

May 28, 1968

To the NER (Copy to Reb; may be read to locals if organizer wishes)
Dear Colleagues:

This is as good a time as any to throw out some ideas relating the book to the organization. This is all the more necessary because you are not going to get copies of the second draft, although the philosophy classes have, no doubt, prepared you to understand the strictly philosophic chapters better than when you read the first draft. I should state at once that, only in part, is your not getting copies of second draft due to lack of money and personnel needed to make those copies. Above all, it is due to the fact that the classes had been undertaken not so much (or not mainly) to have you "understand" dialectics as to have you practice it. This practicing of it, at pre-convention times, is all directed to organizational matters, and it is this which preoccupies me now.

You may remember the tapo I made for NY when they seemed a bit overwhelmed that they themselves must be the teachers. I then pointed out they underestimated both their own abilities and just how much the organization had already taught them philosophy for there was not a single Perspective report ever since we were founded that did not contain a great deal of dialectics. Naturally the daily practice is much richer at the center than "in the field," and, although on different levels, isolation from ideas -- the daily practice of dialectics -- is every bit as stifling as isolation from the masses. Nevertheless, just as try hard to surmount the latter, so we must the former. So, here goes:

A decade has passed since the publication of MARKISM AND FREEDOM. Though not only the solid but the unique foundations it laid for the formation of NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES remain with us and will continue to serve us, the dual impulses -- from the objective situation and from the theoretical void in the Marxist movement -- that have emanated these past 10 years make imperative not a mere "updating" but new development that could rightly be called new discoveries. There may be some who are so bereft of a sense of history, or so involved in what Hegel called "a giddy whirl of self-perpetuating disorder" (that is to say, a world that revolves around Ego rather than around Subjectivity as mass and as theory), that they fail to see that Philosophy and Revolution is the most concrete of all the tasks facing the Chairman, not as "author", but as leader of a revolutionary organization. Let me explain one of the theoretical differences between Lenin and Bukharin that has the greatest applicability for our own development now. It is neither the state-capitalist debate, nor that on Subject -- both of which I believe the organization has in the very marrow of its bones. No, it is self-determination of nations as a dialectic of revolution vs. Bukharin's conception that it was a veritable reactionary step away from the "world revolution."

You must understand that Bukharin was not only not a betrayer of the proletariat, but also not a Trotskyist which tendency Lenin considered a lot of bombast. Bukharin was a Bolshevik and a co-leader with Lenin. Moreover he was considered "the greater theoretician". (Which all goes to show how much of bourgeois ideology creeps into the Marxist movement when theory can be equated to "pure theoretical questions" as against one, like Lenin, who always has a specific political or organizational question in mind when he deals with philosophic questions.) They had just finished collaborating on a book on economics Imperialism and World Economy. Neither the economic analysis nor the common solidarity of the specific Bolshevik tendency as the organization for revolutionary Marxists could, however, unite their view on self-determination of nations. Again, this wasn't just a "general question", for the Bolsheviks were all "for" the right of the self-determination of nations. Rather, the question was: are you for it as a "right" or because you consider it integral to, the very dialectic of proletarian revolution. Lenin said, Yes. Bukharin said, No, the "new" situation of imperialist war, the "new" situation that the proletariat, along with the bureaucratic leaders of the Second International, were participating in this imperialist war, the "new" situation that nationalism, more than ever before, was backward as against internationalism, all mean we must

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be "uncompromising", must take nothing short of proletarian revolution as the revolution. Lenin retorted that the imperialist war must have "suppressed" your reasoning for you to fail to see the development through contradiction, the dialectics of the many varied forces that participate in a mass outburst, etc. etc. &

Now, I'm not interested in the debate as such not only because most of us know it, but also because the point that concerns us at this period in our development is not the theory, but the attitude to the theoretician. You must understand that Lenin and Bukharin were both theoreticians, and, though Lenin was known as the founder of the Bolshevik organization, he was not known--that is to say, history had not yet proven him to be the founder of a unique theoretical tendency, which, in fact, would become the Marxism of the age of monopoly-capitalistic imperialism. They had just authored a book on that very new stage of capitalist development and there seemed to be no differences between them. There were therefore those who were ever feeling that, since Bukharin was the "pure theoretician", Lenin was revealing "opportunism" (sic!) by being for a national "disengagement" when even capitalism was thoroughly "international" but, of course, from the wrong class point of view.

Let me get away from Russia* for a while, come over to the US as the referent. We all recognize Abolitionism as the freedom movement that had the greatest affinity to Marxism, although it was religious and limited to wanting the abolition of slavery, and not a socialist society. It would therefore be natural for us to "prefer" Wendell Phillips, who is the only one of the Abolitionists who came over to the labor movement, to William Lloyd Garrison who did not. And yet history records that Garrison, not Phillips, was the founder of Abolitionism. You might ask: why care about who first founded the movement when, obviously, the more "advanced" was Phillips? The question, however, is not one of "advanced" or any other adjective like "best". The question is that historically (and this history should have been with a capital H because before ever history gets around to "proving", the historical movement would be 10 feet underground if some who had a sensitivity on the question weren't there to become adherents without "proof" and thereby help create the movement that would become "the proof."); to repeat, the question is that historically the importance of being the founder is that he creates the atmosphere for all others to grow in and develop to be more "advanced", or "best". Without him, there would be no room for others; it would just be one more lost moment in history--and they are a great deal more tragic than "lost weekends."

