

1984: It's Not Just Another Election

I. What Makes This Election Different?

On the surface, the 1984 presidential election looks like a carbon copy of countless others which have preceded it. Once again, two bourgeois politicians, each aspiring to be chief executive of the U.S. imperialist system, are appealing to the masses of people for their votes. And once again the country is being subjected to those rituals of populism and patriotism which are the standard ideological fare of the "democratic" electoral process and through which the U.S. ruling class renews its political legitimacy every four years.

And yet there is a widespread sense that something very much out of the ordinary is taking place in this year's electoral contest. The election and the events surrounding it have aroused passions—on all sides—suggesting that, for once, there is more at stake than is usually the case when the imperialist guard is either reaffirmed or changed. Two factors, in particular, stand out.

One is Ronald Reagan. The President's four years in office have been both injury and insult to the working class, to minorities, to women—and to the vast majority of the world's peoples. Injury because Reagan's policies have pushed the world closer to the nuclear brink, methodically paved the way for another Vietnam in Central America, mercilessly punished minorities while promoting "white rights" (meaning white supremacy) as official government policy, weakened the trade union movement, reversed the momentum of the movement for equal rights for women and undermined the living standards of major sections of the working class. Insult because Reagan is the bourgeoisie's contemptuous message to the masses that the U.S. ruling class believes it can get away with anything without fear of retaliation.

The prospect of Reagan, on the basis of his first-term record, receiving a popular mandate to exercise the enormous powers of the U.S. presidency in similar fashion for another four years cannot help but be



One of the extraordinary factors in the 1984 elections is the presence of the consistently progressive voice of the Rainbow Coalition.

Not only has the Jackson campaign brought a program of consistently progressive politics into the bourgeois electoral arena, it has activated a mass social base—principally in the Black community—for their support. Under Jackson's leadership, the Rainbow Coalition has challenged both the assumptions and the policies of those twin pillars of bourgeois rule in the U.S.—imperialist policy abroad and racism at home.

These are the factors—the particular nature of the Reagan presidency and the historic emergence of progressive politics supported by a substantial electoral base in the Black community—which have made the 1984 election an event which we believe cannot be approached simply with formulas and slogans of other periods.

WORKING CLASS STAKE

In our view, the working class has a crucial stake not just in using the 1984

exposure of the myths associated with the bourgeois electoral process—especially the fantasy that power can be transferred from the bourgeoisie to the working class through such means. At the same time, the working class must be trained to approach each political event in its particularity—figuring out concretely how both its immediate as well as its long term class interests are best served.

In the 1984 election, those interests, we believe, are concentrated in two goals.

One is ousting Ronald Reagan from the White House, a goal which requires of the left that it undertake to explain to the masses why it is in their political interest to vote for the Democratic Party's candidates, Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro.

The other is building the Rainbow Coalition, a goal which requires of the left that it work within and help push forward the Jesse Jackson-led insurgency within the Democratic Party.

It is no minor matter for the future of U.S. working class politics for the communists to advocate the election of one bourgeois candidate over another in a presidential election—rather than urging support for candidates of the left, or a "protest" vote or a boycott of the electoral process. It is likewise a major responsibility to advocate building and strengthening a particular political faction within one of the two bourgeois political parties—as opposed to "exposing" such an effort as a negative concession to capitalist rule and pressing for the immediate development of a mass independent working class political vehicle.

It is important, therefore, that this conclusion not be based on intuition or pragmatism. We cannot rest our case simply on exposing Reagan's perfidy or touting Jackson's virtues. We must explain, in the case of Reagan, why another bourgeois politician—no less devoted to the interests of U.S. imperialism—is, *under present circumstances*, a preferable alternative. We must also explain, in the case of Jackson, why an effort nominally aimed at making the Democratic Party "truly" representative of the masses—a goal whose attainment is, to say the least, highly problematic—represents at this stage the most advanced motion toward independent and progressive working class politics in the U.S.

In doing so, we take issue with others on the left who are advocating strategies

based on abstaining from this year's election or fielding alternative left presidential candidates. In our view, such strategies represent uncalled-for and sectarian retreats from the main flashpoints of the class struggle as it has actually unfolded in the realm of politics in 1984.

