

IN LIEU OF REB MINUTES OF MEETING OF JUNE 3, 1984

June 4, 1984

Dear Friends:

At the REB yesterday, I presented the essence of the report I will make to the Executive Session of our Convention, stressing its tentative nature until it is actually voted on there. Although it was presented in an abbreviated form, and will have to be even more abbreviated in this letter, it presents the essence.

The title and three Parts are as follows:

"THE SELF-THINKING IDEA" AND THE DIALECTICS OF A BODY OF REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS: WHAT IS NEW IN THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP?

- I. Philosophically, the Obvious is Never to be Taken for Granted
- II. Marx's New Sense of Objectivity -- "Human activity itself as objective (gegenstandliche) activity" -- as Turning Point for Our Age's Subjectivity/Objectivity
- III. What is New in the Concept of Leadership

I. I'll begin with the most obvious -- the "Self-Thinking Idea" does not itself think -- in order to show you the exact opposite is the truth when you don't accept the obvious at face value. Of course ideas by themselves do not think -- people think -- but when you labor at the Idea and its development, asking why this specific idea emerged to describe that particular action and furthermore what suddenly flows from it, you have reached a new stage of cognition.

In the case of Marx, it wasn't only a new stage of cognition. It was a whole new continent of cognition and revolution. Raya said that to fully understand it, it is necessary to once again look at the very first years 1843-45, that is to say, from his first break with capitalism and use of the phrase "revolution in permanence", to his famous 1844 Essays after which he met Engels and so impressed him with an oral presentation of his vision that they decided upon a life-long collaboration to bring this new vision to the world. The collaboration resulted in the joint work, The German Ideology. Something in it, however, must not have fully met Marx's thought, and he decided, once again alone, to follow up that central section on Feuerbach with the famous XI Theses on Feuerbach. You must all reread the first, not Thesis XI, but Thesis I. You will see there what I saw for the first time in preparing this talk -- that Marx touched what became so central to us this year: a new sense of objectivity and two kinds of subjectivity, specifically the phrase "human activity itself as objective activity". It is this which reveals what we mean by the expression "one, not two", that is to say, Marx and Marx alone, not Marx and Engels. That it took us all the way to this decade to be able to prove it after we have seen Marx's Marxism as a totality says a great deal of what was wrong with post-Marx Marxists. It is this -- Marx's sense of the objective situation, which led him to break with capitalism, and new sense of subjectivity as objective -- that becomes the new transition point from Marx's age to our 20th century.

16281

Remember also the new stage of development in Marx -- 1864-71 -- from the founding of the First International through the Paris Commune. It was at this point that one other expression of Marx -- I'm referring to the greater concentration on the organizational form of "the Self-Thinking Idea" and this time on leadership. Marx was greatly harassed and slandered when he did not sign the First International's statement with his own name, but the name of the organization. He was charged by the bourgeois press with hiding his authorship. His reply was that: 1) He was totally opposed to any "cult of personality"; 2) The important thing was "principles" not personality, and the documents were a collective decision of the International not an individual statement; 3) That gives it its historic importance. Thereby Marx further advanced the concept of what I call "one, not two" by making it not a question of any personality, but of the revolutionary philosophy expressed.

Finally, we want to take up a third period, Marx's last decade, but since that is one thing that is expanded at great length in RLWLKM, all that needs any further emphasis here is the tight and direct relationship between "revolution in permanence" and organization.

