

10,000 attend Revolutionary Convention

U.S. radicals agree on goals

PHILADELPHIA (CUP-CPS) - The Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Convention, called by the Black Panther Party, recessed last Monday (September 7) until November 4 when it will meet in Washington to reach final agreement on what is intended to be a new constitution for the United States.

At the first round, held here over Labour Day weekend, over 10,000 delegates, more than half of them black, agreed on general principles for a socialistic America, while disagreeing on some particular goals. The Convention avoided the open splits which characterized last summer's United Front Against Fascism Conference in Oakland, California, the last attempt by the Panthers to unify the radical American left.

Proposals were made in the form of reports by discussion groups to a plenary session of all attending the convention. No votes were taken, although the favourable reaction to some proposals clearly indicated their popularity with the crowd.

Attending the conference were members of groups covering the entire radical spectrum, including Student Mobilization Against the War in Vietnam, Youth Against War and Fascism, Gay Liberation Front, and the Women's Liberation Front. The Panthers were the only black group represented, as many other black groups were in Atlanta for the Congress of African People where 25,000 delegates discussed the creation of a World African Party.

By concentrating on the kind of society which radicals want after a revolution, the Panthers hoped to avoid the friction over strategy, which characterized previous meetings of diverse radical groups. In large measure the tactic succeeded, although Michael Tabor of the New York Panthers, issued a broadside attacking the Progressive Labor Party as "enemies of the people" for attempting to organize a march on the city hall which the Panthers feared would bring the Philadelphia police down on the black community.

By tying the new constitution to the old, and by emphasizing the Declaration of Independence's guarantee of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the Panthers attempted to make the basically socialist program in keeping with American traditions.

The proposals presented to the plenary sessions by the discussion groups included:

- * plans to end American imperialism. Discussion groups called for the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from around the world and for the abolition of the standing army, to be replaced by a system of people's militias made up of only part-time soldiers. The delegates recognized and accepted that the end of imperialism would

necessitate a lower standard of living for Americans, who now consume over 60 percent of the world's resources while only constituting 6 percent of the population.

- * community control of police. The police would be under the control of community-elected boards, which would be able to fire policemen. Non-uniformed police would be prohibited, and the combined budget for police and the military would be less than ten percent of the national budget.

- * land reform. Control of the land will be vested in the communities, with the entire nation determining a general policy for land use, and the communities handling local problems.

- * basic rights for all people.

By John Pierce

So much for the Left to do. Such a relatively small number of people to do it. And so much needless, senseless waste even of this limited amount of time and energy, in hatemongering, divisiveness in trivial, petty, internecine squabbles. Are people beginning to lose sight of who the enemy is? I am afraid so, in an increasing number of cases.

Let me give you some examples - not examples I've sought out, but things that have just cropped up in my admittedly sporadic perusal of the literature of the left. Item. The Progressive Labor party, in its January-February '69 PL magazine, devoted a major article to an attack on Herbert Marcuse, another to an attack on certain segments of the Black Panther Party, most notably on Eldridge Cleaver. The latter-than-thou approach. Along the same lines the *East Village Other* devoted considerable copy space, last spring, to attacking the *Village Voice*, whose commentators in turn attacked the New York Post, which in turn is not in complete agreement with the views expressed in the New York Times. (All these, except perhaps the Times, are basically on the good side). A certain amount of this may be necessary but I'm not always sure these papers aren't more concerned with the New York pecking order than with the real issues. In Boston, women's liberationists even attacked William Kunstler, lawyer for Rap Brown and the Chicago Conspiracy. People like Kunstler do not have the time for this sort of thing. Nor does women's lib, while women's wages continue lower for the same work, their jobs poorer for the same training, while the smut peddlers of industry and journalism continue to make big money out of sexist advertising. Not that I'm saying anything new, you understand, but women's lib has got a lot to do with the obvious yet before it affords the Arab stand "the White Left scurritism. Nor does women's

Rights to food, shelter, employment, medical care, education, birth control, and abortion would be guaranteed.

- * an end to the oppression of women. The discussion groups called for free child care centres, free child delivery, free abortion, and for 50 percent of all leadership positions to be held by women.

- * the end of the nuclear family. This proposal provoked considerable disagreement, with one discussion group saying the nuclear family might work out under socialism, and the group on Women's and Gay Liberation opposed.

The proposals were worked out in discussion groups Sunday afternoon after Huey Newton set the tone of the convention with a rousing call

for socialism in America. The proposals were presented to a mass meeting Sunday night. Delegates met Monday in regional groups to select a continuing committee to work on possible drafts of the new constitution.

The general meetings were held in the new multi-million dollar Temple University gymnasium, which sits in the middle of the North Philadelphia ghetto. Security was tight, especially for the Newton speech, and commercial press who identified themselves, were excluded.

Attendance at the convention was apparently swelled by the tactics of Philadelphia Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo, who raided the three Panther headquarters in Philadelphia

less than a week before the convention.

