

Party Participation: Return Of The Smoke Filled Room?

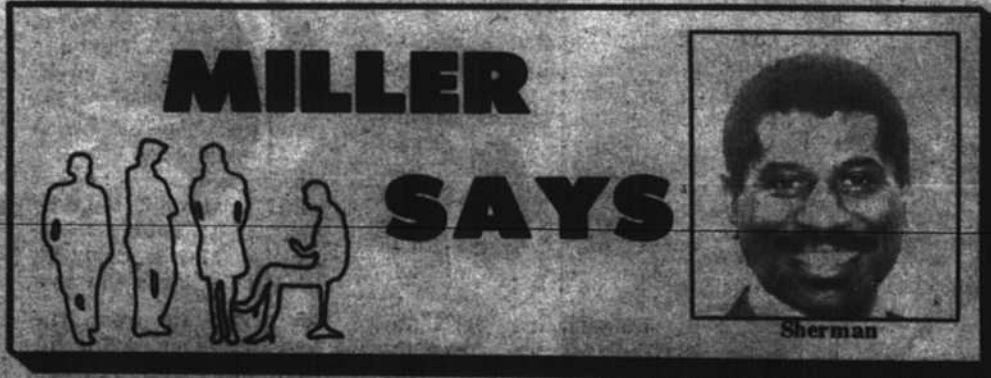
When I consider attending home state's Republican Conventions I find myself imagining an event wrought with factions cutting deals to get the necessary votes to push their philosophies or a good old fashioned floor fight. Yet, I usually find these conventions to be merely homecomings for a handful of party faithfuls. I've recently asked myself, "Does this stodgy manner allow Republicans to quietly ease very important issues through their conventions?"

During the 1985 Delaware State Republican Convention I realized that I had been erroneously using the stereotyped hubbub imagery of Democratic Party Conventions as a norm for conservative Republican Party excitement. I was shocked to realize that the Republicans were making paradigmatic policy shifts that were going unreported.

As I listened to the various resolutions read for convention approval I heard one that hinted at the return of the smoke-filled rooms to Delaware politics. This resolution called for a candidate to have 30 percent of the State Convention delegates' support before he could force a primary for statewide office. This resolution passed by a unanimous vote since all resolutions were voted on in one bundle.

I could not believe this smoke-filled room resolution had passed without anyone questioning its intent. Querying both black and white delegates on why they felt this particular resolution was needed, I experienced difficulty getting many delegates to talk. Many people moved away quickly when I challenged their support of a return to smoke-filled room politics. However, Mr. Frank Di Mondì, the newly elected state chairman, offered a rationale.

Di Mondì feels that the party faithful needs to have



some input on candidate selections so they will continue to work hard in the party structure. "Some of the Republicans want to see the nominating process moved back to their decision making and having more input into it..." says Di Mondì.

He admitted that this resolution was a throw back to the days when one garnered so many votes that they could run in the primaries. When challenged to clarify his comments Di Mondì said, "...it's a fact that after the open primaries came about there were problems in keeping interest up in the various parties. Why should a person participate in the convention process and not really have a meaningful voice?...I'm sure they feel that this is back to basic politics to try to generate interest and keep people interested..." Di Mondì summed up his feelings by saying that party workers' input on the candidates should be in direct proportion to their efforts.

Priscilla Rakestraw, a member of the National Republican Committee, echoed Di Mondì's contention. She commented, "I am supporting the resolution to enable people who are most informed about party matters - about party candidates - to give them more responsibility in selecting the best qualified candidates."

I wanted to know if the Delaware actions were part of a budding National

Republican trend so I asked Portia Scott, a member of the Georgia State

Republican Committee, to comment on the Delaware primary resolution. She

felt very strongly that the process should remain open. Ms. Scott says, "Elections ought to be free for any qualified candidate or individual who wants to run." She felt candidates should have the endorsement and support of the party leadership but that this should not be a necessary condition for a person to run in a primary.

Another major shift in Republican philosophy occurred when Di Mondì made his acceptance speech. He extended a legi-

itimate welcome to the black community to join the Republican Party. Di Mondì had tried on several occasions prior to the convention to convince me that he intends to fully open the Delaware Republican Party to the black community; nonetheless, I elected to wait and see if he had guts enough to make his intentions publicly known.

Di Mondì further revealed a practice that has greatly hurt Delaware's black community.


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