

New York,  
March 22, 1974

John Benson,  
London

Dear John:

This is a long-overdue letter on the situation in France, that I promised you several weeks ago. You can imagine what happened: got back to Canada, then plunged into meetings, a tour of branches to report on WC, edited some internal documentation, etc., with the result that this letter (and other urgent business) was shoved aside. Then to New York, and plunged into IP assignment, more meetings, etc. Please excuse the delay.

I think the best thing is simply to send you my notes that I typed up in Toronto on conversations with a number of people. On looking them over, I think they are ~~fair~~ fairly clear, and retranscribing them into a letter would scarcely add anything, although of course it would make the notes easier to read.

Now, to explain these notes:

The most complete notes are those numbered (with circle around numbers) "1" and "2", on discussions with "Nemo". This is the comrade Christian Leucate (even that name is a pseudonym) who wrote the article in Quatrième Internationale's August issue on "Where is French Capitalism Going?". He is a member of IC's economics commission, is a professional economist, an editor of both QI and Critiques de l'Economie Politique, and was one of the PSUers the Ligue recruited in 1972 (along with Jean-Marie Vincent). He is a co-author of a pamphlet published by the Ligue of over 100 pages, on Why militants of the PSU quit the PSU and Joined the Ligue Communiste. While in the PSU he and Vincent conducted a revolutionary-tendency struggle; some of these documents are available in a mimeo'd brochure which we have here.

His companion, "Eléonore," is an Argentine, former member of Política Obrera. She speaks French fluently, and is able to read (and maybe speak) English. She tends to be more critical of SWP than ~~him~~ he is. But I'm not sure he has read anything published by the SWP. As the notes ~~xxx~~ explain, they have a group of about 10 around them.

This is the group that wrote the document on the "New Vanguard, or Construction of the Revolutionary Party," a critique of the European Perspectives Document of the majority that dissects and demolishes the concept of the "new mass vanguard" (in terms reminiscent of the Spanish LC and Karl) as a ~~xx~~ confusionist mystification, and counterposes building mass revolutionary parties with the method of the transitional program to what it terms the "stages concept" of the party in the EPD.

We are in the course of translating this document here for the Information Bulletin, I believe. However, I made a 12-page point-form summary of it last fall, and if I can locate it will send you a photostat of those notes.

The New Vanguard's document, mentioned above, was originally drafted for Contre le Courant tendency. However its authors decided not to join CLC since they thought CLC was unprincipled, a coalition of dissidents without a clear programmatic basis. They preferred to continue discussing with CLC, meanwhile contribute their own document, ~~and including~~ to the international discussion as well as the national discussion, and continue thinking through their ideas. They now seem to be ready to declare a tendency, in the framework of the national discussion.

Apart from Nemo and Eléonore, I do not know the individual members of this grouping well. I have met only two others. However it is my impression that they are closer to us than most of the people presently in CLC. There is a bit of a "workerist" aspect to some of the things they say. On the other hand they have criticized the LC for neglecting intervention in women's movement.

These are exactly the kind of people we should try to get to come to North America for a while, maybe this summer. I am sure if they could see the SWP in action, it would have a big impact on them. They are very interested in having further discussions with LTF'ers. Anyone passing through Paris who can speak French (and possible even ~~converse~~ leading comrades who can only speak English, certainly comrades who speak Spanish) should contact them. They would like to be notified in advance a few days, so they can arrange more formal (and useful) meetings.

\* \* \*

Item number "2" concerns the debate between the LC's economics commission and Mandel. There are four documents in this series so far, they are being translated here for Information Bulletin. Eddie can tell you about this ~~ing~~ debate.

