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The Peace and Freedom Party

Introduction

The development of a small new electoral party in California, the Peace and Freedom Party, poses a new tactical problem for our Party.

The PFP has developed into a "movement" project supported by all radical tendencies and circles except ourselves. The PFP plans to hold a founding convention in February of 1968. Therefore, it is essential that we develop a precise analysis and clear tactical approach toward the PFP as soon as possible.

[out] The following analysis and proposed tactical approach is being submitted to the Party NCers in California and to the Political Committee in order to initiate whatever discussion will be necessary to arrive at a decision.

CLASS ANALYSIS

1. Origins

The PFP originated out of, and is a continuation of, the Committee (or Community) for New Politics (CNP). Basically it is the same phenomena in a new form. Our previous discussion and analysis of the CNP holds in essence for the PFP. Here we will emphasize what is new rather than repeat our analysis of the CNP.

The CNP first turned to the proposed King-Spock ticket in its search for an alternative in '68. In support of that perspective, the CNP began working towards establishing a place on the ballot for King-Spock through a new party. After the Chicago conference the CNP circles were disoriented and demoralized, and it appeared as though the PFP would die.

However, the Draperites (Independent Socialist Club) and some left independents decided to continue to build a PFP by trying to register 66,000 people under "Peace and Freedom". Gradually their effort began to gather momentum and at present involves a large number of anti-war activists. Although it is hard to ascertain an accurate figure, the PFP claims as of mid-December 40,000 registered voters. By California law they would have to finish their registration drive by January 2, 1968. The PFP has begun legal action to win an extension so that they can continue to petition.

[out] The growth of the PFP in terms of registered voters and active participants has forced all socialist tendencies to clarify their position towards the PFP. The CP, more interested in the CDC (California Democratic (Party) Council), has been an unenthusiastic supporter and participant in the PFP. The SP, except for an occasional individual, has remained aloof, generally treating the PFP in the same manner that it treats the pro-immediate withdrawal anti-war movement.

The ISC (Draperites) has been the most enthusiastic supporter of the PFP. Recently the Spartacist declared their support for the PFP. PL is also actively participating and building the PFP. No tendency except ourselves has opposed the new party.

2. Composition

The composition of the PFP remains the same as that of the CNP. It is based on students, middle class liberals and the reformist socialist tendencies. There is no union or Afro-American base whatsoever.

The ~~40,000~~ people who have registered in PFP are primarily liberal Democrats. Registration in PFP in no way need imply separation from the Democratic Party. After January 2, PFPers can re-register Democrat, and participate in Democratic primaries. This would not effect the ballot status of the PFP. PFP literature explicitly explains how to do this.

However, a substantial number of student activists who do the leg work of the PFP believe they are "breaking" with the Democratic Party.

3. Program

As yet, theoretically, the PFP does not have a program except for two positions; 1. Immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, 2. Support for Black Power. PFP leaders explain that a program will be adopted at their founding convention in February, 1968.

Actually the PFP has an implicit program which is the same as the previous programs of the CNP. Their basic programmatic stance is that candidates who oppose the war and support various liberal reforms are needed to replace the pro-war conservative representatives in the government. The PFP outlook is simply an extension of the individualism which is typical of middle-class milieus. Nowhere and at no time do the PFPers see politics as a consequence of classes. In all the literature calling for the PFP the emphasis is on the need for an alternative candidate in 1968.

The only reason ever given for rejection of the Democratic and Republican Parties is that neither can be expected to run "good" candidates. There is a general tendency to argue against the lesser-evil theory. However, the PFP supporters as a whole can be expected to go for what ever is available in the way of "Peace" candidates in or out of the Democratic Party regardless of verbal commitments to the contrary.

The PFP leadership in arguing, at this time, against McCarthy's candidacy present two key points. First McCarthy is not necessarily a positive good because of his limited opposition to the war. Secondly (and more crucially) McCarthy cannot possibly win. Therefore, they argue, there would be no alternatives after the Democratic Party convention.

While the above implicit program clearly establishes the petty bourgeois class basis of PFP's programmatic outlook, its leadership is anxious to avoid projecting an explicit program. They are anxious to attract as many supporters as possible around the single issue of the war. In effect they are trying to build a single-issue political party. Therefore all programmatic statements remain strictly within the context of the common-place views of American liberalism. Questions which would split this milieu are carefully avoided.

