

SECOND JOINT BAY AREA BRANCH DISCUSSION  
ON BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Meeting of July 21, 1968

DISCUSSION CONTRIBUTED BY SWP AND YSA NC MEMBERS

Paul Montauk (Oakland-Berkeley Party NC)

I have formulated a point of view in my own mind. I would just briefly like to address myself to this particular point. After I passed the note to the chairman and began making notes on why I feel there should be no separation between the national Cleaver candidacy and the local BPP-PFP ones, Comrade Bob [Himmel] did a fairly adequate job of illustrating the contradiction that was explicit in the position of just endorsing local candidacies. I would like to just touch on a few other aspects of that and extend it a little further.

How do you go about separating the Cleaver candidacy from the Seale candidacy? One logically leads to, is related to, is connected to the other. I just can't understand. Do you base the position upon the fact that, according to some information we have, Cleaver's candidacy evolved in one manner; Seale's evolved in a different manner. And that's a presumption at the very best. They are both recognized, referred to, understood as, are accepted and function as leaders of one and the same party. True, stylistically at times there is a difference. In the past period, Cleaver has tended to emerge more. Cleaver is more of a literary figure. But basically and eventually, considering our concept of the tactic of critical support, these are not decisive factors in determining our approach to that.

Quite a ways back, I was of the opinion that we should extend critical support to the local BPP candidacies. When I was back East and heard at the plenum that Cleaver had announced his candidacy for President, my immediate reaction was, oh, my goodness, they're now coming into our presidential campaign, which is our own private property which we have to treasure and put up on a wall and handle with extreme care to make sure that nobody harms us. And we have to re-evaluate our attitude toward their local campaigns, because we don't want to give up this one big, beautiful thing we have which is our presidential campaign. And Pete [Camejo] sent me a note back and said, well, what's wrong with supporting and endorsing Cleaver. And my reaction was instinctively sectarian. Why, it's going to harm us. It'll harm our campaign. It might even cut down on our votes. That's about the essence of it.

Since then, I've had a number of opportunities to think the question over, And the BPP itself has helped me along. I want to take the brief amount of time available to touch on two things which I feel Bob in his presentation notably ignored. They're very vital points to ignore. It's very easy to pluck something that somebody says in a piece of paper in writing and say, "Is this what you're supporting?" I would venture to say that if we took that

particular method, Bob, can you conceive of how we ever would have critically endorsed Aptheker?

It's one thing to go on the basis of form and another to take the real movement as it exists, as it lives, and as it relates in life itself. And that particular method was tragically absent in Bob's whole characterization of the PFP which he presented as one thing, one body with one program, one leader, one logic. I can't conceive of such a formal approach. This one thing with one body, one thrust and one logic disappeared two weeks ago in Berkeley and we had the ranks [at the time of the Berkeley Telegraph Ave. fight].

The PFP has to be analyzed the way we analyze any other class phenomenon -- in terms of its class consciousness, in terms of its different strata, in what direction they are moving, what is impelling them. We had at that time, and to a certain extent we still have, the ball in the leadership over the decisive sector of the PFP which is the militant, radical youth who constitute its real force. I'm not talking about the nutty professors. I'm not talking about the Los Angeles machine. We had them and we're going to hold onto them and keep a good portion of them if we continue along the course we began when we first had this discussion. This reached a very high level in the Berkeley events and I hope will reach a higher level.

What's happened to the BPP? Lenin had the formula: take all the bread they can give you but don't give them any principles. And he took their train and he went across Germany. He took anything he could get from them, but he didn't give them the principles. Unfortunately, it seems that Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver haven't read Lenin and they were making deals. There's no question. We have nothing to hide, nothing to conceal. Unfortunate deals even to the extent that Cleaver gets up and nominates [Paul Jacobs] which provoked innumerable discussions in our own ranks. It's terrible and wrong.

But what has happened since then? We wanted to approach the question of critical support and some comrades, correctly so, said wait, things are changing, moving so fast that this thing could become quite different in a month or two. We had that discussion two or three months ago. And, boy, they were right. Things have changed very fast.

At that time, three months ago there was a PFP up here and a BPP down here. Since then, it has changed considerably. The PFP has lost its independent cadre, if they had any. And when you talk about the PFP, comrades, talk about the ISC [Independent Socialist Club - Draperites], talk about the political tendencies that function in it. Comrade Carl [Frank] referred to PL. Over there, we refer to Jack Weinberg and his mob who, as soon as they get somebody, talk to them about Cannonism and how terrible the Soviet

Union is. Talk about these tendencies and what they represent. Understand it not as one monolithic being, but as a transient current that's going to pass away. Nobody disagrees with that. But analyze it in those terms.

Two comrades who are very responsible and not inclined, like me, to exaggerate -- have given detailed descriptions of the BPP and the court house scene. Five hundred Panthers. They built an organization around the place. They have come up with a secondary leadership. I have two of them in my class. These people are running that party. Seale and Cleaver weren't even around.

