

## WHAT IS THE PEACE AND FREEDOM PARTY AND WHERE IS IT GOING?

For the first time in twenty years, a serious break from the two capitalist parties has become objectively possible. While such a break might take a number of different forms, the most significant attempt to form such a movement thus far has been the Peace and Freedom Party, with its principal base in California.

While many Peace and Freedom members regard their organization as a general left-wing opposition to the major parties, this is not the case. The Peace and Freedom Party is basically a liberal-radical anti-war coalition. The two positions for its formation were immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Viet Nam and support for the black liberation movement. Of these two positions, only the first was operational, partly because the phrase "black liberation" is rather vague and doesn't commit one to any specific goal, but primarily because the overwhelming number of P&F supporters come from the anti-war movement and have no ties to the black ghetto struggles. Whatever illusions P&F supporters may have that the party can be a permanent left-wing alternative to the major parties, it was and remains simply an anti-war coalition. Only opposition to the war (and a desire to pick up members) --certainly not agreement on the character of future American society-- unites such disparate elements as the Maoist Progressive Labor Party and the vehemently anti-communist Independent Socialist Clubs in the same party.

### Democrats Fill their own Vacuum

The Peace and Freedom Party owes its existence as a sizeable organization to the temporary vacuum created when the liberal Democratic leaders failed to respond to the increasingly desperate opposition of middle-class liberals. Shortly after the formation of the P&FP, this vacuum began to fill. McCarthy's surprising showing in New Hampshire and Kennedy's consequent entry into the presidential race raised the serious possibility of a liberal anti-war candidate running in one of the major parties. The vacuum was completely filled when Johnson pulled out of the race and took serious steps to negotiate the end of the war. While the demand for immediate withdrawal is still absolutely correct and necessary, by the time the presidential campaign gets under way, the U.S. and North Vietnamese will be deep in negotiations, the fighting may have de-escalated and the withdrawal question will have lost most of its emotional impact.

Last October, when nobody questioned Johnson's renomination, and the end of the war seemed about as imminent as the second coming of Christ, the SPARTACIST wrote, "The anti-war movement has no future except as a force to building a party of revolutionary change." Since the war is now being ended by the Johnson administration, this contention has become obvious. However, the Peace and Freedom Party has hardly responded to the events of the past few months, and its general political program remains indistinguishable from the liberal social-democrats.

Many socialists joined the Peace and Freedom Party with the idea of getting it to adopt a socialist program and working-class perspectives. This was particularly true in New York which, unlike California, lacks both a large active reform Democratic movement, and a cohesive non-socialist campus radical movement, and where the P&FP is very much a coalition of supposed socialists. In fact, this lack of an "independent" base has resulted in the Party's total domination by the Independent Socialist Club and the Progressive Labor Party and in predictable deep factional hostility, since there are hardly two organizations on the left that have more contempt for each other--the one regarding Maoism as the epitome of a totalitarian, anti-working-class ideology, that is on balance worse than liberal capitalism; and the other regarding China as a workers' paradise and all critics of Mao as "State Department socialists." Thus the New York P&FP is wracked by a continual series of internal struggles over organizational questions, since both the ISC and PLP know that any attempt to develop a shared political program would expose the New York P&FP for the sham it is.

## The California Convention

Whatever hopes socialists might have had about changing the character of the Peace & Freedom Party, these illusions were squelched by the recent California founding conference. From the inception of P&FP through its founding conference, Spartacist members in California P&FP fought for a socialist program and working-class orientation. At the conference, the Labor Party caucus, in which Spartacist members participated, proposed that the conference adopt a socialist program and seek to build a mass party of the American working class. Despite significant support for this position, the conference voted it down. A particularly devious and contemptible role at the conference was played by the Independent Socialist Clubs. A few days before the conference, responding to pressure from the left, they proclaimed in their journal that P&FP should "make as its own major pre-occupation...the program of labor political action--for a LABOR BASED PARTY NOW." /Independent Socialist, No. 4, April 1968, page 11.7 Yet at the conference, ISC was the principal organizational opponent of the labor party position and voted against the Labor Party Caucus resolution. ISC also pushed through a resolution condemning both American imperialism and "Communist imperialism." The alleged existence of Soviet "imperialism" is, after all, the principal rationale of the Cold War, and ISC's peculiar attitude toward the Communist bloc is certainly unrepresentative of the California P&FP, as well as being positively antagonistic to the majority of the New York party. The conference also nominated Paul Jacobs for U.S. senator. Jacobs was a man hired to purge the Reds out of the AFofL in the '40's. Although he has since apologized for this, his nomination shows a lack of concern for the devastating effect liberal anti-communism has had on the American left and again indicates the disproportionate influence that refugees from the CIA-financed Socialist Party have in the California P&FP.

