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**W**HAT SHOULD THE LEFT AND JESSE JACKSON'S forces do now and after the 1988 election? First, they should take part in an all-out effort for Michael Dukakis, simply because any Democrat in the White House will provide more political space for reform.

The harder question is: can a fragmented left unite after the November election to pressure a Dukakis or oppose a Bush presidency with a progressive vision for America?

The Reagan years were among the most difficult of the century for progressive organizations. Even symbolic high points of resistance such as the 1981 nuclear freeze march or the 1982 Labor Day solidarity rally—were unable to build any lasting momentum. On domestic and foreign policy issues, the Reaganites defined the agenda and for the most part won the legislative battles.

In the last two years the tide has started to shift. Administration scandals played their part, as have the economic realities that have hurt living standards among both the middle class and the poor—epitomized by the national scandal of homelessness. But the nation is drifting along with no moral compass and no sense of national purpose as a selfish decade comes to an end.

Public opinion polls show that support for most basic "liberal" programs has remained constant during the decade. The late '80s have already witnessed increased public support for federal government intervention to solve basic problems of economic injustice—poverty, homelessness, hunger and unemployment. The success of the Democrats in regaining control of the Senate in 1986 was an indicator of this new mood, but most telling was the surprisingly broad support for Jesse Jackson's campaign for the presidential nomination.

Although we shouldn't exaggerate Jackson's support, the strength of his campaign was quite remarkable. The campaign mobilized many voters who would otherwise have remained uninvolved. Equally important, Jackson did something that no politician has done since the New Deal: he made the nation pay attention to progressive issues—corporate power and economic injustice, drug abuse and its causes, a humane foreign policy, jobs, health care, affordable housing. Whether these new directions can be maintained beyond the November 1988 presidential election is the major question for the democratic left.

**The big question:** Would a Dukakis administration make any difference?

In his three terms as governor of Massachusetts, Dukakis has been an effective liberal reformer with a strong managerial bent. Liberal groups have generally found Dukakis sympathetic to their causes and willing to devote state resources to solve social and economic problems of poor and working-class people, but often too willing to compromise—on regulation and taxes—for the sake of political consensus.

On foreign policy, he was an early opponent of contra aid and a strong advocate of removing state investments from corporations doing business with South Africa. A board member of Jobs With Peace, Dukakis'

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campaign statements suggest that he does not share the Cold War mentality of some fellow Democrats and that he favors human rights over interventionism.

Whatever we know about Dukakis' experiences as governor, his campaign positions and his personality, the key forces shaping a Dukakis presidency would be political.

Within the Democratic Party the political center of gravity is increasingly dominated by corporate money. The historic Democratic coalition of the poor and the middle class has been eroded by fragmented "special interest" politics permitting well-heeled corporations and business political action committees to dominate. The various left constituencies—the poor, the minorities, labor, feminists, environmentalists, peace activists—have lost influence within the party and within Congress. The low level of voter participation among the poor and minorities, in particular, has created a vacuum within the party that big business, real estate developers and the rich have filled. The erosion of the progressive income tax is probably the best index of this disturbing trend.

In short, the key agenda for the left is to force the next administration and Congress to create policy alternatives to warmed-over Carterism.

**What next for Jackson coalition?** Jackson's supporters must ask not only what will happen to Jesse Jackson as an individual, but also what will happen to the political/organizational forces his campaign mobilized? The Jackson campaign laid the foundation for an effective, ongoing progressive coalition that could survive the November election and become an important force within the country's politics. More than Jackson himself, it requires agreement that a permanent coalition is the best strategy and willingness to concentrate energy on building a coalition that can overcome the left's twin dilemmas of single-issue and candidate-centered politics. We call this approach a "party within a party" strategy.

The '80s witnessed a tremendous amount of progressive political activity. This included campaigns to regulate toxic chemicals in the workplace and community, to oppose U.S. aid to repressive governments abroad, for the nuclear freeze, for tenants' rights, to unionize office workers, to feed the hungry and house the homeless, for plant-closing laws and many others. Organizers for these efforts employed a wide variety of tactics and won some victories. The efforts mobilized millions of Americans, raised their political awareness and honed their activist skills.

Progressive electoral coalitions already exist in several states. They include groups like ACORN, the Rainbow Coalition and others; but most have been initiated by Citizen Action, a national organization with affiliates in more than 24 states. In at least 10 of them, Citizen Action affiliates have sought to pull together the various strands

of progressive forces such as unions, neighborhood and tenant groups, women's groups, minority organizations, environmentalists and senior citizens' groups. They are loose coalitions of existing organizations that come together to identify which candidates they can recruit and support, how best to pool their resources and how to enhance the agenda that each organization seeks to implement. If each organizational member of the coalition cannot support a candidate, then the coalition takes no position and each organization goes its own way.

