REFORMISM AND BLACK POLITICAL POWER:

THE CRISIS OF MIDDLE CLASS LEADERSHIP

FOR THE BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT

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While Black people have always waged a fight for
freedom, the meaning of this struggle has
changed. The change has been based on the
historical character of social relations, the
social forces differentially mobilized as the mass
base and leadership of the struggle, the forms of
organization including the tacticss employed, and
the goals as expressed in the ideological and
political lines that sum up what the movement
stands for at any particular time. The slave
plantation in the Ante Bellum South, the share
croppers plots carved out of those plantations
around the turn of the century, and the urban
ghettoes after WW II have all been key structural
arena's, and one might well regard them as the
basic historical modes of social existence for
Black people in the USA. My view is that for each

it is possible to understand three essential (and logically distinct) ideological and political options:

- a) reaction — leave things as they are, this is the best we can get; *conservative*

- b) revolution — the basic social system must be fundamentally changed, or *radical*

- c) reform — the system is acceptable but some change is necessary to make it work better. *progressive*

A general theoretical framework for understanding Black social protest might well be developed on these two basic aspects of Black protest behavior -- the structure of social life, and the ideology of social action.

This paper is a discussion of leadership and organizational tactics, specifically political leadership and the electoral arena. It is clear to most that this period is not mainly one of militant radical protest leadership, but is a period in which Black protest is organized around the electoral process. This is probably not a permanent condition, nor is Black electoral activism merely the normal voting behavior of

citizens within the US political system.

The election of Harold Washington was a great victory of the Black community. This was a case of successful political protest rather than merely conventional institutionalized political behavior. The Washington campaign became a crusade in the Black community, and therefore, its implication for the future has as much to do with the development of the Black liberation movement as it does with the routine organization of behavior within the established political system. An explosion of Black political protest is best understood in the context of a social movement mode of analysis. This is a fundamental issue of perspective, because the absence of the social movement paradigm from much of the current literature can lead one to make false judgments about the nature of Black politics.

The social movement paradigm focuses on the social behavior of an aggregate of individuals mobilized outside of formal political institutions to use resources to make a change in the social situation (McAdam, 1982; Freeman, 1983; Oberschall, 1973; Zald and McCarthy, 1979). The electoral behavior model focuses on how resources

are used for formal political participation (voting, officeholding, etc.), and the formal character of this process is the basis on which the political behavior of all groups is standardized and can be routinely compared(Milbrath and Goel, 1977).

Our social movement approach sets a broad context in which Black electoral behavior constitutes only one of the many forms of possible political actions (McAdam, 1983). Since protest social movements are regarded as normal by Blacks more so than by whites, approaching the Washington campaign in this way can help explain Black-White differences in voter registration and turnout (Eisinger, 1973). Our analysis focuses on militant protest leadership and how this contributed to the election of Mayor Harold Washington. |1|

Black people have a long history of fighting to get inside of the political system, to gain access to "legitimate political resources" (Walton, 1972). After the Civil War, three constitutional amendments established for Black their freedom, citizenship, and right to vote. In the next 100 years, the struggle for voting rights was against de_jure obstacles in the south (e.g., grandfather

clause, poll taxes, literacy tests, etc.) and de facto obstacles in the north (e.g., gerrymandering, vote fraud, etc.). While a breakthrough in Black officeholding occurred during reconstruction, the numbers of elected officials has expanded in significant numbers mainly in the post World War II period, especially after the 1960's.

The main basis for Black protest has had to be outside of the formal political system, and based on the development of political resources inside the Black community. This has traditionally been in the Black church, the dominant Black social institution. Black colleges, media, social and fraternal organizations, and independent Black businesses are significant, especially as power brokers for Black middle class interests (Morris, 198__). Each social institution has a stable leadership composed of high status elites, and some sector of the overall Black community as its mass base. In the early Past, These elites frequently negotiate for the interests of the entire Black community (Killian, 1965).

There is another aspect of Black protest "outside" of the political system, rooted in the

dual traditions of Black nationalism and socialist radicalism. These are loosely-related small organizations who maintain a highly ideological political style of activity. Because of the intense development of cadre in this type of protest politics, there is the latent potential for these groups to provide leadership for relatively large groups of people such as what develops in the mobilization phase of a protest movement. Furthermore, these groups often have a "vanguard" quality which enables them to start movement activity before it becomes popular, to "risk" legitimacy by disrupting existing norms of the political order (Geschwender, 1971).