When we are talking about independent black political action, what is it? Can somebody draw a picture on the board what it means? It's like refusing to enter into a marriage before you're convinced that it's absolutely perfect. And when somebody reaches that stage and has that ability, they ought to let us all know.

This is a current towards independent black political action. It is distorted, but what else? There's a period of fifteen years where we were groping around for a labor party formation. I remember Comrades Bob [Chester] and Anne [Chester] and I were in favor of endorsing that mutated, distorted, confused, peculiar Oakland Voters League. We considered it to be an incipient labor party. No organization had come into being based upon the working class, controlled by the working class with a democratic structure, a program, everything else that met all the requirements that could classically be viewed as the perfect labor party.

And that is not going to be the case, either, in the independent black political struggle. This is about as close as it's come nationally, and it has come very close. And it is moving further in that direction. No doubt Cleaver is going to become the PFP nominee. And don't function on the premise of the opposite or any other variant. They need him now. They need him so badly that they'll put him on salary to make him their nominee. But that still does not affect our basic attitude towards the Panthers as differentiated from the PFP.

Comrade Bob [Himmel] made an exaggerated elaboration of something we advocated. You know, you sort of take a position of an opponent and draw it to a ridiculous conclusion and argue against that conclusion. Maybe I do the same. I hope not. We want to make it clear why we run in election campaigns. I made a proposal to Carl [Frank] a few days ago. When Fred Halstead comes to town, wouldn't it be beautiful to have Fred speak at his rally going off to Saigon with Eldridge Cleaver next to him? Both of them going. A black and white presidential candidate representing the black independent struggle, political action, and the socialist tendency of this country going on that trip in fraternity and in comradeship, symbolically representing what we want to achieve.

Does it sound ridiculous? I don't think so. I would venture to say that if it sounds ridiculous to comrades, maybe if you examine what we've done in the past you'll see a lot of other things that sounded equally ridiculous.

My position is that we cannot justify politically, rationally, in any way separating the Cleaver presidential candidacy and the three local candidacies. They are one and the same things. My motion is to extend critical support to all four.

Jim Kendrick (San Francisco Youth NC)

I support the motion for critical support to the candidacies of Kathleen Cleaver, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. I do not support Paul Montauk's motion that we should extend critical support at this time to the campaign of Eldridge Cleaver if he's nominated. On formal grounds, he's not even nominated yet. We haven't had a chance to look at what the content of that campaign is going to be. Some comrades say it will have a definite character from the beginning; others say it will change and evolve.

First of all, I have to differ with Bob Davis and with Nat [Weinstein] on the composition, the class character, of the BPP. I'd like to ask them what class do the sons and daughters of black workers come from? Middle class, big bourgeoisie, or don't they have a class? They come from the working class.

Just because the composition of the BPP is not black trade unionists, which seems to be a tremendously weighty factor here, does that say automatically that the thrust of this movement is not in opposition to the capitalist state? No. They're not lumpen because they're not employed and haven't had a chance to go to work. I don't see the logic of that. They're working class kids. They don't happen to work in a factory. Of course, there are certain things that flow from that. I would agree with the point made by Nat on that.

On Bob [Himmel's] presentation. I think that Bob looks at this phenomenon and these BPP candidacies in a total social and political vacuum, in an extremely formal manner not taking into context its essence.

First of all, I don't see when we determine the thrust of a movement or an election campaign by what its formal spokesmen say. I don't think that's the necessary or prime determining criteria. No more than we determine the thrust of the civil rights movement by the verbiage of Martin Luther King. That said zero about the civil rights movement. Just as, in certain instances, the statements by Cleaver, Newton and Seale say nothing about the BPP, nothing about the thrust of the black movement which is filling their organization with members. And it can go beyond them if they don't move with that thrust.

That's one of Cleaver's problems if he runs as the candidate of the PFP. He's got to stake his reputation of being a black leader on his association with people like Tom Hayden and Bob Avakian. How is this going to be viewed by the people in Newark, by SNCC, by the Panthers in Seattle? In what way is he going to accommodate himself to this kind of politics?

Bob [Himmel] makes the point that the electoral coalition between BPP and PFP has shown a distinct trend away from independence on the part of the BPP. He doesn't substantiate that at all. No evidence was put forward to that effect and I would like to see concrete examples of a move away from the daily independent activity by the BPP as a result of this coalition.

I think Sunday and Monday, July 14 and 15, illustrate the opposite characteristic on the part of the BPP. Some 300 to 500 members of the BPP showed up there, very well organized, obviously as entirely separate organization. Apparently they'd done this without even consulting with what was going on with the whites. I don't know what happened in Berkeley on the building of those two things, but it looks like they just showed up expecting the whites to be there. You know, you guys take care of your own. Cleaver sent out his letter and got the motion going among the whites and they showed up and the BPP mobilized itself. They were the ones dominant at that demonstration.

Bob [Himmel] seems to see the central feature of these candidacies as the BPP-PFP coalition. The coalition, the formal side of it, is the essence of the phenomenon. He totally ignores the very important step forward here in the direction of independent black political action. Even the opponents of giving critical support have to admit that there's a touch of it there at least. I figure it's a lot more than a touch.

