

BY BRIAN SHANNON, Socialist Workers party candidate for Berkeley City Council

On January 9th over sixty young socialists and antiwar activists gathered in Stiles Hall on the Berkeley campus to hear Peter Camejo, former National Secretary of the Young Socialist Alliance, and now a student at the University of California, discuss his campaign for Mayor of Berkeley. This meeting was an initial working meeting of supporters of the Socialist Workers Party ticket headed by Camejo, and following the reports the gathering broke up into smaller meetings of several committees that were set up to carry on the campaign.

I have participated in socialist election campaigns before but never have I witnessed the enthusiasm that has been generated by our campaign in Oakland and Berkeley this spring. Already we have received considerable publicity and are winning more and more supporters every day.

Besides Camejo, the SWP is running Paul Montauk, 44, for Mayor of Oakland. Montauk is a long-time activist in Oakland's labor movement and was one of the organizers of the original Berkeley Vietnam Day, May 21-22, 1965.

As candidate for Board of Education in Berkeley, the SWP is putting up Ernest Erlbeck, a member of the Berkeley Vietnam Day Committee, former chairman of the Berkeley YSA, and presently manager of Pioneer Book Store in Berkeley.

Jaimey Allen, 23, and Ove Aspoy, 21, both active members of the Berkeley Vietnam Day Committee and members of the Berkeley YSA are running for City Council in Berkeley along with myself.

Our campaign began with a press conference on January 4th, where we pointed out that our primary emphasis would be to speak out against the Vietnam war. The problems of the poor, of racial inequality, of inflation, of working people generally, cannot be solved so long as our national resources are geared towards a brutal and racist war in Vietnam. The first four points of our platform call for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops, a national referendum to decide whether the U.S. should get out of Vietnam, defense of the constitutional right of soldiers to discuss the war and speak out against it, and for an end to the draft.

The main activity of the campaign so far has been an attempt to place a referendum on the Vietnam war before the voters of Berkeley and Oakland. When Paul Montauk went before the Oakland City Council with a proposed referendum he was flatly rejected. A seemingly more favorable response came from the Berkeley City Council when it was proposed by Mayorality candidate Camejo. Several Councilmen said they thought it was a good idea



Pete Camejo at campaign meeting

Photo by Shannon

SOCIALIST ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN BERKELEY

and the proposal was endorsed by Mayor Wallace Johnson. Endorsement was received by several persons prominent in the antiwar movement and a committee was formed including Cliff Humphrey of the United Committee Against the War, Robert Scheer of *Ramparts* magazine, Robert Avakian of the Community for New Politics, Reginald Zelnick of the Faculty Peace Committee, Bettina Aptheker, student strike leader, Janet Longmead, of the California Democratic Council, Carl Frank of the Vietnam Day Committee, Max Scherr, editor of the *Berkeley Barb*, Peter Camejo, and others.

Instead of acting on the proposal, the City Council appointed a subcommittee to study the idea of a "poll." When questioned by Camejo the Council agreed that a "poll" would be fair only if it was in the form of a "vote." However, when Camejo asked how soon the committee would report back and whether it was their intention to have the poll along with the City Election on April 4, the Council gave no definite answer.

Without notice to the persons interested and without even placing the matter on the agenda (which is always posted in a public place in the City Hall) the committee made a formal report back to the Council on January 24 in order to recommend that the poll not take place in connection with the City Election on April 4. The official explanation was that no "objective procedure" could be established. However the reasons given did not relate to any "objectivity" of the poll but to the supposed impropriety of discussion of "national policy" during a local campaign "concerned with local issues." As a face-saving gesture the committee is being continued in order "to explore the possibilities

of an informational poll which could be conducted this spring."

Meanwhile those interested in placing the poll on the ballot on April 4 had drawn up a suggested wording. Five alternatives were proposed:

1. I favor a more aggressive U. S. government war policy in Vietnam.
2. I support the present administration's war policy in Vietnam.
3. I believe the U. S. government should stop bombing north Vietnam and should negotiate with all parties concerned.
4. I favor an immediate withdrawal of U. S. troops from Vietnam.
5. I do not agree with any of the above, I believe

By the time the City Council had ruled out a poll in connection with the City Election we had collected the signatures of almost a thousand supporters of this proposal.

At present there is no legal way to force the City Council to conduct the poll at the City Election, but the committee for the opinion poll decided that if the City Council will not do it perhaps the antiwar movement can. In Mississippi the civil rights movement has held mock elections for disenfranchised Negroes in order to organize people and to expose the lack of democracy. The antiwar movement can set up tables at the polls on election day and hold a "freedom election" to allow Berkeley voters to express their opinion on Vietnam. At the same time we would allow 18 year olds to vote, tabulating their ballots separately. It has also been suggested that at the same time we could ask voters to sign a petition calling for

a special election in order to vote for a city ordinance that would make "legal" polls possible in the future.

We don't know yet if we can do it because the polls are open for 12 hours; and it will require at least 500 people to organize the printing of the questionnaire and the proposed city ordinance, and to set up and man the tables. To gain the largest possible support we are asking groups not generally associated with the antiwar movement, such as the League of Women Voters, to help in this project. We are also making an assessment of the number of workers the student groups can provide.

