

THE CHICAGO ELECTIONS

By GIL GREEN

THE WIND THAT SWEEPED Chicago on November 4, was a political one, leaving in its wake two badly jarred political machines, and a new political party that is here to stay.

On that day the unprecedented happened in Chicago politics. The Democratic and Republican machines were challenged by a full slate of 21 candidates, running under the designation of a newly formed party.

The Progressive Party, without professional leadership or organization and making its first appearance on the ballot, stunned old-time leaders by winning more than 113,000 straight votes for its ticket, more than 16 per cent of the vote cast. (*Chicago Sun*, November 6.)

The high vote on the Progressive Party ticket was 313,000 for Homer F. Carey, Northwestern University law professor. The low vote was 138,000. Thus, while 16 per cent of the electorate gave the new party a straight vote, 59 per cent cast their ballot for one or more of the Progressive Party candidates.

What are some of the special circumstances that led to this "uprising of the independent voters," as

the *Chicago Daily News* characterized it?

In the first place, it should be borne in mind that this was a judicial election. The only candidates on the ballot were those running for the 21 seats on the Superior Court bench of Cook County (Chicago and suburbs).

Normally, a judicial election is a rather dull affair, arousing little general interest. But there were a number of special and unique circumstances that helped transform the Chicago affair into a battle royal.

Over the years, the Chicago judiciary has been notoriously corrupt and reactionary, a venal and pliable tool of the spoils system. This was particularly true of the Superior Court. Nor were the protests of liberal, progressive, and good-government forces of any avail. Through a system of bipartisan coalition, the two old party machines came together and nominated a single slate of candidates supported by both parties. In this fashion they could ignore all protests and foist upon the community hand-picked political hacks dressed in judicial garb.

A second issue of prime importance was the Jim-Crow character of the Superior Court bench. For many years, the Negro people of the county, and particularly the Cook County Bar Association—the organization of all Negro attorneys—had demanded the nomination of at least one qualified Negro candidate for this court. Over 25,000 signatures of Negro vot-

ers, requesting a place on the ticket, had been presented to the Democratic and Republican political bosses. But this year, as in the past, the Negro people were rudely rebuffed.

There are two special reasons for the arrogant dismissal of this rightful demand of the Negro people. First, the political bosses felt that so long as both parties were united in the campaign, they had nothing to fear from the Negro electorate. How wrong they were in this estimate is now a matter of record. Secondly, the Superior Court of Cook County handles all cases relating to restrictive covenants. The placing of a Negro on that bench would therefore constitute a threat to the very legal structure which keeps the Negro people walled into overcrowded, slum, high-rental ghettos. Both political machines preferred to serve the vested real estate interests and the racial bigots as against the justified demands of the Negro people and of democracy.

A third key issue in the election was that of anti-labor injunctions. Chicago labor has many times winced from the lash of court injunctions. With the passage of the Taft-Hartley Law, the menace of strike-breaking by injunction judges has increased a thousand-fold. At this issue, too, the old party machines shrugged their shoulders, refusing to replace reactionary, company-bribed judges with progressive-minded friends of labor.

It was around these three major is-

ues that a people's coalition began to take shape in battle with the corrupt bipartisan coalition. This progressive coalition brought together a number of diverse class and social groupings: a large section of the middle class, which was moved in the main by the issues of clean courts and clean government; the most important organizations and forces of the Negro people, who responded in the first place to the Jim-Crow issue; and a considerable section of the labor movement, which, while reacting to all other issues, felt most keenly the issue of anti-labor injunctions.

But if these three streams finally joined into the swiftly running Niagara of a new party, this did not take place automatically or spontaneously. Certainly, the issues were there, and the need for an alliance was apparent. But what was absent was the instrumentality for forging the unity and waging the fight. Only the formation of a third-party ticket could effectively challenge the corrupt coalition. But many shied away from this conclusion, thinking it radical or impractical.

HOW THE PROGRESSIVE VOTE WAS RALLIED

Where could 21 qualified attorneys be found who would be ready to risk the ire of the machines on so frail a vessel as that of a new party? How could the imposing figure of 103,000 signatures of registered voters be gathered in the few weeks be-

fore the final filing date? It had never been done before. Most observers believed it could not be done this time.

