

Los Angeles, Calif.

April 16, 1975.

Political Committee
New York, N. Y.

Dear Comrades:

I have written you previously regarding use and non-use of our Transitional Program, particularly letters dated Feb. 5, 1974, Jan. 21, 1975, and March 10, 1975. Now I am writing with reference to an article in "The Militant" of April 18, 1975.

The line of the article, "The Debate Over Seniority and Affirmative Action," is support of preferential lay-offs so as not to disadvantage those hired last with the least amount of seniority. While the article occasionally mentions the larger aim of reducing hours of work with no reduction in pay, the basis for the preferential layoff position is the following statement, "...so long as the labor movement has not mustered the power to win jobs for all, there will be layoffs." (emphasis in original)

This judgement of the labor movement is incorrect and not in line with our position which has been worked out over a period of many years. Our view of the labor (I assume the author, Linda Jenness, means the union movement) movement is that it is quite capable of winning jobs for all and much else in addition. The problem is the conservative bureaucracy that misleads this union movement. We believe that the key to unlocking the strength that resides in this movement is the replacement of the bureaucracy with militant fighters.

The quoted statement, if it represents the official party view, can lead to all kinds of mistakes because it downgrades the potential of the organized workers and turns the party's attention elsewhere.

Just as soon as the right to any layoffs

is conceded, and this is a concession to the bosses, the question of principle is decided. The only thing left to argue about is just exactly who is to be left on the job and who is to go. It is not our mission in life to make such a concession. We demand jobs for all, with reduced hours and no reduction in pay.

This kind of situation was foreseen by our movement at the time of the adoption of the Transitional Program, in 1938. The pertinent section says, "The Fourth International demands employment and decent living conditions for all." (emphasis in original) And further, after describing the sliding scale of wages and hours, it says, "It is impossible to accept any other program for the present catastrophic period." (Emphasis added)

I believe that the article under discussion presents another program based upon an incorrect analysis of the possibilities of the workers to fight for and realize the aims that are in their interests.

The position that our movement has always held, that is, to fight for jobs for all, is described in the article as "This hypocritical stance..." I not only resent such a characterization but call attention to the fact that in a discussion of the merits of various points of view calling anyone a hypocrite at the beginning of the exchange of opinions is not the best way to get a hearing. The same thing can be said about the remark in the article that those who supported preferential hiring and now do not support preferential layoffs are "talking out of both sides of their mouth."

On the last point, I do not hesitate to say that I supported and do now support preferential hiring. But I am opposed to preferential or any other kinds of layoffs. Hiring and layoffs are not the same kind of things. When the capitalist economy is expanding and workers are being hired it is correct to advocate preferential hiring of women and minorities to adjust the balance. When a depression leads to decline in the economy and the bosses are looking forward to layoffs, there is a different situation. The difference is that preferential hiring can win support in wide circles but preferential layoffs most likely cannot. In any event, I think that demands for preferential layoffs is a concession in principle and that we should not advocate it.

I expect to be told in reply to the position I have outlined above that the only realistic position is the one advocated in the article. This will not be the first time that concessions are hidden underneath "realistic" positions. There is nothing unrealistic in the demand for jobs for all. It depends upon how one looks at the Transitional Program.

I believe the program to be a bridge between the present consciousness of the workers and the socialist revolution. Apparently others think differently. However, the original program was designed to be what I have described.

There appears to be a resistance to using our transitional demands. That is why I mentioned at the beginning of this letter others that I have sent you in the last year or so. Since the economic crisis reached the levels where it is now there have been many opportunities to advance our transitional demands in our press. I am, of course, only discussing propoganda at this time. But I believe that even here, in the weekly paper, many times articles do not even mention our program. I think the PC can spend some time profitably looking into this side of the question.

Comradely,



Milton Alvin.

APR 24 1975

Los Angeles, Calif.

April 21, 1975.

Political Committee
New York, N. Y.

Dear Comrades:

Since sending you my letter dated April 16, 1975, I have read again the two pieces of recent propaganda widely distributed by the party.

In "A Bill of Rights for Working People" it states, "'Working hours should be reduced with no reduction in pay in order to spread the available work and achieve full employment.'" This is a correct statement of our position. Nothing is contained in the pamphlet advocating preferential layoffs.

However in the other piece, "Why Can't Everyone Have a Job?" by Fred Halstead in "The Militant," March 14, 1975, after correctly raising the same demand for shorter hours with no reduction in pay and explaining it at greater length, it goes on to say the following:

Just as the seniority system prevented bosses from picking and choosing who to lay off, we must now prevent them from using preferential firing to beat back the gains the most discriminated-against workers have made over the last few years.

This is a matter of self-interest for all workers, regardless of color or sex. If some of us try to preserve our jobs at the expense of minorities and women, it will only play right into the bosses' tactic of "divide and rule." They would like nothing better than to see workers fighting among themselves over a dwindling number of jobs, rather than waging a united fight against the boss for laying off anybody. (emphases in original)

This is confusion confounded. No matter what kind of layoff plan is advocated it will inevitably set workers "fighting among themselves." That much should be obvious to anyone. Let us suppose that preferential layoffs

protecting the jobs of women and minorities are achieved in a given plant. Will those who are laid off take it with a smile? I ~~do~~ don't think so. They will feel embittered and it will surely set them fighting those who are retained on the job. No amount of assurance that this is best for all concerned will convince them.

Among other reasons, this is why our slogan as stated in the transitional program is correct and in the best interests of all workers. The demand for ~~xxxx~~ a shorter work week with no reduction in pay tends to unify workers. The demand for some plan, any plan of layoffs, tends to divide them and set them fighting among themselves.

In the last sentence of the Halstead piece the two ideas are counterposed in that he points out that the bosses would like to see workers fighting among themselves (this would be the result of any kind of preferential layoffs, whether by seniority or any other way) and "waging a united fight against the bosses for laying off anybody." The last expresses what would be the case in raising the demand in our transitional program: Reduce the hours of work ~~XIX~~ with no reduction in pay.

I believe that the two demands under discussion are mutually exclusive.

Comradely,



Milton Alvin