

Box 471 Cooper Station
New York, New York 10003

February 20, 1969

To All Organizers and NC Members

Dear Comrades,

Attached is a report by Dave Thorstad, NC member in the Twin Cities local, on the recent conference organized by the Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes in Quebec. This report is for the information of organizers and NC members only.

Comradely,

Charlie Bolduc

Charlie Bolduc
National Chairman

Box 471 Cooper Station
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February 20, 1969

REPORT ON CONFERENCE OF SOCIALIST STUDENTS IN MONTREAL, FEB. 8-9, 1969

by Dave Thorstad

114 people registered for this conference, which was organized by the Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes (LJS).

The conference had two basic purposes: 1) To draw into the LJS a significant number of the people in its periphery, a periphery it gained largely due to its intervention in the Quebec-wide occupation of schools in October in which 50,000 students participated; 2) To map a program of action in the student arena, which could lead to a struggle inside the Union Generale des Etudiants du Quebec (UGEQ - General Union of Quebec Students) in an attempt to turn the student union into a conscious, action-oriented tool of militant student struggle.

The reason for this approach, I was told, is that the UGEQ continues to enjoy considerable prestige in the student movement, and to some extent the labor movement in Quebec, despite its inability to play a leadership role in the mass occupations in October. This inability can be traced back to the attitude of anarchist spontaneity which still prevails in the leadership of the UGEQ. The result is that barely three months after the impressive occupations, which won the support of several trade unions, there is widespread demoralization throughout the student movement.

At the time of the occupations, the LJS had 3 members on French campuses in Montreal. With the nucleus of recruits gained from that movement, they went into an election campaign in which the LJS and the Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere (LSO-Socialist Workers League) ran student activist Michel Mill for Minister of Education in Quebec. It was the periphery which grew out of these two actions that the LJS hoped to draw into its organization through the conference.

Out of the 114 who registered, 35 were non-students, and more than 30 came from outside Montreal itself. Between 20 and 30 were recruited to the LJS. The LJS now has 5 sections (or clubs) and realistically hopes to have 8-10 in the near future. It has a large fraction at the key French University of Montreal.

The conference was organized around three documents on the international upsurge of youth in 1968, the Quebec student movement, and the organizational concepts of Bolshevism. The latter two were approved by a unanimous vote.

The organizational document provided for clubs on various campuses in Montreal which would function as fractions, and city-wide meetings of the LJS every two weeks. The city-wide meetings would be attended by all comrades, both English and French-speaking, and would determine general policy and interventions of the organization. It also proposed setting up a Provisional Organizing

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Committee to lay plans for the building and consolidating of LJS groups throughout all of Quebec. Indicative of the rapid integration of newer comrades into the leadership of the movement is the fact that five of the eight members of this committee have been recruited since October.

There were three panels at the conference. Participants in the first, which dealt with the international socialist youth movement, were John Riddell from the League for Socialist Action (the counterpart of the LSO in English Canada), myself, and a comrade from the LJS.

The second was actually a debate between Michel Mill and Louise Arrell, Vice-president of the UGEQ. The debate revolved around the relative merits of spontaneity and conscious leadership in the student union. Arrell's appearance itself seemed to indicate that the current leadership of the UGEQ is concerned about the LJS's plans to challenge it.

The third was on the liberation of Quebec, and was certainly the liveliest part of the conference. It turned into a three-way debate between Arthur Young (Montreal Organizer of the LSO), Michel Chartrand (well-known President of the Montreal Central Labor Council of the Confederation of National Trade Unions), and Roland Morin (President of the Quebec New Democratic Party - Canada's labor party - publicity director of the UAW, and spokesman for the Quebec Federation of Labor). Raymond Lemieux, President of the Mouvement pour l'Integration Scolaire (MIS) - which organized the October occupation movement - was unable to attend, although he intended to. He was an endorser of the recent election campaign of Michel Mill.

Most of the discussion at the conference took place in five workshops on the following subjects: The role of the UGEQ in the occupation movement; the character of the bourgeois university and the concept of the Red University; What is student syndicalism?; protest and repression in the secondary schools; and a workshop for the English-speaking participants from Quebec.

At one point, a group of Maoist-oriented Quebec nationalists attempted to break into the conference without paying the registration fee, minimal though it was. After a half hour or so of verbal antics outside the conference hall, they were convinced to leave. The comrades pointed out that this was the first time that the relationship of forces had reached the point where our movement was strong enough to held a meeting in its own name without the threat of disruption from opponents. The Maoists also distributed a leaflet entitled "What is Trotskyism?" From what I could tell, the enlightening conclusion to the leaflet succeeded merely in solidarizing the new adherents of Trotskyism in Quebec who were at the conference: "...we can unmistakably affirm that Trotskyism is a profoundly counter-revolutionary and colonialist ideology whose goal is to enslave the Quebec Working-class."

Though, as I recall, no vote was taken on the question, throughout the conference support of the April 6 antiwar actions was repeatedly expressed.

The conference represented an historic break-through for revolutionary socialism in Quebec. The general, and occasionally explicit, sentiment was that the real beginning of the LJS as a movement in Quebec dates from this conference.