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# *The "Jackson Phenomenon" and the Democratic Party*

*The Convention and Beyond*





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Is the Democratic Party's dream for a peaceful convention more fantasy than reality? The primaries are over. But the battle over whom the party represents — the millions of workers struggling for their survival who supported the Jackson program or the rich and powerful capitalists demanding concessions from the workers to generate greater profits — continues into the convention and beyond. The fight over the platform expresses this battle. Will the Democratic Party respond to the needs and demands of the workers of this country — whom it claims to represent — with a program for securing jobs, shelter, food, and peace in this era of deepening economic crisis?

***State Conventions Foreshadow  
National Convention Rifts***

The rifts in the national Democratic Party are also being expressed dramatically in the Democratic state conventions throughout the country around issues such as party platform, delegate selection, and procedures. Indeed, if state conventions are any indication, the dream for a peaceful convention is turning into a nightmare. Consider the case of Virginia.

[Former Virginia Governor and Senate candidate Charles] Robb and his wife Lynda, daughter of the late President Lyndon Johnson, were jostled at the [Virginia state] convention by a group of Jackson supporters, who booed Robb so loudly that he had to cut short a speech at the gathering in Virginia Beach. (*The Atlanta Constitution*, June 7, 1988, p. A12)

**How will the  
Democratic Party  
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**The convention proceedings, the presidential campaign and election, and events after November 1988 will all be conditioned by the major forces at play within the Democratic Party and by the economic environment in which they are operating.**

The confrontation between Robb, the first chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council (a powerful grouping spearheaded by conservative Southern Democrats), and Jackson supporters is a small but important indication of the battle unfolding within the Democratic Party — a battle between those forces pulling the Party to the right to serve the needs of capital for maximum profits and those forces demanding that the Party serve the need of the American workers for a decent life.

Robb had angered the Jackson forces by suggesting that Jackson play only an “inspirational, not a managerial” role in the Democratic Party and that Jackson and his supporters not have substantial input into the party platform and convention procedures. According to Mary Cox, the Virginia coordinator for Jackson, Jackson forces “were totally locked out of the process” of developing state resolutions to the national platform committee.

### ***Major Players in a New Environment***

The boeing of Robb is a small but significant example of the clash between two major and diametrically opposed forces within the Democratic Party — the conservative Southern Democrats and Jackson, whose base of support comes from people on the cutting edge of social struggle. These two forces are joined by yet a third — the Eastern “liberal” remnants of the Roosevelt Coalition. The convention proceedings, the presidential campaign and election, and events after November 1988 all will be conditioned by these three major forces at play within the Democratic Party and by the economic environment in which they are operating.

### ***Trying to Hold the Coalition Together —***

The Eastern (so-called “liberal”) wing of the Democratic Party represents the financial wing of the capitalist class. It is coalesced around the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

The Roosevelt Coalition and its program of social reform established the leadership of the Eastern wing within the Democratic Party in the post-World War II period. Their ability to deliver reform was based on the enormous prosperity of U.S. capitalism within an expanding world capitalist economy.

Today, in an environment of economic contraction, the DNC is in the process of deserting the working class members of the party’s New Deal constituency while at the same time sustaining the notion that reform is still possible. This is evidenced by, among other things, the DNC position on the 1988 Democratic Party platform. The DNC is calling for a short and broadly worded statement — an “open letter” to the American people — devoid of specific planks which the DNC now refers to as “special interest” demands.

Since the New Deal era, the reform leadership of the Eastern wing of the Democratic Party has been the vehicle by which the ruling class has controlled the U.S. working class. However, in the last 20 years, the Democrats have occupied the White House only during the four years of the Carter presidency. This was followed by the 1984 Mondale debacle, in which the Democrats won only Mondale’s home state of Minnesota and the District of Columbia.

These major events and many more minor ones brought the leadership ability of the Eastern wing/DNC into question. The stage was set for the development of the conservative Democratic Leadership Council. This process of struggle unfolding within the



Photo/People's Tribune

**In this presidential election year the struggles of the workers for the necessities of life are finding their expression in the Jackson campaign.**



**The motion to the right led by the DLC does not reflect a rightward drift in the attitudes and demands of the Democratic Party's base constituencies — labor, minorities, women, and the unemployed.**

Democratic Party, which is likely to come to a head at the convention, is a key influence on the path the working class must travel in its struggle for survival.