II. 1984—The Real Questions Are War and Fascism

One of the main reasons why the 1984 election is not an "ordinary" election is that Ronald Reagan is not an "ordinary" president. He defines the political stakes in this election in a way and to a degree that few other bourgeois politicians—even incumbent presidents—have ever done.

The decision by the U.S. ruling class to put the reins of its state apparatus in the hands of this particular right-wing demagogue in 1980 was a calculated risk. Their purpose was to see whether a political figure representing the neo-fascist right could forge a popular consensus in support of renewed U.S. military aggression abroad, a massive bid to regain nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union, and a program of racism, repression and social austerity at home—policies deemed essential to the defense and resuscitation of the imperialist system.

Certainly Reagan has more than lived up to these expectations. Military activity has been the defining characteristic of his administration's foreign policy—in Lebanon, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Grenada, Libya's coastal waters and the Persian Gulf. Deployment of new intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe represents a major bid to regain first-strike capacity over the Soviet Union. Both ideologically and militarily, the country is inexorably being placed on a war footing.

At the same time, Reagan's supply-side economics, cuts in social spending and attacks on unions are, in essence, a program designed to strengthen the hand of capital and weaken the bargaining position of the working class. The goal is to facilitate a renegotiation of all the conditions of labor in the U.S. on terms more favorable to a bourgeoisie suffering a diminution of its profitability.

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The man who has brought us four years of insults and injuries limbering up for four more.

anxiety-provoking—especially since we can rightfully assume that a second term would make the first look like a dress rehearsal. Just the possibility of ousting Reagan from office in 1984 would make this year's election noteworthy.

The other factor making this year's electoral contention extraordinary is Jesse Jackson—or, to be more precise, the movement which Jackson's unprecedented candidacy for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination has brought into being.

election as a vehicle for having its class interests placed before the masses, but in the actual outcome of the balloting. As a result, left and progressive forces cannot afford the moralistic indulgence of abstentionism or the sectarian indulgence of independent "protest" candidacies—no matter how justified and righteous our anger at the craven alternative to Reagan that the Democratic Party has provided in the person of Walter Mondale.

Certainly the political training of the working class requires the most ruthless

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In order to win popular support for such a program, Reagan has undertaken to alter drastically the country's ideological climate. The Reagan view is that previous administrations—Republican as well as Democratic—helped undermine the necessary ideological fiber for such a consensus by unduly legitimizing an atmosphere of tolerable dissent (as opposed to mindless patriotism), starchy-eyed internationalism (as opposed to hard-nosed national chauvinism), liberal materialist humanism (as opposed to rock-ribbed religious orthodoxy), and holding out the possibility of coexistence with the socialist countries (as opposed to undying anticommunism and anti-Sovietism).

But there has been more to the Reagan game plan than patriotic hype, evangelical religion and hysterical anticommunist propaganda. A central component of the Reagan program has been to racialize its attacks on the working class so that Blacks and other minorities would bear the brunt of the assault while the better-off, predominantly white sectors of the working class remained relatively cushioned from its worst aspects. Exploiting the existing racial division in the working class and further exacerbating it was viewed as the key to winning a substantial portion of the workers to support of the Reagan program. It is a strategy which, it must be admitted, has enjoyed considerable success.

Now, the 1984 election will register the extent of the President's support and what degree of a popular mandate he enjoys on behalf of such a program.

THE MONDALE DIFFERENCE

Of course, if Walter Mondale were nothing but Reagan's Democratic clone, the pending November plebiscite would be politically meaningless. But while Mondale is without question a loyal and dutiful representative of monopoly capital, his differences with Reagan are not without significance. They reflect a perspective and a set of policy preferences within the bourgeoisie which are measurably at odds with the Reagan program. And since, at the present time, the bourgeoisie deems it necessary to rule by way of a "democratically" determined popular mandate, it is politically possible for the masses to intervene in this debate and affect its outcome.

