

July 31, 1975

TO LENINIST-TROTSKYIST COORDINATORS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed you will find the following items:

1. A June 29, 1975, letter to the SWP leadership from the Central Committee of the French LCR.

2. A July 29, 1975, reply to the LCR Central Committee from the SWP Political Committee.

The previous exchange of correspondence between Pierre Lambert and Joseph Hansen, to which the enclosed letters refer, was included in the LTF coordinators mailing of June 17, 1975.

National Committee members will have received this correspondence as an attachment to the minutes of the July 18, 1975, Political Committee meeting.

Comradely,

Ed Shaw

TRANSLATION

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REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE
FRENCH SECTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Paris
June 29, 1975

To the Executive Committee
of the SWP

Dear Comrades,

The enclosed letter was discussed and approved at the most recent meeting of the LCR Central Committee on June 29. It concerns the letter from Comrade J. Hansen to Lambert, a member of the leadership of the OCI, inviting him to the coming convention of the SWP.

Awaiting a rapid response, we send our fraternal greetings.

For the Political Bureau:
Alain Krivine

TRANSLATION

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REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE
FRENCH SECTION OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

Paris
June 29

To the Executive Committee
of the SWP

Dear Comrades,

The United Secretariat has forwarded to us a copy of Comrade J. Hansen's answer to an undated letter from Lambert.

We agree with Comrade Hansen when he writes that any discussion with the OCI or its Organizing Committee is a matter that primarily concerns the United Secretariat. We will not fail to make our position known on this matter when it comes up on the USec agenda.

However, we do not think your invitation to Lambert to attend the coming convention of the SWP is an internal affair of the SWP. We think that this is also a matter for discussion in the USec and, in particular, that it concerns the LCR (French section of the Fourth International) very directly.

You know that since May 1968, without going back further, the relationship between the LCR and the OCI has been essentially a hostile one because of the grave political differences that exist between the two organizations and because of the OCI's conduct in the class struggle in France. We have never refused to meet with all the groups on the far left with a view to carrying out joint actions. This includes the OCI despite its scandalous conduct in May 1968, the most important event in the history of the French workers movement in decades. The Lambertists, let us not forget, called for abandoning the barricades in the Quartier Latin. During the six weeks of the crisis and general strike, they never issued calls for demonstrating for the overthrow of the government. This got them a clean bill of health from the Conseil d'Etat, when the other revolutionary organizations were banned by the government.

Unfortunately, there have been very few meetings with the OCI and still less common actions, less than with any other organization. The reasons for this can be easily understood when you consider the following facts.

Throughout the Vietnam war, the Lambertists hardly ever participated in solidarity demonstrations. They even wrote once that the Vietnamese struggle was hopeless. They showed a particular predilection for denouncing the Vietnamese leaders, even on the eve of the liberation of Saigon, accusing them of not wanting to take the city!

In the 1974 presidential election, they supported Mitterrand on the first round, against our candidate and the Lutte Ouvrière candidate. Before in 1973, in the legislative elections, after several months of tripartite discussions including us and Lutte Ouvrière, the aim of which was to reach an agreement on a geographic distribution of candidates, they broke off the negotiations to run a few candidates only in places where we and Lutte Ouvrière had candidates, in order deliberately to damage these campaigns.

As regards Portugal (where they in fact have no organization) their articles and leaflets in Paris have "unconditionally" supported Soares' party and presented the slogan "All Power to the Constituent Assembly." Recently, they participated in anti-Franco demonstrations under the slogan "Long Live the Republic!"

Last year in the Force Ouvrière convention, they voted for the leadership report given by the General Secretary Bergeron, who is opposed to any unity in action with the CGR [Confederation Generale du Travail] -- Général Confédération of Labor, the CP-controlled union federation and who has acted openly as a strike-breaker against the printing workers at the Parisien Libéré, which at present is the main test of strength in the class struggle in France. Out of the last three issues of the Lambertist organ, we find a short note in the first saying that the attitude of Force Ouvrière in this strike is "unacceptable" (such a moderate term is not usual in their polemics against us); the following issue says nothing about the strike, and the last issue has an article whose fire is directed entirely against the union the strikers belong to and which is defending a trade-union gain.

Moreover, they have called the LIP strike leader Piaget, an agent of the bosses and the Catholic hierarchy.

