

SPARTACIST-WEST

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PFP AT THE CROSSROADS

Five weeks of Peace and Freedom neighborhood group meetings have now passed by and one dominant fact emerges: there has been no serious and organized discussion to determine at the state convention the political character and long-range objectives of the Peace and Freedom Party. All that has been published and distributed in Alameda County to this date is a bare listing of platform planks, without any political analysis directing itself to the decisive question of whether the PFP is to orient towards the reform of capitalism or whether it is to adopt the long-term perspective of working class revolution and the socialist transformation of American society.

All of this means, of course, that, unless there is a struggle by significant forces at the convention, the nature of the Peace and Freedom Party is predetermined and the PFP will shortly and unmistakably surface at the state convention as a reformist, third capitalist party. To be sure it will have a series of platform planks more radical than the two major capitalist parties, but the PFP will do nothing to educate the American people on the capitalist character of war, racism and economic exploitation.

OPPOSITION CAUCUS

In the Bay Area the only organized forces putting forth an alternative working class or socialist perspective have been the Labor Party Caucus in Oakland and Berkeley and the Labor Committee in San Francisco. But they have not

been able to stop the drift of the PFP towards becoming a third capitalist party. Why has the PFP come to this dead-end of middle-class protest politics?

It is sad to have to ask this question at a time of rising class struggle such as this. The current rash of militant strikes and growth of rank-and-file ferment in the unions are just the beginning of bitter struggles that lie ahead. We are approaching an historic confrontation between the American working class and the capitalist owners of industry which will raise the need and open the possibility for the working class to take state power into its own hands.

ATTACKS

The American capitalist class is preparing in Vietnam for a military assault on the workers states, with China first on the list, and with more direct political importance for us it is putting together an all-out attack on the working class, its standard of living and its combat organizations, the trade unions. These attacks come in the form of strikebreaking such as at the Hearst Herald-Examiner in Los Angeles, heightened attempts to divide the workers against each other along racial lines, and demands for anti-strike legislation and compulsory arbitration. The only alternative for workers is to transform their economic struggles into political struggles and to combat racism with rank-and-file demands for the common interests of black and white workers, as exemplified by the militant civil rights caucuses now forming in some

THE ROAD TO PEACE AND FREEDOM LIES THRU

unions. The only answer to increasing government intervention against the trade unions—conducted by "friend of labor" Democrats—is independent political struggle by the working class, such as around the demand for a Labor Party.

MIDDLE-CLASS REFORMISM

What is sad is that now when the working class needs a transitional program for political struggle which will lead it towards socialist revolution, the Peace and Freedom Party comes forth as a vast umbrella-type arena of middle class confusion and reformist politics. Student-derived and arising out of middle class protest politics (marches, demonstrations, "resistance," etc.). The PFP now has the choice of either becoming a vehicle towards building a working class opposition to the capitalist system or else becoming a barrier to working class politics and misleading militants who want to fight for a serious alternative. And we repeat: only a serious struggle at the state convention can prevent the present crystallization of the PFP into a middle-class reformist party.

PAST LESSONS

The fundamental lesson of all past American radical history, including the Populist movement and the Wallace campaign in 1948, is that the Democratic Party, the primary political instrument of the capitalist class, cannot be captured from within, and, even more important, it cannot be smashed without opposing the capitalist system as a whole. Third party movements which only break with the Democratic Party and not with capitalism invariably are reduced to impotence and get sucked back into the Democratic Party. The PFP would do well to analyze the failure of the Populist movement and the Progressive Party.

The failure of past third party movements is that they did not base themselves on the fundamental class divisions of American society. For nearly

a century American political life has revolved around class struggle between the capitalist owners of industry and the working class, primarily the production, transportation and distribution workers who today comprise a force of roughly twenty-seven million, and who, located in the key sections of modern capitalism, confront in daily struggle the giants of U.S. imperialism: General Electric, Ford, General Motors, U.S. Steel, DuPont, etc. In times of relative equilibrium of the capitalist system the intermediary layers of society (between the capitalists and the workers) orient towards the ruling class and its political parties while in a period of social crisis

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fe has and upheaval they will move towards the organized working class if it carries on a political struggle against the entire oppressive system. These middle-class layers cannot provide the basis for their own independent political struggle.

WHICH CLASS?

Thus the PFP has no future unless it can orient towards the gigantic American industrial working class, which, when it enters the political arena with its own party will pose the question of which class is to rule society. The PFP must find its way from middle-class protest politics to class struggle, working class power and a Marxist analysis

of capitalism.

