

On Organizing the Masses #1

ELECTORAL POLITICS: ITS PROBLEMS & PROSPECTS

by Bill Epton



**black
liberation
press**



New Publications

- **Palestine! Zionism! & Black America!**(a Black New York Action Committee Forum)— Speeches by: The P.L.O., Al Pinkney, and Patrice Wagner. illustrated. \$1.50
- **Strategies & Tactics for Confronting Mounting Racism**— 5 essays that cover the development of racism, Black resistance to racism, the effects of racism upon Black women, and how to fight racism and capitalism. Essays by Black historian John Henrik Clarke, Black union organizer Joe Carnegie, veteran Black activists Rosemari Mealy, Bill Sales and Lynora Williams. illustrated. \$1.50

ORDER NOW! Make checks or money orders payable to:
Black Liberation Press
Box 955
Harlem, NY 10027

*Special thanks to LNS Graphics and
Typesetting.*

On Organizing The Masses, #1

**ELECTORAL
POLITICS:
ITS PROBLEMS
AND PROSPECTS**

—Bill Epton—

1980

**black
liberation
press**

box 955 - Harlem 10027

Good Morning, Revolution

Good morning, revolution:

 You're the very best friend
 I ever had.

We gonna pal around together from now on.

Say, listen, Revolution:

You know, the boss where I used to work,
The guy that gimme the air to cut down expenses,
He wrote a long letter to the papers about you:
Said you was a trouble maker, a alien-enemy,
In other words a son-of-a-bitch.
He called up the police
And told 'em to watch out for a guy
Named Revolution.

You see,

The boss knows you're my friend.
He sees us hangin' out together.
He knows we're hungry, and ragged,
And ain't got a damn thing in this world—
And are gonna do something about it.

The boss's got all he needs, certainly,
Eats swell,
Owns a lotta houses,
Goes vacationin',
Breaks strikes,
Runs politics, bribes police,
Pays off congress,
And struts all over the earth—

But me, I ain't never had enough to eat.
Me, I ain't never been warm in winter.
Me, I ain't never known security—
All my life, been livin' hand to mouth,
Hand to mouth.

Listen, Revolution,
We're buddies, see—
Together,
We can take everything:
Factories, arsenals, houses, ships,
Railroads, forests, fields, orchards,
Bus lines, telegraphs, radios,
(Jesus! Raise hell with radios!)
Steel mills, coal mines, oil wells, gas,
All the tools of production,
(Great day in the morning!)
Everything—
And turn 'em over to the people who work.
Rule and run 'em for us people who work.

Boy! Them radios—
Broadcasting that very first morning to USSR:
Another member the International Soviet's done come
Greetings to the Socialist Soviet Republics
Hey you rising workers everywhere greetings
And we'll sign it: Germany
Sign it: China
Sign it: Africa
Sign it: Poland
Sign it: Italy
Sign it: America
Sign it with my one name: Worker
On that day when no one will be hungry, cold, oppressed,
Anywhere in the world again.

That's our job!

I been starvin' too long,
Ain't you?

Let's go, Revolution!

Langston Hughes (1932)

TOWARDS CLARITY AROUND ELECTORAL ACTION

The massive struggle to register voters in Philadelphia and the eventual electoral defeat of Frank Rizzo by those hundreds of thousands of people (primarily black) who did register and then voted against his attempt to amend the city charter to allow himself to run for a third term has once again raised the question of what position does the black radical movement take towards electoral politics. But even more pointedly, in New York a significant campaign was mounted to recall Ed Koch, the openly racist and anti-working class Mayor. Conversely, the drive to register voters to support Judge Bruce Wright for the Civil Court of N.Y. (Judge Bruce Wright won national fame as "cut 'em loose Bruce" because he refused to use bail as a punitive weapon against poor defendants. Because of his stance he has been under constant attack by New York's fascist police department and by Mayor Koch) was successful in that he was elected.

The question then arises: do we tell the victimized black and white working class population of Philadelphia, "Don't Vote-Organize", when, in fact, the registering and voting process was an organizing tool? And, in New York, do we tell the union movement, the black and hispanic workers and the white workers that they are "dupes" of the ruling class if they organize and mobilize their ranks to defeat Koch as the representative of the ruling class? Again, do we lecture the black people of New York not to support Judge Bruce Wright at this level of struggle?

Has the radical movement committed a sin if they register to vote and urge others to cast their ballot against a Rizzo and a Koch and for Bruce Wright? Should the electoral process be condemned and boycotted when the working class and its allies have an opportunity to raise a campaign and present issues while organizing and struggling to gain positions and influence on school boards, P.T.A.'s, shop committees, union positions, etc.? Has the working class been betrayed? Has any fundamental principle been violated? Let's examine the question.

Lenin, in a "Speech on Parliamentarism" has succinctly laid the theoretical framework on how Marxists should view doing electoral work. In this polemic against an Italian Marxist who was opposed to parliamentary action Lenin stated:

There are backward elements of the working class in all capitalist countries, and these elements are convinced that parliament is the true representative of the people; they do not see that dishonest methods are used in it. It is said that parliament is an instrument with which the bourgeoisie deceives the masses. This argument should be turned against you, and it is turned against your theses. How will you reveal

to the backward masses who are deceived by the bourgeoisie the real character of parliament? How will you expose any particular party, if you are not in parliament, if you remain outside of parliament? If you are Marxists you must admit that there is a close connection between the relations of classes in capitalist society and the relations of parties. I repeat: How will you prove all this if you are not members of parliament, if you repudiate parliamentary action? The history of the Russian revolution has proved that the broad masses of the working class, of the peasantry, and the minor office employees, cannot be convinced by arguments if they are not convinced by their own experience.

(V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, Vol. X, p. 245. "SPEECH ON PARLIAMENTARISM", Delivered at the Second Congress of the Communist International, August 2, 1920)

Here, Lenin was speaking of a situation where most of the class and interest groups elected and had representatives in Parliament including the Communists during the bourgeois democratic stage of the Russian revolution. In the U.S. the ruling class fights in every way to guarantee that only *one* class and interest group is represented in its various legislative bodies even though it has hoodwinked the working class into believing the Democratic Party *is its Party*.

Because the ruling class has created this deception and established these rules does not mean that we are bound by them. If we do not believe the Democratic party is the party of the black, hispanic and other workers then let's not only say it but let's prove it by demonstrating in action with the masses and in the various legislative bodies. It is this fear of exposure that moves the ruling class to stop at nothing to prevent progressives and radicals from participating in their legislative bodies and it is the radicals' immaturity on this question that makes it easy for them to do this.

Evidently the question of electoral action is not "new". It may only be "new" to some "infantile leftists" who have not done their theoretical homework and who glorify in being isolated from the struggles of the masses. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin have given clear examples of how this tactical form of struggle can be used and it is only those that ". . . argue like doctrinaire revolutionaries who have never taken part in a real revolution, or have never deeply pondered over the history of revolutions, or naively mistake the subjective 'rejection' of a certain reactionary institution for its actual destruction by the united forces of a whole series of objective factors" who hold back this form of mass struggle and who are "confused". (Lenin Vol. X, p. 103, "Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder").



RULING CLASS NOT ALWAYS UNITED

Can we tell the working class, in general, and the black section, in particular, that it is not in their fundamental interest to organize to defeat a Rizzo or a Koch? And what do we say about Proposition 13-type legislation? Is our response that electoral politics is a fraud, that it diverts the attention of the working class away from the main struggle; that what difference does it make anyway whether you vote or not, the ruling class ultimately retains all of the power in its hands? We offer that none of these responses is a clear scientific explanation of how and why this process is operating. In fact, it is a cop-out for not seriously studying this question.

What would have happened in California if a well organized and unified left launched a massive campaign to educate and politicize the people about the class content of Proposition 13; the role of the real estate interest; the opportunism of Jerry Brown; the necessity to mobilize the working class to defeat it and even more—to put forth its own proposition on the ballot that would speak to its own class interest? In addition, because of our theoretical and organizational weakness, the ruling class is able at every turn to exploit the differences in the ranks of progressive forces and adopt an endless array of reactionary legislative measures in its interest and against the working class. And because we are removed from this important arena of struggle we are not able to draw the proper lessons from these struggles to educate and to further advance the consciousness of the working class. So, the working class by default is left to be manipulated by the ruling class. On the other hand, our theoretical and organizational weaknesses also express themselves in our inability to exploit the differences among various sections of the ruling class. It is obvious that not all sections of the ruling class were united in support of Rizzo or Proposition 13. There were major breaks in their ranks and it appears that the Black United Front in Philadelphia and its allies took advantage of it. The same would apply in New York around Koch and other local politicians.

