. The panel, whose members have not been announced, will be chaired by former Ford administration Labor Secretary John Dunlop, whom many labor leaders mistakenly call their "friend" and who ran Nixon's wage-price control program.

Kirkland hailed the new agreement as part of a broader unspecified accord on economic policy that puts fighting inflation—imposing austerity—as the number one national priority. An official AFL-CIO policy statement released at the council meeting described the reasoning behind Kirkland's "accord": "This will mean a period of austerity for Americans—individual and collective sacrifices for a time—so that we then enjoy the greater bounty of our land in the years to come..."

Reportedly, the Carter administration has added a sweetener to get labor and industry support for the plan. According to the *New York Times*, the administration plans to make a major concession

on the wage-price guideline, removing sanctions from violators.

Chamber of Commerce head Lesher has attacked the plan as giving too much power to labor. The Teamsters union and the Autoworkers Union are reportedly amenable to the plan.

#### Who has Kirkland's ear?

George Meany and Lane Kirkland both come from the right-wing Anglophile Social Democrats U.S.A. network that dominates the AFL-CIO's inner policy-making councils. There is, however, a distinction to be made between the two.

Meany, whose career as a New York plumber has always been greatly exaggerated, is typical of what is commonly referred to as the labor bureaucrat. He rose through the ranks by making deals, especially with the traditionalist leadership within the building trades. This has meant that Meany often must deliver favors to the building trades leadership and others and that he could not stray too far from a basic commitment to economic growth and technological progress.

Nonetheless, there was always a nagging feeling within CFR leadership circles that Meany, with his ties to noncontrolled sections of labor, could not be trusted, especially on domestic policy questions.

Kirkland is a different creature. He is a CFR-created synthetic labor leader. Kirkland has been a CFR protégé since his post-World War II sojourn at Georgetown University's Foreign Service School. After being insinuated into the labor movement through a small maritime union, Kirkland was pushed up the ladder in the AFL-CIO bureaucracy by deals engineered by the CFR.

Kirkland will do whatever the CFR tells him.

—L. Wolfe