

AND WHAT ABOUT BOWSER?

May 1979

Philadelphia has never had a Black mayor and a Black mayor would be a good thing for Philadelphia. It would mean a step forward had been taken in ending the exclusion of Black people from full participation in political life. It would signify that the masses of white voters no longer mark their ballots on the basis of skin color.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BOWSER

Charles Bowser is a Black man who is running for mayor. From the standpoint of what is usually counted as qualifications, Bowser is the most qualified candidate with a long record in city government which he once served as deputy mayor. Bowser is having a tough time running for mayor. He is having more trouble raising money than the white candidates. He has rightfully complained that the media have slighted coverage of his campaign in favor of the white candidates. But Bowser has won the support of some of the most progressive forces in the city, notably the Black Political Convention, which adopted a far seeing platform for change in our city, the Human Rights Agenda.

For these reasons Bowser is more deserving of our support than any of his opponents, but unfortunately he is not deserving enough to go out and vote for. In point of fact, Bowser's candidacy represents a step backward for the people's movement which has made him a serious candidate. Bowser seeks to keep that movement within the Democratic Party and within the boundaries of politics acceptable to the banks and the dominant corporate interests who have run and ruined this city.

The Bowser candidacy could have been a rallying point for those forces who led the fight against Frank Rizzo and want to see genuine change in our city. But this would have meant declaring his independence from the downtown bankers and the political hacks that run the Democratic Party. Charles Bowser, not surprisingly given his political history and background, chose not to do this.

While Bowser succeeded in gaining the support of the Black Political Convention, he refused to support the Convention's Human Rights Agenda — a platform drawn up with the participation of hundreds of organizations from the community; a platform which refused to settle for crumbs and militantly demanded jobs, housing, education and a decent

life for the people of Philadelphia. As a result Bowser has been unable to really tap the militancy of the Black people's movement and harness it to his campaign.

WHOSE SUPPORT IS BOWSER AFTER?

Nor does he really want to. Bowser's campaign is based on the premise that he has the Black vote in his hip pocket and needs to win white support. Of course it is true that Bowser needs white votes and it is a good thing that he is actively seeking them. But Bowser is doing this by trying to disassociate himself from a militant stand for Black equality. Moreover, it is not so much the white working people whose support Bowser is seeking, but white business interests.

Bowser's campaign literature is a dead giveaway to the kind of race he is running. A Bowser broadside features a column by *Bulletin* columnist Claude Lewis with gems like this: "When blacks came at him and told him to support MOVE simply because the group are mainly black, Charles Bowser said it was a matter of law enforcement. When he was urged to consider blacks first, Charles W. Bowser couldn't do it. When they urged him to demand housing for blacks, Charles W. Bowser looked at the whole city and said that for every black who needs better housing there are eight whites who need it as well.

If Frank Rizzo had said MOVE shouldn't be supported just because they're Black and it was just a matter of law enforcement or that for every Black that needed decent housing there were eight whites, we wouldn't bat an eyelash. But it sounds strange coming from Charles Bowser. Of course MOVE shouldn't be supported solely because they're Black and of course whites need housing too. But this misses the whole point that because of racism and inequality Black dissidents get starved out while white law breakers get slapped on the wrist for doing the same thing. And while many whites need better housing, Blacks have the worst housing. But Bowser wants to play down the struggle for equality to pick up white votes.

Bowser also makes much of his running mate, Charles F. Ludwig. By choosing a white running mate Bowser is trying to show that he is not "just for the Blacks" as his racist critics whisper. And again it is positive to run a multi-racial ticket. But did Bowser choose a running mate who is identified with the struggles

of working people, both Black and white? No. Instead he chose a man who is running on the slogan "Philadelphia's Finances Need a Businessman's Talents".

THE TALENTS OF CHARLES LUDWIG

Ludwig, a center city lawyer, certainly does bring "a businessman's talents" to the job of controller. Ludwig has helped many corporations handle "billions of dollars of investments around the world" according to his campaign literature. He has represented RCA, several insurance companies and the Budd Co. among others. He has also helped the Defense Department with the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System, the CENTO communications system (which is the Pentagon's frontline in the Middle East), and in developing a submarine base under the Greenland icecap.

Exactly why this record of service to the war machine qualifies him to be city controller is unclear, but it certainly reveals something about his political orientation. Does Philadelphia really need "a businessman's talents" in city hall when the banks and commercial interests are bleeding this city dry?

Given all this it is clear whom Charles Bowser will serve if elected — it won't be Black people nor will it be "all the people" as he claims — it will be that tiny handful of rich power brokers who really run Philadelphia. The time for a Black mayor in Philadelphia has certainly come. But the time for Charles Bowser has not.

While Bowser has taken some positive stands on a number of issues, overall his program is not qualitatively different than the other candidates. Bowser has bent over backwards to convince big business that he is an acceptable candidate who will safeguard their interests. And he has had some success. Thatcher Longstreth, head of the Chamber of Commerce, and John Bunting, banking chief for First Pennsylvania, have contributed to his campaign and put their seal of approval on Bowser's performance. Bowser has also courted political support from some of the bigger sewer rats in the Democratic cesspool. He called Josh Eilberg, the convicted felon from the Northeast, "an old friend and an honest man." This is going a little far, even in an election year.