

Two Criticisms of the 6-Hour Day Slogan

By ARNE SWABECK

Our readers have become acquainted with the criticism made by comrade Mihelic of the slogan, the six hour day without reduction of pay, which was adopted by our National Committee. Recently the "theoretical" leader of the official party, Earl Browder, also came forward with a "criticism" of this position. Thus there are two views on this question which, however, differ essentially in character. The first demands an exhaustive reply because it contains serious arguments defending a view. The second is of much less consequence because by its very stupidity it brands the arguments of this mediocre "theoretician" as having nothing whatever in common with revolutionary theory.

Comrade Mihelic presented his views for discussion. Browder evidently presented his arguments as the last word on the party line—that is, until the next "turn"—which is bound to follow. In this reply we present the views of our National Committee.

The April Communist contains an article by Earl Browder entitled "How We Must Fight against the Demagogy of Fascists and Social-fascists". In this article Browder condemns the Hoover "stagger plan"; but he also makes the "discovery" that the slogan for the six hour day without reduction in pay, as advanced by us means the same thing. Were that so, one might ask: "What about the slogan for the seven hour day?"

Browder exposes the "social fascist" usage of the six hour day slogan. In that he is closer to being right. We quote from the article in question:

"The Socialist party joined in the game with the slogan slightly modified to six-hour day and five-day week. This was immediately taken up by the Trotskyite renegades, as their own 'original discovery', and the Communist party was denounced by them as an enemy of the working class because it refused to join the chorus that extended from Hoover to Cannon."

A correction is necessary here. In the first place we did not denounce the Communist party as an enemy of the working class. We have the opposite estimate of the Communist party. But we do condemn its leadership for its failure to keep the Party on the correct revolutionary path. In the second place, we advance the slogan in the question as the six hour day without reduction in pay.

Does the Party Oppose this Slogan?

Revolutionary workers may think that there is somehow an unfortunate misunderstanding here. The party leadership cannot actually oppose the six hour day slogan. No there is no misunderstanding. It is the "theoretician" speaking officially. The extent to which such a false position may lead became very vivid in the recent arguments of I. Amter, one of the lesser "theoreticians". Of course we know that he will excel anybody in stupidity and put it into fifty pages of manuscript. He will rush in where angels fear to tread. And so, in an article in the Daily Worker about a month ago he actually denounced the demand for the shorter work-day as assistance to the Hoover "stagger plan".

Why does the party leadership oppose the six hour day slogan? How will it maintain that in contradistinction to it, the seven hour day slogan leads in the direction of the "revolutionary working class solution" of the unemployed problem. This it fails to explain, and there is no good explanation, because its position is false. Its position can lead only to preventing the revolutionary working class solution to the extent that it prevents the correct slogan of the six hour day without reduction of pay from becoming instrumental in rallying a class movement of the American workers. The reasons for the superiority, in the sense, of the latter slogan we refer to consider in the reply to comrade Mihelic.

WHAT ARE MIHELIC'S ERRORS?

Comrade Mihelic presented a seriously reasoned argument in support of his views on the slogan "the six hour day without reduction of pay". The manner in which he poses the question has its distinct value, and a discussion on that basis can become helpful toward further clarification. In his comments on the crisis and unemployment situation, as well as in his criticism of shortcomings in our position, and, what we might call our unemployment program, there is much which can be welcomed. We lay no claim to having as yet adequately covered the subject or to having presented an analysis and program complete in every respect. We are far from that and can well afford to discuss even further than this present scope.

However, there are some of comrade Mihelic's contentions which can by no means be accepted because they spring from an essentially false position. For example,

his two major contentions: First, that: "From the general angle of the unemployed struggle, the emphasis must be placed on the fight for social insurance"—as against the demand for the six hour day without reduction of pay. Secondly, he contends that the slogan itself should be "the shorter working week with no reduction in pay." Both contentions are incorrect.

In regards to the first contention we do not approach this problem from the point of view of counterposing the one slogan to the other or even counterposing its emphasis. The one slogan supplements the other and, when combined, help to make up a program of immediate demands.

Comrade Mihelic proceeds to amplify his contention by saying that social insurance places the chief stumbling block in the path of the capitalist's designs to use the army of unemployed against the employed. He adds: "Social insurance and the fight for it offers the chief instrument by which the unemployed and the employed workers can be united. If they cannot be united on this basis they cannot be united at all."

