

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
January 15, 1974

TO ALL NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades:

Enclosed is a letter from Milt Alvin dated October 31, 1973 regarding the party's policy on extending critical support to Communist Party candidates, a reply from Doug Jenness for the Political Committee dated December 6, 1973, and a reply from Milt dated December 12, 1973 to Doug's letter. Also enclosed is an excerpted and condensed transcript from the November 2 Political Committee discussion.

In his letter Comrade Alvin refers to earlier correspondence on this question which was circulated to the National Committee. Since there are new members on the committee who have not seen this correspondence we are also enclosing it. This includes a letter from Comrade Alvin to the PC dated February 27, 1973; a letter to Comrade Alvin from Comrade Sheppard dated March 30, 1973; and two letters from Comrade Alvin to Comrade Sheppard dated April 3 and April 6, 1973.

Some material related to the discussion on the 1959 Atkinson campaign in Los Angeles and Barry Sheppard's article on the Aptheker campaign to which Comrade Alvin refers can be found in the Education for Socialists Bulletin entitled, Aspects of Socialist Election Policy, and the discussions with Leon Trotsky on the Browder campaign are found in Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40, pp. 251-289.

Comradely,

Lew Jones (d)

Lew Jones
SWP National Office

TRANSCRIPT

Kerry:

I gather from reading Milt's letter that the burden of his criticism is that the "tactic" of critical support has become a fixed pattern. He feels that it was at one time selective, but now is becoming applied generally throughout the country.

In my opinion, he has a point. I think we have become less selective in the application of this maneuver. It's really a maneuver and not simply a tactic of critical support, intended to advance the idea or to promote the movement for independent working-class action. He's right, of course, in saying that these occasional campaigns the CP runs are in no way intended to promote the movement for independent working-class political action. Because for every candidate they run, they support 50 capitalist candidates.

I agree that this example he cites, the Militant item from Pittsburgh, is not our concept of why we give critical support.

We've got to be clear on what we're doing. On one side, there are the tactical maneuvers that we should engage in with the CP. Doug spent most of his time discussing these various tactical maneuvers, in which we use open letters, maybe the tactic of critical support, and so forth and so on. But we've got to be very clear that the line of our agitation and propaganda follows the line of the maneuver. If the maneuver is directed at the YWLL, then our critical support has got to be indicated in some way that would arouse their interest. Otherwise, critical support means that we support the action, but we criticize the program. We don't do that with the CP because we don't give any credence to their action, their so-called independent action.

For example, when we've applied critical support to a labor union running candidates in an election, we gave support to the action but criticized their program. We do the same with a Black candidate. If they had some base for running, we'd support the action and criticize the program.

Milt's wrong about the CP in a very important aspect. The CP is no longer composed exclusively--or even primarily, as far as I know--of hardened Stalinists. We're not dealing with hardened Stalinists, even though he's right about the reduction of their influence. They have very little influence left in the mass movement. I don't know whether they have anything in the trade unions any more--any more than we or other groups have. They have a few old-time Stalinists still around, but I don't think they have any effective trade-union fraction that exercises any kind of political influence. So, in that sense he's correct. But that doesn't mean that it's a hopeless sect like the SLP. In the first place, so long as it has the franchise from Moscow, it will not be a sect. It will be our main competitor and rival in the radical movement.

Secondly, he's wrong because the composition of the CP has changed. It has a large section of young people who have joined, thinking that it is a revolutionary party, that it is a communist

party, especially since it has the connection with the Kremlin. That justifies our entry into tactical maneuvers with the Communist Party wherever the comrades feel that it's worthwhile in doing such. I don't agree that we will automatically give critical support to any CP candidate that's running where we're not running against him, no matter what. We misapply critical support by giving them the type of publicity which Milt quotes here from The Militant, which is not very much publicity. It's more support than criticism. It's the kind of critical support that we would give a candidate of a trade union or a Black party or a Chicano party running for office.

We cannot accept as genuine these forays on the electoral arena by the CP. The main thrust of their policy is coalition politics. They have not abandoned their politics. They have altered it somewhat to create the impression that now they are going to run independent candidates. They don't call for a labor party, and that should be one of the things that we criticize them for.

In our critical support, we should say, "We're glad to see that, at least in this case, you're running independently instead of supporting capitalist candidates. It would be considered a significant example of your seriousness if you supported a labor party instead of supporting Democratic coalition candidates and supporting the concept of a coalition."

That is what the thrust of our criticism has got to be. They're not seriously breaking with capitalist politics and they're not promoting the idea nor the movement for independent working-class political action. In fact, they've done just the opposite, by supporting the idea of coalition politics. They prevent, inasmuch as they can prevent, the movement and the spread of the idea of independent working-class political action.

I don't understand Milt's point on Chile, because our critical support of the CP doesn't depend on what their program is. The Old Man advocated that we support Browder in 1940, just two years after the Moscow trials, which was the manifestation of the real crimes that had been committed in the "people's front." It was after the "people's front" in Spain. They had gone through that experience, plus the Moscow trials, plus the Hitler-Stalin pact. But after all that, the Old Man thought it was important to go through a maneuver with them. This was during the turn that they made, the so-called left turn, after the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939. After being the most ardent supporters of Roosevelt, they suddenly emerged as left critics of Roosevelt, and even ran Browder as a candidate. Then they became the "peace party." That is, they were primarily for peace and they put the blame for war on French and British imperialism.

So the Old Man said that's a wonderful situation for us to enter into as a maneuver. And I think the Old Man was right then. Milt says he thought our people were right because some of the trade unionists had been influenced. I don't think it's true. That was the attitude that was expressed because of our association with the trade unions. But looking back on it, the Old Man was correct. We would have gained, precisely because we could not have anticipated how soon this whole business would

change from their become the "peace" party into the pro-war party. And if we had utilized the level of support to Browder, we would have got a hearing from sections of the CP who were discombobulated by the Hitler-Stalin pact.

On the labor party, our position changed. I remember when we were in the Socialist Party we were opposed to the formation of a labor party. We would speak against it. I made some very eloquent speeches against the labor party in 1936. The reason we changed was because of the rise of the CIO. We changed because prior to the development of the CIO, the Old Man's view was that it wasn't excluded that the American working class would develop in a revolutionary direction. Therefore, it was wrong for us to advocate a labor party, because there was no mass organization of the American workers. The AFL had only organized a very thin layer of the aristocrats of labor.

But once the CIO made its appearance, the most likely movement of the American working class into the political arena, he said, will be through their existing organizations, their mass organization, which is the CIO. The probable course of development will be through the labor party and not directly to the revolutionary party. Therefore we changed our position and became advocates of the formation of the labor party. It has nothing to do with what Milt says, that after the labor party is formed, our leaders said that not only could we be critical, but it didn't exclude running against it.