**Leading the Rightward Motion** — The Southern wing of the Democratic Party includes both the "Dixiecrats" of the "Solid South" and the so-called "New South" politicians, both black and white. It is coalesced around the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which has expanded to include some prominent northern black elected officials. After the 1984 Mondale disaster, the Southern wing organized its challenge to the leadership of the Democratic Party around the DLC.

The Southern right wing of the Democratic Party has historically been the linch pin of capitalist rule. The election and re-election of right-wing Southern "Dixiecrats" (also known as "boll weevils") to Congress year after year was guaranteed by disenfranchising the Southern worker, especially the black worker. These Dixiecrats controlled key committees and voted with whichever party was in power nationally to impose the political program of the capitalist class on both U.S. workers and workers throughout the world.

Today the challenge of the Southern wing of the Democratic Party is based on the need for a "rightward realignment" of the party. This rightward motion reflects the ongoing economic realignment rooted in the introduction of high technology into production. The Democratic Party must realign to come into conformity with the restructuring of the economy — technologically advanced production using far fewer workers to produce more goods.

The DLC was formalized after the 1984 presidential election. Originally labeled the

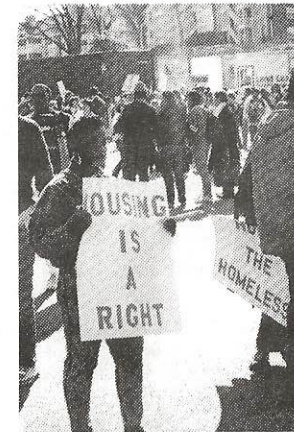
"white boys club," the 30 founding members were all white and were from the South or Southwest. Today the DLC has 175 members, including black elected officials.

Even more than the Mondale defeat in 1984, the booing of Andrew Young by Jackson supporters at the 1984 convention signaled the direction the DLC would have to take. The DLC understood they could and, indeed, must recruit into their ranks "moderate" black leadership that was openly pro-capitalist — the kind of leadership Young represented — if they were to successfully realign the Democratic Party to the right while keeping the black masses loyal to the Democrats.

The DLC has its own platform agenda. A key component of their domestic policy is the "rapid labor deployment" system targeted at women in low-wage jobs and intended to supply employers with a highly vulnerable, desperate, mobile, and cheap labor force on a temporary, as-needed basis. They also call for the end of entitlement programs and their replacement by "earned" entitlements through civilian or military national service.

The centerpiece of the DLC international platform is the repeal of the War Powers Act, thus ending Congressional control over troop deployment and returning it solely to presidential discretion. Whether or not the DLC fights for their positions at the convention, their policies are already being lobbied for in Congress and subtly implemented.

The motion to the right led by the DLC does not reflect a rightward drift in the attitudes and demands of the Democratic Party's base constituencies — labor, minorities, women, and the unemployed. It is an attempt by the forces around the DLC to force the Democratic Party to abandon its working class constituencies. It can only intensify the contradic-



Photo/People's Tribune

**Supporters of the struggle against homelessness rallied in Atlanta, Georgia in February 1988.**



**With Jackson's victory, Super Tuesday turned into its opposite. It became a millstone for the Democratic Party leadership.**

tions developing between the capitalist interests in control of the party and the working class base they have depended upon for their electoral victories since the New Deal.

**The Fight for Survival** — The forces of the working class at the forefront of the struggle for jobs, shelter, food, education, and health care, including much of the New Deal constituency of the Democratic Party, are now coalesced around the Jackson campaign.

The Jackson campaign is the "Achilles heel" of the Democratic Party. Many forces whose objective interests are best served by political confrontation with capital are supporting Jackson. This includes the unemployed, the homeless, the hungry, and the bankrupt farmer as well as those who are demanding jobs at a living wage, affordable housing, a moratorium on farm foreclosures and plant closings, education, health care, child care, and a humane and sane foreign policy based on peace rather than interventionism and militarism in the "third world."

Between now and November, the electoral process will continue to stir up the political movement of the working class. The Democratic Party is locked on the horns of a dilemma. It has spent four years developing a strategy that moves it away from its working class base. But the alienation of the workers from the Democratic Party and the platform agendas of the DLC and the DNC may spell trouble for the Democrats in November. This situation presents a real opportunity for those fighting for their survival — for jobs, food, shelter, etc. — and their allies to challenge the Democratic Party's rightward motion.

