

As for "helping the right", it is the refusal to build a political movement outside the two parties which really helps the right. This argument exaggerates the differences between the "liberals" and the "conservatives". Remember 1964 when they said we had to vote for Lyndon Johnson to stop Barry Goldwater who would lead us into war. Johnson won and instead of peace we got the bombing of Vietnam and thousands of US troops packed off to Southeast Asia.

But differences between the capitalist politicians are basically differences about how to maintain the system of capitalist exploitation. These differences are real and we need to take them into account, but the whole logic of "lesser evilism" leaves us trapped on the treadmill of the two party system. The time is never ripe to make a break with the two parties, because one will always be a wee bit "worse" than the other.

In the present situation Lucien Blackwell can win — He can beat Green, Marston and any Rizzo candidate. Indeed

a Rizzo-backed candidate will hurt Green and help Blackwell. This is what the prophets of doom regarding Blackwell candidacy really fear.

OUR TASKS

A successful campaign around the Human Rights Slate and Agenda will not be easy. It will be an uphill fight. It will require an enormous grass roots organizing effort. It will require a massive educational campaign to counter the "lesser evil" logic, popularize the Human Rights agenda, and clearly demarcate the alternative represented by the slate from the politics of the two parties.

Of particular importance will be a campaign among white working people drawing out their interest in supporting a slate that has its origins in the Black people's movement. The legacy of Rizzoism with its phoney championing of "white rights" remains strong. But if white progressives aggressively take up building support for the slate and drawing out the interests all working people have in realizing the demands of the Human Rights Agenda, the hold of Rizzoism can

be further eroded and a sizeable vote for political independence registered in the predominantly white, working class wards.

To realize its full potential the Human Rights Slate needs to be broadened to include Hispanic and white candidates and more candidates from labor. Ralph Acosta, candidate for council in Harry Jannotti's 7th district, should be supported. Consumer Party activists, who have a record of support for the Human Rights Agenda, like Lee Frissell, Max Weiner and Ralph Wynder would all strengthen the slate. Progressive trade union leaders like Henry Nicholas of the Hospital Workers and Dave Niefeld of the Retail Clerks would also bring much to the ticket. These inclusions would broaden the multi-national appeal of the slate and help build a broad people's movement among all sectors of the community.

The *Organizer* and the PWOC plan to play an active role in the campaign. We urge all our readers to do the same. Let's put a people's candidate in City Hall — Elect the Human Rights Slate.

SECTION IV: *Independent Political Action and the Struggle for Socialism*

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION & THE '76 ELECTION

The following speech was given by Ron Whitehorne, a member of the PWOC Political Committee, at a PWOC-organized forum on the presidential election of 1976.

Today we want to discuss the significance of the present election and in so doing comment on the general importance of the electoral process in this period.

The starting point for such a discussion has to be the meaning of the two-party system in the US. Just as it is that breaking the hold of the labor bureaucracy over the proletariat within the trade unions is an essential step in the preparation for revolution, so it is that the hold of the two parties of the masses must also be broken.

It is clear to us that a working class which tolerates a class collaborationist bureaucracy at the head of its most important mass organizations is a working class that lacks the political consciousness to make revolution. It should be equally clear that a working class that bi-annually and quadrennially casts its vote for one or another capitalist candidate is a working class that cannot begin to take up its historic task of overthrowing capital. Elections, as Engels noted, are a barometer of the political maturity of the working class. By this standard it is clear that our class is in swaddling clothes. As long as it remains confined to the terrain of the capitalist politics of the two parties, its political growth will continue to be stunted.

THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN THE US

The US is unique among advanced capitalist countries in that it doesn't have and never has had a mass working class party. The political landscape has been and continues to be dominated by two thoroughly bourgeois parties. This is in contrast to the European experience where for generations there have been mass based parties that at their very least have had a working class form if not a working class substance. This ranges from the once revolutionary Communist Parties to the long-time reformist Social Democratic Parties. These parties, although bourgeois in the political essence, are organizationally based on the working class, primarily through strong ties to the trade unions, and to one degree or another maintain the posture of being class organizations. They consciously address the working class as its spokesman.

In the US in the modern period it is the Democratic Party which has come closest to approximating the role of these European parties—but with some very significant differences. The Democratic Party never has had or espoused a class form of organization. While the bulk of the trade unions, of course, support the Democratic Party, they have no formal authority or special position within it. Indeed they have always been decidedly junior partners in this firm. Prominent labor bureaucrats have enjoyed an informal status as "advisors" and on occasion have been given a cabinet position, but funda-

mentally organized labor does not play a major role in the Party on a national level. This is all the more remarkable when we recall that labor is the single largest and best organized bloc within the Party. The trade union officials are indeed labor lieutenants to the capitalist generals.

Nor has the Democratic Party ever put itself forward in class terms—as the party of the working class. It has openly and consistently espoused class collaboration. At the same time the Party orients itself in a vaguely populist direction, employing the rhetoric of “the people” vs. “special interests.” This amorphous and classless populism co-exists with a more forthright pro-monopoly politics and provides the ideological basis for tying the working class to the Democratic Party.

These differences are reflections of the greater class consciousness and political maturity of the European working class relative to the proletariat here in the US. And they are extremely important to take into account in terms of our strategic and tactical orientation.