Let us also refer in a few words to their methods in the workers movement. Like Healy, the Lambertists habitually poison political discussions, including those that lead to splits in their ranks, by hurling accusations about people being agents of the bourgeoisie or the Kremlin. They have done so against us. Thus, in their commentary on the last convention of the LCR, they put us in the category of "all the forces that defend the social relations of capitalist production," saying that our role was to "betray the revolution in the name of the Fourth International." So, after this no credibility can be given to any accusations they raise.

The Lambertists also habitually use violence within the workers movement, especially against the far-left organizations. They have done so again recently against a grouplet that broke from them.

But while these few indications explain the paucity of common actions with the OCI, this is not the essential, fundamental reason for our objection to the invitation you have sent to Lambert and his people.

June 29, 1975/page 3

You have always said that only your country's reactionary laws prevented you from formally being members of the Fourth International. This is why we have always considered you as morally an integral part of the Fourth International, that is, as a part of the World Party of the Socialist Revolution, whose existing framework all members respect and in which all members are in solidarity with the other organizations of the Fourth International in other countries, not just in general solidarity in the struggle against capitalism but also against the dissident groups that have broken with the Fourth International. We have no objections in principle to inviting formations outside the Fourth International to a convention -- we do it -- but in the context of the conception we jointly hold of the Fourth International, we do not think that it is possible to invite a group without first knowing the opinion of the section in the country in question.

The invitation to Lambert, in whatever form it is made, will inevitably become known publicly and interpreted by everyone, starting with the OCI, as a political act. Everyone will conclude that the SWP intends to put the OCI and the ICR on the same level. And this conclusion will be correct. In the past of the Trotskyist movement, this was the interpretation given to the invitation issued by Nin and his organization to a representative of a dissident group to attend the convention of the Spanish organization in March 1922 with the same status as the delegates of the International Secretariat and the French section at the time, and Trotsky was the first to so interpret it. This is how the members of the ICR will understand it today. They will understand that at the very time they are carrying out an audacious decision -- launching a daily, the first daily published by a section of the Fourth International -- at a time when they have the right to expect the moral support of all those who justly claim to be members of the Fourth International, the SWP leadership has put them on the same level as the OCI. They will understand that at the very time when you want to celebrate the 1963 reunification at your convention, a celebration we would like to join in, you are giving aid to a group, which along with Healy, has been the most vicious foe of reunification and which has not given up its intention to destroy it. The OCI is seeking only to sharpen the differences and tensions in the International and to this end it will use the invitation given it to redouble its struggle against what it calls the "currents that challenge the programmatic bases of Trotskyism" "within the USec and its organizations."

For these reasons we were surprised by your move. We appeal to you vigorously to change a decision that puts in question whether we can attend your convention. We ask you to inform us as soon as possible of your final decision.

copy to the United Secretariat
of the Fourth International

Fraternally,
The Central Committee of the
Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire
(French Section of the Fourth
International)

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July 28, 1975

To: the Central Committee of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire
(French Section of the Fourth International)

Dear Comrades,

We received your letter of June 29 indicating that you may not attend our August 17-21 convention because of the invitation extended by the SWP Political Committee to the Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International to observe the open sessions. We were sorry to learn that you had placed a question mark over your attendance. We hope our reply will clarify the matter and that a sizable delegation from your leadership will be present in accordance with the practice you have followed in recent years.

For our part we were genuinely surprised by your reaction. We consider our invitation to the Organizing Committee to be within the general framework of the unanimous decisions taken by the United Secretariat last October and December. Since this essential framework of the previous decisions of the United Secretariat (which the SWP leadership agrees with) is not referred to in your letter to us, perhaps it would be worthwhile to begin by recalling those decisions.

At the meeting of the United Secretariat last October 12-13, fraternal observers of the SWP reported on the new request from the leadership of the Organization Communiste Internationaliste, on behalf of the Organizing Committee to Reconstruct the Fourth International, to open a political discussion with the United Secretariat. After considering the request and the background leading up to it, the United Secretariat unanimously agreed to send a delegation to meet with the OCI leadership to hear their proposals. It was agreed that this United Secretariat delegation should include at least one of the leaders of the FCR. It was further agreed to propose that internal bulletins be exchanged, and that the possibility be considered of collaboration in areas such as defense work and publishing projects for Trotskyist literature in the various East European languages. Several members of the political bureau of the French section participated in this United Secretariat discussion and voted for taking this step.

Comrades in the leadership of the LCR are familiar with the October 15 meeting with the OCI leadership as three reports on it -- one by Pierre Rousset, one by Joseph Hansen and one by Francois DeMassot -- were circulated in the FCR last fall.

