



discussion bulletin

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LETTER TO THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE ON ATKINSON AND GREY CAMPAIGNS
By Theodore Edwards

Los Angeles, Calif.
May 20, 1959

Dear Farrell:

You should have received by now or will shortly receive a communication from Comrade Lois on the question of extending critical support to two Negro candidates in the current elections here. This letter is intended to acquaint the comrades of the PC with my own point of view on the question, which is against any critical support for Atkinson in the 10th Councilmanic District in Los Angeles but for critical support of Wm. Grey in the Compton Councilmanic elections.

Technically, the L.A. City Council elections are non-partisan. This allows the party to intervene in the elections, to either run our own candidates with a minimum of restrictions to get on the ballot or to become a part of any movement by labor or the minority peoples that moves in the direction of a break with the capitalist parties. On the other hand, this non-partisan character helps to mask the direct intervention of the capitalist parties or of wings or factions within them.

In my opinion, the Atkinson campaign is a direct off-shoot of the CP entry into the Democratic Party and amounts to nothing less than an attempt by the CP-influenced Democratic Club movement to funnel the demands of the Negro people for representation on the L.A. City Council into Democratic Club and Party channels.

The particular Democratic Club involved is called the Democratic Minority Conference. It was founded by the CP a little over a year ago. As you can see from the enclosed leaflet, it has for its express purpose working within the framework of the Democratic Party, to make that Party a vehicle for minority demands, a real "people's party," to form more Democratic Clubs, i.e., all the professed objectives of the CP work inside the Democratic Party. It was this DMC (Democratic Minority Conference) that actually initiated the Atkinson campaign and under cover of a few figureheads essentially controls and runs the campaign and its machinery.

The PEOPLE'S WORLD of March 14 states blandly: "The idea for a single qualified candidate behind whom not only the 10th District but the whole community could unite, grew out of the experience of the Democratic Minorities (sic) Conference in sponsoring Henry P. Lopez for secretary of state last fall. /Lopez was the only Democratic candidate that failed to get elected in the state in the Democratic sweep last fall. T.E.₂/ "Mrs. Vaino Spencer, president of the DMC, Lopez, and others proposed an even broader non-partisan effort in the council race. They were joined by. . . others in setting up a small interviewing committee."

This committee later enlarged itself and adopted Atkinson, pushed throughout as the candidate of the DMC, as its candidate. Atkinson describes himself in his campaign literature and in his speeches as "very active in Democratic Party affairs" and as a "member of the board of the Democratic Minority Conference." As you can see also from the enclosed platform and personal data, distributed by his campaign committee, Atkinson is invariably described as a "leader in the DMC."

All the Democratic Clubs in Southern California rushed to endorse him and the CP has thrown all its available forces into it. I went to the three campaign headquarters and they were full of white CPers, ex-IPers, etc. Comrade Lois will no doubt inform you of the unquestionable popularity and support of the campaign in the Negro community, especially among the Negro petty bourgeoisie.

My objections to the SWP officially giving critical support consist of a political reservation and considerations of a practical character.

First of all, after some long hard thinking, it appears questionable to me whether we want to associate the party officially with a candidate who points out at every opportunity that he is a leader in a movement dedicated to channelize the Negro struggle into the Democratic Party.

There is no doubt that the popularity and widespread support of Atkinson's campaign expresses an entirely healthy and progressive sentiment of the Negro people for minority representation on the City Council. When the American working class votes en masse -- as a class -- for the Democratic Party, we state also that this contains a healthy and progressive element, a certain heightening of class consciousness on their part that hasn't gone far enough yet to lead to a break with capitalist politics, however. Just because the workers vote Democratic, we do not therefore say that this is a good thing or that we have to join the Democratic Party where we would become the captives of the capitalist vote-getting machine.

It seems to me that a somewhat analogous problem is presented with the Atkinson campaign. Since it is a non-partisan campaign, we could join up without having to join a Democratic Club or the Democratic Party. But under the concrete present circumstances and at this late date, we would end up as mere captives of the CP-influenced wing of the Democratic Party anyway.

This brings me to the practical aspects of the question. We never had sufficient forces to throw into Atkinson's campaign to make a dent into the "everybody-into-the-DMC" orientation. In that case, my reservations on associating the name of the party with this DMC leader would have been only of secondary importance. From the very beginning, however, it was clear that we could not directly intervene with anyone except one comrade who was invited into the campaign committee. This comrade is unable to function openly as an SWPer or as a socialist, thus being quite limited in her effectiveness, in my opinion.

Our other disposable forces are all engaged in the School Board elections where we are running Peter Buch as a candidate of the SWP. Comrade Peter is touring all the Democratic Clubs in the Greater Los Angeles area and is making a big impression on the CPers in these clubs.

The House Un-American Committee in its visit here managed to stir up the specter of the witch hunt in the schools again. The so-called "liberal" candidates of the "Committee-for-Better-Schools"

(another Democratic Party front) promptly collapsed before the threat of an investigation of the L.A. school system, pledging their cooperation with the Committee, supporting loyalty oaths, etc. Peter with his forthright stand on academic freedom and against the House Committee has made a big impression on the "progressives" so hard at work in getting this phony bunch of liberals elected.

The CP finds to its astonishment that we can and do walk into any and all of these Democratic Clubs, unfurl our socialist banner and speak loudly and clearly in our own name. Without pussy-footing around with these darling liberals, we freely present our anti-war program and are able to gather considerable support. So far he has appeared at 10 of these Clubs and is scheduled to appear at four or five more.

The School Board campaign has been the primary orientation of the local, decided upon and set into motion before the Atkinson campaign ever became an issue. In practical terms, this has meant that our intervention in the Atkinson campaign could never have amounted to much more than an article in the Militant.

To my mind, this is not meaningful and makes an empty gesture of the critical support tactic. We should watch the activity of these Democratic Clubs in non-partisan elections and think of ways in which we can possibly intervene. But when we do intervene, we should do so effectively, not in a purely formal and, in some ways, desultory fashion.

I think an explanation is also in order of why this issue comes to the PC so late, with the actual election date of April 7 less than two and a half weeks away.

The issue was first raised by Comrade Lois on Jan. 5 at the Exec but was tabled without discussion. On Feb. 9, it was tabled without discussion on motion by Wells. On Feb. 16, the issue was discussed, with myself taking the negative. It was tabled again on motion by Alvin "for several weeks when nature of campaign becomes more clear." On March 2, it was taken up and discussed and it was defeated! (5 for, 6 against, 1 abstention). On March 16, I proposed extending critical support to Grey in the Compton elections. This led to a reopening of the Atkinson proposal and this time it passed 8-5. (The Grey motion passed 9-4.)

