

Support Grows for City District System

Frank H. Joyce

1967

The Rev. Charles Williams is a conservative, Negro, Republican Baptist.

Robert Tindal is the executive director of the tradition-bound Civil Rights Organization to The Establishment—the NAACP. The Rev. Albert Cleage is a militant black power advocate and chairman of the Inner-City Organizing Committee.

On Monday, May 22, at a meeting—press conference held at the Sheraton Cadillac Hotel, in one of the most impressive displays of Negro Unity in the history of Detroit they all agreed on something.

What they agreed on was their support of legislation introduced into the Michigan Legislature by Reps, James Del Rio and Jackie Vaughn which would radically alter Detroit's government.

Two amendments to other legislation would provide for members of the Detroit Common Council and the Board of Education to be elected from districts instead of the present at-large system. Both amendments passed the House of Representatives but now appear doomed to die in committee in the State Senate.

Assuming the bills do not ultimately pass in the Legislature Rep. Del Rio announced at the meeting that a massive petition drive would be held to place the proposals on the ballot so that Detroit Voters would be given the opportunity to accept or reject it. Included in the show of unity supporting the idea were First District Congressman John Conyers Jr., Negro representatives, Hood, Bradley and Eliot. Also in attendance (at the meeting) were the chairmen of the 1st and 13th District Democratic Party organization, Murray Jackson and Fred Burton, Conyers announced his intention to go to Lansing to lobby on behalf of the bills.

Those opposing the district concept are Nelson Jack Edwards and Horace Sheffield both of whom are paid by the UAW.

The Detroit News and Free Press have also opposed the plan labeling it the "ward system" and calling up phrases like "ward heeling" and raising the spectre of corruption.

What the papers are worried about said one speaker "is the corruption" of the present city council arrangement in which no-one represents the people and everyone represents the interests of downtown merchants, white supremacists and the newspapers."

Other speakers pointed out that there are cultural as well as political advantages to the new plan. one said, "Detroit lacks a sense of community identity; the city is too large to identify with as a whole. Those who believe we need a greater sense of community in the city should support the district plan as a step in that direction."

It appears likely that the bill will not pass the legislature. The people then will have to speak through a petition campaign and referendum.

If they win not only will Negroes gain long denied adequate representation on the city council. It may be possible to follow the lead of the Amsterdam Provos and even put a hippy on the Council.

...John Sinclair?

fifth Estate

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