

A MESSAGE TO SOCIALISTS

The United States of 1967 is a United States of increasing conflict and turmoil. Unrest over the Vietnam war, outbursts against ghetto conditions, an unusual degree of student discontent and activism, and a new militancy in trade union struggle express this disquietude. The material polarization between rich and poor is accompanied by a political polarization.

One expression of these shifting political sands is this Conference, with its disparate political elements all together uneasily under one roof. We can fairly state that convened in the Palmer House for the next several days are individuals who fall into these three broad categories:

- 1) socialists, who have already rejected the exploitation and oppression of the capitalist system and the poverty, unemployment and imperialist aggression it produces, and who know that the only way out is to build an openly proclaimed socialist political movement.
- 2) those who are still in the orbit of capitalist ideology, and who rather like most (but not all) aspects of class society, with its attendant usufructs and privileges. The bulk of the organizers of this Conference fall into this group.
- 3) those who know that something is very much wrong with this country and the world, but are confused over what to do about it.

In addition to this Conference (itself not a new historical phenomenon--remember the ill-fated Progressive Party of the late forties), there are other expressions of political shake-up. Thus Bobby Kennedy, trying to capitalize on the disenchantment with the 1964 "peace candidate," encourages the illusion that the difficulty lies in the personalities which head the Democratic Party. An attempt is made to create a "cult of personality" against LBJ and blame the evils which beset us on him alone.

There are other political people, not as closely tied to the Democratic Party as Kennedy, who are afraid that the gambit of Democratic Party alternatives won't work this time. They know that the coalition of ethnic, racial, and labor union groups making up the main voting bloc of the Democratic Party is starting to come apart at the seams due to the war and a variety of other ever sharpening contradictions.

Many of these same people used to be perennial "don't-waste-your-vote-on-third-party-candidates-and-let-the-reactionary-Republicans-get-in" types, it should be noted in passing. Today they fear that the process of questioning the Democratic Party and its "alternatives" will spill over into a questioning of the inhuman and monstrous system it supports. They know that that system stands naked and exposed by its genocidal actions in both Viet Nam and the black ghettos. The greatest concern of these gentlemen is that if someone does not provide a fig leaf for the system, the working people, black and white, and the students and intellectuals of this country, as they come to question more and more the source of war and poverty, will turn against the present system. They, as the main organizers of the NQNP, intend to provide that fig leaf through a "meaningful alternative" in the form of an "independent" third party which, with its implicitly pro-capitalist program, is independent of everything but the capitalist system.

They themselves are opposed to the Vietnam war not because they are opposed to exploitation and support the Vietnamese workers' and peasants' efforts to throw off their oppressors. They are opposed to the Vietnam war because it embarrasses their system! They speak out against discrimination and squalor and undernourishment and degradation and police brutality and arms spending, and unemployment not because they are opposed to the profiteering and exploitation that underlie it all, but because they fear that if somebody doesn't hold out a thin wisp of hope for change within the system, the badly-used of this society will sooner or later draw their own conclusions and do away with the entirety of the system--and along with it the special status and comfortable feeling of superiority over the masses of the people that the pro-capitalist ideologues now enjoy.

(This is not to say that the Conference was organized by cynical, calculating men smoking cigars in some back room. They genuinely do see American society in a sad state of disrepair. They want to repair it because their view of a just and decent society conforms closely to what this society is in times of "normal" exploitation. All the more reason that socialists, who want to replace the system, not engage in attempts to patch it up, should hold fast and not let themselves be politically sidetracked.)

It is for all the foregoing reasons that the document entitled "Call to Convention" is such a vapid and meaningless collection of pious platitudes and empty phrases, worthy only of a do-gooder liberal or religious soothsayer. In it are many words against the abominations, the by-products of this system. In it is not a single word against the system itself and the state apparatus necessary to maintain it. There are distortions in this statement, there are illusions of a seriously disorienting nature in it, there are simple-minded attempts to deal with anti-Communist attitudes without confronting them head on. In short, there is everything in it except one of the basic ingredients needed to build a radical movement in this country--the demonstrated and unflinching ability to tell the simple truth to the working people.

