

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
April 12, 1973

TO NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached are two letters from Milt Alvin written in reply to Barry Sheppard's letter to him concerning critical support to a Communist Party candidate in Los Angeles. Comrade Sheppard's letter was attached to the Political Committee minutes of March 23, 1973.

Comradely,


Lew Jones

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 Democrat 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 educational 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 that 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 post-war 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