As proposed by the United Secretariat, arrangements were made to exchange internal bulletins.

July 28, 1975/page 2

At the November 16-17, and December 17, 1974, meetings of the United Secretariat there was further discussion on the steps to be taken in response to the request for political discussion as spelled out by Comrade Lambert at the October 15 meeting. There were differences among the members of the United Secretariat on how to interpret the overtures from the OCI leadership. Some thought it was nothing but a maneuver to try to exploit and deepen the political differences within the Fourth International; others thought the evidence indicated that the OCI leadership was sincere in its desire to participate in the discussion of questions of prime political importance taking place within the Fourth International.

Despite differing evaluations of the OCI's intentions, however, there was again unanimous agreement on the next step. The United Secretariat decided to take up two points with the OCI leadership before proceeding to further discussions. The first was clarification of some statements open to misinterpretation in the internal report by Francois DeMassot referred to above. The second was a commitment by the OCI leadership to cease using public characterizations of leaders of the international that are out of place if they are serious about establishing a framework for comradely debate.

In addition, comrades of the leadership of the French section felt strongly that a public statement by the leadership of the SWP was in order, in light of the publicity given to the OCI's contacts with the United Secretariat by opponents of the international and their accusations of a secret intrigue between the SWP and OCI. We were dubious about the wisdom of such a public move, but the opinions of the French leadership were of concern to us, and we acquiesced. The SWP Political Bureau issued a statement, published in the January 13, 1975, issue of Intercontinental Press. Since, to our knowledge, this has not been published for the information of the LCR membership, or commented on by the leadership, we have enclosed a copy.

As you can see, the statement details the history of the contacts between the United Secretariat and the Organizing Committee and asks the OCI leadership to alter the character of its public polemics.

The letter of Comrade Pierre Lambert is a reply to the statement of the SWP Political Bureau. This reply clearly provides additional confirmation of the desire of the Organizing Committee to remove obstacles standing in the way of a political discussion.

This was the context in which the SWP Political Committee asked Joe Hansen to answer Comrade Lambert's letter, specifying that we continue to be opposed to unilateral discussions between the SWP and OCI, but would take the matter up with the United Secretariat. As Comrade Lambert indicated he might be in North

July 28, 1975/page 3

America in the month of August, we extended an invitation to him or any other comrades representing the Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International to observe the open sessions of our convention.

In regard to your letter of June 29 objecting to this invitation we would like to make several observations.

1. You note that the invitation is of particular concern to the ICR (French section of the Fourth International). We of course agree with you that the OCI is the strongest component of the Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International, and in that sense the invitation is of interest to the French section. But we would remind you that there are significant groups affiliated to the Organizing Committee in other countries, including Canada, Mexico, Britain, Israel, and Argentina, where there are also sections and sympathizing organizations of the Fourth International which are directly affected. That is why we consider the question of contacts with the Organizing Committee or leaders of the OCI acting on behalf of the Organizing Committee, to be a matter for consideration by the United Secretariat, not simply the French section.

Our invitation was extended not to the OCI per se, but to the Organizing Committee -- an international current that considers itself part of the world Trotskyist movement and with whom the United Secretariat unanimously decided to investigate possibilities for certain kinds of joint work; with whom the United Secretariat unanimously agreed to exchange all internal discussion material; and with whom the United Secretariat agreed to explore the fruitfulness of more extended political discussion.

We would note that other sections directly concerned, such as the Canadian section, expressed an opinion opposite to that now voiced by the ICR. At the July 1975 United Secretariat meeting they pointed out that those observing the SWP convention might be influenced enough by what they heard and saw to consider it desirable for the groups affiliated to the Organizing Committee to move more actively towards the United Secretariat.

While there were differing views within the United Secretariat concerning the degree to which this invitation advanced the process initiated by the earlier United Secretariat decisions the July United Secretariat meeting decided to express no opinion in disagreement with the invitation.

2. The largest part of your letter deals with an enumeration of political differences that have divided you from the OCI for the last seven years, "without going back further," as you say. We would only note that these are beside the point. A similar list could have been drawn up any time in the last decade. But again, you leave out what has changed: the disintegration

of the former International Committee including the split between Healy and Lambert, between Lambert and Varga, between Wolhforth and Healy, between Healy, Thornett and Black, and so on; the effect of the increasing pace of the class struggle on the forces around the Organizing Committee; the effect of the continued growth and development of the Fourth International; and the effect of the proof of our ability since 1969 to conduct a far-ranging political debate in a comradely way despite sharp differences. You also leave out something else that has changed -- the attitude of the OCI leadership as shown by their request to open a political discussion with us; their willingness to accept whatever format or agenda for discussion we prefer; and their demonstrated willingness to remove obstacles to this discussion by altering the character and tone of their polemics. These were the new factors that prompted the United Secretariat to respond in the first place.

