

"The present debate... has placed the question of independent Black politics squarely on the agenda of the Black community."

BY FRANCES M. BEAL

It has been described as a battle between emotional symbolism and realism, between independence and subservience, between accommodation and resistance.

Whatever the characterization, the debate over whether or not to field a Black presidential candidate in next year's Democratic primaries has become the present focus of contention within the Black community over the future direction of Black politics.

As the time for a decision gets closer, the arguments on both sides have heated up. For John Jacob of the Urban League, a Black presidential bid would be "a counterproductive retreat into emotional symbolism at the expense of realistic coalition efforts." For Johnny Ford, Black Mayor of Tuskegee, Ala., "If a Black candidate does not run, then you can guarantee that both parties are going to be more conservative."

Triggering the debate and personifying the question is Jesse Jackson, whose Chicago-based organization, People United to Serve Humanity (PUSH), played a key role in the recent Harold Washington campaign. But the significance of this growing controversy for the future of Black politics in the U.S. goes far beyond any particular personality.

At bottom, the emergence of the issue as a political possibility warranting serious consideration reflects the growing impatience and anger of the Black masses with the racist system's imperviousness to change and the aggravated decade-long assault which has reinforced white supremacy. In particular, the motion toward an independent Black candidacy indicates widespread disillusion with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

BLACK CONCENTRATION

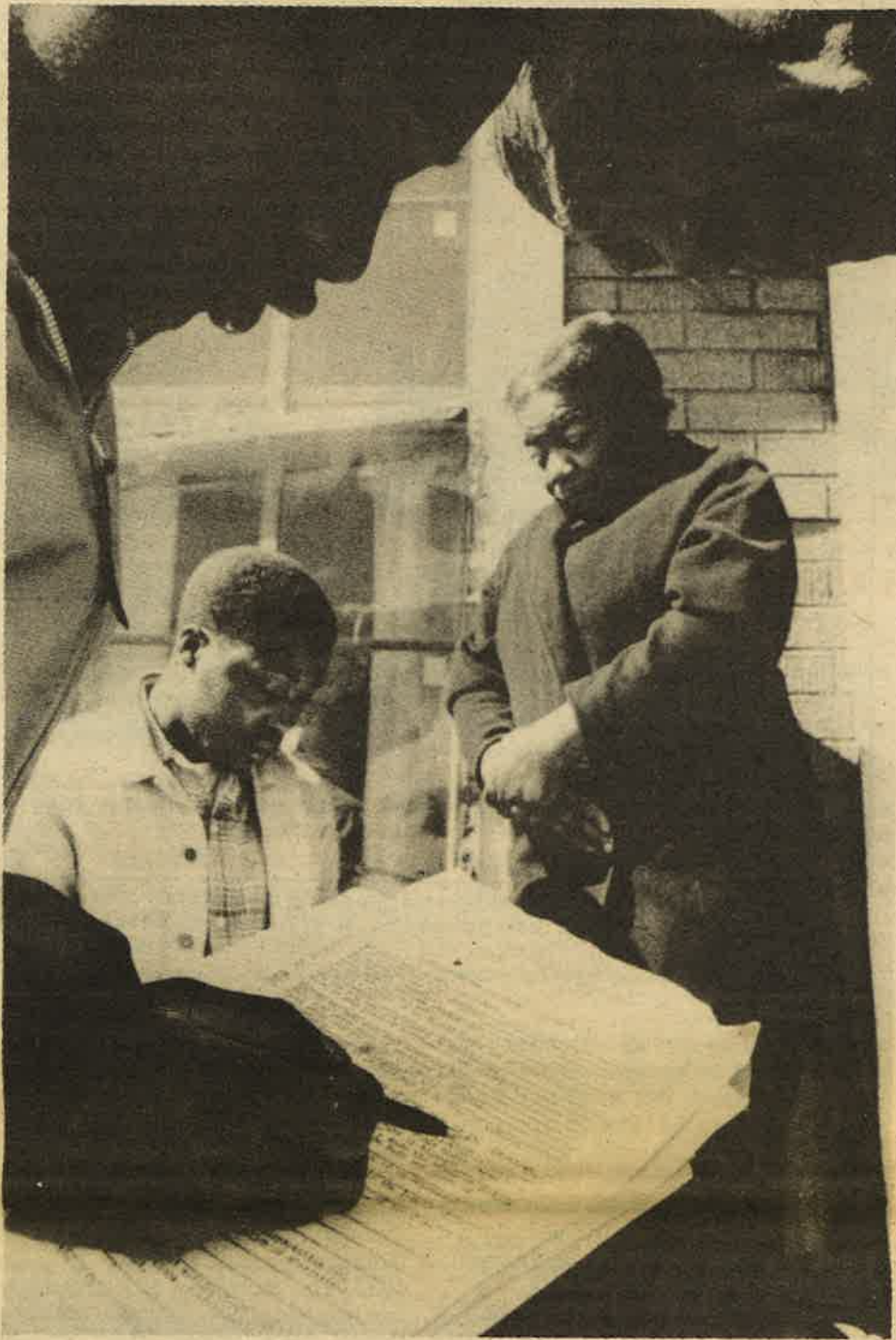
What has brought this question to the fore at the present time, ironically, is the new form of Black ghettoization which, over the past 20 years, has transformed many of the nation's major cities into centers of Black concentration. As a result, there has been a surge of Black political activity which has led to the development of Black political machines and the election of a number of Black mayors, city officials and members of Congress.

