



Nahuel Moreno

Letter to Mandel

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Foreword

The letter we present here, signed by Hugo Bressano (Nahuel Moreno) and addressed to Ernest Mandel, the principal leader of the Fourth International (Unified Secretariat) — to which the Morenoist current belonged at the time, organised as an internal faction alongside the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States — is one of many exchanges between the two leaders. The significance of this letter lies in the fact that it was written less than a month after the military coup led by Videla, Massera, and Agosti on 24 March 1976, in Argentina.

This military dictatorship was the bloodiest in Argentine history, despite the characterisations by some sectors — such as the (Stalinist) Communist Party — which described Videla as a “democratic general”. The unleashed repression did not target only guerrilla groups; it also targeted the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (PST) and its militants, the workers’ and popular vanguard, and even leaders of the bourgeois political parties. As a result of the repression suffered before and during the dictatorship, the PST lost more than one hundred comrades who were murdered or disappeared, not counting the political prisoners. One of the first measures decreed by the military junta was the banning of the PST. The activities of all other political parties, including the Communist Party, were frozen.

In this letter to Mandel, Moreno provides an initial description and characterisation of the situation that unfolded with the coup. As he states in *The Tiger of Pobladora*, “Our analysis in that letter to Mandel is correct. Yes, I admit that there were conjunctural and tactical errors but within the framework of a correct analysis” (p. 62; available at nahuemoreno.org).

Relations with Mandel would break down in August 1979 when the USec supported the Ortega government in Nicaragua and accepted the expulsion of the Simón Bolívar Brigade.

All notes are by the editors.

The Editors

July 2026

Letter to Mandel

Buenos Aires, April 20, 1976

Dear Comrade Ernest,

A few days ago, I received your letter of 16 March, together with the correspondence with Joe¹ and the preliminary draft document on prospects in Europe. My delay is due to the conditions under which we must act after last month's *coup d'état*. Unfortunately, that same delay forces me to send a partial response. Only now, for example, will I be able to devote myself to the study of the draft document on Europe. Regarding the other problem raised in your letter — that of *Intercontinental Press*² — I do indeed believe that its character as a publication must be defined: either it is a partisan, factional organ of the SWP leadership, or it is not. This must be stated openly and clearly, leaving no room for doubt. On the other hand, it is irregular for a publication that, in fact, has a tendency, to come out under the formal auspices of a group of editors who do not share its orientation.

I would like to elaborate further on this and other problems raised by the letter, but at this time I think it is more urgent to make you and, through you, the whole International, aware of the situation we have been facing since the coup of 24 March last.

This coup repeats, to a large extent, what was the gorilla³ coup of 1955. It is directed directly against the workers' movement, whose recent mobilisations the Peronist government was unable to control. To this end, the new government (trying not to appear to international public opinion as "Pinochetist") has launched a selective yet widespread crackdown on the workers' vanguard, that is, the activists, shop stewards, etc., who spearheaded the recent mobilisations.

At this level, the PST — and especially its leaders and working-class militants — has become one of the main targets of the military government repression. Within hours of the new government taking office, one of the first decrees issued was the one banning the activities of the PST. In contrast, it is significant that the Communist Party (CP) has not been "banned" or outlawed, but "suspended" along with the bourgeois parties.

Since last year, the Argentine bourgeois press had been singling us out as the main instigators of the strikes and workers' mobilisations. In an issue of *Revista de América*⁴ we transcribed a long article in *La Nación*, the main Argentine bourgeois newspaper, which warned especially against our activities amongst metalworkers, the decisive trade union of the Argentine workers' movement. We now know, through various channels, that this characterisation has been strengthened, both in the big employers and, of course, among the generals. That is why the decree of banning us has not been a formal measure, but they genuinely attempting to wipe us out of the workers' movement.

