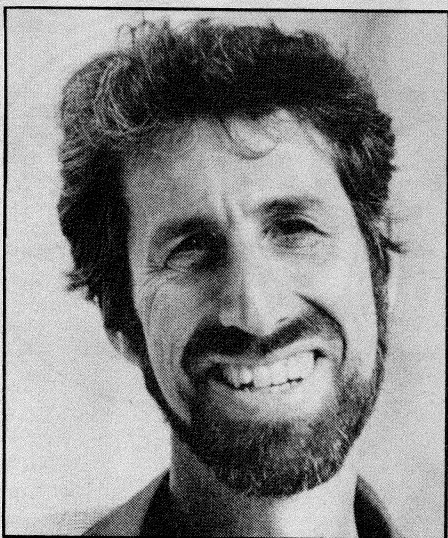


LISTENING IN/*George Vukelich*

No Consensus

Al Weinrub is editor of the newspaper *Labor Report on Central America*, published in Oakland, Calif., by the Labor Network on Central America. With William Bollinger, Weinrub co-authored *The AFL-CIO in Central America, an analysis of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD)*. Born in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1943, Weinrub says his greatest schooling came during the eight years he spent driving a bus in San Jose. An activist member of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 365, he chaired the San Jose Labor Committee on Central America, which documented the political involvement of the AFL-CIO in other countries. The newspaper's editor since 1985, Weinrub is unmarried but has "a companion" in Oakland.



BRENT NICASTRO

Al Weinrub.

"This newspaper and the study of the AFL-CIO in Central America are basically an extension of a very large and growing movement within labor opposing Reagan's foreign policies and also the policies pursued by the AFL-CIO. In addition to the West Coast labor committees that put out our paper, there are similar labor committees on the East Coast and in the Midwest too. Chicago has one. There's even one here in Madison.

"Remember during the Vietnam War when the secret bombing of Cambodia was revealed and people were demonstrating in the streets against it? George Meany, then head of the AFL-CIO, got on the radio and said: 'This is the time when the president of the United States needs the support of the American people, and he certainly has our support!' By that Meany meant the AFL-CIO, and only days later, hard-hats came out on the streets of New York and beat up demonstrators.

"That war was strongly supported by the AFL-CIO—which is not to say there weren't local union activists against the war, but that was extremely muted. Dissent never came up on the floor of the AFL-CIO convention in any prominent way.

"Today you have a situation where Reagan is being blocked from pursuing his pro-contra goals in Central America, from overthrowing the Sandinista government, by the fact that he hasn't been able to get a consensus of the American people behind that policy. And one of the main groups he's been unable to get on his side is the AFL-CIO.

"This time Lane Kirkland heads the AFL-CIO, and he has not taken a stance in favor of contra aid. This time much of labor has lobbied in opposition to the contra war, and it marks a real split within the AFL-CIO.

"On the one hand, you have the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Department, and its operations are more right wing than Reagan. That group favors U.S. policies and is very close to the operations of the CIA. It is fueled almost totally—I would say 95%—by the

U.S. government through the Agency for International Development and the right-wing National Endowment for Democracy set up by Orrin Hatch and his associates to operate throughout Central America.

"On the other hand, you have growing union opposition to these policies. You have all those labor committees across the country that I mentioned. You also have the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador, which is composed of 20 international union presidents, among them AFSCME, the NEA, the International Association of Machinists. It's a long list.

"Inside the unions, there are caucuses of members who are trying to change the foreign policy outlook of their unions. So you have 'Postal Workers for Peace' operating within the two main postal unions. You have the AFSCME 'Foreign Affairs Network,' the NEA 'Peace and Justice Caucus,' and so on.

"If you want to know which union members are progressive or conservative these days, just ask the question: 'What's your position on Central America?' The conservatives support Reagan right down the line. The progressives, by and large, oppose the Reagan policies.

"The progressives understand that international policy questions are very crucial to American workers, that the support of anti-labor dictatorships abroad undermines the position of U.S. labor, that the export of capital abroad undermines the jobs of American workers, that these things are part of a great Reagan assault on the working class and the trade union movement.

"They understand that union members not only have to oppose those policies, they also have to take a hard look at the policies of the AFL-CIO. You can't get into bed with Reagan on international questions and then be fighting him at home. That's just a contradiction." ■