
October 1983

\$2.00

FORWARD MOTION

A Marxist Newsletter
organized by the
Proletarian Unity League

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As we go to press, Black former State Rep. Mel King has won a stunning victory in the Boston mayoral primary. In a city with only twenty to twenty-five percent minority registered voters and in a crowded field of six major contenders, King gained 29% of the vote. King and City Councillor Ray Flynn wound up in a dead heat for the two November runoff spots. King's "Rainbow Coalition" campaign produced Boston's first Black mayoral finalist ever, and now faces an uphill but winnable November battle.

King's victory comes on the heels of other major Black electoral advances this year, particularly Harold Washington's victory in Chicago. These candidacies have drawn the attention of minority leftists and provide a significant challenge to the left overall. In the late 1970's, there was little popular momentum in electoral politics in the United States. With the

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Right gaining, sections of the left, including our own, who had largely ignored elections began to talk about roads out of their isolation. A number of approaches have been tried, but in the major metropolitan areas, it has been a new electoral thrust of the Black movement which has begun to shake up the old alignments and voter loyalties.

These campaigns have brought their own controversies to the left. In particular, defining necessary or acceptable relationships to the Democratic Party has not come easily. Some activists found Harold Washington's campaign too tied in to the Democratic Party to stomach, despite the racist reaction to his campaign from the local party organization. But in Boston, many white leftists reached just the opposite conclusion about Mel King! They worried that King was too independent of the Democratic Party, in particular its traditionally conservative white working class base in Boston, and they jumped to would-be "urban populist" Ray Flynn. Not surprisingly then, both kinds of objections -- too tied into the Democrats, too harmful to arousing the Democratic base against Reagan -- have been raised against Jesse Jackson.

Washington is not King, who is not Jesse Jackson. Yet there is something troublesome about this difficulty among sections of the left in jumping in on this definite area of movement in U.S. politics today. The Black movement has faced it before! We have given over the bulk of October's FM to commentary on the Washington and King campaigns, to be followed up by additional assessment of actual work done in the King campaign. With other elections coming, and a Jackson for president campaign possible for 1984, a more unified left perspective on electoral opportunities is a real must.

Also in this issue a poem and a personal perspective on the lives and struggles of Chinese-Americans. We are sure you will find them of interest.

A number of readers have inquired about subscription renewals, and you may have noted a delay in getting out this fourth issue for 1984. PUL is going through a process of assessing FM for changes or improvements, a process which will be concluded soon. In the meantime, we decided to extend everyone's subscription automatically. Please bear with us: you will be hearing from us soon!

--The editors



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KING VS. FLYNN

After sixteen years in office, Boston's Mayor Kevin H. White is calling it quits. The Mayor changed Boston's skyline over those years, but his increasingly one-sided pro-development policies opened a gap. Even before he announced his retirement, he faced his most crowded field of opponents ever. And among those announcing early were Mel King, a Black former State Representative, and Ray Flynn a white city councillor. Flynn and King were two of the more politically experienced candidates, and together (along with a token SWP candidacy) set their sights on the leftward end of the political spectrum this year. This has given the people of the city more of a choice, and for many progressives, more of a dilemma, than city elections have offered for years.

Both Mel King and Ray Flynn lay claim to speak for the working man and woman of Boston. And in a way that is true. Both would be "good for labor" in a way that, say, Dave Finnegan or Larry DiCara would not be. Finnegan basically echoed the downtown business view in this campaign, and DiCara threatened massive layoffs, weakening prevailing wage guidelines and other familiar pro-business belt-tightening. King and Flynn stand firmest for the neighborhood-based and jobs-oriented growth policies Boston's working class neighborhoods need to survive.

That two such candidates stand to divide almost half the total vote between them shows that Boston politics has progressed. Ten years ago, it was the likes of John Kerrigan and Louise Day Hicks who ran against the downtown interests—as they saw them...

But why the two, running against each other? The very fact that both remain in the running says something about how far Boston politics still has to go.

In 1979, State Representative Mel King mounted the first truly progressive city-wide campaign Boston had seen in at least a generation. It was a campaign that grew out of battles for "Boston jobs for Boston people," for decent housing and quality desegregated public education, against the wave

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of racist violence in Boston's neighborhoods, and for neighborhood-based city council and school committee elections. King challenged Mayor Kevin White on issues that others would not touch, like White's political arrangements with violent anti-buser Jim Kelly that others wouldn't touch. His 1979 campaign showed new Black community strength, and by the same token it signaled a trend toward political independence among working people, among Black working people in Boston. (One of the problems with some characterizations of candidates Flynn and King in this election has been the tendency to label Flynn the "working class" candidate and King the "minority" candidate, as if the large numbers of Black and Latino working people supporting King are not truly workers.)

King's strong third-place finish earned progressives a return engagement in 1983. Many issues of the 1979 King campaign are the issues of this election; the effort behind his earlier campaign pushed political debate in the city leftward. And with incumbent Kevin White out of the picture, King's chances this time were better. But success also attracts a crowd. This time around, Ray Flynn has also made overtures to liberal and progressive activists and some have signed up. They argue that Flynn "is the one progressive candidate in the race who can win" (Campaign letter, "Progressives for Flynn," 9-8-83).

For working people in Boston, there are two problems with this argument. First, it is a self-defeating argument. As Mel King has commented, "When people say they are not supporting me because I can't win, they're saying that racism is so powerful that instead of fighting it, they'd rather join it." With conservative white voters still unready to support a Black candidate, we find their progressive leadership saying, that's o.k., because a Black couldn't win anyway. This doesn't bring people and communities in Boston together—a goal all progressives seek.

What's worse, that kind of argument grows on you. The same letter quoted above describes Flynn as "the labor candidate in the field." The letter acknowledges Finnegan's record, but decides it is o.k. to ignore King's work for solid, practical plant shutdown legislation, for public employees rights, for creating jobs, and so on.

Mel King's record proves he's for working people



Mel King walks picket line in support of striking telephone workers

- Initiated the passage of a city Executive Order, "Boston Jobs for Boston People," which resulted in over 1,000 jobs for Boston residents, people of color, and women.
- Filed legislation against union-busting that would prevent the use of public funds by hospitals attempting to prohibit unionization.
- Actively opposed the contracting-out of city services to non-union corporations (supported Boston City Hospital workers in preventing the contracting out of laundry services, thus preventing massive layoffs).
- Voted in favor of legislation to require corporations to give advance notice of plans to shut down a plant.
- Actively supported "right-to-know" legislation to inform workers of possible exposure to toxic substances at work.
- Fought for the implementation of affirmative action training, hiring and promotion practices in all of Boston's institutions.
- Supports workers' right to earn prevailing wages in accordance with the Davis Bacon Act.