Of all the organized socialist groups active in the PFP, it is the Independent Socialist Club (ISC) which bears the major responsibility for the abysmal dead-end the PFP is approaching. Active in the formation of the PFP and a significant part of the present leadership, the ISC came out with its perspective for the PFP on March 6, that is, only ten days before the state convention. Prior to this the ISC not only did not put forward a working-class-socialist orientation for the PFP, but also attempted to block this orientation where it has been presented. In December, in the interest of catering to the "level of consciousness" in the PFP, ISC members voted against a Labor Party perspective for the PFP labor committee. So heavily engaged in PFP organizational work, the ISC conveniently "forgot" to attend the meetings of the Labor Party caucus. Again, in February, the ISC blocked a Labor Party perspective for the labor committee, bowing to the argument of Bob Avakian: "I of course agree with this perspective but it is too early to advance it . . . Middle-class intellectuals can't go to workers and tell them to form a labor party."

ISC: MAKING THE RECORD?

The Independent Socialist Club has now produced a position for the PFP. Good. But several important questions have to be asked. Is the ISC going to struggle seriously for its position in the remaining local meetings and at the state convention, or will this position paper merely serve the purpose of "making the record" with an apparent working-class perspective and thus serve as a cover for its highly opportunist course? ISC members have only a few days to make this choice.

The second question is even more serious. In its "Proposed Platform Plank on Labor," is the ISC really calling for the PFP to orient towards building a mass labor party with a program of class opposition to the capitalist sys-



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tem? Or is it calling for a working-class base for a reformist, third capitalist party which has pro-labor planks in its platform? There is a world of difference between these two proposals. The ISC says, "The Peace and Freedom Party looks toward the creation of a new Mass party based on the white working class and the black community as a necessary first step toward any real solution to the many-sided crisis of American society today." This key formulation is vague, and is open to a reformist interpretation. It can be contrasted to the proposal of the Labor Party Caucus and the San Francisco Labor Committee: "Work toward the creation of a national workers' party. The PFP advocates the creation of a national political party of the rank-and-file to represent the interests of the working class . . . The object of such a party, which may be called a Workers' Party or a Labor Party, must be to lay the foundations of a new society in which production and distribution will be for use instead of for profit."

CENTRAL ORIENTATION

Entitled "Against the Capitalist System; For Workers Control of Society and Production!" the Labor Party Caucus proposal is clear, definitive, and presented as the central strategic orientation for the PFP, while ISC's proposal is put forward as a "Platform Plank on Labor," which could conceivably be incorporated into an essentially reformist program. ISC members must decide whether they are serious about building a labor party or whether the ISC proposal merely stands as a formal statement resulting from pressure from the left, and as a cover helping the PFP crystalize as a third capitalist party. If the decision is made for a serious struggle for a PFP Labor Party orientation, then there can be no conceivable

objection to a joint statement and joint struggle at the state convention by a coalition of the ISC, the S. F. Labor Committee, the Alameda County Labor Party Caucus and other possible allies. Otherwise it will become clear that the ISC proposal was made in order to undercut the serious struggle for a working class political orientation. The ISC now has the choice of taking a principled Marxist position for class opposition to the capitalist system, or continuing its present course of building an essentially pro-capitalist Peace and Freedom Party.

"THIRD CAMP" HISTORY

Historically, social-democratic politics betrayed the Marxist working-class movement in World War I and in the bloody crushing of the German Revolution of 1918-19. Along with Stalinism, it has been the major barrier in this century to proletarian revolution in Japan, Western Europe and the United States. The Independent Socialist Club has not at all broken with this long record of betrayal and opportunism, however "left" it presents itself in relation to the official social-democratic Socialist Party-Young Peoples Socialist League.

The basis of the ISC's departure from genuine Marxism is its "Third Camp" position, which refuses to defend the Soviet, East European and Chinese workers states against imperialism, in spite of the bureaucratic regimes which disfigure them. While the Socialist Party gives critical support to imperialist policy in Vietnam, the ISC looks for a non-existent "third force," and declares its neutrality in the struggle between the NLF and imperialism. While the Socialist Party gives critical support to the Democratic Party, the ISC gives a left cover to the middle-class reformism of the PFP. "Left" social-democratic politics can be an even more dangerous barrier to proletarian revolution precisely because of its "left" verbiage.

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