

PERSONAL

January 20, 1984

Dear Eugene:

Because to me this issue of the paper, ~~is~~ both number 1 of a new year, a very special new year; number 1 as containing the 2 new columns; number 1 as a totally new stage flowing from the Expanded REB and a precursor of what will be so when we have moved the Center -- and therefore demands of us, once and for all, ~~EMX~~ a more serious dialectical view of that little phrase "concrete totality", we never really realize the oppositeness of that phrase, ~~not~~ as a totality ~~EMX~~ in the usual sense of the word, i.e. as if totality simply meant quantitative, but when concrete becomes the universal, and totality becomes the concrete. Because I hardly think that this articulation has done anything to clarify what is in my mind, and continue to sound abstract, I wish to take up this issue, page by page, cartoon by cartoon, content by content, and ad by ad. And I do hope that at the end of the 12 pages, you will first study it, not as individual suggestions but as that underlying universal which will, in fact, set your report for the Convention:

Page 1, first half of column 1: The new title "Workshop Talks" as a totally new column should not have such small type, and I hope it never will again. Nor should it ever be so small and therefor look so absolutely unimportant, not only because that makes the column below it so much more ~~EMX~~ dominant, but also because a third element is introduced into that same space. If that "Note to our readers" deserves that space -- and it certainly does -- it should have been put at the very top so that at once the reader would know this is new, they are calling my attention to it.

Page 1, the Lead, its graphic: Looked like 16 other such pictures and was especially wrong in this specific issue because, since we have Black world, and since that was such a magnificent logo, and since the subject of the Lead was not just Black, and had what we hardly ever paid attention to before -- battered women -- you should have either kept the cartoon from p. 4 on page 1, or if it was too famous a cartoon have used something on that level. The p.1 graphic belongs in the paper but not on page 1.

I'm completely opposed to the 4th article, page 1, for many reasons: (a) Once again, we are on racism; (b) Though the continuation page is right, there is no indication on page 1 that this is part of "Our Life and Times"; (c) And that even further brings out my opposition -- that is, making OLAT altogether too predominant. What should have been the 4th article, p. 1, was the one from the British demo, p. 11, both because it would have brought in another topic and because it is where we have an organization. I was thinking that if you didn't want that (which I certainly did), the part of "In Brief" on p. 12, provided that section did not begin with Quebec on the race question again but with Spain. In general, I consider that "In Brief" should never be placed in the OLAT page, both because I want to show our internationalism throughout the paper and because it then has the proper "part of a totality" which ~~EMX~~ conveys to the reader "oh dear, there are all these other things I wanted to take up." Finally, still on page one, and this time because we wanted to focus on all the new, the RD reference in

16249

so that we would be there as an organization. (Incidentally, I think that "One the Inside" should generally be three announcements, like ~~XXXXX~~ Editorial, a theoretical article, and one activity.)

Page 2: I consider the title of Dian's article altogether too pretentious, especially when it already has such an overwhelmingly distinctive and serious title as "Woman as Reason", which not a single one of our columnists has yet deserved. Secondly, what is very good about it would be if it had been made into something like "Second thoughts on a specific section of RLWLKM". That part is both concrete and good. But since Diane wanted to relate it to Black women writers now, it absolutely had to a damn sight more concrete about the Black writers and more modest. Here is what I mean: We have yet to learn how to give out what people would call compliments but what actually shows your recognition of others' talents though you don't agree with them. For example, the first para. should have been more than a single sentence, which said that the writer is very happy to see the burst of creativity on the part of Black women writers and there is no doubt that Alice Walker is not only a great writer and deserves her Pulitzer prize, ~~XXXX~~ and that Alice Walker thought that she was really dealing with reality ~~is~~ but insofar as I, Diane, am concerned -- and that's why she loves so much Maria Stewart, S. Truth, is that it isn't reality if it doesn't include revolution. And it is for this reason that she wants to talk of only two things, the early movement and the way a N-Rist looks at it. (Dear Eugene, I have no idea if we have any ~~XXXXXX~~ young woman who could do such editing.)

This page 2, like all 12 pages, is altogether too crowded. For example, instead of the last article on the page, "Reagan's war on the poor", we should have had an ad for something different -- maybe even the ad that is on page 3.

Page 3: I will more or less leave this go, except to suggest that the ~~XXXXX~~ article from page 2 would be exchanged for the ad. In all cases, either an ad or a cartoon should be on each page to break up the solidity. Or an appeal to the reader for articles, not always for money.

Page 4 I liked except for exchanging the graphics, because I do think that to put the Who We Are with the Lead was a good idea.

Page 5 is a good page, except when I keep returning to a page looking too solid, I do NOT always mean to cut something out of the page but to break up the page with little boxes or fillers.

Pages 6 to 7, which have always been my favorite have this time not made me quite so happy. I haven't quite figured out why, and I thought maybe it was because the headlines for the RVs have ~~XXXX~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ singled out something like "Mandel's Stunted Marxism" under a head all its own when it could have just been made part of the next. but "Versus." i.e. Vs. "New Socialist Sittrings"

I liked pages 8 and 9/ and believe it or not I have only one word to add to the ad for ACOT, and that is the words: "NEW EDITION."

Page 10: I think it is very wrong to have Black/Rd and Black World columns together, both because that does not single out each individual writer and because it looks like they are both on the same subject. I think it's very important for us to have these columns separately which would, at one and the same time, show that it's not just the Black Question but the Red, and we really do want to focus on Lou and Alan as separate individuals. On the other hand, I liked the touch of the ad on the 25 Years, and the activity articles.

