

PHILADELPHIA AFTER RIZZO . . . WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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by Ron Whitehorne

With Frank Rizzo bound for retirement, what does the future hold? Who will fill the vacuum created by the disintegration of the Rizzo machine? Will the independent forces, who played such an important role in the charter change victory, play a major role in next year's elections? These are some of the key questions in the wake of Rizzo's massive defeat.

THE SPOILS OF VICTORY

A big scramble is on for control of the Democratic Party with the spring primary shaping up as a battle royal. For the first time in years it is a wide open field and a long list of contenders are lining up. The big prize is control of City Hall.

As everybody knows, the front runner for the Mayor's office is Bill Green. Green has ties with many old line ward leaders, significant labor support and some backing in the Black and Puerto Rican communities. His strength is his ability to offer himself as the most acceptable compromise candidate to all the contending forces.

Grouped around Rich Chapman and the Americans for Democratic Action are the Reform Democrats. They are talking about running an "independent" slate for city council. Their favorite for Mayor is Bill Klenk, presently City Controller. Chapman and company project themselves as the architects of the charter victory and hope to parley this into new power within the Democratic Party.

Based on the massive Black turnout last month, the Black vote is a powerful factor in calculations for next year. Charles Bowser hopes to unify the Black community behind his own candidacy. He has already assembled a broad based organization and the logic of blocking behind a single Black candidate can only work to his favor.

Nor can the Rizzo forces be counted out. Al Gaudiosi, while he broke with Rizzo earlier this year, is in a good position to court Rizzo's constituency. Gaudiosi favors a more moderate version of Rizzoisism and has won considerable support from big business. The possibility of a more hard line Rizzoite, like Al Pearlman, adding his hat to the ring further complicates the picture.

DILEMMA FOR INDEPENDENTS

This poses a dilemma for those who

favor independent political action, that is the building of a third party that will oppose big business and fight for the interests of the masses of people. The illusions that the Democratic Party can become such a party remains strong. This illusion is propelling many towards the present struggle within the Democratic Party with the aim of capturing and transforming it. Within this movement there are unquestionably elements who have no real commitment to the interests of the masses. Their aim is to contain the movement within safe channels, to make sure it does not develop into a real political challenge to the ruling class. But more importantly there are thousands of people who want to see change and who honestly think that the Democratic Party offers the most practical possibility of realizing change. These people, who embrace the majority of the politically active elements in both the movements of the oppressed nationalities and the trade unions, must be won to the idea of a genuinely independent politics if a broad based third party is to emerge.

The question is how to do this. Surely we must expose the Democratic Party. We must show how historically the Democratic Party has always been the graveyard of popular movements. We must document and analyse the control of the Democratic Party by big business. We must show how this control precludes this party becoming an instrument for the interests of the working people. But this sort of exposure is not enough. The masses of people learn mainly through their experience. Only when the masses have experienced for themselves the bankruptcy of the Democratic Party will they be inclined to break with it.

This means we cannot stand aside from the struggles within the Democratic Party. We must intervene in these struggles in order to sharpen the antagonism between the progressive and the reactionary forces. We must seek to influence and shape these struggles in a way that will maximize the exposure of the class essence of the Democratic Party and accelerate the motion toward a break with it. The way to do this is through agitation for a program that draws out the most urgent needs of the masses, a program aimed against the monopoly corporations and embodying the popular demands of labor, the oppressed nationalities and their allies.

This program needs to be popularized with the trade unions and the various mass organizations of the people with the aim of making it the basis of the electoral orientation of these same organizations. Active adherence to such a program

would be the litmus test for judging the various candidates. Independent forces need to coalesce, not around uncritical support for the lesser evil candidate, but around a platform that represents the interests of the people. A campaign could then be waged to gain support for such a platform and make it a real issue in the election.

While in this period intervention in the Democratic Party is important and necessary, it would be a serious error for independent forces to limit their activity to this arena. Unless an independent alternative is beginning to take shape, those presently within the two party system will remain wedded to the logic of lesser evilism. One of our tasks in the present is to support and build formations and candidacies independent of the two parties. Aside from popularizing the idea of independent political action, a well conceived independent campaign can win real, if limited, victories in the present, thus helping to dispel the idea that activity outside the two parties is impractical or utopian.

INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION NECESSARY

Independent and progressive forces in Philadelphia need to come together in order to take up these tasks, specifically hammering out a platform developing an orientation toward the Democratic primary and investigating the possibilities for independent campaigns in the general election.

