

FOR NC INFORMATION

NY "PEACE AND FREEDOM" AND "FREEDOM AND PEACE" CONVENTIONS
by Jon Britton
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Introduction

At the National Conference for New Politics convention in Chicago last fall the Communist Party outlined its strategy for a national "third ticket" in 1968. The Draperites of the Independent Socialist Club counterposed their proposal for the establishment of a permanent national "third party."

The CP's third ticket strategy was and is inseparably linked up with the Dump Johnson/Stop Humphrey movement within the Democratic Party. Its objective is the nomination of a credible Democratic Party "peace and freedom" candidate in 1968.

The Draperites, on the other hand, anticipating that the Democratic Party will fail to nominate such a candidate, see the possibility of harnessing the mass opposition to the Vietnam war behind their get rich quick scheme of building a mass "radical" third party almost overnight. Thus, they eagerly look forward to "the bursting of the McCarthy bubble."

Both of these electoral strategies were voted down at the NCNP convention last fall in favor of "local organizing." This was a setback to both the CP and ISC. However, neither saw the vote as any way binding on them and both left Chicago fully intending to implement their respective strategies as best they could. The built-in conflict between the two perspectives has led to two separate third party formations in New York.

An additional complication in this situation is the electoral alliance between black militants and the third party formations in California and New York.

Background to Conventions

Shortly after the California Peace and Freedom Party ballot victory in early January, the Independent Socialist Club initiated a "Peace and Freedom Party Organizing Committee" in New York. At a press conference held February 1 it was announced that local "Peace and Freedom Party" clubs would be formed and a statewide convention would be called within a few months to adopt a program, choose candidates and take steps to get on the ballot. Francis Halpern, a leader in the California PFP, flew in to aid the ISC effort.

At about this same time the Communist Party decided it would get a New York third ticket effort off the ground. On February 3 a meeting called by New York NCNP leaders and supported by the CP established a group called the "New Party Organizing Committee." A contingent of ISCers participated in this meeting arguing for a permanent third party and against a motion to call a statewide convention in May on the grounds that a base had to be build first. This advice went unheeded

and the meeting voted to call a state convention to be held in May to nominate candidates for President, Vice President and U.S. Senator and adopt a platform.

The ISC began immediately to set up little "Peace and Freedom Party" clubs in various areas of New York City. This reporter attended the initial meeting of the Lower Eastside club on February 19. Present besides myself were four ISCers and one independent. Most of the discussion centered around the need to build "an independent base" quickly to prevent the CP from taking over the N.Y. Peace and Freedom Party. This base was to be built, according to the ISCers, through such "grassroots organizing" activities as draft and welfare counseling in the community.

On March 2 a meeting was held in Albany, N.Y. called by the New Party Organizing Committee to plan the state convention. The political tendencies participating were the CP, ISC and Progressive Labor Party plus their peripheries and a few young independents.

Essentially two points were taken up at the Albany meeting: 1) voting rules for the meeting; and 2) organizing a state convention. Most of the meeting was taken up debating the CP-backed proposal to give the 15 member "black caucus" the right to cast 50% of the vote as a bloc.

Lydia Williams and Blyden Jackson, both of whom had been deeply involved in the 1966 Aptheker campaign in Brooklyn (Jackson, a public CPer, as campaign manager), played leading roles in the "black caucus." Miss Williams was the sole spokesman for the "black caucus" in the plenary sessions. The ISC and PLP apparently had no people in the "black caucus."

The ISC and PLP formed a de facto bloc at the Albany meeting in opposition to the 50% proposal. They argued that it was undemocratic and would make it difficult to recruit whites to the new party. The ISC proposed an amendment providing for a "bicameral" voting system whereby both a black and white caucus would function with the right to cast 50% of the vote as a bloc should a majority in that caucus wish to do so. During the discussion Lydia Williams took the floor to announce that the "black caucus" was leaving and would not come back if the original 50% proposal was defeated. The black contingent then got up and walked out. When the vote was finally taken the CP-backed proposal carried by a comfortable margin (108-65).

Despite this setback, the ISC and PLP remained at the Albany meeting pushing for more radical formulations in the convention call and obtaining positions on the various committees set up to organize the convention now slated for Memorial Day weekend. The "black caucus" exercised its 50% vote once -- to change the proposed party name from "Peace and Freedom" to "Freedom and Peace."

At this point, the ISC and PLP clearly had the perspective of participating with the CP in the Freedom and Peace state convention.

