

Fowler, Keeney reviving racist tradition of Democratic Party

by an EIR Research Team

In a shameless effort to revive the racist tradition of pro-Ku Klux Klan President Woodrow Wilson in the Democratic Party, certain members of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), aided by their nakedly racist counsel John C. Keeney, Jr., are supporting an anti-civil rights, implicitly pro-racist argument against the Voting Rights Act of 1965, urging that the 1965 Act be thrown out as unconstitutional.

Keeney's argument on behalf of the DNC was made in the course of a hearing on a DNC motion to dismiss a lawsuit brought by Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, and Democratic voters from Virginia, Louisiana, Texas, and Arizona, before a three-judge panel in Federal district court in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 16. The lawsuit, filed in 1996, charges that Donald Fowler, then Chair of the DNC, violated the Voting Rights Act, when he ordered state Democratic parties to disregard the votes of thousands of Democrats in the 1996 Democratic Presidential primaries and caucuses, who had cast their votes for Lyndon LaRouche.

Through their attorney John Keeney, Fowler et al. claimed that they anticipated the support of the currently incumbent U.S. Supreme Court for such a retroactive nullification of that Civil Rights law. He argued, that the DNC's proposed nullification of the law was consistent with the losing argument in a dissenting opinion in an earlier Supreme Court case, a dissent submitted by Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, and by Chief Justice William Rehnquist.¹ That dissent avowed that the Voting

1. Chief Justice William Rehnquist knows something about discriminatory election practices in Arizona. In the early 1960s, he was part of Republican Party efforts to prevent minorities from voting in Phoenix, through harassment and intimidation. Earlier, when he was a clerk at the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1950s, he argued against racial desegregation and in favor of the "separate but equal" monstrosity which was overturned—over Rehnquist's objections—by the Court's school desegregation decisions in 1954.

Rights Act should be declared unconstitutional if it is applied to political parties.

In the dissent to which DNC attorney Keeney referred, not only were the positions of Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas merely dissenting positions, but, when viewed in the light of the circumstances under which President Lyndon Johnson and the Congress acted, in 1965, to enact this law, the argument of Rehnquist, Scalia, Thomas, and of defendants Fowler et al., constitute an attempt to return the Democratic Party to the racist tradition of Ku Klux Klan booster and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted out of widespread revulsion against the racist exhibition directed against the Mississippi Freedom Democratic delegation, at the 1964 Democratic Party National Convention, which threw the duly elected Freedom Democrat delegation out of the party's convention, under the same kind of pretexts which Fowler et al. have now asserted through attorney Keeney.

The anti-civil-rights argument delivered by attorney Keeney, Jr., was made "behind the backs of most of the DNC," Democratic candidate LaRouche charged during his Internet webcast with labor leaders on Nov. 4.

LaRouche said that the crowd responsible for this, "is outrightly racist by virtue of the fact that they authorized, and were represented by, a guy [Keeney] who made a racist attack on a piece of civil rights legislation which is crucial for this country." LaRouche pointed out that Keeney made the same arguments that in the days before the Voting Rights Act was passed, were made in Texas by Democratic Party officials in order to exclude African-Americans, namely, the argument that the Democratic Party is a "private club" which can do as it pleases.

The historical facts, including the Democratic Party's racism-ridden 1964 National Convention, fully support



The attorney for the Democratic National Committee argues in court that the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the principal achievement of the civil rights movement, should be declared unconstitutional. Shown here are civil rights activists marching on Washington.

LaRouche's argument that the action of Keeney et al. is a flagrantly, systemically racist one.

The Democratic 'private club'

The "private club" argument is an old one for the Democratic Party. In 1923, the Democratic-controlled state legislature in Texas passed a law that no Negro could participate in the Democratic Party primary election in Texas. When this was thrown out by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1927, the Texas legislature then authorized the executive committee of every party to determine who should be "qualified" to vote or participate in the party. This was thrown out, and then the Democratic Party went ahead and, on its own, limited party membership to "white persons."