Since Marxists hold that political parties represent distinct social classes, some might ask, given that both the Republican and Democratic Parties are both capitalist parties, why are there two instead of one? The answer to this question provides considerable insight into the historic strengths and vitality of the two-party system in the US.

At one level the existence of two parties reflects splits within the bourgeoisie. These splits are based to some extent on the contradictory interests of different monopoly groupings with each other. The contradiction between the monopoly and non-monopoly sectors of the capitalist class is another source of the division into Democrats and Republicans. And finally this divergence reflects an ongoing struggle over policy—over which set of bourgeois politics best serves the interests of the capitalist class as a whole. Generally speaking, the Republican Party has been the political home of the most reactionary sectors of the monopoly capitalist class while the Democrats have represented the more “liberal” wing of monopoly and the non-monopoly bourgeoisie. At the same time neither Party is monolithic. Each party has more or less distinct liberal, moderate, and conservative groupings within it. This heterogeneity serves to mediate the conflicts between the different elements of the capitalist class and enables it to better arrive at an effective consensus.

But there is a larger and historically more important reason underlying the evolution of the two capitalist parties. And that is that the two-party system is excellently adapted to the most fundamental requirement of bourgeois democracy. Lenin described a democratic republic as the “best possible shell” for capitalism—a shell because it hides the essence of capitalist exploitation behind a facade of formal democracy. A critical ingredient of this shell is the illusion of the popular will being determined through democratic elections. And this, in turn, depends on the illusion of choice, of democratic debate and competition. The two-party system provides this illusion very nicely—so well in fact that this system has continued with little change and interruption since the inception of the Republic.

Capitalism inevitably generates oppositional movements and the ruling class is faced with the problem of how to contain such movements and render them harmless to its continued rule. Here again the two-party system plays an invaluable role. Because both parties contain different wings and political elements within them, they are well-suited to absorbing such dissident movements, removing their rough edges and ultimately rendering them impotent. The immense flexibility of the two-party system acts as a kind of safety valve. In the modern period it is primarily the Democratic Party that has acted as a broad net to draw in potentially dangerous

movements and harness them to the maintenance of capitalism.

The whole relationship of the anti-war movement to the Democratic Party is an excellent example of this process at work. The McCarthy movement in 1968 took a broad section of the anti-war movement off the streets and into the Democratic Party. The rough handling the McCarthy forces received at the ‘68 Convention threatened the whole liberal strategy of containing dissent. The Party rapidly reformed itself, adopting rules that would facilitate bringing youth, minorities and women into the Party. This in turn paved the way for the McGovern victory in 1972—providing the appearance that reform “worked.” McGovern was then overwhelmingly defeated, with the connivance of some of the most powerful elements in the Party, and in the wake of this defeat the Party reforms were largely negated. This time in defeat, the Democratic Party had once again performed a valuable service for the capitalist system. It had tamed a considerable section of the anti-war movement by consolidating it behind a bourgeois anti-war politic with tactics to match. Moreover it furthered the illusion that ‘the system’ works. With variations this scenario has been repeated over and over again in the course of US history. It reflects the sophistication and flexibility of our formidable opponent—the monopoly capitalist class.

Another feature of the two-party system that serves to strengthen and maintain it is its legal, institutional status. The evolution of law governing political parties has favored the status quo and discouraged third party formations. The method of selection of candidates is regulated by the state. A variety of legal obstacles exist in most states that make it difficult for a third party to acquire ballot status. With the passage of so-called reforms to discourage corruption, the capitalist parties now receive state funds to run their election campaigns, further tipping the already loaded scales in the direction of these parties.

THE PRESENT ELECTIONS

With that in the way of background, let’s turn to the present election. As we noted in the last issue of the *Organizer*, the main significance of the present election is the shifting of the whole political spectrum to the right. In 1972 the ruling class was deeply split over Vietnam and the response to domestic insurgency. The ascendancy of the McGovern wing of the Democratic Party was the principal expression of this. In 1976 the differences between the elements of the ruling class are much less pronounced. There is a predominant and generalized agreement on a policy of austerity and reaction.

While there are differences between the Democratic and Republican platforms and the programs espoused by Carter and Ford, these differences are, more than usually, more cosmetic than real. This is clearest when we examine the attitude of both parties and candidates toward the democratic demands of the oppressed nationalities and women. The Republican platform unabashedly offers the oppressed nationalities absolutely nothing except a further erosion of the gains made by the civil rights movement of the sixties. Bussing is a key issue here and the Republicans support a constitutional amendment to ban it. The Democrats cannot be as bold since they have a Black constituency that must be in some fashion appeased. Thus the Democrats support bussing as a “last resort.” But in the context of the campaign and the actual policy we can expect “Ethnic Purity” Carter to pursue, these differences lose most of their substance.

In fact one of the most striking features of the current campaign is the absolute neglect of any discussion of the needs of Black Americans. For both candidates Blacks are invisible.

The issue only at all surfaced when Earl Butz told a racist joke to the indiscreet John Dean. Ford termed the incident "unfortunate," implying that had Dean not let the cat out of the bag all would have been well. Carter hypocritically leaped on the anti-Butz bandwagon, obviously relieved that as the author of the "ethnic purity" formulation he no longer stood out as the only open apologist for racism in the campaign. The "benign neglect" of Blacks extends to Hispanics and other national minorities as well on the part of both candidates. Thus in terms of the question of national and racial equality we have a clear cut choice between two well defined lesser evils.

