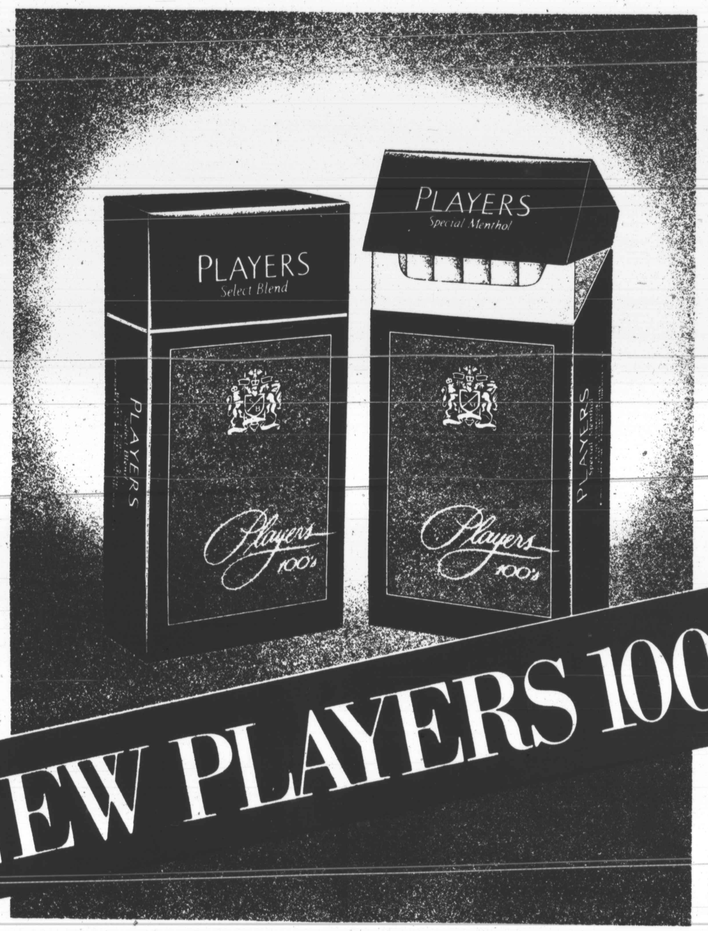
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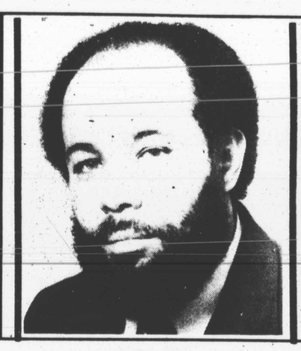
THE CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S RACE



Clarence Du Burns



Mary Pat Clarke



John Clark

By Martin Evans
AFRO Political Writer

When voters arrive at polling places across the city Sept. 13, five names will appear on the ballot for the office of president of city council.

But unlike the options for the regular council seats, in which voters have the luxury of making three choices, only a single candidate may preside over the city's legislature for the next four years.

Fortunately for Baltimore's registered voters' the five contestants, incumbent Clarence Du Burns, second district councilwoman Mary Pat Clarek, Ashburton activist John Clark, former State's Attorney William Swisher, and Debra Freeman, have sufficiently distinct backgrounds and political styles to make choosing from among them as clear a task as, one could hope for in this Mad Hatter's tea party called politics.

In fact, with primary day only a month away, the contest appears to be a toss-up between the two hopefuls with councilmanic experience: Burns and Mrs. Clarke. As incumbents, the two enjoy greater voter recognition than any of the others, with the possible exception of Swisher.

And each of the two occupies the most distinct positions on the ideological spectrum along which the other presidential hopefuls are arrayed.

Mary Pat Clarke

When asked what stands in the way of Burns' quest to succeed himself as leader of the city council, one observer gave a familiar three-word answer.

"Mary Pat Clarke."

How big is that obstacle?

Apparently Clarke, who outpolled Burns in both the '75 and '79 councilmanic elections, will be a formidable one. The two-term city councilwoman has begun to take the gloves off in her criticism of the incumbent president, and has hammered away at Burns's cozy, good-old-boy relationship with mayor William Schaefer.

At an 8 a.m. interview at her E. Preston Street headquarters last weekend the intense former English teacher sipped coffee and smoked cigarettes, struggling to overcome the effects of little sleep and long days of speaking at forums and shaking hands in shopping centers.

But the mention of Burns snapped the councilwoman awake quicker than a Gauloise and a second cup.

