

A BLACK CONVENTION IN 1969

Unity is a necessity if Black people are to become a political force in the City of Newark. Unity in any community has never been absolute and the possibilities of achieving it are diminished by deeply rooted social problems that feed group insecurity and rivalry. However, unity is a desired goal and efforts must be immediately undertaken to solidify the divergent forces of Newark's Black community.

Last fall prior to the citywide special councilmanic election for two seats; (One at large and one in the East Ward. A second at large seat was opened after the convention) the United Brothers sponsored a Black convention that attempted to narrow the field of candidates for the councilmanic positions and develop an organized cadre of workers to support the convention choices. As a first effort in establishing broad based Black unity in the City of Newark it fell short of its goal of providing a unified Black thrust and none of the candidates were victorious. Nevertheless, there were many positive aspects in the effort which provide a basis for a 1970 citywide strategy. Perhaps the major feeling was that it was narrowly sectarian and grew out of the cultural nationalist base that sees political victory secondary to proselytizing. All of the elements of that cultural movement seemed to predominate the convention motif and program. With that the convention made a number of significant contributions towards improving the potential for Black unity in Newark.

First the field of candidates was narrowed to perhaps the most significant extent ever achieved in the Black community in Newark. Therefore, it appeared that the notion of one candidate being selected discouraged the usual number of marginal political hustlers from entering the campaign. Secondly, the convention established a sense of accountability of the candidates to the people. The fact that each candidate had to address the convention and submit to questions concerning his past record, community activities and program for the future provided a possibility to develop Black political leadership that is responsive to a Black constituency.

Thirdly, the convention provides an opportunity for the citizenry to engage in discussion and evaluation of major issues through workshops and panels. But a convention must convene a broad segment of the black voting and political community to be effective. Therefore, it is proposed that a convention committee be established that is representative of the major political, civic, professional, labor, educational and religious forces in the Black community of Newark; and, that this committee be an adjunct or sub-committee of the Committee for a Unified Newark though autonomous enough to establish its own headquarters, financial accountability and staff. Such a committee would not exclude the organizers of the 1968 convention whose experience would be vital to any future effort. However, the committee would not be dominated by any religious or political ideology.

It would attempt to develop operational unity on the basis of a win strategy. It would seek to involve all segments of the community; youth, civil rights groups, religious organizations, labor unions, social groups, neighborhood groups, political leaders and professional organizations. The first objective of such a convention committee should be to establish a new identity. This image could be attached to a slogan that articulates a need for black political leadership and at the same time does not alienate the middle class blacks.

The convention should also be able to develop specific benefits that candidates would receive on the basis of the convention's selection such as perhaps \$25,000 for the mayoralty (or more if possible) and a lesser sum for the councilmanic candidates. The convention committee and its program must be devoid of any single religious identification and seek to deal with potential allies on the basis so where they are not where we want them to be. For instance, we should avoid the use of swahili on telephones and the frequent references to Allah (and negative references to Christ) that were prevalent in last years convention and political organizing. Serious consideration must be given to the manner in which security personnel are utilized. The presence of security personnel at last years convention seems to be one of the major complaints of many people who participated and some who did not. If security is used at all it should not predominate the atmosphere of the convention and create a sense of militarism instead of a feeling of security and freedom.

Of major importance will be the way the convention strategy is presented to the community and in fact to the nation. Much attention will be focused on Newark's 1970 election. Therefore, public relations will be one of the crucial functions of the convention committee. We should, in fact, seek the consultation of highly qualified public relations organizations such as Joe Bankers Associates of Philadelphia.

Needless to say, a difficult aspect not yet mentioned is money. A convention would ~~not~~ cost a significant sum to achieve the desired unity and provide an effective convention program (facilities, food, printing, speaking, etc.) Money is never easy to obtain -- promises are easy to obtain -- but if we can develop a strong, broadly based fund raising committee there are several groups in the area anxious to make a contribution towards the political liberation of Black people in Newark.

Unity at best is very difficult to achieve since individual and group interests never completely disappear, however, one should be consistently reminded of the state of our city; dirt in the streets, horrible schools, mass corruption at City Hall, the water giveaway, the urban renewal (Black removal) program. These are the things that must drive us to set aside petty differences and past rivalries. We owe that much to ourselves and the future children of Newark.