

OAKLAND

Grassroots Organizing Against Reagan

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1. Introduction: Black Politics and Oakland Development

In the June 1984 California presidential primary, Jesse Jackson swept the eight delegates elected in the Eighth Congressional District, of which Oakland is a part. Jackson supporters each polled more votes than any of the Hart or Mondale contenders, including popular liberal state Assemblyman Tom Bates, who was running for Hart. This strong support for Jackson can only be explained in the context of decades of progressive electoral activism within the black community of Oakland, which is the subject of this chapter.

Since the 1960s the most consistent and militant opposition to U.S. policies of domestic austerity and foreign intervention has arisen from the black community. Albeit repressed and contained during the last decade, such opposition, expressed as anti-Reaganism in the last three years, has more and more found an outlet of expression in the electoral arena. In this study we will analyze the widespread sentiment in the black community against Reagan's policies of forced unemployment at home and militarism abroad, focusing on the organizing experience of the Peace and Justice Organization (PJO) in Oakland, California. While there are clearly limits to which such opposition can be developed beyond electoral politics, this study shows how progressive politics, articulated by elected officials, such as Congressman Ron Dellums (D-California), and expressed through grassroots organization, can be considered extremely relevant to black people in our search for equality and justice.

PJO, a community organization based in Oakland, was actively involved in four campaigns of local black progressive candidates during 1982-1983, in which a variety of electoral and non-electoral activities were used to activate voters in black and Latino communities. The Peace and Justice Organization began as an outgrowth of the Grass Roots Alliance, a multi-racial, multinational working-class organization, which had conducted three popular initiative campaigns to tax the corporations of San Francisco in 1979-1980.¹ In repeated campaigns, the people-to-people methods used by the GRA were highly successful in mobilizing progressive working-class voters, particularly those who had been forced out of or excluded from the electoral process. The successes of the GRA were based on both its grasp of the political economy of the late 1970s (as articulated in the writings of Marlene Dixon, director of the Institute for the Study of Labor and Economic Crisis) and its political insistence on the need to organize among, unite with, educate, and learn from the people most affected by the conditions that an organization is trying to change. PJO organizers, using these same methods, were able to turn certain specific working-class districts, which had historically been "swing" districts in their support of progressive issues, into a constituency who could be counted on to turn out for progressive candidates in repeated elections.

While the electoral campaigns of PJO learned many lessons similar to those of the Washington campaign in Chicago and the Mel King campaign in Boston, such as the need for organization, the importance of multinational support, and the critical role of the struggle for black empowerment in galvanizing response for a particular candidate, this study also highlights some of the organizing unique to the PJO work in Oakland. We will first look at the historical and economic factors that condition Oakland's electoral arena, and then, in Chapter Two, examine some of the issues upon which PJO based its electoral and non-electoral agitation. Chapter Three analyzes more closely four local campaigns and their cumulative effect on a particular black working-class district of Oakland. Finally,

in Chapter Four we will try to understand this experience in Oakland in the context of "the new black vote" and its relation to the world economic crisis.

Oakland, California is a typical U.S. central city, with a large minority population and a high unemployment rate. According to the 1980 census, Oakland is 47% black and 9.6% Hispanic.² Since at least 1960, Oakland's unemployment rate has been substantially higher than the U.S. national average.³ Unemployment among Oakland's minority population in 1983 was estimated at 30%, and among minority youth at 54%. In one predominantly black neighborhood of Oakland, the California Employment Development Department estimated the minority youth unemployment rate to be 98%.⁴

At the same time, Oakland is the home for a number of transnational and multinational corporations, the site of a 420-acre redevelopment area, and one of the major ports on the Pacific Coast. Since World War II, regional planning through the Bay Area Council (a regional organization of corporate leaders) has developed Oakland into the industrial and manufacturing center of the Bay Area, while San Francisco became the region's insurance and banking center, Berkeley the academic center, and the South Bay the locus of high-technology research and development.⁵ In this process Oakland drew longshore and warehousing activities away from San Francisco. This, however, did not spur employment in Oakland because the growth of containerization in fact meant a net decrease in longshore jobs in the overall area. Moreover, the recent development of more corporate headquarters has not lowered the unemployment rate, since only one third of all Oakland jobs are now held by Oakland residents. Racism, combined with the planned development of commercial and financial headquarters to replace the light manufacturing sector, has meant that any new employment opportunities are not slated for Oakland residents, at least its black or Latino working class.⁶

The development of urban capitalism played a crucial role in Oakland's early history, but under somewhat different circumstances than in the industrialized Northeast. Like other

Western cities, Oakland has always had small-property mayors since its early days, but it lacked the affluence to develop any prestigious elites until the growth of industrialism in the region after World War II. Also, in its early years, Oakland did not face an influx of immigrant Europeans. Thus, the contention of white ethnic forces, which heavily affected so much of the political development of large Eastern cities, was absent. This accounts for the lack of significant white ethnic voting blocs in Oakland, of Poles or Irish or Italians now waiting to take "their turn" in City Hall, as in Chicago or Boston. Instead, the vast majority of the early white population came from third- and fourth-generation Americans, who came West to make their fortunes in gold.⁷

Much of the industrial development of Oakland proper occurred during or just after World War I. As World War II approached, its economy was further stimulated because of its status as a port and naval shipyard. It was during this period that many of the large manufacturing and transportation-related industries, particularly those which thrived on military contracts, became established in Oakland. Many of these corporations, such as Kaiser Industries, Bank of America, and Safeway Corporation, have continued to play an important role in local and regional politics, often fielding their own executives for elective office.⁸

At the same time, Oakland has always had a multinational working class, reflecting its early days. Since the Spanish occupation and deeding of land to the church missions, there has always been a large Mexican/Chicano population in California, whose members have been increasingly drawn into the city from rural areas in search of jobs. Since the building of the railroads there has been a substantial Chinese community in Oakland, kept out of the political process and deprived of their rights through anti-Chinese prejudice. Prior to World War II, the black population in Oakland remained small, but the advent of war meant marked expansion of employment opportunities in the port and shipyards, far more than could be filled by local residents. Black workers were recruited from the South to take these jobs; at the same time, the Oakland

establishment hired Southern whites as their police force to keep the new black populace in line.

Since the 1930s, the *Oakland Tribune* has played a central role in Oakland politics, through the domination of its owner and publisher, J.R. Knowland, and later his son William. The paper came to speak as the voice for reaction, reflecting the most conservative forces within the Republican Party on a state and national level. During the postwar period, William Knowland, elected to the U.S. Senate, was one of the mainstays of support for Chiang Kai-shek and a leading advocate of the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act.⁹

Thus black electoral politics in Oakland, as in other central cities, must be understood to have a contradictory character. On the one hand, electoral politics has been shown to be one arena through which black people can be mobilized to express their opposition to the status quo; at the same time, corporate capital (both nationally and transnationally based) is vying to ensure that its interests are preserved. While its black mayor Lionel Wilson, embraces the interests of Kaiser and Clorox (or corporations, Oakland also has one of the most progressive representatives in Congress (Congressman Ron Dellums) as well as local representatives (such as Alameda County Supervisor John George), who have demonstrated their commitment to serving the needs of their black and working-class constituents.

POSTWAR OAKLAND MEETS ECONOMIC DECLINE:

In postwar Oakland, many of the public policies initiated in its earlier decades were no longer suitable to the metropolis of heavy industry in the 1950s. The war had brought a severe housing shortage and a serious transportation crisis. Factories, housing, parking, and highways were so inadequate that workers often arrived four or five hours late to work. Factories were short of key parts and materials because trucks were delayed on the heavily congested freeways.¹⁰ Most of the housing had been built prior to World War I, but no new housing was being built to meet the needs of the burgeoning black work force

The post-World War II housing conditions for black Oakland residents were abysmal, in the face of a home construction industry totally dependent for real estate loans on a racist banking industry. This same banking industry perpetuated discriminatory loaning practices and segregation, policies that the city government was happy to overlook.¹¹

During this postwar period, the Oakland economic infrastructure was allowed to falter, in the midst of the overall expansionary period of U.S. capitalism. This seems illogical, unless it is understood in the light of several key corporate decisions that led to the economic decline of Oakland. In 1935, the Oakland Chamber of Commerce had established a program designed to locate new industry outside the city boundaries, a policy whose impact was staved off by the intervening war years. Choice locations were used up and national enterprises were looking to suburban areas for expansion. Combined with the fact that most of Oakland's industrial plants pre-dated World War II, the decisions of corporate planners to look for low-wage non-union areas with cheap land meant that Oakland had a net outflow of capital. By 1960, the city was classified as a depressed area by the federal government. Between 1958 and 1963 alone, Oakland's employment dropped by 3,200.¹²

Thus, during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, Oakland's city government continued its benign neglect. Small and large business alike found their mutual interests satisfied in two main policies: low taxation and low city indebtedness. The tax structure was kept regressive toward the working class, with revenues raised mainly through sales and property taxes (which in the absence of rent control are passed on to renters as well). And, as Hayes points out, the low city indebtedness benefited the corporate class at the expense of the working class being denied vital public services:

The city has a good bond rating in private markets. . . . Such a credit rating is desired by bond purchasers in the private money markets; but it is largely the result of a low level of bonded indebtedness, well below that allowed by state law. This means that even the finances which could be raised by sale of bonds under present governmental procedures are not

raised; hence the hospitals and public housing and development corporations that such money could support have not been built.¹³

As Oakland entered the 1970s, we find a city with a decaying economic structure, growing unemployment, fleeing industry, and a city government presiding over its demise. It was also no accident that out of these conditions, out of the black community whose needs for jobs and public services had been ignored for decades by those in power, arose the Black Panther Party.