We don't say that given the formation of the labor party, that it's excluded that the revolutionary party will rapidly become the dominant party. But at least at this stage, we support the formation of a labor party because it seems to be the more likely course of development of the next stage of independent working-class political action than the revolutionary organization of the working class outside of the framework of the existing institution, that is, the trade unions.

The SLP is a different matter than the CP. We had a proposal once from the Seattle branch in the Kirk-Kay era that we give critical support to the SLP. We voted it down and said, "No. There's no use in this support whatsoever. We're not interested in entering into any kind of tactical maneuvers with the SLP." We said there's nothing there for us. This is a hide-bound sect.

But with the CP, to say that we shut off any tactics which would make it possible for us to approach or to gain the ear or access to some of these young militants who mistakenly entering, would be a very foolish practice.

J. Hansen:

I just want to add a few points here, and express my opinion about the criticisms from Milt. First of all, we're dealing with the appeal of the electoral activities of the Communist Party in the United States. Here we should note that this problem did not exist for us for quite a number of years. The reason was that the CP was driven out of electoral activity largely by McCarthyism and the witchhunt. It was only recently that it reentered this field.

One of the reasons they did was because of the successes that we have had in the continuation of our activity in the electoral arena, even though we don't get a big vote. It represented a challenge to the CP because we became an attractive pole in this area--the electoral arena. Our activity there helped us to gain in opposition to them, since they were our main obstacle.

Another reason they had, of course, was that their bargaining power in the Democratic Party machine was not very high. They lost their hold in the unions. At one time they had had a few electoral successes and elected a few people like a councilman here or there--or maybe some congressman who ran under a Democratic label but was really a CPer. So, they were interested in trying to recoup in this area a little bit for their bargaining with the Democratic Party. That's basically why they went into it.

Now, because of their reentry there, and also their activity in other fields, like the antiwar movement and the unions, they have been making some gains. Their big objective is to try and make some kind of comeback. They have attracted figures like Angela Davis. We can't dismiss a figure like that, because she represents a certain layer of youth that are being won to the CP and thereby represent a challenge to us. They've done some recruiting in the youth. Their youth organization has made something of a comeback. We discussed this at our convention. We've had a number of discussions here in the Political Committee about this and what to do about it, and we've taken certain measures.

We've had to recognize that they did represent a challenge to us. So part of our response here is to this overall challenge and insofar as it concerns the electoral field, it has to be taken in that context.

A related area to this was our activities in the antiwar movement, where we simply could not dismiss the CP. They confronted us all the time and it was a constant question and, therefore, a constant problem. On one side, action coalitions with them did help to advance the movement. At the same time they gave us a constant problem. I don't have to recount all that here. But the constant problems with the CP in the antiwar movement should be related to this.

I would say that our experience with the CP in recent years, in both the electoral arena and in the antiwar movement, shows that they're not just a sect. They represent much more of a challenge to us than a sect like the SLP does.

You could also add to that the point that Tom made that they have that international connection. They belong to part of an international movement with a rather large base in the Soviet Union. At one time they were also able to speak and boast about China. They have connections with other parties throughout the world. What these parties do also affects what they do and it gives them a certain standing and becomes part of their challenge to us.

I think that should be one of the basic things we should consider in regard to this question.

Milt raises the events in Chile. I don't see where the events in Chile should really affect what tactics we follow in the electoral arena in relation to the CP. There's nothing qualitatively different about what happened in Chile from what has happened in many areas in the world recently and in past years. There's no difference there. All that should happen in relation to Chile is that when and if we offer critical support to one of their candidates, then part of the criticism should be their policy in Chile. That's all. It simply adds to the criticisms that we would make otherwise and probably we should give some importance to that at the moment because it happens to be current and therefore very alive and something that you could point to.

Implied in what Milt says--I don't know whether he really holds this if you were to discuss the question with him--but there's a certain implication that when we give critical support to the CP, this in some way implies pinning a badge of honor on them, like it's something we would not do if they were selling out in Chile. Well, I don't think that is really the case. First of all, you have rather eloquent evidence that the CP itself does not consider it a badge of honor to have support from Trotskyists. They either want to say nothing about it, or they want to get rid of it. To them it's not very good publicity, especially in their own ranks.

On the case of the 1940 Browder campaign, I agree with what Tom said. I recall those arguments very well because I was there when it was being argued.

Trotsky's basic argument was that we should offer critical support to Browder. All of us there were sort of astounded. So every kind of argument that could be thought up was utilized. Comrade Kornikow, for example, pointed to the Moscow trials. Trotsky's response to that was, "Well, they shoot at us. The Stalinists even shoot at us." This was right after the assault and the room was full of machine-gun bullets. It was easy to make that point.

Jim's argument was, basically, that if we offered support to Browder, this would be misunderstood by the militant trade unionists, and especially the ones we had been working with in Minnesota. He felt this would be very difficult to explain. Trotsky's response to that was that these unionists that we were working with are good militants, but when the election comes around, they all vote Democratic. So we had a difference with these unionists on that question and we had to work out how to handle that. He said the best way to handle that would be if we had our own candidate. Or if we don't have our own candidate, that we would propose some candidate like John L. Lewis. But if we don't have any of these alternatives, then there's nothing wrong with offering critical support for Browder.

So the references here relating to this particular case I think rather fall against Milton's position, because Trotsky wouldn't hesitate a minute on offering critical support to some kind of a candidate of the CP.

So, we're left with only one argument of Milton's, the one that Tom mentioned, and that is the possible errors in our application. It's quite possible to have some errors. I would raise as one of the first errors that can be made in carrying out this tactic is that it's done at the very last minute. How can you get any gains out of offering critical support to the CP candidate on the very eve of the election where you can't possibly make some use of it in your propaganda and it's only sort of reported casually afterward as if we're making the record with our critical support? I think that all of these cases should be considered very, very carefully and if we decide to offer critical support, it should be done early so that we can make some gains out of it. Otherwise, I think it's better not to do it.

Also, I think it would be quite wrong to offer critical support that turned out to be 99% support and 1% criticism. That's not a good maneuver. It doesn't imply that you have any differences with them. Whereas the whole point of critical support is to expose the candidate, to expose his program and what he represents and who he represents internationally--the Stalinist movement. So you have to be heavy on the criticism, and the support is simply a way to advance the criticism. That's the only meaning of the support, that is, advocating a vote for a CP candidate as a vehicle or a means for advancing the criticism.

So insofar as we made errors on that, what Milton says is completely valid. But I think that also holds true in other areas, not just the CP, but with these independent candidates generally. The critical side should be advanced more than just the support side, especially since we can't wield very much support in the way of votes. We can't throw thousands of votes to some candidate. It's a propaganda question.

