



# Discussion Bulletin

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# TRADITION, ORIENTATION AND PROGRAM

by Milt Alvin, Central-East Branch,  
Los Angeles, California

June 4, 1975

## INTRODUCTION

For several years a process of abandoning or changing the Trotskyist tradition, program and orientation has been taking place in the central leadership of the party. This has occurred in six areas.

In two of these some corrections have been made. In the others erroneous positions have been adopted and maintained. It is urgently necessary for the party membership to know about this process for a number of reasons.

First, only the party membership can ultimately correct errors made by party leaders that are not corrected by the leaders themselves. Second, differences of opinion on questions within the leadership should be made available to the membership as a whole, especially where they have not been resolved within the leadership. Third, knowledge of different views within the leadership and how they are disposed of can be of great educational value to the membership as training for leadership status.

I have decided to submit my views on these questions in my own name and without trying to get anyone else on the National Committee to endorse any of them. In addition to the three reasons given above for writing this article, there is a fourth. The necessity to take up these questions now is caused also by a proposed change in the National Committee, a proposal that came before the Political Committee and the recent plenum too late for me to comment on it. I was unable to attend the plenum so I will take up the pertinent point as the last in this article.

In the first five points that follow I have tried to get the central leadership in New York to adopt certain policies and to change some positions largely by letters and to some degree by discussions with leading comrades when they visited Los Angeles. Quotations from the written part of the record will be necessary so as to give readers as full a picture as possible.

## I. CRITICAL SUPPORT TO COMMUNIST PARTY CANDIDATES

During the period of the Cold War and witch-hunt the Communist Party stopped running candidates for public office. In the mid-1960s, when the political atmosphere had changed, the CP began to run some candidates. The change in CP policy, to function more in the open, and especially to participate in the electoral field was also forced upon them by our own activity.

The many candidates we were running and the exposure our party was getting as a result put heavy pressure upon CP leaders. Some of their members were asking why they could not engage in this kind of activity when they saw SWP candidates speaking at many meetings, on TV and radio, distributing all kinds of literature, forming support committees, recruiting and so on.

CP leaders had to bend to this pressure to some extent even though their main political objective was and still is to corral votes for capitalist candidates. They conceived of the idea of running token candidates for unimportant

offices as a cover for supporting capitalist candidates for top posts.

One of the first of this kind of campaign, designed to take the heat off themselves and to satisfy their ranks, was the 1966 campaign for Congress by Herbert Aptheker, a prominent Stalinist author, who ran on the Peace and Freedom ticket in New York.

At that time our central leaders decided to give Aptheker critical support, ostensibly to embarrass the Stalinists and make them explain why we were doing such a thing. The CP did not enter the contest for governor and other state offices as we did in this election. They supported capitalist candidates and contented themselves with a token candidate in just one congressional district.

This tokenism is what our party should have exposed as a fraud, especially to CP members wherever we could reach them. Instead, his report to the New York SWP membership explaining why the party was giving critical support to Aptheker, Comrade Barry Sheppard referred to the CP as "... our major opponent in the socialist movement," as justification in principle for using this tactic.

Later in his report (see YSA Educational Bulletin, August 1967) [also available in the Education for Socialist bulletin *Aspects of Socialist Election Policy*] Comrade Sheppard spoke of the possibility of demanding critical support from the CP for our candidates in exchange for supporting Aptheker. He stated, "If they should support us that would be a major victory internationally. Think of the leverage it would give in countries where there are mass CP's as in France and Italy if Trotskyists there could say that the American Communist Party says that you should vote for the Trotskyist SWP."

To my knowledge this was the first instance in our party's history where this kind of characterization of the Stalinists in this country was used, that is, as part of "the socialist movement" and also the first time the possibility of doing some horse-trading with the CP on support of each other's candidates was held out as a possibility.

After this first experience in giving critical support to a token candidate, which only helped the Stalinist leaders, our party began to do this as a fairly regular thing where we were not running for the same posts as the CP. I am not speaking of giving critical support to a CP candidate running against capitalist politicians, such as they did in the 1940s for New York City offices. These were not token candidates. Aptheker's candidacy and others for whom the Political Committee approved support were used to pull the wool over the eyes of CP members and sympathizers. Appealing for votes for such CP candidates not only helped the Stalinists, it also misled our own members and sympathizers.

Despite a number of long letters I sent to the leadership in New York beginning in February 1973 protesting this policy it continued for a time. What aroused my opposition was not the previously quoted report of Comrade Sheppard, which I did not know about at that time, but a

proposal in my branch in Los Angeles to give critical support to Bill Taylor, a Stalinist running for controller. The mayorality was open and we were running for it but the CP ran Taylor as a token candidate to legitimize their support of Tom Bradley, a Black Democrat and former cop who was running for mayor.

Although I lost in my efforts in my branch, one-third of those present did not vote for the motion of the executive committee to give critical support to Taylor. Some voted against, some abstained. However, the PC approved the proposal of the branch to give critical support.

The next instance occurred in the fall. On Oct. 31, 1973, I wrote a letter to the PC objecting to its approval to give critical support to Stalinist candidates in Pittsburgh and New York. In both cases our propaganda, including an article in "The Militant" from Pittsburgh, referred to the CP as a "party in the socialist movement" and urged people to vote for them for that reason.

In the New York elections an open letter issued by our mayorality candidate, Norman Oliver, addressed to the CP, also referred to them as a "party in the socialist movement."

On Nov. 21, 1973, the Political Committee held a discussion on the question raised in my letters. On Dec. 6, 1973, that is 15 days later, Comrade Doug Jenness sent me a letter in reply, supposedly summarizing the views of the PC. On Jan. 15, 1974, 40 days after Comrade Doug Jenness' letter, a mailing from the national office to all NC members contained copies of a number of previously exchanged letters on this question and what was described as "... an excerpted and condensed transcript from the Nov. 21, 1973, Political Committee discussion."

I have given the dates in the hope that the reader will take them into consideration. I am not appending the lengthy letters exchanged in this discussion only because they would make this article even longer than it now promises to be. However, if the PC wishes to make the entire record available in the internal bulletin, I certainly have no objection. If they do, *all* the record should be included.

The letter of Comrade Doug Jenness begins, "At its November 21 meeting the Political Committee discussed your letter of October 31 regarding the party's policy of extending critical support to Communist Party candidates. *I want to outline our thinking on the points you raise.*" (emphasis added)

I bring this up as the letter, which ran five pages single-spaced, does not conform to the transcript which was sent out 40 days later. My response to this letter was made before I knew anything in detail about the PC discussion as later revealed in the transcript.

The Doug Jenness letter implies that there was unanimous agreement in the PC that the previous policy, with which I had disagreed, was correct and would be continued. It contained nothing to indicate any differences of opinion. Now, let us see what the transcript tells us about the discussion.

First of all, the transcript does not contain the report of Comrade Doug Jenness to the PC. It begins with discussion, Tom Kerry being the first speaker. Here are Comrade Kerry's first remarks: "I gather from reading Milt's letter that the burden of his criticism is that the 'tactic' of critical support has become a fixed pattern. He feels that it was at one time selective, but now is becoming

applied generally throughout the country.

*"In my opinion, he has a point. I think we have become less selective in the application of this maneuver. It's really a maneuver and not simply a tactic of critical support, intended to advance the idea or to promote the movement for independent working class action. He's right, of course, in saying that these occasional campaigns the CP runs are in no way intended to promote the movement for independent working class action. Because for every candidate they run, they support 50 capitalist candidates.*

*"I agree that this example he cites, the Militant item from Pittsburgh, is not our concept of why we give critical support."* (all emphasis added)

I defy anyone to find a reflection of these remarks of Comrade Kerry in the letter of Doug Jenness which was supposed to outline PC thinking on the points raised.

In other remarks Comrade Kerry disagreed with what he thought was my position on the present composition of the Communist Party. But this was a misunderstanding and I believe it possible that he was misled by the reporter's remarks. Actually, as I said in a later letter discussing the transcript, my position on the present makeup of the CP and its importance as an obstacle to us is similar to that expressed by Comrade Kerry.

The second speaker was Joe Hansen. After dealing with various aspects of the question, Comrade Hansen has this to say: "In weighing who we give critical support to, I think we should *rule out token candidates who are advanced by the CP for the simple purpose of facilitating some maneuver they're carrying out in the Democratic Party or to advance their standing in the Democratic Party. As token candidates, we're not interested in that.*" (emphasis added)

These remarks of Comrade Hansen seem to agree with my position. However, as in the case of Comrade Kerry's contribution, I defy anyone to find even a hint in Comrade Doug Jenness' letter of these thoughts.

