

11/28/68

To the NRB  
Dear Colleagues:

The Call for the Black-Red Conference below may be changed some since the black members of the NRB have the right to change formulations, etc., and they are discussing it in a couple of days. It will also take a week before they write up their brief contributions that will go with the Call. But I feel that the NRB should have advance notice, although this is mainly for Detroit and mainly for blacks. We'll not be able to say how this experiment works out till afterwards -- but it will be new. Yours, Raya

Call for Black, Black-Red Conference

- I. Why? Where? When?
- II. What is it?
- III. How it will be conducted.

I. Why, Where, When?

This call for a Black Conference -- perhaps better designated as a Black-Red conference -- is issued in order to listen to black thinking, not as if it were no more than a command to act, but as part of a total philosophy, the real pre-requisite to revolution. It will be held in Detroit, the day of January 12th, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The Black Revolution has reached the cross-roads. At this transition point, there has been a break in communication, not merely between black and white, but between black and black. There is no point in hiding that fact: the most serious break is not that between black and white, but between black masses and black "leaders." This conference hopes to open this road to black workers.

While it is true that, without some red coloration, there is no way whatever of whites getting to communicate with blacks, what is more important is that there is no inter-communication between the ages, that is to say, between different historic periods. One must begin with one's own past, in this case, the black past. It is a glorious past, not only heroic, but also philosophical. And it has always been international.

Thus, neither the African nor the American black revolts were one-way streets. Indeed, the two-way road to revolution was a triangular development, from Africa, through West Indies, to the United States, and the other way around. In a word, the color question was, at one and the same time, a national question, and a tri-continental question.

The two-way road to revolution between Africa and the Black Revolt in America began long before "Africa Year, 1960", but it is the 1960s that concern us today. The African Revolutions opened a new stage, not only in world history, but also in the world thinking.

The dialectics of liberation compelled a unity of thought and action. Negritude was its color, and ~~freedom~~ was its goal. Because the aim was the re-construction of the whole social order, the unity demanded that there be more than the "making" of revolution; it meant a totally new life. Hence, the philosophy of liberation was to precede and to follow the achievement of independence; it was most certainly not the establishment of a new state form of exploitation.

What was true of the African Revolutions was true also of the <sup>Black</sup> Negro Revolution in America. Here, too, black was its color; Freedom Now its nature. The difference between Africa and America was that on the continent of Africa, ~~West, East and South~~, the black African was the majority; in the US, the Afro-American was <sup>the</sup> the minority. The strategy of black revolt here, thus, was much more complex -- and also more challenging for the revolt occurred in the bastion of world capitalism.

If we look at what preceded the <sup>young Black</sup> youth Negro revolt in 1960 -- the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott -- will at once see that it was both a race and class war. It also, not accidentally, coincided with the East European revolt against Russian Communism, for the freedom movement is a world task. It is precisely because the overwhelming majority of black Americans are workers that the Negro has always been the touchstone of the American Reality, both exposing the hollowness of its democracy and the exploitative nature of its

mode of production. Again, and above all, the Negro became the vanguard in the movement to transform that facility. This vanguard role of the Negro stands out of all crucial points of American development, whether that be the movement for the abolition of slavery leading to the Civil War or Populism; the fight against the very first signs of imperialism (when the US betrayed the Cuban fight for freedom from Spain by itself turning conqueror in 1895); or the building of the industrial unions in the 1930s; the sense of internationalism, or the present attempts to re-construct society on totally new, truly human foundations.

This is why it is all-decisive to see that the Black Revolution gets diverted, neither to being an appendage to state-capitalist societies calling themselves Communist, nor to bowdlerizing to Nixon's "black capitalism." (And there is no use thinking that, just because there is no way of stopping the black revolution, that parts of it cannot get corrupted by the million dollar Ford Foundation grant to one civil rights organization.)

II. What is it?

Philosophy and Revolution is the title of a book in the process of being written. The author thinks that it can not be completed until she has listened to new black voices. This is no because these new voices of revolt express a continuation of what had begun at the beginning of the machine age, the outbreak of a civil war and the French of 1793-1794, but also of the same time a new type of national revolution, i.e., the self-activity of the French masses in achieving freedom was translated by the great German philosopher living at the time, G.W.F. Hegel, into what is known as "dialectics," which has rightly been called an "algebra of revolution." Marx made this "algebra" concrete by transferring the dialectic into a theory of liberation, the expression of the masses struggling for freedom. The present book traces this relationship of philosophy to revolution from that point to 1917, and asks: Why have the revolutions since then been defeated? Is there not only an objective reason (the strength of the oppressor powers,) but also in the theoretic preparation for revolution by the oppressed for these defeats?