The posture of the candidates toward equality for women closely parallels their attitude toward the democratic rights of the oppressed nationalities. Again platform differences mean relatively little. The Republicans support the so-called right to life amendment while the Democrats oppose it. Both parties nominally support the ERA. The real content of the campaign has been a contest between Ford and Carter as to who can best appease the anti-abortion lobby. Ford has attempted to exploit the fact that Carter is saddled with a platform supporting abortion. Carter has responded by emphasizing his personal sexism, his individual moral opposition to abortion. Furthermore he has made it clear that he will do everything in his power as President to minimize the exercise of the right to abortion. He opposes government funding for abortion, a measure that will effect working class and oppressed nationality women most dramatically.

In the realm of foreign policy again what stands out is the basic unity of both parties. Both candidates and parties are committed to the continuation of the policies associated with Kissinger—seeking to maximize US interests in a framework which recognizes that US imperialism is weakened and cannot afford the kind of commitments it undertook in the past. Deterrence with the Soviet Union, pursuit of the opening to China, and a reliance on neo-colonial solutions to the threat posed by national liberation movements are the hall marks of this policy.

There have been no real issues in the campaign connected to foreign policy. What there has been is some transparent demagoguery in which Carter has tried to exploit right-wing, chauvinist sentiment against Ford. This was the real meaning of the whole Polish incident. No bourgeois politician will admit the obvious—that the US is not in any position to challenge Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. Nor is it permissible to suggest that these so-called "captive nations" exercise any degree of autonomy. Ford slipped up when he did just this and Carter jumped on it, thus generating another great non-issue in a campaign which abounds with debates about nothing.

The one area of apparent difference between Ford and Carter is in their approach to the economy. Ford and the Republicans argue, in effect, that we must accept unemployment, restricted social services and decaying cities as the price to be paid for controlling inflation. Their calculation is that enough of the electorate fear inflation enough to buy this argument. Carter espouses the traditional election populism of the Democratic Party—expanded social services, cutting unemployment, revitalizing the cities, etc. It seems Ford is talking about relief for those beleaguered folks who make over 35,000 dollars a year. Carter in Characteristic Democratic fashion talks about closing "loopholes" and softening the tax burden on working people.

On paper these differences between Ford and Carter loom fairly large. It is these differences which motivate substantial numbers of workers who are unexcited about Carter to nevertheless cast their votes for him. But in reality these apparently substantive differences carry little weight. Carter's

populism is nine tenths election year demagoguery. Carter is not about to shift the tax burden from the working class to the rich or make cuts in defense spending. Without such measures any talk of new and expanded programs of a social nature is empty chatter. In the present economic and political context whoever is elected will follow a policy of austerity. While a Democrat might make a minor difference, the plain fact is that Carter will not significantly reduce unemployment, render aid to the cities or deliver on any other of the major election year promises in this area.

So there we have it . . . on the one hand a traditional Republican trying to appease the extreme right of his own party versus a right of center Democrat trying to convince the left wing of his party that he is a closet liberal. And both of them going at it hammer and tongs to "baffle us with bull," to use Clay Newlin's favorite election year phrase.



IS THE ELECTORATE MOVING TO THE RIGHT?

The question arises: Does the rightward shift of the bourgeois political spectrum correspond to a rightward shift in the mood of the electorate? Are the masses of the US people becoming more conservative as most of the bourgeois political pundits claim? According to this view Carter and Ford are simply accommodating the rightward trend of popular opinion. In other words, in true democratic fashion we are getting what we asked for.

We think the answer to this question is clearly no. If we analyze the primaries there is little to suggest a dominant right trend. The left liberals were divided among several candidates and thus never mounted a serious challenge. While it is true (and by no means a matter for chagrin) that traditional welfare state liberals like Mo Udall have lost ground, this element still polled a substantial number of votes overall. A positive feature of the Democratic primaries that was little noted was the complete collapse of the ultra right within the Democratic Party. Wallace's miserable showing compared to '72 and '68 cannot be explained away by his poor health. Wallace always attracted votes as a symbol of reaction and racism, not because anyone thought he would make an able administrator. The low vote for him shows that racist demagoguery focused on bussing and crime has ebbed in effectiveness. Scoop Jackson's poor showing supports the same conclusion.

What about Ronald Reagan's strong showing in the Republican column? Doesn't this indicate a growth of right wing sentiment? We have to remember that Reagan's base of support is very narrow, but well organized. He was thus able to

make a big splash in the Republican party, a minority party to begin with. Reagan, unlike Wallace in the past, made no inroads into the working class.

Finally the whole process of the nominations has to be seen against the backdrop of low voter participation. Voter turnout in the primaries and general elections has continued to drop and this round was one of the lowest. Given that there were ample right-wing candidates to vote for and little in the way of a seriously organized left-leaning candidacy, the low voter turnout is to some degree an expression of disaffection with the right-wing orientation of the two parties and by no means can be construed as a protest against any imagined leftism on the part of the bourgeois politicians.