At the branch meeting of March 18, after a short discussion in which only Lois, myself, and Alvin spoke, the branch voted to extend critical support to Atkinson and Grey. The vote for the former was 21 for, 7 against, 7 abstentions; for the latter the vote was 29-0-6. A motion was also made and passed to refer the entire matter to the PC for decision.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that at this point, the critical support of Atkinson by the party comes down to little more than an article in the Militant. This makes the tactic totally without content and might give the wrong impression to some people that our party is a party of literary commentators on events rather than a party of revolutionary activists. For all the above reasons, I think it would be best for the party to just sit this one out.

The extension of critical support to Wm. Grey in the Compton elections is a horse of a different color. All the negative factors operative in the Atkinson campaign (the ties with the capitalist party, the origin and motion of the campaign, the relationship of forces, our capacity to intervene, and the time left in which to do something) are different and entirely in our favor.

For one thing, the candidate is not a leader in any Democratic Club movement that is dedicated to corraling the Negro votes into the Democratic Party. Grey is merely a registered Democrat and not even a member of any Democratic Club. The origin of the campaign to elect a Negro to the Compton City Council was in the Compton NAACP branch, in which three of our Negro comrades, residents of the area, are very active. They function openly as socialists and SWPers. They participated in the original committee that discussed program and the type of campaign. In a programmatic struggle, they established their opposition to capitalist party politics and got a sympathetic hearing and support in the committee. After this committee selected a candidate, our comrades withdrew and brought the question of official critical support before the local executive committee on March 16.

Lastly, the election is not until May 5, giving us time after the end of Buch's campaign on April 7, to give some thought and forces to the Grey campaign.

The Democratic Club in Compton is moving into the campaign also, but the relationship of forces is altogether different than in the Atkinson campaign, with our forces being much larger and theirs much smaller.

For the above reasons, I am for extending critical support to Grey.

Comradely,

T. Edwards

Organizer, L.A. Branch

Los Angeles, Calif.
April 2, 1959

Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

I have received the minutes containing the motion carried at the PC meeting of March 24 on the question of critical support to Atkinson in the coming Los Angeles Councilmanic elections. I believe the motion to be an error and a departure from our traditional position on questions of this kind.

It appears to me that the PC, because of the need to make a decision quickly, did not have time to get adequate information, for one thing, and did not have time to discuss the question to the extent that it deserves, for another.

I am, therefore, submitting my views in an article which you will find enclosed. The PC motion, in Point 3, recommends further discussion of the problems involved. I agree with this for two reasons. First, it is important for us to get oriented correctly in the party as a whole as it is quite likely that our branches will be confronted with problems of this kind in increasing numbers in the future. Second, the Los Angeles elections are a Primary in which 5 contestants are running for this particular post. If no one candidate secures a majority in this Primary, the two highest engage in a run-off. It is possible that Atkinson may be in such a run-off and if he is, it is important for us to have a correct attitude towards his candidacy.

Comradely,

Milton Alvin

CRITICAL SUPPORT TO NON-PARTY CANDIDATES

By Milton Alvin

From time to time we are faced with the problem of a candidate running for office who might merit critical support from our Party. Usually such candidates are running for local office in non-partisan elections. In the past we have on some occasions supported such candidates when their campaigns met certain minimum requirements. This article will attempt to define the conditions under which it is permissible for us to give critical support, to examine the conditions under which it may be tactically desirable to do so or not, and to relate these to the current campaign for City Council of Edward Atkinson.

Our attitude towards campaigns of this type is guided by the idea of furthering independent politics for the labor movement and for the oppressed minorities. The principle that applies is the nature of the campaign itself, that is, is it genuinely independent of the capitalist parties in its dominant aspects. If it is not, if the candidacy of any individual or slate is only independent formally but really that of either the Democrats or Republicans, then it is impermissible in principle to give any support whatsoever to such a candidate or ticket. In the motion adopted by the Political Committee (March 24, 1959) on the Atkinson candidacy, it motivates denial of critical support because he is "too closely identified with Democratic Party. . . "

It seems, therefore, that the PC decision was made on the question of principle, that is, that the Atkinson candidacy is ruled out so far as our giving critical support because it is not genuinely independent.

Another requirement that we have in deciding whether or not to give critical support is that the candidate be the choice of a substantial section of the labor movement or an oppressed minority. This rules out supporting chance individuals who decide to run for office for one reason or another or small and ineffective groups whose activities, no matter how well motivated, can do nothing to promote the main objective which is furthering the independent political activity of labor and minorities.

These are the main requirements that we have always used to test independent candidacies in the past. First, genuine independence; second, support of a substantial section of labor or an oppressed minority.

It is necessary to cite some examples from the past where the Party has given critical support, and in my opinion, was correct in doing so.

In the 1940's, UAW Vice-President Frankenstein ran for Mayor of Detroit in a non-partisan election. He was supported by a large section of the labor movement in Detroit. He was also supported by the Democratic Party machine in Detroit. In fact, Frankenstein was known to be tied in with the Democratic Party very closely, he was a 100% patriot and anti-red and generally a good-for-nothing strike breaker. Nevertheless, our Party estimated the candidacy as domina-

ted by the labor movement and the support of the Democratic machine as an attempt to horn in, in case he was elected. We gave him critical support.

Again in the 1940's, the American Labor Party in New York, which had never run an independent candidate for a major office, found itself in a quandary when the Democrats nominated someone for Governor that they could not support. They could not support the Republican candidate either. In order to keep their place on the ballot, they had to run someone. Finally, they nominated a certain Alfange, described by the Militant as a Tammany hack. We gave him critical support.

Up to that time, the ALP had nominated Democrats for major offices and had been used as a vote-catching device to fool the New York workers, especially the radical sections, who did not want to vote for either capitalist party. We decided to give Alfange critical support because, willy-nilly, the ALP was compelled to conduct an independent campaign against both capitalist parties, and in our view, this represented a step towards independent politics.

It is true that the non-partisan elections held in many localities are largely a screen behind which the capitalist parties are lurking and that these parties very often are the real controllers of what appear to be non-partisan candidates. However, that is not the whole picture. The non-partisan election also presents the opportunity for genuine independents to run for office and sometimes such candidates are not acceptable to the capitalist machines despite the fact that they have substantial support behind them. It is our business to analyze each situation to see what the reality is and determine our policy from that.

I have left aside the question of program as it does not bear on the matter. We decide to give or not give critical support on the basis of factors other than the program of any particular candidate. As a rule, even where we have given critical support to one or another candidate, the program was not acceptable to us and this is where the "critical" side comes in. Even where we give critical support, we urge people to vote for the candidate and proceed to criticize his program, which is usually innocuous; methods, connections, etc.

