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For NC Information:

Report From Seattle on Washington Peace and Freedom Party

National Context

Coalition politics has been subjected to severe strains in the past year. The deepening and increasingly more organized antiwar sentiment, the Black Power development, and the militancy just beginning to be manifested in the labor movement have all contributed to this process.

In line with our belief that the straightjacket of capitalist politics is the biggest single obstacle to a real offensive against the rulers of this country, we have done everything possible to accelerate its disintegration. The successful fight for the "immediate withdrawal" demand in the antiwar movement, led by our party, was a signal victory in this effort.

Having lost the first round, the coalitionist tendencies in the antiwar movement have not yet given up the fight. And they have in their favor the lack of massive working class independent political action. Liberal capitalist politics is still a strong pole of attraction.

On the other hand the anti-coalitionist thrust of the antiwar movement continues to grow stronger, even manifesting itself within the peripheries and ranks of the coalitionist tendencies. This helps to explain, for example, the decision of the CP to run Aptheker as an independent candidate in New York. The decision of the recent Conference on New Politics meeting in Los Angeles to urge people not to vote for Brown is another indication among many that lesser evil politics has taken severe blows.

As a result of these developments coalition politics in the form of pure and simple support to the Democratic Party is becoming more difficult to peddle. More and more activists in the antiwar movement and in the struggle for Negro equality are becoming convinced that the Democratic Party is not a vehicle for social progress. The CP and other conscious coalitionists have therefore been forced into a position of trying to "roll with the punch." On the electoral arena they have in some areas gone along with the creation of campaigns outside the formal framework of the Democratic Party so long as these campaigns did not constitute a definitive break with capitalist politics. Such is the case with the Peace and Freedom Party in Seattle.

Background

The idea of an independent antiwar election campaign was first raised last May by Frank Krasnowski in the Seattle Committee to End the War in Vietnam. (Krasnowski is presently organizer of the Freedom Socialist Party, formerly the Kirk group in the SWP.) At the same SCEWV meeting a leading Stalinist proposed that the SCEWV sponsor a public symposium for the purpose of discussing the question of what the antiwar movement should do in the November elections. This proposal was adopted with the enthusiastic support of the Kirkites.

The symposium was held in July. About 100 people attended, very few youth. Frank Krasnowski and Rev. Robert Shaw, chairman of FOR in Seattle, projected the idea of an independent antiwar campaign. Krasnowski correctly explained the class character of the Democratic Party and pointed out the need for a new political party based on and acting in the interests of the working class and Negro people. As an initial step toward this goal he called on the antiwar movement in Seattle to run independent candidates in the fall election based on the single issue of opposition to the war in Vietnam.

Rev. Shaw also called for such a campaign. But he stipulated that independent candidates should be nominated only in districts where the Democratic Party had failed to put up any peace candidates. Neither in the discussion that followed nor in his summary did Krasnowski take up this point to explain the difference between a campaign solely oriented toward pressuring the liberal capitalist politicians and one which constitutes a definitive break with coalition politics.

At the close of the symposium Shaw announced a planning meeting for those interested in organizing a peace campaign.

We did not attend this meeting but what came out of it was a small "organizing committee" and a decision to hold another meeting following the August 6 Peace Arch Rally in Blaine, Washington. This organizing committee consisted of Shaw and a couple of pacifist friends, the Stalinist who had proposed the public symposium, Krasnowski, and one or two National Guardian types. This group was apparently to be the nucleus for the "regroupment" the Kirkites have been talking about.

A leaflet was distributed at the Blaine rally calling for the formation of a third "peace party" and announcing an organization meeting to be held August 20th.

The August 20th meeting was attended by about 50 people and chaired by the Stalinist referred to previously. The composition of this meeting was similar to that of the organizing committee with the addition of two observers from the SWP.

In a brief discussion of program the Kirkites present failed to even mention in passing the need for the new party to present a socialist alternative. Instead they restricted themselves to calling for a nebulous declaration of independence from the Democratic Party. Even this mild, "non-sectarian" stand evoked almost total opposition from their regroupment allies. But in order to avoid losing the support of the Kirkites at this point a motion was passed to leave the question of program open for further discussion. It was clear that the CP had things very much under control and that the Kirkites had maneuvered themselves into a trap.