We are not suggesting that there are not any right trends among the masses of the voters. Only that there is no basis for seeing the rightward trend on the part of the two capitalist parties as an adaptation to the voters. Rather it is the other way around. The ruling class through the vehicle of its parties is attempting to propagate and organize such a trend among the voters in order to strengthen its position.

The rightward shift of the political spectrum is a reflection of the basic unity of interest the bourgeoisie has found around a program of austerity for the working class, a reversal of democratic gains for the oppressed nationalities and women, and the continued attempt to stem the losses of US imperialism abroad. This new found unity expresses the shrinking options to the monopolists in the climate of deepening crisis of imperialism.

BREAKING THE GRIP OF THE TWO PARTIES

Now let's talk about what are the implications of this situation. How do we deal with the two-party system and its death grip on the political process? How do we orient ourselves in the present election?

There are certain people who apparently think it is enough to expose the class character of the two parties and exhort the masses to rely on themselves, the logic presumably being that if we only repeat these slogans often enough the masses will travel the road of revolutionary action. We do not subscribe to this view. Propaganda and agitation exposing the capitalist parties is fine, good and quite necessary. But it is not sufficient. The masses need more than leaflets denouncing the capitalist parties and politicians. To use Lenin's phrase, they need their own experience. The broad masses have to be able to see from the course of the class struggle itself that there is both a necessity and a possibility of breaking away from the two parties and ultimately parliamentary politics altogether.

Certainly the more politically conscious workers already understand this to some degree and are ready to seek out a revolutionary alternative. But the broad masses, while increasingly dissatisfied with the two parties, are not ready to vote for a revolutionary socialist or communist party. Socialism remains an abstraction at best. They remain under the influence of reformist illusions or cynicism. Communist agitation exposing the capitalist parties, while important, cannot supply the experience that will develop revolutionary consciousness on a broad scale. We have to search after the forms of transition, to borrow yet another of Lenin's phrases, from where we are now to that future time when the working class and its allies are united under the banner of a revolutionary communist party.

This is the real meaning of the slogan of independent political action. The principal form of transition we must develop, that will supply the masses with the experience that can advance their political understanding, is a third party, a party independent of the capitalist class, a party that bases itself organizationally and politically on the working class and the democratic movements.

We cannot demand nor expect that such a party will be doctrinally pure. Such a party will inevitably reflect the ideological weaknesses of the working class movement. If there were no such weaknesses there would be no need for such a party in the first place.

What we can and must demand from such a party is that it target Capital as the source of oppression of the masses and adopt a fighting program against it. This is the perspective we must fight for and the kind of program we must advocate.

Ninety years ago Frederick Engels put the case for independent political action very well. The 1880s in the US was a period of mass working class ferment in which a variety of political parties came forward. These political movements, while broadly speaking anti-capitalist, were flawed by various utopian and reformist ideas. Typical of the movement was Henry George, who in his book, *Progress and Poverty*, made a stinging indictment of the capitalist system but saw a single tax on land rent as the panacea that would set everything right. The German immigrant socialists in the US opposed participation and support for these movements on the grounds that they were not truly Marxist and would only mislead the working class. In the face of this opposition, which came to a head over Henry George's independent bid for mayor of New York, Engels had the following to say:

"It is far more important that the movement should spread, proceed harmoniously, take root and embrace as much as possible the whole American proletariat than that it should start and proceed, from the beginning, on theoretically perfectly correct lines. There is no better road to theoretical clearness of comprehension than to learn by one's own mistakes, . . . And for a whole large class, there is no other road, especially for a nation so eminently practical and so contemptuous of theory as the Americans. The great thing is to get the working class to move *as a class*; that once obtained, they will soon find the right direction, and all who resist, Henry George or Powderly, will be left out in the cold with small sects of their own. Therefore I think also the Knights of Labor a most important factor in the movement which ought not to be pooh-pooed from without but to be revolutionised from within, and I consider that many of the Germans there made a grievous mistake when they tried, in the face of a mighty and glorious movement not of their creation, to make of their imported and not always understood theory a kind of *only-saving Dogma* and to keep aloof from any movement which did not accept that dogma. Our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process of evolution, and that process involves successive phases. To expect that the Americans will start with the full consciousness of the theory worked out in older industrial countries is to expect the impossible. What the Germans ought to do is to act up to their own theory—if they understand it, as we did in 1845 and 1848—to go in for any real general working class movement, accept its actual starting point as such, and work it gradually up to the theoretical level by pointing out how every mistake made, every reverse suffered, was a necessary consequence of mistaken theoretical views in the original programme: they ought, in the words of the Communist Manifesto, *to represent in the movement of the present the future of that movement*. But the inevitable confusion of the first starting point is even more confounded by forcing down people's throats things which, at present, they cannot properly understand, but which they will soon learn. A million or two of working men's votes next November for a bona fide working men's party is

worth infinitely more at present than a hundred thousand votes for a doctrinally perfect platform." (Engels to C. Schmidt, August 5, 1890, all emphases in the original)

The perspective of independent political action finds confirmation in the historical experience of the working class movement not only in Engel's time but in the twentieth century and in our own day as well. At different conjunctures in US history there have been mass breakaways from the two parties. Twice in the present century sections of the labor movement have broken with the two parties and supported independent candidates—LaFollete in 1923 and Wallace in 1948. During this same period at the local level Farmer-Labor and Labor parties had varying degrees of success, managing to elect state and municipal officials in a number of areas with mass working class support. The idea of a Labor Party was a central part of the left agenda within the trade unions and enjoyed broad support. While none of the various independent movements succeeded in establishing lasting parties on a national level, these movements illustrate the historic potential of independent political action.