"We have an incumbent that on more than one occasion has said he is in the mayor's pocket, and that is it is a good pocket to be in," Clarke said.

"Burns is the mayor's yes-man, "he bespectacled councilwoman said, "a lackey, not a co-worker."

But some, including Burns, say Clarke's strikes at her rival amount to little more than political jealousy, and that her own record is padded with legislative fluff.

"Remember, while the school system was getting worse and worse, she was in the council right along with Du Burns," Ashburton aspirant John Clark said during a recent interview at his Westside home.

Clarke says she will bring changes to council's administration if voters put her in the president's seat. One of her first priorities would be to address the racial disparity in council committee chairmanships.

Currently all of these positions, which play a life or death role in the fate of legislation, are held by whites, a sore point among the council's six black councilperson and much of the city's black majority.

"Committee chairmanships should reflect fairness," the eight-year incumbent said. But Clarke left unanswered the ticklish question of which of the sitting chairpersons would be asked to step aside if all are re-elected.

Clarke's stands on most of the issues facing Baltimore's people cast her as one of the city's most liberal political figures.

Clarke supports stimulating the city's economy by imposing local and minority hiring requirements, and by giving advantages to local contractors.

She favors relaxing renovation standards and streamlining the acquisition process for people seeking to occupy the city's abandoned houses, making them available to individuals capable of borrowing $5,000 to $10,000.

Currently homesteaders must invest between $20,000 and $60,000 and bring structures up to housing code standards within two years to satisfy city requirements.

By re-assigning school administrators to classrooms, class sizes could be reduced without further burdening city taxpayers, the councilwoman says.

And Clarke also favors open Board of Estimates meetings, and public voting at the committee level in city council, changes she says will open government to Baltimore's citizens.

Clarke's decision to join a coalition of the city's black councilpersons, and two white first district city legislators, in voting down the mayor's redistricting plan earlier this year won admiration and respect from many blacks and progressive whites.

Others, however, suggest that with her mind already set on challenging Burns for the president's seat, and realizing she would need black votes to win, her redistricting vote was motivated by her own brand of political opportunism.

Clarke has taken jabs at the other three contestants for the council presidency. Swisher is "a Burns hit man," she says, and is running to repay Burns for his support during last fall's state's attorney race with eventual winner Kurt Schmoke.

She labels Debra Freeman as an exponent of a "bizarre right wing" philosophy, and "a political Moonie."

John Clark, Ms. Clarke says, has his heart in the right place, but does not have the experience to be be city's second officer.

"It's too important a job for amateurs," Clarke says.

Clarence Du Burns

"The only one awake when I get home is the dog," city council president Clarence Du Burns said, rubbing his eyes during an afternoon interview. "I crawl into bed for a few hours and before you know it, it's time to get up, have a cup of coffee, and get back to the campaign."

Long days come in stride for the 64-year-old incumbent. Burns, who was named president by his councilmanic peers on the heels of former president Walter Orlinsky's fall from grace, is the first black to hold the office. "Du," as he is known by friend and foe alike, admits he is as proud of making his mark on history as is a child sporting a new pair of shoes.

A lot of people were asleep when the Eastside native was introduced to politics. Baltimore's blacks were not well organized politically in the 1930's, and were practically powerless in the city. But his father, Clarence, was a lieutenant of black political boss Tom Smith, who bartered black votes for favors from the Democratic party machine, including governor Albert Richie.

"I guess they must have been pretty high up, because a number of politicans came to my house," Burns said, referring to his father and an uncle. "When governor Richie died all of those guys went down the drain."

After being distracted by WW II, Burns returned to East Baltimore politics, founding the precursor of today's Eastside Democratic Organization and backing the elder Tommy D'Alesandro's successful run for the mayor.

In addition to jobs for some of Burns loyalists his netted the budding politician a job in the Dunbar high school locker room

Unglamorous, yes. But some say that over the next 22 years, while Dunbar was pumping out area athletic heroes, Burns was becoming one of the most powerful figures in East Baltimore.

"Ask some of the guys who went there, guys like (Bob) Flakey Wade (Dunbar's current athletic director). Ask them who was more powerful, Burns or the principal," said Daniel Henson, a political observer.

But the incumbent is far from being universally popular in Baltimore.