The next speaker was Comrade Jack Barnes who began by disagreeing with me on the tactical side, seeing more use of the critical support maneuver in the future. Here is what he said, in part: "We should get rid of the idea that the parallel of critical support to Stalinist candidates is our support for a labor candidate or our support for a Black candidate. These are examples where we think an individual or a group of individuals may well be taking an objective step toward independent political action, where we would make this the key thing, plus some programmatic suggestions that may not even sound that critical in individual cases. With the CP, there's no element of that. *It's phony from beginning to end.* And I also don't think you can use the criterion—I know what Joe is getting at—but I think it would be a big mistake for us simply to say, 'Check it out and look for their non-token candidates.' *I don't think they run non-token candidates. I don't think there's such a thing.* The closest thing you can come to is the Pat Bonner-Lyons campaign where they have a person who's a figure in the Black community. But even there it's token as hell and it's part of an overwhelmingly Democratic Party orientation of the Massachusetts CP and cover for them.

"What we've got to figure out is where we want to use the maneuver. *It's true that the Pittsburgh comrades made an error; we made the bigger error of running it in the Militant without discussing it with them. And then we*

*made a little bit of an error in our New York open letter . . .* (all emphasis added)

These last admissions of errors seem to refer to asking for votes for CP candidates on the grounds that they are "part of the socialist movement." I believe that Comrade Barnes' views are inconsistent; at least they appear that way in the transcript. It is hard to reconcile the fact that he believes CP candidates to be "phony" and token and at the same time look forward to giving them critical support.

The other two participants in the discussion did not deal with the substantive question and were very brief, taking up only several lines in the transcript. On the other hand, the first three speakers, who are quoted above, used up over seven pages single-spaced. I got the impression that their remarks were reported in full.

This PC discussion took place on Nov. 21, 1973. Here is what the PC minutes of that meeting say on the point under discussion:

## 2. ALVIN LETTER ON CP CANDIDATES

*Jenness reported.*

Discussion

*Motion:* To send the proposed response and circulate the correspondence to the National Committee.

*Carried."*

Can confusion be more confounded? Just what was the "proposed response?" The remarks of Comrades Kerry, Hansen and Barnes that I have quoted; or the report of Comrade Doug Jenness, the line of which presumably is contained in his letter to me but not included in the transcript? The motion adopted does not say.

Little more remains to be said on this point. If any of the participants in this discussion wish to throw some light on what happened, I will welcome it.

Finally, I don't want to drag this out any further than necessary because some progress in correcting the party's position has been made. In the early part of 1974 the San Jose local of the YSA wanted to give critical support to a CP candidate running for tax collector. Despite the fact that this was obviously another token candidate, I agreed to go along with asking for votes in this case provided that our propaganda *thoroughly exposed the nature of Stalinist electoral activity.*

In consultation with the PC the YSA NEC voted to go along with the request of the San Jose local. In the leaflet they issued they did expose the Stalinists.

My position was a concession but I thought it worth while provided the propaganda was correct and did not credit the Stalinists with being "part of the socialist movement" or anything like that. However, this does not mean that I thought we should do this in every case. I think we should drop giving any critical support at all to Stalinist candidates who are running token campaigns and pulling the wool over the eyes of their members. We should expose their treachery vigorously and completely. That will have a better effect upon their members than anything else.

It is necessary to call attention to the fact that the Trotskyist movement in the United States is stronger in relation to the Stalinists than our co-thinkers in any other country in the world. This is not by accident. It is due to the fact that here we have exposed Stalinist crimes, large and small, more consistently and thoroughly for a longer period of time than others, and further, that they never got

any credit from us for being "part of the socialist movement" or anything else of a progressive nature.

Finally it is not in the Trotskyist tradition to handle discussion material in the way it was in this case. The letter of Comrade Doug Jenness to me supposedly containing the thinking of the PC does not do so. That no PC member protested this after the letter was distributed to them and the fact that no NC member noticed the gap between the transcript and the letter are not encouraging.

The question that arises is: Do the NC members read the material that is distributed to them? Do they consider both sides in a dispute as Lenin demanded so forthrightly?

## II. THE ENERGY CRISIS

The contrived energy crisis, featured by shortages in fuels and skyrocketing prices, had a great effect upon virtually everyone in the United States. While our press did carry a good many articles on various aspects of this new development, it lacked a consistent line. A campaign around the question should have been but was not organized by the party.

I tried to express my views on this question in a letter to the Political Committee dated Feb. 5, 1974. In reply I received an acknowledgement and information to the effect that copies of this letter were distributed to PC members. Other than that nothing was said or written to me.

Rather than repeat the arguments I used I will quote my letter in its entirety.

Los Angeles, Calif.  
Feb. 5, 1974.

Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

I would like to make some suggestions about the way the party has reacted to the energy crisis. Everyone recognizes that this development is of such wide scope that there is not a single individual in the United States who is not effected by it in one way or another, to say nothing about other countries.

There is also almost unanimous agreement that things will get even worse in a number of areas this year: further decline in economic activity, which has already started; greater unemployment; more inflation; continuing shortages of fuels followed by shortages in other fields; and, of course, a sharp increase in general dissatisfaction on the part of just about everyone.

Coming on top of Watergate developments, which have not yet been swept under the rug, the indications are that there should be a greater receptivity to our ideas as the year wears on. But this depends on how we present our programs.

The problem is that we are not making the best and most effective use of our transitional program, and in fact, sometimes using it incorrectly.

First of all, I think the nature of the coming developments requires that the P.C. have a special discussion devoted solely to how we can best meet the energy crisis that is moving ahead so quickly. It is certainly important enough to spend a good deal of time thinking out just what we should do and how we should do it. The results of such a P.C. discussion should be communicated to the branches for orientation and education of the membership.

Some comrades reply to such a suggestion with the fact that we are going to have extensive election campaigns this year and that these will provide the vehicle for our views to get a wide hearing. But I mention this only because that is not what I am trying to convey. It is not only the mechanics of what we are going to do, such as the election campaigns, sales campaigns and so on; it is what part or parts of our transitional program should be used and how they should be used. That is what needs clarification.

I think I can best illustrate the point by using an example. In the January *International Socialist Review* there is a lengthy article by Steve Beck and Cliff Conner on the energy crisis. It is an analysis of the question and near the end, as is usual, it makes a number of proposals. Even though this particular article concentrates on the oil end of the crisis and despite the fact that the ISR is not an agitational publication, I am using this article as an example because similar articles, dealing with the energy crisis, have appeared in the *Militant*.

Near the need of the article the following are proposed as solutions to the crisis: cut in the workweek with no reduction of pay; open the books of the oil companies; cost of living increases to all workers; a congress of the trade union movement that would invite the participation of Black and Chicano organizations, women, students and other sectors; a Labor Party. This is a pretty large order, it seems to me.

The article then goes on to say: "These fighting proposals can protect the rights and living standards of working people, but they will not by themselves solve the problems implicit in the energy crisis." Surely a reader would wonder why it should be worthwhile to try to achieve this imposing list of demands, and also a previously mentioned nationalization of the oil-monopoly blackmailers, if it will not do the job.

The article then goes even further and suggests the overthrow of capitalism and world planning. The authors don't say so, but it seems to me that these last two suggestions surely eliminate the necessity for all those that went before.

My point is that even though these are very good ideas, one and all, the way they are presented is not the manner in which the transitional program should be used in this instance. In an article or brochure explaining what our transitional program is, in general, or in an election program, it would be proper to list many of our transitional demands. But if we visualize the present crisis as one in which our slogans should be propagandistic moving rapidly to agitational, and this is what I think is needed, then the presentation of a long list of transitional slogans is not the way to make the best of things at this time.

What I believe we need is a *central slogan* that would best represent a solution to the crisis. And this, in my opinion, is the *demand that the entire energy industry, oil, gas, coal, atomic, etc., from the extractive end to distribution to ultimate consumers, be nationalized and placed under workers' control*. Although articles in the *Militant* recently contain this slogan, they do not stress it.

This demand goes right to the heart of the problem. We should make it our central demand and campaign for it. It has already been raised in various forms and usually only in part, by bourgeois commentators.

This particular demand is also of such a nature that it

makes unnecessary the raising of some of the others that only clutter up what we have to propose.

With the mess that the capitalist system has produced I think concentration on nationalization would meet a favorable response in many quarters. It is superior to other slogans because it can be explained, if necessary, that nationalization under workers' control would eliminate the layoffs now taking place, the need to open the books, the Congress of Labor and other demands. It would by its very nature lead to the idea of a Labor Party. Workers' control would protect workers by raising wages to meet inflation and from unemployment by cutting the hours of work.