In the present period the initiative for independent political action is coming, not from the trade unions (only one union that I am aware of refused to back the Democratic ticket this year, the UE, which more than any other union has upheld the idea of class politics), but from the movements of the oppressed nationalities. Consistent with the general leading role of these movements over the last decade, they are supplying the cutting edge for a separation from the two parties.

The idea of a Black Political Party that would break the Black masses away from the compromised existence they now lead within the Democratic Party, gained widespread currency during the civil rights movement. There were a number of local efforts to build such parties like the Black Panther Party in Lowndes County, Alabama. Presently the National Black Assembly is promoting the idea of a Black party. Earlier this year the NBA failed in an effort to field an independent Presidential ticket when a movement to draft John Conyars, progressive Congressman from Michigan, failed. The potential for such a party is considerable. The Bobby Seale campaign in Oakland, even if he ran as a Democrat, is a recent indication of the broad appeal of independent politics in the Black community. Within the Democratic Party there are Black forces who have developed independent forms of organization and who co-exist uncomfortably with the Party leadership and platform. Given a broadly conceived alternative and given the likelihood of continued second class citizenship for Black elected officials within the Party, these forces are the most likely to break with the Party.

Independent political action is not limited to the Black movement. The La Raza Unida Party, basing itself on the Chicano people in the southwest, has won local contests in Texas and California and is probably the most successful independent party in the country today. The trend toward independence is observable in other democratic movements as well. There have been calls for a Feminist Party. While the dominant wing of the women's movement is presently committed to working within the Democratic Party, the tokenism and sexist platform of the Party will continue to push these forces in an independent direction.

These developments underline why today the slogan of a Labor Party is a sectarian anachronism. Today our slogan is for a People's Party—a coalition of Labor, the movements of the oppressed nationalities, and all other democratic forces.

Given that we call for a multi-national party that unites all the progressive movements, how do we regard efforts to build parties based on a particular nationality, that is a Black Party

or a Chicano Party? In the main we see these developments as progressive because they are steps that can break away masses from the two parties and propel them against monopoly capital. Among those national minority forces calling for independent political action there are a variety of trends ranging from those who see a Black party as compatible with coalescence with other progressive forces to those who espouse a narrow nationalist, go-it-alone politics. Obviously we seek to encourage the former trend. But this is not primarily a question of waging ideological struggle within the Black movement. What will be decisive in winning broad national minority forces to the conception of a united effort will be the emergence of an anti-racist trend among whites in the labor movement and elsewhere.

Racism in both the past and present has been the main block to Black-white unity in relation to independent political action. In 1967 a broad conference was convened to further independent political action under the banner of the Committee for a New Politics. The result was a split between the Black Liberation movement and the predominantly white Peace forces. While the immediate focus of this split was the question of giving national minority delegates 50% of the votes, the underlying basis was the paternalism and white chauvinism of the liberals and peace activists.

Clearly we need to popularize the idea of a broad People's Party within the movements of the oppressed nationalities. National minority comrades have a responsibility to combat narrow nationalist conceptions. For white comrades the task is not to lecture Blacks on the need to unite with whites but to win over whites to independent political action and a serious commitment to the struggle against racism.

The impetus for independent political action will come from many directions. We must seek to encourage and develop this tendency and avoid trying to impose a pre-conceived strait jacket of our own making on this process. The precise contours and forms through which independent political action develops and matures cannot be predicted in advance.

INDEPENDENT CANDIDACIES IN 1976

The major independent political effort this election is that of former Senator Eugene McCarthy. McCarthy's candidacy has served as a kind of lightning rod attracting students and intellectuals who are disillusioned with the Democratic Party's version of liberalism. But McCarthy's campaign is not really an organized expression of mass forces. It is an individual effort, the last hurrah of a now embittered liberal who cares little about winning and less about constructing a new party.

McCarthy is still operating within the basic framework of liberalism and thus in a political sense his independence is limited at best. Much of his campaign has been devoted to projecting the need for what he calls a constitutional presidency, restoring the proper balance between the presidency, congress and the courts. His fondness for political science in the abstract finds a certain audience on the campus, but excites few others.

More positively, McCarthy has strongly denounced the two-party system, describing it as "undemocratic, unrepresentative, unresponsive and unfair." But true to his quixotic nature, he sees the remedy in moving away from institutionalized political parties all together.

McCarthy's platform is a mixture of progressive demands, quasi-utopian environmental proposals and conventional liberalism. He favors extensive defense cuts, unilaterally if necessary. He favors a shortened work week to bolster employment, both pro-working class demands. But then he

turns around and calls for wage-price controls for the auto industry. McCarthy seems attracted to zero growth theories and believes the nation is over fed, over fueled and over transported. He favors depowering automobiles so that they can go no faster than 55 mph. Finally McCarthy pushes stock in trade liberal reforms like a federal takeover of the welfare system. Consistent with his earlier political career, McCarthy almost completely ignores the question of racism. In short, while McCarthy's program has some progressive aspects, it is in the main a thoroughly petty bourgeois platform with extremely limited relevance for the working class, national minorities and women.

