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LOS ANGELES

Milt Alvin

Dear Milt,

At its November 21 meeting the Political Committee discussed your letter of October 31 regarding the party's policy of extending critical support to Communist Party candidates. I want to outline our thinking on the points you raise.

In your letter you said the following: "In an exchange of correspondence between comrade Barry Sheppard and me at the time of the L.A. support question, which I opposed, he wrote, 'If valid, your position would exclude the use of the critical support tactic in relation to the CP on a national scale.' I replied to this that, 'if your reasons are valid, it would make it mandatory for us to give critical support to all CP candidates.'"

"I am now of the opinion that the party is moving over to this position, that is, supporting the CP candidates regardless of circumstances, just as long as we are not running anyone for the same office."

Your impression that the party is moving toward establishing a blanket policy of automatically supporting any CP candidate where we are not running is not correct. We oppose such a policy. Our policy continues to be one where the branches discuss each case separately before making a recommendation to the PC and the PC judges each case individually according to its merits. There has been no change in this approach and none is projected.

After many years of not running their candidates, the CP began, in 1966, to field increasing numbers of candidates. Since that year the party has utilized the tactic of critical support in respect to nine CP candidates. The CP has run more candidates than this, many of whom we have opposed with our own candidates. Where possible of course, we prefer to confront CP candidates directly with our candidates. However, we anticipate that there will be more, rather than fewer, opportunities to successfully apply our tactic of critical support to CP candidates. And we will want to take advantage of all these opportunities we can to advance our goals.

You received the impression that we were moving toward a blanket policy because we have employed the tactic in three cities where you feel no "special conditions" justified the critical support tactic. You suggest a review of "what this

tactic was supposed to achieve and how it was supposed to be used in the first place."

As part of your review, you cite our support to independent labor candidates and independent candidates of oppressed minorities. We don't see the parallel between our support to such candidates for the purpose of advancing the idea or promoting the movement toward independent working-class political action, and our utilization of the critical support tactic as part of our opponent's work against the CP.

We have supported independent labor, Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican candidates, in spite of any criticism of their programs, because we believe that such support could be used to help encourage a break from capitalist politics. The degree to which we have publicly criticized the programs of these candidates has depended on the particular circumstances.

When we extend critical support to CP candidates our purpose has been different. It is part of a maneuver to utilize the tactic to deal a blow to one of our central opponents. Our aim is to breach the communication barrier to the members and periphery of the CP and their youth group, the Young Workers Liberation League, in order to break a few members away or discourage others from joining. Their members are trained to believe that Trotskyists are CIA agents and counterrevolutionaries. So when we approach them and say that we are voting for some of their candidates it catches them off guard. In situations where we call for a vote to one or more of their candidates but are also running candidates of our own, we get an extra edge by urging them to support our candidates. This helps to make them appear even more sectarian.

Your opposition to carrying out such maneuvers is a result of what you see as the "scanty" results achieved so far and your view of the CP at this time.

First on the results. It's true that the gains so far have been relatively modest. In some cities this can be partly attributed to delaying application of the tactic until late in the election (this, for example, was the case in Los Angeles) and partly to the newness of the maneuver to most of our comrades. Unfortunately we don't have a complete picture of our results as we haven't received reports from all of the branches that were involved. In the future we plan to encourage prompt reports and fuller information from the branches in order to help give the party as a whole a better feel of what we are accomplishing.

Joanna Misnik's article in the November 23 Militant, which appeared since you wrote your letter, offers some additional information about the impact of our critical support tactic in New York City. In New York our maneuver had three aspects. First: Last summer, during Herman Badillo's Democratic Party primary campaign, we issued an Open Letter to the CP criticizing their support to Badillo. We circulated this quite widely to CPers and YWLLers. We know of a few YWLLers who opposed the CP's support to Badillo. Our letter must have registered some impact because the Daily World was forced to

carry an attack on it. We then continued the debate in the pages of The Militant.

Second was our defense of the CP's ballot rights after Lyn Marcus's National Caucus of Labor Committees challenged the CP's petitions. Some of our members participated in a picket line with some of their members to protest this undemocratic move. This action did not properly fall within our critical support tactic, but was an integral part of our political offensive.

The third aspect, which we initiated right after the CP candidates were certified on the ballot, was the tactic of critical support. We issued another open letter to the CP indicating our support to three of their candidates and urged the CP to vote for four of our candidates. (This was not a venture into "horse-trading." But it did help to put them on the defensive.) The letter was distributed at CP campaign meetings, tables, and at several meetings. There were several instances of YWLL or CP members indicating their support to our candidates. This tactic facilitated our getting the ear of some of their members and contacts in order to discuss our political differences.

Our maneuver with the CP and YWLL during the elections was also accompanied with attempts to involve them in united front-type actions against NCLC hooliganism, banning of the Communist League, and repression in Chile.

We have reliable information that there was disagreement within the CP, at least in New York, over the question of how to deal with the SWP and the YSA. One tendency opposes the present policy of refusing to work with us in united front-type actions. So it is within this context that we engaged in our maneuver, which it should be recalled was a secondary aspect of our election campaign.