I don't think a call for a congress of labor is the best central slogan that can now be raised because the situation has already developed to the point that a solution to the energy crisis can be proposed. That is nationalization. If the labor movement faced a problem where it was best to call for some kind of widely representative gathering to discuss what to do, such as an election coming up, then a call for a congress of labor would be pertinent. But that is not now the slogan that can get the best hearing around the present problem.

If the demand for nationalization is popularized and meets obstacles from the capitalist class, as it surely will, then a proposal for a congress of labor will be appropriate to decide how to achieve this aim. But when we do raise this demand we should not weigh it down with additions to invite Blacks, Chicanos, women, etc., as they will be there anyhow as representatives of their unions. And I am sure that if such a congress is ever held, the students will certainly support it and come knocking at the door. It will be hard enough for unionists to win this demand without encumbering it with several other things.

At any rate, I believe our articles should have an agitational flavor and that the central slogan should be to nationalize the energy industry from end to end under workers' control.

Most of all, we should have a central slogan and campaign directed at the energy crisis. And it should be a combination of propaganda and agitation. I think the situation calls for this kind of response, which, of course, would be integrated into the coming election campaigns and other activities.

Comradely,  
Milton Alvin

This letter was written to the PC 16 months ago when the anger over difficulties around the energy crisis was at its height. Unfortunately, it seems that no attention was paid to it. Apparently no attention was paid to the predictions in the second paragraph, which I hasten to say, I did not originate. They were being discussed in wide circles at the time.

The leadership's response to the energy crisis was flat and routine. The situation created by the fuel shortages and steep price increases gave us an excellent opportunity to come forward with parts of our transitional program, to popularize our ideas and to offer solutions to very pressing problems.

But all that was accomplished was an exercise as commentators. A correct exposition of our program could have led to involvement in action, but failure to organize a campaign around our transitional demands closed off that

option for us. To my knowledge we made no visible gains from the energy crisis.

This lack of response to a new situation that arose suddenly and with no previous warning has become typical of the reaction of the leadership to some important events. The net result of our activities in this case was a number of sporadic articles in our press when the situation, because of its far-reaching effects, called for special efforts, that is, a nationwide campaign of propaganda.

### III. THE IMPEACHMENT OF NIXON

In the middle of 1974 as the demand for Nixon's impeachment grew I noticed that the *Militant* was not calling for his removal from office. We had correctly demanded the removal of J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI a few years before in an editorial in the *Militant*.

On June 15, 1974, I addressed the following letter to Jack Barnes, intended for the PC:

Los Angeles, Calif.  
June 15, 1974.

Jack Barnes  
National Office

Dear Jack,

Should revolutionary socialists demand the impeachment and removal from office of President Nixon? I would answer this question in the affirmative.

The latest poll shows that 52 percent of those asked were in favor for impeachment and removal from office of the president. While this sentiment remains unorganized for the most part, it does represent a majority. We should not cut ourselves off from such a mass by refusing to make a demand for Nixon's ouster from office.

There is nothing wrong in making such a demand in cases where an unpopular, untrusted or hated public office holder succeeds in turning a huge number of people against him. We demanded the removal of J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI when public sentiment for such a move reached the stage where many public figures spoke out for firing him.

We are not responsible for the fact that removal of Nixon would only get the country Gerald Ford, who is no improvement. Or that if Hoover had been removed, someone equally repulsive would very likely have been appointed. The problem of the successor is one that requires an explanation from us. We certainly can cope with that.

What is of primary importance is that a removal of Nixon under present circumstances will be only because of large-scale public demand. It would be looked upon as a victory by masses of people just as Johnson's retirement from politics was forced by the antiwar movement and explained by us correctly as due to antiwar activity.

In looking upon Johnson's forced retirement as a positive outcome of the antiwar actions, we did not have to take responsibility for his successor. Our position on Nixon should be that we are in favor of his removal and also in favor of the removal (replacement) of all capitalist office holders by those representing the workers and their allies.

We should not base our position on Nixon and the fact that there is no mass organized movement in the field

demanding impeachment, if this should be used as an argument to remain neutral or noncommittal. What is important in this respect is not the existence of an organized movement, even though it would be good to have one, but that mass sentiment is undoubtedly in its majority in favor of his removal.

There is one other recent example that I think applies here. We supported the one week boycott of meat that swept the country a year or two ago. There was no large organized movement for this, just a rather small initiating committee. But the idea caught on and received huge support. We did not say that this boycott would bring prices down, a point that others supported. And it was not our responsibility that the action had little or no effect on prices. What it did was to bring masses of people together in a common action, even one of very limited possibilities. We solidarized ourselves with this mass and it was correct to do so, of course, with our explanations of how to act more effectively.

We should not cut ourselves off from the mass sentiment (that is all that it is at this moment) for the removal of Nixon. We should be a part of it, explaining just what is required to really solve the problem.

Comradely,  
Milton Alvin

The leadership's position was contained in a series of four articles by Larry Seigle in the *Militant* beginning July 19 and concluding Aug. 16, 1974. I assume that because of their length and prominence these articles represented the views of the Political Committee.

In the first article Comrade Seigle promises to explain what he calls the "unique" position of the SWP on the impeachment question. However, several readings of his four articles have not revealed this explanation, at least to my understanding.

The four articles deal with many, many things, in fact, too many. But nowhere was I able to find just why the SWP was not calling for Nixon's impeachment and removal from office. In one article Comrade Seigle writes sympathetically of the meat boycott of 1973. We supported this mass action by many millions of people, unorganized as it was, but brought together by a solidarity of opinion based upon outrageous gouging in prices of meat.

Everyone knows that our press often addresses itself sympathetically to demands for the removal of a trigger-happy cop who has shot someone, usually a Black or other minority person. What is the difference between demanding the removal of a cop, unknown outside his immediate circle, and demanding the removal of a Nixon? I cannot see any difference in principle.

In both cases we take no responsibility for the replacement. If that is given as the reason for not calling for Nixon's removal, it is incorrect. The cop who replaces the trigger-happy murderer and the person who replaces Nixon are not of our choosing and no one would put the blame for them on us, except possibly a demagogue who could easily be exposed.

In the publication *Party Builder*, Vol. VIII, No. 5, dated August 1974, there is an article by James Harris about Black work in Atlanta. Comrade Harris discusses police repression and says the following under that point: "The whole Black community regards Police Chief Inman as a racist whom they had expected Mayor Maynard Jackson



to fire as soon as he came to office. (A demand we were the first to raise, during Debby Bustin's mayoral campaign against Jackson.)"

Well! Well!!! Well!!! Here is a branch of the party demanding the firing of a police chief. Did the PC reprimand the Atlanta comrades for raising this demand and moreover being the *first* to raise it? I never heard of it, if they did.

Of course, the Atlanta comrades were dead right in raising this demand instead of thinking up some unique reason for not raising it. It has been raised in one form or another by many of our branches protesting brutality against Blacks and other minorities.

The trouble with the four articles by Comrade Seigle is that the point of departure, as he expressed it himself, was to "de-Nixonize Watergate." Just at the time that the Watergate crisis of American imperialism was *coming to a head around the future of the Nixon presidency* and when everything was concentrated on that point, and when unbearable pressure was exerted upon the ruling class by mass public opinion, our press came out with the idea of turning attention elsewhere.

In other words, we cast ourselves adrift from mass sentiment which was clamoring more loudly and insistently by the hour for the removal of Nixon. Why did we not follow such a course in the meat boycott? This was important but not nearly as critical for the capitalist class as the crisis around Nixon's future.

As things turned out I think a good number of our own members did not realize that the party was opposed to calling for Nixon's impeachment. At least six or seven comrades in Los Angeles with whom I raised the question thought that we were in favor of demanding the impeachment of Nixon and that we were doing so.

Why did the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee finally get hearings under way and vote articles of impeachment? Comrade Seigle's articles bury the impeachment question under numerous others and as a result do not give a clear answer to this question. It was not only because the capitalist class saw that Nixon's continuation in office was impossible without doing damage to the system itself.

NO! The reason was that mass sentiment became so great for the firing of Nixon that the representatives of the capitalist class, after stalling around for months in congress, hoping that some kind of miracle would appear and get them off the spot, finally had no choice left but to get on with the business of getting Nixon out of office. The policy outlined in the *Militant* cut our party off from the thoroughly progressive mass sentiment that was the primary cause of Nixon's downfall.

Nixon was out of the White House and holed up at San Clemente before Comrade Seigle had a chance to finish his explanations of our "unique" position.

I think the new "unique" position in this case was a mistake. Our previous position, which enabled us to identify with mass sentiment, was correct. Of course, many of the things Comrade Seigle wrote about were all right. But they could not substitute for a correct policy.

