

Rec'd 05/10/71 (3 of - incomplete)

March 30, 1971.

MON 00110 (CANADIAN)

Dear Art,

Events in Montreal seem to be rushing past us at such a pace-- I thought that rather than settle for ~~the~~ a hurried and incomplete phone call, it was better to step back and pull together a few ideas on paper. Then we can discuss them and other problems by phone or in person, as it seems necessary.

The developments over the weekend certainly came as a shock to me, and to the other leading comrades here. I thought we were going into the weekend with a commonly agreed procedure, but events proved otherwise.

I was frankly astonished at your report of your Saturday meeting. We discussed the proposed majority get-together in detail on the phone, and we had a clear understanding that no meeting was going to be held-- or that if a meeting was felt necessary, you would inform us so we in Tor. could participate in it. We both agreed that it would be very harmful for the majority to firm up around a course of action, a strategy, before the joint meeting with Toronto comrades at which this was to be hammered out. Now we learn that the "party" where comrades were going to "blow off steam a bit" has constituted the majority faction and taken a whole series of decisions, many of which have already been acted upon.

We strongly question many of these decisions; we feel they tend to drive a wedge between yourselves and the central leadership and present our coming meeting with a whole series of fait accomplis. For example I understand your faction meeting decided to move to have the branch and local reopen a ~~xxx~~ discussion of a whole series of questions on which discussion was closed at previous youth and league conventions--like "association provocation," league-youth relations, student syndicalism, etc. And that the branch is now moving to organize such discussions. ~~X~~ It is clearly outside the power of the branch to reopen discussions in this manner; such a decision can be made only by the FC. And in addition I would wish to question the wisdom of doing this. I understood you were going to open discussion of the disputes arising in present work (Vieux Montréal, etc.)--but past disputes--that's a different kettle of fish.

Similarly, we were surprised to hear that your faction was constituted on the basis not of the convention decisions but of your document, which was not adopted and in fact was in part repudiated at the convention. I never dreamed you would proceed to such a decision without consulting us here. For what it's worth, we here felt that this put the majority on the weakest conceivable political grounds. Instead of representing the line of the movement, and loyalty to that line, it represents a peculiar and highly contestable view of a minority based on experiences long since past. It puts you off from many of the most viable forces in Montreal--not least important of course John and Colleen. And at a time when the strategy towards the minority is the focus of your disagreement with the center, it tends to define the majority as ~~antagonistic~~ antagonistic to the line of the center comrades, to bring our differences into the open--just what we had been taking great pains to avoid.

The youth's nominations to the edit. bd. came as even more than a surprise. The youth leaders here have expressed their views on this question. What puzzles me is how this could happen when we had an explicit commitment from yourself and Alain that the purge of minority youth leaders would not take place. Did you not mention this agreement to the majority youth when you spoke to them? Did they refuse

on this question?
to accept your leadership? It is hard to explain ~~xxx~~ this away as a result of "some confusion?" when your agreement with Jacquie was so explicit.

A Montreal comrade quoted you as having said on one occasion, "When you're talking with the comrades from the center you nod, and smile--and then you ignore them." No doubt you said this in jest, or perhaps you were misheard. But the story flashes a danger signal--because truly, that is how we felt this weekend.

Perhaps when we have a chance to discuss these events we may find that honest misunderstandings were mainly at fault. Be that as it may, I think we must see them for what they are--a warning of the degree to which the Montreal majority and the center have drifted to sharply counterposed strategies ~~xx~~ for the LEO, and the speed with which our differences are tending to burrow themselves out into the open.

Let me start with what Jacquie reported of her discussions with you and of her understanding of the decisions of the majority faction. It's always better to get such reports on paper where everyone has a chance to take a look ~~at~~ them. I quote. The strategy of the majority is to declare factional war on the minority, and to drive them out of the movement as soon as possible. The organized majority will consist of comrades who agree with the definition of the minority in your document; comrades who agree with convention decisions but aren't sure about the definition of the minority are outside it. The carrying of the factional struggle will necessarily involve a pulling back from the external activities of the movement, and likely ~~also~~ ^{defeat} the work of putting out and circulating the paper to some degree too. The discussion must embrace not only present disputes but must revive past disputes as well through a series of educationals in the branch. The majority is not oriented to maintain the new youth comrades, except a couple of English-language ones. The others--indeed any comrade who gets hooked up with the minority--have to be driven out. This is to be done in large part by demoralizing minority comrades, in part through social exclusion. That you feel the fundamental cause of the minority is the objective situation in Montreal, and that for this reason the ~~minority's~~ problem it represents will appear again, though not so seriously. *However accurately Jacquie has reported your words, she has certainly accurately described the thrust of your actions.*

