



Herndon to work for permanent Rainbow

by Chuck Goodmacher

Ron Herndon, one of the earliest supporters of Jesse Jackson's presidential bid, is now working to build a permanent presence for the Rainbow in Oregon. Herndon granted this interview to the *Observer* to discuss the plans and hopes of the Oregon Rainbow Organizing Committee as well as his personal views on the Democratic Convention.

OBSERVER: You and several members of the Jackson for President steering committee just mailed out a letter asking support for the Oregon Rainbow Organizing Committee. What will the political agenda of this group be?



Ron Herndon, co-chair of the Portland Black United Front and Oregon's only delegate committed to Jackson. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

HERNDON: To address several different issues, and as I see it, all of them revolve around the quality of life in this state for the average person...what can be done to improve that. We're talking about unemployment, education, or the lack thereof, energy issues and so on.

O: How will the Rainbow pursue that agenda while at the same time helping to get Mondale elected?

H: We'll be getting people together from around the state that worked on the Jackson campaign to develop a clearly well-thought-out plan to move that agenda...

O: The Mondale campaign apparently expects people who supported Hart and Jackson to help out, especially if victory appears near. What do you think about that?

H: It's a bad strategy. Their move, both locally and nationally, should be to extend themselves...to try to bring everybody together and develop some relationship that will allow everybody to be involved in a manner that they feel is comfortable for them. The strategy that people will come to you presupposes a lot of things that aren't true. It ignores the fact that a lot of people are bitter about the Mondale nomination. Jackson won 85% of the Black vote. The Black Mondale delegates only represented 15% of the Black electorate...Now if he thinks that because he's got Coretta (Scott King) and Andrew (Young) that somehow that's going to bring folks out in November, he's mistaken. His best move would be to make some accommodation with Jesse so that the things he feels are important can be...made part of this campaign. That likewise should be the move at the local level.

O: What kind of outreach efforts will be made beyond the people who supported Jackson's presidential campaign?

H: We're already talking with the Gray Panthers. We're also very interested in talking with people in the peace movement, those involved in the environmental movement, those who are really concerned about education, those who are concerned about welfare...those who are overlooked by this society, those who feel there is more to life than the profit motive, getting together and making an effort to force, in this case the state, and in the broader sense, the nation, to respond to these issues. I think it can be done.

O: What about at the city level? Do you see any possibilities there, especially with the new mayor coming in?

H: The same groups need to sit down and talk about economic development that's going to be helpful for more than just a few people and larger corporations. Will economic development mean the development of something that's going to be labor-intensive? What's set up now is not helping those who need it the most.

O: Getting back to the fact that many people are bitter about the nomination process and the defeat of Jesse's platform planks, what do you say to people who state that is why they will not vote for Mondale?

H: A couple of things. I understand it. All too often in this country you get placed in a situation like this: would you have wanted Humphrey or Nixon? Given what's happened historically, I think most people would say, "I wish Humphrey had been in there." Would you have preferred Jimmy Carter over Ronald Reagan? I think I would have preferred Jimmy Carter. That doesn't suggest that I agree with Jimmy Carter, but in terms of having someone in there that gives you at least the ability to make some moves while not watching your people slowly, or rapidly, destroyed in front of your own eyes. He (Reagan) has actually been responsible for the death of literally thousands of people in this country through starvation, through deprivation. The untold misery that



Oregon delegate Johnnie Bell enjoyed the frantic pace and commotion of the convention. She went as an unpledged delegate and voted for Gary Hart. (Photo: Richard Brown)

he has brought upon those who are most defenseless can't be measured. Now, is someone telling me they prefer that to a situation where it would not exist? I think that Mondale would at least lessen some of the misery that those who are defenseless face today.

O: And through organizing the Rainbow you hope to create more room to fight for those needs?

H: Yes, I think that we bring a fresh view to the whole thing. That's what Jesse did. You bring people together who have a history of working to improve conditions for people. Now you have people in the environmental movement, they're not doing that for a paycheck...people in the peace movement, they're not getting paid for that, but they're working because they have a sense of morality...people in the civil rights movement...So you're bringing together people whose lives have been spent in the service of humanity one way or the other. Generally we're more creative than those who are only concerned with a dollar bill...we have a sense of vision they generally don't.

We bring to this whole discussion some solutions that are very, very creative and much different than those which have been put forth.



(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

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