In weighing who we give critical support to, I think we should rule out token candidates who are advanced by the CP for the simple purpose of facilitating some maneuver that they're carrying out in the Democratic Party or to advance their standing in the Democratic Party. As a token candidate, we're not interested in that. Where they do have a candidate that may have some influence in some local area, that's a different question. There the question is to get closer to the rank and file of the CP in order to expose the program of the Stalinists. And we do that by explaining and developing our points in relation to theirs.

Barnes:

I think that most of what Milt says on the tactical side, the opposite is true to the degree that we can foresee it. We're going to be doing more of this maneuver and not less of it. We're going to be doing it in more cities and not fewer. The CP's going to be a bigger problem and not a smaller problem. It's going to continue to attract young people, Blacks, young unionists. It's got more than we've got in a couple of these fields. I agree it doesn't have anything much in effective trade-union fractions, but it's got more friends and contacts left in the labor movement, the Black community, and the Puerto Rican community than we do.

We'll be building more branches. We didn't really have the option of doing a maneuver in Pittsburgh or St. Louis until recently because we didn't have branches there. And the CP will probably be running more candidates. It's part of the problem they have with some of the young people they're recruiting.

And they're recruiting the same types as we are, aren't they? Are they recruiting a lesser animal than we are?

Milt's point about Dorothy Healy ignoring us is interesting. That's what they'd like to do. That's what their historic policy is. That's not what they've been able to do so much since the antiwar movement. That's their problem.

I like the idea of using some word, like Tom suggested, like "maneuver."

We should get rid of the idea that the parallel of critical support to Stalinist candidates is our support for a labor candidate or our support for a Black candidate. These are examples where we think an individual or a group of individuals may well be taking an objective step toward independent political action, where we would make this the key thing, plus some programmatic suggestions that may not even sound that critical in individual cases. With the CP, there's no element of that. It's phony from beginning to end. And I also don't think you can use the criterion--I know what Joe is getting at--but I think it would be a big mistake for us to simply say, "Check it out and look for their non-token candidates." I don't think they run non-token candidates. I don't think there's such a thing. The closest thing you can come to it is the Pat Bonner-Lyons campaign where they have a person who's a figure in the Black community. But even there it's token as hell and it's part of an overwhelmingly Democratic Party orientation of the Massachusetts CP and cover for them.

What we've got to figure out is where we want to use the maneuver. It's true that the Pittsburgh comrades made an error; we made the bigger error in running it in The Militant without discussing it with them. And then we made a little bit of an error in our New York open letter. The Pittsburgh comrades are among the most likely ones that are going to use this because they've got a strong YWLL and CP tradition there. I think in St. Louis too, maybe, where the CP's a little bit strong. These are the comrades we want to encourage to use maneuvers like this.

Our orientation first and foremost is to run candidates for president, vice-president, governor, senator, congress, board of education, sheriff, everywhere we can, and not to flirt anywhere with the CP. I don't believe there is any of that. And not to let the CP off the hook on Chile or anything else like that in our press.

I'm interested in Tom and Joe's views on the Browder campaign. I always read Trotsky's main disappointment with our response to the Browder campaign to be that we weren't running a presidential candidate, we weren't campaigning for a labor

party candidate, the Northwest Organizer wasn't carrying on a big campaign for a labor candidate, so we were stuck. He didn't present it as a good. He presented it as a lesser evil, something we were stuck with since we didn't move on it and think it out earlier.

Novack:

In applying this tactic on the electoral arena our aim is to raise questions in the minds of as many CPers locally and elsewhere as possible and cause the greatest amount of trouble for their leadership. Precisely because of the change in relationship of forces and the contradiction facing the CP ranks, we have more opportunities of doing it, provided the tactic is applied correctly and in time.

I think that in a good many cases we can have a certain measure of success in that. I agree with Jack that we're going to have more and more chances to attempt the maneuver over the next few years. Milt's approach seems off to me.

Kerry:

There's another point apropos of that letter to the Daily World Doug read. The very fact that we give critical support, no matter what the criticism is, comes as a shock to many of their young people because they've been told that the Trotskyists are anti-Soviet, anti-Communist, counterrevolutionary and so forth and so on.

Britton:

I remember that when we gave critical support to Aptheker in 1966, we took the occasion to write an open letter in The Militant to Hal Levin, an "independent antiwar" candidate, who wrote in complaining that we weren't supporting him, but supporting the rotten CP instead. So we used that for a peg to explain why we think it's principled and why we do it to oppose the politics of the CP. I think we could do something like that sometime during the 1974 elections if we have occasion to use the tactic. I think it would be helpful because some of these questions are on the minds of other people. If we say the CP is so bad, why do we urge a vote for their candidates?

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Los Angeles, Calif.
Oct. 31, 1973.

To the Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

Recently the Political Committee approved a proposal of the Pittsburgh branch to give critical support to a candidate of the Communist Party running in the present elections. Several weeks before that the PC voted to approve a request to give critical support to three candidates of the C.P. running in New York City.

As you know, last spring the Los Angeles branch, with PC approval, gave critical support to a C.P. candidate. The results of this tactic were rather scanty. It was reported that a leaflet describing the SWP position was distributed at a C.P. campaign meeting attended by 25 people of whom two were under age 50. That is all.

Mercifully, the L.A. support received virtually no publicity. One of our comrades accidentally overheard someone ask Dorothy Healy, at that time a leader of the C.P. who has since resigned, what they would do in the face of Trotskyist support of their candidate. "We will ignore it," she replied. And ignore it they did.

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 C.P. 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 C.P. candidates."

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

This trend seems apparent to me as I do not know of any special conditions that justify giving critical support to the three C.P. candidates in New York and the one in Pittsburgh, except that this is supposed to make it easier for us to approach C.P.ers and YWLLers, the same reason that was given in the L.A. case earlier this year.

I believe that this is not sufficient reason to use this tactic, especially since important world events now cut across the narrow results that can be obtained by giving critical support. Since the party is giving critical support to so many C.P. candidates, I believe it would be a good idea to review what this tactic was supposed to achieve and how it was supposed to be used in the first place.

My recollection is that this was discussed at some length in the 1930s when we first adopted the position of advocating a Labor Party based upon the unions. Previously, our position was that we would support a Labor Party, if it was formed, but not to advocate it because there was insufficient support for such a party at the time. The rise of the CIO changed that and made a Labor Party a realistic possibility. We then changed our position and began to advocate such a party.

At that time some comrades brought up the problem of what we would do if a Labor Party did appear, that is, would we be obliged always to give it critical support? The party leaders replied that we would not. They explained that in some instances we would even run our own candidates against those of a Labor Party. They said this was a tactical question and that we should be flexible on all tactical questions and decide them in accordance with conditions existing at the time and not by rigid formulas.

