

EDITORIALS

The Presidential Election Reconsidered

The Lack of Real Choices

By Dr. Manning Marable

The circus is over at last. After all the campaign rhetoric and misinformation, after the cynical promises and political posturing, the 1980 Presidential race is history. A lackluster electoral choice between three "Republicans" — Carter, Reagan, and Anderson — alienated and frustrated the overwhelming majority of voters. Ronald Reagan was the selection of the public — the choice of less than 28 percent of the eligible voting public. The large margin of Reagan's victory is not a political statement representing a shift to the right, but a rejection of Carter's record of ineptitude, duplicity and administrative chaos.

Reagan's election, however, is merely the sorry continuation of the badly bungled, antihumanistic policies and practices of a near-moribund political system that historically rewards the owners and managers of corporate wealth at the expense of the poor and working classes of every ethnic group. Nothing has changed with Reagan's victory: the chains that fetter our people to an existence of permanently high unemployment, inadequate medical care, poor housing and crime would be as secure as if Carter or Anderson had won instead. The problem for our generation is not to decide who will run the plantation, but whether we will organize to uproot the plantation, burn it to the ground, and build a newer, democratic order which advances the material interests of our people.

Thousands of black people have concluded that the central crisis in American politics is not that the selection of candidates is so poor. The real problem lies not with personalities, but within the very definition of American politics itself. No one seriously believed the statements of politicians during election campaigns. No one really believes that the democratic charade called electoral politics has a decisive effect upon those forces within the centers of multinational capital and finance that actually determine significant issues within this system. As one Black Philadelphia resident, 22-year-old Charles Adamson, recently complained to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: "I voted since I was 18. Man, I couldn't wait to pull the ballot. But I've given up on the politicians. They just ain't doing the job."

The remarkably low voter turnout in this year's Presidential election illustrated at least three significant points. First, the majority of Black people expressed no confidence in Carter, Anderson and Reagan, neither as individual candidates

nor for that body of politics which they represent. Second, Black people rejected the "boogy man thesis" propounded by Carter spokesmen like the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Andrew Young, which claimed that Carter was the "lesser evil" and that any Black non-voter was actually voting for Reagan. The reality of our political situation was that the Negro Old Guard's backroom politics of pretty patronage could no longer persuade the majority of Black voters to cast aside the experiences of four hard years of benign neglect at the hands of the Carter Administration. And third, many Blacks were implicitly declining to participate in a process that has ceased to have legitimacy as a way to decide things affecting public policy. In short, the very rationale of the electoral system was on trial. That system was accused of operating against our interests as a people no matter which lever we pulled on the Presidential line in the election booth. And a majority of Blacks decided, privately and publicly, that this system was found guilty as charged.

Black America must organize collectively, both internally and externally, to place on the public agenda a more progressive set of priorities in domestic and international policy. Internally, we must develop Black United Fronts to build bridges between existing progressive political groups throughout the nation, facilitating greater dialogue and closer programmatic unity. We must build consumer and producer cooperatives providing critically needed food and clothing to our people. Externally, we must raise serious questions in Congress and statehouses across this country about the patterns of divestment of capital which throw tens of thousands of Black and other Third World people out of jobs every year. We must renew our demand for the passage and implementation of the comprehensive health care legislation proposed by Congressperson Ronald V. Dellmus of California. We must mobilize our families and friends to demonstrate in the streets against the climate of racist terrorism against our communities, as graphically illustrated in Buffalo and Atlanta.

The election of one candidate or another to the Presidency in any given year does not decide the ultimate goal directions and/or necessity of the Black Freedom Struggle. The members of the National Black Political Party Steering Committee believe that the ultimate struggle for Black, Third World and oppressed people is that struggle for complete social transformation and self-determination. We believe that the great Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass was speaking to our current political plight when he declared that "Power concedes nothing without demand; it never has and it never will." We believe that there will be no hope for the masses of Black people in America, until such time that they assume final responsibility for their own emancipation, and that they reject any efforts to compromise their historic battle for full economic democracy, political and cultural equality in America.

The Prospect For Black America

By Dr. Manning Marable

At first glance, the electoral victory of a one-time movie actor and mediocre two-term governor, Ronald Reagan, represents a major shift to the right in American politics.

The figures are impressive. Reagan received 43.2 million votes, about 51 percent of the total popular vote. Carter received 34.9 million votes, and was unable to defeat Reagan in the South and traditionally Democratic states in the industrial Northeast. The so-called "Anderson factor" was not a factor in the Presidential race. Although Anderson received almost 5.6 million votes and so doing, qualified for federal matching funds, his campaign only stole several states from Carter's electoral total.

However gloomy the immediate prospects for a more progressive America may seem, we must be careful not to overestimate the influence of this so-called New Right. Only 28 percent of the eligible voters in this country endorsed the simplistic, sophomoric solution of Reagan. The overwhelmingly majority of Republicans elected to the Senate won by extremely narrow margins.

