

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES No. 16, March 17, 1972

Present: Breitman, Britton, Dobbs, A. Hansen, J. Hansen,
Horowitz, Jenness, Jones, Novack, Rose, Sheppard, Stone.

Visitors: Kerry, Miah, Morrison, Scott, Seigle, Thomas

Chairman: Jones

AGENDA: 1. Black Political Convention

1. Black Political Convention

Morrison reported.

Discussion (Report and discussion attached.)

Meeting adjourned.

(The following is a transcript of the tape of the report and discussion, at the Political Committee meeting of March 17, of the Black Political Convention. The transcript has not been edited by the participants. The final section of the discussion is not included as important portions of the recording of the discussion were unintelligible.)

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BLACK POLITICAL CONVENTION REPORT AND DISCUSSION

MORRISON

At the Black Political Convention, which took place over 3 days, March 10, 11 and 12, they reported 2,776 full delegates from around the country and 4,267 delegates in all. About 8,000 people attended the whole affair. The main force behind the convention was the Congressional Black Caucus and their principal allies in putting the thing together and getting it off the ground were the reformist nationalists organized into the Congress of African People, which is led by Baraka [LeRoi Jones], and also Jesse Jackson of Chicago, of Operation PUSH. The Congress of African People (CAP) were sort of the shock troops in terms of the organization of this thing and in terms of doing the detail work of organizing it.

The stated purpose of the convention was to put together some type of Black Agenda, which Black voters could use as some kind of guideline in deciding which candidates to support for office in 1972. Aside from that purpose, the real intent of the thing was to enhance the positions of the Black Democratic politicians, that is, to give them the image of the power-brokers of the Black vote in 1972. This was the way they saw it and the way they organized it. Although they stated that people were to come there and make some input into some type of Black Agenda, they had already drawn the Agenda up before the convention. They did not plan a great deal of discussion, they did not plan a great deal of dialog among the delegates on the problems that Black people face. This became very clear in the way the convention agenda was drawn up. That is, they put the emphasis on the formal days of the convention, that is, the 11th and 12th. They did not play up Friday, the day on which they had two committees set up to hold hearings. That was the platform committee and the resolutions committee. The stated purpose of the platform committee was to take the position papers that had been drawn up by various state delegations and have them deliver those papers before this committee in terms of a five-minute delivery and then the committee would take these papers and draw up some type of platform.

They downplayed those hearings and most delegates arrived Friday night after those hearings were over and did not get a chance to speak to them. The way they organized the thing was that they planned the last two days of the convention to be given over to speeches by big-name figures. For the first day they had planned to have seven speeches given, two in the morning by Hatcher and Jackson, two in the afternoon by Sadaukai of North Carolina and Carl Stokes, and three in the evening by Walter Fauntroy, who is the non-voting

delegate to Congress from Washington, D.C., and Bobby Seale of the Black Panther Party, and Minister Lewis Farrakhan of the Black Muslims. Out of this whole day of activity they had only set aside about a couple of hours for the delegates to take the floor and discuss the Black Agenda.

The next day they had organized two speeches: one by Shirley Chisholm and the other by Julian Bond, which was supposed to wrap it up. Then they planned to ratify the Agenda and just end the convention sometime that afternoon. But what happened is that people came there with the intention of discussing and making known what some of the problems were. This was sort of the case before the platform committee hearings. That is, the platform committee had about ten or 12 people on it and it was chaired by Fauntroy and Carl Stokes. Although people raised questions about who put the platform committee together. The delegates didn't decide these things. People wanted to know what the platform committee was all about. For the most part, people went along with it because they had the right to speak before it and people presented all types of papers on drugs, housing problems, etc., and dwelt on the whole theme of Black control of the Black community. For the most part, there was not much discussion. That is, people would give five-minute deliveries, hand over the paper and that was it. At one point, though, a couple of people from the Gary Commission on the Status of Women, which is an official body of the city of Gary, got up before the platform committee and a woman presented a paper where she just outlined the whole thing on equal pay for equal work, 24-hour day care centers, and abortion on demand. That sort of caused a lot of static on the platform committee, at least with one of the people on the platform committee. Haywood Henry, who's the chairman of the Congress of African People, gave her a lot of static in terms of genocide, sterilization, etc., and that people are having too many abortions and what we've got to do is stop that.

This was the same case in the resolutions committee. That is, this Gary Commission on the Status of Women also presented a paper there and they got the same type of static. There was also a Black representative from the Third World subcommittee of the GAA (Gay Activists Alliance) from New York and he presented a paper in terms of ending the discrimination against gays. They were so stunned in terms of that report, that nobody said anything and he just sat down. In general, there was just a whole panoply of the issues facing the Black community were put forward.

There was the whole thing about bussing with people trying to get across the need for Black control of the schools, rather than being bussed to white schools.

This was the only time where people actually got to engage in some type of political dialog. After these hearings ended (they lasted for several hours) the next few days were given over to procedural questions. There was never any political dialog that occurred on the first day.

The thing was opened on Saturday by Charles Diggs, Congressman from Michigan, who was the former chairman of the CBC. It opened with the idea that they were going to get this Black Agenda moved upon by the convention in terms of the convention agenda. They started late. It was supposed to start at 9:00, but it started at around 1:00. He opened the convention and immediately moved to have Hatcher speak. He gave a general history of Black political movement and played up big the idea that Black people were not in anybody's hip pocket and that they were going to up the price of their support to various candidates. Then Jackson spoke and laced throughout his speech were references to the idea of a Black party. Not in terms of forming that party now, but that it's a good idea, one that should be considered.

After this, Diggs moved to have a couple of committee reports presented. To give some sense of what the delegates were about, right after Hatcher had spoken, some began to raise the whole chant of "No more speeches! No more speeches!" But because Jackson was the next speaker, others began to raise the chant of "We want Jesse!" But then after Jackson spoke, the chant became "Let's get to work! Let's get to work!" Diggs was sort of oblivious to what was going on, although it was very loud. He just went into these various reports from the credentials committee and the rules committee.

The rules committee made the motion that Diggs, Hatcher and Baraka be ratified as the convention chairmen and immediately the delegates.... I guess Diggs was supposed to call for a roll-call vote, but he just proceeded to a simple aye and nay. Although the nays had the thing obviously, that is, they voted down the motion to ratify the three as convention chairmen, Diggs ruled that the motion passed. Upon that call, the whole convention just broke into pandemonium and the delegates began the chant of "No! No! No!" Finally, Diggs had to step back and talk to some people on the platform. Then he called a delegate from Connecticut. This was the first they had allowed delegates to speak from the floor. The Connecticut delegate just said, "In the interest of unity and out of a sense of urgency, I appeal the last ruling of the chair." Diggs stepped back again, and then stepped to the podium and said he would withdraw the last ruling. Then he opened the floor for nominations for convention chairmen. People made nominations, but the whole intent of them making nominations was to make the point that this should be an open convention, that there should be freedom of expression, that we can't have anything going on behind the scenes. Even people who supported the three nominees made the point that we got to have some democracy here. After the nominations were made, they had a recess and then came back and sort of approved the original three convention chairmen. The whole thrust of the delegates was that some type of discussion had to begin.

The organizers weren't prepared to allow that discussion and at one point, the New York delegation had not been seated, or something like that, or had not been okayed, it was not clear just who represented New York, and six people approached the stage to speak

on that, six nationalists, and as they got on the platform, Diggs made some motion and from the other side of the stage came some plain-clothes cops who began to try to get the nationalists off the stage. There was a scuffle where one plain-clothes cop was thrown off the stage, but eventually they threw the nationalists off.

But then there was a quick recess again. When they came back, it was only around 6:00, so the convention hadn't even gone over five hours, but Fauntroy and Diggs made the motion that there be a recess for the night and that the convention reconvene at 9:00 Sunday. This was just totally opposed. The delegates wanted an evening session and wanted to begin the discussion. So finally they called an aye and nay vote and the motion was defeated. So they maneuvered and said there had to be an hour recess anyway because of the fact that they had to set up the microphones. So delegates agreed to an hour recess, and that just turned into an all-night recess. So the organizers got their way. What they had intended to do was to have the state delegations caucus and they pointed out that they had this national Black Agenda drawn up and they wanted the delegates to consider it in the state caucuses and then come back the next day, and approve it.

The next day, well, during the whole night, it was obvious that people were very disenchanted with the whole convention. There were a lot of things going on in the corridors, in the halls, etc. The people most disenchanted were the nationalists who had come. They were principally from New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, where a number of them are organized around the Student Organization for Black Unity and they've gotten off the ground some type of independent Black party called the Black People's Union Party. But they had a big delegation. Also from DC there were a number of nationalists who were there, who sort of led that delegation. A nationalist caucus was called that night and, surprisingly, it was chaired by and the main speaker was Baraka. He also expressed some disenchantment. The implication of his talk was that he was becoming conscious of the fact that he was being used by the Democratic Party politicians and that the whole thing was up in the air. He then came down and said that the whole convention may be just a total sham, it may not amount to much and there was only about 30 hours left, which did not mean very much. His main idea was to get across that what the nationalists had to push for was a structure, a structure which they could get into after the convention was over. He essentially told the 100 or so people assembled that they should lay aside whatever differences they might have, or disenchantment they might have, and move to push for what structure. Everybody, all the nationalists, agreed with him. Their agreement, to a certain degree, came out of the fact that although a lot of them have differences with the Democratic Party politicians, and they'll come out and say that they're for a Black party, they were just cowed by the whole convention. They could not see taking on the Congressional Black Caucus. For the most party, they did not want to break unity. That is, they

did not want to be responsible for breaking up this convention, although they were very disenchanted with it. For the most part, a lot of them came with the idea that they weren't going to face up to the central task facing the Black struggle, which is the creation of a Black party. They were not going to push that at the convention. What they wanted to do was to get various resolutions passed on, for example, self-determination for DC, or, in Baraka's case, get some type of structure through which they could make some "input," or, in the case of the North Carolina nationalists, they wanted to get the convention to pass a resolution in support of a demonstration that they're planning for DC May 27, called African Liberation Day. They also wanted to get passed a motion on Palestinian self-determination. That tended to be how they saw the thing and what they wanted to get out of it.

