

The Elections

# DECLINE OF LIBERALISM, LESSONS FOR LEFT

The election circus has come and gone. We dare say that the war in Vietnam will grow larger and last for a long time; that food prices will rise, but wages will increase only through strikes; colleges will still remain institutions for ignorance; and cops will still knock your head off if you cross them.

The primary purpose of elections is to enable the ruling class to trot out their stable of skills to sell the people their policies. If minor differences do arise among segments of the ruling class, their front men prattle in public about who can best achieve the goals of the master. This "struggle" between stooges (and an occasional do-it-yourselfer like Rockefeller) is called "democracy."

However, in trying to analyze the voters wandering in a world of liberals, reactionaries, ultra-reactionaries, et al., some peripheral observations may be made. Before the elections most of the professional political analysts said that Vietnam was the major issue. Obviously, millions of Americans are opposed to the war. But "differences" between the liberals, moderates, and right wingers revolved around who could achieve the goals of imperialism best in Vietnam and Asia. Hence, the issue of Vietnam was not brought to the fore by candidates, since there were no real differences. When liberals like Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. were asked about the war, their immediate reply was complete support for Johnson's position.

There were several instances in which the issue of the war was brought forward more sharply. In Dearborn, Michigan, a referendum was placed on the ballot: To stay in Vietnam or withdraw. Forty-one percent of the voters said withdraw. Since voting has been reduced to essentially a middle-class phenomenon, that result indicates deep-seated opposition to Johnson's policy. In the Oregon Senate race the Democratic candidate Duncan imposed the issue on incumbent Hatfield, who occasionally had voiced some opposition to Administration policies. But during the campaign he acted as if discretion was the better part of valor—he dropped the issue like a hot potato. However, Duncan kept raising Hatfield's prior positions. Duncan felt that the voters would support him if he took a position of complete support for Johnson. The opposite happened! Hatfield, through little effort of his own, won a resounding victory. "Representative Robert B. Duncan, a Democrat who campaigned as an all-out supporter of President Johnson's Southeast Asia policies, attributed his defeat in the Oregon Senate race to public dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War." (New York Times, Nov. 9)

Another view of the impact of Vietnam on the elections was the significant drift away from the Democratic Party. Millions of voters switched to assorted Republicans in one of the worst off-year defeats for a party in power. In a number of areas, due to the growing impotence of liberalism, and the weakness of the left, the so-called right wing was able to consolidate its forces

and win posts. This was characterized by the election of Reagan. He was able to maintain the old Knowland forces, and win over some of the independents by not fully emulating Barry Goldwater.

Theodore C. Sorensen, former JFK special counsel, told an audience of Democrats in New York City that the election was "the worst defeat since 1946; far worse than the usual midterm slide; far worse than the issues required; and it spread disaster and disarray into our party in every section of the country and in every normally Democratic state." (New York Times, Nov. 23) He was really saying that the elections were a tremendous repudiation of LBJ. "Let's get Bobby ready!" Of course, he issued the usual politically-inspired disclaimers, saying "that it would be stupid for Robert Kennedy to oppose Johnson in '68." But the louder the protests, the surer one can be that the Kennedy machine is organizing for '68.

Never before has a ruling class stooge like LBJ so thoroughly given the game away. Admittedly, neither LBJ nor anyone else would have an easy time covering up U.S. aggression in Vietnam and designs of conquest for Asia. But LBJ is an obscene man carrying out counter-revolutionary policies. Just prior to the elections, Johnson and his cabal thought they could make a grand-stand gesture to reverse the adverse tide, and to shore up his faltering peace image. His Asian junket and the Manila farce were supposed to accomplish this goal. "Oh sure, the President may well have thought that he did a tremendous job for party fortunes in the election by going to Manila and around the Pacific for 17 days of foreign adulation. He might have thought that before the election returns poured in. If nothing else, they showed his flamboyant image-projecting journey had had impact on the voters." (Ted Lewis, New York Daily News, Nov. 10)

### LBJ SHUNTED ASIDE

Perhaps one of the outstanding features of the elections was the shunting aside of LBJ. Because he has become such a "dud," the ruling class and its political lieutenants in the Democratic Party, told him to stay out of the elections. Apparently they felt his participation would only make matters worse, and that various campaigns were already so undermined they couldn't be salvaged.

