

Problems of the peace movement: TACTICAL FLEXIBILITY URGED FOR
UNITED ANTIWAR ACTION

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During the last week of December, an agreement was reached by the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice (PCPJ) and the National Peace Action Council (NPAC) jointly to sponsor a mass demonstration in Washington Inauguration Day, Jan. 20.

While the necessity for this united action has generally been understood in the peace movement, a number of activists, including some of the best and most dedicated people, have had some serious reservations about it.

Some of the opposition to the united action arises out of bitter experiences in the past with the Trotskyite-dominated NPAC.

Some organizations, such as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, have been so burned by NPAC that they have come to oppose, almost on principle, any united action with the Trotskyites. While Communists are the first to sympathize with these sentiments, we must also point out that in politics you cannot choose your allies on the same basis as you choose your friends in everyday life.

It is not the honesty and decency of your allies that brings you together but rather the viciousness and barbarism of your common enemy. The question is not how bad are the Trotskyites but, rather, will certain forms of unity with them under certain conditions help to compel U.S. imperialism to end its oppression in Vietnam?

However, most of the dissatisfaction with the agreement for a united demonstration stems not from a general hostility to the Trotskyites but instead from the conditions imposed upon PCPJ by NPAC in order to obtain unity.

All of the organizations affiliated to PCPJ, in fact almost all peace organizations in the country outside of NPAC, recognize that the demand which corresponds best to the present situation is "Sign the Treaty Now."

This demand brings out the fact that there now exists a simple and concrete way to end the war. It has the virtue of reminding the American people that a major factor in Nixon's reelection was the promise that he was about to sign this agreement. Also, the demand to sign the agreement effectively exposes the lie that the war continues because the North Vietnamese backed away from the agreement at the last moment. This demand is the demand of the liberation forces in Vietnam. It is the demand of the world forces struggling to end U.S. aggression, and it should be the central demand of the U.S. peace movement.

However, for reasons I cannot discuss here, the Trotskyites are opposed to the treaty and, therefore, to any demand that the treaty be signed. They steadfastly refused any joint action under the banner of "Sign Now." While people are free to carry "Sign Now" placards and banners at the demonstration Jan. 20, and speakers can articulate this demand from the platform, the demands of the lead banner of the march are restricted to "Stop

the bombing -- end the war now."

An Unprincipled Concession?

Some honest peace forces were upset by PCPJ's decision to accept these conditions. Their anger and frustration with the Trotskyites kept them from seeing the situation in its proper perspective.

First, the leadership of PCPJ had to ask itself what the consequences would be of not accepting these conditions. It would have meant that there was no simple mass response to Nixon's election betrayal and to the unprecedented genocidal bombings of the North. It would have meant three (PCPJ, NPAC, PL-SDS), or perhaps four separate demonstrations in Washington, a fact which in and of itself would have made impossible a broad and massive mobilization for Jan. 20.

The leadership of PCPJ correctly judged that such a development would be a disaster.

What Is At Stake Jan. 20?

The actions of Jan. 20 are extremely important. The Inauguration Day actions are a challenge to Nixon's attempt to interpret his election victory as a mandate for continuing the war.

They are the first opportunity the masses have had to express their outrage over the cynical election fraud which Nixon pulled on them. A broad and massive response by the same forces is essential in order to expose Nixon's isolation on the war issue and to temper the desperation which appears to be spreading in certain high administration circles.

A massive turnout Jan. 20 is required, likewise, to pressure a hesitant and vacillating Congress into action. These actions will be seen, both here and abroad, as a test of strength between the administration and the anti-war forces in this country.

Under these circumstances, the issue of what slogans are on the lead banner is not the central one. Indeed, the mass of the American people are not even aware of this debate over slogans. In their minds, "end the war now" means "sign the treaty now." People are going to Washington because they understand that the peace forces must make a show of strength. And they are right.

Mass Turnout -- Essential Issue

Only a united action which combined the organizational and financial resources of both PCPJ and NPAC met the political requirements of the moment. Those who made the issue of the slogan into a question of principle were losing sight of the main principle -- the duty of the American people to stop the criminal aggression of their own imperialism. Our responsibility is not to profess our loyalty and solidarity with the Vietnamese but rather to do anything and everything that will effectively work to restrain the war makers.

Purity of conscience by the few cannot substitute for the

pressure exerted by an organized mass outpouring.

The peace forces must develop the tactical flexibility that will allow us to reach our maximum effectiveness. Compromise on the unessential issues is one feature of this. On Jan. 20, the essential issue was not which slogan is on the lead banners but rather how massive is the turnout.

This is not to say that the debate over slogans and demands is unimportant.

A struggle must be fought to win all peace forces to see the necessity for raising the demand that Nixon sign the treaty now. NPAC must either be forced to live with a united movement in which this is one of the demands or it must be isolated. It cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely to exercise a veto over the vast majority of those desiring peace.

However, the struggle over differences within the movement must not be carried on in such a way that they diminish the effectiveness of the movement itself. Only U.S. imperialism benefits from that.