

are possible tactics to maximize leverage within the Democratic Party rather than leading to a real break with it.

Bowser encounters a real difficulty if he opts to support Green in exchange for greater influence in the Party and city government since he made much of Green being the tool of the old Rizzo machine. For the time being Bowser is keeping his options open. Independents must bring pressure on him to respect the verdict of the Black Political Convention.

Meanwhile two influential Black leaders, Congressman Bill Gray and State representative John White, have come out for Green. Both had been compelled to support Bowser during the primary in the name of Black unity, but now are following their own lights and have thrown a monkey wrench in Bowser's vision of a political brokerage house with himself as chairman of the board. In yet another

development, Milton Street has threatened to throw his support to Marston if Bowser does not proclaim a slate of his own.

All these maneuvers threaten to whittle away the broad Black unity that has emerged over the last year. It also indicates the readiness with which some Black leaders are prepared to trade their influence with the masses for a few crumbs from the political establishment. Neither the Democrats or the Republicans offer a way out from poverty and racism. "Lesser evilism" and pragmatic calculation which sells the Black vote to the highest bidder among the capitalist parties will not produce Black political power, but only a new cycle of raised expectations, defeat and demoralization. Leadership which proposes such a course, no matter how great their present credibility, does a disservice to the Black community.

FROM THE BOTTOM UP

With or without the established Black leadership, BUF activists are proceeding to mobilize for the July convention. Community groups, rank and file trade unionists and a variety of political organizations are expected to attend.

While the convention grows out of the Black people's movement and reflects the special concerns of the Black community, convention planners envision a multi-national slate that can unite Blacks, whites and Hispanics around a program of demands that serve all working people. In all likelihood the Convention will be followed with a broader meeting that can build this kind of unity for the campaign.

BLACK POLITICAL CONVENTION ENDORSES HUMAN RIGHTS SLATE

August 1979

by Mike Simmons

Phase III of the Black Political Convention was held on July 13, 14 and 15 at Tendely Temple AME Church. During the weekend meeting, 2,000-3,000 people from a broad spectrum of organizations met to debate the critical issues facing the Black community and to consider endorsements of candidates for the November election.

At Phase II of the Black Political Convention, a slate of candidates was endorsed with Charles Bowser at the head of the ticket. John Street was the only endorsed candidate who won, although there is strong evidence that voter irregularity may have prevented Herb DeBeary from claiming victory over Joe Coleman in the 8th Councilmanic District.

The convention was held against the backdrop of the bizarre events surrounding Charlie Bowser (see adjacent article). After making a deal to support Bill Green for mayor, Bowser abruptly "resigned" from public life and failed to show up at a scheduled press conference to announce the Green endorsement. Many observers speculated that Bowser and Green's announcement was scheduled to undermine the Black Political Convention process.

At the opening session, State Representative David P. Richardson spoke on the politics of political brokerage. He said that "there is a new day in the Black community. No longer can our so-called leaders go behind closed doors and make deals on our behalf. No group of 'leaders' can claim to speak for

the Black community. They must come before the people and account for their actions."

This set the stage for the major struggle at the convention: who to endorse as mayor. It was clear throughout the convention that participants were not enthusiastic about the choice between Bill Green and David Marston. By a 71-8 vote, with 15 abstentions, the delegates drafted councilman Lucien Blackwell for mayor. The debate around Blackwell's draft was centered on whether independent politics was a viable option. One delegate at the convention summed up the feelings of many delegates when he said, "We lose whether the Republicans or Democrats win. It is time for us to really win."

This statement was verified earlier in the day when candidates came before the convention. When Green was barred from speaking by his continual refusal to sign the BPC pledge, Marston felt he could capitalize on the hostility toward Green. However, Marston's presentation was limited to vague statements on recycling jobs and education. During questioning by the delegates, Marston refused to speak to the Republican party's support of Rizzo during Rizzo's administration or to disavow his support of Ronald Reagan during the 1976 Republican convention, and generally failed to offer any clear program to aid the Black community.

The seriousness of the delegates at the convention was highlighted by the treatment of Augusta Clark, Democratic candidate for Council-at-Large. Clark, though she did not receive the endorse-

ment at the Phase II of the BPC, was clearly a favorite of many convention delegates. Her victory in the primaries almost assured her endorsement at Phase III. However, during the question and answer session, Clark was asked if she would support Rizzocrat James Tayoun for President of City Council. Clark's response of, "If there were not a qualified Black candidate I would support Tayoun," was met with a rain of boos. Many felt that this political pragmatism lost Clark the expected endorsement.

Earlier during the convention, there was a political forum that included Ralph Wynder, Consumer Party, Congressman William Gray Jr., Sladin Muhammed, African Peoples Party, Butch Cottman, Convention Planner, and State Representative John White Jr. This forum brought the struggle of independent politics versus the two party system out front. All of the speakers except Gray and White put forward the need to develop an independent party. Moreover, those in favor of independent action challenged the behind-the-scenes deals many Black politicians had made with Bill Green and David Marston as a continuation of the "lesser of two evils legacy."

