

Candidacy Official: Jackson's 'Rainbow' Politics Move Center Stage

By Frances M. Beal

Riding the upsurge of political energy sweeping Black communities throughout the country, Jesse Jackson finally made it official. The formal announcement of his candidacy for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination at a November 3 Washington, D.C. press conference brought the new dynamic Jackson has injected into the 1984 election campaign to front pages and television screens throughout the country.

Even before the official announcement, Jackson had been making substantial political waves. But now with direct access to the platforms available to the other major Democratic hopefuls, a rapidly growing national campaign structure and the prospect of receiving millions of dollars in federal matching funds, the progressive political potential embodied in the Jackson candidacy can be realized on a mass, nationwide scale.

That potential lies in two essential points.

First, Jackson's candidacy sets the basis for a broadly progressive and specifically anti-racist platform to be projected right into the center of national political debate. Every candidate and political force will be confronted with the issues Jackson raises—and the entire electorate will be able to monitor their responses.

Second, both the substance and the symbolism of Jackson's bid can serve as a mobilizing force, bringing millions of Blacks and other disenfranchised sectors of the population into political motion in general and the voting booth in particular.

If even part of this reservoir of political possibility is tapped, the Jackson candidacy will have far-reaching effects, not only on the 1984 election, but on the motion of U.S. political life for some time to come.

JACKSON'S PLATFORM

In announcing his candidacy, Jackson once again articulated the essential reason for his campaign: "The Reagan administration has turned its back on civil rights, human rights and the poor—both in this country and in the world...[and] regretfully, the Democratic Party and its leaders have remained too silent and too passive in the face of these onslaughts."

Jackson stressed the issues of unemployment, poverty, "unjustifiable subsidies for big corporations and wealthy individuals," the dismantling of civil rights enforcement machinery and cutbacks in needed social welfare programs. He took the Reagan administration to task for supporting repressive regimes in "South Africa, the Philippines and El Salvador" and sending U.S. soldiers to "die needlessly on foreign battlefields in undeclared wars."

Promising detailed position papers on all major issues in the days ahead, Jackson outlined in broad strokes a platform of employment and training programs, tax reform, increases in health, education and welfare services and advocacy of a foreign policy based on "negotiations over confrontation." He particularly stressed opposition to racism, and pledged to make strict civil rights enforcement a major national issue in the campaign. He expressed support for the ERA and "a bilateral verifiable nuclear arms freeze and a reduction in the arms race." Jackson is also pro-choice and advocates democratic rights for lesbians and gays.

Even on paper, Jackson has already projected a campaign considerably to the left of the other major Democratic Party aspirants. But what particularly distinguishes the Jackson bid is its explicit determination to base itself in the poor, specially oppressed and unrepresented sectors of U.S. society, and to bring their



concerns and interests into the mainstream of political debate. Stating that "there is a gap between the announced candidates and the masses," Jackson has set out to mobilize the Black community and to forge around it a broad and progressive "Rainbow Coalition" of the dispossessed. This goal transcends any particular plank in Jackson's program, and actually lies at the heart of his campaign effort.

That Jesse Jackson should be the individual who now occupies the point role in bringing this progressive program before the entire country has been an understandable cause of concern among many progressives in the Black community and elsewhere. His history of political zig-zags and personal ambition, especially now that he has entered an arena where the pressure to vacillate or surrender on key aspects of his progressive program will be considerable, is troubling. So far,

however, Jackson has been accountable to his targeted constituency and his campaign has hewed to a consistently progressive course.

Jackson's success in projecting the main components of his platform before a broad, nationwide audience has already impacted the political terrain on which the struggle for the Democratic presidential nod will be fought. Even before the official announcement, stories about his candidacy appeared in *Newsweek* and *Time*; coverage of his Washington, D.C. press conference was as extensive as that accorded former Vice-President Walter Mondale and Sen. John Glenn, and greater than that given any of the other announced candidates. The heightened visibility of Jackson's program and the "Rainbow Coalition" it speaks for has already dented the attempt to ghettoize the campaign by categorizing him solely as the "Black candidate." Jackson him-

self stressed this point on ABC's "Nightline" on the evening of November 3: "Part of our struggle is to break out of the ethnic struggle into the general domain."

As the Jackson candidacy becomes an accomplished fact on the national political scene, its already demonstrated power to galvanize the enthusiasm of the Black community is bound to increase. Massive voter registration drives in which the Jackson effort was an important factor have already added over 300,000 Blacks nationwide to the election rolls. Jackson's stated goal is to add two to three million more to the lists, a goal well within reach if the present trend continues.

The impact of this new bloc of almost certainly progressive voters will not be restricted to the presidential race. Political analysts are already predicting a major effect on local and state contests. In a number of cases, these new voters may provide the decisive margin that could elect more Black and progressive candidates and oust reactionaries from districts with large minority populations.

