

FOR NC INFORMATION:

The Peace and Freedom Party and the '48 Wallace Movement

In the course of the present discussion designed to formulate a policy, approach and tactic towards the P&FP of Calif. some comrades have sought to develop the analogy between this formation and that of the '48 Independent Progressive Party of Calif. as a guideline source to follow. This is a valid method and we have some rich sources to study.

I am a bit disturbed by some confusion that has been injected into the discussion relating to our motivations and actions in '48. At that time I was the organizer of the Oakland branch and the delegate to the founding convention of the IPP from my steel union and as a participant in that tactic I would like to clarify some of the points and issues involved. I feel that such clarification can serve to demonstrate how wrong some comrades are today when they project the possibility of affiliating in any manner or form with this petty bourg. capitalist formation in order to "get to the ranks" with our line.

There were two outstanding factors motivating our tactical approach towards the IPP in '48:

1 -- The existence of a current within the labor movement then calling for the launching of a Labor Party; this current in many ways representing an extension onto the political scene of the '46-47 strike wave and our agitational activity.

2 -- The fact that in contrast to the general pattern unfolding in other areas of the country, the IPP Calif. was launched here by a significant section of the then existing labor movement, the section predominantly under CP control and influence. The movement was launched by the ILWU, CIO Councils of San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa and Los Angeles and supported by UE, FTA, ACA, Fur Workers, MC&S, Steel locals, UAW locals, etc. throughout the state. They constituted the original base. This lent a "labor" character to a movement that was rapidly chugging along the path to becoming a distorted expression of capitalist politics.

We were under no illusions as to the eventual course of this third capitalist party but within the context of its initial labor support our presence in the labor movement we sought to counterpose our line for an independent labor party, focusing towards the militants and we had a perspective of splitting from the outfit when it met in state convention to officially adopt the candidate and program the CP had already foisted on it. Four of our comrades attended that convention in SF and we all were delegates from our separate unions. We represented Longshore, MC&S, Steel and Electricians. Our major activity was conducted prior to the convention. We had been very active in our unions presenting our concept of a labor party and counterposing it to that advocated by the Stalinists and liberals. The convention itself was an anti-climax; we issued a statement at the very beginning castigating the Wallace movement for what it was and withdrew; to launch our own presidential campaign.

The passage of time substantiated our position. In a sense, it was not a new experience for us, for we had already had the opportunity of going through the experience of the Oakland Voters League, a formation thrown up by the labor movement here as an outcome of the '47 Oakland General Strike.

We had given critical support to the OVL; for that matter, it was in a sense an outgrowth of a resolution we had introduced into the Central Labor Council calling for labor's independent entry into politics. This somewhat distorted "local labor party" formation was rapidly transformed into an effectual liberal caricature by a coalition of the labor fakers and their CP allies and it eventually disappeared back into the capitalist swamp.

The labor fakers here were a bit scared by the OVL experience in the same way they were scared by the general strike and Truman scared them further with his Marshall Plan and the unfolding witch hunt. The proposal to launch the IPP was then bitterly opposed by them, but the CP, in control of a significant section of the labor movement threw all its cards onto the table and went for broke.

That was the decisive factor influencing and determining our tactical approach. We had the opportunity at union meetings and in the shops to get close to many militants and we attempted to influence them with our labor party line as counterposed to that advocated by the CP.

We did not advocate this tactic in order to get close to the petty bourg. many of whom were already attracted to the Wallace Crusade and committed to a course designed to water down and destroy this initial labor character of the movement.

We energetically participated in the discussion within the unions and we went to the '48 IPP "Founding Convention" as delegates from unions where we had introduced resolutions for an Independent Labor Party and we returned from the convention and reported back to the unions on the sellout the CP had pulled off. That constituted the extent of our tactic of participation in the IPP then. It is possible that in other areas we also participated in the emerging neighborhood clubs along the same lines, but that was peripheral to the main course.

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The P&FP must be regarded as a mini-IPP, but totally devoid of any TU base or support and with an essential thrust and program designed to identify it in many ways with its illustrious predecessor. Its liberal quest for "Peace" within the framework of capitalist politics, its absence of any class character and essentially reformist orientation frosted with radical phraseology can at the best accord it the description of being a mini-ghost that won't even get to enjoy a funeral.

The logical question to raise is: If the IPP with all its labor support and tie in with a national movement couldn't succeed then, then what lies ahead for this movement today whose only achievement of note in Chicago was the claim that they drove the Catering Manager nuts ... this movement whose pitch is even on a lesser level than the IPP's when they urge people to register and then re-register Democratic Party. The IPP, by virtue of its mass base in the CP unions was assured a position on the ballot and they submitted over 500,000 signatures. The P&FP, with baited breath, hopefully awaits a favorable court decision that at the best could grant an extension of time to achieve a pre-destined failure. They are attempting to parlay a civil-liberties struggle into a finished political program which they hope to smuggle in after some judge hopefully rules in their favor.

Admittedly, our tactic in '48 was a somewhat delicate and complex one, for that matter the development of principled differences in our party elsewhere in the country on the analysis of the character of the Wallace movement served to blunt the edge here and our tactic was in some ways premature. We, in a sense, were attempting to spread out in mop-ups before the main battle had been won. We intensified our withdrawal perspective, made our pitch at the IPP State Convention and withdrew. Although it was understood by many militants and politicians who we were and who we represented, we were functioning as officially credited delegates from our unions, and at no time was it otherwise.

In light of this, how should we attempt to influence the people interested in or going to the forthcoming P&FP convention? Excluding the possibility of our just busting in and demanding the mike, there are only two conceivable courses open to us:

- 1 -- That we go as registered P&FPers.
- 2 -- We go as partisans of Halstead/Boutelle and set up massive distributions and sales, seeking to break in in this manner.

The first course implies that we register in a party we regard as a transient and somewhat demagogic expression of petty bourgeois capitalist politics and the only justification for this is that it "legitimizes" our presence on the floor and opens access to the mike. That of course is too large a price to pay, for it serves to further muddy already heavily sedimentized waters and lend credence to the fallacious theories already around as to the "socialist" character of this movement. By pursuing such a tactic, we would in effect outmaneuver ourselves and in effect be supporting the thesis that the important thing is to get this "party" on the ballot; program and class character notwithstanding. In addition we would make a poor impression on those who have worked hard for this organization; we would emerge as outside critics who were not around when there was work to be done. That was not the case in '48, for then we were regarded as individuals who in effect had brought the support of their unions into this movement at an early stage, and we did speak with a little more authority.

We can reach those people who will attend the convention ... if it takes place. We can reach them now, in the antiwar movement, in the general movement of student unrest, in a limited section of the labor movement and through our growing forums, meetings, periphery and influence. We can reach them now and if necessary outside the convention with our Socialist Antiwar Campaign. That is a very powerful weapon and can well be used.

At the same time, we can take advantage of their isolation from the labor movement and where we are able to , step up our propaganda there for independent labor class politics.

To proceed so would be to correctly draw lessons and conclusions from '48.

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Dec. 27, 1967