BLACK POWER IN OAKLAND

In January 1972, Huey Newton announced the Black Panther Party's involvement in voter registration in Oakland. The Panther Party was in the forefront of voter activism, becoming a serious oppositional political force at a time when no other organization in the progressive movement was considering electoral methods. The experience of the Panther Party provided a touchstone in electoral activation that would not be seen again in Oakland for another decade. The electoral work of the Peace and Justice Organization continued in the tradition of the Panthers' model, which used non-electoral agitation while running a professional campaign that had to be taken seriously.

In a speech made in November 1972, Elaine Brown explained their electoral campaign as "part of the revolutionary process—to build a base of operations to start talking about seizing power in Oakland, New York, Texas. . . ." The Panthers had already built a strong base of support among the black working class through their Survival programs, including free food, free shoes, legal defense, medical screening, and a busing program to visit relatives in jail. The Panthers were also a strong force calling for unity among all oppressed peoples, and linked their opposition to domestic policies with anti-imperialism and defense of the rights of self-determination for all peoples.¹⁴ When Bobby Seale announced that he was running for mayor at a rally attended by 1,800 people in East Oakland, this indeed marked

a new era in black participation in electoral politics.¹⁵

In the April 1973 mayoral election, besides Seale, the main candidates included John Reading, Otho Green, and John Sutter. Reading, the incumbent mayor, was a millionaire businessman, closely associated with the *Oakland Tribune*, downtown development, and the port.¹⁶ John Sutter was a city councilman, a favorite of the liberal white Democrats. Otho Green was a black businessman, who had cornered the support of the black leadership of Oakland and competed with Sutter for the support of the Democratic Party.

In a joint campaign for Seale and for Elaine Brown for City Council, the Panthers registered 30,000 new voters before the city elections. They had few endorsements from labor or the Democratic Party. Their strategy was to go in a targeted way to the black and non-Republican neighborhoods in the flatlands (which are predominantly working-class), while virtually staying away from the hills and Republican (middle-class) areas. The Panther campaign stressed the need to open up the government to public scrutiny, the issue of community control of police, the creation of jobs that served Oakland residents, and other programs from the Panther platform, such as rent control and public services.¹⁷

The election results "stunned" the political establishment, according to the *Oakland Tribune*.¹⁸

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|--------------|--------|
| John Reading | 55,453 |
| Bobby Seale | 21,329 |
| Otho Green | 17,470 |
| John Sutter | 15,361 |

The Panthers were suddenly a major force to be taken seriously. More importantly, their get-out-the-vote efforts had produced fairly spectacular results, pulling out over 63% of the vote. However, by the May runoff, the Reading forces were now more prepared and, in some areas of the wealthy hills, were able to mobilize over 74% of the voters, who voted 10 to 1 against Seale and the threat they perceived from the Panthers. In May, Seale drew 43,749 votes to Reading's 77,634, which also reflected the level of corporate campaign contributions Reading was able to accrue.

The significant factors of the Panther campaign must be understood in light of the changes occurring in Oakland. In the decade prior to 1973, 50,000 white residents had left Oakland, while 40,000 blacks had come there.¹⁹ This trend in minority and white populations has continued through the present.²⁰ The fact that the Panthers could sign up over 20,000 people to work on the campaign, and get out over 70% of the vote in an off-year municipal runoff election, demonstrated the potential of black voters in elections to come, a force that every politician would thereafter have to take into account.

The Panthers organized a strong base among black youth, and combated cynicism and the traditional arguments against electoral participation. They gave black people hope and electrified the nation with their courage and steadfastness in fighting for their politics. They showed the people of Oakland that a black progressive candidate was indeed viable, and their electoral organizing was decisive in breaking the hold of the conservative white machine over Oakland politics.

The Black Panther Party, repressed by state forces because of its effective and militant organizing, ceased to be an organizational force in Oakland much after 1978;²¹ however, the election of Lionel Wilson as Oakland's first black mayor in 1977 can be directly credited to the electoral thrust by the Black Panther Party. Wilson directly inherited the momentum from the Panther electoral organizing. After Reading announced that he would not seek another term, Wilson, then a Superior Court judge, emerged as the consensus candidate of the Democratic Party, labor, the Black Panthers, the United Farm Workers, and others on the left. He also gained support from black business, as well as significant sectors of larger corporate capital, including Pacific Gas & Electric Co., World Airways, and Clorox.²² His major opponent, Dave Tucker, had backing from corporate and conservative interests, including Edgar Kaiser of Kaiser Industries, Southern Pacific Railroad, Grubb & Ellis Realtors, and Coors Beer.²³

Wilson ran on a program of improving the city's economic base by attracting more business, and thereby creating jobs. He took a strong stand against an increased business license

tax, which he displayed prominently in his campaign material. Tucker used the issue of crime, proposing to put 150 more police officers on the streets (at the cost of \$6 million), and attacking Wilson as "soft-on-crime." However, Wilson could counterattack Tucker for being a big spender; all in all, Wilson was not an extremely vulnerable candidate.

However, neither was Wilson a particularly exciting candidate, nor one who could mobilize the black community. Thus the turnout in the primary was only 46%, and in the runoff only 52%. Wilson drew 42,640 votes to Tucker's 36,925; both candidates received fewer votes in actual numbers than Bobby Seale in the 1973 runoff.²⁴ Wilson of course drew upon Seale's strength, doing best in North Oakland, West Oakland, and East Oakland, the areas where the Panther campaign had been strongest. There was further consolidation of the working-class vote behind Wilson: in some working-class precincts he polled 97% of the votes cast. At the same time, there was an astounding drop in the conservative vote, from 77,000 votes for Reading to 33,000 votes for Tucker.

In the 1981 elections, Wilson faced no significant opposition, with his opponent polling not even 6,000 votes to Wilson's 33,753. What is most striking, however, is the depoliticization of the electoral process since the Panther campaign. Half as many ballots were cast in 1981 as there were in the 1973 mayoral election, which speaks to the lack of mobilization of the black electorate, the active facilitation, as we shall show, by the mayor to a return to "business-as-usual."

OAKLAND EMBRACES REDEVELOPMENT IN THE 1980s

"Business-as-usual" took on a new face, however, as the interests of national and transnational capital diverged from small and local business interests. It is no longer sufficient to keep taxes and bond issues low; in the late 1960s, transnational capital identified the need to develop Oakland as a major port to serve the Pacific Rim strategy.²⁵ This was a strategy

undertaken by transnational corporations aiming towards Pacific expansion; it was designed to turn Southeast Asia and Japan toward the West and integrate those nations into a market system under U.S. hegemony. Oakland's property was too valuable to waste on low-rent heavy manufacturing and warehousing; rather, the financial and commercial needs of the port and its importance as a transportation center for the whole region required expansion of Oakland's capacity as a corporate headquarters and as a major convention center.

With this perspective, an ambitious revitalization plan was begun in 1969 to renovate 25 blocks in the city's center, known as the City Center Project.²⁶ Grubb & Ellis, a local real estate company, won the development contract for this project. It nearly went bankrupt in the process, but since has become the fourth-largest real estate firm in the U.S., based largely on the profits from the City Center Project. The city of Oakland worked closely with Grubb & Ellis, buying land with federal monies, then selling it at a reduced price to Grubb & Ellis. Since 1969, over \$300 million in federal grants, municipal loans, and private equity have gone into the transformation of the central business district. The city also enabled Grubb & Ellis to secure loans at 0% interest; the state of California and the Bay Area Rapid Transit Authority assisted by providing funds for transit connections and freeway construction.²⁷

A tandem project to the City Center Project was the Chinatown Redevelopment Project, whose centerpiece was the Trans-Pacific Center. This office/commercial complex was built at a cost of \$60 million by the Hong Kong-based Carrion Group, headed by George Tan.*

*The financial backing of the Carrion Group seemed to "come out of nowhere," as one source put it, suggesting funding from outside sources. Somehow Carrion was able to obtain loans from reputable banks on an unsecured basis; one source reported that 50 banks had lent money to Carrion. In June 1983, shortly after the opening of the Trans-Pacific Center, the Carrion Corporation was reported as having financial difficulties; its Oakland properties, including the Trans-Pacific Center and its 14% interest in the Hyatt Regency Hotel, were being sold to the Darton Corporation, a Liberian-registered firm. *Wall Street Journal*, (June 17, 1983).