This is particularly significant in the South, where 53% of U.S. Blacks reside. Jackson has made a national issue out of the continuing racist maneuvers that hamper southern Blacks from exercising their right to vote. Pledging to make the South a major target of his campaign, Jackson will focus his energy on an eleven-day period next March during which nine southern states hold primaries or caucuses.

Jackson's mobilization of the Black community's energy, however, goes well beyond increased voter registration. His candidacy has already sparked the formation of functioning campaign committees in 25 states, getting already active political forces working together and drawing many new people into organizing activity. At the core of these committees are the local Black elected officials and Black church figures who have supported Jackson's bid from the first trial balloons; now that Jackson is a formal candidate, the structure is rapidly expanding to include many other forces from the "Rainbow Coalition" the campaign projects. This development offers to reproduce on a national scale what occurred in Harold Washington's campaign in Chicago and what is presently being built in Mel King's effort in Boston: the creation of a coherent network of activists around a progressive program that lasts beyond any single election campaign.

The motion generated at all levels has also sparked a re-examination of political strategy by a number of Black leaders who initially opposed Jackson's bid. Figures like Rep. Walter Fauntroy (D-D.C.), who initially saw Jackson's candidacy as "divisive" of a needed coalition with white Democratic liberals, have jumped on the Jackson bandwagon. The argument of Jackson's early supporters—that a Black presidential candidate would increase

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Mondale Endorsement Splits Chicago Democrats

By Robert Sellers

CHICAGO

Despite the opposition of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington and other leading Black Democrats, the Cook County Democratic Party Central Committee endorsed Walter Mondale for the presidency on October 29.

The vote was engineered by Cook County Democratic Party Chairman Edward Vrdolyak, head of the racist wing of the Chicago party and the main political obstacle in the city council to the reform measures of the Washington administration. Vrdolyak lined up 59 of 78 county ward and township committeemen to vote for the endorsement, but this total did not include a single one of the 15 Black ward leaders on the central committee.

Mondale had been courting Vrdolyak for weeks for an early endorsement, thinking that the stamp of approval of the county party organization would influence conservative voters in white, ethnic neighborhoods who are leaning toward Sen. John Glenn.

Black party leaders, including Mayor Washington, opposed the early endorsement of Mondale, arguing that the party should wait for Jesse Jackson's official declaration of candidacy before deciding who to support. But the main reason these forces fought militantly to prevent the move was the blatantly opportunist alliance being forged between Mondale and Vrdolyak.

Mondale's strategists figure that Black voters will have no choice about supporting their man against Reagan no matter what sort of deals he cuts with right-wing

Democrats. However, this approach only strengthens the hand of backward, racist forces at the local level and is extremely likely to make effective mobilization of Black voters difficult if not impossible.

Recognizing the dangers of the Mondale-Vrdolyak alliance, two Chicago southside Democratic congressmen, Charles Hayes and Gus Savage (both members of the Congressional Black Caucus), took the lead in organizing opposition to the Cook County party's endorsement. They were careful to direct their main fire at Vrdolyak rather than Mondale: "We are being torn apart by a leadership which continues to support an agenda of bigotry and self-interest," said the two congressmen in a joint statement issued at a rally of 700 Washington supporters opposing the Mondale endorsement. "The present Cook County chairman injected racism into the recent mayoralty primary election. He supported the Republican candidate for mayor in the general election. He has worked unceasingly to stalemate the city government. Edward R. Vrdolyak must be ousted as Chairman of the Cook County central committee." □

Ed Koch: Architect of Racist Politics

By Rachelle Kivanoski

NEW YORK

To paraphrase the TV commercial, when Ed Koch speaks, the politicians listen. They have to.

The mayor of New York is, by definition, a politician with considerable clout. Chief executive of the nation's most populous city, the finance and communications hub of the U.S., Koch and his exploits have an impact that register far beyond New York's five boroughs.

Thus when the mayor of New York positions himself—as Koch has done—on the far right of the Democratic Party and is openly attempting to shape its politics in his own image, his activities are a matter of interest to the entire working class.

Never publicity-shy, Koch has received an unusual share of media attention in recent months. In July he tangled with several leading Black congressmen, charging that their investigation into charges of police brutality in New York were unfounded and "politically motivated." In August, he went to San Francisco to deliver a highly touted speech before the conservative Commonwealth Club in which he warned the Democratic Party to stop "catering to special interests"—meaning in particular the concerns of minorities and women—and calling on it to return "to the issues that concern mainstream America." And in September, at the height of the hysteria over the downing of the South Korean airliner by the Soviet Union, Koch again made the headlines by calling the United Nations "a cesspool" in what was an obvious reference to the role of socialist countries and the nonaligned movement in the world body.