Before the meeting adjourned a decision, with the Kirkites concurring, was made to go ahead and establish a "Peace and Freedom Party." A convention committee was elected which included two or three Kirkites and was charged with the responsibility of organizing the convention and electing a subcommittee to draft a platform for final approval by the convention.

Nominating Convention

The nominating convention was held on primary day, September 20th. It was attended by 400-500 people of which 276 had given up their right to vote in the primary by signing nomination forms. (The minimum required by Washington law is 100.) The composition of this meeting was similar to that of the August 20th meeting. Jo Patrick, an ex-party member and ex-CPer told Tom that the overwhelming majority of those present were old progressives, many of whom she hadn't seen in years.

Several skirmishes occurred at the convention. The most politically significant of these occurred when the convention broke up into Congressional district caucuses to nominate candidates.

In the first Congressional district a peace candidate by the name of Alice Franklyn Bryant was contesting for the Democratic Party nomination and stood a good chance of winning. Naturally the CP wanted to insure that no Peace and Freedom candidate ran against her. Others in the caucus wanted a candidate nominated who would run only if Bryant lost the primary. The Kirkites favored nominating and running a candidate whether Bryant won or not. The decision finally reached after much heated discussion and parliamentary maneuvering was to nominate a pacifist named Irwin Hoganauer, with the understanding that if Bryant won in the Democratic primary he would withdraw. The CP, of course, was very happy with this "compromise" but the Kirkites were not. In the plenary session that followed they objected; but in the vote of the convention as a whole they were the only ones to vote against it.

The other skirmishes at the convention involved the proposed platform and simply confirmed the right-wing coalitionist orientation of the big majority of those present. For example, an amendment calling for support to SNCC and CORE was soundly defeated.

The platform discussion did reveal one significant thing: even if the amendments offered up by the Kirkites had been adopted verbatim the character of the Peace and Freedom Party would have been the same albeit with a bit more left over.

It might also be pointed out that the Kirkites signed the nominating forms prior to both the platform discussion and nominations. One of their youth told me they wanted the Peace and Freedom Party on the ballot regardless of what happened.

The other candidates nominated by the convention were Rev. Shaw, a man named Patterson from Bellingham, and Henry Carlton from Tacoma. The latter two were undoubtedly Stalinists from their background and what they said at the convention. Carlton ran in the Democratic Party primary and said he'd been a Democrat for 30 years.

Post Convention Developments

Alice Franklyn Bryant won in the Democratic Primary and Hogauer withdrew as agreed. He is now Shaw's campaign manager. Carlton was knocked off the ballot because he had been a candidate in the Democratic primary. We have received no information about the Patterson campaign in Bellingham.

The Shaw campaign here in Seattle has been an unimpressive affair so far. There seems to be little support for the campaign on the University of Washington campus although a couple of students in the campus antiwar committee have suggested that the committee lend its support. There is little enthusiasm even among those formally supporting the campaign. The Seattle CEWV has not formally endorsed the campaign. They did hold a "Koffee Klatch" for Shaw last Friday evening to which two people came.

Shaw's campaign brochure was issued about two weeks ago. It has not yet been distributed widely.

The Kirkites have not to our knowledge issued a formal statement on their position vis a vis the Peace and Freedom campaign although Krasnowski has told us privately that they "of course" are not supporting it.

Conclusion

As can be seen by the decisions reached at the September 20th convention and the public platform, the Peace and Freedom Party fails to meet the basic criteria which would allow us to give it critical support. It not only fails to raise the need for a socialist alternative but even studiously avoids mention of the word. It represents no independent working class or Negro movement breaking with capitalist politics. It is instead a coalition of radicals and pacifists with a petty bourgeois reform platform who delude themselves into thinking their action can force some concessions from liberal capitalist politicians.

We did not intervene in this development except to observe it. Our forces were extremely small and the vast majority of those involved were old tired radicals and little was to be gained by our participation. In retrospect, it would have been good if we had at the beginning made the record as to our stand on independent political action. We have done this with our contacts whenever it was raised.

The Seattle Branch is preparing a formal statement explaining our reasons for not giving critical support to Shaw's campaign.

Jon Britton

(Report Approved by the
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