There are probably some sections of the ruling class that find Koch an embarrassment. They view his open brand of racism and anti-union activities rapidly reducing their options for dealing with the black community and the unions. They are dissatisfied because he is bringing together forces in the black community who could have easily been kept disunited. He is exposing the ruling class much the same way that Nixon and Rizzo did. Well, how do we exploit these differences? How do we unite the Black, Hispanic, trade union, poor white and the liberal and progressive communities in a campaign against Koch and his policies and also educate, politicize and advance their consciousness? How do we demonstrate to them clearly that he and the policies that he is pursuing are against their most fundamental interests? The campaign to oust Koch also gives us the opportunity to once again point out the class question in its most basic form because even the most rabid nationalist will find it

difficult to justify the role that Herman Badillo and Haskell Ward played. The left can clearly point out the class nature of the struggle and that it transcends race and nationality, even though both are used by the ruling class in a divisive way. Presently there are thousands of black, Hispanic and white workers involved in this struggle and the question for us is whether we join the struggle and concretely demonstrate our anti-racist positions or do we remain outside of the struggle, isolated from the people, perched on the rooftop yelling down to them, "Don't Vote—Organize"?

These campaigns are conducted not only by registering voters but also by putting out literature that explains the class nature of the struggle, what are short term and long term solutions, that there will be small and large mobilizations of the masses into demonstrations and rallies, that there will be various levels of confrontations with the ruling class, that the working class will be constantly educated and agitated to understand that the ruling class is limited in the level of concessions it can make, that as we press them they will increasingly resort to more and more violence against us and that we must respond in kind. We can make these electoral struggles another classroom in educating and preparing the people for the seizure of power. The arena of struggle should be viewed as another front that the working class opens up in our war against the U.S. capitalist system. *Why should we allow them to be the sole occupants of this battlefield and we do not come out to challenge them?*



APATHY AMONG THE PEOPLE

One may advance the argument, why are we proposing engaging in electoral struggles at this time when the people are "rejecting" it; when a little better than 50 percent of the eligible voters are casting their ballots—the lowest in all of the bourgeois democracies. In fact, the average turnout for elections in this country is about 40 percent and in Washington, D.C., with a 75 percent black population only 11 percent of the eligible voters cast their ballots in the 1976 Democratic primary election.

This same steady decline in voter participation and activity can be witnessed in the Trade unions.

Increasingly it is almost impossible for unions to garner a quorum to conduct their business and it is rare indeed when 50 percent of the membership turns out to vote in their internal elections or to vote on contracts. For example, the New York State Civil Service Employees Association, with an eligible voting membership of 185,000, just completed elections for officers. Only 39,108 members saw fit to cast their ballots—less than 25 percent! The reactionary union leadership, who are extremely satisfied with this state of affairs (an apathetic and unaroused membership offer no threat to them), stated that "the low voter participation was more or less a traditional indicator that the membership was satisfied with the current union leadership." What bull!

And all indications point to the fact that unless the ruling class makes some major adjustments or the working class fully assaults this structure the percentage voting will continue to decline. (The ruling class did make one adjustment to overcome the crisis and apathy among the voters by reducing the voting age to 18 from 21 but even this adjustment has not significantly halted the steady decline in the percentage of people voting. The apathy is not necessarily a good thing without an active and militant left because, as has already happened, the right-wing has been able to mobilize their forces and some sections of the masses to press for "adjustments" in the system to "make it work", i.e. further moves to the right.) There's no mystery to this. The right-wing in this country read and analysed these statistics and they understand that if they mobilize their forces in certain areas they can have a significant impact on who gets elected. But it is not only the *who* but what are the *issues* they get elected on. The radicals can do the same kind of mobilizing and concentrating of its forces at the weak points in the bourgeois system and crack it. It is at this point if the radical movement is successful that the ruling class will change the rules to prevent the left from running or winning. Witness the elections campaigns of Ben Davis, a black Communist Party leader of the 1940's-1950's.

In the mid-1940's he ran and won a seat on the New York City Council. In order for the ruling class to defeat him in the 1950 elections they changed the entire electoral system in New York from proportional representation (this gives minority parties representation in proportion to their popular vote) to the current system and ran a black candidate against him who ran on the Republican, Democratic and Liberal ticket. This would have been an excellent opportunity for the "C" PUSA ("Communist" Party) at that time to fully expose the ruling class, to educate and further politicize the masses and explain to them that to prevent this kind of fraudulent behavior, the organized people must overthrow this system and set up a people's government. But, of course, this did not happen because the "C" PUSA then, like now, was essentially reformist and viewed this as just a "flaw" in the bourgeois-democratic system. Similarly when I ran for State Senator in the 31st Senatorial District as the candidate for the Progressive Labor Party (PLP) in Harlem in 1965 the ruling class admittedly sabotaged the voting machines in those districts where they knew I would draw a large vote. The PLP was not politically mature enough for us to take advantage of this chink in the ruling classes' armor and expose them to the people and help the working class in Harlem—and the city in general—to draw the proper lessons from this charade of democracy. There are numerous other examples where the radical movement was on the threshold of conducting significant electoral struggles in this country only to let them slip away by not knowing how to capitalize on the situation.



Unable to develop its ideological foundation and sustain itself in the midst of racism and repression, in 1966 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was not in a position to help Alabama Blacks put progressive candidates into office.

SOME PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS IN THE PAST

Radicals and progressives have conducted election campaigns around particular issues and, at times, have met with limited success but we have always disbanded after the campaign and did not consolidate our gains or the constituencies that were developed. We almost never continued our unrelenting pursuit of and attacks on the programs and policies of our opposition beyond the campaign so if we decided to pursue an electoral policy the next year or some other time afterwards we had to start from scratch. One of the recent examples of this policy was the "Peace and Freedom Party" electoral campaign in California during 1968 where the basically white anti-war movement and the Black Panther Party united to run candidates. Even though they were not tremendously successful in terms of the percentage of votes cast for them they did put the war and the Black Liberation struggle on the top of the agenda. And it must be said that this campaign played a significant role in bringing these two particular questions to the forefront of the minds of many Californians, and others around the country who followed those events. So the percentage of the votes in no way was a clear indication of the overall effect this campaign had.

One can speculate as to what would have happened if the progressive forces in California were mature enough to maintain and build that unity (in the face of the attacks by the ruling class on the Panthers in order to break that unity, which they eventually did) over the last decade and had the theoretical and organizational capabilities to take on Proposition 13? But the "Peace and Freedom Party" for all intent and purpose collapsed once the electoral campaign was over, although some efforts were made to hold it together. In a similar fashion in New York, under the leadership of the then "progressive" PLP a petition campaign was launched to include a referendum on the New York City ballot to prevent any draftee from New York city from going to Vietnam. Nearly 300,000 signatures were gathered on those petitions and the Corporation Council for the City of New York ruled that it could not be put on the ballot because it was not a "referendable" item.

The issue here is that aside from its propaganda and agitational value if the referendum were placed on the ballot the left would have to organize and mobilize the people to vote for it. Not *only* to vote for it but to *actively* register the people so they would be able to cast their ballot for the referendum. This demonstrated, without a doubt, a tactical method where the working class could take advantage of the bourgeois electoral process. The lessons to be learned from this experience are that the PLP and the forces who were united with it around this campaign did not make serious attempts to follow-up and pursue this issue beyond the courts. This did not

speak to the failure of the electoral process as a tactical weapon but it speaks to the ideological immaturity of the PLP in particular and the left in general. There are numerous other examples that occurred all over the country during the 60's primarily around the anti-war and black liberation struggles.



THE QUESTION OF THE SLOGAN "DON'T VOTE—ORGANIZE!"

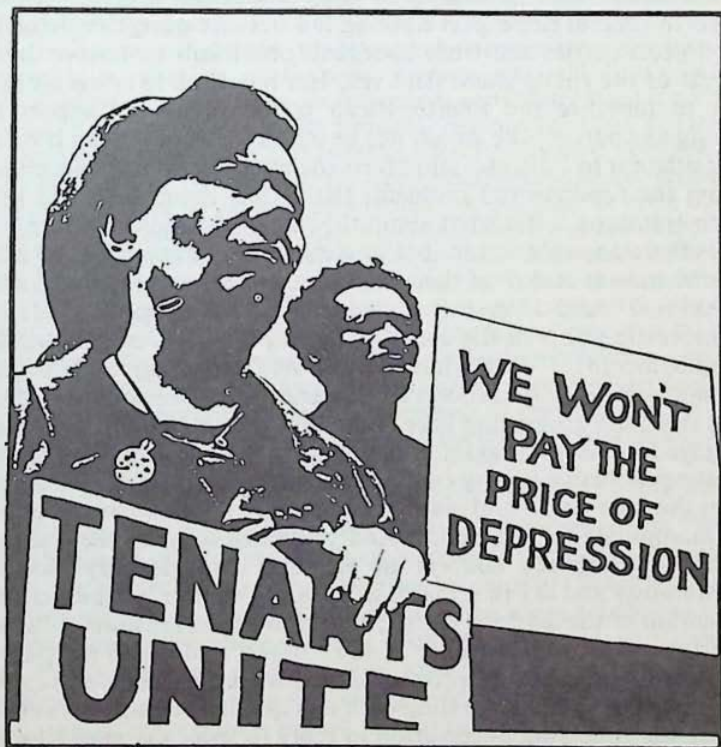
The left has neither demonstrated nor proven to the masses that electoral politics has not served their interests and, therefore, this form of struggle should be boycotted. On the contrary it has been the inability of the ruling class to maintain this charade in its present form and to hold the interest of the masses that accounts for the decline in the participation of the people in the electoral process. (We must keep in mind that a 50% turnout is approximately 90 million people!) Thus, the masses have not learned a revolutionary lesson by this "failure" of the electoral process. They do not challenge the "electoral system" as a method to achieve some degree of achievement. They attribute the "failure" of the electoral system to the lack of "good honest men" in leadership. Their most common statement is that they will withhold their vote until "there is someone worth voting for". There is no question that if the ruling class carefully nurtures a "popular" candidate in a given election that the working class would probably turn out in large numbers to vote for and support that person. Why not? Has the left given the working class a clear alternative political line, candidate or program other than the worn out, empty, non-analytical and un-dialectical slogan, "Don't Vote—Organize"?

