

Democratic meetings provide clues to Atlanta convention

by Patricia Salisbury

Democratic Party members have been meeting in conventions across the country for the past month to complete the final stages of selecting the delegates who will choose the Democratic Party nominee. While Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis may appear to have the Democratic Party nomination locked up, many of the state conventions indicate restiveness and dissatisfaction within the traditional constituencies in the Democratic Party.

At two of the major meetings, Texas and Virginia, Jesse Jackson delegates waged bitter, if losing, fights to increase their delegate strength, and at several conventions, supporters of presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche had substantial policy impact. However, the signs are that the forces backing Michael Dukakis intend the tightest control of the convention possible, running the danger of alienating the Jackson supporters, and almost certainly on a track to emerge with a policy program which has no relevance to the problems facing the nation.

Texas Party adopts pro-space resolution

The Texas Democratic Party Convention meeting in Houston on June 18 was one of the largest, with over 10,000 people attending. The meeting was heavily influenced by the fact that a supporter of the LaRouche faction within the party, Claude Jones, had recently been elected chairman of the Harris County Democratic Party, which includes the city of Houston. Members of the LaRouche faction had a prominent booth at the convention with a policy focus on the need for the nation to adopt a Moon-Mars colonization program and displayed a large sign saying "Democrats Must Land a Woman on Mars." The Texas Convention did go on to adopt a very strong pro-space program resolution.

Ironically, Texas State Democratic Party Chairman Bob Slagle illustrated the alienation of the party leadership from constituency pro-progress concerns. Slagle, in his remarks at the convention, had much praise for the defense-wrecking operations of U.S. Attorney Henry Hudson, who led the illegal raid on the Pentagon (see *Feature*, this issue) and attacked the very government programs and industries which are critical to the space exploration effort.

A few weeks earlier, a strong intervention by supporters

of Lyndon LaRouche resulted in virtually the entire Oklahoma Democratic Party Convention being dominated by a debate over a resolution on a \$26 per barrel trigger price for oil, a measure which is crucial to saving the domestic oil industry and the economy of the Southwest. The resolution, although it emerged in only a very watered-down version at the convention, has passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

The LaRouche delegation at the Texas meeting also addressed the issues of AIDS and the economic and food crises. These policy concerns of the LaRouche faction were strongly represented when Harris County Democratic chairman Claude Jones addressed the Black Caucus. His speech focused on the threat to human life from AIDS, and from policy decisions to treat AIDS and other diseases from the standpoint of "cost-accounting."

Jones warned that the Democratic Party must nominate a candidate who will build hospitals and be committed to spending the money needed to achieve victory over AIDS. He also stressed the need for emergency economic reforms to stop the depression, which will otherwise result in genocide. Jones was well-received by the delegates attending the caucus, most of whom were pledged to Jesse Jackson, and received a standing ovation at the end of his address.

Otherwise, the concerns of the Jackson delegation were primarily expressed in bitterly fought battles over delegate selection with the Dukakis forces. Candidate Jackson's address to the convention, while limited to familiar themes and generalities such as "keep your eyes on the prize," fired up his delegates who proceeded to wage a battle over the selection of at-large delegates to Atlanta, arguing that they should be apportioned according to the popular vote in the Texas primary rather than the results of the caucus process. Since Jackson's supporters refused to give in, some of the meetings on this issue ran long into the night. Many were enraged when Dukakis emerged with the majority of the at-large delegates, and grumbled openly about their "unfair treatment."

Likely nominee Dukakis also addressed the convention, and the behavior of his supporters did nothing to placate the Jackson wing. Dukakis spoke before a large organized rally,

with a virtual army of Dukakis people on the floor with walkie-talkies, to keep the delegates awake. While the pro-Dukakis politicians opened every speech with extensive praise for Jesse Jackson and the "great job" he's done for the Party, most of the Jackson supporters viewed this as a condescending way of saying, "It's over, now get to work for Dukakis." Many Jackson delegates, frustrated over the seeming-inevitability of the Dukakis nomination and being patronized by Dukakis campaign workers, have been overheard saying, "If this is how they're going to treat us, we might as well go for Bush."

A large grouping within the Texas Democratic Party, which is reported to include Texas Commissioner of Agriculture Jim Hightower, have been taking a hard-line Jackson-for-vice president stance. Another grouping within the Texas Party is supporting Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen for vice president.

Dissatisfaction at Virginia convention

The convention of the Virginia Democratic Party June 3-4, also erupted into dissatisfaction and battling, and laid little basis for party unity around a serious program. Despite the fact that Jesse Jackson carried the state, and should have had a majority at the convention on at least key issues on every vote taken, the Jackson forces were defeated. Much of the ire of the Jackson delegation was directed at former Virginia Governor Chuck Robb, who had been quoted in the press questioning Jesse Jackson's credentials for the vice presidency, and who was appearing at the convention to collect the Party's nomination for U.S. Senator.

When a move by Jackson delegates to nominate another candidate for U.S. Senate failed to make it to the floor, the more radical wing of the Jackson camp staged a disruptive rally when Robb spoke. The only fight over substance, however, was led by supporters of Lyndon LaRouche, who initiated a move to open the resolutions section of the meeting to debate and amendment, and who addressed the convention on the issue of the economic and AIDS crises.

California convention pro forma

The convention of the California Democratic Party June 18 was run in a completely pro forma and tight-fisted manner, probably a foretaste of what the Establishment of the party will try to pull off at the Atlanta National Convention. Most of the business of the convention was carried on in caucuses convened by the supporters of the different presidential candidates, and attempts by supporters of Lyndon LaRouche to raise policy considerations were rebuffed.

The joint assembly of all the party members was convened to rubberstamp a prearranged deal on a state party leadership slate which had been agreed to between the Dukakis and Jackson forces. Distraught rank and file supporters of Jesse Jackson, who objected that they had never seen the slate, were ignored by the chairman, and the meeting was adjourned less than nine minutes after it had been convened.

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