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September 5, 1968

TO ALL NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Halstead-Sheppard Letters

Attached are some letters from Barry and Fred written while in Japan. The letters are unedited and were not written for publication.

Please consider these letters confidential, for NC information only. They are not for general membership distribution.

Comradely,

*Jack Barnes*

Jack Barnes  
Organization Secretary

Tokyo, July 30, 1968

Fred Halstead Letter #1

We are staying at the Hill Top Hotel. Upon arrival at airport we were stopped by immigration authorities who were apparently waiting for us and asked which conference we were going to. I showed them the invitation from A & H Bomb Conference (SP). They said OK, and Beheiren conference is OK, but you aren't going to that student conference are you? And I said I was invited to all three and they said you can't come in unless you sign a promise not to go to the student conference. So rather than get on a plane for another 18-hour joy ride we signed, making it clear we wanted to attend all three and signed only under duress.

We got in and were met by student leaders, including a friend. Suggested to them they try to get A-H and Beheiren leaders to join them in protesting this obviously discriminatory attack aimed at dividing movement and wounding student conference. They agreed and arranged press conference for next day, called press and informed them, and invited Beheiren and A-H people to join in. One paper reported it, but none reported press conference next day though many were there. Beheiren and A-H people did not come. Gave excuses, said of course they'd protest, but some other time. Press conference was reported on UPI wire, however.

We happened to be first foreigners invited to student conference to arrive, so probably others will get same treatment. We are told a lawyer was called and he talked to gov. officials and he then said it is "not serious," that such "promise" has no legal standing and we could probably attend the conference and not get booted out, so that's what we'll do since the youth seem to be counting on us heavily to be there, and friends say we should attend.

Called Harry last night from Meiji U. student center, which students control. Call is at U. expense anytime. That's student power. Place is plastered with posters, literally. Rooms are full of HQ's of radical factions, at this U., the red helmet groups. Piles of red helmets and big "Samurai" sticks in most every room, student lounge, etc. The youths carry these around with them as often as not. (One of our friends, Muraki, a fine fellow of 20 with a wistful sense of Japanese culture, history and working class struggles, takes a dim view of this tradition. He says OK when needed, but all the time no. It tends to romanticism and also results in pretty mean faction fights. In both Meiji U. and Chuo U., windows are broken, evidence of such fights with blue helmets (another faction) and also with CP youth.

Saw Mary's friend and wife. They look fine. He says: For revolutionaries objective situation in Japan is very good "better than France before May." People are very young, high level, very active, good in mass movement, but not much experience. Only 2 or 3 over 40. There are 3 groups, divided by area, not by serious political differences--Tokyo, Asaka-Kyoto, and Northeast.

Comradely,  
Fred

Tokyo, July 31, 1968

Letter from Barry Sheppard

We are having a hectic time--this is the first chance we have had to write.

The general political situation in the student movement is wild, however, with extreme factionalism the rule. Our comrades filled us in on the whole situation, and I will send a report on that separately. One example: when we went to Tokyo University, we noticed that there was no glass in the front doors, and many windows were broken. It seems that two factions in Zengakuren were holding unity discussions (not to unite their two groups, but to unite their and other groups into a new Zengakuren) when they had a disagreement (about what we were never quite informed--it doesn't seem to matter). Anyway, one faction has control of this building at Tokyo University, and the other faction attacked it with stones and long sticks. A battle ensued with stones, sticks and the defenders using the firehoses on the attackers. The attackers were beaten off. This was a few weeks ago. Both factions are working together to build the Aug. 3 conference! Defense guards are thrown up at every pretext. Since our friends don't take this too seriously, some students get disturbed because they do not guard us, and once they thrust a big stick into the hands of one of our friends as we were making a telephone call in a building completely controlled by the students. To defend us from what is also an unclear thing. (I'm starting to write in the pidgeon English we use to communicate).

Tonight we will visit peasants engaged in a very militant battle against the take-over of their land for use by an airport. The airport will be in part military. These peasants have had ten clashes this year with cops trying to evict them, and have fought back with sickles and spears. This is one of the developing struggles of an antiwar character in Japan. We also are scheduled to observe a student action in support of railway workers who are protesting increased traffic in jet fuel used for Vietnam. This will also be a militant confrontation.

