

"The labor party was organized to assemble into a new majority the men and women who work, but who have been scattered as helpless minorities in the old parties under the leadership of the confidence men of big business. These confidence men, by exploitation, rob the workers of the product of their activities and use the huge profits thus gained to finance the old political parties, by which they gain and keep control of the government. They withhold money from the worker and use it to make him pay for his own defeat."

The convention of 1919 consisted mostly of rank and file workers and local trade union officials. Although the AFL international leadership, following Gompers' lead, were opposed to the independent initiative, delegates were present from local and state units of over half of the AFL International unions. The tremendous response to the convention call showed a clear rejection on the part of the rank and file of Gompers' policy of "non-partisan" politics.

In 1920, the Farmer-Labor Party, now including many state farmer parties and the Committee of 48, refused to nominate LaFollette because of his generally weak platform and because of his unwillingness to take a militant stand for the rights of Black people. At this point, the movement was still growing rapidly, focusing around 1) increasing the share for labor in management of industry, 2) the democratic management in the operation of publicly owned utilities and natural resources, and 3) Black equality.

In 1922, at the Conference for Progressive Political Action, organized by the Railway Unions' Plumb Plan, the NFLP was voted down on its resolution for the formation of a national independent party by only 12 votes. Clearly the rank and file call for a third party could no longer be ignored as the pipe dream of a few crazy radicals.

SPLIT IN THE FLP

Yet the following year the movement went into a rapid decline. The FLP's convention of 1923 showed a drop off in participation. But most importantly it was the scene of the split between Fitzpatrick's Chicago Federation of Labor and the left and communist representatives. This split was disastrous not only because it ushered in a long period of isolation of the left from the mass workers' movement, but in so doing it significantly

ELECTION '76: "Baffle 'Em with Bull"

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After a hard day's work you come home, grab a cold beer and sit down in front of the TV. Walter Cronkite comes on the screen. During the next thirty minutes you are filled in on the daily adventures of the competition between an Arizona 'Abraham Lincoln,' and Alabama racist, the man from Boeing and a Georgia peanut farmer.

Gerald Ford comes on the screen. He says that he is fighting for the hard-pressed working family. He will hold down the federal budget and prevent a new round of spiraling inflation. He is going to hold down taxes by chopping the big government 'give-away programs.' Yes,

weakened the whole workers' movement because of lack of clear leadership. This split made it possible for the initiative to be seized by the reform forces behind LaFollette -- the same forces who were with great relief to bury the whole idea of an independent party the year after LaFollette's defeat.

Fitzpatrick's hesitations of 1923 and his final withdrawal stem from several causes: 1) 1923 was a year of temporary economic stability which allowed the right wing trade union leadership to consolidate its hold on the locals; 2) the AFL leadership used its influence to threaten Fitzpatrick -- the Chicago Federation of Labor's per capita subsidy from the AFL was cut off; 3) the failure of the Socialist Party, which was strong in the rank and file movement, to support the project and 4) finally, the serious errors made by the Workers' Party, which refused to compromise its plans and program even in the face of the CFL doubts. The sectarianism of the Workers' Party during this period resulted in the total alienation of their most trusted allies within the CFL.

LEFT IS ISOLATED

The result of the split between Fitzpatrick and the left was that the bulk of Farmer-Labor forces absorbed into the LaFollette Progressive Party. Without left leadership these forces were unable to challenge the petty-bourgeois populist program of the Progressive Party. They ended up being a tale on LaFollette's kite. A small remnant of the Farmer-Labor Party, primarily the Communists, went it alone with meagre results in the '24 election. In short, the split strengthened the hand of the reformists over the Farmer-Labor movement and isolated the left.

There can be no doubt that even in its disintegration, the Farmer-Labor movement had a significant impact on the political climate of the nation. The work of these groupings laid the groundwork for the mass LaFollette movement, and forced even the AFL leadership to take what was for them practically a revolutionary step: in 1924, the AFL big-wigs backed LaFollette, an independent candidate for president.

However, there can also be no doubt that the failure of the communist forces to maintain a solid united front with the progressive leadership of the Chicago Federation of Labor made it possible for the same AFL bureaucrats to take the guts out of the movement in the presidential campaign and then to unceremoniously bury it.

