

# Bob Strauss heads push for top-down policy control

by Barbara Dreyfuss

Barely three months after the American electorate overwhelmingly rejected the Carter administration and its policies, a number of the people who ran the Carter administration are trying to reassert control over the Democratic Party. One of the main figures in this effort is the man who tried to convince Americans to accept the Carter administration for another four years: former Carter campaign chairman Robert Strauss.

Strauss and several of his close associates are now organizing a Democratic Coordinating Council to define policy for the Democratic Party and press for its implementation in Congress. Strauss wants to have leading Democratic members of the House and Senate, Democratic governors and mayors, as well as the party chairman, be members of the council. Many Democrats are very reluctant to back the plan, however, because they see it as an attempt by Strauss to direct party activity. "Some people think that this is a means by which Strauss is going to take over the Democratic National Committee and dominate the new party chairman," angrily complained one Democrat who is organizing for the group.

Strauss has also made it clear that he would like to use this group to confront the Reagan administration, rather than trying to develop bipartisan collaboration to revive the economy and American prestige abroad. A memo Strauss is circulating on the Coordinating Council declares that "it can be an effective means for orchestrating and presenting the public Democratic opposition to the Reagan administration policies. . . . Its primary goal will be to strengthen the base and bridge the coalition by attacking Republican policies."

Reliable sources report that the council plan "will get back on track after the new DNC chair is elected" at the end of this month. Lloyd Hackler, a sponsor of the idea and a close associate of Strauss, says that Charles Manatt, a leading contender for the chairmanship, "likes the proposal. . . . I think the new chair will go with it, even if he calls it something else." Hackler terms Manatt's election a "foregone conclusion." "Chuck is a friend of mine—I'd certainly be satisfied if he won." Last month Manatt circulated a letter to DNC members urging that

the party go on an immediate offensive against President Reagan.

Several other groups for formulating party policy are also being proposed by former Carter administration officials and liberals associated with the campaigns of Ted Kennedy and Moe Udall. The thinking is that a proliferation of such groups promoting similar but not identical programs will keep Democrats from coalescing around mainstream economic growth programs.

## Think tanks formed

At the end of this month, a group of liberals will announce formation of a think tank for the party, tentatively called the Democratic Forum. Those forming the group include such former Carter administration officials as Hodding Carter III, Pat Derian, Stu Eizenstat, and Anne Wexler; intimates of Ted Kennedy including Peter Edelman; Ted Van Dyke, a former top policy adviser to George McGovern; and Averell Harriman protégé Paul Warnke. "Our aim is a total re-evaluation of the ideas, the programs, and the policy positions which the party has traditionally fought for," declared one of the people working on establishing the think tank. "We seek to define a new ideology for the party."

At the same time Mark Green, a close collaborator of Ralph Nader, is trying to set up a "Progress Project" which would be an "alternate institution to develop the Democratic Party ideas of the 1980s."

Former Senator George McGovern, the man who has arguably done the most to destroy the Democratic Party as a constituency-based party, has himself formed a new organization called Americans for Common Sense. McGovern hopes this group will create a groundswell for the kinds of liberal, zero-growth economic policies McGovern and the Carter administration backed.

At the same time a multitude of fundraising groups is being created to finance campaigns of other liberal congressional candidates and to target moderates of both parties. These new groups include:

- **Democrats for '82:** Set up by Pamela Harriman, wife of the granddaddy of Democratic liberals, Averell Harriman, and mother of Winston Churchill III.
- **Progressive Political Action Committee:** Set up by former AFL-CIO staffer Vic Kamber, in conjunction with a number of former aides to Ted Kennedy and Jimmy Carter. This group plans a major direct-mail fundraising campaign.
- **Independent Action:** This outfit was just formed by former aides to Morris Udall, Ted Kennedy, and John Anderson, and plans to back Senate campaigns.
- **Democratic Study Group:** This congressional group, responsible for most of the congressional reforms of the 1970s that broke the power of political machines over Congress has suddenly decided to become active again and will raise money for House campaigns.