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1985 News

Raya 1985 Pre-Plenum Bulletin

Introductory Note to Pre-Plenum Discussion Bulletin #1

When Raya was writing her Theory/Practice column on the first 15 years of News & Letters,* she noted that --while the objective event of De Gaulle's coming to power in 1958, which had compelled her Call for an International Conference, was fully recorded and analyzed in N&L; and while the ramifications that followed the Conference which was finally held in 1959, including the critique by Jean Malaquais and others, were fully reflected as well -- the Conference itself was not reported in the pages of N&L. Bess' International Report to the N&L Committees Convention in September 1960 is included in this 1985 first Pre-Plenum Discussion Bulletin to fill that gap and give the organization today a sense of both that 1959 trip by the National Chairwoman and the 1958 trip that Bess had herself undertaken to secure a contract for an Italian edition of Marxism and Freedom and to establish the beginnings of an international dialogue. Included with Bess' report are the actual talk Raya presented to that International Conference in 1959, and excerpts from the report Raya sent back from Milan to N&LC as soon as the meeting had ended.

A very different period characterizes the 1980s. Because Jim's report to the Detroit local on the December 30, 1984 presentation by Raya to the Expanded REB had caught the new ground that was opened at that meeting for all the developments that took us from there, through the March 21 events, to the coming Plenum, it is included in this first Bulletin which also carries the Call.

Peter's talk to the "Economic Anthropology" Conference in Salt Lake City is included because he so creatively projected, in this talk he was asked to deliver on Marx's Ethnological Notebooks, the concept of Marxist-Humanism as the crucial "mediation between Marx and today," as Peter expressed it in the letter we have asked him to excerpt to include here with the talk itself.

Finally, we include an exchange of letters between Raya and Roy (Bay Area) who, although he was writing on the 1973 work, Philosophy and Revolution, had philosophically concretized precisely what we have focused on ever since the last Convention in the section of our Perspectives called "Not by Practice Alone."

Although all these pieces were written before the Call was issued, they not only form the background for it, but are actually integral to what the Call has worked out for our discussion over the next two months and at the Plenum itself.

-- The Resident Editorial Board

* See July 1985 issue of N&L

OFFICIAL CALL FOR PLENUM

June 28, 1985

To All News and Letters Committees
and Members-at-large

Dear Friends:

This year's Plenum Call needs to give an accounting of a period longer than usual. To do so objectively and subjectively means more than just an accounting of the move to Chicago, which made it necessary to hold the Convention of 1984 in July rather than September, so that this Plenum has to cover two more months. To fully understand the move to Chicago requires knowing the history of Chicago, when a new age emerged once the Russian Revolution had burst forth as World War I was winding down. That world phenomenon caused the rulers of world capitalism to lunge into a counter-revolution, not only against Russia but within each one's own country. This counter-revolution showed itself in the U.S. in the Palmer Raids against all "Reds" as well as against Blacks and Labor. The reason this sounds so very todayish is due to Reagan's getting "four more years" to finalize his counter-revolution both abroad and at home.

He has become the world outlaw in mining Nicaragua's harbors without even consulting Congress, and refusing to recognize the World Court's accusations. He has become a strike-breaker at home, destroying PATCO as the first step in selling his union-busting ideology. He has been rolling the clock back on the Black Revolution of the 1960s and on the gains won by Women's Liberation in the 1970s. One look at the much touted, so-called "prosperity" that Reagan is talking about reveals such pauperization on the part of the American masses that Hunger is by no means characteristic only of the Third World. Reaganism is waiting for the masses at home to display themselves as no more than skin and bones as the result of a famine like Africa's before ever he will accept the simple statistic that no less than ten million people have been added to what are officially recognized as poor. Presently, as a preparation for an excuse to invade Nicaragua he has invaded Grenada; and he has done no little to contribute to the utter fragmentation of Lebanon.

To Reagan, all this is secondary to his Pax Americana world-ruler ambitions, embodied in the nuclear Star War phantasy of a "winnable" nuclear war against the other nuclear Behemoth, Russia. Towards this end he imposes endless militarization upon the American people who must be subjected to pauperization, union-busting, racism and sexism.

Our task this year is to work out how to fight Reaganism with its Pax Americana ambitions, not only as we have always done -- and this year we will be joining in the crucial demonstrations on the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima Day, Aug. 6 -- but with all emphasis on never separating activity from a philosophy of revolution, of true liberation.

