

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 18, April 29, 1975

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Britton, Clark, A. Hansen, J. Hansen, Horowitz, Jenness, Lovell, Seigle, Shaw, Sheppard, Stone, Thomas, Waters

Consultative: Kerry, Novack

Visitors: Benson, L. Jenness

Chair: Britton

AGENDA: 1. World Political Situation Report
2. World Movement Report
3. Alvin Correspondence
4. Critical Support Recommendation
5. Membership
6. Titles

1. WORLD POLITICAL SITUATION REPORT

Horowitz reported.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the general line of the report for presentation to the plenum.

Carried.

Agreed: Stone to draft statement for press for submission to National Committee along lines of Vietnam discussion.

2. WORLD MOVEMENT REPORT

Waters reported.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the general line of the report for presentation to the plenum.

Carried.

3. ALVIN CORRESPONDENCE

L. Jenness reported.

Discussion

Motion: To send draft letter (see attached).

Carried.

4. CRITICAL SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION

D. Jenness reported on the recommendation of the Denver branch to extend critical support to the candidacies of Ernesto Vigil for city council and Everett Chavez for the board of education (see attached).

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the Denver branch to extend critical support to Ernest Vigil and Everett Chavez.

Carried.

5. MEMBERSHIP

Sheppard reported on the recommendation of the Detroit branch to readmit J.T. into membership in the party.

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the Detroit branch to readmit J.T. into membership in the party.

Carried.

6. Titles

Breitman initiated discussion.

Meeting Adjourned.

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Los Angeles, California
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 lay-offs 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,
s/ Milt 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 propoganda 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 the other 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 right 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,
s/ Milton Alvin

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14 Charles Lane
New York, New York 10014
April 29, 1975

Milt Alvin
Los Angeles

Dear Milt,

We have discussed your letters of April 16 and April 21 regarding the Militant article titled "The Debate Over Seniority and Affirmative Action" in the Political Committee.

The crux of our disagreement lies in your statement that the demand for jobs for all, through a reduced workweek with no reduction in pay, and the demand to end discriminatory firings, through preferential seniority for Blacks, other oppressed minorities, and women, are mutually exclusive.

We do not consider the two as "mutually exclusive". They reinforce each other. The demand for jobs for all, at the center of which is the sliding scale of hours, is a transitional demand directed at the capitalist class. It is a demand aimed at fighting unemployment.

The demand for preferential seniority or quotas for women and Blacks is aimed at defending the gains made by women and Blacks. It is a demand aimed at fighting discrimination. It is a call for unity within the working class to protect the most oppressed.

Far from being mutually exclusive, these demands go hand in hand. Our point of departure, as revolutionary socialists, is the solidarity of the class. We support all efforts to begin to overcome the divisions created by capitalism and perpetuated and utilized by the bosses.

The demands for preferential seniority, quotas, and other plans to defend Blacks and women against the "last hired, first fired" practices are directed to fighting for equality in employment. In the same way that we demand preferential hiring as a means to fight against the "last hired" practice, we now support plans to fight against the "first fired" practices.

Seniority is a principle which we support. It is not, however, the only nor the primary principle. When seniority provisions in the union contract discriminate against Blacks and women, then we are against those aspects of it. We say to the working class that it is in their own interest to alter or amend the discrimina-

tory aspects of seniority in order to cut across the divisions it creates. The solidarity of the class as a whole is for us a higher principle than union seniority per se.

The truth of the matter is that the seniority provisions, as they now stand, do discriminate against women and Blacks in many instances. That was not, of course, the original intent of seniority, but it is one of its present defects. When women and Blacks revolt against the discriminatory aspects of seniority, we support them.

There is no universal plan that applies to all situations for defending the gains of women and Blacks in the face of the massive layoffs. For instance, in some cases, going from departmental seniority to plant-wide seniority would favor Blacks and women, in other cases it would be detrimental. Each case must be decided individually. But our guiding principle must be to support those efforts that are aimed at preventing discrimination and protecting the gains of the most oppressed.

In your letter of April 16, you say, "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." We are not conceding the right to layoffs. We are, however, compelled to recognize the fact that there are massive layoffs -- which are being used to wipe out the gains of Blacks and women and further divide the working class. These are two totally different things. Of course we demand jobs for all and are against any layoffs. However, the fact that we raise the demand for jobs for all, does not automatically create jobs for all right now. So, we raise other demands at the same time that correspond to and are designed to meet the real problems of the moment.

For instance, we support the demand for full unemployment compensation at union wages for the duration of unemployment. By doing so, we are not conceding the right of the bosses to layoffs. We are, however, recognizing that there are workers unemployed through no fault of their own. Are the demands for jobs for all and the demands for full unemployment compensation contradictory or a "concession in principle"?

What is happening right now? Millions of Blacks and women are being fired by the capitalists who are utilizing this to exacerbate and further the divisions that already exist within the working class. They are using discriminatory firings to foster racist and sexist

notions that women and Blacks should bear the brunt of the economic crisis. By doing this, they are trying to reduce the social impact of the layoffs.

We see no contradiction in our demanding of the capitalist class that they provide jobs for all and at the same time calling for a defense by the entire working class of the gains made by the super-exploited sections of the working class. That is the only way that unity will be achieved and the divisions bridged.

