

YSA

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

Vol. 11, No. 7

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20 cents

YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

YSA, BOX 471, COOPER STATION, N.Y., N.Y. 10003

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THE PEACE AND FREEDOM PARTY

Submitted by Derrel Myers,
January 22, 1968

Alternatives Wanted

Many people who supported Johnson in 1964 will not support him in 1968. The escalation of the war, lack of improvements in the living conditions of Afro-Americans and fierce repression against them, increased taxes and inflation add up to growing discontent with the candidates and policies of the Democratic Party. The most active opponents of Johnson are antiwar students and Afro-American militants. They are looking for a way to express their opposition in the electoral arena, but want to avoid the choices offered in 1964.

While some important lessons have been learned from the approach of supporting the lesser evil in 1964, many people haven't drawn the correct conclusions. Because of the middle class base of the student movement and the lack of motion among the workers, many radicals still look for a solution in the form of running individual candidates against Johnson. This narrow approach, no matter how radical or independent it may sound, can only lead in the wrong direction.

Some Wrong Alternatives

This approach is based on the incorrect premise that society can be changed by merely placing the 'right' individual in public office. Such an approach can only promote the politics of the most backward layers of the movement, because it is geared to getting liberal votes, not mobilizing opposition to the ruling class.

Part of this approach involves de-mobilizing activists. This is necessary, we are told, to avoid alienating potential support. King's proposed civil rights moratorium prior to the 1964 elections was an example of this. A recent article in the L.A. Times reports an announcement by the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) at a kick off rally that "We ain't marching anymore ...it isn't necessary." This poses the danger that the energies of anti-war activists will be spent drumming up support for liberal candidates instead of building mass independent actions.

A middle class movement which has no independent power of its own to change society, must look either to the working class through a socialist program or to the ruling class through a liberal program for alternatives. There is no middle ground. There is no such thing as a political movement independent of classes. And, it follows, there are no candidates independent of classes.

Socialists understand that the only force capable of changing society is mass working class political action. This action

includes electoral campaigns which are independent of, and in opposition to, capitalist parties. Unfortunately, American workers are not yet organized into their own party to do this. Until they are, we must conduct our own educational campaigns to orient labor, radical students, and Afro-Americans toward a class perspective of political action. Socialist electoral campaigns need not compete with mass action around single issues. On the contrary, these campaigns can help build them. The opposite of our approach is to support, because they might win, candidates who oppose most of our political ideas; candidates like Bob Scheer, King or Spock, who have a liberal, pro-capitalist program of reform.

When so-called socialists or radicals support candidates who are oriented to winning now, and who oppose socialism, they become pawns in the miseducation of the movement and they inevitably get what they don't want; another liberal opportunist in office or a demoralizing waste of time.

Independent of What?

Some alert liberals are aware of the discontent with Johnson. They are looking for some way to dull the opposition, orient it to looking for allies in the ruling class, and thus encompass it in capitalist parties. To them, working in the Democratic Party is not a principle, but so far has been the most effective way to accomplish this. If this variant becomes ineffective they will not hesitate to trade in the Democratic Party for a newer model of the same machine. The Democratic Party itself was organized for this purpose. The 1948 Wallace campaign was another example of this wrong kind of 'independent' political action. In 1948 it was done to thwart the rank and file unionists' demand for a labor party. Today it is to contain the antiwar movement and Afro-American struggle.

Several such 'alternatives' are being offered or sought. They vary only on the question of who is the best candidate, not in approach. They are looking for McCarthy, King, Spock, or any 'leader' who has enough courage or principals to oppose Johnson on one or two issues. All these campaigns will be offered to socialists, antiwar activists and Afro-American militants as independent and radical alternatives to Johnson, or a step in that direction. None of them claim or even aspire to be independent of the ruling class and whatever parties and candidates it may offer. To the contrary, they orient the movement to look to the ruling class for allies. This report will show how the Peace and Freedom Party is another version of the same thing.

History of the Peace and Freedom Party

The PFP was not conceived of as a break with the Democrats. Its roots are rather in an attempt to elect peace candidates in Democratic Party primaries. This grouping started around the Bob Scheer campaign. Scheer ran on an antiwar, pro-civil rights, local reform platform in the primaries for the 7th Congressional

District (basically Oakland and Berkeley). The impressive vote he received (45%) was a stimulus to liberals and antiwar students.