**Difficult task:** This is not to suggest that uniting the Jackson national constituency and the Citizen Action-type local constituencies would be easy. Beyond the technical and ego problems is the question of what it means to be a part of these existing grass-roots organizations.

The millions who join Citizen Action or ACORN, for example, do not necessarily feel they are part of a movement and that joining is an expression of a shared ideological and political vision. The Jackson campaign was primarily an expression of black unity.

The forging of this coalition obviously involves great difficulties.

A successful "party within a party" strategy would link the momentum of the Jackson campaign and the efforts of these grass-roots movements into an ongoing coalition. There is already considerable overlap between Jackson's forces and these movements. But there is much to be worked out, and no one should expect a tight organization when there are so many "turf" issues—sources of funds, leaders, issues, loyalties to elected officials and so on. But Jackson's strength so far has been his ability to articulate vision, program and a sense of direction that adheres to the basic principles of the nation's fragmented progressive movement. If he decides to do so, and steps carefully, Jackson could help build a powerful progressive force within the Democratic Party that can have an impact on national policy.

**Transforming the Democratic Party:** It will take time to build a coalition that puts justice, equality and democracy at the center of American politics. We need millions of new citizens activated with a shared politics, new leaders elected and the Democratic Party transformed. It will require a great deal of diplomacy within the progressive movement to forge such a coalition in light of the many organizational and personal rivalries and pragmatic choices involved. But if there was ever a time for such a venture, it is now.

What would the progressive coalition do to achieve these idealistic goals? Here are some suggestions.

- Create a "shadow cabinet" composed of well-known policy experts. On a regular basis this group can evaluate and offer alternatives to the way the next administration—and subsequent administrations—does business. This "shadow cabinet" might include Jim Hightower as secretary of agriculture, Barry Commoner as secretary of energy or Ralph

Nader as secretary of commerce, to give a few examples. Numerous spokespersons help diffuse the dangers of the cult of personality, while recognizing the need for leadership.

- Create a weekly syndicated column for Jesse Jackson to provide a regular forum for his views and ideas on domestic and foreign policy.

- Engage in grass-roots voter-registration campaigns and efforts to reform state and local voter-registration laws.

- Compile a scorecard to rate elected officials' voting records on key issues of concern to progressives.

- In the spirit of maintaining a foothold both within and without the electoral system, it will not be sufficient to critique other candidates and officials. In the long run, people espousing a democratization of the American economy will have to stand for office in much greater numbers.

This means that any organizations attempting to seize upon the opening created by the Jackson campaign will have to be on the lookout for vulnerable conservative incumbents, open seats and similar opportunities; and be able to recruit candidates—as much as possible from within progressive organizations—for offices at all levels of government, as well as campaign managers for those candidates. This may also involve the development of training centers for progressive candidates and campaign managers to help with the nuts and bolts of electoral politics.

- Hold conventions in between the Democratic Party's presidential nominating conventions. Since the official party eliminated the "midterm" convention, the progressives will have an opportunity to discuss issues, put forward a legislative agenda for Congress and lend support for candidates for Congress.

Many people attracted to Jesse Jackson's campaign and its issues will not be content simply to pull the Democratic Party lever. Activists will continue their organizing efforts—to build and democratize unions and community organizations, reshape universities, challenge environmental devastations, fight for peace and equal rights, fight against drug abuse and corporate irresponsibility.

The strength of the "party within a party" strategy is that by maintaining an independent political base it avoids the pitfalls of being completely absorbed by electoral politics, but gives the left an opportunity to have more direct influence over public policy.

Jesse Jackson has become the recognized leader of the nation's progressive movement. He has earned that mantle. At a time when Americans are looking for a new direction, a new sense of national purpose, a federal government that is compassionate and competent, Jackson has taken up the challenge. But he cannot and should not do it alone, and he cannot do it with only the organization he developed during the presidential campaign.

But Jackson can, if he desires, help build a coalition from the legacy of his own campaign and the strength of the existing progressive grass-roots network—a coalition that can reshape the party and the nation. ■ John Atlas is on the board of Citizen Action and is president of the National Housing Institute. Peter Dreier is director of housing at the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Tom Gallagher, a former Massachusetts state representative, is director of the New England Equity Institute, a progressive policy center.