



Photos/John Judis

ACORN demonstrators assemble outside the Democratic convention on Saturday, Dec. 9. Inset: ACORN's president Steve McDonald huddles in the cold.

Democrats midterm convention

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On Saturday, the White-Carter bandwagon got derailed. Saturday was to be devoted to 24 workshops led by panels of experts and public officials. Carter would personally attend the morning workshops on inflation and defense.

The inflation panel was dominated by Carter supporters like Alfred Kahn and Charles Schultze and balance-the-budget governors like Florida's Robert Graham and North Carolina's James B. Hunt.

But the delegates in the audience were from the Democrats' activist core, and as soon as the panelists were finished, they let fly their criticism and complaints at the panelists and then at Carter himself, who entered halfway through the session.

Charles Perkel, Service Employees Union member from San Jose, Calif., took umbrage at the moderator's request that the delegates ask questions of the panelists. "I think it is most inappropriate," Perkel said, "to expect these people who are leaders of the Democratic Party in their communities to come here and listen for an hour to a panel discussion and then only ask questions instead of airing the concerns which they have come here to express."

Perkel, to persistent applause, expressed his: the Carter program was attempting to solve the nation's economic problems "by putting the burden on those least able to afford it." District of Columbia trade unionist Ruth Jordan attacked the panel for the absence of any labor or minority representatives; Texan Doug Seals berated the Carter administration for a farm policy that didn't distinguish the plight of the small farmer from the profits of the large middlemen; Missouri businesswoman Vivian Eveloff questioned the rise in defense spending, and James Fite of Baltimore asked Carter why he adopt-

ed the inflation remedies of the National Association of Manufacturers.

In his response to his critics, Carter was conciliatory on social spending, but uncompromising on the need to increase defense expenditures. "I do not have any apology to make for maintaining a strong defense," he told the delegates.

Kennedy speaks.

The national health insurance workshop was scheduled for late afternoon, usually the worst time at a conference. But with Ted Kennedy on the panel, the delegates packed the auditorium.

Kennedy dealt the Carter-White forces another blow. He didn't hesitate to criticize the administration's budget plans and to urge the immediate, rather than "phased-in" adoption of national health insurance. And he gave a speech that Milwaukee city councilman Terry Pitts and other delegates described as the best they had ever heard.

Teddy Kennedy's electrifying speech sent Democratic party officials into secret meetings to try to stem the rising anti-Carter tide.

As Kennedy has grown more isolated in the Senate, his passionate advocacy of government responsibility toward the poor has grown. Perhaps he now sees himself as a martyr; more likely, he knows that a recession is in the offing and that positions that now seem merely "moral" will become realistic political options in a year or two.

The speech's profound impact stemmed from the combination of Kennedy's appeals to equality and his willingness to acknowledge, rather than hide, his own privileged inheritance. In a moving conclusion, Kennedy recounted how his father, his son, and then he himself had been struck down by prolonged illnesses that would have bankrupted the average American family. He had been able to afford it, Kennedy explained; in fact, he had been able to afford the best of medical care. He wanted all Americans to have the same security that he had.

'Regular folks' stage a counter-convention

In Memphis' funky old Loew's theater, six blocks away from the Cook Convention Center where the Democratic midterm convention was meeting, Mary Jacobsen, a middle-aged South Dakotan who one might expect to meet in the front yard of a prairie farmhouse, was leading 1,500 ACORN delegates in a rousing rendition of "The People United Shall Never Be Defeated."

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now was holding its first national meeting to bring together angry housewives from Missouri, senior citizens from Philadelphia, unemployed black teenagers from Little Rock, and Chicano families from Texas to demand that the Democrats "stop listening to big business and the oil companies."

ACORN is composed of 20,000 families in 14 states. It was founded in Arkansas in 1971 by veterans of the Welfare Rights Organization. Its members have low-to-moderate incomes; they have done everything from getting stoplights on a busy Memphis street corner to winning lifeline utility rates for Arkansas citizens. It is militantly multi-racial in its composition and leadership.

ACORN's first national convention was designed to counter the larger Democratic one. "Every two years the Democratic Party spends a fortune to hold its national convention," ACORN president Steve McDonald, a black IBM administrator from Little Rock, explained. "The party leaders get together to congratulate themselves on the fine job they've done. But this time, thousands of regular folks have come by the busload to deliver their

own message to the Democratic administration, and that message is, "You've done nothing for us."

UAW president Doug Fraser and Congressmen John Conyers (MI) and Mickey Leland (TX) left the Democratic convention to come address the 1,500 ACORN delegates who had weathered snow and rain to come to Memphis. (The Colorado delegation had arrived on Saturday morning after a 30-hour bus ride, only to leave by bus at 10:00 that night.)

At their convention, the ACORN delegates adopted a platform that called for controls on bank loans, progressive tax reform, a National Lifeline plan, national health insurance controlled by local boards on which lower-income people are fully represented, and action to guarantee full employment and every person's right to decent housing.