Another aspect of this matter deserves mention here. That is, the kind of politics we engage in should relate to

actual events, to the thinking of people we want to influence and should take this thinking as the point of departure. We enter the political arena to take the ideas and concerns of the masses as they are and, with the help of our program, to draw them towards us.

It is unnecessary and useless to try to divert those who listen to our views from what *they consider to be the main question*. During the middle of 1974 the fate of Nixon was the question that contained within it all the others, or most of them, that Comrade Seigle tried to explain in his articles. It was our business to take this concern with Nixon and to go from there.

Not to "de-Nixonize Watergate," but to support the ouster of Nixon for the totality of his imperialist, reactionary policies. This is how the party should have approached the question but did not.

Was Nixon's resignation, forced upon him by overwhelming public opinion, a victory, a defeat or of no consequence? I would not hesitate to call it a victory in the same sense that Johnson's forced retirement from politics was a victory.

After Nixon's resignation virtually all supporters of capitalism, from liberal to reactionary, simply went euphoric in explaining that "the system works." Hosannas to the system were heard on all sides. But our propaganda largely ignored all this instead of utilizing it as a peg to describe just how the system works and for whose benefit.

All in all, we missed some good opportunities to make effective propaganda because the political approach to the Nixon-Watergate crisis was not correct.

#### IV. THE ORIENTATION OF THE PARTY.

Next to the adoption of a correct program, the choice of where to expend the party's efforts to realize this program is the most important political question. We have learned from our teachers and by considerable experience that errors in selecting a realistic orientation, if they are made often enough can lead to a catastrophe. Any number of well-intentioned groups have been badly hurt and sometimes completely destroyed by mistakes of this kind.

This is the reason why all party members, those in leading posts and everywhere else, should constantly raise this question in their minds. Are we working in the right places in accord with the circumstances of the time? Constant questioning on the problem of orientation leads to further thought about which slogans and tactics are appropriate at any specific time and place.

It is doubtful that anyone will dispute the idea that things are different in some respects today from what they were only a few years ago. I will not go into detail here but instead publish copies of two letters sent by me to party leaders. These discuss in some detail a proposed change in the party's orientation. Together with these the reader will find two brief replies from Comrades Barnes and Shepard.

Reports from the May plenum indicate that under the Tasks and Perspectives report the National Committee adopted as part of its position a turn in the direction I suggested in my letters. To what extent the change in orientation that I support will be carried out is unknown at this writing. Here are the letters:



Los Angeles, Calif.  
Jan. 21, 1975.

Jack Barnes  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Jack,

On recent visits here both you and Barry mentioned that there are in preparation some fundamental resolutions for the next plenum and that you hope to have copies out to the NC members in time for them to read before the plenum.

I cannot comment on these until they are published, of course, but I have been giving some thought to what the party needs now in the way of documents.

Fundamental resolutions that relate current developments to our basic conceptions are always useful. But nothing was said about a conjunctural document. That is what I think the party needs for the coming period which shows strong indications of considerable changes in the economy, unemployment, etc. These changes have been taking place at an accelerated pace. Over 600,000 workers were laid off last month, for example, and more layoffs are being announced every day this month.

During the 1960s the party correctly saw its growth coming mainly from the youth recruited to the YSA. The actual radicalization of that decade was largely among young people, in the student movements, in antiwar activity and among the minorities, women, gays, etc. The orientation of the party toward the youth and the expectation of building the party out of newly recruited youth were successful.

However, the last few years indicate that a shift in our thinking is necessary. We can no longer expect that future growth of the party will come mainly from the same source, that is, the YSA. A recent survey of first year college students conducted by UCLA and the American Council on Education reveals shifts in attitudes of young people that confirm the experience of our comrades who are active on campuses.

The survey consisted of a study of over 189,000 first year students in 364 colleges across the country and a comparison with a similar study made a year ago. It showed that among these young people there is a decrease in those who consider themselves "liberals," and an increase in those who look upon themselves as "middle-of-the-roaders." This is a shift to the right.

Fewer of them think that keeping up with political affairs is an important life goal. Fewer think marijuana should be legalized (an important gauge of opinion). While the number who thought of themselves as "far left" remained the same, the percentage was only 2.2 percent of those surveyed.

I am sure that everyone has noticed that protest actions on campuses are qualitatively smaller in recent years than they were in the 1960s. This tends to confirm the findings of the survey.

I do not want to give the impression that I think we should consider this survey as the final word and turn our backs on the youth in the colleges. I do not think we should write them off. I do think that the YSA should continue to work on the campuses and not assigned to go into factories or anywhere else.

A turn towards the workers is due now as recent developments indicate that advanced workers must be thinking in different terms than they did in the 1960s

when most of them felt, secure and not very much concerned with the upsurges of those years. Other surveys, noted by us, have shown a change in thinking is taking place among younger workers who were moving towards radical opinions before the present economic downturn became as severe as it appears now.

Many workers who were secure in their minds last year are either unemployed or threatened with layoffs. This is on top of persistent inflation with prospects of more of the same to come as well as reductions in real wages.

Getting back to the question of resolutions and documents I think we need one to reorient the party towards the workers. This would be a shift in emphasis in our *propaganda* for the most part since we are not yet in a position to call for *actions* except in rare instances.

If we do this, the party will have to learn how to talk to workers, in the press, at meetings and face to face. This is necessary because workers' language is not the same as students'. And our comrades have had a one-sided experience in this respect, with students.

I thought it interesting that the recent call for a conference in Boston to organize further activities in the fight against racism was billed as a *student* conference. Of course, I realize that the racism question is currently around schools and students in Boston. But the forces engaged in the struggle are much broader and I wondered why the conference was not projected on a scale to reflect this. Is it because the party is locked into the formulas used in the 1960s?

Many of the big actions in which our party was engaged in the 1960s were preceded by nationwide student conferences. The youth were the spearhead, as I indicated earlier, of just about all the big actions of that decade.

But that cannot be true of actions to come around economic questions in which the workers and unions will play the leading role. It should be our task now to engage in widespread *propaganda* work among these elements in preparation for the actions that will surely come. *Propaganda* precedes agitation and agitation precedes action.

I continue to stress that our work should be mainly *propagandistic* in this period because among the sectarians and ultralefts demands for general strikes are often made in a light-minded manner. Naturally, no one is taking such advice seriously.

It is necessary for us to present to workers new ideas that they are not yet familiar with in such a way that they are understood. That means very concretely and includes analyses of what is taking place with regard to their jobs, income, taxes and future prospects. Our transitional demands should be widely used. In this respect I must say that there are far too many articles in the *Militant* that are strictly news reports and make no demands. This is a mistake; we should advance transitional slogans to a far greater extent than we have been.

The *Militant* should not be conceived of as a newspaper except in those instances where the capitalist press ignores certain events. These are relatively few in number. The paper should have more the character of a journal of opinion, *making analyses, drawing conclusions, making predictions and raising demands*. Even if some predictions go awry, that will not be fatal. All the great revolutionary leaders made errors here and there insofar as they attempted to foretell the future. Trotsky wrote that the more concrete a prediction, the more qualified its character

had to be.

I will not belabor this point any further nor say anything about the necessity of the party to have a proletarian class composition. These are commonplaces in our movement and in general agreed to by everyone.

Everything depends upon where the leadership thinks new members of the party are coming from in the next period. If you look to the student youth, as we did in the 1960s, then the present course does not need much, if any adjustment. But if you see things as I have explained briefly, then a shift is necessary and there should be a document on it and it should be discussed in the party ranks as well as the leadership.

I tried, in October 1972, by means of a memorandum to the PC to call attention to the change then taking place. I won't go into this in detail except to note that it wasn't until six months later at the spring 1973 plenum that my suggestions were adopted in part. But even then the leadership chose not to go along with my proposal that leading comrades from the center visit the branches and explain the change in tactics that was made. I think this was a mistake. It is always best to explain any shift in tactics to the membership, even changes in emphasis. This introduces the greatest amount of consciousness into the party's activities and eliminates to some extent the element of surprise which can demoralize some members.

Comradely,  
Milton Alvin

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14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
February 25, 1975

Milt Alvin  
Los Angeles

Dear Milt,

Barry gave me a report about his discussions with you about the plenum and our perspectives. It was very helpful to him. He will be the one responsible for the conjunctural report and initiating further discussion in the Political Committee on this. I was sure you wouldn't object, so I have made your letter available to the Political Committee members to help jog their thinking further.

(a paragraph on something not pertinent—M.A.)

Comradely,  
s/Jack

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Los Angeles, Calif.  
March 10, 1975.

