

April 14, 1971

Dear Joe and Barry;

I got back late Monday night from the German conference in Koln. It was an exhausting experience. It was held outside of the city in an isolated community ~~where~~ the sessions were very long and the food was ~~very~~ inadequate. There were few comrades for me to speak to. Of course they were busy ~~throughout~~ all the time with the sessions and with what little time was left with subsidiary committees. Few comrades spoke English --they appear to know it like Ontarians know French-~~practically~~ practically nil. I and a young Copenhagen comrade were the only foreign guests--plus a French comrade who works in Germany among Spanish emigre groups. I was dependent on Gisela for translation and for a short period a Koln woman comrade. It was difficult to follow things. But I do not think that is just a problem of Gisela's translating but the general confusion of the congress ~~was~~ There was one whole problem that I could not grasp during the sessions; was not too ~~satisfied~~ satisfied with Gisela's subsequent interpretation, asked the Danish comrade who apparently is quite knowledgeable of German, and he said that he did not understand it at all, and finally after closeting with David (an old timer and leading Frankfurt union functionary with excellent command of English) got a totally different picture than Gisela gave me. In my opinion it was really key to have someone here with a good command of German. But here is what I got

There were 61 voting delegates and candidates. The number of persons at the Monday session (Easter Monday holiday) was about 55--it appears that some of the Hamburg comrades left Sunday night to miss the traffic jam. While it was an open membership convention I wouldn't think there were ever more than 70-75 persons present. It was reported that there are 120 members in the adult organization ~~IMM~~ (GIM)--and 250 in the youth (RKJ) I was told that there is not much dual membership although a considerable number of the delegates and candidates were young comrades (but there is a problem here as you will see later). At any rate it is obvious that the conference attracted very few other than delegates and candidates, despite the fact that transportation is excellent, distances are short and ~~living~~ living standards are relatively high. There was no spirit at the congress, they neither opened nor closed with the Internationale. The chair was most casual in the conduct of the sessions---they allowed interjections and cross-discussion, some comrades spoke many times on the same agenda point. The congress had no political focus--and the movement appeared to have no real authoritative leadership. All in all it was a very low level affair.

I arrived Saturday morning in time to sit in on the closing hour of the plenum. Both Monte and David suggested either that afternoon or Sunday morning that it would be good if they could arrange for me to address the congress for about 20 minutes, I of course said yes I would like to very much. On the Monday mentioned it again but they never made any adjustments. Then a little later Monte then in the chair brought it in a very casual way before the delegates --there were several loud protests, largely I gather on the basis of the shortage of time--Willy one of the loudest--that if they heard me they would have heard the Danish comrade and the French. So it was dumped. There were only a couple of women in attendance. One of them gave the organizational report and contributed several times to the discussion. I had forgotten that she had given the report and during one of her contributions which Gisela did not translate as she said she was adding nothing new I asked Gisela if she was one of the leading comrades. She laughed --you and the American comrades would say so but we wouldn't--she said. She was the only woman among the 23 nominees for the new national committee. They elected 15--and she didn't make it. During the financial report and elections Gisela asked a young woman comrade from Koln

to translate for me. There was a three or four way tie ~~between~~ and another vote was called to determine the alternates with ~~the~~ sole woman nominee still in the running. As my translator was voting I forgot my ~~observer~~ observer status and made some comment to the effect that it was very unfortunate that the woman comrade did not get elected. My translator petulantly replied that she would not vote for her "just" because she was a woman. Fortunately our comrade did get elected as an alternate. From what I have seen so far not only doesn't the European movement understand women's liberation but the few women in the movement are no help in developing an understanding. When I was at Turin talking with a woman comrade about women's liberation she attacked a photo that appeared in the Militant reading Women of the World Unite -ridiculing it for its none class character. When I saw it reproduced in Rouge of a week ago my first reaction was that they too might make a sectarian attack on it --fortunately they didn't

