

By David Moberg

GREENFIELD, IOWA

IN 1980 RALPH MITCHELL FOLLOWED HIS LIFELONG Republican instincts and voted for Ronald Reagan. On February 8 he was sitting on a folding metal chair at a Democratic caucus in this small town 50 miles southwest of Des Moines to throw his support to Jesse Jackson.

Earlier this year Jackson had visited Mitchell's modest 200-acre grain and cattle farm. Later a few people asked him why he'd let a black on his farm. But Mitchell, 55, scorned that reaction and was impressed with what Jackson said. "I just like his approach and

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what he stands for," Mitchell said. "He's down to earth with the average person. Everybody would love to see him be president, but they won't vote for him because he's black, and that's a shame."

But when the huddling and maneuvering in various corners of meeting rooms and the kitchen of Greenfield's Multi-Purpose Center were all over, the 98 Democrats in Greenfield's caucus sent two-thirds of their delegates to the county convention committed to Jackson. The remainder of the delegates were evenly split between Rep. Richard Gephardt (Mitchell's second choice) and Gov. Michael Dukakis. It was an extraordinary but not altogether surprising margin for Jackson, who had set up his state campaign headquarters in Greenfield after a warm, overflowing crowd turned out for his first visit a year ago.

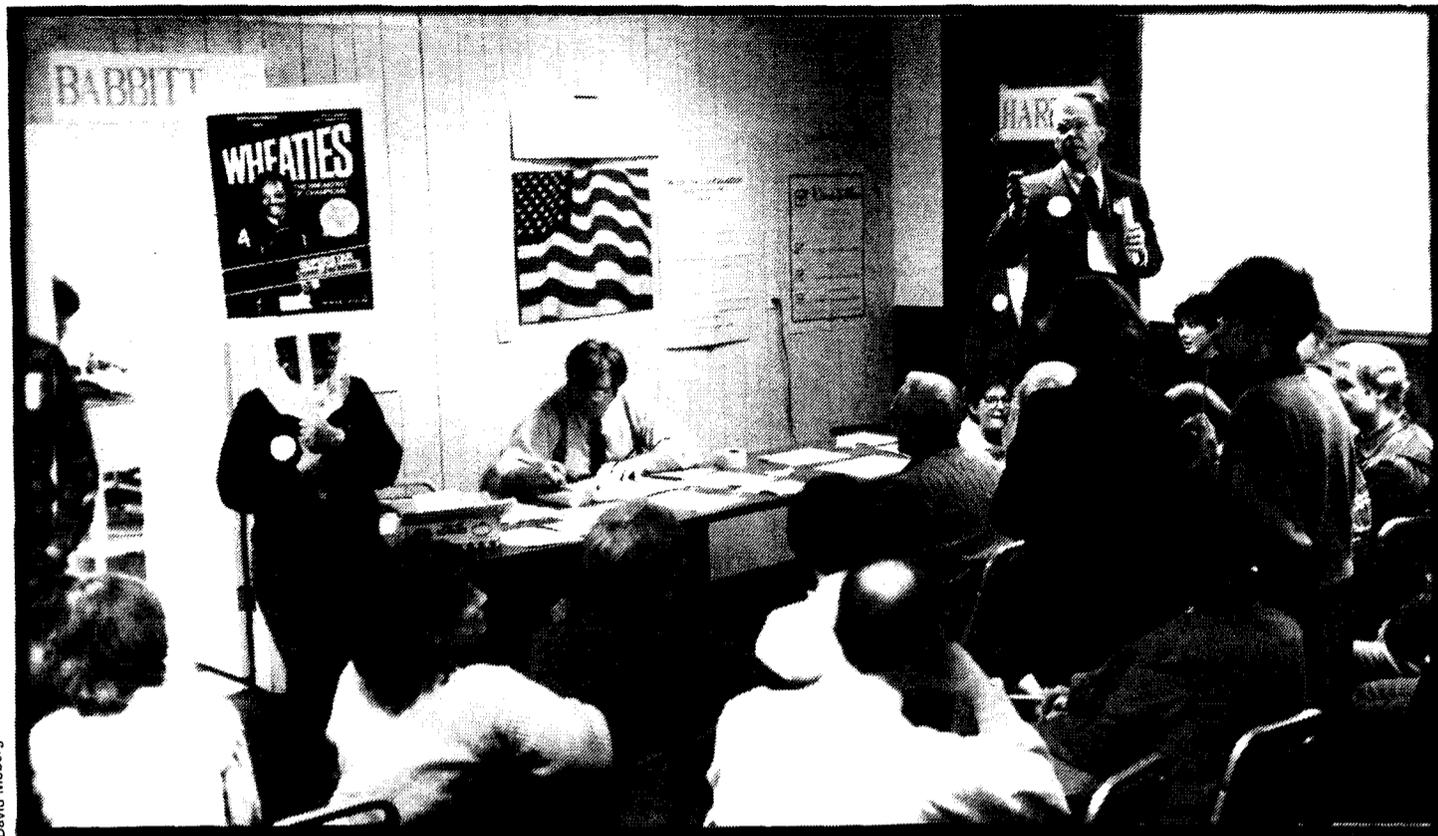
The Jackson factor: Statewide Jackson got only 8.8 percent of the delegates, less than his double-digit goal and roughly in line with what polls have shown for the past year. Yet his fourth-place showing was "significant," according to state Democratic Party Chairwoman Bonnie Campbell. It may also represent a breakthrough to a broader coalition for Jackson in a state that is only 1 percent black.