Johnson and the policies for which he is fronting have become so suspect that the ruling class is setting up a new group of "Joe Sinceres" for coming elections. Both the Republican and Democratic parties need new images. And, since creating them has become the thing U.S. capitalism is best at, one can be sure such new images will be forthcoming. Joseph Alsop, in the New York World-Journal-Tribune, Nov. 23, says it this way: "If you want to defeat a President of Johnson's stature, whose worst weakness is his inability to inspire popular

liking and trust, you do not logically turn to a candidate whose most common political nickname is 'Tricky Dicky.' (Nixon) You turn, rather, to a candidate capable of exuding sincerity, morality, and virtuous purpose in the most convincing possible manner. In these respects Governor Romney positively surpasses Pres. Eisenhower."

Murray Kempton, in the New York Post of Nov. 23, thoroughly demolishes LBJ the man, but not his policies, by saying: "Poor Mr. Johnson, the atmosphere here makes plain, is an object not merely of national but of cosmic distrust. He may be the first statesman in the history of mankind of whom, thanks to the miracle of Telstar, it may be said that to see him is not to believe him instantaneously on television screens all over the world. If there is life on the moon, there cannot be dismissed from the imagination the thought that one citizen is saying to another citizen there: 'If they must come, I rather hope it's the Russians first; that man makes me uneasy.'"

So here is the ruling class in its most ruthless cynical manner hedging its bets by being able, if



Leslie Silberman, Independent Candidate for Congress in Queens

necessary, to dump a has-been, and set up a few new bodies to carry out unpopular policies. The most dangerous of all the latest shooting stars is Bobby Kennedy. This boy wonder, who could easily have been the star of Peyton Place in his younger days, instead chose to star for Senator Joe McCarthy and other inquisitors. Being bright, rich and apparently pleasant-looking he moved over to liberalism. The Kennedy boys felt that by using liberalism both the best interests of U.S. imperialism and their own desire for personal political power could be served. In his newer trappings, best-suited to his "charming" manner, Bobby has become the darling of the left. Of course, it was during his brother's reign, in which Bobby was Attorney General and chief brain-truster, that there was a qualitative change in the war in Vietnam. He also was one of the masterminds of the Bay of Pigs. But memories are short on the left, and illusions in the state are still rampant.