Ford must be the candidate of the working people.

Or is it Ronald Reagan? He is against big government intruding into the lives of the honest and hard-working citizen. He is for tax reform, for turning over the \$90 billion dollar boondoggle in welfare, education and poverty funds to the states where they can be administered with less bureaucracy and at lower costs. He claims to be a "citizen politician" who is running against the system. Recently he said, "Unless we elect to the highest office men with no ties to the system, men at the top who are not afraid to tangle with it and take it on head first we will never change it."

WHAT ABOUT THE DEMOCRATS?

But then, what about those running for the Democratic nomination? What about 'Mo' Udall? Isn't he also for the working people? After all, he is for jobs, for oppressed minorities and for youth. He wants to bring back "responsible government," government "of, by and for the people," doesn't he?

Or is it George Wallace? Clearly he is not the "segregation forever" racist of yesteryear. Now he says he is for all the dispossessed who are being pushed around by "pointy-headed bureaucrats in Washington." He advocates the return of capital punishment to protect the innocent from the 'criminals and rapists' that roam our city streets. He is against the intellectual elite "performing social experiments with little children."

But what about Henry Jackson? He is on the anti-big government bandwagon. He lambasts the Ford administration's failure to come up with jobs for the unemployed. He is for shifting the tax burden on to those who can afford to pay. A self-styled 'friend of labor' he is opposed to busing only because "it does not work." He is for desegregation but he maintains that busing just leads to white flight.

And finally, how could we forget 'good ole' Jimmy Carter, that down home country boy? He is so much for the working people that to him issues are unimportant! Sure he is anti-establishment and anti-Washington, but his real assets are his "honesty" and his "electability."

THE BOURGEOIS MYTH

It could almost make you feel sorry for big business; all these candidates to choose from, and each one is for the working people. What a system! the working people get to choose two of the foremost political figures in our land, one to represent each of the major parties in the presidential elections in November. Nationally recognized leaders take their ideas and programs, and set them before the masses. The people voice their opinions by endorsing the candidate of their choice.

Thus the primaries are an exercise in 'real democracy.' The working people who make up the overwhelming majority of the US population get to choose their candidate on the basis of the issues. *So runs the bourgeois myth!*

In reality, however, the primaries are anything but democratic. In the first place, the real issues facing the working class and its allies are obscured. The various political figures do speak to "the issues," but both the issues that are spoken to and how they are treated are determined by the bourgeoisie.

From the bourgeois point of view, there are six major issues in the present campaign: defense spending, detente, busing, balancing the budget, the economy and the credibility of the federal government.

Other important problems such as a decent standard of living for all working people, full employment, racism, sexism or peace in the world are most often ignored. If they are spoken to, it is only an occasional and oblique reference.

"DIFFERENCES" ON DEFENSE SPENDING

And the six issues put forward by the bourgeoisie are all treated within strictly defined limits. For example take the treatment by the various candidates of defense spending. The candidates differ on how much of the federal budget should go to defense. Reagan, Ford, Jackson, and Wallace all argue that more funds should be allocated to defense. Carter and Udall maintain that the budget is unnecessarily high and should be cut. But whether an expansion or a cut, all changes advocated stand *well within 10%* of the present allocation. No major candidate is calling for the kind of massive reordering of priorities that is really necessary.

The same is true of the attitude of the various candidates towards the economy. In the midst of the deepest recession the US has had since before the Second World War, all the candidates are for speeding up the economy -- they could hardly be against it! There are minor differences on how much encouragement the federal government should give to the 'recovery' and where funds for that encouragement should be allocated. Some want an 'expansionary budget' the others are for a 'balanced' one. Some call for tax credits for capital investment, others call for federally funded jobs. But *none* of the candidates has called for the kind of massive program necessary to move the country out of the recession and each is satisfied that a sizeable unemployment is necessary.

In reality, there is not one candidate that is speaking to the issues from a working class perspective. There is not one candidate that has challenged the cause of the most significant problems facing the working class -- the capitalist system. There is not one candidate that has called for ending unemployment once and for all. There is not one candidate for nationalizing the energy monopolies (remember the energy crisis?). There is not one candidate firmly opposed to racism and sexism. No candidate has spoken out against the developing trend towards political reaction manifested by the racist violence in Boston or the S-1 Bill in Congress. Nor is any candidate committed to a real and lasting peace.

