August 6

To: the NAC and members of the national teachers fraction

From: the Bay Area Teachers Fraction

Re: the Selden-Shanker election

Dear Comrades,

On August 1, we received a communication from STeve Z. informing us, among other things, that the national fraction steering committee passed the following motion on our attitude toward the Selden candidacy:

"Motion: that we vote NO in UAC meeting on Selden nomination
that we abstain in meeting of Coalition
that we vote against Shanker in convention (not for PL)
Vote: two for (Tom, Sheila); DM abstains, he is considering suggesting abstention even in UAC after a strong statement, in view of no alternative candidate."

To put it mildly, this motion left us very perplexed. Clearly, it implies that we vote for Selden on the convention floor ("that we vote against Shanker in convention" but "not for PL"). Yet, it is our understanding that the July NAC motion would rule out such a possibility, as it states from the beginning: "In the usual sense of the term, it is quite impossible for us to extend critical support to Selden's candidacy." Further on, the statement that ". . . we do not urge delegates to repudiate Selden's candidacy in the absence of another" clearly implies that we play cool our opposition to Selden, not that we ourselves do not repudiate his candidacy. We would like some clarification on this from the NAC.

In fact, we are quite dissatisfied with the entire thrust of the fraction steering committee's recommendations for this convention which we think flow from an adaptationist methodology with respect to the elections. Furthermore, we find parts of the NAC's motion indonsistent with others in such a way as to leave the way open for such a methodology.

From our point of view, the Selden candidacy represents a step backward for the building of a rank-and-file movement among teachers, that to the degree rank-and-file delegates accept Selden's candidacy they are admitting their own inability to function independently of bureaucratic elements in AFT. All this is stated quite clearly in the NAC motion, itself written by Steve Z.

Then why support Selden? No reasons have as yet been given, but from individual conversations and implications of the NAC motion, we would assume it is because those who are closest to us in the AFT have decided to support Selden. Perhaps the closest thing to a political argument for supporting Selden is partly contained in the NAC motion explaining that for many delegates the real meaning behind their support of Selden is purely on grounds of anti-Shanker, that they are not really supporting Selden, just voting against Shanker.

While this may in fact be the motivation of some for supporting Selden, we fail to see how it should become our motivation, as a vote for Selden would clearly prove. Is it our position to vote for union candidates only because our friends are voting for them or because we will vote for anything as long as it is against Shanker? This was never part of our method before, even when we are in an insignificant minority. In fact, the IS fraction as well as Steve Z., who was not a member at that time, decided not to support Miesen in 1970 when he ran against Selden, primarily because he was not responsible to a caucus and because he had no program. And even though the New Caucus, at that time very small, voted not to support him, most delegates did in fact, because he was the only anti-Shanker candidate. (Now, presumably

Selden is). It seems to us that the same situation obtains today, even more so since he has been a loyal Shanker supporter and collaborator, an integral part of the bureaucracy, unlike Miesen, who was a relatively unknown national organizer.

In fact, opposition to both candidates represents a consistent anti-Shanker position, precisely because Selden has proven in deeds that his approach to teacher unionism differs only slightly from Shanker's. And this should be explained very carefully to our friends who are conveniently"forgetting" this fact.in the rush to unite behind Selden. Does saying this and not voting for Selden cause us to break with these delegates? Does this mean we cannot"lay the ground for work with them during the convention and in the future"? Certainly not. When we opposed Miesen in 1970 and at least partially in 1972 this was not true. Only the most conservative elements in the coalition would resent this. Those who have worked and collaborated with us would understand that this is a legitimate difference, one which our propaganda has openly discussed time and time again. Even more important, we at least would be pointing to a real future for an opposition movement and force those delegates who want to see such a movement to confront their own political ideas. This is precisely the role of revolutionaries when the rest of the movement succumbs to momentary pressures. In the context of the teachers union, the role of Selden, etc., to vote for him moves us backward, makes a real fight with Shankerism more difficult. To play this question cool, it seems to us, only aids and abets our enemies in the union by not pointing a different route.

The Bay Area fraction has voted for the following strategy as a substitute for that of the national fraction steering committee:

1. that we immediately try to convene a left opposition grouping inside the UAC to discuss convention strategy, including the question of Selden. Here, we try to convince people of the dead-end of Selden and to push the UAC to run its own candidate for president.

2. Assuming that the group does not want to push another candidate, we at least propose that it not endorse Selden and that it not enter the pro-Selden "coalition".

3. Assuming that we lose on these, we cannot go into the coalition ourselves to fight for"program." The coalition is purely a pro-Selden vehicle. To go in there means you have to support Selden on the Convention floor. Otherwise, how can we justify entry. Besides, conducting a fight around program in a Selden electoral vehicle is a fight for an illusory program, a program which will never see the light of day. The character of the campaign itself already predetermines the campaign's real program. Let us not perpetuate illusion's about what Selden's program really is. We would simply be providing a left cover for him, without ourselves or our politics gaining anything. (It is precesely here that the NAC motion calling for us to go into the Selden coalition leads logically to support for Selden without saying so, in fact denying it. How can we go into that coalition without committing ourselves to Selden since that is the sole purpose of the coalition?)

4. Finally, we propose that comrades abstain in the election, as we did in 1970. A vote for PL (or its equivalent) would be meaningless, not really a protest vote since Pl represents virtually nothing in the AFT. Furthermore, this position should be made public and the reasons given, perhaps in a leaflet put out by ISers and others who share this position (there will be others, though few in number). The nature of the leaflet should not be agitational, that is, it should not urge campaign against Selden, and for abstention. Rather, it should explain our reasons for abstention and why Selden is no real alternative to Shanker, that another must be built, but only on a political basis, etc., etc.

It should be understood that we regard the Selden question as only one, though important, issue at the convention and that we should make every effort to collaborate with others on issues of importante. Our fraction should very

seriously discuss these issues which will arise on the convention floor. Indeed, it is essential for us to do so, especially if the fraction follows our suggestions on the election. It is here that we will be able to demonstrate to other rank-and-file elements the seriousness of our union program.

Because of the differences that are developing over the election issue, we also recommend that the NAC attend the pre-convention fraction in Detroit, in case it should want to intervene more decisively in this matter. Has the NAC decided to leave the decision to the fraction? If so, we have not been so notified.

Looking forward to seeing you in Detroit.

YFTR,

Joel

Joel J., for the Bay Area Fraction