In sum, we can make a distinction between political insiders and outsiders, across a political spectrum. My plan is to discuss the logic of how middle class leadership emerged and led the fight to elect Harold Washington in 1983, and how it has faced new challenges since its success.

There are three questions:

1. How did Harold Washington get elected?

2. How has Chicago's Black power leadership

functioned?

3. What does the Chicago experience suggest for the national scene?

The leadership of the Washington campaign developed in the historical context of Black Chicago: on the one hand, the Black community grew and developed a diverse set of institutional resources within segregated geographical limits, and on the other, a pattern of electoral activity that resulted in a form of proportional representation as far as city council representation is concerned.

The fundamental resource of the Black community of Chicago is its population size: by 1970 Chicago was 35% Black and by 1980 this had increased to 40%

Table 1

CHICAGO POPULATION: PERCENT BLACK, 1890-1980

Year	% Black	Total Pop.
1890	1.3	1,099,850
1910	2.0	2,185,283
1930	6.9	3,376,438
1950	14.0	3,620,962
1970	34.4	3,366,957
1980	39.8	3,005,072

Source: U.S. Census.

Based on an Index of Residential Dissimilarity, chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the USA. This score was 92.1 in 1950 and it has slowly increased to 93.0 by 1980.

Out of this segregated social world developed a Black middle class in control of increasing resources, resources used to fuel the Black liberation protest movement. In 1950, there were 10,065 Blacks in chicago with at least a college education and by 1980, this number had increased to over 47,000. But Blacks did not make great gains in positions of power. The Chicago Urban League did a study of Blacks in top decision-making positions in 1967 and 1977. The overall pattern is found in Table 2 (Fox, 1980).

Table 2

BLACKS IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS IN

CHICAGO: 1965 A 1977

Date	Item	Public Domain Positions	Private Domain Positions
1965	Total	1223	9900
	Black	75	226
	%Black	6.1	2.3
1977	Total	1619	12013
	Black	204	364
	%Black	12.6	3.0

Source: Chicago Urban League.

It is obvious from Table 2 that Blacks are overwhelmingly underrepresented in both the public (government) and private sectors, but greater representation and improvement has taken place in the public sector. The public sector is much more sensitive and responsive to the demands of the Black protest movement since it needs the potential political resources of that movement, votes. The pattern seems to be that small electoral districts with large Black populations tend to be represented well. This is borne out by the Black Power Battling Average of City Council

representation.

The Black Power Batting Average is computed by dividing the percentage Black of the City Council by the percentage Black of the voting age population. Eisinger calls this a "Black representation ration" (Eisinger, 1973), and Karnig and Wlesch "Black council equity ratio" (Karnig and Welsch, 1980). Figure 1 presents the Black Power Batting Average for Chicago, 1923-1983.

This figure graphically portrays the pattern of post World War I Black political representation. There are three definite periods:

