

Los Angeles, Calif.

Feb. 1, 1974.

Dear Jack,

If the letter attached to this note, in an envelope, arrives before you leave New York on your trip, don't open and read it until you return. The matters in it can wait.

Comradely,

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Milton Alvin.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Feb. 1, 1974.

Jack Barnes  
New York, N. Y.

Dear Jack,

I have your letter of Jan. 24, 1974, and am glad to hear you will be here in March.

I am writing in response to some of the items in your letter because I would like this to be on the record and also because it is obvious that there is still a good deal of misunderstanding in the PC of what I am talking about. Your letter starts with "We discussed your January 15 note at Tuesday's PC meeting." The Jan. 15 note I sent merely asked about my letter of Dec. 12, 1973, which had then not yet been acknowledged. Should I assume that it is this letter that the PC discussed? I don't know.

If I can take it for granted that some of the remarks of Tom Kerry and Joe Hansen in the transcript of the PC discussion that went out in the mailing represents the opinion of the PC, and the transcript did not say anyone disagreed with them, then there is not much left to discuss insofar as future activities in the field of critical support to Communist Party candidates is concerned.

Tom said we should be much more selective in this field, one of the points I tried to make. Joe Hansen said, "In weighing who we give critical support to, I think we should rule out candidates who are advanced by the CP for the simple purpose of facilitating some maneuver that they're carrying out in the Democratic Party. As a token candidate, we're not interested in that." This is exactly what I am trying to get at.

However, I don't see how Joe's and Tom's remarks, which I think are entirely in agreement with my ideas, at least on this point, can be reconciled with your statement to the effect that, "We're going to be doing more of this maneuver and not less of it," and the following in the letter to me from Doug Jenness dated Dec. 6, 1973, in which he writes, "However,

we anticipate that there will be more, rather than fewer, opportunities to successfully apply our tactic of critical support to CP candidates."

The transcript has you saying, "I don't think they run non-token candidates. I don't think there's such a thing." If this is the case, and I agree with you that it is, then will you please explain to me how a speaker for our party during an election campaign can get up and say to an audience that the formally independent candidate of the CP, like Bill Taylor in Los Angeles last spring, is running for controller, a relatively unimportant post, only in order to take the heat off the CP leaders and pull the wool over the eyes of their members and supporters, so that they can put their major effort into supporting Tom Bradley, a Black Democrat and ex-cop, and then ask the same audience to vote for Taylor anyhow? If this is what our speakers are going to say, people will surely think we have taken leave of our senses.

I think this is the point that still remains to be clarified between us. Can we at the same time expose the phony character of CP token candidates and ask people to vote for them? I say we cannot and we would make ourselves ridiculous if we did. I am confirmed in this by the fact that those token candidates that were supported in Pittsburgh, Boston and Los Angeles, just to name a few, were not exposed as such by our speakers or in our press, according to available reports. By asking people to vote for them our speakers were prevented from exposing the real nature of their campaigns. At least there is some logic in this, even though the basis for it is wrong.

This is not a tactical error or something that results from lack of selectivity on our part. It is an error in principle because by remaining silent on the token character of such candidates the party helps the CP to put over a deception and swindle on its members and followers.

It would be principled and much better in every respect, I am adding for the benefit of those who are concerned about getting to talk to Cpers and YWLLers, if we told them about the fake campaigns being put over on them by their crooked leaders, rather than trying to embarrass them or something like that by giving critical support to phony candidates.

In his remarks Tom said, "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." I don't know where Tom got the idea that this is what I think. He cites no source. I do not believe that and did not write that in any of my letters to the PC. I think, as I have previously written, that we should pay more and not less attention to the CP and YWLL.

For example, some of the comrades, according to the transcript, and Doug in his letter to me of last Dec. 6th, cannot understand why I brought the coup in Chile into this discussion. I must confess that reading this makes me sad. Joe, Hansen is reported as saying, "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." Doug's letter had similar remarks, nothing qualitatively different.

Do we only wait for qualitative differences to appear? Do quantitative differences have no importance?

I think the coup in Chile represents a historic defeat of the proletariat of that country and not just an episodic setback. I hope I am wrong about this but that is how it looks to me. It is also a setback for the entire Latin American revolution. I think we should have mounted a far more extensive campaign around this event than we did and that we should have placed far more emphasis on the treachery of the Stalinists than we did.

I tried to indicate this before news from Chile virtually disappeared from the daily press. I wrote a letter to Comrade Malik Miah, Nov. 13, 1973, who has an article in the pamphlet "Tragedy in Chile." In my letter I noted that his article pointed out the similarity between the events in Chile and the fascist generals' uprising in Spain in 1936. I called his attention to the differences in the two events explaining that the Spanish workers' immediate response to the fascists was to form military detachments and take the field against them and that they fought for three years before Stalinist treachery and lack of a revolutionary party defeated them.