This, of course, applied to other formations such as groupings that arose in unions or among oppressed minorities to run candidates only for a single election. We were not obliged always to give such candidacies critical support, even though in principle, it was permissible.

Some general criteria were established at that time for using the tactic of critical support. First, the main purpose of it was to encourage independent politics, that is, independent of and against capitalist parties as contrasted to class collaboration politics. Second, recipients of our critical support would have to represent the working class or oppressed minorities. This could be determined usually by the types of organizations that sponsored candidacies, for example, unions, ad hoc committees support a Black candidate, etc. Program was not a criterion. Third, such movements would have to represent substantial numbers and not just small sects.

In fact, sects were specifically excluded even from any consideration for critical support on the grounds that supporting them would not do anything for the idea of independent politics. Such groups were usually isolated and outside the political mainstream. The Socialist Labor Party is a good example of this. We have never even considered giving critical support to the SLP even though it would not be a violation of principle to do so.

In arguing for giving critical support to C.P. candidates in this period some comrades point to Trotsky's position in 1940 when he advocated giving C.P. presidential candidate Earl Browder such support. We had no candidate of our own at that time.

Trotsky's purpose was to break away and recruit a few hundred C.P.ers. However, SWP leaders with whom Trotsky raised this proposal were of the opinion that there was more to lose than to gain in using the tactic. Their view was that it would put us in a bad light with union militants who were allied to us in the unions but who did not support us politically and usually voted for Roosevelt. Trotsky did not push for his views in the party; he wisely withdrew when he saw the SWP leaders were firm in their views.

Further experience proved that the SWP leaders who did not want to support Browder were right. It was precisely in this area, among left-wing and militant unionists who had been Democrats on election day, that the party recruited impressive numbers a few years later, after they had a chance to get additional experience with Democratic Party politics during the war and to our political positions.

It should be recalled that in 1940 the C.P. had about 100,000 members in the party and Young Communist League. They

had a great deal of influence in unions and other organizations. In Los Angeles they had 10,000 members in the party and youth. It was estimated that Communist Party views were anywhere from persuasive to decisive among two and a half to five million people in the United States. They were not a sect, in the usual meaning of the term. Therefore, it was quite proper for Trotsky to raise the possibility of giving them critical support.

However, today the picture is different. The C.P. is actually a sect now. Even though they represent an obstacle to our growth, it is not as formidable as it was 30 to 40 years ago. That is the reality.

To return to the latest example, that is, Pittsburgh, the PC approved giving critical support to a candidate of the C.P. running for a relatively unimportant post, something like the L.A. incident last spring. This approval was given after the coup in Chile, which caught the workers there unprepared, and for which the Stalinists in that country bear primary responsibility. The American C.P. supported the Chilean C.P. line for all three years of the Allende regime.

Should not the events in Chile have had some influence on our attitude towards the American C.P.? I think they call for an extended and wide attack on the C.P. 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.

The Militant should carry a series of articles, to come out later as a pamphlet, explaining in great detail just how the Stalinist-reformist bloc in Chile led the workers to defeat. It should contrast the workers' response to the fascist-military uprising in Spain in 1936 to the response in Chile, even though we don't yet have all the facts from Chile.

In Spain the Stalinists had virtually no influence to speak of in the unions. That is why the Anarchist, Left Socialist and POUM workers seized arms very quickly and stopped the fascists in their tracks. They fought for three years before a combination of Stalinist treachery and lack of a Marxist party brought defeat.

In Chile, the C.P. and Socialist Party controlled the workers' organizations and lulled them to sleep. That is the reason, the main reason, for the two different initial responses.

No matter how much criticism is contained in critical support, we must still ask those who hear us or read our press to vote for the C.P. candidates. This seems to me to be a monstrous way to proceed at this time when Gus Hall and other C.P.ers are trying to explain away the defeat in Chile with an outpouring of lies and slander. Ordinary horse-sense, to say nothing of dialectics, should dictate no support of any kind to the C.P. Not at this time!

This, of course, does not preclude our giving support to movements to save victims of the generals in Chile, including the Stalinist, as we already have.

In the Nov. 2, 1973, issue of The Militant an article (page 18) from Pittsburgh explains the attitude of our branch there to the C.P. candidacy. It says in a letter to the C.P.

candidate, "In spite of the deep political differences between our parties, we are urging Pittsburgh voters to vote for you in November as the candidate of a party in the socialist movement running against the capitalist parties and candidates."

This statement has plenty of support in it but I cannot find any criticism. Critical support, especially of Stalinists, is supposed to be 99% criticism and 1% support. It is supposed to support the C.P. the way a rope supports a hanging man, as Lenin put it.

I cannot think of worse formulations than those contained in this letter, addressed to the C.P. candidate. It prettifies him instead of exposing him as a substitute for a genuine independent who would have contested the mayoralty and not some less important post. It gives the C.P. credit for being a "party in the socialist movement" without by so much as a word explaining that the C.P. is not at all "socialist" even though it is a party functioning within the working class. The C.P., by the way, is Stalinist and not socialist.

And just what is this "socialist movement" that the letter refers to? Have we gone through all these decades of fighting against and differentiating ourselves from every kind of reformist, Stalinist, sectarian, anarchist and everything else that got in the way only to discover that we are all part of a "socialist movement"? What is the difference between the Pittsburgh "socialist movement" and the European "new mass vanguard"? I would like very much to be instructed on this point.

The Militant story from Pittsburgh is an incorrect and harmful way of putting our position. It leads to a revision of how we have always characterized Communist parties. This could have been avoided, if our branch there had directed itself to a head-on attack on the C.P. instead of giving its candidate support. I cannot say critical support as they do not mention any criticism. The reference to "deep political differences" between the C.P. and SWP explains nothing and can only confuse readers, especially new readers.

The tone of the Pittsburgh letter is what could be expected in a polite argument between two alumni at a university club. The letter reeks of politeness and paternalism. It seems to say, "We are all good fellows; we just have some differences, even deep differences."

Completely forgotten are the lessons we learned from Trotsky. The Communist parties are working class organizations but at the same time, where they are strong enough, they are the greatest obstacles to the socialist revolution. That is the dialectic of this question as demonstrated so tragically in Chile only a few weeks ago.

We used to say Stalinism is reactionary "through and through." Now the American C.P., which is completely Stalinist, has been promoted to "a party in the socialist movement." The truth is they are a party of the anti-socialist movement.

The same issue of The Militant (page 19) gives details of results obtained in the critical support tactic used in New York. All in all these results appear rather sparse. Little space is devoted to explaining differences between our party and the C.P.