Both the capital infused into the City Center Project on behalf of Grubb & Ellis and the financial backing of the Trans-Pacific Center exemplify the influx of transnational capital into Oakland's redevelopment, responsive to enterprises of a far greater scale than the small-to-medium-sized businesses that have occupied its city government. Five major office buildings were opened in 1982, with almost 750,000 square feet of additional office space added to the city inventory. Some 101 new construction projects are planned or under construction. Bechtel Corporation is planning to construct a \$100 million office tower to relocate one third of its employees now based in San Francisco. The \$40 million Convention Center and adjacent Hyatt Regency Hotel round out a development schema to fulfill Oakland's role as the financial/commercial center of an expanding transportation center to serve the global needs of capital.²⁸

It comes as no surprise then that the major transnational corporate interests have embraced Mayor Wilson, as he has taken the lead in promoting downtown development. Wilson reportedly counts among his closest friends Cornell Meier (president, Kaiser Aluminum) and Bob Shetterly (vice president, Clorox Corporation). Clorox and Kaiser have been among the main corporate players in the City Council and Oakland city politics in general. In addition, Bank of America, Pacific Telephone, Southern Pacific, Grubb & Ellis, and Pacific Gas & Electric Company have taken active roles, controlling as well as the Oakland Chamber of Commerce, despite its image of representing small business.

There has also been a more conservative wing of corporate interests, represented through such key individuals as attorney Justin Roach, Jr. (Reagan fund-raiser), Emylan Knowland Jewitt (sister of the late publisher and owner of the *Oakland Tribune*), and George Vukasin (owner of Peerless Coffee). This bloc historically was more linked to small business and opposed promotion of black moderates in response to the militant organizing of the Panther period; in recent years, however, the right-wing grouping has seemed quite content to support Mayor Wilson both politically and financially with campaign contributions.

Thus it is that Oakland's first black mayor, elected from the groundswell of militant organizing of the 1970s and the demand for representation from the black electorate, now faces his second re-election in 1985 backed by the combined forces of transnational and national/local-based capital.

THE PROGRESSIVE THRUST OF RON DELLUMS

There is also a progressive aspect of Oakland politics that has grown and matured over the past two decades. Out of the tumult of the 1960s and the opposition to the Vietnam War, voters in the Eighth Congressional District—which includes the communities of Berkeley and Oakland—elected Ron Dellums to the U.S. Congress. Since 1970 he has served as a rock of progressivism in Congress; he has kept the faith and his principles. In the interview with Dellums (included at the end of this section), he describes some of the community forces that came together to propel him into office, forces to which he has held himself accountable politically while in office.

Since his first term in office, he has been an outspoken critic of U.S. militarism and the expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. In 1977, he was the first member of Congress ever to introduce an amendment against all funding for the development, production, and deployment of the MX Missile, an amendment that only mustered 11 votes in its support at the time. As a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, he convened in 1982 the Special Congressional Ad Hoc Hearings on the Full Implications of the Military Budget, at which more than 40 defense and budget experts were invited to testify.²⁹ Following the six-day hearings, Dellums introduced into the House (and again in 1983) an alternative military budget that would reduce the Pentagon's budgetary authority by \$50 billion in the first year alone. His budget proposal was based on basic principles directly opposed to the foreign policy objectives pursued by the Reagan administration: a non-interventionist foreign policy stressing international cooperation and a firm commitment to human rights; a national security policy based on a rational, restrained deterrent defense of the

U.S., rather than the attempted domination of the world through the covert or overt intervention in the internal affairs of other countries; and a doctrine of nuclear arms "sufficiency" rather than "superiority."

Dellums has consistently defended the needs of his constituents for jobs and public services and argued against the massive military budget undertaken at the expense of domestic spending. His alternative military budget also addresses these issues by incorporating specific economic conversion proposals for a transition from a war economy to a peace economy. These proposals would provide job training and economic assistance to those areas most hurt by reductions in the Pentagon budget.

Another aspect of Dellums's progressive positions has been his internationalism, standing for the common interests shared by poor and working-class people of the U.S. and the majority of the peoples of the world. As the following interview describes, he visited Cuba and Grenada in 1982, and admired the social achievements both countries had made, in particular, the profoundly democratic process being undertaken then by Maurice Bishop and the Grenadan people. He has also spoken out against U.S. trade with South Africa and decried the brutality to which black South Africans are subject. More recently, as chair of the House Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities, he has protested Reagan's militarization of Honduras, which thus far has not been authorized by Congress.

Taken together, these positions articulated by Dellums on a national level have been very influential in pushing forward other black politicians to support progressive causes, and in pressuring groups such as the Congressional Black Caucus to take public positions in opposition to the Reagan administration.

On a local level, Dellums and his staff have also provided political space in which community organizations, progressive activists, and aspiring politicians can be effective. Without the continuing support for progressive issues in his home district, campaigns for other black progressive politicians, such as John George (Chairman, Alameda County Board of Supervisors),

Wilson Riles, Jr. (Oakland City Councilman), or even Jesse Jackson would not have been as successful. From the onset of its organizing, the Peace and Justice Organization has been assisted by Dellums and his staff, who opened doors, provided information, and united with the PJO efforts to mobilize the black community in Oakland around the dangers of militarism. It was also at the initiative of Dellums and his staff that PJO entered the Oakland electoral arena in June 1982.

Members of PJO also mobilized electoral support for Dellums, as described in Chapter Three, and held key staff positions in his 1982 re-election campaign. That election posed a particular challenge to Dellums, since redistricting after the 1980 census had added large areas of white middle-class suburban voters (from Contra Costa County), while excluding from his Congressional District portions of the black community in Oakland. His Republican opponent made a special effort to get out the vote in these newly added white areas, and at the same time embarked on a red-baiting campaign against Dellums. Thus PJO organizers particularly targeted black voters in South Berkeley and East Oakland, so that lack of voter participation from his widespread support base in the black community would not spell defeat for Dellums. He won that campaign by 67% districtwide, polling over 90% in some areas of the black community. Following this election, PJO has continued to serve on the Dellums Executive Committee, a broad grouping of political representatives and activists who advise the congressman on local issues and candidates.

Dellums continues to be elected to Congress for the same reasons he was sent in 1970. Although there is no question about his representing the interests of the black community, he has consistently taken the most forward position in the interests of all the people, not only in his district, but across the nation, and internationally. Repeatedly in our interview he refers to the refusal of most elected officials to see the world as a community of nations, and not just the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. He has consistently been a model of political integrity even when it was not "politic" in the narrow sense. He exposes

emphasize personality and ignore issues can be elected to public office.

PROGRESSIVE POLITICS ON A LOCAL LEVEL

In Oakland's local politics there is the example of John George, chairman of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, who sees his role as part of the struggle for black empowerment. George came out of the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s, drawn to law as a way to mix rebellion with profession. As he said in a recent interview, "There I was, trying to figure out how to bring about a revolution by being a physical education instructor. Then someone said to me, 'Brown vs. the Board of Education will require a generation of litigation.' One of our rationalizations then was that blacks should become lawyers. Then Kennedy came into office and there was hope on the part of the masses of people. Under Eisenhower, and then Nixon, and now Reagan, the objective conditions may be as bad, but you may not have the same optimism, the same hope to keep on struggling."

From legal work with the NAACP on de facto school segregation to legal defense of Huey Newton and the Panthers, he came in 1968 to run for Congress in the Eighth Congressional District. In 1966 he had actively supported a white progressive anti-war candidate, Bob Scheer (former editor of *Ramparts*) who had come close to winning with 45% of the vote, in particular drawing upon liberal Berkeley and Oakland. By 1968, as George puts it, "I had reached an anti-war position, although I came to it not out of alienation (like white progressives did), but out of the conditions of oppression. I decided to run for Congress, in order to use the resources of that position to try to do something about those conditions. At that time, many blacks, including many middle-class blacks, would have thought my running was idiotic. I was not well known at the time, but there was no one else, in terms of black established politicians, available or willing to run."

In the 1968 race there were many factors that ran counter to George's success, factors that in the recent period have been reversed. First, redistricting had tended to increase the number of conservative voters in the district. Second, blacks, especially working-class blacks, had at that time turned to the Panthers as a viable organizing vehicle. The Panthers were not yet involved in electoral politics: the energy of the Panther youth was directed to "Free Huey." While George's position was "Save Huey Newton," black youth did not identify with his candidacy enough to engage them actively in support of his electoral campaign. Third, the Peace and Freedom Party had just been formed, attracting much of the white progressive anti-war vote; even though it did not yet have ballot status, those registered in Peace and Freedom Party could not vote in the Democratic Party primary. Yet despite all of these factors, John George won 45% of the Democratic primary vote, a showing that he regarded as a "miracle" and that was sufficient to convince Ron Dellums to run in the 1970 primary. According to George, Dellums felt that if George could do that well without the white progressive vote, it was time that the Eighth Congressional District had a black congressman.