"No Tuition — Tax War Profits"

In order to meet a budget crisis California's new Governor, Ronald Reagan, has proposed a 10 per cent cut in the state budget, with a proposed 30 per cent cut in the budget of the University of California. He hopes to get additional revenue from the imposition of a \$250 a year tuition (tuition is not charged at the University of California but there are already "incidental fees" amounting to \$250 a year) to be raised to \$400 a year in the future.

On January 19 over 3,000 students assembled in front of University Hall on the Berkeley campus (where the Regents of the university were meeting) to protest the proposed cut in the University budget and imposition of tuition. Students showed great interest in Camejo's charge that the inflation brought on by the Vietnam war was responsible for both national and state budget crises and that cutting back on state welfare and university education was related to the national financing of the Vietnam war at the expense of working people. "Are millionaires going to keep their money and get richer while students find part-time jobs?" he asked. The *Barb*, Berkeley's anti-establishment weekly, reported that the greatest student applause came when Camejo said that in order to balance the budget without charging tuition Reagan could tax war industries 100 percent.

Liberal Opposition

In addition to the SWP's slate of candidates the Community for New Politics (CNP) is running three candidates for City Council and one candidate for city auditor. According to its spokesman and candidate for City Council, Bob Avakian, the CNP is a "coalition of radicals and liberals" that is attempting "to educate people about the causes of war, racism, and exploitation and to relate these to immediate issues and to the structure and forms of power in this society."

This is certainly a worthy objective. However,

in our socialist campaign program we go further and point out that "both the Democratic and Republican parties are controlled by big businessmen and are committed to the preservation of the capitalist system. In our opinion neither party will take any stand that runs counter to the interests of the capitalists who profit from war and racism." For this reason we call for a break with the two parties of "war, racism and exploitation" and support black independent political action such as the Black Panther Party in Lowndes County, Alabama and "general working class independent political action and the formation of a labor party."

How about the CNP? Does it "educate people about" the Democratic and Republican party's role as the props of "the structure and forms of power in this society" and point out their responsibility for "war, racism, and exploitation?" Does it, for example, agree with Stokely Carmichael who has said that "the Democratic party is the most treacherous enemy of the Negro?" Not at all. In fact the CNP is merely a radical faction of the Democratic party and is attempting to elect its "good guys" in place of the entrenched "bad guys." In one of their campaign brochures they explicitly state: "We will only support candidates who fight for our needs whether these candidates are Democrats, Republicans, or independents."

The CNP is the organizational continuation of Robert Scheer's (an editor for *Ramparts* magazine) unsuccessful Democratic party primary campaign against the incumbent congressman last spring. The \$70,000 campaign began when some dissident Democratic party liberals became dissatisfied with the incumbent's support of the Vietnam war. Scheer is young and articulate and as a well-known Bay Area spokesman against the war he was able to win the support of many students.

A few of Scheer's supporters even thought that they could use the campaign as an educational

"Whenever a new radical protest movement comes along the liberals have tried to encompass it and thus make it impotent. This is usually done by corralling the radicals into some sort of Democratic party reform movement, but it can also be achieved by temporarily stepping out of the Democratic party framework to get the radicals huddled up with the liberals. In this manner mass radical protests have collapsed into a whimper. Through this political alliance the radicals are harnessed, silenced and kept from becoming a threat to the system. They become full members of that Community for Old Politics (COP) which has been around in one form or another for a long time."

(Peter Camejo in an article in the
Berkeley Barb, Jan. 13, 1967)

vehicle against the Democratic party, but they soon dropped out of the campaign after learning that Scheer was not against the Democratic party—only against *certain Democrats*. They also learned first-hand the impossibility of attacking the Democratic party while supporting candidates in the Democratic primary.

It was clear at the beginning of the Scheer campaign that this was basically a reform movement of Democrats, and not a genuine break with liberal capitalist politics.

The further evolution of the CNP has only confirmed this. Its candidates for city council and city auditor were chosen at a general meeting of the CNP. Mike Shute, who was seeking the endorsement of the CNP, complained that before the nomination of candidates there should be a discussion of program. His suggestion was rejected and Shute himself, who asked for votes only if they agreed with his program of "breaking with the Democratic party" and "devising a strategy to aid Negroes in their fight for political power," received only 15 per cent of the votes.

An Educational Campaign

The YSA-SWP campaign was conceived of as primarily an educational one around the points I have outlined above particularly opposition to the Vietnam war and the need for independent political action. This, however, doesn't mean that we aren't conducting an active campaign. Our press conference received wide coverage on TV and in the daily press and over fifty articles have appeared in local newspapers about our campaign. In addition to the media coverage we have printed and distributed over 2,000 posters with the following slogans: "Let the People Vote on Vietnam," "Nationalize PG & E and Pacific Telephone," "No Tuition—No War Tax—100% Tax on War Profits," and "End the War—Bring Our Troops Home Now." We are also selling two buttons—one saying "Vote Socialist," and the other "No Tuition—Tax War Profits." As the campaign moves along we expect to receive even more opportunities to speak on radio and TV.

Recognition of the need for a labor party, an independent Negro freedom party, and a socialist transformation of America, will be brought about not only by socialist education but by events and struggles that will show their necessity in order to end war, racism and exploitation. We will be satisfied if in the course of our campaign we can convince a few people that real change and real power for Negroes and workers will come about only when they organize politically—*independent of the capitalist class and its political parties.*