On the question of Cleaver's PFP campaign. I don't think that the PFP is going to pick up steam again unless the big bourgeois parties fail to encompass the antiwar sentiment in their election campaigns with a peace candidate. If that happens, if there's a Nixon-Humphrey ticket and the antiwar sentiment in this country has no way of registering itself in the elections, that's going to add to the thrust to break out of the Democratic Party.

It could be said that Cleaver's candidacy for the PFP, in the context of such a move away from the Democratic Party, would tend to drive his campaign to the right, build up steam for the PFP and so forth. That's true to a certain extent. All those liberals who registered PFP and who subsequently switched over to the Kennedy-McCarthy campaigns would find themselves in a position of having no candidate to vote for and would be searching around.

Is Cleaver going to be their candidate? What's Cleaver going to say -- I'm for integration in the ghetto? No, that's not what

he's going to say. He's going to say what a black leader from the BPP is going to say and they're not going to go along with that. He cannot be the candidate of that layer.

I think, as a matter of fact, that the bourgeois candidates will do a much better job of taking care of the sentiment which cannot register itself within the Democratic or Republican parties. They'll do a much better job than the PFP can do. If PFP wants to do a better job, they'll go for somebody like Spock who's a little more palatable to the liberal layer and explain it to the radicals in that sense. "Well, we gotta have somebody they can support; that's why we're doing this."

On the point that Andrea brought out of pressure on our movement to support these candidates and the question of third partyism seeping into our ranks that's been injected into the discussion. I'm exaggerating the way it was put here. These comrades see the essence of the BPP campaign as a PFP campaign -- as Tom Kerry says quite incorrectly, a move by the BPP to win concessions from the big bourgeois parties by using the PFP to pressure them. (Earlier in the discussion, Andrea Davis had quoted from Tom Kerry's remarks on the BPP and PFP printed in the PC minutes No. 8, Feb. 1, 1968.) I think Tom Kerry is dead wrong on that point. That's not why they're in that coalition. These comrades naturally want to accuse the proponents of critical support of slipping into third partyism, being subjected to pressures from the PFP, and so on.

What I think is wrong with this point is that the proponents of Bob Himmel's motion just simply and totally ignore the vacuum of leadership in the ghetto, the fact that it has to be filled and that the BPP is moving in a very rapid direction of filling that. I think Monday's illustration of their success at that is the indication that they're going to be doing it. The show of their membership is a very impressive fact. That means they've accomplished something.

Those kids, in my opinion, are not lumpen, either. They may be subjected to, as Nat Weinstein put it in the last discussion, extreme alienation. They hate everybody. They want to destroy anything in their path, including us because we're nothing but whites. They have no hesitations, as Pete Camejo once put it, about destroying bourgeois property. They just burn it down and tear it up. It's tremendous hatred of society. And that may be their central feature. But those people can be educated. They're in an organization and that organization can accomplish political goals and objectives.

I just want to say that there seems to be a difference in estimation of the BPP here that still exists in the discussion, and a different feel for what's going to happen politically. I get the impression that the comrades think that the BPP is going to be sucked up in some social democratic move if a shift takes place by the voters away from the Democratic and Republican parties and there is

no candidate they can vote for. Tell me how black nationalists who up to this point have hated whites, refused to cooperate with them, are going to be sucked into that. I don't understand that.

What drives them into independent political action is not a desire to collaborate with whites. It's the only way out for them. They understand now that they have to fight on the political arena, raise the question of governmental power. That's the only thing it can mean for blacks as a whole.

Paul McKnight (San Francisco Youth NC)

The origins, composition, and the nature of both the PFP and the BPP are entirely different. PFP arose around the 1968 elections because the liberals were unsatisfied because they were going to get Humphrey or Johnson and Nixon at the time. It created the objective possibility for this third party type formation. Since that time, when the capitalist parties developed peace candidates and campaigns, the liberals that were the impetus for getting PFP on the ballot, deserted PFP in droves and have left ISC and PL holding the bag.

Right now in the Bay Area, the heart of this BPP-PFP alliance, the PFP consists of Bob Avakian and ISC and, on this side, PL. The phenomenon of the PFP that we've seen here in the Bay Area will most likely disappear after the 1968 elections. It's essentially an unstable phenomenon.

The BPP is not the product of preparation for a bourgeois election. It's part of the general direction of the black liberation struggle that's taking place in this country, part of the general movement towards independent black political action. We see this in Seattle, in Lowndes County, in the Newark convention, in SNCC's latest conference where they advocated building a national black political party. It's something that we have advocated and predicted for the past five years. And the BPP will be around a long time after the PFP has been pushed into the dustbin of history following the 1968 elections. It's a logical and necessary part of the struggle for the liberation of an oppressed national minority.

I don't think the essence of the question we're discussing is the alliance of PFP and BPP. The fact is that these two groups are coming from totally different origins and moving in different directions. They crossed paths in history at the PFP convention. This alliance is temporary. It will fall apart and is already falling apart. This should not prevent us from seeing the essentially independent nature of the BPP campaigns.

