

USCPFA Convention

Build Peoples' Friendship Broadly

Since the third annual convention of the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association (USCPFA) this September, the role of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) in the Association has become something of a public question. The September 15 issue of the *Guardian* carried an article on the meeting by Irwin Silber which devoted much of its space to gloating over what he called a "forceful political rebuke to cadre and supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party." By an odd coincidence, there appeared an almost identical article in the *Call*, the organ of the October League.

The RCP has not made a practice of commenting on its work or the internal struggles in the USCPFA outside the Association. We would let the *Call* and *Guardian* articles pass but for the fact that the developments in the Friendship Association they have united in crowing about are ones that could seriously hinder the continuing growth and development of that organization and therefore deserve some attention.

The real question at stake in the many particular issues that have been raised is whether or not the USCPFA will continue to carry out its goal as laid out in the Statement of Principles: "to build active and lasting friendship through understanding between the people of the U.S. and the people of China." The RCP has argued consistently that the Association should be carrying on broad outreach about New China and its great progress to all sections of the American people as the best way of accomplishing this.

The RCP has fought for the Association's main emphasis to be on this kind of people-to-people friendship work, while supporting recognition of the People's Republic of China as the sole government of China and normalization of diplomatic relations between the PRC and the U.S. government. Under present conditions the latter task can be accomplished especially by demanding, as the Association does, the implementation of the 1972 Shanghai accord and an end to U.S. interference in China's internal affairs, most importantly its propping up of the Chiang Kai-shek clique on Taiwan.

Unfortunately, through the course of the Association's history a number of lines opposing building broad outreach in practice have developed. One trend has held that in building friendship, the fact of socialism and working class rule in China should be avoided in the Association's outreach work and the accomplishments of the revolution presented as "easy-to-understand" reforms—healthcare, women's equality, etc. Discussion of socialism, China's foreign policy, and so on are necessary but should be carried on among Association activists. This results in a position of panda bears for the masses, Marxism for the initiated—which misses the boat twice.

More serious is a "left" tendency which argues that the focus of U.S.-China friendship work should be among workers and the oppressed nationalities. On the surface there is much to agree with in this—a major job confronting the USCPFA is doing more outreach into the working class and among the oppressed nationalities and recruiting more Association members from among these groups. There have been strides in carrying this task out. To cite just one example, the Cincinnati Association got a very enthusiastic response when it set up a large photo display and information tables in some of the busiest shopping malls where workers of various nationalities go. It is through boldly and imaginatively extending broad outreach and educational work and paying particular attention to reaching workers and minority people with it that the Association as a whole can move ahead on this front.

Inward Turn

But those demanding a working class/minority focus do not put much stock in this. In fact, their whole thrust is not outward to the masses, but toward turning the USCPFA inward on itself. They argue that the only way to judge the effectiveness of the Association's work in reaching these "focus" groups is by the number of individuals of working class or minority background who become Association members. Some even put forward and fought for the slogan "Membership first, program second" to guide the organization's work. Further the "worker/minority focus" forces contend, it is the current Association members who are, because of their petty bourgeois backgrounds and attitudes and particularly their "racism," the main roadblock to bringing in workers and minority members.

This proposal to "broaden" the Association finally ends up not only promoting the internalization of its efforts, but winds up blindly attacking the entire petty bourgeoisie which is supposed to be "already reached"

and "over represented" in the local chapters and the national organization. This is absurd.

The only stratum of society with any substantial representation in the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association is pretty narrow—radical or communist-minded veterans of the upsurge of mass struggle around Black liberation, the Vietnam war, etc. in the 1960s. Many of these forces are among the most dedicated to building friendship with the Chinese people and to say the Association couldn't use more people from this background is unbelievably small-minded.

