

REB AGENDA FOR JUNE 3, 1985

Present: All; Jane as sitter-in

Agenda: I. Report by Olga on Meetings in Detroit on relationship of new book to Archives exhibit as actuality; II. Raya on concrete-Universal and relation of process to results re the sum-up of the 30 years of N&L; how it affects pre-Plenary Bulletins; III. Discussion of both reports; IV Ongoing Activities (Mike); V. Proposed Calendar for REB Meetings from today to Plenum. VI. G&W

II. Raya entitled her report on the 30 year summary of News & Letters (which actually dealt for this time only with the period from our birth in 1955 through the 1960s, leaving the 1970s through today to a future issue): "the concrete-Universal".

Note that the concrete-Universal is here hyphenated as a collective noun. It contains the biggest contradiction within itself, because: a) when the concrete is emphasized and b) when the Universal is stressed in that collective noun, focuses immediately on what is specific and fundamentally tells us why we want it used as a collective noun, never as two words. The why manifests what characterizes the whole of a new epoch as "birth of history." It is this: rather than any single new feature, which first has to be discovered, worked out, absorbed, before ever the whole of the epoch is characterized, we have to watch the process. But for that one has to have at least an instinct as to what one is really searching for in examining even a single new feature.

Here is a perfect example (which I prefer calling a "manifestation" rather than an "example", because manifestation makes you think of the Universal); I'm referring to the 1844 quotation from Marx's Humanist Essays that I used at the top of my essay on "Labor and Society" as I embarked on the study of the Five-Year Plans, and kept developing for 10 years just before the summation of that decade as State-Capitalism and World Revolution. Now contrast to that what resulted as SCWR when you don't have that instinct and are thrown way back as you (I mean Grace and CLRJ) embark on having for the first time ever a philosophic section, which is entitled, by no accident, "The Philosophy of State-Capitalism", instead of "Marxist-Humanist Philosophy." No wonder that section stopped dead philosophically at the Hegelian category of Contradiction from "Essence" rather than proceeding to the crucial part of the Science of Logic, the Doctrine of Notion. And need I add that simultaneously with that philosophical "stopping dead" was the refusal to make a category of the just concluded Miners' General Strike.

It all revolves around the difference between "the process of" and the "result from" that ten-year probing and development which was indispensable (though perhaps it could have been done in five years as was indicated when I met the Camerounian in Paris

in 1947 who expressed the revolution in his country as totally new and as what was emerging immediately after WWII). It first became clear during the following years (1) the Miners' General Strike simultaneous with my translation of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks and the correspondence transmitting them to CLRJ and G; 2) in 1953 when I broke through on the Absolute Idea and 6 weeks later came the East German workers' revolt against Communist totalitarianism; 3) even then, however, it was only when, at the end of 1954, we were forced into a recognition that the greatest contradiction was right within the State-Capitalist Tendency -- on the one hand, forced by the McCarthyite listing, and on the other hand, by the Johnsonites running the other way. It was only then, when we were free of Johnsonism, that the ground was created for both N&L and M&F, for which we voted at our very first Convention.

It is with issue number 1, in June, 1955, that N&L appears and this is where I begin my 30 year survey. Because all the new, the truly new, as to the type of paper that is both theory and practice, the type of paper where all the new forces of revolution -- labor, Black, women, youth -- speak for themselves, is seen in that very first issue, I pay the most attention to that first issue, and that first year. This Part I is called "From the Birth of Marxist-Humanism to the Publication of M&F, 1955-1957." It has a sub-section on just two years, 1957-59. The Two Worlds column remains unsigned and my name is not listed until after the publication of M&F -- a full year after -- so the fact that I chaired the REB as National Chairwoman, and the fact that we had an organization named N&L Committees, are not reflected in the paper. This great contradiction gets jolted by the objective situation in 1958 with DeGaulle's coming to power and my calling for an International Conference of all those (mainly state-capitalists) who opposed both poles of world capitalism in WWII, to rise to the challenge of a new fascist threat. I there for the first time offer my total philosophic conception of Marxist-Humanism which M&F had first revealed both philosophically and concretely, in both the Hungarian Revolution and the Black Revolt. Unfortunately it was equally revealed at the 1959 conference that the inadequacies of state-capitalist theory was not only in the JFT but in the international tendencies. They did, however, agree to continue the dialogue by establishing a special green-paper section of Prometeo for discussion in English, Italian, German and French. 1959 ends with the Cuban Revolution, which we hailed but insisted that it was not the first of the colonial revolutions; Africa was. But both are Third World and need not only international solidarity but a new relationship. It is with that that we meet the turbulent 1960s.