There have thus come into being relatively new political mechanisms through which all forces in the Black community—both the traditional accommodationists and the forces of resistance—are now trying to establish themselves as the representatives of the Black masses. This development has laid the basis for the emergence of a Black voting bloc in the Democratic Party which no politician can afford to ignore.

The debate over a Black presidential candidate, therefore, is essentially a debate over the fundamental strategy of Black politics, the central question of which is the struggle against racism. Will Black politics continue to operate as a relatively passive adjunct to the leadership of the Democratic Party, cajoling favors from it in return for virtually automatic support? Or will it seek to assert leverage over the political process—and the Democrats in particular—by flexing a concentrated independent electoral muscle?

This is not the first time that this debate has surfaced in Black politics. It has been a perennial theme ever since the first National Black Political Assembly (NBPA) which met in Gary, Ind., in 1972, where the wisdom of continuing to tie Black political efforts to the Democratic Party was seriously aired. The NBPA's 1976 meeting also considered the question and went so far as to sound

A Black Presidential Candidate?



Voter registration in Mississippi. Despite a history of legal and extra-legal obstacles to Black voting rights, Blacks now comprise a voting bloc that could decisively tilt a presidential election.

out Rep. Ron Dellums (D-Calif.) on the possibility of being a presidential standard-bearer.

"BLACK LEADERSHIP FAMILY"

The present proposal to project a Black candidate grew out of a series of meetings launched late last year by an informal grouping of Black elected officials, civil rights, religious and labor leaders self-designated as the "Black Leadership Family." Responding to the explicit and all-sided racist assault launched by the Reagan administration, the goal of the Black Leadership Family was to develop a strategy to oust Reagan and the Republicans in 1984 and to unite on a Black political agenda.

Participants identified affirmative action, employment, education, environmental protection and military spending as the key issues. They also agreed on the need to launch a vigorous voter registration drive among Blacks nationwide.

The idea of a Black presidential candidate, which had been vaguely discussed from the outset of the Black Leadership Family's discussions, came to life in the course of the sharply polarized Chicago mayoral election last spring. The political enthusiasm of the Black community, which registered and voted in record numbers, and its capacity to function as a coherent voting bloc behind a militantly anti-racist candidate offered compelling evidence of the Black electorate's potential political power nationally. At the same time, the endorsement of Washington's white opponents in the Democratic primary by most of the party's national liberal figures—and the desertion of the party by large numbers of normally Dem-

ocratic whites in the general election—underscored the fact that the Democratic Party's liberals could hardly be considered reliable champions of anti-racist politics.