As for the rest of the petty bourgeoisie, there is vast fertile ground for the Association's work which has barely been touched. Teachers, professionals, small businessmen, farmers—there is great interest in People's China in all these strata. The fact is that at the present time the members of the petty bourgeoisie will tend to be the most attracted to Friendship work. More than workers, they have had exposure, although much of it through bourgeois or petty bourgeois "scholarly" sources, to analysis and reporting on New China and they tend to have the time, the opportunity to pursue such interests.

Special attention has to be paid to reaching workers, not in place of the other strata but to strengthen the Association and insure that it does work as its charter states among all popular sections of "the American people." At the same time, there are objective reasons why workers have not responded to the USCPFA in the same manner as the petty bourgeoisie.

Even leaving aside the particular conditions sparking interest among professionals and others cited above, the general approach of advanced workers to China will not as a rule be focused around or limited to the question of friendship. Practice has shown that advanced workers are particularly interested in questions of the science of revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the class struggle under socialism and the path to communist society not only as they manifest themselves in China but in terms of the tasks workers face here.

These questions have a clear and important place in the USCPFA, but they are not and should not be its basis of unity or principal area of interest. This too would run directly counter to the goal of building friendship broadly.

It is interesting that even those pushing the worker/minority focus have been forced to tone down their assertions of how easily the Association could attract workers if it only tried. A workers' trip to China put together by the Association last year had serious recruiting difficulties and resulted in a definition of "worker" so broad as to include practically anyone this side of David Rockefeller. The leadership of the entire Southern region, who have been among the strongest advocates of the "turn to the workers and minorities," were unable to produce a single candidate for the trip.

The only result so far of this brush with reality has been a shift of accent toward the second half of the "worker/minority focus." And indeed the question of the oppressed nationalities is a different one from the working class. These nationalities contain within them different classes, and their response to China tends to parallel those in American society as a whole. (Chinese-Americans, of course, show a particular interest.) Members of various petty bourgeois strata and community activists in the oppressed nationality communities already take part in many local associations and the potential exists to increase this several fold.

Quotas?

Unfortunately one of the key decisions taken at the recent convention turned away from the path the USCPFA should be continuing along and flew in the face of concrete experience in working with workers and minority people. This was a vote to establish a quota system on trips to China whereby no Associa-

tion trip could leave without two workers and two minority people on it. This condition betrayed the real outlook of its proponents on building friendship.

First, it assumes that trips to China, preferably fully funded, are the only way to win workers and people of the oppressed nationalities to the Association and to friendship with China. Secondly, the quota system is based on the openly stated premise that the "white, petty bourgeois" Association membership will not move a finger to broaden the group beyond their own class and nationality unless they are threatened with some kind of club: "Do some outreach or you can't go to China yourself."

The results of this kind of scheme are not too hard to imagine—threats of trip cancellations, opportunist recruiting, organizational infighting and further squabbles over whose motives—and class background—are purest, in short a situation into which any prospective member would hesitate to step.

Lost in all this is the real importance of the Association's tour program, which takes people from many walks of life, many communities, and fires their enthusiasm about China and equips them to carry on the work of building friendship among ever wider sections of the masses. This highlights the basis on which people should be chosen for the tours—their potential to reach others on returning, especially where the Association's work has been weak—and the need for concrete measures around finances and planning to facilitate participation by those for whom the trip poses hardships.

How did such an odious proposal pass the convention? The majority of people there were not dishonest or opportunists, but many of them fell for the arguments purveyed by an unholy alliance of political opportunists like the OL and individual careerists, some of whom consider themselves Marxist-Leninists yet work only in the Association and seek to mold it to fit their needs for a political organization. One participant described them as having pushed their proposals through by using three "magic weapons"—narrow nationalism, patronage and anti-communism, each of which contributes its own bit to narrowing the overall work of the Association as well.

Minority Caucus

The opportunists inspired and supported the construction of a minority caucus in the convention as a cutting edge to push through the quota proposal. It helped consolidate some honest members from minority nationalities behind the line of "worker/minority focus" and served as a club to cow and guilt-trip white delegates into supporting the proposal.