But it is not only the issues and how they are spoken for that is determined by the bourgeoisie. The candidates themselves are thus chosen. Various interest groups within the liberal and conservative wing of the bourgeoisie decide to run a candidate. They set him up with an initial store of money and set him on the campaign trail.

FOOL THE MASSES

The future of any bourgeois candidate is determined by his ability to 1) fool the masses or "baffle them with bull" as Stuart Spenser, Ford's campaign manager, would put it and 2) attain sufficient financial backing from other monopolists. Obviously each factor is related to the other. It takes money to buy radio and TV time, to purchase newspaper advertisements and to mail out propaganda -- the means of gaining political support. But on the other hand, since the bourgeoisie likes a winner, a candidate has to be able to win mass support in order to get money.

However, in the final analysis, it is the money which is most important. Candidates that can put across a good line are being trained constantly in local, state and congressional elections. They are a dime a dozen. But to

build up a campaign fund takes backing. The present Democratic front runners had developed significant war chests before the primaries even started. Carter had accumulated and spent nearly \$1 million by the end of November 1975, and Jackson had raised some \$3 million by the end of December.

In the primaries both candidates spent heavily. Jackson's victory in the Massachusetts primary cost him \$400,000, mostly spent in a last-minute TV advertising blitz. Jackson -- as if explaining his victory -- has said, "cash on the line is the name of the game."

MANY VOTERS STAY HOME

In spite of the fact that the primaries are essentially a bourgeois affair, they do reveal some important facts about the present political climate. A New York Times poll taken shortly before the New Hampshire primary revealed that a clear majority of the polled voters distrust the federal government. This distrust was demonstrated by the low primary turn out. Just as the 1974 Congressional elections set new records for the numbers who stayed at home (only 36.2% of the voting age population participated, down from 43.8% in 1970) so recent primaries have shown that only a small minority of eligible voters have gone to the polls. In the North Carolina primary, for example, only about 20% of the voting age population cast ballots.

Secondly, there has been a general shift to the right in bourgeois politics. Four years ago, proposals for peace, for defense cuts, for federal funds for the oppressed and for an end to sex and race discrimination were being championed by a number of bourgeois politicians. Presently, the leading trend is for a more warlike posture toward the Soviet Union, for increased defense spending, for holding down or cutting the budget and for a more reactionary stance toward oppressed nationalities and women.

Four years ago McGovern and Humphrey -- both liberals -- were the frontrunners, whereas the more reactionary Jackson scooped up last place. Today Carter and Jackson are leading the pack, and the liberal Udall is doing poorly.

CAPITALISM IN CRISIS

This rightward shift in bourgeois politics stems from the worldwide crisis facing the monopolists. The old methods of cooption with reforms is losing its effectiveness. With their backs against the wall, and the world's peoples striving for still more of what justly belongs to them, the monopolists are moving toward reaction as their method for meeting the growing movement.

In order to shore up their exposed position, they must try to create as large as possible a political base for these policies. While acting like the friend of the working people, their candidates must try to manipulate the



"I BET IF I HAD A MILLION DOLLARS, I COULD HIRE AN IMAGE MAKER AND MAKE YOU VOTE FOR ME."

people into taking up the cause of reaction, the cause of increased exploitation for the workers and intensified oppression of national minorities.

It is for this reason that the bourgeois politicians have been calling for a balanced budget with cuts in basic social services, more money for defense and a tougher stand in the conflict with the Soviet Union. It is for this reason that nearly all the bourgeois politicians have been making thinly-veiled racist attacks on oppressed nationalities under the guise of opposition to busing.

RIGHT PLAYS TO PEOPLES' FEARS: LEFT ALTERNATIVE NEEDED

The danger in the present situation stems from the fact that the mass disaffection from the political system in the United States can be channeled into rightist political causes if there is no viable left alternative to the bourgeoisie's reactionary drive. The intense social pressures caused by the economic crisis, the frustration with the failure of the same old political approaches which have demonstrated themselves to be unworkable, leaves open the opportunity for the monopolists to utilize right-wing candidates to play on the fears and the frustration of the working people.