Today George represents the Fifth Supervisorial District of Alameda County, which encompasses Albany, Berkeley, North Oakland, West Oakland, Emeryville, and certain portions of the Lake Merritt area of Oakland. This is said to be a progressive district, covering the same area that Dellums represents in Congress. George describes his politics as "the politics of neighborhood and community empowerment: Nothing can be done solely by elected officials. You have to catch up with the people, get in front of them, and try to lead them."

While many people think of the state as providing schools, open space, recreation, and museums, there is another side of the state, its coercive arm, which is carried out through the county apparatus: "The city police arrest people, but it's the county who jails and prosecutes them." The function of the county, in George's view, is to process the poor, for it is to the county that the superexploited of the black community

must turn in the end to meet their needs for housing, health care, emergency services, etc. He describes a week in the life of a typical poor single mother:

On Monday she will have to be processed by the county welfare bureaucracy to get Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Then on Tuesday that same mother may have to take her child on county transportation to the county hospital, where she will have to be processed by the health care bureaucracy. That same woman may on Wednesday have to appear in municipal court with her son, where the public defender will provide his legal defense. They may wait around all day: the court system is one meant especially for processing the poor. Her son may end up being taken away by the county sheriff. Then on Thursday she will have to visit him in the county jail. On Friday she has to go to the county probation department. By Saturday, left alone and without any childcare, she is taken away screaming to the county emergency psychiatric service. On Sunday she still has to feed her kids, but she tries to rest in quiet desperation, the only way she can survive.

George sees his constituency as the segment of the population that has to deal with the county, and his role as attempting to deal with the "tangle of pathologies" that come together in this context. As he says, "I need the resources to do something, so I join with the black people of my district to say that the preparation of war is killing us." He confronts the day-to-day realities of federal policies on his locality, which have led to a cascade of state and local budget cutbacks and massive unemployment. In the end, he believes, all politics is local: "Have you ever walked a precinct on a federal level?" He argues against those who claim that the threat of nuclear war is not a local issue; the county board has had to consider such issues as the location of population in a nuclear war, and the preservation of the county hospital for military purposes. George says: "Ask the mayor of Hiroshima if nuclear war is only on a national level."

He also sees the duty of elected leaders to educate their constituency about the relation between conditions they face locally and conditions in the rest of the world: "We've got to think globally, but we can only act locally. We can see the forces

struggling in Central America, and then we hear the people in East Oakland asking for the same things, for housing, schools, health care. I wonder who's putting them down—it's the same corporate forces who are putting them down in El Salvador and Nicaragua. I'd like to be able to break down the mystery so that people can fully understand the linkages."

It is the history of decades of electoral organizing in the black community which then accounts for the sweep of the primary delegates by Jackson in the Eighth Congressional District. In George's view, "For whatever their motives, black working-class people are voting and it is this black unity which must be transformed into organization. And now certain professional/middle-class types are joining them, too. That's what happened in Chicago, and what's really been going on since Reagan. Jackson didn't make this happen, but he could see that it was happening."

There are no easy answers to the question: how do progressive politicians remain responsive to their constituency? But throughout his public service, George, like Dellums, has maintained his commitment to the struggles of black and working-class people, and has welcomed and assisted progressive organizations working in Oakland. He lent considerable time and energy to the electoral campaigns in which the Peace and Justice Organization was involved (described in Chapter Three). And he continues to be involved, to lend his presence, and to be accessible to the constituency he serves. The search for black empowerment requires both local leadership of this caliber and the organization of the constituency to whom these politicians must hold themselves accountable.

2. "Money for Jobs, Not for War"

While the immediate period in Oakland has welcomed a development boom, a highly significant fact remains that only one-third of Oakland's jobs are held by Oakland residents. There are more jobs than resident Oakland workers, but two thirds of these jobs are held by commuters.³⁰ According to a study by the Oakland Planning Commission, racial discrimination in hiring is at the root of Oakland's unemployment, and causes businesses to hire non-Oakland workers: "Minorities and low-income persons have been denied equal employment opportunity either intentionally or institutionally."³¹

Plant closures and runaway shops have also affected the city of Oakland, just as they have devastated millions of families across the U.S. Between 1980 and 1982, Alameda County, of which Oakland is the largest city, led the state of California in plant closures, with Oakland the hardest-hit city in the county.³² Within the past few years alone, 11 plants have been shut down, including World Airways, Del Monte Cannery, and the General Motors Parts Plant.

It is no secret to the people of Oakland, particularly its black community, that Reagan's federal policies have directly exacerbated the lack of prospects for jobs. While social programs contracted or disappeared under his budget cuts, the Reagan administration slated Oakland as one of the touted sites for an "urban enterprise zone."³³ Under this schema—reminiscent of South African bantustans—workers would be

recruited to low-wage, non-union jobs without protections, while capital would be lured in with local incentives and federal tax credits. While Reagan's urban enterprise zones never materialized, he achieved a semblance of political mileage by proffering the prospect of jobs to a depressed area whose social services his administration had decimated.

As Reagan's militarism has channeled a larger and larger percentage of federal revenues into the Pentagon and its associated military-industrial complex, as his policies have precluded detente and jeopardized already-strained U.S. diplomatic relations around the globe, the threat of war, most especially nuclear war, has become a more considered possibility within the Reagan administration. The cost of Reagan's militarism has been borne by working-class and middle-class taxpayers—for example, in the forms of soaring unemployment, reductions in available public services, and decreases in Social Security and other benefits. At the same time, there have been corresponding transfers of wealth to benefit corporate interests, through, for example, tax credits, incentives, and deregulation of critical resources.

In 1982, the Peace and Justice Organization initiated a 24-month campaign within the largely black working class in Oakland to oppose Reagan's policies, with a specific demand for jobs. The political strategy underlying its approach was inspired by analysis done by the Institute for the Study of Labor and Economic Crisis, whose research on urban taxation, runaway industry, and voter participation showed the need for organizing among the most exploited sectors of the working class, i.e., the worst-paid, least-organized, often unemployed "lower-and-deeper" working class, which has a high proportion of minorities and women. It is this sector that has been excluded from the political process in this country, and whose mass participation—both in the electoral and non-electoral arenas—could profoundly alter the entire political landscape of the United States.

Despite the potential for developing a progressive political movement centered on the consciousness and militance of the black working class, there are many reasons for this stratum



of the population to be wary of those who have traditionally been posed as its allies. First of all, there is the shameful experience of organized labor, which for decades has stood for the interests of the skilled, white male sector of the labor force in opposition to the interests of the majority of the work force. Second, the Democratic Party has consistently taken the support of the black electorate for granted, despite the fact that the black community has been among its most loyal supporters. Third, white liberals who have been progressive around issues like segregation, which did not threaten their interests, could not be depended on when their interests were threatened (e.g., Oceanhill-Brownsville). Fourth, the decimation of the Black Panther Party itself is an obvious example of what happens to black working-class people when they do build effective organization.

For these reasons, PJO attempted a variety of organizing methods, including electoral work and non-electoral organizing. This strategy had a dual purpose: it could assist progressives to be elected to government positions; but also could be used to pressure these officials once in office, since officials have a tendency to forget rapidly who actually elected them.

Thus PJO undertook several activities simultaneously: popular rallies, support for local candidates pledged to full employment goals, work on an electoral initiative campaign to increase jobs, direct pressure on the local government for jobs, actions against corporations that refused to provide jobs, involvement in full employment legislation in the U.S. Congress, and door-to-door organizing that linked jobs and U.S. foreign military intervention. It was this series of electoral and non-electoral activities that brought a new style of politicization to the Oakland scene. The level of education, mobilization, and activation, sustained over a 24-month period on a wide range of progressive issues, meant that the voters were already identified and knowledgeable about many of the issues that most touched their lives. While PJO was a very different organization from the Panther Party in that it was multi-racial, its style of activism and concern for classwide unity meant that PJO engaged many of the same issues and built upon its legacy.

