

Conyers Takes the Point Against Voter Suppression

by Edward and Nancy Spannaus

The senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, told a packed hearing room on Dec. 8 that Democratic members of the House Judiciary Committee will go to Ohio to hold hearings there, to examine voter disenfranchisement and irregularities in the Nov. 2 election. Conyers' promise came during a forum on "What Went Wrong in Ohio," which was so crowded that an overflow room was needed.

The forum was actually a hearing, minus the Judiciary Committee Republicans who had declined an invitation to participate. Nine Congressmen were in attendance throughout most of the forum—more than are usually present at any Congressional hearing except the most high-profile events, and a testament to the importance of the occasion. All present received copies of written testimony by Democratic leader Lyndon LaRouche, who was the first to call, on Nov. 9, for prosecution of the criminals who carried out voter suppression on Nov. 2.

The Dec. 8 Capitol Hill forum was part of an ongoing investigation of vote suppression and irregularities being conducted by Judiciary Committee Democrats. On Dec. 2, Conyers and 11 other members of the House Judiciary Committee sent a letter to Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell, requesting his assistance in their investigation of numerous complaints and allegations about the conduct of the 2004 Presidential election.

The Congressmen told Blackwell, "We are concerned that these complaints constitute a troubled portrait of a one-two punch that may well have altered and suppressed votes, particularly minority and Democratic votes." The first element of this is irregularities in vote tallies, which could be the result of machine malfunctions or fraud. The second is "a series of actions by government and non-government officials [which] may have worked to frustrate minority voters"—which in-



Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) convened and chaired a de facto Congressional hearing on the Ohio elections on Dec. 8, after the Republicans failed to respond to the Democrats' request for an investigation of election irregularities and voter suppression.

cludes the "lack of voting machines in urban, minority, and Democratic areas, and a surplus of such machines in Republican, white, and rural areas," resulting in long waiting lines, up to eight hours and more. Also cited was "a campaign of deception," in which minority voters were directed to the wrong polling places, and then given provisional ballots which often were not counted because of a directive issued by Blackwell.

Blackwell was also invited to attend and participate in the Dec. 8 forum. Needless to say, he did not appear, and instead had his spokesman issue a statement declaring that "Ohio had a great election"—which, given that Blackwell was also the head of the Bush-Cheney campaign in Ohio, is understandably his view.



The first panel at Conyers's hearing led off with Rev. Jesse Jackson. The members of the panel (left to right) were: Ralph Neas, president of People for the American Way; David Cobb, Libertarian Party candidate; Rev. Jesse Jackson; Cliff Arnebeck, attorney for Alliance for Democracy, who is contesting the Ohio election results; Steve Rosenfeld, senior producer for Air America; Prof. Robert Fitrakis, editor, The Free Press, Columbus, Ohio.

Ralph Neas, President of People for the American Way, said that the Ohio election was characterized by the "spirit of suppression," and he called for prosecution of those responsible for voter disenfranchisement.

But the forum did hear from a number of activists and lawyers who are at the center of the battle in Ohio, as well as a number of spokesmen for national civil rights and voting rights organizations. For "star" effect, Jesse Jackson was the lead-off witness, just having parachuted into Ohio for rallies the previous weekend. He apparently learned something while there, because he did describe what had happened in Ohio as "classic voter suppression," and called for a legal action under the Voting Rights Act, and he noted that the U.S. Attorney General—i.e., John Ashcroft—is supposed to enforce the Voting Rights Act, which, of course, Ashcroft has prevented career lawyers in the Civil Rights Division from doing.

Jackson also urged members of Congress to come to Ohio, at which point Representative Conyers said he hopes to be able to report soon that the Committee as a whole will come to Ohio and hold hearings, and if not, it was made clear that Democratic members will do so.

