Rainbow Ready for San Francisco and Beyond

By Frances M. Beal

The Democratic Party primary season has come to an end, but the Jesse Jackson campaign is far from over.

Most immediately, Jackson strategists are preparing to bring the Rainbow Coalition’s peace and justice program to bear at the Democratic National Convention this July. But Jackson’s candidacy by a 4-to-1 margin in California, has already, to impact the general elections next fall and to institutionalize the Rainbow Coalition as an ongoing force on the national political landscape.

The first order of business, however, is to take on the Democratic Party establishment. To this end, Jackson is reaching out beyond the 375 delegates that he already won in the primaries. The most important breakthrough in this regard was the agreement among members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) — even those pledged to other candidates — that Jackson has legitimate concerns about the discriminatory impact of current party rules. CBC members have also expressed support for Jackson’s challenge to run-off primaries, Gerrymandering, at-large rather than district-wide representation and dual registration schemes.

The CBC has also agreed to try to hammer out a common agenda on certain domestic and international aspects of the Jackson program. Emerging from the meeting with Jackson, CBC head Julian Dixon (D-Calif.) noted the caucus’ commitment to “bring about an agenda for the 1984 convention that will not only address platform issues but will address the issue of fairness as it relates to the 1984 election.”

To head off what is emerging as added support for Jackson’s demands on the credentials, rules and platform committees, Mondale strategists have responded by trying to undermine Jackson’s stature as the voice of Black Democrats during the convention. Jackson has charged state party leaders who support Mondale with attempting to appoint a number of Black Mondale supporters to at-large and uncommitted delegate seats. Jackson called this tactic a “manipulation” of the democratic process, designed to obscure the fact that he had the highest vote ratio among Black voters in the primaries.

RAINBOW WORKSHOP

To ensure that the Jackson forces are well prepared to impact the convention, campaign leaders have scheduled a “Rainbow Coalition Workshop” in Chicago on June 29. The invitation-only gathering will include Jackson delegates, the local co-chairs and coordinators of Jackson campaign committees and a “selected list of Rainbow forces.”

This appears to be the first step in institutionalizing the Rainbow Coalition as a continuing force in national politics. Jack O’Dell, international affairs director of PUSH and consultant to the Jackson campaign, told Frontline, “The Rainbow Coalition exists and it has played a key role in bringing us this far in Jesse Jackson’s candidacy. This workshop is aimed at preparing the delegation for the San Francisco convention as well as discussing how to broaden and expand the Rainbow Coalition’s activities between July and November around a certain structure of state conventions. A number of concrete mechanisms for maintaining the Rainbow Coalition as an independent political voice have already been suggested. Ongoing voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives have been mentioned as possible activities, as well as taking up local issues that correspond to the perspective of peace and justice. As O’Dell told Frontline, “Our theory is that this work will keep the Rainbow Coalition together. Rather than let a vacuum set in, people who participated in the Jackson campaign during the primaries are wondering what they should be doing from the time of the close of the convention until November. The Rainbow Workshop will discuss this and arrive at a consensus on what needs to be done and where the focus ought to be.”

PUSH Convention

‘America, a People’s Rainbow’

By Vicki Baldassano

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Annual Convention of PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity), held June 5-9 in Washington, D.C., drew 2,500 people under the theme “America, a People’s Rainbow.” PUSH members from the East Coast and Midwestern states dealt with a broad range of issues — each of the four conference days focused on a specific theme with special events rounding out an agenda that ranged from Black economic empowerment to U.S. foreign policy.

But the key underlying concern of convention participants was the future of the Rainbow Coalition and the continued relationship between Black America and the Democratic Party. Speakers expressed this concern in a variety of ways on Thursday, “Political Empowerment Day.”

“We are the difference this year,” said Dr. Lavonia Allison, a panelist from North Carolina. “The Democratic Party will fall... unless they stand with us.”

Arnold Pinkney, national campaign manager of the Jesse Jackson campaign, said that “any Democratic platform agenda that does not include our candidate is an agenda doomed for failure in November.”

Thursday evening Jackson himself summarized the demands he will bring before the Democratic National Convention in July to an enthusiastic audience of PUSH members: “Party justice must precede party unity,” Jackson said. “Anything short of justice as the foundation of our relationship within the Democratic Party would be unacceptable.”

Jackson then issued several “challenges” to the party, which he described as “therapy and a formula for victory in 1984.” First, he reasserted his demand that the party “end all schemes to discourage political participation and adopt the principle of one person, one vote” for delegate selection.

Jackson also declared that “the Democratic Party must learn the lesson of reciprocity voting—if Blacks and Hispanics vote for whites, then whites must vote for Blacks and Hispanics.” But, he noted, “not one white member of the House of Representatives, not one white U.S. Senator, not one governor, not one major or minor daily newspaper that is white... not one major white candidate endorsed my candidacy. Yet they are the first to urge me to fall in line behind another white candidate. It’s dangerous to be that discredited, discredited power that you may need before the sun comes up again,” he said.

Jackson ended his speech with a warning that the future of the Democratic Party depends on the disenfranchised, particularly minorities, in America. “There’s a danger in rejecting the poor and impoverished... America be careful who you run with.”

WEEK OF EVENTS

The conference’s attention to Black politics was complemented by a wide-ranging week of PUSH-organized events. Tuesday’s workshops highlighted religious and educational activism on Black consciousness Wednesday was devoted to “Women on the Rise” with a particular focus on Black women’s rights. Thursday was reserved for Kwanzaa, Wednesday’s agenda also featured PUSH’s director of international affairs Jack Hill’s presentation of “The Future of Black Emancipation in Central America and the Middle East.”

Friday focused on Business, Economics and Labor. An afternoon workshop dealt with trade and economic development of America’s Black community. Included ambassadors and representatives from Algeria, the Sudan, Mali and Upper Volta.

Jackie Jackson, Jesse Jackson’s son, announced his candidacy for the Illinois State Senate in Chicago Sunday. Jesse Jackson announced that PUSH has signed economic “covenants” with seven major corporations that guarantee principles, scholarships and contracts to benefit minority-owned firms.

The closing day of the conference featured an address by Nation of Islam National Representative Louis Farrakhan and a concert with Lionel Richie.

Many people who participated in the Rainbow Coalition are ready to stay active around the issues raised by the Jackson campaign.