

GREEN SITS ATOP DIVIDED DEMOCRATS

June 1979

By Jim Griffin

Amidst charges of fraud and demands for a recount, Bill Green emerged as the unofficial winner of last month's rough and tumble Democratic primary for mayor, besting Charles Bowser by some 40,000 votes. David Marston, as expected, had no trouble in winning the Republican nomination. In the races for council and the city's row offices, machine-backed councilmen Al Pearlman, Francis Rafferty and controller candidate Thomas Leonard were big winners, but so were Rizzo foes David Cohen and Augusta Clark.

THE MAYOR'S RACE

The mayoralty contest was far closer than expected. Bill Green was denied the landslide margin predicted in the polls by a strong showing by Black candidate Charles Bowser. Pre-election polls had given Bowser a mere 25% of the vote. Instead, Bowser ran up 44% of the total. Given that Green outspent Bowser 5 to 1 and had the de facto support of the Democratic machine, Bowser's showing was impressive. In capturing between 75% and 80% of the city's predominantly Black wards, the Bowser candidacy demonstrated the new strength of the Black vote as a factor in Philadelphia politics.

Green's margin of victory rested on the big totals he ran up in the city's white areas, where he captured an estimated 80% of the vote. In the river wards and the Rizzo strongholds of South Philadelphia, Bowser was held to 3% of the vote and did only slightly better in liberal Center City and the far Northeast. Given that Bowser had an edge over Green in terms of qualification and that there was little to sharply differentiate the two when it came to the issues, the white vote for Green is in some large part an indication that the consideration of race still counts with white voters.

At the same time, Bowser might have won or at least come closer had he run a different sort of campaign. In adopting a soft middle ground and disassociating himself from any demands that ran counter to the needs of the city's big business elite, Bowser hurt his chances.

By playing down the Black community's demand for equality and failing to call for radical measures to provide jobs, housing, and improved social services, Bowser failed to fully mobilize the Black vote. While there was substantial grass roots sentiment for Bowser, voter turnout was well below that in last year's charter change election. Bowser's campaign did not inspire the enthusiasm and broad mobilization that characterized

last November's battle.

To win white working class votes Bowser would have had to clearly differentiate himself from Green. Had he talked openly about how the city's rulers use racism to mislead white working people and divide them from their Black allies, had he called for tax relief for wage earners and homeowners at the expense of the banks and corporations, had he stood for stopping the runaway shops by hitting the employers with penalties, Bowser could have undercut Green's support in the white areas. Instead Bowser, both in his platform and in his selection of Charles Ludwig as a running mate, sought to appease white business and financial circles and thus undermined his appeal to the masses of white working people.

With a larger and more solid Black vote and with a modest increase in the share of the white vote, Bowser could have licked Green. And he would have done it on a platform calculated to genuinely improve the lives of Philadelphia's working people and build real Black-white unity. This is the lesson progressive forces have to draw from Bowser's failure. Bowser's claim that he actually won and was robbed of his victory by fraud has to be seen as an attempt to divert attention from the real reasons for his defeat.

COUNCILMANIC AND ROW OFFICE ELECTIONS

The press has been quick to interpret the vote for council and row offices as a "standoff" between the still alive and kicking Rizzo machine, and the anti-Rizzo reform forces. It is certainly true that the results mean the continued survival of the machine and the presence of notorious Rizzoites like Al Pearlman, Franny Rafferty, and Marge Tartaglione on November's ballot. But the machine has been badly gored and its victories are more the product of the lack of organization and disunity among anti-Rizzo forces than anything else.

In the large councilmanic races incumbents John Kelly and Earl Vann were ousted, and Charles Murray trails in a too close to call race with liberal John Anderson. Anti-Rizzo candidates David Cohen and Augusta Clark are clear winners. A better showing for anti-Rizzo forces would have been possible if there had been a unified slate but instead the vote was divided among a dozen or so

The race for controller bears out the analysis that the anti-Rizzo vote was in the majority. Machine-backed Tom Leonard beat Rizzo foe Rich Chapman by 20,000 votes, but if the votes for John

Braxton and Charles Ludwig, who like Chapman are anti-Rizzo reform Democrats, are added to Chapman's, it is clear that the majority opposed Leonard and the machine.

The City Commissioners contest tells the same story. Rizzo opponent Gene Maier topped the list, with Marge Tartaglione, an outspoken Rizzoite, trailing by some 8000 votes. Tartaglione got the second slot on the ticket because the anti-Rizzo vote was split between Dorothy Brennan, backed by Maier, and Chaka Fattah, supported by the Black Political Convention. Brennan and Fattah together outpolled Tartaglione by 12,000 votes.

The contest for four judgeships on the Court of Common Pleas was the machine's worst showing. They dropped three out of the four nominations to anti-organization Democrats with Lou Hill and Lynne Abraham, both critics of Rizzo, leading the pack.

What this shows is that, while there continues to be a hard core of voters who rally to the banner of Rizzoism, and that the Democratic machine can still deliver a sizeable vote to candidates of its choosing, the majority sentiment is opposed to the Rizzo doctrine. The machine is only decisive when the opposition is split.

GREEN'S DILEMMA

To translate his primary victory into a win in the fall, Bill Green has to unite the deeply divided Democratic Party — a virtually impossible task. Green must pull together Rizzoites, machine regulars, liberals, and the more independent supporters of Charles Bowser in order to insure his election. Green faces the twin dangers of defections from both the right and the left.

Frank Rizzo crawled out from under his stone election night to warn of the possibility of a Rizzo-backed "independent" for mayor. Bowser supporters are talking of either running an independent candidate or backing Republican David Marston. If Green moves to accommodate either wing of the party he increases the danger of the other wing abandoning ship. Yet, particularly in relation to the Bowser forces, if Green does not come forward with important concessions, he will be unable to stem a breakaway.