The Peace and Justice Organization initiated its Oakland activities by organizing a march to oppose the rise of militarism engendered by Reagan's policies. Organizing for this march was in itself a lesson in how closely people identified their lack of jobs with Reagan's warring postures. The original conception of the Oakland march was based on a very successful rally held earlier in San Francisco, whose central theme was "Peace and Disarmament." The leaflet written to publicize the San Francisco rally was designed to reach the predominantly white, liberal, middle-class constituency there. When this same leaflet was distributed in Oakland, however, PJO leafleters found that people would not take them. When PJO organizers analyzed the response, they found that the reception to the event's initial publicity was cool at best. This rapidly changed when the rally's focus was changed to "Money for Jobs, Not for War"; rally organizers reported an overnight change to great enthusiasm, tapping the depth of opposition to Reaganism within Oakland's black community. The spirited march and rally held April 17, 1982, attracted over 3,000 people, 50% minorities, who turned out to the beat of high school bands and filled the streets of downtown Oakland. The rally was also unique in its breadth, being one of the first in many years to bring together speakers from the revolutionary movement in El Salvador and the anti-nuclear movement, as well as progressive black politicians and religious leaders condemning Ronald Reagan.³⁴

PJO then launched its Full Employment Project, a broadly conceived campaign with many layers of activities and tactics—local and federal legislative proposals, demonstrations, civil disobedience, guerrilla theater, "open mike" rallies, and street-corner speeches, among others. This project was designed to reach out to many diverse types of people who would be willing to participate in a wide range of activities. One tactic used by PJO was to address those politicians and corporations that refused to provide jobs to Oakland's chronically unemployed. This tactic was used in the Oakland Jobs Petition, which demanded that 80% of the new jobs at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, a major downtown development, go to Oakland residents; that the mayor's summer jobs program, funded by Oakland

corporations, be expanded from 1,000 to 5,000 jobs; and that a tax be levied on downtown businesses that refused to hire Oakland residents. Petitions bearing 16,000 signatures in support were presented to the mayor and City Council on June 21, 1983, after a colorful rally, at which the petition signatures, joined together in a scroll, were unfurled in front of Oakland's City Hall.³⁵ The process of gathering signatures drew in people from many areas of the city, including many unemployed youth, going door-to-door in the most dilapidated housing projects, setting up tables in areas of heavy street traffic, and driving car caravans through Oakland's neighborhoods.

Part of the signature-gathering effort was a series of street theater actions, demonstrations, and "open mike" rallies at which anyone could take the microphone and talk. All of these events were covered to some extent by the local media. One demonstration at the Clorox Corporation demanded more jobs in the mayor's summer jobs program, noting that Clorox had pledged a mere 15 jobs in the program, while earning \$42 million in profits in 1982.

PJO also canvassed the Chicano/Latino community in Oakland with literature opposing U.S. intervention in Central America, linking the use of militarism and the lack of jobs. PJO extended its analysis of unemployment in Oakland to a national perspective and the responsibility of the federal government to provide jobs to its residents. Local work was aided by researchers from ISLEC, who participated in the drafting process of a wide-ranging piece of federal legislation, the Income and Jobs Action Act of 1984, being introduced by Congressman John Conyers (D-Michigan) and Congressman Charles Hayes (D-Illinois).³⁶

These issues of Reaganism, jobs, and militarism were also central to the education done in the course of campaigns for specific local candidates. When meetings were held in housing projects to teach people the mechanics of voting, these were also opportunities for PJO organizers to discuss other avenues of struggle beyond electoral methods.

It must be emphasized that all of these efforts were conducted prior to the current mobilization for a national black

presidential candidate; black people were just beginning to become activated electorally to express their long-standing opposition to reaction, represented by Reagan's election, and its consequences for both domestic and international relations. The 1982 elections were the first opportunity following Reagan's ascension to the presidency for an anti-Reagan sentiment to be registered electorally. It was in this context of opposing the rise of reaction that PJO took on its electoral campaigns.

3. Four Campaigns: The Role of Anti-Reagan Sentiment

No one needs extensive electoral analysis to show that black people don't like Ronald Reagan. What these studies on the new black vote do point to, however, is the degree to which black people have come to identify the search for black empowerment with opposition to Reagan and a program for progressive change on a variety of domestic and international issues. As in Boston and in Chicago, black enfranchisement became identified with a particular candidate or candidates, for whom voting was not just a lesser of two evils but a statement against the continuation of inequality, injustice, and racism.

In the case of the Peace and Justice Organization, this fact was demonstrated over the course of numerous campaigns conducted over several years. From June 1982 to May 1983, PJO carried out extensive electoral work in East Oakland, an area that is predominantly black and Latino. Its organizing aimed to activate the working-class electorate, first through a voter registration drive in which 15,000 new registrants were added to the rolls, and then in four campaigns to support local black candidates, who were running on progressive programs. PJO organizers stressed issues about which black people were expressing concerns: unemployment, housing, crime, schools. On the one hand, people had a large degree of cynicism towards how much change could be accomplished within the existing system. On the other hand, organizers encountered an eagerness to discuss politically the situation in East Oakland and the possibilities for change.

The electoral methodology used by PJO was based on the experiences of the Grass Roots Alliance (GRA), which had organized three initiative campaigns in San Francisco to tax the major corporations based there. The experience of the GRA showed that through sustained organizing efforts and people-to-people techniques, the working-class electorate could be mobilized to vote in its self-interest:

An organization using people-to-people methods can counter over time the commercial strategies of established politics. Personal contact methods (e.g., street work, canvassing) are labor-intensive and time-consuming, but used properly they encourage people to participate in the electoral process. The success of such personal contact depends very much on access to residents, which may be influenced by such practical factors as traffic patterns, language of residents, and type of housing. However, in comparison to consumer marketing approaches (such as direct mail and radio ads), whose effectiveness can be very immediate but transient, the people-to-people approach builds long-lasting support.³⁷

The Tax the Corporations movement organized by the GRA faced well-financed opposition, which they countered through the use of street work, leafleting, canvassing, phone-calling banks, and the involvement of thousands of activists. The first two initiatives were narrowly defeated; the third, Proposition M, was finally passed as a policy statement in November 1980.

Key PJO organizers had gained considerable campaign experience through the GRA Tax the Corporations campaigns, and these same organizing methods were applied by PJO in East Oakland. In the candidates' campaigns, they particularly used canvassing, a system of identifying supporters throughout a precinct by going door-to-door, talking with residents and convincing them to vote. Activists were identified and trained as precinct captains, who then were responsible from the beginning to the end of a campaign to work their precinct and bring out the vote. Voters were identified in the classic method as supportive of the candidate ("1"), undecided ("2"), or opposed ("3"). Then on Election Day, both "gross pull" and "select pull" methods were used to get-out-the-vote: "gross pull" (bringing out the "1's" and "2's") was used in very supportive areas,

while in "swing" areas "select pull" (doing the utmost to bring out all of the "1s" without contacting the opponent's supporters) was more effective. This method of canvassing in itself is not new and is a standard method of electoral organizing. However, what was unique about the efforts of PJO was the volume and intensity of activity, the number of times each precinct was visited. A precinct was not considered "fully canvassed" until two thirds to three quarters of all registered voters had been reached—which sometimes meant going through precincts 6 to 10 times! (This compares to the standard campaign practice of canvassing 10-15% of a precinct's voters.)

Prior to beginning their electoral campaigns, PJO activists had also spent nearly a year going door-to-door, talking with residents about the need for organization, about why it was important to "vote working class," and about the need to get involved. There were car caravans through the neighborhoods every weekend, "open mike" rallies in the unemployment office, and a very visible presence in the community. Then, when organizers came around during a campaign, many people were already familiar with PJO and the issues.

We will now examine highlights of four electoral races in which PJO campaigned and sample the impact of its organizing on the progressive vote in the precincts in which it worked.

SANDRÉ SWANSON CAMPAIGN: PRIMARY AND RUNOFF

PJO entered electoral work in Oakland in June 1982, working for Ron Dellums's aide, Sandré Swanson, who was running for the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. This campaign would be the first in many years to mobilize voter activism in Oakland's black community, to call upon black voters to support the struggle for black empowerment in a concrete way through their vote for a young black progressive against an entrenched 12-year white incumbent who had significant ties to the moderate/liberal wing of the Democratic Party and organized labor.

There was already one progressive black supervisor on the Board (John George) and it was PJO's assessment that the election of Swanson would build a George-Swanson bloc that could be responsive to and held accountable to a mobilized black and Latino working-class electorate. Both George and Swanson took strong positions against Reagan's policies of promoting domestic unemployment and militarism abroad. While Swanson was in the end not to win, his coming within 3% of defeating the incumbent signified the beginning efforts to build this movement of progressive voters who could be called upon in future elections.

The Third Supervisorial District, in which Swanson was running, is made up of the neighboring city of Alameda (32% of the registered voters in the district) and East Oakland (68% of the registered voters in the district). While East Oakland working-class voters generally vote progressively, the city of Alameda, composed predominantly of white middle-class and upper-working-class voters, tends to vote more conservatively. Even though the preponderance of registered voters live in East Oakland, the voter turnout is historically much higher in Alameda. In the June primary, Swanson ran first in a field of three candidates, receiving 38% of the vote. The other two candidates, both white, were incumbent Fred Cooper and Chuck Corica, mayor of the city of Alameda. Cooper barely edged out Corica for second place with 31% of the vote; however, analyzed by area, Swanson received 58% of the Oakland vote while Cooper and Corica together took 90% of the votes cast in Alameda.