"Don't Vote" for whom or what? Don't vote against Rizzo? Don't vote against Koch? Don't vote against Proposition 13? Don't vote for Bruce Wright? Don't vote for progressive candidates on PTA and school boards? Don't vote for radical shop stewards, delegates or union officials? Who's to "organize"? "Organize" for what? "Organize" against whom? And it goes on and on.

The entire electoral process has been in the hands of the ruling class and it's because of their arrogance and contempt for the people (can it be any other way?) and the crisis in the capitalist system that this process is in crisis. The crisis did not come about because the left was involved in the process and exposed it from within to the masses as a fraud. The crisis did not occur because the political consciousness of the masses was raised to the level where they understood that the two-party system was no more than a clever ruse to give them the illusion that two distinct parties existed that had different ideologies. The masses have not learned political lessons from this crisis. In fact, because of the low level of political consciousness of the people, withdrawing from the electoral process can also be taken as another step backwards for them politically.

But one will surely hear the argument that the crisis itself is a lesson and since this crisis has been developing since World War Two, the working class is clear in what it is doing. Of course this is just another case of "infantile" reasoning, of not doing proper

political analysis and work among the masses. This argument presupposes that this spontaneous behavior among the people with very little input from progressive and radical forces and without an alternative solution will have a lasting and deep rooted effect. Just like the ruling class has been able to manipulate the masses and sink into this crisis with very little interference from the left so will it be able to solve its current crisis and continue to manipulate the masses. The only guarantee that this will not continue to happen is for the left to enter this arena of struggle, open up this festering sore for all to see and smell, attack it and, more important, also learn to manipulate the process in order to further expose it. This is the *only* way the masses can continually engage in an on-going learning process, internalize the lessons they will learn and become more politicized as to the nature and limits of bourgeois democracy. This is how we work with and educate the masses—not by encouraging them to boycott the very institutions that exercise a major influence and control over their lives, i.e., trade unions, local community organizations, school boards, various elected positions, etc.



THE ROLE OF RADICALS IN ELECTORAL STRUGGLE

In a recent publication of a respected Marxist-Leninist organization that is involved in on-going mass work we find the following analysis:

Badillo and other associates, in carrying out campaigns in the Puerto Rican communities in favor of voter registration for bourgeois political parties distract and divert the attention of this community from the fundamental problems that effect them daily and from their solutions. They distract and divert their attention, creating the false illusion that the elections will solve the serious problems of health, housing, unemployment, and education that confront the workers and those of oppressed minorities in particular. If the solution were what the 'political lords' propose, then why does Mayor Koch threaten municipal hospital closings in the black and Hispanic communities? How do we explain that, while 40% of our young people are unemployed, Koch and President Carter reduce employment programs for youth by 80%. It is clear that Puerto Ricans and other minorities can expect nothing from the bourgeois parties nor from politicians that serve their interests.

So right! The Puerto Ricans, other minorities and the working class in general can expect nothing but lies and deception from the bourgeois parties and from bourgeois politicians that serve the interest of the ruling class. And yes, Herman Badillo *is supposed to* try to mobilize the Puerto Rican communities to support the bourgeois parties—he would not be a bourgeois politician if he did not attempt to "distract and divert the attention of this community from the fundamental problems that affect them daily and from their solutions". But what about the role of the radical movement?

Is there any role within that process for it to champion the cause of the masses and rivet their attention on the problems and offer solutions? And if a call is made to ". . .struggle to defend democratic rights in the areas of health, housing, education, and employment. . ." then what prevents us from using the bourgeois democratic electoral process to "defend" these democratic rights? What we are addressing here is the fact that many left groups are engaged in daily struggles in many areas for the democratic rights of the people using every conceivable bourgeois democratic weapon that they can find—and many times coming up with clever methods to manipulate the "system". And yet, when some of them are approached with the concept of electoral struggle they look incredulously and say that that is a "sellout position", "it diverts the attention of the working class", "it creates false illusions", "that's a waste, we should organize", and "haven't you read the papers, the lower voter turnout proves that the working class is boycotting the elections", etc. In dealing with this question Lenin, in his time, made the following observation in reply to some German "Lefts" who stated that ". . .parliamentary forms of struggle. . . have become historically and politically obsolete. . .":

PARLIAMENTARIANISM

Parliamentarianism has become "historically obsolete". This is true as regards propaganda. But everyone knows that it is still very far from the *practical* overcoming of parliamentarianism. Capitalism could have been rightly declared to be "historically obsolete" many decades ago, but this does not in the least remove the need for a very long and very persistent struggle *on the soil* of capitalism. Parliamentarianism is "historically obsolete" from the standpoint of *world history*, that is to say, the *epoch* of bourgeois parliamentariaism has come to an end and the *epoch* of proletarian dictatorship has *begun*. This is incontestable. But in dealing with world *history* one counts in decades. Ten or twenty years sooner or later makes no difference when measured by the scale of world history; from the point of view of world history it is a trifle that cannot be calculated even approximately. But this is precisely why it is a crying theoretical mistake to measure questions of practical politics with the scale of world history.

"Is parliamentarianism 'politically obsolete'? This is quite another matter." "Clearly, the "Lefts" in Germany have mistaken *their desire*, their ideological-political attitude, for objective reality. This is the most dangerous mistake revolutionaries can make. In Russia—where the extremely fierce and savage yoke of tsarism, for a particularly long period, and in particularly varied forms, produced revolutionaries of diverse shades, revolutionaries who displayed astonishing devotion, enthusiasm, heroism and will power—we watched this mistake of the revolutionaries particularly familiar with it, and hence, we can see it with particular clearness in others. For the Communists in Germany parliamentarianism is, of course, "politically obsolete"; but—and this is the whole point—we must *not* regard what is obsolete *for us* as being obsolete for the class, as being obsolete *for the masses*. It is precisely here that we see that the "Lefts" do not know how to reason, do not know how to conduct themselves as a party of the *class*, as a party of the *masses*. You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. This is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You must call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices—prejudices. But, at the same time, you must *soberly* observe the *actual* state of class consciousness and preparedness of the whole class (not only of the Communist vanguard), of all the toiling masses (not only of its advanced elements).

(Lenin, Vol. X, P. 97, 99) (emphasis in original)

We quote Lenin at length here because many would-be "left" groups have over the years mis-quoted and taken out of context Marx and Lenin on this question. They often quote Marx as stating that the right to vote for Parliament is the right to choose once every several years which member of the ruling class will misrepresent the people and Lenin as stating that the struggle between contending bourgeois parties is a struggle for the "spoils of office." After taking these quotes out of context they then conclude that the masses should abandon parliamentary struggle. What is the truth of the matter?