Given the overwhelming organizational predominance of the California party, the NY party cannot adopt positions radically different from those of the California conference. Thus, socialists in the P&FP are now faced with the choice of abandoning a socialist alternative this election and supporting P&FP on a deliberately vague program while perhaps trying to win people in P&FP individually to a socialist perspective or transcending P&FP to develop a new political form for the elections.

### McCarthy-Kennedy

It was obvious that Peace and Freedom had neither the programmatic distinctiveness nor social cohesiveness to survive past election day, With the McCarthy-Kennedy campaign, it becomes questionable whether P&FP can even survive to the elections. Because of the liberal premises underlying P&FP's program it has had a difficult time countering McCarthy's campaign. P&FP has countered McCarthy and Kennedy not with programmatic alternatives, but by digging up old quotations, exposing their illiberal voting record, demonstrating the inconsistencies in their current positions--in other words, by arguing that McCarthy and Kennedy are hypocritical, opportunist and can't be trusted. While these points are correct and should be stated, this is totally inadequate political opposition. To begin with, this type of argument is limited to politically sophisticated people who have some knowledge of the history of the Democratic Party. Second, and more important, by focusing on the contradictions of the liberal Democrat's "liberalism" one implies that if Kennedy and McCarthy were only consistent liberals, then they should be supported, thus reinforcing liberalism as the dominant ideology of American politics. These inconsistencies are not the result of Kennedy or McCarthy's personal opportunism, but reflect the oppressive nature of class society as such, which forces all capitalist politicians to support the suppression of the masses at one time or another.

The differences between P&FP and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party are rhetorical rather than programmatic. However, liberals are quite capable of using radical phraseology when they feel the audience warrants it. Thus, in a recent speech at Indiana University, McCarthy denounced American "colonialism" as practiced on the ghetto Black people and called for the firing of J. Edgar Hoover. And Kennedy, or even Humphrey, can use the same kind of language. Apart from the demobilization of U.S. military presence abroad, there is no non-socialist

radical demand that can't be adopted, at least verbally, by liberal Democrats. Important as the latter issue is, it is hardly an adequate base for building a mass party. There is no "third camp" between liberal reformism and socialism!

#### A Radical Party or a Working-Class Party?

As everyone knows, socially, the American left is middle-class and particularly concentrated in the academic community, and among bohemians and college-educated white-collar workers. In rejecting the demand that the P&FP seek to transform itself into the representative party of American labor, the P&FP conference demonstrated no particular concern over its composition or any sense of urgency in developing organic working-class support. It is clear that P&FP members will seek to expand their influence among "their own kind."

It is tragically ironic that, since its inception, the New Left has spent much of its intellectual energy arguing that the American working class is satisfied with liberal reformism, while, during the same period, the far right has been building a working-class base, largely on the discontent caused by the failure of liberal reformism. The New Left has been so enthralled by the upsurge of radicalism on the campus that they have failed to see it as part of the general disintegration of American society, which is paralleled by working-class political activity on the right and, paradoxically, by an upsurge in union militancy. The unsuccessful Viet Nam War and consequent destruction of the President's "credibility" accelerated this disintegration. That is why, for the first time in twenty years, serious third party movements have developed on both the left and the right.

