

Report on Quebec Conference of LOR: January 7-8

By Chuck Petrin

This conference was organized by the Quebec National Bureau of the LOR for the purpose of informing and educating comrades on three points: 1) the new situation in the Fourth International; 2) the debate on "Euro-Communism" among left groups in France; and 3) youth work and youth organizations.

### I. The Fourth International

Paul Carignan presented a report that reviewed the evolution of the faction fight, the dissolution of the LTF and IMT, the fusions in Canada, Mexico, Spain, and Australia, and the new discussions that are taking place in preparation for the 11th World Congress. Several comrades asked questions during the discussion period about the various positions held by the LTF and IMT. An ex-LSO comrade attempted to summarize the differences -- in ten minutes -- without success, and it was then agreed that these historical questions would be better answered by individual comrades reading over the available documents.

### II. Euro-Communism

Francis Olivier presented a report along these lines: The CPs in certain European countries are adapting to the democratic aspirations of the masses -- their hatred of totalitarianism -- by taking some distance from the Kremlin on the issue of democratic rights in the Soviet Union. They do this in order to facilitate their class-collaborationist course, an attempt to improve their standing both with the masses and with the national ruling classes.

A process of "Social-Democratization" is taking place in the CPs; that is, there is a bigger and bigger break taking place between the policies of each national CP and the Soviet bureaucracy. There is not the same degree of subordination of interests by the national CPs to the Kremlin and it is not so easy for the Kremlin to quell opposition. If a new Stalin-Hitler pact were signed today, would all the CPs line up in support? Probably not. This is not a finished process by any means, but a tendency.

Still, there has not been and cannot be a definitive break by the CPs with the Soviet bureaucracy, because otherwise the CPs would lose their identity in relation to the Social Democrats. The key distinction between these two reformist currents is precisely the fact that the CPs owe their existence to the maintenance of the Soviet bureaucracy, whereas the Social Democrats owe their existence to the maintenance of imperialism.

We have a difference with the OCRFI on this matter. The OCRFI says the position of the CPs is essentially no different than before; they underestimate the crisis of Stalinism that "Euro-Communism" has exacerbated; they don't see the conflicting tendencies that exist, or don't attach much importance to them.

The Fourth International has to intervene in this situation, taking advantage of new opportunities to apply the united front tactic with the CPs and participating in discussions on the various issues raised -- democratic rights, what is the Soviet Union and what's happening there, what is Trotskyism, etc. We stand to gain from this.

### III. Youth Work and Youth Organizations

This was the main point taken up at the conference. There were six separate reports presented: 1) Olivier on Spain; 2) myself on the USA; 3) Deb Schnookal on Australia; 4) Olivier on France; 5) Gary Kettner on English-Canada; and Al Capp on Quebec. There was a brief time for discussion and questions.

First on the background to this discussion. At the time of the fusion in Canada, youth work was an unresolved question. Comrades from the four groups had different traditions and experiences: the LSA collaborated with an independent youth organization, the Young Socialists; the LSO carried out youth work through party fractions; the RMG and GMR tended to give less importance to youth work, particularly student work, and organized entirely through party fractions. Comrades felt at the time of the fusion that there were no insurmountable differences, but agreed to a period of common discussion and common work to sort things out. A compromise was settled on, whereby the Young Socialists would continue to function in the three cities of English-Canada where it existed and that in all other cities youth work would be organized through fractions of the RWL-LOR. The comrades hoped to build an integrated national leadership for this work.

Experience, however, with this arrangement has convinced comrades that a speedier resolution of the question is necessary. It has been difficult to collaborate on the work, and there is widespread uncertainty, of course, as to how in the long run things will be organized.

A formal discussion has already been opened in English-Canada, with a joint RWL-Young Socialists discussion bulletin. Comrades are proceeding from the basis of the last political resolution drafted by the Young Socialists national leadership, as a contribution on the conjunctural situation facing youth. From there the comrades plan to take up

the broader questions of the international youth radicalization and the question of youth organizations. They hope to prepare a line document sometime late this spring or summer. The comrades in Quebec are planning to open a similar discussion soon.

From the discussion at the conference, and from informal discussions with comrades elsewhere, there seem to be three main questions raised about the value of building an independent youth organization:

1) Wouldn't that be a diversion from the main tasks of party-building today? Our main task is to implant ourselves in the working class. A youth organization would require valuable cadre that could better be utilized to colonize unions, etc. In general, an orientation to youth work -- student work specifically -- would get the RWL-LOR on the wrong track politically.

2) Why can't we just recruit young workers and students directly to the party? What function does an independent youth organization serve?

3) How do you justify building a youth organization today that would probably be composed mainly of students and would orient mainly to college campuses? If we do build a youth organization, shouldn't we be building an organization of young workers? Isn't that our perspective?

The reports by international guests at the conference were aimed at trying to provide some answers to these questions, as well as others.

