

Elephants & Donkeys by Kathleen Klenetsky

Dems return to the smoke-filled rooms

With no clear frontrunner emerging from the pack of Democratic dwarves, party officialdom is frantically trying to get a hold on the outcome of the primary contest.

Democratic National Committee chairman Paul Kirk announced March 15 that he plans to hold a pre-convention convention to designate the party's presidential nominee. Kirk proposed to get all the candidates together, sometime after the final round of primaries, to forge a consensus on who the Democratic standard-bearer should be. Doing the wheeling-dealing before the convention, he indicated, would be less messy than allowing the convention to do the choosing.

Kirk said that whoever was the front-runner at the time of the meeting should become the nominee, even if that person had failed to garner the 51% of convention delegates necessary to win the nomination.

The proposal originated with Mario Cuomo, who outlined it at a press conference March 9, at which he said that the meeting should include Sens. Bill Bradley of New Jersey and Sam Nunn of Georgia, and Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas, all of whom have been mentioned as potential candidates.

Cuomo repeated his support for the idea during an interview on ABC-TV's "Nightline" just hours after Kirk went public with it, calling on Democrats to rally behind the front-runner after the California primary June 7. If that candidate does not have a majority of delegates, "party leaders should help that person" get it "before the convention, by making switches before the

convention."

Most of the candidates have been receptive to the Kirk-Cuomo proposal, hoping they will be the beneficiary of the back-room wheeling and dealing. But some party regulars are none too pleased. As one bitterly observed to *EIR*, "I should have known Kirk would pull something like this. After all, he's owned by the Kennedy family. I guess we're going to have to come up with a new name for the party, because it sure isn't democratic. The convention's just going to be a rubber stamp for the deals made by the boys in the back room, and maybe some wrangling over how deep a cut in defense spending the party platform should call for."

Koch to lead 'draft Cuomo' movement

Cuomo's endorsement of the Kirk proposal, and his continued insistence that he is not a candidate, has still not convinced many Democrats that he's out of the picture.

New York City Mayor Ed Koch announced March 11 that he will personally lead a "draft Cuomo" movement at the Democratic convention. Koch told a local metropolitan TV interviewer that Cuomo was the party's best choice, since Mike Dukakis would lose to either George Bush or Bob Dole. Koch also proposed that Cuomo offer Jesse Jackson the post of "drug czar" in exchange for his delegates.

Dukakis goes shopping for delegates

A deal with Jackson also looms large in Mike Dukakis's plans. The Massachusetts governor, whose claim to be front-runner was severely undercut by his poor third-place showing in the March 15 Illinois primary, has already

sent out feelers to Jesse Jackson, who has racked up a substantial number of delegates.

Dukakis's campaign reportedly has hired two black businessmen to sound out Jackson on a deal. An aide to the Massachusetts governor told the *Philadelphia Bulletin* that the Dukakis campaign "wants to maintain favorable relations with Jesse and his campaign and keep the lines of communication open" so that, "assuming we go into the convention in a position to seize the nomination, we can be ready to discuss what people want."

One of the businessmen was specifically assigned to sound out California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, national chairman of the Jackson campaign, to see what Jackson would demand in return for handing his delegates over to Dukakis.

Nixon encourages Dole to stay in race

Despite his extremely poor showings since the Iowa caucuses, Bob Dole is getting a lot of encouragement from Republican bigwigs, including former President Richard Nixon, to stay in the race.

Dole, appearing on CBS-TV's "Face the Nation" March 13, declared he would stick it out no matter how poorly he did in the Illinois campaign. He reported that Nixon, who has refused to endorse Bush, despite Bush's own personal request that he do so, "sent me a very nice telegram, in effect, hang in there, don't give up. . . . There are a lot of people who want an alternative. What about the 26 million people in California?"

Dole didn't say whether Nixon mentioned Bush's deepening Iran-Contra troubles, but that's certainly entering into the Kansan's political calculations.