

Ad Hoc Platform Hearings Give Voice to ‘Forgotten Man’

by Nancy Spannaus

A panel of eleven Democratic State Legislators, joined by former U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy, came together in Washington, D.C. on June 22, to preside over Ad Hoc Democratic Party Platform hearings. Under the chairmanship of Rep. Erik Fleming of Mississippi, the panel took on the responsibility to do what the current Democratic Party leadership has refused to do: give a voice to those “forgotten Americans” who comprise the lower 80% of income brackets in the United States, and who *know* that the so-called “crisis of abundance” being discussed by Al Gore and other Democratic officials is a fraud.

The all-day event began with a brief presentation by Debra Hanania Freeman, the national spokesperson for Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche, on how the hearings came about. She introduced the panel: Sen. Eugene McCarthy (ret., Minn.), State Sen. Carlos Cisneros (N.M.), State Sen. Joe Neal (Nev.), State Rep. Perry Clark (Ky.), State Rep. Erik Fleming (Miss.-chair), State Rep. John Hilliard (Ala.), State Rep. Thomas Jackson (Ala.), State Rep. Harold James (Pa.), State Rep. Ernest Newton (Conn.), State Rep. Coy Pugh (Ill.), State Rep. Ed Vaughn (Mich.), and State Rep. LeAnna Washington (Pa.).

Chairman Fleming led off by saying that all the panel members considered it a “matter of conscience” to be at the hearings. And, as became increasingly clear throughout, all the participants were deadly serious about rebuilding *their* Democratic Party around the urgent tasks of rebuilding the nation. In stark contrast to most hearings, in Congress and elsewhere, the dialogue between witnesses and panelists proceeded as from the standpoint of constituencies looking for a common solution based on the general welfare, a concept

which Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche had put forward in the *Road to Recovery* campaign book — precisely in the direction of what is needed to rebuild the Democratic Party.

The day of testimony was divided into three panels, starting with one on the economic crisis, followed by health care, and Constitutional law and justice.

LaRouche Strikes the Theme

The first witness was economist and Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, who testified by videotape. LaRouche defined the current situation as “roughly comparable” to that when President Franklin D. Roosevelt came into office in 1932. He proceeded to lay out certain areas of the crisis, beginning with the hyperinflationary process, on the one hand, and the collapse of physical infrastructure and health on the other. He also devoted a significant portion of his presentation to the threat of the New Violence.

The more general problem is that we’ve abandoned the principle of the general welfare, which is otherwise enshrined in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, LaRouche argued. Instead we’ve gone to a “John Locke system,” which says that “anything which makes money is good. And therefore, if we have owners of property, they have a right to their profit, they have a right to profit, even as it is being made now in the Internet area. Just pure speculation, the kind of speculation which is destroying our economy and destroying the world. So, the fact that people condone this, think this is right, think that shareholder values are primary, the corruption of the majority of the members of the Supreme Court — as Roosevelt faced back then in the 1930s — these are

the problems. And as long as we, as a people, believe you have to go along with public opinion, as expressed by our major news media, have to go along with the idea of shareholder value, you have to submit to that. As long as you accept that, you're bringing it on yourself. You're bringing doom on yourself just the same way that the so-called popular opinion, the *vox populi* of the pagan Roman Empire, sent the Latin Roman Empire to its doom. We're headed in that direction."

He concluded: "So, to sum up, first of all, we have the worst financial crisis in modern history. We shan't survive it, unless we come to our senses. If we come to our senses, we can. We need programs to deal with it, programs which do have precedents, and we need leadership, leadership typified in the past by people like Abraham Lincoln and President Franklin Roosevelt. With that combination, we can survive. With that combination of leadership, we will fix up our infrastructure, go back to high levels of productive employment, restore our health-care systems, restore our power systems, restore our transportation systems, restore our education system, and get some good old-fashioned clean morality into our nation.

"Under those conditions, we can survive. That, I think, is the gut of the platform which the Democratic Party must shape during this coming period."

The Farm-Labor Crisis

Following LaRouche's presentation, the legislative panel took testimony from, and carried out questioning of, three farm representatives, three representatives of organized labor, and two urban community activists. The picture which was presented in great detail, demonstrated that the nation's food supply, and its labor force and population, are definitely "at risk" of destruction. The fundamentals of the economy are *not* sound.