The principal concerns of that section of the bourgeoisie backing Mondale's bid for the presidency are that Reagan may be misassessing objective political and military conditions facing U.S. imperialism on a global scale; and that, by the wholesale nature of his attacks on the working class at home, the President risks losing popular support for the social arrangements through which the bourgeoisie's rule has been reinforced and which provide the ruling class with a popular consensus for its policies and property relations.

We have already had a glimpse into the way in which these differences get expressed politically in the course of Reagan's first term. They would, we believe, be even more graphic in a second.

THE WAR DANGER

To begin with, it is almost certain that a re-elected Reagan administration, its political mandate renewed, would be even more likely to step up its aggression and military buildup. A Reagan victory would make it more difficult for the highly unstable congressional opposition to continue to refuse funding to the Nicaraguan "contras." Indeed, with Reagan already campaigning for re-election on the basis of blatant appeals to jingoism and militaristic anticommunism, his return to office would undoubtedly help reinforce a consensus behind new military actions and would buttress the President's contemptuous attitude toward negotiations with the Soviet Union on nuclear weapons and other questions.

Does this mean that a Mondale administration would be a beacon of peace and justice on a world scale? Hardly. But a Mondale presently pledged to "stop the illegal war in Nicaragua" in his first 100 days in office is not as likely to invade that



Mondale and Ferraro represent the bourgeoisie, but their program differs from Reagan's preparations for fascism.

country in the first flush of enthusiasm after the election or to be as precipitous as we can expect Reagan to be in sending U.S. troops into El Salvador. Certainly a president dubious at the prospects for regaining the nuclear edge over the Soviet Union is more likely to make the attempt promised by Mondale to "negotiate a mutual, verifiable nuclear freeze."

Like other candidates before him, Mondale in office may quickly renege on these and other campaign promises. Nor

should we have any illusions that Mondale would hesitate to take any military actions required to defend the imperialist system. Nevertheless, the ouster of Reagan and Mondale's election would signify the fact that the bourgeoisie has not forged a stable, reliable popular consensus on behalf of a policy of naked military aggression and nuclear roulette—and that alone will be something of a fetter on the policy options open to the next administration.

PREPARATIONS FOR FASCISM

On the domestic side of this political equation, it is time to take a step back from the phenomena of slashes in social welfare, attacks on equal rights, assaults on women, forays against the trade unions, threats to social security and the like and attempt to identify the more far-reaching political trajectory of the Reagan administration.

In our view, the first Reagan administration set into motion both an ideological climate and a series of political measures which represent a qualitative escalation in the preparations for fascism. Emboldened by its re-election, a second Reagan administration would attempt to carry this process ahead even further—and would be in an excellent position to do so.

This motion toward fascism is an inevitable counterpoint of the Reagan administration's preparations for war. For the standing summation of the leading political and military representatives of the ruling class in the wake of the Vietnam War is that the U.S. cannot fight another war on a similar (or larger) scale without demanding extensive economic sacrifices from the workers and without extensive curtailments on political liberties.

Many of the characteristic features of fascism have already become part of the country's political and ideological landscape. Not nearly as crude as Hitler's proclamation of Aryan ethnic "purity," the Reagan administration's carefully coded racism has nevertheless legitimized and reinforced existing white supremacy in practice and simultaneously given it a moral justification in the name of "white rights" and "traditional values." The attempt to weaken the trade unions—while not nearly as blatant as the assault on minorities—is nevertheless a significant reversal of prevailing bourgeois policy for more than 35 years and is likewise typical of fascism's need to undermine every form of organization developed by the working class for its own protection.

The Reagan administration has also created an ideological climate that literally reeks of a fascist mentality. The

'We Are Emerging as the Progressive Force in the De

The Rainbow Coalition's consciousness of itself as a force in U.S. politics beyond the election is pointedly captured in an Open Letter addressed to the Democratic National Convention which was adopted by the Jesse Jackson for President Rainbow Conference held in Chicago June 29-July 1. In this significant document, Coalition leaders and activists underscore three main points: the definition of the Rainbow on the basis of progressive politics; the Rainbow's role as a left force in the Democratic Party; and the development of a mass electoral base. The following text of the Open Letter has been slightly edited.