It's true that it was an opportunist move for the BPP to take the place of the PFP ballot slot. It's also true that John Hulet, the leader of the Lowndes County Black Panther Freedom Organization,

at the time of the National Convention for New Politics was sitting on the executive body of the NCNP. We didn't withdraw our support from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization because John Hulett did that. The Lowndes County party is still an example of independent black political action.

Some people have said that you can take a statement by Eldridge Cleaver and say he speaks for the BPP. As it was pointed out in one of the documents in our previous discussion, you can ask any different member of the BPP about what this alliance with PFP means and you can get different answers from every one of them.

On the Cleaver for President campaign. At this point, I don't think it's a case of independent black political action. It was not originated by the BPP and right now the campaign is in the hands of the white middle class radicals like Tom Hayden. It's predominantly right now a PFP campaign and as such we should not support it.

It's possible that between now and the elections the character of this campaign could change. It could be turned around and used by the black liberation movement on a national scale as a tool to organize a national Black Panther Party. And there will be a lot of pressure on Cleaver to do this -- from James Forman, from the SNCC people, from the Newark conference, from Seattle. See, Cleaver's moving against the stream of the black liberation movement and it's quite possible he may be turned around.

So the character of the Cleaver for President campaign is not permanently fixed and I don't think we should be making any decisions on that right now.

A major difference between the presidential campaign and the local campaigns is that right now the local campaigns are being run by the BPP. That's the main driving force behind the local campaigns even though PFP is helping them out with literature and money. The national Cleaver campaign is being run strictly by the white mother country radicals.

There's an argument that since 1968 is a presidential year, the Cleaver for President campaign will change the tone of these local independent campaigns and give them the same type of tone that Cleaver's campaign has now. Like the SWP runs a presidential campaign and all our local campaigns are oriented around the presidential campaign. That's not quite what I see happening in these local campaigns. These local campaigns are going to be centered around the single most important question for the BPP right now and that's the defense of Huey Newton. Unless the Cleaver for President campaign relates to that and changes its direction, it won't be able to hook up with these local campaigns in any substantial way.

I think these local campaigns are an expression of independent black political action and, as such, should be supported by our movement even though there are little difficulties here and there. As was mentioned in the discussion last week, we should bend over backwards to try and give support and direction to any movement in the direction of independent black political action.

James Forman disagrees with the use of the PFP designation on the ballot. And he carries a lot of weight in the black movement. But he doesn't say, I don't support these local campaigns because they're using the PFP designation. He opposes the PFP alliance by working with the BPP, by giving speeches at their rallies where he advocates and says the most important national task is to build a national black independent party that's independent of white radicals. He has said that in both speeches that I've heard him give.

Some comrades seem to think that we would make a pronouncement, give critical support, and not do anything about the forces in motion. We would let them go on and have no intervention, that our intervention would carry no weight and would not be able to change the direction of anything. I think our movement carries a lot of weight in the Bay Area right now. If we threw some weight into the campaigns, it could be a very good influence in keeping these campaigns from being turned around and used by the PFP. Some of the comrades in Berkeley think that we have a chance of wiping PFP off the map on the Berkeley campus even before the elections next fall.

Just an example of how we could affect the BPP campaigns by giving them critical support. A comrade from San Francisco was in the campaign office of Kathleen Cleaver down in the Fillmore the other day. He was talking to someone sitting at the desk, a Black Panther. And he pointed to that awful campaign poster that Kathleen Cleaver has out with the big PFP in large letters and the BPP in small letters. He just casually mentioned that he thought it would be a better idea if it had BPP in large letters and if they had PFP at all, it should be in small letters down at the bottom. She agreed with that. She said, that's a good idea. You see, we can intervene in these campaigns. We can have some effect on their direction.

Nat Weinstein (San Francisco Party NC)

Comrades, when this discussion began I thought it was simply a difference of opinion that didn't have any deeper significance. I didn't think it was a serious difference. But particularly after today's discussion, I'm becoming more and more concerned over the deepening of the division that's developing and what it means for the party and for the youth.

Carl Frank called me over during the intermission to point out that there shouldn't be any misunderstanding of any identity between his position and Paul Montauk's. I will concede that in Carl's mind there is no question that there are no identities of opinion on this question. But it's a danger signal, comrades. It shows the logic of a position when it's carried through to its end. The comrade who spoke just previous to the last speaker also indicated this approach.

I've observed in discussions that have taken place over a long period of time in the party and outside of the party that if you've got essentially the right line, the people that support your line come up essentially with the right arguments. It flows from that essentially correct line. If you've got the wrong line, the people that support your position who are less sophisticated tend to articulate the logical extension of your line. They tend to articulate more clearly what your line leads to. That's what's been happening here in this discussion.