Since his election to the council in 1971 he has been the target of criticism from the black community that his coalition-style politics amount to a mostly one-way subsidy for white politicians and provides only crumbs to the black community

Burns freely admits to having given away two key council appointments, the chairmanship of the powerful Budget and Finance Committee to appointed council freshman Tim Murphy (D-6th) and his own vacated chairmanship of the Urban Affairs Committee to Don Hammen, in exchange for a clear track to the president's seat.

The deal which left no committee chairmanships in the hands of the city's majority population, drew vitriolic condemnation from much of the black community, which accused him of everything from back-room politicing to unabashed Uncle Tomism.

Ironically, when George Meany did it, when Lyndon Johnson did it, when Richard Daley did it, they were called "hard-nosed" and "cagey." But they were respected.

Burns' avowed closeness to the mayor does nothing to silence his critics, either.

Burns has been accused of toeing the Schaefer administration line by supporting a city development plan which unfairly favors downtown areas over neighborhoods.

And supporting just about everything else the mayor dreams up.

One can see it in the tightness in his lips, the trace of anger in his voice. The criticisms sting, particularly as they get more personal.

Burns sees himself as a man who has done more than talk about black power. He has gone out and gotten things done for his community, even when it meant swallowing hard.

During the interview, when confronted with the criticisms, Burns pulled out a campaign flyer listing development projects which came through Urban Affairs while the committee was under his chairmanship. On it were listed projects which developed parts of each of the city's six districts.

Agitated, he jabbed the list with his index finger as it lay on the desk before him, as if it were the lapel of a non-believer.

"As chairman of the Urban Affairs committee it was my responsibility to get that legislation through and passed. I don't know who has done more," Burns said, his voice a mixture of pride and indignation. "I fought like mad to see that these ideas be put in motion and see if they work. And they did work."

"They say all sorts of bad things about me but nobody attacks me or my record," Burns says, thrusting a last emphatic jab at the flyer.

The list includes a number of neighborhood fixtures. The East Baltimore Medical Plan. The Ashland Mews housing redevelopment project. The Shake and Bake Family Fun Center. The Park Heights Street Academy. The Cherry Hill New Homes Redevelopment Project.

"And I didn't do it by preaching black rhetoric. I did it by making friends and getting the votes.

In fact, Burns is acknowledged as a shrewd parliamentarian even by those who do not subscribe to his style.

"There is nobody better than Du at counting the votes, nobody," said Henson. "Whether that is leadership is another question."

John Clark

John Clark, a relative political outsider, also is in the race for the council presidency.

But, he says, unlike the two perceived frontrunners, incumbent Clarence Du Burns and second district councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke, his disinvolvement with the legislative process is a plus.

His hands are clean, and he owes no political favors. And if politics makes for strange bedfellows, Clark suggests, the two frontrunners are willing to sleep with anyone.

The Westside activist has a background in community politics that is similar to his frontrunning rivals, through not as far along.

Clark, who was president of the Ashburton Neighborhood Association between 1980 and 1982, has appeared before the council to address several issues. In the spring he argued against the awarding of a cable contract to Caltec, a Baltimore County firm, charging that Caltec was evasive on specific terms for minority involvement.

Clark also has called for more independence between the mayor and the president of the city council, and has been sharply critical of the close relationship between Burns and Mayor William Schaefer.

But Clark was an early backer of mayoral candidate William H. Murphy, Jr., and his campaign manager is with the Murphy for Mayor Campaign.

Clark, a bearded psychiatric social worker, will push for many liberal programs.

He has endorsed Murphy's 75 percent local hiring requirement and a 10 percent option which would allow firms to win over over out-of-town firms if they bid within 10 percent of the lowest offer.

He is also a proponent of rent control, and advocates using city trustee money to renovate Baltimore's abandoned housing, and to relocate residents from the city's highrise projects.

The vocal Westsider also said he would bring a more activist role to the city council presidency. Committee chairmanships would be changed immediately, particularly those held by individuals perceived as unresponsive to the black community.

"If I am president of the city council Frank Gallagher and Tim Murphy would not be the chairmen of these committees," Clark said last weekend. Gallagher, from the third district chairs the Judiciary Committee.

Is Clark too combative smooth an efficient interaction between the legislative and executive offices?

"I would be able to work with them," Clark replied. "Whoever is in the council or is the mayor, I will work with them."

But Clark thinks it is time that the city's powerless realize that their destiny is within their own grasp.

"I think it is imperative that black and poor people realize that we are the majority in this city...that black people need not be defensive about standing up and voting for black people. Because that is what other groups have done. And that is not racism."