In your letter of April 21, you note that in the Bill of Rights for Working People there is nothing advocating what you call "preferential layoffs". The Bill of Rights was drafted early last fall, before the big layoffs of the last months and the ensuing controversy. It wasn't an issue at that time. A slightly revised version of the Bill of Rights for Working People will be off the press soon. The section you refer to has been altered and now reads:

"The only way to counter the rulers' attempts to undermine working class solidarity is for all working people to support the struggles of oppressed minorities and women for equal opportunities.

"Preferential hiring and upgrading are necessary to help achieve equality on the job. Employers must not be allowed to use layoffs to reduce the proportion of minority and women workers."

Comradely,

s/ Linda Jenness, for the
Political Committee

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Denver, Colorado
April 23, 1975

POLITICAL COMMITTEE

Dear Comrades,

The Denver branch voted tonight to recommend that we extend critical support to Everett Chavez, who is running an independent campaign for Denver School Board, and to Ernesto Vigil, who is running as a candidate of the Raza Unida Party for City Council in District 9.

The elections are to take place on May 20, so a quick response would be welcome.

The estimate of the branch is that both these candidates are clear on the question of remaining independent of the Democratic and Republican parties. The fact that Vigil is running as an RUP candidate demonstrates this, as well as the fact that he is running against Sal Carpio. Carpio was a candidate of the RUP in 1972. In January of this year, there was a recall election in District 9, thanks to a two-year effort on the part of the Crusade for Justice. Carpio ran in that election, which is formally nonpartisan, as an independent, but making clear that he was not a candidate of the RUP. The RUP did not field a candidate, and El Gallo, the paper of the Crusade for Justice, which is the prime moving force behind the RUP here, called for a vote for Carpio. Since that time, the seat is up for re-election in the May 20 election, which is also formally nonpartisan, and Carpio was the first to announce his intention to run. This time around, however, Carpio has received the official endorsement of the Democratic Party. Vigil so far has not aimed much of his fire at Carpio, but he is in fact running against him. District 9 is largely Chicano, and the Vigil campaign is going to hurt Carpio's chances of being elected.

The Chavez campaign is a little different. Chavez was originally announced as a candidate of the RUP. He has, it seems, since fallen into disfavor with some of the leaders of the Crusade and the RUP has withdrawn its support from him. The reason they gave him was that they did not like many of the people he had working on his campaign. These seem to fall into two categories: first, he has some community people who consider themselves Democrats working for him; and secondly, there are a few individuals from the campuses who are on the outs with the Crusade. As far as these Democrats go, they are not district captain types or committee-people. There are a few Chicanos running as Democrats, however, who have also promised to help him. He has stated clearly that he welcomes the help of anyone who is willing, but will give no support, nor ask any of his

campaign supporters to give any help, to any candidate of the Democratic Party. This much he has stated publicly.

On the tactical question, there are different reasons why we want to extend critical support. The advantages of our supporting these candidates is much clearer in the case of the Chavez campaign. Chavez himself has a lot of respect for our party, both in terms of looking to us as to how to run a campaign, as well as being open to discussing political questions with us. He kicked off his campaign by calling an organizing meeting to which he invited us. The meeting was attended by about 15-20 Chicano activists, mostly from the campuses. He looked to us for organizational tips as to how to most effectively carry out his campaign, but there was also some discussion of his program, which we were able to intervene in and influence. We still have a few points of disagreement with some positions he takes. For example, he is not extremely clear on the question of how to fight racism in the schools. He tends to counterpose community control to busing. But, at the same time, he is beginning to understand. We have had a series of discussions with him, as this is the most important disagreement, and convinced him to participate in an April 19 demonstration in support of desegregation and to speak. He did so, and gave a speech with a position very close to our own, saying that the struggle for busing in Boston was the same struggle as the fight for community control in Denver. The branch feels that we will be in a much stronger position to influence Chavez himself and to work with the group of activists that he has gathered around his campaign if we urge a vote for him. There are two seats open on the school board, so there is no contradiction between urging a vote for Chavez and continuing our campaign for Jack Marsh.

The Vigil campaign raises different questions. He is not using his campaign as yet as a real organizing tool as Chavez is. In my opinion, this is another sign of the inward-turning of the Crusade at the present time. Nonetheless, Vigil's campaign does have the support of most of the Chicano activists on the campuses and in the community and is viewed as an RUP campaign. But the fact that he is not having similar organizing meetings, plus the fact that over the past period our relations with the Crusade have been strained, limits how much of a direct influence we can have. There are two points on which we do think we might have some influence. The first is in relation to clarity on the RUP question. That is, while Vigil is a candidate of the RUP and is known throughout the Chicano community as a leader of the Crusade, his printed material and his initial press statement omitted his RUP affiliation. With an article or two in *The Militant*, we can explain the advantages of an RUP campaign. Also, by our supporting both Vigil and Chavez, it will be an extra pressure on the RUP

to get away from some of their sectarianism and to get behind Chavez again. Also, it would be seen as an attempt to get involved in some factional fighting within the Chicano movement if we were to extend support to Chavez and not to Vigil.

We have begun discussing what our critical support would mean. There is an initial Militant article which I sent to Doug, and there would be at least one more right before the elections. We would also want to get out a leaflet showing our support for the two campaigns, attempting to draw them together. There would also be numerous opportunities for our candidate for school board to urge a vote for Chavez for the other open seat.

Neither of these candidates has put out much material. What there is, as well as the original newspaper articles on their announcements, I sent to Doug along with the article.

Comradely,
s/ Rich Feigenberg