Let's take a look at some of the arguments. Bob Himmel has already pointed out very well the contradictions in the arguments of the comrades who are in favor of giving critical support. They say, how are we going to explain it to this milieu. What milieu are they talking about? Are they talking about the ghetto milieu? Isn't that strange? Are they talking about whether blacks will understand our position or not? Oh, no. They're talking about whether the student milieu will understand our position or not.

I wouldn't want to say, because I don't think it would be correct, that Paul Montauk is a typical petty bourgeois student that has been swept up by the pressures that prevail in the student community. But comrades, this line of argument of how will our position be understood by this milieu is very, very wrong.

The other side of the argument, as Bob Himmel has pointed out, is very contradictory. The other side is that we will intervene and by example we will demonstrate what's wrong with the BPP coalition with PFP. Think it through. Do you know what's been supposed here? The motion of critical support is a misnomer. What is being proposed is support to the BPP campaigns.

When you participate in the forming of a committee for the election of a candidate, that's not critical support anymore. That's support. We've never entered into this type of a campaign. That is, organized an independent committee to promote the candidacies of those to whom we are giving critical support. Don't refer to the ISP or some other phenomenon that wasn't a critical support campaign. The ISP in New York in 1958 was a coalition between the SWP and other socialist-minded people in New York on a socialist program. So we did participate in the electoral effort and we criticized from the inside.

What's the logic of participating in a committee to elect Cleaver, Newton and Seale? We want to be able to intervene. We want to be able to win over some of these healthy young blacks and some of these healthy young students. That's the whole argument for critical support. We want to place ourselves in a strategic position to best be able to influence them. So we go into these campaigns.

Cleaver, an individual, he is the Minister of Information. His statements appear as the official positions -- black paper -- of the BPP which ostensibly are going into the black community. Is that a paper that's only written for the white student milieu? Oh, no. It's supposed to be written for the black community. In this paper, he indicates something quite different. He indicates that it's the BPP that supports his orientation towards the PFP. In the BPP office there's a big poster -- "Cleaver for President."

Are we going to proceed under the assumption that there's some kind of a division between the individual Eldridge Cleaver and the BPP? The evidence is all to the contrary. There is not a different identity between the Eldridge Cleaver presidential campaign and the local campaigns.

We go into a supporting committee. What are we going to do? The pressure inevitably will be monumental to identify the presidential with the local campaigns. The BPP wants to do it. The PFP forces are going to do it. And the student milieu, the so-called independents, are going to do it.

What position are we going to be in? Are we going to just keep quiet? If we keep quiet, we're guilty. We're going to have to say no, you've got to separate these two campaigns, unless we want to accept Paul Montauk's position. This is the logical position for those that want to extend critical support.

So we're going to go in and argue that we want to separate the two campaigns. Do you know what we're going to look like? We're not going to be in a strategic position to influence people. We're going to look disruptive. The charge of Trotskyite disruption will assume tremendous force. If you think that the blast we got in the BPP paper was something, wait till you see the kind of blast we're going to get if we go in there and act in this fashion.

Do you know what that is? That's maneuvering. You don't maneuver with people that you're trying to win over. You maneuver with enemies, with opponents, the class enemy. You don't maneuver with people you're trying to win over. They won't understand. It's an expression of paternalism. You're going to tell them to develop a committee and help support their campaign, and all the time what you're going to do is try to drive a wedge between the two parts of their campaign.

We're going to give critical support and then go ahead and criticize? If you criticize, man, you're going to get it. You're not going to influence anybody.

I say it's not easier not to take a position. Nobody proposes not to take a position. It's far easier to take a position, to propose a line of argumentation that's clear, and not get sucked up by the prejudices that prevail in the student milieu.

What is the effect the BPP is going to have on the Lowndes County Freedom Organization? Aren't they going to give it an impetus in the direction of third partyism when they see the BPP of San Francisco and Oakland, which they look up to, in this kind of a coalition? Already it must have given them an impetus to it. Can you imagine what's going to happen with Cleaver as the presidential candidate of the PFP? Forces like this all over the country are going to be disoriented. It's going to take the whole movement away from independent black political action.

I'm confident that the forces operating in the direction of independent black political action are far more powerful. But that's no argument for us to move in an opposite direction from these forces because of a lack of understanding of the individuals we're attempting to influence.

No, sir, comrades, we're making a serious mistake. I said at the beginning, and I'm going to conclude, that I'm very concerned because young comrades are going to be disoriented by this whole discussion, this whole playing down of the bourgeois character of the PFP.

Don't give us this stuff about how one petty bourgeois party is different from other petty bourgeois parties. They're all different. The Wallace party was different from the LaFollete party and the LaFollete party was different from the Populist movement. But the differences don't determine their essential character. Their essential character are bourgeois parties.

Do you know what that means when you begin to play this kind of ball at a time when our key purpose is to project the idea of independent politics and to separate independent politics from every phony detour and attempts to adapt itself to the growing awakening in the masses of the people? It's our task to clarify, even if we're a minority of one, even if we're a handful shouting against the whole storm as we were in 1964. We were an isolated, tiny handful. And we said what we knew to be true and in the long-run that's what counts.