That was declared unconstitutional in 1944. Still, the Texas Democratic Party did not give up, and in many parts of Texas, the party set up the "Jaybird Democratic Association." They then ran the so-called "Jaybird primary," in which white voters selected the candidates who then ran in the Democratic primary, and almost always won. Even though this was purely "private," in 1953 the Supreme Court declared the Jaybird primaries unconstitutional.

The Texas "white primary" was one of the reasons why Congress passed the 1965 Voting Rights Act, as is still recognized today. But sections of the DNC have been insisting for years that they should be permitted to reinstate the notion of the Democratic Party as a "private club."

The real story of Albert Gore, Sr.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act was passed, with support from President Lyndon Johnson, in reaction against the

shameless conduct of then-Senators Walter Mondale (D-Minn.) and Al Gore, Sr. (D-Tenn.), notably the action, supported by Mondale, to throw the Mississippi Freedom Democrats out of the 1964 Democratic Party convention, a racist action which is the exact model for what 1996 Democratic National Committee Chairman Don Fowler and his current supporters have done in Federal court in calling for the nullification of that Civil Rights law today.

The Gore story is particularly important to highlight, because, last July, Vice President and Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Al Gore, Jr. boasted that his father was "a great contributor to the cause of civil rights in the South." The younger Gore even claimed that it was because of his dad's firm support for the cause of civil rights, that he ultimately lost his seat in the United States Senate.

In truth, Sen. Albert Gore, Sr. *opposed* measures to end segregation. In 1964, Senator Gore first tried to render the 1964 Civil Rights Act, then under consideration, impotent by amendment. When that effort failed, *he voted against it.*

What Senator Gore's amendment would have done, was to eliminate any financial penalty for segregation's continuance, by reversing the provisions for cutting off Federal funds to non-compliant programs; he also attempted to put the *timetable* for desegregation into the hands of the racist judges of the South.

Southern Democrats, including the senior Albert Gore, almost to a man voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Gore stood shoulder to shoulder with his Confederates, and voted against the bill, after his attempt to sabotage it came to naught.

The Mississippi Freedom Democrats

What were the practices of the Democratic Party which Mondale and Gore, Sr. were supporting?

The platform of the Mississippi Democratic Party, adopted in 1960, declared: "We believe in the segregation of the races and are unalterably opposed to the repeal or modification of the segregation laws of this state." The Democratic Party controlled the Mississippi state legislature, which passed laws making voter registration almost impossible for blacks, and also forbidding anyone from participating in a state party primary who did not agree with the principles of that party—which included "segregation of the races."

Civil rights leaders began an organizing drive to register the black population of Mississippi to vote, an effort which met with violent resistance from the Democratic Party estab-

lishment. White “Citizens’ Councils,” which functioned as a public front for the Ku Klux Klan, were led by local Democratic Party elected officials and leaders. Arrests, beatings, and bombings were used to stop the voter registration drive.

In 1964, hundreds of volunteers, mostly students, were brought in from the North to join in the Mississippi Summer Project, to register Mississippi’s black population to vote. The organizers were met with violence and arrests, and three civil rights workers — James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner — were murdered.

Because the Mississippi Democratic Party would not allow blacks either to register or to join the Democratic Party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), open to both blacks and whites, was formed in April 1964. Meanwhile, in June, the official Democrats chose an all-white delegation to represent Mississippi at the Democratic Party’s National Convention. Blacks were barred from the delegate-selection process. The official Mississippi Democratic platform expressly rejected the national party platform.

By late July, 80,000 black Mississippians had registered for the MFDP. On Aug. 6, the MFDP, at a state convention attended by 2,500 people, elected an integrated, 69-person delegation to represent Mississippi at the national convention. The regular Democratic Party responded by having the new party banned by court order, all its local leaders served with injunctions, and its chairman, Lawrence Guyot, arrested.

