

FIRST JOINT BAY AREA BRANCH DISCUSSION
ON BLACK PANTHER PARTY CANDIDACIES

Meeting of June 23, 1968

(Verbatim transcript not edited by speakers.)

Presentation by Peter Camejo

You have two documents, the seven-page document and Nat's document. Now, the proposal is to try to come to an evaluation of the Black Panther Party and certain aspects of it such as the Peace and Freedom Party - Black Panther Party coalition. What we really seek is an overall evaluation and what is being proposed, though the actual voting will not take place here, what I'm proposing is adoption of the general line of this document which is more or less summarized in the last two paragraphs. It's all there and I'm not going to go over everything that's written. I want to discuss certain aspects of it. But let me just very briefly summarize what the document says.

First of all, we say that the BPP is independent of the ruling class. That is, it reflects an organization of black people; that it is a reflection of the development of a radicalization, the beginnings of a vanguard. We recognize that programmatically and in its activity its main problem, its main weakness is ultra-leftism.

On top of that, its program is incomplete -- not so much wrong as incomplete. That is, it just does not explain or deal with many, many questions with which it is confronted. But its major weakness is ultra-leftism. In terms of its outward activity since it established its relationship with PFP, the document recognizes both the positive and negative side to it.

The attempt to form coalitions, to work with whites is recognized as being positive. The attempt to engage in electoral activity, the attempt to engage in propaganda campaigns has a positive aspect in the sense that it tends to negate the ultra-leftism. It's a step in the right direction of the type of strategy that must be applied at this point in order to develop a black vanguard. A move towards the number one necessity, in our opinion, in the Afro-American community and that's the development of independent black political action.

We see a negative side in that the coalition with PFP is one in which, as the document explains, can tend and has to some extent already tended to cut across the perspective of building independent black political action. By their support of PFP, they have given support to a formation which we don't believe can go beyond bourgeois politics. In fact, it's an expression of radical politics within bourgeois limits.

Fourthly, we say that the whole BPP development is walking into a situation where there's a complete vacuum. You may notice that in the whole discussion no one has had to raise the BPP's relations to other black groups. That's only been raised in two points. One is their unity with SNCC which, in effect, means nothing organizationally though it does reflect a certain attempt of the BPP to think nationally instead of just provincially. Outside of that concrete mention and the fact that we criticize their having turned to a white group for a coalition on the electoral arena rather than attempting to create a united front effort within the black community -- outside of those two we do not mention any black groups.

That in itself reflects the complete vacuum that exists for leadership; the, in effect, collapse of any sort of radical black leadership in the area and the general opportunism of any leadership that does exist. So that we see the BPP moving in the area where young black people are radicalizing but yet there is an utter vacuum of leadership. Therefore, the document makes the general evaluation that in spite of errors, there is tremendous impetus for the existence of any such group and the BPP can be expected, regardless of mistakes, to continue for some time.

I'd like to deal with some aspects of the question which I think are crucial for our understanding in terms of what we're going to do and how we relate to it. And in terms of getting the evaluation of the BPP into context. You can't evaluate any phenomenon like the BPP and so forth out of the context of the existing political situation, political organizations and tasks before the working class and the Afro-American community and the revolutionary movement. You have to place it in context.

In fact, half of the problem is placing it in context and understanding how it relates. A tactic which is right one day may be wrong the next. Support at one point for a certain development may be wrong at another point. The classical example is the Labor Party slogan, a slogan we opposed in 1935 when many people were calling for the formation of a labor party in the United States. We opposed it because it was still unclear as to whether when the workers radicalized they would not radicalize let's say through the socialist movement, joining by the hundreds of thousands and developing a mass socialist party rather than a trade union based labor party.

When the rise of the CIO came, it became clear that the organizational expression of the radicalization of the class would take the form of the industrial union. And that this thing was more than just a union drive, just like the general strike in France was more than just a strike. It was a social movement which directly posed political questions. And, therefore, we felt that the formation of the CIO should go beyond just its trade union formation. It should immediately give a final expression to its political development by forming a labor party and declaring itself a contender for governmental power. So we raised the slogan of the labor party.

Now, if tomorrow the Socialist Workers Party would start to grow by leaps and bounds before a labor party appeared in the arena and a labor party were projected as a means to combat the development of the Socialist Workers Party let's say, we would have to be opposed to calling for a labor party.