However, a few days later the ISC and PLP made a 180 degree turnabout. The PFP Organizing Committee met in New York City and voted almost unanimously to: 1) withdraw completely from the Freedom and

Peace formation; 2) continue to build Peace and Freedom Clubs with the perspective of holding a statewide Peace and Freedom convention prior to and separate from the Freedom and Peace convention; 3) set up a "Delegates Assembly" made up of representatives from each club (one delegate per ten members) to implement this perspective. The only stated reason for splitting was the 50% black caucus voting rule adopted by the Albany meeting. PLP participated fully in the meeting having decided to join the ISC-initiated formation.

In the next few weeks, the period leading up to the two state conventions, both Freedom and Peace and Peace and Freedom formations busied themselves setting up local clubs. Freedom and Peace ran full page ads in the Village Voice and the Guardian consisting of the call for their state convention.

A struggle between PLP and ISC over who would control the Peace and Freedom group broke out almost immediately. PLP took over the Upper Westside club and the Lower Eastside club and initiated clubs in Queens and Brooklyn. They claimed huge memberships for their clubs (something like 200 in the Upper Westside club) thereby strengthening their fraction in the Delegates Assembly. The ISC left the PLP dominated clubs and set up their own clubs in the same areas. PLP responded by declaring that these areas of Manhattan were the exclusive domain of the original clubs.

The ISC also attempted to initiate clubs on various campuses in the city. Their most successful effort was at New York University where they have a half dozen or so members. They succeeded in winning over many of the campus radicals to the idea of setting up a P&F group on campus and in recent campus elections this group took over student government.

The power struggle between the ISC and PLP set the context within which the Peace and Freedom convention held May 25-26 at New York University took place. Both sides organized caucuses. The PLP caucus called itself the "Democratic-Left Coalition." The ISC called its caucus the "Independent Caucus."

NY Peace and Freedom Convention

Just prior to the convention the "Democratic-Left Coalition" issued a four page printed newspaper "explaining" the issues and containing PLP's structure proposal. The paper Trotsky-baits the ISC and attacks the ISC for viewing the NLF leadership in South Vietnam as an incipient exploitative ruling class.

Both the ISC and PLP fully mobilized for the Peace and Freedom convention. A total of 324 people registered. A definite majority of these were young people. Only a handful of blacks participated, most of these being in the PLP caucus. Carlos Aponte, a Mexican-American from California, was the main spokesman for the ISC caucus in the plenary sessions.

According to the mailing sent out prior to the convention, the first plenary session was supposed to feature a talk by Kathleen Cleaver

and reports on the P&F movement in California, Michigan and New York. Mrs. Cleaver didn't show up and no explanation was provided. There was no report on Michigan but there were reports on California and New York.

Tom Condit gave the report on California. It was basically a description of the evolution of the California PFP from the ISC point of view. He claimed 2 - 3,000 active members in the California PFP (people who regularly attend meetings), and a 71,000 PFP registration. He predicted a big upsurge for the PFP "after the McCarthy bubble bursts."

The N.Y. report was given by ISC'er Pete Davidovich who had been traveling around trying to set up Peace and Freedom groups in other areas of the state. He was very vague about the results of these efforts claiming that "a lot of potential" existed but that the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns were creating problems. He also mentioned that the SWP campaign was giving them serious competition. He reported that 17 local clubs existed in New York City.

Most of the remainder of the two-day convention was taken up with structure. The ISC caucus argued for a loose, decentralized structure -- small clubs having no exclusive jurisdiction and no central policy making body. They proposed that there be an "Interim Administrative Committee" to be elected at the convention to run the central office and an "Interim Coordinating Council" consisting of two representatives from each club to coordinate and exchange information.

PLP argued for large clubs having exclusive jurisdiction over their area and a continuation of the "Delegates Assembly" which would have the power to make policy and settle jurisdictional disputes between clubs.

The ISC out-mobilized PLP and their structural proposal passed 195-135 with one abstention. There were 40-50 people at the convention, including some of the new NYU recruits, who did not particularly identify with either the ISC or PLP and they set up their own caucus. Most of these people ended up voting for the ISC structure proposal.

Bullet voting was allowed in the election of nine people for the "Interim Administrative Committee" and the PLP caucus didn't get a single person on it.

The only other motion of significance passed at the convention was one calling for "collaboration with the California PFP" in an effort to establish a national Peace and Freedom Party.

There was no discussion of candidates but a motion was passed in favor of holding a statewide conference in mid-July to take up the fall election. It seemed that everyone present took it for granted that a slate of national, state and local candidates would be nominated and gotten on the N.Y. ballot. There was no decision or even discussion regarding a possible common slate with the Freedom and Peace Party.