#### Right-Wing Populism

What is important to realize about the upsurge of working-class right-wing radicalism is that it is strongly motivated by economic discontent. The fact that the right is viewed as opponents of high taxes, as against the liberals and the left, means that most seriously discontented workers regard the right (seen as the main opponents of the status quo) as the defenders of their living standards. Even the much touted white-backlash is not simply irrational color prejudice, but results from exaggerated, but not completely unfounded, fear that civil rights reform will come at the expense of the living standards of the white workers, in form of increased competition for jobs from presently unemployed black workers, higher taxes to pay for ghetto uplift programs, and incursions on limited public services, such as education. To the extent that the Left is identified with the liberal ruling establishment, and particularly with the administrative bureaucracy of the welfare state, which is closely tied to the academic community, it will be a target of working-class hostility to the existing character of American society.

Most radicals haven't paid much attention to the Wallace campaign, regarding it as a predictable manifestation of the far right. This neglect is unfortunate. Apart from the race issue, the Wallace campaign is based on a kind of pseudo-populism, in which the sorry state of American society is blamed on Harvard-educated millionaire politicians and their "egghead" advisors, who are completely alienated from the life of the "common man." It is again tragically ironic that the Wallace campaign will have a far greater undertone of lower class resentment than that of Peace and Freedom, with the latter's heavy aura of academic rationalism. To most workers P&FP will not seem qualitatively different from the McCarthy movement--perhaps more consistent and idealistic. This view is hardly surprising, since P&FP has primarily oriented itself to winning over McCarthy's campus followers, with whom P&F members feel a social, as well as political, identity.

In this period of international and domestic disintegration of American political authority, working-class identification of the Left with the left wing of the liberal ruling class is literally suicidal, both for the Left and for the working class which they hope to represent. If American politics continues to polarize into a leftish cultured middle class and a right-wing working class, the incident at Whitehall, when fifty dockers attacked student anti-war demonstrators,

will be a small portent of things to come. If it is not understood that this attack wasn't motivated by immutable jingoism, but reflected a perverted sense of class resentment that the Left must deal with, then, in Isaac Deutscher's words to the Socialist Scholars Conference, "you will be lost."

Defenders of Peace and Freedom will argue there is no obstacle to its developing a mass working-class base, citing its statement of principles that it seeks to represent workers and its correct trade union planks. To begin with, the statement about workers is more a verbal concession to the Old Left than an operational principle of the party, as the California convention showed. As previously, P&FP sees its principal recruits coming, not from working people, but from McCarthy's student supporters (with lip service to "organizing the poor"), and operates accordingly. Moreover, style is important in politics, and often undermines formal programmatic positions. Can anyone see a disgruntled industrial worker being drawn to an organization whose symbol is a pastel-colored dove, even though he might agree with its trade union positions, taken in isolation?!

Peace and Freedom Party's contention that it desires to become a mass-based party is given the lie by its support for draft resistance, an example of pacifist protest politics, sui generis. Most socialists in P&FP know that draft resistance is not only ineffectual but that it creates a tangible barrier between working-class draftees and the student radicals; they are unwilling to make an issue of it for fear of driving away the numerically significant hippy-resistance element in the movement.

A political organization is not just an aggregation of written positions but a social organism with a certain style of existence. A political party cannot equally represent hippies and trade union militants. To the extent the Peace and Freedom Party desires to be the broadest possible coalition of existing anti-war elements, it must make concessions to academic liberalism and bohemian radicalism that make it virtually impossible to develop any working-class base.

For A Labor-Socialist Ticket in '68!

In this election year of tremendous discontent among broad sections of the population and widespread disrespect for traditional political authority, the American left can do far better than trying to consolidate the existing anti-war forces around an ultra-liberal program. The Spartacist League continues to advocate that anti-war radicals, black militants, trade unionists, and socialist organizations seek to organize a Labor-Socialist ticket in the coming election. Although no organizational basis exists, at this time, for a labor party, a strong movement of this type would generate some support from left-wing unionists. A campaign along these lines would be an excellent vehicle for radicals of all stripes to project clear alternatives to the Democratic Party's liberal line. Of equal importance, by focussing on the class character of American society, this campaign would break through the idealistic mode of American politics, in which conservatism, liberalism and socialism are presented simply as alternative solutions to universal "social problems." It would enable radicals to link their demands and ideas to the fight against the oppression and powerlessness which all workers--even presently reactionary ones--suffer,

New York District Spartacist League 25 May 1968

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