So when Baraka made his pitch, everybody just fell into line. The next day Baraka was the chairman. It was obvious that none of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus could, and all of them weren't there, none of them could have pulled the thing together in terms of getting it through without the whole thing busting up. That was the role that Baraka played in terms of keeping the thing from blowing apart -- just sort of doing their dirty work. What he did was, throughout the whole day, was to keep the discussion on procedural questions. But what he did was to appear more responsive to the delegates than Diggs. He allowed some discussion on motions, but always with the idea that the proceedings had to be moved on, that we had to get a structure and a platform out of this thing, and end the deliberations. For railroading motions through, he depended on a couple of delegations. These were the New York delegation which was headed by Senator Waldaba Stewart and which was the biggest delegation, Indiana and New Jersey. New Jersey was controlled by Baraka's people. He would call on them to make motions and so forth. It didn't matter who was on the mike on the floor, but if he wanted a motion he would call on New York, New Jersey or Indiana, or sometimes Ohio.

He related that there was a new agenda that had been drawn up and that it had been drawn up that night by the steering committee, which was composed of the convention organizers, the delegation chairmen and the representatives of national Black organizations, like CORE, Congress of African People, National Welfare Rights Organization, etc. He said that this was the agenda drawn up by the steering committee. The agenda as it was laid out, with structure and the Black Agenda being the two main points, and passage of the resolutions that had come out of the resolutions committee. But the structure proposal came before the Black Agenda -- approval of that. In terms of getting the agenda approved, there was some opposition to it (the convention agenda) from people who thought the Black Agenda should be discussed before the structure. Michigan raised this. Michigan was heavily filled with UAW and AFL-CIO bureaucrats. They had some disagreements with the Black Agenda as it was drawn up and passed out. But they wanted that discussed before structure.

With the aid of some of the key delegations, Baraka just moved the thing for a vote. He called a roll-call vote, which gave the delegations some sense of participation and some delegations rejected the convention as it was structured. But then he went on after that to the point of structure itself.

What he did was to get New York to make a motion calling for the adoption of the point number two, which was the rules of the convention, and point number three, which was the structure. A lot of people thought that adoption meant that these points would be taken up for discussion, but what New York and Baraka meant was that by adopting these two rules, the convention in fact approved them. There was a little discussion and there was a hand vote and people approved those two points. Then, after they were approved, Baraka said, "Since the steering committee is going to work on refining this structure, we want state chairmen to be certified and so forth, so we're going to have a recess to do that."

After the recess was over, Illinois -- for the most part state delegations spoke -- Richard Neuhaus, who was the head of the Illinois delegation, expressed some disenchantment. He didn't think that the last motion had meant that they had approved the structure. The structure had not been read, and Neuhaus said so. We haven't got a copy of it. Baraka tried to play on the fact that Neuhaus had been at the steering committee the night before and he knew what was talked about and should go along. But people had not read it, so there was disgruntlement with the thing. As the discussion went on, New York proceeded to reconsider the motion, but still approved the structure.

Finally, when it came to a vote, South Carolina made the motion to reconsider and it was not passed. Then when they went on to resolutions, the structure proposal was read. It had been proposed by New Jersey. It came down to the setting up of a National Black Political Assembly, or for short, the National Assembly. This was to be composed of 10% of the total delegates, which would come down to 427 people. This National Assembly would act as a sort of congress, take up issues that Black people were concerned about and meet once a year. This assembly itself was to elect a National Council, which would be a working body of 43 people. The way the proposal ran was that there would be political conventions every three or four years to select the National Assembly.

After the proposal was read, people still had objections. People expressed the fact that it was too detailed and that they objected to it. Baraka emphasized the fact that this was just a draft proposal and that the steering committee would refine the thing and detail it. For the election of the National Council, certain categories had been read off, like women, youth, nationalists, activists, Black elected officials. One stipulation in terms of the National Assembly was that every state would have at least two representatives, and at least one of those representatives had to be a Black elected official. But the Illinois delegate raised the point that there was no mention of labor and that labor was a very important element in this body. Baraka's reply was that "You have a state chairman who is on the steering committee. You should talk to him so he can make

that input on the steering committee when we meet after this convention to detail the structure." That is, his response was that the state chairman would act for him and he should give his suggestion to him rather than bring it to the floor.

He just dealt with objections like that and the proceedings rolled on. Then, at one point, the Louisiana delegation got the floor and read a resolution which called for a Black party. After they read the resolution, Baraka made the comment that they had to hand that up to the chair in writing and it would be dealt with then. Then he proceeded to call on California, which raised a motion on Angela Davis. He just sort of gave them short shrift and never came back to their proposal. They went through and passed the proposal by California and North Carolina that the convention support Angela Davis, H. Rap Brown and other political prisoners. So Louisiana got the floor again later on and made the point that they had submitted their resolution on the Black party to the platform committee, to the resolutions committee and to the chair. So Baraka's response was "If you submitted it to the resolutions committee, it will come up at a certain point, so just sit back and wait." The Louisiana delegation was very disgruntled at the way they were being treated and kept trying to get the floor again.

Then the resolution came up of not supporting a presidential candidate and again, Louisiana managed to get the floor and point out the fact that if their resolution passed and they set up a Black party, then, obviously, it would probably have a presidential candidate, so the motion on non-support to a presidential candidate now should be set aside. Finally, other delegations began to get the sense that this Louisiana motion could not just be pushed under the rug. So Indiana raised the motion that the convention consider the Louisiana motion, and after that, that they consider no support to a presidential candidate. Then Indiana asked for the right to speak on the Louisiana motion. Baraka agreed to that. The Indiana spokesman pointed out that this was a very young convention and the idea of a third party was a bit too much for the convention to take up. He called for the idea that the idea of a third party should be researched and studied for a year and then taken up at that point. Baraka then called Illinois and the spokesperson for Illinois was Jesse Jackson. His first sentence was, "I'm unequivocally for a Black party, or a third party." Then he went on to explain that he was in agreement with Indiana, that the idea of a third party was just too heavy for the convention at this point. His whole thing was that if we looked at the structure proposal that was just passed, once that's set up, that's going to eventually lead to the setting up of a third party, so we've already set the machinery up, in motion.

After Jackson spoke, he had the Louisiana delegation clapping at his remarks and so they agreed to withdraw their proposal. Then they passed a motion on non-support to any presidential candidate.

To give a sense of just who they were after, it was expressed in the way they treated Louisiana on the one hand and the way they

treated Michigan on the other. Right after they passed the motion on no support to a presidential candidate, the whole question of approving the national Black Agenda came up. Michigan expressed extreme displeasure with the Agenda and they gave a minority report in which they said they wanted more discussion on the Agenda, they didn't want it approved and that they would not go along with it. Baraka went out of his way to stress that the Agenda was just a draft and that the steering committee, of which Michigan was a party, would shape up the Agenda and so Michigan would have some "input" into the final thing. But Michigan just could not be satisfied. There was a minority of the minority in Michigan, that is, there were a group of Pan-Africanists who were part of the Michigan delegation who agreed with the Black Agenda, although they couldn't speak. So Indiana gave this minority of the minority the mike and the minority ran down the fact that these people were from the UAW and from "friends of the Negroes groups," that they can't deal with nationalism. References were then made to the point that this convention will not be blackmailed by the threat of a walkout and then Jackson went over to try to calm the Michigan delegation. He asked for five minutes to do that. While all this was going on, most of the delegates were becoming very impatient. They wanted the Agenda approved so they began a chant of "Nation time," which just spread throughout the hall.

This forced the hand of the chair. That is, Baraka was waiting to try to appease the Michigan delegation and avert a walkout, but that couldn't be done as the tension built up. So as this chant got louder and louder, the Michigan delegation proceeded to walk out and New York called the motion and the Agenda was passed. Then after the body died down, Indiana and Illinois began to take the floor. Indiana made the point that the UAW and labor has a lot of weight and that you can't just dismiss them and that you have to -- although the Indiana delegate agreed with the action that had been taken against Michigan -- to try to get them back into the convention. The Illinois delegation, which I guess was also a lot of labor officials, said that while they agreed also with the action against Michigan, still they were not going to have anything crammed down their throats and they made veiled threats of walking out also. Then Baraka again stressed the fact that this was just a draft platform and that it would be refined by the steering committee and that they would try to get the Michigan delegation back in.