You mention a statement by former CP leader Dorothy Healy that the CP's response would be to ignore our support to their candidate. This is not surprising. For over 40 years the CP has tried to ignore us. But we don't let them. And insofar as the critical support maneuver helps our members get the ear of a few YWLLers or CPers, it makes it even more difficult for them to dismiss us.

You may have noticed in the Daily World's letter column on October 27 a letter was selected for publication that showed that they could not ignore our maneuver. The letter, allegedly written by a Frank Henderson in Cleveland (but more likely in their editorial office), stated:

"I wondered why the Socialist Workers Party (Trotskyites), sent me their platform for New York City when I vote in Cleveland, until I saw something else enclosed with the platform -- an 'Open Letter to the Communist Party.'

"It's plain enough that the SWP is far more interested in trying to cause dissension in Communist ranks all over the country than in fighting the capitalist politicians of both old parties. As always, the sharp edge of the Trotskyite attack is against the Communists and the Soviet Union. And their 'anti-

capitalist' phraseology is just so much window-dressing to fool leftward-moving people.

"The constant turnover in Trotskyite ranks and the endless splintering of their groups shows that their capacity to fool people is transitory. As in the case of much of the CIA funds, whoever is backing the Trotskyites is pouring money down the drain."

You noted that there was insufficient criticism of the CP's line in the application of our critical support tactic. You particularly pointed to the formulation used in the Pittsburgh and New York open letters referring to the CP as a party "in the socialist movement." We agree that this is not a good formulation. A more accurate statement would be that the CP is a tendency in the working-class movement. However, we don't feel that this error inevitably flowed from the tactic of critical support to CP candidates nor that it can't be corrected by sharpening up our application of the tactic.

In your criticism on this point, however, you argue that, "The truth is they are a party of the anti-socialist movement." This isn't exactly clear to us. If you mean that the program and actions of the CP are a counterrevolutionary obstacle to the workers struggle for power and to the development of socialism, we of course agree. However, if you are suggesting that the Stalinists are no longer a petty-bourgeois tendency within the workers movement, then we disagree.

Your analysis of the CP would preclude at this time extending critical support to any of its candidates. You ask, "Should not the events in Chile have had some influence on our attitude towards the American CP? I think they call for an extended and wide attack on the CP and all varieties of Stalinist class collaboration. The best tactic, the most effective in the present circumstances, is a head-on attack on Stalinism and its politics, not critical support."

It's not clear exactly what you are getting at here. We assume that if you are not implying that the betrayal in Chile has revealed something new and more reactionary about Stalinism than what we already knew. The Stalinist policy in Chile is consistent with its wretched class-collaborationist politics for the last four decades. There is nothing qualitatively new. But if your point here is that we should not extend critical support at a time when the CP is being discredited because of a monstrous betrayal, we would disagree. In this regard, it is useful to recall that Trotsky's proposal to the SWP was to critically support Earl Browder in the 1940 elections. This came on the heels of the Stalin purge trials, the betrayal in Spain, the Stalin-Hitler pact, and a Stalinist gunfire attack on the Trotsky household.

And it is not true that we have not attacked Stalinism head-on. Particularly during the events following the coup in Chile our comrades were selling The Militant with its attacks on Stalinist policy in Chile. Party speakers, including candidates, spoke out on this at scores of meetings. Nor do we

believe it is valid to say that the CP is so discredited and isolated as a result of its betrayals that there is nothing to gain from a critical support maneuver. In your letter you say, "The CP is actually a sect now. Even though they represent an obstacle to our growth, it is not as formidable as it was 30 or 40 years ago. That is the reality."

The CP is not as large or influential as it was a few decades ago and the relationship of forces between the SWP and the CP is more favorable to us than it was. However, this unfortunately does not make the CP simply a sect.

Barry Sheppard discussed this in his March 30 letter to you:

"The consensus of the Political Committee is that it is unfortunately not true that the overwhelming majority of people who have been radicalized or others who are becoming radicalized or will do so in the near future, have rejected the CP because of its conservative role. The CP remains a formidable opponent for us. In the past few years, it has emerged as our most important opponent on the left, competing with us for the allegiance of the radicalizing layers. It has succeeded in building a youth movement, the YWLL, that has somewhere around 1,000 members, and on a national scale is the YSA's most important competitor. Through the Angela Davis campaign, the YWLL has apparently succeeded in attracting a number of Black youth.

"On a more fundamental level, we can expect that as long as the Soviet Bureaucracy remains entrenched in the Soviet Union, there will be a basis for the development of the Stalinist movement in this country, which has the franchise. Just as the Stalinists confront us on a world scale, we will have to confront the counterpart of world Stalinism in this country. Thus we can expect to have to content with the American CP for some time to come."

One additional piece of evidence since Barry's letter was written is the CP's conference on African liberation in Chicago that drew more than 800 Blacks.

We will circulate this exchange of correspondence within the National Committee.

Comradely,

Doug Jenness
for the Political Committee