

REB Meeting of July 10, 1985

Agenda: I. Report on Draft Perspectives by Raya; II. Discussion (to be continued after next point); III. Lou's sub-report on Black Dimension and Caribbean, and Continuation of Discussion; IV. Ongoing Activities -- Mike; V. G&W

I. Raya's Draft had three sections: I. The New Russian Ruler on the International Scene; II. The U.S. Economy vs. The Mass Struggles; III. Organizational-Philosophic Conclusions. (It will be summarized only briefly here, as it will be developed and presented in full in N&L mailed out on Aug. 2, with one copy of the galley sent to each local a week earlier.)

Part I begins as follows: Mikhail Gorbachev, the new player in global nuclear brinkmanship between those two Behemoths -- Russia and the U.S. -- is about to attempt writing so new a chapter in their relationship as to result in a shift in Russia's world relations, from West Europe to the East -- China, the Middle-East, the whole Third World. It isn't that Gorbachev is disregarding the U.S., but the shift to the East is not merely for showing Reagan that Russia is not following his tune but that Reagan had better recognize just how serious and global and military is Russia's world-reach.

For the time being he can gloat about the erosion of NATO from within its own contradictions. This is not only seen in such obvious divergent attitudes between West Europe and the U.S. on both Central America and Afghanistan, but on what they supposedly agree about -- the deployment of nuclear arms. (Here the draft includes statements of a former Secretary of Defense official concerning Europe's distrust of the U.S. and U.S. cynicism toward "the salvation of Europe".)

As for the Middle East, it is true Russia has "lost" Egypt but it has Syria, and that means not only Lebanon and a great influence in the whole Middle East, but Syria, in turn, is pulling at the U.S. It is not the games rulers play that concern us, but the two worlds within each country. Russia has plenty of contradictions even when it is not in relationship to the global power struggle, within Russia itself. And the revolt in Poland has not been destroyed but only driven underground.

Part II, then, begins: As American revolutionaries, it is Reagan's retrogressionism that is the immediate enemy. What has priority over all else is what the four more years Reagan won in the last election means to the American masses. (Here the draft takes up the so-called "prosperity" which actually means a greater increase than ever in the number of officially poor, while for the Black population the retrogression is in everything from employment to civil rights to child care; and for Women's Liberation all hard-won rights are threatened from abortion rights to the right of a job at all, let alone comparable pay.) The American economy has experienced such structural deformities that even the bourgeois economists, like Martin Feldstein, has had to admit that if it were not for the inflow of no less than "nearly \$100 billion from abroad", we would not have the right to think we are not a "debtor nation."

The Reaganism of the media that pretends to be independent is shown not only in the failure to report such things as Benjamin Hooks' sharp critique

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of Reagan at the recent NAACP Convention, but the manner in which they have stopped covering what is truly happening in the Philippines. The truth is that outright gun battles, growth of Communist insurgency, and development of new guerilla forces have all increased greatly in the recent period. Insofar as U.S. capitalism-imperialism is concerned, whether at home or abroad, the "enemy" remains the masses who fight and die for freedom.

Part III continues with our Organizational-Philosophic Conclusions:

The question, What To Do?, becomes more urgent than ever because it demands that we concretize what was meant in last year's Perspectives Thesis, by the expression, "Not by Practice Alone." What sounds like a subjective analysis is, in fact, what is demanded by the crises-ridden nuclear world, where time is, indeed, running out.

"Not by Practice Alone" cannot be left a generality. Once we recognized our organizational responsibility for the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism, this meant our becoming practicing dialecticians. Organizational-philosophic-journalistic responsibility means practice of the dialectics of thought as in the analysis of current events. That, and not a mere 30th birthday celebration, was the motive for going through 30 years of N&L, relating the objective events of that period, both in our books and in history in general, not by keeping theory and practice in separate compartments but by the concretization of theory as practice and the universalization of the practice, as it emerges out of the movement from below. It is this universalization of the movement from below which led to our philosophic conclusion of human history as having been born out of a movement from practice, and yet its full meaning was not grasped by the movement from practice or the movement from theory, until it was worked out philosophically, dialectically, as humus for humanity's leap forward.

