

A SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING OF NEWS & LETTERS  
COMMITTEES, HELD AUGUST 30-31, 1975

Felix Martin chaired the EXECUTIVE SESSION, where Roya reported on the meeting the NEB had held on Friday evening at which she had called her presentation, not "Stewardship of Leadership", but "Dialectics of Leadership", and emphasized that she was speaking here not of leadership as the NEB, but of leadership as a category. Her report had three parts: 1) the artificer, laws of the heart and the fetishism of commodities; 2) the dialectics of an epoch in crisis and a period of revolution; 3) what to do?

Roya began by reading a poem from the Ching dynasty, which was integral with a picture of an orchid and the calligraphy -- all of which were parts of the artistry as a whole. She said she had begun with this to make us realize that culture is not as simple as when we all laugh at it because it is a substitute for revolution. Hegel wanted us to be fully aware of how great something like culture is, which he nonetheless fully denied. Materialists who claim to be Marxists are too superficial when they dismiss culture as "superstructure" and get rid of it that way. And Mao was not unaware of what he was doing by calling his nonsense "cultural revolution." She said she had used the word "artificer" in

one of her Two Worlds columns to describe the "confidence man", and CLRJ. But Hegel was not talking about some flim-flam man. The artificer in Hegel is part of the Absolute. It's religion, the Egyptian religion. Hegel not only enjoyed poetry; his best friend was a poet and he got plenty of ideas from him. And when he wrote about "laws of the heart" (Blake's expression was "the heart has its reason"), we have to realize this was a most important part of Hegel's life. Yet he uses the same expression against it that he used against Indian philosophy -- he calls it philosophy of unfreedom. He made philosophy higher than religion, but he still called philosophy only the "owl of Minerva" -- the owl being the symbol of wisdom, and an animal that sees in the dark. His point was that the philosophers can give you the meaning of something only after the event has already happened.

This is where Marx comes in when he says the point is not to analyze the world, but to change it. But he didn't just "throw out" culture or any of the other parts of the whole process any more than Hegel did. His great genius was to say that there is no point to just being wise after the event, that we had better learn how to anticipate some of these revolutions. We have done better than anyone else in understanding Marx, but the truth is that nobody has yet fully analyzed those great pages on the fetishism of commodities. Marxists all understood right away that Marx was showing the key was not in the market place but in production relations, and that the exchange of equals actually hides the inequality because only one commodity is living, etc., etc., etc. Where they stopped (and not only the Second International, either) was when they added that the reason it was so bad is because of the reification of labor. They were too quick to come to a conclusion. What did Lukacs and Adorno do? They tried to apply reification to themselves, because alienation is so universal. But how does Marx break at that point with both Hegel and classical political economy? What stopped the classical political economists from seeing what Marx saw? They all stopped at Substance and never saw labor as Subject. They never saw the actual reshaping of history. I was amazed when I realized that nobody is more erudite than Adorno and yet he never got beyond exchange value.

How was it that Hegel was great enough to be able to reject the "Laws of the heart", the artificer, culture? He caught the dialectic of an epoch in crisis. That is so tremendous that you can suddenly see the past, the present, and the future. And he caught it because he lived in the period of the French Revolution.

Unless at one and the same time you let the movement from practice root you, and the movement from theory compel you to have a creative will, you will not have the dialectic of leadership. Hegel's break with Jacobi was because if you go to faith instead of to Reason you will regress no matter how great you are. Unless for this year, we have P&R as Organization builder, we will not have measured up. The difference between Trotsky saying the crisis of the world is the crisis of leadership, and talking about "dialectics of leadership" is the difference between elitism and Marxist-Humanism -- which says you better suffer through second negativity yourself, because the whole fate of humanity is involved in it.

And we have to talk about "philosophy and not philosopher" because everything can be transformed into its opposite. Mao knows a lot of philosophy; he doesn't know dialectics, but he knows Confucius very well. When he gets the passion of philosophy he has everybody saying China is great because they have 700 million philosophers. That was supposed to make him a man of the masses. But you have to understand what is philosophy before you can say "philosophy not philosopher", or else it can be diverted to mean cult of personality. In the whole question of philosophy you have to realize it is the question of freedom, the self-development of mankind, self-discipline, and also organization.

Marx had no theory of the party, and Lasalle was supposed to be the organizational man, but Marx called himself and Engels "the party" when he refused to participate in all the factionalism after the 1848 revolution was lost -- because he knew that if you don't have an organizational expression for the unity of thought and your new society, if you don't have complete identification with the fact that the proletariat will create it, that there is no separation between spontaneity and organization, then you will never succeed in changing the world. The reason we preserve Lenin, even though we throw out the vanguard party is because Lenin said you are not a Marxist unless you belong to an organization -- and unless you have theory. It is in the separation between philosophy and organization that we fell down.