The question of what you call for must come out of context. And, in terms of politics, the crucial question is not just theoretical abstractions as to whether a labor party is good or not. It must be put in the concrete context to decide whether that formation or that development is positive, is progressive, or not.

I'd like to go over a couple of things along these lines. First of all, what is it that we are for. We're for the building of only one kind of party and that's the world revolutionary party. That's the only one we're for. Everything else we support is because to us it's a step along the road to building the world revolutionary party. That is, it's a tactic, a strategy that we may use. The only thing we're after is building a world revolutionary party and the discussion of everything else, including the labor party, the independent black political action, all these things tie into the process of building that world party.

By the way, you should understand that that world party does not exist. It exists and it doesn't exist. That is, it doesn't exist in the concept of what we want to see. It exists in its embryo. It exists and has expression, motion in the direction of it in every major struggle that's taking place in the world -- in the Fidelista leadership, in the Fourth International -- these are all different aspects of movement towards the formation of a world revolutionary party.

The Fourth International, on a world scale, is the embryo in terms of what a world party would be because it has the program that the world party would need. But in itself it is not the world party and as Joe Hansen said in the Cuba discussion probably in its final form will not come into existence until some time after the revolution. That is, its final form. But we should understand what we're after.

The Socialist Workers Party is not yet a vanguard party of the working class in the United States. It is not the revolutionary party in the United States. Our objective is to build it. And we call ourselves a party because that is precisely the way to achieve it, by moving in that direction, by trying to achieve it, by declaring ourselves a party, by acting as though we were a party. That is, making it clear to everyone what we want to achieve and what is necessary through our very actions.

Now in a sense that's what we do when we try to work with other groups. We try, by working with them, to show what we're for and in action what we want to achieve. The whole question of elections, electoral activity, is a very minor aspect of this overall question. When we look at the BPP or PFP or any other

group we've got to put in the overall context. The election itself is a very secondary aspect of the question.

For quite a few years, since the founding of the Party in 1938, we looked upon nationalist currents as a secondary aspect in terms of the overall class struggle. That is, we saw and believed that the Afro-American people were a part of the working class and it was that aspect which was dominant in the struggle. That nationalism could play a progressive role but we did not analyze it at all the way we do today.

In fact, we tended to give nationalism many negative aspects. We tended to see it sometimes as divisionary, as opposed to the working class. This was reflected in some of our literature. It was reflected in some of the pamphlets we put out.

After the general quiescence of the class struggle in the fifties and the beginning of the civil rights movement and then the development of a resurgence of black nationalism, we began to change our position. First we began to say that since the working class was not in motion, then the struggle of that section of the working class which is black, the Afro-Americans, was taking the form of an independent struggle and therefore developing nationalist characteristics.

But since that time -- that was our first reaction -- we've developed a conception that's much deeper. We've developed the concept that nationalism, the struggle of the Afro-American as an oppressed nation, is not a secondary phenomenon, not one that only appears when the class struggle is not moving, but is very deeply imbedded in the whole history of oppression. That is, that oppression both as a class and as a minority creates the currents of nationalism, creates the necessity in terms of expression in order to fight back against oppression of black nationalism.

That is, we recognize it now not just as a phenomenon that happened to come along because the workers were not in motion but as something that is endemic and has been there all along in the whole history of black people in this country. And it took the situation of the 1960's to really bring that home to our movement -- what it means and the depth of it. That must be fully understood.

Black nationalism is not going to disappear when the white workers begin to move. It's not like a temporary phenomenon that appears on the arena until the white workers move. This does not mean that black workers are not workers and they're not part of the class and they're not going to be interrelated in all struggles regarding the class, that they're not going to be part of the same organizations as white workers -- it doesn't mean any of that. It means that our recognition of this phenomenon has definitely taken a turn and a change and we evaluate it now as a very fundamental thing.

And that's why we look upon things like the BPP and the development of the black vanguard not as simply a temporary phenomenon until the workers begin to move, not simply an expression of a working class leadership, but an expression of a vanguard of an oppressed nationality, of the oppressed Afro-Americans.

