

NAM AND ELECTORAL POLITICS: THE TOM HAYDEN CAMPAIGN

Today the United States ruling class finds itself in a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Depression, inflation and the collapse of American hegemony in the third world have--according to the People's Bicentennial Commission--convinced 33% of the American people that capitalism is on the downgrade. The problems affecting U.S. workers and oppressed minorities grow daily, but the people are resisting. The miners in West Virginia are waging a determined struggle against the mine owners, the mine owners' state government and their own "progressive" trade union leadership. The mobilization of large forces in the defense of JoAnn Little, and similar growing campaigns in our own area--to defend Frank Shuford in Orange County and Michael Zinzun in Pasadena--show that people can be organized to resist racist oppression. The struggle of women within labor and other organizations shows the viability of mass women's movements.

Against this background of economic crisis and growing class antagonism, socialist formations are presented a variety of lines of struggle:

- Organizing the working class in their workplaces
- Community organizing against racist and sexist oppression
- Independent electoral activity
- Support for any of a variety of politicians who claim to present an "alternative" within one of the capitalist parties

The first two are already professed goals of NAM. The other two are under discussion.

HOW SHOULD REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISTS VIEW ELECTORAL POLITICS?

As long as the majority of the working class and oppressed people in this country are not ready to pick up arms and struggle for a new state power that represents their class interests, a socialist organization should not reject out of hand independent class electoral activity. This activity on the part of the revolutionary organization can help educate broad masses of people to its own program and to the meaning of socialism.

However, a revolutionary socialist organization in the strongest imperialist nation on earth can ill afford to cultivate illusions about the electoral process--illusions, for example, that electoral politics of itself creates reforms, or that the capitalist system can be voted out of existence. In 1860 the slave-owning class refused to accept the decisions of an election and fought a civil war to preserve its power and keep its property worth \$2 billion in human beings. Can anyone believe that the present U.S. ruling class will give up \$12 trillion invested in the means of production through the electoral process?

The struggle for reforms is important in improving the lot of working people and in demonstrating the limits of the capitalist system to reform itself--and it should not be ignored by a socialist organization. However, reforms are a product of mass struggle and not electoral activity in an of itself. For example, Social Security, unemployment insurance and the "right" to organize unions were all products of a tremendous mass struggle involving millions of workers, inspired and led in many instances by the Communist Party. These reforms won in struggle by the working class and oppressed people are maintained and extended only by the continued organization and struggle of the people through their unions and other organizations, not by liberal Democrats in Washington, Sacramento and city hall.

It was a great misfortune to the working class that agents of the ruling class within the workers movement were able to implant the illusion that F.D.R. and the Democratic Party "gave" the workers all these reforms. Ever since that illusion was created, the "liberal" imperialists, working through their Democratic Party and assisted by numerous liberal reformers, have been able to contain the workers and liberation movements within the safe limits of capitalist reform politics.

NAM TODAY

Today NAM is a socialist organization in the process of development, and it has not reached a definitive conclusion on how to defeat the U.S. ruling class. It is only beginning to establish its roots in the working class and in local communities. Historically, the greatest danger to a socialist organization in this stage of its development is to be drawn into a form of get-rich-quick opportunism--a single-issue or single-person campaign--and particularly one that leads radical discontent back into one of the capitalist parties. The experience of the movement, especially beginning with the New Deal, the Henry A. Wallace Progressive Party in 1948, the Robert Scheer campaign in California in 1966, and the George McGovern campaign in 1972 all show how revolutionary forces are disoriented and destroyed, and those around them are scattered and demoralized by impatient shortcuts to mass influence.

THE TOM HAYDEN CAMPAIGN

Tom Hayden's campaign for the Senate did not grow out of the mass struggle of working people or an oppressed minority. We believe the origin of any political phenomenon is important because it indicates something about its class character. Who asked Tom Hayden to run? To which class is he responsible? Who does he represent?

At a meeting held by the Tom Hayden for the Senate Committee at the University of California at Irvine, August 27, questions were put to him by NAM members and others who identified themselves as socialists. He said that he would accept the support of socialists, but seemed surprised that they could find anything in his campaign to support. In addition he insulted socialism by saying that socialists had been a divisive element in the anti-war campaign: they were so worried about getting from A to Z that they could not find their way from A to B, and they were so busy fighting the system (he would not use the word "capitalism") that they would not stick to the issue of stopping the war. Apparently he does not believe that the capitalist system was responsible for the imperialist war, but that the war was simply a momentary aberration on the part of a viable economic system. Can a socialist organization support a man who believes this and openly belittles socialism?

