

Bus

October 3, 1976

To the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party

Dear comrades,

In my September 29 appeal to the New York LEC on the question of endorsing Amadeo Richardson for New York State Assembly, I concentrated on the confusion in the Chelsea branch regarding what we mean by "running as a Communist." My emphasis in this letter is on the Richardson campaign itself. I assume that the LEC and the PC may conclude in any case that this is a CP campaign or at worst a borderline case in which the judgment of leading comrades on the spot should be accepted.

There is undoubtedly agreement that there must be something more required for giving critical support to a CP campaign than known membership in the Communist Party and running against the Democrat and Republican parties. How much more is required?

I am writing this second appeal because in the Richardson case nothing more exists. It is not a borderline case. Based on the known facts, there can be no reasonable interpretation that any significant body of people (including the Communist Party itself) will relate to this campaign as a CP campaign, and no portion of his vote will be cast as a vote for a working-class tendency.

HOW WILL DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE COMMUNITY ENCOUNTER THE AMADEO RICHARDSON CAMPAIGN?

(1) The broad public will see some posters that urge them to vote for Amadeo Richardson as an "independent" candidate for state assembly. Based on what we've already seen in the campaign, the slogans, if any, will deal with housing, community services, and opposition to the cutbacks.

When they go into the voting booth, they will see Richardson's name and "Voters Independent Party."

(2) A somewhat narrower group, which we can call the interested public, will take a leaflet. Some of these people may get a second one. (So far, I know of only two.) The main piece of literature is a 4-page, 8½ x 11 flyer on heavy orange stock. There is a portion of Richardson's "Opening Statement to the Press" and a statement by Mercedes Mercado, his co-campaign manager. These are also in Spanish. The Committee of 112 (or Committee to Elect Amadeo Richardson) is listed. These individuals have no political or other affiliation after their names.

The second leaflet is the People's Legislative Questionnaire. You are asked questions on your views on avoidance of taxes by "big real estate and big business," rising rents, racial and sexual discrimination, improvement of community services, and strict code enforcement in housing. A short description of Richardson says he is a community leader and active in community struggles, chairman of the local poverty board, and "UN correspondent and staff writer for the Daily World." Following this is a 10-pt local reform program. After this, some key slogans: Bring the People to the Government!, Vote Independent, Vote Richardson.

Readers of the Chelsea-Clinton News may be in this category. An article generally favorable to the Richardson campaign appeared June 17. He is described as "a self-admitted Communist" and further on in the article: "the UN correspondent for the Daily World News Paper" (sic). It adds that the Richardson campaign is "issue oriented" and "specifically non-party affiliated." The issues mentioned are local. No attempt is made to link them with national or international questions. (This is also true of the Daily World articles.)

(3) Some may read the Daily World. I doubt that even CP members do it daily. From June 19 until the present, there have been no more than 10 articles dealing with the Richardson campaign. Half have directly featured the campaign. The others quote his views on the subject being dealt with. Excepting 2 articles, Richardson is dealt with solely as an "independent" candidate for state assembly. In these 2 articles (June 19 and September 15), it is added that he is also UN correspondent for the Daily World. Curiously, even in a personal interview with him (August 28) he is treated as though he could be a stranger to the newspaper. By the way, the headline for this last article, which is typical, is "The Community's Candidate."

(4) A narrower group would be those who contacted the campaign--as I did. I received the orange flyer, plus his program, in the mail. This program is a capitalist reform program adopted by the Committee for Independent Political Action (CIPA) on June 19 & 20, 1976. The question of Richardson's membership in the CP was initiated by me. Within the context of posing as a supporter of McCarthy, I asked what relation the Richardson campaign would have to the CP candidacy of Hall and Tyner. The person on the phone was open about Richardson being in the CP. At the same time he pointed out that the candidate could have been another community activist, such as Mercedes Mercado, the co-chairman of Richardson's campaign. He said that it was a United Front and that the next time, or for another office, someone without that type of affiliation could be the candidate.

(5) Active campaign supporters and people around the Chelsea Action Center (the poverty program that Richardson is chairman of) must be aware of Richardson's CP membership. How large or active this group is I don't know. The times that I have been by it, it seemed very quiet. In this category we should include members of the CP, others on the Committee of the 112 who are not in the CP, employees and activists of the Center. Altogether, I don't believe this is a very large number.

WHAT CONCLUSIONS WILL THESE DIFFERENT SECTORS DRAW REGARDING THE CAMPAIGN?

It can't be reasonably inferred that any of the above groups will conclude that Richardson's campaign is a working class political alternative to the capitalist parties. Those individuals who receive, read, and draw conclusions from the Chelsea-Clinton News, the People's Legislative Questionnaire, and the 2 Daily World articles as to Richardson's CP connections will be few indeed. And I don't think that they will think that it is a CP campaign. If you have a special reason for getting all of these, as do NYC SWP leaders, you could conclude that he was in the CP. I fear that every time one of us sees a poster, a leaflet, or an article on Richardson that we project onto that item our already-drawn conclusion that this CP "heavy" has struck again. No, it just says that an independent candidate is running for state assembly on a reform program.

