

Los Angeles, Calif.

Jan. 21, 1975.

Jack Barnes
New York, N. Y.

Dear Jack,

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

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

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

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

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

The survey consisted of a study of over 189 thousand first year students in 364 colleges across the country and a comparison

with a similar study made a year ago. It showed that among these young people there is a decrease in those who consider themselves "liberals," and an increase in those who look upon themselves as "middle-of-the-roaders." This is a shift to the right.

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

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

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

A turn towards the workers is due now as recent developments indicate that advanced workers must be thinking in different terms than they did in the 1960s when most of them felt secure and not very much concerned with the upsurges of those years. Other surveys, noted by us, have shown a change in thinking is taking place among younger workers who were moving towards radical opinions before the present economic downturn became as severe as it appears now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

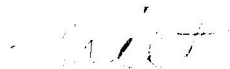
I will not belabor this point any further nor say anything

about the necessity of the party to have a proletarian class composition. These are commonplaces in our movement and in general agreed to by everyone.

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

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

Comradely,



Milton Alvin