

End of the Rainbow

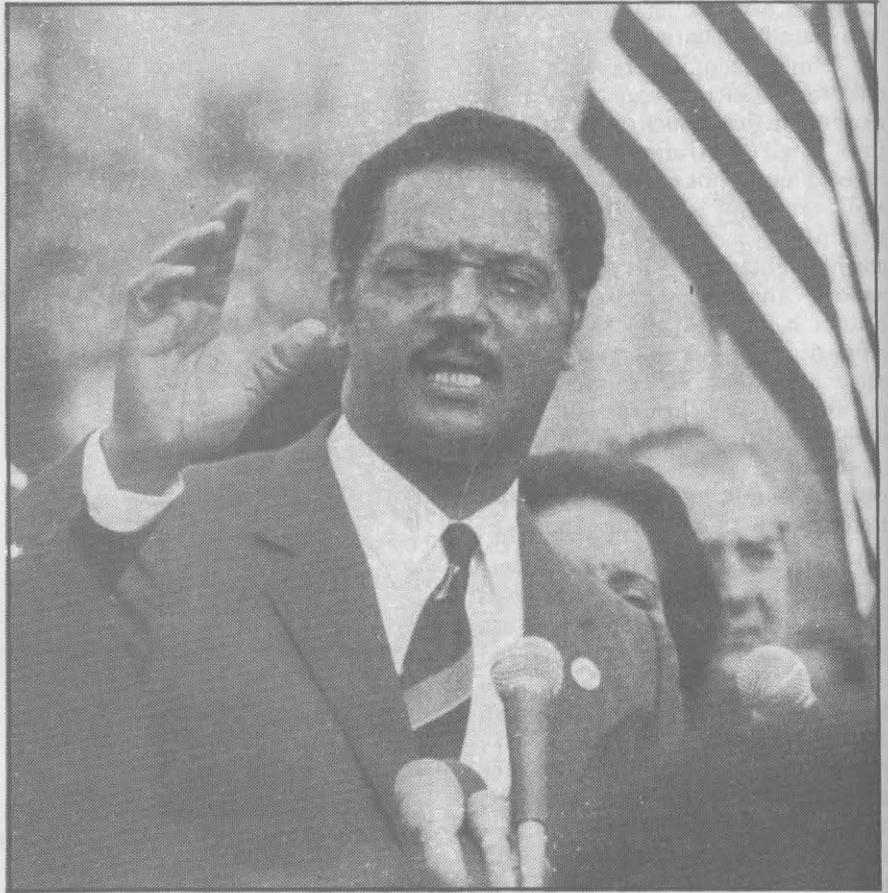
It's highly unlikely that Jesse Jackson will be chosen as US vice-presidential running mate for Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis by the Democratic Party Convention in mid-June. To pick Jackson would be, as Sir Humphrey Appleby would say, "courageous". And the party leadership, like Sir Humphrey, is certainly not that.

However, the party leadership would be well advised to take more seriously the power behind Jackson's impressive campaign than in 1984, when they ignored Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition, thus probably contributing to Reagan's second term.

Back in 1984, they made no effort to accommodate Jackson's and the Coalition's minority platform positions — including a no first strike nuclear policy, affirmative action programs without strict quotas, and a reduction in Pentagon spending. This angered many delegates and alienated much party support. And during the 1984 election campaign they rejected — or at best failed to build upon — the grassroots support established through voter registration drives and Jackson's extensive campaigning.

In the present campaign Jackson has built upon that support. Until very recently in the primary race he had leaders and pundits truly wondering if he would out-poll Dukakis in the tally of delegates committed to vote for him at the Democratic Convention. He will still go to the convention with a large block of delegates. And Senator Albert Gore, who dropped out of the race after losing badly in New York, has neither given up his delegates, nor stated (at least publicly) to which contestant they will be pledged.

Nevertheless, Dukakis has emerged from the final round of primaries with more than the 2,082



delegates he needs to win the party nomination for presidential candidate. Perhaps it's an indication of increasing conservatism in the Democratic Party that he could do so well in California — when up against a candidate like Jackson — which, traditionally, takes a more progressive stance in primaries.