The RCP opposed the formation of the caucus and its recognition as an "advisory body" by the convention. The USCPFA is not in any way an organization which is based on or profits from national oppression. As in any group fighting for the interests of the masses in capitalist society, there is no barrier that can prevent the ideas prevalent in capitalist society from manifesting themselves in various ways in the organization. This is true not only of national chauvinism, but also male chauvinism, anti-working class thinking, anti-communism, class collaboration, the list is endless. However, none of these, national chauvinism included, is dominant in the Association. The formation of caucuses around any or all of these issues, let alone their formalization as semi-official USCPFA bodies, can only divide the Association and turn it further in on itself.

Patronage is the glue that holds together blocs of opportunists in organizations like the USCPFA. Petty bickering over who will control trips to China and determine who gets to go on them show where the "capital" lies in the Association now, but as it grows there will be paid official posts in the national office, on publications, etc. and some of those who have chosen friendship work as the field in which to hew out a political career see these as plums to be worked for even today.

Anti-Communism

The last of these "magic weapons" is anti-communism, which has been directed mainly at the RCP (and Association members who have agreed with RCP positions or with whose positions the RCP agreed). Members of one local Association even produced and sent around the country a whole pamphlet attacking the Party. The RCP has made a point of not responding to each and every provocation of this type because turning the USCPFA into a battleground for left sects is a sure prescription for stagnation and a service to the bourgeoisie.

Although those peddling anti-communism sometimes claim "It's just the RCP and its line we oppose," the objections raised are against communist forms of organization as a whole, and particularly the unity and discipline of Party members in the organization. This is usually raised as the spectre of "The RCP is trying to take over the Friendship Association." Those raising this hue and cry are doing so to hide the fact they themselves are trying to use the Association to further their own ends. While aiming their main attack at the RCP and even warning of others who have an organizational presence in the USCPFA, they have also attacked and even driven away numbers of independent, individual

Continued on Page 12

Revolution

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Elections ...

Continued from Page 1

the masses of people that he could claim to represent their interests. After the primary elections, in which a host of Democratic senators applied for the job, Jimmy Carter, "the man from nowhere," got the nod.

Carter the Savior

From the beginning, Carter tried to present himself as the real alternative for the working people, trying to lay claim to the "heritage" of Franklin Roosevelt, appealing to the well-constructed and widely held myth that FDR fought for the little man and singlehandedly brought an end to the Great Depression. In appealing to Blacks, Carter and his image-makers added a new twist—he was the representative of the "New South," the opponent of segregation and discrimination who was perfectly willing to lie to Black voters as well as white.

Carter got plenty of help in trying to sell himself to the American people. Almost all of the top union leadership got into the act. According to the UAW, workers "could lose in the White House what they gained on the picket line." (Exactly what "gains" they are referring to isn't exactly clear.) The United Mine Workers officials turned their union newsletter into a Carter campaign brochure complete with pictures of John L. Lewis (long time leader of the UMW) standing together with Roosevelt, which supposedly was the key to the miners advances in the '30s. A host of Black "leaders," centered mainly in Carter's home state of Georgia where the Black bourgeoisie is particularly strong, came out as if Carter was salvation itself for Blacks. And in one of the most disgusting examples of this type of treachery, the leadership of the United Farmworkers Union pulled out the stops to get farmworkers to cast ballots for a big grower. (See article on page 13.)

But despite all the buildup, Carter never caught on among the workers the way the rulers hoped. Though many voted for him, few workers had any overwhelming enthusiasm for Carter, and his pious generalities about all the good things he was going to do for the people got vaguer and vaguer.

Carter campaigned against unemployment, claiming he would provide jobs for everyone willing to work. But how? Gerald Ford was quick to point out (and the only time these politicians tell the truth is when they tell about each others' lies) that this was a fraud and that anyway the government would be unable to employ the vast millions that were out of work without greatly increasing inflation and throwing the entire economy into a shambles.

