

July 14, 1971
New York

Dear Bala,

We are wondering what the latest developments might be in Ceylon. The wire services have become silent and the special correspondents of the big newspapers seem to have been assigned to go anywhere except to Ceylon. A curtain seems to have been lowered. The natural conclusion would be that the situation has quieted, that nothing is happening now, and that there is therefore nothing to report. But if that is the case, this would appear newsworthy in view of the crisis that shook the country so recently.

An article by you, or some clippings from which an article could be written here in New York would be most useful. However, if something like that is not already in the mail, we would not be able to publish it until September. That is because we are going onto our summer schedule with the next issue -- suspending publication until September. So we are preparing to close up shop temporarily and turn to other activities for a few weeks, mostly associated with the coming convention of the SWP.

Under separate cover, I am sending you two items which you may want to study at your leisure. One is issue No. 4 of the International Information Bulletin (June 1971) which has just come off the press. I know that you will receive copies through regular channels but I wanted to make sure that you got at least one copy in advance.

The other item is a copy of a letter dated July 7, 1971 in which the Political Committee of the SWP states its opinion on the material in bulletin No. 4.

All of this material is largely self-explanatory but a few additional points may make things still clearer.

The key item in bulletin No. 4 is a letter signed "Domingo" which was widely circulated among the Trotskyists in Latin America. We did not know about it at all until a copy accidentally reached us. The author of the "Domingo" letter was Comrade Livio Maitan, as he acknowledges in a statement included in bulletin No. 4. He maintains that the letter was purely a "personal" one. We do not agree with that. To us the letter on the face of it is a factional document.

Even worse, in our opinion, is the attitude taken by the majority of the United Secretariat. They back Comrade Maitan in his claim that it was a "personal" letter and that it is perfectly normal to write such letters.

I recall that at the last world congress you denounced in the strongest terms the practice of writing such letters. My memory is very vivid of how you took this up on the floor of the congress, and again in the subsequent meeting of the incoming Executive Committee.

I heard that you also took up the question in the Ceylon commission. I remember not only some of your words but the fact that you opposed the nomination to the United Secretariat of one of the comrades guilty of engaging in this practice.

You named two comrades as having written such private and personal letters to selected individuals in Ceylon, thus adding to the problems of the comrades there.

I thought at the time that your points were very well taken and that you certainly pointed up in a most articulate way a practice that did damage to the movement as a whole.

I also thought that the lesson would be learned by the comrades involved; that if others were inclined in that direction they too would learn from the experience, particularly since no one defended the practice and the delegates gave strong approval to what you said. I hoped that the disapproval of the practice, voiced at the congress, would mark the close of such practices and the opening of a new chapter in which such gross departures from the organizational norms of our movement would no longer be seen. In my opinion, this was one of the most salutary developments at the last world congress.

But now we are confronted with an instance in which a different member of the United Secretariat has engaged in the same practice. And this time, the majority of the United Secretariat has approved it as quite normal!

No other conclusion is possible but that a very bad concept is guiding the organizational practices of the top body of our international movement. With that concept, a genuinely collective leadership cannot possibly be built.

We have discussed the meaning of this development at great length. It appears to us to represent a decided step backward. We are not sure exactly how to proceed to create pressure in favor of the norm that you argued for at the last world congress. But we think that it has to be done. This was the thinking behind the July 7 letter of the Political Committee of the SWP calling on those who are concerned about this to engage in direct consultation as to the best course to follow. The proposed consultation, as the letter indicates, would include leaderships of sections, sympathizing organizations, and declared tendencies.

I do not know what would come out of such consultation -- the thinking of the SWP leadership on this is completely tentative at present, no one having made up his mind. The most that has been suggested is the possibility of calling for formation of an international tendency based on the political differences that have arisen and that are obviously involved in the "Domingo" letter and the stand taken by the majority of the United Secretariat.

After you have studied this latest material and considered it in the light of the issues that have come to the fore in the international discussion you may have some suggestions on this. We would be happy to hear from you.

Fraternally yours, Joseph Hansen