Livio came to give an international report in French which was translated into and took from 1:30 to 4. I tried to follow it on my own --one of those all encompassing jobs of his. Boy are they making a lot of that Vietnamese letter in the Militant; a big play for the Argentinian terrorists; some comments on the coming world congress and the differences expressed in the previous one. Only two comrades took the floor after the report. David was not satisfied with Livio's explanation of the differences held by the minority on LA. Willy embarrassedly explained that they have not yet got ~~the~~ Joe's and Livio-Ernest-Gisela documents out. ~~but~~ but the translation was almost done and they would be available very shortly. The other questioner was Ingo, a leading Stuttgart activist who asked why our Argentinian army was called a peoples army and not a workers and queried our uncritical attitude to the Vietnamese leadership--referring to something in Rouge. Livio replied that Rouge article were not necessarily the views of the international or even the French leadership and took on the French Lambertists for their sectarian attitude to the Vietnam leadership and struggle. Livio left right after his report but very demonstratively before the delegates got up and came over to shake hands with me saying he would see me next week. I wonder if I shouldn't have got his speech translated--but then it would have been Gisela's. Before the sessions next morning one of the old guard who gave the youth report got into a conversation with me--his name is Johannes Seiffert--he knew John Riddell when he was here. He asked me if I could get him Peng's documents. I gather the German comrades only circulated the German translations and they translated only what they thought were the key documents.

Would you mail them to him--with bill I suppose--Johannes Ernest Seiffert  
34 Gottingen Stellwagne 9 W. Germany

While I am at it I should give you the address of the Danish comrades. I am quite sure this is not the address we have in Canada--for an exchange of papers - SUF Guldborgves 28 DK 2000 København F Denmark  
I got into several short discussions with the Danish comrade--a fellow of about ~~25~~25--a student--member of their leading body. He told me that they have 70 members and are quite active in women's liberation. I told him that if he would take it up with their leading body and the Swedish comrades and suitable arrangements could be made I would be very happy to make a trip to address meet they would arrange. English works in Scandinavia. He was enthusiastic and will write me. He thought that Red Mole was a bad paper--we had a bit of a talk about England and I am sending to his private address the SWP Internal Information Bulletin of the DNG 1970 conference discussion. There are three or four sitting here in the office. Incidentally George J put on a very nice display of Pathfinder books--I salted the display with some copies of the ISR that I had brought for reading. Does Mannheim I suppose it is getting copies of the ISR? A comrade Dalmer from the Koln area reported that he is editing a collected works of Trotsky in German. It is going to be complete--they are not coming out in order of date--a couple are out now--dealing with Germany and I think Spain--and they have already printed a paperback selection from these couple of volumes that sells dirt cheap. GDM is buying in bulk--if there is a market we should order

some --we could make a little money.

The big question before the German section is the youth radicalization. I gather that it was only last year that they started to attempt to work in the youth milieu. That the RKJ has 250 members shows that they have had some success. Apparently the Socialist party youth has undergone a terrific growth and is a constant source of irritation for the SP brass and the CP has also been quite successful in building up a youth movement. But it is apparent that the leadership doesn't have a common understanding of the importance of this arena or of how to work in it

The crisis of leadership in the GIM is reflected in the RKJ. According to the reporter the RKJ has not developed a national leadership--it operates very loosely without any national strategy through a 6 person coordinating bureau. Apparently in the northern area it does not have a democratic centralist character whereas it does in the SW. In some areas the GIM branches have done nothing to build RKJ and in fact consider it serves no function to do so. The task of this convention was to overcome the differences on the question of RKJ and to come to a common agreement to build a national democratic centralist youth movement with a national leadership.

Did the convention solve this problem? I doubt it very much. The vote on the document was delegates 26 for, 8 against, 4 abstentions, candidates 7 for, 8 against and 8 abstentions. In other words 33 for 28 against including abstentions. From what I can see the candidate votes are as important as the regular. For instance there are now ~~two~~ comrades in Berlin--they were given candidate status--they have one full member and 1 alternate on the new national leadership. The Mannheim-Franfurt delegates were all for--but the Hamburg-Stuttgart delegates were all opposed or abstentionists. Before supper Gisela thought that the opposition would win the vote--after supper and following the vote she told me that the supper adjournment was a masterful device in weakening the opposition. But it still came out 33 to 28.

