

Jones Reportedly Wooed GOP as Early as 1968

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LOS ANGELES — The Rev. Jim Jones, who preached a bizarre blend of Marxism, Christianity Democratic politics and socialism to his Peoples Temple flock, was a Republican for at least six years, it has been learned.

He put his followers to work for Richard M. Nixon and other GOP candidates in Mendocino County in northern California with the same fervor he later gave Democrats in San Francisco.

From 1968 through 1972, the Peoples Temple — then based in rural Redwood Valley, Calif. — supplied volunteer workers to the local Republican Party.

In 1974, Jones and his followers wrote letters of support to Nixon, who then was threatened with impeachment. They were described as "sort of" hang in there, Mr. President' letters," by one former temple member.

Despite his self-proclaimed ideology of communal socialism, Jones wooed figures all over the local political map — from Communist Party member Angela Davis to Walter Heady, the Mendocino County chairman of the ultra-conservative John Birch Society.

On One occasion, Heady recalled, Jones even tried to enlist the Birch Society's support to get former Black Panther party leader Eldridge Cleaver out of jail.

Jones' remaining followers insist their leader was a genuine socialist, but temple defectors and some politicians concluded Jones was instead an opportunist.

"Their thinking was simply to vote for the winner, for whoever could help them," said Marge Boynton, a former chairman of the Mendocino

From 1968 through 1976, Jones supported two Republicans, Rep. Don Clausen and state Sen. Milton Marks, through Boynton's central committee.

"The (temple members) were a dream come true," said Boynton, still a Republican activist, "They'd do precinct work, they'd get information from the courthouse, they'd do the grubbies—addressing envelopes, making phone calls. They'd do anything you'd ask, and so quickly you couldn't believe it."

Linda Dunn, a former member of

Jones' "inner staff" of female aides, explained how the temple did the job so quickly. "We stayed up all night," she said. "Jim wanted us to have as much influence as we could."

Jones arrived in the county in 1968 and almost immediately took an interest in local politics. His first election efforts were on behalf of a Democratic candidate for sheriff, who won.

"He was a registered Republican at the time," Boynton said. "He said Mr. Nixon was a fine man . . . They led you to believe they had a basically Republican philosophy," and worked mainly through the party's central committee.

At the same time, former temple members said, Jones was busing members of the church to San Francisco to demonstrate against the Vietnam war.

But in conservative, Republican-voting Mendocino County, Jim Jones' followers as late as 1972 "were very solidly for Nixon," Boynton said.

Jones also offered to help some Democrats. "They let us know that they were willing to work for us, but their involvement was minimal," said Sybil Hinkle, who managed the successful assembly campaign of state Sen. Barry Keene in 1972.

In San Francisco, meanwhile, District Attorney Joseph Freitas said prosecutors are checking allegations that temple members were bused to San Francisco from Redwood Valley to vote in the city's 1975 municipal election, the Associated Press reported.

They also are investigating published allegations—"more implied than real," he said—that Timothy O. Stoen may have improperly covered up the temple's alleged election law violations. Stoen, who joined the temple in 1969, served as an assistant district attorney in Mendocino County for six years before conducting a city employe voter fraud investigation in San Francisco County in 1976, Freitas said.

Freitas said the investigation involves review of Stoen's files from the voter fraud probe and interviews with investigators and Voter Registrar's office employes.

Stoen called allegations of Temple fraud "absolutely false."