

CALL FOR CONVENTION
to Work Out Perspectives for 1984-85

April 6, 1984

To All Members of News and Letters
Committees and British Marxist-Humanists

Dear Friends:

Ominous is the very numeral, 1984. So vividly had Orwell described the totalitarian horror he saw looming before him out of the crisis of the year, 1948, which he transposed into the then far-distant "1984", that when that year finally did arrive, there was no way for the ideologues of our capitalist-imperialist age not to note some substantial similarities. It didn't take them long to forget it, however, when the electioneering hoopla began.

We, on the other hand, from the very first day of the new year, as we held our Expanded REB, declared that it is the task of revolutionaries to transform 1984 into its absolute opposite, by working all the harder to build the ground for the total uprooting of this exploitative, racist, sexist society. This means that we will continue to stress the horror of all the objective events in this Reagan Year of deep retrogression in economics, in politics, in a militarization that doesn't stop even at a nuclear outreach of Star Wars! At this very moment, the smiling U.S. imperialist Behemoth, in the form of the Great Pretender, Ronald Reagan, is once again saying the exact opposite of what he is doing on his retrogressionist road -- calling, allegedly, for a "ban" on chemical warfare weapons while he asks Congress for \$1.1 billion for chemical weapon "modernization" as "deterrent."

So great is this counter-revolution that the reigning intellectual void has sucked in the so-called Left, who refuse to face the reality of the counter-revolution emerging from the revolution itself -- such as that which appeared in Grenada with the murder of Bishop by his colleagues, Austin and Coard, who thus paved the road for the U.S. imperialist invasion.

I. MOVEMENTS FROM PRACTICE: TODAY AND YESTERDAY

The absolute opposite to this crisis-ridden world is the great ferment from below, the massive resistance, the movements from practice bent on uprooting the ruling madness. Indeed, so deep is the revolutionary opposition that it is visible even in such minor events as bourgeois electioneering politics. Though we generally disregard all such politicking, it is impossible not to sense the significance of the Black masses in motion in this election year. When 80 percent of the Black voters in Chicago, and over 90 percent in New York City, turn out for so previously disregarded an event as a primary, it is crystal clear that this Black mass support of Jesse Jackson has nothing to do with support for Democratic Party politics. Just as the millions who flocked to Marcus Garvey at the end of World War I, when race riots greeted returning Black soldiers, did so not because they wanted to "go back to Africa" but because they wished to be free here and now -- so thousands are following Jesse Jackson now, not because of any

16265

belief in the capitalist system but because they wish to uproot the whole exploitative, racist system. It hardly needs ghosts come from the grave of either Marcus Garvey or Frantz Fanon to tell the American Black masses and Latinos and Asians to spell out the depth of their feeling as the need for a total uprooting.

Ever since the age of revolutions -- industrial, social-political, intellectual -- that marked the end of feudalism and the rise of our machine-age, those masses in motion and the dialectics of revolutions in action as well as in thought laid the ground for that new continent of thought and of revolution we know as Marx's "new Humanism."

By no accident, Chapter 1 of Marxism and Freedom was entitled "Age of Revolutions" and the whole of Part I, which was entitled "From Practice to Theory," manifested the Marxist-Humanist contribution to this age. The structure of the whole work remains our ground today. In the movement from practice to theory that is itself a form of theory there is embedded the movement from theory which is reaching philosophy. Without the unity of the two, revolution cannot succeed. It is the todayness of Marx's Marxism that made the Marx centenary year so alive in 1983 that we have, in fact, been working nonstop with Marxist-Humanism as a body of ideas expressed in our trilogy of revolution and an outreach to national and international activities.

II. FROM 1980 TO 1984

The 1980s began with our declaration that 1980 was both the "Year of the Book" and the year we would vote to expand News & Letters from an 8-pager to a regular 12-pager, so as to have room, at one and the same time, to hear more voices from below and to include new Essay Articles. Indeed, we had a new logo emphasizing "Theory/Practice" -- which became also the new title for the "Two Worlds" column.

In 1981 we did appear as a 12-pager and, at the same time, created what we may call a direct relationship to Marx's Marxism as a totality, since our analysis of his last work, the Ethnological Notebooks, became integral to all three parts of our book-in-progress, Rosa Luxemburg; Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution.

By the time that work was published, in 1982, not only had our slogan become "three books, not one" in order to stress Marxist-Humanism as a body of ideas -- and indeed Marxism and Freedom and Philosophy and Revolution were published with new Introductions along with the new work -- but it was further spelled out in our Perspectives as "Methodology and Politicalization," which covered our whole 30 years of existence.