Item number "3" ~~and~~ some notes I pulled together on the pamphlet cited above, where Leucate and others explain why they left ~~Ligue~~ PSU and joined Ligue. What is interesting here is their conscious rejection of centrism (as Nemo says, we didn't leave a centrist organization in order to get into another); their insistence on the programmatic nature of the political struggle, and their ~~sharp~~ criticism ~~of~~ of other currents in PSU for ~~depreciating~~ depreciating programmatic questions in favor of celebrating "forms of struggle" as the essential ~~and~~ determining factors; their belief that the Fourth International had under-

stood the "new forms" of class struggle, and its rupture with entrism; and the importance they attribute to the scope of the internal discussion within the FI, and the fact that the FI has avoided a split despite the presence of important differences within it. As well, the pamphlet indicates some ~~ix~~ inadequacies in their development at least at the time they wrote it. But it helps us understand the development of their political views of these people. I have the impression that others in the Nemo grouping come from PSU, although I understand that Eléonore has been in LC for several years.

\* \* \*

I won't say so much about CLC, since you are acquainted with some of their documents, and know some of them personally. The notes (numbered "4") refer ~~aminly~~ mainly to a meeting M-A, Peter and I and Dudi had with ~~them~~ leaders of CLC after WC. I think it is generally self-explanatory. The first few lines on the sheet refer to information we got subsequently that at a meeting of CLC members the weekend following our meeting, the tendency debated the question of whether to dissolve or not. Dumas' proposal for dissolution got 16 votes, Krasno's to continue got 13.

\* \* \*

Finally, on our LTFers. We had a number of conversations with them after the WC. Mary-Alice talked to Mona and Catherine in particular. Tony T. and I, ~~we~~ together with some of the PSTers, had two formal meetings with the whole group in Paris to report on the WC and discuss where we go from here. The big question that came up was: what is the LTF going to do to help build its little coterie in France? ~~xThey~~ Mona and Catherine in particular seemed to think it was contradictory for us to talk about the importance of the struggle in France in the next period, and yet refuse to send in a full-timer to give them leadership. Well, it was a long debate, rather heated at points I fear. I don't think we convinced M and C as to the impossibility, the political reasons against, doing what they proposed. ~~One~~ Several things became clear in the discussion, however. One is that few of the comrades have the perspective of staying in France. Catherine wants to go to the U.S. to continue her studies within the next year. ~~Ken~~ Ken is returning to U.S; in a few months. Mario and Estelle are planning now to return to Argentina. Mona may well decide to leave, she hasn't said no to the proposal to go to Quebec or New York. If she leaves (and possibly even if she doesn't) so does Ken. This leaves Georges (a Latin-American exile), our contact in Tours whom no one has spoken to (he didn't respond to a telegram I sent ~~xxx~~ him), Michèle

(you know her~~x~~ from last summer), Nestor (a comrade from Dahomey, living in France) and Annie-Françoise (Nestor's wife). The last three tended to agree with what Tony and I said about this problem of an LTF presence in France -- Nestor argued strongly along these lines.

So the debate was not resolved. On Alberto's suggestion, it was agreed ~~that~~ that they would continue the discussion among themselves, and Mona and Catherine might draft a letter to the LTF ~~xxxxx~~ steering committee setting forth their argument for extended material aid. The Argentines, by the way, behaved admirably in this debate; Alberto argued eloquently against a "public faction" in the International, and explained the importance of their relying on their own forces, doing what they could, etc. However, I had the distinct impression that part of the problem with M and C stemmed from previous discussions they had had (before the WC) with PSers in which possibly the latter had given an inaccurate impression of what was possible at this point in France.

We proposed a modest set of projects for the next period, and this was generally agreed on~~x~~. It included:

-- they should meet semi-regularly (maybe every two weeks, more often if necessary~~x~~, e.g. if ~~we~~ and when the situation inside LC starts to heat up);

-- they should continue and extend contacts with other dissident currents, discuss with them informally, find out what they are thinking, keep the LTF center informed;

-- they proposed to draft a few documents for the LC national discussion, at this point ~~xxxxx~~ signed by individuals. Topics like the national question in France (Brittany, etc.), the strik~~x~~ at Joint Français, the LIP struggle, problems in Chile work.

-- I suggested they draft something on the Union of the Left. ~~They~~ Catherine said no, there were differences among them on that. Some of the others of us said, fine, all the more reason to discuss it, and any other difficult questions. Have regular~~x~~ educationals, build the meetings around them. They agreed they would discuss the U of L more fully, maybe even try to prepare a document on it.