Barry Sheppard  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Barry,

I am writing you because Jack told me you would make the report at the plenum on the current conjuncture. I will not be there but would like my views to be known to you. This letter should be looked upon as an extension of my letter to Jack of Jan. 21 which you have. You may show this to anyone you think should see it.

The most important thing that is new in this period is that the economic crisis, which began as long ago as 1971,

has changed the psychology of the workers. I believe this change has been extensive.

The workers, as an organized force, participated very little in the movements that arose during the 1960s. They were confident that their jobs were secure, more or less, and that their standard of living would be maintained and even improved.

Today that confidence has been eroded and in all likelihood has just about disappeared. The rapidly escalating layoffs have thrown a chill into the working class as a whole. All workers feel far less secure, if they fell secure at all, than they did five years ago.

The first actions of protest, demands for jobs, etc., have already been seen. These have been inadequate, hesitating and limited by the conservative labor bureaucracy. However, the union leaders have in some cases threatened larger actions if something isn't done.

In discussing changes among the workers (that I think it necessary for us to shift to some extent to planned propaganda work at factories and unions) with a few comrades here I have received the astonishing reply that the work we have done and are doing in Boston is a substitute for my proposal. While I am in agreement on the party's work in Boston and its importance, I think this is entirely different from making propaganda on economic questions aimed at the working class as a whole. I don't see how one can be confused with the other. The struggle against racism has a validity of its own, as we have said many times in the past. If this struggle can be tied to others, and I think it can as I will explain later, so much the better. But if it cannot, then it must be pursued on its own merits.

But work among the class as a whole is something else again and in this period, when workers are no longer looking to the future with confidence, and when the most important questions on their minds are economic, this puts a different obligation upon the party.

One comrade blurted out to me that the struggle against racism in Boston was our answer to the current problems of the workers. He said, "We have to demand that the white workers support the program of the Blacks." I cannot think of a more unproductive way to approach the white workers in this country than that. We can demand this of the white workers from now to doomsday but it will yield no results as anyone can tell you has worked in a factory and been around American workers, that is, white workers.

In 1933 Trotsky thought that 99.9 percent of the white workers were chauvinistic towards Blacks. (see *Young Socialist*, Feb. 1975) This figure may have been too high. In any case things have improved somewhat in this respect since 1933. But if we want to see things in their real light, we will admit that the great majority of white workers remains prejudiced against Blacks even now. There is also a good deal of antisemitism and prejudice against other minorities.

How to overcome this and effect a unity in action between the majority white workers, without whom a revolution cannot be made, and the minorities is a problem for us. However, here a lesson from the past can be useful. In the mid-1930s, when the CIO came upon the scene Black workers were for the first time welcomed into a large labor organization by white workers. Many of these whites were originally from the south and, as

Cannon explained in his 1946 speech on the Theses on the American Revolution, were former members of the Klan.

The white workers who formed the CIO had to confront the problem posed to them of many Black workers in the plants. I think they had to weigh their economic interests against their long-standing prejudice. In this confrontation in the minds of the white workers the economic interests won out over the racial prejudice.

This lesson should be relearned by the party and the example turned to good use in the current situation. Means of opposing the economic interests of the white workers against their remaining prejudices can be found and propaganda worked out around such questions. This kind of approach can yield some results; ultimatums issued to white workers will bring nothing at all.

If we want to learn all that is possible about the working class in this country, we have to say that the white workers make up a majority, even an overwhelming majority, of the class. To talk of revolutionary activities without this segment of the class is foolish; it just cannot bring anything. We have a program for the white workers, a program that applies to all workers no matter what their race or color. We should use this program more than we do.

For example, on page 24 of the March 7th *Militant* there is an article on oil. (I cite this article as a sample of many of its kind and mean no special criticism of the author.) There is no programmatic demand made in the article, to nationalize the oil industry with workers control. Why not? I think our writers far too seldom use our program in their articles. They need to be educated in how to do this. Bourgeois writers are discussing the idea of nationalizing the energy industry; letters to editors of daily papers raise the question, but our press pays little or no attention to this excellent demand.

To illustrate how little our party is oriented towards the workers, and I repeat that my proposal is only to organize propaganda campaigns among them and not to form left-wing factions in unions, as one comrade asked me, I am enclosing the branch letter sent to our membership dated Feb. 17, 1975, a few weeks ago. I have underlined four sales during the week, all of them on campuses. This would be appropriate for the YSA but shouldn't the party try to sell to workers? I think it should and should start now, or else others will get there before us and this will produce more problems.

In politics time is of the essence. Cannon was fond of the expression, "Strike while the iron is hot." The party must be able to turn to the fields where opportunity is present. Right now, this is among the workers. It is necessary to make a turn and to explain it to the membership as a turn, if you agree to make it.

A final word on consciousness. It is of the greatest importance in educating the membership to introduce the greatest amount of understanding of what the party is doing in any particular period. The better the membership understands why the party's course is set in a certain direction, the better the tasks will be carried out, the better the program can be explained to others, the more recruits can be obtained.

Comradely,  
Milton Alvin

14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
March 29, 1975

Dear Milt,

Thanks for your letter of March 10, and the clippings you sent.

I've distributed the letter to the Political Committee so they would have it before we begin discussing the report on tasks and perspectives to be given to the plenum.

Comradely,  
s/Barry

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As in the energy crisis, the response of the party leaders to this new situation and its tasks has been uneven and insufficient. Of course, our press has carried a good deal of written material regarding the economic crisis and its effects upon the workers. However, this cannot substitute for consistent propaganda work *directly particularly towards the workers*. This has been done only spasmodically, and by only a few comrades, usually some of our candidates engaged in election work.

As matters stand now, the NC has adopted a new orientation. This is welcome. However, it seems that it will be discussed in the branches and come before the August convention before any action is taken. If the party waits until after the convention to put the orientation to the workers into effect, almost a year will have been lost. I hope this will not happen.

If, as I said earlier, time is of the essence in politics, loss of time can never be made up except by sacrifice, and in this case, needless sacrifice.

**V. THE PROBLEM OF LAYOFFS** The many workers laid off since the beginning of the present economic crisis have raised a problem for the party in regard to our response. Unfortunately, the Political Committee saw fit to present certain ideas publicly in our press that are not part of our program and that can do a great deal of damage to our efforts to win support among workers. A discussion of various ideas and approaches is in order.

I have been told that the position on this question that I expressed in two letters to the PC shortly before the May plenum "disturbed" some comrades. For this reason, in order to eliminate misunderstandings to the greatest possible extent, I wish to state in the most unambiguous way that I am unalterably opposed to *advocating* layoffs in line of seniority, a position defended by AFL-CIO President George Meany and other top union leaders. I am also just as opposed to *advocating* any other kinds of layoffs, including those supported in the articles by Comrades Fred Halstead and Linda Jenness. Neither of these positions is in our program and neither belongs there.

The second point that should be clarified is that what I discussed in my letters and the further explanations offered here deal with what our *demands* should be. That means what is said in our press and by our public speakers as well as what our members put forward as proposals in their unions. This is, of course, not necessarily what any

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particular union may have to settle for. That can only be decided in the course of the struggle and the final decision can go either way, depending upon who is stronger, the union or the company.

Here are the two letters.

Los Angeles, Calif.  
April 16, 1975.

Political Committee  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrades:

I have written you previously regarding use and non-use of our Transitional Program, particularly letters dated Feb. 5, 1974, Jan. 21, 1975, and March 10, 1975. Now I am writing with reference to an article in the *Militant* of April 18, 1975.

The line of the article, "The Debate Over Seniority and Affirmative Action," is support of preferential layoffs so as not to disadvantage those hired last with the least amount of seniority. While the article occasionally mentions the larger aim of reducing hours of work with no reduction in pay, the basis for the preferential layoff position is the following statement, ". . . so long as the labor movement has not mustered the power to win jobs for all, there *will* be layoffs." (emphasis in original)

This judgement of the labor movement is incorrect and not in line with our position which has been worked out over a period of many years. Our view of the labor movement (I assume the author, Linda Jenness, means the union movement) is that it is quite capable of winning jobs for all and much else in addition. The problem is the conservative bureaucracy that misleads this union movement. We believe that the key to unlocking the strength that resides in this movement is the replacement of the bureaucracy with militant fighters.

The quoted statement, if it represents the official party view, can lead to all kinds of mistakes because it downgrades the potential of the organized workers and turns the party's attention elsewhere.

Just as soon as the right to *any* layoffs is conceded, and this is a concession to the bosses, the question of principle is decided. The only thing left to argue about is just exactly who is to be left on the job and who is to go. It is not our mission in life to make such a concession. We demand jobs for all, with reduced hours and no reduction in pay.