In Chile, on the contrary, the initial response of the workers was far weaker. I pointed out the reason for this was the lack of Stalinist influence among the workers in Spain in

1936 and their overwhelming influence in Chile in 1973. Unfortunately, Comrade Miah did not see fit to acknowledge my letter. I brought out the same idea, with considerably more forcefulness, proposing a world-wide campaign by all Trotskyists, in my article for our internal bulletin dated Oct. 24, 1973, which was not published. (I agreed to not publishing this article)

On the other hand, when I wrote a letter last May 29th to the YOUNG SOCIALIST suggesting that the paper "...should have something about the YWLL or the American CP in every issue of the paper," I got back an immediate reply from editor Rich Finkel, a comrade I have never met personally and, as they say, would not know if I fell over him in the street, thanking me for the suggestion and inviting other comments and ideas. Hurrah for Comrade Finkel!!! He treats correspondence like Trotsky did, that is, he answers letters. I hope his example will be followed by others.

What I think should have been done on the coup in Chile is furnish every member of the SWP and YSA a printed copy of the remarks of the Chilean CP leader in which he assured everyone of the generals' loyalty to the legally elected Allende government. Our comrades should have been encouraged to seek out every Stalinist member and sympathizer they could find and demand an explanation. We should have challenged the CP to debates about the events in Chile in every city, every branch, every campus and anywhere else we could find them. Is it too late to do this now? I don't think so.

Our speakers who did deal with the coup, I cannot say anything about because I heard only Fred Halstead in Los Angeles. While he made a good enough speech in general, he went far too easy on the Stalinists in my opinion. I called this to his attention, but unfortunately, only after he had returned from a speaking tour on Chile, visiting about 20 places from here to Pennsylvania. You see, I could have helped Fred make what seems to me a necessary correction in his speech, if I had known he was going anywhere. But no one tells me who is coming or who is going and I'll have something to say about that later.

Despite all the articles and pamphlets the party put out on Chile, and despite all the meetings held, I am of the opinion that the question was handled in a routine

manner where it deserved a large-scale campaign. What else can one deduce from the remarks in the transcript and Doug's letter which points out (how profound!) that what the Stalinists did in Chile is not qualitatively different from what they have been doing for years.

Anyone with a feel for politics, by which I mean strike while the iron is hot, would have used the Chilean events of September, coming right at the time of our fall election campaign, to beat the god-damned Stalinist traitors over the head. Instead, THE MILITANT article I referred to in one of my previous letters reports that one of our speakers slammed the CP with a cream puff because they supported Badillo in the Democratic Party primary for mayor of New York. Isn't this swallowing a camel and straining at a gnat?

In the transcript some of the comrades were critical of my reference to the CP as a sect. This is either an unfair criticism or a misunderstanding. If you and they will re-read what I wrote you will see that I was referring to the size of the CP now as compared with their past, the 1930s and 1940s, and not making a political characterization of them. I don't think we have any disagreement on this, if what I wrote is correctly understood.

Finally, on the critical support issue, I note that Tom Kerry and Joe Hansen are now in agreement with Trotsky's proposal of June 1940 that the SWP give critical support to Browder's candidacy for president. In previous letters I have already explained that it was quite proper for Trotsky to make this proposal from the standpoint of principle. The CP was not pulling the wool over anyone's eyes in this campaign. They had to oppose both the Republicans and Democrats and not, as in 1936, support Roosevelt by campaigning under the slogan "Defeat Landon at all Costs," while nominally running Browder. I have also explained that I agree with those SWP leaders who disagreed with the Old Man for tactical reasons and will not repeat here what I wrote then. However, I would like Tom and Joe to say if they think we would have given support to Browder in 1936, if we had not then been in the Socialist Party and supporting Norman Thomas. I am very much interested in how they would reply to this, especially if they reply in the negative.

Here is what Cannon wrote in his "Struggle for a Proletarian Party," published at the end of the faction struggle in

the SWP in 1939 and 1940. The original article was published in the internal bulletin near the end of the faction fight which was concluded in April 1940. "Everyone knows the crisis has dealt heavy blows to the imposing movement of Stalinism. With the signing of the Soviet-Nazi pact the flight of the Stalinist fellow-travellers began. They could stomach the Moscow Trials but not the prospect of coming into collision with the democratic government of U.S. imperialism. After the Soviet invasion of Poland and then of Finland, the flight of the fellow-travellers became a rout. This wild migration attracted wide attention and comment. We ourselves contributed our observations and witticisms on this ludicrous spectacle." (emphases added)

You will note that Cannon says nothing about any flight of CP workers. The fact is that the Stalin-Hitler pact sent some strong tremors through the CP and its periphery but they did not lose much of their membership. And we gained no recruits from them. I know because I was in New York then and recall Stalinists who came up to our headquarters looking for some enlightenment which we tried to furnish. But we were unable to win over any numbers to speak of.

After the first flurries over these unexpected events, the CP managed to pull itself together and, by and large, lost only what Cannon mentions, that is, some intellectual fellow-travellers. They retained their main ranks and strong positions in the unions and other organizations. Next, about ten months went by, and in June 1940, when the discussions with Trotsky about giving Browder critical support took place, we had still made no dent in the CP but did, as Cannon also points out, lose a good number of our own fellow-travellers as well as the whole petty bourgeois opposition in the party.