Scheer supporters became the Community for New Politics (CNP) and ran candidates in the Berkeley non-partisan municipal election. They would not run a candidate for mayor because they knew one could not win this post. They refused to go as far as supporting Jerry Rubin who did run, although Rubin supported their campaign and had no basic disagreements with them. The CNP and Rubin had illusions of winning and spread these illusions to their supporters. Out of the 35,000 votes the CNP candidates averaged 10,000 and Rubin received 7,400. Camejo the SWP candidate for mayor, received 1,000, which was twice the number received in 1963 and against stiffer odds this time. In L.A. our candidate for Board of Education received more votes than the CNP candidate; SWP 27,000; CNP 19,000. (There was no race for mayor there.)

After these elections the CNP in Berkeley unanimously adopted a resolution to draft King-Spock and called for the formation of a party for the sole purpose of getting King and Spock on the ballot. (This plan required the registration of 67,000 members of the new party or 670,000 signatures.) The decisions of the Chicago NCNP convention, however, confused and disoriented them. The CP and some liberals urged the CNP to work in the California Democratic Council to fight for a peace ticket in the Democratic primaries. The Independent Socialist Club (left wing social-democrats) took the initiative to get a new party on the ballot. They still haven't found any leaders to run, but this hasn't stopped them. This campaign was slow to start, but in the last few months gained momentum and they were able to register 105,000 people.

Composition of PFP

The bulk of registrants in PFP are liberal Democrats who want to pressure some liberal antiwar figures, like King and Spock, into running by offering them a place on the California ballot. Many antiwar activists who are looking for a real alternative to Johnson and a way of registering antiwar sentiment at the polls have registered PFP. This initial success has attracted the attention of many radicals and socialists.

PFP "Socialists"

The Communist Party is still oriented toward the California Democratic Council. They are, however, mild supporters of PFP. They play no leadership role in it.

ISCers have played a key role in the leadership of PFP. They are the center of its Radical Caucus. They provide PFP with a radical cover needed to attract militants.

The Socialist Party has spent little time with PFP. A few maverick leaders are sponsors.

Progressive Labor supports PFP, but plays an insignificant role. Spartacist League recently came out in support of PFP.

Most antiwar activists and other radical students are registered PFP. They do the legwork. Many of them see this as the best way to extend the antiwar movement into electoral politics, and as the beginning of a real break with the Democrats.

There is no labor and little Afro-American support for the PFP. The Black Panther Party for Self Defense supports PFP in exchange for PFP defense of Huey Newton. This is at best a shakey alliance at the top. The liberals in PFP are already grumbling.

Program of PFP

It is clear that an important section of the PFP leadership does not regard this as a serious break with the Democrats. Their literature explains that one can register PFP and re-register Democrat in time for the primaries. (PFP is permanently on the ballot, even if all members re-register.) This is undoubtedly good news to Democrats who might have been worried about this "break." They explain their break as purely tactical: "There are no good candidates this year." The purpose of the PFP is to get "good candidates on the ballot. They don't support McCarthy because he is not "good" enough, but primarily, they explain, because he hasn't a chance of winning. They oppose him for wrong and opportunistic reasons. They still hope to convince King and Spock to run. Mike Parker, one of the ISCers in PFP, explained in the Berkeley Barb that they are looking for good candidates and that some 'leaders' are considering, but are "waiting to see if there is enough support before they stick their necks out." (my emphasis.) The only thing these cautious liberals could possibly lead is a retreat into Johnson's waiting arms.

PFP has called a founding convention for March. At this time their only program is withdrawal from Vietnam, support for the black liberation struggle, and progress. They will have to devise a freak program that can attract the critical supporters of imperialism and militant opponents of it. The likelihood is that militancy and program will have to give way to success. It will be difficult, but not impossible, to convince some radicals and socialists of the wisdom of this approach. Others, who are looking to PFP for a genuine break with capitalist politics and militant opposition to the war, will be disappointed. A fight is already developing over these issues.

It is possible that the initial success of PFP will stir others to copy it in other parts of the country. An early understanding and exposure of PFP will help comrades in other areas win young radicals to our approach.