So you see that the historic and American and international demands on the Marxist-Humanist tendency to be born are not accidental, nor are they what Hegel would have called "the arbitrary caprice of prophetic utterance." It isn't "prophecy"; it is the "labor, patience, seriousness, suffering of the negative" that are the prime requisites on leadership, on ranks, and, if they would try the patience of Job, impatience is no more capable of creating "shortcuts to revolution" than are guerrilla tactics. Moreover, none but self can create the discipline needed for the task of working out Philosophy and Revolution. (Marcuse used to tell me that I was "too close" to the proletariat and, by remaining in a "so-called" ivory tower, he had both the advantage of "objectivity" and "tension" needed for development of original theory. The resulting One-Dimensional Man showed, however, that, unfortunately, it resulted in all in one-dimensional theory.) You cannot afford, as collaborators, not to create free time for me to ~~complete the work~~ complete the work.

And yet, of course, there was no way for me not to engage in those organizational problems that are directly (and not so directly) related to the work. Thus: (1) It's more than a year since I've achieved contact with East Europe. On the one hand, the chapter the Marxist-Humanist there submitted, though far above anything the American comrades could do, showed a lack of philosophy. On the other hand, it seemed to bespeak organizational developments that I felt would reach a certain climax long before the changes that are now catching the headlines.

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that I felt it imperative to establish in-person contact. Hence, Eugene's trip, but hence, also, the fact that the very first week of allegedly "being away" I had to take time out to make a not unimportant tape for that meeting.

2) As part of the inseparability of Philosophy and Revolution and the organization I had decided last winter to take time out to work up the Outline of Lectures. It wasn't just a question of gaining some new members--though both Detroit and NY did set out of internalizing a methodology both for analyzing events and participating in them as well as relating ourselves to other organizations in a new way. It is the latter I'm not sure the leadership in New York internalized. To make sure, however, that the first reaction of self-defense or apportioning blame doesn't beat down the second negativity before it ever has a chance to emerge; and, above all, because it will become of essence to any pamphlet that may result and therefore is first to be tested later, I will give an example, not from NY or even N&L Committees anywhere, but from a far off place. The place is France, the subject is the relationship of methodology, not only for analyzing events but for being "actors of change, for those who would be revolutionaries. And the person involved is Jean-Paul Sartre, a petty bourgeois intellectual of such "high" stature as to have created a philosophy other than Marxism: Existentialism. After a full decade's existence--actually it had begun in the late 1930's in France but World War II made it invisible, so to speak, and it didn't become a challenge to Marxism till end of war--Jean-Paul Sartre felt so totally impotent to create actors and he, too, having gotten, he claims, some new impulses from the death of Stalin (not to mention that Existentialism almost got a following in East Europe) that he decided to declare a Marxist after all! But still his task was not "to join" but "to search for a methodology" for revolution. It is there that he declared that Marxism will remain the philosophy of our time, and that Existentialists merely "tended the garden" because "today's Marxists" had stifled Marxism's self-growth. He called Existentialists "ideologues." You must understand it was not a compliment. It is a word used by Sartre like we use "popularizers" plus the way Marx uses the word ideology as false consciousness. (With Sartre it's always a hybrid; that's so easy for the brilliant writer for whom words are toys, "dialectical" toys.)

In a single sentence, this means that it is impossible to create an organization without a Marxist methodology, one that needs constantly to be "restated" to meet the challenge of new situations, and that any "pretenders to the throne", as the Existentialists were to the Communists, ~~not~~ ~~the~~ ~~Marxists~~, must know how to bow to the organization-builders on a different methodological basis.

What relationship does this have to us? On the question of methodology and on the question of other organizations Sartre at least knew how to pose the question. The answer is something else again, and he can't fail to be wrong again precisely because he doesn't have the Marxist methodology. But we do have it, and it amazes me to see that the minute a concrete event comes up, that's when some fail to practice dialectics, fail to distinguish between philosophy of revolution and books "about" revolution, fail to relate oneself to both other organizations and our own in a way that bears proof that they are not "ideologues" but "co-editors" of Marxist-Humanism. It is this which we will need to have mastered by the time the convention rolls around and we decide on what kind of pamphlet on Columbia U. events we want.

3) Finally there is the book itself, and I want to quote just a few sentences from the Introduction that was not in the first draft: "It becomes necessary to return to Hegel whose philosophy has a validity all its own. That is why Marx kept returning after he broke with Hegelianism and created historical materialism. Marx's problems, Lenin's problems aren't cured. No age can speak for another, Precisely because the impulse to grapple with Hegel's Absolutes came, neither from scholastic needs, nor even the founders of the new world view of Marxist-Humanism, but because our age imparted a new urgency to it, it would be at our own peril if we were to dismiss the new facets unfolded by our world in transition!" Yours, Raya 14038