Fred is losing some weight, since he can't get all the food he wants and the food itself is not very fattening. The Japanese get a big kick out of Fred--his size, how much he eats, etc.

Barry

Fred's letter #2

I feel a little never-never-landish. Japan affects me this way. A great big city with cars, air conditioning, neon, etc., but you can't understand a word or a sign. It's a little like always being in S.F.'s China town. And so far nobody at this conference or among friends speaks really good English. The best speaks it about like I speak Spanish. They read it well, but when speaking you can never be sure things are clearly understood. Added to this is the additional lack of clarity about our position here. This morning we had breakfast with a friend who is also on steering committee of the conference and spotted 2 cops watching us. I took a walk and stopped at a musical instrument store to buy a harmonica and that really shook the cops up. Maybe they thought it was a bomb.

This afternoon we will observe a demonstration at a railway station where the youth will try to block a train carrying jet fuel for Vietnam. We will also have a discussion with a Mr. Saraji, the representative of the Communist League. This is the major group at the conference. Its youth group is the Socialist Student League. It, like most of the other groups at the conference, originated when the militant youth were expelled from the CP for advocating a line that struggle in Japan is for a socialist revolution rather than for a national revolution. Their main difference with our friends here is connected with this. They apparently over-react to the CP position and reject those aspects that are real in a Japanese nationalist feeling toward U.S. imperialism. But relations are very friendly between them and our friends.

Our friends are the Internationalist faction of the Socialist Youth League, which is not the same as the Socialist Student League. The other SYL factions are the Liberation Faction (libertarians or "blue helmets.") and just the plain SYL which is the SP youth who are still dominated by the SP. You will receive a detailed description of the various groups later.

It seems that I was mistaken in letter #1, at least one paper did carry a story on the press conference and it appears in an English language edition (clipping enclosed) Don't get thrown by the word "pacifist." In Japanese newspapers, that word means any anti-war militant. But as you can see, other things also get confused in translation, but the article is generally correct.

Later today John Wilson and Ken Cloak are scheduled to arrive for the conference and we'll see what happens to them.

We met at Tokyo U, air conditioning, green tea and all, with some leading friends. Very pleasant. They gave us a run-down on the general political situation, especially antiwar movement, Japan-U.S. Treaty struggle, splits and factions of Zengakuren, CP, SP, etc. Barry has it down in notes. It's very complicated, but beginning to clear. When the politics are explained by good political people it makes sense. These are young people (20 to 30) very high level. We seem to hit it off. GI concept was new to them but they picked right

Fred's letter #2, cont.

up on it. Seem level-headed non sectarian, have good relations with other groups.

More later, Fred

Fred's Letter #3

Tokyo, Aug. 1

Enclosed find clipping. Just in case you don't think they take their faction fights seriously around here. It says the pro-Moscow CP conference warns the Soviet delegate not to accept invitation to SP conference. When one did the pro-Moscow conference banned the Soviet delegate. This news really breaks up the foreigners, but the Japanese don't seem to get the joke, our friends excepted, of course. They laugh as hard as we. But the other Japanese don't seem to think it strange. Their attitude seems to be a fight is a fight!

I just heard that Reiji Matsumoto, chairman of the youth conference, announced that the case of the ban against foreign delegates to the conference is being discussed in the Diet. Also that orders have gone out to all Japanese consuls not to grant visas to attend the student conference.

Ken Cloke from U.S., representing SDS arrived last night but no trouble. He went through on a straight tourist treatment. So--put those two things together and the situation is confused.

Today a demonstration of students led by the Socialist Youth League (internationalist faction) stopped a train loaded with jet fuel headed for the U.S. airbase at Tachikawa near here. They stopped it for 40 minutes and raised the NLF flag on the train. (about 50 students did this) Last night a similar demonstration led by the Communist League was broken up much faster, lasting only a few minutes. But the passers-by jeered the special riot police and clearly sympathized with the students. Just why these two demonstrations couldn't be combined I still don't understand, since there seems to be cooperation between these groups. But that's the way it is. We just observe and ask questions of this sort of thing.