Operating on a shoestring with virtually no organizational backing, McCarthy has been surprisingly effective. He draws large crowds on campuses and appears likely to capitalize on liberal distrust of Carter. Polls show him with as much as 6% of the vote. A recent California poll gave him as much as 10% as a write-in. On the ballot in 30 odd states, McCarthy is in a position to be a spoiler, costing Carter a key state or so and if the race is close possibly the election as well.

What is interesting from our standpoint is that even a campaign as weakly conceived and organized as this could capture such broad support. It is yet another indication of the current potential for independent political action.

In addition to the McCarthy campaign there is the People's Party which is fielding a ticket headed up by Benjamin Spock. This is the remnants of the old Peace & Freedom Party and has little support and dynamism. Finally there are the various left and social democratic parties all of whom are fielding candidates. The CPUSA and the SWP are the best organized and can expect to poll in the vicinity of 50 to 100,000 votes between them. These campaigns are more geared to building these organizations than to promoting a mass electoral vehicle.

In summing up the situation in the present election two things stand out. The dissatisfaction with Carter, the low voter turnout and the support for McCarthy are all in different ways indications that a base for a genuinely independent campaign exists right now. At the same time the political leadership and the organizational forms that could translate this sentiment into an actual challenge to the two capitalist parties do not exist. It is this missing ingredient that we must aim at building.

The best way to do this at present would be to endorse and work for the candidate that would do the most to build the trend toward independent political action. In approaching this question we do not rule anyone out in principle, including Eugene McCarthy or for that matter Gus Hall, although we obviously have no special fondness for either gentleman. Unfortunately the Executive Committee has concluded on the basis of an examination of the candidates that there is not one whom we could endorse as a meaningful step toward class independence.

We were committed to working with the National Black Assembly earlier around a presidential campaign, but their efforts nationally and locally seem to have largely collapsed. Even so we considered endorsing their candidate, the Rev. Frederick Douglas Kilpatrick, but so shadowy is the NBA campaign at this point that we have been unable to find out exactly what Kilpatrick stands for.

If McCarthy was a Wallace (Henry that is) or even a La-Follette we might very well support him. But he is not and his campaign does not represent a positive step forward for reasons we have already made clear.

Of the left parties the CPUSA has the best program in our view. It has the most working class content, calling for an 80% cut in the military budget, 30 for 40, an end to racism,

equality for women and independence for Puerto Rico. It is a program that for the most part corresponds to the aspirations of the working class and the democratic movements and could serve to mobilize them in struggle. At the same time this program is projected in the framework of the peaceful, parliamentary transition to socialism and all the rest of the trappings of revisionism. But this, in and of itself, would not prevent us from endorsing the candidate of the CPUSA. If Engels could support Henry George and communists could support a former vice president of the US in 1948, it is hardly beyond the pale of imagination that Marxist-Leninists could extend critical support to a revisionist. However, on balance, such a step would be a serious error. Our main task right now is the construction of genuine vanguard party which requires drawing clear lines of demarcation with revisionism. To support the CPUSA ticket would confuse and disorient the anti-revisionist, anti-dogmatist forces and strengthen the hand of both the revisionists and the ultra-lefts.

Given that we cannot endorse a candidate our approach to the elections and building independent political action is limited to propaganda and agitation. We recognize that at this point our endorsement of a candidate would be largely symbolic and have little practical effect. We believe that if a people's party capable of playing a role in the revolutionary process is to emerge the critical ingredient is going to be the vanguard working class leadership. In this context an important element in examining the elections is looking at the role of communist forces. Much of what we must do in the present period is related to consolidating the advanced forces around a Leninist approach to elections. Only if this is done can we then be in a position to actually influence electoral activity in a significant way.

MARXIST-LENINISTS AND THE ELECTION

We must say frankly that the Marxist-Leninist movement lacks a correct orientation. We have repeatedly pointed to the prevalence of dogmatism and ultra-leftism in our movement and have identified it as the major ideological block to forward motion. This is no less true in relation to the question of elections. In fact the approach of virtually all the anti-revisionist forces to the election is an object lesson in dogmatism, sectarianism and revolutionary phrasemongering. Indeed we might well say that the approach of the communist movement presently has far more in common with anarchism than Marxism. While no Marxist-Leninist grouping has explicitly held that in principle the working class should abstain from the electoral process, that, nevertheless, is the implication of much of what passes for propaganda and agitation on the question.

For Marxists there is no such abstentionist principle. While Marxists have employed the tactic of an electoral boycott in various situations, Marxists have also participated in electoral activity in all sorts of guises. The tactical flexibility of the Bolcheviks in relation to the Duma elections in Tsarist Russia is an excellent case in point. What was the decisive consideration was not that the Duma was a sham parliament, but rather what approach would serve to advance the fortunes of the revolutionary movement. In periods of ebb Lenin fought for maximizing participation in the elections in order to gain a platform to address the masses and find a way out of isolation. In the revolutionary period of 1905 Lenin opposed participation in these elections as a diversion from the immediate task of overthrowing the Tsarist state.