Demand Criminal Prosecution

Ralph Neas, president of People for the American Way (PFAW), noted that PFAW, the NAACP, and other organizations had just issued a preliminary report on the 2004 elections; that report states that "we have documented systematic problems which resulted in the widespread disenfranchisement of American voters." Neas described the more than 40,000 incident complaints received by the umbrella Election Protection Coalition around the Nov. 2 elections, and he said that determining what was behind the long lines for voters in minority areas "will be key to finding out the extent of the

voter suppression" and why it occurred. Neas also referred back to the PFAW/NAACP report entitled "The Long Shadow of Jim Crow: Voter Intimidation and Suppression in America Today," issued prior to the elections.

Neas declared that Kenneth Blackwell should get the "Katherine Harris Award of 2004"—referring to Jeb Bush's Secretary of State in the 2000 elections in Florida. He said that what Blackwell was doing was "not the spirit of democracy," but "the spirit of suppression," and he asserted that "prosecution should be considered with respect to what happened in Ohio."

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.), speaking later in the hearing, noted that the problem in Washington right now is that there are no checks and balances: The Republicans control the Senate, the House, and the White House. He pointed out, in response to various calls for prosecution of those responsible for election crimes, that "you can't have criminal investigations unless the Executive Branch authorizes criminal investigations." Since this means, under current conditions, that the investigations which are needed won't get done, Scott said that "we have to expose enough anomalies so that people are embarrassed into taking action."

But the most potent and effective calls for criminal prosecution of those Republican officials responsible for vote suppression, came from members of the LaRouche Youth Movement (LYM), during the question period. Neil Martin, after identifying himself as being with the LYM, called on the Congressional Black Caucus to stop certification of the Bush "victory." After a couple more questions, LYM member Jason Ross took the microphone, and went to the heart

of the matter.

I have a very specific concern, Ross said. It is on the difference between vote fraud and voter suppression. Fraud has to be pursued and proven on a state-by-state basis, but voter suppression is a violation of the Voting Rights Act. It is a national issue, and this includes in states that Kerry won as well, not just in Ohio. You have to build up a pattern of voter suppression and make the case that the pattern of intimidation and harassment proves that there is a national intention to win by voter suppression, then use that to stop the certification of Bush on Jan. 6, and send people like Blackwell and higher-ups in the Bush campaign to prison.

The audience broke out into enthusiastic applause, and Ross received the personal support of many of those present when the hearing broke up.

What Happens Jan. 6

Considerable attention was given to the Jan. 6 Joint Session of Congress, at which the Electoral Votes to be submitted by the states will be considered by Congress; and while no firm commitment was made by the Congressmen present to object to the Ohio vote on Jan. 6, there were indications from the Congressmen and others, that efforts are under way to find a member of the Senate who will join members of the House in such an objection, so that this is not a replay of what happened in January 2001. At that time, House members' objections to the certification of the Florida Electoral Votes were shunted aside because *not a single Senator* had the courage to step forward to support their complaint.

In a radio interview Dec. 9, Lyndon LaRouche noted how the campaign he is spearheading against Bush's Social Security privatization plan will feed into the movement to prevent Bush from being certified. Once the voter who was deluded into voting for George W. Bush learns that "George Bush is going to take your Social Security away, going to kill your grandmother, that voter is going to suddenly decide, that maybe he made a mistake," LaRouche said.

"And, in politics, it is not merely the technicalities of law which are important, it's also *the intent of law*. And the intent of law, is to allow people in an election, to select a Presidency, for example, that they choose. If they were fraudulently represented, and made the wrong vote, they are going to complain. And there are mechanisms, in the Electoral College and in Congress, in January, which could lead to an overturning of the reputed vote for George Bush.

"Or, failing that, to put such a restriction on the elected Bush Administration, the inaugurated one, the re-inaugurated one, that it would be under the control of a mounting process in the Congress and elsewhere. In other words, you could find that Bush's putative re-election could do him about as much good as the re-election of Dick Nixon."

LaRouche will be doing his part to create this situation, including holding a webcast on Jan. 5, the day before Congress convenes for certification.