Part II, then, is called "The Turbulent 1960s and its Critique." That second part, after recording all the new forces and activities as well as reason, which means considering the outpouring of pamphlets that began in 1959 with the Afro-Asian Revolutions pamphlet on the challenge from Mao; and in 1960 we devoted the entire N&L to Denby's Workers Battle Automation. It was that same way of the paper producing the pamphlets that applied whether we were producing the Freedom Riders pamphlet <sup>one on the</sup> or the FSM which had listened to my talk on "Marx's Debt to Hegel in the theory of Alienation" but in it practice gave it such an Existentialist and semi-CP twist that it became clear that we would meet a form of opposition within ourselves, of those not ready to accept organizational responsibility for M-Hism.

This leads me to create a sub-section on just 1968 and 1969, entitled "1969 is not 1968." Both 1968 and 69 will reveal that the ground for the 1973 book, Philosophy and Revolution was laid right there. Thus, you will be surprised to find where I gave my first speech on P&R as what I called a "book in progress" and which I entitled Part III of that book, calling it "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Revolution." It was 1968 when we called for a Blac/Red Conference which was chaired by Charles Denby. That Call was directed to and concretized by the many non-M-Hists there, especially the Blacks directly involved in the wildcat at Mahwah who opposed philosophy, and women who were not M-Hists. Also present at the Conference was the Japanese translator of M&F and the discussion lasted 6 full hours. the concrete motion that we passed was the establishment of a special Black/Red column by John Alan. It also gave a ground for a new type of relationship with Women's Liberationists, and we called for a WL conference of the same kind, to include many nonmembers. That led to the establishment of a WL columnist for "Woman as Reason," as well as a special statement of "What we stand for" to stress the autonomy of WL; it was also expressed in the pamphlet "We Speak in Many Voices". Both in the Black/Red conference and in the WL Conference those who grasped most fully the philosophic dimension as the center of the new were the Youth. Of course, from the start, as I showed in the analysis of the 1950s issues of N&L, the Youth had their own page and column, which at first was called "Thinking it Out" and then "New Beginnings". What became clear at the Black/Red conference, it was the young Black youth who spoke out against those who criticized my talk on P&R and the centrality I gave to the philosophic dimension. It will all be much more detailed in the actual Theory/Practice column.

Finally, there is one more thing in the 1960s that is totally new and that brings us right back to what we mean by historic responsibility and international scope. That is the establishment of Weekly Political Letters in 1961 as an immediate response to the U.S. imperialist invasion of Bay of Pigs. What I stated when I suddenly made that decision was that too many things were happening in the world that were so objectively challenges to a M-Hist analysis that we could not leave it to be expressed only monthly, which is all we could afford to publish as N&L. We had to have a weekly expression of our analysis, and tried to have a wide audience for it -- if not as large as for N&L, certainly more than just for our membership. Moreover, it was not only the urgency of the times but also, and even mainly, the fact of how M-Hism can associate with ongoing spontaneous movements without ever giving up our right to a critique of the same. Thus, the entire African trip was expressed in these Political Letters on a level way above the mere recording of facts. They remain as ground to this day for what is happening now. Even more expressive of both the critique and the solidarity was the fact of that first letter on Cuba where we showed our criticism of Castro would in no way modify our total opposition to U.S. imperialism. History is never just past. It is what is present for today, not alone as relevance but as very ground for developing what we as M-Hists project for this era. (I may just as well add, right here, that I'm more than ever determined that our Plenum study seriously what I assigned to Eugene -- an analysis of 10 years of Perspectives.)

For the moment all I'm proposing is a first pre-Plenum bulletin to contain: 1) Jim's presentation to the Detroit local on the Dec. 30, 1984 talk to the Expanded REB; 2) Peter's talk on the EM to the Conference in Salt Lake City; 3) Bessie's 1960 report on the 1950 trip to Italy. (Motion made and carried. This will be expanded in the weekly letter to locals.)

