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November 10, 1970

TO ALL NC MEMBERS AND SWP ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

The enclosed items are for the information of National Committee members and party organizers only, and are not for general membership distribution.

Comradely,



Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

November 2, 1970

Dear Fred:

Your letter of Oct. 28 came this morning with copy of your presentation before the ITU Committee on Automation and Reproduction (and the other material you asked to have returned which I am enclosing).

I have discussed with Farrell the immediate problem you have there. The following are some ideas we have about this:

1) You must first clarify the problem.

We thought you had introduced too many considerations, too much along the lines of our previous correspondence in which we were discussing solely among ourselves the general nature of the problem of automation.

I do not think it is wise at this time to suggest that you think bogus is irrational, or that the union should right away give it up. You will get into a lot of unnecessary arguments with some very good union men on this question. Bogus is defensible and has in the past served a useful, if limited, purpose. In 1953 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right of the ITU to compel a newspaper to pay for the setting of type not used.

These arguments can only confuse and divert the discussion, and may prejudice some against you at the outset.

The problem is automation and the resulting structural (not cyclical) unemployment in the trade. How to cope with this problem at this time?

2) Problems of cyclical unemployment have long existed; but automation creates structural unemployment, changes the character of the industry, introduces new processes, and can lead to the displacement of the ITU.

The question of cyclical unemployment is extraneous, has nothing to do with the problem of automation. To introduce this, even by way of contrast, is a distraction.

3) You must keep in mind who you are talking to.

At this stage you are talking only to your own union brothers, trying to convince them that the best answer to the problem of automation is a sliding scale of hours.

Hours will only be reduced. They will not be extended.

What you are seeking is a way to measure how much they will be reduced and when.

I thought your suggestion a good start at working this out.

"For instance, if the employer claimed he had a surplus of 175 man-hours per week, instead of laying off 5 men, he would reduce the entire 350 man crew by 30 minutes."

Once other workers get the idea of what a sliding scale of hours is, they will have many good ideas along this line about how to make it work out.

It is a distraction to talk now about hours sliding up. Maybe sometime in negotiations with the publishers this question will be introduced by them and will have to be taken up, but that is still a long way down the road. Right now you are talking only to members of the union, trying to convince them that the sliding scale of hours is a good idea.

4) The sliding scale of hours is designed to cope with the problem of automation, to allow the workers to share in the benefits of the new labor-saving equipment. The employers are not entitled to all the benefits, while workers are made to suffer the effects of unemployment.

5) Other attempts to cope with this problem have not been satisfactory. Bogus is one such attempt, in the printing trades. (I gave examples of the Miners and Longshoremen in previous correspondence.) Bogus has not solved the problem (regardless of whether it is thought to be good, bad, or indifferent); so what is needed is another approach, or way of looking at the problem.

The ITU is in a position somewhat analagous to the UAW in 1946-7-8, looking for a way to cope with the problems of rising prices. The cost-of-living formula, far from perfect, was first (1948) included in the UAW contract. Since then it has been copied by many other unions.

It is now time for some union to introduce the sliding scale of hours concept, a completely new idea. It is all the more urgent in view of the failure in the longshore and mining industries.

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Please let us hear what further ideas you have on measuring or estimating the number of man-hours and relating this to the size of the work force. I will try to learn more about this from those in the industry here, and write to you. I would think this is what will be of most interest to union members, once the general idea of the sliding scale is outlined. We ought to have some specific examples of how it will operate.

Comradely,
s/ Frank Lovell