

Tejano Dems Meet in San Antonio; The ‘New Politics’ Is Introduced

by Harley Schlanger

Three days before the Dec. 12 special run-off election for Texas’s 23rd Congressional District seat, between underdog Democrat Ciro Rodriguez and Republican incumbent U.S. Rep. Henry Bonilla, the Tejano Democrats in San Antonio sponsored a panel on the theme, “Which Direction for the Democratic Party?” The purpose of the event was to review the outcome of the Nov. 7 election in Texas, so that the Democrats might make the changes necessary to once again win statewide elective offices.

The panel consisted of influential figures who have provided leadership in shaping both tactical initiatives, and strategic direction, for the Texas Democratic Party. These included Dr. Richard Gambitta, director of the Institute for Law and Public Affairs, University of Texas at San Antonio; Peck Young of Austin, a long-time Texas Democratic Party consultant and pollster; Prof. Rudy Rozales; and David Van Os, an activist from the progressive wing of the party, who was the Democratic nominee for state Attorney General in 2006.

What made this panel different was the participation of a member of LaRouche PAC, Harley Schlanger, who is also the Western states spokesman for Lyndon LaRouche. His participation reflected the recognition by activists among the Tejano Democrats (*Tejano* is the Spanish word for “Texan” and refers to Texans of Mexican descent), and party leaders more broadly, of the profound significance of the special kind of organizing carried out by members of the LaRouche Youth Movement (LYM), both in Texas and nationally, which catalyzed a dramatic increase in involvement of young voters in the midterm elections.

Though the LYM in Houston had been at the forefront in the drive to defeat the corrupt U.S. Rep. Tom DeLay in 2004, and continued that campaign until he was forced to resign in disgrace in 2006, the LaRouche Youth became a statewide force with the candidacy of Kesha Rogers for state Democratic Party chair in 2006. Rogers joined with Charlie Urbina Jones, a long-time Democratic Party leader from San Antonio, who also ran for state chair, to rock the establishment with their candidacies.

Both insisted that the Party must recruit new voters, through aggressive outreach, with Rogers emphasizing going to youth on the campuses and in the neighborhoods, challeng-

ing them to take responsibility for the future. Her slogan, “Out of the Bushes and Into the Future,” caught the attention of many Texas Democrats, and her spirited speech at the state convention in early June gave her enough votes that, when combined with Urbina Jones, a run-off was required in the chairman’s race.

The Failure of the ‘Old Politics’

More than 40 people attended the forum, including the current state chair of the Tejano Democrats, the past state chairman of Mexican-American Democrats, members of LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens), and the Democratic nominee in 2006 for lieutenant governor of Texas. It was moderated by Urbina Jones, who said he wanted to bring together leading activists to address what must be done to win a Democratic majority in Texas, so that the damage which has resulted from six years of the Bush-Cheney Administration could be reversed.

The first four speakers presented interesting thoughts on the failure of the Texas Democratic Party—and the national party, under Howard Dean—to mobilize effectively, particularly in support of the statewide ticket. Many of their criticisms covered familiar ground: not enough money, either from the state or national party, and a bureaucratic structure that is out of touch with the voters, and doesn’t listen to activists in the field.

However, they also identified the flaws which come from applying the statistical-mechanical approach of the “Old Politics,” such as the lack of a serious, consistent grassroots organizing operation; and, too much emphasis on “focus groups,” to determine how to use television and robo-calls, to narrowly target previously identified voters. This standard approach was attacked by Professor Gambitta, who said that the Democrats continue to concentrate on “consistent” voters, instead of engaging in campaigns which expand the electorate. This is in part due, he said, to the failure to organize on the precinct level, the way the Democrats used to do in San Antonio.

Peck Young, who has been an “insider” for years, and was a leading backer of Boyd Richie, who ultimately defeated Rogers and Urbina Jones in the race for state chair, added two points. It is necessary, he said, to build a cadre of qualified

candidates. Further, these candidates and party officials must always “tell the truth about the Republicans.”

Van Os sharply attacked the national and state Democratic leadership for its timidity in recent years. He contrasted his campaign, during which he visited every county in Texas, including those which vote overwhelmingly Republican, with the failure even to field candidates in many races, ceding ground without a fight. The party has become too much like the Republican Party, he added, dependent on corporate funds and afraid to stir up a debate.