ACORN plans now to remain active on a national level. "We're mad as hell and we don't want to be ignored anymore," delegate Elana Hangii from Little Rock told the convention. "The Democrats are not listening to us. They're listening to big business, the oil companies. In 1980, they're not going to make their decisions without ACORN being a part of it. We're going to organize the whole nation wherever we find low or moderate income people. We're going to take over county Democratic Party committees."

During lunchtime, the ACORN delegates marched to Cook Convention Center, where they attracted some curiosity from Democratic Party delegates.

—John Judis

whether the resolution would embarrass the President.

But DNC head White appealed directly to that question. "The American people trust Jimmy Carter, the Congress trusts Jimmy Carter, and this conference ought to trust Jimmy Carter," he said.

In defending the energy and inflation resolutions, Harrington tried to counteract the DNC's claim that the resolutions would bring on socialism. "I want you to know," he told the delegates, "that these lights are procured from a publicly-owned energy corporation established by the Democratic Party, which gives us cheap energy."

But Texas Attorney General John Hill responded: "How would you like the federal government to come in and set up a corporation in your business?"

The three resolutions received about 40 percent of the votes. The Southern states were very strong in favor of the administration positions, while other regions were evenly divided. The District of Columbia, feeling the effect of administration pressure, went eight-to-five against the budget resolution. Illinois, with the ghost of Mayor Daley hovering above the delegates, cast all 72 votes against the resolution, in spite of misgivings about urban aid cuts. California and New York supported the resolution, but only by narrow margins.

Two different majorities.

Contrary to Fraser's wishes, the vote was not on the issues, but on Carter. This was most evident among black and white liberal Southerners who oppose Carter's budget cuts but remain intensely loyal to the President. "I take a pretty dim view of budget cuts as they affect human services," I.D. Newman, of South Carolina, said. But he voted against the resolution because he thought that generally Carter had "done a good job." Texas and Mississippi delegates were less begrudging in their praise: Carter had done an "exceptional job," according to Odell Gray of Waynesboro, Miss.

The delegates were divided politically into three camps:

- Conservatives like North Carolina Gov. Hunt, who advocate balanced budgets, oppose national health insurance and any measure that threatens free en-

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PEOPLES TEMPLE



Peoples Temple children hold sign aloft at San Francisco demonstration against the threatened demolition of International Hotel.

S.F. left protected Jones from public exposure of terror

By David Moberg

SAN FRANCISCO

OUTSIDE OF INTERNATIONAL Hotel, the threatened home of many low-income people on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown, several thousand leftists and community activists, largely white, had gathered to protest eviction and demolition plans one day in January 1977.

Suddenly their ranks swelled. A fleet of buses had pulled up. Out of them flowed between one and two thousand demonstrators—the majority black, many of them obviously from poor or working-class families, many of them very young or very old. They were disciplined and enthusiastic as they sang, chanted and marched. Then they all departed just as abruptly as they had arrived.

They were members of Peoples Temple, the "church" run by Rev. Jim Jones out of the huge old yellow brick, closely guarded former synagogue on Geary St. in the Fillmore or Western Addition neighborhood, one of the poorest, blackest sections of the city. The other demonstrators were impressed. Jones had proven again, as he had for various liberal politicians and leftist causes, that he could "turn out the troops."

In a city without a disciplined political machine, aspiring officials appreciated that power. At a time when the left's star was fading, Bay Area socialists respected Jones' ability to create such a large, varied, enthusiastic organization espousing socialist ideas and including so

Bay Area left leaders continue to stress Jones' adherence to socialist principles and refuse to condemn him outright.

many "real people" (non-intellectuals).

In the aftermath of the Jonestown, Guyana, suicide-murder, many of those people now recall things that were "weird," "creepy," or suspicious about Jones and Peoples Temple: its confusing mix of a religious cover and irreligious socialist rhetoric for the members, the extreme devotion of followers to Jim Jones, Jones' faith healing, the heavy security, the hermetically closed church community, the apparent manipulation of information to give observers a good impression and the trickle of very bizarre charges of brutality and "mind control" made by former Jones devotees.

Yet, like Jones' liberal politician friends and much of the press, people on the left were reluctant to criticize Peoples Temple and ignored or denied most of the troubling signs. After all, the argument generally went, isn't Peoples Temple "objectively progressive"—and mainly black, as a bonus? Aren't the attacks on the Temple very much like the tactics used by the FBI in its COINTELPRO subversion against other groups, such as the Black Panthers? We may have our doubts and questions, went the discussions, but is it proper for the left to air its stained laun-

dry in public and give the right ammunition to use against us?

At least a few people on the left are now wondering about the wisdom of such decisions, but others continue to defend Jones and the Peoples Temple as a progressive organization that went berserk somewhere near the end or was even destroyed by hostile conspirators.