If a given candidate or ticket is judged by us to be independent and to be the choice of a substantial section of the labor movement or an oppressed minority, the next question that arises is whether or not it is tactically advisable to do so.

Of course, if a given branch of the Party finds itself with such a candidate, who can be given critical support, but cannot do more than make the record, it may be advisable to let the matter pass.

But this is not a difficult or serious problem. The only real problem of a tactical nature arises when we have to decide whether to give critical support or to run a candidate of our own, in opposition to a candidate that could be given critical support.

This appears to me to be the only serious problem of a tactical nature that is likely to arise.

In a case where there is an independent candidate that we can give critical support to and where we have none of our own, either because we decided not to run against this candidate or because we were technically unable to do so, it seems to me that we are obliged to give critical support.

This is even more true where we have the chance to influence the campaign in our direction, where we can make contacts from within the movement and so on. It is far better for us to give critical support where it is permissible, than to stand aside and give the impression that we think nothing is going on that merits intervention on our part.

In principle, there is no difference between our critical support of a strike led by right-wing elements and critical support of a candidate for office of the same right-wingers. Both are expressions of the class struggle. Similarly, there is no difference in principle between giving critical support to the activities of the NAACP or other minority groups and critically supporting a candidate for office sponsored by such a group. We only require that such candidates be genuinely independent and have the support of a substantial section of labor or the minority involved.

We should decide our policy in any given instance from the objective facts and not from what The Peoples World, the CP-dominated Democratic Minorities Conference or anyone else has to say about what is going on.

In the Atkinson candidacy, there are four others running. The incumbent, Navarro, is an outstanding reactionary, a Republican and without any doubt the choice of that party. A Dr. Gray, a Negro, appears to be running without any substantial support. A Paul Burke is trying for the Council after making a reactionary record for some years as a member of the Board of Education. Allen, the fifth candidate, served on the City Council some years ago. He was then elected to the State Legislature on the Democratic Party ticket. Now, he is trying for the Council again.

It seems to me that the two real candidates of the capitalist parties are Navarro and Allen. On the other hand, Atkinson is without doubt supported very widely and energetically in the Negro community, is himself a Negro, and has the support of the noisy but certainly not dominant section of the Democratic Party where the CPers have entrenched themselves. To picture Atkinson as some kind of Democratic Party politician who is running as an independent and whose main purpose is to lead the Negro people into that party is simply ludicrous.

If we take the view that we cannot support Atkinson because he is too closely tied to the Democratic Party, we had better take a look at what we did in the Frankenstein and other campaigns and acknowledge that we should not have supported them.

As a matter of fact, in all candidacies of this kind, it is virtually impossible to find someone running who has no ties to the capitalist parties and we should take for granted that such candidates, while their campaigns are independent in their dominant

aspects, are also tainted to one extent or another with capitalist party support. This was certainly the case with Frankenstein.

Let us look at the events in Harlem last fall, which I think throw some light on the question. When the Tammany machine tried to dump Powell, we said he should run independently and we would have supported him, if he had done so. Can anyone doubt for a moment that if Powell had taken our advice and been re-elected as an independent, that he would have rejoined the Democrats as soon as Congress met so that he could get committee appointments, patronage, etc.?

If we want to judge Atkinson on the basis of his ties with the Democrats, and it is correct to do so, we must say frankly that he is not nearly so closely tied to the party machine as Frankenstein was. The Democratic Party in Los Angeles is not distinguished for nominating Negroes for public office. The real heads of the party are not for Atkinson, they are for Allen, we can be sure of that despite the fact that the capitalist parties do not formally take a stand in non-partisan elections.

I have not dealt with independent candidates of other radical parties where other considerations apply.

The candidacy of Atkinson in Los Angeles for City Council merits our critical support, if we follow the tradition of the Party established in the past in such instances.

Some of the arguments of Comrade Edwards, who is opposed to giving Atkinson critical support are entirely beside the point, have nothing whatever to do with the problem. For example, he cites the fact that our branch is busy supporting the campaign of Peter Buch for Board of Education and that even if we wanted to support Atkinson, we could do nothing more than write an article about it for the Militant. This has absolutely nothing to do with the question. We do not determine our attitude from the standpoint of the effect our support might create. Our attitude must be founded upon whether or not the candidacy is truly independent and if it furthers the idea of independent politics of labor or the minorities.

Edwards' letter to the PC gives the impression that Atkinson is running for the purpose of dragooning the Negro vote into Democratic Party channels. This is not the opinion of others who are close to the situation and does not correspond to the facts. Atkinson, a Negro small business man, is far less a tool of or a leader in the Democratic Party than he is an instrument of a mass movement of Negroes in Los Angeles determined to get representation in city government.

Edwards states that Atkinson is supported "especially by the Negro petty bourgeoisie." This also has nothing to do with the problem. We do not expect independent candidates of minorities to necessarily have a proletarian class character and, as a matter of fact, they usually are petty bourgeois and are backed by petty-bourgeois elements. Roybal, a Los Angeles City Councilman who was supported by our party in his first campaign some years ago, was just as petty bourgeois as Atkinson. He ran with considerable support in

the Mexican-American community, had an organization behind him and received critical support from us. However, his organization and the movement behind his campaign could hardly have been designated as having a proletarian class character.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the question of Atkinson's candidacy, which has more of a movement of a variegated kind in the Negro community than anything that has appeared here in many years, must be decided on the basis of whether or not it is independent of the capitalist parties in its dominant aspects. The PC decision quite correctly looked at it from that standpoint, but in my opinion, erred in its judgment. The Atkinson candidacy is less tied to the Democrats than Frankenstein was in Detroit, by far, if we understand that the real Democratic Party is not the regional clubs in which the CPers have infiltrated, but the machine politicians who represent the interests of big business in this area for that party.

I propose that the Political Committee reconsider this question as there is a possibility that Atkinson may be a candidate in the run-off a couple of months from now. Of course, we have all accepted the previous motion of non-support so far as the Primary Election to be held in a few days is concerned.

Comradely,

Milton Alvin

Los Angeles, Calif.
April 26, 1959

Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

The last minutes received here indicate that the PC has not yet reconsidered its decision in the Atkinson campaign. In the primary elections, Atkinson placed second and Navarro, the incumbent, who placed first did not receive a majority of the votes. Therefore, a run-off between Navarro and Atkinson will take place May 26th.

Since the primary, the AFL-CIO has endorsed Atkinson and we understand that Democratic Party elements also favor him over Navarro and will give some support. However, these are secondary aspects of the campaign which remains essentially one to elect an independent Negro to the City Council, backed by an independent committee and enjoying very widespread support in the Negro community.

