

An Interview

GW: Ken, what do you think are the major responsibilities of this community in relation to the heroin problem?

I think that the community has two responsibilities, both of which are interrelated. One responsibility is to try and make some sensible analysis of an extraordinarily complicated electoral situation here in Detroit.

I should take this opportunity to suggest that I will not be a candidate for mayor. This statement becomes complicated within the construct of such an interview as this, but at the same time, I have to at least start off with that kind of general predisposition in order to clarify what I mean about the relationship of the present electoral situation to the resolution of the heroin problem.



photo by Chabot-King

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GW: You've said that you are not going to be a candidate for mayor. Given that, what is your view of the importance of the present electoral situation in Detroit?

It is important because the community of people in this city will have no effective ability to deal with the question of drugs outside of the context of some sort of material control over the state apparatus in Detroit. I think that this is clear in terms of events, such as the revelations about the indictments of the police officers in the 10th Precinct, and the fact that task forces are continuing to investigate other precincts. Obviously, the question of the relationship of the law enforcement apparatus to the presence of narcotics in our community is a pressing one, and there is little a community is going to be able to do absent the effective ability to control the way in which police power is executed in this city.

GW: In view in what you have said about control over the state apparatus, would you enumerate those events or potential events which your view of control of the state by the people?

There is the question of a John Nichols' candidacy for mayor and how that is going to be countered.

There is the question of proposals that have been prepared by the Detroit Charter Revision Commission to reform or reorganize the DPD within the context of having a five member commission appointed by the mayor, and the establishment of three independent persons as chief of police, director of investigation and personnel director. A hard analysis of this has to be made because the question of who runs the DPD on a daily basis is absolutely essential to the resolution of the dope problem, at least from the stand-point of law enforcement.

GW: Ken, how do you see our community organizing to answer these questions?

All these questions are questions one would hope could be distilled into a firm and solid position by an independent people's political movement around a candidate who then constitute the nexus around which this kind of organization could take place.

GW: Do you see any relationship between this electoral strategy and mass organizing around issues of community concern which would not be electorally defined?

For me the question of the strategy for the independent political force in the 1973 election would merge, obviously, with the strategy for organizing inside of this community, because I don't see them as being separate. But absent our candidacy, we're in a situ-

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ation where we've got to be able to make a political judgment about the kind of individuals out here with whom we can work in terms of trying to do the best we can for the people inside of this community.

GW: In your judgment, is there any candidate who is viable as an independent people's candidate?

There is the situation with Coleman Young. Of all the individuals being talked about as being prominent candidates and regarded by persons as being "electable," Coleman Young comes closest to an individual with whom we could work.

GW: You say Coleman Young is closest to a candidate with whom you can work. Would you develop your view of Coleman?

It's not just a question of Coleman Young. It's a question of what is part of the package that comes with Coleman Young. For example, where is the Democratic party likely to be in this nominally non-partisan race? The UAW, (which really has an illusory kind of image as being a liberal and progressive force inside of the community) is also, as we understand it, going to be nominally neutral in the primary election.

GW: What about the UAW's role in the mayoralty race?

We have to be able to understand and use the leverage that exists among rank and file workers inside of this city to force the UAW, independently of its overtly neutral primary stance, to see to it that resources are made available to a candidate for mayor who is committed to the material alteration of conditions out here. That's going to require some organizing in terms of what the community can do.

GW: Would you state your overall rationale for the development of an independent political force, particularly as this movement relates to the plague of heroin?

We are about organizing an independent political force because we don't feel that there's any other way to approach the problems that face us—including the question of drugs.

There are strategies that people can implement and people have discussed with me using legal theories, such as the abatement of a nuisance, as a basis on which to file law suits with the objective of characterizing the presence of dope houses in neighborhoods as

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a nuisance. I agree with that.

I think that any kind of organizational lever that has the effect of generating some access to people, through which we can begin to discuss the relationship of the dope problem to the state apparatus, (meaning the courts, prosecutors, police, and the various levels of government) is in no way unimportant. Through that discussion we can promote some kind of action in which people can participate in a way that expands their receptivity without feeling that they are being put in a situation where they've got to incur particularly monumental risks.

GW: Ken, you mentioned the risks incurred by people in the community when the problem of dope is being fought. Could you expand that and explore just what role fear and terror play in the perpetuation of dope in Detroit?

One of the main things that perpetuates dope traffic inside of our community is the level of terror that is part of the force that maintains the atmosphere in which narcotic trafficking can go on. Everybody in the community is opposed to dope, but, people don't have the confidence that they could safely give information that they have about narcotic trafficking to the police department. If for no other reason than that it's like calling the dope man to bust the dope man.

GW: What about the relation of dope to violence? What do you see out here in response to Hayward Brown and the others?

People are concerned about the almost epidemic level of homicidal violence that is part of narcotic trafficking. Cats who are engaged in narcotic trafficking are engaged in a very profitable endeavor. They are not about to voluntarily terminate it. So, there's a certain amount of violence that is involved in it.

There are a lot of people who have various attitudes about violence. Some have a philosophical posture which makes it impossible for them to accept certain tactics and strategies that could effectively eradicate heroin. For example, look at the response to Hayward Brown. There are all kinds of people in the community who agree that dope is a problem and that something has got to be done about it but are opposed to vigilantism and run that Brown should not have taken the law into his own hands. That kind of thinking suggests that people who were doing what Hayward Brown, Mark Bethune and John Boyd were doing in terms of the dope man are somehow beyond the point of support.

The truth of the matter is that it's a very desperate situation out here.

GW: We've about run out of tape. Would you care to make a final statement?

The essence of it is that we should have inside of this community a thrust that is in the direction of education and programmatic activity. At the same time no talk about anything inside of the city of Detroit can take place without there being some conscious desire to connect that to the compellingly urgent 1973 electoral situation.

I think we could all agree that we could probably support a Coleman Young candidacy if it shapes up in such a way that enables us to conclude that it is going to be a viable, reasonable and well-supported undertaking.

I think that we might be in a situation where we can make an input to reflect a combination of forces that could represent a step forward inside of this community.



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