The police ripped apart the offices in their dawn raids, and then ordered 15 Panthers to strip outside. The police held guns pointed at the heads of the Panthers. The pictures of the stripped Panthers brought more support from the Philadelphia black community than anything the Panthers have done so far.

Rizzo's men stayed away from the convention and there were no incidents.

As the convention moves to Washington, the major questions are whether the Panthers' leadership can continue to unite radical factions, and whether the constitution, once adopted, will prove to be the rallying point the Panthers want it to be.

An End to Hate

lib have a monopoly on this sort of slipshod thinking; it has long been common to all the (X)-power groups - whether the (X) represented blacks, workers, or even students. We all tend to be keener at perceiving wrongs done our own interest group - even if these are slight or even imagined - than in observing the picture as a whole. That, you can rest assured, is plenty grim enough without embellishment.

Another distinct but related form of this is the conspiracy theory, with all its variations. In recent years, we have witnessed the extreme black militants on the left and extreme white militants (States Right Party) on the right embracing the same pro-Arab anti-Zionist-conspiracy theory, even though the States Righters have also been virulently racist, as the "Who Needs a Nigger?" sign on their Baltimore, Md., headquarters attested. While one deep South newspaper termed Earth Day in April a Communist conspiracy, many black militants all but termed ecology a white conspiracy; both forgot the issue, that we are all in this survival game together. Most disgracefully and most alarmingly, the Black Panthers, who have in the past stayed scrupulously clear of Jew-baiting and other such shabby tactics, have now (see July-August *Dissent*) joined the forces of paranoia, distrust, and hate - unless the International Coordinator does not speak for the organization, but only for herself. I refer now to a *Dissent* article entitled "The Panthers and the 'Zionists'".

Noting that many white American leftists are Jewish, Connie Matthews, Panther International Coordinator, proceeded to write (*Black Panther*, April 25) that although the white left had up-rt for the Panthers, after the Panthers took their pro-Arab stand "the White Left

started floundering and became undecided," which "leaves us with no alternative than to believe that a large portion of these people are Zionists and are therefore racists." Think this is incredible? Then read on. "... It was a Zionist judge, Judge Hoffman, who allowed the other Zionists (a majority of whom are Gentiles - my note) to go free but has kept Bobby Seale in jail and sentenced him to 4 years for contempt charges. Bobby Seale alone stands trial again in April on conspiracy charges. With whom did he conspire? The Zionists?" I ask who came to New Haven in May as a show of solidarity--the Zionists? And there's more, the best yet. "The other Zionists (was Seale the original one?) in the Conspiracy 8 trial were willing and did sacrifice Bobby Seale and his role in the conspiracy trail to gain publicity." Followed by a condemnation of Zionism as a racist doctrine, a reiteration of solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement, and a declaration that "The one-eyed bandit of Tel-Aviv, Moyshe Dyan (sic) must be hunted down and killed." With 'friends' like this, does the left need any enemies?

As *Dissent* correctly points out, Miss Matthews, in her patently illogical and paranoid argument, is using the same patterns of code-identification and conspiracy-theorizing as have long been used by fascists, Nazis, and other bigots of the far right. *Dissent* closed its article (written by its editor, Irving Howe), inviting New Left supporters of the Panthers to explain why Miss Matthews' tactics are those used by right-wing bigots. The scope of Miss Matthews' wrong goes beyond the stupidity of the attack on Kunstler. When a leader of a major political organization puts herself on written record as endorsing anti-Jewish bigotry, that leader is in effect

telling her organization to say "Hiel, Hitler!" With the extent of black anti-semitism already expressed, as in last year's WBAI radio shows in New York, it is small wonder that white leftists would hesitate about support for a black militant organization. And more will do so as the result of Miss Matthews' article. And still more will do so if the leaders of the party do not retract that article and see to it that its like doesn't appear. Is not the ultimate racial chauvinism the acceptance of anti-democratic politics from someone just because he or she is black? Thank God, *Dissent* has the humility to realize what things are under fascism. I do not think Connie Matthews does.

Again, who is the enemy? I have the feeling that Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver know, but certainly Connie Matthews doesn't. Or, one might ask, who is keeping us from realizing who the enemy is? Is it not those members of any (X)-group who resort to conspiracy theories involving virtually all non-(X) group members, those who call anyone to the right of their (X) group counter-revolutionary bourgeois? those who commit indiscriminate, random acts of violence (the left's equivalent of saturation bombing and napalm)? The leveller heads on the right have been smarter. William Buckley and others on the *National Review* have, to their profit, often denounced the Minutemen, the Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan; they have taught that conservatives who are patriotic will steer clear of John Birch. It is time now for the left to clean house, to purge itself of its bigots, fascists, and crazies. Harboring them does neither the organization in question nor the left as a whole any service; to disavow them is to set them apart for the dangerous cranks they are. There is no more place now than there has ever been for an anti-democratic politics of the left, but now its potential consequences could be even more dangerous than before.