And yet both tasks were accomplished. Twenty-one progressive attorneys were found, and within three weeks time, 121,000 valid signatures were filed with the Board of Elections.

A great deal of credit is due the relatively small handful of persons—leaders of labor, community and Negro people's organizations—who, together with the 21 candidates, had the courage of their convictions and the confidence that when the issues were made clear the people would respond.

Surprised at the ability of the independent voters to win a place on the ballot, the machines, however, still continued to underestimate the movement. Jack Arvey, County Chairman of the Democratic Party, rushed to press with a Red-baiting blast, charging that the Progressive Party was Communist inspired, a "plot" by which the Communists hoped to win a place on the ballot behind the subterfuge of the Progressive Party name. But so transparent was this trick, so ridiculous the accusation, so deep-going the resentment of decent-minded people, that Mr. Arvey hastily reversed his strategy.

The machines decided on another course of action. They were not going to be provoked into any debate over issues. They were not going to give the Progressive Party any recog-

nition or publicity. They were going to keep mum, act as if it did not exist. And this is exactly what they did.

Not a speech, poster, or meeting emanated from the side of the bipartisan coalition. The Democratic and Republican leaders depended exclusively on the power of their machines. They rounded up their precinct captains, ordered them to bring out only the sure machine vote, and threatened the loss of jobs and political plums if they failed to deliver their precincts.

So certain were the machines that only the controlled vote would come out, that on the eve of the elections, "Bunny" East, Republican County Chairman, estimated that some 300,000 voters would turn out at the polls, while Mr. Arvey's guess was 400,000. The turn out exceeded 700,000.

The strategy of silence on the part of the Democratic and Republican parties placed a heavier burden on the newly formed, poorly organized, and finance-less Progressive Party. It had to transform a walk-away into a race, to force the issues, to arouse the electorate, to bring out the independent voters, and to guarantee that, once they came out, their votes would be counted.

Of course, the strategy of the machines, clever as it seemed, had one serious defect. It gave the Progressive Party the much coveted initiative and kept it on the offensive. It helped to prove to those who were reached with the issues that the old parties

had something to hide and were afraid to face the people.

How the fledgling Progressive Party was able to reach the people and organize the vote is a story in itself. But the underlying political fact that made it possible was the receptiveness of the people. Once it became clear that an effective alternative to the Republican and Democratic coalition had been placed on the ballot, things began to happen, and a qualitative change occurred in the relationship of political forces. The people had something to rally around, some way of expressing their discontent with the old parties and the movement for the Progressive Party ticket began to mushroom and grow into something bigger and broader than originally anticipated.

The mere existence of an effective alternative on the ballot not only focused attention on the major issues; it also brought to light new ones. Cracks and fissures began to appear in the old machines. In the industrial suburbs of Cicero, Berwyn, and Maywood, the voters, many of whom were traditionally Republican, saw in the new party an opportunity to register their dissatisfaction with the domination of the big city machines over the smaller towns in the county. On election day a small-town revolt took place, the Progressive Party sweeping a number of the small townships.

On Chicago's great South Side, many Democratic and Republican precinct captains, sensing the mood

of the voters, refused to deliver their precincts. In other cases, individual precinct captains expressed their resentment with the policies and leadership of their parties by lying down on the job, or by going out to do a job for the Progressives.

Nor was it any longer possible for non-partisan critics of the bipartisan deal to continue their criticism without taking a stand for or against the candidates of the Progressive Party. Thus, the conservative, austere Chicago Bar Association, which could not for the good of its own reputation go along with the bipartisan coalition slate, had to endorse three of the Progressive candidates. The Cook County Bar Association (of Negro attorneys), not only endorsed the three outstanding and qualified Negro candidates on the Progressive ticket, but called upon the Negro people to give a straight vote to the Progressive Party, making its offices available as the South Side headquarters for the campaign.

While the militant *Chicago Star* was the only paper to support the Progressive Party ticket as a whole, and did a yeoman job in that respect, the daily newspapers could not remain silent. Having previously attacked corruption in the courts and the method of coalition, although for varied and sundry reasons, they were compelled before the end of the campaign to endorse one or more candidates on the Progressive line. This did not stop them, however, from issuing dire warnings against a third

party and from belittling the Progressive Party ticket as a whole.