-- Some of us proposed they make efforts to circulate IP, sell subs to it (many students can read English), and make sure members of Rouge read the internal documents of international discussion.

The biggest problem they have is lack of confidence in themselves. None of them have had leadership experience. They are overwhelmed by the immensity of the task before them. To win the largest official section to Trotskyism!

...5

At present they are not ready to take on the responsibility of constituting a tendency. But of course there is big pressure on them to do so. We should be careful not to increase that pressure, even unconsciously. They would burn out very quickly. Our major task with them is to ~~XXXXXXXX~~ preserve them.

~~XXXXXXXX~~

\* \* \*

In general, the situation inside the LC is very explosive. It is not one conducive to calm, democratic discussion. There are big pressures on the organization -- from the external class struggle (Union of Left from the right, frustrations of far-left groups from the left), from the internal debate in FI (pressure to get rid of minority, settle the thing for all time), pressures within the organization which reflect some present difficulties (stagnation in membership, accentuating pressure for short-cuts, etc.). The biggest problem may be that the leadership is increasingly less able to give leadership against the "extremists" and "provocateurs". There is an ever-present and growing danger of organizational reprisals against any and all minorities. One of the first tasks of any dissident current -- and both the Nemo grouping and CLC seem to understand this, judging from what they have ~~ix~~ told us -- is the necessity for a united front tactic in defense of the democratic rights of minorities in the organization. No doubt we'll have some practical tests of this in the near future.

Oh yes, one more item of interest: there are rumors that Michel Field is organizing a tendency around the demand for a youth organization. This bears looking into.

Hope this is useful,

Comradely,

Dick F.

- encl: 1) discussions with Nemo Feb. 23  
2) conversation with Nemo, Feb. 26  
3) notes on PSU-Ligue Communiste pamphlet  
4) notes on krasno grouping.  
5) notes on New Vanguard's document (Nemo et al.)

P.S.: You might also be interested in some notes on our conversations with the Vietnamese. I am enclosing:  
a) notes on meetings of Feb. 5 and Feb. 11 ("1")  
b) notes on document from comrades inside Vietnam ("2")  
c) rough translation of reply by GBL in France to "b" above  
d) copy of letter from Peng to John Riddell on Vietnamese Trotskyists.

Dick Fidler's notes referred to in 3/10/72 letter  
discussions with Nemo. to Benson

1st (Feb. 23) - Eleonore (Diane) also present....  
with Alberto, Marie, Dudi and me.

he is acquainted with the Kompas critique of concept of  
new vanguard, and also with Enerucijada documents...  
thinks latter are very good.

asked them about their comments on the minority in  
the "annex" to their document on New Vanguard...  
did they still ~~agree~~ hold that view?

they said no, that when they had criticized LTF for  
being soft on Moreno's "rightist course" that had been  
written "under the influence of the League (Communiste)"

they were very interested in the PST, especially its  
work in the trade unions and how it works to expose  
Peronism, the question of slogans, maneuvers, etc.  
They subscribe to Avanzada Socialista since December,  
and read it very closely.  
They expressed no critique of PST work,

asked them what their differences with the LTF are.

they replied that they ~~had~~ did not know what their  
differences in action were with the minority

they thought that the nature of the debate in Int'l  
as it has been conducted to this point ~~is~~ was not such  
as to shed light on this question. Since the LTF  
role was one of defense of the achievements of Trotskyist  
movement up to this point, against the "revisionism" of  
the majority; i.e., the debate remained on a ~~2~~ very  
"fundamentalist" level.

correct

they still weren't sure we had a viable/alternative  
line on Latin America. As for North America, well,  
they thought it was a serious possibility that  
the very ludicrousness of the IT's positions in SWP  
prevented other members of party from looking critically  
at the SWP's majority's line. But they weren't sure  
they had ~~it~~ clearly defined differences with SWP line  
- altho they had many questions, in particular ~~it~~ relating  
to trade union work, and whether or not we had a coherent  
overall ~~exp~~ analysis of the radicalization that  
linked the struggles of "sectors" (blacks, women, students)  
to the proletarian struggle as a whole.

as for Europe, they recognized that our discussion was  
only beginning

thus, they considered a critical examination of what LTF-led  
sections in North America and elsewhere do as a crucial  
next step in their evaluation of the political line of LTF.

