

Paid Time Off Proposed So Workers Can Stump

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A proposal that corporations give their employes two extra weeks off with pay prior to the November election to campaign for local candidates has been made by a

leading businessman. Lawrence S. Phillips, president of Phillips-Van Heusen Corporation, said yesterday that his offer to its own workers who request such an opportunity "because of the urgency of the matter and the divisiveness within the country."

He said that "corporate presidents—of large and small companies, but particularly small—should encourage their associates to take part in local elections. Involvement is terribly important . . . even in a bad year."

College Closings Cited

In discussing this proposal, which he compared to the spreading movement of planned college closings for the pre-election period, Mr. Phillips added, "I'm not really suggesting a permanent fringe benefit. But at worst, it's better for a company to shut down for two weeks while our system exists rather than for 52 weeks if our system is destroyed."

Few businessmen reached yesterday would voice an immediate reaction to the paid-time-off idea.

However, Harold Willens, president of Factory Equipment and Supply Corporation in Los Angeles and chairman of the Businessmen's Educational Fund, called it "in the self-interest of the business sector as well as of the country as a whole."

He said that "if the business sector involves itself in this fashion, I think that the majority of the people would work for peace candidates. It would become a national referendum in a meaningful kind of way."

Mr. Willens noted, "This is

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a precedent-shattering kind of thing and I would go along if we had enough companies to make it a creditable showing. If 100 Southern California companies were willing to do something like this, I would consider it worth doing."

Senator George McGovern, who has been active in the antiwar movement, termed Mr. Phillips idea "superb." It strengthens the concept when it is more than a student effort because it indicates some responsibility on the part of the business community."

The South Dakota Democrat pointed out, moreover, "it's a very generous thing. None of this is tax deductible."

Rising Pressures Cited

In a speech earlier this week at the annual convention of the Edison Electric Institute in Boston, Dr. Asa S. Knowles, president of Northeastern University, alluded to the pressures building up in corporations by workers wishing to participate more in the democratic process.

"Many employes will ask for time off to demonstrate on public issues," the university head said. "All of this will give rise to a need for new personnel policies."

Mr. Phillips, whose company has more than 13,000 employes and registered sales last year of over \$210-million, first proposed his plan publicly on Wednesday night at a joint meeting here of three business associations.

It came in the course of an off-the-cuff talk, although he had been thinking about the proposal as he pondered methods of helping to elect peace candidates to Congress.

Encourages Involvement

"The issue is not whether business will survive this year but whether the nation will survive," he said yesterday. "I am groping for the moderates who can no longer remain inactive. And in our company I plan to encourage all of our people to be involved."

Mr. Phillips observed that his phone "hasn't stopped ringing" since the proposal became known. "All those who have contacted me have reacted favorably," he said.

Mr. Willens, a co-founder in 1967 of the Business Executives Move for Vietnam Peace, also offered a couple of possible modifications of the Phillips plan.

"I would like to see the corporation and the individual employe split the cost," he said, "so that the individual knows that it costs him something to be a practicing citizen. I'm attracted to the overt manifestation of commitment, not only of the corporation but also of the person who works for it."

No Shutdowns Wanted

In addition, according to Mr. Willens, "it might be necessary to stagger the time off—perhaps having different groups get it for different one-week periods. I would not want to see a business hurt or forced to shut down."