

Congress Deadlocked On Energy

## Mondale Allies Paralyze Senate

A bill to decontrol the price of U.S. natural gas has become the momentary focus of the most bitter congressional fight to date on the question of national energy policy. For the past week Vice-President Mondale, aided by Energy Secretary Schlesinger, has led a filibuster against the deregulation proposal that has succeeded in completely paralyzing the Senate. Attempts to reach a compromise between the largely conservative supporters of the decontrol proposal and the political faction allied with Mondale's brand of Fabian liberalism have collapsed, highlighted by acrimonious exchanges between President Carter and leading Senate conservatives.

At issue is not the incompetent deregulation proposal per se, but the deepening deadlock over energy policy throughout the government. Unable to muster sufficient support to enact their "deindustrialization" package of conservation, labor-intensive "public works," and regional energy corporatism, the Mondale group is plainly working to paralyze and disorient all opponent congressional efforts at energy legislation, or anything else, by turning the Senate into a zoo. As long as theirs are effectively the only proposals on the table, the Fabians apparently believe that they will be able to buy time until a new "national energy crisis" creates the climate for passage of their proposals — the same "crisis" that Energy Secretary Schlesinger is looking to as the pretext for imposition of his soon-to-be-unveiled WEEP energy dictatorship (see below).

The originally narrow policy basis for opposition to the Carter-Mondale energy program among Republican and conservative Congressmen — of which the decontrol proposal itself is an example — is evolving into an insistent demand across the political spectrum for serious economic program that will stress energy and industrial production, not conservation, and ensure the survival and expansion of the nation's industry and agriculture. The formation this week of a Senate "steel caucus" to deal with the crisis in that vital industry, the wide demand on Capitol Hill for the U.S. Labor Party's just-published detailed programmatic proposal for the rebuilding of the U.S. steel industry, and the failure so far of diversionary yelps for steel protectionism to gain significant ground, all point to the change in political climate that has driven the Mondale group to its present nihilist strategy.

*Compromise Fails*

Earlier Administration attempts to reach some sort of compromise with its conservative opponents over the de-

regulation issue, including offers of a much higher price for natural gas but under continued controls, went down in flames after President Carter tried to defend his badly faltering program against Senate "special interests" in a Sept. 28 press conference. The previous Monday, the Senate had voted to kill the Administration's oil equalization tax, a tax on oil at the wellhead which would have greatly raised oil prices. In remarks that bore the clear stamp of his energy czar, Carter threatened an "imminent" energy crisis and attributed Senate amendments to his energy program to "powerful lobbying influences." The Senators, he said darkly, "have their own reputations to protect." Commented the *Baltimore Sun*, Carter "stopped (just) short of accusing his Senate opponents of being in the oil industry's hip pocket."

The result of Carter's statement was to increase both the vehemence and the number of his opponents. Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) denounced the President as "dishonest" for implying that Senators were "under the control of the oil lobby," while his Democratic Senate colleagues Nunn and Burdick both joined the decontrol bill's list of supporters.

The filibuster therefore is rolling on, in an attempt to keep any further legislation from being passed before Congress adjourns for the year (sometime around October 15). Vice-President Mondale, in his capacity as President of the Senate, has already provided sufficient means to keep "debate" on the bill going forever, by allowing his cohorts to propose more than 500 amendments to the deregulation bill. In a breach of Senate procedure that outraged his opponents, Mondale refused to follow the custom of allowing the Senate majority and minority leaders to speak before other Senators, and instead recognized those who wanted to introduce still more amendments to the bill.

The Senate met all night Sept. 27 to discuss the amendments, adjourning at 7 a.m. only to reconvene two hours later, having acted on only 38 amendments. Led by Senators Abourezk (D-S.Dak.) and Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), Mondale's supporters dragged out the action on each amendment, forcing rollcall votes and demanding a quorum call. Anyone who left the Senate floor was immediately surrounded by Administration lobbyists, including energy czar Schlesinger himself. Gloated an aide to one Senator in the Mondale faction, "We may lose the vote on deregulation eventually, but the Senate will be good for nothing when we are finished."