Jones had at best "episodic" involvements with leftist groups and causes in the Bay Area during the mid-'70s. He seemed much more interested in political officeholders, such as the late Mayor George Moscone, District Attorney Joe Freitas, former Lt. Gov. Mervyn Dymally, or state assemblyman Willie Brown. "Jones played with the left," socialist activist Michael Kazin says, "but his strength was outside—mostly liberal politicians."

Jones could use elected dignitaries to enhance his reputation. His support for a candidate—such as Moscone—could also yield appointments for Jones (chairman of the San Francisco Housing Authority until August 1977) or for his associates. Many of them were in sensitive positions where they could learn about any pending difficulties for the Temple and head off investigations. Jones may have ultimately wanted great power, but much of his political activity seemed more aimed at providing the Temple protection.

Within the Western Addition, however, and in black organizations, such as the NAACP and the Black Leadership Forum, Jones sought substantial control and influence. The poor, depressed, and crime-plagued neighborhood lacked solid organization. The main force, the churches, had lost some of their crusading spirit. Jones moved in with a powerful social gospel that used religious forms to attack religion. He offered a variety of programs to meet immediate needs—medical care, day care for children, employment counseling, free food, drug and alcoholism rehabilitation, care for the aged.

Soon many black ministers saw his growing congregation as a threat, although black leftists in the community, such as newspaper publisher Dr. Carlton Goodlett, and alternative high school principal Yvonne Golden, supported Jones vigorously.

Despite their misgivings and sporadic acquaintance with Jones, most other leftists in the Bay Area had many reasons to

be impressed, even awed. Peoples Temple claimed 20,000 members in California. It distributed a newspaper, *Peoples Forum*, to hundreds of thousands of households with articles about fascist torture in Chile, racism in the Supreme Court's Bakke decision, the innocence of the Wilmington 10, evils of South African apartheid, success of socialism in Cuba and, of course, the projects and accomplishments of Peoples Temple under Jim Jones.

Jones took up the cause of leftist celebrities, such as Angela Davis or American Indian Movement leader Dennis Banks, when they were attacked. His dedicated, diverse congregation joined rallies and marches on all these topics, often providing most of the blacks who attended.

Jones, the civil libertarian, mobilized his letter-writing brigades, whose attention most often turned to praising Jim Jones and trying to dissuade newspapers from investigating him, against the legally repressive federal criminal code revision, S-1. He rallied over a thousand marchers in defense of the *Fresno Bee* Four, journalists jailed for keeping their notes confidential, and backed *Los Angeles Times* reporter William Farr in a similar case. In retrospect, his support of the press seems to have been calculated to stop bad publicity or even routine investigations.

Jones' efforts to stop articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and in *New West*, which eventually published a critical piece despite earlier hesitations, are now well-known. But Jones also stopped publication of an earlier investigation by Chester Hartman and Tom Brower for the socialist newspaper, *Common Sense*, distributed by the Northern California Alliance.

Hartman says he was put off by the "staged" quality of his tour of the Temple, by the tight security, and by the difficulty in seeing Jones, who ultimately refused to let him take notes or tape his interview. Hartman's account eventually balanced praise for the Temple's work with questions and mild criticism (for example, that Jones had not used his clout on the Housing Authority to aid the International Hotel movement).

Hartman showed the article to Jones, who denounced him as an agent. "How could you do this to me?" Jones demanded. Immediately leaders of the Alliance were bombarded with phone calls from Temple members and influential politicians with one basic message: Jim Jones is a great guy; don't run the article.

Alliance leaders were surprised, confused and even scared by the response. Some people had doubts about publishing the article since virtually all of the reporters' sources were unwilling to speak on the record. But others argued that it was politically wrong to run it, saying, as Hartman recalls, "Here is a black group, doing things on the left, outright socialists even. Why are we, a comradely publication, doing this to them?"

Others argued that, whatever the Temple's faults, it was "principally" a progressive organization under "attack by the bourgeoisie," and therefore the left should defend it publicly, keeping any criticism private. Some people, arguing that whites had no right to criticize a largely black group, denounced the proposed article as "racist."

"It was like what happened with the [Black] Panthers," a former *Common Sense* editorial board member says. "The fact that the base of Peoples Temple was principally black made the left susceptible of being enamored of them. It's a real reflection of our own isolation."

Still others argued that the apparent authoritarianism and discipline or the faith-healing were excusable, perhaps even necessary, for a group to attract and organize poor people, especially blacks.

Later, when the press accounts of physical abuses, deception, psychological coercion and financial corruption within the Temple began, "the whole city was sure that it was a set-up, that the government was out to get Jones," Bonnie Ladin, former northern California organizer for the Campaign for Economic Democracy, recalls. With leading leftists still defending Jones and noted lawyer Charles Garry now handling Temple legal matters, the suspicions of right-wing or FBI plots against Jones seemed plausible.

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