Flynn supporters argue that only their man can "heal Boston." A pro-Flynn article by Peter Dreier in the weekly, In These Times, is peppered with comments from activists to the effect that, "Ray is the only candidate who can bring this city together racially," or that "he can speak to people that Mel can't." Behind these remarks is a recognition that a strong people's movement in this city depends on unity among white, Black, Latin, and Asian people. But that kind of unity has never been bought cheap. Proclaiming that only a white progressive can win in this year of Black and Latino electoral breakthroughs is both patronizing and cowardly. And it is sad to see activist leaders conclude that only a white can speak to both whites and Blacks. This is especially so when Mel King not only has taken his campaign into all parts of the city, but, as the press has noted, has earned the respect and gotten the attention if not the votes of white audiences throughout Boston.

There is a second problem with the "Progressives for Ray Flynn" position. A handful of labor and community activists backing Flynn have created a candidate larger than life. Ray Flynn asks people to judge him by the changes he would bring to the city. He also says he may have made some mistakes along the way. But he refuses to repudiate specific stands that mark him as a social conservative. And as in the case of so many other urban populists and white political "mavericks," this social conservatism undermines and undercuts Flynn's would-be economic radicalism.

Flynn built his career on two issues -- busing and abortion -- and he fought progressives on both. His backers today try to apologize for those positions, but it doesn't wash. Flynn was not the worst of the worst on busing. But where some liberals today see in Flynn a broker of racial moderation, others remember him as one of the group of established leaders giving credibility to and shielding the anti-busing

"He is the Lech Walesa of Boston politics, the workingman's politician..."



Ray Flynn

mobilization. Flynn and others claimed their only concern was for safeguarding the next generation's education as they saw it, but it is hard to read his bill to make education voluntary that way. For those who were around South Boston in those early years of busing, politicians like Flynn made a mass mobilization against the Black movement legitimate and possible.

Flynn's backers want to write off his abortion stand in the same patronizing way they argue his candidacy: white people won't vote for a Black; opposition to abortion was just following the dictates of a typical working class constituency. No matter that Flynn was not just a supporter, but the state-wide leader in the House of Representatives to ban abortions. No mention that this anti-woman campaign was no fluke, but part of Flynn's generally conservative social outlook. (He also filed legislation to bar women from keeping maiden names after marrying, to take one example.)

Flynn's progressive supporters want to accent the positive. They say his stand today for economic justice will do more for minority working people or for women than clearcut support for social justice, racial equality, affirmative action would. They accept the New York Times' (that pro-labor newspaper) praise of Flynn as a "populist champion of the working poor". They accept the Boston Herald's claim (that other people's newspaper) that Flynn is the Lech Walesa of Boston politics." But movements for economic justice have never succeeded where working people have been divided among each other.

The polarization among Boston's working class communities over the last ten years have been clearer than in perhaps any in the country. And if those ten years have shown anything, they have shown that progress cannot be bought in our city on the backs of Black and Latin people. Boston must rebound from two to three decades of pro-developer, pro-downtown economics. But Boston's problems of race must be faced by anyone who would truly lead the city forward. Ray Flynn may be an unusual candidate in some ways, but he is not the leader of a movement among working people or Boston's neighborhoods generally. Not only does he not see racism as a major problem in Boston, he has refused to acknowledge it specifically as any kind of problem. That his route to economic populism is paved with consistent support for Massachusetts' conservative, tax-cutting Gov. Ed King and, in some reports, early support for Reaganomics, fits with this muddled view of the people's needs.

Mel King offers a different kind of chance. He has pressed forward the hopes and aspirations of the Black community. He has equally been in the forefront of working out policies which can work in Boston to bring jobs, housing, and better conditions for all of us. His first campaign was something of a movement, as the press reports finally acknowledged. After the primary, we may have the chance to pick up where we left off.

--September 1983
J. Hoffman

ALL OUT FOR MEL KING

After the surprise Harold Washington mayoral victory in Chicago, Black mayoral candidate and political activist Melvin H. King began to attract national attention. Earlier, the media pooh-pooed King's chances -- and so did many progressives. Not recognizing the importance of the King campaign in the movement for Black political power and in advancing a left-progressive agenda, many progressives were seduced by the candidacy of white self-styled urban populist Raymond Flynn.

The Harold Washington electoral upset, followed by Pena's victory for Mayor of Denver and the Goode primary victory in Philadelphia, and King's strong showing from the summer on, should lead white progressives in the Flynn camp to reconsider their position.

While King is an independent (he resigned a few years ago from the Democratic Party) running in a nonpartisan election, many of these oppressed nationality candidates ran in Democratic primaries. But either way, these campaigns are critical parts of struggles for political power locally. They help build the momentum of independent political action. Harold Washington's campaign was the clearest example of a Black community mobilizing to choose and elect a representative from its own ranks. But the slogans of "Now its our turn" or "Time for a change" which surfaced in several campaigns (including the unsuccessful Murphy campaign for mayor of Baltimore) highlight the same basic thrust -- a demand for power for the historically disenfranchised.

White supremacist national oppression historically has meant gerrymandering, poll taxes, terror and slander as various means of depriving oppressed nationalities of their basic democratic right to electoral participation and representation. When leftists and progressives jump on Ray Flynn's bandwagon because he supposedly has a better chance of winning, they display a serious blindspot to the demands and aspirations of oppressed nationalities for consistent democracy. They capitulate to "liberal chauvinism."

The Mel King campaign offers the chance to begin to coalesce those forces

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interested in independent (of the two major parties) politics. How? By creating a left-progressive pole with a definite agenda for the historically disenfranchised. With that agenda specific overtures can be made to oppressed nationality communities, progressive union locals, women's organizations, gay and lesbian organizations, and others who have an interest in consistent democracy and political empowerment. Depending on the strength of such coalitions, there can be collective movement around specific legislative measures at least at the state and municipal levels. Needless to say, this kind of unity will initially be very fragile.



Joyce and Mel King greet Chicago's Mayor Harold Washington.

Will this new group of Black and Chicano mayors be forced to capitulate to big business along the lines of Detroit's Coleman Young? There is no simple answer to this question. Mel King is not Goode, who is not Pena who is not Coleman Young. There are major differences among the candidates, and there are important differences among the cities themselves. Also, most attention has been on campaigns in larger cities, or the Bradley campaign for governor of California, or Rev. Jesse Jackson's possible presidential candidacy. There are also countless, less publicized candidacies in smaller cities and regions. The implications of a successful candidacy in the South or in smaller cities elsewhere may be dramatically different, and the possibilities for change and reform may be greater. But the importance of progressive oppressed nationality candidacies today goes beyond their prospects for immediate success. In addition, how we approach these campaigns will help determine their long term contributions to the struggle.

TWO LESSONS FOR ELECTORAL ACTIVISTS

For one thing, the capture of any governmental office by a Black or Latino will not mean that he or she will gain the power his or her white predecessor held. The actual seat of real power can shift around, and laying hold of that governing power can be like trying to grab a bubble under water. When an oppressed nationality candidate gains an office, practical authority may shift to some other municipal position or to the state level. (New York's experience with "Big MAC" in the 1970's shows how quickly financial control of

the city can be shifted out of the hands of elected officials.)