The CP has jumped into the campaign and is very active among the Negro people in an effort to recoup their losses in this field. With us out of the picture, they have a clear field. We still have time to enter the situation and to influence it to some extent. I hope the PC is able to reconsider this question in time for us to get in some activity.

On the question of our line in the unemployment movement, I see from the proposed convention agenda that there will be a special point on the question. Will there be a resolution on this? If you have not already done so, I would like to have my letter of April 11th circulated to the NC members, like you did the others. The Militant continues to come out with articles on unemployment without even mentioning the fact that the AFL-CIO is on record in favor of a thirty-five hour week and that the McNamara Bill is still before Congress. They have opened the door wide for us and we should take advantage of the opportunity. It would be completely wrong to abstain from the struggle for the thirty-five hour week. In fact, if we do not agitate for it, for a campaign for it, for militant methods of struggle, for organization, etc., who will?

Comradely,

Milton Alvin

THE ATKINSON CANDIDACY AND PARTY POLICY

By Lois Saunders

Two programs for the continuing fight of the Negro people in the United States for equality were proposed at the May 17, 1957 March on Washington, one by Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, the other by the Rev. Martin Luther King.

Powell proposed the creation of a "third force," independent of the Democratic and the Republican parties, and based on the Negro clergy. King, who followed Powell to the rostrum, ignored this proposal and instead put forth the perspective of a campaign throughout the South to obtain for the Negroes the right to register and vote. He avoided making any commitments as to whom Negroes should vote for once they had obtained the ballot.

Efforts to obtain the ballot by Negroes in the South are not new. Since the March on Washington, however, these efforts have been intensified. Campaigns of considerable scope have been carried on to encourage Negroes to register. The campaigns in the South have had a reflection in the North in repeated drives to get Negroes to register and in a developing movement to run Negro candidates and thus obtain Negro representation at the city, county, state and national level.

This movement has advanced to a point where it is now one of the main avenues through which Negroes are pressing their drive for equality.

One such campaign is now being waged in Los Angeles where the Negro community, after carrying on a registration campaign for a year, selected a candidate for the 10th Councilmanic district in an effort to unseat the incumbent, a reactionary Republican who carries out the policies of the Los Angeles Times and the Chamber of Commerce. The man selected is Edward Atkinson, a Negro, a Democrat and a member of an organization called the Democratic Minority Conference. The DMC was organized two years ago, largely by Stalinists and fellow-travellers for the dual purpose of carrying out the CP pro-Democratic party line and to press for the election of minority candidates.

The election is non-partisan. Atkinson was selected by a citizen's committee which interviewed a number of aspirants. A non-partisan campaign committee, with the leading local Republican as its head, was formed. While some leading Republicans have been active in the campaign, the bulk of the campaign committee is made up of Democrats.

Although this was Atkinson's first venture into politics, he proved to be an energetic candidate who carried out an aggressive campaign. He had strong backing in the Negro community. He ran primarily as a Negro seeking representation for the Negro community in the City Council, which has never had a Negro member.

Atkinson ran second in a field of five and so placed in the run-off elections which will be held May 26. He obtained 7,628 votes. The incumbent, Charles Navarro, 12,961. Total votes cast were

29,570. Negroes make up about one-third of the voters of the district.

The SWP abstained from participation in the election, following a directive from the Political Committee on the grounds that Atkinson is too closely identified with the Democratic party and that his candidacy does not further the concept of a break with capitalist class parties. This decision overruled the action of the local executive committee which voted 8 to 1 for participation, with three abstentions, and of the Los Angeles branch which voted to support the campaign by a comfortable majority.

The decision of the PC has caused confusion among the comrades as to what our policy is with regard to critical support of minority candidates and raises the question of the party line on this issue.

The PC decision is a reversal of the policy we have generally followed in the past. Up to now we have given critical support to minority candidates where the elections were non-partisan and where there was evidence that the candidate represented a serious community effort. In all cases that I know of the candidates we supported were either Democrats or Republicans, and I know of no instance where the candidate gave any indication that he was breaking with capitalist class parties.

Our position in the past has been that we supported minority (mostly Negro) candidates -- critically, of course -- on the grounds that the attempt on the part of the Negro (or Mexican-American) community to obtain a voice in local political councils is justified, is progressive and impels the Negro into political action. We supported the drive of the Negroes for representation, and this is all we supported. We criticized the programs as inadequate; we criticized the illusions of reliance on capitalist class parties; and we stressed the need for independent political action. But we supported the candidates.

The new criterion now established by the PC, namely that the campaign must be of such a nature as to indicate a break with capitalist parties, is something borrowed from our work in the regroupment field. In socialist regroupment, a break with capitalist parties is a minimum requirement. It is incorrect, however, in my opinion, to confuse these two separate aspects of our activity and treat them as if they were one and the same thing where identical criteria apply.

The oppressed position of the Negroes in American society makes it incumbent upon us to support all attempts on their part to break down barriers, whether these barriers consist of segregated schools, housing, job discrimination, denial of voting rights, or, as in this instance, denial of representation in government. None of these demands is revolutionary. We support them because they impel an oppressed minority into motion against the capitalist rulers who seek to keep them in a lowly status. I believe we are just as much justified in supporting the Negro demand for representation in government as we are in supporting all other demands of Negroes against discriminatory treatment.

By insisting upon a break with capitalist parties or at least a movement away from such parties as a condition of our giving critical support to a Negro candidate in a non-partisan election, we are in reality adopting a policy of abstention. In politics, it is easy to abstain. It is easy to sit on the sidelines and tell the Negroes what they must do in order to merit our support. This way we keep our principles "pure," and no one can accuse us of not adhering strictly to the "class line."

The difficulty with this approach, however, is that while we are preoccupied with maintaining our "purity," we let the real class struggle pass us by -- for the attempt on the part of the Negro community to obtain representation is part of the class struggle.

It is true, as the Los Angeles organizer said in opposing participation in the Atkinson campaign, that we can "sit this one out." How many such campaigns must we "sit out?" As a result of manifestations in many places at the present time, we can expect that in cities and towns all over the country there will be an increasing tendency for Negro candidates to seek office. Must we "sit out" all of them? In practically all of these instances the candidates will be to one extent or another tied to either the Democratic or the Republican parties. Instances where candidates will be socialist-minded (that is, in opposition to capitalist parties) as well as being Negroes will be rare, in view of the present apathy of the working class toward independent political action.

Although it is easy to abstain from the main stream of politics, it is not easy, with such a policy, to find a hearing for our ideas or to have any influence upon events.

Negroes want representation here and now. They think they have a right to such representation. They think they have a chance of obtaining that representation in the Atkinson election. They are not overly concerned with party labels, but they are concerned with getting one of their people elected. They are not interested, to any great degree, in socialism, but they are willing to listen to socialists providing socialists support them in their drive for placing candidates in office.