LOGIC OF CANDIDACY

The essential logic behind running a Black candidate in next year's presidential primaries is to elect a bloc of delegates to the Democratic Party national convention who will have sufficient political leverage to influence both the party's eventual nominee and the party's platform. Or, as Jesse Jackson puts it, Blacks will be "renegotiating our relationship with the Democratic Party."

Fielding such a candidate would, in addition, encourage Black voter registration, give prominence to Black issues and enhance the prospects for other Black candidates in both the primaries and the general election.

The success of such a plan is well within the realm of possibility. According to a study issued by the Joint Center for Political Studies, "A Democratic presidential victory in 1984 is inconceivable without a strong Black showing in northern cities and the South." Blacks produced 20% of the Democratic vote in the last three presidential elections and constitute a swing vote that can tilt the election one way or the other according to the degree of their turnout.

Proponents of the Black bid argue that if most of the Black electorate were mobilized behind a Black candidate, this could translate into a powerful bargaining weapon to wrench a convincing commitment from the party for policies that Blacks want and need.

While Reagan has been the immediate spur to a more activist Black politics, the idea of a Black presidential candidacy probably is due even more to the sorry record of Jimmy Carter and the Democrats. Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), a veteran of Congress and the Congressional Black Caucus, expressed a widely held view among those advocating a Black candidate when he said: "Despite Black gains in elective politics at all levels of the Democratic Party structure, Black issues have been virtually diluted beyond recognition by old line but more powerful party interest groups." Similarly, H. Carl Holman, President of the National Urban Coalition, notes that past allegiance to the "best" white has not been able to "transform party platforms, campaign strategies and the composition and direction of an administration once it is in office."

OPPOSITION TO BLACK CANDIDATE

But opposition to the idea of a Black presidential candidate is also widespread. It is centered principally in that section of Black leadership—both elected officials and prominent figures in the traditional "mainstream" Black organizations—which has carved out a niche for itself in the framework of Democratic Party politics.

Their essential argument is that a Black candidate would be a self-defeating enterprise for the Black community. In practical terms, they say, such a candidate will split the "liberal" vote and lead to the election of delegates more favorable to candidates further to the right. Concretely, such a candidacy would probably work to the disadvantage of Walter Mondale who comes closest to having the traditional liberal claim on Black support among the most prominent candidates in the field.

"Anyone closely aligned with minority issues will suffer from a Black candidacy," asserts Rep. Mickey Leland (D-Texas), Chair of the party's Black Caucus, since the Black candidate has no real chance of winning the nomination and the more desirable of the white candidates would lose out in the delegate scramble. This argument is also advanced by Atlanta Mayor and former Carter ambassador to the UN Andrew Young, a staunch Mondale backer. He proposes that Blacks fan out among all the white candidates so Blacks can have some input no matter who wins the nomination and not weaken the chances of defeating Reagan in the general election. Carl Rowan, *Washington Post* columnist, summed up this perspective succinctly in an article entitled, "Blacks Don't Need a Black Candidate." He warned that a power bid would hurt the "liberal" white who "already in his heart supports the Black agenda." Blacks should stay put, Rowan exhorts, and "show their muscle in mainstream politics in 1984."

JESSE JACKSON'S ROLE

Since all talk of a Black presidential candidate has been predicated on the assumption of unified support in the Black community, it might seem that the powerful opposition put up by people like Young, Jacob and others would settle the matter. But not all participants in the debate are willing to be held hostage to the dubious prospects for unity. This is where Jesse Jackson comes in.

Jackson, who appears to be seriously considering such a race, has built a political base outside the Democratic Party and thus might have the capacity to mount a campaign. The recent formation of Jackson campaign committees in several locales strongly suggests that the final decision, expected sometime in September, could well be affirmative.

