

TO THE NEB

nov. 24, 1957

Dear Friends:

The press proofs of the book just arrived special from the publisher. Just as soon as I get more than this single copy for final check, I will of course see that a few copies are sent to each locality. The reason I address this to the NEB rather than to the whole organization is that I want you to know about a proposition I will bring into the next NEB regarding the study of W & F.

When I read Djilas's book the overwhelming characteristic although subordinate to his main theme, was the actual ignorance about Marxism among the theoreticians in the Communist field. He himself sees it in others, but not in himself, and he has his "theory" --it is that with Stalin Communism became "practical" rather than "theoretical."

The only thing true about that is the correct dividing mark--that of Stalinism. With the transformation of Bolshevism into its opposite, Stalinism, theory stopped coming from the masses and therefore perished. That is to say, revolutionary theory. But bourgeois theory, which comes from ordering the masses about, flourished. The theory of the monolithic party was not an eclectic thing, a mere deviation or bureaucratization. It came out of the speeches of Stalin telling all others what to do, and these speeches are organized into book form and labelled "Collected Works". But the author himself writes no book, collected, selected or single. This he leaves to the hacks who today he gives the Stalin prize and tomorrow he wants executes. Intellectual work thus reaches its most frustrating isolationism as "mere theory" while the leaders are no longer theoreticians but politicians "practical men".

Trotsky was the only one of the original leaders who continued to write books and attempted to write theory in counter-position to Stalinism--that it was not "original" that is to say, truly opposite, we know but it was the transition to the general theory of state capitalism. Outside of Trotsky himself the Trotskyists have produced nothing and "written no books."

Take the favorite theory of the Social Democracy, and it was in embryo and is still there also in Johnsonism, that Stalinism comes from Leninism. I have a pregnant footnote on that in Marxism & Freedom: "That the Party (S-D) was corruptible to begin with could be seen even from the corridor gossip which had it that one of the leaders of 'the revolutionary wing' said to Bernstein, 'But such things you speak about should be done, not said.' Those who insist on seeking the 'roots' of Stalinism in Leninism would, if they were truly objective, find a whole forest of 'roots' for the One-Party State concept in the Second International's ukase that only one Social Democracy exist in each country."

If you recall Johnson's Dialectic Notes, you will remember that he on the other hand thought that the "objective" was in the fact that Stalin took one aspect of Leninism and led that (vanguard party) to its "logical" conclusion. The same type of thing was once said about the relationship of anarchism and Marxism in the First International. The truth however was that Marxism won over Proudhonism

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not only theoretically but because the objective base--small as capital and artisans--had gone under and factory production had become dominant. ~~Worse than that~~ as in the Latin countries--Proletarianism flourished, in or out of the First International. Similarly, the theory of the vanguard party of Lenin's was all we say it was in that magnificent chapter where we trace 20 years of its development against the objective background. When, however, the 1917-23 revolution did not succeed and the workers did not dominate the industrial development, then state capitalism demanded the monolithic party as the "logical" development of the vanguard party, or even as just its opposite, but because it positively represented state capital.

I do not have time to develop these ideas at this moment, nor is a letter the proper place for their development. I brought these factors out only in order to motivate the proposition for the study, not just reading, but the study of Marxism and Freud. Concretely, I will propose that as soon as the press proofs arrive, educationalists locally change completely. Every week, week in and week out, until the 287 pages of text (although it would not harm if also the other 100 pages of Indexes were included) have been covered, a chapter of the book is discussed and done seriously and systematically. That is to say, one person, beginning with the organizer first, but then changing reporters each week, prepares a summation of 20 minutes. Then unlimited discussion and a summation of 5 minutes. Footnotes at all times should be included as part of the text where they belonged but for the printer finding it cheaper to set otherwise. Supplementary reading material assigned.

This means that we can get a head start before the actual publication, I mean actually coming off with covers, and concentrated sales. Secondly, and as important, it means week in and week out the people who will have bought the book or be interested in finding out about it come to the regular meeting, which, except for 1/2 hour of business, and once in 3 weeks an hour of editing, and go through the book literally so that it is mastered. Thirdly it means we above all have mastered it. There is no other way to act as founders of a movement rather than as salesmen of merchandise.

We have looked for a long time to educationalists and have not yet found the solution. The regular meetings, however, are very often "draggy" and the public meetings are too few and far between. This however can be regular and since, no matter how historic any one part is, there is always in the book some reference to the present, they can be more current than many educationalists on current topics, and a good deal more solid. We just cannot let "theory" become either a mere intellectual preoccupation or bourgeoisified. We must become living proof of the unity of theory and practice and a solid year at that and we will have a convention that will startle the world.

I would like to hear from you within a week so that I have the benefit of the field in the discussion at the REE.

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