Support for at least one Progressive candidate became incumbent upon the press, when it was revealed that a leading bipartisan candidate, Wilbur F. Crowley, Assistant State Attorney, was a bosom pal of the mouth-piece of Jack Guzik, notorious Chicago mobster. It was to defeat Crowley that all Chicago newspapers endorsed Homer F. Carey, the best known of the Progressive candidates. This undoubtedly explains the 313,000 votes received by Carey, who missed election by the narrow margin of 20,000 votes. That Carey was actually elected is a widely held view in Chicago for the machines voted the cemeteries on election day and stole bushels of votes wherever they could get away with it.

But the high vote for Carey is not the most important outcome of the election. As Milburn P. Akers, political editor of the *Chicago Sun*, noted a day after the election:

The significance of Tuesday's election is not the spectacular vote received by Homer F. Carey, Progressive candidate. . . . But the 120,000 to 130,000 votes received by the low candidates have significance.*

Undoubtedly they constitute the base of a left-wing movement in Chicago politics. And a left-wing movement, that can garner 120,000 to 130,000, or more, votes in Cook County can be, at times, a balance of power.

Sponsors of the Progressive slate may

be unable to hold the base vote together. It consists of a number of elements. They may be difficult to put together into a real third party. . . .

Be that as it may, this fact remains. They did so for the judicial election. They may do so again. So the shadow of Henry Wallace still hangs ominously over the Democratic Party.

Mr. Akers is undoubtedly correct when he says that the Progressive Party vote "consists of a number of elements." But this is true of every broad movement, particularly those of a mixed class character.

The building of the third-party movement, both locally and nationally, consists precisely in the art of bringing together all forces and elements who can be united around a common progressive program and party. To look for "pure" movements, made up of single class or social groupings, is to close one's eyes to the only way in which the broadest base for a third-party movement can be established.

The people of Chicago were not asked to vote for the abstract idea of a third party. Had they been, it is doubtful whether the same results would have been obtained. They were asked to vote on issues, and where one or more of these became clear to them, where they felt deeply about them, they did not hesitate to leave the old party columns for that of a new party. This is one of the most important lessons to be learned from the Chicago elections, one of great importance for 1948.

* The final tabulation shows that the lowest vote on the Progressive ticket was 138,000.

NATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE
PROGRESSIVE VOTE

It goes without saying that it was not only the local issues that brought out the progressive vote. In the period of the Roosevelt New Deal, too, there had been considerable progressive and clean government opposition to the shenanigans of the corrupt Kelly machine. But in those years people were ready to forgive the crimes of the machine politicians, for were they not supporting the Roosevelt Administration nationally? Under such circumstances "uprisings" and third-party movements could not be organized around such "small" matters as a judicial election.

Ample proof exists that the people who voted for the Progressive Party were not oblivious to its national significance. First, the press tried to make much of the fact that if the new party received 5 per cent of the total vote it would become a legal party, capable of running a third ticket in 1948. In the gathering of the signatures, and on election day itself, many were those who asked whether the Progressive Party was associated with Henry Wallace.

The day after election the *Chicago Tribune* carried the story that, in certain Republican precincts, voters "associated the Progressive ticket with the party of the same name in the 1912 Bull Moose movement led by Theodore Roosevelt." Which proves that there are more than a few Republicans who are thinking of a third party.

Likewise, the *Chicago Defender* reported that Negro voters, when asked why they were voting Progressive, responded that they were voting for their race and that since the death of Roosevelt they saw no difference between the Republican and Democratic parties. Certainly this had something to do with the ability of the Progressive Party to sweep a number of wards highly populated with Negro people, and why Earl B. Dickerson and Sidney Jones, two Negro candidates, polled 216,000 and 182,000 votes respectively.

It is important to note the role that the women voters played in the election. They sparked much of the campaign in the precincts. On election day, reports from all over the city showed that the women were among the most responsive to the issues and least tied to the machines. The women rallied around the candidacy of Pearl M. Hart, a progressive, who has made a brilliant record for herself, especially in the field of juvenile delinquency. Miss Hart polled over 181,000 votes. The performance of the women in this campaign leads this writer to conclude that the progressive movement generally underestimates the role of women, gives leading women too little recognition, and hence fails to tap this great reservoir for progress.