- a) Symbolic representation (1923-47) represents seven terms of office for two Blacks on the council. These two Blacks were symbolically the representatives of all Blacks in the city. The declining Black Power Batting Average reflects greater increases in population, while council membership stayed the same.
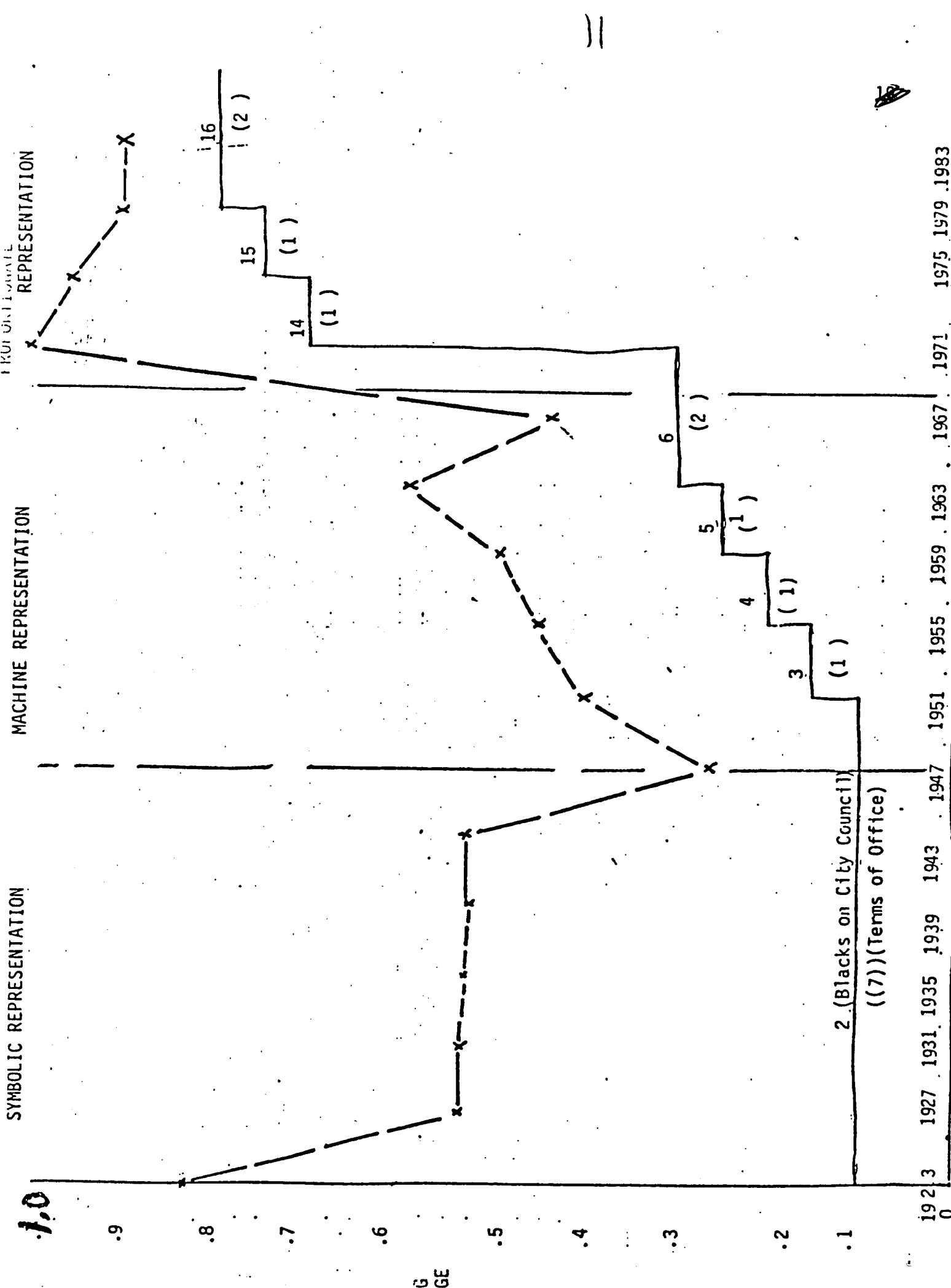
- b) Machine representation (1947-67)

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

MACHINE REPRESENTATION

PROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION

16
(2)

15
(1)

14
(1)

6
(2)

5
(1)

4
(1)

3
(1)

2 (Blacks on City Council)
((7))(Terms of Office)

1.0
.9
.8
.7
.6
.5
.4
.3
.2
.1
0

NG
AGE

19 2 3
1927 1931 1935 1939 1943 1947 1951 1955 1959 1963 1967 1971 1975 1979 1983

Figure . Years of City Council Elections

represents five terms of office for an increase of 3 to 6 Black members of the council. These politicians were loyalists to the Daley machine.

- c) Proportionate representation (1967-83) represents an increase to 16 Black members of the council, a group that is divided into machine regulars and independents.

The basic resources of the Black community had to be mobilized if this change in the structure of political opportunity (increased representation) was going to be taken advantage of by effective social protest. Mobilization can be effective to the extent that it can focus the mobilized resources on one key objective. These two political conditions of social protest--mobilization of resources, and unified political focus--were developed FACILITATED MOST in Chicago by insurgent forces, especially the Black militants who became the Task Force for Black political empowerment. There were three aspects of this pre-campaign build-up:

1. building a consensus of issues, especially the mayoral election, with the unifying political

objective to defeat Jane Byrne, the white machine mayor:

2. building a consensus of leadership, by agreeing to support one major Black candidate-Harold Washington; and

3. building basic political resources, voter registration, education, and turnout to accomplish the defeat of Byrne and the election of Washington.