It was to meet situations of this type that our policy of critical support was adopted. If we support the effort of the Negroes to elect their candidate -- that, and that alone -- they will be prepared to listen to us. If we deny support, they will regard us at best with skepticism, at worst with hostility.

The Stalinists have jumped into the Atkinson campaign with both feet and, as a result, they are beginning to recoup their fortunes in the Negro community. They have a clear field, because we are not there to counterpose our ideas to theirs.

Will the PC position be applied nationwide -- in the South as well as in the North?

As pointed out at the beginning of this article, an energetic campaign is being carried out among Negroes in the South to register.

In places like South Carolina, Mississippi, etc., an attempt on the part of a Negro to register requires courage. He faces the loss of his job, refusal on the part of storekeepers to sell him even a loaf of bread, blacklisting by employers, and possibly physical violence, even death.

We encourage Negroes in the South to register. We back the registration campaign. But after they obtain the right to vote, what shall we tell them?

If we follow the PC line as regards Atkinson, we shall have to tell them that after obtaining the right to vote, they should refuse to go to the polls and exercise that right, for virtually every candidate who will be running for office, whether Negro or white, will be either a Republican or a Democrat.

Such a policy, I am certain, will appear unrealistic to Negroes in the South. With or without our blessing they will go to the polls and vote for any candidate who runs on a pro-integration program, regardless of his party label. We can abstain, if we wish, but the Negroes won't. If we abstain, we will merely shut ourselves off from the developing Negro political movement and from any possibility of influencing its direction.

In 1939, in a discussion with Johnson, Trotsky had this to say about supporting Negro candidates (see attached):

"If we are weak and cannot get the organization to choose a revolutionist, and they choose a Negro Democrat, we might even withdraw our candidate with a concrete (declaration) that we abstain from fighting, not the Democrat, but the Negro. We consider that the Negro's candidacy as opposed to the white's candidacy, even if both are of the same party, is an important factor in the struggle of the Negroes for their equality; and in this case we can critically support them. I believe that it can be done in certain instances."

The situation referred to by Trotsky was not exactly what we face in the Atkinson and similar campaigns, but I believe it is analagous. Trotsky says that where a Negro Democrat is running we give critical support to the Negro, not the Democrat. That is the viewpoint I have been trying to express here.

Trotsky goes even further. He says, "we might even withdraw our candidate" in favor of the Negro Democrat.

Los Angeles
April 25, 1959.

* * *

CONDITIONAL SUPPORT OF MINORITY CANDIDATES

(In April, 1939, Comrade Trotsky, Comrade Johnson and several other comrades held a series of discussions on various aspects of the Negro question in the United States. Comrade Johnson had proposed the formation of a Negro organization for the purpose of carrying on the fight for equality in all fields, including the fight in the political arena. The organization would be composed mainly of Negro workers and share-croppers. Our comrades would work within the organization but would not dominate it.

(The discussion turned to consideration of running political candidates. Comrade Johnson put forth the idea that the Negro organization would run a Negro candidate on a program "suitable to the masses of poor Negroes." Another comrade asked: "Isn't that coming close to the Popular Front, to vote for a Negro just because he is a Negro?"

(Following are the replies of Comrades Johnson and Trotsky.)

Comrade Johnson: This organization has a program. When the Democrats put up a Negro candidate, we say, "Not at all. It must be a candidate with a program we can support."

Comrade Trotsky: It is a question of another organization for which we are not responsible, just as they are not responsible for us. If this organization puts up a certain candidate, and we find as a party that we must put up our own candidate in opposition, we have the full right to do so. If we are weak and cannot get the organization to choose a revolutionist, and they choose a Negro Democrat, we might even withdraw our candidate with a concrete (declaration) that we abstain from fighting, not the Democrat, but the Negro. We consider that the Negro's candidacy as opposed to the white's candidacy, even if both are of the same party, is an important factor in the struggle of the Negroes for their equality; and in this case we can critically support them. I believe that it can be done in certain instances.

(SWP Internal Bulletin No. 9. June, 1939, p. 32. A stenographer's note at the beginning of this section of the discussion states: Rough draft uncorrected by participants.)

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COMMENTS ON THE TROTSKY JOHNSON DISCUSSION

By George Breitman

(Reprinted from 1954 National Committee Discussion)

For many years there has been confusion among comrades about the meaning of Trotsky's remarks on critical support of Negro candidates in the discussion held on April 11, 1939 (reprinted in the FI, February 1949, p.59). In the hope that no one will ever again interpret those remarks to mean that Trotsky was in favor of giving critical support to Negro candidates running on the Democratic ticket, here are the circumstances in which the remarks were made:

The discussion that day centered around a proposal that we should help to form an independent mass Negro organization, a project that was generally favored, and around specific practical proposals for its formation, program, activity, etc. Under point 12 of the proposals, "The relationship of the Negroes to the Republican and Democratic parties," Trotsky said:

"How many Negroes are there in Congress? One. There are 440 members in the House of Representatives and 96 in the Senate. Then if the Negroes have almost 10% of the population, they are entitled to about 50 members, but they have only one. It is a clear picture of political inequality. We can often oppose a Negro candidate to a white candidate. This Negro organization can always say, 'We want a Negro who knows our problems.' It can have important consequences."

In the discussion that followed some participants expressed doubts and reservations about the permissibility of our supporting a Negro candidate run by the independent Negro organization whose formation had been projected. One voiced the fear, "Isn't it coming close to Popular Front, to vote for a Negro just because he is a Negro?" Another, answering this question, said, "This organization has a program. When the Democrats put up a Negro candidate, we say, 'Not at all. It must be a candidate with a program we can support.'" Then Trotsky said:

"It is a question of another organization for which we are not responsible, just as they are not responsible for us. If this organization puts up a certain candidate, and we find as a party that we must put up our own candidate in opposition, we have the full right to do so. If we are weak and cannot get the organization to choose a revolutionist, we might even withdraw our candidate with a concrete declaration that we abstain from fighting, not the Democrat, but the Negro. We consider that the Negro's candidacy as opposed to the white's candidacy, even if both are of the same party, is an important factor in the struggle of the Negroes for their equality; and in this case we can critically support them. I believe that it can be done in certain instances."