In one place the article says that the SWP Open Letter to the Communist Party "urges the Communist Party to support the four SWP candidates where the C.P. is not running." This is suggested as a reciprocal exchange for support given by the SWP to three C.P. candidates.

This nonsense, that is, hoping for a favorable response to such an offer, which is how a reader would interpret it, is a measure of how far our party has gone from the original and correct conceptions of using the critical support tactic. This is practicing the politics of the absurd. It is more like horse-trading in the style of the French Ligue Communiste and Lutte Ouvriere.

The same article reports that an SWP candidate, replying to a question from a C.P. supporter about the differences between the C.P. and SWP, used the example of C.P. support for Herman Badillo in the Democratic primaries in contrast to our position. In itself this is not incorrect but it came several weeks after C.P. treachery in Chile became plain for anyone to see, if attention is called to it by our speakers and representatives. The opportunity to expose Stalinist class collaboration by tying together the Badillo and Chile events was missed.

The responsibility for these unfavorable events in Pittsburgh and New York are due to following an incorrect policy in giving critical, and not very critical at that, support to the C.P. at this time.

In light of the above, I propose to the Political Committee that a discussion of this whole question, of the tactic of critical support, be inaugurated within the National Committee. Added to this, it now is apparent, is the necessity to clarify once again our position on Communist parties and Stalinism. The party must be re-educated on these points as the present positions in the New York and Pittsburgh branches is dead wrong.

Comradely,
s/Milton Alvin

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

December 6, 1973

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 NCIC 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 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 contend 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,
s/Doug Jenness
for the Political Committee

Los Angeles, Calif.
Dec. 12, 1973.

Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

I have the letter of the Political Committee dated Dec. 6, 1973, signed by Doug Jenness, replying to my letter of Oct. 31, 1973. The arguments made therein are so wrong and open the door to so many harmful effects for our party that I am forced to once again take up this question, I hope for the last time. In addition, I must call attention to what are obviously dubious methods of exchanging polemics. If we are going to discuss or debate a question, it serves party interests best to describe the position with which one is in disagreement accurately and without implying ulterior motives for which there is not a scintilla of evidence.

I shall take up a few points on the level of principle and tactics, both of which are involved in this discussion. Both require further explanation.

Your response to my criticism of the formulation that the Communist Party-USA is part of "the socialist movement" is that this "is not a good formulation." I believe that it is more than that; I think it represents a complete misunderstanding of our estimation of the CP and opens the door to principled errors.

But before going into that I must respond to some other questions raised in your letter. You say, "However, if you are suggesting that the Stalinists are no longer a petty-bourgeois tendency within the workers movement, then we disagree." (your emphasis) I do not see how you could possibly draw such a conclusion, if you read my letter of Oct. 31.

I wrote about the CP, "... it is a party functioning within the working class." And further, I stated in the same letter, "The Communist parties are working class organizations..."

This should be sufficient to indicate that I am not proposing any changes in our fundamental appraisal of the class character of the CP. Yet in your letter you once again cast doubts upon my views in this respect by stating that the recent Stalinist betrayal in Chile is not qualitatively new. This implies that perhaps I think this new betrayal calls for a change in our fundamental position. But I made no such proposal; I reaffirmed our traditional position. I do not want to characterize this kind of polemic at this time.

However, I would like to know if the Political Committee is of the opinion that I am trying to change our position on the CP-USA. I think it far more likely that those who place the Communist Party in some undefined "socialist movement" are trying to change our position and your strictures should be addressed to them.

Your letter says you are not clear about my characterization of the CP as a party of the anti-socialist movement. I did not spell this out as I took it for granted that anyone in our party who is familiar with the history of Stalinism and the CP-USA knows whether this organization is part of a "socialist movement" or an anti-socialist movement. I refer you to the voluminous works of Leon Trotsky, James P. Cannon and many

other Trotskyists, and, if you will permit, to the series of articles I wrote for Intercontinental Press entitled "Fifty Years of Stalinist Treachery."

In the fourth article of this series, published in the Oct. 8, 1973, edition, I wrote, "In order to survive, the capitalist class must have the help of strong currents among the workers and peasants that support its hold on state power. This is supplied by world Stalinism and reformist socialism.

"The Stalinist contingent is the more important part of this support, since it exploits connections to countries that have had revolutions. In this way it fools many well-intentioned but poorly informed people. For example, the loss of thousands of youth who were miseducated and then demoralized by Stalinism in past decades in the United States stands as a historical crime of enormous magnitude.

"The continued existence of Stalinism is indispensable to capitalism. As soon as enough people realize that Stalinism is in the service of capitalism, the death knell will sound for both."

This excerpt from my article merely repeats what all of us have said many times. This is what I mean when I say that Communist parties are part of the anti-socialist movement. Up to now, no one has protested anything in the articles I wrote on Stalinist treachery. If you do not agree with the above, I certainly want to know about it.

A careful reader of both The Militant and Intercontinental Press, after reading the above and the article from Pittsburgh that places the CP-USA in the "socialist movement" would certainly be mystified. I think the Political Committee should take a stand on where the CP is to be found, either in the "socialist movement" or the anti-socialist movement. It cannot be in both places at the same time.

When I wrote my letter to the Political Committee on Oct. 31 I was under the impression that the formulation "a party in the socialist movement," as a description of the CP-USA, was only an episodic but important mistake caused mainly by looking for reasons to give them critical support. After I mailed my letter additional information that I did not have at the time came to my attention.

I sent for and received a copy of "An Open Letter to the Communist Party from Norman Oliver, Socialist Workers Party Candidate for Mayor of New York." Referring to the three candidates of the CP that the SWP supported critically, this letter states, "We support Gomez, Henning and Stevens because they are running against the capitalist candidates. Voters in these races will have a choice between casting a ballot for the capitalists or for candidates from a party in the socialist movement." (emphasis added) The disease of seeing a "socialist movement" and the Stalinists ensconced comfortably within it seemed to be spreading.

Now we have not only the Pittsburgh Open Letter but also the New York. Both use the same formulation, that is, that the CP-USA is a part of a "socialist movement." If this were all, perhaps the Political Committee would conclude that I am making too much of a stir over this.

However, after mailing my letter on Oct. 31 I came across an educational bulletin turned out by the Young Socialist Alliance in August 1967, that is, more than six years ago. I had not previously read this bulletin. It contains two reports and summaries made in July 1966 to the New York membership of the SWP in connection with elections to be held the following November. One report and summary, made by Barry Sheppard, explains why the New York SWP executive committee proposes giving critical support to a prominent CP figure, Herbert Aptheker, running for representative to congress on a "Peace and Freedom" ticket. The other report and summary, by Jack Barnes, explains why it is proposed not to give critical support to several other candidates, non-CPers, running for various offices. The latter report does not concern us.