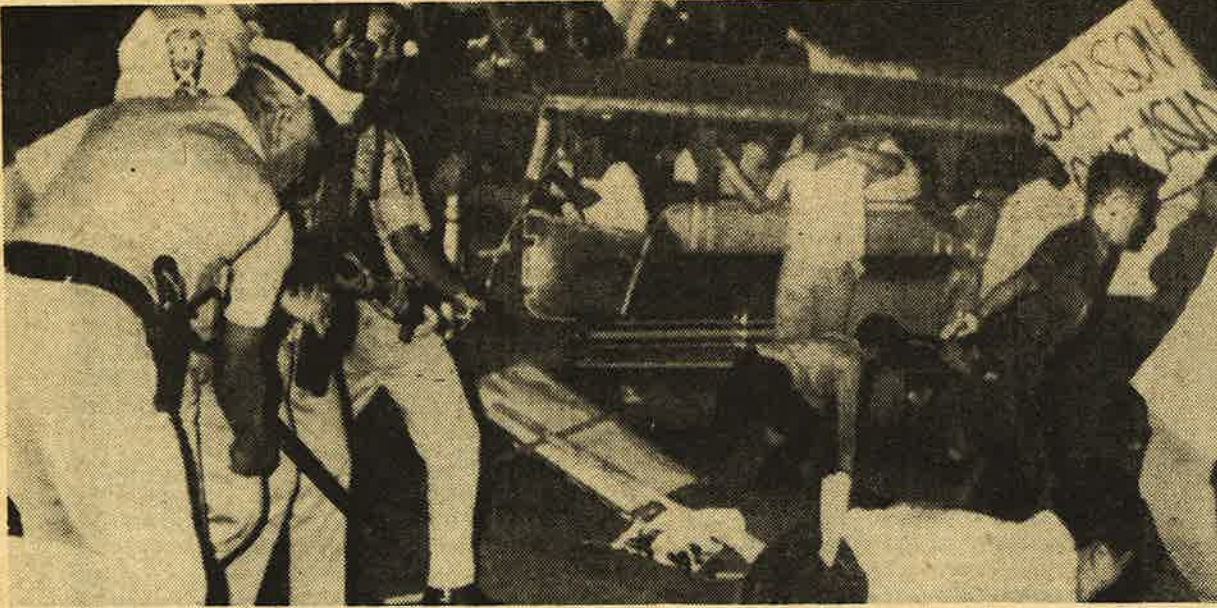
### BOBBY BIG WINNER

Bobby has emerged from the elections as the big winner. Adding to the bonus of an increase in the Kennedy sentiment are the facts that LBJ is going down; and that with the big defeat of O'Connor in New York Kennedy emerges as the undisputed leader of the Democratic Party in New York. Liberals, revisionists and assorted radicals are already clamoring for him to run in '68. Somehow or other he has planted the myth that he is at serious odds with the present policies in Vietnam, which he himself helped evolve. "Kennedy in '68" buttons are already appearing at radical rallies and in areas frequented by militants.

Kennedy is taking on one of the most important jobs for the ruling class. LBJ has helped deal liberalism a sharp blow. Restoring the potency and influence of liberalism is very important to the ruling class. Its stake in this quest is to prevent millions of people from moving to the left, and many from reaching revolutionary perspectives. The U.S. ruling class still prefers the







Philippine students demonstrate against Johnson "peace offensive."

## The Election

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liberal image. It dove-tails better with its claim of bringing "freedom and democracy" to the rest of the world. If the liberals fail, as every sign indicates they will, the ruling class is preparing for that eventuality by consolidating its right-wing forces.

Prospects for liberalism are declining. In this period U.S. imperialism is challenged by the forces of revolution on a world scale and is losing much of its economic and, hence, political maneuverability. Consequently, the question is not one of personalities but rather of objective economic and political developments. (Of course, LBJ clipping his nails in church during prayers, his first day out of the hospital, isn't being charitable to liberalism.)

Adding to the problems of liberals is the fact that people's struggles are sharpening and spreading. The Administration, despite all the noise about the "great society," can't solve the problems of the masses. The war sharply accentuates them. Strikes are mounting and Black rebellions spreading. A good example of this contradiction emerged in the issue of "The Civilian Review Board" in New York City. The liberals placed great stock in the Review Board gambit. With this device they thought they could buy some time. They felt they could hoodwink the Black people into believing the police were being governed by an impartial body, which would lessen and halt police brutality. They felt this meaningless gesture would restore the Black peoples' confidence in the state apparatus, and slow down or stop the rebellions. At the same time they hoped—or felt—that the sophisticates would be just that, and see the board for the gimmick it was.

Terrified by police propaganda, and more so by the rise of Black militancy, thousands of normally liberal voters, especially Jewish voters, helped vote the board down. Apparently these voters had more confidence in the single tactic of brutality, than the liberal leaders' historic reliance on the dual tactic of terror mixed with a baleful of duplicity. The class outlook of the Jewish people—reflecting their enormous growth into higher economic brackets—prevailed over historic ethnic oppression—namely anti-semitism. The Conservative Party doubled its vote in New York's Jewish areas in the election.

In the election, the left, "new" or old was a minor factor. This is nothing to bemoan or even to speculate about. The revisionists have no base among the people—fortunately! Their greatest influence is within the "new left," which they try to mislead. The newer independent forces have no base yet because of various reasons: they are new; they are centered among students and assorted intellectuals; as yet they have no mass line leading them to united action with sections of the working class; they still have not developed a revolutionary ideology.

For the left, elections in and of themselves have little strategic importance. U.S. imperialism will never be defeated at the ballot box. Socialism will never be voted in. The Trotskyite and Communist Party line of peaceful transition to socialism via "constitutional amendment" is a pipe-dream. This calculated illusion is designed to obscure the question of the eventual seizure of power by the workers, and the need to establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

In the short-range, the line of these opportunists acts to perpetuate ties of masses to current bourgeois heroes.

In addition, many working people, especially the most oppressed, do not vote. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates the voting population at 116.4 million. Even with the record off-year election vote, only 56 million, slightly less than half (48%) voted. Probably a majority of working people did not vote.

