

REPORT ON THE 1969 CLEVELAND CAMPAIGN, By Syd Stapleton  
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When discussion was begun on the mayoralty campaign here there were feelings that the Stokes campaign would be a little too difficult to take on in the situation where the branch had little or no contact with the black community. The petitioning was seen as an arduous and drawn-out task that would not be able to contribute much to the influence of the Trotskyist movement in the area.

Experience in the campaign proved exactly the opposite. The critical political issues raised by the Stokes campaign made the impact of our campaign very sharp, and the degree of attention in the city focused on the race made the campaign of public importance in almost every segment of the population. To outline this experience I will list the major areas of work or importance for the campaign, and list the most important lessons. There will be some overlap, but I'll also try to list some of what we think are the most important general conclusions at the end.

1. Use of the media. The most important single area of the campaign was the use of the media. In addition to heavy newspaper coverage, including three front-page stories, the news coverage in the electronic media was excellent. The major news, rock and t.v. stations normally carried campaign releases on the news, and press conferences received good coverage.

A fairly good estimate of the amount of t.v. and radio time is 25 hours (7 or 8 of which were t.v.), and the estimate may be low in instances where tapes were played more than once. Also included in that time are 30 one-minute spot ads on the only rock station in the town, and 18 minutes of prime time in the last week of the campaign played as part of a three-part presentation on the candidates.

We held five press conferences during the course of the campaign but found them to be the least productive of any press-oriented activity. The best results came from almost daily press releases in the last part of the campaign, in the form of attacks on what the other candidates said, applying transitional demands to public transportation, strikes, crime, etc. Another important factor was keeping the press informed of public meetings. The newspapers refused to cover the campaign for a period of time until we demanded meetings with the city editors and got reporters assigned to the campaign. Newspaper coverage again deteriorated in the last three or four days of the campaign, but after we had gotten two weeks of almost daily coverage. When we were given t.v. time to explain our own programs we did everything possible to carry the youth and audacity of the campaign into those areas. Professional-style work with films, tapes, skits, photos, etc. made the spots and program have terrific impact in the radical movement, and did not at all cut us off from working people or high school students.

Needless to say, the impression of the campaign as a serious, innovative, and reasonable alternative created by our use of the media had an impact in every other area of our work. High school students set up meetings because they had seen things they liked on t.v.; liberals gave us money because of the issues that we were able to raise, etc. People thought of the Socialist Workers Party as a big operation.

2. The black community. Going into the campaign the situation in terms of leadership in the black community was as bad or worse than any city in the country.

An example is in the case of the railroading of Ahmed Evans. The astrologer-reformist-cultural nationalist leadership of the black community has effectively prevented the formation of a united-front type defense committee. The overall situation, of course, has not changed radically, but the campaign was generally seen as the only consistent and public defense that Ahmed Evans has had.

In the last month three young black people have been recruited to the YSA as a result of the campaign, which is the most important gain in the movement in that area in a long time. These young people will serve as the basis for forming a Third World Committee for Solidarity with Vietnam.

We were not able, however, to have any visible impact in the black high schools. Meetings that we organized in the schools were either not attended or packed by the "cultural nationalists," in spite of the fact that they were organized around Malcolm X tapes in addition to campaign speakers.

The Harris campaign, the endorsement by us of independent black school board candidate Gloria Gould, and the political points raised and publicized in the mayoral campaign have created a reservoir of sympathy for our movement in the black community which we expect to have further dividends. One example of that which may not be entirely accurate is a newspaper poll which indicated that Stapleton would get .5 percent of the vote in the black community, which is 500 to 1,000 people.

3. College campuses. On the two college campuses of the area that we have had no contact with, meetings set up by the student newspapers led to five students on one and six on the other signing up to join the YSA. There can be the perspective for functioning fractions on these campuses within a couple of weeks. On the two campuses where we have people the fact that we were not a novelty, that there was an enormous volume of antiwar work, and that our own people were overextended already, reduced the amount of possible gain. However, on the major campus, Case Western Reserve, we were able to organize three large forums, to get 50 votes in a mock election, to set up dorm meetings, and towards the end of the campaign to begin the recruitment of the people who had worked on the campaign without joining the YSA.

4. High schools. High school meetings, speeches to "urban problems" classes, etc. were set up in one of two ways. Either a YSAer or campaign supporter in the school wangled the meeting, or the school set it up as part of three presentations, one each by the major mayoral candidates (the SLP ran a write-in campaign). The campaign was seen by a whole layer of students as the logical expression of their antiwar, generally alienated feelings, and the only limitation on the number of kids that we can recruit is our own level of organization. At the meeting for which we were most organized Stapleton spoke to 400 girls, held a seminar with 50 of them afterwards, and signed up 18 to join the YSA. That experience could and should be repeated at almost every high school in the area.