After that, about half the delegates had left by then, the convention went into a thing of just passing various resolutions that had come out of the resolutions committee. They had also considered a proposal, between taking up the structure and taking up the Agenda, a proposal from a number of the Southern delegates who had had to leave early. They put on the floor a resolution on an alternative to bussing. Essentially what that was, was for an equal allocation of funds in the Black and white communities, for Black control of the schools, and opposition to the dismantling of Black

institutions of higher education in terms of Black colleges being merged with white schools.

Later on near the end of the convention, after a lot of the Southern delegates had left, that was amended by the Alabama delegation to the effect that we would support bussing where it's necessary in terms of getting a quality education. That was approved.

Some of the resolutions that were passed had no real discussion: the resolution supporting Palestinian self-determination; dismantling of the Israeli state; other resolutions to that effect. The whole idea was that these resolutions would be dealt with by the steering committee, and that they would act as a sieve for resolutions that had passed. This was indicated with some glee in the editorial in the New York Times a couple of days ago which pointed out that while they passed this anti-bussing motion, that what they called the continuations committee would be meeting and would deal with the resolutions. It was also indicated in the report by Hatcher, in an article in the Times, where he said that it was unfortunate that the motion on Israel was passed, but he indicated that that would be dealt with by the steering committee.

That essentially was what happened. We had 34 people there for our intervention as a fraction. We didn't have any trouble in terms of having a literature table, selling Militants freely. We sold 400-450 Militants. Literature sales amounted to a couple hundred dollars. Our whole attitude toward the thing was that we would not intervene, that we would not attempt to get the floor, speak, what have you, because the whole thing was a farce. Given the illusions that existed about the thing, that it was a genuine affair, that this was a genuine convention, that our main thing would be to discuss with people and to get out The Militant.

Because the whole convention was so undemocratic, a lot of the political questions were not discussed at all: the discussion of the Black party; the discussion of the state of the struggle. They just did not come to the floor. The discussion was not as intense as we thought it would be. Because a lot of the nationalists to a certain degree were coopted and made a part of the machinery, they didn't really spark any discussion for the most part, although they expressed suspicions, they went along with what went down.

According to some reports, about one-third of the delegates there were local Democratic Party officials. Another one-third, and probably more, were people from antipoverty programs around the country. The rest were just a sprinkling of nationalist students, etc. A lot of the Southern delegations tended to be very young and composed of a lot of students, whereas in the North, the delegations tended to be middle-aged people, and in some of the delegations, like Michigan, people were pretty old.

Although the thing came off without any big blowup, because of the great deal of reliance the Black Democrats had to put on the nationalists, that is, Baraka, I don't think they see that as a very good situation, where they call a convention and they have to depend upon the nationalists to pull it off. They were hesitant about calling this convention in the first place and I don't think they'll call another convention like this. Even with the way it was organized and even with the people there who were not about to launch any movement for a Black party or anything like that, still they were afraid of any real discussion, of any real motion. The fact that all these contradictory resolutions were passed, in terms of Israel, in terms of bussing, etc., they just don't see it as a way to get across their leadership of the struggle. We'll just have to wait and see in terms of what happens with this National Black Assembly, which is supported by some of the people in the CBC and a number of just local Black Democratic Party politicians.

All in all, although the talk after the thing was that the white politicians will have to deal with this convention and its work, it just didn't meet fully what they wanted and what they expected.

THOMAS

One of the most significant things about this thing, about this convention, even though there was no real serious opposition around the question of building a Black political party, no caucus to do that, was the fact that all of the reformist speakers that spoke, the scheduled reformist speakers, spoke with the rhetoric of the Black party. In fact, they were the ones, as opposed to those people like Baraka and other nationalists, who spoke about it. Other Pan-Africanists, like Baraka and these people who were from this Black political party in North Carolina, did not speak about it at all, even in the nationalist caucus. The only time outside of the time that the Louisiana delegation made their motion that this was discussed was in the speeches of two major Democratic politicians, that is, in Hatcher's speech. He gave a very strong speech about the history of Black politics and ended up by saying that this would be the last chance for the Democrats, and after that, he would launch something like the Stalinist thing of an antimonopoly party. He talked about building a Black party and then workers would be involved, then Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and then liberals would be involved in the thing. He clothed it in very radical rhetoric talking about how we have to fight and ruling class and everything. Then Jesse Jackson, also. His whole speech had a lot of rhetoric about a Black party, but if you listened to it very carefully, you found that he was talking about perhaps building a Black party in a hazy future. But Baraka and these other people did not speak about it at all and it helped to strangle the whole thing.

Another aspect of this was the question of the current so-called crisis of the cities and the effects it has on the whole layer

of Black reformist politicians and just general Black reformists, many of whom have been involved in the war on poverty. That whole layer was very broadly represented. You could just go down to the lunchroom and you would hear people talk about "what foundation is funding you? Where are you going to get federal grants?" and that whole kind of thing. But, with the whole crisis that American capitalism is in, all of these things are being cut back. Another problem is that there's a downturn in the Black struggle and the capitalists don't need to buy these people off as much, so that was another aspect of what these people saw themselves doing. They were making sure the Democrats win, because they feel the Democrats are more sympathetic to these types of reformist schemes. Secondly, making big demands on the Democrats that all these types of programs will be continued and extended so that they would continue to be on the pie.

One of the things that's clear, though, is that Baraka and the whole group around him are the ones that lost the most. Even the Black Democrats weren't on the line in this thing in terms of exposing themselves to the people there. It's very clear that the people around Baraka are just going more and more to the right. A year and a half ago, they were talking about building a Black party. A year ago, they were talking about building a Black party but not opposing Black Democrats. Then they were talking about building a Black party through working through the Democratic Party. Now they just talk about working through the Democratic Party. One of the things that we have to do, in aiming and orienting many of the more serious people who in the past and currently look to them, is begin to more and more, in the light of this convention and other events that will continue to happen leading towards the Democratic and Republican conventions, just continue attacking these people on the whole question of the Democratic Party.

Also, one of the things that we have to do is explain the whole centrality of the Black party issue. That is, as Derrick pointed out, many people were there, especially in the DC delegation and North Carolina, who were hardened advocates of a Black party and had spoken out previously against this convention, but they didn't understand that if the question of a Black party was not taken up, whatever resolutions they passed would be completely meaningless. We have to begin that type of discussion. How important is the question of a Black party to just getting the immediate goals of the people in the Black community? How is that process going to come about? What type of Black unity is needed and what type of Black unity is not needed?

NOVACK

Did Bobby Seale speak and what did he say?

MORRISON

There were only two speeches, by Hatcher and Jackson. The rest of the speeches were not given.

KERRY

Did the fraction discuss the reason for calling this gathering? It would seem, just superficially, that one of the considerations in calling this kind of a gathering must have been a feeling or knowledge of great dissatisfaction with the two-party system among the masses of Blacks in this country. There must have been some kind of pressure that would impel them to do this, because there's a certain amount of danger involved in calling this kind of a gathering, as the report indicated. They were constantly on tenderhooks and afraid that the convention was going to get away from them, so they kept a tight wrap on it. It was obviously impossible to get unity with the elements involved. They knew that to begin with. We knew it to begin with. The only way you could get unity is by burying the contradictions, the differences, the conflicts between the various individuals and tendencies and groupings that are involved. You can't get unity on that basis, except on the basis of the lowest common denominator, that is, on the vague projection of some kind of a program that's going to unite everybody.

Just judging, again only by what I've read in the paper, it appeared to me that they felt that out of this they could get this one advantage: a pressure for concessions on both the Democrats and the Republicans. You had representatives of the Nixon administration participating. What you had in common was skin color, that is, this was supposed to be a gathering of Blacks, the only thing that you were united by. The moment you began to talk politics, divisions began to occur. That's what we've got to point out, the lesson of the concept that you're going to have Black unity when you have such diverse, conflicting and contradictory currents in the Black population. You cannot have unity on that basis, except unity that's meaningless -- unity on the basis of not doing anything but doing a lot of talking. Or unity on the basis of permitting everybody to go off on their own and create the appearance that they're acting in the interest of the Black communities throughout the country.

In and of itself it has this significance to me: you have to ask yourself the question: How is a Black party going to come into existence? It would be utopian to think that it's going to come into existence by everybody getting together in a conference, out of which was going to develop a Black political party. Obviously it's not going to happen that way. We've gone through a whole number of experiences. This is only the latest one. They indicate that there are too many deep differences to permit that kind of development, yet, the impulsion is always there. They'll always have to give lip-service to the idea. They have to speak about this concept. They have to say, "Well, we'll give them one more chance," like one of the spokesmen there kept talking about how we'll give them one more chance. This is the last chance we're going to give them, and so forth. So there must be great pressure from below and that is the positive manifestation of dissatisfaction, discontent with the whole prospect of continuing the Tweedledee-Tweedledum business of supporting one white capitalist party against the other,

the Democrats or Republicans. It is this that we've got to analyze, and do it very pedagogically. I don't think that it would be wise for us, even if we conclude that it was a farce, to proceed that way in our analysis. We've got to be much more serious. We've got to take this as a serious manifestation of a real pressure on the part of the masses flowing from their dissatisfaction with the political line that's being carried out today by their so-called leaders -- the Democrats and Republicans, and the nationalists. Even to have Jones there, he was the only one who could act in that capacity as the unity broker. He wasn't a politico. He was an ultra, ultra-nationalist. That's his reputation. So he could give this aura: "Let's unite." Well, what are you going to unite on? "We'll unite on the basis that we're all Black." That's all you could unite on. All the rest will lead to a vague committee that's going to come in at some time. But the real differences were involved in the walkout of the Michigan delegation and the dissatisfaction of the others. That's what really exists, the real stage of the development of the Black political movement in this country at this time is adequately, I think was quite reflected in this convention. There is no real leadership around which the majority, or a big section of the Black community, is prepared to rally at this stage of development. Those are some of the lessons that we've got to draw. As was remarked, it gives us a good opportunity to begin to develop our concepts on how the Black party is going to form, the question of its program, what sort of a demagogic role this cry of unity can play. It submerges the differences and prevents them from coming out in the open so that people could take sides and say, "We know, on the basis of our experience, what we want." They don't even provide that opportunity by this kind of a maneuver where everything's submerged, everything is glossed over by the fact that we've got to maintain unity. Unity -- that was Baraka's main contribution. He was the only one able to put that over, because the rest are obviously tied up with one political machine or another. They couldn't do it. He could, because essentially -- he's "politically independent" whereas he really is not. His whole current of nationalism is politically subordinated to the American two-party system. Abstentionism which means maintenance for capitalist rule in America through the two-party system.