Speaking on the farm crisis were 1) Randy Sowers, a prize-winning dairy farmer from western Maryland, who spoke on his own experience, and read testimony from Greg Blaska, director of the National Dairy Board; 2) V.B. Morris, National Secretary of the American Agricultural Movement, who spoke by phone from Texas; 3) George "Bill" Burrows, a member of the State Committee of the Farm Service Agency from Nebraska, who spoke as an individual; and 4) Rep. Thomas Jackson, chairman of the Agriculture, Forestry, and Natural Resources Committee in the Alabama State Legislature.

The farmer-witnesses spoke directly to the point of how family farmers are currently being destroyed by the monopoly control of the market by the multinationals, and the lack of parity prices. Mr. Morris of the AAM put forward a set of policy goals around the need for immediate adoption of parity pricing. Representative Jackson's testimony addressed the issue of the lack of necessary water infrastructure, a major contribution to the drought devastating farmers in the Southeast.

Representative Jackson read the joint resolution for the New Bretton Woods which he had succeeded in passing in the Alabama House, although it had died in the Senate, and called for "re-inventing" this policy in the 21st century, including with water infrastructure. "No more business as usual," he concluded.

The panel proceeded to hear testimony from Terri Bishop, Director, Community for Creative Non-Violence Homeless Shelter, Washington, D.C.; Marty Jewell, Chairman, Richmond Coalition on Housing; Robert Cebina, Vice-President, UAW Local 723, Detroit; Melvin Muhammad, State President, AFSCME, Nebraska; and Louis Whitehead, President, Portsmouth Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, Virginia.

Throughout the extensive testimony and discussion, the focus was on the devastating consequences which the Democratic Party leadership's adoption of a Gingrichite free-trade program under the North American Free Trade Agreement, budget cuts, and privatization, has had on the majority of Americans. Most captivating was the presentation by Ms. Bishop, who began with one of President Clinton's recent encomiums to the "unprecedented prosperity," only to ask, "If these statements are true, why, then, are the canaries dying?" The canaries, she explained, were taken by miners into coal mines in the old days, in order to test for invisible, but deadly methane gas. If the canaries died of methane, the miners still had time to escape. Today, she said, "this nation has human canaries. They're the homeless," and they show that the nation is dying.

The Health-Care Crisis

The health care panel took direct testimony from five experts, who each addressed the impact of the collapse of health-care delivery services to especially urban, minority populations, who have been devastated by the combined impact of the economic depression, and the fascist health maintenance organization (HMO)/managed-care system which denies treatment to those considered "useless eaters."

Dr. Alim Abdul Muhammad, M.D., Medical Director of the Abundant Life Clinic in Washington, D.C., opened the panel with a report on his work on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. "The world is facing an unprecedented biological holocaust," he warned, which is ravishing Sub-Saharan Africa; but we are now beginning to see the "Africanization" of America. Dr. Muhammad charged that AIDS is not a "natural disease," but rather was developed by the architects of Global 2000 and National Security Study Memorandum 200, who used the deadly plague to carry out their policy of reducing the world's population.

According to the World Health Organization, there are now 34 million infected, but, Dr. Muhammad said, the figure is probably much higher. The only nation which has any accurate figures for HIV/AIDS infection is Cuba, which conducts universal testing. The technology exists now for cost-effective mass testing, and treatment is now available

which can arrest and even cure AIDS, but it is being withheld. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has embargoed the test kit, which was used successfully at the Abundant Life Clinic, for four years. Dr. Muhammad urged that these diagnostic techniques, and proven therapies be employed immediately, if we are to save nations, both here and around the world.

Joe Jones, City Councilman of Cleveland, Ohio testified next. He said that the City Council had passed an emergency resolution calling on Congress to investigate the HMOs; "Today I am convinced that the Democratic Party Platform should include a call to abolish HMOs," he said, and commended Lyndon LaRouche and his publications for initiating the movement to ban the HMOs. "Where does my Congressman or legislator stand on the bill to abolish HMOs?, should be the litmus test to determine who is going to be elected in November," Jones proposed. "It is wrong to put a price tag on human life, by giving doctors and hospitals a financial incentive to withhold necessary care."