By playing on the racism that the bourgeoisie has successfully inculcated in many of the working people in our society, and by appealing to the people's frustration with steadily increasing taxation and their fears of crime, demagogues like George Wallace have shown their potential to manipulate the working people into reactionary stands. While Wallace himself is politically dead, Reagan and Jackson are striving hard to fill the vacuum.

The only vehicle that could offer a viable alternative to the growing reaction in bourgeois politics would be a mass peoples' party. Such a party could find a firm political foundation in an alliance between the labor movement and the Black and other oppressed nationality liberation movements. By putting forward a progres-

sive anti-monopoly capitalist political program, such a party would be able to successfully compete on the field of political battle.

The building of a vanguard communist party (see series on "Party Building" in past issues of *the Organizer*) remains the central task of communists in this period. However, this struggle does not take place in isolation from the day-to-day struggles of the people. Communists work in and provide leadership for the mass organizations: trade unions, organizations for oppressed nationalities, community groups, etc. Communists would work in a mass people's anti-capitalist party in the same way.

It should be obvious that the development of such a party is a long way off. At present, the labor movement is organizationally firmly in the grasp of the Democratic wing of the bourgeois party and the immediate prospects for breaking it free are bleak. The broadest sections of the Black liberation movement, while generally more conscious of the need for independent political action of this kind, are also still firmly wedded to the left wing of the Democratic party.

NATIONAL BLACK POLITICAL ASSEMBLY CAMPAIGN

The one promising development on the general political scene is the National Black Assembly which has put forward a strategy for an independent campaign for President in 1976. Unfortunately, the Assembly is far to the left of most of the present leadership of the Black Liberation Movement, and it has not been able to mobilize sufficient support. At its recent March convention in Cincinnati, it failed to nominate a candidate for president when Oakland's John Conyers declined the nomination. It also decided against the development of multinational organization to push its campaign, determining instead that an all-Black Independent Freedom

Party would be the sole policy-making body for the campaign. While clearly most of the support for this campaign would come from the Black people, all the working people must be united in order to make such an effort have real impact.

Thus the potential for a viable challenge to the bourgeois parties' campaign of reaction this year does not look good. While the Black Independent Freedom Party could provide a form to do general agitation around the need for a mass people's party, it is clear that it itself will not be able to provide a real alternative to the bourgeois campaign.

BEGIN WORK TOWARD ALTERNATIVE

What can and must be accomplished, however, is the development of as wide as possible agitation in the factories, in the offices, in the mines and in the communities around the need for the development of a mass people's party. Local bodies of rank and file workers, of Black, Spanish, Chicano and Asian activists, of community workers and of other progressives should be established in every possible locality to serve as the organizational vehicle for such a campaign.

While such a party is indeed a ways down the road, it is presently possible to point out to the masses of working people that only a people's party based on the people's organizations would be capable of providing a viable alternative to the single Democratic-Republican bourgeois party. Only such a party could provide the masses with a real opportunity to express their views and have the real issues addressed from a working class perspective. Only such a party could be a viable center for people's politics.

And until this people's party is built, the working people will have to choose between such candidates as ex-football players and peanut farmers.

CARTER & FORD NOMINATED: Two Parties Move to the Right

August-September 1976

Neither the Democratic Convention in New York City in July nor the Republican affair in Kansas City in August held many surprises. Jimmy Carter, the ex-Governor of Georgia who made his money in peanuts (and cheap, non-union labor to process them), was enthusiastically nominated by a "united" Democratic Party for whom the smell of victory in November was powerful indeed. And Gerald Ford, a petty reactionary Michigan Representative who ended up President of the United States through no fault of his own, narrowly squeaked past southern California's answer to George Wallace, Ronald Reagan. What is there of significance, from a working class point of view, behind all the ballyhoo of the two conventions?

TWO PARTIES MOVE TO THE RIGHT

The most outstanding development is clearly the marked *rightward drift* of both parties, formalized by their respective conventions. Focusing on the Democrats, since they are the party most able to manipulate and deceive the working people of the U.S. (and are also the party most likely to occupy the White House come November), we come up against a platform that promises little, to say the least.

There are the standard planks calling for a federal jobs program, for national health insurance, for a guaranteed annual income to replace the welfare system, for tax re-