Although we are practically alone in our opposition to PFP, we are far from being isolated. Our work in the antiwar movement has established us as a part of the leadership of the student radicalization. As leaders our ideas have an impact on many of these students. They are very interested, for example, in our reasons for opposing PFP, and some are overly concerned that we are not with them in this venture. Some of them see no contradiction yet in being in PFP and supporting our campaign.

This is a good example of the value of our campaign. It raises questions and creates interest in our politics. Our example of a national campaign, unequivocal in its program and opposition to capitalism, has, even at this early date, attracted much attention and has made the liberal snow job more difficult.

ADDENDUM TO THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Since submitting the proposed constitutional amendment of 1/23, it has been brought to our attention that the language of the document does not accurately reflect the meaning we had intended. The document was written and mailed in haste, and we failed to consider the possible and probable effect the overly acrimonious language would have.

In short, we did not intend to impute bureaucratism to the N.E.C., although the document does seem to imply such a charge. Rather, we meant to sharply call to comrades' attention the discrepancy between the formal 90-day discussion period and the actual shortened period that we have had. This discrepancy, we feel, is the result of inadequate constitutional clarity rather than any deliberate malfeasance on the part of the N.E.C., although conjunctural circumstances have undoubtedly played their part.

We would, if possible, "renounce and repudiate" much of the "clearly dangerous and potentially disastrous" language of the document which gives it a hostile tone, for we intended no hostility to the N.E.C.

The proposed constitutional amendment may or may not be the best means of correcting the problems we referred to. We hope the convention will find a way of lengthening the effective discussion period. However, the proposed amendment should be given consideration by the delegates, and discussion by the convention would be appreciated by the authors.

We also hope the convention can appreciate this object lesson in how not to write a document.

Milton Chee
Steve Meisenbach
San Francisco
January 28, 1968

ON THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

The proposed amendment to the YSA constitution submitted by Milton Chee and Steve Meisenbach raises several questions that were discussed when we adopted a new constitution at the 1966 Convention. For this reason, we are reprinting the introduction to the National Executive Committee Draft of the Constitution (YSA Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 9, No. 3, January, 1966).

This introduction outlines briefly the functions a constitution serves for the YSA and some of the deficiencies that existed in the constitution adopted at the founding convention in 1960.

The proposed amendment would reintroduce into the constitution a provision that was in the founding constitution, but consciously deleted from the new constitution adopted in 1966. The old constitution explicitly stated that: "the ninety day period (pre-convention discussion period) shall begin only when the principal majority resolutions have been published;" the new constitution states that the National Committee "shall provide for a pre-convention discussion period of at least 90 days" and that the NEC "shall issue a call at the start of the pre-convention discussion period." Thus there is now no constitutional requirement for the date of publication of any of the major documents.

This provision was deleted from the old constitution because it was too rigid. From the founding convention in 1960 through the 1966 convention, the publication date of the first major document was almost always considerably less than 90 days (in 1966 it was 40 days) despite the fact that the NEC was required by the constitution to publish all the major documents 90 days before the convention. This was not due to ill-will, negligence or deliberate mismanagement on the part of the national leadership, but rather to a number of factors including lack of staff, problem with the timing of antiwar conferences, etc.

There have been occasions in the past eight years when the major documents may not have been published early enough to provide for an adequate and fruitful discussion. However, it has been proven in practice that a constitutional requirement does not guarantee that there will be sufficient time for discussion. Also, under some conditions, it might be preferable to delay the publication of a major document so as to have time to incorporate information not available 90 days before the convention.

To include in the constitution a provision which is continually violated and is not absolutely necessary leads to a situation where the constitution is not taken seriously. It is better to leave rigid provisions of this kind out and have a constitution that is workable and treated seriously.

Doug Jenness
February 1, 1968

INTRODUCTION TO THE REVISED YSA CONSTITUTION ADOPTED
AT THE MARCH 1966 CONVENTION

The first constitution was adopted at the Founding Convention in April, 1960. The delegates to this convention came from many different backgrounds in the socialist movement, and many of them had no experience with the way in which a revolutionary-socialist organization actually functions. Consequently their constitution was an educated guess at what would be workable--the errors of which the new constitution attempts to correct.