The second point is one the left always repeats, but it is no less true today. Any failure to continue to organize at the community level in support of those issues endorsed by a progressive candidate will leave the door open to back-sliding on those issues. The pressure of the "business community" during periods of fiscal austerity can be immense. While a mayor would be foolhardy to ignore business' concerns and burn his or her bridges behind through premature anti-business measures, popular support among working people will be essential in offsetting that pressure. As happened in Chile under Allende and in Jamaica under Manley, big business can ally with small proprietors and turn their objections to progressive governments into a popular cause.

Organizing popular support does not mean the automatic creation of an organization out of the campaign workers and volunteers. Following the 1979 mayoral election in Boston, Mel King campaign workers created an organization known as the Boston Peoples Organization. BPO played a significant role in fighting Proposition 2 1/2 [a tax cutting initiative similar to California's Prop. 13 -- ed.] and laying the groundwork for the successful "Campaign for District Representation" which reformed Boston's city council and school committee elections. Yet the BPO never attracted and united with significant numbers of Blacks and Latinos. Nor was it able to root itself among white workers to any degree.

A campaign organization may be one basis for the future organization of a political leader's popular support. Coalition efforts around specific issues can build a sense of working unity and can provide the initial impetus for a new organization. But lasting organization requires clear and active leadership over a long period.

The fight for Black political power and the movement of an independent anti-racist, pro-working class politics will be enhanced by victories in campaigns like Mel King's 1983 campaign. No one or even several progressive mayoral victories will resolve the crisis of capitalism as it affects our cities. But local victories can be one step in stopping the erosion of the people's standard of living, while strengthening our defense of reforms and rights won by oppressed nationalities and women in the 1960's and 1970's. These victories can be the beginning of the left-progressive unity necessary to slow and eventually reverse the stampede of the Reaganites, the New Right, and Democratic "new realists" who all seek resolution of the crisis of U.S. capitalism on the backs, heads and stomachs of working people.

--September 1983

R. T. Simms

JOIN MEL KING

Mel King says,
Boston Jobs for Boston People.
Do you not believe he is right,
Whether they be women, laborers, business-minded, gay, Asian,
Black, or white?
Mel King is for better schools, better communities, better streets,
better health care, and better chances.
Mel King has worked hard toward these goals.
So don't believe what you've been told.
Check his record.
You might be one of the few - yes, I'm speaking of you -
Who judge this man by the color of this skin, and not by his content,
Or by his shoes, his clothes, or even his bow tie.
Now look at Ronald Reagan! He was a movie star,
His make-up is applied without a flaw;
His skin is white and he is dressed just right.
And even he has writers to prepare his speech.
Now that's a peach!
Does that make him for you?
The blunders he articulates are captured by the press.
The job he has done on us you speak of in disgust.
The jobs he has taken from us leaves less meaning
To our lives, and other people are starving or just die.
And you, you're still trying to decide
And judging this man by the way he's dressed.
Does the fact that he works to wipe out racism, sexism,
Capitalism and discrimination not account for something?
Does not the fact that he's working toward improved conditions
That would eventually decrease crime,
Instill more meaning to life, and provide more jobs
Account for even more?
Well, if it does, then go for it.
Vote for the man.
That's for you - and stop being one of the few.
Join Mel King.

Maxine Fennell

THE HAROLD WASHINGTON CAMPAIGN

The Washington campaign in Chicago was an important struggle in which all revolutionary socialists should have participated. While the campaign had many dimensions, its primary character was a struggle for democratic rights.

This struggle reflected demands for better housing, education, jobs, city contracts, and less police brutality. The campaign swept through the Black community with the spirit of the civil rights movement, reflecting the pent-up anger and hopes of the oppressed minorities. Carried to victory were also a number of new city council members, including Wallace Davis, a well-known victim of police brutality, and Bobby Rush, ex-minister of information for the Black Panther Party in Illinois.

Washington put together a coalition which looks much like a third party organization. This consisted of long time white liberal reformists who have opposed machine politics over the years, white leftists, the large majority of Latino voters (particularly the Puerto Rican community), about 15% of the white working class (mainly the advanced sector), and of course the overwhelming majority of Blacks.

While part of this organization had been regular Democratic Party people in the minority communities, the campaign attracted thousands of new voters and activists who never were involved in electoral politics. Although the basic content of the campaign was one of democratic rights, there was also a strong emphasis on reform politics. It was clear to minorities that only by smashing the old Democratic Party machinery could democratic rights be won.

Lined up behind the Republican Bernard Epton were almost all major financial concerns, the overwhelming majority of the white petty-bourgeoisie and small business community, the mob, the most racist elements in the city, and the large majority of the backward sections of the white working class (which is the majority of the class at this time). This has constituted the ruling circles of the Democratic Party in Chicago and its base for the last four decades.

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The Washington campaign did not strengthen the Democratic Party in Chicago. Washington won in spite of the Party, and many minorities understand that perfectly. This means that Chicago minorities can see themselves as an independent force, capable of victory without the Democrats -- certainly a big step towards independent class politics.

For socialists it was a chance to take a clear-cut stand. Just as in the Boston busing struggle a decade ago when the racist reaction was so strong, so too in Chicago, every revolutionary had to say what side he or she stood on. It is only through a consistent and strong stand against national oppression that the strategic alliance [of the working class and oppressed nationalities in the United States] can be built. To boycott the Washington campaign on the grounds that he was a Democrat would simply prove to minorities that the white left deserves the chauvinist label it has held for so long.



Barry Washington, Illinois. All Democrats are not the same. (AP photo)

Now some people say because Washington is a Democrat that this was not a struggle for democratic rights, but a cruel joke on minorities to support the very system which is responsible for their oppression. Since the Democratic Party is a party of capitalism, any activity which supports that party infringes on the independence of the working class. But can't we say the same for all reform struggles? That people are only fighting to make capitalism, the system responsible for their oppression, run better? The fact is that there was a tre-

mendous amount of energy and expectations released by this campaign. Demands are being made which do not please the ruling class. Of course they will try to manipulate and control those reforms. So what's new with that? An important fact is that Washington is trying to win through to his major goals, and not cut a deal. This is the reason for the fierce struggle now going on.

What must be understood is that without building the strategic alliance there will never be anything such as independent class activity. The American ruling class has based its power on divide and rule. As long as they can continue the split between white labor and minorities there can be no significant progress for the multinational working class. The strategic alliance hinges on a consistent fight against all forms of national oppression. Without paying attention to the national contradiction, the class question can only be dealt with in a distorted and ultimately unsuccessful manner.

A concrete example of the interrelationship between the national and class question was in a large steelworkers union local in Chicago. A militant

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union president was defeated in her last election when she faced a coalition of opposition forces. Arrayed against her were those aligned with the international, the center caucus (actually the right wing of the Sadlowski movement), and the older and conservative minority caucus. During the primary battle the reform forces were the only whites to fully and actively support Washington, doing door to door work, and fighting inside the union for his endorsement. The old Sadlowski forces (including Sadlowski himself) backed Richard Daley, and the international caucus backed Jane Byrne. This caused the minorities to split from those forces and join in working with the reform caucus, in effect realigning the balance of power in the local. Reform forces had also opposed concessions which meant less jobs for minorities. By taking these positions in defense of minority rights, a stronger front has been built in the fight for class demands.