The prospect facing the N.Y. PFP appears to be a debilitating faction fight between PLP and ISC. At a minimum it will take the form

of PLP-led clubs and ISC-led clubs in each area attacking and raiding each other. At a maximum there will be a complete split and two separate PFP's in New York.

NY Freedom and Peace Convention

The Freedom and Peace convention was held June 1-2 in New York City. A total of 543 people registered, according to the credentials report, of which 324 were voting delegates. One could become a delegate either by being so designated by an existing organization or by collecting 15 names on a petition. A total of 97 Afro-Americans attended the convention most of whom participated in the "black caucus." There were 88 delegates and observers present from outside New York City. About one third of the participants could be classified as youth. There was almost no overlap in attendance between this convention and the Peace and Freedom convention.

A lot of money had obviously gone into this convention and it was extremely well organized with professional looking banners, printed delegates' cards, fancy convention kits, and well briefed people assigned to registration, press information, security, housing, etc. This was in marked contrast to the PFP convention which had more the appearance of an SDS gathering.

During most of the first day of the convention the "black caucus" met separately. Unfortunately, we had no observer sitting in on its meetings and so don't know the extent to which it is dominated by the CP. The Afro-Americans acting as spokesmen for the "black caucus" in the plenary sessions of the convention were: Blyden Jackson (a public CPer), Lydia Williams (active in 1966 Aptheker campaign), and John Wilson (SNCC and NBAWADU; non-CPer).

On the first day the delegates were addressed by Fannie Lou Hamer and Ossie Davis. A message was read from Dr. Spock. On the second day, Donna Allen of WSP spoke to the convention and Norma Becker of the Parade Committee sent a message of support.

There was no hint of dissension in the plenary sessions with one exception which is described below. The 50% voting rule was passed unanimously and without debate, in sharp contrast to the March 2 Albany meeting.

In the convention kits was a folder containing platform proposals (short position papers) on Vietnam, foreign policy, labor, education, health, students and youth, transportation, civil liberties, women, economics and housing. These were written up by the "platform committee" formed at the March 2 Albany meeting. The delegates had not seen these proposals prior to the convention.

There was about two hours of discussion on the Vietnam and Foreign Policy proposals, most of which was concerned with wording rather than substance. However, John Wilson, speaking for the "black caucus" proposed several changes of some significance in the Vietnam platform:

- 1) a change in the wording to indicate that the primary reason for

opposing the war is because it is racist; 2) substitution of immediate withdrawal of troops and immediate cessation of all bombing for a demand which was vaguely worded and included a reference to negotiations; 3) inclusion of a statement in support of the South Vietnam NLF.

Several white delegates spoke against the third suggestion and a compromise was proposed involving a statement of support to all movements around the world struggling for national liberation without being specific. Wilson would not accept the compromise. All three changes proposed by the "black caucus" were then approved.

A little later, however, the chairman of the platform committee announced that it would obviously be impossible, because of lack of time, to discuss and adopt the platform proposals. He then moved that the "state committee" (to be elected at the convention) be empowered to adopt a platform after holding "public hearings." Another part of his motion was a proposal to approve the following platform points which would "define" the party until a more comprehensive platform was adopted:

Freedom & Peace Platform

Halt to all bombing in Vietnam and immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.

A new foreign policy based on principles of non-interference in affairs of other people, and self-determination for all peoples. Recall all troops and close all foreign bases.

End U.S. complicity with Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia. End the Cuban blockade.

No support to the Greek military junta.

Independence for Puerto Rico. Recognition of People's Republic of China, end domination of Latin America.

The platform also condemned aggressive use of force by the government of Israel in the Middle East, and called on Israel to abide by the unanimous decision of the UN Security Council and return all conquered territories.

Condemned role of U.S. in instigating and perpetuating the crisis in its use of Israel as a tool for its imperialist ends.

Called for renunciation of all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and destruction of all stockpiles.

An economic bill of rights, including the guarantee of "the right to earn enough to provide adequate food, clothing and recreation," the right of every family to a decent home; free mass transit, an increase in funds to operate subways and buses by taxing corporate and real estate profits.

Nationalization of drug industry.

Administration and control of welfare and anti-poverty programs by the poor.

A \$2. state minimum wage.

Immediate amnesty for all political prisoners, including draft resisters.

Repeal all repressive legislation, such as McCarran and Smith Acts.

Repeal shoot-to-kill law.

Stop arbitrary arrests and persecution of Black leaders.

Community control of police forces.

Immediate abolition of Selective Service system.

Restore Medicaid cuts.

Universal government-operated health insurance with uniform system of health care.

Community control of schools: funds, hiring, firing, construction, curriculum, textbooks and supplies.

