

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
September 19, 1975

TO ALL ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached for your information are reports describing the recent conventions of the People's Party and the Socialist Party USA.

Comradely,

Doug Jenness

Doug Jenness
SWP National Office

Report on People's Party Convention

by Cindy Burke

This is a report on the People's Party national convention which took place in St. Louis, Missouri, at the University of Missouri from August 25 through 31. The purpose of this convention was to discuss program and nominate candidates for the '76 national elections.

The maximum attendance at the convention was about 75 people. The majority were males; two Blacks and one Asian were in attendance and the age of participants ranged from 25-30 with a few older and younger.

Other organizations with observers present were CoDEL, the Congress of Afrikan People, the National Interim Committee for a Mass Party of the People (NIC), the New American Movement, the Socialist Workers Party, and the St. Louis Student Coalition Against Racism. A representative of the Socialist Party participated as a voting delegate.

The 1972 convention of the People's Party that nominated Benjamin Spock and Julius Hobson was attended by 200 or more delegates while only 40-45 participated this year. Spock himself attended the entire convention but did not play any role in the plenary discussions.

The People's Party is composed of local affiliated parties such as the Michigan Human Rights Party, a wing of the California Peace and Freedom Party, and others. The majority of the participants at the convention were from the Washington D.C. Resource Center or national office of the party, from Michigan, or from California. The party puts out a paper each month called Grass Roots which covers the activities of local parties. The party claims to have elected 10 candidates to local offices in city councils around the country since its inception. The People's Party has permanent ballot status in four states: California, Hawaii, Vermont, and Michigan.

Discussion on program went on for six days. Although the party has declared to be a socialist party there is no formal position or agreement on how socialism will come about. Most of the discussion was highly abstract and with one exception no action proposals were adopted aside from running in local election campaigns. The convention did approve a motion to support and publicly advertise the upcoming conference of the National Student Coalition Against Racism. This motion was close to unanimous. However, the discussion on other points revealed that the party has no significant base outside of its own membership and no concrete plans for the upcoming election campaign.

Under discussion of the program the question of busing came up and a representative of CAP addressed the convention urging the participants to come out against busing in Boston.

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The other major opponent of busing was a Black member of the Northern California Peace and Freedom Party who attended the founding conference of NSCAR and participated in the disruption there. The convention finally approved a resolution approving the right of Black self-defense in cases of 'forced busing'. No such cases were mentioned.

The presidential ticket was nominated at the end of the convention. Previous to the convention the People's Party had been involved with NIC, NAM, and the SPUSA about a joint ticket. These discussions broke down. Convention participants attacked NIC and Baraka, claiming that Baraka was unprincipled and would compromise socialist principles to win support. They also characterized CAP as sexist and criticized it. Representatives of CAP and NIC came to each other's defense and denied the allegations.

On the nominations: prior to the convention and during the program discussions the People's Party Search Committee contacted various prominent individuals about running on a PP ticket. Some of these were: Anne Braden, Kate Millett, Dave McReynolds, and Jonathon Kozol. All refused. Anne Braden suggested that Angela Davis be contacted. The convention split 50/50 on whether to approach her. There was great hostility to Davis and participants hissed when her name was mentioned. The idea of contacting her was dropped. The search committee discussed and rejected Camejo and Reid. The final nominees are: Margaret Wright, a Black 'community organizer' from Los Angeles for president, who is about 50 years of age, and Maggie Kuhn, 70 year old Grey Panther activist, for vice-president. These candidates are provisional. At the People's Party convention later this year these candidates will be evaluated and may be replaced, depending on future events.

CoDEL participated as a result of Spock's intervention. The People's Party is a longtime endorser of CoDEL and members were friendly. CoDEL convened a workshop on the campaign 'reform' law which was sparsely attended.

There was a Pathfinder literature table and campaign literature as well as Militants and Young Socialists on hand. There was negligible interest in these. However, most convention participants were friendly and willing to engage in discussions. Although there was not any sentiment in favor of nominating Camejo and Reid, the convention did invite Peter Camejo, who attended the second half of the convention, to address them for 10 minutes. He was very enthusiastically received. In general the People's Party was gratified by the collaborative and friendly approach taken to them by the Socialist Workers campaign representatives and expressed a desire for further collaboration.

Report on the National Convention of the
Socialist Party USA

by Pam Burchett and Bob Schwarz

Two years ago, following the split of the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation, some former members of that group, based around the group in Milwaukee and dissidents in a few other parts of the country, decided to reorganize themselves into the Socialist Party USA since they disagreed with both the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee led by Harrington and the more conservative Social Democrats USA. They had a national convention in Milwaukee last year, and this year held one again in Milwaukee Aug. 30-Sept. 1. It was attended by about 50 alternates and delegates and a few observers, including two people from the Committee to Defend Soviet Political Prisoners who set up a table, and several people from a Marxist study group in Chicago associated in some way with IS. A reporter from the Milwaukee Journal was present on Saturday, which resulted in a big article in the Sunday Journal. They also got local TV news coverage.

