

Texas Democrats slalom to disaster

by Mel Klenetsky

One of the most important, yet unheralded developments of the Super Tuesday, March 8, elections was the victory of LaRouche Democrat Claude Jones to the position of Harris County Democratic Party chairman. Chairman-elect Jones now controls the most important county-level Democratic Party organization in the state of Texas. Harris County, which includes Houston, also happens to be the third-largest electoral district in the country.

The incumbent Harris County Democratic Party leadership went crazy, throwing democracy and the whole concept of an open party out the window. They have adopted the kind of strongarm tactics that would have made Josef Stalin proud. Since the Harris County situation has had very little coverage from the national press, let us first recapitulate the events as they occurred.

Within hours of LaRouche Democrat Claude Jones's victory in the race for Harris County chairman, the county Democratic Party leadership threw caution to the winds, and began setting into motion party rule changes, designed to strip chairman-elect Jones of his powers. Three days after Super Tuesday, the incumbent Harris County executive committee met and proposed a rule change that created a steering committee and a party secretary position. The appointed, not elected, party secretary, would be given all the powers that previously belonged to the chairman. This would include party finances, holding party membership and fundraising lists, and generally handling all major party functions.

The Harris County chairman would be allowed to sit on the steering committee, as 1 of 18 members, with all of his previous powers removed. The proposed rule change, which still has to be approved in another meeting of the Harris County executive committee, would be in effect for two years, the exact term of Jones in office, after which the rules would automatically revert to the old rules, unless a new resolution were introduced.

Jones has already set a court date, and intends to fight what he terms the executive committee's "Bull Connor" tactics, in both state and federal courts. In plain and simple terms, the Harris County not-so-Democratic executive committee opted to ignore the 54,000 Houston voters who placed Jones in office, and are now attempting to strip him of his powers by setting up a new, appointed position that they control.

Press accounts quickly picked up on this. Local NBC television described the executive committee decision as

throwing democracy out the window. Letters to the editor of the *Houston Chronicle* and *Houston Post* denounced the actions as dictatorial, running three-to-one in favor of Jones. Cook County (Chicago) Commissioner Rosemary Love, a Democrat familiar with the suicide tactics that Adlai Stevenson used in Illinois when two LaRouche Democrats won primary victories in 1986, wrote a letter to Jones and the Texas Democratic Party leadership advising against these self-destructive, autocratic methods.

In 1986, Mark Fairchild and Janice Hart, two LaRouche Democrats, won the Democratic Party primary positions for lieutenant governor and secretary of state. Stevenson, the victor of the Democratic gubernatorial primary, refused to run on the same ticket with them. Instead, he formed his own party and lost, resoundingly. The Democratic Party of Illinois has yet to recover from that debacle.

Cook County Commissioner Love wrote, "What the Democratic Party of Harris County, Texas is doing to the lawfully elected new chairman, Mr. Claude Jones, is a violation of our Constitution. This smells of a dictatorship. . . . I abhorred the travesty of justice perpetrated against Mark Fairchild by our Illinois Democratic Party, just as I do the injustice meted out against Mr. Jones, as well as the Texas voters. . . . The brutality against free elections casts a very dark cloud over democracy. How can the Democratic Party play a role for freedom when it emulates the policies of Russia? The Harris County Democratic Party of Texas ought to learn from the insanity of our Illinois Democratic Party and Adlai Stevenson."

And at the state level

The desperation tactics of the Harris County executive has also spread to the Texas State Democratic Executive Committee (SDEC). On March 16, the SDEC met and passed a resolution supporting the Harris County executive's actions to strip Jones of his powers. Ed Cogburn introduced the resolution. He and other SDEC members discussed the possibility of having the county party meet its \$20,000 debt to the state party by surrendering mailing lists, computer equipment, and other campaign-related items—leaving Jones with only the shell of an organization. Another official proposed opening a state office in Harris County. Larry Veselka, the incumbent chairman who lost to Jones, has indicated that the Harris County Democrats do not plan to renew the lease on their office. It appears the gameplan will be to close down the county party offices and open up state party offices with the idea of totally disenfranchising Jones and the 54,000 voter base he represents.

In an equally outrageous move, three delegates duly elected in Minnesota precinct caucuses were denied access to county-level caucuses after it was learned that they were LaRouche Democrats. While they were forced to wait outside, a blatantly unconstitutional vote was taken to deny them access to the county presidential caucuses.