Comrade Sheppard, in one part of his report, states, "The Communist Party is our major opponent in the socialist movement." (emphasis added) The disease is spreading! Here it is again! But that is not all.

Later in his report, Comrade Sheppard turns to what I have characterized as horse-trading, or rather attempts in that direction. After saying that we would put the CP on the spot by demanding critical support from them for our candidates, including one for governor, in exchange for our support to Aptheker, Comrade Sheppard goes on to state, "If they should support us that would be a major victory internationally. Think of the leverage it would give in countries where there are mass CPs as in France and Italy if Trotskyists there could say that the American Communist Party says that you should vote for the Trotskyist SWP." Comrade Sheppard later softened this perspective by saying that we should not expect this but he also held that it is possible.

From these examples it becomes clearer that putting the CP-USA in the "socialist movement" and trying to do some horse-trading on candidates with them have a history in our movement, unfortunately.

Here again, the candidacy of Aptheker, a widely known Stalinist writer and leading spokesperson for the CP for House of Representatives is used as a screen to conceal the real CP policy which was and is to support capitalist candidates for important offices. The CP did not run a candidate for governor in that election as we did.

In Boston, where our branch extended critical support to a candidate of the YWLL in the recent elections, an Open Letter issued by our branch stated, "We will continue to urge the people of Boston to vote for you for School Committee and ask you to support my campaign for City Council." This was signed by SWP candidate John E. Powers, Jr. Comrade Powers did not credit the YWLL or the CP with being members in good standing in the "socialist movement," but did attempt some horse-trading, which must have failed as nothing that I know of was reported in our press.

Once again all these attempts failed to jolt the Stalinists in France and Italy who survived our election campaign unscathed. I suggest that some other ways should be found to influence French and Italian Stalinists; the methods used so far that I have mentioned above indicate there is something lacking. If we exposed the true nature of Stalinist electoral politics instead of what each instance of critical support to the CP does, perhaps

we can jolt the American CP, if not those of France and Italy.

The Political Committee must decide just where it places the CP, in a "socialist movement" or, as we have for years, in an anti-socialist coalition based upon class collaboration. The CP cannot occupy both places at the same time.

Although you admit that the results of giving critical support have been "relatively modest," in another place in your letter you refer to anticipating "...that there will be more, rather than fewer, opportunities to successfully apply our tactic of critical support to CP candidates." (emphasis added) You can't have it both ways. If the results have been "relatively modest," which is something of understatement, then it is inappropriate to speak of successful applications.

You write that our aim is to "...break a few members away or discourage others from joining." Why do we have to legitimize CP electoral politics in order to obtain such meaningless results? Why can't we "break a few members away" without underwriting Stalinist politics? You do not say.

By giving critical support to CP candidates, who are in reality only acting as screens to conceal their class collaboration politics, your policy aids the CP in this deception. It is logically impossible to give critical support to a CPer and at the same time explain the nature of the CP campaign and its main purpose which is to ward off criticism of class collaboration politics from their members and supporters. That is why explanations of CP electoral policy, insofar as it is represented in an occasional "independent" candidacy, is largely missing from our propaganda. Your policy has succeeded only in whitewashing the "independence" of CP electoral politics.

As a matter of fact, if Stalinist policy is understood for what it is, it would exclude from the very start the idea of giving them any critical support because it is not independent in the first place. It is only designed to fool the unsophisticated and it is a disgrace to assist the Stalinists in this kind of venture.

This applies with equal force to their candidate for mayor in New York. The CP could afford the luxury of appearing to contest the mayoralty because everyone knew the Democrats could not lose. Where there is a possibility that a CP candidate would take enough votes to effect the outcome of an election from a capitalist candidate favored by the Stalinists over another candidate, the CP does not contest this office.

This is what happened in Los Angeles last spring when the CP ran a fake campaign for controller but did not enter a mayoral candidate against the Black Democrat and ex-cop Tom Bradley. They openly supported Bradley. We were unable to explain these shenanigans because the branch gave critical support to the CP candidate for controller. What a price to pay!

I propose that we reverse the policy of legitimizing fraudulent Communist Party candidates and instead expose the Stalinist real policy.

You refer to the article in The Militant of Nov. 23, 1973, published after I had written my Letter to you. Permit me to add an additional point. The article states, "...a vote for its (CP) candidates would be seen as a vote against the capitalist

parties." This is said in reference to explaining why the SWP urged voters to cast their ballots for the three CP candidates running independently. Just who would "see" these candidacies in this way is not explained. However, only the most naive people are taken in by the kind of candidates the CP is offering to which the SWP has given critical support.

The article would have been more accurate and effective if it had explained that the CP fakers run some candidates for relatively unimportant offices as a screen for supporting the main candidates of capitalist parties. This is what the article should have explained instead of complimenting the CP for running independent candidates. This is an example of how an incorrect policy leads, unwittingly I hope, to making it appear that we approve of Stalinist chicanery and are taken in by them.

Your attempt to bolster your position by using the example of Trotsky's proposal to give critical support to Earl Browder, CP presidential candidate in 1940, omits what I wrote on that point in my letter, while at the same time tossing out more hints that maybe I am trying to smuggle in a change in our position on Stalinism.

You have forgotten a few things. First, the Browder candidacy was not a screen for supporting a capitalist candidate because the CP disapproved all capitalists in the race. Second, the CP was a large party and had mass influence at that time. Third, the SWP did not agree with Trotsky on his proposal. I think the Old Man was wrong on this point and I frankly said so in my letter. If you now think he was correct, you should say so.

My letter pointed to the fact that in principle it was proper for Trotsky to make his proposal. The SWP leaders thought it was not correct tactically. That is a good deal more than can be said for the policy of giving critical support to CP candidates who are running for the sole purpose of pulling the wool over the eyes of their members and followers.

You have also forgotten that we gained no recruits to speak of from the Stalin-Hitler pact and other crimes you list as preceding Trotsky's proposal. The Stalin-Hitler pact was signed in 1939, in the year prior to the presidential election. If we got nothing out of that, the prospects for recruitment as a result of giving critical support to Browder became very dim.

Your letter did not respond directly to my request that a discussion be started within the National Committee on these disputed points. However, distributing the correspondence to NC members does this in an informal way and is satisfactory to me. I request that this letter be distributed in a similar way.

Comradely,
s/Milton Alvin

Los Angeles, Calif.
Feb. 27, 1973.

Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

At last night's branch meeting a motion was passed to give critical support to a Communist Party candidate, Bill Taylor, who is running for controller in the local elections. Of course, this is pending approval by the Political Committee. The election is nominally non-partisan and we do not have a candidate for this post. The CP is running only this one candidate. His election propaganda openly identifies him as a CP leader in this area. This latter point is a departure from previous policy followed for many years.