First of all, Marx, Lenin and Stalin *never* described bourgeois

parliaments as institutions where the working class and the masses of the people could ultimately resolve their contradictions with the reactionary ruling class. But what they all did say, which our "Lefts" of today try in every way to obscure, and is embodied in this statement by Lenin is that "to express one's 'revolutionariness' solely by hurling abuse at parliamentary opportunism, solely by repudiating participation in parliaments, is very easy; but, just because it is too easy, it is not the solution for a difficult, a very difficult, problem." (Lenin, Selected Works, Vol. X, p. 105) And further, in discussing some of the ways good leadership can be developed and tested he singles out the "parliamentary arena" as an important one. He then suggests that "criticism—the sharpest, most ruthless, uncompromising criticism—must be directed, not against parliamentaryism or parliamentary action, but against those leaders who are unable—and still more against those who are *unwilling*—to utilize parliamentary elections and the parliamentary tribune in a revolutionary manner, in a communist manner." (Lenin, Selected Works, Vol. X, p. 106)

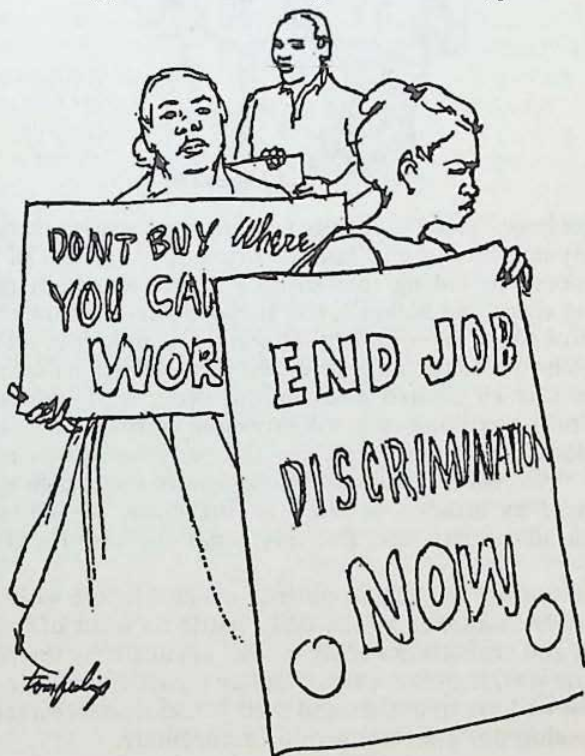
Furthermore, is there any bourgeois institution that affects the lives and well being of the masses and in which the masses are involved that we will not penetrate, undermine and exploit the contradictions within it? And, why should *all* radical political candidates declare that they are "radical"? Did those people who went into the armed service during the Vietnam war openly declare to the ruling class that they were going in to disrupt and to organize against U.S. imperialism in one of its most hallowed institutions?

In the U.S. today there are many areas where successful electoral actions can be taken by progressives and radicals ("successful" can be taken to mean raising the political consciousness of the masses up to and including "winning" elections). The key questions in these actions is to run our own candidates around a working class program that clearly spells out to the working class how we view the issues and how we will fight around these issues in their class interest. This does not mean that we operate in the opportunist manner of the "C" PUSA, the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and various and sundry other opportunist sects who run candidates on programs that are barely distinguishable from those of the two bourgeois parties or who many times support the "lesser of two evils" candidates. No radical group has the right to initiate or join electoral struggles without first making a concrete analysis of the class forces at work around the issues; determining objectively who are the friends and the enemies of the people; analysing every aspect of the local situation; putting the electoral action in its proper context within the general framework of the group's program; having a general perspective of what the group's overall goals are and realistically assessing one's own strengths and weaknesses. Only after this analysis has been made can a radical group consider entering into electoral action!

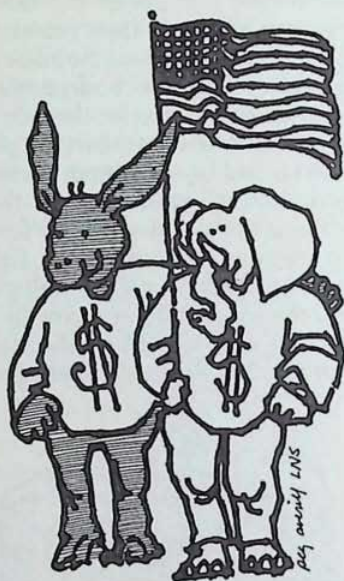
There has been a history, due to the lack of this analysis, of the

left jumping into electoral campaigns and coalitions with all kinds of renegades, opportunists, right-wingers and anti-working class elements—in many cases just to have something to do! They jump from one struggle to the next—wherever the masses rise up spontaneously; from one politician to the next whenever they utter a progressive statement. They have no concept of long range building and digging in among the masses for the long haul. This right opportunism under all kinds of left covers has a history of running rampant among the left in this country. Usually it's the groups that have the "hardest" line on the concept of electoral struggle that have the most right opportunist line in their practice.

We have to assess where we can best mobilize our forces to launch concentrated attacks where the bourgeoisie is weak and where they can be defeated in one or two (or three or more) election campaigns. In fact, it would be a crime against the people if we had popular radical leaders who had broad support among the masses that we could enter into electoral action and we did not. But we should be careful that those people who we run for various posts should have a proven record of consistently fighting for the people's interest and are not "fly-by-night" militants or radicals who suddenly appear on the scene and tomorrow they're gone. We saw thousands of them who were swept into the mass struggles of the 1960's and disappeared when that particular struggle went into an "ebb".



We view electoral action as being just one tactical part, not the primary part, of an overall revolutionary strategy of confronting, challenging and defeating the ruling class. It is part and parcel of the ongoing political education and ideological advancement of the working class and the general masses. We stand opposed to the working class or the radical movement forming electoral parties solely for the purpose of electing people to various offices. Likewise we view with skepticism the concept of radical candidates engaging in electoral actions around single issues.



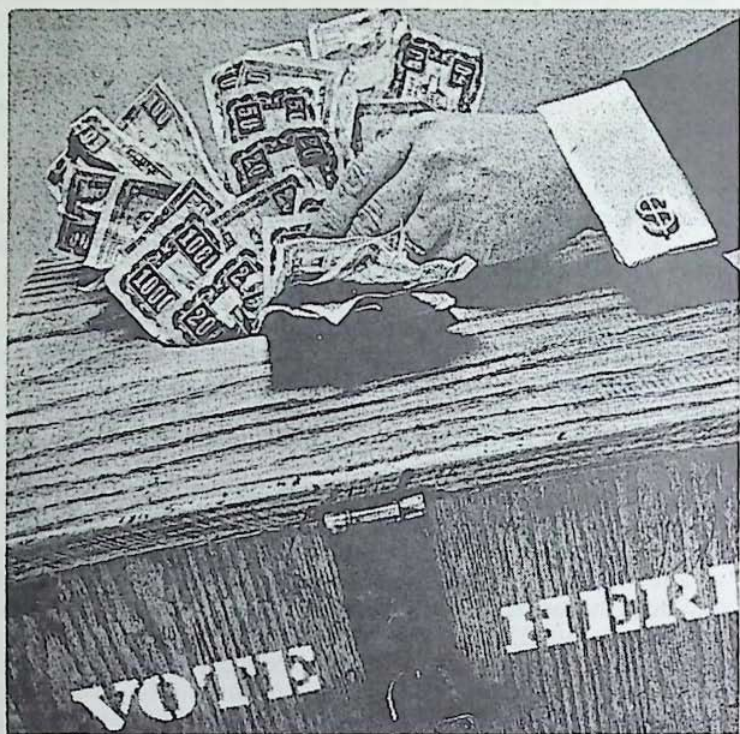
Single issues have historically attracted and sparked actions among the petty-bourgeois, i.e., “Ban the Bomb”, “U.S. Out of Vietnam”, (as opposed to linking that struggle to the liberation of the U.S. working class), No Nukes”, etc. It is our duty to show the working class how all of the problems it confronts daily are all connected and can be traced to one source, and it is only when the source of its problems is eliminated and, in the process of elimination, the power of the working class will grow and mature until it achieves its liberation. It is quite simple for the petty bourgeois to raise the slogan “No Nukes” and completely ignore the racism of U.S. imperialism, its attacks on the working class, its world-wide imperialist adventures, etc. But this is not the case for the working class.

As important as the anti-nuclear struggle is, the working class is completely enmeshed in the daily battle to ward off all kinds of present and real attacks being leveled against it by the ruling class. Thus the working class cannot isolate a particular issue—correctly so—and we have to understand their consciousness on this question and develop our electoral actions accordingly.

The people must also build into their party or organization an ideological, political and organizational structure where they can effectively recall their candidates if the candidates break with the platform or political line of the party or organization. The candidate must be completely subordinated to the control and direction of the party or organization. All radical political candidates for whatever office run for and occupy an "organizational seat." It belongs to the Party and not the individual. We do not create "career politicians". The Black Liberation Movement is still suffering from the errors that were made in the 1960's when we raised demands for more blacks in this or that agency, in the news media, on various boards, etc., and because we had no political or organizational structure to put forth the people we wanted or a *definitive program* to advance, the ruling class chose which black *they* wanted and these people have been a force in suppressing us ever since.

In the course of these electoral actions we will maintain the masses at a high level of constant mobilization where they will daily fight in their interest and the electoral actions will be viewed as just one more mobilization and forum for the left to educate the masses. We will learn to understand the tactical differences in conducting local small electoral actions and city-wide, statewide and national actions. There are different contradictions that require different sets of strategies and tactics. We must learn to explain to the working class that we are participating in these electoral actions as a tactic and using it as a platform to champion their cause. We will make it clear that we are not and will not rely on legislative bodies alone to solve the problems of the working class. We will spell out to them at every turn that the only source of political power for the working class is revolution and the establishment of a socialist society in the U.S. We will present a clear alternative to the ruling class' candidates—whether they are Democrats, Republicans or some of the "loyal opposition" so-called "third party", like the "Citizen's Party" which is presently organizing itself.