Carter promised a "Marshall plan for the cities," that somehow he would reverse the pattern of decay in the big cities of the Northeast and Midwest. But how? Where was the money to implement his fine sounding proclamations? Already he has begun to hedge.

Ford, on the other hand, tried to present himself as "experienced," "capable," "firm," the man who had taken the reigns of power in the dark hours of Watergate and steered the country back onto the right course. But for workers Ford's claim had a hollow ring. After all, the "record" on which Ford was running included presiding, along with Nixon, over the worst economic crisis since the 1930s.

Carter was quick to point out what Ford was saying: that things are basically all right the way they are, that unemployment numbering in the millions is "acceptable." And in 1976 the status quo is one thing that isn't selling.

When it came to foreign policy, Carter also tried to have his cake and eat it too. He was for "trimming the defence budget" but at the same time make sure that America was the strongest military power on earth. Ford, on the other hand, pointed out the obvious, guns and bombers aren't free. Henry Kissinger's name got dragged into the mud, with Carter accusing him of a "lone ranger style of diplomacy" etc. But after the election Carter was quick to kiss and make up with "his good friend" Kissinger, who returned the compliment by calling on all Americans to support the foreign policy of the president-to-be.

During the campaign, each tried to outdo the other in posing as the great liberator of East Europe (liberating it from Russian imperialism into the tender clutches of American capital). All their rhetoric only showed the growing preparation for war on the part of the whole capitalist class.

As election day drew closer, big efforts were made to drum up interest in the elections. Three debates were held to, in the words of their sponsor, the League of Women Voters, combat voter apathy. All of a sudden Ford was moving up fast in the polls. The election was "too close to call," "every vote counts" and the word went out: unless the masses turn out in large numbers it's going to be Jerry Ford.

Throughout the whole campaign, working class organizations were taking up the struggle. The Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee, which called the election night marches, met Carter and Ford in many



Over 200 people marched in the election night demonstration in Chicago.

cities across the country when they showed up campaigning. Picket lines ringed the sites of the first two debates with the slogans Jobs or Income, We Won't Be Kicked by the Donkey or Stepped On by the Elephant, and Politicians Fight for Moneyed Interests, We Must Fight for Our Own.

Lesser Evil?

Among the working class few really bought the line of Carter being a savior and response to the elections generally broke down along three lines. A lot of people including quite a few workers active in struggle figured that Carter couldn't be *any worse* than Ford and why not put him in there since one of the two had to be president. In addition, a large number of workers weren't about to vote at all, mainly as a result of a very cynical attitude about the possibility of real change coming no matter who got in. Unfortunately this cynicism, a result of the political crisis and decay of the capitalist system, often also included the possibility of change through struggle. Among a small but important section of the class, there was agreement with the line that UWOC and other forces were putting out: that workers can influence the affairs of state, can win advances, but only through relying on their own efforts and building up their own movement and organization.

The real significance of the election night demonstrations was not in aiming at an election boycott, simply at encouraging the broad "it doesn't matter, why vote?" sentiment among people, but in posing a clear answer to the question how *do* we change things?—by taking matters into our own hands and struggling against the capitalists and their political system whose workings lead to ruin and misery for people.

As people building for these actions put out this view, which represented a radical break with much past thinking, a lot of controversy and questions were raised up. This spread far beyond those who actually came out to the demonstration, as others read and struggled over leaflets, wore buttons and some signed banners later carried by their fellow workers in the demonstrations. All this brought out ideas which, though not fully convincing to all, will remain to be checked out in comparison to the performance of Jimmy Carter and the rest of the capitalist politicians.

A series of forums held by the Revolutionary Communist Party in a number of major cities before the election, helped deepen these points and put out the communist view that the goal of the working class struggle must be the overthrow of the capitalists' rule of society.