It's our job to go along with history. It's not our job to go along with the prejudices and adapt ourselves to the backward thinking of the people we're trying to influence.

Derrel Myers (Oakland-Berkeley Youth NC)

I'm going to take up where Nat left off because I think the ending remarks in his statement indicate a gross misunderstanding of the motivations and thinking of the comrades who are proposing that we give critical support. I say that because of the statements that are made that we should not bend to the student pressures, that we shouldn't bend to this and that. On the other hand, we're warned of the problems of being Trotskyite disrupters and things like that.

I know for a fact that the young comrades in Berkeley are far from fearful of being called those kind of things. They're ready to go into any kind of action and any kind of meeting and propose what we see is the principled political program that should be proposed by that movement.

I'd further like to point out that if comrades are fearful that comrades proposing critical support to the BPP local candidates are adapting to petty bourgeois pressures, to third party politics and King-Spock type derailment of independent black political action, stop and think of the discussion we had on the nature of the PFP. Is there one young comrade I've heard who's proposing we give critical support to the BPP candidates who proposed that we go into the PFP? Not one of them proposed that the PFP is a manifestation of independent political action. Not one voice was raised in the Berkeley branch or local from the young comrades who are arguing most adamantly that we support the BPP.

It's not because we're succumbing to pressures. On the contrary. The comrades are arguing so adamantly now not from a position of weakness, not from a position of pressures from the right student radicals at Berkeley, but the opposite. Because of our leading the mass demonstration in Berkeley, because of the lack of intervention on the part of the so-called student radicals, the PFP, the Bob Avakians, the Mario Savios who I'm running against and who Berkeley hasn't heard from for the last three months. That's who we're all running against in this campaign right now.

They're going to get some momentum and we understand this and we understand that's going to be a problem. But right now, I feel that the comrades who are arguing today are not arguing because they are succumbing, adapting to PFP politics.

The comrades pointed out that the young Black Panthers are not wearing PFP buttons. The young kids that came around that demonstration did not vote for the PFP to take over this demonstration when the PFP put forward at a meeting of 2,000 people that it become the leadership of this demonstration. They were overwhelmingly defeated if not laughed down by the majority of the young activists in Berkeley.

If the reverse were true, then you might think that there's some adverse pressures on our movement. But the comrades are thinking from a position of relative strength. And the strength is the changes in a three-fold relationship of forces between us, the BPP and the PFP. That has changed between the PFP and us since we went into this discussion.

There's been some misstatements made. Let's look at the origins of these two movements. Roland Sheppard is wrong when he says the BPP did not organize an independent party. The BPP was organized long before the PFP was talked about. It was organized, they developed their ten-point program, they stated what they were organizing for, what they wanted to do and they proceeded to recruit young blacks to their party.

Then the PFP phenomenon -- why did that come about? It was a result, as some people have correctly stated, of the lack of a choice in the Democratic Party for the liberals. And it was stated in the PFP's literature that we're organizing the PFP to put Mr. King and Mr. Spock on the California ballot. There's no such statements from the BPP that this is the purpose of their organization.

There are two totally different reasons for coming into existence. That's going to determine the length of existence of these organizations and is determining their direction, momentum and composition.

I hear comrades say the BPP is lumpen and petty bourgeois blacks. If you took the YSA in Berkeley, I don't know about San Francisco, we got a lot of lumpen kids over there and a lot of petty bourgeois students. But we're moving in the right direction and we've got the right politics.

On the question of composition. It's my understanding that when the SWP calls for independent black political action and calls for the formation of a black political party, it doesn't stipulate that 51% of that party has to be currently employed. It doesn't state that 51% of that party should not be students. I'm not saying this sarcastically, not because I think comrades are taking a tactical question -- it's my understanding that this discussion is to be a tactical question. It's now being escalated to a principled question when you make accusations that our reasoning is a result of a lack of understanding, a result of pressure, etc. There's not one comrade that's weak on the question of the PFP. That's clear. We resolved that question.

Jerry Healy has some criticisms of the British Labor Party. And he can make some damn good arguments and exposeés of statements by Harold Wilson and other leaders in the Labor Party. And he takes these weaknesses and escalates it into a principled question that you can't work in the British Labor Party because Harold Wilson will pervert the minds of the young workers and students.

Eldridge Cleaver is a spokesman today for the BPP. But we don't escalate his statements, his weaknesses on this question of the PFP into a principled opposition because I will say that the logic of our position is not to go into the PFP and then from there the Trotskyist movement will go into the Democratic Party. No!

I say the logic of not giving the BPP local candidates critical support, the thinking behind it, means that we look at the BPP as an opponent organization. That's the conclusion I would draw from not giving them critical support. That we would look at them -- because they sell the red books and we all have a good laugh because, you know, these lumpen kids sell the red book; they're soft on Maoism. You're goddamn right they're going to be soft on Maoism and a hundred other questions. And we're going to straighten them out on that.