The changes in the constitution have been based on our concrete experiences. They are part of the process of growth of the YSA. The 1962 YSA Convention amended the constitution to include an age ceiling. At the 1963 Convention the YSA took a step forward by changing its Statement of Purpose. The timeliness of this particular change was driven home by many of the experiences of the witch hunt in Bloomington. Without changing our principles, we adopted a new statement which reflected more accurately the national as well as international roots of our political heritage. The new statement was also more appropriate for public use and for our campus units trying to get official recognition.

The experience of the YSA in dealing with specific problems related to the constitution led to another major alteration at the 1965 Convention. On that occasion we eliminated references to proportional representation of minorities on the NC and the NEC. The experience of having a disloyal member of the Robertson minority on the NEC taught us that this provision was a foolish obstacle to a responsibly functioning national center. In several instances the disloyal Robertsonites passed along internal matters to opponent organizations. Consequently a "duel NEC" developed with the majority NECers meeting separately to discuss the major problems and carry out the work. The sections on proportional representation had left the door open to putting the organization in jeopardy and to a necessary "winking" at a section of the constitution to prevent this.

These changes, however, did not eliminate many of the extraneous sections or correct all of the faults of the founding constitution.

At last year's Convention, the constitutional commission pointed out that many more amendments were necessary. Not only were there several sections that the commission thought to be wrong, but there were many that simply did not belong in the constitution if it was to serve its major purpose, that is briefly and clearly define membership--its requirements, rights, and basic duties--and define the relationship between and the responsibilities of the various bodies of the

YSA. The incoming NC was instructed by the Convention to rewrite the constitution. In order to accomplish this task the drafters of the new constitution began by pruning-- that is deciding what a constitution is not and what problems are not within their province to solve.

1. A constitution is not a statement of principles or a codification of our traditions and procedures.

For example, in drafting the new constitution the provision for granting fraternal votes to National Committee members at conventions was deleted. Fraternal votes to NCers is a tradition that we have practiced and undoubtedly will continue to practice, but it is not a defining feature of membership or of the relationship between YSA bodies. It is a procedural matter for the convention to decide.

Likewise, it will continue to be the norm for the YSA to have representation of political minorities on the NC and NEC. This is a good tradition, but it is foolish--as we found out in 1964 and 1965--to make it part of the constitution as a formal requirement.

2. A constitution is not a collection of tips for organizers or locals; nor should it be a substitute for any needed local by laws.

One section of the old constitution states that chairmen of all meetings and committees shall have voice and vote and that the nay vote shall be taken first in calling the question. Clauses of this type do not set the boundaries on membership or define the relationship between bodies. They more appropriately belong in a local organizer's handbook than in the constitution--although the concept of taking the nay vote first is probably too weird to belong in either.

3. It is not the function of a constitution to foresee all types of future needs of the YSA.

For example, the founders of the YSA included two sections on district and regional organization apparently expecting rapid growth of the YSA. Regional and district organization will eventually be necessary but details like these are better left to a future convention to add when the pace of growth makes it necessary and the outlines of what a region and district would be and what functions they would carry out emerge.

4. A constitution is not a listing of actions that individuals and bodies may do.

If the constitution were to list all of the activities that comrades are allowed to do the list would become infinite and would mean turning the constitution into a manual of

our organizational traditions. An attempt was made to include only provisions defining what comrades must or shall do. If an action is not contradicted by the constitution that means it is not unconstitutional. It may be wise or foolish, right or wrong, but that is up to the bodies concerned to decide, not the constitution.

The draft also deletes sections that were too rigid or formal. Experience has demonstrated, for example, that there is no necessity in outlining specific duties for the National Chairman and the National Secretary. In fact it is an obstacle to a rational division of labor within the National Office. Also it is too easy to violate provisions like this. The National Secretary, for example, has not always been the person responsible for the administration of the national office as specified by the constitution. It is much better to eliminate irrational provisions and abide by the constitution than it is to keep these provisions and continually violate them. It is important that the YSA have a constitution that we do not take with a grain of salt. The NEC tried to draft a document that is simple enough to be understood, flexible enough to be workable, and rational enough to be treated seriously.

No constitution will solve any more than a small handful of the problems an organization of our type faces. It cannot do the impossible--that is solve major political and organizational problems or be beyond the need for interpretation. But a good constitution is an important part of the YSA's structure.

YSA National Office
January 26, 1966