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Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

I would like to make some suggestions about the way the party has reacted to the energy crisis. Everyone recognizes that this development is of such wide scope that there is not a single individual in the United States who is not effected by it in one way or another, to say nothing about other countries.

There is also almost unanimous agreement that things will get even worse in a number of areas this year: further decline in economic activity, which has already started; greater unemployment; ; more inflation; continuing shortages of fuels followed by shortages in other fields; and, of course, a sharp increase in general dissatisfaction on the part of just about everyone.

Coming on top of Watergate developments, which have not yet been swept under the rug, the indications are that there should be a greater receptivity to our ideas as the year wears on. But this depends on how we present our programs.

The problem is that we are not making the best and most effective use of our transitional program, and in fact, sometimes using it incorrectly.

First of all, I think the nature of the coming developments requires that the P.C. have a special discussion devoted solely to how we can best meet the energy crisis that is moving ahead so quickly. It is certainly important enough to spend a good deal of time thinking out just what we should do and how we should do it. The results of such a P.C. discussion should be communicated to the branches for orientation and education of the membership.

Some comrades reply to such a suggestion

with the fact that we are going to have extensive election campaigns this year and that these will provide the vehicle for our views to get a wide hearing. But I mention this only because that is not what I am trying to convey. It is not only the mechanics of what we are going to do, such as the election campaigns, sales campaigns and so on, it is what part or parts of our transitional program should be used and how they should be used. That is what needs clarification.

I think I can best illustrate the point by using an example. In the January INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW there is a lengthy article by Steve Beck and Cliff Cornner on the energy crisis. It is an analysis of the question and near the end, as is usual, it makes a number of proposals. Even though this particular article concentrates on the oil end of the crisis and despite the fact the ISR is not an agitational publication, I am using this article as an example because similar articles, dealing with the energy crisis, have appeared in THE MILITANT.

Near the end of the article the following are proposed as solutions to the crisis: cut in the workweek with no reduction of pay; open the books of the oil companies; cost of living increases to all workers; a congress of the trade union movement that would invite the participation of Black and Chicano organizations, women, students and other sectors; a Labor Party. This is a pretty large order, it seems to me.

The article then goes on to say, "These fighting proposals can protect the rights and living standards of working people, but they will not by themselves solve the problems implicit in the energy crisis." Surely a reader would wonder why it should be worthwhile to try to achieve this imposing list of demands, and also a previously mentioned nationalization of the oil-monopoly blackmailers, if it will not do the job.

The article then goes even further and suggests the overthrow of capitalism and world planning. The authors don't say so, but it seems to me that these last two suggestions surely eliminate the necessity for all those that went before.

My point is that even though these are very good ideas, one and all, the way they are presented is

not the manner in which the transitional program should be used in this instance. In an article or brochure explaining what our transitional program is, in general, or in an election program, it would be proper to list many of our transitional demands. But if we visualize the present crisis as one in which our slogans should be propagandistic moving rapidly to agitational, and this is what I think is needed, then the presentation of a long list of transitional slogans is not the way to make the best of things at this time.

What I believe we need is a central slogan that would best represent a solution to the crisis. And this, in my opinion, is the demand that the entire energy industry, oil, gas, coal, atomic, etc., from the extractive end to distribution to ultimate consumers, be nationalized and placed under workers' control. Although articles in THE MILITANT recently contain this slogan, they do not stress it.

This demand goes right to the heart of the problem. We should make it our central demand and campaign for it. It has already been raised in various forms and usually only in part, by bourgeois commentators.

This particular demand is also of such a nature that it makes unnecessary the raising of some of the others that only clutter up what we have to propose.

With the mess that the capitalist system has produced I think concentration on nationalization would meet a favorable response in many quarters. It is superior to other slogans because it can be explained, if necessary, that nationalization under workers' control would eliminate the lay-offs now taking place, the need to open the books, the Congress of Labor and other demands. It would by its very nature lead to the idea of a Labor Party. Workers' control would protect workers by raising wages to meet inflation and from unemployment by cutting the hours of work.

I don't think a call for a congress of labor is the best central slogan that can now be raised because the situation has already developed to the point that a solution to the energy crisis can be proposed. That is nationalization. If the labor movement faced a problem where it was best to call for some kind of widely

representative gathering to discuss what to do, such as an election coming up, then a call for a congress of labor would be pertinent. But that is not now the slogan that can get the best hearing around the present problem.

If the demand for nationalization is popularized and meets obstacles from the capitalist class, as it surely will, then a proposal for a congress of labor will be appropriate to decide how to achieve the aim. But when we do raise this demand we should not weigh it down with additions to invite Blacks, Chicanos, women, etc., as they will be there anyhow as representatives of their unions. And I am sure that if such a congress is ever held, the students will certainly support it and come knocking at the door. It will be hard enough for unionists to win this demand without encumbering it with several other things.

At any rate, I believe our articles should have an agitational flavor and that the central slogan should be to nationalize the energy industry from end to end under workers' control.

Most of all, we should have a central slogan and campaign directed at the energy crisis. And it should be a combination of propaganda and agitation. I think the situation calls for this kind of response, which, of course, would be integrated into the coming election campaigns and other activities.

Comradely,



Milton Alvin.