But Jackson's impact in Iowa went far beyond his votes. Dixon Terry, a dairy farmer from near Greenfield and state chairman of the Iowa League of Rural Voters, argued that Jackson had changed the whole political culture of Iowa and challenged many Iowans, especially older people, to confront their feelings about race.

Jackson also introduced issues and themes that continually challenged his fellow Democratic contenders. For example, all of the candidates except former Gov. Bruce Babbitt eventually supported a farm program that would manage supply to avoid overproduction and maintain adequate prices for basic commodities. But in the agricultural policy debate, Jackson broadened the issue to concentrate on corporate domination of agricultural suppliers and processors—and several other candidates followed his lead.

Even Gephardt's resurgence in January to win the caucus—with 31 percent of the delegates compared to 27 percent for Sen. Paul Simon and 22 percent for Dukakis—was in part inspired by Jackson's tough criticisms of government and corporate abuses. Gephardt, the conservative, pragmatic, technocratic congressional insider, touched

Democrats' foggy road out of Iowa



David Moberg

The Greenfield caucus committed two-thirds of its delegates to the county convention to Jesse Jackson.

a raw nerve with his TV ads attacking foreign trade barriers. Jackson, on the other hand, criticizes U.S. corporations for taking jobs overseas, then shipping products back. Despite urgings from many advisers, Simon did not adopt a "populist" attack on corporations or the rich and delivered a mushy if well-meaning liberal appeal that failed to recreate the lead he once held. Even though Simon's old-fashioned Democrat appeal seemed tailor-made for Iowa's disproportio-

nately older caucus-goers, he even lost ground among the elderly to Gephardt, who once backed a Social Security freeze.

While campaigns blew hot and cold for Gephardt, Simon and Hart, Dukakis held steady. He did best in urban areas, apparently primarily among white-collar and middle-class Democrats. But he also scored well among farmers near the Minnesota border, thanks in part to his endorsement by Minnesota's popular commissioner of ag-

riculture. Former Gov. Bruce Babbitt never clicked, ending up with 6 percent of the delegates. Despite the outsized Jackson support, the Greenfield caucus was not completely atypical. Participation was up; many attendees were still undecided when they arrived; and there seemed to be generally warm feelings about most of the candidates even among those voters with strong preferences.

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Democracy at the diner: the caucus at Doc and Jo's

By Osha Davidson

MECHANICSVILLE, IOWA

MARY BROWN, BRUCE BABBITT'S LONE supporter in the Pioneer Precinct, will not be moved. Seated beneath a single sheet of yellow paper thumb-tacked to the wall above her and bearing her candidate's name, the elderly woman persists like a rock against the tide. Her face is closed and her arms folded in an impressive demonstration of the kind of Midwestern defiance achieved only by farm women well into their seventh decade.

It is February 8, 7:35 p.m.: caucus night. Fifty-nine Democratic Party loyalists are crowded into a proverbial smoke-filled back room at Doc and Jo's restaurant on the edge of this tiny eastern Iowa town to decide the fate of the six remaining presidential hopefuls.

"Come on over to our side," a muscular young Michael Dukakis-backer with his sleeves rolled up to the elbows yells at Mary Brown from across the room. "I'll give you a dollar."

Brown isn't impressed or amused. She tugs at her sweater's right sleeve and sits up even straighter—if that's possible.

"It took me a long time to decide," she says quietly but firmly and lets it go at that. It is rebuke to those who would have her flitting like a butterfly from one candidate

to another.

Dave Ferguson, a middle-aged party official who is running the caucus, looks up from the front table where he and two assistants are tabulating results.