This is certainly an altogether too sweeping statement to make. We believe we are much more to the point in saying: The slogan for social insurance is correct. It is the one with the most immediate appeal to the unemployed workers. It is not to be conceived merely for purposes of ameliorating the present unemployed misery but primarily as a means of drawing into the orbit of the class struggle all those workers who suffer under this pressure. In this sense, it also becomes a means of advancing the struggle more directly and more specifically against the existing system of capitalism.

Granting of social insurance certainly becomes an important stumbling block in the path of capitalist designs, as do most actual working class gains. By way of comparison, it is well to remember that in the United States at present there are indications that some form of unemployment relief may be granted. Senators, governors, and others have to an extent put themselves publicly on record. Of course, all efforts would then be towards loading the whole burden of such relief upon the worker having a job. This does not in the least invalidate the slogan for unemployment insurance. Actual relief will be granted only provided the workers fight sufficiently for it.

While the capitalist class displays its hostility toward unemployed insurance we may take for granted that it will be much more hostile to granting the six-hour day without reduction in pay.

In this respect we may also refer to England and Germany with their experience in unemployment relief as an established system; miserable though this relief is. In the first country mentioned, the employers have already, as in the recent coal miners' strikes, offered the most bitter resistance to the shorter work day, and enjoyed the connivance of the McDonald government in this attempt. We may conceive of what the picture would be in either one of these countries with a serious working class struggle for the shorter work day and the opposition the capitalist rulers would offer in comparison to the irritation they suffer from the prevailing unemployment insurance.

There are already indications that they will rather retain the longer work day with more production of what becomes absolute surplus value, even at the cost of maintaining an unemployment insurance system. Marx has particularly emphasized how much dearer the absolute surplus value produced by the longer work day became to the heart of the employers than the relative value produced during the course of the shorter work day. Their motto is—keep the workers at the grindstone long hours, speed them up and they will pay for these out of work. Now to the second contention of comrade Mihelic. He says: "Granted that the six hour day could be obtained at once (which it cannot) even at this time it cannot be proved that this would provide jobs for all the jobless and even if it would, it would be only a question of a very short period before the situation would be the same as at present, due to rationalization, new machinery, and the law of surplus value. Thus social insurance offers the most permanent form of relief (even though it is not complete in itself) and places the biggest stumbling block in the path of the capitalist class."

From this point, comrade Mihelic proceeds to show the necessity of beginning at the very bottom and arrives at the conclusion that the slogan should be "the shorter working week without reduction in pay". This he also amplifies by first stat-

ing that, when we raise the slogan of the six hour day in a general manner we will succeed in nothing but appearing visionary. Secondly he states: "A reduction of the working hours can be won only by direct struggle with each separate set of bosses and not by pressure on the government and in that sense it surely is much different than the fight for social insurance."

We have no agreement at all with such views of the six-hour day slogan. We will much rather subscribe to Lenin's conception of the eight hour day slogan as stated in his preface to the pamphlet "May Day in Kharkov": "The demand for an eight-hour day, however, is the demand of the whole proletariat, presented not to individual employers, but to the government as the representative of the whole of the present day social and political system, to the capitalist class as a whole, the owners of all the means of production." (Collected Works, The Iskra Period, Book I, page 47)

This does not in the least put us in the position, against which comrade Mihelic correctly warned, of drawing a mechanical analogy with the period of the eighties and the movement for the eight-hour work day. But is it more visionary now to promulgate the slogan of the six-hour day than was the slogan of the eight hour day? Is the gap from the present work day to the six-hour day bigger than from the then prevailing work day to the eight hours? We think not. History gives no such proof.

What is, however, more decisive today is the fact that we are in the epoch of capitalist imperialism with its immense rationalization of production and permanent elimination of millions of workers from the productive process. During the decade ending 1929 it is estimated that productivity per worker increased 48.5 percent without any appreciable reduction of the work day. We have reached the stage of the development of capitalist production where the six-hour work day has become an even more potent need than the eight-hour work day when it was first advanced in the eighties.

The present epoch is also the one of proletarian revolution. This imposes so much more the duty upon us to advance the slogan of the six-hour work day precisely in the sense in which Lenin speaks of the eight-hour day slogan. In this manner, utilizing the slogan to assist in setting workers definitely into motion in the direction, not merely of obtaining relief, but of fulfilling its historic rôle.

The present conjuncture of the working class movement is not the same as during the struggles in the eighties. Today, it is rather a defensive curve occurring under a period of crisis, unemployment, and drastic lowering of the working class standard of living. But precisely in this are created the conditions and the possibilities for the coming rising movement. In this situation, the character of the six-hour day slogan is that of a bridge from the defensive towards the offensive. Hence, it becomes an effective means for preparing for the next stage of the struggle.

