

April 16 talk / Jesse Jackson-'88 Picnic
By David Chandler

I believe Jesse Jackson can win in November.

Conventional wisdom says Jesse Jackson can't win. That simply means we must use unconventional means: we must vote; we must get America out to vote!

People who don't vote remind me of people who litter the beach. When they are walking along a beautiful stretch of beach they think to themselves: who will notice one candy wrapper? As the litter begins to pile up they think: this place looks so awful already, what difference will one more wrapper make? It's not the one candy wrapper that litters the landscape, it's the attitude that put it there. People who litter don't feel pride in their country because they don't feel a part of it.

People don't vote for the same reason: they don't feel a part of the process; they feel locked out, powerless and demoralized. They need to see that they are not just part of the system, they own the system. True, they are fighting against powerful corporate interests, but corporations can't vote!

One way to make people feel locked out is to give them non-choices to vote for. Is it dangerous for the Democratic party to put up candidates that deviate from "standard bland"? No!! It is dangerous for democracy to make "bland" the standard. It's a way of saying, "We know what's best for you. Sit in the back of the bus, and leave the choosing to us."

Is the majority in this country in love with Reaganism? I don't think so. I'm not sure they ever were. Ronald Reagan won the last election with fewer votes than some losing candidates got in previous elections. The press would lead us to believe that there was a Reagan Revolution, that most of the country is on track with Reagan and the rest of us can get lost. Do you really think the average American wants to sell off the National Parks to the oil companies? Do you really think the average American begrudges the salaries of overworked air traffic controllers who guide their planes in for safe landings? Do you really think the average American mother wants to send her boy to fight for who knows what in Lebanon, or Grenada, or Nicaragua, or the Persian Gulf? Do you really believe most Americans feel better off, more secure, and more proud of America than they did eight years ago? Do you really believe most Americans believe anything Ronald Reagan says anymore? I believe Reaganism is ready for the ashheap of history, and I believe the majority of Americans agree with me.

Poll after poll in the last eight years has shown that people have given Mr. Reagan high approval ratings while showing disapproval of virtually all of his policies. This seeming contradiction should tell us something: Americans want a leader who will lead. In Ronald Reagan we got a leader. We got a leader with a broken compass, but we got a leader.

What is the message for the Democrats? Should we put up a candidate that will go soft on Reaganism and keep a low profile? Absolutely not. The Democrats need to nominate a leader who is not afraid to lead.

If Jesse Jackson is nominated, I can tell you right now that Nancy Reagan won't vote for him. There are a lot of hardened racists out there who won't vote for him. Oliver North and "The Company" won't vote for him. But these people won't vote for Dukakis either! On the other hand, there are a lot of farmers out there who would vote for Jesse, and a lot of laid off auto workers who have seen the underside of Reaganism who would vote for Jesse. There are enough of us out there to elect him, if we can get up the courage to take ownership of the system.

Can you really visualize the political scene after the Democratic Convention with Jesse Jackson as the nominee? The conventional wisdom of the political gurus will be out the window. It will not be a business as usual campaign. People will be awakened. They will be listening to issues and watching the candidates like they never have before. They will see the same tired old cold war paranoia trotted out on one side, and a vision of peace and international cooperation on the other. On one side they will see Reaganism stripped of Reagan, the bath water without the baby, the brutality without the banality. On the other side they will see a clear reaffirmation of American values expressed in concrete national priorities. On the one side they will see the kind of leadership that comes from "being out of the loop", experience that comes out of the CIA and the White House basement, and a commitment to truth that is subject to plausible deniability. On the other side they will see the kind of leadership of one who has experienced oppression, stood up to the oppressor with the strength that comes out of love, and a commitment that arises out of faith in the truth.

It's in the issues that Jesse Jackson stands head and shoulders above all the other candidates.

--He realizes that the bottom line is not the whole story. His plan for rebuilding American industry stresses the long term view, not just quarterly profits.

--Reaganomics has cut support for education at all levels. Jesse Jackson sees clearly that "schools at their worst are better than jails at their best", that an investment in people pays rich dividends for society.

--Jesse Jackson sees more clearly, I believe, than any other candidate that health care must be viewed as a basic human right; that denying health services to the poor is fundamentally immoral.

--Jesse Jackson realizes that the key to the nuclear threat is not some magical pie in the sky SDI. The key is to go beyond the simplistic assumptions of the cold war and learn to talk with our adversaries.

--Jesse Jackson realizes that the key to resolving the instability in the third world is to alleviate the poverty and injustice that make revolutions inevitable.

Here is a leader whose compass is in good working order.

I believe Jesse Jackson deserves my vote. He is the only candidate to stand up, make a clean break with the devastation of the last eight years and offer a clear alternative. Jesse Jackson has said, "I don't have the money, but I have the message." His message is coming through loud and clear to me. I believe it is coming through loud and clear all across this country. I urge you to follow your highest instincts and vote for Jesse Jackson in June and again in November.