

EXCERPTS from

CONVENTION DISCUSSION

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TWO REPORTS ON THE IMPACT OF NEWS & LETTERS IN THE SHOP

In the shop where I work, when we have a full force working, there are about 6 thousand workers. Conditions in the shop had grown so bad that everyone was asking, "Why doesn't someone do something?" Regardless of how serious the problem was, no one seemed to take the initiative about doing anything about the problems which exist there, the problem of overtime, safety, and violations of the badly written contract, in general.

We do have a group which is known as the union which is supposed to represent us, but within the union itself there are small politicians and as a result corruptness begins to come in. You have the Negro fighting against the white, and the white against the Negro, and the politicians against the non-politicians, which really is a big problem -- and it gives management a free hand to do anything it desires.

A few of us decided that there was something that could be done if someone had the nerve to enlighten the rank-and-file on the problems and maybe offer some suggestions to a solution and work it out. A lot of the things that were done to the workers were done because we just accepted it, put it under our hat, and that was all. You aren't supposed to say anything. If you do say something about conditions among the group which represents the Reutherites, they call you a trouble-maker and pretty soon you'll find things happening to you.

Through News and Letters a few articles appeared in the paper and it was passed out at the gates. Since that time, there has been a big stir made within the plant over the publication because now people began to say, "Well, who had the nerve to write something of this nature?" The workers said, "No one has been heard before, and this is what we need. This is what we want -- to do something about the problem." Several from the plant inquired at the paper's office, picking up publications of N&L. They have also passed around copies of Workers Battle Automation -- and many others would like to get that. All the comments I have heard on it were very favorable.

Since N&L was passed around the plant, overnight the conditions seem to have changed. Nobody wants to be attacked. Nobody wants to do or say anything which would come out in the paper. They are thinking now, "Well, maybe I'd better not say this or do that, because it might get published, it might not go under the hat this time." It has done an awful lot of good. With N&L and a little bulletin which has been passed out at various times to keep the membership informed as to what's actually going on, and what is happening in the plant, it has made a real difference.

There will be more, and the workers seem to be interested in when the next edition is going to come out, or when we will be able to learn more, or what they will be able to read concerning their problems and the conditions. There is a great possibility of doing a wonderful job, and this is just the beginning.

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Concerning the youth — there's no problem, because there's no youth in the plant. This is the beginning and the end. Recently people with as much as 10 years seniority in the plant, people who have been out a year, were scratched right off the list. How are you ever going to have any younger people? If this happens to people who have actually worked in the plant for 10 years, what chance has a younger individual to come in on any job? They don't have a chance.

What's going to happen to those that are retiring? As Automation takes its toll, pretty soon there won't be anyone there, as I see it. Even the guy that's sweeping the floor won't be there, because they even have machines now to sweep the floors.

It is a strange feeling to be on the way out. Another ten years and I don't think we'll have anybody around at all. We had a group of 100 laid off. Only 65% of those can expect to come back, because during the time they are laid off machines are moved in and they aren't needed any more. I don't know where this thing will end. The younger people don't have a chance. The older people are retiring or facing the prospect of getting laid off and never getting back.

Someone has to be able to figure it out — I can't figure out where it will end. I am going to continue to work with the group where I work, and I think it's going to be a great help to the organization.

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I'd like to tell you my experiences when N & L was indicted by my local union. The reason I am talking about it was that it made me a little sore and for that reason I want to give you the benefit of my experience.

I work in one of the plants in the Chrysler Corporation. I would like for you to know that the Chrysler Corporation has methods to their madness. And my local union, which is in the parent body of the AFL-CIO, also has method to their madness. For you to understand the way that these guys operate, both union and company, let me tell you some of the "small" things that they do. I'll leave out the big things.

One young fellow worked where they do all of the mopping, sweeping, and all the dirty work. He came into the shop at a young age, went through Automation and continuous lay-offs. He went on to school, and was almost ready to get a degree from the university -- which is a great human interest story. Supervision was asked, "Here is a guy that it seems as if you fellows could use, why do you keep him in that department?" Here's the way the company justified their discrimination -- here is the new twist, the new gimmick. They said, "Well, I'll tell you. There was a time when we did do a lot of mopping and pulling chips and that sort of thing in that department. But we have some machines in now, so there is a change. There was a time when we said these people were workers, we called them the lowest workers in the shop, where they got the lowest pay and that sort of thing. But now they are called 'Maintenance Engineers.' So you can no longer refer to this fellow as just being a common worker -- he's an engineer!"