In regards to the practical organization for this stage, one is naturally tempted to ask: "Would the realization of the six-hour work day appear within the realms of possibility to the American workers?" We think so and do not conceive of it as visionary. This is attested to by the fact that the United Mine Workers in convention back in 1922, went on record for a fight for its attainment. Within the various railroad workers' unions there is today a growing demand for the six-hour work day. The attainment of the six-hour day would mean a real gain for the workers, and a strengthening of their position. The relief which it could afford from the unemployment situation could certainly become visible now to the workers.

We do not take the view that if the workers cannot be united on the basis of the slogan for social insurance they cannot be united at all. We think rather that the six-hour day slogan particularly possesses the quality of uniting employed and unemployed alike in the struggle. Nevertheless, we fully realized that the more complete program of our immediate demands, together with the proper pursuit of the fight on a revolutionary basis, is necessary to accomplish working class unity and to guarantee its correct direction.

Because of these various reasons, it would be entirely incorrect to substitute the slogan "the shorter working week without reduction of pay". Due to its indefiniteness it would not sufficiently furnish a clear pivotal point for the working class in this struggle. Moreover, the slogan of the six-hour work day without reduction of pay, and thus the better possibility of crystallizing a definite movement, would make it

that much more possible to shorten the existing work day.

It is our duty to raise this slogan in an effort to have the idea penetrate the masses. We must, with the small forces at our command, do our best to assist in organizing the fight for its realization and by all means to win the Communist movement as a whole to become active participants. The various slogans supplement one another and thus make up a program of immediate demands. One important part of these activities is to carry on class education. Only that can assure that the workers, when set into motion, take a definite direction along which each demand becomes a stepping stone to the revolution.

M. Malkin Expelled From Opposition

At the last meeting of the New York branch of the Communist League of America (Opposition) a resolution was adopted to expel Maurice Malkin from the ranks of the Left Opposition as a deserter unfit for membership in the League. Because Malkin has in the past been considered an active representative of the Left Opposition, we deem it necessary to announce this action to the Communist workers, to explain to them the causes for it, and to warn the militants that the Left Opposition rejects all responsibility for the recent actions of Malkin, which we have condemned.

What did Malkin's action consist of? At a time when the Left wing union (in the needle trades) to which he belonged, was under severest fire of its enemies; at a time when the liquidators of the Lovestone Right wing were concentrating all their energies to sow panic among the Left wing and drive it into the Schlesinger and Kaufman camp in wild disorder—at such a time, Malkin, without informing the Communist League or receiving permission from it, made a private deal with Begun, Kaufman's right hand man in the Right wing Furriers Union, as a result of which the "known Communist" Malkin, was to be admitted into the Right wing union under special privilege. While it is correct today for militants of the fur workers' branch of the needle trades to join the Kaufman controlled union for the purpose of building a Left wing within, Malkin's action had nothing in common with this policy.

For this he was put on trial by the New York branch of the Communist League. He twice failed to appear before the E. C. to answer the charge. Malkin knew quite well that at his hearing in the Left Opposition his action would be categorically condemned and repudiated. In an attempt to cover up his desertion from the Left wing movement, he is planning to repudiate the principles for which he was once expelled and persecuted by the official Party bureaucracy. He is now again trying to seek favor at their hands. We know that the Stalinist bureaucrats, who have no principles, are quite capable of whitewashing Malkin in order to strike at the Left Opposition.

The Left Opposition, however, has no intention of allowing anybody who claims or claimed association with it, to sail under false colors. Malkin's planned bargain with the Party bureaucrats is not a strengthening of our Communist party. It is a cheap and fruitless endeavor to cover up desertion from Communist principles in the trade union field. Against this desertion we put the Communist workers on guard. Malkin's departure from the Left Opposition marks a departure from the revolutionary class struggle. His plan to rally to the Party apparatus is a camouflage. The Left Opposition, by its expulsion of Malkin, remains true to the revolutionary principles of Communism, to the ideas and teachings of Lenin and Trotsky, to the task of regenerating the Communist movement by purging it of the opportunist corruption into which the present regime has led the party.

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BOSTON LECTURE

Comrade James Cannon will speak on the "Prospects of the American Revolution" on Sunday June 7th; 2:30 P. M. at Belmont Hall, 150 Humboldt Ave., Roxbury, Mass.

The meeting is under the auspices of the Boston branch, Communist League of America (Opposition). There will be discussion after the lecture and party comrades and sympathizers are especially invited.