

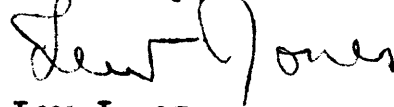
14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
May 31, 1973

TO ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached is a report by Wendy Reissner on the May 5
demonstrations.

Comradely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lew Jones". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Lew Jones
SWP National Office

REPORT ON THE MAY 5 DEMONSTRATIONS

by Wendy Reissner -- May 30, 1973

The May 5 demonstrations against high prices were modest in size. They did not organize the mass sentiment against inflation manifested during the meat boycott, but they did contribute in a positive way to the development of a response to the effects of inflation.

In most cities the May 5 demonstrations were widely endorsed. Significant numbers of trade unions sponsored them. In a number of areas trade unions offered their facilities for building the actions, printed leaflets, and put out mailings to their memberships. In addition the demonstrations were endorsed by consumer groups, antiwar organizations, welfare and poverty groups, some local politicians, student governments, National Organization of Women chapters, and the Communist Party.

For the most part, speakers at the May 5 rallies reflected the breadth of endorsement. This enabled the political point to be made that different constituencies have an interest in coming together to fight against the various effects of inflation. Some representatives of trade unions saw May 5 as an opportunity to explain that the fight for a decent standard of living on the part of working people is not the cause of inflation. Representatives of the antiwar movement were able to relate war spending to inflation. Representatives from women's groups and groups fighting against government cutbacks in social spending were able to relate to May 5 on the basis of how inflation affects their needs.

Detroit was the scene of one of the most successful actions. The Michigan Committee Against High Prices was set up in response to the call for actions coming from the National Consumers Congress. One of our comrades who is a vice-president of a teachers union played a leading role in organizing the action. The head of the Metropolitan AFL-CIO Council became involved in the organizing effort, helping to draw in unions. The United Auto Workers was successfully involved near the end of the building campaign. The central organizing center for May 5 was offered by the Wayne County Community College Federation of Teachers. Our comrade was invited to speak before the Metropolitan AFL-CIO Council where she received a warm response and many union endorsements for the action. The Wayne State Student Government endorsed May 5 and offered facilities for building it. The president of the local NOW chapter actively built the action as did a number of NOW members. The Communist Party actively participated in Detroit. This was one of the few places where this occurred. In most places, the CP gave lip service to the action but did not participate in the building efforts.

The Communist Party began a Trotskyist-baiting campaign against our comrade in Detroit which backfired on them because of the response she had won among activists in the coalition. She was selected to give the keynote speech to the rally of 500 that took place on May 5, and is now widely known in Detroit as a leader and spokesperson of the protest against inflation.

Through the course of our participation in May 5 around the country we were able to come in contact with a layer of individuals and organizations that we have not previously had the oppor-

tunity to work with. The contacts we were able to make with trade unions were particularly important. Significant results were made in this arena in San Francisco, around the United Labor Action Committee, which organized the April 28 action of over 3,000. The coming together of this united front of labor organizations, with a perspective of reaching out to forces beyond the trade unions, provides an example for future struggles.

The role of the consumer groups around May 5 was uneven. In some places they supported and helped build the action. In others they were hostile. In some areas these groups are quite conservative, with leaderships that are conscious opponents of demonstrations and fearful of becoming involved in coalitions that include radicals. Some of them are anti-union, believing that the main cause of inflation is high wages.

On May 12, in Chicago, the second gathering of the National Consumers Congress was held. This meeting was organized by a number of individuals who participated in the original Washington, D.C., meeting. It was not widely built and about 60 people attended. Most of those in attendance were from established conservative consumer groups that orient toward lobbying. In addition there were representatives from Women United for Action (a group dominated by Youth Against War and Fascism), a sprinkling of CPers, and a number of representatives from Community Action Project (CAP). CAP is a Chicago based group headed by former SDS leader Paul Booth. It is a glorified community organizing project with money.

Most of the participants in the meeting were hostile to May 5. The interim president of the group had spent the time since the original NCC meeting, consulting with Congresspeople and presenting a position paper to the Cost of Living Council. This paper, presented in the name of the NCC, includes an analysis that places major blame for inflation on organized labor's fight for decent wages. The Chicago meeting voted to repudiate this paper after heated debate.

Aside from a small number of delegates representing May 5 committees, the rest of the participants in the Chicago meeting were interested in establishing a structure for the NCC rather than discussing what to do next. It is most likely that the National Consumer Congress will concentrate on lobbying from now on. It is unlikely that this group will provide a vehicle for mass action against inflation.

At this time there does not exist a focus for action around the issue of inflation. In some areas -- such as Detroit -- consideration is being given to organizing a broadly sponsored teach-in about inflation. While there is no focus for action at this time we know that the effects of inflation are more and more becoming a central question in American politics today. We can help lay the basis for future struggles by continuing to educate around our analysis of the causes of inflation and our transitional program for dealing with inflation. This can best be accomplished through the use of our press, pamphlets, and forum series.