"Well then Mary," he says, adjusting his glasses, "you stick right in there." Several people applaud.

Iowans, especially rural Iowans, are well known for their resistance to change. A retired farmer once told me that his father was the first person in the area to try raising soybeans back in the early part of this century when corn was the undisputed king.

"It probably took quite a while to catch on," I remarked.

"Oh no," he assured me. "Why, some of the neighbors were giving the new crop a try just six or seven years later."

Even among Iowans, the people of this area are famous for their independent ways. In 1931, when the government began testing all dairy cows in Iowa for tuberculosis, scores of armed area farmers vowed to shoot the first son-of-a-bitch to touch a Cedar County cow. The National Guard had to be called in to protect the veterinarians.

"Not that we thought it was a bad idea to test for TB," said a local farmer who was a teenager during the Cow War. "In fact, most everybody thought it was a good idea. We

just didn't like being told we had to do it."

Something to say: The caucus, which supposed to start at 7 p.m., doesn't get underway until 7:25 when Ferguson, a quietly good-looking man with short gray hair, droopy mustache and glasses, gets up in front of the room at the spot usually occupied by the salad bar, clears his throat and calls out, "Could I have your attention please."

The back room of Doc and Jo's is your basic sit-yourself-down-and-eat small town restaurant dining room, with a decor that is simple but comfortable. If locals get the urge to eat at a fancier place they can drive over to the city of Cedar Rapids, 30 miles to the west. But few people do—except for weddings parties or silver anniversaries.

The first order of business, before breaking up into candidate "preference groups," is to call for resolutions, issues that people present think should become planks in the party platform.

"I got something to say," says a voice from the side of the room.

Larry Domer, an avuncular man who, in his black-rimmed glasses and sweater-vest, looks like a rural Ozzie Nelson, stands up to inveigh against Lee Iacocca's moving plants down to Mexico, Japan's unfair trade practices and the line-item veto. He offered no resolutions and ends by declaring himself as "undecided right now" about a presidential candidate.

There is a thick moment of silence then, as if everyone in the room is steeling themselves for the main event, the ritual for which

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By Salim Muwakkil

THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (FBI) has never been a big hit in the black community. Even before news of the agency's vicious harassment campaign against Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in the '60s was revealed, many blacks had already learned to be wary of J. Edgar Hoover's grim legions. The heroic "G-men" of national mythology may have existed, but the FBI agents with which most blacks had contact were more likely to be well-armed white men dedicated to protecting the racist status quo.

Since 1962 the agency has hired more African-Americans; they now represent about 4 percent of the agents. But according to at least one black employee, the agency's status quo is still racist. Donald Rochon, an agent since 1981, charged in a federal discrimination suit last November that fellow agents in two offices subjected him to an astounding ordeal of racial harassment and threats.

RACE RELATIONS

Among the court papers filed by Rochon was the recommended decision of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) hearing that bolsters the black agent's charges. The Justice Department adopted the EEOC decision. Rochon initiated the EEOC proceeding after repeated complaints to his superiors fell on deaf ears. The EEOC, which compiled a 66-page report on its hearing of Rochon's charges, found a clear pattern of racial harassment. The commission report also revealed that the FBI retaliated against Rochon when he lodged formal complaints.

Esprit de corps: Rochon charged that the racial incidents began in the Omaha office, within a year of his 1982 graduation from the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va. The EEOC report chronicles a series of "racially obnoxious pranks" and harassing incidents that took place in Omaha. The 37-year-old agent said the most distressing incident involved an instance in which a fellow agent defaced a family portrait. A picture of an ape was pasted over the face of Rochon's son.

Rochon said the abuse continued and intensified after he was transferred to the Chicago field office. According to the suit, his family was the target of regular late night phone calls, many of which were obscene and focused on interracial sex. Rochon's wife is white. The suit also disclosed that Rochon received a number of letters that threatened his murder or mutilation and threatened his wife with sexual assault. The matter was investigated internally and a FBI handwriting analysis revealed the material was written by a white agent also assigned in Chicago. The author of this offensive material was given a two-week suspension without pay; but other white agents in the Chicago office chipped in to pay his salary during that time, according to the suit.

During the course of the EEOC's hearing, Herbert H. Hawkins Jr., then the special agent-in-charge of the Omaha office, said he thought the racial pranks were positive signs of "esprit de corps." The report noted that Hawkins was aware of Rochon's complaints but took no formal action.