This kind of situation was foreseen by our movement at the time of the adoption of the Transitional Program, in 1938. The pertinent section says, "The Fourth International demands *employment and decent living conditions* for all." (emphasis in original). And further, after describing the sliding scale of wages and hours, it says, "It is impossible to accept *any other program* for the present catastrophic period." (Emphasis added)

I believe that the article under discussion presents another program based upon an incorrect analysis of the possibilities of the workers to fight for and realize the aims that are in their interests.

The position that our movement has always held, that is, to fight for jobs for all, is described in the article as "This hypocritical stance . . ." I not only resent such a characterization but call attention to the fact that in a discussion of the merits of various points of view calling anyone a hypocrite at the beginning of the exchange of opinions is not the best way to get a hearing. The same

thing can be said about the remark in the article that those who supported preferential hiring and now do not support preferential layoffs are "talking out of both sides of their mouth."

On the last point, I do not hesitate to say that I supported and do now support preferential hiring. But I am opposed to preferential or any other kinds of layoffs. Hiring and layoffs are not the same kind of things. When the capitalist economy is expanding and workers are being hired it is correct to advocate preferential hiring of women and minorities to adjust the balance. When a depression leads to decline in the economy and the bosses are looking forward to layoffs, there is a different situation. The difference is that preferential hiring can win support in wide circles but preferential layoffs most likely cannot. In any event, I think that demands for preferential layoffs is a concession in principle and that we should not advocate it.

I expect to be told in reply to the position I have outlined above that the only realistic position is the one advocated in the article. This will not be the first time that concessions are hidden underneath "realistic" positions. There is nothing unrealistic in the demand for jobs for all. It depends upon how one looks at the Transitional Program.

I believe the program to be a *bridge* between the present consciousness of the workers and the socialist revolution. Apparently others think differently. However, the original program was designed to be what I have described.

There appears to be a resistance to using our transitional demands. That is why I mentioned at the beginning of this letter others that I have sent you in the last year or so. Since the economic crisis reached the levels where it is now there have been many opportunities to advance our transitional demands in our press. I am, of course, only discussing propaganda at this time. But I believe that even here, in the weekly paper, many times articles do not even mention our program. I think the PC can spend some time profitably looking into this side of the question.

Comradely,  
Milton Alvin.

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Los Angeles, Calif.  
April 21, 1975

Political Committee  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Comrades

Since sending you my letter dated April 16, 1975, I have read again the two pieces of recent propaganda widely distributed by the party.

In "A Bill of Rights for Working People" it states, "Working hours should be reduced with no reduction in pay in order to spread the available work and achieve full employment." This is a correct statement of our position. Nothing is contained in the pamphlet advocating preferential layoffs.

However, in another piece, "Why Can't Everyone Have a Job?" by Fred Halstead in the *Militant*, March 14, 1975, after correctly raising the same demand for shorter hours with no reduction in pay and explaining it at greater

length, it goes on to say the following: "Just as the seniority system prevented bosses from picking and choosing who to lay off, we must now prevent them from using *preferential firing* to beat back the gains the most discriminated-against workers have made over the last few years.

"This is a matter of self-interest for all workers, regardless of color or sex. If some of us try to preserve our jobs at the expense of minorities and women, it will only play into the bosses' tactic of 'divide and rule.' They would like nothing better than to see workers fighting among themselves over a dwindling number of jobs, rather than waging a united fight against the boss for laying off *anybody*." (emphasis in original)

This is confusion confounded. No matter what kind of layoff plan is advocated it will inevitably set workers "fighting among themselves." That much should be obvious to anyone. Let us suppose that preferential layoffs protecting the jobs of women and minorities are achieved in a given plant. Will those who are laid off take it with a smile? I don't think so. They will feel embittered and it will surely set them fighting those who are retained on the job. No amount of assurance that this is best for all concerned will convince them.

Among other reasons, this is why our slogan as stated in the transitional program is correct and in the best interests of *all workers*. The demand for a shorter work week with no reduction in pay tends to unify workers. The demand for some plan, any plan of layoffs, tends to divide them and set them fighting among themselves.

In the last sentence of the Halstead piece the two ideas are counterposed in that he points out that the bosses would like to see workers fighting among themselves (this would be the result of any kind of preferential layoffs, whether by seniority or any other way) and "waging a united fight against the bosses for laying off *anybody*." The last expresses what would be the case in raising the demand in our transitional program: Reduce the hours of work with no reduction in pay.

I believe that the two demands under discussion are mutually exclusive.

Comradely,  
Milton Alvin

I think that by means of an example some light can be thrown on the problem of layoffs and how the party should react. Let us suppose that there is a plant with 1,000 workers. 800 of these are white males with the greatest seniority. The other 200 are women and minorities, hired after the 800, with the least seniority.

The company calls in the union representatives and tells them that it has to lay off 200 workers. According to the prescriptions described by Comrade Fred Halstead and Linda Jenness the union people would respond with a demand that all workers remain employed at reduced hours with no reduction in pay, and at the same time, that layoffs be made in such a way as not to disturb the existing proportion between workers with greater seniority and women and minorities who were the last hired.

Comrade Linda Jenness does not believe as I do that these two demands are mutually exclusive, that is, cannot be raised simultaneously. In a letter to me dated April 29, 1975, she writes, "Far from being mutually exclusive, these demands go hand in hand."

It would be interesting to be present at a meeting of the union and company representatives, in the example I have cited above, to hear Comrade Linda Jenness make these two demands "hand in hand."

The company would very likely respond by asking the union representatives which they wanted, everyone to work at reduced hours or layoffs of 200 workers selected in some other manner than in line of seniority. The company would very likely advise the union people to go back and talk it over among themselves and decide which they wanted, as obviously they could not get layoffs and no layoffs at the same time.

Let us further suppose that the union decides to demand that the 200 to be laid off be selected in a manner that would not disturb the existing relationship, that is, four to one, between the white male workers and the women and minorities. If the company agrees to this, the 200 laid off would consist of 160 white males and 40 women and minorities. This would leave working in the plant 640 white males and 160 women and minorities, that is, a ratio of four to one, the same as prior to the layoff.

Let us pursue the example further. First of all, it would not protect the jobs of all the women and minorities as 40 of these would have to be laid off. In addition it is doubtful in my mind that these 40 plus the 160 white males to be laid off as well, would look upon this plan of preferential layoffs, as worked out concretely, as some kind of windfall for them. I doubt that any sizable number of these 200 workers would vote for this proposition, which would put them out on the street on unemployment compensation at a reduction of weekly income of at least 50 percent.

Comrade Halstead describes this kind of preferential layoff as follows: "This is a matter of self-interest for all workers, regardless of color or sex." Just what "self-interest" would accrue to the 200 victims of the layoff as described above, Comrade Halstead does not tell us. Nor does Comrade Linda Jenness explain what benefits would come to those laid off under this formula, either in her article in the *Militant* or in her letter to me.

Of course, this is no accident as it is impossible to find any benefits coming to workers who are laid off no matter what the method.

Using the same example, let us now look at the situation if the party's transitional demand, for a reduction of hours so as not to lay off anyone, is used. I leave aside for the moment that part of this demand that deals with pay.

The union responds to the company's proposal to lay off 200 workers with the demand that the hours of work be reduced to four eight-hour days *so that no one is laid off*. This would retain the same number of labor-hours as a layoff of 200 workers.

This demand has the merit of uniting the workers and not dividing them as preferential layoffs would do. All the workers would remain on the job, all the workers would share the available work. Under this formula all the workers share and share alike and this kind of demand builds a feeling of solidarity among them.

Next, the union also demands that the workers get five days pay for four days work. The company, will of course, say it "cannot afford" to pay. The union replies with the demand: "open the books" and we will see.

It should now be apparent that the demand for reduced hours of work with no reduction of pay does far more than unite the workers and keep everyone on the job. *It leads to*

raising new and deeper demands, as our transitional program visualized. The demand for preferential layoffs does not do either of these. Needless to say, layoff in the line of seniority also does not do either.

An examination of the company's books, if this can be obtained, (we now visualize our simple example as applying to a large corporation) would probably reveal huge amounts of money expended for personal expenses of owners and officers, bribes of all kinds such as have been featured in recent disclosures, illegal political contributions to capitalist parties, exorbitant salaries and bonuses paid to high officials, high interest and dividend payments and other things big corporations like to keep out of sight. Once these are discovered and brought into the light of day it will be seen that the company can indeed "afford" to pay its workers for five days while they work four.

But suppose the company refuses to open its books for the union's inspection. That is what General Motors did in the big 1946 strike. This refusal would count against them not only in the eyes of the general public but would further solidify the workers and build their unity.