The leaders of a labor party -- do you think they're going to be Trotskyists? Do you think the man who first gets up and proposes that Local 600 of the UAW originate a labor party is proposing it because of an understanding of the dynamics of permanent revolution. . .? No, it's going to be attempts to stop the movement of the rank and file. And the statements that come out and the program of that labor party when it first gets organized are going to have some very reactionary ideas. Some of the leaders of that labor party are going to be racists, they're going to be against the Soviet Union, be social democrats, weak on a hundred questions.

But why do we call for a labor party? Because of the thrust of that idea. Because it tells the working class that the most important thing is to break from the ruling class and organize your own party.

And that's what we tell the black community. Organize things like the BPP. Get into them and build them. And would we, if we had a cadre of young blacks in the Bay Area, would we tell those comrades not to join the BPP because they're soft on Maoism, soft on the PFP and a hundred questions? Or would we see it not as an opponent organization but as a weak start in the direction of independent political action that requires our comrades going in there?

And those black comrades like Derrick Morrison and Paul Boutelle will be called Trotskyite splitters and manipulators and every name in the book, but we would send them in there, I'm convinced. We would send them into those formations because it's an initial step in the right direction. That's why we give it support. It's in the right direction. There's no other movement in that direction and the relationship of forces is changed.

Cleaver may be toying with many things, but those young blacks that we talked to on that picket line -- and someone said that they don't want the rank and file of the BPP mixing with other people and they don't involve them in their campaigns. That is untrue. They had those kids out in numbers, talking with white kids. They invited

the Trotskyists to bring their banner up to the front of the demonstration. That's how sectarian they are. That's how afraid they are of their young comrades coming into contact with us. Don't say they're afraid of their young people coming into contact with us; they're not. The fact that we participated in this shows this.

In the last few weeks has been the first time that we've been accepted, that we've been able to intervene. And that's because of a fundamental factor -- that the relationship of forces has changed. PFP is weaker; we are stronger. And the BPP is stronger and moving in the right direction, Eldridge Cleaver notwithstanding.

Bob Chester (San Francisco Party NC)

Comrades, sooner or later in these discussions you get into the philosophical aspect of the discussion. I'd like to treat one facet of this. The basic problem that we're working on now is the question of what is the reality of the situation. And what we've had in the presentations has been actually emphasis on the two different aspects of the reality. That's the fact.

Carl Frank emphasized the essentially independent role of the BPP from the PFP. Bob Himmel emphasized the interconnection of the PFP and the BPP through the medium of Eldridge Cleaver. The problem we have, and that's what all this discussion is about, is can we separate out the essential of what is really happening and find out what direction this thing is moving in.

I think that Bob Himmel misstated the facts of the Oakland convention of the PFP. It wasn't just the combination of BPP and PFP that took place. You had two contradictory currents develop there. The first was the insistence of the BPP on accepting their ten-point program or they'd walk out -- an absolutely firm independent stand. The second was the action of Cleaver in saying that the white radicals ought to join the PFP and black radicals ought to join the BPP and making the nomination speech for Paul Jacobs.

These indicated two trends right there. These two trends have continued and, in a sense, accentuated in the intervening period. I'm sure they're much sharper now. The discussion now indicates that.

Apparently the trend inside the BPP in reality has been toward more independence, toward building their independent strength on the basis of their ten-point program separate from the program of the PFP.

Cleaver, on the other hand, is just the opposite. If you read the platform or brochure of Cleaver for President, there wasn't one part of the ten-point program in it. It was complete hogwash, petty bourgeois statements on rent control and whatnot, no mention whatsoever of the BPP's ten-point program.

If Cleaver runs on the PFP ticket, he will have to run on the PFP program, not on the BPP program. I believe there is a separation there, and it's only on the basis of that separation that it is possible to give any support at all to the BPP.

I think Paul Montauk is absolutely wrong on the question of critical support to Cleaver as well as the other BPP candidates. Because the only purpose of critical support would be precisely to separate out the BPP from the PFP, not to combine them in a presidential candidacy.

It's important that we understand that this reality we're facing here is a contradictory thing. It has cross-currents; it has complications. But what we do is cut through these complications and get to the basic movement. If we don't do that, we aren't Marxists.

I think that the party has been delinquent in some aspects of this work in that they talked a lot about the BPP but they didn't do enough about finding out what the real facts were. That situation is changing because what is recorded here this afternoon indicates that comrades are now beginning to make contact and get a feel and understand what is happening in the BPP. But I think that we haven't exhausted that aspect of it at all.

I think it's tremendously important for us to get as full a knowledge as we can of the different trends and currents in the thinking of the members of the BPP. And I want to separate that from the written aspects in the paper which is actually the province of a small, more literate section of the BPP. They're not the real body of it. So we have to get the full reality of it, not just what appears in the paper here and there.

The tendency I have now is increasingly towards giving critical support to the three local BPP candidacies. But I'm not satisfied yet on the one aspect that we really don't know what the impact of a Cleaver for President campaign is going to have on the BPP. Is that going to reverse the trend and introduce more of these complications?