I am writing this letter as I opposed the motion to give critical support and want to give you my views before the PC makes a decision. Of the other NC members and alternates here Harry, Oscar and Edwards spoke in favor of the motion. The others did not attend any of the three meetings that took up this point. I assume that you will hear from the Executive Committee and that they will motivate their position. The EC unanimously supported the motion.

The motivation expressed by virtually all the speakers who supported the motion boiled down to the fact that giving critical support would enable our people to approach CPers and especially YWILLers for discussions. I do not challenge this but believe that this must be weighed against other considerations.

For about 15 years there has been a radicalization in this country. I need not go into any details on this as a great deal has already been written by us on it. We have pointed our campaigns at the milieu created by this radicalization and not at the CP which has existed largely at the periphery of the movements that emerged from the radicalization.

Among a huge number of radicals who have been produced in this period, I believe an overwhelming majority, the CP is known for its conservative and disruptive acts and is disrespected as a result. We have also had a good deal to say in connection with this and I need not dwell on it.

In my opinion the present campaign should be directed at the general radical milieu, on the campuses, high schools, anti-war elements, women, Blacks, Chicanos and other oppressed minorities. The CP should receive only such attention from us as is indicated by their participation in the election campaign. If we give critical support to Taylor, we are obliged to vote for him and ask others to do so as well as expressing our criticism of his program. I think that explanations of why we are taking such a stand unnecessarily handicaps our approach to the radicals who may very well raise a few eyebrows when they learn we are giving support, critical support to be sure, to a Stalinist.

In trying to find experiences from the past I brought to the attention of the branch the 1940 decision not to support Browder, the CP presidential candidate, even though we had none of our own and despite Trotsky's view that we should give him critical support. The arguments of party leaders who discussed this with Trotsky were that militant unionists who were close to us would not understand such a position. The CP was dis-

credited in those days and our party thought it would be a disadvantage for us to be identified with their campaign in any way.

On the contrary, I also told the branch, in the regroupment period that followed Khrushchev's revelations we made a turn towards the CP and its periphery. The circumstances then enabled us to influence a considerable number of people who had been under CP persuasion. We were able also to penetrate right into the CP itself.

While the present situation is not, of course, identical with either of the two above, it is more like the first than the second. But even that is not decisive in reaching a decision. What is of importance is just what giving critical support would gain for us and what it would lose. My opinion is that we can talk to the YWLLers just as well without supporting Taylor as we can if we do. Our people are already doing this, it was reported at the branch last night.

As I said at the branch it is unfortunate that not a single person who supported the majority in the debate mentioned the matter of the party's orientation, either for the whole past period of the radicalization or the present. The majority supporters obviously came to their conclusions on the basis of very narrow considerations, that is, the opportunity to approach YWLLers. I believe that a broader conception of our orientation is required.

Some speakers took up the shift in electoral politics that Hall indicated in a recent report to the CP leadership (the pamphlet "A Lame Duck in Turbulent Waters"). Past experience should caution us to take Hall's seemingly new stand with a considerable amount of salt. We should wait to see what they do and not take it for granted that they are going over to a position of independent politics just because they talk about it. The Taylor campaign hardly indicates an expression of the new CP policy. He is running for an obscure post. The CP is not contesting the mayoralty or any other posts that attract far more attention than that of controller.

While the vote in the branch was somewhat one-sided in support of the motion to give critical support, 44 in favor, 14 opposed and 8 abstaining, I hope that the PC will reject the proposal for the reasons I have given above.

Comradely,
s/Milton Alvin

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

March 30, 1973

LOS ANGELES

Milt Alvin

Dear Milt,

At its March 23 meeting, the Political Committee voted to concur with the Los Angeles branch's proposal to utilize the critical support tactic in relation to the campaign of Bill Taylor. Your letter urging the PC to reject the recommendation of a majority of the branch to grant such critical support was distributed to the committee and considered by it in reaching its decision. I want to briefly outline my thinking on the central point you raise in light of the PC discussion.

You say that, "Among the huge number of radicals who have been produced in this period, I believe an overwhelming majority, the CP is known for its conservative and disruptive acts and is disrespected as a result." Consequently, you say, "If we give critical support to Taylor, we are obliged to vote for him and ask others to do so as well as expressing our criticism of his program. I think that explanations of why we are taking such a stand unnecessarily handicaps our approach to the radicals who may very well raise a few eyebrows when they learn we are giving support, critical to be sure, to a Stalinist." The implications of your argument go beyond this specific campaign in Los Angeles. If valid, your position would exclude the use of the critical support tactic in relation to the CP on a national scale.

The concensus of the Political Committee is that it is unfortunately not true that the overwhelming majority of people who have been radicalized so far in the course of the radicalization, 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 contend with the American CP for some time to come.

The tactic of giving CP candidates critical support can be useful in countering their politics. Of course such critical support is totally different from the kind of support we have extended to La Raza Unida Party candidates in recent elections, for example, since it should consist of total criticism of their

program and perspectives. The only element of support is that we ask people to vote for them as against the capitalist parties. We can utilize such critical support in situations like the one in the current L.A. elections to point to the contradiction in the CP's running its own candidate for controller, in order to more effectively give backhanded support to the Democrat Bradley's campaign for mayor. Since the SWP is fielding a ticket in the elections, with a candidate for mayor, there is a working-class alternative to the capitalist candidates, which we can use to expose the CP's class-collaborationist position, and the critical support to the Taylor campaign would complement this. It would help us reach YWLLers and others with our positions, and can aid us in intervening in their internal disputes around the Gus Hall speech on the CP's electoral line.

We have utilized this tactic in relation to the CP successfully a number of times in the past. Tom remembered an instance in New York in the mid-forties, when Ben Davis ran as an open CP candidate. Our critical support at that time forced the CP into a public debate, where they rejected our support for a vote for Davis. A few years ago, we utilized the tactic in relation to the Apthekar campaign in Brooklyn, and more recently in the Pat Bonner-Lyons campaign in Boston. This latter forced the YWLL to attempt to refute our criticisms in their paper and defend their class-collaborationist politics. Comrades who were around in 1946 can check back into the 1946 bound volumes of The Militant to get an example of how we hammered away at the Ben Davis campaign with our critical support tactic.

There is one unfortunate aspect of the situation, and that is the lateness of the decision to utilize the critical support tactic. The branch would have been able to make better use of it if the branch discussion occurred earlier, and if the branch decision was communicated to the PC more quickly. As it stands now, there is little time left to do much with the tactic.

Comradely,
s/Barry Sheppard
National Organization
Secretary

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Los Angeles, Calif.

April 3, 1973.