To start off, what is the minority? Is your document of last year sufficient ~~to~~ to be the basis of your strategy? I was ~~xxx~~ struck by the fact that not the least of the minority's defeat at our convention was that it was unable to sustain a single one of its basic objections to our policy--at least sustain their differences in a form understandable to anyone but themselves and a few experts on the majority side. Since the convention I am not aware of a single major difference which has arisen in our work. True, when we met in Montreal ten days ago I had the impression the differences were re-exploding. But nothing seems to have emerged but ~~personal and~~ ^{transitory} tactical questions. The only possible exception is the question of the youth--and I cannot help thinking that that is largely a set of defensive reactions by the minority to the factional situation in the movement, rather than a reflection of its basic anti-Trotskyist character. If the minority were a hardened liquidationist, anti-Trotskyist current, its conduct over the past months would be inexplicable. It seems inescapable that its fundamental character is that of a clique which exhibits persistent tendencies to liquidationism, etc., but is based more on personal ties ~~than~~ ^{than} a hardened opposition to our line.

When we declared factional war on Shactman-Burnham, or Cochrane, or Engler for that matter, we had solid evidence of their revisionist

views on the most urgent and obvious issues. Attack the minority like that and you may find yourself flailing at thin air. While you press home points about long passed discussions, you assume the appearance of a "clique" that cannot justify its existence, and they become the innocent victims, the advocates of unity and harmony. And you assume the posture of blocking the growth of the movement out of factional bile, why they struggle to free themselves to work in the mass movement. You simply can't attack a clique like that--you hand them all your weapons, all your defenses. You can't win.

At the risk of seeming dogmatic, let me say that the struggle with the minority in Quebec will be decided by one very simple question. Who can best lead the movement in its intervention into the exploding mass struggles in Quebec? Who can best extend the influence of the Trotskyists, and increase their forces, in these mass struggles? If every factional struggle is ultimately decided by reference to the class struggle, the ~~a~~ rapid decisiveness of this factor is multiplied by the level of revolutionary ferment in Quebec. ~~As~~ As it girds its loins for the internal struggle, the majority seems to be giving up this ~~key~~ decisive test, leaving the field clear to the minority.

One of the things that disturbed me about our discussion last weekend was the fact that we could debate the internal struggle for some seven hours without any reference to the ~~current~~ ^{revolutionary} events occurring literally outside our doors. I searched my mind for a parallel in the history of Bolshevism. But frankly, what came to mind was the old factionalism of the NDY. ~~where~~ The discussion seemed to me symptomatic of the degree to which many majority comrades had become derailed, politically warped, by the long and very difficult experience of the factional struggle--to the extent where they could really no longer relate in a positive manner to the mass struggles. And the talk of the need to pull back our external work, not to recruit, etc., only made this explicit in my mind.

The War Measures crisis, I thought, showed how the majority must conduct itself. We moved out boldly to apply the convention line and to recruit on that basis. We moved to involve the minority in this effort and place them under our discipline. The onus was on the minority to find a basis to disagree with our line, a basis to justify its existence. The minority receded not because we'd been "soft" or because of objective conditions primarily but above all because we'd been effective, and left them little alternative but a political struggle on the most unfavorable grounds.

But I feel the more general experience ^{to lead the movement} particularly in recent months has been that of the inability of the majority to carry out, to implement its line effectively. This is after all what we said was the lesson of Vieux Montréal--we handed political leadership in fact over to the minority. In defense work I have the impression the minority has always played the key role. ~~It was in French-Canadian work.~~ And in Vietnam majority comrades seem strongly influenced by minority positions: eg. the attitude to "outsiders", to pan-Canadian actions, to the center. And the whole majority position seems to be a rationalization of lack of confidence in its ability to lead the movement--expressed in terms of the inherent tendency of Québécois to support the minority etc.

So now we are to settle into an extended factional siege warfare. Your strategy, while single-minded, does not appear to promise any rapid resolution of the question. The strong points of the majority--the fact that our line is the only one capable of building the movement--will be forgotten because movement built is to be suspended. And