We the members of the Rainbow Coalition declare our resolve to become a permanent presence in the fight for a more humane, equitable and progressive America in both its domestic and foreign affairs. In making this declaration, we are at first consciously distinct from conservative forces standing for the status quo, and liberal forces seeking minor reforms. We are a progressive movement for major changes in the substance and structure of American life.

This perspective has developed out of our experience and identification with the problems of the downtrodden in America and in the world at large. We conclude that with power we can make our own way. Therefore, the Rainbow Coalition must successfully confront those who choose to narrowly define power in terms of liberalism or conservatism. Our Coalition is emerging as the progressive force in the Democratic Party. We stand for progressive change as a product of Party and public policy.

We therefore support the elimination of racism, sexism and age discrimination. We believe it is the responsibility of government to assist those who cannot help themselves and to exercise leadership so that all citizens have access to a humane existence. We also support jobs and job training for the poor, unemployed, young and elderly; quality education for all; support for small independent farmers; support for humane immigration policies; food for the hungry and homes for the homeless.

We further seek the reduction of tension in the world through a leadership for peace that includes negotiation and the aggressive use of the instruments of trade, aid, communication and cultural exchanges, in an atmosphere of mutual respect . . .

On Africa: the conservative sees U.S.-Africa relations only through the perspective of the Soviet Union and strategic raw materials; the liberal offers trade and aid within the framework of U.S. and European nationalist interest; but the progressive wants self-determination, development, and an end to American corporate involvement with South Africa, as the basis of long term relationships.

On the Military Budget: the conservative wants to raise it 9%; the liberal wants to raise it 3 and 4% each year; but the progressive wants to cut by 20% over 5 years.

On Nuclear Weapons: the conservative wants to launch a first strike; the liberal wants a mutual pledge of deterrence; but the progressive pledges unilaterally and boldly in the name of humanity never to commit the act of Hiroshima again and become the first to use a nuclear weapon on another country.



On Affirmative Action: the conservative wants to eliminate it; the liberal wants to define it out of existence by making goals and time-tables impossible to use by open-ended prohibitions on all quotas; but the progressive understands that serious social policy and political participation demands quotas of all types to make up for past discrimination against entire groups.

On Voting Rights: the conservative wants to maintain impediments to the right to vote; the liberal wants to eliminate a few impediments which do not threaten their interest; but the progressive wants them all eliminated in favor of fair systems where one-person-one-vote and fair representation is the rule. . . . We stand firm in our conviction that the rule of participation in the Democratic primaries are unfair and we do not believe that the issue has been resolved. . . .

The Rainbow Coalition has made a striking advance upon the landscape of

openly chauvinist attacks on the United Nations and Third World countries go far beyond the protocols of bourgeois diplomacy, speaking to racist subjectivities and nationalist arrogance which are as self-righteous as they are undisciplined. The hostile stance taken towards women's rights has given the administration the dubious distinction of being the most backward of any developed capitalist country on this question since Hitler proclaimed that women's rightful place in the social order was "Küche, Kirche und Kinder" (kitchen, church and children).

ATTACK ON BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY

All this has been accompanied by a methodical assault on the very institutions of bourgeois democracy. Working through its ideological agents in every branch of government—executive, legislative and judicial—the administration is either violating, circumventing or repealing as many legal restrictions on its authority as it can get away with.

In the executive branch, it has used the cloak of "national security" to ignore checks on presidential authority built into the constitution or enacted by Congress in the wake of the Vietnam War. In Congress, it is promoting a rash of repressive legislation—in the guise of bills on "terrorism," crime and immigration—that would make a mockery of traditional protections afforded by the Bill of Rights. At the same time, an ever-more-compliant Supreme Court—to which at least two and possibly as many as five new members will be appointed in the next four years—is increasingly cooperating in this power-grab with decisions upholding the arbitrary exercise of presidential, military and police authority.

