

HUMAN RIGHTS SLATE GAINS SUPPORT

August 1979

Election Editorial

Lucien Blackwell has accepted the draft of the Black Political Convention and the Consumer Party to run for Mayor on the Consumer Party ballot. Blackwell will head up a Human Rights slate of independents running either on the Consumer ticket or the Human Rights Party, an instrument created by the Black Political Convention. The slate also includes some progressive Democrats. With Frank Rizzo threatening to run a candidate of his own and with both Green and Marston camps in disarray, Blackwell and the independents stand a real chance of winning this fall.

A REAL ALTERNATIVE

The *Organizer* believes that this slate offers to all working people in Philadelphia a real alternative to the policies of the two old parties. The Human Rights Slate is running on a platform, the Human Rights Agenda, which opposes racist, corporate domination of the city's political life and calls for a wide range of measures to improve the living standards of Philadelphia's people and democratize the city's political institutions.

First and foremost the Human Rights Agenda puts forward the urgent demands of the Black community — for housing, education and social services, for measures against discrimination, for jobs and for an end to police brutality. All these demands, including those that promote racial equality, are in the interests of all working people in the city. Eight years of Rizzoism demonstrate that racist demagoguery and discriminatory policies benefit only corrupt politicians, the bankers and corporate interests. The Human Rights Agenda is a rallying point in all of our struggles to stop runaway shops, the destruction of our neighborhoods, the decline of our schools, the crush of taxation, and the host of other fights we face as working people, Black, Brown, Yellow and White.

This platform goes well beyond what the politicians of the two parties are willing to commit themselves to, even in words. One of the important developments of the present campaign is that masses of people are breaking from the two party system and setting an independent course. As long as working people remained locked within the two capitalist parties, the struggle for our basic needs will remain restricted within the narrowest limits.

The present Human Rights Slate

represents the growth of such an understanding, particularly within the Black movement. Rightfully distrustful of Green and his Democratic machine, unwilling to embrace former Ronald Reagan backer Dave Marston (from the Party that gave us Watergate) and disillusioned with the wheeling and dealing of Charles Bowser, the thousands who attended the Black Political Convention are charting a new direction. While the need for a thoroughgoing break with the two parties, politically and organizationally, remains unconsolidated, the Human Rights Slate represents a major step forward in that direction.

Lucien Blackwell is an excellent choice to head up the ticket. Blackwell as a city councilman representing west Philadelphia's 3rd district and as an active figure in the citywide Black movement, has a record of responsiveness to the needs of the people. Notably Blackwell has united with the struggle for jobs, for housing and against police brutality. As a trade unionist Blackwell has an understanding of the problems that face all working people. With his record, popularity and ties to the mass movements, Blackwell can expect broad support in a bid for Mayor.

THE VOICES OF DOOM

Three objections have been put forward to an independent mayoralty campaign — the same objections that are always raised whenever a breakaway from the two party system emerges as a possibility. 1) there is not the money and the organization, 2) we will lose our leverage on the elected officials from the two parties, 3) an independent campaign will benefit the right wing — in this case the Rizzoites.

Blackwell himself pointed out we can never expect to match the financing of the two parties who draw on the rich and Big Business. But experience shows that mass organization, such as developed during the Stop Rizzo Movement, is more than a match for big money. When the masses know what they want, are aroused and organized, the power of numbers will win out over the power of the dollar.

As for losing "leverage" over the two party politicians, where does this leverage come from anyway? Only an organized mass movement with its own agenda can force these politicians to make concessions. Look at the civil rights

movement. Was the civil rights legislation of the 1960s the result of Black votes for Kennedy and Johnson? No, it was the mass actions, the sit-ins and the threat of rebellion that forced these politicians to finally pass these laws. It was a response to the independence of the Black movement and the fear of this show of self-reliance that prompted the Democrats to act.

This "leverage" has never been good for more than a few crumbs anyway. The two parties stand for Big Business. The Democratic Party, which claims to be for the "common people", favors throwing a few more crumbs our way than the Republicans in order to keep the masses in line. This argument about maintaining our "leverage" by keeping inside the two party system is in reality an argument for settling for crumbs.



As for "helping the right", it is the refusal to build a political movement outside the two parties which really helps the right. This argument exaggerates the differences between the "liberals" and the "conservatives". Remember 1964 when they said we had to vote for Lyndon Johnson to stop Barry Goldwater who would lead us into war. Johnson won and instead of peace we got the bombing of Vietnam and thousands of US troops packed off to Southeast Asia.