Why is it that whenever we talk about independent black political action we think about elections? And we do. We think of things like the Freedom Now Party and stuff -- entering elections. There's a very simple reason for it. Elections are quite important in the sense that elections are the clearest way in which the desire for political power is expressed. That's the clearest. You elect to govern. It's a concept that's deeply imbedded in people that elections determine who governs. And participation in an election immediately raises to the public the fact that you want to govern, the fact that you wish to express and represent the people in terms of government. Therefore, elections are important in that sense.

And that's why when we look upon any movement that does not take advantage of the electoral arena, like CORE or SNCC or SCLC, we recognize that this refusal to engage in electoral activity is part of their refusal to be political in the broad sense of the word, their refusal to challenge the ruling class, their insistence on maintaining a class collaborationist attitude towards governmental power. Because organizations like SNCC, SCLC, CORE and NAACP are political organizations and sometimes they, especially the more militant organizations, make decisions against the ruling class and engage in actions against the ruling class. But in the electoral arena, they've all been completely class collaborationist.

The concept of abstentionism is, in effect, an indirect way to give support to the ruling class politically. That is why we give such importance to the formation of such groups as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, the Freedom Now Party in Michigan and now the Black Panther Party in Oakland.

Wherever it appears that an all-black organization gives an expression to the black people as an oppressed minority, trying to seek entry into the electoral arena, it is an expression of the beginning of consciousness towards the move that the black people must govern themselves, they must have a say, they must be political, they must struggle for governmental power. Once that consciousness appears in whatever form, that's a terrific step forward.

Because we recognize that the whole problem of the American working class and the oppressed minorities in the United States has been its utter lack of fighting on the political arena in the sense of struggle for governmental power, the rejection of the concept of struggling for governmental power in place of, in the case of the trade unions, strictly economic power at the factory level. The critical question before the next historic period for

the working class in this country is the attempt to transform what has been only an economic struggle now but must become a political struggle. That's why we give it such importance.

When the PFP came along, it, too, aspired to run candidates and had many aspects of the kind of thing we had been talking about -- the need to break with the Democratic and Republican parties and run candidates. But we rejected it for a very simple reason. PFP rejects, not only by its program, not only its leadership, not only its actions, but the whole manner of its creation, the whole history of its development. It's very important to understand every political phenomenon as it historically develops -- what forces move it, its history, how it comes into being -- because in the process of such a thing it delineates itself and characterizes itself.

The PFP was an expression of the fact that within bourgeois politics -- not within the trade union movement, not within the black community -- but within bourgeois politics there was a slight vacuum of any position that was moderate, that moved away from the tactical line being carried out by the Johnson decision.

That is, there was no expression of the Kennedy line, no expression of the liberals in this society that wanted a modified escalation, all the way down to withdrawal from Vietnam as a tactical question for imperialism. There was no expression of this on the bourgeois electoral arena. That gave rise, starting in 1965, to all types of little formations within bourgeois politics.

First within the Democratic Party, occasionally semi-independent, and at times completely independent from the actual structure of the two major parties, we saw candidates trying to give expression to this phenomenon. Nothing deeper than that. It was not a question of classes in struggle. It was not a question of, or a reflection of, any attempt to establish that one class should rule and not another. And we saw that when this PFP came into existence that, being this, it had a terrific limitation on it.

One, it stayed within the context of bourgeois politics. It was not mobilizing workers or Afro-Americans to break from capitalist politics but in itself was a compliment to it, though a very limited one and one which sat on its extreme left. Totally untenable as a permanent fixture in the context of today's politics, almost totally unusable for the bourgeoisie. There would have to be a fantastic radicalization.

The only role PFP could play for the bourgeoisie of any consequence would be to block the formation of a labor party or a mass socialist party. That is, to be a formation that stands in between, that as people move to the left can absorb this and contain this. But there is no motion of that sort right now.

Instead of the bourgeoisie that has tactical differences with Johnson moving in that direction, they're simply using the

normal electoral arena -- the McCarthy campaign, the Kennedy campaign and so forth -- isolating PFP down to a student radical formation. I raised all this about PFP because it's very important to understand it if we're going to understand the BPP and where it has chosen to make the coalition with whites.

From the same point of view, if you take a look at the BPP, you'll see it is very different from the PFP. Its history, where it stems from, is the radicalization of black youth who rejected the opportunism of civil rights leaders, who rejected token struggle, who rejected all that which we know as the civil rights movement during the early sixties. They rejected and they had no other alternative, nowhere to go.