PROBLEMS AHEAD

While emphasizing the positive aspects of the Chicago election, and showing its intimate relationship to

the developing third-party movement nationally, it would be highly dangerous to exaggerate what took place, or to underestimate the big and difficult problems that still confront the third-party movement in Chicago. This election did contain certain peculiarities that will not repeat themselves again in the same way or form. For example, the Democrats and Republicans will certainly not coalesce around one slate of candidates in 1948. There may be no vital issues that separate them, but there certainly will be two different slates of candidates. This will lend itself to greater demagoguery and greater confusion. The machines will also try to bribe or buy off some of those who participated in the "uprising."

Furthermore, one must not underestimate the power still displayed by the machines, which, after all, did win the election. Especially in the white working-class wards, the Democratic Party polled an exceedingly high straight vote. This does not mean that the workers who marked their cross in the Democratic circle are indifferent to the issues, or are in basic agreement with the policies of Truman and his local henchmen. It does mean, however, that a great many workers still think of the Democratic Party as the party of Roosevelt and continue to have a fatal attraction to the Democratic column.

In this election, a great job was done by a number of important trade unions, which reached their members in the shops and which con-

tributed to the man-power in the precincts and at the polls. But the failure of the official city C.I.O. and A. F. of L. leadership to join hands with other progressive forces in this campaign did much to create confusion in the minds of workers. The net result of the election is, however, a sharp rebuke to those trade union leaders who prefer to wallow in the pigsty of party patronage, as against giving courageous and honest political leadership to their rank and file.

The way to overcome this division in the ranks of the trade union leadership and to win the great mass of the workers away from the old parties is to reach and clarify the rank and file on the issues. Where this cannot be done through the trade unions, it must be done in the precincts, and in as many places as possible on both levels. This means, in the first place, better and more permanent organization on a precinct level.

It also requires better knowledge of the "know-how" of clarifying issues. The experience in this campaign proves that the issues must be simple and understandable. This is particularly important for 1948, when the country will be deluged with demagoguery, and when every politician and candidate will be ready to promise the most beautiful legislative program to the people. The advantage that the Progressive Party had in this campaign is that it stuck to facts, to deeds. For example, no matter how desperately certain Negro political

leaders tried to squirm out of their predicament by pointing to this or that stand of their party on the Negro question, they could not explain away the stark fact that both parties had denied Negroes a place on this high court. And it was this and other such simple facts which advanced the cause of the Progressive Party.

There must also be more indictment of the two-party system as such and the corrupt machines of the two major parties. Both major parties in this country have become electoral corporations in the service of monopoly capital. The struggle for a political realignment, for a third party, must also be the struggle against corruption in politics. Too long have the progressive forces ignored this issue. And yet, when this issue is tied-up with a general progressive program for peace and well-being, it can help create the moral fervor of a crusade.

In the Chicago election, for the first time, an important section of the labor movement joined forces with many good-government, reform forces, and, as a result of this, the local third party was able to attract to its fold considerable middle class support. These middle-class groupings are opposed to corrupt politics because it has meant higher taxes,

dirty alleys and streets, and a school system of which the less said the better. The future of the Progressive Party in Chicago will depend in great part upon its ability to maintain the triple alliance of the progressive trade unions, the Negro people and the good government, reform elements of the middle class.

The third party movement must grow out of every phase of American life. Its appeal and program must be as all-sided as life itself, for monopoly capital and its parties are not responsible for war preparations and Taft-Hartley anti-labor laws alone. They are just as responsible for the shameful wave of teen-age crime, for the rat infested slums of our cities, for Negro discrimination and anti-Semitism, for corrupt courts, and for everything that is foul and debased.

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These are only a few of the many lessons that can be drawn from the Chicago elections. But neither time nor space will permit of further treatment of them in this article.

The progressive forces of Chicago have made an important beginning in the building of a third party in that city. Only time will tell whether they can maintain the necessary clarity and unity to forge ahead.