The valuable lessons of this and other experiences of the revolutionary movement in relation to elections have been lost on most of our movement. Our dogmatists, as usual, specialize in abstract principles and revolutionary phrases and give little, if any, thought to the real needs of the move-

ment at its present level of development. Let me amplify with a few examples.

The Central Organization of US Marxist-Leninists (COUSML) has covered the city with wall posters on the elections. Their slogan is "To Hell with the Capitalist Parties, They're All the Same—Prepare for the Anti-Fascist Proletarian Revolution." Now this sounds very revolutionary indeed. But on examination it is both wrong and empty of meaning. Wrong because the capitalist parties are not, in fact, the same and to insist otherwise is an insult to the intelligence of the working class. To tell the workers there is no difference between a Roosevelt and a Hoover, a Johnson and a Goldwater, a Nixon and a McGovern and, yes, even a Carter and a Ford, is to play the fool in the eyes of the workers. Anyone who has tried to do so with real workers will confirm this.

George Wallace showed more political intelligence than COUSML when he advanced the slogan "There's Not a Dime's Worth of Difference"—a slogan that places the real differences between the parties in proper perspective. Our task is to show that the class essence of the two parties is the same and that the differences between them, when viewed against the backdrop of what an independent working class movement could achieve, amount to crumbs. What we must stress is that the choice between these two parties is a choice between lesser evils.

Then we have the phrase "prepare for proletarian revolution." Now this falls on deaf ears with the broad masses who hardly see proletarian revolution as the alternative to reliance on the Democratic Party. But even as a slogan aimed at the advanced it is hopelessly abstract and thus ineffectual. Yes, by all means, let us prepare for proletarian revolution, but how, dear COUSML, do we do this? What are the forms of transition? What are the concrete, practical steps we must take right now to make such preparations? Well, we must have a Party. Oh yes, this is true, but to do what? What preparations would this Party, if we had it, now be engaged in? Beyond the usual glittering and painfully obvious generalities, they have nothing to say.

Of course COUSML is a small sect that is outside even the narrow mainstream of our movement. What about the Revolutionary Communist Party, the largest of the anti-revisionist organizations? They repeat the same nonsense on a more sophisticated level. They also call for a boycott of the election, putting forward the magnificent slogan that we should "rely on ourselves."

Yes, by all means, we should rely on ourselves rather than bourgeois politicians. We know that by "relying on ourselves" the RCP has in mind strikes, demonstrations and other forms of direct action. But what about voting for a working class candidate? Would this not be relying on ourselves as well? Apparently not, since there is no suggestion that we seek to run such candidates and try to build an independent electoral apparatus in any of their propaganda and agitation. By counterposing "relying on ourselves" to participation in elections the RCP adopts the classical anarcho-syndicalist stand. Like the anarchists, the RCP argues, if only implicitly, that electoral activity has nothing to do with building a self-reliant working class movement.

Objectively this line actually increases the masses' reliance on the capitalist parties. By refusing to take up the task of building an independent alternative, the RCP consigns the masses to reliance on one or the other of the two parties. The masses are not going to stop voting. Electoral activity is an important form of struggle and the working class will not and should not abandon it.

Would the position of these groups be any different if there was a candidate running on an anti-capitalist platform with

some degree of organized support? We seriously doubt it. When the Congress of African People earlier this year put forward the idea of a united left presidential campaign, the RCP, the OL and the other "lefts" spurned the idea. The OL characterized this proposal as diversionary and neatly skirted all the serious strategic and tactical questions associated with independent political action. So the position we find ourselves in of having no vehicle in the present election is, to some degree, a situation that these organizations have willed upon themselves and the rest of us.

Unfortunately "left" opportunism around the elections is not limited to the dogmatists but affects healthier forces within our movement as well. *The Guardian* in a recent editorial lined up with the ultra-"lefts" on the question of the elections. The Guardian puts forward the notion that the only task for Marxist Leninists, aside from an occasional foray into local politics, is to expose the capitalist parties and the electoral system. It, too, by implication liquidates independent political action except as a peripheral tactical maneuver in certain unspecified local circumstances.

What is even more amazing about the Guardian editorial is how it manages to turn a rather dismal situation, a situation that exposes the weakness of the people's movement, into a situation bursting with revolutionary promise, a sign of the growing maturity of our class. The Guardian waxes euphoric about the fact that millions of people are not going to vote. In their words this "mass disaffection . . . reveals a measure of political sophistication among the masses that is more than a little encouraging." And, further, this low turnout represents "a massive protest by the American people . . . a prospect that is causing great anxiety in the ranks of the ruling class."

All this is at best a dangerous half truth. The disaffection from the two-party system is real and important. But to describe what is essentially a passive reaction to the offerings of the capitalist parties as a "massive protest" is absurd. Among those who do not vote, demoralization and cynicism predominate over the sentiment of militant resistance. This is the hard truth of the matter and we must face it squarely rather than delude ourselves with sishful thinking and silly triumphalism.

The ruling class may indeed feel some anxiety about the fact that their institutions are losing their ability to captivate the masses. But we suspect that this more than balanced by the glee they feel at the fact that in spite of a decade of imperialist war and the most serious economic crisis since the depression, there is absolutely no challenge in the present election to their policies, let alone their class rule.