This consensus was built in the protest tradition. The key political orientation was defining the issue as essentially one of the democratic right of Black people to rule in opposition to the racist political machine. The mainstream middle class Blacks had a problem — with ties to the white machine, was the risk of supporting a Black candidate worth losing their patronage? On the other hand, with a growing grass roots anti-racist movement for a Black mayor could they afford to remain aloof and risk losing their credibility in the Black community? The answer was provided by the racial polarization of the campaign.

In the first stage of the campaign militant

grass roots action was decisive. Mass struggle
over varying issues were turned toward protests
against the incumbent mayor. Just as Mayor Byrne
had once been a symbol of reform when she was
elected, she became the symbol of racist tyranny.
The Task Force for Political Empowerment hit the
streets — rallied the poor to register, attacked
the middle class support of white candidates, and
actively spread a "movement image" for the
campaign. This was a Black organization with
Black professional leaders based on a blend of
"participatory democracy" and a strong chair.
This group was joined by other city wide groups
such as PUSH.

Within a month after announcing, Washington
pulled together a blue ribbon steering committee —
with almost no overlap with the Task Force (5 out
of 62). He had the timing and the resources to
call upon Black middle class elites and they
responded.

The organization of the campaign was difficult
precisely because the leadership had to deal with
vastly different sets of expectations. The
mainstream demand was that the future mayor and
campaign organization be acceptable to all aspects

of the Chicago community, especially whites and business interests, and this was quite different from the Black demand that far-reaching reforms be advocated by aggressively pitting Black power advocacy against white racism and machine dominance of the Democratic Party. In general, this is the contrast between the insider rightward pull of mainstream institutional politics, and the outsider leftward pull of Black people mobilized into a protest movement. In this context, outsiders were aT "the point of political production," fighting for the votes in the street, so their status derived from their function — the more votes, the more status. However, on the inside, people were respected more for their social station in life, so status was fixed to rather stable occupational and political roles. This set the basis for the outsiders rise and fall in status, because once their "production" of votes was no longer needed, they experiences a rapid decline in status.

After the primary victory, it was necessary to make definite decisions about planning a new Washington administration — one prepared to take over control of City Hall. This posed a new

problem because running a large government bureaucracy and managing a diverse legislative body requires different skills than for mobilizing voters, especially when Black unity might win against a white racist vote, but would not work as the basis for running the entire city administration. Washington organized a Transition Team modeled after the method used to facilitate succession of presidential administrations.

There are 3 key groups, then, that emerged at 3 key points:

1. The viability of the candidacy was facilitated by the Task Force,

2. the viability of the campaign was facilitated by the Steering Committee, and

3. the viability of the administration was created by the Transition Team.

Overall, there is a great deal of significance to the percent Black of each leadership group: Task Force (100%); Steering Committee (71.0%); and Transition Team (39.7%). This pattern of declining Black composition rather accurately parallels the percent Blacks of the relevant reference group

being served. The Task Force was for building
unity in the Black community, so it was 100% Black
while the Steering Committee was for Washington's
electoral support. His vote in the general
election was 77% Black, while the Steering
Committee was 71% Black. %ob TransitionTeam virtually matched % B of ε pop. Washington maintained a
proportionate percent Black of all leadership
groups in his campaign.

The three groups are quite different in terms of
the bureaucratic character of individual resources
being organized. The Task Force was a loosely
organized group mainly based on an individual's
willingness to contribute personal resources to a
collective process. Similar to most social
movement contexts, the participants select
themselves and gain status in the movement to the
extent that they live up to the expectations of
membership, and lose status when they cease to
function. The Transition Team members came from
organized institutional contexts, and in a sense
represented themselves and organization, and
derived their status as much from their position
as from the performance in the role assigned. The
Steering Committee consisted of institutional
elites who were given formal public recognition,

while the expanded committee structure allowed a
great deal of formal and informal cooptation. The
informal cooptation on some subcommittees made
them much more like the Task Force where status
was a matter of performance: "What have you done
lately?" is the question asked in these
contexts.

Our approach to the first question is that
Washington was elected as a result of the
following:

1. An expansion of the Black vote and virtual
   proportionate representation in the City
   Council.

2. Black unity reflected in a consensus of
   community leaders on issues, a candidate, and
   resource mobilization.

3. A diverse leadership of three groups with
   social compositions, organizational style and
   goals that fit different stages of the overall
   process.

