

FOR N.C. INFORMATION:

May 6, 1967

Dear Comrades,

The approaching Presidential campaign has created anxiety among student antiwar activists and the antiwar movement as a whole over what should be done. A hundred and one gimmick electoral proposals are circulating among these layers. Some want to work for a Republican peace candidate, some for peace Democratic primary campaigns, some for total abstention, some for a boycott movement, some for dumping LBJ regardless, some for petition drives for peace votes, etc., etc. Each is an effort to develop some way or some approach, within bourgeois politics, to oppose the war electorally.

This development is still diffused and fortunately at an early stage. We all recognize the danger it presents in blowing the antiwar movement to pieces. I personally believe the '68 campaign can lead to demoralization within the antiwar ranks. After all, the electoral set up offers the bourgeoisie an opportunity to strike out against the antiwar movement's growing influence over the mass of the American people. If successful the bourgeoisie can divert the anti-government attitude of the student activist toward an anti-working class attitude. Instead of blaming the government alone for the war the student is induced to blame the "stupid workers" who vote for the pro-war candidates. The bourgeoisie will shout -- internationally -- "Look, the people have freely chosen the new government, see how weak the antiwar movement really is; it might make a lot of noise but when the vote is in it represents a tiny minority."

Because of the middle class nature of the antiwar movement there is no way an electoral formation of the working class can conceivably be created from it. We can expect any electoral formation created by the liberals or Stalinists to not only be extremely opportunistic and petty-bourgeois, it will also have the net effect of aiding the bourgeoisie in legitimatizing bourgeois politics as representative of the desires of the American working class.

Because of the above I'm convinced that a transfer of blame from the government to the workers (or "people" in general) will take place within the antiwar movement as a result of the elections.

The question of what tactical approach we should take within the antiwar movement and through our own electoral campaign to minimize this.

First, with the introduction of our own slates of candidates to present our socialist, working class viewpoint. We recognize from the start that our position runs counter to the class instincts of the movement as presently constituted. The

problem, therefore, is whether there is any demand which links the present consciousness of the antiwar movement to our program of opposition to all bourgeois politics, to all sectors of the bourgeoisie.

The demand for the right to vote on war, the referendum demand, takes on special importance for us. It is strictly a democratic demand, clearly within the present consciousness of the antiwar movement, if not the working class in general. Correctly used it can become an important weapon in undermining the claims of the bourgeoisie that "the people have endorsed the war." All our arguments about the phony nature of the electoral system, our attacks on the nature of bourgeois democracy, can best be understood by the milieu we are working in by concentrating on the refusal of the government to allow the people to vote on this war. The impact of the argument, of course, is relative to the degree the demand for a referendum has been raised and rejected, side-stepped or whatever, by the government.

Consider the tactical advantages of the referendum demand. As the antiwar activists search for a popular formula with which to approach 1968, only the referendum and a campaign for it offers a vehicle within the framework of "electoralism" and their present level of consciousness which is, however, still against the bourgeoisie. Consider the power of the proposal for the referendum to prevent the Stalinists and Co. from diverting antiwar activists into bourgeois politics.

We recently had a skirmish in the Berkeley Student Mobilization Committee with the Stalinists on this question which I present as an example.

The CP'ers proposed we collect signatures during the summer of voters who pledge not to vote for pro-war candidates. We can easily recognize the intent to lay the ground work for "peace candidates" but the average student sees this as a perfectly legitimate proposal. Our opposition on the basis that it is a trap to get support for peace candidates who are not really peace candidates appears sectarian. We took the following approach at the meeting and easily defeated the Stalinists' proposal. We began by explaining how the pro-war ruling class has the elections in the bag.

"They have the money, the established pro-war political machines. We cannot yet expect the massive break from the capitalist parties which could create a labor party and in addition, many within the antiwar movement would not agree with us socialists on the necessity of such a break. However, wouldn't a drive to collect signatures to a pledge not to vote for pro-war candidates only lead us into a trap? Even if we got a million signatures the pro-war Democrats and Republicans, after rolling in their 60 million votes, would point to the elections as further proof of their "pro-war mandate." Not to speak of the opportunist candidates who would try to use the antiwar sentiment to further their own personal ambitions. On

the other hand, if we petitioned to place the war question on the ballot in '68 so the American people can have a direct say, can decide, and we gathered a million signatures and the government refused (as we expect), we could expose their whole phony electoral victory by their fear of such a straightforward direct vote, etc., etc." The students' reaction was quick, almost automatic. The CP'ers had no answer. A negative approach without a countering positive proposal would have opened the way for the CP'ers to carry their proposal.

Concretely my suggestion is this: We begin to raise the demand for a national referendum on the war both within our movement and the antiwar movement.

There are many concrete ways to implement this. I present the following only to indicate the type of activity we can engage in:

The Berkeley delegation at the forthcoming student conference in Chicago will propose a simultaneous referendum on the war on all campuses where it can be arranged next fall. Along with a statement like the Dearborn referendum, the student poll is to include the question of a national referendum -- the right to vote on war in '68. The debate around this question on the campuses, plus the favorable results we can expect, will strengthen our position. Hopefully, this proposal will help maintain the morale of the antiwar activists and keep their hatred channeled against the capitalist class.

We can raise the referendum as a demand for the next major action of the Mobilization Committee, especially if this turns out to be a march on Washington.

The antiwar movement could arrange to have an legitimate public opinion sampling institution, possibly a university one, with sympathy for the movement, make a sampling of public support for the referendum demand. All sorts of activity popularizing the idea could be organized by the antiwar movement.

We could update and reprint Burnham's pamphlet or put out a new one. The CP's opposition to the 1940 proposal to let the people have the right to vote on war would not be very popular if the word gets out.

In conclusion, we should examine the whole question of a more vigorous use of the transitional demand for the right to vote on war.

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