II. Now when it comes to the 20th century, neither RL, who first profoundly declared that 1905 was totally new, the first of a series of 20th century revolutions, nor Lenin, who did turn to the question of organizational form of these new revolutions -- and indeed, was credited with being the first and only Marxist who created a theory of organization with his famous pamphlet, What is to be Done? -- claimed to have created a new Universal. On the contrary, Lenin claimed the opposite, that he was just following orthodox Marxism, except that he lived under Tzarism and therefore needed special, concrete defenses from autocracy. Whether or not Lenin did or didn't mean that organizational form as a Universal -- between 1905 and 1917 Lenin insisted it was a question of a specific case, and in 1917, when he was establishing a new Universal with State and Revolution and paid great attention to the Critique of the Gotha Program, what he chose to concentrate on was not the organization but the necessity to smash the bourgeois state, hardly even mentioning the word Party in State and Revolution -- nevertheless, the Party was made into a Universal once the Bolsheviks got into power, and not alone for Russia but for the whole new Third International. Not even Stalin's transformation of the workers state into a state-capitalist society moved anyone from questioning vanguard party. Even Trotsky -- who did fight the Stalinist bureaucracy, and called it "betrayal" -- and even after his expulsion from Russia, long after, when he established a Fourth International, adhered to that vanguard party. That meant leadership to him. (Do please reread the section "Leadership, Leadership", pp. 145-150 in P&R and note the last sentence: "Dialectics takes its own toll of theory and theoreticians.")

III. The necessity to concretize for this year's Perspectives the question of what is new in leadership is the hardest of all things to do, not because we don't have the historical comprehension of the philosophic concept of leadership, but because it is a task which concerns all of us and will continue for years. Take the historic, which I traced back to the period 1843-45, and Marx's body of ideas after that. And then re-examine that concept of leadership through Luxem-

although we did reject Party for Committee-form burg, Lenin and Trotsky, and not excluding the JFT/ The one thing that did become clear was that no single issue, not even one as fundamental as State-Capitalist theory, can become the determinant, even though we did reject the vanguard party. Only a body of ideas can serve that function and only when it has found an organizational form in which to articulate itself. This began anew in the 1970s when we finally returned to the source -- the Hegelian dialectic" in and for itself"-- and that was followed on the objective scene with the new type of revolutions in Africa and Portugal, especially Portugal. Because it openly raised the question of apartidarismo, it served as a compulsion to re-read Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program at a time when we could see Marx's work as a totality with the publication of the Ethnological Notebooks.

Once philosophy, not philosopher*, instead of Leadership, leadership, leadership was made by us the principle -- revolution in permanence as ground for organization -- the expression, "one, not two", no longer worried us because it was not a quantitative matter; this was the new concept of leadership, philosophy as dialectics of revolution.

To trace our own composition of leadership, which, by no means just incidentally, we always stress does not mean only those who are on the NEB but all members, we went back, on the one hand, to 1955 and the first addition of a Black production worker as editor to the NEB, and, on the other hand, we traced what we represented all the way from 1917 through each decade of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, so that at no time was the subjective and objective left unrelated.

* A serious philosopher does have one advantage, and that is his reigning concept of totality. Ironically enough, it is Sartre who made the most serious contribution to the question of "one, not two" with his development of the rarity of philosophic creation in his Question of Method. He stresses that in the whole period from the 17th to 20th centuries there were only three philosophies; for us in the 20th it was Marx alone, and it will remain Marx until capitalism has been transcended, because it's such creativity that explains the "humus" of every philosophic thought that arises, and the "horizon" of all culture. Too bad that after all that praise of Marx and eagerness to subordinate Existentialism to him, he abandoned Marxism not Existentialism.

This week, here in the Center which is still Detroit, we are: 1) sending to the printer the final issue of N&L to come out of Detroit, our June-July issue with the lead on Toledo and the announcement of our move to Chicago and that new address, the new address for the Detroit local, and the reminder that the Archives of Marxist-Humanism remain in Detroit at the WSU Labor Archives Library; 2) preparing the final pre-Convention Discussion bulletins the Center is responsible to send out; and 3) reading the galleys of the 1949-50 Miners Strike pamphlet.

This is the last you will hear from me until I see you at the Convention, when I trust I will have finished the Perspectives.

Yours,

RAYA

P.S. O yes, I have finished my letter to the Youth which will be sent out in the pre-convention bulletin at the end of this week. It is entitled: "ON LISTENING TO MARX THINK, AS CHALLENGERS TO ALL POST-MARX MARXISTS"

16284