The fact that there are so many factions may give one a false impression, however. Because it clearly isn't just pure unreasoning factionalism. Each group has real political differences with the others. It appears to me at this point that the movement here is on a high political level. These are not like SDS kids in the U.S. They all consider themselves Marxists, all class struggle oriented. To say Zengakuren is like saying "student government" in the U.S., but here student governments have more autonomy than in U.S. and much more control over parts of the physical plant of a university. Different factions control different schools. Formally the CP Zengakuren control about 60% of the schools. Groups in this conference control about 15%. But the CP control is formal, not so actual.

Fred's letter #3 cont.

Barry went to a peasant area this a.m. for interview with leader of peasant struggle against enlargement of U.S.-used airfield at expense of peasants' land. He'll send story on this and on jet fuel train. If he gets time to stop a minute.

We have to move from our hotel--good, air conditioning, etc--to the YMCA. It seems hotel space is very tight and they forgot to reserve our room for long enough. Too bad. But I'll still check hotel for any mail. But send to American Express from now on.

Fred

Letter from Barry

Tokyo, Aug. 2

This conference is not too impressive. The first day (yesterday--was spent by each faction giving their views on general world problems. "We stand for a new international,"..."We believe in Marx, Lenin and Mao tse-tung,"..."We believe it is necessary to overcome Stalinism and Trotskyism"--each faction making its point in very abstract and factional language. Only a few observers were present, so they were talking to each other. Nothing accomplished except we made some points about the GIs and the antiwar movement. SDS people there also supported working with GIs, which was surprising. Today I am staying in the Y room and writing and Fred is at the conference. He says it is better today, with some discussion of concrete action. It looks pretty certain they will call a fall action.

Yesterday I interviewed a peasant leader. He and his group are fighting against extension of an American air base that would take over their land. He is an impressive fellow, striking you as realistic and with his feet on the ground. Had to get up at 6:45 to see him. Then we went to the conference all day until 8. Then we met Yamanishi until 10:30, so you see we are pretty busy.

Our immigration case is now in the Parliament. A parliamentary member of the Socialist Party called the conference to tell us he had succeeded in delaying any possible action against us, and our case is now before a committee in Parliament and the Ministry of Justice. The SP member said it will stay in discussion until Aug. 8, so we are safe until then, according to him. But we are not quite sure just what is going on, and don't quite trust the judgment of our friends who do not think that anything will happen to us. But, we are left with little choice, since our friends strongly advise it and are concerned about relations with the student group, etc., but to attend this conference.

Our time here is a little too hemmed in by the necessities of these conferences, and it is difficult to get other things done, but we are slowly doing what we must. We will probably have to split up some in the next week.

Barry

Fred's letter #4 was on the student strikes in Tokyo, and was printed in The Militant.

Fred's letter #5

Tokyo, Aug. 3

I'm sitting on the stage of the auditorium of Elruo University. As reported in previous letter this date, the students broke open the doors after authorities had banned conference from this hall. They took it. Police did not come yet. Probably won't now. Auditorium filled with 1,000 students, girls and boys. Banners of strike committees and red flags and NLF flag hang from balcony. Since 1:30 p.m. meeting has been going on. Speakers from various factions talk. Foreign speakers must pause for rough Japanese translation to audience, only small part of which understands English well enough to catch spoken word.

This is supposed to be final meeting of conference discussion, but actually it is one speech after another on strategy and tactics and theory of socialist revolution. Big questions are revolution in advanced countries and colonial countries, is struggle in advanced countries crucial (majority say yes). Many polemics against Japanese CP position of 2 stage revolution. Maoists have claque here (about 50 noisy ones). Most of audience considers themselves Trotskyists of some sort. JCR girl, Janette Habel, me, John Wilson, Barry, SDS rep, all other foreign observers and reps spoke. I got a good response when I said support Czechoslovaks, Polish students. "You read Trotsky--why shouldn't they read Trotsky?"...

Then good laugh and jeers at Maoists when I say next: "I even think they ought to be able to read Mao." Somebody hands me book of Mao as gift.

Red helmets abound in audience. But it's very hot, humid. They take them off, stack them on writing boards in front of the seats. Leader of Communist League speaking now. Has many supporters here.

This is not really a simple antiwar conference, but a conference of revolutionary socialist youth arguing world revolution. Some white helmets in balcony. These are students from Japan U., only recently activated by strike, and largely non-political.