To make sure that the revolts in our era are neither transformed into opponents, (as were the Communist revolutions into state oppressive powers squalling the private capitalist powers) nor defeated before ever they have a chance to see freedom become real, is essential to listen to black thinking on what has happened to the black revolt.

To what extent was the revolt against "whiteness" a reaction to the fact that, as the black revolt extended itself from the South to the North, it found the North not fundamentally different from the South?

To what extent did the surge in 1965 of the white youth (who had gone South in the early 1960s to aid the black revolt) totally into the anti-Vietnam war movement affect the black revolutionary, a turning inward?

To what extent did the interest shown the black revolution by Castro and by Mao influence black thinking because it seemed a shortcut to black revolution, has had become significant with the slowness of the black people's achievements? Did any of the leaders of the black workers what they think? *None*

III. How?

In asking these questions, and in wishing to relate whatever may be posed by others to NEWS & LETTERS' own history, we are here presenting brief summaries of past documents (1) the role of the Negro intellectual, (2) the relationship of Marxist-Humanism to black revolts; and (3) American Civilization on Trial, or the Negro as Touchstone of American History up to 1965. Finally, there will also be available to all participants Black Man's Revolt, the NEWS & LETTERS Committee's analysis of the black revolts, 1967, as well as draft chapters of Philosophy and Revolution, up to the point where black thinking today is involved.

*The author Mrs. D*  
She will introduce the book as it relates directly to the conference itself, posing questions that are decisive not only for the book, but for the next stage of development of the black revolution. The floor will then be open for a full day of discussion by the black participants. Only at the end of that discussion, and just before the summation, will the other white participants have a chance for brief interventions in the discussion in which they will have, up to that point, only been observers. One final word. The summation cannot be anything but a very preliminary and tentative one; it will take

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The Black Revolution has reached the cross-roads. <sup>At this</sup> ~~point~~ transition point, there has been a break in communication, not merely between black and white, but between black and black. There is no point in hiding that fact; the most serious break is not that between black and white, but between black masses and black "leaders". <sup>This</sup>

conference hopes to open this road to ~~the~~ black ~~workers~~ workers.

Some of <sup>lowest</sup> those who shout black, black, black are the ones who are following a white's concept of revolution, or, more correctly put, guerrilla war. It is true that what ails Castro's theory of guerrilla war is not that it is "white", but that, far from being a "shortcut to revolution", it is a shortcut to self-destruction. To call for urban black guerrillas in white America is sheer suicide. Far from being revolutionary (in the deepest sense of a spontaneous, mass outburst), it is a commandeering from above in isolation from the mass revolt. In any case, if one wishes to argue the point, one must argue on the basis of its content, not its color.

While it is true that, without some red coloration, there is no way whatever of whites getting to communicate with blacks, what is more important is that there is no inter-communication between the ages, that is to say, in different historic periods. ~~as a matter of fact~~ we must begin with one's own past, in this case, the black past. It is a glorious past, not only heroic, but also philosophical. And it has always been international.

Thus, neither the African nor the American black revolts were one-way streets. Indeed, the two-way road to revolution was a triangular development, from Africa, through West Indies, to the United States, and the other way round. In a word, <sup>color question</sup> there was, at one and the same time, a national question, and a tri-continental question.

The two-way road to revolution between Africa and the Black Revolt in America began long before ~~the~~ Africa Year, 1960, but it is the 1960's that concern us today. The African Revolutions opened a new stage, not only in world history, but also in world thinking. <sup>of</sup> The dialectics of liberation compelled a unity of thought and action. Negritude was its color, ~~the~~ freedom was its goal. <sup>of</sup> Because the aim was the ~~reconstruction~~ re-construction of the whole social order, the unity demanded that there be more than the "making" of revolution; it meant a totally new life. Hence, the philosophy of liberation was to precede and to follow the achievement of independence; it was most certainly not the establishment of a new state form of exploitation.

