

The behavior of the Democratic mayoralty candidates was a sign of the times. They tripped all over themselves in a rush to disassociate themselves from the most blatant symbols of Rizzismo. Gaudiosi and Green, as well as Bowser, said they would sack School Superintendent Michael Marcuse and Police Commissioner

Joseph O'Neil. But when it came to substantive policies this boldness disappeared.

Al Gaudiosi, as Rizzo's long time henchman at City Hall, naturally had the biggest credibility gap. Gaudiosi tried to close it by pointing to his break with Rizzo over the charter change issue and with bland reassurance that he would be a Mayor of "all the people." He also hoped his endorsement by long time activists Walt Palmer and Mohammad Kenyatta would boost his stock, but instead it only discredited Palmer and Kenyatta. Gaudiosi's public relations effort collapsed when he tried to argue that Frank Rizzo had had the potential to be "the city's greatest Mayor ever." While disassociating himself from Rizzo's most recent excesses, Gaudiosi naturally had to defend Rizzo's earlier policies and actions, since he, himself, was in on them. While Gaudiosi's decision to come before the Convention shows that he is more astute politically than his former boss, he did nothing to convince the delegates that he

should be taken seriously as a "born again" friend of Black people.

Bill Green also failed to win friends and influence people. He trotted out his rather vague pledges, apparently failing to realize that something more is needed in 1979. Green was raked over the coals by the delegates for his wishy-washy, Johnny Come Lately, stand on the charter change. He was also hit for failing to back welfare rights demands while a Congressman.

Charles Bowser, as might be expected, was most in tune with the Convention, but he too fell way short of meeting the expectations the delegates have for a Mayoral candidate. While Bowser did endorse some of the specific items in the Human Rights Platform, like the demand for an elected school board, he too specialized in vague phrases. To the extent he outlined a program, it was well within the bounds of corporate liberalism. Bowser's supporters also alienated many delegates by attempting to stampe the Convention into endorsing their man.

NO CLIMBING ON ANYBODY'S BANDWAGON

None of the candidates gave what could be considered an endorsement of the Human Rights Platform. All of them

pleaded that they had not had time to seriously study and evaluate it. At the same time they had "studied" it sufficiently to conclude that they agreed with "most of it." Since it is possible to agree with "most of it" and still not agree with

the most far-reaching demands, this general "agreement" did little to reassure the delegates.

In the end the Convention affirmed the kind of independence it had demonstrated earlier in framing its platform. While some delegates, notably Bowser supporters, urged that an endorsement be made now, warning that by delay the Convention would forfeit its influence, the majority was not willing to extend support to any candidate at this time. By a 3 to 1 margin the delegates voted to withhold endorsement, focus instead on popularizing the Human Rights Agenda in the community, and reconvene in March to reconsider the question.

By this decision the Convention showed that it is not willing to be the appendage of any candidate, and that it takes its program seriously. The candidates had better begin to take that same program seriously between now and March if they expect to line up any support among the thousands of independent voters who buried Frank Rizzo last November.

BLACK POLITICAL CONVENTION BACKS BOWSER

April 1979

by Jim Griffin

On the weekend of March 9th the Black Political Convention, representing a broad spectrum of organizations, met to consider endorsing candidates for the mayoralty race and the city's row offices. At the first convention, held in late December and early January, the delegates drafted the "Human Rights Agenda", a platform of demands based on the needs of the community, but held off on candidate endorsements. The most recent convention was primarily to take up this unfinished business.

The major struggle at the convention centered on the mayoral candidacy of Charles Bowser. Bowser, as the only major Black candidate with substantial organized backing, figured to have an easy time of it. He expected to walk away with the endorsement and had planned his schedule accordingly, allowing only a few hours for politicking at the convention. Instead Bowser faced a serious challenge and had to fight for his political life on the convention floor.

BOWSER TRIES END RUN

Bowser miscalculated in thinking he would get the nod without having to

commit himself on the Human Rights Agenda. The Convention's candidate evaluation committee had prepared a detailed questionnaire, based on the Human Rights Agenda, to determine where each candidate stood on the issues. Every candidate seeking endorsement was expected to fill out the questionnaire and on the basis of their response would be given a rating. Bowser failed to fill out the questionnaire.

When told that he would not be allowed to address the convention or be considered for endorsement, Bowser reluctantly agreed to fill out the questionnaire. The reason for his reluctance soon became clear. When the candidate evaluation committee reported on the ratings of the candidates, Bowser brought up the rear with a 557 out of a possible 861 rating.

Bowser's supporters defended his poor showing by attacking the rating system. They argued that any candidate could say they supported the Human Rights Agenda but this was no proof that they would actually fight for it. This line of attack neatly skirted the question of why Bowser would refuse to endorse a platform democratically adopted by the broad forces in the Black community.

Bowser himself answered this question in a roundabout fashion. He said he couldn't support the Human Rights Agenda because parts of it were "against the law." He also said it was based only on the needs of the Black community and he sought to be mayor "of all the people."

In fact there is nothing in the Human Rights Agenda that is "against the law." Rather there are demands which are not presently part of the law or that would require that the law be changed. This is quite a different thing. Bowser implied that the Human Rights Agenda stands for anarchy to cover his own devotion to the present law which serves the city's financial, business, and political elite.

Bowser is on record as opposing any change in the City Charter. The charter in its present form minimizes popular control over local government in the interests of rule by Big Business. The charter would have to be changed, for example, to allow direct election of the school board, a popular democratic demand incorporated in the Human Rights Agenda. Bowser opposed this demand in the name of protecting the city charter. His lack of faith in the people and his trust in the ruling class is

echoed in his stands on a whole range of issues that raise the question of control.