There was no revolutionary black party. The revolutionary socialist movement was small. The working class was not in motion. And they sought to somehow build an expression to the left and revolutionary in the sense of rejecting tokenism, absorption into the society or working within the structure. That is its foundation. It stems out of the mass struggle of black people. It is an attempt to give expression to the Afro-American community as opposed to the ruling class.

The appearance of both these formations is a good omen. The appearance of PFP was a good sign. It's a sign that there are shifts taking place. It's a sign that bourgeois politics is fragmenting, both to the right and to the left, that the stability of the society is beginning to break down. That's one of the first signs you will have when instability results. That is, the spectrum of bourgeois politics spreads.

From that point of view, the PFP was a good sign. It was an attempt by some young people to do a correct thing. That is, break from the Democratic and Republican parties and engage in politics, but in the wrong way. That is, not seeking a relationship to the classes and to those social layers that could change society, but attempting to substitute themselves as a small group within a reformist program of bourgeois politics. In other words, an attempt by them not relating to a class to change society, but as an electoral machine to get some reforms and that is, therefore, bourgeois politics, not politics based on a class.

The BPP is the first step in the right direction, also, but basically in a correct way. That is, an all-black political party. The trouble with it is that it's got certain things wrong with it. It's got certain programmatic aspects of it that are wrong, that we're critical of. Primarily, it's ultra-leftism.

When these two groups come together in unity, one has got to separate form from content. What ties the BPP towards PFP is their feeling of isolation; they're looking for allies. They're looking for allies to struggle against what is wrong. That is what motivates them, in essence. That is why, for instance, they agreed to hold a combined rally with us in April, 1967. That is why

they were responsive to holding a rally on campus that we held for them after the Sacramento events during the summer of 1967. It wasn't because they're interested in some abstract coalition or something. They're looking for allies. They're looking for help in their defense.

They went to the PFP, primarily through Eldridge Cleaver, seeking additional forces and additional help. Whatever may subjectively motivate any one specific member of the BPP, that whole formation's willingness to engage in coalitions is also a rejection of the mystical type of anti-white, ultra-leftism of certain black nationalist groups. It's an attempt to work out some sort of concept of how you relate. In that sense, it was positive and we have no objection to it.

Did the BPP dissolve into PFP? Did it declare that the program of PFP was correct? It didn't do any of those things. It did a variation of things. There's a spectrum of what the BPP-PFP coalition means. You talk to Eldridge Cleaver and ask him. You talk to Bobby Seale and ask him. You talk to Stokely Carmichael and ask him and you'd probably get three different answers as to what it is. Because it's not any one thing.

All it is, in essence, is that this group that would like to have an independent party saw this political formation, saw certain advantages it could gain. And not being Marxists or anything like that, not being like us with an evaluation of PFP, made an incorrect evaluation of PFP and now engages in some joint projects. Some of them are wrong, some of them good.

Let me go into one other aspect of this whole thing. Why do we take so much time to theorize? Why do we take so much time to think out an evaluation of the BPP? -- a clear evaluation of what their weaknesses are, what their strength is, exactly what the coalition means between the BPP and the PFP? The reason we do this is because you have to have theory in order to act correctly.

Let me emphasize this point. We're not interested in sitting around and coming up with good theories and explaining things and being brilliant. We expound these theories, we take this time to think things out because we want to act correctly. Action is the other side of the dialectic of theory and it's just as important. You cannot carry out correct action unless you have a carefully thought out revolutionary theory, unless you are very careful and you follow very carefully the whole conception and evaluation of theoretical evaluations and discussions.

Anyone who thinks that you can empirically just go out and carry out correct actions, engage in actions without discussion, without thought, is wrong. The other side, anyone who thinks that a movement which only lives in the world of theory, not of action, doesn't have correct theory. Without correct action, actually applying and carrying out and being active and partici-

pating in a mass movement, no revolutionary movement can maintain correct theory. Its theory will go wrong. It will either fall into sectarianism, formalism, rigiditism, or it will become opportunist. It'll go wrong. Because the dialectic of theory and action is that they're one and must be interrelated.