Last, but hardly least, the Reagan presidency has strengthened a definite fascist movement in the U.S. In a number of states—Minnesota and Michigan are but two recent examples—political operatives of the far right have already taken control over the Republican Party establishment. New Right ideologues have been seeded into every branch of government. Right-wing publications have pro-

liferated while, under cover of a revival of evangelical Christianity and anti-abortionism, a network of semi-fascist religious associations with enormous access to funds and media has grown rapidly.

CRYING WOLF?

The left has been criticized—and often rightfully so—for too quickly rushing to invoke the specter of fascism every time a bourgeois politician tilts to the right. But in the wake of Reagan's first term, it is all too appropriate to give voice to the danger posed by fascism. In this light, to dismiss the alternative offered by the Democratic Party in this election as qualitatively indistinct from what Reagan represents would be a misreading of the political realities and an inexcusable complacency.

The fact that in the context of the 1984 election, the objective defense of bourgeois democracy against the inroads of fascism proceeds under the leadership of the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie is quite sobering. All of history demonstrates that this is a most unreliable political force—a judgment which any assessment of Walter Mondale and the leadership of the Democratic Party would have to affirm.

In the long run, the struggle against fascism will only be as stable and as consistent as the concentrated political strength of the working class can make it. For as the imperialist crisis deepens, the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie, along with the opportunists in the labor movement and in other spontaneous movements of the masses, will inevitably be pulled towards the fascist alternative. One can already see the harbingers of such future developments in the controversies surrounding Jesse Jackson—for who can doubt that a substantial portion of the Democratic Party would bolt and support Reagan (and fascism) if the political alternative was Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition?

Nevertheless, in the present set of circumstances, the defense of bourgeois democracy against the stepped-up preparations for fascism represented by Reagan is bound up with electoral support for Walter Mondale and the Democratic Party.

III. The Rainbow Coalition

If working to defeat Ronald Reagan in November constitutes the immediate defense of the working class, doing so from the vantage point of the Rainbow Coalition—and working to make that coalition a stable and ongoing political force—constitutes a crucial step in the emergence of independent working class politics.

Clearly Jesse Jackson's campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination was fueled by the blatantly racist contempt demonstrated by the Reagan administration for the well-being and dignity of the Black community. But to see the Jackson candidacy as merely a response to Reaganism—and nothing

more—is to miss the real significance of that campaign and the Rainbow Coalition it produced.

After all, when Jackson traveled the country seeking votes in the Democratic primaries, he was not running directly against Reagan. He was running against Walter Mondale, the first choice of the Democratic Party leadership—and against others in the party who had their own reasons for opposing Mondale. He was running against the leadership of the

a powerful grip in the working class prefer to ignore this aspect of the Jackson candidacy, obscuring tensions and dynamics that are there for all to see with platitudes about the "unity of the anti-Reagan front"—as though forging such a unity will not itself come about only as the result of intense struggle with opportunism.

Some on the left are unable to see the class character of the Rainbow Coalition because it originates from the Black section of the working class. Locked into



Berkeley Mayor Gus Newport (far left) and Rep. Ron Dellums are among the progressive Black leaders associated with Jackson who seized the initiative from accommodationist forces in the course of the Jackson campaign.

AFL-CIO, challenging its right to speak for the working class on the central political question of 1984. And he was running against the traditional Black political establishment which rightfully saw in Jackson's candidacy a challenge to the bowing and scraping approach to the Democratic Party they had imposed on the Black electorate.

In short, Jesse Jackson's candidacy was not simply an angry response to the most reactionary administration foisted on the masses by the bourgeoisie in half a century. It was—and remains—a telling critique of opportunism in the labor movement and in the Black community.

The Rainbow Coalition is verifying in practical political life one of the most fundamental truths about the process by which the working class becomes conscious of itself as a class with its own class interests—and begins to organize itself accordingly: namely, that such a process inevitably originates as a challenge to the prevailing political leadership of the working class and matures precisely as a result of the struggle with opportunism.

