

Real-life Dynamic Duo

By MIKE DAVIDOW

When the Communist Party, at its convention last month, nominated a presidential ticket of Mrs. Charlene Mitchell and Mike Zagarell, the two most dynamic segments of today's popular upsurge were symbolically joined: black America and the youth. And when you see them together, you know that the joining is a happy one. Charlene Mitchell, a 38-year-old black mother, knows Crisis America very well: as a Negro, a woman and a communist. Her knowledge began with her mother, a domestic worker from Tennessee, and her father, a railroad worker from East Point, Georgia, who met and married in Cincinnati, Ohio. Charlene was born there June 8, 1930.

Something happens when you begin to pry open — almost forgotten pages of a person's life. And that something seemed to peel years off Charlene's warm face. It glowed with an extraordinary mixture of sadness and vivacity. Suddenly it struck you: the Communist Party has a beautiful Presidential candidate.

... "We were seven children" she mused, "I was second from the top." The "second from the top" did as much of the "normal thing a black girl brought up in the slums of Chicago's South Side can do. She went through high school including a year graduated from Theodore Herl Junior College.

EARLY POLITICS

At 13 she joined the American League for Peace and Democracy, a forerunner of today's peace movement. At 15 she was a state leader of the American Youth for Democracy, a predecessor

of today's radical youth movement. And at 16 she was in the Communist Party. These were natural steps in the 40's when the Communists were the recognized leaders of not only the Left but of every early battle for black liberation.

The 22 years Charlene spent in the Communist Party included the terrible years of McCarthy (Joe) hysteria and FBI harassment, and the bitter years of internal party struggle.

She smiled as she recalled her first picket line at 4 a.m., worked in the war strike wave in 1946. "I walked the picket line at 4 a.m. I worked in the soup kitchen from 5 to 7 a.m., went to school, came back and walked the line again from 3 to 6 p.m. every day as long as the strike lasted."

"That was the year I met my first coal miner" she said as though speaking of a first love. "We were a delegation, two blacks and two whites, who were to deliver food donations to the striking miners in Southern Illinois. We went into the home of a handsome coal miner who looked like Eugene Dennis (late General Secretary of the Communist Party). It was the first time these white miners had any social contact with Negroes. We had a wonderful time. We danced. We had a ball."

IN LOS ANGELES

Mrs. Mitchell, who lived in Los Angeles, was very active in the black liberation struggle and played a leading role in the organization of one of the earliest Black United Fronts. This arose out of the massive protest that

swept the community with the brutal police killing in 1966 of Leonard Deadwyler, father of five who was slain as he rushed his pregnant wife to a hospital. Charlene was in the soundtrack that led a mass march to Los Angeles' notorious 77th Precinct, the headquarters of a largely white police force that oppressed an overwhelmingly black community.

The Temporary Alliance of Local Organizations that embraced all major black organizations in the community set up a Community Alert Patrol, a forerunner of the kind of black defence organizations formed later by the Black Panthers. Charlene, who is now Field Secretary of the Communist Party Commission on Black Liberation, recently proposed to Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther Minister of Information, and candidate for President of the Peace and Freedom Party, that all black presidential candidates engage in a "friendly debate" on how best to advance the black liberation struggle. She intends to pursue this point and to broach the question to Dick Gregory, the presidential candidate of the Pennsylvania Peace and Freedom Party.

How did she feel about making history as the nation's first black woman to be a candidate for President? She recognizes it as a "tremendous breakthrough" for her people, her sex and her country. At the same time, she seemed a bit awed by it all. After all, she has a son, Steven, 17, who is active in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and a husband, William, a die-cutter. "It's very difficult in this capitalist country just being a woman," she notes.

Mike Zagarell was born Dec. 26, 1944, "two hours after Christmas." "My mother stumbled into the hospital. It was a snowy night," Zagarell said. "His mother was born in this country of Rumanian-Jewish parents. His father came to the U. S. as a youth from Sicily. I remember Joe Zagarell as a leader of the Unemployed Councils in Red Hook, Brooklyn. He had the same fiery sincerity then that his son, the candidate for Vice President, has now.

A graduate from the High School of Music and Art, Mike has held the post of National Youth Director of the Communist Party since he was 19. He married Laura Bilander, Dec. 16, 1966.

How did he feel about those who said the Communist Party was not serious since it nominated a 23-year-old? I asked.

Mike bristled. "First, these age requirements are undemocratic and should be abolished. My candidacy is a dramatic challenge to this age barrier, which is based on the outmoded concept that the young should be seen but not heard. The young people in our country, black and white, who are in the forefront of the fight for peace and freedom, have demonstrated their maturity." His voice was heavy with passion. "War brings suffering to all people but it brings death to the young. Unemployment means hardship to the entire black community but it is disaster to the black youth.

Charlene Mitchell was smiling. It was at once a warm tribute and a nostalgic recognition.

Yes, Charlene and Mike go well together.

ADDITION TO LIST OF SWP LOCAL CANDIDATES:

MICHIGAN: Evelyn Sell and Ellen Robinson for State Board of
Education
Evelyn Kirsch and Joseph Sanders for Wayne State
University Board of Governors
Helen Schiff for University of Michigan Regent
George Bouse for Michigan State University Trustee
James Griffin for Congress (17th district)
Frank Lovell for Congress (12th district)
Henry Austin for Congress (16th district)
Sarah Lovell for Congress (18th district)
Robert Fink for County Sheriff
Edith Gbur for County Clerk
Ed D'Angelo for County Auditor