Incorporation of African, Asian and Black American history and culture into required curriculum.

Support for struggles of students and faculty for democracy and in higher education.

Preferential and compensatory admission for Blacks, Puerto Ricans and other minorities.

Subsidies to students. Free higher education. Revision and strengthening of N.Y. Equal Pay law to ensure equal wages for women for equal labor.

Two hundred thousand public housing units be built every year for ten years.

Support to Black and progressive caucuses in such unions as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the United Federation of Teachers, to struggle against "reactionary, racist and bureaucratic leadership."

The convention delegates voted by acclamation and without discussion to draft Dr. Spock for President and Coretta King for Vice President. Not a single delegate raised an objection to this. There was no indication given as to how likely it was that these drafts would be accepted.

In addition, Herman Ferguson was nominated to be the Freedom and Peace Senatorial candidate. Ferguson is not a CPer. He is an Afro-American teacher currently standing trial on frame-up charges of criminal anarchy and conspiring to murder Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young. It has since been alleged by the prosecution that he also conspired to assassinate Robert Kennedy.

Ferguson made an acceptance speech. In it he described his candidacy as an educational campaign in which he would call for: bringing all black GIs home from Vietnam; support to black draft resistance; freedom for all political prisoners; and black control of the black community. He also stated that black people should seriously consider withdrawing their children from the public school system and sending them to schools like those set up by the Nation of Islam if drastic steps aren't taken to better the conditions in black schools and the quality of education in the black community. He also suggested that possibly black workers should establish an independent black union cutting across all job lines. Finally, he stated his opinion that the ultimate solution to the problems of black people was the establishment of an independent black nation.

It's interesting that in the Worker (June 9) article on the Freedom and Peace convention written by Mike Davidow not a single word is devoted to reporting the programmatic part of Ferguson's speech. This points up the contradiction between the CP line on the black struggle and that of non-CP militants like Ferguson.

Toward the end of the convention a motion was passed calling for a "Freedom and Peace Summer" in which students and youth would devote their

summer to working for Freedom and Peace.

Finally, a collection was taken by Lydia Williams for the Freedom and Peace Party and to help defend the "Harlem 5" (five black Harlemites recently picked up on trumped up charges of planning to kill a cop a week). John Wilson pledged \$20. for NAWADU. (Lydia Williams announced during the collection that the CP had contributed \$100. This brought general, prolonged and enthusiastic applause and cheering from the convention delegates.)

As can be gathered from the above description the Freedom and Peace convention was pretty much a stage managed affair with the CP calling the shots. Any political person attending the convention would sense this very quickly.

The Freedom and Peace convention showed that Johnson's withdrawal from the Presidential race, the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns, and the CP's decision to run its own national ticket did not cause the CP to drop its third ticket strategy. The CP considers Humphrey to be as bad as LBJ as shown by the "Stop Humphrey" campaign in their press. And Robert Kennedy's assassination, leaving only McCarthy to challenge Humphrey, has undoubtedly strengthened their conviction that a third ticket is necessary.

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EXCERPTS FROM JUNE 18, 1968 WORKER EDITORIAL

It was the independent political action of the masses that propelled Sen. Eugene McCarthy into the race for the Democratic Presidential nomination and keeps him fighting on principle; it was this which impelled the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy to present himself as a candidate.

But now the warmongers, the racists, the monopolists seek to sew up the two old-line parties for the repudiated policies of the Johnson administration. The Republican Party is hopeless as a vehicle of change of President Johnson's policies

In the upper echelons of the Democratic party, the enemies of the American people hope to cancel out the vote in the primaries for peace and black liberation and steamroller through the nomination of Humphrey as the Democratic Presidential candidate against the will of the people.

The presence of an alternative, third, national Presidential ticket of Dr. Spock and Mrs. King in the electoral campaign could provide a further extension of the independent political activity of the masses of the American people to counteract this maneuvering of the reactionary forces in the two old-line parties.

The candidacy of Dr. Spock and Mrs. King could provide an alternative for millions of American voters to the Democratic party bosses' efforts to impose LBJ's Humphrey upon the electorate. It could provide a real choice on the ballot for millions of voters who will recognize

no possibility of the solution of the problems of the country in the old-line parties.

That there are possibilities for an alternative third Presidential ticket is indicated by the birth of a number of Freedom and Peace parties from California to New York. In those states where such parties are not yet in existence, there are groupings of independent political forces prepared to move in the same direction.

What appears to be needed is the bringing together of these parties and groupings into a national force. A third national ticket could be that unifying force in the 1968 electoral struggle to achieve freedom and peace.