More than that, it would lead to another transitional demand, on an even higher level. That is, the demand to put the plant under workers' control or to nationalize it, if it is a large enterprise, under workers' control. The workers will say that if the bosses cannot provide jobs for all, they are willing to run the plant and can do so. Isn't this what the French workers at Lip did a couple of years ago? Of course it is.

Now we can see that our transitional program that begins with the sliding scale of hours and wages is a far more effective, unifying program than any kind of preferential or other layoffs. The idea of all workers remaining on the job, regardless of how the pay aspect is resolved, actually protects the jobs of women and minorities to a greater extent than preferential layoffs. As our example showed, the preferential layoff would result in the loss of some jobs for women and minorities. Jobs for all would not.

Another aspect of the question is this: Can the workers who have the greatest seniority, in our example the 800 white males, be expected to vote 160 of this category out of a job in the interests of 160 other workers who were hired later? I doubt it. Perhaps in some few isolated cases workers can be expected to do this but it would be an exception, not the rule.

According to our method of dialectical materialism we expect people to act in their own material self-interest. That they do this we know from all previous experience. Therefore, we should expect a worker who, by virtue of seniority can hold his job to vote to do so in most cases and not to vote himself out in the street to get by on unemployment compensation.

Someone may raise the point that keeping everyone working four days instead of five will very likely result in a cut in pay for everyone as it would be difficult to achieve the demand for no reduction in weekly pay. Will the high-seniority workers vote for this? Sometimes they will and sometimes they will not. In any event scattered reports from around the country tell about such a solution of the problem. Here is an article from "The Los Angeles Times" of May 16, 1975, in its entirety:

## "NEW YORK BELL WILL PUT 2,000 WORKERS ON A SHORTENED WEEK.

New York Telephone Co. said the operators will begin a four-day week at four day's pay beginning July 6. It said the move will avoid laying off 400 operators because of a drop in business resulting from the recession and increased mechanization. A union spokesman said his group backed the move because health and welfare benefits will continue. The operators, who handle directory-assistance and long-distance calls, now earn either \$168.50 or \$180.50 a week, depending on experience."

Several other articles I have seen in recent months that tell a similar story do not mention anything about pay. We must assume that in all these cases there was a reduction in pay in proportion to the reduced hours. However, even in such cases a better overall situation developed than any kind of layoff could produce.

Another point in favor of keeping everyone on the job is that the dispute with the company then takes place over the pay factor and all the workers can easily be united on that point, that is, to get as much as possible for the reduced hours of work.

I want to deal now more fully with what Comrade Linda Jenness points out as a very important aim of our movement, that is, to achieve unity among the workers. In the light of what I have described above, just which way towards unity should we advocate? Preferential layoffs, no matter what the formula, by seniority or in any other fashion, can only produce divisions among the workers, those laid off embittered and expressing some of their anger against those retained on the job.

On the other hand, to retain everyone's job, even at reduced pay, can yield far better results, as I have described above, and especially lead to unity of the workers.

Another point stressed by Comrade Linda Jenness and also mentioned by Comrade Halstead is that working class unity can be achieved around the defense of the most oppressed section of the class. Unfortunately, this idea at best is incomplete, at worst, is a failure to appreciate just how workers act.

The idea, as Comrade Linda Jenness expresses it, leads to the belief that the more privileged workers (those with the greatest seniority) can somehow be mobilized in a struggle to defend the interests of the less privileged. The implication is that they can be induced to do this even when it goes against their own material interests. I doubt this proposition very much. As I stated above, only in exceptional cases can this be expected.

However, history teaches that it is possible to win more privileged workers over to supporting less privileged. We had an example of this in the early days of the CIO when predominantly white unions welcomed the entry and participation of Blacks. This was done by adopting programs that benefited all the workers, both white and Black. A study of how Black workers came into the CIO (they were largely excluded from the AFL) would benefit the party as a whole.

The idea that the workers as a whole can be united around support of the interests of women and minorities, as it is put forward by both Comrades Halstead and Linda Jenness, is misleading. Unity on any scale worth talking about can be achieved only on the basis that it is an all-



*encompassing unity that benefits all the workers and not just some of them.*

Comrade Linda Jenness believes that since we supported preferential hiring we should automatically support preferential layoffs since, according to her, they are the same. But they are not the same. Here is where there is a difference.

When preference in hiring is given to women and minorities no one already working in the given plant is hurt in any way. On the other hand, any formula for preferential layoffs or any other kinds of layoffs hurts those who are laid off. Surely this difference between hiring and layoffs should be clear.

Of course, it can be argued that preferential hiring does hurt those not hired. This is true. But the hurt in this case is not very great compared to the hurt in the case of layoffs. Those not hired are not much worse off by going elsewhere to look for a job. On the other hand, those who are laid off can only go to the unemployment office to register for non-existent jobs and receive compensation drastically lower than their wages had been.

The party should immediately stop advocating preferential layoffs or other kinds of layoffs and go back to our transitional program which demands jobs for all with no reduction in pay.

## VI. THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE

At the April 22, 1975, meeting of the Political Committee Jack Barnes made a proposal to eliminate the category of advisory membership on the National Committee. The minutes of the meeting, to which a transcript of Comrade Barnes' report is attached, tells us that a motion to that effect was adopted together with a proposal to bring it before the May plenum. His remarks are the only ones in the transcript.

The category of advisory member of the NC was adopted by the convention in 1963 and has now been formally in effect for 12 years. In the transcript of Comrade Barnes' remarks he gives only one reason for eliminating this category, that is, it was set up, "... to facilitate the transition in leadership," which he believes has now been accomplished leaving no further need for this kind of NC membership.

Comrade Barnes goes on to say that this "... was never intended to be a permanent form." Aside from the fact that regardless of anyone's intentions nothing on this earth is "permanent," including provisions in our constitution, his reason suffers from a too narrow interpretation.

He gives the impression that the only thing involved here was a series of transfers of older regular NC members to advisory status in order to make room on the committee for new and younger leaders. Undoubtedly this was one of the important reasons for establishing advisory membership in the first place.

However, there is another reason, at least as important, in my opinion. That is, to enable the NC to include the participation of comrades transferred to advisory status, to take advantage of their experience and abilities.

The constitutional provision adopted at the 1963 convention reads as follows: "Regular members who have served on the National Committee for an extended period and are *no longer able to be fully active* may be designated

as advisory members of the National Committee with all rights except vote" (emphasis added). This implies that advisory members can and are expected to be partly active to the extent that their condition enables them.

Since the constitutional provision does not spell out the precise reason or reasons for establishing this category, it is just as correct to consider both what Comrade Barnes stated as the reason, that is, the transition in leadership, as it is to the other reason I have given, that is, to be able to use the experience and knowledge of the older comrades who are transferred to advisory status. As a matter of fact, the two reasons are so intimately connected that it would be impossible to separate them.

I believe that this decision to eliminate advisory NC membership, which was presented to the plenum after being unanimously adopted by the PC is wrong. The plenum also adopted it unanimously and without any discussion. According to the plenum minutes not even one comrade present had a word to say.

I don't think this question should be disposed of so easily and with such haste, as I will explain. First, let us look at the record of what has happened since this category was established.

In 13 years (three comrades received advisory status at a plenum about one year before the 1963 convention formally adopted the constitutional provision) a grand total of 16 comrades have been advisory members and not all of them were members at any one time. For a period of that length this hardly adds up to a stampede of committee members rushing to become advisory members and thereby creating a problem from the weight of numbers alone. The proportion of advisory to regular NC members has been a reasonable one, not overweighted on either side.

There are eight advisory members of the committee at the present time and 28 regular members. This is about the average ratio of these two categories, more or less, during the 13-year period. I have never heard of a single problem in the functioning of the NC created by comrades in advisory category since 1963. In the failure of Comrade Barnes to state that this category, which was helpful in the past, has now turned into its opposite, I am compelled to conclude that the advisory members have not been getting in anyone's way. If there is evidence to the contrary, it would be a good idea to make it available so the party can discuss and decide intelligently.

There is also the fact that membership in an advisory category does not prevent new members from being elected to the NC with regular status. The number of regular members is limited only by the constitution which provides for 28. The number of advisory members does not have any effect upon the ability of comrades to be elected to the NC except insofar as openings are created by the transfer of regular members to advisory status.

If advisory status has not been misused in the past by an extraordinary number of requests from the older generation of party leaders to be put into this category, it is certainly unlikely that there will be a great rush of present regular NC members to change to advisory. There are only about a half dozen present regular members who are in the 60-year age range, give or take a year or two.