What do you think motivated them in calling this conference at this time and attempting to bring together all these diverse elements? What did they hope to gain out of this? Can you make an educated guess as to what they hoped to get from this?

MORRISON

As Tony pointed out, there's this crisis of imperialism in terms of the wage freeze, etc., and the effects of that are to move in terms of cutting back the OEO programs, the antipoverty programs. So there's a certain amount of disgruntlement that's being caused and, with the rapid deterioration of the cities, problems are getting worse. At the same time, the whole movement

of the Black Democrats is to act as some sort of safety valve for expressions of disenchantment for the problems as they are. In terms of acting as a safety valve, they have to bend and adapt to the nationalist sentiment that's growing in the Black community. In fact, the various wings of Black reformism respond differently to that whole thing. Their differences -- like the national NAACP expressed disagreement with the Black Agenda because it talked too much of separatism and nationhood, which they're in violent disagreement with. They just don't see any sense, at least the national NAACP, in trying to bend to nationalist sentiment. Whereas the Black Democrats, who share the same assumptions as the NAACP, are just attempting to play on that sentiment, and their ability to play on it is heightened by the fact that the nationalists are willing, that is the organized nationalists, are willing to move with them and are sort of deceived by what they're doing.

The only parallel thing to this type of development was the Raza conference that I think was called last November, where the Raza Democrats tried to get together some type of caucus, and only because you had organized parties, Raza Unida parties, who intervened in the thing. They wanted unity also, that is, the Raza Democrats. But when the youth began to define it as being for a Chicano party and being for the independence of Puerto Rico, the whole thing sort of blew up. Badillo and the others sort of went home very disenchanting with what happened and now they're trying to meet secretly to form some type of Raza Caucus to negotiate with the Democrats. But in terms of the Black struggle, there's just no organized groupings around the idea of a Black party who will take the radical measures necessary to deal with the problems. So that allows the Democrats to appear much bigger than they actually are and to be more demagogic. The fact that Diggs could not hold together that convention the first day was just an indication of what happens when they try to go too far in relating to the mass and it almost boomeranged. So it's just the lack of any organized Black revolutionary nationalists that helps the Black Democrats to play the role they're playing.

THOMAS

One of the questions also involved: there's not a strong Black reformist organization either, that was able to give enough.... That is, most of the people at this conference, even though there was broad dissatisfaction with the way the conference was, even though there were walkouts, even though half of the people who were there the first formal day of the conference left, there was not very much political opposition to what the conference intended to do, just a lot of opposition to the way that it was organized. But the thing that came through is that there's not a national Black reformist organization or tendency that has hegemony in those circles and is able to organize such a convention in a very smooth fashion, that's in all the state delegations leading things, preventing unnecessary disruptions

from their point of view, smoothing things out because of these other divisions. The only thing that there is is CAP, and that's a really serious force only in a few places on the East coast and maybe in California. It's very disparate. Some of the forces in it aren't reformist at all.

I don't think we ever thought that the character of our intervention in the conference was determined by any opinion that this conference was a farce. That never came up in the planning of the convention nor during the convention nor after it. The main reason we intervened in the conference the way we did was because it was a structured delegated convention and only people who had been chosen to be delegates in a very undemocratic fashion could function in it.

KERRY

How were the delegates chosen?

THOMAS

They were selected in different ways in different states. Generally, they were supposed to have had meetings open to all Black people who were voters to elect delegates. They had several meetings of this kind in New York: one in Brooklyn and one in Manhattan. But they were completely undemocratic. For instance, in the one in Harlem, about 1,000 - 2,000 people attended and they had a couple of speeches by a couple of reformist politicians. Then somebody said, "Are there any nominations?" It was clear that there were several hundred people who wanted to discuss and make nominations. They said, "We have so many delegates for Manhattan. Write out a list of who you think should be a delegate," without any discussion and without even any nominations before the body. Then the next day, a list of delegates was announced. It was done the same way in Brooklyn. In some areas, like the District of Columbia apparently and Louisiana, several of the states where the Democratic reformist Black apparatus is weaker, there were actually democratic precinct elections in which people who weren't on the pie and weren't chosen from the top, were chosen. But that was only in a very few places. For instance in Michigan, according to the comrades there, the whole selection of the delegates was secret. It was held someplace in central Michigan, hundreds of miles away from Detroit and the other cities where Black people live, completely secretly, only announced afterwards. That's the types of ways the delegates were chosen in most of the areas where we have people. It was just impossible for us to get delegates elected, given our strength. If there had been some sort of serious opposition tendency within the Black community, ourselves or somebody else, they would have just tightened the bureaucratic character of the thing to prevent delegates of that character from being elected. So we were unable to be delegates to speak on the floor, even if we had been delegates, only those people chosen by the chairman of the state delegation could address the

body, could make motions, etc. It's just organized like a union convention, or a Democratic or Republican party convention. So there was nothing we could do. I imagine if the conditions had been different, we should have and would have tried to get people to become delegates and to intervene with our ideas and it would have made it easier for us to reach the people who were there amongst the delegates, and also amongst the people who just came to see it.

Another factor is that most of the real action at the thing took place in backroom meetings, either in the state caucus meetings that were held during most of the time the conference was in recess, which we were able to attend but we couldn't speak at them, and also in the secret meetings of this steering committee and other bodies of that character. So in terms of our actual intervention, the main thing we could do was to sell our press, talk to people and see what happened. Actually, the thing was less of a farce than the people who organized it planned it. That is, they planned it just to have speeches, people making everybody feel good, giving nice speeches, sermons, etc. They had a band there. They would introduce Jesse Jackson and the band would play a few tunes and people would get up and say "I'm from the Empire State, the largest state," garbage like that. That's what they wanted the convention to be like. Like a big cheering rally. Actually, that was just broken up by the attack of politics on the convention. So it was actually less of a farce and more of a political event than the people who organized it would have liked it to have been. This just underlies, although there's no strong alternative to the Black Democrats and the nationalist Democrats like Baraka, and there are no actions going on to crystallize things. That is, we can't say, what is your position on this struggle that is going on? What are we going to do about it to pose things? It's very clear that these reformists are very weak in terms of how much they can push across, how well organized they are, how strong their hold is going to be on the Black community, and the fact that they have to use the real reformists like Hatcher and Jackson, and have to use all kinds of nationalist, even anti-imperialist, rhetoric to give themselves some credibility points out what is going to happen to them as an alternative leadership does begin to crystallize and actions happen in the Black community, or as conditions in the Black community begin to get worse and their rhetoric doesn't provide much of a solution just shows what is happening, even though there is a real downturn in the struggle.

DOBBS

Derrick, your report makes clear that there was a certain component of those present at the conference, I would assume mainly among the younger ones, that came there with the hope that they could have democratic discussion. The moods are described in a sense in your description of the procedural rharbarbs in the

convention proper. It's reflected most in the panel discussions you mentioned where various issues were brought in that never got to first base in the conference proper, and then Tony just mentioned the factor of our comrades having an opportunity to discuss individually with various people. Can you make any generalizations, on the basis of this composite of factors, of what you found the political mood to be on what could be characterized as the healthy components in this gathering? What were they instinctively striving for? How did they articulate it? What were the reactions in individual conversations about what was going on? Can you make any generalizations about that?