LEFT BLIND-SPOTS

Most forces on the left—even those who responded positively to Jackson's candidacy—have not yet grasped the significance of this development. Those who are made uncomfortable by any suggestion that opportunist politics maintain

mechanical, color-coded formulas, they think that working class politics can only emerge out of the economic struggles of the organized sector of the industrial working class; in other words, out of the trade union movement. But while they wait in vain for such a development—or, what is worse, while they view the reinvigorated political activity of the opportunists in the trade union movement as an expression of the independent motion of working class politics—an actual movement based in the most oppressed sectors of the working class has emerged before their very eyes.

Some on the left are unable to see the politically independent character of the Rainbow Coalition because it emerged as a force within the Democratic Party and because its perspective is to continue advancing its politics on that terrain. Such a view is a classical expression of that left infantilism which Lenin criticized in terms that apply equally well to our present situation. "We must not regard what is obsolete to us," he said, "as something obsolete to a class, to the masses."

Yes, the Democratic Party is a bourgeois party, a valued institution of capitalist rule—and it will never be anything else! The vanguard elements of the working class know that. But until the mass of workers learn that truth out of their own experience, they will struggle again and again to make the Democratic Party into a political vehicle suitable for their class interests. The communists cannot stand aloof from that struggle—let alone castigate the political representatives of the proletariat's spontaneous motion for organizing that effort.

It is an implacable law of politics that the oppressed will attempt to use the forms of bourgeois democracy nominally available to them in order to improve and change their condition. This is the first step toward political maturation—a signal advance over the lethargic abstention from politics by which the oppressed, however bitterly, resign themselves to their condition.

Finally, there are some on the left who are unable to see the progressive character of the Rainbow Coalition because its political program does not make a complete break with the underlying assumptions of the imperialist system. (Why does Jackson call for "only a 20% reduction in the military budget?, they want to know.) This, too, is extremely short-sighted and betrays a totally schematic and amateurish sense of politics. The real point politically

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Democratic Party



John Jackson/Frontline photo

American politics. The old minorities—Black, Hispanic, Asian, Arab and Native Americans, women, Jews, gays, lesbians—are the new majority. They live in cities we have won such as Philadelphia, Newark, Atlanta, Little Rock, Norfolk, Houston, St. Louis, Charleston, New Orleans, Chicago, New York and others. We represent nearly four million popular votes which reflect an estimated 10-12 million votes in the general election. We were the majority Jackson vote in Washington, D.C. and states such as Louisiana, Virginia and South Carolina.

With this power, we are becoming conscious of our ability to affect local races at the state, county and municipal levels. But, we are also aware of our ability to elect congresspersons, senators and President. Our power will not be given away nor will it be compromised or traded away. Our support cannot be taken for granted. We are not so desperate to defeat Ronald Reagan that we will compromise our dignity and self-respect. □

FRONTLINE Forums

THE CHALLENGE TO THE LEFT IN THE 1984 ELECTION

A new vehicle for left discussion and debate—regular **FRONTLINE FORUMS**—will be launched this fall with a program on the most challenging political issue of the year, the 1984 presidential contest. Attend a presentation and discussion on the threat posed by Reagan's bid for re-election, the politics represented by the Mondale/Ferraro ticket, and the road to building the influence of the Rainbow Coalition.

Besides forums in the cities listed at right, smaller discussions will be held in a number of other localities. Watch for local publicity or write to *Frontline*, P.O. Box 2729, Oakland, CA 94602 for specific information.

Childcare available at all events.

NEW YORK
Sept. 16

SEATTLE
Sept. 22

WASH. D.C.
Sept. 23

LOS ANGELES
Sept. 23

SAN FRAN.
Sept. 29

BOSTON
Oct. 21

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is that the program of the Rainbow Coalition directly challenges the practical policies which the bourgeoisie deems crucial to the defense of its strategic interests; and through the Jackson candidacy that program has become a material force among a section of the masses!

And if this were not reason enough to assess the progressive, independent working class character of the Rainbow Coalition, the deep hostility and anxiety which the Jackson candidacy has produced in all sections of the ruling class and uniformly among its opportunist supporters indicates that the most class-conscious agents of the bourgeoisie have certainly figured out the strategic potential of the Rainbow—even if some on the left have not!