Cooper's campaign was typical of commercial politics, relying on misleading information and playing to racism, while avoiding stands on issues. Two examples bear out this point. He had two sets of campaign materials, one for white voters in Alameda and another for blacks in Oakland. The East Oakland brochure showed a black man on the cover with Cooper's name under the picture, clearly intended to give the false impression that Cooper is black. On the day before the election, the Cooper campaign hung doorhangers, labeled "Vote Democrat" and listing

Cooper's name alongside well-known black candidates, such as Tom Bradley and Ron Dellums—as if they were running as a slate, and as if Cooper was officially endorsed by the Democratic Party (neither of which was true in the primary). One of Cooper's main supporters was Carter Gilmore, the city councilman from Oakland's District 6, who happened to be black. Cooper was also endorsed by the United Auto Workers, in repayment for political debts. He had clearly called in favors owed to him by significant parts of the black establishment and the Democratic Party, but even given this, he was unable to win a majority in the June primary.

We examined a sampling of 13 precincts in the Fruitvale area of East Oakland, which were among those canvassed by PJO in the June election. These 13 precincts were considered "swing" areas, based on the 1978 election where a black progressive only received 53% of the vote against Cooper in the same area. This sampling was indicative of the success of the grassroots methods PJO was able to employ; with an intensive people-to-people campaign, PJO brought out 65% of the primary vote in these sample precincts for Swanson.

Between June and November, PJO conducted a two-month voter registration drive in areas considered to be the most progressive, primarily black, working-class sections in East Oakland. A roving car equipped with a sound system traversed the main thoroughfares in the area, and reached into the housing projects along with stationary teams. The drive resulted in 15,000 registrants added to the rolls, with approximately two thirds coming from East Oakland. This was significant in that the number of registered voters in Oakland in November 1982 was 23.6% higher than in November 1978. This was in contrast to the city of Alameda, where the number of voters rose by only 10% in the same period.

Get-out-the-vote efforts were similarly intense in the work done by PJO; in one sample of 16 precincts on Election Day, there were 90 campaign workers walking these precincts during peak hours, which had the effect of drawing out 68% for Swanson in this area. Both primary and runoff campaigns had

shown that intensive efforts to engage black working-class people in the issues, to identify the candidate as a progressive black, and to link his election to opposition to Reagan had turned this particular set of "swing" precincts into a set of progressive precincts whose vote could be called upon in repeated campaigns.

Table 1. THIRD DISTRICT, ALAMEDA COUNTY SUPERVISOR RACE, GENERAL ELECTION, 1982

| | PJO* | | | |
|---------------|------------------|---------|---------|-------|
| | Sample Precincts | Oakland | Alameda | Total |
| % Turnout | 61.1%** | 59.7% | 68.6% | 62.5% |
| % for Swanson | 68.3% | 62.4% | 20.1% | 47.4% |
| % for Cooper | 31.7% | 37.6% | 79.9% | 52.6% |

*Based on analysis of 16-precinct sample worked by PJO.

**This percentage includes a factor for absentee voters based on the countywide proportion of absentee to nonabsentee voters.

Racism in Alameda, and the lack of an effective strategy to counter this racism, resulted in Swanson losing to Cooper by 3,000 votes. Swanson received 62.4% of the vote in Oakland, compared to 20.1% of the vote in Alameda. The PJO campaign staff had estimated that Swanson needed 65% of the total Oakland vote and 25% in Alameda to defeat Cooper, who accrued the bulk of the white vote from Alameda and Oakland.

The importance of this progressive voting pattern can be seen in the light of congressional elections and their effect on a progressive like Ron Dellums. Since the Swanson campaign was conducted in some areas also shared with Dellums's Eighth Congressional District, the electoral apparatus of progressive voters was also infused with support for his re-election in 1982. One example is shown in Table 2, which examines a sampling of five "swing" precincts worked by PJO in the Dellums district. While the overall Oakland average for Dellums was 67%, the average in these five precincts was 91.5% for Dellums. When we compared control precincts chosen for demographic similarity, the five PJO precincts showed a 2-3% increase in their support for Dellums from the June primary to the November runoff. The control precincts, on the other hand, showed a slight decline (averaging 0.6%) in support for Dellums over the same period.

Dellums has strong support in his district, receiving 90% of the overall vote in these five precincts; however, in that light, convincing 3% of 10% opposition to vote for Dellums is significant.

Table 2. SAMPLE ANALYSIS OF DELLUMS SUPPORT IN "SWING" AREAS, NOVEMBER 1982

| | PJO* Sample Precincts (N=5) | Control Precincts (N=20) |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| % Dellums, Nov. 1982 | 91.5% | 90.5% |
| % Dellums, June 1982 | 89.5% | 91.1% |
| % Difference Nov.-June | +2.0% | -0.6% |

Much of the excitement and mobilization around the Swanson campaigns came from the fact that he was clearly running as a progressive black candidate against a white conservative incumbent. The issue of black enfranchisement was a strong mobilizing force in involving working-class residents in the campaign. Even though he did not win, the fact that he came so close, in a race where it had seemed so unlikely that he would be able to capture the seat in a three-way contest against two well-known established white politicians, was seen as a forward thrust for black political power in his district. Also, his association with Dellums was viewed as a powerful factor in his favor, continuing the progressive representation fielded from the black community. For no one had forgotten that Dellums himself had started his political career on the Berkeley City Council.

WILSON RILES, JR., CAMPAIGN FOR CITY COUNCIL

PJO next managed the campaign of Wilson Riles, Jr., for re-election to the Oakland City Council in April 1983, using the same people-to-people methods. The campaign was conducted out of the PJO office at the same time as the Full Employment Project petition campaign, which meant that the office was a constant center of activity involving people of all races and ages. Of important significance in the Riles campaign was

the reversal of the historical voting pattern by which middle-class voters turn out at a higher rate than working-class voters. In the course of the campaign, hundreds of volunteers contacted over 13,000 of the 21,000 registered voters in the district.³⁸ As a result, Riles was re-elected by a landslide of 66% in Oakland's most racially mixed district. This election was the first in which the City Council was elected by district rather than citywide. Riles's district in central Oakland has large black, Latino, Asian, and white working-class populations. In fact, few of the precincts in the district have a majority of any one race; to reflect this, PJO produced Riles campaign literature in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

Riles campaigned on a platform of fighting unemployment, increasing citizen participation in city government, organizing neighborhoods to fight crime, and rent control. In particular, he called for higher taxes on local corporations that refuse to hire Oakland residents and for immediate expansion of the city's summer jobs-for-youth program.

Riles was opposed by pro-business Mayor Wilson and major corporate interests in Oakland, which (as has been shown in Chapter One) have been pursuing a course of major expansion. They preferred a City Council that would remain subservient to their corporate needs. The fact that six other candidates entered the race against Riles was seen in progressive circles as a downtown strategy aimed at preventing Riles from obtaining a majority vote in the April election. Had this happened, Riles would have been forced into a runoff, in which corporate resources could be concentrated behind one opponent who, theoretically, could have defeated Riles through sheer force of money and media. The likelihood of this occurring was predicted by most political observers to be extremely great, considering that if each of his opponents took only a small percentage of the vote, Riles would be forced into a runoff. In fact, because of the people-to-people organizing by PJO campaign workers, Riles surpassed his 1979 vote of 56.6% in that district, when he had only faced one opponent. In the 1983 race, he ran strongest in five predominantly black precincts,

receiving 75% of the vote, even while running against three other black candidates.

PJO organized the Riles campaign by reaching out to a broad cross section of forces throughout Oakland—churches, labor, democratic clubs, community organizations—to involve them in the campaign. This outreach resulted in one of the most impressive coalitions in Oakland's recent political history. The coalition itself reflected the multinational constituency in the district. Among those participating in the campaign were Democratic clubs, including the Niagara Movement, Muleskinners, La Raza, and Montclair-Greater Oakland clubs; ministers such as Bishop Martin J. Clifton and Rev. Herbert Guice; the Alameda County Central Labor Council and unions including SEIU locals and the United Farm Workers; the Black Political Alliance, the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Oakland Progressive Political Alliance.

The extended support through this widespread coalition built upon the electorate already mobilized by PJO through the Swanson campaigns and his appeal for black empowerment. While Riles's appeal was broader, PJO was able to continue the process of identifying progressive voters and building a progressive bloc of precincts: 70% of the top-ranking precincts for Riles were directly canvassed and organized by PJO activists. An additional comparison can be made to the vote in that district for Swanson, who received 59.5% in the runoff, which indicates that the Riles campaign built upon and extended the progressive voting patterns in these precincts.