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June 4, 1985

Dear Friends:

The most central point of yesterday's REB meeting was the report by Olga on her trip to Detroit, especially the new guided tour she led at the Archives, and Raya's report on the sum-up of 30 years of News & Letters, which she is calling "The concrete-Universal". They must be read in full and cannot be summarized here, especially since they present in an important sense the actual ground for the pre-Plenary discussions to come. All I can do in this letter is to point to why both reports were discussed as one and why, indeed, they were different aspects of that central new stage for the organization that was started by March 21, where the Archives and not just our official existence since 1955 was dealt with inseparably from the new book. The fact that these reports were an extension, a concretization, and a deepening of what began at the last Convention in the 3rd part of the Perspectives, called "Not by Practice Alone," and yet present the new needs of the current year, is what will characterize the whole period of pre-Plenum discussion. All I want to do here is explain the motion that followed my report. Here is why we seem to be hurrying so in launching that discussion this early, and why at the same time, once we get a volunteer from the locals to be responsible for producing the first discussion bulletin, we are asking them to wait until I have written an introductory page, which I will not do until after the first REB discussion on the Call, June 17:

1) You will have noted from the motion that I am including three articles from very different periods, one going all the way back to 1959-60. This is an international report by Bess of her 1959 trip to Italy, which uses the expression "the creation of a Marxist-Humanist international cadre." Not only had that phrase not become current to us, but the whole Conference, which I then attended, and which revealed many contradictions, was very nearly unreported in N&L. In general, we seem to easily forget history as past until its relevance for today hits us concretely. This was especially brought home to me both on the failure to list Bess's report in the Archives, and what I consider more currently concrete, the failure to understand fully the importance of the special bulletin we have called "Marxist-Humanism as a Body of Ideas -- Dialectics of Revolution". My whole point, when this was so recently issued, was that here was a single bulletin which can tell a new contact the whole of Marxist-Humanism: 1) by my lecture of Jan 27/Feb. 3; 2) by my "In Memoriam" to Denby; 3) by Eugene's analysis of N&L as "Theory/Practice"; 4) by Mike's report on Archives as not past but living; and 5) Olga's essays on Women's Liberation. I repeat, in a single bulletin there is a chance to present Archives, N&L, and WL, in the context of both Denby's role in our development and my most current analysis. How can we project it if we pay no attention to it ourselves?

2) Jim's report on my Dec. 30, 1984 talk was not only profound in itself but was about the only one that concretized that Expanded REB which really initiated a new beginning for the Perspectives set at that last convention and the move to Chicago.

Finally, 3) there is Peter's new analysis of the Ethnological Notebooks, which only Salt Lake City heard.

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What is of the essence is the historic-philosophic projection of Marxist-Humanism in its organizational responsibility.

Mike's report on ongoing activities and communications likewise stressed all the new developments since March 21 and the three issues of N&L that have followed it up, with a real flow of subs, orders, and new dialogues of a very important nature. Last week we reported the letter from Kansas which was answered by Kevin (whose paper on RD had first initiated the interest from this reader), and we look forward to a developing relationship. The new interest in us is seen in the donation that accompanied Adrienne Rich's renewal sub, and other such donations that come from new subscribers as well. Whereas most of our subs come in through the locals, the majority of the new subs have now begun coming in directly through the paper. Internationally, there is renewed interest -- for example, from an Italian intellectual who has "disappeared" from our sub list for some time, but has now reappeared to order the Praxis article, the High Tech pamphlet, and a sub renewal; while we have learned that there have been several reviews of RLWLKM in Yugoslav journals, and that another review will appear in the coming issue of Marxist Review in India. In Britain Dick's reading group now has five members, including two auto workers, two intellectuals, a new hospital worker, and the promise of another who was met on a picket line after he had on his own already written to N&L in Chicago; while a trade union feminist from Bristol and someone who first heard of us through Harry in Glasgow in 1982 have also written directly to the Center and want a relationship with us.

As for the locals themselves, New York has produced a most creative new brochure which prints the Spanish translation of Chapter 12 of RLWLKM on the EN, and can be used as a mini-pamphlet by all the locals. Ted's reports from SLC show that the follow-through to Clga and Peter's trips continues to develop with

6 to 8 new friends at every meeting. And the LA-NEB minutes are excellent and can be read with benefit by all, for all of us are sharing in working out the new stage of organization we have reached.

Yours,  
Raya

P.S. I should have added that at the REB, after the formal presentation, I made the following points regarding the new book, that it was impossible to project it fully unless one had a firm grasp of Marxist-Humanism's original contributions for this age: 1) singling out its characteristic as the age which manifests the movement from practice that was itself a form of theory; 2) singling out that it was not just that AI was broken through "in general" but that the AI was made "as new beginning"; 3) that singling out meant also the making of a new category as the perjorative "post-Marx Marxism" and 4) now with the fourth book, it was not just a report of 35 years nor was it a report only on Women's Liberation, though that is central to it, but the refusal to present it chronologically. This was the central point philosophically because it meant that each section, and the whole was expressed as a whole, so that Part I, for example, begins not with 1950 but the 1969 creation of the category for our age. And Part IV focuses on the trail from the 1880s to the 1980s as a "reaching for the future."

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