Let us repeat: The question being discussed was quite concrete -- the running of a Negro candidate by an independent Negro organization (not just any Negro who happened to be a candidate). Trotsky

was saying that we had the right to run our own candidate against the Negro candidate of such an independent Negro organization, but that we didn't have to employ this right under all circumstances. He also was saying that inside this independent Negro organization, when it got around to choosing the candidate it wanted to run, we would try to get it to nominate a revolutionist if possible, or a militant. If we failed in this inner nominating contest between ourselves and non-revolutionary tendencies inside the independent Negro organization, and if this organization chose instead a Negro who was a Democrat as its nominee, then we might decide to withdraw or not run a candidate of our own party against him in the general election, explaining that we took this action not because he was a Democrat in his politics but because he was a Negro candidate of an independent Negro organization. All this presupposes that this independent Negro organization's candidate is running against a white Democratic candidate, which is what Trotsky clearly meant when he said "both are of the same party."

The context plainly indicates that Trotsky was talking about critical support to the candidate of an independent Negro organization engaging in politics; to what we can properly call an independent Negro party running its own candidates against the candidates of the capitalist parties. This is exactly the policy that our party has been following for more than a decade. The only difference is that no single independent Negro organization running candidates has appeared in this country. (The largest Negro organization, the NAACP, does not formally run candidates in its own name.) What has happened generally is that a number of local Negro organizations get together and agree on or unite behind a candidate; instead of one independent Negro organization, there is usually a conference of several organizations, often on a temporary rather than a permanent basis. When that happens and their campaign represents a significant part of the Negro community and they run their own candidate against those of the capitalist party machines, it has been our practice to give him critical support, on the basis of the right of Negroes to representation in office, despite our differences with their program and despite the fact that the candidate may be a Democrat or Republican in his politics. Our present policy, therefore, is in accord with the proposal made by Trotsky in 1939.

Trotsky was not talking about critical support to any Negro candidate; he was not talking about critical support to a Negro put up as a candidate by the capitalist parties; he was not talking about critical support to a Negro who had entered a capitalist primary election and won a capitalist party nomination with the support of the Negro community against the resistance of the capitalist party machine -- he was talking about critical support to a Negro candidate of an independent Negro organization (or "party") running against capitalist party candidates.

I don't know if Trotsky knew the details about primary elections which are unknown in most of the world, or if he understood that entering primary elections meant entering capitalist parties. The point is that he did not consider this question at all in the 1939 discussion.

It may be argued by some comrades that we should give critical support to a Negro candidate of the Negro community who has won the nomination of a capitalist party in a primary election. But there is no valid reason whatever for claiming that such a position is supported by Trotsky's statements in the 1939 discussion, or in any other discussion or article known to us.

April 1954.

FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF THE ATKINSON QUESTION

By Farrell Dobbs

Last March the Los Angeles branch recommended critical support to Edward Atkinson, a Negro candidate running for the City Council in the local primary elections. In asking the Political Committee's approval of this policy the comrades supplied the following information:

After a year's registration campaign among Negro voters in the Tenth Councilmanic district a Citizens Committee nominated Atkinson against the incumbent, Councilman Navarro, a Mexican-American identified with the Republican party machine. With the issue of Negro representation in office a key factor, the campaign aroused a strong response in the Negro community.

The elections are formally non-partisan. A Republican heads the Atkinson campaign committee, while the bulk of the committee is made up of Democrats. Atkinson, the candidate, is a Negro small businessman and a Democrat. He has not been prominent in politics and has not previously run for office.

Atkinson has described himself as a member of the Board of Directors of the Democratic Minority Conference, a local setup initiated by the Communist Party. The stated "Purposes and Objectives" of the DMC include: "To work with the organized Democratic Party. . . To seek for ethnic and cultural minorities a voice in policy within the Democratic Party. . . to promote the general welfare of the Democratic Party."

After weighing the above factors in the light of established party policy the PC on March 24 adopted the following motion: "As nearly as can be determined from available information, the Atkinson candidacy is too closely identified with the Democratic Party to warrant critical support."

In the April 7 primary elections Atkinson ran second in a field of five with 7,628 votes. Navarro led the field with 12,961 votes. A total of 29,570 votes were cast and the comrades figure about one-third of these were Negro votes. There will be a run-off election between Atkinson and Navarro on May 26.

Comrades Milton Alvin and Lois Saunders asked the PC to reconsider its March 24 decision and approve critical support to Atkinson in the run-off election. In submitting their request they made extensive criticisms of the PC decision (published elsewhere in this bulletin).

Charging the PC with a reversal of past policy, Comrade Saunders argues along these lines: "Up to now we have given critical support to minority candidates where the elections were non-partisan and where there was evidence that the candidate represented a serious community effort. . . I know of no instance where the candidate gave any indication that he was breaking with capitalist class parties. . . We supported the drive of the Negroes for representation, and this

is all we supported. We criticized the programs as inadequate; we criticized the illusions of reliance on capitalist class parties; and we stressed the need for independent political action. But we supported the candidates." (Her emphasis.)

Comrade Saunders thinks the PC has established a new criterion: ". . . namely that the campaign must be of such a nature as to indicate a break with capitalist parties. . . something borrowed from our work in the regroupment field. In socialist regroupment, a break with capitalist parties is a minimum requirement. It is incorrect, however, in my opinion, to confuse these two separate aspects of our activity and treat them as if they were one and the same thing where identical criteria apply."

To buttress her argument Comrade Saunders quotes extensively from the transcript of the 1939 Trotsky-Johnson discussion, seeking to clinch her point with the assertion: "Trotsky says that where a Negro Democrat is running we give critical support to the Negro, not the Democrat." The emphasis is hers, not Trotsky's. Let us begin the examination of the question with this aspect of Comrade Saunders' argument.

To grasp the essential meaning of Trotsky's remarks about critical support to Negro candidates, it is necessary to recall that the Trotsky-Johnson discussion centered on the question of helping to form an independent Negro organization. As part of our effort to get the organization to adopt the most far-reaching program (transition measures), we would support the most militant wing. But among the leaders of this organization might be some with a Democratic background and the organization, against our urging, might decide to advance one of them as its candidate.

As members of the organization, what would we do in such a case? It would be possible under certain conditions, Trotsky thought, to offer the candidate critical support. What the conditions might be is not indicated in the transcript of the discussion (which remained uncorrected by the participants), but we may assume they would include control of the candidate by the Negro organization, plus his opposing Republican and Democratic candidates.

When understood in the full context of the Trotsky-Johnson discussion, the quotations cited by Comrade Saunders do not support her viewpoint. (See "Comments on the Trotsky-Johnson Discussion," by George Breitman, published elsewhere in this bulletin.)

Looking further into the general question, one can only agree with Comrade Saunders' estimate that the running of Negro candidates is becoming a main avenue of struggle in the drive for full equality. Demands for a voice in Democratic Party policy, it may be added, also mark a new stage in the political development of the Negro movement. These changing conditions make our tactical problems more complex. But we must not forget that the problems remain two-sided. It is not alone a matter of adjusting our tactics to meet new conditions; we must be careful to maintain our basic principles.