Tom Hayden's brochures suggest that his campaign will give the American people back their power, dignity and hope. Power, dignity and hope for working people grow out of their own organizations and their own struggle. They grow out of class movements with leaders responsible to those movements. Not out of a political star educating a whole new radical constituency in liberal capitalist reform and leading them back into capitalist parties.

A number of arguments are raised by NAM people in favor of supporting the Hayden campaign:

"This is the living struggle and we must work within it."

A socialist organization does work inside the living movement, when it has the forces to do so, always working as socialists, always exposing the movement's policies when they are incorrect, and always working to isolate the bourgeois elements within the movement. Unfortunately Tom Hayden's positions are such that a socialist organization working within his campaign would have to struggle continually to oppose and expose point by point everything he stands for. For example, his campaign brochure says: "We must . . . do away with the notion that unemployment is a necessary part of the economic system." This is precisely monopoly capital's political line. A socialist points out that unemployment is a necessary part of capitalism. Is NAM, in relation to the much larger forces within the campaign, either prepared to or capable of consistently exposing statements like this at every turn? Is NAM welcome in the campaign, in terms of opposing everything Tom Hayden stands for, including his decision to run in a capitalist party in the first place? Would NAM be welcome, saying "We are here to isolate the bourgeois elements and Tom Hayden--judging by his statements--is one of them?" Only by exposing him and his campaign, would NAM be serving socialism.

The true living struggle for NAM at this stage of its development is much closer to home, and it should not take a political star to show us where it is. It's in the workplaces and communities, and it's already in motion.

"We will build ourselves within the Tom Hayden campaign."

The Hayden campaign is going to be much larger than NAM at this point in time. History suggests that we would lose people to the campaign, people who would then become demoralized and leave politics entirely or disoriented and end up as liberal reformers. We will build ourselves--not by get-rich-quick schemes--but by establishing our roots in the working class and our communities. Then we will still be here long after Tom Hayden is gone and forgotten. And we will be here as socialists. There is no shortcut to mass support.

"We're tired of losing; at least he'll win."

He won't. When the Democrats trundle out their "Kennedy mystique" and Ted Kennedy in person to campaign for Tunney, Tom Hayden will be swamped.

Even if he should win, what would we have? Another left liberal in the Senate, responsible to no one, raising no socialist issues, in fact, deprecating just those issues, and unresponsive to ongoing workers' movements. And we would have the inevitability of further demoralization because one left liberal in the senate could not accomplish any of the goals of the campaign.

"He will have vast working class support which we can contact."

It is doubtful that anyone who has heard Tom Hayden speak could believe that he will generate working class enthusiasm. An informal straw poll we conducted in two Orange County factories in early September was unable to find a single worker who had heard of Tom Hayden. In fact, anecdotal evidence from our county suggests that a number of good socialist organizers within the working class have been away from NAM as a result of just the hint of a flirtation with Tom Hayden. We must not lose these people. NAM must establish its own roots in the working class, in principled socialist ways.

"At least he might split the Democratic Party."

The Democratic and Republican Parties are capitalist parties, with millions of dollars invested in their preservation. When class contradictions reach a critical point, the working class and oppressed people will seek an alternative. If the revolutionary forces at that time have an organization with real ties to the people, a genuine base in the trade unions and other movements--and most important, if they still believe it is necessary to create fundamental solutions to the contradictions of our society--then and only then will there be a split with capitalist politics. Only a class conscious mass movement coming from outside the parties can "split" a major party.

"He was a great anti-war leader and deserves our support."

We have no desire to belittle Tom Hayden's role in that important struggle--but did he raise socialist or anti-imperialist politics in the movement? And do we owe anyone support because of his or her past experience? Hundreds of thousands of Americans in mass struggle are the heroes of the anti-war movement. We don't need stars. We need lasting socialist organization.

THE ALTERNATIVE FOR NAM

The alternative for NAM is to continue its efforts to sink roots in class, anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles, to raise socialism in principled ways in these struggles, and to insure NAM's own survival and growth as a socialist organization. To do this we must oppose any attempt to lead us back into the system that we mean to destroy.

We regret that elements within NAM are already deeply committed to Tom Hayden's campaign. We believe this is a fundamental political error for a revolutionary socialist organization, but we do not wish to split NAM or drive anyone out of the organization.

The name New American Movement belongs to all of us, and if the majority agree with our position, we can insist that any people who feel they must participate in this campaign continue to do so as individuals, without using the name of the organization.

We propose that NAM pass the following resolution:

"The New American Movement does not support any politician working within a capitalist party, and will not allow the name of its organization to be used in any electoral campaign not built on a mass independent working class base."