So when we sit here and discuss an evaluation of the BPP, that's one half of our discussion. The other half is how do we implement concretely, and that discussion is just as important. And that discussion, and then action based upon the concrete discussion of tactics, is just as important. We must have this discussion first, our evaluation. But then we will have the discussion through the executive committees and then application of our line. It's not enough just to lay down theoretical guidelines of what we would like to see. The question is how to achieve it.

Let me just deal briefly with what our task is and the question of Nat's position here. What we face in the United States today is not that the black people have broken with the capitalist parties and we're fighting reformist currents within it. Or that the workers have broken with capitalist politics and we're fighting against the program that they're carrying out. The main problem is that the black people and the workers still follow the capitalists. Therefore, we lean over backwards and grab any opportunity to engage in any sort of activity that will involve even the smallest sector of the mass in motion against the capitalist class.

We look for any excuse, any pretext to give support to and involve ourselves in any sort of activity which breaks from capitalist politics. And the extreme example of this, if you ever want a living example, is the Stokes campaign. Everybody knows who Stokes was, now the Mayor of Cleveland. Two years ago he ran. Now, who was he? He was part of the Democratic Party machine. He obviously missed out on getting the nomination and he decided to make an independent move. For what purposes? To fight capitalism? To give black people independence? Nothing doing. His aim was to have his part of the Democratic Party apparatus strengthened, to put himself in a better position to immediately re-enter the Democratic Party and get stronger. That was Stokes in 1966. Now, the Socialist Workers Party, the revolutionary socialist vanguard, urged people to vote for him. Why? Because when he ran independent of the Democratic and Republican parties, as a black man basing himself on the black population, we tried to use that involvement in that bourgeois campaign to give expression to the fact that black people can elect their own representatives, can be independent of the Democratic and Republican parties.

And our motivation was not whether he was programmatically correct or programmatically wrong or what the nature of Stokes as an individual is or what his politics were. It was the fact that the masses participating in such an electoral thing can learn and go through an experience in the direction of independent

political action. Even though Stokes' campaign was a borderline case where you have to analyze it very carefully and look at the content of what it's going to mean to vote for him, what it's going to mean to actually give concrete support, concretely urge people to vote for him regardless of all the criticism that you give, of course, simultaneous with it in order not to create confusion.

When we supported Stokes, in terms of what we said, it was ninety percent criticism. We'd say vote for him and then attack him and then explain why you vote for him is because it can be a step in the direction of showing the power of independent black political action, that it can be done independent of the Democratic and Republican parties, to break the mythology of two party control.

Now, there's an example. We leaned over backwards in that direction because the problem in the black community as well as among the white workers is not their programmatic lack of understanding. But they are even voting for the wrong class. Not their programmatic understanding in terms of their own class and where it has to go. They have not even made a break. And the same for the Afro-American people.

So what we have to try to do whenever we're faced with an electoral campaign as we're faced now with four of them in this area -- Kathleen Cleaver, Newton, Seale and possibly Eldridge Cleaver's presidential campaign that we want to discuss -- is that you've got to evaluate them in what their content is, not just the specific form that it's taking, but the content.

The question of the BPP being on the ballot with PFP and whether it permits us or doesn't permit us to give the BPP critical support -- I'll just say this. The meaning of the vote for Huey Newton if he were to run in the Democratic Party -- the Democratic Party being the party which imperialism is using to rule, one that in the deep traditions, history and so forth of its existence clearly leaning to the peoples' support of the structure -- would totally change the content of his campaign. It would totally alter it and give such a deep aspect to that content that his campaign would no longer be the same. No matter what he said or did, if he entered the Democratic Party that's the content it would give it. By the way, that's why we never support a Democrat.

Just running in the Democratic Party changes the content of any campaign into being opposed to the absolute necessity of breaking from bourgeois politics. If a vote for Stokes was a way for people to express, a way for us to relate to the movement away from the power structure towards independent political action, a vote for Huey Newton on November 8th will be a hundred times more a vote against the power structure and a vote for independent black political action regardless of how it is labelled on the ballot, whether he is running as BPP, PFP, independent or whatever. The fact that he's labelled PFP creates certain problems that are primarily, in my opinion, tactical problems as to how to explain and clarify our position.

Let me say one last thing in ending. What concerns us in this whole process of relating to the BPP-PFP coalition and the elections is to explain our position. Not just to find a way to work with people and so forth, but to get out and build ourselves. That is, how to explain our concept of what is needed in the ghetto, needed in America towards building a revolutionary socialist movement. That's what our emphasis is. And when we discuss tactics, we must discuss what tactic best accomplishes that task and how we can best relate to these developments in order to build a revolutionary party.

