

May 19, 1960

Dear Leopold Sedar Senghor:

Your June 1959 Report to the Constitutive Congress of the Party of African Federation, published in America as AFRICAN SOCIALISM, has just been made available to me. Because I was interested in giving it as wide a circulation as possible I have reviewed it for NEWS & LETTERS, which is enclosed herewith. You will note that my critique centers around the positive aspects, especially on Marxism as a humanist philosophy and dialectic method, and notes my political differences with you on De Gaulle France or the present course of the African Revolutions.

Because the African Revolutions are the present creative force for the reconstruction of society on totally new, truly human beginnings, the destiny of the American, indeed the world's, proletariat, black and white, is indissolubly tied with the fate of the Africans. The same, it seems to me, is true in reverse. It is this which impels me to write to you.

First, if I may, I would like to call to your attention my book, MARXISM AND FREEDOM, which had, as its dual objective, the re-establishment of Marxism in its original form of Humanism as well as the disclosure of the American roots of Marxism. In addition to emphasizing—as you have done so brilliantly in your speech—that Marx's Early Philosophical Works are indispensable to a comprehension of his CAPITAL, I have shown that the struggle for the 8 hour day following the Civil War in the U.S. led Marx to change the entire structure of his book. At the same time I was interested in tracing through the very concept of theory for it is the warp and woof of the relationship of intellectual to worker, which characterizes Marxism as the theory and practice of liberation. That this relationship of intellectual to worker also characterized the relations of white Abolitionists to the runaway Negro slaves long before the birth of Bolshevism illuminated, for me, today's need for a New Humanism and a new relationship of intellectual to worker.

Indeed, the problem of the organizational relationship of intellectual to worker (and here I include the peasantry) gains a much greater urgency in our epoch when the economically under-developed countries face the question, which way to Industrialization, at the very moment in history when the whole capitalistic world is divided into but two power blocs, nuclearly armed,—America and Russia,—fighting for world domination, which may very well spell destruction of civilization as we have known it. I followed up MARXISM AND FREEDOM with a special, brief pamphlet, "Nationalism, Communism, Marxist Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions", enclosed herewith.

Writing from afar, however, I could not but write "coldly." I felt that a generalized statement was nevertheless needed to break theoretical ground where neither the founder of Marxism nor its extender (Lenin) could have been. Our generation must hew out its own path. Ever since 1939 when I broke with Trotsky (whose secretary I had been), I have been acutely aware of the theoretical void in Marxism since the death of Lenin. I do not agree that Fr. is the one who has extended Marxism. His realism on the peasant question was to end as perverse as Stalin's on the proletariat. Nor do I agree that the complex problems of Africa in the present state of world technology compel appeals to the established authorities only rather than to the proletariat. But the purpose of this letter is not to argue that.

The purpose of this letter is to try to open up a relationship between Marxist Humanists, if I may call you that. I would warmly welcome a letter from you, be it on general problems or comments on my book. Please forgive me for writing in English. I would not dare write in French, although I can read and translate it. For your convenience I am enclosing one of my articles which was recently translated into French in Arguments.

Fraternally yours,

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Leopold Sedar Senghor
Secretary of the Party