5. The campaign forums. Our own public meetings were organized around the idea of relating the campaign and its momentum to specific issues in the radical or black liberation movements. Close to 200 people attended one of the largest forums in the history of our movement here, which was a debate with the Weathermen by the two candidates. A forum on black control held in a predominantly black high school was the second most successful. However, they were no substitute for party or YSA activities involving people who become supporters of the campaign.

6. Trade unions. Probably the single least successful area of campaign work. Not one union gave the candidates an opportunity to speak, but the use of transitional demands did evoke a favorable response from plants where we have comrades, with the central question being the war in Vietnam. The fact that Stokes came out for immediate withdrawal didn't impress older people or young people who saw the importance of building the movement against the war, since it was possible to raise proposal after proposal for ways that Stokes could make his opposition to the war real. Of course, he declined to accept any of them.

7. General impact of the campaign on the antiwar movement, older ex-radicals, and active liberals. The clarity of the campaign around the war and black control, and the discussion that it was able to generate around those questions were generally seen as very valuable, even by those who have in the past been hostile to the party. We were able to raise contributions from older ex-party trade union officials, people who had not functioned in the radical movement, and in one case from an official of local SANE who had withdrawn from the antiwar movement to work on pollution. Wearing his Stokes button he wrote out a check for \$20 on the basis that the campaign obviously had the allegiance of all radical young people (!) and was doing the things that he would like to do. The Socialist Workers Party is now generally seen as a major independent force in the movement, and as one that makes it embarassingly difficult to be against the war and at the same time to support the Democratic Party. The campaign was received in a friendly way by the Ethical Culture Society, for example.

8. Some general statistics. Syd and James spoke to 7,100 people at at least 40 public meetings. Only six of those were campaign forums, although high school and dorm meetings organized by our efforts made up another 10 of the meetings. The figure is somewhat inflated by the fact that one of the meetings was the Kent State University meeting with 3000 at it, but then the City Club debate, with only 150 actually there, was carried live by five radio stations and was listened to by an enormous number. Only forty-five endorser cards were collected during the campaign, but that flowed from a general lack of consciousness on the question, rather than any difficulty in getting endorsers. Once we began circulating "I would like to join the YSA" lists at meetings where a big pitch was made to join, 48 people signed up to join in the last four days of the campaign. That process is not at all concluded since there is little overlap between the "I want to join" lists and the endorser list -- which is predominantly young people.

#### Some general conclusions

Getting on the ballot, combined with the fact that the campaign was one in which there was a lot of general interest because of Stokes, was the single most important factor in making the campaign a success. It compelled stations to give us equal time, compelled the media generally to take us seriously because of the 20,000 signatures we had collected to get on the ballot, and once those things had given us an opportunity to develop our ideas, the other things tended to fall into place.

Second, there is no reason for our campaigns not to project the kind of identification with the youth radicalization that our publications do. Transitional demands can be presented in such a way as to identify with the humanitarian inclinations of young people, while not making them offensive (unnecessarily) to other sections of the population.

Third, it is very important to not limit the application of transitional demands to formulas. We run in elections because people have illusions about elections. People also have illusions that the issues that other candidates raise are real issues. Application of a transitional approach to statements by the other candidates, specific proposals they make, attacks they make on one another, and so on are very important in developing the view of the socialist program as a serious contender for power on all questions -- not just "ours." Some of the best responses that we got came from an attack on a big charity drive in town that had previously been looked on like motherhood. We exposed the phony participation of the corporations, did a muckraking job on the thing, and then let out with a series of proposals for creation of real solutions for public health. Another example is a statement on art and culture in this society which was printed by the biggest enter-

tainment weekly in the city -- and was read by thousands of young people -- tying the problem to the war, the subjugation of art to advertising, etc.

Last, we had some problems during the campaign. They came from the fact that we were simply not prepared to recruit the young people who came to agree with us during the campaign. Had we been more conscious of the opportunities that would be presented by the campaign we could have literally signed up 200-300 young people wanting to join the YSA. Another problem was that the campaign became largely a branch activity, not involving larger numbers of people in actions.

Finally, this local campaign has built up a very good momentum which will be continued on a statewide basis by the 1970 campaign. The announcement will come on election night, at our victory celebration.