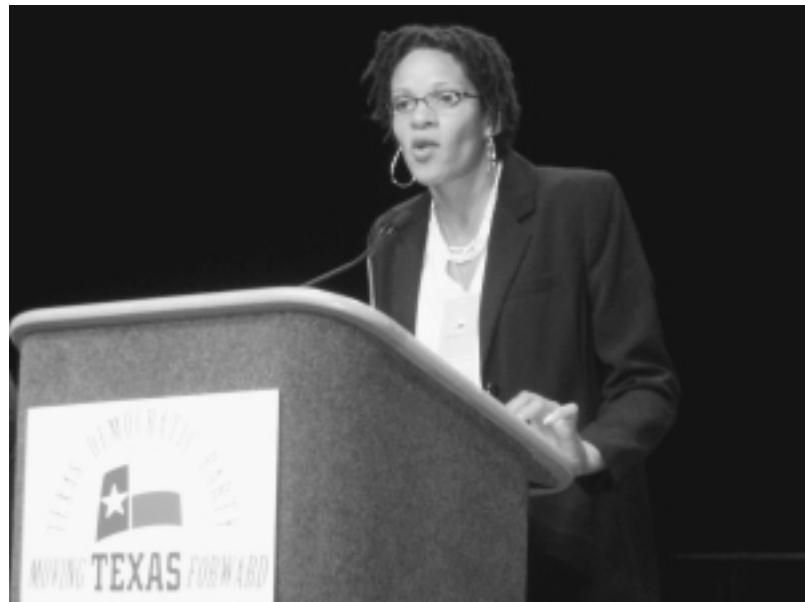
New Politics’ Presented

While these presentations offered useful contributions, a listener might gather from them that Nov. 7 had been a catastrophe for the Democrats. This was challenged by Harley Schlanger, who presented LaRouche’s conception of the “New Politics.” Each of the previous speakers, he said, spoke of their problems with “party insiders,” and the “traditional” methods of campaigning. “I am a spokesman for the one Democrat courageous enough to be a real outsider, Lyndon LaRouche, who, from his position as an ‘outsider,’ shaped the outcome of the midterm elections.”

Schlanger reviewed the significance of the increased turnout of young voters, and how LaRouche had unleashed the LYM with a strategy of mobilizing them to effect a marginal expansion of the electorate. “In some states, such as Missouri and Montana, it turned out that the youth vote was the decisive margin, which enabled the Democrats to win the U.S. Senate.”

This approach worked, not through applying traditional methods, but precisely because it rejected the accepted means of getting out the vote. The mass effect, combining the distribution of nearly 1 million pamphlets, with one-on-one discussions with young people who are hungry for new ideas, generated a ripple effect in the population, which produced the Nov. 7 tsunami. Making the campaign one for double impeachment of both Bush and Cheney—so that solutions to the strategic crisis in Southwest Asia and the global financial crisis may be introduced in the new, Democratic Congress, without obstruction from the Administration—inspired previously apathetic youth to go to the polls. The activation of the youth vote served, in turn, to provoke a positive response in older voters in the lower 80% of family income brackets.

The “New Politics,” he concluded, is the means by which LaRouche’s call for a return to the American System principles of Franklin D. Roosevelt can be realized, and the Democratic Party will serve, again, as the vehicle through which the “forgotten men and women” of America can participate as full citizens.



EIRNS/Michael Steger

LYM organizer LaKesha Rogers, addressing the Texas Democratic State Convention last June. She told the Tejano Democrats: “We are not just youth walking precincts, but preparing to be leaders.”

Unique Role of LYM Presented

The response to Schlanger’s speech was enthusiastic, and was followed by an animated dialogue. The highlight was Kesha Rogers’ intervention, during which she elaborated on the unique nature of the LYM: “We are not just youth walking precincts,” she said, “but preparing to be leaders.” She described the task that she had taken on in her campaign for state chair. “There were too few young people who were delegates to the state convention. We are going to change that.” She spoke about the intellectual work undertaken by LYM members. By mastering the rigorous curriculum prescribed by LaRouche, in physical science and the arts, we are developing that new leadership. She emphasized the importance of singing and the focus on Bach’s motet, “Jesu, meine Freude,” as necessary to give this generation a sense of beauty, as well as a connection to history.

Her intervention was seconded by a former chair of the Mexican-American Democrats, who said, “I saw the LaRouche Youth in Boston [at the 2006 Democratic national convention], and at the state convention. It was the most exciting part. . . . Every time you turned around, there they were, singing and whooping it up.”

The meeting concluded with an announcement by an official with Rodriguez’s campaign that former President Bill Clinton would be in town the next day, to rally support for the Democrat, to defeat Bush puppet Bonilla.

Following the crushing defeat delivered three days later to Bonilla, a participant at this forum told a LaRouche organizer that he believes that the outcome of this election validated LaRouche’s idea of the “New Politics.”