

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Will Jesse Jackson run for D.C. mayor?

Speculation swirling around the District of Columbia for months has broken out into the open, with the public prediction by a local TV commentator that Jesse Jackson might make a run for mayor next year.

The present mayor, Marion Barry, has been under fire for a long time. It is well known that two of the most powerful (and cynical) members of the city's elite, *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham and the late Edward Bennett Williams, spearheaded the "Get Barry" effort.

Nonetheless, few paid attention to the attacks on Barry, because the general consensus was that he was getting what he deserved. No one has been happy with the functioning of city government, and when the mayor stayed in sunny California for the Superbowl while his city was paralyzed by a near blizzard two years ago, his popularity plummeted.

A steady stream of convictions of former Barry friends, aides, and officials for fraud, embezzlement, and other charges played into the general view that the local government was corrupt. Added in the past year has been the alarming rise in the murder rate in the city. In one year, the total leapt to more than one murder per day, as drug-pushing gangs from Los Angeles and New York competed for turf in the District.

In the new year, Washington General Hospital announced that it could no longer handle the overload of cases referred to its trauma unit every day.

Some in Washington are beginning to wonder if there is not some

sinister design to all of this. Last year, Jesse Jackson changed his official residence from Chicago to Washington, ostensibly on the idea that if Dukakis won the election, then the District of Columbia would become the 51st state and Jackson would get elected a U.S. senator.

So he is now a registered voter in the District, and eligible to run for mayor in September 1990. Jackson's ego, some say, craves elected office. His advisers also say this one achievement which has eluded him so far, election to a public office, will shore up his image as a credible presidential contender in 1992.

Some have even gone so far as to speculate that the introduction of organized drug gangs into the District, and the resulting rise in the murder rate, is not an accident. What if it were all choreographed for Jackson to become mayor and, with the help of Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, gain national fame as a real anti-drug fighter by setting the Muslims loose in the ghettos to blow the dope pushers away? The result would be a new level of national respect for Jackson, and new credibility for Farrakhan and other para-military thugs taking over law enforcement functions in cities.

It wasn't until an obvious federal sting operation against Barry was tried in December that this scenario began to be taken seriously by many insiders here. The sting was aimed at catching Barry in the act, as it were, in the hotel room of a friend carrying drugs. It apparently didn't come off as planned, even though a grand jury investigation into the incident is still under way.

Jackson is playing the role of Barry's friend for the time being, at least until some serious charges come down against Barry. You can be certain that Jackson's advice to his "friend" includes some firm words against the idea of running for reelection next year.

Many insiders here point out built-in liabilities for Jackson if he were to move on the above scenario. There is an old axiom against running for an office you don't really want, but only view as a stepping stone. Richard Nixon fell victim to this when he thought that running for governor of California in 1962 would set him up to another try at the presidency. He lost the race, and it almost finished him off for good.

In Jackson's case, there is little doubt he could win running for mayor in the District. But he could suffer so much political damage in the process that the net result would be fatal to his national ambitions.

When he ran for President, he had the whole country to bob and weave around in, never staying anywhere long enough to get pinned down. But in D.C., with a population of 630,000, Jackson could not duck someone who decided to run a really relentless campaign, nailing him again and again on the issues. Jackson the symbol could be undone by such means, exposing Jackson the ultra-leftist, badly out of step with most of his constituents.

State Department speechless on Berlin

Spokesman Charles Redman was unable to answer my question at the U.S. State Department's daily briefing Feb. 3, when I asked him why the U.S. government sanctioned the placement of a former member of the SS Leibstandard Adolf Hitler in the recent elections in West Berlin—namely, Franz Schoenhuber of the Republikaner party.

Officially, West Berlin is still under the control of the U.S. Occupational command, along with the French and British, and no candidate can appear on the ballot there without explicit U.S. approval.