That was supposed to justify the discrimination, and all the ramifications of it. And of course that was just one case.

Another fellow went to the school that they have at the plant, an engineering school. He was a young lad, he had a mind, he went to school, he wanted to better himself, he studied blueprinting and all that sort of thing. And when he was about to graduate and thought that he could advance himself, here is what management said about it: "Well, you see, what has happened to this fellow is that between the time he started and the time he ended he got a little too old for the job. He's too old now. The tide has passed for the knowledge that he has accumulated." Of course, this was the end of that case.

We had another man who came into the shop, and graduated from the university with a personnel manager's degree, and went on to get a master's. He was about 45 years old. The company couldn't do anything for him because he also was too old. These are some of the gimmicks they use.

That's enough of the company for now, let's get on to the union. When two young fellows were at the gate passing out the paper and selling the Freedom Rider pamphlet some of the committeemen were spreading lies about it — trying to get workers to believe that it was detrimental to the union, and that it was against the Negroes. And some believed it until they read the articles for themselves. At the same time there were other workers who were supporting News and Letters as being a bona fide and sincere argument for the workers — one that was propagating the real answer to the total problem of Automation.

The company and the union have been selling Automation all over the joint as "progress". When a few of the pamphlets about Workers Battle Automation got around and workers began to read and get the true sense of what it was doing — and especially when the article came out about the workers dying on the line — the workers started to take a new look at everything and repel it. They said, "Oh no — this thing isn't what you said it was. Two guys just died over there. What are you trying to give me now?" This made the company and the union very angry — and I want to tell you that it is a potent, a very potent force in my shop. I daresay it will be a potent force in civilization. It is more exciting to me than anything I have ever heard.

I have always liked the word Humanist, and when you put Marxism and Humanism together, it makes a total philosophy and a total story to me. If you can approach people with the notion of humanizing human beings to the point where they can live together in peace and solidarity, you have something to sell that is so dynamic, something that is so great, something that is so wonderful that I can't possibly see how anyone can reject it. I think that you have something really exciting to sell.

I will assure you that the company is not too happy about the attacks made upon them. And since the company is the Senior partner in this operation of Automation and the other evils you could recite, and the union is the Junior partner, the union is none too happy either. They rushed down first to the company, but nobody could figure out anything they could do about it. Then they sent a delegation down to talk to the International. I hear that all the International could probably say was, "Yeah, we know all about it because we have been in contact with them before." So the rat race ended there, and of course they are now sitting in judgement to find some method of doing their dirty work.

It makes you awfully angry when something that is as simple as this, and as human as trying to help another human being, is taken by some political monster who starts to twist it and make it look like it's somebody from Mars doing some insidious thing against people. This is the type of thing that really makes you sore, and I guess it has its benefits because when you get angry you start to go to work. I had no intention when this first started of trying to defend N&L or any other proposition, because I

felt that I had done enough of that in my time and I figured it was about time for me to take a rest. But when I saw all this fermentation of ill will coming out of this, it made me angry, and I wound up defending N&L.

I'm glad I did and I'm hopeful that in the future I can do more fruitful work in this direction, because I really believe that if there is a true answer to the multitudines of problems there are in the Auto plants, or in steel, or any other plant where people work for a living, that Marxist Humanism has the answer. It is the only answer that I can think of that really is the salvation for the workers. If we can get the story over to the working people and into the shops through their already captive organizations ... if we can get it started where it will have some means of growing ... where they already understand the business of organization ... you can do a great job by going in and trying to get them to see the very fine proposition of Marxist Humanism.

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THREE DIFFERENT METHODS OF WRITING — THREE DIFFERENT PAMPHLETS

Raya: I want to speak on the three different methods of writing, the three different pamphlets — for the moment I will call the Youth Bulletin a pamphlet — and at the same time their unity through the organization, not only because organization is written on it, but because that's the way they're going to be written and we are going to take them somewhere and make a member.