The question of principles becomes increasingly obscured as Comrade Saunders further develops arguments in support of her

tactical viewpoint. She contends: "We encourage Negroes in the South to register. . . . If we follow the PC line as regards Atkinson, we shall have to tell them after obtaining the right to vote, they should refuse to go to the polls and exercise that right, for virtually every candidate who will be running for office, whether Negro or white, will be either a Republican or a Democrat."

In reply let us consider some fundamentals. We support the right to vote no matter who the Negro voter may decide to back. At the same time we do not hesitate to say what political road we think the Negro movement should take and we do not go with them on the wrong road. This approach in no way contradicts the political necessities of the day. On the contrary, it is in accord with our basic task, our fundamental method, our whole reason for being as a revolutionary-socialist tendency.

We support the democratic demands of the Negro people even though they do not transcend the limits of the capitalist order. But we don't stop with that; we don't put democratic demands above class principles. At all times and under all circumstances we counterpose class struggle policies to class collaborationist illusions.

Merely to put a Negro candidate in office does not necessarily mean to advance the struggle for full equality. The democratic aspirations of the Negro people cannot be realized on the capitalist political road. The problem is rooted in a class question: What class shall the Negro people align themselves with in their freedom struggle?

Our first basic Negro resolution adopted in 1950 answered: "We must support this mass movement, develop it, and make it a politically conscious and definitely class movement. . . . The primary and ultimate necessity of the Negro movement is its unification with the revolutionary forces under the leadership of the proletariat." (Fourth International, May-June 1950, page 95.)

In line with this basic concept, we have given critical support to Negro candidacies only insofar as they represented independent political action in opposition to the capitalist parties. Formally non-partisan elections are not exempt from this criterion. They have particular significance only in the sense that they sometimes present a favorable vehicle for independent Negro political action.

Two examples from the past should suffice to illustrate that the question of critical support to Negro candidates has always centered on the issue of independence from the capitalist parties. In the spring of 1954 we gave critical support to the Turner candidacy in Newark, seeing it as a step toward independent Negro political action. A year later we made the opposite decision about the McCree and Robinson candidacies in Detroit. The latter two candidacies at first showed promise of being independent. Then the UAW-CIO brass moved in with the approval of the candidates and linked the campaign to the Democratic Party machinery for factional political purposes. With the Democratic-labor coalition thus acting to derail what had been a potential independent Negro campaign, we decided against critical support to McCree and Robinson.

Our criteria in deciding such tactical questions may be summarized as follows: We support the democratic demand of the Negro people for representation in government. We will give critical support to a Negro candidate -- despite differences over program and despite the past connections of the candidate with the capitalist parties -- provided the campaign represents a significant part of the Negro community and the candidate runs independent of and in opposition to the capitalist party machines.

We have always considered the question of crossing class lines in politics a matter of principle. Our policy has been to maintain unvarying class independence in political tactics. In accord with these conceptions the 1957 Negro resolution calls for: ". . . support to Negro candidates for public office so long as they run independently of the Democratic and Republican parties. . . A labor-Negro alliance to launch an independent labor party based on the unions." (See The Militant, August 26, 1957, or the pamphlet "Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality.")

This aspect of party policy is recognized by Comrade Alvin in his criticism of the PC decision. He says: "Our attitude towards campaigns of this type (Atkinson) is guided by the idea of furthering independent politics for the labor movement and for the oppressed minorities. The principle that applies is the nature of the campaign itself, that is, is it genuinely independent of the capitalist parties in its dominant aspects."

However Comrade Alvin argues at length that the PC has departed from our traditional position in determining whether a candidacy represents an independent political action. Much of his argument is based on the idea of proof through precedent. He cites the Alfange candidacy for governor of New York on the ALP ticket in 1942 and the CIO-backed Frankenstein candidacy for mayor of Detroit in 1945.

In both cases, Comrade Alvin accurately recalls, we gave critical support to the candidates on the basis of the independent nature of these labor campaigns as against the capitalist parties. His argument also puts major stress on the fact that we called Alfange a "Tammany hack," that Frankenstein had close ties with the Democratic Party and that the Democrats climbed onto the Frankenstein bandwagon toward the end of the campaign.

Comrade Alvin thinks Atkinson is not nearly so closely tied to the Democratic Party as was Frankenstein. On this premise he contends we were wrong in supporting Frankenstein in 1945 if we now refuse critical support to Atkinson on the ground he is too closely tied to the Democratic Party.

Once again let us consider some fundamentals. Tactical decisions do not derive one from another through the rule of precedent. Criteria deemed valid in one specific case do not automatically apply in another case.

Although tactics are generally designed to serve a specific current task or a given branch of the class struggle, in no field can tactical decisions be made without considering party perspectives

as a whole. Our tactics must flow from and serve our central strategic aim, the building of a mass revolutionary party. Basic to this aim are our efforts to promote a mass turn from class collaborationist policies onto the class struggle road.

Our tactic of critical support to candidates running independently of the capitalist parties represents a transitional step toward the central strategic aim. For a number of historic reasons, we do not expect the initial mass break from capitalist politics to take place through the medium of the revolutionary socialist party. It is therefore necessary to adapt ourselves tactically to the actual forms through which independent political action develops. In doing so we seek to influence the movement in a revolutionary direction and to build up a revolutionary nucleus within it. The whole tactic is aimed toward building a mass revolutionary party. We must never forget that.

In every instance we must be clear about the basic purpose a particular tactic is intended to serve and we must weigh tactical decisions in terms of the given objective conditions and trends. Let us look again from this standpoint at our decisions to give critical support to Alfange and Frankenstein.

Both had a background of connections with the Democratic Party, a matter not to be taken lightly. What then were the considerations -- in terms of the key facts and objective trends -- that led us to extend critical support to their candidacies?

Alfange joined the ALP upon his nomination in 1942 as the party's candidate for governor. He ran in opposition to candidates of both the Democratic and Republican parties. As was their custom, the ALP backed several Democrats whose names appeared on both the Democratic Party and the ALP ballot lines. We supported none of these candidates on the ALP ballot. We gave critical support only to Alfange who ran as an independent ALP candidate in opposition to both capitalist parties.

Alfange got 400,000 votes, a significant demonstration of worker sentiment for independent class political action. This outcome became an important factor in the SWP's decision in 1943 to shift our advocacy of a labor party from a propaganda slogan to an agitational slogan. In doing so the party proceeded from a basic analysis of objective conditions and trends as appraised in the light of our fundamental aims. (See "Campaign for a Labor Party!" by James P. Cannon, Fourth International, August 1943, pages 230-235.)