Revolutionary socialists see elections and election campaigns solely as a forum for getting their ideas across, and have no illusions about the ruling class permitting themselves to be voted out. But this observation aside, would the authors and signers of the "Call" care to say when it was that the election process was ever "meaningful" in this country? It seems that for some people elections which perpetuate an exploitative system are indeed "meaningful." And what is one to make of all the New Left phraseology about people "governing" and "controlling" their own institutions--without a word about abolishing the profit system. Are the people going to take over these institutions in order to administer their own exploitation?

We can expect that the main spokesmen of this Conference will do anything, say anything--no matter how radical-sounding, rash or even adventuristic (such as calling for "disruption of the community")--so long as we don't ask them to break with capitalist politics! To keep as many of the participating groups together as possible on their program, they will even insist they are "revolutionaries"--so long as everyone follows them down a path which, while temporarily outside the Democratic Party, will ultimately and logically lead back to it once the Vietnam war has reached some sort of conclusion and the ghettos have spent themselves. This result is logical because it is within the Democratic Party that token reforms can actually be made, not to mention the added lure of patronage rewards and salaried jobs for reformers.

What can socialists do at this Conference? We can try to win a large part of the delegates, perhaps even a majority, over to the only program that is going to be able to do away with the grotesque social and human aberrations of the profit system--the socialist program that will eliminate and replace that system, and forbid the using of one class of men by and for the benefit of another class.

We can best implement that purpose at this Conference by forming a Socialist Caucus and insisting that the following minimal points be included in the program of the projected political movement. If they are accepted by a substantial part of the Conference, this could form the basis of a principled movement which could be supported by socialists:

1. Immediate and unconditional withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.

The working people and peasantry of Vietnam are fighting a war for their just and legitimate interests against an oppressive ruling class supported by the U.S. government. Any who claim to side with the exploited of whatever country cannot temporize their support in this sanguinary and crucial struggle.

The precise phrasing "immediate and unconditional withdrawal" is necessary because virtually any other formulation that is put forth has sponsors who hope to "interpret" the alternative slogan to mean support for pressuring the NLF ("Viet Cong") to negotiations. Negotiations imply that the U.S. has some right to be in Vietnam that can be negotiated about, and that the people of South Vietnam are not entitled to complete military victory.

2. Complete break with Democratic and Republican parties and the building of an independent party on a radical socialist program.

In addition to the arguments set forth above, there is a whole history of experience and serious polemics in the workers' movement as to whether socialism can be achieved piecemeal by reforms, whether capitalism can be "reformed away." Militants who think socialism is the only way out, yet are not familiar with this rich and persuasive history are urged to expose themselves to it if they wish to be disabused of any remaining illusions about following a reformist course to the abolition of capitalism.

3. Opposition to anti-gun legislation and support of ghetto inhabitants for the same right to arm themselves as other citizens have.

Any wavering or indecision on this point actually shows an inability to break with the ideology and propaganda of the corporate liberal rulers, not to speak of an attitude of paternalism and racial chauvinism incompatible with any sort of pretensions of building a movement and leadership for a socialist transformation of society.

4. Opposition to the introduction of armed police and military detachments to the ghettos to quell disorders. Order to be maintained by armed neighborhood patrols, similar to the "Deacons for Defense and Justice," and responsible to the ghetto inhabitants themselves.

This point takes full recognition of the fact that the conditions of life endured by ghetto residents are conditions imposed by the very forces that control the police and military; that these conditions are the underlying cause of the uprisings; and that one of the more intolerable conditions is the routine disrespect and brutality on the part of the police which not only make powderkegs of the ghettos but in fact usually touch off a situation which is then used to justify sending in rioting police and soldiers.

5. Through contact with union militants across the country, preparation of an eventual one-day general strike against the Vietnam war.

Dissatisfaction and opposition to the war is certain to grow the longer the war contin-

ues. A turn toward the working class must be made if this opposition is to mean anything. Demonstrations alone are demoralizing to participants when they fail to "influence" the government, and they fail to provide a basis for building a movement against this and all such wars.