The discussion was chaotic. The GIM leadership has no idea how to lead even a discussion let alone a section in action. I had the greatest difficulty trying to establish what the differences were. The core of older comrades (part of them are that Frankfurt trade union group) are not the recognized leaders--in fact there were no authoritative leaders in the congress. The plenum after the congress did not elect a national secretary. The last one has refused to stand again and Gisela says they are going to try to fill this function with a group or some such thing. Another leading comrade refused despite embarrassing urgings to stand for national committee. The comrade who headed the poll for NC --way out in front--was the professor who is editing the Trotsky works who seem to be a fine human being but from what I could see ~~was not considered by any as a political leader.~~ The comrade who would not stand again for national secretary was I understand the only full time functionary that the German movement has (had?)

After making the decision to ~~transform~~ transform the youth into a national democratic centralist organization they came to Publications. The leadership proposed that Vas Tun become the youth paper. The vote was 33 to 28 (counting abstentions) on the first. On Vas Tun the vote was 12 for, 13 against (counting abstentions) delegates; 6 for, 3 abstentions candidates; 6 for, 6 against 4 abstentions.

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As I understand it there were actually three positions. 1) those who want to build a mass youth organization (Stuttgart) 2) those who want to build what they call a youth cadre organization but without doing so on a national plane (I think this is the Hamburg position) and 3) those who want to build a youth cadre organization organized on a national basis.

What is this about cadre organization? I couldn't understand it from Gisela. It seems to me she makes a sort of ~~mk~~ mystique of Germany, SDS etc. And I don't think she understood what the German leadership expounding the 3rd position were about. The retiring secretary gave this youth cadre organization a two year projection. I pointed this out to her and she dismissed it. Then I told her about the British discussion on the fusion of Spartacus and IMG. She denied that the British are discussing this at all--although as I told you Peter Gowan actually formally proposed it at the IMG meeting a few weeks ago. ~~Ingo~~ A comrade Ingo who holds one of the opposition views--I think No 2 made some comment that his view was that of the Ligue Communiste. Gisela said she did not understand him.

So I managed to get David aside and have a talk with him. Yes, GIM is the organization of the German Trotskyist cadre. But they don't see any perspective of building it--not even through RKJ--by recruiting through and from it or its activities giving added attractiveness to GIM and it recruiting workers, adults, young adults. They are trying to carry out a big maneuver. Not only is the old Trotskyist cadre worn out but the working class as such doesn't have much possibilities. But there is a unique youth situation...elements of SDS. They consider these to be cadre.

That they mean by cadre I gather are revolutionary types who are sophisticated who are articulate in certain areas of revolutionary theory, who are prestigious who from time to time may well be able to carry off some big flashy actions. They don't mean working men and women, students, youth who have assimilated some of the basic elements of Trotskyism and who are going about building a Trotskyist movement, through united fronts and mass actions around broad radicalizing issues.

They are out to win this element of radical youth ~~in~~ this cadre to a Trotskyist youth organization organized on a national basis. They think that in two years time they can achieve this and what there is of GIM will fuse with it into a common Trotskyist cadre organization I would suppose of a quantitatively and qualitatively different scope.

This is a version of what Ernest was telling me very heatedly down at this office one day--- the revolutionary vanguard of ~~some~~ some tens of thousands in Britain who know what the CP and what the LP is, who we only completely cut ourselves off from if we identify with the Labor Party in any way at all. That is how it comes through to me. I am sending the documents of the congress which of course I am unable to read. I hope that this little ~~play~~ ploy of the majority is expounded with some clarity so that we can come to grips with it.

How they assess the German congress, what they think they have to work with I do not know. From the vote and the general atmosphere in the congress I would guess that the various groups will continue to work on their own from their own understanding of Trotskyism. Unfortunately I do not have the impression that the German section is internationally oriented--European possibly but not Canada-U.S. etc.

I think the ouvrierist impression I got of the German work from the report in Turin made by Ingo is erroneous--probably flows from the work of the Stuttgart comrades. ..certainly not the views of the Frankfurt comrades. You don't g.

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the impression there is a national movement in Germany with common concepts of many things. The movement has developed very unevenly. Mannheim is the center--and what will happen when it tries to instal itself in Frankfort

I do not know whether you have received INPREKORR--Is this the answer to Intercontinental. They plan to put this out once a month. Internationale will be coming out every other month--but they expressed doubts as to the possibilities.