

Mike

June 17, 1980

Dear Harry,

Finally the draft perspectives have been finished (I will see that the galleys get to you so that you don't have to wait for the paper), and that gives me a chance to raise one question that I'm very anxious to get your comment on as soon as possible, since it concerns the article I'm working on, "On the 25th Anniversary of the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.", which is about the time I met you. Actually, I believe I began writing to you in 1953, but it's with News & Letters rather than Correspondence that our relationship became serious both in respect to state-capitalist theory and international relations.

The topics on which I'm most interested in hearing from you are not so much all the theoretic contributions we have made in bringing Marxist-Humanism onto the historic stage, but the question of Organization. This is one topic I've had no help at all on, not even from Lenin. That is to say, in our rejection of the party-to-lead, I was anxious to show that the Stalinists have transformed that into opposite as they have everything else, and therefore in M&F I spent a lot of time showing the changes he himself had made between 1903 and 1905; those he introduced in 1917 when he demanded that the Party work be checked by the non-Party masses, and in the trade union debate with Trotsky in 1920-21. It's the last one that got reinstated in a new way ever since the death of Stalin, and as that form became the beginning of the end with the Johnsonites so that it becomes a prelude to 1955 when we're fully independent, which is the period that is the jumping off point for the article I'm working on now.

Here is the difficulty insofar as my figuring out why Lenin did not make as great a break with his organizational past as with his philosophic past, considering that in the last years of his life that is exactly what speeded his death -- seeing the bureaucratism in the early workers' state, sensing the horrors of the General Secretary, Stalin, and bringing into his Will that even the best of them, like Bukharin, who was the most scholarly, had so little conception of what the dialectic was that he couldn't even be considered a full Marxist. And yet there is no worked out methodology as to what that little word, "dialectics," would mean in the dialectics of the party.

I don't know whether you have in your files the original letters I wrote on the Absolute Idea in 1953, which were reproduced in 1955 as an Appendix to our first pamphlet on Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks. If you do, you will note that I take that question directly into the history of both the Absolute Idea and the Party in various historic periods, thualy: I ask everyone to face the staggering truth that Hegel no sooner projects Absolute Idea, than he states that the greatest of all oppositions is in that. And I then break it down into being a movement from practice as well as from theory. Whereupon I show the following in relationship to the history of 1903-23, and then I leap to our period, 1953:

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Where Party, as 'simple' class instrument, dominated Marx's period with its concentration on spontaneity of the masses, be that in the 1848 Revolutions or the 1871 Paris Commune, Party became the divider of tendencies 1903-1917.

As divider of tendencies -- Marx certainly knew plenty of tendencies, beginning with the Communist Manifesto on -- Party began having a very new interpretation with Lenin's theory of the Party, 1902-03, where the politics demanded that the tendency itself be the organization -- Bolshevism.

Also as divider of tendencies, with politics predominating over the trade unionism of the German Social Democracy, it became clear that Lenin was preparing for revolution organizationally, where even so great a revolutionary as Luxemburg was not.

With, however, the actual conquest of power, the destruction of capitalism has by no means solved the question of the mass party, and it is at that point when Party becomes different social layers including especially the triangular relationship of Party, Trade Union, and Non-Party Masses in the 1921 debate, that Lenin becomes a very, very sad person. He literally doesn't know what to do when confronted with the very grave contradiction between the Party that is now the state and the poor masses that still get exploited; the Party, or rather its leadership, is so very, very thin a layer that 'knows' history and theory and organization and is still on the way back to capitalism. And the reason Bukharin worries him so much is not only that he was with Trotsky in the trade union debates, but as, in his Economics of the Transition Period, shows he does not understand dialectics, i.e. the development of a very necessary new relationship of Party leadership to ranks and to masses. And Lenin dies.

What we have seen with the rise of Stalinism is not anything "theoretical" as the Party becomes the suppressor of revolutions, be it in Russia, China, England in the late 1920s, or the Spanish Revolution, 1937, climaxing with the Hitler-Stalin Pact, 1939.

And yet, why haven't we been able, in rejecting the party-to-lead that so misled, to work out some organizational form that would attract, I mean, have a pull on the masses and the intellectuals that party-to-lead had?

When I show the rise of the new tendency, I mean state-capitalism, 1941-50, I designate it as clarification of ~~Marx's~~ ideas, elaboration of theory, eyes on the masses. That's good, but not good enough, because it becomes clear in 1951 once we, instead of just being a tendency within Trotskyism, finally break one and for all with ~~Marx's~~ Trotskyism and become responsible for organization that organization without philosophy, like state-capitalism without humanism, leads only to the break-up of the state-capitalist tendency. And it's only after that break that we work out Marx's Humanism, even as (without being conscious that that was what we were doing) the breakthrough on the Absolute Idea as a movement from practice that is itself a form of theory anticipates

the June, 1953, revolt.

My point is that there is nothing abstract about philosophy because its generalization is historic and poses -- it only poses, it cannot be the organization -- so new a relationship of theory to practice and practice to theory, that there must be a new form of organization.

Committee form is good both in its correspondence to what comes from the masses themselves and the non-rigidity of "the Party form." But it, too, is not fully adequate because so much time had to be spent on making the leadership listen to the masses that self-development of ideas was very nearly subordinated to self-development of the individuals in the committees, especially what we called "the third layer."

Unless we take seriously the form of organization, indeed organization itself, then the leadership leaves open what shouldn't be left open -- responsibility ~~for~~ that the projection of the ideas live in an organization.

You may remember how hard I tried to see that some of your original grouping has direct correspondence with us, that they must feel that responsibility for the Marxist-Humanism they now accepted and not leave it all up to you. When that disintegrated, I then tried that a new youth -- I forgot his name, but do you remember the young man who came to you in 1959, but then ended up joining Tony Cliff's group? -- know feel as close and responsible for ideas and not be overwhelmed by lack of organization.

You are so active, project ideas in so many places, both to workers and students, and yet frankly, Harry, I feel that the new organization that gains more from that than we do is Tony Cliff. I'm very anxious to find out from you what you have thought about organization ever since you broke with Stalinism.

In this, the 25th year, we have produced so many unique historic contributions, from state-capitalism to Marxist-Humanism; from the appreciation of the deepest layers of the proletariat to new forces of Reason like the Blacks, like women, like youth; from Marxism and Freedom which laid the ground for pamphlets, beginning with Workers Battle Automation, Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves, the Afro-Asian Revolutions and the birth of a whole new Third World, to Philosophy and Revolution and now the Luxemburg book -- none of which ever stopped the daily activities or participation in mass movements -- that it seems to me that we simply must now also work very hard now on the question of Organization.

Have you thought of this quarter of a century, not only as all the revolutions and counter-revolutions, that is to say, the objective situation, but also how does a "Party" -- naturally I do not mean the party-to-lead but a group of workers and intellectuals ~~like~~ like ourselves that is very vigilant about a live link to Marx, this historic continuity of that new continent of thought, at the same time as ~~they~~ we do not let our eyes wander from today -- create so new a form of organization that it ~~in~~ realizes philosophy of revolution?

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