

Letter from Guy Debord to J.-L. Jollivet 8 December 1961¹

Dear comrades:²

I agree to send you the two selected negatives,³ if you aren't too pressed for time (I myself don't have them on hand). You will have them in 10 to 15 days.

To respond to the question of your letter of 4 December [1961] about the motives for my departure from *Pouvoir Ouvrier* and the possible theoretical divergences between the situationists and that organization, I send you a copy of my letter of resignation,⁴ of which you haven't any knowledge. I add to it a text previously written in opposition to several stupidities published in the *S[ocialisme] ou B[arbarie]* journal.⁵

As to the letter of 5 May, several copies have been circulated in *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, then quickly lost in the sands. Finally, I point out to you that the first editorial note in *I[nternationale] s[ituationniste]* #6 must be read as a critique of the positions of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*. That is to say, their inarguable insufficiency in praxis, which is accompanied by a serious theoretical insufficiency *at a certain level* (I hear that, as critics of the traditional politics of the extreme Left, they are basically right).

I believe that these documents must be accompanied by a summary clarification of the connections between *Pouvoir Ouvrier* and the Situationist International [SI].

Last year Canjuers⁶ made contact with the SI in Paris and, after sufficiently long discussions took place between him and I, we drafted "Preliminaries,"⁷ which isn't, as you have written in *N[otes] C[ritiques]* #1, a publication of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*.⁸ This text was in fact published by the SI as a platform for discussion proposed to all of the situationists and the militants of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*. But, from the beginning, it was presented as the sole responsibility of Canjuers and myself, without committing any of the others. It was the exposition of what, it seemed to us, must be accepted by all (thus it is a little weak on several points). Later on, it was discussed at length and finally accepted by the SI; but it seems to me that one didn't start to read it in *Pouvoir Ouvrier* until ten months later. In the meantime, Canjuers had left France for a year,

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² J.-L. Jollivet, editor of the journal *Notes Critiques*.

³ The town of Mourenx (on the model of Sarcelles) and the Milwaukee stadium built for 43,000 spectators and [a sufficiently large] parking lot.

⁴ *Translator*: "To the participants in the National Conference of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*," dated 5 May 1961.

⁵ *Translator*: "Pour un jugement révolutionnaire de l'art," which Debord wrote in February 1961. It would eventually be published in *Notes Critiques: bulletin de recherche et d'orientation révolutionnaires* #3 (Bordeaux, 1962).

⁶ *Translator*: Daniel Blanchard.

⁷ *Translator*: "Preliminaries Toward Defining a Unitary Revolutionary Program."

⁸ A correction appeared in *Notes Critiques* #2.

and this discussion came to a standstill. Several situationists had meanwhile begun to participate, in a badly defined way, in the activities of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*: in France, because the current, archaic but invasive problems of local capitalism made it disagreeable to not be tied to a political group; in Belgium, because, after the strike, the moment appeared favorable to launch an organization (called *Pouvoir Ouvrier Belgique*).

Where are we now? A tendency, very weak from all points of view, which, after the discussions at the [most recent] national conference, had tried to constitute itself in *Pouvoir Ouvrier* in May-June 1961, has been able to do nothing and its members are now dispersed. The subsequent evolution confirms to me the judgments of my letter of 5 May [1961], so much so that [it now appears] they weren't severe enough: I have had the occasion to read, three months after its publication, an *Internal Bulletin* (#25)⁹ that recounts the debates of this same national conference. It is so comical in its falsity that it no longer appears very useful to us to discuss with those who produce – or cover up – such a clumsy farce (which appears to me to be the case of Canjuers become belatedly resurgent). Thus, the last situationists withdrew from *POB* in November [1961]. In Paris, I only have contact on the personal plane with one or two *Pouvoir Ouvrier* militants (and this quite distorted by the pressure of the others).

We estimate that the work of creating a new revolutionary organization will be very difficult, theoretically and practically: less hurried and less casual. But, on the other hand, the constitution of this organization can be the point of departure for a very rapid development; contrary to the patient administration of a small capital of militants that enriches itself 6% every year.¹⁰

I ask you now to take good note of the fact that the information that, given the precise terms of Jollivet's letter, I have the obligation to give to you, *does not lead to any advice* (whether or not to join *Pouvoir Ouvrier*).

I know too little the conditions in which you find yourselves to know if membership (critical membership, this goes without saying) in *Pouvoir Ouvrier* signifies an advance or a regression. These two factors, as you well know, are often in the same bed.

Still, I add that we approve of the *Pouvoir Ouvrier*'s position against Lefortism (which we consider weak in its theoretical premises and appalling in its practical results). You also know that, in the case of *Notes critiques*, whose autonomy with respect to *Arguments* we appreciate very much, we nevertheless clearly see the same peril of constituting, despite yourselves, a "Leftist cover" for Morin and his fine team; which, to judge them in all moderation, appears to us to join together bad faith and imbecility (in the jumble of #22, only the short text¹¹ by George Buchanan is worth something).

If one of you comes this way, let me know.

Quite amicably,
G.-E. Debord

⁹ April-May 1961.

¹⁰ *Translator*: that is to say, the *Pouvoir Ouvrier/S. ou B.* group.

¹¹ "For the second revolution," followed by "Towards the second revolution," in issue 25-26. [*Translator*: note well that the ambiguity – is it issue #22 or issue #25-26? – is in the original Fayard edition.]