

BLACK POLITICAL CONVENTION

January 1979

by John Malachi and Jim Griffin

In the last week of December a broad range of Black activists came together to develop a common agenda now that the Rizzo era is drawing to a close. The Black Political Convention was sponsored and organized by the Black United Front (BUF), a broad based organization which grew out of the charter change struggle.

The Convention demonstrated conclusively that the political energy unleashed by the fight to deny Rizzo another term has by no means spent itself and that the BUF has staying power. The workshops and plenary sessions spanning the holidays drew upwards toward 1500 people. Delegates encompassed most of the Black organizations in the city. The same elements who constituted the successful coalition against the charter change were on hand.

Progressive elected officials like State Representative Dave Richardson, community activists like Sister Falaka Fattah and revolutionary nationalists like the cadres of the African Peoples Party all played important roles. Marxist-Leninists, while not numerous, were also active participants.

But the Convention was not limited to veterans of the political scene. As one delegate said, "There are a whole lot of ordinary Black working people and people off the street here and they're making their voices heard." The Convention reflected the overall growth of activism and political understanding that has developed in the Black community over the last year.

A PLATFORM FOR STRUGGLE

In calling the Convention the BUF had several related aims. The first was to adopt a platform that would concretize the urgent needs and demands

of the masses of Black and Hispanic people. This was achieved through a series of ten workshops which developed proposals to submit to the plenary sessions. One purpose of adopting the platform was to provide a basis for evaluating the candidates and influencing next year's election. But more importantly the platform raises demands that should become the focal point for struggle over the coming years regardless of who is in office. Finally the Convention was expected to determine the future of the BUF, giving it a more formal structure and clear direction.

The Convention also adopted resolutions condemning U.S. involvement in South Africa, endorsing justice for MOVE, calling for a decent standard of living for welfare recipients and enforcement of affirmative action programs in firms doing business with the city. . . to name just a few.

FOR A BLACK INDEPENDENT PARTY

The Convention also demonstrated an understanding that neither the Republican or Democratic Parties provide a vehicle for winning these demands. A resolution calling for the BUF to work for the formation of an independent Black political party was adopted.

A final session of the Convention will hear the candidates for Mayor and the row offices and decide on endorsements. Charles Bowser would appear to be the only mayoralty candidate who stands a chance of gaining endorsement.

The show of independence on the part of the Convention is an encouraging sign that the Black people's movement is not about to become the appendage of any candidate's political campaign.

The Convention platform was not adopted without struggle. In the

economic development workshop there was an attempt to tie the Convention to a Black capitalist program with an almost exclusive emphasis on building Black owned businesses and financial institutions. This current was soundly defeated. The Convention was deadlocked over the question of desegregation of schools versus an emphasis on community control.

While the Convention succeeded in convening a broadly based conference and adopting a progressive platform, some shortcomings stand out. Black trade unionists as an organized force, both leaders and rank & filers, were woefully under represented at the conference and the platform only partially reflects their concerns.

Secondly, the platform does not speak to the question of funding expanded city services. Without a demand calling for the shifting of the tax burden from the working people to the wealthy and the corporations, the support for the rest of the program is narrowed.

Finally, while the Convention was relatively free of the most simplistic forms of narrow nationalism, there continues to be a failure to grasp that the whole multi-national working class has an objective interest in winning the kind of platform articulated by the Convention. While there was recognition of the need for tactical alliances with whites, the necessity of a strategic alliance between the movements of the oppressed nationalities and the multi-national working class remains a distinctly minority viewpoint within the movement.

These weaknesses should not blind anyone to the fact that the Convention marks a great step forward and that the movement represented by it is the cutting edge for progress in the city of Philadelphia at the present time.

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Votes Thumbs Down on Mayoralty Candidates

February 1979

by Michael Simmons

In the last week of December the Black Political Convention, brought together a broad spectrum of political forces in the Philadelphia Black community and adopted a platform called the "Human Rights Agenda." The platform reflects the urgent needs of Black people in this city and coincides with the needs

and interests of working people generally. (See January issue of the *Organizer*.)

In early January the delegates reconvened to hear from the candidates seeking nomination and office in this year's election. Recognizing that in the post-Rizzo era, no candidate can boycott the Black community as in the past, both Al Gaudiosi and Bill Green were on hand.

Charles Bowser, the front runner among Black voters, was naturally there. Hardy Williams, the other announced Black candidate for the Democratic Mayoralty slot stayed away, mistakenly denouncing the Convention as a stalking horse for Bowser. The Consumer Party was also represented. In addition, some 20 odd candidates for the row offices presented themselves.