Rep. LeAnna Washington, a member of the Health and Human Services Committee, Judiciary Committee, of the Pennsylvania Legislature, who served on the panel, also testified, with a shocking report on the widespread use of Ritalin and other drugs to control "behavior" problems in children and youth. In 1968, she said, passage of a law broadening the definition of "handicapped" to include "mental disturbance," gave psychiatrists a "green light to label and drug children into compliance." By 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Act adopted a new category for special education, "learning disabled," or "LD" children. By 1996, some 2.6 million children were considered "LD." Today, Ritalin and similar drugs are prescribed to some 6-9 million children and adolescents in the United States. Moreover, Representative Washington charged, in Philadelphia, there are a disproportionate number of minority children being prescribed these drugs.

Dr. Ray Terry, Director of Health Research, University of Maryland, presented a report on the health-care crisis among the elderly, decrying the fact that the system is not able to deal with the "graying of America." The numbers of uninsured are growing, he said, and he proposed that universal health care may be a solution.

Alphonso Coles, National Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer in Washington, D.C., testified about the crisis in men's health care, which he said, needs to be addressed in the Platform of the Democratic Party. Coles noted that men are at higher risk for injury because they hold more dangerous jobs; and they are also at higher risk for cancer, AIDS, diabetes, etc.

Constitutional Law and Justice

The final panel of the Ad Hoc Platform hearings was devoted to issues of Constitutional Law and Justice, and heard testimony on political harassment, racial profiling, and the death penalty. There were 11 witnesses, including several from the panel of legislators itself.

The keynote witness on the question of political prosecution was South Carolina State Sen. Theo Mitchell, himself a victim of political targeting. Mitchell spoke primarily to the point of what the Democratic Party, in particular, has been doing in its violation of the Voting Rights Act in the case of Lyndon LaRouche. "There cannot be a Democratic Party convention, without having this matter raised," he said.

The other speaker on this question was Judge Ira Murphy, a former State Representative from Memphis, Tennessee. Murphy testified on Operation Fruehmenschen, the FBI program which had targeted black elected and appointed officials, and concluded that "we need Democrats who will bring this issue forward, and expose the permanent bureaucracy."

The phenomenon of racial profiling was addressed by several witnesses: Delegate William Robinson of Virginia, Rep. Harold James of Pennsylvania, and Rep. Ernest Newton of Connecticut. All three addressed the way in which African-Americans have been targeted for arrest and incarceration, and they described legislation which they are promoting in order to deal with the problem.

Former Congressman Mervyn Dymally (D-Calif.) called into the hearing to present testimony on foreign policy, wherein he described the practice of the U.S. government toward the nations of the Caribbean and Africa as exemplary of the same mind-set as the racist treatment of African-Americans in the United States.

The last section of this panel was devoted to the death penalty, and heard from four witnesses: John Giliam-Price, National Spokesman for the Campaign to End the Death Penalty; Father Richard McSorley, S.J., Director, Center for Peace Studies, Georgetown University; William Taft, Representative and Legislative Affairs Chairman, National Juneteenth Observance Foundation; and Barry Scheck, Esq., co-founder of the Innocence Project, and a member of the National Commission on the Future of DNA Evidence. Scheck's testimony was delivered by videotape, and had previously been given to a Senate hearing on DNA.

Where Do We Go From Here?

LaRouche's Committee for a New Bretton Woods, his campaign committee, which facilitated the hearings, has taken on the task of getting out the content of the discussion. LaRouche's campaign website sponsored a live audio webcast of the proceedings, and arranged for videotaping of the event. The campaign has plans to produce a videotape, and to circulate it broadly among delegates to the upcoming Democratic National Convention.

Will Democrats from among the lower income-brackets actually move to prevent the Gore-dominated party from committing political suicide? If so, it will be because they begin to realize that an FDR-style coalition can be put together, and devise an approach to today's problems along the lines put forward at the Ad Hoc Democratic Party Platform hearings held on June 22 in Washington.