

(For Internal Use Only)

June 18, 1968

The Black Panther Party Coalition with the Peace and
Freedom Party

In deciding what our approach to the Black Panther Party candidates will be we should establish some basic premises first.

The Black Panther Party is clearly an independent Black Political organization. And even if it was composed of black businessmen and professionals and their program was a few simple reforms (equal jobs, housing, easier credit for black businessmen, etc.) we could give it critical support. Because it could advance the general idea of breaking with the capitalist parties and it could spur the movement toward building a national independent black party, which in its turn could upset the stability of capitalist politics, which could precipitate independent working class political action ... and so on.

If the Black Panther Party were running independently (apart from any electoral alliance) there would be no problem on the principled level. Just a tactical decision on whether or not it would advance the general interests of the socialist revolution and the strategy subordinate to it.

Such was the case for example, with the Freedom Now Party in Michigan. We had a freedom of choice there. In the recent Stokes campaign in Cleveland, we didn't.

We have such a freedom of choice in the case of independent parties based on Afro-Americans by virtue of the laws of the permanent revolution. The oppressed black masses cannot achieve their freedom within the framework of capitalism. They are objectively propelled beyond the democratic tasks towards anti-capitalist positions.

However the BPP is in a coalition with another political organization. One of the forms of this coalition is their appearance on the ballot as Peace and Freedom Party candidates. If the coalition was with the Democrats in this form there would be no question but that critical support would be a violation of principle.

Exactly what the Peace and Freedom Party is, therefore, is very important in our calculations.

We recently concluded a discussion on this question. We decided that the PFP is within the category of the bourgeois parties. Not in the sense that the Communist Party is a bourgeois party -- which it is -- or the Social Democratic parties or the British Labor Party, but in the sense of the capitalist Progressive Party of Henry Wallace.

The PFP is different from the Democratic or Republican party. For one thing it is infinitely weaker. It has not been in the back pocket of the capitalist class for decades. It is, however, a party of a type through which the capitalist class can rule. And one through which the working class cannot rule.

Because of its weakness and its unique composition -- largely radicalizing students and younger intellectuals -- it is possible to go through maneuvers with them that we couldn't with the Democrats. It also provides more room for maneuver for the Black Panthers. It is moreover desirable to draw the PFP into mutual activities in order to keep touch with their healthy elements. However we drew the line of the permissibility of giving critical support. It is a question of class principle.

Let us assume that the electoral coalition of the Black Panthers with the Peace and Freedom Party is wholly formal and the BPP is substantially conducting an independent campaign. Of course then, what would be a violation of principle for us is a different matter in the case of the Black Panthers. Not that it is not wrong for them too. It is, and it is for them too a principled violation. But we don't have to take the responsibility for every one of their acts in giving critical support.

Thus the question before us is the substance of the Black Panther Party electoral effort. It is essentially independent despite the form. If the elections were next week and we had to make a decision, I would say on the basis of the information I have seen, that their campaign is essentially independent and we could give them critical support.

Let us assume now that the electoral relation between the BPP and PFP in the next months draws so tightly together that the substance of the Black Panther's candidacies becomes definitively interlinked with the PFP electoral effort. Assume that it becomes clear that a vote for the BPP is a vote for the PFP. And assume also that the dependence of the Black Panther candidates on the PFP becomes so great that the independence of the Black Panther Party in this election is no greater than an all black branch of the PFP in Oakland might be.

In that case I would have to say that we couldn't give them critical support. Because it would not advance the concept of independent black political action but rather it would further the cause of petty bourgeois politics.

I think such a development is unlikely. It is, however, not excluded. Some negative developments have already taken place. Eldridge Cleaver nominated the PFP senatorial candidate at their convention. The BPP and its candidates endorse both the PFP and its candidates. They (the BPP) urge Afro-Americans to register PFP, even after getting on the ballot and they tell whites to join the PFP, that it's a great outfit.

These negative things are not decisive. But Eldridge Cleaver's announcement of his intention of running for office is something else. True, he hasn't said much about it since -- maybe he got too much heat from the ranks and for different reasons, from his PFP allies too -- but we don't know what he will do on this score.

It raises a number of questions: Will he try to be the PFP candidate? Will he make it? How will he conduct his campaign -- on whose program? What will the Black Panther Party's position on this be? All these questions would have to be answered before we could tell what effect it would have on the independence of the BPP campaign.

It would be well to wait as long as possible for all the factors to reveal themselves. Then we will be in a better position to make the political evaluation and then a tactical decision.

Nat Weinstein