Should this turn out to be the case, left forces in the Black community are bound to view Jackson's candidacy with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the fact of his candidacy would certainly represent a significant expression of independent Black politics whose potential would not

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Recovery Still Leaves Most Unemployed in the Dust

BY RANDALL SEWELL

Despite the headline-grabbing .5% drop in the official jobless rate in July, the depth of the U.S. economy's unemployment problem has hardly been touched. Growing structural unemployment along ever more sharp racial lines continues to be the underlying trend in the U.S. employment picture. In addition, nine months of "recovery," while providing some number of new jobs, has simultaneously provided the political excuse to scuttle even the most meager federal efforts to provide employment or emergency relief to the millions who are still without work.

RECOVERY'S LIMITED IMPACT

Officially, the U.S. economic recovery is in full swing and corporate America is registering a return to high profitability. The economy grew at an annual rate of 8.7% in the second quarter of 1983; average personal income is up 5% over a year ago and inflation has been held to its lowest level in a decade.

As usual, improvement in the jobs picture lagged behind strengthened corporate profitability as the economy climbed out of its recession. It has taken a full nine months of officially declared recovery to make any significant dent in the record 10.8% unemployment rate reached last December. But finally some noticeable gains were made; the .5% July drop was the largest monthly fall in joblessness in 23 years, and overall the official unemployment rate has now fallen 1.3% to 9.5% of the "active" work force. The 1.7 million jobs added since last December (the majority of which showed up only in the last 3 months) is the largest comparable gain in a recovery period since World War II.

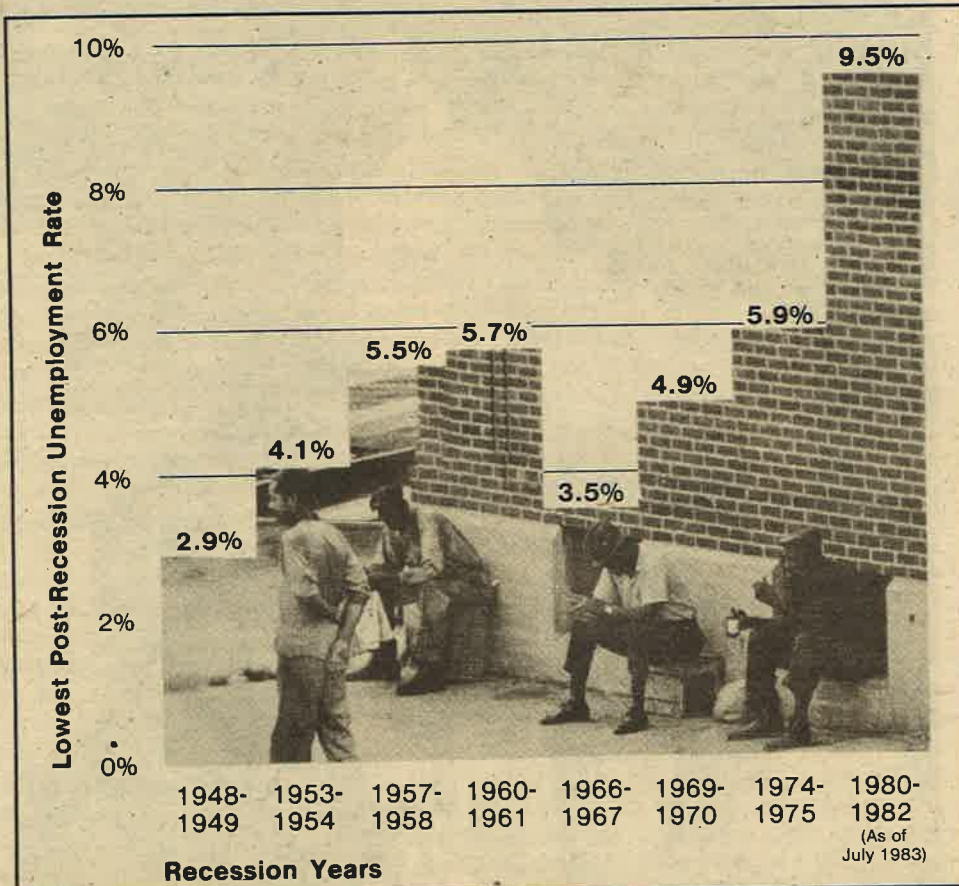
This is good news for those going back to work. However, for the 10.6 million who are still officially listed as without jobs the forecast remains bleak. For despite the impressive gains in the latest figures, all they really show is that the business cycle still exists and the strength of the present recovery is a result of the depth of the recent recession.