I think that people will conclude that Richardson is a community candidate, a "good guy." That's what I think too--except for his being "good." From what I've read he's probably an attractive personality to community activists. He's an accomplished musician, has studied in the German Democratic Republic, covers the UN as a correspondent for a radical paper, is a Black militant fighting on community issues. Even to people who understand and approve of his party affiliation--and I think that this is the basis of support that he would otherwise not have--the Richardson campaign is a militant reform campaign based in the community.

HOW DOES THE COMMUNIST PARTY VIEW THE RICHARDSON CAMPAIGN?

While our class analysis of a campaign whose candidate is a CPer is not determined by how the CP perceives itself, it should be taken into account as part of the overall projection of the campaign.

While the CP gets some advantage out of Richardson being known within the campaign as a member of the CP, they are very careful to avoid any formal linking of this campaign with the state and national CP ticket. The only connection so far are

2 by-lines on articles on Apthecker's campaign for U.S. Senate from New York.

Not once has he been called a member of the Communist Party. This fine discrimination extends to the Young Worker (the YWLL newspaper), which in August included Richardson among 4 youth candidacies that it endorses. Two were CP candidates in the Illinois elections. One (LeBlanc--see below) was a leader of the YWLL. For Amadeo--his election to the Chelsea Neighborhood Board of the Chelsea Action Center, the Committee of 100, endorsement by CIPA.

I believe that we can further trace the distinction the Communist Party makes between those members who run as Communist Party candidates and those who do not. An interview with Carl Bloice (editor of the west coast People's World) says:

/Bloice/ pointed out that there has been remarkable growth in the party's popular electoral activity.... A recent city council candidate in Berkeley, running openly as a Communist, got more than 35 per cent of the vote.

In New York a month ago, another woman also running openly as a Communist in a nonpartisan election, won a post on a district school board through that city's peculiar system of proportional representation. Another Communist won a seat on a neighborhood body similar to our Model Cities boards. (Chicago Reader, Jan 13, 1974)

This last reference is undoubtedly to Richardson. I believe that it is no accident that the first two candidates are called "open" and Amadeo is not.

Phil Bart, in a long article on the history of Communist Party electoral activity in the September 18, 1976, Daily World, after referring to William Taylor's Los Angeles campaign, says:

Last year Alva Buxenbaum, member of the Central Committee of the CPUSA, was elected to a local school board in Brooklyn. Though she ran on an "Independent" ticket, there was no question as to her political affiliation.

Bart--and I think this is very significant--does not mention the Richardson campaign, although it was just being launched. There is not even a reference to the position that a CP member held on the neighborhood poverty board in Chelsea. Similar distinctions, I believe, are made in the 1975 Draft Resolution of the Communist Party (section on political and electoral struggles). This is more complicated, in part because of jargon I don't understand. I'm not going into this; but for me the distinction is clearly made between the CP's own candidates and campaigns where CPers

are running independent, non-party campaigns.

We must take into account that the Communist Party today openly runs candidates throughout the country. A campaign for a similar office is being run in Massachusetts. The Sept. 21 Daily World headline: CP ANNOUNCES DRIVE FOR MASS. STATE SENATE. The first sentence: "Judith LeBlanc launched her campaign as Communist Party candidate for Mass. state senate at a press conference here Thursday." Further on: "LeBlanc is on the Central Committee of the Young Workers Liberation League and a member of the National Council of the Communist Party."

In Connecticut the CP is running Joelle Fishman for congress. Daily World (Au. 17): "Joelle Fishman was formally nominated by the Communist Party of Connecticut Friday night to be its candidate for U.S. Representative." This announcement was made "on the eve of a three-day media tour of Connecticut by CP Presidential candidate Gus Hall." Her credentials as a CP candidate are impeccable: "past Communist candidate for Mayor of New Haven and for U.S. Congress," "executive secretary of the state party." After Hall's visit, Tyner came. The Sept. 17 Daily World reports that "Jarvis Tyner, Communist Party candidate for vice-president, will be present" at the official opening of her election office.

Similar treatment was recently given to Herbert Aptheker when he was substituted for Arnold Johnson on their N.Y. state ticket (for U.S. Senate) to run against Moynihan and Buckley (Daily World, September 23 and 25).

PROGRAM AND BALLOT DESIGNATION ARE IMPORTANT

In the most important sense, Richardson is running on the CP program. Whether the CP runs inside the Democratic Party (or just works for it), participates in or leads independent electoral formations (such as the Richardson campaign), or runs in its own name, it still pursues its class-collaborationist objectives.

At the same time the limited character of the immediately observable program of the Richardson campaign means something to people who see it. The absence from Richardson's campaign of such points as an 80% cut in military expenditures, the advancement of "detente," and "a long-range plan ... to stop the profiteering by the few, and build a new society--SOCIALISM" indicate something about how the campaign is perceived. What's at issue here is not the overall class-collaboration program of the CP, but how the interested person perceives the campaign. In the absence of other aspects that would make it a CP campaign, the minimal character of the Richardson program is also a factor in our evaluation.