Seven Days magazine in its July 20, 1979 issues says "the Party's organizers include a triumvirate of wealthy, liberal philanthropists: Archibald Gillies, president of the John Hay Whitney Foundation and David Hunter, executive director of the Stern Fund, who have collectively financed many of the groups they hope will support them; and Stanley Weill, a businessman who funds the Nuclear Information and Resource Service in Washington, D.C. who first pulled the third-party idea out of the hat. Don Rose, who ran Chicago mayor Jane Byrne's successful campaign, community organizer Don Leahy, and environmentalist Barry Commoner, soon came on board. . . ." Obviously these kinds of "third party" formations that will raise the issues of "inflation, the gas crisis, unemployment, and for decisions on the more 'emotional issues' of anti-discrimination legislation, abortion, and women's rights" may be springing up all over the place because the liberals and the



apologists for the ruling class are becoming increasingly fearful that the bourgeois democratic system is slipping away and the right-wing pro-fascist elements are organizing and waiting in the wings to seize power. They are also trying to resurrect the system from its crisis to short-cut the left from capturing the minds of the masses on these same issues. But these groups *are not* and *will not* deal with the basic and most fundamental question—and that is the question of state power and which class *must* have that power—the working class! These groups also act as a smokescreen and put forth the proposition that all that's needed to solve the problems in America is a nice liberal president that will listen to the people!

A REVOLUTIONARY ELECTORAL PROGRAM

A revolutionary electoral program will deal foremost with the question of state power. It will show the U.S. working class that its main enemy is not a foreign power but a small handful of rich powerful men *right here in the U.S.*, constituting less than 2% of the entire population. The program will explain in clear terms that only a socialist revolution offers a solution to the issues mentioned above. It will show the interconnection between capitalism and racism. It will explain the political economy of racism. It will educate the white workers to understand that it is in their interests and the interests of the entire working class to fight racism and support the Black Liberation struggle. A revolutionary electoral program must also deal with the class nature of the oppression of women and not confuse the issue with petty-bourgeois feminism.

It will show how the military-industrial complex has consistently lied to the people and robbed the public treasury. The platform will describe the real nature of U.S. imperialism and its relationship to the suppression of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. But most of all we must be skillful enough to offer solutions to some of these complicated questions and show the connection to local situations and issues and local campaigns. And we must also learn to apply the science of Marxism-Leninism to local issues and work out solutions with the masses. We will be very explicit in explaining and educating the working class why we give conditional support to some progressive candidates and why we run our own independent candidates. We will first study this question and come to understand the limitations of supporting certain progressive candidates. They are not under the discipline of a radical political organization and they have faith in the bourgeois democratic process yet they have a progressive side that we should encourage and strengthen. At the same time we must be ever so vigilant not to allow these petty-bourgeois progressive politicians to lead the struggles of the masses!

In this process radicals find themselves in coalitions, that are involved in mass struggles, with petty-bourgeois politicians and the like. Radicals must work to organize and mobilize the masses to struggle around the issues—but not to create platforms for the politicians. Too often radicals in this kind of situation work the longest, hardest and devotedly among the people to only find the fruits of their labor drop into the outstretched hands of some local politician, who in most cases is not even “progressive”. This stems from the fact that we have not yet mastered the art of working in and among broad based groups and coalitions, laying out our conditions for participating in them or spelling out our terms for including others, winning over the masses and either equally sharing the platform to clearly set forth our line or dominating the platform. But one of the main reasons why many left groups have not been able to assume this posture is because of their general isolation

and lack of respect among the masses. So the left does not come to these coalitions from a position of strength with the masses familiar with their work and respecting them, even though once this mass work begins we often find that there is a tremendous leadership vacuum. The left consequently finds itself trying to ride on the coattails of the politicians or labor leaders and maybe pick up a few crumbs. Obviously this is and has always been a losing position! So, if there is no constant political, agitational and organizational work among the masses by the left it cannot participate in these coalitions in a principled manner. *Hard work is not enough without troops!*



None of this implies that we are diverting the masses' attention away from the issues that affect their daily lives or that we are creating illusions about electoral struggles. It does suggest that we are attempting to apply a Marxist-Leninist analysis and action program to a situation that affects the lives and existence of the working people in this country. It does not mean that a worker who is a registered voter is a traitor to his class or will no longer actively function in the militant or black caucus in the union, or that parents who are registered voters will stop fighting in the PTA's, or local community struggles will be curtailed because members are either registered voters or participate in electoral actions. The question logically arises, can a fragmented left that's organized into hundreds, if not thousands, of small collectives, study groups, "pre-party formations", various "Marxist-Leninist" and "communist" "Parties" hammer out an electoral action program? And, is an electoral strategy possible without a Marxist-Leninist Party? We think it is on a certain level.

If these various formations are fully integrating their study with concrete practical work among the masses then electoral tactics can fall very well into the concrete application of uniting theory with practice. Of course, if some of these formations have elevated theory or the study of theory to a level of "book worship" or to a fetish, they may find it extremely difficult to engage in this kind of struggle, or for that matter, any struggle that is not on a purely theoretical level.

What we are saying is that most of these small formations are located in or near small and large cities or industrial centers or close to or on college campuses. Wherever they are, the people are engaged in some form of electoral struggle, and invariably, they are the kinds of struggles that directly impact on the lives of the people. Some of these left formations are capable of doing the kinds of analysis mentioned earlier: developing an electoral strategy, presenting a working class electoral program, fielding a candidate and doing the organizing work among the masses. Others are so mired in their sectarianism and anti-working class attitudes that if they did attempt to do this kind of work it would probably take the form of an all-out assault on the working class! We will leave the discussion of these anti-working class forces on the "left" for a more developed analysis later. But for the purpose of this article we must recognize that there are forces who call themselves "left" who may engage in electoral struggle but will wind up only confusing the masses.

Many of these left formations are engaged in varied forms and levels of struggle. They have not said that "we don't have a Marxist-Leninist Party so we cannot engage in struggle among the masses." Quite the contrary! Those that are seriously developing have taken the position that as part of their growth, gaining experience, widening their circle of influence, testing theory and enmeshing themselves among the masses, they must take on the ruling class in as many arenas as they are capable. They understand that a Marxist-Leninist Party is not created in an ivory tower or in a library or in a backroom. It is created out of the concrete practice of revolutionaries among the masses in struggle—the unity of theory and practice! It is within this concrete practice that we educate and agitate among the masses the need for a Marxist-Leninist Party!

We said "on a certain level." Naturally, since most of these left formations are localized, their electoral actions can only be localized. This is one of the major weaknesses of conducting electoral actions without a national unified Marxist-Leninist Party. We are not able to coordinate programs in many different areas of the country and to a degree each electoral action by each group can be just that—a local action isolated from others. On the other hand this problem can be partially overcome by those formations who are working in approximate cities, districts, unions, PTA's, etc. working together to carve out a common program and working col-

lectively to accomplish it. This too becomes a concrete step towards party building!



In conclusion. The left has a lot of homework to do on the question of electoral actions and their approach to it. We have a history of either "ultra-leftism" (boycott all elections) or right-opportunism (support "lesser of two evils" or run "independent" candidates with reformist platforms) and have not mastered the strategy of combining all forms of struggle and looking at their interrelatedness—viewing electoral actions as a dialectical process. Hopefully this pamphlet will help us to examine this process and to master it.

The author welcomes comments, criticisms and suggestions on how this debate can be expanded and deepened. Send all comments to BLP.

A BRIEF SUMMATION OF ELECTORAL ACTION AND THE PHILADELPHIA BLACK UNITED FRONT

Two significant events occurred during the November 6, 1979, elections of which we should take note. One was the election struggle waged by Black people throughout the South; and the other was the election campaign of Lucien Blackwell, running as an Independent for the office of Mayor of Philadelphia.

The people who raise the slogan, "Don't Vote—Organize!", would find themselves totally isolated from the Black population in the southern parts of this country. One only has to count the thousands of people who lost their lives and who were maimed, threatened, intimidated, fired, run off the land, and harassed in order to win the right to vote over the last seventeen years or so, to understand what an advance this right is under the present conditions in the South.

Not since the Reconstruction period following the Civil War (1865–75) have so many Blacks been elected to public office throughout the Black Belt states (Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas). Blacks have been elected as mayors of such large cities as Birmingham, Alabama, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Atlanta, Georgia, as well as in several small towns and rural hamlets. One has to understand that in the particular situation in the South, these kinds of election victories offer some relief for Black people from the oppressive racism exercised against them by the ruling class and its lieutenants.