## **Super Tuesday: A Victory for the Jackson Forces**

Spearheaded by the Democratic Leadership Council and institutionalized by the party leadership, Super Tuesday — the 20-state super-primary on March 8 that included all 14 Southern states — was intended to give the Democrats the "Southern route" to the White House. Instead, it expressed the contradiction facing the Democratic Party.

Its creators hoped that Super Tuesday would give conservative Southern forces an early and decisive influence in the selection of the Democratic presidential nominee. They anticipated that a Southern conservative such as Robb or Sam Nunn (Senator from Georgia and current chairman of the DLC) would be in the running and would, therefore, be the beneficiary of Super Tuesday. Had this happened, it could have laid the basis for the unification of the Democratic Party around the Southern Democrats and their agenda.

But the black and white workers of the South handed the Democratic Party leadership a resounding defeat. The three most important results of Super Tuesday were:

1. Jackson won the Deep South with more than 12% of the white vote in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia and over 50% of the vote in South Carolina.

2. Jackson won the popular vote, with 27% compared to 26% for Dukakis and Gore.

3. Jackson was the only candidate to win delegates in every Super Tuesday state.

Jackson's win on Super Tuesday meant that the Democratic Party nominating process was, at that moment, locked in battle with no sign of being resolved before the convention. With Jackson's victory, Super Tuesday turned into its opposite. It became a millstone for the



Photo/Dolores Gonzalez

After Super Tuesday the DNC and DLC temporarily set aside their differences to join forces against Jesse Jackson.



**The black and white support for Jackson threatens to undermine the very foundation of political power in America.**

Democratic Party leadership. As sweet as the victory was for Jackson's forces, that's how bitter it was for the Democratic leadership. Jackson emerged as a broad-based and popular candidate attracting both black and white workers. And Dukakis had entered the South and taken a significant number of delegates, putting the Southern candidate, Albert Gore, in the number three spot.

More fundamentally, the black and white support for Jackson threatens to undermine the very foundation of political power in America. The capitalists have historically maintained their rule by splitting the working class in the South along color lines. Thus, the nearly unanimous support of Southern blacks for Jackson and, most importantly, the substantial and growing support of Southern white workers put the ruling class and its Democratic leaders on notice.

The developing unity of black and white workers on the basis of common objective interests made it possible for Jackson to defeat the Southern conservative forces on Super Tuesday. This coupled with his growing popularity with white workers and farmers in many northern states poses a serious threat to the ability of the ruling class to maintain its present form of political rule.

To be sure, then, no one should have expected the Democratic Party to roll over and play dead. But the Super Tuesday results coupled with Jackson's overwhelming victory in the Michigan caucuses left Democratic Party insiders in a state of near panic. It gave rise to the vicious "stop Jackson" campaign. Differences between the Easterners/DNC and the Southerners/DLC were momentarily suppressed while they united in an attempt to block the Jackson forces.

This effort began in Wisconsin, peaked in

New York, and continued from Pennsylvania onward. An old familiar alliance — the Southern Democrats, with their front man Al Gore, and a section of the Eastern Democrats, led by New York Mayor Ed Koch — conjured up the reliable ideology of white supremacy in their campaign to prevent further Jackson victories and virtually hand the Democratic presidential nomination to Dukakis.

But, as Jackson himself has observed, the forces who support him have, in fact, won a substantial victory. They have raised the issue of the economic violence being perpetrated against American workers — men, women, and children of all nationalities and colors — at the highest level of U.S. politics.

Workers rallied around Jackson in the primaries because he articulated their demands for a decent life in his platform — the "workers' bill of rights." This is the real challenge being put to the leadership of the national Democratic Party. They dare not ignore it. In Jackson's words, "It's not just what I want. . . . I represent a constituency." (*The Washington Post*, p. A10, June 8, 1988) "Thus my constituents deserve consideration at every level of our party's leadership, its development and its direction." (*The Washington Post*, p. A21, June 3, 1988).

***Politics as an Expression of Economics***

Both the strength of the Jackson campaign and the fracturing of the Democratic Party are results of the contracting U.S. economy. The introduction of high technology throughout the entire economy has displaced literally millions of workers who have no hope of ever rejoining the labor force. Millions of others will do so



Photo/People's Tribune

**The Justice for Janitors Movement is challenging the largest international real estate developers in the Southeast.**



**The Jackson campaign and the social upsurge it represents are the most important, dramatic developments in the political life of this country since the building of the Roosevelt Coalition.**

— but many will find only part-time work and most will earn greatly reduced wages. This structural change is also the basis for the attack by the capitalist class on the living standard of those who remain in the workplace.

