

# The Democrats' smashing defeat in Texas: Will the lessons be learned?

by Harley Schlanger

In no state of the union did the Democratic Party suffer a defeat as smashing as it did in Texas. While President Reagan received over 64% of the vote, the Republican Party retained the Senate seat of retiring Sen. John Tower and gained four seats in congress. In 1980, Texas had 22 Democratic congressmen to only 5 Republicans; today that total has changed to 17 to 10.

But the magnitude of the sweep goes beyond the vote totals in the presidential and congressional races. This is not the first time that a Republican presidential candidate carried Texas. What has most Democratic Party officials in hysterics is the depth of the rejection of Democratic candidates.

For example, there will be a Republican sheriff and a Republican county commissioner for the first time in the history of Tarrant County (Fort Worth). In both Harris County (Houston) and Dallas County, a majority of the Democratic judges lost their seats. The Republicans gained 17 seats in the Texas House of Representatives. And in parts of East Texas and West Texas, even the so-called "Yellow Dog Democrats" (those party loyalists who would even vote for a "yellow dog" if it was on the Democratic ticket) went for Reagan and Republicans in local races.

As might be expected, the Harrimanite Democratic party leadership in Texas has put forward the same inane nonsense as the liberal national media to explain this defeat. State chairman Bob Slagle, a flunkey of party national chairman Charles Manatt, attributed the defeat to "Reagan's popularity" and "problems with Mondale's national organization."

Many of the moderate-conservative wing of the party, including the so-called Boll Weevils, reject these as self-serving delusions and are preparing for a brawl over control of the party. Their motto is "move to the center." However, they have yet to demonstrate that they have learned the lesson of the Reagan landslide. As one long-time party leader commented about them, "They are making the same mistake all over again. They are concentrating on strengthening their opposition position in the party, acting like a bunch of opportunists." He added: "The problem they must address is

what's necessary for the nation to survive, not for their faction of the party to gain power."

The seeds of the November 1984 Democratic Party election collapse in Texas were planted in September 1980, when the Democratic Party elected Bob Slagle state chairman over Travis county commissioner Dave Samuelson, who was a farm activist supported by the growing number of "LaRouche Democrats" in the state. At this time, Samuelson echoed LaRouche's warning that the Democratic Party must reject the disastrous economic policies of Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker or face large-scale desertions from traditional Democrats.

Again in 1982, Slagle's only opposition came from a LaRouche Democrat, state leader of the National Democratic Policy Committee Nick Benton, who told the state convention that the control of special-interest groups over the party ("gay rights," etc.) was a cover for the racist and anti-technology policies associated with the Harrimanite Democrats nationally.

Benton challenged the delegates to restore to power in the party the "coalition of producers," the real FDR coalition, which had been the backbone of the Texas Democratic Party for years.

Slagle's re-election was followed by two suicidal decisions on his part.

First, he endorsed Mondale early in 1984, and began twisting the arms of Texas Democrats to follow suit—in the thuggish manner he had learned from former national party chairman Bob Strauss.

Second, he enthusiastically endorsed Manatt's declaration at a Washington press conference that all Democratic presidential candidates must support the "nuclear freeze."

By these two acts, he sealed the doom of Democrats in Texas in 1984. Of course, Mondale was not popular in Texas to begin with, both due to his association with the hated Carter administration and because of his past opposition to a strong U.S. defense, highlighted by his attacks on President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

The first warning signal that the official party was headed for disaster was the May 5 primary election. In the general primary, LaRouche Democrats received more than 125,000 votes running for 18 different posts. Of the 24 LaRouche Democrats running for the position of Democratic Party county chairman, 13 received more than 25%, with five receiving more than 40%. In Slagle's home county, Grayson, a LaRouche Democrat received 42%! Billy Willibey won the Democratic nomination for Congress in the 7th Congressional District, and more than 40 LaRouche Democrats won election as precinct chairmen.

As revealing of the Party's weakness was the extremely low attendance at the caucus meetings the evening of the May 5 primary to choose delegates to the national convention.