The Marx Centenary opened so many new doors for us in 1983, through our projection of Marx's Marxism as a totality, that it was possible to project, at one and the same time, his philosophy of "revolution in permanence" as ground for organization, and our 30 year existence as the organizational manifestation of Marx's

Humanism for our age. At the same time, the death of our editor, Charles Denby, made all tasks, especially for organizational growth, more difficult. We did, however, have the advantage of his participation in laying the ground for both our Constitutional Convention and our move to Chicago. As he put it when our new edition of American Civilization on Trial came off the press:

"We have always spoken about and practiced the two-way road between the U.S. and Africa in the ideas of freedom, and it is as clear in American Civilization on Trial as it is in our trilogy. But the reason I am most happy that it is being published now, is that it can help the movement reach a new stage."

(His last statement, written for the 1983 Constitutional Convention, in which he wrote this, is reproduced in full, along with our In Memoriam, in the November 1983 issue of N&L.)

The outreach we achieved in the 1983 Marx Centenary, with the National Chairwoman's lecture tour and the entire membership's practice of "Have Thumb, Will Travel," extended to all our activities -- whether with the Black dimension, the Latino world, Women's Liberation or anti-war youth, as well as rank-and-file labor, as witness our new columns on "Black World" and "Workshop Talks." It culminated in a new kind of classes we held in 1984.

In a fundamental sense, this series of eight classes was an extension of the Marx Centenary year as we articulated Marxist-Humanism for our age in the three major works we referred to as the trilogy of revolution. This involved the whole organization, from founders to the newest member-at-large, and deepened our revolutionary international relations as well. Now that these classes have ended, and have achieved our self-development as a walking body of ideas, they have laid the ground for the move of the Center to Chicago.

III. FROM CLASSES IN THE MARXIST-HUMANIST BODY OF IDEAS TO THIS YEAR'S PERSPECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES FOR 1984-85

For the very critical period in which we now live -- with the contradictory state of the Union; with a heated-up new Cold War as well as the ongoing regional wars all over the globe from the Middle East to Central America; with both nuclear Behemoths constantly testing each other -- we will have three new publications that will be sure to open new doors: in Labor with the pamphlet on the 1949-50 Miners General Strike; in the international arena with a new edition of the pamphlet on the Afro-Asian Revolutions; in the Women's Liberation Movement with the essay we are reprinting from Praxis International. The latest activity -- our participation in the Third World Conference -- as well as the coming Women's Studies Conference, a National Labor History Conference, and a number of academic conferences next fall, are but one manifestation of all the liberation movements in which we will deepen our activities, never separating them from the projection of our philosophy, and our challenge to the post-Marx Marxists.

In issuing the Call this year we are seeking not only to initiate the fullest discussion among the members of News and Letters Committees but with all those not-yet-members, anxious to uproot this racist, sexist, exploitative, imperialist world and create a new one. Thus we have already voted to issue as a special bulletin the report on our Archives given to the class in Detroit by the National Co-Organizer, Mike Connolly. The pre-convention bulletin issued by our WL-N&L Committees will include Susan Van Gelder's report on the development of our unique category of Woman as Reason and Force of Revolution as seen through the Archives -- for which Detroit remains the home. Because the move of the Center to Chicago means that many new aspects for the paper will emerge from its new home there, the Philosophic-Technical Committee this year will issue its own bulletin, which will include Mary Joan Grey's report on N&L to the final class in Detroit, which traced the Black dimension through four bound volumes. Eugene Walker, as the Chairman of the PTC, will write a summary of the year for that bulletin.

This Convention Call opens the 90-day pre-Convention discussion period. The National Chairwoman, Raya Dunayevskaya, has been asked to bring in a Draft Perspectives Thesis which will be printed in the May issue of N&L. By then, a tentative Agenda will be sent out, listing the reports to be given on organization, the paper, finances, and all other aspects of the year ahead.

A Plenary session for the outgoing National Editorial Board will be held on Friday, July 6, at 7 PM. It will be preceded by meetings of the national committees of both Youth and Women's Liberation. The Convention will open officially on Saturday morning, July 7 and continue through Sunday, July 8. It will begin, as always with the National Chairwoman's Perspectives Report.

All sessions of the Convention, except a final Executive Session for the membership only, are open to friends and sympathizers on the invitation of the locals in consultation with the Center. All invited have full voice.

The Detroit local has been asked, for the last time, to host a party to greet visitors and out-of-town members on Saturday night, as well as to host the entire Convention.

-- THE RESIDENT EDITORIAL BOARD

16268