What was true of the African Revolutions was true also of the Negro Revolution in America. Here, too, black was its color; Freedom, Now, its nature. The difference between <sup>the</sup> Africa and America was that on the continent of Africa, ~~the black African was the majority~~ <sup>the black African was the majority</sup> in the US the Afro-American was in the minority. <sup>of</sup> The strategy of revolt, <sup>thus,</sup> was much more complex -- and also more challenging for the revolt occurred ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> the bastion of world capitalism.

*Also, not necessarily coincided with the East European revolt against Russian Communism for the freedom movement (U.S. a world task)*

If we look at what preceded the youth Negro revolt in 1960-- the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott-- we will at once see that it was both a race and class war. It is precisely because the overwhelming majority of black Americans are workers that the Negro has always been the touchstone of the American reality, both exposing the hollowness of its democracy and ~~the~~ its exploitative nature of its mode of production. Again, and above, the Negro became the vanguard in the movement to transform that reality. This vanguard role stands out at all crucial points of American development, whether that be the movement for the abolition of slavery leading to the Civil War or Populism; the fight against the very first signs of Imperialism (when the US betrayed the Cuban fight for freedom from Spain by itself turning conqueror, 1895); or the building of industrial unions in the 1930's; the sense of internationalism, or the present attempts to reconstruct society on totally new, truly human foundations.

*(C)*

This is why it is all-decisive to see that the Black Revolution ~~neither gets diverted to being an appendage to state-capitalist societies calling themselves Communist, nor to kowtowing to Nixon's "black capitalism".~~ (And there is no use thinking that, just because there is no way to stopping the black revolution, that parts of it cannot get corrupted by the million dollar Ford Foundation grant to one ~~and~~ civil rights organization.)

*Outward of the Civil War in the North in 1941, was a time when the Negro was*

Philosophy and Revolution is the title of a book in the process of being written. Its author ~~does not~~ think it can be completed until ~~he~~ has listened to new black voices. This is so because these new voices of revolt express a continuation of what had begun at the beginning of the machine age, the ~~beginning~~ of the national revolution, the beginning of a new epoch of revolutions. ~~The self-activity of the French masses in achieving freedom was translated by the great German philosopher living at the time, G.W.F. Hegel, into what is known as "dialectics", which has rightly been called an "algebra of revolution". Marx made this "algebra" concrete by transforming the dialectic into a theory of liberation, the expression of the masses struggling for freedom. The present book traces this relationship of philosophy to revolution from that point to 1917, and asks: Why have the revolutions since then been defeated? Is there not only an objective reason (the strength of the oppressor powers) but also in the theoretic preparation for revolution by the oppressed for these defeats?~~

To make sure that the revolts in our era are neither transformed into opposites (as were the Communist revolutions into state oppressive powers equalling the private capitalist ~~power~~ powers), nor defeated before ever they have a chance to ~~see~~ see freedom become real, ~~it is essential to listen to black thinking on what has happened to the black revolt.~~ To what extent was the revolt against "whitey" a reaction to the fact that, as the black revolt extended itself from the South to the North, it found the North not fundamentally different from the South? To what extent did the move (of the white youth who had gone South in the early 1960's to aid the black revolt) ~~and~~ ~~is~~ ~~it~~ ~~totally~~ into the anti-Vietnam war movement affect the black revolutionary's turning inward? To what extent did the interest shown the black revolution by Castro and by Mao influence black thinking because it seemed a shortcut to black revolution who had become impatient with the slowness of the black revolt achievements? Did any of the leaders ask the black workers what they think?

-3-  
111 How?

In asking these questions, and in wishing to relate whatever may be posed by others to NEWS & LETTERS' own history, we are here presenting brief summations of past documents (1) the role of the Negro intellectual up to 1947 in the actual developments of the struggle of the black masses; (2) the relationship of Marxist-Leninism to black revolts; and (3) American Civilization on Trial, or the Negro as Touchstone of American History, up to 1963. Finally, there will also be available to all participants Black Mass Revolt, the NEWS & LETTERS Committee's analysis of the black revolts, 1967, as well as draft chapters of Philosophy and Revolution, up to the point where black thinking, today, is involved.

Raya will introduce the book as it relates directly to the conference itself, posing the question that are decisive not only for the book, but for the next stage of development of the black revolution.

The floor will then be open for a full day of discussion by the black participants. Only at the end of that discussion, and just before the summation, will the other white participants have a chance for brief interventions in the discussion in which they will have, up to that point, only been observers.

*One final word*

One final word. The summation cannot be anything but a very preliminary and tentative type of conclusion. It will take weeks, perhaps months, to internalize ~~the~~ the ideas she heard before it can become an integral part of the work, PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION.

