

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING, No. 4, November 5, 1973

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Britton, Camejo, A. Hansen,  
J. Hansen, Horowitz, Jenness, Jones, Lovell,  
Morrison, Seigle, Stone, Thomas, Waters

Consultative: Dobbs, Kerry, Novack

Visitors: Evans, Finkel, Lund, North, Scott

Chair: Lovell

AGENDA: 1. World Movement  
2. Watergate

1. WORLD MOVEMENT

Waters, J. Hansen, and Horowitz reported.

Discussion

2. WATERGATE

Barnes opened discussion.

Discussion

Agreed that next issue of the magazine will be a special  
issue devoted to analysis of Watergate.

Meeting adjourned.

14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
November 6, 1973

TO POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached you will find Milt Alvin's letter of October 30 to the Political Committee concerning critical support to Communist Party candidates. His earlier letter concerning the Los Angeles branch recommendation for critical support was attached to the Political Committee minutes of March 23, 1973.

Comradely,

*Bev*

Bev Scott

NOV 5 1973

Los Angeles, Calif.

Oct. 31, 1973.

To 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 supporting 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 do not 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.

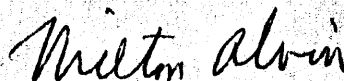


The same article reports that an SWP candidate, replying to a question from a C.P. supporter about the differences between the C.P. and SWP, used the example of C.P. support for Herman Badillo in the Democratic primaries in contrast to our position. In itself this is not incorrect but it came several 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,



Milton Alvin

P.S. I would like to have a copy of the New York SWP Open Letter to the Communist Party.