MORRISON

That's pretty difficult, because the gathering was not representative. A lot of Black students just don't see relating to this thing. A lot of the militants that we know just didn't see getting into it. A lot of the people there, given the fact that a lot of them were from antipoverty programs and what have you. I didn't get into that many discussions, but from what comrades said, in some cases there were sharp debates with the people from the Student Organization for Black Unity over the whole question of our belonging to a white socialist party. For the most part, people would buy literature, but there just wasn't a lot of discussion. That's because, given the undemocratic character of the thing, people's attention tended to focus on what do we do next, what's going on, and so forth. People just tended to take the procedural disruptions as part of the process of achieving some type of unity. Illusions were very great about this whole thing. People just had illusions that this was a meaningful gathering, that meaningful decisions would be made, that meaningful organization would come out of it. On that score, we represented the only force there that understood what was going on and knew who controlled the thing. It's very difficult to get some people to talk much at the thing, given the fact that it was not really representative and the fact that there weren't a lot of students there. There were some students from Louisiana who recognized Pulley and talked to him, and who tended to, at least some of the nationalists we talked to, to be sort of cowed by the whole thing. They could only see getting through some type of resolution on this matter or that matter, but not taking on the whole question of what really has to be done. We couldn't even have a real dialog with them. The whole thing was a distortion of reality to a certain degree, and people there were not about to try to get down and deal with that. So it wasn't like the Black power conferences that were held where you could get into real discussions with people because a lot of people that came there came out of the struggles that were taking place. A lot of them were students. A lot of them were just becoming conscious of the need for some fundamental change and you could have all types of discussions at literature tables, etc., and sell all types of literature. But at this gathering, in some respects it was a show. People came there and this was supposed to be some big show of unity. That's how it was

planned and that's how some people saw it. It's a very contradictory gathering, and the only thing it did reflect was the fact that a lot of people talked about drugs, a lot of people talked about other problems that were going on, just in terms of pointing out that these problems existed. But in terms of what had to be done and in terms of any need to break with the Democratic Party, this was not readily apparent. And because a lot of the nationalists were coopted into the machinery. Like Doug Moore, from the Black United Front in DC, was making statements about "We're going to come to the platform and we're going to push for a Black party." People like Sonny Carson, the head of the Brooklyn Congress of African Peoples, said "I'm very suspicious of this gathering and we've got to get masses of people here to make sure the Black politicians don't sell this thing out." But they were all on the platform Sunday morning, so they were not going to violently disagree with the whole affair. Because Baraka was one of the organizers of the affair, it made it difficult for them to attack it in a fundamental way. Baraka and CAP were side-by-side with the Black Democrats and it melted any real opposition to the thing. It was not that much of a reflection of what has to be done and the forces that are willing to do it.

KERRY

There are two questions: one on the use of the term "reformist." I'm just confused. I notice The Militant does it too in a big headline. Were there anybody else except reformists involved in this, except us? Tony uses the terms "reformist" and "real reformist." A term begins to lose all meaning. I consider Baraka, a cultural nationalist, a reformist, although he disavows politics. He's in politics up to his eyebrows, both local politics and national politics and he's a reformist. The NAACP, prior to this (have they even attended a political gathering before?) this is contrary to their basic tenet. They disavow partisan politics, or have from the very beginning. So, it tends to conceal more than it reveals when you imply that there were others besides reformists involved in the conference, because there weren't. The only revolutionists had no delegates to the conference. I know there's always a difficulty in finding the correct term. It would be better to use "conservative," or "right winger," or "cultural nationalist," or "integrationist." Some other terms are probably applicable.

The other question I want to get back to is the important question. It's a problem we've got to grapple with. Does this conference represent the level of political consciousness that prevails in the mass movement today? As you say, there were a lot of illusions. There were a lot of illusions about it because they thought, that is those who had these illusions, they thought that this conference represented really an attempt to grapple with their discontent and their dissatisfaction with politics as it has been played among the Black community and among the Black leaders today.

Does it represent an advance in the developing political consciousness of the Black mass? Prior to the conference, you had these conferences on Black power, where discussions were much freer and much more open, but you didn't have the focal point. I get the impression that even the reformists, the real reformists, gave lip-service at this conference to the idea of a Black political party. Doesn't this represent a developing part of their political consciousness, or a reflection of the developing political consciousness in the mass as refracted through their rhetoric? We know that they don't mean it. We know that they're opportunists. We know that they resort to this rhetoric to advance their own political fortunes inside the Democratic Party. But the masses don't know that yet and they still have a certain amount of trust in Baraka and a certain amount of trust in these other politicians. Yet, these people feel that at this stage they've got to manifest somehow their dissatisfaction with the treatment that they've been getting from the Democratic and Republican parties, and hold it out as a threat that, "By god, if you don't give us more than what we've been getting, we'll use our collective strength in launching a political party." Even Meany, I recall Meany at the time of the Landrum-Griffith Act. Remember the time of the Landrum-Griffith Act when he threatened the capitalist politicians. He said, "Don't go too far. You're going to force us into establishing a labor party based upon the trade unions." I think it's this aspect that we've got to be cognizant of. This is the progressive aspect, in that in a perverted way, it expresses the discontent and dissatisfaction of the mass upon which these politicians rest, even though they've got all kinds of jobs in the poverty programs. They've got those jobs because they're being bought off. They've got a certain amount of influence, they have a certain base in the community, and the politicians, the cheapest way for them to buy off, to keep the rest of the masses from breaking through, is to buy off their leaders. That can only work up to a certain extent, you see. They've got to produce, they've got to produce concessions, and especially with the economic downturn, with unemployment growing in the Black community, especially among the youth. The concessions are hard to come by, and even the poverty work is being cut back and they're becoming discontented. They have their little pie-card and their rug pulled out from under them. That, to me, shows that we've got to watch the developing political consciousness of the Black mass. We've got to watch equally signs in the labor movement, and in the Chicanos, and in other sectors of the mass movement here. Because it's going to be in these distorted, perverted and farcical, if you want to use the term, ways that these movements will achieve maturity. They don't come full-blown. It's not going to develop suddenly overnight and we're going to have a Black political party or an American labor party or a new political formation. It's not going to develop that way, but in all sorts of bastardized forms. But we've got to be cognizant at each stage in this development how we can intervene and taking their word, put them on the spot and drive the movement forward. Not to dismiss it out of hand, because that's the easiest way. That would be the way sectarians would to it. That's the way

Wohlforth and his gang turned their back on Black nationalism. Why? Because they get such reformist -- "revisionist" they would say, revisionist manifestations as Baraka. Totally reactionary. So they equate that with Black nationalism. No, that's not our concept of Black nationalism. Black nationalism to us is representing the interests of the mass of the Blacks in this country, means breaking with capitalist politics and launching a Black political party. That's why our intervention has to be more a pedagogical one than one of blasting them and dismissing the thing. That's my impression anyway. That's the way I felt about it while reading about it, that any Marxist is not going to be fooled by what they were saying and what they were doing. We knew that from the very beginning, that nothing was going to come out of this gathering. No Black political party could emerge from such a gathering. Yet, I was very much interested, read everything I could find, because this represented to me another stage, a new stage in the developing political consciousness of the Black masses in this country. They had to give lip-service to the idea of a Black political party, even those who were the most right wing, or the most conservative. And why? There must be some pressure somewhere to compel them to do it. That's the thing that we've got to look for. Where is the movement underneath that impels these people to get up and to give such warnings and such threats and to utilize a Black political party as a scarecrow. They use it as a scarecrow to frighten the Democratic and Republican bosses into granting a few crumbs, a few more concessions. We have to ask ourselves, is it possible for the ruling class to grant any more significant concessions? Is it possible for them to continue to play this kind of a role? I don't know. The American economy is in bad trouble and unless there's a miracle, they're going to have to cut back more, not to grant more. There's going to be less jobs, less blackmail, and certainly, more unemployment, more suffering, more discrimination in the ghettos and in the cities and in the communities. That's what we have to watch.

MIAH

Considering the composition of this convention, I think that what you say is really true considering the sales that we had of The Militant. By selling The Militant and talking to a number of people, particularly after Jackson had raised the whole question in his speech of a Black party and the bourgeois press really picked up on it as the main thing that Jackson said in the headlines. Through our sales, many people, even though there wasn't a large number of youth or students at the conference, were really thinking along that line and wondering whether or not a Black party would be formed. A lot of people considered that that was a necessary step, but they didn't know when that would come about. But they thought that it was necessary and that it would have to have some base, but they just didn't know how to proceed in building that type of formation.

That is an indication of the type of pressure from the masses of Black people, particularly Black students and youth, on Black politicians upon the rise of nationalist consciousness in the Black community. I think because there is no national Black student organization, because there is no type of national Black political formations that are viable, that have any type of base; that is one of the main reasons why they figure that this was the proper time to call this type of political convention because they knew, or they speculated, it wouldn't receive any large opposition as far as any organized contingents coming to the convention, which didn't occur. The only nationalists that did exist, like Baraka's, they could buy off. It was obvious that they had bought Baraka off before because he was one of the co-chairpeople at the conference. The Black Democrats understand they had no worry about any real hard opposition, organized opposition, and they could get away with using radical rhetoric, like Diggs who talked about colonialism and imperialism in his opening remarks. They could do that at this particular time without any fear of any formations taking up that call and moving ahead and taking on seriously what they were talking about and start building a Black party. That way, they could tell the Democratic Party and the Democratic machine that they still have total control of the Black community, or the developing radicals in the Black community and the nationalists and that they are still following their wishes, and with that type of control as an instrument for continued bargaining with the Democratic bosses who control the party, because of the economic crisis and the cutbacks in OEO and so forth, this is proof to the Democratic and Republican parties that they still have total control over the Black community and they still had to come to them and that they had to start getting more concessions to them. I think that's one of the primary reasons why they thought it was necessary to call this convention at this particular time, because they had no fear of nationalist organizations or radical Blacks who would give them any opposition. So at this early stage of the election period, they have total control and they can move ahead now with this formation of a National Assembly with, they say, the backing of the entire Black community. They had different Black representatives, not only from Black capitalist politicians, but they had Black nationalists also there, they had everyone there. Even Black students when you include SOBU, which is one of the most viable Black student organizations on a national basis, even though it's basically organized in the South. That's what they had, everyone there, with the exception of labor because of the walkout of the Michigan delegation and Illinois. But that's not even true, considering that Diggs and Conyers have the backing of the UAW in Michigan. So in essence, they had everyone behind them and just took advantage of the disorganization that exists in the Black movement at this particular time. They came out ahead. But it also provides us with an opportunity because they opened up in essence a Pandora's box by talking about a Black party and by talking about how it was necessary for next year, as Jackson said. Now what we have to do is go all around the country. One reason we had all the comrades come in like candidates was so they can go

back and pose what happened at the convention and explain it to radicalizing Black youth, particularly on college campuses and high school campuses, what happened at this convention, the type of discussions that went on, and explain how we see more concretely a Black political party coming into existence, how to oppose ourselves to this "unity" of Baraka's, which obviously doesn't exist because it has no clear political program except that of the capitalists. That way we can begin winning more people over to our campaign and recruiting . So this convention has that advantage to us for propaganda purposes and is also for us a reflection of the level of the Black movement at this particular time.