A case in point is Mississippi. The New York Times described it as the "most racially polarized state in the Deep South, a state in which many residents remain stuck in poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy—a state viewed almost as the last frontier by developers and industrialists who have rushed to the Sun Belt Region in the past two decades" (Nov. 8, 1979). Not only did the Democratic Governor of Mississippi owe his victory to Black voters' support, but their victory includes the election of 17 Black legislators in 1979 who in turn will sit on every House committee. These victories have to be understood in the context of a Black electorate sophisticated enough to vote out Charles Evers (active in the Civil Rights movement during the 1960's) because "he had too often aligned himself with anti-Black politicians, some thought" (New York Times, Nov. 8, 1979).

Despite these electoral gains, we should not be deceived. In the country as a whole, Blacks hold only 81 or 1.9 percent more elected positions in 1979 than in 1978. This figure represents "only 18 Black elected officials for every 100,000 people" (New York Times, Nov. 4, 1979). We can see how the ruling class maintains and manipulates

racism by setting the "rules" of the game. Black elected officials represent only Blacks, while white elected officials represent "everyone".

The following is a political critique of the growth and development of the Philadelphia Black United Front and the Black Political Convention (BPC). At this time, their critique is important if we are to understand how to build the necessary revolutionary consciousness and organizational forms among the masses on a day-to-day basis.

The Development of the Philadelphia Black United Front

"Elections," as Engels noted, "are a barometer of the political maturity of the working class." The rise of the Black United Front in Philadelphia cannot be isolated from the history which preceded it and the mass movement which produced it. In November, 1977, 457,851 people went to the polls in Philadelphia and defeated Mayor Frank Rizzo! Their massive "no" vote could not have been won so overwhelmingly without the movement that grew up around the issues that Rizzo made into headlines: "Racism, Redbaiting, and Violence."

Several groups have staked claims on Rizzo's defeat. One was the Charter Defense Committee (CDC), under the leadership of the Head of the Chamber of Commerce, Thatcher Longstretch. Their opposition to Rizzo was extremely narrow. They deliberately avoided discussion of his policies, and never felt the need to take a position on Rizzo's rule of racism, repression, and reaction. Instead, they hoped to confine the charter change issues solely to the merits of the two-term limit. Their struggle consisted of raising money for billboards and spot advertisements airing a very limited theme. One couldn't expect these forces—headed by the Chamber of Commerce—to raise the issue in any other way.

Then there was the Committee to Protect the Charter (CPC). They were based primarily in the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) reform wing of the Democratic Party, and included a well-known Republican and the Consumer Party. They organized canvassing and poll-watching, but limited their efforts to "wards" in the white sections of Philadelphia. The CPC underestimated the rising fervor of the Black community and ignored the potential groundswell of new voter registration efforts. They remained silent during the MOVE* crisis.

Out of these activities the Stop Rizzo Coalition (SRC) was formed which in turn produced a coalition of progressive whites, and alliance of Hispanics and the Black United Front. They were the products of a

**MOVE is a back-to-nature, anarchistic "commune" which is predominantly Black. In the 1970's they defended their house and property against a racist landlord, racist neighbors, Drexel University encroachment, police harassment and brutality. When in August of 1978 the police brutally evicted MOVE men, women and children and razed their home there was a massive organized outcry against the racist neighbors, police and the man who gave the orders to brutalize the MOVE people . . . Frank Rizzo.*

developing unity among anti-racist whites, the Black community, and much of the Hispanic community. The near annihilation of the MOVE organization sparked a "political crusade" in the Black community, and a repulsion of Rizzo among the anti-racist whites. Together, the 3 coalitions represented the most progressive sectors of the Black, progressive, and white working class sectors of the city: those tired of Rizzo's gestapo-like administration, overt encouragement of increasing police brutality, and defense of "white rights" (i.e., racism). Comprising over 30 organizations of Black, white, and Hispanic individuals, trade unionists, tenants, professionals, and a wide range of left political organizations, the *STOP Rizzo Coalition* carried out its mandate.

The role of one left political organization is worth noting. For example, the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) was quite active in the STOP Rizzo Coalition, and some of its members participated in the Black United Front. In addition to the canvassing, petition gathering, leafletting and building the coalitions in the black, white and Hispanic communities there was some agitating in trade union caucuses and on the shop floors. Particularly active were Locals 813 and 92 of the United Auto Workers who passed resolutions attacking Rizzo and racism; the Hospital Workers Union 1199C and the Retail Clerks. When attempts were made to move this struggle to the city-wide Central Labor Council the reactionary forces in the council prevailed and the move was defeated. Even without the support of the entrenched reactionary leadership of the Philadelphia Central Labor Council the SRC was able to register nearly 50,000 voters in Black, white and Hispanic working class districts of Philadelphia.

Another group which participated in the SRC was the Consumer Party. By securing enough signatures to secure it a place on the ballot for the Gubernatorial race, the Consumer Party became entitled to poll watchers certificates which it provided to the anti-Rizzo forces. The Consumer Party later provided the tactical strategy which enabled Lucien Blackwell to run on their ballot, representing the Human Rights slate.

Finally, the Black United Front (BUF) included many broad-based organizations which grew out of the charter change struggle. Many of these understood that only a systematic, organized movement could sustain the momentum of their victory, and that this would have to be developed. At that time, they felt that independent political action in Philadelphia was the correct course for them to take.

The development of the SRC and the three coalitions was basically a temporary alliance around a single issue among groups that did not have a long history of doing political work among the masses in Philadelphia. It represented a spontaneous reaction on the part of the masses and progressive forces to Rizzo's reactionary policies. It was held together on a day-to-day basis by the progressive forces who attempted to broaden the issues beyond Rizzo and to expose and attack the long list of problems that faced the people. It was this desire that subsequently produced the HRA.

History and thousands upon thousands of struggles have demonstrated

that spontaneous actions are *spontaneous* and long term mass movements cannot be built based on them even though it is essential for progressives and radical forces to intervene and raise the political issues and strive to raise the consciousness of the masses. Once the masses have expressed themselves on the issues their spontaneous heightened political consciousness loses its sharp edge. The action of the masses will no longer be spontaneous when the progressive and radical forces have built political bases among them through many years of consistent struggle around the key issues in the communities, the factories, among the women; the white, Black and Hispanic workers. It is at the point when the progressive and radical forces are one with the masses and have sufficiently politicized them that the initiative will shift into the hands of the people and they will call the shots. Under conditions of spontaneity it would be difficult to hold these coalitions together for a long period of time and as the masses begin to drift away the door is then opened to political opportunist, narrow Black nationalist elements, etc.

Convention I

In December, 1978, the Black United Front organized and sponsored a citywide Black Political Convention, with workshops and plenary sessions which drew as many as 1,500 people over the holiday season. On hand were the same forces which had worked from community to community and contributed to the charter change victory: Black working people, the unemployed, welfare recipients, and sectors of the lumpen-proletariat. Other active participants included progressive elected officials, revolutionary Nationalists, and a small number of Black Marxist-Leninists.

The convention was called with several interrelated aims. The first was to adopt a platform, later to be known as the "Human Rights Agenda" (HRA). The HRA became the standard for evaluating and challenging the political candidates who would later seek the convention's endorsement. It raised demands and addressed issues and concerns which would define focal points for struggle in future years regardless of who would win an election seat. The Convention also addressed and attempted to determine the future of the BUF.

A resolution was adopted which called for the BUF to work for the formation of an independent Black Political Party. Sharp struggle ensued in many of the convention workshops, and was followed onto the floor for debate. For example, the economic development workshop attempted to tie the convention to a Black capitalist program with an almost exclusive emphasis on building Black-owned businesses and financial institutions. This perspective was soundly defeated, but the convention remained deadlocked over the question of desegregation versus community control of schools. In both its platform and its ongoing work, the BUF showed weaknesses related to the under-representation of Black trade unionists as an organized force.

Some 20 candidates for local offices came before the convention delegates seeking endorsements. In order to be recognized by the con-

vention, each candidate had to sign a pledge promising to uphold the aspirations of the Black community if elected and to submit to its scrutiny. In the past, the Rizzo-circle politicians had often boycotted the Black community or approached it through their flunkies. These same politicians now clamored for a place at the convention; in particular, the more opportunist and liberal elements who had previously supported Rizzo now tried to dissociate themselves from him. Al Gaudiosa (Rizzo's stand-in) and Bill Green (now Mayor) were both on hand.

The candidate most in tune with the convention was Charlie Bowser. He had run against Rizzo in 1975 as a Black candidate on the Philadelphia Party ticket financed by John Bunting, the city's biggest banker. He was a popular front runner among Black voters in 1979. However, Bowser fell short when questioned on specifics of the HRA. His supporters attempted to stampede the Convention into endorsing him, but it was not willing to be anyone's caddy and no candidate was endorsed. However, the planned March 1979 Black Political Convention, Part II, appeared to be an exciting challenge to traditional political party charades.