1- ON THE YOUTH BULLETIN:

If the youth will forgive me, I would like to make some suggestions. You cannot hurry this issue. Once you get this issue out, they will come out as often as they can, but the first issue always means the unfurling of a banner and what distinguishes you from everybody else, whether that is economics, politics or philosophy. By the time that Marx could get down to the single word that what distinguishes one epoch from the other is the mode of labor, it was a revolution. Then you could say that a windmill is feudalism, a factory gate is capitalism, and automation is machine eating up human beings. It isn't an easy thing. But the youth have it made for them because their first opening statement should be, "Why are we called Young Marxist Humanists? There has been a great deal said against Marx when he was a young man and wrote those essays. We are very proud to associate with them. This is our man, the man who wrote those essays."

I have some absolutely fantastic combinations to propose, so I hope you like them. Johnny and Barbara should unite to write one article in which Barbara takes up the little paragraph in that essay which says: "How can psychology have anything to say to us when it excludes the factory and labor?" Break that up against the sentence from the same beautiful essay (and they're going to understand the philosophic essays which they don't understand when they are in my book, but which they will understand when you two get through writing your article) which says: "The whole history of humanity is through the five senses. How in the heck can you have a beautiful sense of beauty when you are merchants, and all you see in a diamond is the exchange value?" You break those two sentences up, jam them together, learn what opposites mean. And then Johnny brings in, both as a young worker and through the understanding of the other sections, what distinguishes our group from all other groups — and that is the opening section.

Dick is now going to be the youth representative to the NEB, if we approve what the youth has proposed at our executive session. This makes it a duty for him to be the organization man. I propose that the name of the column he writes for the first bulletin be: "Speak for yourself, young man." And that he jams together two opposites — what do we mean by Freedom Riders Speak For Themselves (that's the open-door policy), and what do we mean by a politico speaking for himself (why have you broken with the YPSL's) — but they must not be separate. They must be jammed together as tight as anything. The unity must arise from the actual

dialectic of saying, "Yes, we are the only ones who produced this because we let the Freedom Riders speak for themselves, but you YPSL's have to know that it's not a matter of private property why we don't let you steal our ideas. We'd be happy if you took them, but you've drawn such a wrong conclusion from trying to steal those humanist ideas and at the same time join against them that you end up with one more betrayal."

Louise is now the editor of the youth page of N&L and she's a Freedom Rider. She doesn't speak about Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves, but she speaks about how a Freedom Rider as the editor of the youth page has her eyes opened by this young man from Venezuela. Before he leaves, he's got to combine with her in an article for this bulletin. We will demonstrate our international features in this way.

And Eugene gets back the letter that has been written to the Gambian youth who wanted a pen pal -- the youth whose article from the Gambia has already been published in our paper. Ask him what it meant to him to have heard that a second America exists and we are not all either rich or oppressors. And what it means to Eugene who has to fight the Birchers at his university.

What I am trying to establish is that if this is your opening sentence, and you yourselves constantly take opposites and jam them together, we get a synthesis, rather than letting them lie alongside each other in peaceful co-existence. If you really get a totally new unity which will be a new beginning for jumping off -- this is your manifesto. Then you can write on anything you please.

I think Mark has something to say on hot-rodders. And I think that Karl should be the one to take it out of him in a different way. Why? Because we have made a specialty in the youth page to allow teenagers to speak for themselves when they didn't even think they had anything against society. They just thought they didn't like their mother or their father. It is important because we have always said that the forms of revolt on the question of the youth, particularly, are many. We insisted on a youth page even though at times we didn't have a single solitary youth because we felt that even though it takes an entirely new form, whether as a hot-rodder or a person who doesn't want to go to school or something, he is not only rebelling against the mother, the father, or the teacher. He is saying this is a delinquent society.

Then take Bobbie, who likes to flirt around with all organizations, including SNCC. If those three got together, you would see that all the unspoken words from people who don't think they are Marxist Humanists -- some are only interested in the Negro question, or only interested in hot rods, or think that they don't know how to express Marxist Humanism -- you would be surprised at what would come out.

The first issue of this Bulletin will be very, very serious. We can wait 3 or 4 months to issue it, because it has got to be a manifesto in which there won't be anything that won't be included — from the Negro Question to the Youth Question to the International Question. If I knew the Japanese well enough to expect an answer from them, I would propose an actual article by them. But if we don't get a direct article, then we'll take something from the political letter that I wrote on the Japanese Left plus what letters were written to me. Imagine that a Japanese person takes 15 pages out of a pamphlet to review MARXISM AND FREEDOM. We have got to say something about that.