But differences between the capitalist politicians are basically differences about how to maintain the system of capitalist exploitation. These differences are real and we need to take them into account, but the whole logic of "lesser evilism" leaves us trapped on the treadmill of the two party system. The time is never ripe to make a break with the two parties, because one will always be a wee bit "worse" than the other.

In the present situation Lucien Blackwell can win — He can beat Green, Marston and any Rizzo candidate. Indeed

a Rizzo-backed candidate will hurt Green and help Blackwell. This is what the prophets of doom regarding Blackwell candidacy really fear.

OUR TASKS

A successful campaign around the Human Rights Slate and Agenda will not be easy. It will be an uphill fight. It will require an enormous grass roots organizing effort. It will require a massive educational campaign to counter the "lesser evil" logic, popularize the Human Rights agenda, and clearly demarcate the alternative represented by the slate from the politics of the two parties.

Of particular importance will be a campaign among white working people drawing out their interest in supporting a slate that has its origins in the Black people's movement. The legacy of Rizzoism with its phoney championing of "white rights" remains strong. But if white progressives aggressively take up building support for the slate and drawing out the interests all working people have in realizing the demands of the Human Rights Agenda, the hold of Rizzoism can

be further eroded and a sizeable vote for political independence registered in the predominantly white, working class wards.

To realize its full potential the Human Rights Slate needs to be broadened to include Hispanic and white candidates and more candidates from labor. Ralph Acosta, candidate for council in Harry Jannotti's 7th district, should be supported. Consumer Party activists, who have a record of support for the Human Rights Agenda, like Lee Frissell, Max Weiner and Ralph Wynder would all strengthen the slate. Progressive trade union leaders like Henry Nicholas of the Hospital Workers and Dave Niefeld of the Retail Clerks would also bring much to the ticket. These inclusions would broaden the multi-national appeal of the slate and help build a broad people's movement among all sectors of the community.

The *Organizer* and the PWOC plan to play an active role in the campaign. We urge all our readers to do the same. Let's put a people's candidate in City Hall — Elect the Human Rights Slate.

SECTION IV: *Independent Political Action and the Struggle for Socialism*

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION & THE '76 ELECTION

The following speech was given by Ron Whitehorne, a member of the PWOC Political Committee, at a PWOC-organized forum on the presidential election of 1976.

Today we want to discuss the significance of the present election and in so doing comment on the general importance of the electoral process in this period.

The starting point for such a discussion has to be the meaning of the two-party system in the US. Just as it is that breaking the hold of the labor bureaucracy over the proletariat within the trade unions is an essential step in the preparation for revolution, so it is that the hold of the two parties of the masses must also be broken.

It is clear to us that a working class which tolerates a class collaborationist bureaucracy at the head of its most important mass organizations is a working class that lacks the political consciousness to make revolution. It should be equally clear that a working class that bi-annually and quadrennially casts its vote for one or another capitalist candidate is a working class that cannot begin to take up its historic task of overthrowing capital. Elections, as Engels noted, are a barometer of the political maturity of the working class. By this standard it is clear that our class is in swaddling clothes. As long as it remains confined to the terrain of the capitalist politics of the two parties, its political growth will continue to be stunted.

THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN THE US

The US is unique among advanced capitalist countries in that it doesn't have and never has had a mass working class party. The political landscape has been and continues to be dominated by two thoroughly bourgeois parties. This is in contrast to the European experience where for generations there have been mass based parties that at their very least have had a working class form if not a working class substance. This ranges from the once revolutionary Communist Parties to the long-time reformist Social Democratic Parties. These parties, although bourgeois in the political essence, are organizationally based on the working class, primarily through strong ties to the trade unions, and to one degree or another maintain the posture of being class organizations. They consciously address the working class as its spokesman.

In the US in the modern period it is the Democratic Party which has come closest to approximating the role of these European parties—but with some very significant differences. The Democratic Party never has had or espoused a class form of organization. While the bulk of the trade unions, of course, support the Democratic Party, they have no formal authority or special position within it. Indeed they have always been decidedly junior partners in this firm. Prominent labor bureaucrats have enjoyed an informal status as "advisors" and on occasion have been given a cabinet position, but funda-