Page 11: In place of the report on the British demos, which I suggested could have been on page 1, I was thinking of two things -- that both the last article on that page, Marcotte's critique, should have been moved higher, and perhaps the ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ North African youth from page 1 could have been there.

Page 12: First of all, I think it is wrong to have the "In Briefs" on the same page as OLAT. If I said otherwise before, once you see it, it looks different. Generally speaking, on the last page I always like a very organizational piece or an ad. Secondly it makes us more international if the "In Brief" space appears throughout the paper, either as fillers or just to break the focus of another page that is otherwise all Black, or all woman, or ...

Incidentally, why ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ are the heads so heavy?

to discuss

Now then, I would very much like for you to discuss ^{this letter} with Mike and Olga -- ~~not~~ because the words are etched in solid gold or that everything I say has to be followed, but because, as I said in the very beginning, the question of the concrete being universal, the question of universal being not a quantitative totality but a qualitative overview, and, above all, that each issue must not bend only to what is paramount that very month, or year. We must always remember Marxist-Humanism as a body of ideas, as the ground on which we stand daily, hourly, ~~more~~ as well as at turning points of history. When Lenin considered the paper to be the organizer, it did not necessarily mean that we run around with membership cards to all. He did mean that you as the Bolshevik do not separate organization from revolution, that you never forget the goal of revolution, where you do hand the reader a membership card.

Yours,

16251

February 1, 1984

Dear Raya,

I wanted to report on a series of meetings which I have had since receiving your letter on the Jan. Feb. issue of News & Letters. The first and most important was the one which Olga, Mike and I had shortly after you left. We all felt that it was certainly a most difficult letter, and quite different in part ~~of~~ other letters you have written in the last three years on the paper. We felt much of the key for understanding your concrete suggestions in the main body of the letter revolved around grasping what you were working out both in the first and last paragraphs of your letter. One part of that letter which we did feel we understood was your critique, one which you have made other times, on the paper's tendency to overemphasize a particular subject of revolution, in this case the Black quest as it appeared on the front page, and thus not making sure the other forces of revolution were represented as clearly. For me two things emerged from this--

1) trying to grasp what is new at a particular moment. Here I am referring to the fact that the new in Olga's lead was the new developments on women, which we had not taken up in this manner before. Thus if I had been sensitive to that, the picture on the front page would have caught that dimension, instead of that of Black unemployment. With such a picture, I believe we could have still had Kevin's international report on page 1, 2. the way in which we have been looking at different sections of the paper has been too rigid. That is, ~~we~~ I think of a women's liberation page, a youth page, a labor page, a black-red page as whole pages, instead of thinking of them more as sections to which you might bring different elements on the page such as ads, or the In Brief international column, and especially pictures as well.

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This dimension of the letter I believe we grasped. What was very new to us and what I believe we are just having first inklings, ~~was~~ what you were referring to both on one level in your commentary on the Woman as Reason column and on another in the last paragraph of the letter. We all found it quite difficult to grasp. Both Mike and then Olga referred to it in discussion, Olga with reference to your latest letters to George Armstrong Kelly, as an "openness." That Marxist-Humanism is this body of ideas, but it is a body of ideas which has an openness integral to it. This in our paper ~~we have~~ we have to be able to present at one and the same time this body of idea, but to present it not as a closed system, but as the antithesis of that. I was thinking about that expression that you have loved from GAK when he said you were subverting Hegel's Absolute Method from being a complex matrix to being an "unchained dialectic." That is what we need each issue of News & Letters to be -- an unchained dialectic. But how is quite complex, and that is what we saw in particular in your last two sentences on how we put forth organization, but with the goal as revolution even when handing out a membership card. How do we work this out -- a solid ground, this body of Marxist Humanist ideas, and yet the confidence in, and the truth of, projecting that body of ideas with an openness that becomes a pole of attraction to the serious revolutionaries whom we meet.

After meeting with Olga and Mike, I undertook a series of individual meetings with all the members of the PTC, Mary Joan, Bob, Suzanne, Bob in which I tried to do two things -- one discuss the front page of the past issue -- everything from Workshop talks logo to the predominance of Black/race and on the inside box, and then in turn to discuss their particular section - LOLAT, Labor, WL, Black/Red. Olga had already spoken with Suzanne with regard to the Woman as Reason logo. The main emphasis with regard to each of the sections which members of the PTC are responsible for, ~~is~~ show they could look at each section as a totality, including ads, pictures, activity stories. We discussed with each person the conception of ~~fillers~~ "fillers" as a revolutionary category, not alone quotes from Marx, but for instance trying to create one or two inch fillers with historic dates such as triangular shirtwaist fire, or perhaps a quote from Maria Stewart, plus saying who she was, or a significant date in labor history, or a quote from David Walker and a reference to our ACOT pamphlet. Plus of course continuing to try and work out ads. We left each meeting with I hope a feeling of that particular PTC member to be working out some material in advance for his/her section, and not as filler if nothing comes in, but as short elements that we would want to create space for in the paper. With reference to Black/red, Lou agreed to jumping his column on a page separate from John Alan's column.

As always the proof will reside in the issues to come.

Handwritten note: what a playdown when reduced to "Logo" Eugene

16252