In the same year the coal miners fought a series of heroic strike battles to break the war-time wage freeze. The year 1944 saw a general rise in labor unrest and a series of rank and file attempts to break through the official no-strike pledge. As the end of the war neared in 1945 a new, vast wave of working-class struggle was building up.

In this objective setting the Frankenstein candidacy developed. It came at a time when unemployed demonstrations were sweeping the country and a half million workers were on strike. The General

Motors strike was soon to trigger a general explosion that would see two million workers on the picket line at one time. Frankenstein's candidacy came on the heels of the 1945 victory of the British Labor Party and amid rising expressions of labor party sentiment in UAW-CIO locals, particularly in the Detroit area.

Frankenstein had ties with the Democratic Party, his candidacy had come on his own initiative and the Democrats climbed on the bandwagon at the last minute. That was one side of the picture. But he was also first vice-president of the UAW-CIO and he had been made the candidate of the Detroit CIO in a formally non-partisan election. The capitalist press, raising the alarm that the CIO was about to take over City Hall, stressed that the significance of his candidacy lay not in Frankenstein the individual but in Frankenstein the symbol. That was the other side of the picture.

Weighing both aspects of the question the Political Committee evaluated the Frankenstein candidacy as a borderline case where the decision might go either way. Because of the substantial weight of the trend toward independent class political action manifested in the campaign, a decision was made to give critical support. Present members of the PC who participated in the 1945 decision recall that it was expressly stated at the time that the decision should not be considered a precedent.

To evaluate party tactical decisions in the Alfange and Frankenstein cases the whole picture must be taken into consideration. One or another facet cannot be torn from context and used one-sidedly as an argument for critical support to the Atkinson candidacy today. The Atkinson question, like all tactical questions, must be appraised in the light of our fundamental aims as they apply to present objective conditions and trends.

Unlike the objective setting of the Frankenstein candidacy the present period is not characterized by great class battles giving rise to significant labor party sentiment. The labor-Democratic coalition line still dominates heavily in the unions and finds its echo in the Negro movement. Stalinist propaganda and devious CP maneuvers further disorient the masses politically.

These objective political factors must be considered alongside the democratic aspirations and the essential motion of the Negro movement. We must be clear not only on the issue of the independence of Negro candidates from capitalist politics. We must also be careful about rushing to characterize as independent a campaign where there is evidence it may in fact represent an attempt to play a greater role within a capitalist party.

In this connection we must examine carefully the role of the Democratic Minority Conference with which Atkinson has identified himself as a member of the Board of Directors. Nothing is explained when Comrade Alvin refers to this setup as a ". . . noisy but certainly not dominant section of the Democratic Party where the CPers have entrenched themselves."

The question is not one of dominance of this party of Big Business but of factional politics within it. Whether Atkinson is

actually a leader of the DMC or is simply letting the CP use him and the Negro representation issue to push their pro-Democratic line, the result appears the same: political action within a capitalist party framework, not independent political action.

If we slur over questions of this kind in cases of Negro political action we can only introduce confusion into questions of independent labor political action. Policy in both spheres becomes intimately linked up through the need for a labor-Negro alliance to launch an independent labor party. Also directly involved are our basic aims and tasks in the 1960 presidential elections where the central issue will be independent political action in opposition to the capitalist political parties. We will be hurt in every field of activity if in any one of them we nibble at crossing class lines in politics.

We cannot subordinate basic considerations to the argument advanced by the comrades that failure to give Atkinson critical support will shut us out of the situation and give the Stalinists a clear field. We can't aspire to lead a movement if it is headed into Democratic Party politics. Our aim is to lead the fight for independent political action. For us two criteria are paramount: the nature of a given movement; and the direction in which it is going. We give critical support to a Negro candidate only where there is a break with capitalist politics and then only because the break implies a tendency toward independent class political action.

In fighting for this policy we have no reason to fear being in a minority or to look upon ourselves as being isolated from any chance to influence the mass movement. Our policy articulates the vital political needs of the Negro people. We have every reason to be aggressive in pushing our political line, to stand by our principled class position and to defend it vigorously against all opponent tendencies.

In general we must still act as the vanguard of the independent class political movement yet to come into being. But we can be confident mass discontent will grow and frustration will lead toward a break with capitalist politics. In the end we will be the big gainers from our consistent, principled vanguard role.

Our task now is to combine basic propaganda with action designed to help genuine independent political tendencies. In the process we will help to educate the best militants in class principles and to instill in them revolutionary consciousness. Wherever we can act to promote independent political actions the masses will be helped to realize they can build their own class political party apart from and in opposition to the capitalist parties.

In deciding to give critical support to a genuinely independent candidate we do not make programmatic agreement a condition. We support the break with capitalist politics as the first step toward independent class political action. But we do not hesitate to criticize errors and weaknesses in the program of the independent candidate and to advance our own program. Nor do we refrain from criticizing organizational weaknesses in the independent campaign in the sense of pointing the way toward an independent labor party built in alliance with the Negro movement.

Regarding the important role of the Negro movement in this key task, our 1957 Negro resolution said: "There are virtually no capitalists among the Negro people and only a thin layer of middle class elements. As a people they are overwhelmingly working class in composition. Taken nationally, a large section of the Negro workers are already unionized. These unionists are farthest advanced in connecting the fight for their civil rights with the struggle to defend their class interests and in raising political consciousness to a higher level. . .

"As yet the Negro movement is ahead of organized labor in gathering mass momentum. . . When the workers act their struggles will lend fresh vigor to the Negro movement. This interrelation between the two movements will tend to lead them toward unity of purpose in the sphere of independent political action. . .

"Their fusion into a united political force would imply a head-on collision with the capitalist ruling class, breaking up the present two-party swindle and precipitating a class polarization in politics. In the process the civil rights forces could be expected to ally themselves with labor to launch an independent labor party based on the unions."

The passages quoted outline two transitional steps toward our central strategic aim, the building of a mass revolutionary party. These steps are: To help develop a working-class political orientation within the Negro movement and promote a political alliance with labor as a class. To work for the creation of an independent labor party within which we would advocate adoption of a revolutionary-socialist program.

This perspective clearly requires that we make independence from capitalist politics a criterion in giving critical support to Negro candidates. It also impels us to have the facts and a correct evaluation of the facts in determining whether a given candidacy is genuinely independent in character.

Fulfillment of these requirements, in the opinion of the Political Committee, was not established by Comrades Alvin and Saunders in their request for reconsideration of the decision on the Atkinson question. Consequently the PC on May 5 adopted the following motion: "To reaffirm decision that critical support of Atkinson candidacy is not warranted on basis of available facts."

May 12, 1959.