They had studied the documents of the 1971 SWP convention,  
as contained in the yellow booklet (Pathfinder) on the  
new radicalization (Revolutionary Strategy for the 70s)

said it was very interesting, our analysis of the different sectoral struggles, but there were problems. We had no real analysis of the economic situation, nor did we analyze the crisis of the bourgeoisie and its parties. It was a very partial analysis. Moreover, Diane didn't think we employed a class criterion in examining the radicalization. There was no analysis of the working class as such, where it is at.

The kind of intervention we proposed seemed to be built around the construction of different "fronts" in the various sectors. This could only result in a "dismemberment" of the transitional program.

Moreover, what did the SWP propose as a "consigne dep pouvoir" (a government or state power formula), that could unite the diverse perspectives of these sectors of struggle

for example, all very well to talk of black party, but how did we pose the question of a proletarian revolution to the blacks?

Nemo added, we agree that the struggles of these sectors can have a revolutionary dynamic, can certainly have consequences in the working class -- but you don't seem to analyze how these things affect the working class as such.

you have a ~~French~~ "sociologist" conception of radicalization just like Germain in his theory of the "new vanguards" (by this I think he means we develop programs and strategies for various sections of the masses, without elaborating an overall programmatic approach directed to the whole working class)

A very interesting discussion followed - & I attempted to explain how the SWP (and LSA/LSO) see the course of the contemporary radicalization, how we pose governmental formulae, how we link the struggles of Blacks, women, etc. to question of workers power, proletarian revolution, how we differed with Germain's theory of new mass vanguard (among other things, that we thought part of his error in not breaking down the "vanguard" into component parts and on that basis developing programmatic intervention into their struggles, around a global analysis of proletarian revolutionary process).

Told them how, for example, we ~~made~~ responded to the present inflationary price rises in the U.S., what kind of demands we put forward, how we attempted mobilizations with sectors of the labor movement, ~~why~~ the "specificity" of American labor (why the big battalions are not in anticapitalist action), the kind of work SWP comrades did & in trade unions at present time (leaning heavily on material in TU panel at Oberlin).

They were favorably impressed with this - claimed it was not what they understood the 1971 convention documents to say... They want us to send them material like Trade Union panel, electoral program of party, copies of Militant to illustrate above.

...3

What are their plans for the next period, we asked.

they say they now have a group of about 10 comrades, a few from outside Paris, who are in contact with each other, discuss more or less regularly.

they are thinking of constituting a tendency for the national discussion this spring.

what they are doing now is to work on two documents:

1) an analysis of the Union of the Left, and a critique of the League's approach to it during the legislative elections, much along the lines of the critique SWP and LC in Spain have made. (Must send them the Spanish document, letter to BP of LC-France).

they think that many of the key errors in the Ligue's politics can be discussed within this framework, and they ~~will~~ consider this question of the Union of the Left to be very important...

they think this document will be relatively easy to write, since their preliminary discussions among themselves have been characterized, they say, by a large measure of agreement on this question.

2) much more difficult will be the second document, ~~an~~ attempt to demonstrate what a "démarche programmatique" (programmatic approach) to the present crisis in France would mean, concretely -- that is, ~~draw up~~ more or less draw up a program for the LC. They say its present intervention, particularly in working class, is very ~~an~~ a-programmatic.

They are not sure they will be able to produce this document before the congress, ~~now~~ now scheduled for June. However they will try, and the very attempt will be useful, they feel, in clarifying their own thinking on the objective situation, and the revolutionary Marxist response.

They say that the majority leadership of the LC is ~~an~~ an empirical, empiricist "ouvrièreist" kick. There is a grouping around Clelia (Jeannette), Lourson, Radot and Krivine (Alain) who will produce a document spelling out such an orientation.

Roger has already drafted a document, tentatively titled ~~Comment construire un parti ouvrier~~ "Comment construire un parti ouvrier" (How to build a workers party), that they characterize as very empirical, bearing mainly on ~~the~~ organizational angles and approaches (implantation, etc.).