I ask those comrades who have changed their minds and now think we should have given Browder critical support this question: If we could gain nothing from the CP as a result of the Stalin-Hitler pact and the invasion of Poland and Finland in ten months, what reason is there to believe that we could gain anything from them by giving Browder critical support? I call attention once again to the fact that when the turn came in 1943 in the political situation here and other parts of the world, and our movement began to grow, the recruits came to a large extent from precisely those elements that Trotsky had described as good unionists who voted for Roosevelt on election day.

Now, we should understand that the SWP leaders

were much closer to this situation than Trotsky could possibly be and it turned out that their judgement was better than his on this question. As I implied in a previous letter, Trotsky knew how to give some consideration to associates in the field and when to defer to their position. He did not raise his view on this point formally.

It is my own opinion that over the long period of years that we have battled the CP, that is, since 1928, except for the first few years when almost all the recruits came from the CP, the Stalinist leaders have pretty well succeeded in poisoning their members against us and when they leave the CP they don't come to us except in very few instances. Even the Khrushchev revelations that dealt such a hard blow to the CP yielded few recruits for us but we did succeed, especially in those branches that seized the opportunity, to deal them some hard blows.

Another twelve months went by between the time of Trotsky's proposal of June 1940 and Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. We still had gained nothing from the CP and when they changed from a "peace" position to a jingoist one at that time, we gained nothing either. If you will read some of their writings, for example George Charney's "The Long Journey," which I reviewed for the ISR during Tom Kerry's tour of duty as editor, you will see that he tells about how happy the CPers were to "get back into the mainstream" after Hitler's invasion of the USSR.

I mentioned earlier something about Fred Halstead's tour on the events in Chile and that I heard his forum speech in L.A. but knew nothing about the tour. Generally, and I am speaking only for myself and not other NC members in this area, I find myself very poorly informed on what is going on to say nothing about exerting any influence on any question. I am constantly called by comrades and asked questions that I am unable to answer and receive suggestions to do something or other that I cannot respond to.

There is a different attitude in the younger generation of party leaders from the one we used to have and which, I have been informed by Jim Cannon, he learned from Trotsky.

Jim once told me, and I want to record that this is the first time in all my years in our movement that I am quoting him from a conversation and not his writings,



that Trotsky taught him in the very early days of our movement that he should pay close attention to the views of leading comrades in the field and especially to criticism. I should also explain that I would not quote Jim on this point without his permission and without giving the source except that the Cannon-Trotsky correspondence seems to have disappeared and is not available for reference. This is a real loss, unless it can be found.

Perhaps I can best make this point with an illustration. When George Novack, one of the older generation of leaders, was in Asia last year he wrote me from Tokyo that he would be returning to New York via Los Angeles and asked me to arrange a meeting of NC members here to get a report from him. I did this as a matter of course; we were accustomed to getting such reports from anyone passing through. I need hardly say that I have never expected anyone to make special trips here for that purpose except in extreme cases. But if some party leader was going to be here anyhow, it used to be the custom to hold a session with the NC members.

When Fred Halstead returned from a stay in Argentina last year he visited Jim, I think twice, to report on what happened there. I support entirely the idea that comrades who visit other countries go to see Jim separately as he does not participate in meetings any longer and I always ask all comrades who come here on tours or other party business to see Jim, if I know they are in town.

Fred did not ask for an NC meeting to hear his report nor, as far as I know, did other NCers here ask him for such a meeting. So, as far as I am concerned, I am still in the dark about Argentina and the election campaign there except what I heard at a public forum.

When Barry Sheppard returned only recently from visits to Japan and India, I called his attention to the Novack and Halstead incidents described above. I told him that it may just be possible that an NC member in L. A. may have an idea of some value with respect to Argentina, Japan, India and other places. I explained to Barry that I am just as interested in these other countries as anyone he can find. He made no response to my suggestion that we hold a meeting of NC members; he didn't say yes, he didn't say no. But we had no meeting.

I regret to say that it is not in our tradition to withhold information from NC members who were in the Fourth International when it was founded and before many of

those who could today pass on such information were born. This is not the way to build, educate and keep a cadre. I hope you will take this to heart because if you don't, if you and other party leaders do not keep in much closer touch with leaders in the field, you will never build the kind of cadre a revolutionary party needs.

The most striking result I know of because of failure of leaders in New York to keep in close touch with leaders in the field and to give weight to their views is also to be found in Cannon's "Struggle for a Proletarian Party." It is in the part that discusses the auto crisis (pages 66 and 67). I recommend this for study to all comrades without necessarily making any correspondence between the present party leadership and the leaders of the petty bourgeois opposition against whom Cannon's remarks are directed.

Since this letter discusses the views of other NC members I request that it be distributed to the NC.

I have read the LT Political Resolution and am in agreement with it. I think you have done a good job on this. I am assuming that you are not going to publish my article criticizing the IEC-MT resolution and if you don't, it is all right with me.

Tybie and I are looking forward to your coming visit.

Comradely,

*Milt*

Milton Alvin.

P.S. Good luck on your journey.