Under such conditions, to reply by simply repeating a list of political differences that may be under process of alteration, and to refuse on those grounds to discuss, would be a response more appropriate to dead-end factionalists than to revolutionary Marxists. The conclusions that would be drawn by the entire workers movement is that we are not confident or capable enough to confront the OCI politically or that we are beginning to act more like a sect than a Leninist leadership determined to build the Fourth International.

You seem to recognize this problem when you state, "this is not the essential, fundamental reason for our objection to the invitation."

3. If we understand you correctly, your fundamental objection is that you consider our invitation to be a breach of the norms of democratic centralism because it is not "possible to invite a group without first knowing the opinion of the section in the country in question."

But the fact is that the leadership of the LCR voted in favor of the course set by the United Secretariat. Our invitation to the Organizing Committee comes within this framework and has nothing to do with challenging the norm you outline.

4. The invitation to the Organizing Committee is, as you say, a political act, but there is no basis for your assertion that the SWP thereby intends to put the OCI and the LCR on the same level. As everyone on the left knows, the LCR and SWP are part of a common international current. Were it not for reactionary legislation in the United States we would be the American section of the Fourth International. Representatives of our respective leaderships regularly attend each other's conventions and national committee meetings, not merely as observers at the open sessions but as fraternal delegates to whom the courtesy of voice has been extended when requested.

July 28, 1975/page 5

To avoid any misunderstanding owing to incomplete information, we should call attention to the fact that unlike the conventions of the French section, our conventions are generally open. Not only elected delegates, but all members of the SWP and YSA, selected sympathizers, and members of any section or sympathizing organization of the Fourth International are all invited to attend. At this year's convention we anticipate that more than a hundred nonmembers will be present and possibly even reporters from major daily newspapers.

Under the circumstances, an invitation to the Organizing Committee to send a delegation to listen to the oral reports and debates, which are based on the written discussion that has already been made available to them by the United Secretariat, cannot reasonably be construed as a decision by the SWP leadership to place the OCI in the same category as the LCR.

5. Your reference to Nin's invitation to Collinet of the Gauche Communiste in France to represent the French section of the International Left Opposition at the convention of the Spanish Left Opposition in March 1932 does not appear pertinent in our opinion. Did the International Secretariat, with the agreement of Molinier, Frank and Naville, decide in late 1931 to meet with Rosmer's group to explore possibilities for political discussion and areas of collaboration? Did the International Secretariat decide to give Rosmer's group all internal discussion material of the Left Opposition and its Spanish section? Did Nin keep the International Secretariat informed of his contacts with the Gauche Communiste? Did he send copies of all correspondence and related documents to the French section and the International Secretariat? Did the International Secretariat delegation (Molinier, Frank and Naville) boycott the Spanish convention when it was agreed to seat Collinet as an observer, while they were seated as fraternal delegates? The answer to each question is, No. Such details, all of which are pertinent to the international framework, but which you fail to mention in your letter, are rather important.

6. You seem to imply that our action is particularly dubious in light of the decision of the LCR to launch a daily paper. The exact connection between the two is not very clear to us. In any case, we are certainly pleased that the French section of the Fourth International today feels itself strong enough to take the step of publishing a daily and we wish you the best of success in the venture. In light of this considerable expansion of the Trotskyist propaganda apparatus in France, however, it seems to us that it would be desirable to seek to mobilize support for this undertaking from all sections of the French left, including organizations that claim to be Trotskyist.

We thus see no contradiction between launching a daily and responding to overtures from a group that might decide to move further in our direction.

July 28, 1975/page 6

For all these reasons we think the objections you raise in your letter do not warrant withdrawing the invitation to the Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International to observe the open sessions of our convention. In fact it would be difficult to offer a reasonable explanation for such a turnaround and it would open the United Secretariat and the SWP to charges of bad faith.

We repeat that we sincerely hope that representatives of the Political Bureau of the LCR will attend our convention. They will be welcomed as fraternal delegates and accorded all the courtesies that have unfailingly been extended to the French section at every past convention of the Socialist Workers Party.

With comradely greetings,

/s/

Mary-Alice Waters
for the SWP Political Committee

cc: United Secretariat