THOMAS

What it reflects is that nationalism is much deeper in the Black community. Four years ago, these same individuals who called it, the Black Democrats and the traditional Black reformists, even pseudo-nationalist types like CORE, would not have had to call together something like this. They would simply have gotten together at the Democratic convention, or behind the scenes talking to Democratic bosses, maybe a little show on the floor of the Democratic convention, and that's it. Or maybe making some types of statements after a particular action takes place in the Black community. But the whole situation is radically different today. That is, in the Black communities, despite the fact that there's a downturn in activity, despite the fact that there's not any large leadership that thinks it's revolutionary, even if it's not, like the Panthers were four years ago. The fact is that in the rank and file of the community, the idea of Blacks moving in a collective body against other people, that is very deep and that's the only type of way that these people have to use, can move and reflect any type of base in the Black community. It's not just that they wanted to do this to show the Democrats "we have a lot of people behind us and you'll get more votes if you vote for me." The fact is, that this is a feather in their caps and the Black Democrats go back to their community and say I was involved in a Black political convention along with all the nationalists trying to get all Black people together, etc., and that's part of the thing. I remember in the resolutions committee, one of the people from Michigan, he was from the NAACP, got up and he read a thing about dumping Nixon and how Nixon has to be defeated in terms of the Republican Party being trounced, and basically supporting the Democrats. They had a lot of good statistics about what was happening in the Black community under Nixon, but then one of the people on the platform, who was himself just a Democratic state senator from Wisconsin, spoke and attacked him: "We can't think of the Democrats and Republicans, we have to think of Black people as a people. It's no more of this traditional politics."

In terms of reformists and nationalists, what I think is better is that I agree that everybody there was reformist, there are some

people who are Democrats who are now taking on a more nationalistic rhetoric. That is, people like Diggs, the Congressional Black Caucus, some of the more traditional type figures there who are opportunists. Then there are people like Baraka who are reformist-nationalists who support the Democratic Party. This is nothing new. Even this phrase "nationtime" that they use comes from a poem that Baraka wrote whipping people up to work harder on the Gibson campaign to be mayor of Newark. That's where the thing is at. It's no change for Baraka and his people to support the Democrats. They have talked about supporting a Black party in the past, and they continue to talk about it now, but when election time comes around, they have not opposed and have supported Black Democrats. This is the way it is.

BRITTON

In The Militant a few weeks ago articles by Derrick and John Hawkins went into some of the machinations that took place leading up to the holding of this convention. One of the ideas that some of the people had was being able to have a national convention that would discuss and endorse a candidate for president. Obviously, as the thing got closer to happening, people began to see that was going to be impossible. A few weeks before the convention, apparently some people believed that it would be possible to have white Democratic Party candidates come before the convention and give speeches on the assumption that they would be asking for a people's endorsement. Others of these Black reformists started saying that that would be divisive and might blow up the convention. Then people said that maybe the thing to do was a power move to show that we're united, unity without uniformity, to show that we're united, we should at least endorse Shirley Chisholm and that would give us more bargaining power vis-a-vis the Democratic Party. This idea of getting concessions, of getting jobs, of spoils, as they call it. But even that evaporated as the convention opened. Even a few days before the convention, there was speculation in the Black press about will there be a big fight to get Shirley Chisholm nominated, will the convention nominate Shirley Chisholm? People pro and con on that issue. It became clear that there wasn't even enough unity to be able to do that. She didn't even show up at the thing and there was no serious move to get the convention to nominate her, to endorse her campaign. It had all been agreed beforehand by all of the people really running it that that would be divisive and a lot of Black leaders support candidates. Abernathy was all the while in Florida and made a public statement critical of the convention, that the real work for Black people was taking place in Florida. That was a certain thread of continuity from when this thing was called. It appears that it was called partly in response to the fact that Baraka and the CAP had called a gathering for later this spring. It would have been more like these Black power conferences that took place a few years ago. It appears that that was called partly as a bargaining tool by Baraka with the Black Democrats to get this kind of a gathering. We have to be very careful not to get

across the idea that Baraka was somehow duped at this convention, or somehow he came there and he discovered that the thing was rigged. He was part of it, he was an architect of this whole strategy and wasn't just brought in at the last minute to get up on the stage Sunday morning. All the things comrades said about his role are true, that he's one of the few people who could have done it, but that was all part of the plan. They may not have realized how much they were going to have to depend on him to keep the thing from unravelling, but he was obviously from the very beginning one of the key architects of this whole move. He was deeply involved in Democratic Party politics and has been.

It's one thing to say, yet, most everyone there, at least the delegates, half of whom were Black elected officials and therefore mostly Democrats, that most of the delegates were reformists, but the point we were trying to get across in The Militant was that there were people there, including delegates, who did want to have meaningful discussion on the situation that Black people found themselves in and how to change it and if there had been a democratic discussion at this convention, the political positions adopted would have been way to the left, especially with the pressure of the people who were there who were not delegates. I assume that most of the several thousand people who were there who were not delegates were younger student types and so on, who would have constituted in that kind of a democratic situation, certain pressure on delegates to take more radical positions and so on. If they had had any semblance of a democratic procedure there, there would have been a big number of people that would have been for a Black party, that would have been for taking serious steps to discuss serious political questions.

I think the rhetoric used was used for two reasons: they were using it to increase their bargaining power within the Democratic Party, as a threat; they were also using it because of the delegates there. When opposition broke out to having all these endless speeches right after Hatcher spoke, I'm sure that Jackson changed his speech a little bit from what it would have been otherwise, when it became clear that people didn't just want two days of speeches. I'm sure he slipped in the Black party thing, at least partially with that in mind, to be able to get through his talk and to be able to try to appease delegates with the idea that there was going to be some serious ideas raised and discussed.

Jackson's not a politician like Democratic or Republican politicians, but he is very much of a politician in a more general sense, and he has had in the last period what we used to call, and I think still do, a third-force concept, where he uses the threat, and the actual practice, of endorsing Republicans to try to make the Democrats shape up more and give more concessions. Well, raising the Black party idea is going one step beyond that, and shows both that they feel they have to up the ante in terms of threats in order to get meaningful concessions (meaningful for them is not meaningful

for masses of Black people of course) and also that when you get several thousand Black people together, or several thousand people of any oppressed nationality in this country, you're going to have a feeling of power, or a feeling that something meaningful could be done if we organized ourselves independently. That's just going to tend to happen.

DOBBS

Thinking out loud about the basic question, I believe the Gary conference can be said to mark the opening of a new phase leading toward the political self-organization of Black people. I think that's the essential meaning. The conference is organized by what? By a body of reformists who are composed of Black capitalist politicians, conservative leaders of Black mass organizations, and aspiring young opportunists on the make, which I'm inclined to believe is the case with Baraka. Among the capitalist politicians there's both Democrats and Republicans, so you could say there was quite a diversity in the composition. What is the lowest political common denominator? I think it's this: they're feeling more and more pressure from the Black rank and file in this country and they're not having a whole lot of luck in getting any kind of concessions from the capitalist ruling class. They feel a need to find some form of pressure to at least get some lip-service in the election platforms of the capitalist class. This is one of the short-term hopes that they have. It's not contradictory for both Republicans and Democrats to be doing this, because they got the common need to get this form of pressure, this threat of Black organization against the capitalist parties, which is implicit in this whole thing, and one group can write it for their use in lobbying at the Republican convention, and the other group can write it for their use in lobbying at the Democratic convention. That's the essential thing they want. From that, it flows that the second common denominator is the concept of playing faction politics within the capitalist two-party system. What is new? Organized, or semi-organized, faction politics within the two-party system of capitalist politics.

On that basis, they can well afford to give lip-service to the idea of a Black political party, by analogy, in the same way that Lewis and Co. could give lip-service to the idea of a labor party back in the mid-30s, where they did then, in a somewhat different way, exactly what they're doing now. These people in the CIO in the mid-30s set out to organize faction politics in the capitalist parties through Labor's Non-Partisan League. Within the labor movement in that period there were both supporters of the Democratic Party and supporters of the Republican Party, just as you've got aspirants in Black politics today going in these diverse directions. They found this same common denominator that they do now, in the form of organized pressure politics. It worked out that the dynamics of the thing evolved toward a coalition with the Democratic Party, and under the momentum of the thing, since the Blacks historically

had tended to be Republicans following the Civil War, as a result of the total impact of the labor upsurge of the 30s, Blacks got pulled predominantly over into the coalition with the Democratic Party, which today still characterized Black capitalist politics.