A closer look at the unemployment figures highlights the more significant long term trend, revealing an unabated advance in structural unemployment. The number of discouraged workers (those who have given up looking for a job and who are not counted in the official unemployment statistics) is still estimated at 1.7 million, down only .1 million from the height of the recession. There has been virtually no change in the number of people working part time due to a lack of full time employment. The average length of time unemployed workers remain without a job is still at a record 21.7 weeks, down only .3 weeks from the peak last month of 22 weeks. Finally, of those looking for work, only 38.6% received any unemployment benefits in July, compared to two-thirds of the jobless who received benefits at a similar point in the last recession.

The distinctly racist edge to the whole unemployment picture is widely recognized. However, not so often mentioned is the fact that the recovery has only aggravated the gap between white and Black unemployment rates. The Black jobless rate, which at the height of the recession was 2.1 times that of whites, is now 2.4 times greater.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

The minimal impact of the present recovery on the long term employment picture continues a pattern which the U.S. economy's recession/recovery cycle has followed for decades. Since World War II, the lowest unemployment rate reached



Since World War II, the lowest unemployment rate during each recovery after a recession has been higher than the lowest in the previous recovery (except in the recovery during the Vietnam war buildup). This illustrates that—despite fluctuations in unemployment in periods of recession and of recovery—structural unemployment is rising steadily in the U.S.

after each recovery has been higher than the one after the previous recovery. The only exception to this trend was the recovery following the 1964-66 recession in the midst of the Vietnam war buildup. The recovery that followed the 1974-75 recession only brought unemployment down to 5.9%, and this recovery will be lucky if it gets joblessness below 8%—and minority unemployment below 18%.

All of this is really no surprise given the structural changes taking place in the U.S. economy and capital's drive for increased productivity based on cost cutting, automation and speed up. The era of unchallenged U.S. dominance over its capitalist rivals is over, and U.S. corporations now face stiff competition even to keep, much less expand, their previous shares of both the international and domestic markets. Under these circumstances, the key to profitability is to slash the costs of production in order to make higher profits on a reduced volume of business. Necessarily, this implies an all-out employer attack on workers' wages and benefits, as well as a large scale infusion of funds to install the newest and most efficient production technology.

The most graphic example of this strategy is in the auto industry. Chrysler has made a spectacular comeback, and its ability to do so was based on eliminating half of its workforce and shutting down a third of its plant operations while significantly modernizing the plants it kept open. In the proposed joint General Motors/Toyota retooling of GM's recently closed Fremont, California plant, half of the previously existing assembly line jobs will be wiped out. In Nissan's new plant at Smyrna, Tennessee, welding and painting operations will be almost completely automated. These efforts will soon represent the norm in U.S. plant technology—not only in the auto industry, but throughout the manufacturing sector.

As a result of such technological improvements, labor productivity in the U.S. is increasing at an extremely rapid rate. According to the latest BLS figures, workers' output per hour increased by 4.3% in 1982, and in the first three months of 1983, it leaped a full 8.3% over the previous quarter. These productivity gains translate directly into increased unemployment.

While increased automation is a key

cause of the continuing high level of unemployment, there are others. Over the past decade, for example, rising energy costs have led to the displacement of many jobs in the basic industries. In the production of fuel-efficient automobiles, for example, Ford Motor Company reduced the weight of its vehicles by over a thousand pounds between 1977 and 1982. This included a 60% reduction in cast iron and a 30% reduction in steel and rubber. These changes alone accounted for the permanent loss of thousands of jobs in the feeder industries that depend on auto companies as a major market for their production.