A series of local one-day strikes, leading up to a general strike of several millions of working people in key areas, however, would not only affect general morale and popular support of the war, but would make a startling impact on those in power who now seem to feel that the drive to "defend" the system abroad can be ever-widened without a challenge arising from within. It is on a class basis that opposition to the war can have a serious thrust.

6. Organization of a movement for abolition of the draft, including neighborhood education of draftees and potential draftees about the nature of the Vietnam war and the system that produces such wars.

The lack of enthusiasm for this war and the growing reluctance of young men to fight in it should be taken advantage of to build sentiment for replacing this system. Military personnel have a perfect legal right to express opinions on political matters to their fellow servicemen.

7. 30-hour work week with 40 hours pay.

While not opposing welfare, recognizing its necessity under the present system, neither do we lend political support to it. Such support implies support for the system welfare in fact bolsters. As opponents of the present system, we must put forth alternatives, not endorse sugar-coated pills that even the present rulers are coming to recognize as necessary to perpetuate their system. In fact, there is great danger for militants to acquiesce in continuing unemployment and the dole. Not only is the base of the working class narrowed, but the permanently unemployed have traditionally been the first to be used by the corporations or right-wingers against the workers' movement.

We do not lend political support to the extension and regularization of welfare and its attendant human degradation, whether in the guise of guaranteed annual income or some other noble-sounding phrase. 30 hours work for 40 hours pay would cut sharply into bloated profits, offset the effects of automation and create new jobs, making it possible for a large sector of the population to re-enter the working class and end their present downward tail-spin as human beings.

"Jobs for all!" through the abolition of the unemployment-generating profit system.

Guaranteed annual wage through gurranteed annual jobs!

KING'S CANDIDACY

In concluding, it is necessary to call attention to the fact that the Rev. M. L. King has discredited himself once again by supporting troops to Detroit (for Watts he said, "It was necessary that as powerful a police force as possible be brought in to check them..."). Some are beginning to question the "wisdom" of his being put up for office next year.

Of course, it would be foolish to nominate him when someone better could be found. But if he (or for that matter, Lyndon Johnson or even the Devil himself) were willing to accept the program with the points we insist are minimal, it would be just great if he would go stumping around the country, saying to his audience of tens of millions that working people should make a complete break with capitalist politics! Nothing would push things ahead faster politically in this country.

We can be sure that because he is what he is and plays the role he does, he will not accept that program. We should not, however, let people who favor a pro-capitalist program divert us by agreeing to dump the Rev. King if we will just stay with their program.

COMMUNITY AND TRADE-UNION-BASED SOCIALIST ORGANIZATIONS

We of West Side CIPA contend that the most fruitful form of political activity that can be undertaken by socialists at this time is the organization of a whole series of community and trade-union based political groups across the country. Conditions are mature in the larger cities for attracting a substantial number of individuals to an open socialist program, and we expect that this will increase as the prevailing capitalist ideology becomes more untenable.

But socialists should not simply wait for conditions to mature; the very process of creating a public face and presenting your views in the community attracts and wins over those who can be persuaded and won, but who would not automatically go through the educational process of their own accord.

Some of the activities around which such local organizing can be centered, in addition to anti-draft educational projects already mentioned, are encouraging the formation of militant oppositional trade union caucuses, improvement of educational facilities and curriculum content, halting "urban removal" of slum residents and demanding the substitution of low-cost housing, and calling for shifting the armaments budget to slum renewal projects under control of the local people affected.

We expect that a network of such initially autonomous organizations will lay the basis for a nationwide socialist party at a later date when there is enough of a movement to sustain it. The important thing now is to take the next step.

That step is community-based organizations with a socialist program which challenges the assumptions of corporate liberal reform of the capitalist system.

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DELEGATES INTERESTED IN THE FORMATION OF A SOCIALIST CAUCUS AT THIS CONFERENCE, CONTACT CIPA DELEGATE JOEL LEICHTER AT REGISTRATION DESK OR LEAVE MESSAGE THERE FOR HIM.