The reformist wing of the bureaucrats did that in the 30s, and they've made it stick right down to today, which is something like 34 or 35 years later. But it doesn't follow that that same pattern can be reproduced with regard to what I believe can be said to start as organized Black faction politics within the capitalist political system. We're in an altogether different stage in terms of the objective developments in this country. Instead of Black reformism having a long life expectancy in a sense parallel to that in the post-1930s role of reformist politics in the labor movement, the objective situation is more close to the end for this particular form of the line of reformist politics in the labor movement. There's more and more pressure mounting emphasizing and underlining among the workers the need for an independent labor party. Also, the Black movement is confronted with the fact that the Chicano movement has gotten out ahead of it. They've got the Raza Unida Party, which if it continues to evolve as it has up to now, is going to succeed in giving a few palpable demonstrations to Black people that there's something to be gained along this road. I was particularly interested in the articles that Harry's been writing for The Militant where he shows there's a certain contrast between what the situation was for the Chicano workers down there in Texas when they were in the Teamsters and what the situation has been since they've developed their own union and La Raza Unida Party has arisen. They're now beginning to play a much more pronouncingly pro-Chicano role in grappling for places in the governmental structure on the local level there than was ever the case under the Teamsters.

So the probability is that there will be the evolution of a Black political party out of what now appears to be starting as organized faction politics with the capitalist two-party system on a much shorter range than what has taken place with respect to the labor movement. Then, when the Black political party arises, it's going to be a reformist party. This is implicit in the whole situation. The first phase is organized faction politics within the capitalist parties, but on the basis of a reformist program, much as we anticipate that if a labor party is formed, it will start as a reformist labor party. I say if a labor party formed, assuming the probabilities. Unless the labor party is formed through such explosions of such magnitude that a reformist labor party will be bypassed. I won't say it's a probability, but it's never theoretically excluded. But that would be the indicated next stage in terms of the organization of a Black party.

So, what is the essence of our tactics? To recognize the potential that's implicit in self-organization in whatever form of Blacks on the political level, but have nothing whatever to do with the idea of organizing faction politics within the capitalist two parties, any more than we had to do with respect to the labor movement or any other sphere, and call for a complete break with capitalist politics and the organization of the Democratic Party. On the road to that, in the case of a labor party, we support, without question as to the program, the idea of a definitive break, an organized break with capitalist politics. At the same time, the support is critical in the sense that we keep advocating what the program should be for this party. This thinking out loud is along the lines in which I'm inclined to think that we should view this.

These guys don't voluntarily launch a new thing because they can draw more water in capitalist politics. They do it under pressure. They feel more and more the urgent need to do something that will make it look to the masses like they're getting bold, getting militant and raising poker to a higher plane, and, at the same time, hope that they can get some kind of a concession out of the capitalist ruling class that will make them look a little better in the eyes of the Black masses. That's their reason. In that sense, the key thing here is that even the worst of the reformist Black politicians are feeling the need to do something that will make it look like they're getting tough. That says an awful lot about the kind of fires that are burning under them. I think we should look at it in that general sense.

SHEPPARD

There's another aspect to it, and that's the point of view of the Democratic Party. This is one of a number of such things that we've seen this year. Someone mentioned the Chicano caucus attempt. It was blown up, but there's still that attempt to do the same kind of thing with Chicanos inside the Democratic Party. There's the other caucuses: the women's caucus; the youth formations; other attempts like that. One section of the Democratic Party wants to try to refurbish its image somewhat. They've even invited the SMC. They called up the SMC and said, "What kind of facilities would you like at our convention?" I don't know who did it. There's a section of the Democratic Party that wants to utilize these things to make it look like -- they don't want to have quite the same Daley image, the 1968 image of the Democratic Party. They want to avoid that and at least make it look like the different caucuses are there, fighting to get women to be delegates, Blacks to be delegates, Chicanos to be delegates, fighting a little bit on the platform, getting this or that concession. That is from their point of view. But another thing about these caucus formations is the other side to them. When they're set into motion, there are bound to be a lot of people who are going to be disappointed by the results at the conventions after they go through the whole process. We can see it among the Women's Political Caucus. Already differentiations

occurring as the process of trying to work in the capitalist machinery goes on, they become disillusioned, not in terms of great masses, but in terms of some political activists. I think we can expect the same thing here.

I assume that someone or other is going to tend to speak for this conference, especially at the Democratic Party convention. Somehow speak in the name of it or try to use it for pressure, but the results are not going to be so hot, especially from the point of view of the healthier people who are drawn into it. For us, it's an important situation because we can recruit. We recruited some people at this convention. Whether they stick, we'll see. We did sell 400 Militants and passed out over 5,000 campaign brochures to these people. But that means following this development, and it's around the conception of the Black political party that we'll have the best chance of differentiating ourselves.

There are two things I'd like to say about the conference in relationship to a Black political party. I tend to agree with Tom that it's most likely it has to reflect that these people feel that they have to talk about a Black political party to carry out their demagogy. Betsey and I were talking while we were looking at the conference on TV and we were thinking, suppose there was a meeting called of labor, and those who wanted to continue working in the Democratic Party had to do it in the form of some of them saying, "We'll give the Democratic Party one more chance and then we'll build a labor party if they don't come through." Others saying, "Let's build a labor party, but not until next year" and using all that kind of rhetoric. What that would mean insofar as the developing mass moods. You can't make too close an analogy because the difference is that the labor movement is highly organized whereas in the Black movement there's very little organization, but it has to reflect that there's a mass response to that concept. Otherwise would they utilize it, if it was not at least striking some responsive chord amongst the masses? It would seem to indicate a greater response to that demand for a party, that idea, the idea of a Black party, than I had thought in the recent period. It would seem to indicate that there's a greater response amongst the masses of radicalizing Blacks to the idea of a Black party.

There's another side to it. The conference itself, and the publicity that came out of it, played this aspect up. There's a lot of Black people around the country who saw this aspect. Like the first night, on Saturday night, the thing that they had on the TV news was Jackson's speech, and that part calling for a Black party. The whole convention broke out in applause. That will also have an impact on people. That is, the publicity given to the concept of a Black party because of this conference, although it was shunted aside and nothing was done at the conference as we would expect, nevertheless, it did raise the conception of a Black party on a wider arena than before. I think it will make our propaganda more concrete. Like Malik said, one of the discussions that comrades

had there was that we should have forums on this conference all around the country. It gives our candidates the chance to talk about the concept of a Black party in the concrete relation to this conference. They can talk about how it was raised by different people, how there was disagreement, etc., there's all kinds of ways it can be raised. But it's especially important for our election campaign because through Pulley's tours and speeches and the other speeches by our candidates, they've got now new ammunition to talk about the Black party. It doesn't sound as abstract as it has necessarily been in some past campaigns. It's a little bit more concrete because this conference occurred. From the conference itself, you can point out the power of Black people, the ability to launch such a party objectively, if the proper leadership was provided. As this development occurs, and as the Democratic and Republican conventions are held, there will be some disillusionment around them -- illusions will be the highest now up until the conventions. After the conventions we'll have a different problem: that will be the lesser evil problem. I think that if we hammer hard on this aspect in our election campaigns, it will help us pick up some people. So, the intervention was quite good. Now we must take this intervention out to as many people as we can to put our view of this conference across and use it to explain the Black party. Our comrades should be more aggressive in reaching out and I think we can make some recruits on this thing and get a little bit greater toe-hold in some of the discussions and things that are actually going on in the Black community.

STONE

Barry mentioned something about how this will make our call for a Black political party more concrete. I can remember discussions that we had in the past about this question. I remember a couple of years ago, especially it came out at the YSA convention, where comrades got up and spoke about how when we raised the idea of a Black political party they felt that we were doing it in a very abstract and mechanistic way, as though a Black political party would just come out of nowhere. The point that was made was that the basis for a Black political party will be mass struggles of Black people, where self-identity begins to be made in struggle, and through the process of struggle a Black political party will arise. So we started to put this concept of mass struggle more and more into our propaganda.

What I think is interesting about what happened at Gary is that the concept of a Black political party has been raised without this kind of struggle that we envisioned. That is, the whole Black struggle is now very much on a low ebb. There are no mass struggles going on, or those that are going on are very small. What has happened, despite this fact, is that the nationalist consciousness has deepened to such an extent, and the general political consciousness and the general crisis in the Black community have deepened to such

an extent, that this kind of thing has emerged even without these types of struggles going on.

I thought it was very significant, however long ago it was, a year ago or so, when the CBC itself was formed and it was announced that the Black members of Congress were meeting together. This was a kind of a turning point in the sense that it meant that on the highest levels of government in this country, a nationalist concept was being accepted. Even a few years before, the concept of Blacks getting together and excluding whites, whoever they may be, would have been considered racism and we would have been met with all the general charges that we still sometimes hear against nationalism. That first little step on the part of the Black Congressional Caucus was very significant as an indication of the deepening of nationalist consciousness. It was also a recognition on the part of these politicians of where their power comes from. Their power, and the fact that they've been elected, comes from the nationalist radicalization in this country, which puts them in a tremendous contradiction. Because another thing we see by the mere holding of this conference is the fact that now it's been suggested that it's correct and right for Black people to get together in a room and decide together, as Blacks, how they should relate to the elections. Immediately we see that just the fact of getting Black people together for this purpose in itself helps to raise the concept of a Black political party naturally, and a break from the two-party system, extremely radical things.