1 **Joseph Hansen** (1910–1979) was an American Trotskyist and the main leader of the Socialist Workers Party after the death of its founder, James Cannon. He was Leon Trotsky's secretary and lived with him in Coyoacan, Mexico City, when he was assassinated in 1940 by one of Stalin's agents. From the 1970s onwards, he led the alliance and capitulation to Mandelism, supported the bourgeois Sandinista government and the repression of the Simon Bolivar Brigade in Nicaragua in 1979, and the subsequent total shift towards Castroism.

2 ***Intercontinental Press (IP)*** was a weekly news magazine produced by the SWP on behalf of the Fourth International (FI) between 1963 and 1986.

3 **Gorilla** is a term from Argentina's domestic politics, historically used to refer in a derogatory or pejorative way to those who gave a coup against Peron. Over the years, the term has been extended to a greater or lesser extent to other countries in Latin America as synonymous with "reactionary right".

4 ***Revista de América***: Magazine of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores [Revolutionary Workers Party] (PRT-*La Verdad*) and Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores [Socialist Workers Party] (PST). The editorial board consisted of Hugo Blanco, Nahuel Moreno, and Ernesto González. Published in 1969–1973, 1975, and 1977–1978.

The repression against the PST began to take effect the very night that the prescriptive decree was issued. Army and police forces, with armoured vehicles and heavy weapons, stormed our premises, starting with our central headquarters on 225, 24-de-Noviembre Street, in Buenos Aires. After smashing down the doors, they tore down the identification signs and closed the premises with sashes. It should be noted that this decree also includes the confiscation of our property; a subsequent measure ordered the freezing of bank accounts linked to the party.

This was only at the beginning. In the following days, the repression intensified, directed mainly against our militant comrades and factory leaders. Both in the industrial belt of Buenos Aires and in the interior of the country, police and army detachments went through the factories trying to arrest our comrades. Sometimes they arrested all the shop stewards, regardless of their political leanings (as happened in the Yelmo factory, an important metallurgical company in Greater Buenos Aires) and then selected. In other places, repression was more selective.

The information at our disposal, especially from some places in the interior of the country, is quite incomplete. But we can estimate that there are several dozen comrades in prison; hundreds of comrades have had to leave their work, sometimes also their homes, to avoid arrest. Those most heavily persecuted are the comrades who played a leading role in the Coordinating Committees, organisations that emerged last year and that grouped activists and class-conscious activists and shop stewards from factories in each area. The Coordinating Committees had promoted a good part of the mobilisations. Also wanted are activists who led important strikes (Villa Constitución, Propulsora Siderúrgica, etc.).

We have received reports that some of the arrested comrades have been brutally tortured. Recently, two comrades were abducted by a heavily armed group wearing black uniforms and balaclavas, and we fear for their lives.

But arrest, torture and abduction do not exhaust the forms of persecution that we have been suffering. Mass redundancies are beginning to take place in state-owned enterprises and, to a lesser extent, also in the private sector. Many of the laid off comrades are also persecuted by the police.

We could fill several pages with the details of the repression that the military government has unleashed upon us. But what has been said is enough for our comrades of the United Secretariat to form a picture of the problems we must confront.

At the same time, we have the immense satisfaction in reporting that the party has resisted these attacks on a firm footing. We have been prepared for the possibility of a *coup d'état* for some time and, in fact, during the last year we operated in semi-clandestinity. Thus, the repression of recent weeks has not only failed to dismantle us but we even continue to grow, recruiting new militants. This is also linked to the new perspectives that have opened up to us. We estimate that our possibilities in the medium term may be enormous, to the point of repeating — in a corrected and increased form — our boom of 1956, when, a year after the gorilla coup, we came to lead the Metallurgical Workers Union (the union representing a quarter of the Argentine proletariat) against Vandor⁵ and the Peronist bureaucracy. This optimistic view is based on two objective facts which, if they persist, will inevitably work in our favour:

1) The working class continues its struggles despite the draconian decrees against strikes and all forms of class struggle, there is a muted but massive resistance, especially in the large factories, which translates especially into a drop in production, poor quality, etc. The first strikes have already taken place. Last week the General Motors factory in San Martín, in Greater Buenos Aires, went on strike. The army, in a spectacular operation, surrounded the plant with tanks, cannons and machine gun nests, despite which **the strike succeeded.**

2) The union bureaucracy is finished, and the guerrillas have reached a dead end. This leaves us as the only leadership in many places. Of course, the key to this perspective is what I mentioned in the first place: that the workers' movement is not defeated and continues to fight. On the other hand, if there is a great retreat of the class, we will suffer the consequences and we will retreat with it.