An attempt was made to exclude us, as well as the table from the Marxist study group, but both exclusions were voted down.

The convention opened with the reading of greetings from the French SP, Swedish SDP, Labor Party of Ireland, SP of Malta, and Dave McReynolds. Greetings were later received from a New Democratic Party member of the Winnipeg city council, but not, apparently, from the NDP itself. No greetings were received from Germany or Portugal.

There were area reports from 13 locals: Colorado, Washington D.C., South Florida (Ft. Lauderdale), Illinois, Indiana, Brooklyn NY, Manhattan NY, Cleveland, Milwaukee County, South-Central Wisconsin (Madison area), Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Virginia. Membership in each local seemed to range from 10 in Cleveland to 22 in Virginia. Most reported slow activity with some involvement in farmworker support work, Portugal support work, and electoral activity around their own campaigns, mostly write-in. Also reported was support to the D.C. Statehood Party and the Peace and Freedom Party in California. Electoral activity on any serious scale seems confined to Virginia and Wisconsin. Most groups carry out some educational activity, put out newsletters, and a few hold modest and irregular public forums.

Virginia and Wisconsin seem to be the most viable areas. Wisconsin claims it will have members this fall on 8 campuses and Virginia, less than 1 year old, has 22 members (many of them re-activated older drop-outs), 20 sympathizers, and a mailing list of 300. The Virginia delegates were young, and along with the D.C. group seem to be adapting somewhat to the "new mass vanguard" phenomenon. The base of the Virginia group appears to be at William and Mary, and the central person, Lee Hubert, is on the local board of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The SP claims a membership of 550 and 21 locals, but according to the Treasurer's report they received dues ranging from \$1-5 (\$7 for couples) from 238. These are yearly dues. Last year's total income was \$10,000 -- \$3,000 from dues and \$7,000 from contributions, probably much of that from old sympathizers in Milwaukee and rural Wisconsin. Expenses were \$6,000 in salary, \$1500 for printing, \$1500 for postage and \$500 for phone and \$500 miscellaneous. They have only one full-time officer, the National Secretary.

Quite a few resolutions were submitted, quite similar to the barrage of paper at an antiwar conference, but only a few were discussed or acted upon. Much of the discussion centered on resolutions on Stalinism or "left totalitarianism," which includes anyone who speaks at all favorably of Lenin. In discussion on this question the extremely right-wing, anticommunist bent of many of the older members came through. The word "commie" was even used a couple of times.

There was considerable discussion around whether or not it is ever correct to work with "totalitarians". Delegates from Los Angeles and New York were especially insistent that they be allowed to work with the CP. No one indicated they wanted to work with the SWP, but the danger of allowing new, young members to do so without somehow "insulating" them was obviously on one member's mind when he referred to the demise of the Tennessee group of the SP, apparently partly under our influence.

There was some discussion on the labor resolution, mostly around a paragraph on the question of discriminatory layoffs. A certain amount of political discussion began around this but it was fairly quickly stifled. Oddly enough, Frank Zeidler, former mayor of Milwaukee and generally very conservative, expressed sympathy with the antidiscriminatory layoff position, but clearly did not want to press it. No position was very clear on this point.

Discussion on electoral activity took place over several days, generally around its use for education, building the party, and cooperation with "other democratic forces" (People's Party and NAM). Several younger delegates opposed electoral activity, from a "new left" anarchist position, and one said the present "degenerated" state of the SP was due to electoral activity. There was some concern, from older delegates, that defaulting on elections left the field open to the SWP and the SLP. There was no mention of the CP in this connection.

After much discussion there was finally a decision to write a national election platform and nominate a presidential ticket, though there was an undercurrent of support for "provisional candidates" who might withdraw in favor of the People's Party. They chose Frank Zeidler as their presidential candidate and Quinn Brisben, a teacher from Chicago.

In the discussion on ballot status there was mention of the Committee on Democratic Election Laws (CoDEL) as an ally in

ballot fights and some, but not much, interest, in getting involved in such fights, from older members. In general, the older members are interested in this, but the younger ones are either against all electoral activity, or for only "grassroots" campaigns that can get big votes. It is an extension of the attitude indicated by their lack of a national newspaper (though they talked of one) and proliferation of poorly put together and generally useless newsletters.

The last day was spent discussing inconsequential aspects of their draft platform. It virtually ignores desegregation and when this was raised under education the person was told to wait until they got to the section on human rights. But then they never discussed that section. In general, the question of racism, desegregation and the struggle of national minorities was totally absent from the convention.

Most of the serious members are old-time conservative social democrats, new-left intellectual types, or new-left anarchist types. We met one person who we took to our bookstore and sold a book, and probably convinced him to work with the SWP when he gets back to Athens, Ohio.

The organization exists primarily because of Frank Zeidler and Bill Hart, an old-time socialist candidate who lives on a farm near Madison. They have a few people around them in Milwaukee and Madison, and to a limited extent they are a force in Wisconsin.

Our role consisted of talking with a few people, selling a Militant subscription to one person who sort of wandered in, and talking with the person from Athens.