BUILDING THE RAINBOW

But that potential will not be realized automatically. The gains registered by the Jackson candidacy have to be consolidated and refocused into political forms more flexible than those produced by a nominating campaign. The Rainbow's perspective must be synthesized into a clear statement of political program. Most important of all, a strategic conception of where the Rainbow Coalition is going and on what battlefronts it will struggle must be developed.

The direction already charted by Jesse Jackson to guide the Rainbow through November is extremely positive and indicates the same keen sense of principled politics which characterized the Jackson candidacy from the outset. Its essential points are:

- To maintain and consolidate the Rainbow Coalition as an independent political force in the struggle to oust Reagan from office;
- To refuse to be driven out of the Democratic Party but to consolidate itself as a permanent progressive faction within it—in effect to constitute itself as the Democratic Party's left wing;
- To continue the political mobilization of the Black masses through voter registration drives and through building an institution that will function both inside and outside the electoral arena;
- To strengthen the breadth of the Rainbow, especially in its effort to build unity between Blacks and Latinos, as well as other minorities;
- To refuse to turn back to the traditional Black political establishment the mandate given Jackson by the Black electorate in the primaries.

Building the Rainbow Coalition on the basis of such a perspective would do more than institutionalize the gains and experiences of the Jesse Jackson candidacy. It would, for the first time, bring into U.S. political life a force which, standing at the critical intersection of the class and racial contradictions in U.S. society, would provide the working class with an independent voice capable of forcing its demands onto the country's political agenda.

IV. The Independent Role of the Left

Needless to say, no one on the left supports Reagan's re-election; indeed, most (if not all) left forces acknowledge that the President's defeat would be a good thing. It is also true that much of the left has been able to recognize the progressive thrust of the Jesse Jackson candidacy and the Rainbow Coalition.

But such views, by themselves, have only a glancing relation to politics, the point of which is not to monitor the class struggle but to interact with it. The perspective we have advanced here—which is captured in the slogan: "Build the Rainbow Coalition, Dump Reagan!"—is advanced in order to provide a strategic orientation that would define and guide the practical political work of conscious forces of the left in the 1984 election.

Not everyone on the left agrees with this perspective. Some don't think that the differences between the Republicans and Democrats this year are significant

enough to justify support to one bourgeois candidate over another. For the most part these are the same forces who fail to see anything progressive in the Jackson candidacy. (In classic Trotskyist fashion, the Socialist Workers Party dismisses the Jackson campaign as "No step forward in [the] fight for Black equality" and calls the effort an "obstacle" and a "diversion" to independent working class politics. Not surprisingly, they are running their own candidates for president and vice-president.)

Of greater concern to us, however, are those who do think that Reagan's ouster would be a signal victory for the working class and who likewise recognize the progressive character of the Rainbow Coalition—but whose practical strategy contradicts such a perspective.

ABSTENTIONIST TENDENCY

Troubling on this score is an abstentionist tendency which seems to have developed a measure of currency among some Jackson supporters so angered and frustrated by the treatment accorded Jackson and the Rainbow forces at the Democratic National Convention and since, that they are now contemplating a boycott of the November election.

We believe that this is a subjectivist error which, in the name of justifiable anger, gives in to despair and surrenders politics. Certainly the arrogant contempt displayed by the leadership of the Democratic Party for the political representative overwhelmingly chosen by the Black community to speak on its behalf is racist to the core. Even worse is the attempt to transfer the mandate won by Jesse Jackson to the white-picked Black leaders Jackson defeated.

This is all the more reason not to leave the battleground of the Democratic Party uncontested and do the work of these racists and opportunists for them. Their insults and attacks are themselves the tacit acknowledgement that the Jackson campaign has struck a deep responsive chord among the masses—one which they rightly fear.

Permitting these forces the political privilege of posing as the only opponents to Ronald Reagan is to grant them a practical victory they were not able to achieve in the course of the primaries or the Democratic National Convention. Not abstentionism, but the independent effort of the Rainbow Coalition to mobilize the masses—especially the Black community—in the struggle against Reagan through voter registration and, yes, by casting their ballots for Mondale and Ferraro, is a far more effective way of translating the class and anti-racist hatred which many activists rightfully feel into a meaningful and effective political force.