No one has a political, programmatic approach to the problem of getting into the working class, ~~they~~ they say.

Roger can not be counted on to develop such a program, since he is not very sophisticated, and ~~he~~ tends to equate an orientation to the workers with an orientation to the CP.



They think, however, that if Roger is isolated, he might be inclined to link up with others who do provide him with a programmatic approach. Thus they do not exclude some form of alliance with him. But they will have to elaborate the programmatic basis of such an alliance, they stress.

They think the national debate will be very hard, very difficult. They will be very isolated. They feel that the vast majority of the league's cadres are so uneducated and mis-educated that it is unlikely they can pick up ~~my~~ much support. They also fear very much that the majority leadership will undertake organizational reprisals against any minority which it can isolate, like them. They cite what the majority is already doing to Contre le Courant.

They are following developments with CLC very closely, are optimistic about possibilities of linking up with Krasno and others in the national discussion. They see themselves to some extent as a sort of theoretical "advance guard" for CLC...

Nemo reports that the Sept-Oct. issue of Critiques de l'Economie Politique will be a double issue, devoted to a debate ~~with~~ on Earm Mandel's latest book (Der Spätkapitalismus)...

from conversation with Nemo on  
economics debate with Mandel....  
Feb. 26/74

from Nemo's remarks:

must distinguish between Mandel's formulation  
and the use the militants make of them - i.e. they  
simplify his generalizations, apply them rigidly  
etc.

also, must distinguish between Mandel the economist  
and Mandel the leader of the Fourth International.  
He is much more competent as the former than the latter.

also, must keep in mind the conditions of the debate  
in the French section  
since 1968, the debate on the "analysis of the  
period" has always been somewhat crude.

since 1969, Mandel's prognoses have been tended to be  
increasingly mechanistic and "grossières" (crude)

the debate begins very late, and it is difficult for the  
comrades to understand.

the political bureau has refused to have a debate on  
economic analysis

the august 1973 article of M. on crisis of dollar  
started the "radicalization process" in the economics  
commission of the IC.

during the ensuing debate mandel has greatly nuanced  
his position

at stake: analysis of the role that economic crisis  
can play in social crisis.

the French section holds a simplistic position that  
the worse the economic situation gets, the better it is  
for the working class... this is the "idéologie moyenne" (average  
of the workers' work commission (commission ourière) ideology)

terms Mandel's tendency to ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ add economic crisis and social crisis  
and get "decisive confrontations" a form of "subtle economism"

~~XX~~

(the following are partial notes, not complete exposé)

since 1968, the Ligue's analysis of the period has been  
dominated by its understanding of the degree of  
maneuverability of french capitalism  
this is linked to their view that workers radicalization  
can change the character of the union of the left

mandel has an objectivist concept of class struggle  
from his speech at 9th world congress (political  
report) to his latest article in QI

....2

never clear from mandel's works whether he actually thinks there is a new stage (stade) of capitalism, different from the imperialism that lenin analysed

his concept of "neo-capitalism" is revisionist total confusion long cycles and a conjunctural characterizations.

e.g. the majority's political resolution - where they tend to talk of coming downturn like a new 1929

since, he has retreated somewhat

a secondary point - the question of "decline of American imperialism"

this is a superficial thesis, founded on the idea that the capacity for export of capital and commodities of U.S. is a relatively weakened share of European and Japanese capital.

not shown in facts - the recovery of european base of production and exports has as its base, increase in U.S. investments in europe their thesis doesn't take account of forms of interpenetration of capital in europe

we want to change the format and method of debate - e.g. thru special issue of the review (QI?) on the "crisis of imperialism"

a comrade named Pierre Salama (Salami?) who wrote an article Le Proces du Sous-développement in recent issue of CEP, is preparing a book (editor) on sub-imperialism.

if PST writes document on development of the bourgeoisie in latin america, this would interest them greatly - might want to include this in the book

~~REVISION~~

notes on PSU-Ligue communiste pamphlet... authored by  
Leucate et al.