I think that when we write about this conference in The Militant and talk to comrades about it through the campaign, etc., that what we want to get across to comrades is the openings that this makes for us, because it is a big change as far as our being able to talk about a Black party in terms that people can understand. There is tremendous openness to our ideas at this time, partly because of the vacuum in the Black struggle. There are very few organizations to turn to and we are literally going to be the only ones around who were interested in this conference, who are interested in the whole concept of Black political organization, a Black political party. I think it's opened up very good possibilities for us. Of course, we know it's going to be a process of going through the experience of Black organization within the Democratic Party. It's not any surprise that those kinds of stages are involved.

MORRISON

I agree that this whole convention makes more concrete the propaganda about a Black political party. I don't think that it's a thing of these people eventually calling for a Black party. At the conference, the only people who played around with the idea of a Black party were Jackson and the people in the Louisiana delegation. None of the Black Democrats spoke in favor of a Black party. The bourgeois press was actually most sensitive to that idea, during the convention itself, because of the fact that they see that one of the possibilities of this whole self-organization that's going on. But, at the same time that they play around with

the nationalist consciousness and what they do does go toward making more legitimate that notion of a Black party, even some of the editors of the Amsterdam News, which has become a very political paper, have expressed support to the idea of a Black party. While this is going on, the formation of a Black party I think is inseparable from struggle. Until there is a whole new wave of struggles, it will still just be a concept that people toss about. While to a certain degree, Black Democrats draw power from the nationalist radicalization, their power is in the Democratic Party. The organized nationalists tend to be into a certain amount of counter-institutionalism. They feel, at least Baraka does, that once we begin to have political institutions, and other institutions, then we can eventually move toward that step of forming a Black party. But none of them pose it in terms of struggle. That's to a certain degree why a lot of people who tend to be involved in struggle, like the prison activists, etc., because of the fact that the idea of a Black party is tossed around by the reformists, they don't tend to see this as concretely related to some of the struggles that are going on. The whole concept of a Black party arising out of struggle is one of the things that is not yet understood. But even to begin to have people understand that, first there's going to have to be those struggles, and those struggles have not yet come into play. The idea of a Black party, even a reformist Black party, that represents sort of a crossing of the Rubicon which the ruling class understands more the implications of that than a lot of these officials. Because of the fact that the poverty programs still exist, the Ford Foundation still gives out money, right now most people are bought off. The whole idea of a Black party, even when it is eventually formed, there will have to be a certain break with all of this capitalist money that's going around and which people get hooked into. While people talk about that, at the same time, that's not what Jackson and the others tend to move on. Until there's a movement built that's independent, not only in leadership and politically, but also financially, it's going to be very difficult for something like that to get off the ground. If a convention like this occurred, for example, during the whole upsurge of the Black student movement, it would just be busted wide open by those activists and militants who would have raised all types of things, including the notion of a Black party. At the same time that it makes concrete the concept of a Black party, also the concept of struggle is what we attach to it and what others do not attach to it and makes this idea of Jackson and others utopian, not very real.

THOMAS

I think some of those things are true, but I do think that this whole convention, and the whole way these people are forced to go, could lead, in a distorted form, to a Black party, maybe without the main top leaders involved in it, these big operators like these congressmen, and people like Stokes as individuals. But there are other people who have more maneuvering room and the situation may develop for the ruling class in this country that they're no longer

able to fool people through the Democratic and Republican parties and they may look to the alternative of backing reformists, or working with a reformist wing of a Black political party as opposed to just losing whatever political domination they have in the Black community. The fact is, that all we know about is the two speeches that were given by Hatcher and Jackson. The way that the conference developed prevented any of these other speeches by Stokes, etc., all of these other people, which would have given us a better taste to what these people were actually doing. The fact is that both Hatcher and Jackson did speak of this whole rhetoric about breaking from the Democratic and Republican parties. There's also an element involved of their maintaining their base and their fighting for concessions to them and their machine and different programs they're involved in against the Democrats and Republicans. So there is the possibility of this type of break taking place, with them being pressured into doing it by the community, and by struggles and by worsening of conditions tied into the fact of the amount of bribes that the ruling class, and concessions, can give to them is being lessened by the economic situation that the capitalists are in. I think, it's going to get to the situation where this whole process of moving toward the formation of a Black political party, the capitalists would be pretty stupid, in my estimation, not to use the alternative of using this wing of Black reformists -- nationalist or otherwise -- to be their expression of their ideas, their expression of holding back the militancy of a Black political party. That will mean of course that that will be another stage of the struggle in terms of moving from a Black reformist party, perhaps a bureaucratized reformist party, to making it more the type of vehicle that the Black community needs.

KERRY

On this question of struggle, it's difficult for me to understand what the comrades are getting at. So far as struggle is concerned, struggle goes on incessantly, all the time. I don't know what the comrades mean, that the movement will come into existence through struggle, and now we find it coming in without struggle -- I just don't understand that. The struggle continues, it goes on all the time. It never ceases. Its forms change, yes. But if comrades have the idea that it's going to take some cataclysm, that the struggle advances from peak to peak to peak until you reach the ultimate, and then that's the final struggle, history doesn't progress that way. Like the class struggle -- class struggle goes on all the time. Sometimes it erupts in a strike, and sometimes in a general strike, and sometimes in a revolutionary insurrection. But we don't say there isn't struggle because there isn't always a sort of military confrontation between the contending forces. Anybody who says there hasn't been struggle, or that there isn't continuous struggle, I don't think they're really cognizant of what's going on. Where there's such deep discontent, and such dissatisfaction, it must breed rebellion, you see. It must breed resistance. And this resistance gives rise to different forms and types of struggle.

Without struggle you wouldn't have life; and especially a minority, a group that's so oppressed and so repressed and so discriminated against, how could you even think that there isn't a constant, continuous struggle going on. It takes different forms. Originally, it took the form of the sit-in, breaking down the more flagrant forms of discrimination in the South. Then you had the big eruptions in the ghetto, where they burned down the ghettos. Do we think that's going to be the form again? I don't know. The masses go through these experiences, and they learn from certain experiences. I think they've advanced to a much, I tried to make that point clear, they've advanced to a higher stage, you see. They've advanced to a political stage, where they're beginning to think in terms of political action, not action which seemingly had no sense or meaning when they burned their own ghettos down. That didn't bring relief.

Concerning the term reformist, when used in our paper. To Marxists, reformist has a very definite political connotation. When you speak about reformists, you're speaking about a political tendency that believes that through the process of reform you can change, qualitatively change the character of the social system. I'd rather we wouldn't use the term when we're dealing with opportunists of all political stripes. They're opportunists, they're concerned primarily with advancing their own career. They proceed from the material benefits, or a job or a position here, or something like that. They're opportunists, not reformists. Reformist has a very definite meaning to a Marxist, it doesn't to the masses. They don't know what you're talking about. They have no objection to reformists; as Farrell and others pointed out, the Black political party will be reformist in all likelihood, it'll be a reformist political party. We don't demand that it be a revolutionary party. Our demand is not for a Black revolutionary political party, it's for a Black political party. And in all likelihood, these types, and types like them, will be in the leadership of the party, if and when it comes into existence. So the term reformist just serves to muddy up the discussion; it doesn't clarify anything.

I'm afraid it leads to the concept that you've got to wait until the struggle reaches a certain level, and only then can you anticipate, realistically, that out of that will arise the actual organization of a Black political party. Not necessarily so, not necessarily so. It can be a whole accumulation of grievances that find expression in this particular form at any given time. The struggle goes on all the time, locally, statewide, and nationally. It erupts in different forms in different areas of the country. And that's the way it's going to continue.

We don't exclude any cataclysmic events, no. That's also part of the struggle. Cataclysmic events also enter into the consciousness of the masses. They sit back, and say "What did we win, what did we gain? Is this the method? Is this the way to get relief? Or do we have to go beyond that? Try something else?" To me, that's what's so significant about it--either that, or it's of no significance at all--is that there is this developing political consciousness. That it's reached at least the stage where they have illusions--this sort

of a gathering, a national gathering, the first time it's taken place, you see--is capable of delivery, what past actions have failed to do. They have not solved the problem; which is all to the good, so far as we're concerned, because the struggle we're talking about is essentially the political struggle. And a political struggle, not in the bourgeois sense, but in the Marxist, proletarian sense, which combines both the struggle on the electoral arena with the mass struggle in the streets. And that's part of the struggle too. When Blacks get together and discuss how they're best going to advance their interests and proceed to take some kind of an action, that's all part of the struggle. They didn't go as far as we would have liked, and this may take all kinds of zigs and zags. But I say now it's in our interest not to deprecate the continuation--when is it set for? A year from now? We've got to prepare, and we've got to go out into the communities as much as we can. This time we've got to prepare. The revolutionists have got to prepare. The radicals. The mass has got to prepare for a real intervention. Because this thing didn't go, these people are hesitating, they're shillying, they're shallying, they're milk and water types, they're not prepared to go the whole way. We want our program, our ideas, our leadership. And that's what we've got to prepare for, to make. And compel them to hold it! Not to permit them to forget that one is called, on whatever basis they've called it. Because this is politics, in my view, this is politics, you see. This is intervening, intervening in the political development at the stage at which we find it today, not six months from now, not a year from now. Of course, we don't have too great forces to throw into the struggle. I think we've got to think the thing through.