

To be read to all locals--

February 12, 1973

In Lieu of N.Y. NEB Minutes: Philosophy and Revolution as
Organization Builder

Dear Friends,

I should like to discuss with you the process of arriving at a new formulation on P&R as organization builder as well as the concept itself. Because the needed copy-editing sent me back to my library and Mary in Detroit, thus cutting me off from my N.Y. stay directly after presenting the first chapter of the book, I had thought that the return to N.Y. would be strictly organizational, strictly local, strictly, tangibly concrete. Indeed, I had not even invited Kevin to come up for the N.Y. NEB although the invitation to the Connecticut WL had been tendered. The truth (in the Hegelian sense of the logical, the dialectical conclusion) of the tangibly concrete turned out to be a concretization, not of the tangible, but of P&R itself as organization builder. Theretofore, whenever the usual question about the Party came up, our answer, and an impatient one at that, always was that's the biggest nose around the Movement's neck. And that was my first reaction when contacts once again posed that question. But second negativity on the very last day in N.Y. led to a new type of answer and became the pivot of the NY NEB meeting and is here presented for the organization as a whole.

The weighted question of organization to spontaneity, not to mention philosophy to revolution, has a history that goes back to that new continent of thought that Marx discovered. From the very start, when there was no such thing as a "proletarian party", Marx insisted that "the Party" must not turn its back on philosophy. Rather it must "realize it". Lassalle who was supposed to have been as "good" a Hegelian as Marx also from the start was bent on building a mass party whose job it was to send him (and other leaders) to Parliament and they, the intellectuals, would fight "for" the masses. Though Marxists were all supposed to be "for" Marx and opposed to Lassalle, the truth is that long before the Second International betrayed; long before, in fact, there was a Second International, everyone (and I mean every SINGLE one, including Lenin and Luxemburg) acted on the Lassallian organizational ground. Repeat that to yourself--"Lenin was a Lassallian"--and see how absolutely fantastic it sounds because, while it is true we have exposed that Lenin's concept of the "party to lead" was rooted in Kautsky's and the whole Second International's concept of vanguardism, we did not roll the film all the way backward to Lassalle. This was not only because, as against Kautsky, Lenin had the very great distinction of disciplining the intellectuals by the proletarian organization. It was also because

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it was necessary to stress that Marx had no theory of the party, and to prove it, we often repeated the fact that Marx, in the bitter 1850's, referred to "the party" when all he had in mind was himself and Engels. While all this is true, even as it is true that the 1860's generated the great, mass First International which Marx headed and which was certainly more rooted in spontaneity and a philosophy of liberation than ever was Lassalle's party, what is not true is that this didn't add up to a "theory" of the party. It is true that it was never worked out "as theory" by Marx, and things went wrong only after Marx's and Engel's deaths. Nevertheless, we will either begin here or we will have no solid new beginnings in organization as we have in philosophy.

Let me return to "shocker" that Lenin (and Luxemburg, despite all her talk of spontaneity) were Lassallians, i.e., made a separation between philosophy and organization, had a "secret" feeling that, whereas Marx was right theoretically on all questions in the dispute between himself and Lassalle and was the founder of all of us, Lassalle was really the only organizer and "therefore" the organization as mediator between the masses and the new society must be learned from Lassalle. (Just take a look at what remains the standard biography of Marx by Mehring, Luxemburg's theoretical colleague, or for that matter some of the articles by Lenin on Lassalle.)

Now then, although we're all versed enough in dialectics and pointing out that Lenin was ambivalent in philosophy, none has dared to say he's ambivalent also in organization. The very opposite is the case since it is all too clear that Lenin did have a theory of the party, did practice that type of organizational dialectics, and we, we alone, spent a very elaborate and original chapter (11) of Marxism and Freedom which traced through the fundamental changes in his "party to lead" concept from 1903 to 1923, indeed every time he met an actual revolution and enthusiastically admitted that these spontaneous revolutionaries were far in advance of the party. So why can both anarchists and social democrats, from opposite sides but towards the same conclusion, maintain that Lenin's State and Revolution (where he develops so beautifully the new concrete universal, "to a man",) was "mere propoganda"? We don't have to bow either to their slander or stupidity. But we do have to see that, just as time did not allow Lenin to work into "a finished form" his Philosophic Notebooks, so he did not draw to a fine point his many changes in the pamphlet by which all vanguardists swear, What Is To Be Done?, but allowed that to undergo numberless editions without ever introducing into it the changes he himself practiced 1903-1923. In any case--and that's no incidental matter--we cannot go limping on the question. We must work out all the implications of Philosophy and Revolution and indeed prepare ourselves in the few months before publication and practice it after publication, that P&R be the organization builder.

Because we as N&L Committee members not only know well but have always practiced committee building we take for granted that N&L is known by its readers as an "organization expression". Our life as Marxist Humanists is in it. And yet the truth is that not only haven't we made the point manifest but, as all our

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conventions and plenums show, none of us has been satisfied with our organization weakness. On the other hand, take the "new" organizational manifestation in Russia as a State-Capitalist Society, when we were in another party and so easily spoke of the Fourth International as "it". Now it wasn't only a matter of "diplomacy" for a minority, an organizational opposition, to state that though we disagree with you theoretically, we are one with you organizationally. No, the greater truth is we hadn't worked out any other form of organization; we hadn't, in 1946 much less in 1942, rejected in toto the concept of the "party to lead"; we were behaving as a "faction", as a tendency, because that's what we really believed; that is to say, we did feel that if the Fourth International would only have a correct position, give up its fantastic view of Russia as a worker's state, "though degenerate", we could indeed live with them. Even in 1950-51, when for the first time we did add a section on philosophy right within our political document: (State Capitalism and World Revolution) and were on the threshold of totally breaking with Trotskyism organizationally as well, we still had not, in throwing out the concept of the "party to lead", created anything to take its place.

That is the whole point. We haven't ^{fully} yet, not fully, not yet. We have practiced an alternative. We have created committees and for the first time --and it still remains the only one by any tendency or group-- made integral to our constitution that we stand for unity of theory and practice, concretizing that as N&L and M&F. This constitution remains our ground and foundation. We must now expand that by making it a totality so that P&R is its organizational and not only philosophical manifestation, even as P&R in turn must become the organization builder ONCE we, its individual exponents, do it.

Where 1955 (the year of birth of N&L Committees and its constitution) became on the one hand, a concretization of the 1953 breakthrough on the Absolute Idea, and on the other hand, was the actual objective eve of the 1956 revolution in Hungary, 1973 must become both the pre and the post year of philosophic and organization breakthrough. All the more imperative does the new practice which will also be the philosophic challenge. With this in mind we therefore went through, in very concrete terms, what each person on the NY NEB would do in new activities on the Black front in Harlem, in new activities among the youth especially with the openings on the "amnesty" front (with whom I spent a couple of hours talking in their office, and Chris will write up the youth discussion on the paper and on the column), and the new N&L WL committee in Connecticut is planning to do both in issuing a shop paper and in developing Marxist Humanists in NY as well as Conn. (Anne took extensive notes of the Conn.-NY discussion on WL and will write it up for the organization.) At the same time every new contact we met we approached with this new attitude of P&R as organization builder.

Yours,

RAYA

PS: I just this minute received a special delivery from one of these youths who, in addition to sending in an RV, has volunteered to come down for ten days to help in the proof-reading of P&R and to bring with him the galley proofs when the publisher will have them ready. Hope there are as quick results in membership growth.

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