

How special interest politics have failed

by Mel Klenetsky

The image of the Democratic Party “defending the little guy” was carried to new depths of bathos in Mario Cuomo and Jesse Jackson’s convention speeches. In fact, the Democratic Party is no longer a constituency-oriented grassroots party. Its candidates are media creatures bankrolled by the Wall Street moneybags and tycoons.

Political analysts across the country have been writing post-mortems about the sorry state of Fritz Mondale’s efforts and the wretched state of the Democratic Party. From Joe Kraft to Max Lerner to Patrick Buchanan these pundits pin the lack of enthusiasm and hope for a Mondale victory on factors from the Democratic Party platform to the confusion of leaders and the use of fake symbols and categories.

The reality is that Democratic Party clubs don’t function anymore. While party leaders like Cuomo and Mondale rhapsodize about the rich and the poor, the lucky and the left out, Chuck Manatt has Ann Getty, wife of Gordon Getty, who is worth \$4 billion plus, host dinners for the most powerful publishers and TV media people. Mondale enjoys close ties to Herbert Allen, the mob-linked Wall Street investment banker and entertainment industry mogul.

Since the “McGovern Reforms” of 1972, the grassroots constituency politics practiced by such Democratic big-city mayors as Coleman Young, Richard Daley and Kevin White (let alone the FDR coalition!) has been replaced by special interest groups, who are satisfied by symbolic and rhetorical gestures of support rather than substantive policies. So Mondale tries to win the women’s vote by selecting Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate; win the South by choosing Bert Lance as his campaign chairman; placate the blacks by offering Jackson a job handling voter registration for the Democratic National Committee, with a large staff and control of millions of dollars; and win over the Yuppies (Young Upwardly Mobile Professionals) by saying that he will help Hart pay off the remaining debt of his \$13 million campaign.

Each of these decisions has already backfired—or soon will. Ferraro, so-called champion of women and the poor, is the wife of one of New York’s most distinguished slumlords. Mondale’s tactical blunder in trying to replace Manatt with Bert Lance as DNC head, with the convention in Manatt’s home state, only pointed up the disastrous effect of running a party by pandering to special interest.

Mondale backed off from replacing Manatt with Lance and instead made Lance his campaign chairman. Lance, of course, presents major problems for Mondale. Lance has brought about discontent from Jewish delegates, Southerners, and labor leaders. Lance has the taint of the Carter mafia about him and the scent of scandal remaining from his forced resignation in 1977. Lance’s history of ties to Arab financial interests has raised a whole array of objections from Jewish leaders.

One of the biggest affronts to any semblance of constituency politics came from the handling of Jesse Jackson, who received 22% of the popular vote and wound up with only 9% of the delegates. The fix was apparent in the roll call where one state after another came in with the most delegates for Mondale despite Jackson and Hart popular-vote victories in the primaries and caucuses. Jackson called for proportional representation for delegates and was heard by an ad hoc commission set up by Rep. Tip O’Neill, but was not given any satisfaction.

The bitterness of the black delegates came out sharply when Mondale put up Coretta Scott King and Andrew Young to defeat the Jackson minority plank. Martin Luther King’s widow and Young were booed by the Jackson delegates. For the black community Jesse Jackson represented a symbol for their aspirations to end the disenfranchisement they have felt in the Democratic Party, especially since the Carter administration. Mondale’s offer to Jesse on the voter registration drive meant nothing.

Not only did the Mondale camp fail to meet any of the demands of the Jackson forces, the most important of course being proportional representation for delegates, but the Mondale camp used harassment tactics against Jackson supporters as they did against those delegates who signed the petition to place LaRouche’s name in nomination. One of Jesse Jackson’s top advisers, Lamond Godwin, charged that Jackson supporters were subjected to “intimidation” during the nominating process at the Democratic convention Wednesday. Godwin said one Mondale supporter who switched to Jackson was taken off the floor and replaced with a white alternate and that “credentials were physically removed” from some other black delegates who wanted to change to Jackson.

The Hispanic delegates abstained from voting to protest their opposition to the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill. The Texans were annoyed because Ferraro and not Texas Congressman Lloyd Bentsen was chosen for the vice-presidential spot. Mondale’s solution was to have black Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley give his main nominating speech, with seconding speeches by Rep. Robert Garcia, a Hispanic, and Texas Treasurer Ann Richards.

The Democratic Party with a Mondale and a Manatt at the helm will be destroyed. The sleaze factor behind the money and media, together with the thug tactics, is what this gang is really about, and what they use to cover up the failures of their “special interest” politics.