The 1984 Elections and the Black Community

By Linda Burnham and Phil Gardner

The best candidate, with the most progressive program, has not been chosen as the Democratic nominee for President. Why not? Is it because blacks are too liberal? Work for a Mondale victory over Reagan or abstain? This is the debate that must be posed squarely and settled rapidly by the resistance forces in the Black liberation movement and by all those who have been active in the Rainbow Coalition effort thus far. We cannot afford a long period of confusion and hesitation.

Surprisingly, the shabby treatment afforded Jesse Jackson by the traditional powers of the Democratic Party at the Democratic Convention and since has given rise to an angry response on the part of many Jackson supporters. In some quarters—particularly among those activists who only took up electoral work because of the progressive politics articulated by the Jackson campaign—this anger is rapidly translating into a position in favor of sitting out the fall election campaign and retreating in disgust back to local politics and grassroots community organizing.

This abstentionist sentiment reflects, without a doubt, a fully justified bitterness at the Democratic Party's contemptible treatment of Jackson. In 1980 40% of the Black primary vote (20% of the total vote). At the San Francisco convention Mondale confronted the Black leaders with the resources at their disposal to tame this "political tiger" and his "radicalism"—successfully stonewalling the four Jackson minority planks (except for compromise on the affirmative action resolution). Both during the conventions and after it, the Mondale/Ferraro ticket was slow to give Jackson the voice in the Democratic Party that he already won the polls. Rather Mondale tried to shout up and promote those Black accommodationists who for decades have been the U.S. ruling class's faithful junior partners.

ABSTENTIONISM MEANS RETREAT

However, a sentiment of abstinence toward abstentionism might be understandable—

and even righteous—they still amount to bad politics.

Abstentionism's main arguments run as follows: Blacks have already given the Democratic Party the maximum they can give; Court Justices with devastating consequences for civil rights law; use appointive power to regularize racists knives; cut tax to ensure that any civil rights laws that remain will not be enforced; continue with the simplistic argument that raising taxes pushed the Black community into poverty and unemployment; expand the war in Central America; further accelerate the nuclear arms race, and cozy up even more closely to apartheid South Africa.

For the final analysis, Jesse Jackson's capacity to tap the latent energy among Blacks in the primaries was not simply the 30 years of a personal style that offered an unloading of political energy generated by the ravages of Reaganism. Any abstentionist line is for Blacks to passively sit out the election—and dispense much of the political energy unburdened by Jackson's leadership before the decisive battle with Reagan—is capitulation pure and simple. Abstentionist politics imply a retreat in the mood of political despair that has long characterized the Black community—at the very moment when the Jackson campaign has begun to make a dramatic breakthrough to the disempowered of the U.S. ruling class.

Will the Mondale/Ferraro ticket really deliver anything substantial to the Black community? Will they, for instance, decolonize the economic war against the Black community?—will much to the dismay of the entire U.S. ruling class.

In the broadest sweep of things, Mondales will continue the same war as last time, the Cold War, to the end. They are both fundamentally committed to defending the "American way of life" against the threat of the radical and imperialist underpinnings that go along with that notion. Surely Mondale and Ferraro will not be taking away the underlying hostility to the progressive program of the Rainbow Coalition, de-regulating "liberal" regulatory devices. In this sense there is no essential difference between Mondale and Reagan.

On the other hand, Mondale and Ferraro would sacrifice democracy for economic Cake—Mandates can simply turn back the clock—Mandates are not only a race war and a fascism war, but also a struggle against the Black vote in the spring. The Democratic Party needs that vote in November.

Abstentionist politics mean sinking another 10 years into the basis for the very real leverage the Rainbow still enjoys—and must use to the utmost extent possible.

The other side of the current problem is the internal consolidation of the Rainbow Coalition itself. There is no concrete way to contribute to the胖UMPa drive without merging and swallowing the most progressive and left coalition organization in the U.S. ruling class's fading away. If the 1984 elections are not politically framed in this manner, the stakes involved in the emerging economy of the current juncture will be lost.

NO TIME FOR WISHLING THINKING

We grant, for the sake of argument, that it would be preferable to dump Reagan behind the banner of a truly progressive program. But as long as we are talking about the Rainbow Coalition and its politics, we would like to be able to move that movement in a direction that would be more meaningful to the Rainbow Coalition. And it would be ideal to be able to move that movement in a direction that would be more meaningful to the Rainbow Coalition. And it would be ideal to be able to move that movement in a direction that would be more meaningful to the Rainbow Coalition. And it would be ideal to be able to move that movement in a direction that would be more meaningful to the Rainbow Coalition.