The Washington campaign also put socialists in the position of organizing new ward organizations. There are fifty wards in Chicago, and each ward is divided into precincts usually covering about eight blocks. Through the campaign, independent Marxists were able to build a number of ward organizations in alliance with other progressives. This was done in white working class wards as well as white middle class areas. After the election, these ward organizations have been kept alive, and they have allied with minority ward organizations in which many minority revolutionary activists have been involved also.

CONTINUING THE GRASS ROOTS FOCUS

Now the question is how to keep things going, and in what direction. On this question many different opinions exist. To me, the main focus should be community work: basic grassroots campaigns which focus on education, housing, and unemployment. The ward organizations should not be seen as electoral groups. When necessary a critical attitude should be taken to city government, and pressure put on Washington to help counterbalance the banks and business community. These forces and the system of city government have already forced Washington into a number of compromises. That's capitalism and the nature of politics, and we should expect that, but not tail in an uncritical role.

Other people feel that the wards should focus primarily on elections. Run people for Democratic Party Committee, get into the Democratic Party organization in Chicago and nationally. One suggestion lays out the plan to run people for delegates to the national convention on a progressive platform and says we are the "new" Democrats, as opposed to the "old" Democrats of Daley and Byrne. This direction is the most influential, including among Marxists. This trend also sees ongoing community work, but it directs its focus into the Democratic Party rather than onto an independent path. To me this is the wrong direction, and here the question of independence truly comes to the fore.

For example, what does the Democratic Party platform really mean? Certainly no candidate runs on it, nor is any candidate held to it once in office. In this context, what are we for that the Kennedy-Cranston wing is not already supporting? Full employment? They will bring up the Humphrey-Hawkins bill. A political settlement in El Salvador? Already their position. A nuclear freeze? Talk to Cranston. A national health coverage plan? Talk to

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Kennedy. That is what makes the Democratic Party so strong; it can always find room for you, incorporate your energies, and then tell you to go campaign for Mondale. If the Party has a progressive anti-Reagan program, does that mean we focus our efforts in door-to-door work for Glenn or Mondale?

I think not. Rather we should focus our energies on the progressive movements, and make sure they remain independent. Such diverse struggles as El Salvador solidarity work, the peace movement, anti-Klan organizing, resistance to contract concessions, and unemployment groups, are not tied to the Democratic Party. Yet some people have stated everything ought to be focused on the primaries and advocate we should help move the anti-Reagan front into this arena.

So the question is: does the Democratic Party become our base of activity? Do we direct our efforts into changing or splitting the party, and do we use our influence in mass organizations to join campaign organizations?

I think that is an incorrect orientation, and in fact would stifle the mass movement and curb its ability to freely fight for reforms.

SUPPORTING JESSE JACKSON

Our efforts should not be directed into the Democratic Party, but into the mass movements. Mass movements can target the Democratic Party, can direct their efforts at time at the Democratic Party, but that is different from seeing the Party as your arena for organizing or the soil in which you put down your roots. In essence the question becomes do we want to build a revolutionary trend within the mass movements, or simply maintain activity in reform movements with generally progressive politics? I believe we should work in a non-sectarian manner in the reform struggles, seeking to unite the advanced within those movements into a militant, class conscious, multi-national trend.

Real involvement in electoral politics is still new for most communists. Every question hasn't been answered, and each situation presents new problems. The Jesse Jackson campaign for president (if indeed he runs) brings on a whole new situation. Already his "pre-campaign" has been innovative and impressive. His issues hit home, voter registration in the South and among GIs is politically important, and his articulation of the "rainbow coalition" the germ of a third party base. Jackson's campaign also presents a major contradiction to the Democratic Party. They want the Black vote, but not Black power inside the Party.



Yet Jackson clearly directs all the energies of his campaign into the Democratic Party and wants a popular coalition to "take over" the Party. He is pushing for the recognition and power of the Black bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, and his efforts to create a base is to have some bargaining chips inside the Party organization. So can communists support Jackson's campaign without falling prey to his strategy? Not an easy question, and one I certainly don't have a complete answer for.

The idea of going door-to-door and bringing up all the issues of Jackson's campaign is attractive. But as communists we must look beyond the spontaneity and pragmatism of the moment. In putting a major effort and focus into this campaign where would be heading, what would we be creating? It seems to me we immediately define the struggle as one inside the Democratic Party. We are forced into a situation where we say we want a floor fight at the convention. But can the Democratic Party be a vehicle for major reforms of the imperialist system? I do not think so, but this is the position we put ourselves in.

We are now speaking about the national level and not local politics, and there is a great difference. Locally it is possible to build a lasting independent organization which can affect local conditions. But the control of the Democratic Party at a national level is firmly in the hands of the ruling class. They will be more than happy to have you campaign for their candidate. And that is the position we will be in when Jackson gives his support to Mondale at the convention. Of course the Party will pledge its support to the anti-Reagan issues, and probably ask Jackson to campaign for them, as all good post-primary candidates do. But if we truly wish to affect the national scene, the best place is in the independent mass movements, not on Jackson's coattails.

But I do think there is a way to support Jackson's issues at a different level. Inside our mass organizations his campaign should be brought up, endorsements sought in union locals and by community groups, and support given to his issues. But we should not divert the energy and program of these organizations into the primaries. They should continue to remain independent and work on their own goals. We can point out that the Democrats will never allow a Black to run for president, but that we support that right. We can say that our support for Jackson is based on issues, and that we will continue to work for those issues whether Reagan or Mondale is president.

For those who think a boycott is right or for those who believe we should roll up our sleeves and get to work, perhaps this stand is too half way. But it seems to me a basically correct orientation at this time, especially since we are feeling our way through new experiences, and do not need to jump with both feet in either direction.

—Jerry Harris, Federation of Revolutionary Socialists
August, 1983

WINNING WITH WASHINGTON

Major magazine cover stories announcing the "New Black Power"...Nightly news of the Chicago Democratic machine under seige...lively press coverage of the Black movement debate over a Black presidential bid... Who can ignore the continuing fallout from Harold Washington's successful campaign for Mayor of Chicago? In an otherwise drab election year, Washington's campaign stands out, with over 100,000 new voters from Chicago's Black and Latin wards. With a lackluster 1984 presidential primary season already shaping up, the new Black impact on electoral politics commands attention.

Washington's election, Wilson Goode's victory in Philadelphia, recent Chicano breakthroughs in San Antonio and Denver, and the strength of campaigns like Mel King's in Boston may fit a new political pattern. In the past, a big part of the equal rights battle focused on getting legislation passed. The Right's counterattack today includes efforts at legislative repeal, but it has been more effective at simply undermining the enforcement of existing laws. Affirmative action, equal educational opportunity, the social "safety net," and voting rights remain the law of the land, but Reagan era officeholders and administrators are steadily eroding their effect. (The Supreme Court's elimination of the "legislative veto" over the administration of new laws may reinforce this pattern.)