They listen quietly, heads swimming with new ideas. Red helmets clap, make traditional shsh sound of approval or disapproval--it's hard for a foreigner to tell the difference. Sometimes they shout or stand and point at opposing faction when good point made against them. Generally atmosphere is of good humor not tense. They are blase as hell about possibility of police attack. Maybe they know it's not coming. But yesterday I noticed a group going to a demonstration they knew would be attacked (they were going to block door or something during negotiations with Tokyo U. administration) and it was all very matter-of-fact. Incidentally they call this tactic "mass negotiations."

A group of 6 U.S. students from Minnesota enter the hall inter-

Fred's letter #5, cont.

ested in watching. They're not radicals, just curious. They're ushered on stage to cheers. Audience apparently think they are delegates. They sit on stage taking it all in.

The meeting is adjourned for supper recess. Immediately several young men with electric bull horns stand in different parts of the hall calling their particular factions together for caucuses in the hall. The din is terrific as the caucuses proceed with the use of the loudspeakers.

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This afternoon, before speaking at above meeting I attended the foreign delegates briefing session of the Gensuikin (SP) conference. There are supposed to be 19 foreign delegates about. I met some: a British M.P. who had never heard of Zengakuren, unless he was pulling my leg. A British pacifist lady, a representative of the Arab League who lives in Japan, a traveling New Haven student who says he represents SDS, etc.

Have just been informed of big flub in my speech. A very serious mis-translation. Just before I spoke a Maoist attacked the 4th International. When I spoke I said: "There has been some criticism of the 4th International. I agree in ideas with the 4th International and I want to answer the argument." This got translated: "I agree with some of the criticisms of the 4th International."

So, now I must protest when the meeting re-convenes. Our friends who understand only Japanese were terribly hurt. Well, that's life in the big city when you don't know the language.

In any case, from what gets through to me in the meeting, the 4th International is a big issue here, some for definitely, some against rather angrily, and most sort of sympathetic. Anyway, it keeps getting discussed.

Comradely, Fred

Aug. 5, Osaka to Hiroshima train

Fred's letter #6

We got out of the Aug. 3 meeting all right. It ended with a great scene of about 1,000 singing the Internationale, in Japanese, of course. They do it a special way here, with arms locked and alternate rows swaying back and forth. Anyway, that part of the meeting was nice.

Now, if you wonder why we haven't sent an article on the conference, and why we have just written about side lights and other matters not



Fred's letter #6 (cont.)

directly involved in the conference, let me explain. It is rather complicated and delicate, and we should be careful what we say about the student conference itself. Things like street scenes, demonstrations, the student strike, the peasant struggles, are OK to print. We have observed those ourselves and checked the facts we use. But otherwise, as regards factions, groups, the student conference itself, and even the Gensuikin and Beheiren conferences, the plot thickens. Indeed, to understand the majesty of this plot, you must use an analogy.

Imagine an antiwar conference of the kind we have in the states, that is a struggle where you need a program to tell the players. And 2 innocent foreigners are invited to it from a far-away country and they don't have a program. And they don't know one word of the spoken language and can't read one letter of the written language. The conference we are imagining is on the scale of the first NCC in Washington, Thanksgiving, 1965, both in size and energy of division.

But you must also understand that this whole affair is, while large by standards of the foreigners' country, only a small part of the antiwar movement in the host country, a part like the "Revolutionary Contingent" relative to the Parade Committee in New York, at least in relative size and possibly in other ways as well.

Now add to this the idea that these foreigners came expecting to play a more or less ceremonial role, exchanging information, bringing greetings, and supporting a call for future united action. But the groups involved expect them to play a direct part in the fighting. Now add to this the sudden revelation that the very presence of these innocent foreigners is not only a central, if not the central feature of the conference, but a key point in the fight itself.

Now add to this the image of --well, let's say Sam Marcy, but younger, as leader of the group which controls the steering committee of the conference. Now co-thinkers of the foreigners are involved, but the innocent two are not sure just how, and their co-thinkers, while very clear in explaining some things, are vague--shall we say it's a language problem--on some key points. Now add to this that the foreigners have been invited by the Marcyites, stay where they arrange, and use their interpreters.

