

# After the Convention Storms . . . The Rainbow Comes Out Fighting

**W**ith the experience of the Democratic National Convention behind it, the Rainbow Coalition is coalescing policies and plans to maintain itself as an independent political force through the November election and beyond. The dual tasks of defeating Reagan and consolidating the Rainbow will now shape the efforts of the movement led by Jesse Jackson for the duration of the campaign.

While sharply critical of the shabby and racist treatment afforded the Rainbow in San Francisco, as well as Mondale's continuing refusal to take up Jackson's post-convention demands, the national and local leadership of the Rainbow Coalition remains convinced that the task of defeating Reagan must remain on the top of the agenda of the dispossessed and that the temptation to quickly bolt the Democratic Party or abstain from the electoral contest this year must be resisted.

This perspective was highlighted in a recent communication from Jackson to state and national campaign officials: "Although we did not receive all we expected during the primary elections, we now move to support the Democratic Party's mission—the defeat of Reagan in 1984, as we continue to move on our own behalf in the formation of a Rainbow political organization."

This theme was echoed by Mary Kenyatta, who worked in the Rainbow in western Massachusetts. "Reagan represents a reactionary trend with a consolidated hold on the government," she told *Frontline*. "His track record has been so racist and so aggressive internationally that we have to get rid of Reagan and then fight the Democrats."

Jitu Weusi of the National Black United Front agreed that the defeat of Reagan is a crucial task for all progressives in this country. "Reagan has been depicted as invincible, representing the majority of the American people," he stated. "But if Reagan can be unseated, it will be a stunning defeat and force a lot of people, including the Democrats, to take notice that there are millions of people who are opposed to his policies."

## CRITICAL SUPPORT

What has emerged as a major theme throughout the Rainbow Coalition is the concept of "critical support" for the Mondale/Ferraro ticket. Josie Camacho, co-chair of the Jackson campaign in California's Eighth Congressional District, noted that "the Rainbow Coalition is not the same thing as the Mondale campaign. In the course of organizing people to vote for the Democratic ticket, we will not just emphasize what we're against in terms of Reagan, we will be talking about what we're for and that is peace and justice."

Kenyatta was even more specific. She noted that "People will be asked to pull that lever for Mondale because it is the only way to vote against Reagan in the general election, but we are not encouraging people to go into the Democratic Party with their eyes blindfolded; we want people to go in to change it."

The criticism in this "critical support" of Mondale is sharp; as of this writing, he has failed to make a single concession to the Rainbow demands that were established at the end of the Democratic Convention: a leading role for Jackson forces in every aspect of the election campaign; inclusion of Jackson forces in the leadership of the Democratic Party state organizations, especially in the South; a mass campaign to register Blacks, again especially in the South, and a pledge that Mondale will set as a goal the election of at least one Black congressperson from each southern state.

Instead, the Mondale campaign has been giving Jackson the brush-off, continuing its effort to undermine Jackson's leadership by promoting accommodationist Black figures who backed Mondale during the primary season.

Mondale's press secretary Maxine Isaacs tried to obscure the politics behind these demands by posing the issue in



Jesse Jackson addressing the convention of the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees August 9.

terms of traditional Democratic Party power-brokering: "Mondale does not need a broker between himself and Black America," she said. "Jesse Jackson does

**The Rainbow Coalition will now address the dual tasks of defeating Reagan and pushing forward its program of jobs, peace and justice.**

"we in the Rainbow Coalition must not measure our identity by our proximity to the Mondale-Ferraro campaign. Rather, we must measure their campaign by its proximity to our ideals."

In a major policy statement presented on the steps of the Capitol during an Alpha Kappa Alpha voter registration rally on July 26, Jackson underscored the importance of his supporters maintaining a "spirit of independence . . . as we prepare for the battles ahead."

In this speech, Jackson announced that the "Rainbow Coalition is being institutionalized as a political organization—a political arm for progressive politics in 1984 and beyond." He warned, however, that the Rainbow must be "economically independent" since "our competitors can't finance our army."

In concrete terms, this means that plans are afoot to convene a national Rainbow

convention to constitute the founding of the Rainbow Coalition," he added.

Some organizational mechanisms have nevertheless been agreed upon. It has been reported that a formation entitled Rainbow Coalition, Inc. (RCI) has been established as well as a Rainbow Political Action Committee (RPAC). The purpose of the former is to carry out voter registration and voter education. The purpose of the latter is to support local and national progressive candidacies.

Local bodies meanwhile have been summarizing the lessons of the spring campaign and the Democratic Convention and cranking up their machinery for the current tasks. "Part of this process has been to analyze what was gained and what was not in the course of the primary season," Camacho stated. "Without this type of assessment, we could lose our bearings in the coming months."

In some local areas, groupings of activists disgusted with Mondale's response to Jackson are vowing to boycott the presidential campaign altogether. While those who argue the "critical support" position largely share the anger that has given rise to this view, they argue that the defeat of Reagan is a major concern and do not see a boycott as a viable strategy to build the influence of the Rainbow Coalition.

Most of the local Jackson committees have minimally laid plans to launch aggressive voter registration campaigns. Kenyatta told *Frontline* that "in Massachusetts, we're in the process of coming up with new registration materials that will be based on the politics of the Rainbow." In the process of registering people, Kenyatta added, "we are not going to misinform them that the Democratic Party is the end all and be all."

As local committees forge ahead and the national forces struggle to develop the organizational and political mechanisms to guide the dump Reagan effort and consolidate the Rainbow, Jackson continues to travel throughout the country promoting his progressive platform.

In his July 26 address Jackson noted, "The Democratic Party's mission is to defeat President Reagan in November—and we agree. We share that mission. But defeating Reagan is not enough. The absence of Reagan is not the presence of jobs, peace and justice." Speaking at the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees national convention in San Francisco August 9, he declared that the Rainbow Coalition was committed to maintaining its independence, that it would not compromise—to the Democrats or anyone else—the struggle for freedom. □



The shabby treatment afforded the Jackson forces at the Democratic Convention has strengthened the Rainbow's determination to maintain its "spirit of independence."

not need to perform that role or broker for us."

Once again, the Democrats are out to obscure the point. Jackson's wasn't a traditional campaign, and he is not looking for the traditional "spoils" of Democratic Party maneuvering. The Rainbow's demands are part of a program to consolidate an ongoing progressive wing within the Democratic Party based in the nation's Black communities, and in fact this is the real reason they are stonewalled by the Mondale camp.

Knowing they will face such stern intransigence, Jackson and his campaign advisers are hardly banking their future on getting concessions from Mondale. "In the spirit of independence and self-respect," Jackson stated emphatically,

meeting "in the very near future," to "provide the foundation for our political machinery to promote our mission of a new coalition, a new leadership and a new direction."

## NUTS AND BOLTS

While this general orientation for the future work of the Rainbow has been established, the nuts and bolts of how to consolidate the new formation have still not been agreed upon. Weusi attributes this partly to outstanding differences on how to structure the new organization.

"There are some people who want to call a meeting of national leadership to constitute the Rainbow," he stated. "An opposing proposal is to hold city and state meetings, and from this, call a national

John Jackson/Frontline photo

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