It isn't true that we don't have to worry about Mao attracting revolutionaries now that they have sent the army in to put down the workers. In 1937 the Stalinists were killing the Trotskyists in the Spanish revolution, and were killing the Spanish revolution itself. Yet when we spoke about this they said we were counter-revolutionaries for daring to raise it when there was fascism in Germany. You can't delude yourself that you don't have any problem any more just because you have reached a new plateau and have new enemies. It is easier to see it in relation to Lenin and what he said in 1914. It wasn't sufficient to say the problem was over because everyone could see who the betrayers were. Lenin said the Second International would continue to live -- just look at what is happening in Portugal right now. It was only that the revolutionaries would no longer be with them. The idea represents a certain material base.

What happens if you don't keep practicing the dialectic and meeting the challenge? (Not by telling me about what is in P&R, but telling it to the person who didn't even ask you about it, and may not think they even want to know about it.) In New York we had people who liked studying racism with us, but there was something they didn't catch about us that made them think they could be together with Marxist-Humanists -- until the question of Russia and China was discussed directly. Or take the Bay Area -- it is fantastic to think that the very same people who want to take over the women's organization there should stop us because they accuse N&L of "wanting to take over" -- N&L who beg the forces to take us over. You are accepting their ground if you don't project Marxist-Humanism, no matter what trouble that may bring. Or take WL. If you argue with women like Sheila Rowbotham on the basis of "what is male-dominated Left" instead of what is the real philosophy you are following, you'll never get to structuralism or Trotskyism or anything else, because they know better than anyone how to twist around the phrases of Women's Liberation. You have to be very concrete and very comprehensive, and never lose hold of philosophy.

Now to part 3, and what to do ourselves. At the NEB, the hardest point was how do we break down "the spontaneous immanent rhythm and the hard toil" as one and the same thing. Let's go away from philosophy for a moment to take up a different expression of "collectivity" and "one". Take that little collective of four Maoists in the Bay Area who accuse you of paying attention to Raya while they're so "independent" (independently for Mao!) There is no totalitarian from Napoleon to Stalin who didn't begin by being for the collective. Stalin didn't have a philosophy, but he put Trotsky completely on the defensive. You can't win when you accept your opponent's ground.

You have to work it out. You can't ask, for example, why we didn't discuss Vietnam more. We weren't with people who kept insisting on talking about that. If you were, you have to say to yourself: well, either they

are very dumb at the center, or they don't appreciate how important it is, no I'll do it. Work it out...you're the one who has to answer it.

We have to go back to spontaneity and hard toil and then draw three little conclusions. There is something in the development of the objective situation, something in the development of thought, and something in the consciousness of people who revolt -- a spontaneous rhythm -- that is not only in the masses, but in you -- IF you did the hard toil to dig it out.

The hardest thing is to talk to yourself. Take the six weeks between Stalin's death and the Absolute Idea letters, and the six weeks between that and the East German revolt. There is something that comes from below. Anybody who writes knows that you don't know what is going to come out. Somebody as great as Hegel wrote 850 pages when he only intended to write 300. And Walter Kaufmann had the stupidity to write "It got away from him". Yes, it did -- that's exactly what the spontaneous rhythm and the hard toil means. What unites the objective and the subjective is that this "from below" really catches both. Everybody catches something in the air.

And we have to practice that in the simplest things of We have to practice P&R as Organization builder not because that's the "rule", but because you recognized something when you knocked on someone's door and they asked you a question. Mary made a great leap today, philosophically; it was the first time she caught what happens when you knock on that door. If you really practice the unity of these two opposites, you will always check yourself against the objective situation, and look at a historic mirror. Let's quit using the word "contacting". Either you're establishing new relations, or forget it. But to establish new relations, you have to be theoretically prepared; you have to anticipate the kind of questions people will raise. There is no such thing as organizational discipline. There's only self-discipline. Organization consciousness without the dialectic is just another form of vanguardism. Everything we do this year must flow from P&R as Organization Builder, whether that is the pamphlets, the paper, or any other aspect of our work. Each one is a leader in this sense not because of being "elected", but because that is what history demands of us.

Following the Discussion after the Report, Rays gave a brief farewell to all who would be returning to their own localities to practice the dialectics of this Plenum, and the meeting was adjourned.

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