At least the potentially divisive delegate horse-trading on the conference floor has been averted, but Jackson is still in a powerful position to influence the party platform. The party can ill-afford to ignore his constituency.

In 1984, shortly after announcing his candidacy, Jackson had near unanimous endorsement from Black church leaders representing over 12 million Blacks. The Rainbow Coalition included activists and supporters in the environment, anti-nuclear, peace, gay, women's, Latin American movements and unions. However,

progressive, liberal leaderships in these groups, and prominent Democrats, thought otherwise as did many in the left generally. The white liberal women's organisation NOW, individual Black leaders like Andrew Young, Julian Bond and Coretta Scott King, notable union leaders and others preferred Mondale to Jackson.

White feminists were sceptical. *Off Our Backs*, a radical feminist publication, acknowledged that Jackson was committed to Blacks, but asked whether or not he was "really committed to being a candidate for feminists". A fair enough question: no doubt they remembered Jackson's sexist comments about women in the late 'seventies, comments reminiscent of men in the earlier Black Power movement.

Nevertheless, Jackson's politics had, by 1984, matured considerably and his positions on anti-

discrimination, affirmative action and gay rights, for example, were far better than Mondale's.

It's a dilemma the American left consistently finds difficulty with: work within, and with, the Democratic Party to defeat the forces of reaction — Reaganism — and attempt to redirect the Democratic Party to a more progressive stance over time. Or, challenge the status quo by running a Black candidate in the Democratic primary race and try to push the party to a more progressive stance that way (and risk the election, some would warn)?

The former is what political movement and party leaders were arguing for in 1984, and still are today. The second was the path actually taken, but without any move to a more progressive program by the party. And it lost.

The Democratic Party is suffering a similar ailment to the ALP — with the difference that it has failed to secure political power nationally. It attempted in 1984 to win by taking on Reagan's agenda — splitting hairs on fiscal fine tuning rather than by presenting a critique and a viable alternative. George Bush and the Republicans really shouldn't win this election. The Democrats will have to throw it away.

Bush will carry on Reagan's mantle. He had declared that he will stick to Reagan's agenda which includes an ill-defined foreign policy; an economy in trouble; and a depleted welfare state. The Reagan administration is one of the most corrupt in US history and Bush himself is deeply implicated in the Iran-Contra scandal.

The hardest hit by eight years of Reaganism is the Democratic Party's traditional base. Jackson has mobilised support from that base with a program which is, in essence, a classic Democrat New Deal one — but one which looks increasingly radical as the party moves further to the right of centre.

Jane Inglis

A New Deal?

The impact on French colonial policy of Mitterand's re-election and the formation of the Rocard government is as yet unclear, but it could mark a return to a more moderate position in New Caledonia. Through Olivier Stirn, the Minister for Overseas Territories and Departments, whose appointment was welcomed by FLNKS president Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the new government could, as a starting point in negotiations, restore the gains made by the Kanaks under the Pisani/Fabius Statute of 1985.

The strength of that statute was that the Kanaks were able to exercise a degree of administrative and political autonomy in three of the four regions into which New Caledonia had been divided; and, perhaps even more importantly, were able to reassert their own culture through such projects as the setting up of a national centre for Kanak culture and the teaching of Kanak languages in schools. These gains were subsequently overturned by the recent Chirac government, which tried either to deny or dismantle Kanak culture, attempting to

undercut the base of support for the FLNKS and independence.

Yet, while the statute provided the framework for certain gains it nonetheless failed to address the real question of independence in anything other than an oblique and unsatisfactory manner. In its proposal for New Caledonian independence "in association with France" it clearly indicated that whereas the Kanaks could win a certain cultural and indeed a limited political independence they were to remain ultimately under the economic and political influence of France.

New Caledonia, with its two hundred nautical mile territorial zone around its coasts, represents a long term economic interest for France. It is also a strategically important site for military bases and communication stations. The dilemma thus facing Stirn and Rocard is that while they need to concede cultural and ultimately some political independence to the FLNKS, they must do so in a manner that doesn't disrupt the economic and strategic interests of France. To the extent that they are able to grant a form of independence which still maintains a determining influence over New Caledonia, the differences between the New Caledonian policies of the Chirac and Rocard governments may become increasingly blurred.

Peter McNiece

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