Are you confused? Is this mysterious? If so, you are beginning to get the picture. Now add to this a few wild rides in cars and taxis allegedly to elude the followers--for what reason the 2 heros of our story don't know, and an exit from a meeting through a tunnel (literally)--also for what reason the foreigners don't know--and you may get some idea of the atmosphere.

Very early in our story, you must imagine, the 2 foreigners develop the habit of sitting still and looking straight ahead.

Now add to all this the revelation that there are differences among the co-thinkers as to whether the student conference should have been called in the first place, and that the majority of them are involved in delicate, and they think very fruitful work in the Parade Committee, which is supported by the unions, and had decided not to have anything to do with the conference until their two foreign friends accepted the invitation that Sam Marcy had dreamed up and padded out, and arrived in the country to the blare of national press publicity about attending the conference.

Now add to this the erie revelation that the co-thinkers our heros first talked to were not of the majority view and neglected to mention--or perhaps it was a language problem--the fact that any differences existed. Now add the fact that those in the majority view were too polite to mention it either, though our heros began to sense something and sat even stiller and stared even straighter ahead.

Now add to all this the arrival of another innocent foreigner, with charismatic prestige in the host country, who gets off the plane, takes one look, and begins to suggest that the first two innocent foreigners cease sitting still and staring straight ahead, and start getting really involved. At which point the two innocent foreigners sit even stiller and stare even straighter ahead.

That is the end, for now, of our little story. If you can't figure it out, you'll know how we feel. But we will challenge anyone to a game of poker when we get back.

As per our original plan, we are now in Hiroshima for the Gensuikin (SP) conference, where we understand further games will be played. I got a nice little interview with peasants from the Narita airport struggle in Osaka. I'll send it in as soon as I check a few facts. Our health is fine.

Comradely, Fred

Aug. 7  
On train Hiroshima to Tokyo

Fred's Letter #7

Yesterday we attended the Gensuikin (SP) conference in Hiroshima as well as the ceremony on the anniversary of the dropping of the bomb. I'll write under separate cover about the ceremony. The Gensuikin conference has only one day scheduled for discussion including foreign delegates. That was yesterday. The rest is trips to Nagasaki and Okinawa for peace parades and demonstrations.

We were scheduled to go on these, with the exception of Okinawa, but it turns out the Gensuikin conference was not paying any of our bills, so it would have been very expensive (sleeper train to Nagasaki, hotels, meals, etc.) So we decided to leave the Gensuikin conference at this point, having already attended the political part, and go back to Tokyo where we can make our visa arrangements, get shots, see GIs and write. We need these few days for those things anyway and didn't want to spend money and time on merely ceremonial stuff.

Some of our expenses for the Beheiren conference Aug. 11-13 may be paid. Beheiren has already sent us a train ticket to get to Koyoto where this conference is being held. Just how much more they will pay is not sure. But we will try. The idea that the student conference would pay for our entire stay here is out the window. They paid in Tokyo and Osaka but would continue to pay only if we went on tour with them around the country speaking and being shown off to their meetings, but this would mean we couldn't go to Gensuikin or Beheiren conferences, because, we we found out only after a few days in Japan, the schedules are different, and in different cities at the same time.

As near as we can figure out, one faction-- the Communist League-- Socialist Student League faction--organized the youth conference. They brought other groups in to pad it out, but maintained complete control. They invited foreign delegates to show that they had important international connections, and they intended to tour these foreigners around the country to meetings organized to build CL-SSL in various cities. The CL-SSL stands for a fifth international and wanted to use this conference to launch it, or at least to make it look to the Japanese youth who are radicalizing what the most important international revolutionary contacts. CL-SSL appears at first glance to be close to our ideas, but on further investigation there are important differences. For example, they have no class position on the nature of Soviet and Chinese states and often lump "imperialism and Stalinism" together without distinction.

They are street activists and almost exclusively student Zengakuren-based. (Zengakuren, remember, means student council and anyone who's got one calls himself the Zengakuren) This side of them may be good and may also be a bit romantic.

Fred's Letter #7 (cont.)

But aside from political differences, their methods of operation are fast and loose--like PL's or YAWF's. That is our personal impression, based on our personal experiences, nothing more. Our friend has similar view of them, we finally discovered.