This shift means that who runs and staffs state and local governments has growing importance again. Reagan's "New Federalism" would make this even truer if it ever gets anywhere. Not only has this reality tugged at the Black left's Black United Front and National Black Independent Political Party, but it places tremendous pressure on the traditional lobbying tactics of the NAACP. (Women's organizations like NOW as well as the AFL-CIO also are moving toward a more direct role in fielding and nominating candidates for office.)

WASHINGTON ELECTION: DID THE BLACK MOVEMENT WIN?

Washington's victory advanced the Black struggle in several ways.

* The campaign ends the exclusion of Black Chicago from citywide

politics. This has been a long phase of electoral struggle for Chicago's Black movement, set in motion a decade ago by efforts like the electoral rebuff of DA Edward Hanrahan for his deadly raid on the Black Panther Party. Through the successful Washington campaign, the Chicago Black community increased its organization and power tremendously. In addition, this campaign has probably put an end to citywide politics pretty much as a "family affair" among former Daley associates.

* Washington's victory marks a real step toward ending Chicago's infamous patronage system. This battle is far from won, but for the first time the ringleaders of this racially-biased and non-union-eligible fiefdom are on the defensive. The seriousness of the threat is the key to the racist backlash organized by Democratic ward leaders after the primary.

* A massive voter registration drive grew up around the Washington campaign, and the Chicago success now bolsters similar efforts in New York, Boston, Baltimore and a number of other cities.

* Finally, the Washington victory gives practical meaning to the slogan, "With or Without the Democrats." Washington ran for Mayor as a Democrat, and he sought the white Democratic vote. But his campaign did not depend on that support and succeeded without it. This victory will help change the terms of progressive coalition politics in the years ahead. After the primary Washington commented, "We try to push one of our own and everybody asks us for explanations... Is there anything wrong with a black base?"

This last success in particular raises for many the question: what's next for Black electoral initiative? But some activists instead ask, is it real? The International Socialists, for one, stood aside from the Washington campaign and criticized its ties to the Democratic Party as a dead end for the Black movement. Dan La Botz's article in Changes (May 1983) headlined "...The Winners Are The Democrats" -- not the Black movement.

Today's electoral experimentation does ride a crest of real dissatisfaction with late 1970's Democratic Party politics, but it is still taking place largely along traditional party lines. Some activists will be satisfied only if ferment among Black voters (or the "gender gap") results in immediate practical momentum out from under the Democratic Party. La Botz argues against support for any candidates running on Democratic Party ballot lines. In doing so, he sets unrealistic or abstract standards for what is truly progressive and independent in electoral politics today.

In the case of Harold Washington's campaign, La Botz criticizes the absence of a real program and a true progressive coalition in the campaign. Progressive program and a movement-oriented campaign, along with democratic organization of the campaign itself, are three useful criteria for judging the independence of a political candidacy. (For more on these criteria, see "Electoral Politics and the Left Today: Fighting the Defensive Battle," J. Hoffman, Forward Motion, March 1982.) A closer look at La Botz's objections on the first two counts should help us decide who gained from the Washington campaign.

PROGRAM, PROGRAM, WHO'S GOT THE PROGRAM?

Dan La Botz cannot quite make up his mind about Washington's campaign program. "The program was pride..." blasts his headline, and hardly enough he says. Later, he concedes "social welfare" as well as pride to be in the program and that this was enough at least to be in "conflict with the program of business." So we're getting somewhere already. In fact, when La Botz gets down to details, he allows that Washington has a program of "impeccable liberalism" -- more than you can say about most Democrats still at large today. La Botz mentions Washington's stand against plant closings in a mass struggle underway against Westinghouse, concluding that Washington also "reached out to workers" (implying that "pride" was not a workers' concern--that is, that workers are white workers...)

La Botz goes even further. He says "the most important part of Washington's program has been his promise to eliminate [the patronage system]." So now Washington not only has a program, he has enough of a program to have a "most important part," and that most important part is a challenge to the patronage system. Now what is wrong with that?

For the Left, program all too often means a shopping list of paper demarcations about this and that. Useful agitational points perhaps, but not much more. Today's rebuilding of independent electoral politics will not get far without a recognition that practical politics does not run on that kind of program. It runs on slogans and immediate platforms pinpointing the actual lines of motion among real political forces.

The Chicago machine outlasted by several decades the decline of ward boss patronage politics in most cities. In fact, Chicago politics has been frozen at a point just before minority communities and new unions began to flex their muscles in the 1930's and 1940's. Some Blacks made it into the machine, but the machine operation persisted. Without a doubt, breaking down this political relic will unlock Chicago politics. The intensity of the fight between Washington and the ward machine bloc on the city council since the election shows just how much is at stake.

Some might argue that an issue like the city's industrial future -- whether, for example, it will be founded on more corporate concessions like the New Detroit -- has greater significance. Sure, an independent electoral coalition for a democratic economic program would be great. But who can really expect the Black movement or other progressive social forces to gain real influence over Chicago politics so long as the machine is the predominant and unchallenged power? Big business has always been uneasy with the machine, but under Daley it learned to live with it. To the extent that Washington and his supporters can make good on their pledge against the patronage system, the door will be open for mass challenges to big business' Chicago agenda. (Whether Washington will lead that challenge is a question for the future.)

La Botz is so intent on running down Washington's connection to the Democrats, he never actually says what is wrong with the "most important" part of the new Mayor's program or what would have made up a better programmatic core. In fact, dismissing Washington's political statement as "pride" insults

the candidate and the movement. La Botz tosses around the slogan "Black pride" as if it was comparable to Boston's Celtics Pride rather than a powerful rallying point against racist abuses -- which Chicago's city agencies epitomize.

BUILDING A COALITION

La Botz carefully notes the roots of Washington's campaign going back to the 1920's and 1930's. By 1976, he comments, Black power had reached the point where the "Black vote was key to any future election." He refers to the stresses this put on the old machine, to confrontation between Washington and the white power structure, and he describes Chicago as a city where "even voting itself requires some courage." Yet with little more explanation than his dismissal of Washington's program, La Botz faults the Washington campaign for not being part of a movement. He says in a couple places that the campaign didn't start as a movement and that it "substituted for a movement." The thrust of the article is that a Democratic Party operation substituted for a movement-based campaign.

This line of reasoning has several problems. First, it gives the Democratic Party too much credit. La Botz focuses too much on the outside support Washington received from national Democratic leaders. Blacks already overwhelmingly vote Democratic. The issue for the national Democratic Party leadership was not how to maximize new gains for their party but rather how to minimize the danger of defection.

Between the lack of support for Washington from liberal Democrats in the primary and the poisonous show put on by local Party officials after, a new wave of Black disgust with the Democrats was in the making. The primary showed that Democratic leaders were far from eager for the chance to move in, but after the primary they simply had to head off disaster. In reporting that Democratic Party leadership will "have to back" Washington in the final election, Newsweek's cover story (April 11, 1983) bears this out. It does the Washington campaign an injustice to suggest that Blacks needed to see Walter Mondale getting mobbed in a white church in order to get behind that campaign.