Bowser opposes the demand of public housing tenants that they elect the director of the Housing Authority. He opposed the demand for a civilian police review board. In a question and answer session in Germantown, Bowser said he didn't think the people had the expertise to exercise control over these institutions. The bankers, politicians, and the bureaucrats presumably have the "expertise", so they should be allowed to continue running roughshod over the people of this city.

MAYOR OF ALL THE PEOPLE?

Nor is Bowser's charge that the Human Rights Agenda is only in the interests of Black people true. The demands for more jobs, better services, greater democracy, tax reform and dozens of other measures are in the interests of *all* working people in the city. The Black Political Convention makes no demand for special favors for Blacks at the expense of white working people. Rather it rightly calls for an end to discrimination and real equality for minorities.

The reason Bowser objects to the Human Rights agenda is not because he seeks to be mayor of *all* the people, but precisely the opposite. He is eager to win the backing of a small segment of the people — namely the downtown power brokers who run the city from their corporate board rooms. Support for the Human Rights Agenda, which is support

for the interests of both Black and white working people, would definitely antagonize the Big Boys. Bowser was willing to risk losing the support of the Black Political Convention in order to prove to the city's ruling class that he could be entrusted with power.

Unfortunately the full content of Bowser's rejection of the Human Rights Agenda and his slavishness to Big Business was not brought to the convention floor. Bowser's aggressive supporters maneuvered to prevent a full exposure of his views. But many of these same supporters were themselves taken aback when they read Bowser's questionnaire. Many housing activists, led by Milton Street, were actively backing Bowser without realizing that Bowser does not support many of their basic demands. Some Bowser supporters were surprised to learn that Bowser opposes cuts in the military budget and shifting the tax burden from poor and working people to the rich, while supporting Carter's anti-inflation program. Bowser has come out in opposition to further cuts in social services, but he clearly has no program for paying for these services.

The most damning testimony against Bowser during the convention came from his own candidate for controller, Charles Ludwig. Ludwig, a white, center city lawyer with a background in real estate did not inspire a great deal of confidence in either himself or his running mate. Ludwig, who admits to sending his children to private school and has absolutely no credentials as a friend of the Black struggle, symbolizes who Bowser is

really trying to appease. It was evident to many delegates that Ludwig, while a fine candidate from the standpoint of Big Business, had no place on a ticket claiming to represent the masses of Black people.

In the end Bowser, nevertheless, succeeded in gaining the convention's endorsement, but it was much closer and more of a struggle than the 59 to 6 vote implied. Eight delegates abstained and some 35 odd delegates didn't vote at all, most of whom were not present when the vote was taken. Still Bowser got roughly half of the 101 possible votes. Had the full extent of Bowser's departure from the Human Rights Agenda been known his margin would probably have been slimmer. But in the minds of most of his supporters Bowser's appeal as the only Black candidate in a city which has never elected a Black mayor outweighed his liabilities.

There was a healthy recognition among the delegates that the business of the Convention isn't done and that it will be necessary to monitor the candidates between now and the election to see that they honor their commitments. A monitoring committee was created for that purpose.

That Bowser was able to win the endorsement in spite of such a miserable stand on the issues was a setback for the development of independent politics in the Black community. But the fact that this endorsement was won only after some intense struggle is a sign of the growing maturity of the movement.

WHAT IS THE HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA?

June 1979

by Shafik Abdul Ahad

Many Black Liberation activists both of the past and present correctly attempted to analyze the Black Liberation movement of the 1960's in an attempt to review its strengths and weaknesses as well as ways of moving forward. One weakness that has been identified as a key weakness was the inability to form a national organization which could have given the Black liberation movement a single direction based around a united program. In 1968, 9000 Black conventioners gathered at Little Rock, Arkansas, and there formed the National Black Assembly which to date was perhaps the most serious attempt on a national scale to forge such a united program.

In the same spirit, this past December over 1300 members of the Philadelphia Black community representing Black elected officials, clergy, workers, women and students held Phase I of the Black Political Convention. After several days of workshops and serious discussion, resolutions which were passed

at the convention were written into a document now referred to as the Human Rights Agenda.

What is the Human Rights Agenda? Why was it called "unlawful" and "too based on skin color" by mayoral candidate Charles Bowser? First of all, let's take a look into this "unlawful" Human Rights Agenda and see what demands have been raised by the Black community.

1. Job opportunities should be increased by reducing the 40 hour week to 32 hours.
2. "No-strike" clauses in union agreements should be abolished.
3. The January 1st Septa fare hike should be opposed.
4. Work-study programs within the public schools should be created.
5. For a better quality education in the public schools.
6. Federal fuel subsidies to senior citizens must be available for those who cannot afford the price of fuel.

As one can see, these demands speak to the most basic needs of the Black community in a very real way — needs that, because of extreme racist discrimination, have been historically denied Black people. Where then, is it "unlawful"? Is it unlawful to want a job? Is it unlawful to want a decent education or decent health care? Of course not (unless you are a Black person living in South Africa). Is the Human Rights Agenda "based on skin color"? Once again the answer is no! Every person wants a decent job, not just Black people. Every person wants a decent house, a decent education, decent health care, not just Black people. Every other demand raised in the Human Rights Agenda would, if won, benefit all people, not just Black people.

The Black United Front, which was the sponsor of the Black Political Convention, should wage a continuous and uncompromising fight to see that the Human Rights Agenda is circulated and publicly discussed in the Black community and, wherever possible, in the