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Cleveland, Ohio
December 5, 1973

Political Committee
Socialist Workers Party

Dear Comrades:

The energy crisis and the government's proposals for dealing with it is the most blatant attempt to maintain the rate of profit at the expense of the workers' standard of living since the wage freeze, and is having a comparable impact on consciousness.

The gut reaction of most workers is a combination of confusion, fear, ~~anger~~ cynicism, resentment. In the shop where I work we have been complaining about the temperature being too cold for sedentary workers for a few years, since air-~~conditioning~~ conditioning was installed and adjusted to the needs of the computer and other "labor-saving" equipment. We have been ~~now~~ working wearing sweaters and jackets. Now the company has officially announced the temperature would be reduced to 68 degrees in compliance with the needs of the "energy crisis." "Now they're patriotic!" was the cynical comment of composing room employees.... One of the women told me confidentially that she's ~~by~~ buying a couple of extra tires for her car, in anticipation of shortages, and advised me to do likewise... Others, discussing the shortage of gas, are becoming more selective about driving to meetings (like the Council of Union Women) on Sundays, because they might not have enough to get to work on Monday. ... One of the men ~~quoted~~ quoted statistics from news articles on gas exports and said we should demand a ban on all fuel exports for the duration of the shortage.., I said, "How about a moratorium on profits of the oil companies for the duration of the energy crisis?" They want us to take cuts ~~in~~ in our standard of living: colder homes and work places (colds, arthritic pains, etc.); shortages of commodities; cuts in production and jobs. Why not "sacrifice" ~~their~~ their profits? -- No one I've raised that with could see ~~what~~ why not.

The defensive reaction of the officials of the labor movement, "equality of sacrifice," does express the lowest common denominator of agreement in the working class today. At the AFL-CIO Council meeting I attended in November President Valenta sounded off: We should be involved, participate in the discussion of the energy crisis and what to do about it on all levels - local state and national. We should demand equality of sacrifice.... Several delegates spoke about the fact that it is an artificial crisis created by the oil monopolies, and quoted articles in the news media.... The transit workers union passed a resolution opposing cutbacks in city transit service, demanding that the Cleveland Transit System maintain full service until fuel actually runs out, instead of cutting back with "piecemeal solutions" which can only delay action to bring more fuel to mass transit. The Council endorsed their stand.

On another level, a letter to the editor of The Plain ~~News~~ Dealer headed "Internationalize the Oil Industry" argued no Arab leader should be permitted to blackmail the world by monopoly control of oil. -- The obvious response, given by Comrade Herman Kirsch, ~~an~~ SWP candidate for Lieutenant Governor at our 1974 campaign kickoff at the 45th anniversary Militant Banquet, was that we should, by the same logic, nationalize the oil industry in the United States.

The Militant articles explaining why there is a shortage, what kind of a shortage it is, and beginning to explain why oil (fuel) should be nationalized, are excellent. But they are a bit too academic. Most workers know from their own experience and the general news media that there is a shortage, and why.

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What they want to know is, "What can we do about it? What should we do about it?"

Frankly, I've been watching every week for a banner headline on the front page of The Militant: "Nationalize ~~Oil~~ Oil!" Instead, it was only in the final paragraphs of the ~~first~~ otherwise excellent articles in our paper. I think this reflects a misreading of the mood of the masses, an underestimation. I think ~~most~~ ~~people~~ people -- most worker consumers, not just the amorphous "mass vanguard" -- look to socialists to be sharp and unambiguous on such issues.

Now, on another level, I want to propose that we raise as an immediate transitional demand in the labor movement and other mass movements not yet ready to demand nationalization, "A Moratorium on Oil Profits for the Duration of the Energy Crisis!"

This demand starts with the broadest area of agreement -- equality of sacrifice -- and concretizes it: As long as the working class is deprived of the jobs, goods and services required to maintain our standard of living, the ~~private~~ private owners of the fuel industry should be compelled to forego profits.

The reasoning: The industry can continue to produce. Profits are not essential to production. Workers are ~~accustomed~~ accustomed to sacrifice for the duration of an emergency. Bank moratoriums are a concept from economic crises of the past. If the oil industry actually faced a moratorium on profits for the duration of the energy crisis, ~~then~~ they'd have a strong incentive to find ~~ways~~ ways and means of ending the crisis. If they can't, then the industry should be nationalized like any other essential utility. Human needs over profits.

I think this concrete demand could be raised effectively in women's organizations, as well as some unions, consumer organizations, student organizations, etc. as well as in our election campaigns on all levels.

The educational value, in raising questions about the profit system on a broad basis, is obvious. And, within the international movement, I think it provides an example of how to apply our transitional program ~~concretely~~ concretely.

Comradely,

Jean
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cc: Dick Roberts
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