Rochon's well-documented suit has sparked a furor in the Reagan administration and in both houses of Congress. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said, "The president is very upset about that (the Rochon suit) and has asked the director of the FBI

Race-baiting charge sparks probe of FBI



Agent Donald Rochon was subjected to a rare and overt display of racism.

to look into it." In addition to the EEOC probe into the matter, several congressional hearings on this matter are also planned.

Congressional outrage: Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE), chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, announced last month that he will hold hearings to determine if Rochon's experience is an isolated case or systemic throughout the FBI. Biden is holding the hearings at the prompting of Rep. William H. Gray III (D-PA). "When the Congressman heard about these allegations involving the FBI he exploded," said Gray aide Charlene Williams. "He couldn't believe that such things are still happening in this day and age and within one of the major agencies responsible for enforcing this country's civil rights laws."

Rep. Don Edwards (D-CA), chair of the House judiciary subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights, which oversees the FBI, will initiate hearings in the House. In addition

to those charges of racism, other bureau hijinks are keeping Edwards busy. His subcommittee already has its hands full with hearings scheduled on recent revelations about the FBI's surveillance of domestic groups involved in legitimate political protest (see *In These Times*, Feb. 16).

"We may hold hearings to look into the reasons why nothing was done for three years after the black agent made his complaint," said Julian Epstein, an aide to Rep. John Conyers (D-MI). Conyers is the chair of the House judiciary subcommittee on criminal justice. "It's inconceivable to the Congressman why the Department of Justice's criminal division failed to take action," Epstein added. "He's very concerned about the reasons for that oversight."

An aberration: The FBI's first black agent wasn't appointed until 1962. Today out of the agency total of 9,443, 403 are African-

A black agent with the Chicago field office received letters threatening his murder or mutilation, and his wife, who is white, with sexual assault. A handwriting analysis revealed they were written by a white agent also assigned in Chicago.

American, 406 are Hispanic, 113 are Asian and 41 are Native American. Of the 59 field offices across the country only Philadelphia has a black special agent-in-charge. There are no Hispanics in that position. In fact, one of the FBI's highest-ranking Hispanics filed a suit last year that alleged Hispanics are routinely denied promotions.

Rochon has since been assigned to the Philadelphia office. Special Agent-in-Charge Wayne G. Davis, one of only three blacks ever to head an FBI field office, was surprised and angered by Rochon's charges. "I can't comment on the specifics of his allegations, but I can tell you that many of us were shocked by them," Davis said. "In my 25 years of service in the FBI, I've never experienced anything like agent Rochon has. If what he charged is true, I'd have to say that his treatment was an aberration. The FBI generally takes great care to treat its employees fairly."

Davis conceded that in the bureau's early days, Hoover was probably reluctant to make the FBI truly representative of U.S. society. "There was a time," he said, "when I knew every black special agent. During the early '60s, however, the Kennedy administration applied a lot of pressure to get more black agents appointed and although some reluctance remained we made a sincere effort to become more representative."

Unimpressive totals: The 25-year veteran said the institutional reluctance to change the FBI's racial makeup is less an expression of racism than benign clannishness. But, he added, even that attitude is seldom manifested in the treatment of blacks within the agency. "There was probably much more prejudice being exhibited outside the FBI, within society in general, than there was inside," he noted. "There's a certain pride that goes with being a part of the FBI, and there's a powerful camaraderie among employees." Davis admitted that the current number of minority agents is "a very unimpressive total," but despaired that the current spurt of negative publicity may hamper the FBI's ongoing recruitment efforts.

Another agent is significantly less upbeat about the future of blacks in the bureau. Not surprisingly, he requested anonymity. "The agency has changed, but it has not changed quickly enough," he said. "Without continuous outside pressure, nothing would ever happen in this agency. The institutional inertia is just too strong."

Although they were disinclined from making a specific charge, several FBI employees suggested that Rochon provoked the treatment he received by some quirk in his personality. Why else, they asked, would he be subjected to such a rare and overt display of racism? Also, there are indications that his interracial marriage played a large part in activating latent racial hostilities. But others, including many long-time bureau observers, pointed to the Rochon case as a prime example of the racism they contend is an indelible part of the FBI culture.

The series of investigations and upcoming congressional hearings should at least provide explanations for the racist behavior Rochon encountered in Omaha and Chicago. Sen. Biden said FBI Director Sessions "seemed very upset" by the incidents. "I have complete faith that he means what he says when he says he wants to get to the bottom of it."

Biden also urged Sessions to "go beyond this and see to it that the composition of FBI agents begins to reflect the composition of society—in short, more black agents." □