Not only did Washington not need the outside support to win, his win without substantial support from white ethnic wards gives the Black movement a measure of independent strength it did not have before. Other successful Black mayoral races have needed a substantial white vote to win. However much this simply reflects local demographics it has forced compromise with the white power structures in Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. In ideological terms, this pressure for white support has said to the Black and Latin movements that speaking too definitely for minority communities would cost a Black or Latin candidate the election. Washington's victory strikes back at this pressure on the national movements. Out there in the real world, Washington's campaign gives the Black movement a new measure of independence in electoral politics, rather than a greater subservience to liberal Democratic dictates.

Second, La Botz associates the lack of a real coalition with its lack of independence from the Democrats. The lack of Black-white unity (outside of the

liberal Lakefront areas and among voters influenced by the gay and women's movements) was pretty glaring in this election. But what does running on the Democratic line have to do with this? There is nothing that Washington could have done as an Independent that he didn't or couldn't do as a Democrat to seek out white support. Should we think his staff grew complacent about reaching white working class voters because the local AFL-CIO delivered its traditional post-primary unanimous endorsement to the Democratic nominee? Should we think that he was so naive as to count on the Democratic presidential candidates to overcome Chicago's patterns of white political privilege?

For all the polarization of the election, the Washington campaign was a step toward the kind of coalition La Botz describes and progressives seek. No real coalition was possible in Chicago on the old white terms, and the essential forces for change in the white communities, like the unions, had little pressure on them to do anything about it. Now the momentum around the Washington campaign shows the unions not just the need to move but also the direction to go in. Presumably some will move in the elections to come.

MASS MOVEMENTS AND VOTER REGISTRATION

Third, with the renewal of progressive electoral politics just barely underway, we ought to worry more about where to begin than who's capturing what. Today progressives need to be practical and flexible in their tactics, not rigid and doctrinaire. By any practical estimate of US politics, a new progressive or social democratic party is a long ways off, and different kinds of initiative today are liable to feed into it. The Citizens Party campaigns are one kind of independent politics, but independent electoral initiative today can emerge in campaigns run on Democratic ballot lines.

The Washington campaign was a real beginning for a new progressive electoral politics in Chicago. However much you may want to call it a Democratic Party campaign, it was also a campaign of the Black movement. The Washington campaign evoked an active and enthusiastic response from Chicago's Black community. The search for an alternative to Byrne got started two years ago and was independent of Harold Washington's own interest. The challenge to Byrne gained momentum in last year's Alan Streeter campaign and in the dramatic Black boycott of the city's 1982 Octoberfest. Most important, a wide range of Chicago's Black organizations (including but not just Operation PUSH) joined together in one of the biggest voter registration drives since the 1960's.

When progressives talk about the prospects for electoral realignment, new parties, and so on, discussion today invariably turns to voter registration. Massive changes in US voting patterns, like the ones that created the Republican Party, that enabled the Republican party to bury the Democratic-Populist "fusion" in 1896, or that installed the New Deal coalition, resulted more from bringing new blocs of voters to the polls than from shifting old allegiances. Today, almost half the adult population doesn't vote and non-voters are more working class than voters. This basic fact fuels registration drives by peace activists, Black and Latino organizations, and other community-based groups.

Yet any electoral activist will tell you that voter drives consume enormous amounts of energy usually for limited results. Most incumbents, Democrat or Republican, don't worry too much about that kind of challenge. So why was the Harold Washington effort so successful?

Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, former welfare rights activists and chroniclers of that movement, today are working and talking about voter registration as part of a new electoral strategy. Their comments suggest an answer. They argue that voter registration only succeeds on a mass scale when it is "simultaneously an electoral strategy and a movement strategy." Otherwise, the pressures not to vote today are too intense; besides, voter registration drives are vulnerable to attack and disruption by the authorities. "Without a protest movement, registration cannot be promoted on a truly mammoth scale, millions of new voters cannot be moved to the polls, and a party realignment cannot be precipitated" ("Realigning the Democrats," The Organizer, Winter 1983).

From this point of view, the success of the Chicago drive suggests that powerful social forces centered on the Black movement were at work. Given the cynicism and electoral withdrawal which characterized the 1970's, it is hard to imagine 150,000 people registering in one city on any other terms.

* * *

La Botz's objections to Harold Washington's campaign are worth pursuing not because they are so terrible. He writes out of support for both a stronger Black movement and commitment to progressive electoral initiative. The Left needs both. But his reservations and hesitations are also part of a wider and continuing impracticality on the part of the US Left. There is no point hoping for a renewal of progressivism in electoral politics if activists are going to get squeamish about the long back and forth we can expect with Democratic liberalism. And in judging the progressiveness or independence of a campaign like Washington's, the white Left cannot afford to miss where a blow is being struck in the freedom struggle. The Washington campaign drew on a growing electoral orientation in wide sectors of the Black movement, and in turn it provided a political context for strengthening a progressive electoral thrust. This is something we should all be part of.

—July 1983
Jonathan Hoffman

Note: this article and a reply by Dan LaBotz also appears in the September 1983 Changes.

CHINESE

What do you think of when you hear "China," or "Chinese"?
Chinatown, with Chinese food, slanted eyes, opium dens, or
maybe Reno and gambling or just laundry?

Do you think of the small but strong man that built your railroads
in the west, carrying each piece of track over hill and
mountain on his back -
Do you think of the man that was allowed to come into this county,
but forbidden by law to be accompanied by wife and family -
Do you think of the man that was banned from trade unions because
he was too small?
and that's not all -

Do you ever think of the fear of concentration camps just because
the Chinese resemble the Japanese,
Or the fact that after they carried all that track
there was nothing left for them to do?

Do you think that is why the Chinese established laundries,
restaurants and stores of their own,
Do you think they smuggled other Chinese into the country so they
wouldn't have to be alone?
Do you think that the Chinese always wanted to live in small sections
of a city not allowed to grow,
Or that they were forced to out of fear that the rest of the
world would soon know
that they just smuggled in mother, sister, or Aunt So & So?

China is a large country with a large population.
People live on land and sea. There is not enough space
For everyone to have a decent place.

Do you think that is why Chinese migrated?
Do you think these things are really so?
Well, the Chinese don't think it. They really know.

—Maxine Fennell



Courtesy of Bancroft Library

CHINESE-AMERICAN

Growing up Chinese in America, I was not taught my people's history here. All I knew was what my parents told me, and they didn't tell me much -- trying to protect me from their own bad experiences, trying to make my way easier than theirs had been. For example, when they bought their first house in a white neighborhood, the neighbors complained and didn't want them there. I was thirty before that fact got pried out of them.

The main lesson about being Chinese in America that my parents taught me from my earliest years was, "You have to be better to be equal." Work harder, study harder, and still see white people passing you by. When our friends were out partying, us Chinese kids were in studying. That's how the stereotype of the quiet studious Chinese came into being -- no muscles, buck teeth, three inch thick glasses. It was bad enough as a girl being typed that way, but think how hard it was for Chinese boys in this macho society! But no one -- including us Chinese kids who resented being kept in to study -- realized that the pressure put on us was a reaction to discrimination. It was our parents' generation's strategy to help their children make it in white America, and to gain access to the jobs they had been refused. They thought education would be the key to success. Education has always been highly valued in Chinese culture. Knowledge, not money, was respected; the scholar, and not the businessman, was the one looked up to in China.