Last year's Convention Perspectives Thesis phrased the task philosophically as: "Not by Practice Alone." This year's

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Plenum needs an accounting of how we carried out this task since the move to Chicago and the further concretization it needs now. The shocker came from the counter-revolution arising from within the revolutionary movement. The fact is that the revolution in Grenada in the late 1970s had succeeded and yet it was that new government itself that had made it easy for the U.S. invasion of Grenada. What we saw that was new as compared to the revolutions of the 1960s was that whereas the latter had also relied on only activity and more activity and so subordinated the question of philosophy that they remained unfinished, here is what happened in Grenada: The revolution succeeded. They had already been in power since 1979. It was at this point that the Coard faction shot down the leading face of the revolution -- Bishop. We must face this stark reality. What happened in Grenada is the most recent and most concrete manifestation of what happens when you separate the philosophy of revolution from revolution itself -- that is, from the masses themselves; you thereby make it easy for the outside counter-revolution to invade.

Where Reagan has put his stamp of counter-revolution on the epoch of the 1980s, we have been working out the absolute opposite with the designation that the trail to the 1980s had, in fact, been indicated in the "new moments" Marx had developed in the final decade of the 1880s. Our reconnection with the Marxism of Marx, at a time when we were working out the reality of the Third World's existence, was deepened because in his last decade, when he was studying pre-capitalist societies, he was predicting that the technologically backward lands could experience revolutions before the technologically advanced countries. At no time has this re-integration of a philosophy of revolution with actual revolution been more imperative than in our age. This sets the task for this year's Perspectives.

Once we fully knew Marx's work as a totality and worked that out for our own age, we developed a new category of "post-Marx Marxism" as a perjorative of all Marxists beginning with Engels. As we showed in Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, Engels was no Marx -- as could be seen in his very first work after the death of Marx, Origin of the Family. While the divergence from Marx may appear to be on the question of Women, the truth is that the question of dialectics is involved, by no means limited to any one subject, but to the difference between Engels' unilinear view of the development of humanity and Marx's multilinear view.

One exception to post-Marx Marxism as a perjorative -- Lenin -- is related to the fact of his return to the Hegelian Dialectic as he faced the betrayal of the Second International as he was preparing for the Russian Revolution. He recognized then that it was a question of any single work of Marx that had not been understood, but that Marx's greatest theoretical work, Capital, "especially its first chapter" could not be understood unless one had gone through the "whole" of Hegel's Science of Logic. This remains a bridge for all Marxists today, but Lenin's unchaining of the dialectic got stuck on the 1902-03 concept of the vanguard party. That was no concept of Marx's. That concept, very nearly word for word, was taken from Kautsky, and the

whole Second International, both reformists and revolutionaries, accepted this.* It is this 1903 concept, though Lenin modified it through the years, especially in revolution -- both the 1905 and the 1917 revolutions -- that he never gave up, not even in his last few years. This was so even though he had sensed the early bureaucratization and saw in Stalin both one who had "accumulated too much power" and one who had no comprehension of the revolutionary nature of the National Question -- especially in the case of Georgia. This becomes the determining question in our age, and not just in Russia's relationship to Poland, but to all of East Europe. And, it is by no means only a question of bureaucratization or the National Question; as the Russian masses are likewise suffering from the class enemy, their own rulers, State-Capitalism.

It becomes imperative to single out the expression, "the ~~new continent of thought~~", from what we always defined Marx's Humanism to be -- "a new continent of thought and of revolution". It is the new continent of thought that needs a great deal of further development and discussion. There is no other serious way to fight Reaganism; which is moving helter-skelter backwards on all fronts -- Labor, Black, Women, Third World and especially Central America -- constantly universalizing his reactionary ideology. Where he is not engaged in an actual invasion as in Grenada, he is planning one for Nicaragua, and possibly even for Lebanon. He is now both sponsoring counter-revolutions and propping up reactionary regimes like South Africa, as well as interfering with Americans travelling abroad by warning them not to go to Greece in the very period when Greece has been declared to be "the cultural world capital" by the European Community.

The one thing that has arisen over the hostage crisis which has been little noted but is the one important positive fact is the human action which has been able to influence even such a Behemoth of reactionary ideology as Reagan. Here the media is showing how Reaganite they themselves are, notwithstanding Reagan's criticism of them, when they do not reveal that Reagan has been doing more than just toying with military moves (bombing of Beirut?) irrespective of the death of the Americans. What they are not revealing is that it is the ordinary people, aroused over the lives of other human beings, who have stayed Reagan's hand so far. If anyone thinks that philosophy is not involved here, they know nothing of how inseparable life and philosophy are, and will not know how to fight hijacking, kidnapping, bombing and other forms of terrorism.