Another point of significance was the response to Riles in the Latino precincts. In 1979 he had received only 40.9% of the vote in those precincts with predominantly Latino voters, and only 36.9% in the three with the most heavily concentrated Latino residents. In 1983 he received 65.1% and 63.3% of the vote, respectively, in these groupings. A graphic illustration of the swing toward progressive voting in the Latino precincts was seen in one precinct, which had previously gone 31% for Riles in 1979 and only 44.5% for Swanson in 1982. This precinct (which has the highest Latino population in Oakland—over

50%) went 59.6% for Riles in 1983. This is just one example of areas that were previously unorganized, which through a variety of organizing methods—Spanish-speaking canvassing, churches, tables, Spanish literature—could be clearly responsive to progressive issues and candidates.

Over all, the PJO grassroots campaigning increased voter turnout districtwide by 4-6%, which is generally considered to have made a significant impact. This percentage is based on using the middle-class precincts near Lake Merritt as a standard; historically the Lake area has a 4-6% higher turnout than the district as a whole. In this election, the turnout in the Lake area was equal to the district as a whole. Voter turnout in the Latino precincts was actually higher than the turnout in the Lake precincts or the district as a whole, reversing traditional voting patterns. In the predominantly black areas, voter turnout was 2% lower than the Lake area in April 1983, a marked increase over June 1982, when black voter turnout was 12% lower than in the Lake area.

Table 3. VOTER TURNOUT IN LATINO PRECINCTS, DISTRICT 5 CITY COUNCIL RACE, 1983

| | June 1982 | November 1982 | April 1983 |
|------------------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| Latino Precincts | 36.8% | 53.9% | 30.5% |
| Lake Area | 46.0% | 63.3% | 27.7% |
| Overall District | 37.5% | 56.1% | 29.9% |

At the time of Riles's re-election bid, he began to raise the issue of jobs for Oakland residents. ISLEC proposed a "Jobs for Oakland" ballot initiative, for which it prepared the major research and documentation.³⁹ PJO organizers publicized the jobs initiative as a major theme in Riles's campaign. The proposal would have increased local taxes on Oakland corporations that continued to refuse to hire Oakland residents. Corporations that increased their hiring of chronically unemployed Oakland residents, without displacing other workers, would receive tax rebates. In this way, more jobs would have been created, either through direct hiring by the corporations or through more local

tax funds for the hiring of more public-sector workers. The initiative specifically addressed the key fact that only one third of Oakland jobs are held by Oakland residents.

As we have shown, unemployment is one of the most critical issues facing Oakland's working class. The racism of the corporate interests stands all the more evident with the current development boom. The new office highrises are occupied by employees translocated from San Francisco: the transformation of Oakland into a commercial/financial hub has little prospect for employment of black and minority unskilled workers. At the same time, plants and warehouses are running away to nearby non-union states, such as Nevada and Utah; employment in these states is in reality not available for these workers, compounded by the racism they would face, moving into rural communities with few black residents and entrenched white chauvinism towards Chicanos/Latinos.

Therefore, the "Jobs for Oakland" initiative proposal presented a concrete approach toward the problem of unemployment. Introducing it at the time of his re-election campaign, Riles also gave the image of a politician more than willing to take an anti-corporate position and willing to oppose the mayor and the dominant corporate interests. It also distinguished Riles from the other black and Latino candidates for City Council in his district, making his re-election not an issue of race, but one of class interest. This election represented a victory for black progressive forces in Oakland, a significant victory for multinational grassroots organizing.

Riles as candidate must be distinguished, however, from Riles as elected official. The Jobs for Oakland Initiative appeared to be facing legal entanglements; Riles no longer pursued it once he was re-elected. He no longer consulted with those organizations that had, in the main, returned him to office; and the broad-based coalition of progressive forces built during the campaign was allowed to disintegrate. He did not see himself as accountable to or responsible to the larger movement that had fueled his campaign, a key lesson understood by other progressive politicians, that they are ineffective without

a base of popular support and mobilization. While Riles has not kept his campaign promises, he now has his eye on the mayor's job in 1985, and it remains to be seen (as with Lionel Wilson) whether he will continue to move to the right or be more accountable to his constituency. Riles's particular shortcomings, however, do not detract from the progressive impulse represented by the voters who came out in his support, and who embraced an anti-Reagan program in this campaign.

DARLENE LAWSON CAMPAIGN FOR SCHOOL BOARD

Within a few weeks of Riles's re-election, the Peace and Justice Organization was asked by Darlene Lawson to help elect her to the Oakland School Board, representing the same district as Wilson Riles, Jr. In a very brief campaign, by activating its precinct workers and supporters who had already been identified, PJO was able to transform this election from one based on race alone to one in which positions on progressive issues were decisive. Lawson, a black woman, had come in second during the April 19 election, but neither she nor her Latino opponent Noel Gallo had received a majority, which forced a runoff election May 17. In entering this election, PJO emphasized political differences between the two candidates, so that the race would be decided on progressive politics, not on whether the person was Latino or black.

Lawson's campaign focused on increasing Oakland's summer jobs-for-youth program, stopping layoffs of teachers and other cutbacks in the school budget, shifting more of the burden of supporting public schools onto large corporations, stepping up bilingual education programs, and creating a safe learning environment for students and teachers alike. When PJO entered the campaign, she was trailing and not expected to win; in fact, many observers said that she didn't have a "ghost of a chance." Within four days, this situation was reversed. PJO undertook a door-to-door canvas in the district, seeking out existing Lawson supporters and persuading others. By Election Day, the number of identified Lawson supporters had

increased from less than 100 to almost 3,000, thus laying the basis for an extensive get-out-the-vote effort.

By a narrow margin, Lawson did win the election, becoming the first black woman elected to the Oakland School Board. Working-class voters in Latino precincts gave stronger support to Lawson (42%) than Gallo (38%), while middle-class whites were Gallo's strongest base of support. This election was won on the basis of class, not racial interests, another example of the depth of opposition to Reagan policies existent in both the black and Latino communities.

Table 4. COMPARISON OF LAWSON AND GALLO VOTE IN DISTRICT 5 SCHOOL BOARD RACE, 1983

| Precincts | Lawson | Gallo |
|---|--------|-------|
| Latino/Working-Class | | |
| April 1983 | 38% | 62% |
| May 1983 | 42% | 58% |
| Black/Working-Class | | |
| April 1983 | 57% | 43% |
| May 1983 | 71% | 29% |
| White/Middle-Class (Lake Merritt Area) | | |
| April 1983 | 25% | 75% |
| May 1983 | 27% | 73% |

The electoral efforts of the Peace and Justice Organization ultimately went on to contribute to the campaigns of Ron Dellums, John George, and other progressive Oakland candidates, culminating in "Run, Jesse, Run." The Jackson sweep of the Democratic presidential delegates in the Eighth Congressional District must then be understood within the fabric of progressive unity that had been built up over this series of campaigns. It is significant that the progressive black leadership—such as Ron Dellums and John George—took a strong stand against the mainstream Democratic Party support (black and white) for Mondale and organized for Jackson, even when it was almost certain that Mondale would get the nomination.

While the PJO electoral energies were subsequently assimilated into the Jackson campaign, the style of political mobilization that PJO brought to Oakland elections remains as something very unique. The level of electoral activism, voter education, and linkage to a broad program of progressive issues in opposition to Reagan have moved whole districts of the city to vote in a progressive direction. PJO did not build just another effective "machine," but sought to link an efficient organization with the struggle for black empowerment, the search for the broadest aspirations of our people for equality and justice.

4. Conclusion: Black Enfranchisement and Beyond

The 24-month campaign studied here, conducted by the Peace and Justice Organization in Oakland, brought a new vibrancy to the Oakland political scene, which many observers agreed had not been present since the Panthers' organizing in the 1970s. Arising in the advent of growing opposition to Reagan, this phenomenon parallels the Panthers' opposition to domestic and military policies of the 1960s. But the new black voters have perhaps indeed learned their lessons, not to just get transmuted into another Lionel Wilson or a subsequent black face doing the beckoning of those in power. The electoral work by PJO also demonstrated that multinational organizing was essential in winning an election in Oakland, for the populace is and always has been racially and culturally very diverse. While Oakland is nearly 50% black, the fact that white turnout is generally so much higher than black turnout means that it would be difficult for a black candidate to be elected on the basis of black support alone.

But the issue is not just one of electing black candidates. What do they stand for? Are they out for "a piece of the pie" for themselves? We would submit that progressive black candidates must speak to the aspirations of all black people, which includes those on the very bottom. And there cannot be "more" for everyone without a radical restructuring of the wealth and power in this country, a restructuring that speaks to the needs not just of blacks but of Latinos/Chicanos, Asians, Native

Americans, working-class women, the unemployed, and underemployed—all who are forced into the lower reaches of the working class.

While it is likely that those in power will be forced to moderate in some way the rising demands of the masses of black people, that will not come about without hardship. The problems faced daily by black people—lack of jobs and social services, dilapidated housing—are not ones that local or even national governments can solve. Since 1967, as a consequence of the steady expansion of production in all of the major productive areas after 1945, the world-economy has entered a period of stagnation—the result of a classic worldwide crisis of overproduction. It is the combination of this contraction and the loss of U.S. political hegemony that makes the current U.S. unemployment crisis such a deep and long-term phenomenon.