When November 2nd rolled around all the stops were out. Soundtrucks manned by the AFL-CIO cruised through the major industrial centers; Mayor Daley's Chicago machine was in high gear; and New Yorkers were reminded that Ford told the city to "drop dead." The message? If Ford stays in the White House and if the country goes to hell for four more years, it's your fault for not voting.

But the fact of the matter, as borne out by all the campaign arguments and Carter's early backtracking on promises since the election, is the country will continue to go to hell, even though Jimmy Carter will preside over the process from the White House. No doubt the working class will now be asked to hold its struggle in abeyance until Carter has a chance to "deliver" on his promises. And no doubt this period will grow longer and longer, and excuse after excuse will be found about why things continue to get worse. Already Carter, not yet even inaugurated, is making a big effort to explain away his pie-in-the-sky about bringing unemployment way down. Carter is now saying that unemployment will continue to hover at 5 or 6% for several years but "sometime" in his administration it will be brought down.

Smile Going Flat

And no doubt when Carter's smile and double talk go completely flat we will be told to wait until 1980 to take our struggle into the ballot box and give him the boot, only to be replaced, of course, by another capitalist politician with a new set of gimmicks.

But the experience of the masses provides the basis for more and more to see, with the help of communists and other advanced forces within the class, that the system has its own dynamics, its own laws, which operate no matter who is in the White House, and in fact *dictate* what policies the government will follow. Now that Carter will preside over the machinery of government, he will have no more ability to do away with unemployment, curb inflation, restore America's "respect" (read domination) in the world than did his Republican predecessors. What is also true is that the workers will continue to struggle as the crisis continues to deepen.

The working class is not predestined to be chained to the treadmill of the capitalists' "democratic process." As the crisis deepens and the struggle intensifies, more and more workers can be drawn into the political struggle, not as an appendage of the bourgeois parties but in the workers' own political interests. And as this movement develops the real alternative to the policies of the bourgeois parties and the capitalist crisis will emerge—working class revolution. ■

USCPFA ...

Continued from Page 4

members who wouldn't kowtow to to them.

From the formation of the first local friendship groups in New York, Chicago and San Francisco over five years ago members of the RCP and its predecessor organizations, especially the Revolutionary Union, have been involved in the Association. The Party has never concealed its active participation in building the USCPFA, never tried to dominate the Association by force of numbers, and never wanted or tried to run the Association.

At every point, Party members have sought to make the USCPFA a broadly based mass organization which could not be "run" by any group or clique, and they have fought hard against lines and positions that would hinder this happening. On the organizational level, the RCP has opposed schemes like "candidacy" periods that would limit membership. On the political level, we have opposed any number of proposals which would have directed the Association away from building people-to-people friendship, such as holding Marxist-Leninist study sessions and a demand that the Association devote much of its efforts to fighting discrimination and prejudice against Asian Americans.

One of the most persistent struggles the RCP has waged is to insure that the Association defend China and put forward its true nature and interests as the best and only possible foundation for real friendship. The most recent form this struggle has taken is over China's foreign policy. Some relatively isolated forces have been clamoring that the Friendship Association should be a forum to openly debate, by which they mean criticize, China's foreign policy. Another more underhanded attack has come in the guise of defending China's foreign policy. This line claims that China bases her foreign policy not on proletarian internationalism, but on the five policies of peaceful coexistence. Such a "defense" in effect denies the revolutionary character of the People's Republic and makes China indistinguishable from other countries. Under criticism, its proponents backed off, a victory which will help Association members build the work by really supporting and defending China.

Despite the efforts of a small minority and the setbacks their opportunism have caused, the majority of members of the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association, and great numbers of future members who have not yet joined, want to build true people-to-people friendship with China. The RCP will continue to work within the Association to help unite the maximum possible number of people to develop and carry out the kind of programs that will reach out broadly to the American people and make the Association a center to which everyone interested in building friendship with the Chinese people can rally. ■