But this idea of being better educated to become equal didn't work before the 1940's, because getting ahead by far outdistancing your competition implies that there is competition. For most of our history in America, Chinese weren't even allowed to run the race. In the 1930's, when Chinese parents in California -- most of them restaurant, laundry, or garment factory workers -- were able to get their children into the free state universities, 90% of those children graduated from college. They graduated, but then could only get jobs back in the laundries and garment shops! With all the current propaganda about the "successful" Chinese, most people don't realize how recently the Chinese have begun to be allowed some participation in American life.

BOTH EXCLUDED AND EXPLOITED

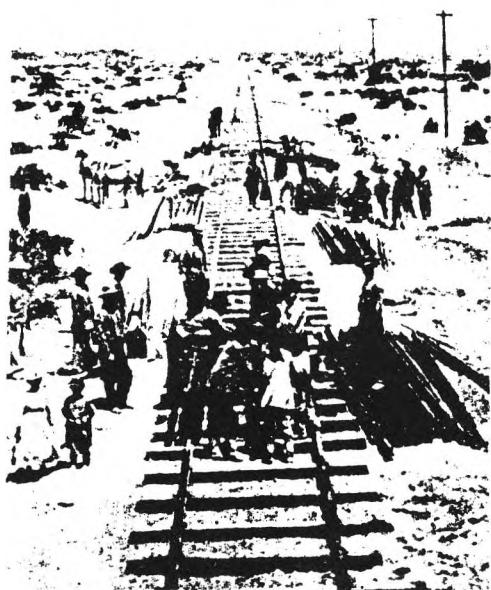
The Gold Rush of 1849 brought the first wave of Chinese immigrants. At that time, America was a vast land, underpopulated and full of resources, a land of immigrants whose doors were supposedly open to all. "Give us your poor, your hungry, your downtrodden." But almost as soon as the Chinese arrived, they found hostility and racism. White mineworkers thought that Chinese labor "degraded" white, since Chinese would work for lower wages. No workers were yet organized into unions. The sensible thing would have been to organize workers of all colors into unions and fight for equal wages for equal work. But the white miners made so much noise against the Chinese that they got a law passed saying the "foreign miners" would have to pay an extra tax. This was aimed straight at the Chinese who paid 98% of those taxes, and that tax money amounted to a half of the income of the state of California in the 1850's.

Obviously, white capitalists benefited from this system and wanted to keep employing Chinese labor -- in order to exploit them for taxes and low wages. The Sacramento Daily News, a Republican newspaper which represented business views, said they were glad to have the Chinese as long as they did "labor which Americans would not condescend to perform," and "accepted compensation which Americans would not receive."

In the 1860's and 1870's, the first labor organizing began in California. But instead of uniting all labor, one of the main goals of that early white labor movement was to stop Chinese from coming to America! So the white workers wanted to get rid of them while white capitalists wanted to exploit them -- a classic position for workers of color, caught between a rock and a hard place.

What with the anti-Chinese attitudes and the high taxes, mining got pretty uncomfortable as well as unprofitable. The Chinese went into farm labor and railroad work where they had their usual lot, the hardest jobs, the lowest pay. In 1863, Irish railroad workers struck for higher wages. Chinese labor was used to break that strike. They worked so hard, the railroad companies eventually used 20,000 Chinese laborers in building the transcontinental railroad that was completed in 1869, built on the bones of many a Chinese worker.

Anti-Chinese sentiment kept increasing in California. In the 1870's Californians succeeded in making Chinese exclusion a national issue. Congressional hearings were held to hear why Chinese should not be allowed to immigrate. The Chinese were called "a social, moral, and political curse." Newspapers said, "We are determined that the Mongolian, with his pig-tail, his heathenism, his filthy habits,



shall not increase in this part of the world." It was said that the Chinese were inferior, coming from the lowest classes in China, that if white and Chinese mixed, it would degenerate the Anglo-Saxon "race." (Laws against intermarriage of Chinese and whites remained on the books in twelve states up until 1967.)

It was said that the Chinese were unsanitary and bred disease. For example, during a smallpox epidemic in 1875, a city health officer said, "My belief is that the cause is the presence in our midst of 30,000 unscrupulous, lying and treacherous Chinamen, who have disregarded our sanitary laws." This gave the excuse to burn down many parts of Chinatown. Medical science later found that disease is not spread through the air as was believed in the 1870's, but through germs carried by rats and fleas.

Some argued that the Chinese didn't want to assimilate, but wanted to keep their own ways. Whites characterized their "own ways" as opium smoking, rat-eating, prostitution, and gambling. The anti-Chinese agitation stirred racist emotions and increased violence against the Chinese. In 1871, a mob riot in Los Angeles beat, mutilated, and lynched fifteen Chinese and looted all Chinese buildings. In 1877, 10,000 San Franciscans assaulted the Chinese with clubs and set fires in Chinatown.

All this took place right after the Civil War, which our history books say was fought to give freedom and equality to Afro-Americans. But if it were simply a matter of white concern for justice, the Chinese would have been brought into the American process as well. The defeat of slavery brought the white establishment the problem of a black citizenry to whom they still did not want to grant equal rights.

To avoid that problem in the case of the Chinese, states with large Chinese populations wanted to simply exclude Asians from immigration and from citizenship. In 1882, the Chinese had the honor of being the first immigrant group to be denied entry into this land of immigrants. The Exclusion Act restricted the entry of Chinese workers into the United States, and denied all Chinese the right to become citizens. Chinese women were particularly barred, thus making family life impossible.

LIFE UNDER THE EXCLUSION ACTS

When my father talked to us of his childhood in Seattle's Chinatown in the 1920's, having left China as a young boy, he talked about living with uncles and male cousins. I didn't understand until much later that mothers and aunts and sisters were left behind not by choice, but by law -- often never to be seen again. Chinese men saw themselves as sojourners in a foreign land, working and saving enough to go back home to China for good some day. For most, that time never came, and they were condemned to live in male communities, never knowing the warmth of family and home.

So the Chinese did not see themselves as part of the American labor movement, although their contributions to the building of America were monumental. Not allowed to compete for jobs with whites, the Chinese had no choice but to find little niches of their own, outside American economic

structures. How did they get into the business of washing other people's dirty laundry? That was considered "women's work," something no white man would do. So in the mining and railroad communities, all it took was an ironing board, an iron, and some soap, and the Chinese could have his own little job. A Chinese restaurant is also separate from the white job market. That was my grandfather's business, which mainly catered to other Chinese.

Employment was not the only areas of discrimination. Laws were passed that stripped the Chinese of rights. Chinese could not own land. Whites could testify against a Chinese person, but a Chinese could not testify against a white. This law gave whites free rein to do anything up to and including murder a Chinese. (And have things changed that much when Vincent Chin was murdered in Detroit in 1982 and his killers were freed on three years probation and a \$3000 fine?)