First Joint Bay Area Branch Discussion
on Black Panther Party Candidacies

Meeting of June 23, 1968

Summary by Peter Camejo

I think the discussion has been very good. I think it's one of the best discussions we've had in quite some time. One is able to learn more and grasp more when there are some sort of differences within the movement in the evaluation of different phenomena than when we have general agreement.

Generally, when you have complete agreement it's because you are not in a position where you're engaging in outside activity. During the fifties, for instance, we had some people who occasionally would flip out and there would be some wild differences. But, generally, the basic cadre in the party went along in a situation where the lines were pretty clear that we could not intervene in things and you could go six months, a year, without any differences. And it didn't mean in any way that the party wasn't healthy.

I think the situation we're confronting here is clearly nothing like the differences that appeared in our party at the turn of the sixties, but an example of the party being in a position where it is engaged in outside work, where it is confronted with outside phenomena, where we are involved in a world where things are happening. Therefore, we have, naturally, differences in evaluation of that and that's the healthiest possible example of a live party, a party that develops differences, that has open discussion and settles it through evaluating it and then judging the different decisions in real life. Therefore, I think that the very fact we're having this discussion is a reflection of something which I want to emphasize.

Let me just go over some of the points. There's no time for me to work it out so I'm just going to go over them as I have them written down. Number one, on the question of who is our enemy. In our election campaign, the enemy is the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, the parties of the bourgeoisie. Now, we oppose PFP but we oppose it not so much for what it is, but for what it isn't. That is, the main problem with PFP is that it is not what is needed.

Like when we attack the Democratic Party, we talk about how it lies, how it's exploiting people, how it's doing the thing in Vietnam, how it's controlled by the bourgeoisie. And we concentrate our attack on them as a direct organ of oppression.

When we attack PFP, we don't do the same thing. Our approach is very different. It's obvious because the PFP is very different. Mainly, what we talk about when we talk about PFP is what's needed. That is, you need a class party, we need socialism, we've got to talk about socialism, we need a socialist movement in this country,

we must win the young people to understand that this is a class society. That's why we reject PFP.

It's very important to maintain that difference, to understand that. The main problem with the PFP is that it represents an attempt by people who are trying to fight capitalism in a way which will not be effective. We see ourselves as part of the same movement, the antiwar movement, opposition to the war. And we are having a debate about which way we can end the war and which way we can change the society. That's not true between us and the Democratic Party in any way, shape or form. It's totally different.

It's very important for us to always deal in the real world and get as concrete and as close to reality in working out our strategy and tactics towards formations as possible, not to just deal in terms of theoretical abstractions. Because theoretical abstractions can be very misleading if you don't understand the real substance and content to them. And there's obviously a substantial and fundamental difference between the PFP and the Democratic Party, though they have one thing in common. That is, the PFP does not go beyond the boundaries of bourgeois politics. It does not have any class basis or any approach that would put it in the context of being a working class formation.

Let me deal with this question about whether we should wait. There's a couple of confusing concepts that have arisen here. Nat in his summary made this point which I thought was quite wrong. He said that, for instance, if we wait until within a month of the elections, then we could probably be sure. That's true. I'm not disagreeing with Nat on that.

But I think there's an implication there that's wrong. And that is that the important thing about the campaign is the actual vote. That's wrong. It's not the vote, though the vote is an important aspect of it. It's the campaign itself and how we relate to it. See, if we don't take a position, if we should wait four or five months while an independent campaign is being run by the BPP, that in itself is a position.

There's no such thing that we don't take a position. Not taking a position is a position. Nat made the point that we need time to think these things out and we want a leisurely, long discussion. That's true, too. And that happens to predominate over the immediate needs of having a tactical position. That is, we have to pay a certain price in taking our time for discussion, but we make a conscious decision to do so because it is more important that we be clear and that we have as thorough a discussion as possible. But it would be wrong to think that what we're doing is sitting around waiting for the issues to clarify themselves.

The world is going to change. It's going to be continuously changing. Three months from now, who knows what's going to happen. Fantastic things could happen. To argue that way and therefore not take a position is wrong because there's a reality right now

which people are relating to and where we've got to begin to make a real shift in our whole thinking. The type of thinking that was correct in the 1950's and even in the early sixties is now wrong.