Convention II

It was during the planning of the second Convention that clear political lines began to emerge. Among the different "active" political forces, the range of differences did not fully materialize in practice until after the November, 1979, election. This would be the culminating phase of independent political action in Philadelphia.

Phase II of the Convention convened over the weekend of March 9, 1979, when convention delegates met to consider the endorsement of a Mayorality race candidate and the city row offices. The major struggle on the Convention floor centered on Charles Bowser's Mayoral candidacy. Bowser had expected his mere appearance to ensure smooth sailing, but this time, "political convention politics" wasn't on the corrupt terrain of the bourgeois parties. Instead, Phase II of the Convention structure was based on a democratic process for people and candidate participation.

Bowser showed little respect for democratic procedures. The Convention's Candidate Evaluation Committee had prepared a detailed questionnaire based on the Human Rights Agenda by which to determine each candidate's stand on the issues. The Credentials Committee was highly organized, and each candidate seeking endorsement had to complete the questionnaire and be rated accordingly.

Bowser failed to answer the questionnaire or to meet the Convention's deadline. He reluctantly did so only when told that he would not be allowed to address the Convention or be considered for endorsement. When the Candidate Evaluation Committee disclosed the poor results (557 out of a possible 861 rating) to the delegates, all hell broke loose on the Convention floor. Bowser's supporters manoeuvred to prevent full disclosure of Bowser's views, and led an attack on the Convention's rating system. In essence, they attacked the Convention process.

Bowser was backed by the Housing Activists, led by Milton Street (now State Representative). (At the time, some people felt that Street

didn't realize that Bowser did not support many of the basic HRA demands, but in Phase III, Street again backed a reactionary position on the endorsement of Lucien Blackwell as the HRA Mayoralty candidate.) An intense fight on the Convention floor followed. Although Bowser opposed cuts in military spending; opposed the Public Housing Tenants' demand that they be empowered to elect the Director of the Housing Authority; opposed the demand for a civilian police review board; and openly declared that he could not support the HRA because parts of it were "against the law," he was given the Convention's endorsement. The vote was 59 to 6, with 8 abstaining.

The reasoning which finally prevailed was that it's better to be "Black" than politically sound. Bowser's supporters would have had difficulty in selling him to the Black community as the only Black candidate in a city which had never elected a Black mayor if the full extent of his response to the HRA had been known and if the opportunist forces had not successfully interceded on his behalf at the Convention.

In November, the BPC Mayoral candidate, Lucien Blackwell, and his running mates for various offices lost to the liberal Democratic candidate, William Green. Ironically, the former Rizzo supporter who first came to the BUF Convention seeking an endorsement, who was rejected in favor of then front-running Charles Bowser and later endorsed by the First Convention, defeated the HRA candidate by only one-sixth of the city vote.

This Black voter expression exemplifies that the process of selecting political candidates on the basis of party affiliation (i.e., Democratic and Republican) can truly be challenged if the independent political forces take an independent line. This requires cutting the ties *ideologically* with *Big Business and Finance Capital*. That was the ideological perspective argued within the BUF and the Convention, and it must be pushed forward within the movement. Throughout the country, a trend called the "Black United Front Movement" is growing out of the Black Liberation Movement. We must take a lesson from our Philadelphia brothers and sisters who had to struggle against opportunism, ultraleftism, Nationalism, and both the reactionary and petty bourgeoisies. The Black Liberation Movement has yet to sustain a truly independent Black Political Convention or a Black United Front for the reasons stated earlier.

As demonstrated in Philadelphia, the progressive Left and the Black Marxist-Leninists played important roles in defending the political integrity of each Convention. The Conventions became an open platform for debating revisionists, opportunists, the ideologies of the Black petty bourgeoisie, and even some of the dogmatic sects. However, the Left forces' ability to mobilize for the Convention was limited, as they concentrated on organizing for it and meeting among themselves to discuss objectives. In essence, the Left devoted a lot of time to developing a defense against those forces which would attempt to turn the convention into nothing more than an electoral "only" arena.

After each convention, the Black United Front took on a more independent character. At that time there were many day-to-day struggles in the city, which the BUF endorsed and was actively involved in. The

actual organizing for each convention was done by individuals who worked in the BUF, as well as by individuals who were primarily interested in organizing and doing the hard, often tedious work of the convention. In other words, one did not have to be a member of the BUF in order to work on the convention.

Within BUF meetings, there were often political struggles. In particular, these concerned the BUF's development beyond each convention process. These struggles were often defused by some of the leadership for the sake of "unity".

Some of the Left forces attempted to convene the Left organizations. The purpose would have been to assess political differences and to approach the concept of "United Front" strategy within the BUF. For many reasons, this idea never developed, and there was therefore no consolidated, advanced, "left-ML" leadership within the Front. However, Black progressives often met together as individuals.

Convention III

After the May primary in which Charles Bowser lost the nomination, the Black community suffered set-backs and divisions emerged within the city's established Black leadership. Many of the activists and those who had been recently drawn into the electoral process were demoralized.

Bowser had lost to Bill Green. Charges of poll rigging by Green's forces were valid in many precincts—particularly in Black precincts where voting was heavy. Bowser then made a deal to support Green, but when the heat was applied, he abruptly "resigned from Public Life." In retrospect, if the Left had been more united and clear on the entire process, the Convention in which Bowser's folks had deemed his rating unfair could have served to educate the Black community as to who Charlie Bowser was really committed to. It wasn't the Black community or the white community he also claimed to represent. From Bowser's behavior, he was clearly just another Black politician tied to big business and liberal politics.

The BUF attempted to be another voice of the Black community. In the heat of this political chaos, it reconvened Phase III of the Black Political Convention. From July 13 through July 15, over 2-3,000 people attended the convention. And all of the hacks were there, a-politicking all around. Brother Mike Simmons, who was active in the BUF and a member of the Evaluation Committee, said in an interview with the *Organizer* in August 1979 that State Representative Richardson's opening remarks calling for accountability on the part of so-called Black leaders

set the stage for the major struggle at the convention: who to endorse as mayor. It was clear throughout the convention that participants were not enthusiastic about the choice between Bill Green and David Marston. By a 71-8 vote, with 15 abstentions, the delegates drafted councilman Lucien Blackwell as mayor. The debate around Blackwell's draft was centered on whether independent politics was a viable option. One delegate at the convention summed up the feelings of many delegates when he said, 'We lose whether the Republicans or Democrats win. It is time for us to *really* win.'

This statement was verified earlier in the day when candidates came before the convention. When Green was barred from speaking by his continual refusal to sign the BPC pledge, Marston felt he could capitalize on the hostility toward Green. However, Marston's presentation was limited to vague statements on recycling jobs and education. During questioning by the delegates, Marston refused to speak to the Republican party's support of Rizzo during Rizzo's administration or to disavow his support of Ronald Reagan during the 1976 Republican convention and generally failed to offer any clear program to aid the Black community.

The seriousness of the delegates at the convention was highlighted by the treatment of Augusta Clark, Democratic candidate for Council-at-Large. Clark, though she did not receive the endorsement at the Phase II of the BPC, was clearly a favorite of many convention delegates. Her victory in the primaries almost assured her endorsement at Phase III. However, during the question and answer session, Clark was asked if she would support Rizzocrat James Tayoun for President of City Council. Clark's response of, 'If there were not a qualified Black candidate I would support Tayoun,' was met with a rain of boos. Many felt that this political pragmatism lost Clark the expected endorsement.

Gray, along with C. Delores Tucker, Bowser's campaign manager, were called to task by the convention for their endorsement of Bill Green before the convention process. Delegates reminded Tucker that less than two months ago she was telling the Black community that a vote for Bill Green was a vote for Rizzo. The attempts of Gray and Tucker to defend their actions were rejected with boos by the convention, which led to Gray's premature departure from the convention.

Another indication of the thrust toward independent politics was the vote received by Consumer Party candidates. At Phase II of the BPC no Consumer Party candidate got more than 10 votes. However, in Phase III, three Consumer Party candidates, Lee Frissel (Comptroller), Max Weiner and Ralph Wynder (both for Council-at-Large) got majority votes. Had the 2/3 majority rule been suspended, as in Phase II, they would have made the Human Rights slate. Nevertheless, their vote total was a clear indication that independent politics is on the agenda for the Black Community.

After the Convention, the first task was to develop a campaign structure for the endorsed candidates. The BUF continued to be the organizing and follow-up structure for the Convention's mandate. The campaign was not an easy one. An entire campaign structure was developed from monies raised through discos, raffles, house parties, and barbecues. The attempt to popularize the Human Rights Agenda was not always easy. However, some of the Charter Change momentum was still alive. Many of the Black politicians who had used the BUF as well as the Conventions were now seen courting Republican candidates, falling to the side, and badmouthing the BUF. These types were the real losers. They had no faith that the progressive forces and Black community could break from ruling class party politics and *win*. It was their distrust and lack of faith in the masses that gave the election to Bill Green, the Democrat. They did not unite with the Black United Front because it represented something which was not in *their* class interests.