Equally problematic is the position taken by several left political parties—the Citizens Party and the Workers World Party for example—who are nominally committed to the importance of ousting Reagan and advancing the Rainbow but who insist that a vote for Mondale is a

political surrender and, not surprisingly, have fielded their own presidential and vice presidential candidates in the election.

CPUSA POSITION

The approach of the CPUSA which claims to play an "indispensable" role in the anti-Reagan front is troubling as well—particularly because we must hold those who speak in the name of communism to a higher standard of accountability than we do others. The CPUSA's

1984 election and acting as a leading force in the working class movement.

The Hall-Davis effort gives the CPUSA an escape valve from facing this contradiction. Its impact is objectively sectarian, materially drawing needed energy and resources away from the task of building the Rainbow and ideologically failing to educate the advanced that the precise battleline between opportunism and progressive politics in 1984 lies at the boundary of the Rainbow Coalition.



While Mondale has become the anti-Reagan candidate, the independent activity of the Rainbow Coalition brings the most advanced critique of Reaganism to the 1984 elections.

justification for running Gus Hall and Angela Davis in this election is that their candidacy represents the "independent" role of the communists and will help defeat Reagan by "reaching millions" with the "real issues" of the campaign.

Such a course might be the tactic of choice if U.S. communists were indeed positioned to "reach millions" with their views—and if the Rainbow Coalition were not popularizing a peace and justice platform on a broad and massive scale. But in the concrete conditions that prevail today, the Hall-Davis candidacy is a diversionary enterprise which obscures more than it illuminates about the road forward for the working class.

On one level, the CPUSA campaign is simply confusing—Hall and Davis are openly urging the masses to vote for Mondale while they themselves are running against him. But more importantly, the campaign—as an extension of the CPUSA's erroneous underlying perspective on the fight against Reaganism—amounts to another tactic to equate all the components of the anti-Reagan electoral front (except the CPUSA itself) and to avoid pinpointing the qualitatively distinct role of the Rainbow Coalition. Acknowledging the Rainbow's uniquely advanced political significance within the anti-Reagan front is anathema to the CPUSA, as it would undercut their constant claim that the trade union movement is playing an "independent role" in the

The objectives of the left in the 1984 election campaign which we have advanced—ousting Reagan and building the Rainbow Coalition—are clearly not mutually exclusive. They are, in fact, very much intertwined, for the ouster of Reagan will not be accomplished without the mass mobilization of the most oppressed sectors of the U.S. working class which only the outlook of the Rainbow Coalition can bring about; nor will the Rainbow Coalition be built without taking responsibility for defeating that representative of the U.S. ruling class who has become its most concentrated expression of the drive towards war and the motion towards fascism.

But no matter what happens in the November election, the struggle against fascism—the cutting edge of which is the struggle against war and racism—will go on. Even if Reagan is re-elected, the movement to oust him which is now being built—especially the Rainbow Coalition which represents the working class component of the anti-Reagan front—can materially affect the degree to which the President would be able to pursue his program and the pace at which he tries to implement it. That movement will also act as a powerful check on a Mondale presidency which, inevitably, would be pulled toward policies of war and repression in defense of the imperialist system. For the forces of peace, national liberation and socialism throughout the world those are not minor concerns.

But beyond such practical urgencies rests an even more fundamental question. Precisely because the central questions of class politics—the bourgeoisie's motion toward war and fascism, the spontaneous straining of the working class for its own voice and political expression—have been brought to the fore this year, the 1984 election has the potential to become one of those historic turning points which mark the maturation of the class struggle. How the left responds to this possibility—both analytically and practically—will likewise be a turning point in the development and maturation of a proletarian vanguard in that struggle. □

This editorial statement was collectively prepared by the Editorial Board of the Marxist-Leninist journal Line of March, which takes overall responsibility for the political perspective of Frontline.

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