We used to always point out that the party is not on trial. That before the public in general, any mass milieu, it is not on trial. We do not necessarily have to involve ourselves. Sometimes we don't have the forces. Sometimes we don't even make decisions. To some extent, that is now going away. It is wrong to say that we are in a position of weakness, that the SWP looks at all these things from basic weakness. You're standing everything on its head. The point is that we are facing everything from ever-increasing strength in which we have to come much, much closer and deal with each reality that is happening like the BPP campaign. And whether we declare for it or don't declare for it is part of the objective reality in this area and something that's going to affect us.

Let me just explain what I mean by that one step further. What the SWP and YSA is, is not just a program and a headquarters somewhere and a newspaper. It is not just a center of ideas and an organizational apparatus. The SWP-YSA is also defined by our participation in action, by our participation in mass work. You see, for so long we have been isolated from the working class that this concept is yet very unclear in the minds of all the comrades, those that were not here in the 1930's of which there are very few of us. And that excludes me, too. There's only Farrell and Tom and Asher and Chester and a few others. And Nat got in just in time to catch some of it at the end during the '45 period.

But there are very few people that understand what it means to be working in the mass. The revolutionary party must be imbedded, must be swimming, must be part of a mass movement all the time and seek every way, every tie to be working in mass activity and working with the working class, with the class itself. The student movement is never going to change capitalism. It's going to be a party based on the working class, within the working class, made up of workers that's going to change this society. And so we seek a way at all times to find a way to intervene.

And our emphasis in our looking at every phenomenon is looking for ways to intervene. But the biggest criticism I have of some of the comrades that are very hesitant to give critical support is a sort of pessimism, a sort of conservatism, a fear that if we start swimming out there, if we start messing around, giving critical support, trying to get involved, sending a couple of people maybe into this radical caucus of PFP that we're going to taint ourselves.

You see, the dangers of opportunism can destroy us. If we gave critical support to PFP candidates to make an organizational gain, that would open the door to destroying what gives us our power. That is, our revolutionary class program. But in the

exact same way, non-interventions, beginning to adopt a position where we are making no slips, you will find that then you begin to make a slip in itself. How the party builds itself is very dialectical and we are going to continuously make errors.

There's nothing that develops without having both sectarian aspects and opportunistic aspects, including Lenin's party. The very fact is that when we look twenty years back to what we're doing right now, we will find all types of errors. Just like looking through the history of the SWP you can find errors. Just like Daniel Guerin's book on the black struggle which was the book we sold for ten years explaining our position was wrong. It said that the black people have definitively decided against separation and are assimilationists. That's wrong. And that's what I meant. Our position in the past has been wrong on this question. There's nothing wrong with being wrong so long as you correct yourself through struggle.

Let me give an example of where I think that this type of thing can be really serious. Take the recall Reagan petition that Sylvia mentioned. You know, I didn't know this. I think that's the most fantastically good idea that could possibly have come about because it is precisely the direction the BPP should go into. Take bourgeois channels of protest which are legitimate in the mass movement and turn them against the bourgeoisie. That's the correct tactical approach.

Take the petition, go out and campaign. What does it matter whether the bourgeoisie is going to replace him with someone else? That's not the point. The point is the masses are mobilized to try to change society. They see their power, they intervene, they look for legitimate channels. They're able therefore to have a much broader milieu. That's a good idea to direct the opposition to the police department in a way that can get mass support. That's the type of thing that we should endorse, that we should work with the BPP on to seek to involve ourselves and participate and reach out and talk to people. That's the perfect example, a recall petition. And if this Reagan thing makes the ballot, we've got to find a way to relate to that, to any young groups that are set up. Maybe we set up committees on every campus to do Reagan in. And we'll participate in that.

One thing about this BPP-PFP thing. Part of our whole strategy in understanding political phenomena is to understand what is historically necessary and what is a passing phenomenon. The PFP, as many comrades pointed out and I think all of us agree, is a passing phenomenon; it's a conjunctural thing. But the point that I was making in all this emphasis on black nationalism is that it is not a passing phenomenon. This is one side of the third American Revolution.