Barry Sheppard

Dear Barry,

I have your letter of March 30, 1973, in which you outline your thinking on the issue of critical support to the local CP candidate Taylor in the elections. The only reason I am responding to your letter is that these things have a way of turning up years later in educational bulletins, like a letter or article of Comrade Dobbs on a critical support question that arose in the L.A. branch. The question at that time concerned a candidate for City Council named Atkinson. I believe the PC was wrong in denying our branch permission to give critical support to Atkinson. I believe that the PC is wrong to approve support for Taylor, if the reasons you give in your letter are the basis for the decision.

You say in your letter: "If valid, your position would exclude the use of the critical support tactic in relation to the CP on a national scale." However, why can't the same thing be said about your position, that is, if your reasons are valid, it would make it mandatory for us to give critical support to all CP candidates?

Unfortunately, no prescriptions can be used that are good for any and all occasions. I don't think much of the examples you give of previous instances when we gave critical support because in each case circumstances were different. You will recall that I gave two examples in my letter; one in which we disagreed with Trotsky and the other when we gave critical support.

I don't see why we cannot "hammer(ed) away," as you call it at the CP without necessarily giving critical support. Your position seems to imply that in order to attack the CP we first must lay the basis by giving them critical support. I reject this and am sure you do too.

I don't know why the last paragraph in your letter is addressed to me. I had nothing to do with the delay in bringing this before the branch or any other delays. The proposal was sprung on the branch without anyone not on the Executive Committee knowing that it was under consideration. One member of the EC told me she knew nothing of the matter as she had not been able to attend the meeting where this came up. She was more surprised than I was to hear the Campaign Manager, Comrade Starsky, make this proposal in his regular weekly report.

In his remarks Comrade Starsky held out the possibility that in exchange for our support of Taylor the CP might support our slate in the elections. He said this would have international repercussions of the most important nature. Of course, I felt compelled to reply to this nonsense and told the branch that to expect the CP to support our slate was completely unrealistic.

In your letter you mention that the CP is running Taylor in order to more effectively give backhanded support to Bradley, a Democratic running for Mayor. For your information, the CP is not giving Bradley backhanded support, they are supporting him openly and unabashedly. I cannot see why it is necessary for us to give Taylor critical support in order to attack

the CP for supporting Bradley.

Finally, I must confess that it makes me unhappy to read a lecture on the necessity to pay attention to the CP, that they are our most important opponents and will continue to be so for years to come, etc. I have held this view for some time and you know it. I have written the editors of The Militant on numerous occasions urging that more attention be paid to the CP and so on.

Comradely,
s/Milton Alvin

Los Angeles, Calif.
April 6, 1973.

Barry Sheppard

Dear Barry,

I answered your letter of March 30th on April 3, before the PC minutes of March 23 arrived here. Therefore, I did not know that the correspondence from Comrade Stu Singer, my letter of Feb. 27 and yours of March 30 would be attached. However, I did say in my letter of April 3 that "...these things have a way of turning up years later in education bulletins...." While the above mentioned attachments to PC minutes are not quite the same thing they do have a fairly wide distribution.

I mention this because I mistakenly thought your letter of March 30 was a personal one since in it you wrote, "I want to briefly outline my thinking..." (emphasis added). Also, the minutes do not indicate anything regarding either the discussion in the PC or the vote. I must ask, therefore, that my letter of April 3 and this letter be distributed in the same way as yours and Stu's.

First, I have a correction on what Stu wrote. He said, "The only serious objection to critical support to Taylor was raised by Milt Alvin." This is obviously wrong as 14 comrades voted against the motion to give critical support and a few of these took the floor. Their opposition was just as "serious" as mine. Eight other comrades abstained from the vote and this must be put down to doubts on their part that either side in the debate was right. In my letter of Feb. 27 I gave the figures in the voting, something that Stu failed to do. His letter gives the impression that I was alone which was not the case.

There are one or two matters that I would like to say something further about. First, the idea that critical support we gave Davis in New York, as you say Comrade Tom recalled, more than a quarter of a century ago, has absolutely nothing to do with how tactical questions should be decided in 1973. We are not discussing the question of principle on which it is obvious we are in agreement. The same thing applies to the other examples you gave, that is, the Apthekar and Pat Bonner-Lyons.

If you will look back on the dispute over the Atkinson case, which I mentioned in my letter of April 3, you will see that I said his connections with the Democratic Party were not as close as those of Frankenstein, a UAW vice-president who ran for mayor of Detroit and who got critical support from us. Frankenstein was not only a leading Democrat in Detroit but the official Democratic Party endorsed his campaign and supported him for mayor.

Atkinson, on the contrary, while holding a post as a director, one among others, of the California Democratic Council, did not consider himself nor was he looked upon by anyone else as a leader of the Democratic Party. The CDC was then a noisy faction in the Democratic Party in which the Stalinists functioned. It never was able to impose its views on the party as a whole.

When I introduced the differences between Frankenstein and Atkinson in an effort to bolster my argument and if we could support the former why couldn't we support the latter, Comrade

Dobbs replied to me that support of Frankenstein was not to be taken as a precedent. Of course, speaking generally, he was right as it is impossible to arrive at correct tactics through precedents. Even though Atkinson never got the support of the official Democratic Party here I agree with Dobbs' position that precedents from years ago cannot be useful in the present.

Since I don't want to drag this whole thing out very much further I will not take the space to indicate just what the differences are between the situation in 1946 and the present. Comrades who are interested can, as you suggest, look back at our press of 27 years ago. However, if they can't find it there, it may be pertinent to remind ourselves that at that period in history, during the mighty postwar labor upsurge, when the CP was at a point in its development far stronger than it is today, when Stalinists stood at the head of numerous unions including several international unions, when their influence was many times greater than it is today, when they even got something for the victory of the Red Army over Hitler, before the Cold War and the witch-hunt, before their leaders were jailed under the Smith Act and before they were expelled from many posts in the CIO and before many other things, including the Khrushchev revelations, things were not quite like they are today.

Finally, I must say in this letter, even though I would have preferred not to, that I have not been at the tail end of our movement in looking for ways to hammer the Stalinists. I have written numerous articles for The Militant on this theme and even one for the ISR, at least one in recent years. I have submitted to Intercontinental Press a 50-year history of Stalinist treachery which as a summary record written on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the emergence of Stalinism in the world labor movement, runs 78 typewritten pages triple spaced. I don't know if IP will use this.

Finally, before anyone else shouts "sectarian!" at me, as one young comrade mistakenly did in our branch, I wish to state that when there was a good opportunity to intervene in the CP and its milieu, that is, in 1956, I was in the vanguard of those who took that stand. In fact, I know of no other SWP member who beat me to that punch.

Comradely,
s/Milton Alvin