Speedup, which eliminates the need to hire back laid-off workers as production increases, is another factor contributing to unemployment. At the start of any recovery, especially temporary recovery, employers use the leverage of high un-

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rest on the particular identity of the candidate. On the other hand, Jackson is such a maverick that the ability to make him accountable to a set of progressive politics is quite problematic. Already he has begun to downplay his earlier focus on anti-racist issues in the interests of trying to "broaden" his constituency. Meanwhile, Jackson's pandering to national chauvinism by attacking Japan for "unfair" trade practices and his promotion of "buy American" schemes does not bode well for his ability to field the kind of all-sided progressive politics advanced by figures like Washington and Dellums.

Despite the weaknesses of a Jackson candidacy, however, a useful political objective has been served simply by floating the idea of a Black candidate. The ensuing debate has thrown a spotlight on the role of the Democratic Party as a prop of the racist system; and it has placed the question of independent Black politics—irrespective of form—squarely on the agenda of the Black community.

INDEPENDENT POLITICS

Implicit in all this is the question of how independent working class politics may finally come to the one developed capita-

employment to intensify and increase the working day. According to the BLS, the average manufacturing work week rose to 40.3 hours in July after having fallen to 38.8 last October. In addition, average weekly overtime increased to 3.1 hours per week, a jump of more than 20% over the last year's average. And, with workers clearly worried about their jobs, absenteeism averaged only 2.1% of scheduled work time in the first quarter of this year, the lowest figure since the Bureau of National Affairs began keeping track a decade ago.

As a result of all these factors, there is unlikely to be any significant job expansion in U.S. manufacturing in the coming years. Recovery or no recovery, an unemployment rate in the 8-10% range has become a permanent feature of the U.S. economy.

GUTTING RELIEF PROGRAMS

Though the recovery has had minimal effect on the unemployment rate, it has provided the excuse for Congress and the President to avoid enactment of any legislation which would alleviate the hardships facing the jobless.

Bills to provide health insurance for unemployed workers, introduced during the height of the recession, have been toned down with each new economic report. The \$4 billion plan recently approved by the House was not only reduced from an initial \$5.4 billion measure, but its Senate counterpart calls for only \$1.8 billion, with the funds to be made up by cuts in Medicare. And any compromise that could get congressional approval would still face a promised presidential veto.

Meanwhile, legislation providing \$760 million in loans for unemployed workers to meet home mortgage payments is stalled in the Senate. And absolutely no money was specifically allocated for unemployment relief in the 1984 congressional budget, as liberal congresspeople were forced to settle for a face-saving gesture which placed \$8.5 billion in a general "reserve fund" which may ultimately be used for any purpose.

On top of this, the one piece of jobs and relief legislation that did make it through Congress while unemployment was front page news has so far proved completely useless. Though it has been three and a half months since the \$4.6 billion emergency jobs program was signed by the President, not one of the bill's promised 700,000 jobs has yet appeared.

All in all, it's bleak news for the unemployed. The U.S. economy is cycling out of its recession, but a significant sector of workers is simply being left in the dust. □

list country which has never produced a mass workers' party. The essential condition for such a development will come about when a significant section of the working class concludes that its own interests can no longer be served within the bourgeois-led, cross-class coalition for which the Democratic Party speaks. The section of the working class most likely to confront that reality first is at the intersection of class and racial oppression—most particularly, the overwhelmingly proletarian Black community. Therefore, the idea of a Black presidential candidate represents a significant step toward the political polarization of the Democratic Party around the question which rests at the very heart of any serious advance for working class politics—the struggle against racism. That polarization is the indispensable condition for eventually splitting the party and enabling the most advanced section of the working class to move the class as a whole in the direction of independent politics. In this sense, the present debate over a Black presidential candidate bears within it the seeds for a strategic rupture of the Democratic Party that could destroy the capitalist monopoly on U.S. politics. □