Framing Koch's gyrations are two upcoming political events: the 1984 presidential election and the 1985 mayoralty election in New York City. Concerning 1984, Koch is trying to stake out a claim as a Democratic Party power-broker and a potential vice presidential candidate. Concerning 1985, Koch is already preparing his defenses for a challenge to his power which, as in Chicago and Boston, would be rooted in New York's substantial minority communities.

So who is Ed Koch—and what makes him so dangerous?

EVOLUTION OF A "LIBERAL"

Traditionally the mayor of New York City is a "liberal," and Koch was no exception—at first. Beginning his political life as a crusading reformer against the party machine in Greenwich Village, Koch's politics gradually drifted rightward during his tenure in Congress and came full circle with the hard-nosed neo-conservatism which has characterized his mayoralty, won in 1977.

Today he is an unabashed reactionary who is despised by New York's minority communities, viewed with alarm by much of the labor movement in the city and something of an embarrassment to New York's liberal intellectuals. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie hails him as an astute politician and a grade-A mayor.

Koch's standing with the powerful centers of finance capital in New York is based on two accomplishments: he bailed the city out of its mid-'70s financial crisis by imposing on it a program of racialized social austerity and anti-union assaults which were, in many ways, the forerunner of policies advanced by Ronald Reagan when he took office; and he has succeeded in forging a highly racialized, cross-class social base among the white "ethnics" who comprise the bulk of the most stable sectors of the working class and petit-bourgeoisie in New York City.

Since this perspective is at the heart of Koch's formula for the Democratic Party nationally, it is worth examining more closely.

Koch's greatest success in New York, which has earned him the respect of finance capital, was to engineer the city's

fiscal recovery. Inheriting in 1977 a city teetering on the brink of default, Koch has managed to eradicate the budget deficit and restore the city's viability in the municipal bond market. Koch achieved this "miraculous" turnaround by a successful head-on assault on organized labor and a conscious program of racialized cutbacks in city social expenditures.

During Koch's six years in office, the number of municipal workers has de-



creased by over 40%, "last-hired" minority workers bearing the brunt of the layoffs. In the face of strikes called by the hard-hit municipal unions, Koch rallied the public against city service workers (and pitted different sections of city workers against each other) causing union after union to cave in to his giveback demands.

The attack on labor was coupled with the virtual decimation of city services to the poor, consciously designed so that Black, Puerto Rican and immigrant communities would bear the brunt of the slashes. Prior to 1975, New York had the most extensive municipal hospital system in the nation, its facilities mainly serving the poor and undocumented workers. Koch's crusade against "duplication of services" reduced the number of beds in city hospitals by half and closed many hospitals and clinics serving Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant and other minority enclaves. Dismantling bilingual education programs has been part of Koch's policy of malignant neglect of the city's public school system, which has largely been abandoned by whites.

BUILDING A RACIST SOCIAL BASE

While the primary victims of Koch's policy of "fiscal restraint" have been the largely minority lower strata of the working class, whites have consciously been sheltered from the worst of the social and economic deterioration. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that these "mainstream" whites would rally behind Koch's program with "cut them, not us" blazoned across their banners.

The inherent racism of Koch's fiscal and social policies has been complemented by his explicit support of white supremacy. Under Koch's leadership, the city has filed numerous court actions opposing federally mandated quotas of minority workers in the schools, on construction sites or in the police and fire departments. The mayor has become a demagogic proponent of the myth of "reverse discrimination" and points to the achievements of white ethnic groups over

the generations as evidence of greater ability rather than privileged access and opportunity.

The most volatile component of his program, the war cry against crime, is likewise racially coded. Koch established himself as the defender of the "rights of society" (read whites), opposed to the "rights of the defendants" (read minorities). As a vociferous advocate of the death penalty, Koch has made a reputation as a staunch defender of the police in the face of racially motivated police brutality in the Big Apple. He was conspicuously silent, on the other hand, when white vigilantes bludgeoned to death Willie Turks, a Black transit worker, yet pointedly expresses heartfelt sympathy for whites who "defend themselves" against "criminal elements."

Koch's success in forging a racist ideological consensus with himself as its chief political representative in New York is not to be sneezed at. In 1981 he was accorded both the Democratic and Republican Party nominations and won re-election handily. Now he believes that the Democratic Party can duplicate this feat on a national scale.