In 1976, the ballot designation is also important. I think that Thomas's comment on the distinction between the 1966 Aptheker campaign and the CP campaigns beginning with 1968 is

well-taken (SWP DB, Vol. 34, No. 7, p. 13). Completely aside from the question of the "witchhunt," the CP today runs under its own name in order to get support "as the CP." Even in legally "nonpartisan" city elections, as Bloice points out, the CP puts forward its own candidate "openly... as a Communist."

The CP has even had an internal debate on this issue. The point that Hall has been making is that, in addition to their other two capitalist "prongs," they should run open campaigns as Communist Party candidates.

CONCLUSION ON PRINCIPLED CHARACTER OF CAMPAIGN

I started out by saying that our position is that "there must be something more than known membership in the CP and running against the Democrat and Republican parties" to make the Richardson campaign, or similar campaigns, the campaign of a working-class political tendency.

There's not much more; is there? A certain knowledge of his CP membership by Richardson's periphery--inherent in this and analogous situations involving a known CPer, although the details might differ--is all there is.

CAN WE GAIN FROM THE TACTIC OF "CRITICAL SUPPORT"?

In my appeal to the New York LEC I said that I did not oppose the Richardson campaign for tactical reasons. I no longer hold this position. However we might apply the tactic: critically, supportive, or in some combination of the two, we would run into serious trouble. I also think that serious thought about the critical support tactic in this case, and especially any attempt to apply it, would reveal the unprincipled character of endorsement of any kind. But I lay that aside.

If we endorsed the Richardson campaign, for the first time in the campaign it would be given credit as some sort of socialist campaign--

SWP endorsement would mean that for the first time the word socialist would be connected with the campaign, even if it is only from the name of our party. Likewise, the idea of a workers party. We would also be identifying it as a CP campaign, possibly by pointing out that the Daily World was the newspaper of the Communist Party. The campaign would be connected with two radical labels it as yet does not have: the SWP and the CP. Even worse, or better, in this case both groups are united around Amadeo.

The short-term solidarity that we might gain through some Richardson supporters feeling kindly towards us (aside from possible irritation over being labeled as a CP campaign) would be small change compared to the increased status the Richardson

effort would have.

To the extent that we would criticize the campaign we would undoubtedly raise the idea of a Labor Party, of independent political action by Blacks and other oppressed minorities.

If we are then asked: then why are you supporting this campaign? Testily, we reply: "It's in our leaflet. It's because it is a CP campaign." "But it is not" will be the answer. "We know better," we holler. Considering how tenuous the CP connection is, aren't we really in better shape if, in a friendly and comradely fashion, we explain what kind of campaign we consider to be genuinely "independent" instead of trying to maneuver in this very tight area.

On the local level, this friendly criticism would deal with the campaign's inadequacies as an "independent" campaign. On the national level we could take on the overall CP strategy and tactics. Even though we don't call it a CP campaign as such, we are entirely justified in laying it at the CP's door. We can point out that Richardson is a well-known community activist, he is Black, the Chelsea community is predominantly working class and Puerto Rican in composition. Why is this member of the CP running a campaign so deficient in working class principles? Richardson's program doesn't begin to tackle the problems facing Chelsea and other communities. He fails to call for political action by the working class. In his campaign statement of June 14 (Daily World, June 23--this section is dropped from the orange flyer) he says: "A few incumbent candidates have challenged these policies in the past and must be supported. Such candidates must continue to challenge policies which hurt the people and benefit only big business." His independence from the capitalist parties is a fraud, etc.

We could also raise the question of the Committee for Independent Political Action. Entirely aside from whether my interpretation that this is a class-collaborationist type alliance is correct or not, certainly it would be a useful polemical point to advance in our criticism of the CP political strategy--its consistent strategy to divert working-class opposition to the two capitalist parties into another capitalist electoral trap. This point, too, would be easier to make if we did not give the campaign critical support.

Comrades have raised another maneuver that we might make. During the 1966 Aptheker campaign we called on him to support our slate in New York state headed up by Judy White. The CP did not have a full slate. We did. We scored well on this point. The 3 ^{Militant} articles following the PC endorsement zero in on this. The idea was put forward that we could ask the Richardson campaign to support us in 1976.

This is tricky. Recall, we are already calling it a CP

Why, then, are we asking it to endorse the SWP?

campaign. Richardson's, or his representative's, reply is simple and straightforward: "Personally, I support the Hall-Tyner-Aptheke ticket in New York; but my campaign takes no position on this. There are socialist alternatives, and some 'independent-minded' people may support McCarthy. In any case, I hope you will work for my campaign as a consistent 'fight-back' campaign in the 64th A.D. Next question!"

No, this could be a very short maneuver indeed. Whoever writes the Militant article on it will undoubtedly make some sound points around it. But that clear tactical advantage that existed in the Aptheke campaign is not here, far from it.

Comradely,

Brian Shannon