On Aug. 22, the national Democratic Party convention opened in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Both the all-white “official” Mississippi delegation and the integrated MFDP slate approached the Credentials Committee, asking to be recognized. The MFDP strategy was to force a floor vote on which delegation should be seated, expecting that a majority of the total delegates would vote to seat the integrated slate.

At the Credentials Committee hearings, which were nationally televised, speaker after speaker described the reign of terror against blacks in Mississippi. Former sharecropper Fanny Lou Hamer described, to the committee and a national television audience, how she had been viciously beaten by police in a local jail for her organizing efforts. “All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens,” Hamer said. “If the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America? The land of the free and the home of the brave?”

Western Union reported “an avalanche” of telegrams from around the country to convention delegates supporting the seating of the MFDP slate. The problem was that neither the Democratic Party leadership nor the White House wanted to seat them. Lyndon Johnson’s advisers were afraid that seating the MFDP delegates would result in Barry Goldwater and the Republicans sweeping the South in the November elections.

Hubert Humphrey and United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther took the point in pressuring the MFDP to drop its challenge. Humphrey worked out a plan for a special subcommittee of the Credentials Committee to handle the Mississippi dispute, with his protégé Walter Mondale (then the Attorney General of Minnesota) heading the subcommittee.

The MFDP delegation refused to capitulate, but the arm-twisting and threats of the party leaders forced the support for the MFDP position below 10% on the Credentials Committee, and the committee voted to seat the segregationist delegation. Walter Mondale later said: “What should be the best way to resolve this? One theory was you just take the black delegation and seat them, kick the white delegation out. . . . Well that didn’t solve any long-term problems. It didn’t establish any rule of law.”

Even after having been handed a victory by party officials, the “official” Mississippi delegation still refused to take the loyalty oath to the national party, and it walked out of the convention. The next night, Fannie Lou Hamer led the MFDP delegates into the convention and occupied the seats vacated by the all-white delegates. On orders from convention leaders, guards were sent, and the MFDP delegates were dragged out of the convention. Hamer and the delegates went back in the next night, but found that all the chairs for the Mississippi delegation had been removed! Undeterred, Hamer then led the entire delegation in the singing of freedom songs from the convention floor. But, in the end, the MFDP was forced by the racist actions of Humphrey, Mondale, and others, to leave the convention empty-handed.

Selma and the Voting Rights Act

In the months following the battle at the Democratic Convention, the fight for voting rights escalated in the state of Alabama. On Jan. 2, 1965, working with local civil rights leaders such as Amelia Boynton (Robinson), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. launched an organizing drive in Selma. Within days, massive violence was unleashed by the local Democratic Party-controlled establishment against anyone joining King’s efforts. Between Feb. 17 and March 26, more than 2,000 people were jailed, scores were beaten, and three voting rights activists were murdered.

March 7 saw the violent “Bloody Sunday” assault against marchers on the Edmund Pettus bridge, who were attempting to march from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery to petition Gov. George Wallace for protection for black voter registrants. Throughout these events, once again it was the Democratic Party that enforced the rules and laws — and encouraged the unlawful activity — that disenfranchised black voters.

Two days before Bloody Sunday, Dr. King had met with President Johnson, who promised that a voting rights bill would soon be introduced. Johnson was monitoring the events in Selma closely, and eight days later, he called for the passage

of a new Voting Rights Act in a televised address before a joint session of Congress.

Selma, the President said, marked a turning point in history, as had Lexington and Concord, and Appomattox. "Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote," Johnson said. "Every device of which human ingenuity is capable has been used to deny this right." Johnson laid out in broad outline, the measures to be incorporated in the Voting Rights Act which he was to send to Congress days later.

In Congress, Southern Democrats launched a full-scale campaign to obstruct and defeat the Voting Rights Act, including a filibuster in the Senate. In the House, Virginia Democrat Howard Smith kept the bill bottled up in the Rules Committee for five weeks.