5 **Augusto Timoteo Vandor** (1923–1969) was a trade union bureaucrat who led the recovery of the UOM (Metalworkers Union), which had been taken over after the military coup that overthrew Perón in 1955. In the 1960s, he tried to promote a "Peronism without Perón", which was quickly aborted by the exiled leader in Madrid. A month after the Cordobazo, in June 1969, he was executed by a small armed Peronist group that years later would join the Montoneros.

Bearing in mind the situation we must face, we consider as very positive the vote taken — as Mario⁶ informed us — in the USec before the coup: that a special campaign would be launched to aid the Southern Cone. Well then, we propose that the time has come to put that vote into practice. **We believe that the way to make it effective is for you to raise, on our behalf, within two weeks**, between 15,000 and 20,000 dollars. We do not consider this sum to be excessive. The Lambertists,⁷ who according to your reports are an insignificant sect, raised \$10,000 for Política Obrera when they held a meeting at the Mutualité, at which the Argentine leader Altamira⁸ spoke. We insist: The OCI [Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (unifié)⁹] and PO, compared to the LCR and the PST respectively, are small sects.

We are raising this issue openly, and we demand an urgent definition since, according to Mario's reports, there are great difficulties in putting into practice what was voted in the USec in relation to us. We want to be told in no uncertain terms whether this will be implemented or will remain merely on paper.

This is not just a matter of money. Our party has weathered situations a thousand times worse than this, and it has always managed to pull through without ever having had the help of the International, as Bolivia did, for example. We believe we have the right to ask for assistance just as our sister section in Bolivia was helped in its time.

In our recent discussions you have insisted — and you have reiterated in your letter — on the need to forge new relationships, collaborative relationships for the building of the International. For us, putting resolutions such as those of the USec into practice is the litmus test for assessing whether the intentions behind the statements truly correspond to the facts or whether, on the contrary, everything remains merely on paper.

With fraternal greetings,

Hugo

6 **Mario Doglio** was a leader in the La Plata regional branch and the PST's representative in the USec during those years. He spent some time in exile in Bogotá.

7 Followers of **Pierre Lambert** (1920–2008) a French Trotskyist leader. Headed the PCI (Internationalist Communist Party) since 1954. He left the Fourth International and formed the International Committee with the Irishman Gerry Healy, with sectarian positions regarding the Cuban revolution. They denied the character of a workers' and socialist state in Cuba. In 1979, Lambert rejected the expulsion of the Simon Bolivar Brigade by the bourgeois unity government of Sandinismo in Nicaragua (which was supported by Mandel and the SWP of the USA). This led in 1980 to a unification with the international organisation led by Nahuel Moreno (they formed the Fourth International–International Committee, FI-IC). But they split soon after when Lambert broke with the commonly approved revolutionary program (the "Draft Theses" of the FI-IC) and turned to opportunism, supporting the bourgeois-imperialist government of the Socialist Party in France, headed by Mitterrand. From then on, Lambert's organisation entered into a pronounced decline. See *The Mitterrand Government, Its Perspectives and Our Policy* (1981), *The OCI(u)'s Betrayal* (1982), *End of Unity with Lambertism* (1982), and *Our Experience with Lambertism* (1986) at nahuelmoreno.org.

8 **Jorge Altamira**, pseudonym of José Saúl Wermus (b. 1945), a prominent Argentine Trotskyist and historic leader of the Política Obrera party.

9 **International Communist Organisation (Unified), OCI(u)**, French national-Trotskyist party led by Pierre Lambert.