

October 6, 1964

Dear Morgan:

Although your "Dear Marxist-Humanists" letter of August 23 was not a personal letter to me, I should like to reply to it. I do not intend, however, either to ~~change~~ in a too loose use of the word "counter-revolutionary" as you do, much less take issue with such an adjectival assault as your "compulsive, hypocritical, dogmatic." Instead I wish to limit myself to what I consider the two fundamental points: the mode of production, on the one hand, and a philosophy for the 60's on the other.

Not because I have a predilection for 19th century philosophy, but because the points at issue were treated so basically by Marx, I should like to begin with his conception of why production is the determinant of all else. (I do hope, Morgan, that we have sufficient in common that I need not hurry to explain that by "the determinant" I mean nothing so vulgarly materialistic as either the Communists or the capitalists mean in their use of this term; both for Marx and for Hegel "the whole is the truth" and it's only within that totality, which includes culture as well as economics, that determinant is used.) In his "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy" -- I'm referring not to the book as a whole, but to the famous introduction that actually was put at the end of the book -- Marx says that some people point to the fact that many societies live by plunder; others by politics; and still others by religion. Nevertheless, for people to have something to plunder, something had to be at hand to plunder and that something at hand differed in various societies depending on the mode of production. You may recall that when he repeats this thought, in a footnote in Amintor itself, at which point he also brings in Cervantes' Don Quixote, as showing full appreciation of the fact that modern society did not live by knight-errantry, he not only deals with the land-ownership by the medieval church, but also the very superior-to-capitalistic-materialistic politics, the Greek polis. Just recently, I read a book, a very weighty book in which the specific sentence I'm referring to was said in a very casual way, as if not deserving of more than the phrase he gave it, the fact that in the great Peloponnesian Wars the decisive battle was won by the best oarsmen. These oarsmen were the lowest of the low category of working men. Because, however, of the victory of this crew they were entitled not only to the spoils of victory, but also to a say in the manner of running the Greek state, including the foreign policy with Persian and all other contestants for what was then world power. And once these oarsmen were given voice in the polis, there was no one you could possibly leave out except the slaves. So the great big Greek philosophy extending to the proletariat came about in as simple a manner as when the sans-culotte, by merely remaining in the galleries after the great intellectuals decided questions of war and peace, and continuing to talk among themselves on what they should do, were the real discoverers of democracy.

Now, you can say that the crew produced nothing, and indeed they didn't, except when engaged in fishing instead of military exploits. And that was precisely Marx's point when he stressed that whereas our world lives at the expense of the proletariat, the ancient lived at the expense of the slaves, and because the slaves were the only ones who did produce and the proletariat did not, the Greco-Roman world was brought not merely to defeat, but to a total destruction. Furthermore, Marx continued, the slave revolts, as brave as they were, could not bring on a society of a higher order ~~until~~ until a different mode of production arose, and the reason he "preferred" capitalism as against feudalism or slavery was that this mode of production had within itself not alone its "inevitable" collapse, but the class that could reconstruct it on newer and totally different beginnings. You may think that our proletariat is a minority class, and purely by virtue of numbers if nothing else, can no longer perform the revolutionary role either history or Marx, whichever you prefer, assigned to the class. All I want to stress at this point is the fact that some very fundamental looking classes

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existed in Marx's time other than workers and capitalists: the very weighty landlord class on the one hand, and the not-so-weighty but very vociferous petty-bourgeois intellectuals on the other. It took Marx very nearly 20 years before he decided that the landlord class would be dealt with no earlier than Vol. III, as a sub class, sharing with the capitalist, the surplus value created by the proletariat and the peasant. And it took all his skill as a historian of so inconsequential a hero as "little Napoleon" -- The Eighteenth Brumaire -- to settle accounts with the brilliant intellectuals who were proving to him how far removed they were from the petty grocery man to whom Marx seemed to have likened them, whereupon Marx answered that they may indeed be, in status and in brilliance as far removed as they say and are; nevertheless, they cannot, in thought, move any further than the petty grocer does in action.

The whole point is that production, be it automated or otherwise, sets the condition of both relations of man at the point of production, as well as those not having anything whatever to do with production, but who nevertheless must eat to live. Food, shelter and clothing still remain the primary needs in as advanced a land as USA and as backward a one as the Gambia. I believe that we understand this, then all other questions about how many are used in production now, and how many will be used before the nuclear bomb destroys all of society, can easily be dealt with statistically. (I enclose the report to the Convention which will dispose of that question from the statistical point of view.) Here what interests me is the methodology of deciding what constitutes a class. I certainly cannot see how you think that the state-capitalist society can create a class that is not related to production and one which includes such antagonistic elements as the recipient of relief and the dispenser of relief.

Now let us get down to the question of the philosophy of the 60's and whether that really is so different from the philosophy of the 1950's that somehow Marxist-Humanists must, in order to "prove" that they do not believe in the theory of the "infallibility of the leader", admit that they are wrong, and dispose of themselves, I suppose, in the dustbin of history. You yourself still admit that the humanism of Marx should certainly be discussed further, that work as self-activity and realization of all human potentiality is of the essence, and that the relationship of exploiter and exploited can certainly not be dispensed with even though you are ready to define those terms in evidently new forms. The XXXI truth is, of course, that the humanism of Marxism was not only new in the 1950's, or to be more precise, the old (1844) that had to be renewed for our day, but that our day includes the 1960's as well. What is new and what I have been working on, as you know, for many years, is the spelling-out, not either in blue-rint form or in uncritically following "the war on poverty", but spelling out in the sense of deepening and expanding the philosophy of freedom. This philosophy of freedom, in abstract form, was dealt with in the most profound manner by Hegel in "The Doctrine of the Notion". This is the part of the Science of Logic, that still awaits to be transcended. It deals with the hows and whys of the birth of a new society. But it is dealt with in such "idealistic" terms that the reader thinks that it is a question of mere philosophic category, such as subjectivity, judgment, syllogism, teleology, analytic, synthetic and dialectic cognition, all ending in the Absolute Idea, that the impression given is that it is a question only of thought and not of actuality. If ever there was a need of a "materialistic" reading of the Absolute Idea it is now, and I mean NOW. And it would be a very brave step, dear Morgan, if you came to my aid in this, for I have no safe havens -- not even in Marx and Lenin, (because their problems were for a different age) nor even in Marcuse, such less any old radicals. And neither in philosophy, nor in economics, is time of such short duration as you would be willing to set a period to on the question of the African Revolutions and whether or not they "lived up to my prophecy".

Yours,

P.S. Please forgive the involved style; I have just returned to town and am full of the Absolute Idea which I saw very clearly on the St. Clair River, but not on Grand River.