But, finally, on Aug. 3, 1965, the House passed the Voting Rights bill by a vote of 328-74—a more than four-to-one margin. The next day, the Senate passed it by a 79-18 vote. In the presence of civil rights leaders, President Johnson signed it into law on Aug. 6, 1965—in the same room where President Abraham Lincoln, on Aug. 6, 1861, had signed a law freeing the black slaves who had been impressed into the Confederate Army. "Today," Johnson said, "is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that has ever been won on any battlefield."

Woodrow Wilson and the Klan

Although the pre-1965 efforts to enforce the constitutional rights of African Americans were chiefly benefits achieved with support of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, the Democratic Party's policies had been openly racist ones until a revolutionary change in the character of the Party was introduced through the Presidency of Franklin Roosevelt beginning in 1933. The 1936 Presidential election—a Roosevelt landslide—was the first in which blacks in large numbers supported the Democratic Party; up until that time, blacks had voted with what was still then considered the "Party of Lincoln," the Republican Party.

The old Democratic Party, to which Fowler's DNC faction is attempting to return, was the party of the Confederacy. It was the Democratic Party of President Woodrow Wilson, an open supporter of the revival of the Ku Klux Klan.

It was Wilson who once said that, when he was in his native state of Virginia, he was amongst people of his own "race and breeding." Not only did Wilson pack his Cabinet with Southerners, but he segregated Federal government agencies, bringing Jim Crow laws into the Federal government. Blacks were fired and transferred, to which Wilson responded with whole-hearted approval.

The KKK itself was revived during the Wilson administration as a mass movement, which was ushered in by a project which culminated in the release of the two-hour and forty-five minute silent movie, "The Birth of a Nation."

The initiating ceremony reviving the Ku Klux Klan occurred on Thanksgiving Eve of 1915, when a group of 15

men huddled together in the cold autumn air before a makeshift altar of rocks atop Stone Mountain, Georgia. When they lit a match to the kerosene-soaked pine boards rising above the altar, a burning cross lit up the Georgia countryside.

That ritual, which launched the resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan and Confederate ideology, was timed to coincide with the opening presentation of "The Birth of a Nation" one week later in Atlanta—literally a white-supremacist recruitment film for the Ku Klux Klan. D.W. Griffith's film was based on a 1905 book written by Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Clansman—An Historic Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. At Johns Hopkins University in the mid-1880s, Dixon had become a close friend of Woodrow Wilson.

In February 1915, Dixon wrote a letter to his old friend, requesting a half-hour interview, which now-President Wilson granted. By mid-February, Dixon was in the White House meeting with Wilson, and stating that he had a favor to ask of him, "Not as chief magistrate of the Republic but as a former scholar and student of history and sociology." That favor was for President Wilson to view Griffith's new movie.

Thus it came about, that on Feb. 18, 1915, "The Clansman" became the first motion picture ever to be shown in the White House. The audience in the East Room included President Wilson and his family, and members of his staff and Cabinet, along with their wives.

Wilson's comment, after viewing the film was: "It is like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is that it is all so terribly true." This quotation was quickly put into general circulation—although the White House staff would later attempt to downplay this endorsement of the film.

Several months later, Dixon wrote a letter to Joseph P. Tumulty, the President's secretary, in which he stated that his intent in showing Wilson the film was to "revolutionize Northern sentiments by a presentation of history that would transform every man in the audience into a good Democrat!"

"And make no mistake about it," Dixon added. "We are doing just that thing. . . . Every man who comes out of our theaters is a Southern partisan for life."

This is what those DNC officials behind Fowler and Keeney are yearning to return to.

Those in the DNC, who are now moving, in the year 2000 Democratic primary campaign, to eradicate the 1965 Voting Rights Act, are pushing for a return to that pro-Confederacy, racist tradition of President Woodrow Wilson, and to the kind of Democratic Party which he led down to disgrace and crushing defeat, as the fruit of his two terms as President.

If the Democratic Party is not to go down in disaster in next year's elections, the full membership of the DNC and all other honest party officials must overturn and repudiate, for once and for all, this racist tradition which Fowler, Keeney, et al. are attempting to revive.