Elections should be viewed by the left solely as a means of putting forward advanced radical and revolutionary positions; to build permanent bases in important communities. The elections should be used to bring people into struggle with the system, not to accommodate to it. If election activity were to become a strategic instead of a tactical concept, it would be a big mistake. The vote that genuine radicals and revolutionaries receive when they run an occasional candidate can indicate the relations between the group and certain sections of the community. It also shows the level of activity carried on the year round.

But without the increase of class organizations and working class struggle in the communities and shops there is no way to overcome ruling class control of all the means of communication which dominate election results. Anyone who thinks that the mere running of a good candidate will gather in the potentially huge anti-ruling class vote is naive. A great deal more must be done if serious changes for the left are to appear in election results. And even if the left and revolutionary forces could win a number of seats in various bodies this would be no guarantee of even minor changes. Changes will only come by sharp action by the working class and its allies on the job and in the streets. Does anyone think that the police will be controlled by pulling down a little lever in a polling booth? The police will only be controlled when the workers win power and have their own police. Some curbing of the ruling class police might be accomplished by growth of political power and action of working people, but even that is doubtful.

### NEED CONSISTENT WORK

Initial results by the Progressive Labor Party and others begin to show that consistent year-round work in key areas may show up at the polls. With a limited effort in Manhattan's 69th Assembly District (see article p. 11 for more details) the PLP was able to get 5% of



Wendy Nakashima, PL Candidate for State Assembly, Manhattan

the vote. This was the "best" effort of any of the independent candidacies in New York. (We believe that had Leslie Silberman been on the ballot in Queens she would have done even better.)

The PLP campaign was particularly important because Wendy Nakashima ran as a communist—not an "independent"—like the revisionist in Brooklyn (although it is just as well that Aptheker's charade of being a communist is obscured by the CP. One must be happy for small favors). Wendy Nakashima also took a clear, sharp line on the war, and was able to link it to the other problems the people faced in the community. More important, out of the campaign came the growth of the PLP and other new people's groups in the community. Thus, PLP's election activity increased our permanent ability to organize struggle consistently, and gave the people in the area additional tools to work with throughout the year. This campaign revealed that with consistent work revolutionary forces can build a base in the community around key issues.

Other real independent anti-imperialist campaigns got off the ground in New Jersey and in Connecticut. The Black Panther Party in Alabama made a real start (see article p. 12). They are all small but important beginnings. However, the ability to even get on the ballot is in jeopardy. In Brooklyn and Queens the ruling class kept Silberman and Levin off. In Brooklyn it was essentially a case of giving Aptheker a clear field. (See article p. 11 for more information.) In Queens the incumbent, previously



Hal Levin, Independent Candidate for Congress, Brooklyn.

supported by the CP, challenged Silberman. She had run an effective campaign. One must keep in mind that the elections are the instrument of the ruling class. It is their ball game, played on their terms. Advantages can be garnered only if elections are viewed as building forces to fight to win power in the long run—one way or another.

Radicals must quickly develop an approach for '68. Otherwise the revisionists and their liberal allies will stampede the newly-emerging left forces into a Bobby Kennedy steamroller. Conferences and consultations should take place now to organize the widest possible unity of the left for '68, around the following ideas: that the U.S. should get out of Vietnam Now; support for demands of Black power and self-determination; support of all strikes and struggles for improved conditions for workers; control of the universities by students and teachers; an end to the draft; lowering of food prices; reduce all taxes on working people, local and national; end the huge arms budget, which enables the U.S. to carry on wars of aggression; bar an attack on China; improved social benefits in every category. This program should help develop strategy for winning workers to alliances with students and Black liberation forces against the war and into struggles of mutual self-interest.

There are great opportunities to organize against imperialism. Millions of our people are in struggle against or disgusted with the policies of the ruling class. These struggles, from the reduction of super-market prices to those against the war, show the breadth of people involved. Initial efforts demonstrate that people can be won to the left. Nobody says it is easy. Obviously the ruling class has many advantages. But the one thing it doesn't have is the ability to satisfy the needs of the people. The long-range advantage is with us. The short-term obstacles can be overcome by base building among the people, using the line of our party.