For this Plenum, we had to return to our 1981 Plenum Call because it was there that we first pointed to the ominous nature of the age because of Reagan's coming to power. It was in our Call that year that we first used the expression "organizational responsibility for the Marxist-Humanist philosophy of liberation." Indeed, what followed ever since that Plenum was Convention upon Convention, all

* The one thing that broke the Social Democrats in Russia into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks dealt not with the concept of vanguard party, but with the question of having to belong to a local and be disciplined by it. (See Marxism and Freedom, Chapter XI, "Forms of Organization: the Relationship of the Spontaneous Self-Organization of the Proletariat to the 'Vanguard Party'")

concretizing that responsibility. In 1982, for example, the focus was on "Methodology and Politicalization" with the aim that we would all become "practicing dialecticians." The Marx Centenary Year, 1983, gained a special importance both because that year witnessed the most extensive lecture tour we ever undertook, with our "trilogy of revolution" in hand, and because it was the last year that our original editor, the Black production worker, Charles Denby, was with us in working out the new amendments to our Constitution and the projected move to Chicago. It was that year that so many new doors were opened to us and we were given both Black Studies and Women's Studies platforms. Indeed, the many new additions written during the Tour that year for "the Rosa Luxemburg book" have become final chapter in our new, fourth book -- Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution: Reaching for the Future.

Finally, the 1984-85 Perspectives Thesis -- "Where are the 1980s Going? The Imperative Need for a Totally New Direction in Up-rooting Capitalism-Imperialism" -- concluded with the expression, "Not by practice alone," which became our point of concentration this year. This is the reason why we considered that, in a fundamental way, the 1985 Plenum discussion actually began on the last day of 1984 at the Expanded Resident Editorial Board Meeting held on December 30.* It was there we showed that even when we focus on a single subject, Women's Liberation, the dialectics of revolution can be concretized as it was developed over 35 years -- which means that it was present in embryo even before we had the category of Marxist-Humanism. Both its American roots and its world Humanist concepts manifested themselves not only in those 35 years but throughout the whole of our Archives. This is why the March 21 events in Detroit at the lecture and exhibit of our Archives on deposit with Wayne State University hold such significance for us. What has now given a totally new meaning to the word, Archives, is the realization that only because we now have all of Marx's archives, which include the Ethnological Notebooks, do we fully understand his very first 1844 Humanist Essays, which included the concept of the Man/Woman relationship.

What becomes the essence is this: the new forces of revolution must not be separated from the Reason of revolution, as well as the establishment of new human relations. It is because Marx's "new moments" meant both the recognition of new revolutionary forces as Reason as well as taking the responsibility for developing these inseparable from developing your philosophy, that we have this year reached a new concept of Archives and of the relationship between an Idea in embryo and that same Idea fully developed and projected.

Flowing from all this -- beginning with a view of Marx's Archives and going through our own Archives, including the move to Chicago -- we find a new dimension to the very word Archives. That is to say, without knowing Marx as a totality through all of his fundamental writings, it was impossible to understand all the ramifications of the very first of Marx's writings in 1843-44 as a historic break in thought. The point is that this first break with capitalism was not only an opposition to what is but an opening to the future. That is what makes one fully grasp that the birth of Marx's Marxism.

* The presentation that was given "internally" to the REB at this meeting was presented publicly and videotaped on Jan.27-Feb.3.

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in embryo was, indeed, a new continent of thought and of revolution.

The Plenum this year, which is the meeting of the full National Editorial Board members and alternates, opens in Executive Session Friday, August 30, 1985 at 7 pm. All sessions of the Plenum are then opened to all members and to invited friends, who are given the same privileges to the floor for discussion.

The Executive Session on Friday will be preceded by national meetings of both the Youth Committees and the Women's Liberation-N&L Committees.

The two day Plenum will officially open on Saturday morning, August 31, at 9 am with a Welcome by Dave Park. The Perspectives Report will be given by the National Chairwoman, Raya Dunayevskaya. The integrality of philosophy is seen in the "and" in all of the reports this year. Thus, there will be two Organization Reports: Mike Connolly's on "Marxist-Humanist Philosophy in Readers' Views and in Organization"; and Olga Domanski's on "Organization and the New Book, Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution." Eugene Walker will report on "News & Letters and its relationship to Perspectives," and Lou Turner's subreport to Perspectives will be on "Black Dimension and the Caribbean." Peter Mallory will give the report on "Philosophy and Finances."

The final report, on Leadership, becomes an Executive Session for the membership.

With this Call, we are asking the Chicago local to host the Plenum, for the first time, and to be responsible for a Saturday evening party to greet out-of-towners.

Pre-Plenum discussion begins with the issuing of this Call. The Draft Perspectives will appear directly in the pages of the August-September issue of N&L, which comes off the press on August 2, for full discussion through to the Plenum itself. Discussion throughout the summer within our local committees and with all those we can reach and whom we may wish to invite to the Plenum itself becomes a measure of the inseparability we put between preparation for our Plenum and all our many activities throughout the pre-Plenum period.

-- THE RESIDENT EDITORIAL BOARD

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