The Blackwell-for-Mayor campaign was also a difficult one. The attempt to popularize the Human Rights Agenda within a short period of time wasn't always done consistently. Many of the HRA candidates

failed to use it as a basis for campaign issues. As the recognized President of the International Longshoremen's Association—Local 1332, Lucien Blackwell often found it more important to put union interest before the interest of the human rights agenda.* However, in spite of inadequate planning due to lack of organized leadership, the momentum and spirit of the struggle against Rizzo and the struggle to form a Black United Front enabled Blackwell to pull more than 15 percent of the total votes in the Mayoral race. He even got a significant number of votes in white working class districts in Philadelphia. In Black districts, he pulled more than 85 percent of the votes.

Although Blackwell ran on a reformist platform, it was progressive in the sense that, within the limits of the bourgeois State, it addressed the aspirations of the poor, working class, Black and Hispanic communities of Philadelphia. The campaign and all that it represented grew out of independent political action: initiated, organized, and run by the people. The Human Rights Slate broke the grip of the two parties in Philadelphia. Sister Valerie Lane—one of the first organizers of the conventions—received enough signed petitions to have her name placed on the ballot representing the HUMAN RIGHTS PARTY TICKET! Yes, that was a real choice the voter had.

After the Election

At this point, very little is known of the Black United Front's summation of the experience. Many of the progressive and Left elements have either left the BUF or now find it somewhat difficult to work in. There are various reasons why many of the progressive forces are no longer within the Black United Front. For instance, some of the progressive organizations took up other tasks and issues such as national human rights work, anti-Klan activities or deepening the struggles around and in the workplace. In addition, some progressive forces left Philadelphia and a few others became discouraged. The few who have remained active in the Front are isolated and/or overworked and therefore do not have as great of an impact on the ideological developments as well as the day-to-day workings of the Black United Front.

Hence, there is a renewed thrust in the BUF by some of the petty bourgeois Nationalist forces who had attempted to push it into taking up single issues which they considered priorities, as opposed to the BUF developing independent political action. Clearly, this sort of leadership can potentially kill Black United Fronts in other cities. New leadership has been elected and membership is now limited to those groups/organ-

**Lucien Blackwell was also backed by the International. In fact, he was at the annual ILA convention at the time the Black United Front endorsed him. Thus, he not only received immediate support from his local, but also received the go ahead from the rank and file of the ILA. But as his campaign pressed on, it appeared that the ILA national and Local 1332 were pressuring Blackwell to place more emphasis on union matters than the struggle for mayor.*

zations which are Black; those Third World groups and organizations whose Black members had participated in the BUF can no longer do so as members. This had been a strength of the early Fronts, where Third World groups did much of the work, secured resources, linked together the various movements in the city which opposed Frank Rizzo, and saw the need for independent political action.

The most simplistic forms of Nationalism are reflected in the Front to a greater degree now than during the Conventions. The entire multiracial working class has an objective interest in winning the kind of platform articulated by the convention. While there was recognition of the need for tactical alliances with whites, the necessity of a strategic alliance between the movements of the oppressed racial minorities and nationalities and the multiracial working class is not the viewpoint of the majority within the Philadelphia Black United Front, the national Black United Front Movement or even the U.S. Marxist-Leninist forces.

In the final analysis, the development and struggles of the Philadelphia Black United Front reveal the need to be tactically flexible within the electoral political arena—on a day by day basis. Its experience also highlights the reality that the political terrain in the U.S. is not the same everywhere. There are no set formulas that apply to Philadelphia as well as to Jackson, Mississippi, or St. Louis, or Seattle. However, the study of each struggle can indicate whether progressive forces have developed a long-term strategy suited to the struggle for independent political action by the working class. If anything, the electoral action led by the BUF and the progressive white community in Philadelphia has the potential of laying the groundwork for establishment of a progressive political platform built on the strength of the masses. The independent political action developed in Philadelphia also highlights the real possibility of forming progressive electoral political action within the white working class through the organized efforts of progressive predominantly white organizations at the workplace and on the neighborhood level. This platform, organized by and coming from the masses, would be the basis of ongoing, day-to-day challenges to the Philadelphia ruling class.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

BLP recently received this press release from the Peoples Energy Committee in Detroit. We feel that this kind of political action among the masses can serve as a vehicle to educate, agitate and arouse the peoples consciousness. At the same time we must be careful not to raise illusions or false hopes that U.S. imperialism will voluntarily turn the energy industry over to the people. It is obvious that this kind of action can be applied to numerous issues and should be studied and implemented where possible.

Peoples Energy Committee

229 Gratiot, 3rd floor
Detroit, Mi. 48226

(313) 962-4979

News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jerry Goldberg

DETROIT FIRST IN COUNTRY TO VOTE ON PEOPLE'S TAKE-OVER OF OIL INDUSTRY QUESTION TO BE DECIDED IN AUGUST 5th PRIMARY

March 26, 1980—Action by Detroit's City Council made it official today: the people of Detroit will be the first in the nation to vote on a people's takeover of the oil industry, in the August 5th primary elections here. The Council voted five to three to place the following advisory question on the ballot: "We call for the oil industry to be owned and operated by the people and not by private industry."

Their action culminated a petition drive by the People's Energy Committee (PEC) which gathered 11,300 signatures of registered voters over the last four months.

Jerry Goldberg, a laid-off auto worker and spokesperson for the PEC, said today, "For the first time in this country people will be able to express their feelings against the oil monopolies in a popular vote. Detroiters are leading this movement because they are fed up with the massive layoffs in auto and skyrocketing gasoline and energy prices which have resulted directly from the phony shortages, profiteering, and illegal price gouging by the oil monopolies. Many of the petition signatures collected by the People's Energy Committee were obtained at Detroit's packed unemployment centers. Throughout the city, at supermarkets and shopping centers, in churches and union halls, the response to the petition drive has been electric: at the mention of action against the big oil companies, people grabbed the petition boards out of the cam-

paigners' hands."

The nationwide campaign for a referendum on a people's takeover of oil was launched last October 17th at the National Day of Protest Against Big Oil actions across the country. In Detroit, the People's Energy Committee, a grass-roots community organization, was formed to get the question on the ballot here. The PECX campaign has been endorsed by Operation PUSH, the P.E.O.P.L.E. Committee of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (Region 1, Council 25), Nellie Cuellar of the National Caucus on Black Aging and the Grey Panthers, and many union, community, and political leaders from the Detroit area.

The proposal for a people's takeover of the oil industry demands that Congress divest the oil companies of all ownership and invest ownership instead in the people of the United States. The oil, gas, and energy industry should be run by popular committees, composed of direct representatives of all interested parties—trade unions, community groups, the elderly, minorities, women, the disabled, etc.

While the oil monopolies are very rich and will spend a great deal of money to defeat this ballot initiative, the People's Energy Committee pledges to continue to rally community support behind its proposal. The Committee is planning to reach out to block clubs, churches, unions, and on the streets to mobilize the people of Detroit for a "Yes" vote for a people's takeover of the oil industry.

Goldberg also stated, "This vote in Detroit should serve as a spur to working and poor people across the country to organize to actually takeover the oil industry. We must operate our basic energy resources on the basis of people's needs, not for the profits of a handful of oil billionaires. That is the people's answer to the energy crisis."



JOIN THE **black liberation press** SUSTAINERS GROUP!!

Black Liberation Press cannot survive on sales alone. Because we are an independent Black political press, we get no funding from ruling class foundations. Thus, we need financial support from *you*—our readers.

We know you recognize the importance of maintaining and building a progressive publishing venture in tune with the Black Liberation Struggle. We know you realize that struggle and sacrifice are inseparable in our fight for victory over exploitation and oppression.

It is in this context that **Black Liberation Press** invites you to join our *BLP Sustainers Group* by pledging \$5, 10, 15 or more a month (see form below). Members of the *BLP Sustainers Group* will be financially supporting an essential liberation tool and will also benefit from Our:

- **BLP Sustainers Quarterly Newsletter** of publication developments, analysis of important issues and correspondence from our readers and Sustainers.
- Annual BLP Sustainers' meetings for discussion of future publications and major issues facing the Black Liberation Struggle.
- 20% discount on all BLP publications.

Clip + Mail to: BLP, Box 955, Harlem, NY 10027

I recognize the vital importance of the work of Black Liberation Press and would like to help develop it so as to help push forward the Black Liberation Struggle.

Monthly Pledge

\$5 ___ \$10 ___ \$15 ___ or more \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

I would like to help with distribution

black liberation press



BOX 955
HARLEM, NY 10027

Price: \$1.50