The development of formations like the BPP, regardless of all their specific faults, all the weaknesses of the leadership which I have not dealt with and maybe am giving a slight incorrect impres-

sion and which Nat and other comrades dealt with and are correct. Many of the things they say are absolutely true. This crudeness of treatment of people, of Seale and Eldridge Cleaver. You can name them all, all these personality weaknesses, all these political weaknesses. But the thing that we have to recognize is that in spite of all these contradictions, they are one more phenomenon of a tendency filling this gap that is historically necessary. That is, the vanguard for black liberation as an oppressed nationality. And we take the essence of things and look at that first carefully. PFP is a temporary phenomenon of the student movement having no class to relate to and therefore appearing on the electoral arena. But the BPP as a fundamental phenomenon is something quite different.

We've had this discussion first. We have not really, except a few comrades did a little bit, talked about the possible tactical advantages or disadvantages and exactly how, if, and when we give critical support. That discussion, as I said in the last sentence of my document, is different. And it really is different. We haven't begun to discuss whether, for instance, we actually try to set up a Newton campaign committee where we would work, PFP members would work, and BPP members would work. Whether we discuss this with them; whether we don't. Whether it's just an article in the Militant. All the tactical questions we have not discussed and that's correct. We have to have that discussion, though.

We must differentiate Eldridge Cleaver's campaign from the other three. No one has really spoken to this but there are fantastic differences between the three local campaigns and Cleaver's campaign for president. I think if you think about it they become obvious. Eldridge Cleaver announces as an individual that he would like to be the presidential candidate of PFP. All three other local candidates announce themselves as BPP candidates and asked for PFP endorsements and declared they were running on their own program.

Eldridge Cleaver has made no statement about what program he's running on. It's very unclear what he's doing, where it's going to go, whether it's the BPP that's nominating him or not. On Cleaver's campaign, it is totally undefined at this point. And, I think, it's ruled out for us to give critical support or even consider the question because there is no campaign at this point from an electoral point of view. We don't even know whether he's going to get the nomination, whether he's going to run. The other three are candidates on the ballot for November who have already declared.

Just two more last points. On the question of which way to vote. I would urge a vote for the document I wrote as it stands and to vote down Nat's amendment on this basis: that although Nat agrees that the way things stand now it is possible for us to give critical support, where the two documents differ is on the evaluation of the importance to give the BPP-PFP coalition. The way he puts the emphasis is opposed to the emphasis in my document which is that the alliance is secondary and not crucial and the way it

stands now is such that it permits us clearly to give critical support if we so want and that there's no sign of this changing.

Nat's evaluation is that where we might be able to give critical support right now, the thing is in flux and very unclear and could very easily possibly change about. I don't like to speak for somebody else, but I think that those differences are, in a rough way, the differences. And though they are minor differences, I think that the purpose of voting is to decide which way we're going to go.

Let me just finish on this last point. One thing we should try to really understand is that when the objective conditions arise for the creation of a vanguard, when you have the movement you've had among the black masses, optimism is correct, politically correct. We can expect not that the BPP's weak sides will predominate in the next period, but that one way or another -- through a split, through new people arising, through some people changing their minds -- the gap of a conscious revolutionary leadership in the Afro-American community is going to be filled. And we bank on that. Not the other way around.

If we're going to lean one way or the other, we lean to giving the benefit of the doubt because historically that gap is closing and we are pulling for its fulfillment. And the last thing is don't ever underestimate our role. Don't underestimate our role now and think that our role now is to maintain a pure and correct position. Our role is to get out and build a mass revolutionary party, to get out and build it. See, we talked for years and years about how we will act when the working class moves. Well, one section of the population is in motion -- the students and most certainly the black community. And we've got to go out and recruit and build a mass socialist youth group and recruit by the hundreds among the black people.

Any talk about we can't recruit black is just dead wrong. It's empirically true that until now we've only recruited a small amount. But there's nothing historically blocking us and there is no saying that developments will surprise us on how fast we might be able to recruit in the next period. We are going to make breakthroughs and we should have no pessimism on that question and build in some psychological blocks in ourselves towards the question of recruiting blacks.

We've got to find a way to do it and we're going to find a way to do it because there's nothing objectively, theoretically that could be shown that should block us. There are a lot of things that indicate that there's difficulty, but we're going to be able to do it and I think we'll see that in the next period.