Laws required Chinese to carry residence papers, like the passbooks blacks must carry in South Africa. Anyone caught without papers could be deported on the spot. There were laws denying the Chinese the right to practice their own health care, like herbal medicine and acupuncture, even though they were denied access to the American health care system. Because of their discriminatory laws, the saying grew up, "You haven't got a Chinaman's chance."

The Exclusion Act definitely slowed Chinese immigration to a trickle. But a loophole was created in 1906, when a lucky earthquake destroyed all public records in San Francisco. Since immigration was allowed for those few persons born in the United States, and since the records were destroyed, it was difficult for immigration authorities to prove that a Chinese immigrant was not born in America. And once a man was recognized a citizen, he could bring his children over when they came of age. And once a man could bring over his children, what could stop him from reporting extra sons of relatives and friends, and bringing them over as well? These were called "paper sons." To try to separate real from false sons, U.S. immigration set up a detention center at Angell Island in San Francisco Bay to interrogate potential Chinese immigrants. It could be weeks before your turn to be questioned came up; if you failed and appealed, you could spend years at Angell Island in conditions worse than prison.

So from the 1840's to the 1940's the Chinese in America were outcasts. They were stereotyped as "inscrutable," "unscrupulous," "untrustworthy," and yet, like other people of color, Chinese were given no chance to earn those labels. What did they mean? That Chinese overcharged for laundry work?! As for a strategy for integrating into American life, the Chinese had none. They remained Chinese, not American, and during their life here, had only a strategy for survival: be as quiet as possible to avoid notice, and work in jobs outside the American labor market.

It was not until 1943 -- less than forty years ago -- that the Exclusion Acts were repealed. Why? Because China and the United States became allies in World War II. It is amazing how government policies and pronouncements can change public opinion over night. Suddenly, after the war, the Chinese were America's good friends. Our public image changed to the hard-working,

studious, goody-goody stereotype I grew up in the shadow of. And because Chinese women were finally allowed entry, Chinese-American women's history is only forty years old.

But 1943 was not the end of our troubles, even though my parents' strategy of working twice as hard as whites began to gain them some jobs in the white professions in the 1940's and 1950's. For example, my uncle was one of the first Asian professors in a Michigan university; but he still saw whites promoted ahead of him.

And then those fragile gains were threatened when government policy changed again. There was a successful Communist revolution in 1949, and this fed into the new "red scare." Under the banner of McCarthyism, the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover said that every Chinese in America was a potential Communist agent, and surveillance and repression spread through Chinatowns across the country. There were witch-hunts for "paper sons," and many a respectable and law-abiding Chinese-American citizen was hounded out of his or her job.

Many Chinese thought we might be put into prison camps like the Japanese Americans had been a few years earlier. But after that craziness passed, we became OK again. Racial attitudes can be shaped by the government. And one of the things about being a person of color in America is that you never know when the policies will change due to things happening in the world totally beyond your control. Having a yellow face makes white Americans see you as a foreigner. And although four generations of my father's family spent large amounts of their lives in the United States, and although I am American born, I am still held responsible for whatever the US government says China is doing. And people persist in wanting to tell me that I speak good English!

THE STRUGGLE TODAY

In Boston, where I live now, the history of Chinese-Americans is pretty much the same as on the West Coast, on a smaller scale. Massachusetts got introduced to the Chinese people when they were imported to break a shoemakers' strike in 1876. In 1902, there was a raid on Boston's Chinatown by federal immigration authorities. The whole community was blockaded by police. No warrants were shown or read, but every Chinese without his residency papers on his person was taken to the Federal building. Two hundred and fifty were loaded and herded into detention in conditions so crowded they had to stand from 8 PM to 4 PM the next day. All but twenty were legal residents. In 1940, 1600 Chinese resided in Boston. The repeal of the Exclusion Act set the immigration quota for Chinese at 105 per year, but benefitting from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's, Congress liberalized the laws in 1965. Boston's Chinatown population tripled between 1960 and 1980. At the same time, the land area of Boston's Chinatown was cut in half by construction projects -- the Mass Turnpike, the Southeast Expressway, New England Medical Center Hospital expansion. This has caused new problems, but the point is that only very recently have the Chinese entered the struggle for equality as permanent citizens, as whole families, with the intention of staying in America.

Now there is a new stereotype of the Chinese: that we are the minority that has "made it," the "good minority." Of the ten richest people in Boston,

two are Chinese -- Mr. and Mrs. Wang, of Wang Laboratories, and Forbes lists An Wang as the fifth richest American overall. But this is a trick of statistics. Boston has two Chinese multimillionaires, but 77% of the Chinese men work in unorganized Chinese restaurants, ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. Seventy-five percent of the women work in garment shops on piecework. There are hardly any Asian city or state workers since we are out of power and out of the patronage system. Asians are considered "too small" to do construction work, even though our forefathers went up mountains and through mountains, building the American railroad. No, we have not overcome.

And people still say, the Chinese are so clannish. They don't want to leave Chinatown. They don't want to mix. They don't want to join labor organizations. The history of racist exclusion has forced the Chinese to turn inward toward their own communities, to set up their own protection groups, their own ways of dealing with crime, their own health care, their own businesses. Because of the fear of being found an "illegal alien" or harboring one, they don't want to make waves that might get someone in trouble. And so, as my parents told me, "Be quiet, be better at your job and be glad if you can get a toehold in American society."

I heard this "you have to be better to be equal" from another source as well -- from prospective employers. The boss would say, "You Chinese are such hard workers, aren't you!" I know what that means. It means, "We'll get more work out of you than out of our white workers for less pay. And we'll hold you up as an example to the white workers to get them to speed up, and they'll hate you instead of me!" The white capitalist hasn't changed much over the years. But in my generation we are not ready to fall for that. I don't want to bust my hump like my parents did just for the privilege of getting out of the



laundry. I want the same equality that white Americans have, and I see that workers of all nationalities have to join together for union protection to get that equality. Recent job actions by Chinese-Americans show that we are getting tired of being quiet and good -- as citizens, we need a strategy for more than survival. For example in New York last year, when garment shops in Chinatown tried to pay Chinese workers less than union wages, they took to the streets with the ILGWU, and won equal pay.

And the next generation is already growing up with a new attitude, and maybe a new stereotype. When I visited my son's school, the kids all stood back and said, "Watch out! It's Madame Kung-Fu!" Another stereotype, but I'd rather have people think we are tough than that we are marshmallows to squash. And Chinese kids won't take abuse these days. When I was little, kids would say, "Ching-Chong Chinaman, sitting on a fence/ Trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents!" and I would feel I had to laugh too. Walking down the street with my son when he was eight, some white kids passing by started singing, "Chinese people never swear, ah-so, ah-so!" and he turned around and gave them the finger and said "Fuck You!"

We want full equality now, and our children will not accept second-class citizenship! This is the new spirit of the Chinese-American!

--August, 1983
M.Z.L.