

Elephants & Donkeys by Kathleen Klenetsky

Jackson, the spoiler

Jesse Jackson, rumored by Washington political "insiders" to be a long-term asset of the CIA and a spoiler for the George Bush campaign, appears determined to make life difficult for his Democratic rival Mike Dukakis.

Jackson shook up his campaign staff in early June, bringing in Washington lawyer Ronald Brown to handle his operation going into the Democratic Party Convention, while shunting his two former top honchos, Willie Brown and Gerald Austin, to the side.

Some political observers give the credit to Brown for Jackson's aggressive pursuit of the vice presidency issue since the June 7 primaries gave Dukakis a lock on the nomination.

Jackson—and Brown—have been making the Dukakis camp extremely uncomfortable via a series of public statements asserting Jackson's "right" to the vice presidential slot. The candidate backed off a little during an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" June 12, rescinding an earlier statement that he wanted to be vice president and intended to "push" Dukakis on the question. But he continued to insist that he has "earned serious consideration" as a vice presidential contender.

Jackson knows full well that Dukakis can't possibly choose him for the ticket, if he wants to win in November. There are only two explanations for why he would nevertheless continue to press the question: First, to keep himself in the media limelight

and bolster his bargaining power going into the convention. And second, because it puts Dukakis in the politically precarious position of having to reject Jackson. This could so anger black Democratic voters that sufficient numbers of them could simply not bother to vote come November—a decision that could cost Dukakis the election.

Though Bush has little hope of winning any significant portion of the black vote, he is nevertheless making all sorts of openings to the black community: an obvious effort to underscore Dukakis's reluctance to deal with Jackson.

Moreover, the Virginia Republican Party recently nominated a black businessman to run against former Gov. Chuck Robb for the U.S. Senate—just a few weeks after the Jackson forces created an uproar at the state Democratic convention, booing and hissing Robb after he said that Jackson should be satisfied with an "inspirational" role.

The Jackson forces are flexing their muscle in another area: the party platform. At a meeting of the drafting committee over the June 12 weekend, Jackson representatives demanded that the platform call for higher taxes, defense cuts, and label South Africa a terrorist state.

The Dukakis people conceded the last point—after all, their boy supports the incredibly harsh sanctions bill sponsored by Rep. Ron Dellums (D-Calif.). But they adamantly refused to give in on the other two. That's not because they disagree with Jackson—Dukakis's policy advisers support a national consumption tax and military spending cuts—but they don't want to give Bush more ammunition for his stated campaign strategy of attacking Dukakis as a typical tax-and-spend liberal.

The dispute will continue when the

platform committee meets again later this month in Denver, and could explode on the floor of the convention itself, giving Dukakis an extremely inauspicious send-off for the general election campaign.

Dukakis pledges to end SDI, MX

Despite the wrangling over the platform, Dukakis is as committed to disarming the United States as Walter Mondale or George McGovern ever was.

In what his staff billed as a "major foreign policy address," the Massachusetts governor told the Atlantic Council's annual conference in Washington June 14, "We all know that the defense budget of this country is not going to increase . . . no matter who the next President is, no matter how the election turns out, so the time has come to make some tough choices on defense."

Dukakis has already made some of those choices. He vowed to his audience that, if elected, he would get rid of the MX missile, the Midgetman, and the SDI. "We don't need a laundry list of new strategic systems," he told his audience, but a defense strategy "that will set sensible priorities."

NATO, too, will almost surely be a casualty of Dukakis's "sensible" military policy. Although he paid lip service in his speech to the importance of NATO, he then proceeded to decry America's Western European allies for failing to shoulder "their fair share" of the burden for protecting Western security interests.

This argument has become a favorite line of attack for those who wish to sever the U.S.-Western Europe defense link, and hope to use the "burden-sharing" issue as a way of whipping up popular support for pulling American troops out of Europe.