I haven't said much on Britain because after you are in Africa you hate Britain because they have exploited Africa so much. But the youth there are quite tremendous now. And we have this new fellow, from whom we must get this one incident plus one other. They were heckling Gaitakell, and Gaitakell looked down on them (after all, he's an MP and they were 15 and 16 year olds who didn't even have a vote) and said, "You are nothing but a bunch of peanuts!" So the youth got together, and bought 50 bags of peanuts, and sent them to every member of parliament! They consider peanuts their distinctive mark now. I think that's a wonderful story and it must be included. Our British youth must write it up. You'll get the peace movement into it, too — because they are distinguishing now since the Stalinists have come into it. This young fellow didn't know what to do. He didn't want to go on a demonstration because of the Stalinists and what they were doing. I told him that he shouldn't go on a demonstration that says only that the Americans are awful, but supposedly the Russians are only making bombs to protect themselves.

If you combine all these, you have Japan, you have Venezuela, you have the Gambia, and you have yourselves in these new forms. Every-
one of you is new by what you're going to write for this.

You're going to distinguish yourselves from all other organizations in such a fashion that they're not just going to listen and then not want to join this one. You're going to say: we want to organize around this, even though we'll participate in every single activity that anybody does against the system. You're going to make them see elements of revolt in things that they don't see — that's why J.'s speech must appear in it so they see the relationship to labor.

I believe that if you write up this session and mimeograph it and let each one pass it around when they get back to their own localities, you'll get so many volunteers you won't know what to do with them — you'll say, "We need a book, now." All will be around a certain organization that is bringing this out, and that wants to build a youth movement on these principles. You are the only ones in the world who are going to say, "I'm so proud that this is the 123rd anniversary of the writings of the young Marx that we'll skip the 100 and consider him 23 years old."

2-ON "WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE STAND FOR" :

This pamphlet has to be entirely different. The concrete has to be done concretely to whatever we are. Each locality must write its own section. We may throw it out when the REB reads it -- but unless we know exactly who are the friends and who are the enemies, whom Barb wants to appeal to, whom Johnnie-Mae wants to appeal to, and so on, we don't know what this pamphlet is going to be.

I could write 500 pages by tomorrow morning on "who we are and what we stand for" and it wouldn't do anybody any good, because it wouldn't answer any concrete problems. This must answer concrete problems -- that's why we've got to know what each section or locality wants to hear. By November each local must tell us what it is they want.

Johnnie-Mae has to become a writer, she writes very well. She has to say what it is she would like in a pamphlet that would answer the questions of the people they meet, and would make them want to join. What questions are the workers asking to whom you give N&L? The scores of workers you sold Indignant Heart to -- why didn't they join? You've got to ask them. You've got to tell us whom you're approaching and what problems they are raising, whether it's in the steel mills, or on the question of education for the young. I know Johnnie-Mae has a lot to say because she doesn't think that the white schools are good enough for the Negroes.

All these things have to be put down. We must know what Dick needs for his circle, what Detroit wants, what Barbara wants Then we will see what are the problems we face. And that's when the Marxist Humanism becomes concrete -- it says: well now, in relationship to these problems, this is what we're going to publish. I don't mean we will only answer these problems, but that will make it concrete.

You know what Marx did? When he wanted to write a pamphlet, which has just first been published in some place like Ceylon, he sent out 50 questions. He said the questions that others had been asking were all wrong, and he couldn't possibly know what the workers wanted if they filled out 16 questionnaires of the kind they would give them. He wanted to know how many hours a day they worked, who does what on what machine, what is it they got on rest periods, were they interested in politics, did they vote for anybody, etc. He posed 50 new questions. He didn't even like the questions the others were asking, and he was right.

It isn't possible to know, if you would read our Gallup Poll, what the workers really want. Not only don't they go to the workers, but the kind of questions they ask are all wrong. You would pose the right questions. Even if you don't know the right answers, don't worry about it. The questions are what we want to hear.

Then it will be the kind of "who we are and what we stand for" which will not only answer our problems, but will be the cross-section of society. You think we don't represent the cross-section of society just because we are so few? We certainly do. And we don't know the answers because, even though we're a cross-section of society, we're all Marxist Humanists and we all sit in the same room and agree with each other. But if we met the others who didn't agree with us, we would finally know. That's the only thing that has stopped us from knowing. In one respect, it's wonderful that we all agree with each other. In another respect, we isolate ourselves and don't know the exact and precise problems.