The nomination of Mondale in San Francisco was not greeted with enthusiasm by many of the state's Democratic elected officials. Several congressmen, including Hightower, Wilson, Ralph Hall, and Sam Hall, refused to even attend the convention, let alone endorse the national ticket. They and others said that Mondale-Ferraro could not win in Texas, and they warned that it would bring other Democrats down. In particular, they stressed that the anti-defense posture of the platform, especially the "nuclear freeze," would alienate Texas voters, not to mention party positions favoring homosexuality and abortion.

The second sign that the Manatt-Slagle party in Texas was headed for disaster was the success of a Texas committee of Independent Democrats in their petitioning effort to place Lyndon LaRouche on the ballot as an independent for the November general election. Over 80,000 mainly Democratic voters signed petitions for LaRouche, more than the number of voters who participated in the delegate-selection caucuses. With the success of this committee, Mondale's slim chances of winning in Texas were doomed.

The Mondale campaign could read the hand-writing on the wall. Instead of spending the \$1.2 million originally allocated by the national campaign for Texas, less than \$200,000 was spent. One state campaign official said that the national Mondale campaign committee decided to write off Texas once LaRouche was on the ballot.

Since no Democrat has ever been elected President without carrying Texas, this decision indicated to many that the Mondale-Ferraro ticket was not serious about winning.

## The lessons

The election brought down several good Democrats along with Mondale. Rep. Tom Vandergriff of Arlington and Hightower of Wichita Falls were both conservatives who had backed Reagan on defense policy. In both cases, they did not get much support from the Democratic Party machine; Representative Vandergriff lost by less than 2%. Commenting on his defeat, the congressman noted that in some cases, including his, "The Democratic Party and not Ronald Reagan

was responsible for the losses of Democrats."

Will Democratic leaders in Texas learn from this humiliating defeat? Rep. Charles Stenholm, a "Boll Weevil" leader from Stamford, is preparing a challenge against House Speaker Tip O'Neill. Six defeated Texas assemblymen held a press conference in Austin yesterday to call on the party to "return to its traditional conservative base" if it wishes to remain the majority party in Texas. And Gov. Mark White, who campaigned heavily for the Mondale-Ferraro ticket, has been trying to distance himself from it ever since, saying that the party must "move to the middle."

Yet, there is no sign yet that there is any content to these calls to action. There is a general sentiment to dump Slagle, of course, but that will not solve the problem. It is clear that the underlying problem is still the lack of a program to rally voters back under the banner of the party—by virtue of the voters' recognition that the program is in the national interest.

Only LaRouche offered such a program, and he received over 14,000 votes for his independent presidential campaign in Texas, despite the fact that many LaRouche supporters pulled the lever for Reagan.

In an election-eve broadcast shown only in Texas, LaRouche addressed the concerns of the voters in this state. After thanking his supporters for their votes in the primary and the votes for LaRouche Democrats more generally, he outlined a program for Texas in terms which address the crises facing the nation. He offered a program to solve the endemic problem of drought for west Texas agriculture, the NAWAPA project (North American Water and Power Alliance), his Operation Juárez proposals to expand trade with our neighbors to the south and build a second Panama canal, among other Ibero-American development projects. Such a second canal, relieving the over-congested existing channel, would open the Asian Basin for trade from the ports on the Gulf of Mexico.

Finally, he stressed the importance of defeating Mondale and his Soviet-sponsored defense policies: "Mondale's policies cannot be supported by any patriotic Democrat," he said, explaining why the development of beam-weapon defense systems (the Strategic Defense Initiative) is essential for U.S. national security.

LaRouche concluded by saying, "If someone asks you what a strategic missile defense will do to benefit the state of Texas, tell them that Lyndon LaRouche is fully committed to shooting down any Soviet missile that is aimed at any part of Texas, and that LaRouche thinks that President Reagan is committed to that, too."

By the way the voting turned out on Nov. 6, it is apparent that more voters in Texas believe LaRouche than they do Mondale, Slagle, or anyone else from the Harriman faction. The future of the Democratic Party in Texas depends on whether or not the moderate-conservative Democrats in Texas have learned this lesson.