So, when it came time to attend the Gensuikin conference, we left the other tour and went to Hiroshima. It seemed to us necessary, in spite of the expense involved in leaving the other group. We simply weren't going to be paraded around for something we were not at all sure we agreed with, especially since the translators sometimes leave out or get mixed up big points in our speeches. That is what happened at the Tokyo meeting I wrote about. Besides, we did want to go to the Gensuikin conference and Hiroshima observance.

All this is complicated by the fact of differences among co-thinkers as to tactics toward the conference and toward CL-SSL. But all agreed we should go to Gensuikin. SNCC, SDS and JCR is consulting with our friends.

Now, formally, the youth conference passed a motion to call for Oct. 21-26 international actions "for victory of Vietnamese revolution and against U.S.-Japan Security Treaty." SDS and SNCC supported this.

This may be useful in the U.S. But just how we report that conference we are still figuring out. So wait.

Now, Gensuikin (SP) conference also passed a call for international action Oct. 21 (We couldn't change date, but it is understood "around that time.") Also Sohyo has called for a strike against the war Oct. 21. So that's very good news.

The Gensuikin conference (one day discussion) went well. I spoke and will send copy of speech. It may make something for the Militant, or possibly Intercontinental Press. I mentioned our position on World War II, Minneapolis truckdrivers, etc. Because it was very logical to do so. You'll see from speech. My main pitch was that Gensuikin should send appeal for Oct. 21 international action to all U.S. movement, and to U.S. unions. Also, the Japanese transportation union has decided to stop carrying napalm and other munitions for Vietnam. I appealed for that union to appeal to U.S. unions to do same.

This was the best received speech of the day. But, of course, one never knows what the SP bureaucrats will do with the suggestions. But the suggestions were supported by all others present. So we can publicize something about this.

We were well treated at the Gensuikin conference by the other foreign delegates and by the Japanese unionists and intellectuals there as delegates. But the top organizers of the conference seemed very uncomfortable with us and seemed relieved when we said we were going back to Tokyo. However, they all seemed pleased with my speech. I think the SP bureaucrats are trying to look more revolutionary too, and a little of that around their conference was OK with them, but

Fred's Letter #7 (cont.)

not too much.

The Gensuikin conference passed a motion protesting the ban of the French revolutionary groups. Of course, so did the student conference.

What Gensuikin was: about 15 foreign delegates plus about 200 Japanese, mostly unionists representing workers. They make reports back to their unions, officially. There are not many SP members, I am told, only about 50,000. The power is in the unions directly. But don't print that figure, it is only hearsay; I must check it.

What Jack told us before we left we have so far found true. As far as the antiwar movement and radicals are concerned over here, we are some kind of a big deal. That's part of the problem. Since last April 26 strike and especially since the French events, internationalism is a very attractive thing here among the radicalizing youth, both student and workers. And all sorts of Japanese groups are claiming to be internationalists. So the CL-SSL pulled a fast one to take advantage of the mood and a couple of innocents abroad walked in and without so much as uttering a word, put our foot right in it. But it's working out.

More later,  
Fred

Letter from Barry

Aug. 6, Hiroshima

We are now in the Gensuikin conference, and I can grab some moments to write as speakers speak.

Our hotel is almost right in the center of the bomb blast, and is part of a peace memorial park. This morning we attended a memorial meeting here organized by the city of Hiroshima on the anniversary of the bombing. Tens of thousands came here for the memorial service. At the time of the bombing about 8:15 a.m., everyone is silent as a bell and gong rang.

It is difficult to communicate the emotion in Japan in general about the atom bomb. One young comrade was talking about how trucks came to carry away the dead and partially dead and dumped them into the sea. He described in a soft voice a mass grave, only 10 meters square, where 20,000 people were buried. Very quietly, he said, "It was very awful." He told us that there is a sharp difference among those who were here at the time of the bombing and new residents. Those who lived through the bombing are affected psychologically. They tend to be depressed and to have no will to live. This psychological disease is worse among their children.

The first conference was a problem. It took us some time to figure this out. Our coming to the conference gave our friends some

Letter from Barry (cont.)

problems, about the same we would have if Pierre Frank accepted an invitation to the "anti-imperialist" conference organized by YAWF. Just what we have been going through would take a small novel to describe and I think a full report will have to wait until we get back. However, with the advice of our friends, we handled ourselves OK and the result was generally good for our friends.

Barry