It is high time for each of us to become a practicing dialectician and to be put to the test by objective events over which we have no control at all. Precisely because of that, and precisely because monthly was insufficient to meet the challenge from the objective events, we were compelled to establish Weekly Political Letters, as we did at the time of the U.S. Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. This, however, could not reach all the readers of the paper. Now, that we will soon have, along with our 30-Year Retrospective and the present Perspectives Thesis, also Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution, which is a demonstration that dialectics of revolution can be carried out even when the focus is on one force of revolution (WL in this case), the REB proposes:

- 1) That, instead of this year's drive being just an appeal for \$2.50 for a sub, we transform the Appeal to all readers of N&L to help us establish a Special Fund to Expand N&L into a Bi-Weekly Paper, with the 1986 Convention to decide, on the basis of this response, when the first bi-weekly could appear.
- 2) That the Theory/Practice retrospective of our 30 Years, together with the 1985-86 Marxist-Humanist Perspectives Thesis, become a pamphlet in January, 1986.
- 3) That we sell the new book not as salesmen but as founders of Marxist-Humanism, from the time it was founded in 1955 with N&L as its paper, to the present.

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4. That in order to help us in all these new undertakings we ask Peter to move to Chicago to strengthen the Center.

Clearly, these additional responsibilities will affect all of our activities -- whether in support committees for El Salvador or Nicaragua freedom struggles, anti-nuke movements, demonstrations against apartheid, or labor picket lines, or whether it be in our own development recording voices from below. In all our activities, it is Marxist-Humanism that we project. It is not just a question of organizational or philosophic development but the imperative fight against Reaganism and all those who just tack on to one or the other of the two Behemoths, U.S. and Russia, fighting for world rule.

(The Draft would, at this point, repeat paragraphs 2,3, and 4 from the official Call, and then conclude:)

As practicing dialecticians we need to demonstrate that total freedom requires putting an end to the division between mental and manual labor. There is no other road to establish new human relations. In these nuclear times, when the very question of the survival of civilization is at stake, this ultimate problem has put an end to the division between ultimate and immediate. The immediate, the practical, the revolutionary goal is the daily practice.

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Raya : I thought it would be great if we could demonstrate what "practicing dialecticians" means by looking at Gene's discussion right here. I saw three important new elements, two of which are a challenge to the theoreticians, and one of which could be an assignment for him to do this week. The first relates to the fact of objective/subjective, not as a generality but as a specific event that must be transformed into a revolutionary moment. The second was the way Gene, instead of using the phrase we usually do, "workers not only as Force but as Reason," said that the Youth said the other organizations did not respect their minds, and that what they wanted recognized was that they have minds. I believe we could begin using that word "minds" instead of "Reason", since that came from the workers themselves. The third is a task for Gene -- could he write an article for N&L this week in which he contrasts the way the bourgeois economists use the expression "labor productivity" as if

it resulted from machines, to the way the workers refer to the fact of how the bosses react to an accident. If Gene tells the story he just told us, of how the worker could not even get time off for an accident, and was merely put on lighter work, it would make a fine article for N&L.

I want also to say a word on the question Neda raised about the new Classes next year. I had not yet worked out what form they would take, but I now think that they could revolve about the 30-year retrospective and be so related to the perspective of a bi-weekly that they become workshops.

July 31, 1985

Dear Friends:

The most serious problem facing N&L Committees as we approach the Plenum is Finances. That is so not merely because living in Chicago is so much more expensive than it was in Detroit, in everything from the move to Chicago to existing through this first year, as organization, as individuals, as paper. No, finances is not just our problem; the whole economy is going down. And, with it, the ever-deeper political retrogression by Reaganism, in the U.S. and in its tentacles abroad, is taking its toll. Nor am I referring only to the tentacles in Nicaragua, where he is busy trying to overthrow the government, the excuse being that it supposedly directly endangers the U.S. I am referring also to Africa, where he did not even vote for the UN sanctions against apartheid. What he fatally refuses to recognize is that Africa is not far away, which is to say that the American masses totally oppose apartheid in so serious a way as to demand both divestment and opposition to that fascist government that Reagan embraces. On the horizon is the youth movement at a very new stage and the nearly daily protests at the South African embassies in the U.S. Nor do those movements of opposition separate themselves from the opposition to the retrogression suffered by the Black masses right here. The prevailing feeling among all opposition groups to Reaganism is that we have reached a stage that is more dangerous than in the period of McCarthyism. He was just a Senator and nevertheless produced a lot of terror in the land; Reagan is the President, who has his hand on the button that could set off a nuclear holocaust. It becomes imperative for us not only to let the voices from below be heard but to increase all of our activities in fighting Reaganism in all ways, including resisting his brainwashing.

Yours,

Raya

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