Washington had to enter the trenches of city
government facing a fight on three fronts. He had
won the Mayors office but faced a battle against

racist intrasigence of the City Council, the city
hall bureaucracy, and the Cook County Democratic
Party. Each of these three battles appears
essentially over, at least as clear issues of
racism versus Black power. Court reapportionment
of wards and subsequent elections has shifted the
City council to give the mayor majority support.
Washington has initiated a vigorous policy of
hiring previously excluded groups, especially
Blacks. And, the county Democratic party is
swinging to Washington as *chairman* Vrdolyak is
on his way to becoming a Republican.

There are three main features of political life
in Chicago in this period of the second Washington
administration:

1. Democratization and fairness - the general
   political orientation is still toward reform,
   especially in equalizing resources and city
   services to each ward, especially streets and
   sanitation, and in increased representation of
   previously excluded groups.

2. However, a second feature is that Chicago
   political traditions continue. This includes
   criminal prosecution of officials (pre

Washington as well as his supporters, (and his staff), and a concentration of power in the mayors office. Close friends are as routinely appointed to high posts under Washington as had been done by Mayor Daley. In fact the center of power has shifted from Daleys Back of the Yards area to Hyde Park on the southeast side where Washington lives.

3. The main task is crisis management. Virtually every major issue is a threat to the continued viability of the city — two major sports teams leaving the city, a crumbling lake front, collapse of public housing, gentrification of the inner city as Yuppi policies attack the homeless and underclass, rapid decline in industrial jobs, etc. The underlying crisis reflects Reagans cutbacks, a Reaganite governor, and a continuation of Chicago's industrial decline since World War II. As crisis managers the city government is forced to mediate between the national and international economic forces and the population in Chicago, as well as mediate the conflicts between different sectors of Chicago's population.

One can quickly sum up these three points in a popular way:

1. The system now works.

2. Some things change, some things remain the same.

3. The problem is in the White House.

The current character of Black power politics is defined within the electoral area, with two key contradictions:

1. 1) within the city those who have and will receive material benefits and those who haven't and wont; and

2. 2) between a democratic city and congress, and a Republican President and Governor. this is the political reflection of the race class dynamic for Black middle class political officials. the data is clear -- in cities with Black Mayors, while police murders decline the main benefits are to middle class professionals and entrepreneurs. On the otherhand, democrats hold the overwhelming loyality of Blacks, especially in a Presidential year.

This political process can also be usefully understood as part of the economic transformation of the middle class. It has shifted from the relative independence of small entrepreneurs and service professionals to managers and professionals who work in large public organizations. This is a fundamental shift. The ~~diminished POTENTIAL FOR~~ independent protest ~~potential~~ of the Black middle class is limited by its leadership inside of formal mainstream politics, and its occupational base within the goverment.

One can easily see a mayor shift since the mass protest of the 1960's to the orientation of the middle class. As the Chicago case makes clear the trajectory of middle class electoral leadership is to move to positions inside the political system. Furthermore within this system, while there is ~~also~~ a rhetorical shift to more radical expression by Black officials, the main bases of power are organized within the parameters of mainstream parties based on the legal guidelines of elections.

Since the political system, at least since Nixon, has been hostile to income redistribution and protective social legislation, given that only

the middle class gains major benefits from the system, the middle class can recruit mass support only if it can define situations in terms of race and not both race and class. The critical issue is that Harold Washington is the logical limit of middle class Black power. However, I believe there is political terrain beyond Harold Washington. This terrain *for Black politics* ~~lay~~ outside of the mainstream political institutions, but its meaning will depend on *Two Things:* the class defection of middle class radicals to a greater commitment to organize the poor and working classes, and on the underclass fnding its voice and spontaneous forms of organized political motion that challenges the system.

We have just heard through Ollie North about the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This agency has had responsibility for contingency planning in case of national emergency. One possibility considered by this arm of the executive branch of government was massive social disorder of the kind usually associated with the Black underclass. It proposed suspending the constitution, imposing martial law, and massive detention. In reaction to this Black middle class leadership has some

vocal critics, but always generally being a loyal

opposition. The new Black political terrain is

not likely to be loyal, but in the tradition of

Nat Turner, Ida B. Wells, and Malcolm X. In sum,

there seems to be space for a revolutionary impulse

on the other side of our current reformism given

the limitations of Black middle class leadership.