Green's dilemma is nothing but the historic dilemma of the Democratic Party which has always aimed at reconciling irreconcilables, whether it be big business and labor, or segregationist politicians and the masses of Black people. It is yet

another example of why the Democratic Party is not and cannot be the vehicle for genuine progress. David Marston hopes that Bill Green's dilemma will be his opportunity. But the idea that the Republican Party can serve as any kind of progressive alternative to the Democrats has nothing to recommend it. It is the Party of Nixon and the Party of Meehan and Devlin; it is even more tied to big money and hostile to the interests of working people than the Democrats. A vote for Marston might punish Bill Green and the Dems, but it won't promise any changes at City Hall.

NEEDED: AN INDEPENDENT CANDIDACY

Green's dilemma means that the time is ripe for a real break from the Democratic Party. What is needed is an alternative to Rizzoism, to the mealy-mouthed corporate liberalism of Green and the naked opportunism of Marston. What is needed is a genuinely independent candidacy for Mayor, independent of big business and

their two parties, and based on the needs of all working people.

The embryo for an independent movement already exists in the Black Political Convention. The Convention adopted the Human Rights Agenda (see related article), a platform for real change in Philadelphia. The Convention is also on record as supporting the formation of an independent Black political party. During the campaign, in which the Convention endorsed a number of candidates, the Convention also functioned as the left wing of the Bowser forces.

Many activists now favor a rapid reorganization of the convention to check the move toward Marston and to initiate a broad-based independent ticket running on the platform of the Human Rights Agenda. Such an initiative could create a pole to which progressive forces from labor, the women's movement and other elements of the coalition that beat Frank Rizzo could be rallied. Besides running a mayoral candidate, independents could

be nominated for council and row offices. Such a ticket should include support for those Democrats who have backed the Human Rights Agenda or have generally taken a progressive anti-Rizzo stand.

Another factor in assembling an independent ticket is the Consumer Party which has ballot position and is on record as favoring cooperation and united action with other independent forces. The Consumer Party platform is consistent with the Human Rights Agenda and poses a definite alternative to the two capitalist controlled parties.

Both Green and Marston will be wheeling and dealing in the next month. They will be offering jobs and making promises to try to capture the support of Charles Bowser and his supporters. This sordid maneuvering has nothing to do with the real interests of the people of Philadelphia. Only independent political action by and for ourselves will serve our interests.

Black Political Convention to Reconvene MOVING TOWARD AN INDEPENDENT TICKET

July 1979

by Jim Griffin

Voters who think there's not a dime's worth of difference between David Marston and Bill Green, who rightfully suspect that neither mayoralty candidate offer the people real change, may very well have a real alternative this November. Efforts are underway to put together an independent slate based on a genuinely progressive platform that speaks to the needs of Philadelphia's working people.

INDEPENDENCE FORCES

This activity is coming from two sources, the Black United Front and the Consumers Party. The BUF is reconvening the Black Political Convention, which earlier this year adopted the Human Rights Agenda, backed a number of progressive candidates in the primary and supported the candidacy of Charles Bowser for mayor. The Human Rights Agenda calls for a whole range of reforms directed against racist, corporate domination of the city and aimed at improving the conditions of life for both Black and white working people. In the wake of the defeat of Charles Bowser, who refused to support this program, the more independent activists of the BUF see running a slate based on the Human Rights Agenda as a logical and necessary alternative to supporting either of the two parties, or sitting out the election.

The Black Political Convention is scheduled to convene on July 15th.

Convention planners see the need to support progressive candidates running in the Democratic column as well as nominating independents to oppose Rizzoites and fencesitters in the councilmanic and row office races. There is a determination to reaffirm the importance of the Human Rights Agenda and not allow the question of program to be pushed to the background as it was during the primary.

The convention will need to decide whether to utilize the offer of the Consumer Party (C.P.) to place its ballot position at the disposal of a broad people's movement or to run a slate under the auspices of a new organization. The practical advantage to running on the Consumer Party line is that it avoids a time consuming petition drive. Politically speaking, as the C.P. is an already established Party with a clear commitment to independent political action, this route would have the effect of strengthening the independent character of the campaign.

The Consumer Party has taken initiative on its own to build an independent slate with a broad based appeal. Early last month the CP called on city councilman Lucien Blackwell to run for mayor. Blackwell responded by indicating that while flattered, he would not consider such an option until the question of Bowser's challenge to the legality of the election was settled. The Party has since organized a "Draft Blackwell" campaign aimed at showing him he has the support to make a bid.

Some BUF activists were disturbed by this unilateral effort on the part of the Consumer Party, feeling that it upstaged the Convention and would thus foster division in the ranks of independents. The Black Political Convention, as the broadest expression of the independent movement, is the natural vehicle for determining a mayoralty candidate.

The Consumer Party, however, has clarified its position. It is prepared to accept the verdict of the Convention and plans to bring the Draft Blackwell campaign into the Convention rather than counterpose it to the Convention process. The Consumer Party also unites with the basic thrust of the Human Rights Agenda. Its own program coincides with it at many points. The Party argues that Blackwell as a councilman with a progressive record and a leader in the Black movement and the labor movement would be an effective candidate against Green and Marston.

DIVISIONS IN ESTABLISHED BLACK LEADERSHIP

A key question is, where does Charles Bowser stand? Bowser retains a strong influence on the basis of his primary showing and his championing of Black anger over election irregularities. From all indications, Bowser is seeking to consolidate a position as power broker from which he can deal with the Democratic Party leadership. From this standpoint the option of supporting an independent slate has a certain appeal but so does the Marston gambit. Both options