3. ON "THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION -- ONE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER" :

This will be our most important pamphlet, even for technical reasons. It will be the only one that will say, "Statement of the National Editorial Board of News and Letters Committees." We're not going to have any signatures. It will have to have this general stamp.

It's not a Negro pamphlet. It is on the Negro Question, because that is the most critical question in America. But what it really is is the Two Americas. And here is how much they're going to know about the Two Americas beginning 100 years back:

First, the Abolitionists and Marx are going to say: this Civil War is going to bring us nothing unless there is a second addition. 1789 was followed by 1793. In 1789 you overthrew Louis XIV, but in 1793 we have our sans culottes. Marx said that if the Civil War also didn't have that second addition, we were going to suffer -- exactly what we know we have. Everything he says is going to sound like he must have known what we're living through, with all the discrimination. Wendell Phillips also says that. In other words, we're not importing a "foreign" Marx -- we're showing an Abolitionist as well. Wendell Phillips said this; Marx said this. And we're going to show what Lincoln said. We're going to bring this second America from Lincoln down to JFK, don't you worry. They will see that there were always two Americas, even when they were, so to speak, united as one nation, or separated. In other words, we will show the class division and that the Negro simply showed it up more.

Secondly, we will see two Americas from the minute that a trade union was born. Yes, the National Labor Union of this country, 1866 -- it belonged to the First International. People are going to learn that May 1 was not born in Russia. It was born here in the struggle for the 8 hour working day -- and the others humbly said, "Gee, aren't the American workers

wonderful. They are declaring a General Strike to get the 8 hour day. Let's accept it as an international holiday." Now Kennedy has declared it a "Law Day." He wants you to forget your American history, doesn't he? Well, we're going to show him that he isn't going to make anybody forget it. It's an American holiday and we're re-establishing it.

At the same time, it's going to hit all the other radicals, including DuBois -- the great DuBois who did contribute so much. Who knows that DuBois, now that he's supposed to be such a great nationalist and Communist and is in Accra, Ghana, made a motion for the expulsion of Garvey, because he was ashamed of this man who wasn't as cultured as he, and didn't have a beard like DuBois. (He had a little goatee that made him look like a product of Heidelberg instead of like a product of the West.)

Just as we brought Marx in naturally with the 1861 period, Lenin will come in naturally, as he was born here with the 1920 period. In the whole world, who said that the Negroes in America were a National Question...? Lenin. And every Negro got up and gave him a long lecture saying that he didn't understand the Negro in America; that he had the same culture as America, the same language, etc. -- what did he mean that Negroes were a National Question. Lenin said: go back and find out about the share-croppers and see why I'm also including the Ghetto of Poland as the National Question. It is a matter of the extra oppression you get as a minority.

They will see the National Question 40 years ahead of what everybody is talking about. But not as it is written up in the Afro-Asian pamphlet. It will be written in this manner: this is what Garvey said; this is what DuBois said; and this is what Lenin said -- and did.

And after this, we are going to teach the Africans something. They're teaching us about the party and I'm very happy about that; but they're not going to keep telling us that just because Russia didn't oppress them they don't know the danger of Communists. That is a lot of nonsense. We're going to teach it to them through the Negro in this country. We're going to show that in 1941 the Negroes were in the Communist Party by the thousands, from the unemployed movement in the '30's. Because the Communists did do something for them. And the minute that Russia was attacked, they changed their line quickly from "the Yanks are not coming" (into the war) to "the Yanks are coming" -- and told the Negro: never mind your particular struggle, you have to wait until fascism is dead and broken. By the thousands, the Negroes streamed out of the CP. They're going to see the rejection of Communism by Negroes in America; that's the way the Africans are going to learn something. It's not going to be a one-way street.

Now when we come down to this period, beginning with the Montgomery boycott, at the same time as the Hungarian Revolution, the Freedom Riders at the same time as the African freedom struggles -- it is going to be the organizational question. You will have to say: if this is the America you are for, then we who have issued this pamphlet and can show for 30 years what we have been saying about this, have a historic right of existence and an immediate appeal which demands you joining us.