Jackson does have a chance

The week before Super Tuesday I was walking my way onto the Red Line at Park Street, through all the subway zombies, when a runaway crowd of bony railway workers cleaned in be- hind me. They looked like caricatures of "American Blue Collar Worker!" — big, white, wearing Levis, flannel work-shirts, and corduroy engineer's caps, and loudly jangling among themselves.

As the subway started to roll, I noticed that I was surrounded by these towering macho types. I cringed a bit deeper inside my wool overcoat, nervously think- ing my long hair, red-starred beret, and political buttons might attract their collective wrath.

The biggest of them, who had to crouch to avoid banging his head on the ceiling, looked straight at me, pointed to my jack. "88 piece," he said in a box-rattling baritone, "So you're Jesse Jackson fan, eh?"

"Uh, yeah... I am," I stuttered out, as twenty pairs of blue eyes turned in my direction. Oh shit, I thought, are these guys from South Boston?

The big man raised his massive hand high and smashed my square on the shoulder.

"Well, all right," he shouted, "So what?"

His approval was echoed loudly by his fellow workers. Only then did I notice every one of these guys were a similar Jackson pin on their hats or their coats.

The "redneck" Anarchist Brother scenario of the American blue collar worker shattering before my eyes.

"We've just come from the State House," the big man said, "that Dukakis won't give us the time of day. We've been on strike for months and the only man who gives us a shit is Jesse."

"Yeah," another piped in, "just isn't been with us all the way."

Then another one asked me, almost pleadingly, "So you think he's got a chance?"

Until that moment, I honestly believed that Jesse Jackson didn't have a prayer's chance of break- ing into America's white power elite. But as I looked around the packed subway and saw the ex- tremeness and hope in these men's eyes, I started to believe it was possible.

I thought of the soul that eight years of Reaganism has taken on this nation. I thought of the rapid- ly growing gap between the poor and the rich, the thousands of homeless, the millions of un- employed, the factory shutdowns and the farm closings.

I thought of the many hard- fought battles that were won for civil rights and women's rights in the '60s that were being struck down, one by one, by Reagan's tripe-k-k judges and the Jim Crow laws.

I thought of the millions of Americans who have had a post-Watergate glimpse into the dark corners of society in the base- ment of the White House: the lies, the deceit, the drug deals, the wiretaps, the dirty tricks, the massive programs of domestic spying.

But no, I thought, there is a person of the people. Jesse Jackson fights a fire in the hearts of every audience he plays to.

As Mark Sigel of the Demo- cratic National Committee re- cently said, either Bush or Dukakis will have a strong appeal for Americans who swept "Yes," I said to the carload of railroaders as I stepped on the train, "I think Jesse does have a chance!"

Jackson could make a landslide victory in Michigan, his growing lead in the polls and popular votes over Dukakis, and his consistently strong showing in every primary, are proving that the hopes of those railway workers just might become reality.

Jesse Jackson has the potential to attract millions of the disillu- sioned and disappointed people who make up a large part of the 50 percent who don't traditional- ly vote in this country. The rich, white elite who control the Democratic Party have not had to explain his role in the sup- pression of the civil rights movement, the Civil Rights and civil liberties acts, the farm closeouts.

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