In state after state, Republican candidates were able to squeak into office upon the public mandate of conservatism and political reaction. In Alabama, Republican Senator-elect Jeremiah Denton won by only 51 percent; Mack Mattingly, Georgia, 50 percent; Steven D. Symms, Idaho, 50 percent; Warren Rudman, New Hampshire, 52 percent; Al D'Amato, New York, 45 percent; John P. East, North Carolina, 50 percent; Robert Packwood, Oregon 52 percent; Arien Specter, Pennsylvania, 51 percent. Incumbency has ceased largely to be a major factor in Senatorial and Congressional elections. If these Republicans do not deliver on their promises to an impatient "Moral Majority," they would be vulnerable to progressive challenge six years hence.

What was most predictable, and lamentable, about Reagan's victory was the response of the "Old Guard" black leadership. For months they exhorted black voters to turn out on election day to support Jimmy Carter. They declared that Reagan administration would turn back the clock to a age of Jim Crow and economic equality. Privately, their real concern was that they would lose plush plums and federal grants from the bureaucratic drough in Washington, D. C. once Reagan's reactionaries took over.

The winds of change that produced a Republican majority in the Senate have also reaped a transformation of black rhetoric. Black opportunists who jumped aboard the Reagan

bandwagon were the first to crow. "I am most pleased and convinced that Reagan is not a warmonger" clucked Ralph David Abernathy, "and, unlike Carter will do everything possible to keep his promises to the American people, particularly in the area of putting Americans back to work."

Joseph E. Lowry, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, had endorsed Carter and warned constituents that a Reagan Presidency would revive racism and bring disaster. Now, Lowry states that "we have offered cooperation and support" to Reagan, because he has given a token promise to protect the rights of poor people.

Urban League President Vernon Jordan now is telling us that it's too soon to conclude that Reagan will ignore black concerns such as affirmative action and an expansion of public center employment opportunities. It is "dangerous," in Jordan's view, to think that the Reagan administration will be hostile to blacks. Jordan applauds Reagan's idea of developing "free enterprise zones" in the ghettos by granting huge tax writeoffs to major corporations for employing black urban workers. Once Reagan was our bitter nemesis; now, as President-elect, he understands the need for finding solutions to the pressing problems of the oppressed. Jordan embraces a "solution" that in Southern Africa has led to the development of Bantustans.

Years from today, volumes of critical studies will document the incredible lack of political consistency, the bumbling judgment and shallow insights of our current generation of black "leaders." Let history pass this judgment: at a time when neither Carter nor Reagan merited the support of the majority of black people, our "official representatives" stumbled hastily over themselves to get behind "the evils of two lessers." New faces in the Senate will emerge next year: a reactionary actor without a shred of compassion for the interests of blacks, Hispanics and the working class will occupy a new stage in the Oval Office; but nothing fundamentally has changed.

Black America is still oppressed, and our motto must still be resistance and self-determination — by any means necessary.

Dr. Manning Marable is a leader of the newly formed Black Political Party and a Senior Research Associate of political economy at the Africana Studies Center of Cornell University. From the Grassroots

Letter to The Editor

Dear Editor:

In the December 1, 1980 issue of the Voice, the article "FSU Students Boycott Classes to Protest Homecoming," Mr. Irving Veazie made a statement stating that I, Jonathan Fant (not Johnathan) failed to complete the proper chain of communication necessary to make the complaint known.

I, head of the Student Homecoming Committee, presented to the committee that there were problems about the theme. This was noted two days after the University Homecoming Committee had voted to theme in. Dr. James Carson asked me if we could add something to it or to make it more clear. The Student Committee voted not to add any more nor take away. The following Monday, Dr. Carson approached me and stated that the second suggested theme "A Pridelful Past; A Progressive Future" was sent to the print shop and for me to encourage my committee members to accept it. He explained that we took too long to make a change and it was costing the school \$15 a hour to hold the information needed to be printed for Homecoming.

My committee began to protest this issue by bringing it first to the SGA Executive Committee. They informed us that it was out of our hands (the student committee) and that they will begin new steps. This is when the subject of boycott came about.

I was approached by several administration personnel asking me why I didn't go back to Dr. Carson with the complaint. My committee and I felt that it was too late and that we were running into more problems daily concerning homecoming. We then informed the Student Body letting them know what was happening. We weren't referred back to the Homecoming Theme Committee about the displeasure, but when I asked Dr. John Wolfe about the committee, he didn't know he was chairman. He agreed with the theme we picked and when the static started he came back to me also about adding more to the theme.

If any failure occurred, it occurred in the Administration, not on me nor within the Student Homecoming Committee.

Thank You,
Jonathan Fant
Chairman, Student Homecoming Committee

Letters to the Editor are welcome. Please limit comments to 300 words.

Address Letters to:

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The Voice, RJSC