Nov. 24, 1968

14054

December 7, 1968

Dear Friends:

Under separate cover, I am sending you Part II -- THE INTERREGNUM: Void and Retrogression vs. Movement from Practice. In view of the fact that it will be very easy to read, as contrasted to Part I on Hegel, I hope you will forgive the long title, especially if you realize that it may very well be junked and called merely "Alternatives". The "alternatives" to Marx and Lenin from within the movement that calls itself Marxist are Trotsky and Mao; and from outside the movement, Jean-Paul Sartre. As you know, the chapters on Trotsky and Sartre had been written previously and, under the circumstances, some repetition is unavoidable, but I still consider that there is no substitute for seeing the draft of the book as a whole. I did not, after all, combine Trotsky and Mao into one chapter, first because they are of different historic periods; secondly, by relating each body of thought to a specific historic period, it gave me the opportunity to expand the parts dealing with the objective situation. You will find, for example, that the chapter on Mao, despite the fact that I have written so much on him over approximately a decade, is put in a quite new context because he is "accepted" as a great revolutionary and talks so endlessly of revolution that it was very important to develop further how that Thought tilted into its opposite -- retrogression -- and to deal with that, not just politically, but philosophically.

-- Raya

Here is the outline or "table of contents" for Part II

The Interregnum: Void and Retrogression vs. Movement from Practice

Chapter I - On the Eve of World War II

- A. The Depression and the Theoretic Void
- B. Leon Trotsky as Theoretician

Chapter II - The Postwar World

- A. Marx's Humanism vs. the "Thought of Mao Tse-tung"
- B. The Retrogressionism of Mao Tse-tung

Chapter III - Sartre's Search for a Method

14055

Excerpts from the REB Minutes of Dec. 15, 1968

Raya reported on Part II, The Interregnum, calling attention to the fact that this section may be called Alternatives, since, though it deals with the whole period from the death of Lenin to the Post-War world, it concentrates on the reflection of the problems in the theories of Leon Trotsky and Mao Tse-tung from within the Marxist movement, and Jean-Paul Sartre outside the movement, all of whom based themselves on their own, as against Lenin's views of the objective situation. Chapter I has two sections, A. Even of World War II and B. Leon Trotsky as Theoretician. The very first sentence reads: "The Great Depression kept the world in shambles," and the paragraph shows that with the Depression and the rise of Nazism, not in some "backward" land, but in the very heart of "civilized" Europe that "civilization had evidently reached the end of something." As against these developments, there was the great Spanish Revolution but even the revolutionaries who were very much in it made no "special category" of it and, instead, based their theories on the old categories of nationalized property workers' state. Thus, Leon Trotsky's theory helped disorient the whole generation, not only of Marxists but also all of the new forces that had become disgusted with capitalism. This then (Leon Trotsky as Theoretician) concludes the chapter and contrasts the theory of permanent revolution to Lenin's theory on the colonial and agrarian questions.

Chapter II, The Post-War World, likewise has two parts -- A. is Marxist Humanism vs. The Thought of Mao Tse-tung. What is especially important in this section is that, for the first time, we not only showed the East German revolt as a Workers' Revolt starting a new page in history, but we also trace the changes in philosophy. It is true that the intellectuals were on the sidelines only then, but something new was occurring (the only section in English from Ernst Bloch that people can read is included in Socialist Humanism). The totally new philosophic additions, however, are in the section B. Mao as Retrogressionist. Although we are including much of what we said before and even re-producing a part on the "Cultural Revolution", the point is that heretofore I had been speaking of trying to work out Hegel's Third Attitude to Objectivity as if it applied to Trotsky. Trotsky stood still, theoretically speaking, and there was some moving backwards in anything that stands still, but he did not build a theory on it. Quite the contrary with Mao. Beginning with 1958 and the failure of the "People's Communes", Mao began to develop the view that even if it "takes a century", workers must continue to build that statecapitalist monstrosity. Because he had garbed it in so much revolutionary sounding verbiage, this didn't become clear. Everyone should read, especially carefully, the last three pages of this chapter. Although the third chapter on Sartre will be reworked somewhat, it is not necessary to have it in any other draft than you have it now.

Part III ECONOMIC REALITY & THE DIALECTICS OF LIBERATION will not be written until after the Conference we are calling Black/Red on January 12.

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