interesting for a ~~22~~ description of centrism, ~~2~~ with very  
concrete examples given- much more precise than the rouge  
pamphlet on centrism

p 46 on - the debate/fight against Gauche prolétarienne  
and ultraleftism

"Une vision mécaniste de la 'montée des luttes' devait  
conduire celle-ci à méconnaître très profondément les formes  
de domination du réformisme sur la classe ouvrière ainsi  
que les conditions concrètes du développement inégal de la  
combativité ~~2~~ et de la conscience ouvrières....  
La célébration sentimentale de la révolte ouvrière et des  
luttes anti-autoritaires débouchait sur une fétichisation  
abstraite des formes violentes de l'action et de la spontanéité  
des travailleurs aux dépens de toute réflexion sérieuse sur  
les objectifs des luttes de masses et sur les conditions et  
les étapes de la prise de conscience de ~~21~~ la classe ouvrière  
et de son organisation révolutionnaire.~~22~~"

and so ~~2~~ on -- making forms of struggle determinant  
~~2~~ essentiel, etc.

ignorant toutes les exigences de la centralisation politique  
et de la lutte idéologique d'ensemble contre les appareils  
réformistes...

49 - necessity of a political intervention in the tu's  
around a program of struggle and internal  
democracy, against the bureaucracy.

also interesting for description of different currents in psu

~~xxxxg~~ e.g. fact that the revly marxist current in psu  
was from post-68 generation, and almost no one  
was from the old revolutionary-socialist current  
of early 1960s.

p 83 - section: The Fourth International and ~~22~~ Us

FI had shown itself capable of revising Trotsky's prognostic  
on stagnation of productive forces... (actually, Trotsky  
had noted that if no major extension of prole. rev'n in  
advanced imperialist centers, the class struggle could  
be set back several decades, and a new period of capitalist  
expansion could follow -- DF).

FI understood the ~~xxxxx~~ "decisive importance" of colonial  
revolution

e.g. chinese rev'n - proved that a party from  
the ~~third~~ third international could lead a revolutionary  
process (sic)

that the process of colonial rev'n, its importance,  
necessitated a re-examination of role of peasantry, often more

...2

FI understood decisive role of Vietnamese rev'n  
and the emergence after 1965 of new vanguards  
and in ~~XXXXX~~ more recent period, the contradictions  
of chinese foreign policy

thus FI understood the new forms of class struggle

also its rupture with entrism

also, the fact that since 1964 ~~(since)~~ that is, since turn  
in world situation, there has been no split in the  
fourth international - ont the ~~XXXXX~~ contrary

~~XXXXXX~~

"Quant aux arguments qui font de la IVème un bloc mono-  
lithique, figé, 'où l'on ne peut pas discuter', nous croyons  
y avoir déjà répondu en ~~xx~~ retraçant son évolution. Mais  
on peut aussi préciser qu'il y a aujourd'hui dans la IVème  
Internationale majorité et minorité, que le clivage (qui  
s'est fait au cours du dernier congrès mondial sur le  
problème de la lutte armée en Amérique Latine, la majorité  
s'y déclarant favorable) n'a apparemment pas nui au fonc-  
tionnement de l'Internationale, pas plus que l'existence de  
minorités dans toute une série de sections ne s'est traduite  
par des scissions et n'a paralysé leur développement. Et  
les problèmes à l'ordre du jour pour le prochain congrès  
mondial font d'ores et déjà l'objet de contributions  
divergentes avec une densité dans la circulation de l'infor-  
mation à laquelle le PSU ne nous a guère habitués."

86 - as e.g.'s of FI's intervention in mass struggles,  
mentions hugo blanco in peru, Bolivian POR's "armed struggle"  
ERP in Argentina, student struggles in Japan, Luxemburg...  
"Qui dirige le ~~XXXXXX~~ mouvement anti-guerre aux USA?"

102 - criticism of LC ~~forXXXXXX~~ having neglected  
some important areas of mass struggle, abandoning them  
to spontaneism and reformism. We think sometimes it was  
wrong, notably in the case of the women's movement. But  
it has never theorized this situation as one that should  
be permanent, no more than its has ~~falling~~ fallen into the  
primary economism of some revly gro ups.