In approaching these tasks several points must be taken into account. In drafting a platform or program there will inevitably be differences. Compromise will be necessary to insure that such a platform represents broad forces. At the same time it will be vital that the program reflects a real break with the politics of corporate liberalism which dominate the Democratic Party. The interests of the working class and the oppressed nationalities, reflected in concrete demands, must form the core of such a program.

In relation to the Democratic primary, a key focus should be the forces grouping around Bowser. The Black people's movement is the most advanced political force and is most independent in relation to the two party system: A breakaway from the two party system is likely to come from this quarter first.

In terms of an independent campaign, the full range of possibilities will not be clear until after the primaries. Independent forces should minimally plan to mount a campaign for city

council, concentrating their strength in a district where the possibility of a real breakthrough is greatest. The only independent party presently planning to run a city wide slate is the Consumer Party, which has indicated a desire to build unity with other independents in order to mount a broad based challenge in next year's election. This initiative on the part of the Consumer Party should be seriously explored.

Unless independent forces organize themselves to exercise the maximum impact on the election next year, much of what was won in the course of the charter change campaign will be squandered away. Few of us who worked so hard to stop Rizzo did so in order to see a reinvigorated, freshly credible Democratic Party with a new set of slick power brokers at the helm. To build on the charter victory we must avoid the

twin pitfalls of withdrawal from the electoral process on the one hand and tailing behind the liberal wing of the Democratic Party on the other.

TOWARD A PEOPLE'S PLATFORM

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Now that Frank Rizzo no longer dominates the political life of Philadelphia, many are talking about a "new dawn" for the city. But talk is cheap and phrases of this sort mean different things to different people. If Philadelphia is really to go forward the policies of the Rizzo years will have to give way to programs that really benefit the working people of our city. Next year's election, if it is to mean something, must center on what measures can improve the conditions of life for Philadelphia's people.

The following ten points represent the PWOC's thinking in outline form. In future issues we will expand on these points. We are also anxious for criticism and suggestions from other organizations and individuals. We offer these ideas as a contribution toward what will hopefully be a broad discussion among progressive forces.

1) **DEMOCRATIZE CITY GOVERNMENT**—Recall of all elected officials—redraw city council districts to eliminate racially motivated gerrymandering—eliminate council at large positions—an elected school board—abolish provision of city charter giving financial interests control over appointment of finance director—reform election law.

2) **IMPROVE CITY SERVICES**—restore all cuts in service and personnel—end moratorium on city hiring—prioritize health, child care and senior citizen services—cut cost to consumer for energy

through public regulation and ownership of utilities—improve SEPTA services and hold line on fare increases.

3) **QUALITY, DESEGREGATED EDUCATION**—Restore all cuts in program and personnel—strengthen special, bilingual and remedial programs—replace firetrap schools—promote greater parent student and community involvement—promote real desegregation based on a metropolitan plan—full funding for the schools.

4) **DECENT HOUSING FOR ALL**—Pass Tenant's Rights Bill—Strict Liscense and Inspection (L&I) enforcement aimed at landlords—aid to small homeowners to maintain properties—expand rehabilitation of abandoned properties—expand both subsidies for low income housing ownership and public housing programs.

5) **REDEVELOPMENT FOR PEOPLE, NOT PROFITS**—Cancel the Center City Commuter Tunnel—No more expensive downtown commercial development—redirect funds to improve housing and transit—aid to small businesses in the neighborhoods with particular emphasis on minority businesses—stop all urban renewal programs which promote the decay of neighborhoods.

6) **FIGHT UNEMPLOYMENT**—Public investment in job creating programs—hiring priority to minorities and women who suffer greatest unemployment—aggressive approach to passage of federal

programs that will curtail unemployment—promotion of national legislation for a shorter work week with no cut in pay—pass law penalizing local firms that move jobs out of the city.

7) **CURB POLICE ABUSE**—Institute an elected Police Review Board with power to indict and prosecute police wrongdoers—destroy all police files on political activities of citizens—abolish civil disobedience, labor and K-9 squads—carry out court mandated affirmative action programs in relation to police hiring and promotion.

8) **FIGHT DISCRIMINATION**—Affirmative action in hiring and promotion for all city jobs and firms with city contracts—aggressive enforcement of existing civil rights legislation—promote anti-racist education in the schools—beef up the Human Relations Commission.

9) **NO MORE TAXES ON WORKING PEOPLE**—no increase in property taxes—lower accessments on small homeowners—restore corporate net income tax—abolish city wage tax—institute a progressive tax on unearned income from rents, interest and capital gains.

10) **BREAK THE STRANGLEHOLD OF THE BANKS**—Declare a Moratorium on debt service payments—end practice of high interest, short term loans from banks to cover cash flow problems—end deficit spending which increases reliance on banks.