In response to the crisis of stagnation, oligopolistic producers have attempted to maintain their profit margins by increasing prices amidst competition with each other for markets. At the same time, many of the largest firms have sought to solve their immediate problems through cost reduction by relocating parts of their production processes to low-wage areas of the world. Thus, since the 1960s and the 1970s, a significant amount of mechanized production has been shifted out of the core countries (e.g., U.S. and West Germany) to the free-trade zones in the periphery, to the so-called newly industrializing countries (e.g., Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea), where wage rates are considerably lower than in the core countries. As we have written elsewhere,

The core zones of the world-economy are no longer sole supplier of manufactured goods, while the periphery provides raw materials. Under the emerging new arrangements, the core zones will provide the plant and the know-how while the periphery provides the primary products and manufactured goods... What the restructured world-economy portends for the working classes of the core zones, especially the United States, is increased polarization. The outlines of such a polarized work force are already extremely clear: a small technological elite and a large number of unskilled, unemployable workers.⁴⁰

The process of reindustrialization will not return U.S. workers to their former standard of living; rather, it is a program designed to transform increasingly larger portions of the population into superexploited workers.

The importance of the new black vote then takes on broader importance in the context of the social crisis being forced upon the black and other minority communities. As of yet, there are no large uprisings occurring in the streets; because of both the chronicity of the crisis and the hope that things may improve, the worsening social conditions have not produced even the tumult of the 1960s as yet. But the aspirations for empowerment, the sentiments for equality and justice that reside among the minority working class are being expressed electorally, particularly when they are accompanied with organization. This vote has elected Harold Washington and supported Mel King and Jesse Jackson. This is the sentiment that returns Ron Dellums to Congress with 90% of the vote in some areas. This is the locus for the broadest opposition to Reagan's policies, both in domestic and foreign affairs. Whether this expression of social outrage can be contained in the electoral arena remains to be seen in the coming decade.

Of course, there are limits to which black progressives in office can achieve significant social change outside of the context of a broader social movement. That movement for black empowerment has witnessed the repression of the Panthers, the containment of its protest through accommodation to its moderate leadership (such as Mayor Wilson), and the rollback of most of its hard-won gains in civil rights. Today this search for black equality and justice is being expressed in the electoral arena, electing black progressive candidates to office and challenging the Democratic Party to represent the interests of that movement. Until conditions exist within the U.S. for a broader movement to press beyond the limits of electoral reformism, black progressives in office, just like white, Latino, and Asian progressives, cannot be expected to achieve more than the social movement that placed them in office.

The experience of the Peace and Justice Organization in Oakland speaks to the potentialities of electoral organizing. Until the emergence of the "new black vote," the black community in Oakland had viewed the electoral arena with a healthy and realistic skepticism. The assassinations of King and Kennedy, the destruction of the Black Panther Party, the predominance of Reagan in national politics, and the ineffectiveness of the Democratic Party locally—all of these cooled any enthusiasm for electoral politics. The black candidate had to be more than black to fire people's imagination. The Black Panther Party, the Peace and Justice Organization, and other comparable organizations around the country were able to involve black people in electoral politics because they offered more than "good candidates"—they promoted candidates who actually talked politics and debated the burning issues of the day, a far cry from the commercial politics of slick brochures and packaged media campaigns. They linked candidates and propositions with broader political issues and emphasized the interconnection of voting and educating; they talked about power and the necessity to build power by mobilization of the community, not just through the political representation of one person; and they recognized that electoral politics is only one of many arenas for political mobilization.

PJO and other similar grassroots organizations also learned about the limits, the constraints, and the potential treachery of electoral politics. First, it is increasingly difficult/problematic for local politicians, however progressive, to exercise political control over a political economy that is increasingly regional, national, and transnational. Secondly, the track record of progressive politicians, once elected, is often not impressive. The constraints of political office, the conservative lure of upward mobility, and the lack of formal and real mechanisms of accountability to their constituency—all of these factors account for the to-be-expected "defection" of "progressive" candidates once in office. In this sense, politicians like Congressman Dellums and Supervisor George, who have remained both progressive

and accountable for many years, represent a unique political animal.

PJO made it clear to its constituency that the solution to their problems was not ultimately to be found in the election of this or that person. It encouraged people to vote in their class interests and for candidates who might reduce the burdens of Reaganism and provide space and support for progressive community organizations. It did not promise pie-in-the-sky. PJO recognized but did not solve some major dilemmas: 1) How do we keep honest politicians honest? 2) How do we ensure that community organizations maintain a spectrum of political activities and do not become totally absorbed into the electoral arena? 3) How do we develop electoral strategies that take into account the growing contradiction between local politics and regional/national/global power? These are the questions that must be addressed by future Black Panther Parties, by future Peace and Justice Organizations, and by future Rainbow Coalitions.

5. Peace, Justice and Politics

An Interview with Congressman Ronald V. Dellums

This interview* with Congressman Ronald V. Dellums (D-California) highlights some of the issues that progressive black politicians must address, to remain responsive to and representative of the movement that keeps them in office. While the interview was conducted in 1982, in these times of mean-spirited Reaganism, many of the same policy issues—such as Central America, the threat of nuclear war, and unemployment—are even more urgent today.

Bush: Could you describe how you got into politics and your political evolution?

Dellums: How I got into politics? I literally was talked into going to a meeting one night. This was in January of 1967. The occasion was a discussion among black community leaders in Berkeley to determine how many black candidates they wanted to run in the upcoming city council election, and who that person or those persons would be.

A number of candidates came. A few of my friends literally took me to the meeting, although I told them I was not interested in political office. When it was my turn to speak, I got up and said why I wasn't particularly interested in politics; I said which issues I thought were important, but I was not sure they'd ever get talked about in *this* country.

*Interview first published in *Plum Speaking* 6, 10-11 (May 16 and June 1, 1982).

Later, when it was time to select the candidate, somebody said, "Take Dellums's name off the list, because he's not interested in running."

There was a woman in that room. Her name was Maudelle Shirek. She turned to me and said, "Son, I heard what you said, and I want to ask you this question. Now that I've heard what your thoughts are, would you run on your own terms?"

I turned to her and said, "That's the only way anyone ought to be in public office—on their own terms—not owned or controlled or manipulated by anyone, but on their own integrity."

And so she said, in a very motherly way—because since then she's become like one of my mothers—"You leave his name on the list, because he's going to get one vote."

When she made this statement, I literally did not know how to respond. In that moment of hesitation, my whole life was changed. I then won the majority of the votes cast that night, and thus became a candidate for the Berkeley City Council by no design of my own.

Bush: Do you regret having made that decision at that time and place?

Dellums: If I had to have a baptism of fire in politics anywhere in the country—anywhere—I would not exchange the experience of that time, at that moment, in that place. There was incredible energy in this community—tremendous intellect, outrage, principle—a genuine desire to really change society. And a very serious concern about people dealing with each other as equal human beings, and people trying to move away from the incredible power of materialistic values.

So I had an interesting opportunity to grow up black in the Bay Area, in a place where people are trying to address those problems in some genuine way. I also was able to develop politically in the left wing of the body politic. And that clearly is a result of my being in Berkeley and my political evolution in Berkeley.

Martin Luther King is the other very powerful reason why I am in politics. If you can understand Martin Luther King, and where he was going at the time he died; if you understand

the passion of what was happening in the 1960s and in the early 1970s in Berkeley, then you can understand me and my politics. It was the peace movement that gave rise to my going to Washington, D.C.

Bush: What are some of your main concerns?

Dellums: I'm still in search of peace. When I went to Congress, the issue was withdrawing from Vietnam. The issue today is withdrawing from the mentality of war. And so I still essentially have the same constituency. I feel that this same constituency is raising the same questions. They are still raising the issues of war and peace. They are now raising them in a larger context than Vietnam. They are raising them in the context of El Salvador, in the context of Cuba, in the context of Europe, the context of the Middle East. They are raising these issues in a global context. People are still concerned about peace in this area. And I see myself still as an advocate of peace, and as a person elected to office to seek peace.

To me, it was not enough to just stop at getting out of Vietnam—it always had a larger context. I came into politics at a time when people were struggling around the issues of justice and equality, and I think that those are still issues that have to be struggled around. They have not been achieved fully in this society.

Bush: Why do you think it is necessary to fight for peace year in and year out?

Dellums: Our foreign policy continues to mirror the fact that we have not clearly addressed ourselves to the problems of international relationships. We find ourselves in bed with South Africa, a very racist regime. We find ourselves propping up military dictators around the world. We're involved in El Salvador in an inappropriate way. So I think that what brought me into elective office in the late 1960s are still very important matters in the early 1980s.

The only difference is that maybe, in the 1980s, people will begin to see that they have to look to the progressive wing of the body politic for the leadership of the 1980s. I think that when one looks across the political spectrum, the only wing