

Dec. 23, 1957

Dear Andy, Ig and Johnny:

At yesterday's first meeting of Detroit on the series of . . . on the book, I moved that we skip one meeting-lecture since the chaotic conditions in the post office have delayed the arrival of the . . . and it was thus impossible for all to read before each lecture. I suggest the same thing be done out of town.

That, however, is not the reason for this letter. I believe that the first lecture, or rather the discussion on it, revealed a pitfall we do not wish to repeat. Thus, while the lecture itself was excellent both in the manner it stuck to the text and the way it used the current scene to illuminate a point, the discussion too often fell back into the familiar groove of speaking only on the familiar and not really grasping something new, the discovery of what theory means, the illumination therefore of the daily life struggles which made them fall into a movement of history, and hence the subjective task one imposes on himself to grapple with theory, not as philosophy in general, but as concrete generalization. If "concrete generalization" seems to be a contradiction in terms, then you have achieved the necessary desire to stop taking things for granted.

In a word, it is high time that each of us took as a dictum of behavior the Hegelian phrase we so often repeat and so little understand: "seriousness, labor, patience, suffering of the negative." In this case I do not want illuminations from the class struggle as to what "the negative" means. In this case it better mean one's personal struggle with a theoretical problem. I do not know how else one can possibly become a builder of a new Marxist Humanist movement.

and "labor"

Now then "seriousness" means each one, whether lecturer or listener, takes the question of this so seriously that he is well prepared in advance of lecture with the material to be discussed, with the questions he or she wishes to pose, with the illuminations he or she wishes to contribute because he has already grappled with that section as something so general and concrete at the same time that he will know exactly how to use the theory as a weapon of analysis of current events and shop problems. You have exercised your mental faculties, have labored, and now you are ready to develop yourself.

"Patience" and "suffering" means you have stopped on the section even if at the beginning one of two things happened: either it was not clear and you grew impatient because you wanted the answer much ahead of when the "answer" could possibly have evolved out of the material at hand. Or it was so simple that it was deceptively clear--that is, because you understood every word, you thought you also understood the theory behind the word and ahead of the next one and all its ramifications. Go back and start all over again with deliberate patience and expanded testing or suffering and overcoming your hostility to thought.

In no other way can we all become theoreticians, as we must.

Rae

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