FORMULA FOR THE "MAINSTREAM"

Calling for the party to "reach out . . . to the great mainstream of America," Koch spells out who that color-coded "mainstream" is without once mentioning race. He doesn't have to. It's enough for him to say, concerning the Democratic Party's constituency:

"Where are the steelworkers from Youngstown? The farmers from the corn belt? The pensioners from South Miami Beach? The wives and mothers from Brooklyn? The car dealers from Richmond? And the Air Force sergeants from Colorado Springs? The office workers, the doctors, the dentists, the small businessmen? They once formed the party's broad and stable base."

Koch's idea of how to bring this "mainstream" back into the Democratic Party is a program which rejects "special treatment" (affirmative action, quotas, etc.) for minorities, eases the tax burden on the middle class (requiring cuts in social services for the poor), and wages the war on crime by strengthening the police, curbing the legal rights of defendants, and more extensively utilizing capital punishment.

FOREIGN POLICY

Koch's advice to the Democratic Party on foreign policy is of a piece with his reactionary domestic program: "We are allowing ourselves to be seen as a party which dismisses the very real threats to peace and democratic values to which the present administration, however clumsily, is attempting to respond."

From this perspective, Koch advocates a Reagan-type budget for the military and a confrontational stand with the Soviet Union everywhere in the world. His unbridled anti-Sovietism is matched only by his unwavering support for Israel and all its policies. Outraged that some Zionists expressed horror at the massacre of Palestinians at Sabra and Shatila last year, Koch lambasted them for having "knuckled under to anti-Israel sentiments."

Koch's new national assertiveness is aimed at countering the conspicuous leftward pull now being exerted on the Democratic Party by the political upsurge in minority communities. That upsurge particularly threatens the tenures of white big city mayors like Koch who preside over major urban centers with sizeable minority electorates.

ANOTHER "DUMP KOCH" CAMPAIGN?

On the surface, Koch's own political position in New York might appear fairly safe. In fact, it is not nearly as secure as it seems. One reason for Koch's overwhelming electoral victory in 1981 was that a "Dump Koch" campaign mounted behind the progressive candidacy of

Frank Barbaro downplayed the struggle against racism and thus failed to galvanize a minority electorate which has traditionally stayed away from the polls. It is already clear that an anti-Koch movement in 1985 will not fall into the same dead-end trap.

With large numbers of New York Blacks likely to register this year as a result of Jesse Jackson's presidential candidacy, prospects for an anti-Koch coalition rooted in the Black and Puerto Rican communities and the municipal unions are quite promising. Already a group of leading Black political figures has formed a Coalition for a Just New York whose stated purpose is to unseat Koch in 1985. Meanwhile Victor Gotbaum, Executive Director of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 37, largest of the municipal employee unions, has jumped on Koch's San Francisco speech calling Koch's program an attempt to "borrow the program of the Republicans to give warmth to the most reactionary government visited upon the U.S. in recent history."

With New York's minority population constituting approximately 40% of the city's electorate and with the main municipal employee unions angered over the mayor's attacks on them, the potential for a 1985 mayoralty election capable of polarizing New York City politics much the way Harold Washington did in Chicago this past spring is thus quite real.

Win or lose, such a campaign would have an electrifying effect on New York City politics. And it might even rid the city of the mayor who has come to represent the politics of "liberal" white supremacy in its most blatant and odious form. More importantly, it would bring the city's vast minority communities into the political arena in sizeable numbers for the first time—certainly a crucial step in the political maturation of the working class as a whole. □

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Black political leverage and allow Blacks to "renegotiate their relationship with the Democratic Party," is simply proving, in practice, too compelling to resist.

LONG RANGE SIGNIFICANCE

Still, the most accommodationist forces in Black community politics—and the Democratic Party establishment to which they are tied—are not convinced. They are clearly worried that Jesse Jackson is setting in motion forces too powerful and too explosive to control. The present Democratic Party coalition requires Black votes and is prepared to make some minimal gestures to get them—but it requires even more that Blacks remain in a subordinate position relative to liberal capital and the trade union movement. Above all, it requires that the poor and working class strata of Blacks who are being galvanized by Jackson's candidacy remain politically passive, that they avoid a head-on challenge to entrenched white privilege and the desire to have any major say in U.S. foreign policy.

Jackson's candidacy threatens to upset this carefully constructed apperception. To be sure, Jackson is running as a Democrat and has played down any notion of bolting the party for an independent presidential bid. But he himself has identified the bottom-line contradiction in this position: "We are members of the party and we don't want to leave," Jackson said, "but our self-respect is non-negotiable."

The point is, the self-respect—that is, the basic political and economic rights—of the masses of Black people and other disenfranchised strata are not attainable within the limits of Democratic Party politics. Bringing that social force decisively into motion, then, creates an explosive contradiction right at the heart of the present U.S. political arrangement. Ultimately, this is the real significance of the Jackson campaign for the long-range interests of the U.S. working class in developing a vehicle independent of capitalist politics. □