Olivier's report on Spain concentrated on the work of the FJCR, the youth group affiliated to the LCR. The FJCR was first set up in 1975 and has since grown to about 3,000 members. 80-85 percent of the members are young workers, and this percentage is roughly the same in the Central Committee. The FJCR is organized as a federation, with a Spain-wide structure of leadership as well as separate national bureaus in the Basque country, Galicia, Catalonia, etc. The youth group affiliated with the LC is smaller, mainly students, but with a similar structure.

Despite the tremendous growth of the FJCR, there have been problems. Education and integration of comrades is weak. There is no real mechanism for developing leadership. Things have been disorganized -- there were no full-timers until recently -- with sales of the press a big weakness. Comrades have had to correct imbalances either in terms of tending toward functioning like a "junior party" or like a broad "youth movement."

Questions have come up about relations between the party and the youth; whether party members should function as a fraction in the youth organization. There have been conflicts. In the Basque country, for example, a small nationalist sect initiated a demonstration that the LCR decided not to support or build; the FJCR decided the opposite. The LCR continues to put the emphasis on independence for the youth, however, allowing for mistakes., while trying to educate the young comrades.

Questions have also come up about the composition of the FJCR. Some comrades felt that students should be refused membership -- college students -- because they were not really a part of youth. This was talked out and comrades now agree that a bigger effort must be made to recruit and integrate students in the FJCR.

My report on the USA reviewed the origins of the YSA, our composition, and our main areas of activity. I spent time on the relationship of the YSA and the SWP, how the two organizations are complementary instruments, and why the SWP sees the building of the YSA as an essential part of building the Trotskyist movement in this country.

Deb's report on Australia covered much of the same ground as mine in terms of party-youth relations and the role of a youth organization. The Socialist Youth Alliance existed prior to the establishment of the SWP there, and for a time there were big problems in differentiating the two organizations. This was overcome by recruitment; by the publication of an independent newspaper by the SYA, and by the eventual concentration of the SWP on work in the labor movement. The SYA and SWP have a joint Labor Party fraction, although the SYA also participates on its own in Labor Youth Groups. The main arena of the SYA is the college campuses, and it intervenes in the Australian Union of Students.

Olivier's report on France reviewed the evolution of comrades' thinking on the student movement, youth work, and youth organizations. From 1968-72, the student movement was transformed from a mass movement led by mass decision-making meetings to a movement dominated by various political currents -- most of them ultraleft, centrist, etc. The movement became splintered and paralyzed. From this conjunctural situation the LCR drew false generalizations. It reduced its analysis of the student movement to an analysis simply of the different political currents, underestimating the social and political potential of the movement to take a mass character again.

As a result, the LCR took a sectarian stand toward the student movement. Student demands, mainly democratic demands, were seen as insignificant. The ability of the student movement to mobilize in action was reduced to the ability of each political organization to mobilize its members and supporters. The united front tactic was seen as inapplicable since the divisions in the student movement were inevitable and unbridgeable.

The position of the French comrades on the 1969 Worldwide Youth Radicalization document has changed considerably. They accept the basic framework of the document -- Red University strategy, analysis of the student movement, tasks of the Fourth International -- while maintaining certain reservations on the program elaborated: they are still concerned that not enough attention is given to transitional demands, although they fully appreciate now the importance of the democratic demands raised.

Previously, the LCR had rejected the building of an independant youth organization because they saw students as basically a petit-bourgeois layer. At the present stage of party-building, they did not see building a youth organization as helpful. They saw history breathing down their necks with no time to build a party, let alone a youth organization. Now, however, the LCR feels the objective basis exists for establishing a youth organization among both students and working youth. Youth are a weak link in the plans of CP and SP to channel masses into class-collaboration. The youth radicalization is rooted in the general crisis of capitalism, affecting students and young workers in different ways. The priority must be put on recruiting worker youth, but there is no question about the importance of the student movement.

There are main tactical variants used by revolutionary socialists throughout history in establishing youth organizations. We must keep open the possibility of working with non-Trotskyist currents in a common youth organization, even though right now that will not be the main orientation.

OCRFI has different conception of youth groups. RJS in Quebec and AJS in France are conceived as broader revolutionary youth organizations not in solidarity with GSTQ or OCI. This is opportunist, since it hides real political basis of these youth groups, which is OCRFI line. It also poses an obstacle to education of young militants.

The youth organization must be built around the full program of the Fourth International, concretized differently in different countries. Youth must have full freedom

of debate. Parties must insist on homogeneity of line put forward by members in the youth.

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Most comrades felt that the conference was very helpful in clarifying the discussion on youth work and youth organizations. Of course, it is only beginning. The discussion in both Quebec and English-Canada will be interesting to follow. Olivier stayed on in Quebec for three more days after the conference to have more meetings with comrades about this and other matters.