The present surface unity created by agreement on the single issue of the war will come under stress when the PFP begins to act, choose candidates and run in elections.

ATTITUDE OF THE PARTY TOWARDS PFP

1. As a matter of principle we cannot give the PFP support. There is neither a change in composition nor in program from the CNP which in the past we unanimously agreed cannot be supported.

2. Like the CNP, but even more so, we recognize that the motivation for most independent participants in the PFP is their desire to oppose the war in Vietnam. Precisely because of this we must take a friendly attitude towards the PFPers and an explanatory tone in expressing our views. Our over-all tactical approach stems from the inclusion of the PFP and its activists within the broad outlines of the anti-war movement, of which we as revolutionary socialists are also participants. That is, the essence of our approach to them is as fellow anti-war activists who disagree with PFP and counter-pose a class analysis and a socialist perspective.

3. There are three concrete steps we should take. First we need to have our position prepared in written form. (see note at end of report). We need a pamphlet which can be handed to PFPers explaining our criticisms. This is especially true because there is no quick answer we can give an anti-war activist. The reason for this is quite simple. Our position on the PFP cannot be deduced from the one programmatic point we have in common with the young activist in the PFP - our mutual opposition to the war in Vietnam. To explain our position, one has to raise the question of classes, the class nature of our society.

The second step we can take is to prepare as strong an intervention in the PFP convention as possible. Our intervention should be similiar in most respects to the intervention at the NCNP conference. We should not seek to present motions, vote, or in anyway be "part" of the PFP. Such an orientation should help to dispel accusations of disruption. We will probably be able to participate in workshops and possibly speak at the plenary session about our national campaign. Our intervention should include a massive Merit display, lots of campaign literature and campaign contact work.

The third concrete step we can take is to have campaign trail blazers go to the outlying chapters of the PFP and talk to them prior to the convention. It is our understanding that one such group, the Sonoma PFP, favors supporting Halstead and Boutelle in '68.

4. Several comrades have raised the possibility of making an entry into the PFP, aiming at a split at their convention. Both in the Bay Area and in Los Angeles, comrades who raised this possibility have done so as preliminary thoughts. Several different kinds of entries have been projected.

The first question we must ask ourselves is whether any entry would violate principle, whether a principled question is involved. In itself the formal act of joining a new political formation, even one which we expect to be nothing more than a new front of bourgeois politics does not necessarily constitute a violation of principle. This is true where multi-class forces are involved in a fluid situation.

Our entry into the Progressive Party in 1948 in California prior to its founding convention was atleast a questionable strategy. We knew that only a bourgeois party could result. However our formula of withdrawing at the convention if a labor party did not materialize was atleast plausible outside the Party because of C.I.O. participation. The present PFP doesnot have any union participation.

In the specific case before us we must note the following two factors. (1.) No section of the working class or Negro people is participating in an effort to achieve independent politics. (2.) We cannot honestly project the possibility of a final outcome which we could, on principle, support.

In the present context there is no way we could make an entry without violating principle, that is, giving support to a bourgeois political formation, or appearing totally ridiculous. That is, the only principled public position we could take upon entering PFP is to urge others to quit it. The net result would be to outsmart ourselves.

The main danger we face in trying to develop a tactical approach to the PFP is to trap ourselves in a complicated manuever. Abything except a straight forward presentation of our views as a Party can end up confusing independents at a minimum and at worst mis-orienting our own comrades.

Therefore we should reject any entry, ultamatums, unity proposals, etc.

PERSPECTIVE

Although,as in the past, we face isolation on the question of electoral politics, we can be quite optimistic that developments will quickly aid us in 1968. The possible growth of the McCarthy campaign, the localized basis of the PFP, and our nation-wide socialist campaign among other factors can alter the present context. Therefore, the more rapid and dynamic we are in getting our views to PFPers now, the greater will be our gains later.

(A 20 to 25 page pamphlet is already in process. We are editing a speech by myself on "Socialists and the '68 Election" which explains our attitude towards PFP. Hopefully it will be ready by January 1 st.)

Submitted by Peter Camejo
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