Gray attempted to side-step the issue by stating that there was a need for the style of a Malcolm X and the style of a Martin Luther King. Many delegates resented Gray's attempt to counterpose Malcolm and King, ignoring the fact that both Malcolm and King saw the need for a mass based organization that determined their political direction.

GREEN SUPPORTERS GET ROUGH TREATMENT

Gray, along with C. Delores Tucker, Bowser's campaign manager, were called to task by the convention for their endorsement of Bill Green before the convention process. Delegates reminded Tucker that less than two months ago she was telling the Black community that a vote for Bill Green was a vote for Rizzo. The attempts of Gray and Tucker to defend their actions were rejected with boos by the convention, which led to Gray's premature departure from the convention.

Another indication of the thrust toward independent politics was the vote received by Consumer Party candidates. At Phase II of the BPC no Consumer Party candidate got more

than 10 votes. However, in Phase III, three Consumer Party candidates, Lee Frissel (Comptroller), Max Weiner and Ralph Wynder (both for Council-at-large) got majority votes. Had the 2/3 majority rule been suspended, as in Phase II, they would have made the Human Rights Slate. Nevertheless, their vote total was a clear indication that independent politics is on the agenda for the Black Community.

COMING OUT OF THE CONVENTION

The first task is to develop a campaign structure for the endorsed candidates. Currently, activists are meeting to form a "Committee to elect the Human Rights Slate" which would be the campaign organization for the endorsed candidates. This would not

preclude candidates from having their own organizations, but will help facilitate a team concept to centralize tasks such as the production of literature, fundraising and volunteer coordinators.

At this point the Human Rights Slate consists of Blackwell for mayor, Valerie Lane for City Commissioner, John Anderson for Council at Large, and Lucien Blackwell, David Fattah, and John Street for City Council in the 3rd, 4th and 5th councilmanic districts respectively. This leaves a large number of slots where no candidates have been endorsed. Many convention activists feel that efforts must be made to put forward more candidates for council and row offices, including support for those who received significant support at the convention but failed to gain endorsement because of the 2/3rds majority rule.

LUCIEN BLACKWELL DRAFTED

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The following article was contributed to the Organizer by a journalism student in attendance at the Black Political Convention. The Organizer welcomes opinion, analysis, and news articles from its readers.

Councilman Lucien Blackwell, who is also president of International Longshoremen's Association, Local 1332, has accepted nomination as a third party candidate for mayor in November.

Minutes after being endorsed by the Black Political Convention Phase III, in which Bill Green was barred from speaking, Blackwell told a group of reporters, "Blacks and whites are capable of making their own decisions. If I run, I'll not only be a Black people's candidate but a poor people's. . . This system gives poor whites a little bit and gives Blacks nothing."

Several delegates of the 116 organizations registered, including John Street, raised the question of funding for the endorsed independent. "Anyone who thinks we can elect an independent candidate without money is a fool", said Street, "we need to take a long, hard, serious look at this thing."

State Representative Milton Street, who had on the previous day endorsed Republican David Marston for mayor, added that if the endorsement were not followed up by cash and community sup-

port, then, "they've put this man up here for nothing." Street also warned the delegates, "If we run an independent and we lose, don't expect me to deal with them." (the two majority parties)

The last statement by Street drew boos and cries of indignation from the crowd. Delegates made it clear to Street that as an elected official, he is responsible to the community and that he is obligated to keep "dealing with them".

After Street spoke, Blackwell stated, "I'm not worried about the consequences right now. We have always supported the two major parties and what have they done?" He also warned the convention against thinking it must match the corporate structure "dollar for dollar" in any political endeavor. "It's not the money, it's what you do out there in the fields. If I decide to accept, then I'll accept the consequences." Blackwell said that he considered himself "another instrument they (poor people) are using to free themselves."

Earlier in the evening, delegates passed a motion disallowing Democratic candidate Bill Green from speaking because of his failure to sign the convention's four-point pledge for all candidates.

Several delegates addressed the convention, blasting Green for what they considered his lack of respect and his failure to take the convention and the

Black community seriously. "A vote for Green is a vote for the Rizzo machine!" shouted one delegate. "If the Democrats or Rizzo had asked him to sign the pledge, he'd sign the pledge," said Milton Street.

Following discussion, the delegates voted by more than the two-thirds majority needed to bar Green from speaking. When it was made official that Green would not speak, the audience shouted "Go Home, Green."

The section of the pledge that Green objected to required candidates to "constantly act out of my accountability to the manifest virtues of the Black community as revealed at present through the Black United Front and whatever interest the Convention will establish."

Green said that to sign the pledge was to give the Black United Front a "blank check". Green knew in advance that he would be barred from speaking because of his failure to sign the pledge. His supporters tried unsuccessfully to pass a motion allowing him to speak anyway.

State Representative David P. Richardson, who has a long record of struggling for the community, was also drafted by the convention as a third party candidate to oppose incumbent Joseph Coleman in the 8th councilmanic district. Although he supports the Human Rights Slate, Richardson has chosen not to run.