It is the activity generated as a result of this economic contraction that is the base of the strength of the Jackson campaign. Jackson has responded to the picket lines, plant closings, and farm foreclosures. His response has, in turn, galvanized these evolving struggles around his candidacy.

At the same time, the very lack of any viable response from the rest of the Democratic Party and its candidates sets the basis for its fracturing. After all, the combatants in these emerging struggles are claimed by the Democrats as part of their New Deal constituency. The party's refusal and failure to respond to their needs — indeed, its outright desertion of them — has resulted in the Democratic Party's inability to unite behind a single candidate until late in the primary season and is reason to anticipate heated platform fights.

### ***The Convention and Beyond***

Excluding the November election, the 1988 Democratic Party convention will be the most publicized, scrutinized, and debated political event of this election season. It is there that those workers who are in political motion will come into direct confrontation with the leadership of the Democratic Party.

The confrontations will be significant and many. Who will be credentialed at the convention? What will the party rules look like? Who will be Dukakis' running mate? The biggest battle will be over what the platform

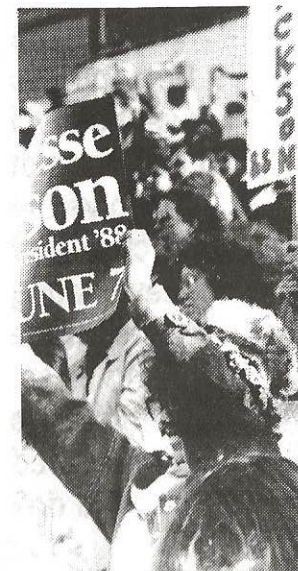
says. While this is very important, something else is even more important. That is the ability of this section of the working class, including those it has sent to represent them as delegates at the convention, to use these confrontations to build its momentum and its movement.

The movement which is being expressed by the Jackson candidacy is shattering the edifice of post-war politics. Something new is being born. The Jackson campaign and the social upsurge it represents are the most important, dramatic developments in the political life of this country since the building of the Roosevelt Coalition.

The Democratic Party may seek to coopt and placate certain elements. But they cannot derail the entire motion because the economics of our capitalist system cannot allow it. The capitalist system cannot accommodate the economic aspirations of the working class for a decent life.

We must be very concrete in our approach to this convention. The realization of our hopes, dreams, and aspirations for a decent life demands careful, thorough organizing to try to make the Democrats "do right" — to be responsive to our needs.

This means that during the convention we must coordinate the activity of the delegates inside the convention with that of the demonstrators outside. The convention must not be permitted to become a self-enclosed, isolated meeting. Demonstrations, marches, rallies, and meetings outside the convention hall must be planned to impact on events on the convention floor. And when the convention is over, we must continue to work together to plan for November 1988 and beyond.



Photo/People's Tribune

During the primaries, workers throughout the country voiced their demands at Jackson rallies like this one in California. After the primaries the workers whose struggles found expression in the Jackson campaign then turned their attention to the national convention and beyond.



**The 1988 Democratic convention will not and can not resolve the economic crisis and its devastating effects on the working class. What, then, are we prepared to do?**

### ***It's Not Over 'Til It's Over***

The 1988 election process has seen many changes. At one point we were all convinced that the Democratic National Convention would be brokered; that is, that no candidate would win on the first ballot. Then they tried to convince us that it was all over, that Dukakis had it sewn up even BEFORE the California primary with its 340 delegates. We now know that Dukakis has more than the 2082 delegates needed to win on the first ballot.

For the Jackson forces and every worker in this country fighting for the necessities of life, however, this is not the main point. The point is that this convention will not and can not resolve the economic crisis and its devastating effects on the working class. The question boils down to: "What are we prepared to do?"

If nothing else has been made clear in this process, it is that no one is going to do it for us -- not the Democratic Party leadership, not our elected officials. Only we can solve our problems. Real change has always come as the result of mass activity -- in the community, on the job, in the churches, in the schools and universities, and in the streets.

We seek to make the Democratic Party respond to our needs. If we can't, then no party loyalty can be substituted for food on our table, a roof over our heads, decent jobs, health care, and a secure future for our children. If the Democratic Party can not be the vehicle for our demands, then we must take the necessary steps to secure our survival needs. The future is in our hands.