The Guardian's attitude is nothing more than a glorification of spontaneity and an abdication of political leadership. Our responsibility is not to congratulate ourselves because half the people do not vote. What we must do is translate the disillusion this represents into political action, which necessarily means action on the electoral field as well.

OUR PRESENT TASKS

What are our tasks in the present elections and by extension in elections in this period?

First and foremost is the fight for revolutionary theory on the question of elections. As we said earlier the ability of the left and the communist movement to play a role in the electoral process depends on its consolidation around a correct line. In our view this means taking up the struggle for independent political action. As we have seen we are in a distinct minority on this question. We have to fight for our position and win over our trend to it. We have to expose dogmatism and break its influence. Only when the importance of independent political action is recognized and taken up by the

communist movement, will we be in a position to provide real practical leadership.

Secondly in relation to the elections we have the task of exposure of the capitalist parties. We have stressed throughout that we do not see this as the only task. But this doesn't mean that it is not an important and critical part of our activity. Much of what currently passes for such exposure is hopelessly abstract and rhetorical. We need concrete and popular agitation that documents our contention that these parties do not serve the interests of the masses. For example it is a truism as far as we are concerned that the Democratic Party stands for the continued exploitation of the workers and its supposed pro-labor orientation represents mere crumbs. But how do we deal with workers who point to the 100% COPE ratings of some of these politicians. Some of this legislation is extremely important in immediate material ways to the workers. We have to be prepared to show the limitations of the AFL-CIO legislative program, its narrow and partial character as a criterion for working class interests. We have to expose those elements of this program which are clearly anti-working class. And we have to draw out the meaning of a Democratic Party politician supporting such a program on the one hand and simultaneously supporting pro-monopoly measures (Scoop Jackson is a good case in point).

Our agitation must also take into account the fact that sizeable numbers of workers are influenced by the Republican party and right-wing trends. We shouldn't forget that almost half the organized workers voted for Nixon in '72 and that a substantial number will vote for Ford this time. We have to

expose the Republicans' "trickle down" theories of prosperity, Ford's demagoguery about inflation, and the ideological underpinnings of the notion of "reverse discrimination" against whites and men.

Elections offer great opportunities for broader exposure of the working of the capitalist system. The basic contradictions are thrown into sharper relief during elections. Every day the papers are full of material that exposes the hypocrisy, corruption and subservience to the bourgeoisie of the two-party politicians. Too often we assume the lessons that are implicit in this material are obvious. This is a mistake. We should milk every incident for every drop of truth and hammer home its meaning.

Finally we must begin the practical work of developing independent political action. We must move beyond propaganda and agitation. We must seriously explore those forces, both locally and nationally, which are moving in this direction. We must begin to work with these forces to build forms for advancing independence. As this work develops we must aggressively seek to involve broader sections of the workers' and democratic movements in this activity. Particular attention must be paid to the Black Liberation Movement which is most advanced in terms of independent politics. We must look to generating independent candidacies on the local level in the coming period.

In the present election we are limited to pointing out the need for an independent electoral alternative. If we take up these tasks with energy and creativity, come next election we may very well have such an alternative.

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION & THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

In the wake of the charter change struggle and with the emergence of an independent political movement thousands of people are moving outside the orbit of the Democratic and Republican parties. The Black Political Convention, the Puerto Rican Alliance and the new prominence of the Consumer Party are all expressions of this. All these organizations have adopted programs that go against the grain of the capitalist controlled two parties. All of them in varying degrees have pledged to fight for demands that reflect the interests of the broad majority of working people versus the narrow interests of the bankers and monopolists. And all of them have organized independently of the two parties to achieve their demands. Another reflection of the growth of this independent sentiment is the response of the two party politicians who have been forced to seek the support of this movement and make concessions to it. The decision of Lucien Blackwell to accept the draft of the Black Political Convention and the Consumer Party and run for mayor is yet another expression of the growing power of the independent movement.

The PWOC supports this movement and is an active part of it. We support it because it represents a real step toward independence from the two capitalist controlled parties. We support this independence because we believe these capitalist controlled parties can never meet the needs of the masses and will never do anything by mislead and betray the people.

THE MOVEMENT OF THE PRESENT

At the same time we recognize that the present movement for political independence is uneven and still immature. Many still retain illusions about the Democratic Party and see working outside it only as a tactic to reform this party. Others see this particular campaign as everything and give little thought to utilizing the present contest for building permanent independent political institutions. Still others see independence simply as a matter of organization and fail to grasp the centrality of an independent program—that independence is first and foremost a question of politics. Finally traditional notions of how to build a political campaign still hold sway. The need for grass roots organization and mass mobilization, for linking up with the day-to-day movements of the people, as the way to wage and win an independent campaign is only partially understood within the broad movement.

These weaknesses are inevitable in a movement that is young and charting a previously untried course. They indicate what the tasks are for ourselves and others who have a conscious commitment to independent political action. We have to translate the present independent *sentiment* into a conscious political understanding that an independent party must be built in Philadelphia and across the country. We have to combat the idea that the aim of our efforts is to pressure the Democrats or the Republicans to throw us a few more