So my feeling is that we shouldn't try to go into a vote right now, but wait until after the August convention, get a real estimate of what the exact situation is and, on the basis of what we find, then make our decision. I don't see any reason whatsoever to jump at a decision here. It's a tactical problem. We can take our time since there is time to take on this: And when we send in our request to the National Office, we'll have to bolster our arguments with facts. They won't accept this argument for argument's sake. The facts are absolutely necessary here. What I'm asking we do in this situation is to make as exhaustive an analysis as we can on the basis of what the concrete experiences are in the next week or two so that we can get a much more accurate estimate of the real thinking going on in the BPP.

As far as I can see, there is a national movement for independence of the black organizations. Seattle is only one aspect of it. I don't think a Cleaver for President movement would substantially change that. Take the Seattle case, for example, where our comrades are in direct contact and supporting them. If that group in Seattle supported Cleaver for President, it still would not change our estimate of their local campaign. I think essentially that same attitude would have to be taken here in the Bay Area, unless there is some significant current that develops that we'll see in action and then adjust our thinking to.

But the problem is if you're going to base yourself on reality, you have to understand that reality in full or as fully as possible. And up until a week or so ago, that was not the case here in the Bay Area as far as I could see.

One more point. I think that Nat has made a serious error on the question of critical support. Our tactic of critical support is that we balance the amount of criticism and the amount of support we give to any other tendency on the basis of the concrete circumstances. That applied to the ISP campaign in New York as well as to the Labor Party campaigns or to the CP campaigns. In each case there was a different proportion of criticism and support. And that depends on specific circumstances.

In the ISP campaign in New York in 1958, we gave critical support to the campaign even though we were one of the main operators in the campaign and carried that campaign. But it was not a Trotskyist campaign. We didn't give it 100% support; we gave it critical support with the emphasis on support.

And that point has to be understood that this would also carry over in the local situation here. How much criticism and support we would give to the BPP is going to depend upon the circumstances. But the emphasis, especially in a borderline case as this obviously is, would be on the basis of leaning on the side of giving more support. We emphasize support in the early period to make contacts and use our criticism in a judicious fashion. But it has to have the element of both. Otherwise it isn't critical support.

QUESTION: Bob, are you introducing a fourth motion?

ANSWER- CHESTER: The motion made by Carl Frank does not set a time schedule. I think we should wait until August to make that decision. So it's not another motion.

Asher Harer (San Francisco Party NC)

I find it not very difficult to cut from ten minutes to five minutes because I find myself essentially in agreement with Carl Frank et. al. I've had this position for some time now.

I find a certain symmetry in the positions of Paul Montauk and Bob Himmel. Both of them do not recognize the differences between the local candidates -- their origin, development -- and the presidential candidacy of Eldridge Cleaver.

The Eldridge Cleaver candidacy came about essentially as a defensive tactic because he was in jail. It was first proposed inside the BPP as a BPP candidacy. Remember that Eldridge Cleaver was in prison at the time. And this left Kathleen and the rest pretty much in the leadership though it was cleared with him in prison. At first it was seen as a BPP candidacy, and only later did it become a PFP candidacy.

I agree in general that Eldridge Cleaver has a different direction which is shown by the depth of his involvement in PFP politics. I think there are differences inside the BPP. Bob Himmel, on the one hand, doesn't see the difference and he takes Eldridge Cleaver as the measure and says no support to any of them. Montauk, on the other hand, takes the Seale and Huey Newton campaigns as the norm and says support them all. But, essentially they don't see the differences between them.

We don't support the candidacies of the BPP for the same reason as the PFP. There's a lot of confusion here. People are so afraid that somehow we're going to get tagged with the onus of in some way being involved in the PFP, this petty bourgeois organization. Because they support them, then we can't support them. That isn't true. We have entirely different reasons for supporting these candidacies. And the reasons have been very adequately given by the various speakers.

I believe that the direction of the BPP is indicated by Seattle, not by what is happening in the Bay Area. And that's the direction in which we want it to go and that's why we must intervene with critical support.

This business of getting called names and so forth. It would be much worse in the milieu in which we operate to have to start out with a negative position. Then you spend all your time arguing why you don't support them. It's better to have a positive position. We support them because of this and that reason, because they represent these tendencies in the American political scene, but we have criticisms. You're then in a position to give those criticisms. Whereas the other position is abstentionism. It's on the outside looking in and that's a very bad position to be in. If you can avoid that, you should.

We have a borderline case here. The question of critical support is not a principled issue in this case. Always in the past when we have a borderline case, we prefer to err on the side of intervention, not on the side of staying out. It's much, much better to do that, and in this case more so.

There's a certain formalism. Criteria, which may be very well in the past, are being set up. And if the criteria one, two, three, four are not met, then we can't give support. But criteria change with changing conditions.

The most important thing is what is the direction, what is the composition. For me, the discussion today, especially the comrades from the East Bay, have established what the essential substance, what the central direction of the BPP is. And I think that their using the designation of the PFP is incidental and may very well be overcome in the next period in substance, if not in form.