In his remarks to the PC Comrade Barnes gave as his opinion that those in this age range would not ask for advisory status but remain as regular NC members until they leave the committee for one reason or another.



Anticipating the convention decision, Comrade Barnes referred to the present advisory members as "formerly holding advisory membership," and also noted that they could make themselves available as regular NC candidates, if they so wished.

From a formal standpoint this is correct. But I would like to ask just which of the present advisory members are likely to become candidates for regular membership? I can speak only for myself on this point, and say that I have no intention, after having been made an advisory member at my own request in 1971, to stand for election to regular membership.

Of the other seven in advisory status one expressed his views in a letter to the recent plenum which he had intended to attend but could not because of an injury. In the letter he briefly discussed the proposal to eliminate the advisory category and said he approved because he "... had already decided to resign from the National Committee at the 1975 Convention."

What is interesting about this letter is that the writer seems to take the view that it is all right to eliminate the category *because he was about to resign anyhow*. This reason is even narrower than the one given by Comrade Barnes at the PC meeting. In other words, he is saying, I am going to resign so you have my permission to fire the seven others, those who wish to be removed and also any who may not. It is not a well thought out position.

In his report to the PC Comrade Barnes said he had consulted with the three advisory members resident in New York and that they were all in agreement and some even anxious apparently to eliminate this category. He said nothing about the opinions of the five advisory members who live in California. I must assume that they were not consulted. Again, I can speak definitively only for myself. I was not consulted.

I think this is very peculiar procedure and certainly not in the Trotskyist tradition as established by the founders of our movement. National Committee membership is a post of responsibility at least as important as, let us say for example, the post of branch organizer. My own branch has had to ask for assistance from the national office a number of times in order to fill the post of organizer in Los Angeles.

Several of the organizers assigned here were later transferred elsewhere to do other work. It is impossible for me to believe that any of these comrades were abruptly removed from their posts without discussion with them. I ask the comrades who are so anxious to eliminate the category of advisory membership on the NC if they made these changes in L.A. organizers without consulting the comrades involved.

Given the circumstances described above, I would also like to ask why any comrade who is presently an advisory member and who does not want to continue in this post, simply not stand for reelection at the coming convention? That is what the comrade who wrote the letter to the plenum was planning to do before he learned that he was going to be fired before he had a chance to resign.

Comrade Barnes, as I stated above, does not anticipate any problem from too many others asking for advisory status. If that is the case, just what problem is created by retaining this category for those who think they still have something to contribute to the party leadership and who are supported by the convention?

Comrades who wish to eliminate the advisory category should consider that if they do this and the present advisory members do not stand for election as regular members, and there is a strong likelihood that none of them will, then the following consequences will take place: (a) None of the present advisory members will be able to attend NC plenums, unless specially invited; (2) None of them will be able to attend PC meetings (three are presently advisory PC members) unless specially invited; (3) None of them will be able to participate in future party conventions as fraternal delegates as they do now; (4) None of them will receive any of the written material normally distributed to NC members.

Some may argue that just as the advisory members can run for the regular National Committee, they can also run as regular delegates to conventions from their branches. I don't think any of them are likely to do this, that is, try to take the place of branch leaders and activists who should be regular delegates to conventions. Again, speaking only for myself, I will not do this.

Someone may suggest that the central party leaders can draw these comrades into consultations and into other work, attendance at PC meetings and plenums, etc. Of course, this is possible and in my own opinion, even likely for some but not all. The failure to consult California advisory members on the proposal to eliminate them from the NC does not lend encouragement to the idea that they will be consulted on anything in the future.

It should be understood that if the present advisory members, some of whom have been top party leaders, have not forsaken politics altogether, then *their future participation in the leadership in some way or other is inevitable*.

What this can lead to is an informal existence of "party elders." Such comrades can be drawn willy-nilly into advisory and even active status. If this happens, then the problem arises of explaining why one comrade occupies a position different from that of others even though their formal status is the same. This can be avoided by retaining the formal setup we now have and should keep in the same way we have for the past 13 years.

I think all party members should oppose the elimination of advisory category on the NC. I hope that the voting delegates to the coming convention vote against this proposal.

Let those comrades who are now advisory members and do not wish to continue announce that they will not run for reelection. Let those who want to continue make themselves available with the decision to re-elect them or not remaining with the convention delegates.

## CONCLUSION

The record contained in the six sections of this article reveals that the central leaders of our party have developed certain well-defined shortcomings. Corrections are in order. The Trotskyist tradition, orientation and program must be revived wherever it has been abandoned or altered.

The entire party must be conscious of the fact that this leadership reflects very precisely the class composition and background of experience of the majority of the party as a whole. Most of the newer leaders came out of the student milieu and gained experience in the antiwar and other movements of the 1960s in which young people

played the most prominent role.

The party must also understand that this leadership, unlike its predecessors, lacks experience and firsthand knowledge of the workers' movements, the unions. This has given them a one-sided background for which they are not responsible as the opportunity to do fruitful work among workers and in unions has been largely absent for many years and is only opening up now.

Among other reasons I have given, this fact alone should be sufficient reason for the central leaders to have the closest relationship with older leaders who do have backgrounds in the unions.

The present leadership shows an inclination to change the party program without sufficient discussion and to do so by means other than those used traditionally by American Trotskyists. For example, the position taken on the problem of layoffs was decided . . . by whom? I cannot say. I do not recall any report of discussion in the PC before the party came out in public with a new program. In

our tradition and practice the party program is not whatever the PC decides, and not even what the National Committee decides. It is what the party convention decides.

The record I have described in giving critical support to Stalinist candidates and especially that part of it that deals with how this was reported to the NC, goes against all Trotskyist traditions.

In the sections that deal with the energy crisis and the party's orientation it will be seen that the leadership sometimes reacts sluggishly to new developments, looking upon them in routine ways and failing to develop the kind of campaigns that are needed.

As indicated at the beginning of this article, it is up to the membership to make the necessary corrections in the functioning of the party. In the final analysis only the membership can do this and I hope every member will look critically both at what the party has done in the areas discussed above and what it should do.

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## ON MEETINGS AND LANGUAGE

by Eric Sell, Central/East Branch, Los Angeles

June 7, 1975

At business meetings of our movement (I speak of business meetings as the most obvious examples of a problem which we should generally be aware of) our membership should become more conscious of conducting such meetings in a way which does not exclude those who are not "intimately" familiar with our movement's activities (either in general; as of yet; or who have not been intensely involved in a particular project). Specifically, I'm referring to the fact that although the Trotskyist movement has traditionally tried to stay away from hackishness and obvious rhetoric (overusing "key" words), there still is a real problem of "lingo" (and sloppy habits in this regard) being used in our movement.

We must, by necessity, abbreviate remarks with a certain linguistic shorthand, but I strongly feel that we should try to avoid the lapse into our own particular brand of verbiage as much as possible. New people should feel from the beginning that they are actively involved in all areas of our movement and aren't some kind of "outsider" requiring "initiation" to understand what the hell these people are talking about in their reports.

To take an obvious example: it won't do to have many SWP meetings with the typical agenda of "EC Report, Black Frac Report, Militant Report, and Sub Drive Report." This may seem like an EC way of saying things, but it often creates more difficulties than is worth the few seconds of time it saves if there is at least one person in a meeting who isn't "initiated" into the fact that a "Sub Drive Report" is not a report on the latest subterranean drive (you've heard of the sewer socialists, haven't you?) literally undermining the foundations of the imperialist colossus.

I'm not simply cracking poor jokes, for there are many occasions when a person unfamiliar with our lingo has to sit through hours of such shorthand which, when translated into English, can often be absurd; or worse, confuse the issue the report is supposed to clarify.

Even more common, and with equally negative results, is the phenomenon of people giving reports assuming too much. To give an example, one report was given in my branch that referred to "the meeting yesterday" which was building the May 17 demonstration against racism in Los Angeles. Other speakers referred to "the relatively small teach-in yesterday." Because I hadn't been involved (due to job training reasons) in many of the activities building for the demonstration, from what he said I assumed he was referring to some sort of organizational meeting for the 17th demonstration. I wasted the branch's time in discovering that the various speakers were referring to the same event in reporting different things about it and referring to it in different ways. It's a very normal occurrence, for it seems to each speaker that they're being perfectly clear, but they should have thought about how it could be misunderstood by someone who didn't know that the teach-in was the only important meeting occurring on that day building for the Los Angeles May 17th action.

We want every member to feel that they are able to participate in the discussion and participate fully in making the decisions. We are not a movement for the "in crowd" only; we want to reach out to more and more people, and shouldn't allow such a small thing as sloppy habits in the use of language in conducting our meetings to get in our way.