

What's Happening to People's Voice

By Doxie Wilkerson

(Conclusion)

What the new accommodating role of **The People's Voice** entails for the Negro freedom struggle is revealed by **PV's** attitude toward the vital consumer movement now emerging in Harlem.

Several Negro consumer groups are waging a militant campaign against the excessively high prices which many 125th St. merchants charge for goods of inferior quality. Their program includes public meetings, price-watchers in stores, delegations to offending merchants, and picket-line demonstrations; and they have the support of most Harlem newspapers, social agencies, sororities, labor groups and church organizations, including the influential Baptist Ministers Conference of Greater New York.

Just as the offending merchants were beginning to squirm under this organized consumer pressure during the pre-Christmas shopping season. **The People's Voice** came forward to their rescue. In the same issue which carries the new "Statement of Policy," **PV** published a full-column editorial entitled, "Let's Use Reason." It cautions strongly against the use of picket-lines, and urges leaders of the consumer movement to call off their militant struggle and to put their trust in peaceful negotiations with (of all things!) the Uptown Chamber of Commerce, which has long been notorious as chief spokesman for the real estate and big business interests which prey upon the Harlem community.

There was a time when **The People's Voice** would have been in the very forefront of this militant consumer movement, fighting hard to protect the people of Harlem against the special exploitation to which they have long been subjected by many of the shops along 125th St.

But the **VP** of today assumes a different role. It kow-tows disgustingly to the price-gougers, in an obvious bid for advertising favors.

Many long-time friends of **PV** have recently asked the question: "What's happening to **The People's Voice**?" Here is their answer:

The People's Voice is being transformed from the crusading people's paper it used to be into a spineless commercial sheet which plays down or ignores the main political issues of this period, and seeks to bolster its seriously declining circulation through constant resort to the vulgar sensationalism of the Hearst press; which carries favor of the exploit-

ers of the Negro people, and makes repeated overtures to political reaction.

THE PATH AHEAD

During the period ahead, **The People's Voice** may still try to wear as a mask the reputation inherited from its progress past; but so long as its current policy is maintained, the newspaper will be forced to move closer and closer toward the camp of the main enemies of democracy in America. This perspective is inherent in the logic of **PV's** present course of development and its increasingly grave financial difficulties.

The People's Voice never was a money-making enterprise, either in fact, or until recently, in avowed purpose. Indeed, as is true with so many non-commercial agencies primarily devoted to struggle for the people's cause, **PV** generally ran a deficit.

The change in editorial policy which was effected last summer—and which was accompanied by extensive changes in editorial personnel—was apparently dictated in large part by the publishers' determination to make the newspaper a "successful business enterprise." It was thought that **PV's** circulation and advertising income could be substantially increased through a policy of giving much less attention to political issues, emphasizing sensational crime and scandal news, and avoiding editorial conflicts with conservative groups of influence in the community. As is charac-

teristic of the commercial press generally, **PV's** editorial policy was to be subordinated to what was considered "good business."

But this new policy has not paid off as was expected. Very many liberal and progressive readers who used to buy **The People's Voice** because it was "different" have now become disgusted with what they term "another scandal sheet," and have withdrawn their support. Moreover, the changed policy has not sufficed to build a new base among readers who do go in for sordid sensationalism, but whose needs along this line are already well supplied by other publications.

Thus, **The People's Voice** is faced with an increasingly grave financial problem, which threatens its very existence. In this situation the newspaper has but few alternatives:

1. **PV** could try to rebuild its shattered reputation along genuinely progressive lines, reorienting to the fighting people's paper it started out to be—for which there is still need, and which could be developed into a self-supporting enterprise. But it is clear that the newspaper's policy-makers would now reject any such proposal.

2. **PV** might try, without any real change in its new orientation, to trade upon its progressive past as a basis for continued financial assistance from the labor-progressive friends of the Negro freedom movement. But attempts along

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WORLD AT ITS WORST

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this line have already failed; and they will continue to fail, because it is all too evident that the newspaper's primary interest is becoming something other than the democratic struggle of the Negro people and their allies.

3. **PV** might persist along its present path, still hoping thereby to become a "successful business." But the market for this type of newspaper is already glutted. There is little or no chance that the publication can now be built into a profit-making enterprise on this basis.

4. **PV** might—indeed, will be forced—to seek financial aid from those covert reactionary enemies of the Negro people who are the open red-baiting foes of the labor-progressive movement generally. Along this line, as **PV's** publishers have probably already had occasion to learn, there lie very real opportunities. In this period of aggressive imperialist reaction, especially with a national election in the offing, there is big money available for a Negro newspaper which is willing to play ball with certain forces which, to say the least, have never distinguished themselves as true friends of the Negro people.

Thus, if **The People's Voice** continues along its present course of development, it will have to align itself more and more with precisely those reactionary forces which the **PV** of old used to fight. There is no other solution for its grave financial problem.

It follows, of course, that in return for necessary and continuing financial subsidies, **The People's Voice** will have to perform a service for its new allies; and the nature of that service is already becoming apparent. **PV** will become increasingly an instrument which seeks to disrupt militant and progressive movement among the Negro people, and to sever the growing alliance between the Negro freedom movement and the broader labor-progressive movement against imperialist reaction and war. This, unfortunately, is the path which now seems to lie ahead for **The People's Voice**.