

Sept. 4, 1950

Dear Raha:

Here is the letter I promised to write you on that miserable book, Marxism and the Party, by John Molyneux so that you can work out in your own words. It happens that Dick from England likewise was interested in working out in his own words some of the points I make that are applicable to Britain. I am certain that the problems in Iran and the problems in Britain are so very different, not to mention what different personalities you two are, that there will be no overlapping of points of concentration that either one or the other makes. Now then, to Molyneux:

Nothing reveals more sharply how deep into the mire a Marxist can land when he disregards the philosophy of Marx in considering organization, as when that separation of philosophy and organization occurs on the theory of permanent revolution. It is there (pp. 20-22) where John Molyneux's inglorious achievement occurs. In the very first chapter of his book he deals with Marx's 1850 Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League; there is hardly a line in those 3 pages on the Address that doesn't display total deafness to Marx's new continent of thought. Just listen to a few of Molyneux's fantastic conclusions:

1) First comes the misreading of the Communist Manifesto. The misreading begins with the reference to "the main scheme set out in the C.M." and ends with outright slander that Marx was "led to depart somewhat", in the actual 1848 Revolution, from that "scheme" instead of coming forward as a clear advocate of proletarian revolution and the representative of an independent working class party. Marx was forced to act through the Neue Rheinische Zeitung as the extreme left wing of radical democracy... "Departure" (?) of CM in NRZ ???

There is no point of going into the details of Marx's magnificent revolutionary journalism in the NRZ when obviously Molyneux has not read a single issue and got third-hand the subtitle of the NRZ as an organ of (democracy). And if he ever did read a copy, he proves himself to be as deaf to it as to that greatest of all Manifestos, which, though ordered as "the program" of the Communist League, turned out to be the unfurling of so historic a challenge to capitalism and for proletarian revolution, that no one could possibly recognize the document under Molyneux's description of "the main scheme." Evidently it doesn't seem to enter his mind that both writings and the actual revolution were the very ground for Marx's famous 1850 Address on the permanent revolution. (Key)

2) Molyneux to the contrary, thinks that it is the organizational question—the independent political organization of the working class—which predominates over the question of "the theory and practice of Marxism." No wonder Marx felt compelled, when he heard such Marxists in his day define Marxism, to declare, if that is what Marxism is, "I am not a Marxist."

* If you are reading it in Farsi, I am referring to Chapter 1, Sec. 3.

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3) Marx supposedly issued the March Address because the preoccupation with "practical realization" with party organization couldn't be realized in the autumn of 1849 when he was already in London, and since Molyneaux's preoccupation is with organization, he chooses to quote from that Address the two paragraphs of the "organizational part, Address to the Central Committee, as to how to reorganize itself "if it is not to be exploited and taken in tow again by the bourgeoisie as in 1848." One would think that at this point even a strict SWP vanguardist would follow Marx in his report on the dialectics of revolution "whether it will be called forth by an independent uprising of the French proletariat or by an invasion of the Holy Alliance against the revolutionary Babylon," that is, Paris. The further continuance of revolution Marx concludes would be "the party of the proletariat. Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence."

4) No such logic flows from the mind of a Cliffite. Instead he concludes his analysis with something out of the blue: "Marx makes his closest approach to Lenin's concept of the vanguard party (though of course there are still major differences)." (p. 21) And if that hasn't ^{into} you into fantasy-land, Molyneaux continues with his own guide to action: "The key to these organisational proposals is that they are the product of the most direct involvement in revolutionary action that Marx was ever to experience, and that they are designed as a guide to action in a situation in which it is assumed that "a new revolution is impending." Even when Molyneaux makes some acknowledgment of revolution, he embellishes it with such loaded phrases as "the plan to tighten the organization", and only then does it become "an integral part of the perspective of dynamic revolutionary action..."

First let us clear up some of the misstatements that are supposed to parallel Marx's and Lenin's concepts of the vanguard party, which would certainly shock Lenin no end. So far as the historic periods are concerned, while Marx in 1849-50 was still thinking of an impending revolution, Lenin, in 1902, when he was working out What is to be Done?, was very far from expecting an "impending revolution," much less a proletarian revolution. Nevertheless, at the 1903 Congress, Lenin did apologize for his emphasis on the need to limit membership, saying that the attack had to be "bent" in such a direction both because the party had been so ~~stagnant~~ and loose, and we must recognize that without a theory of revolution, there can be no revolution. And indeed, when the 1905 Revolution burst out so spontaneously, it was just then when Lenin changed his position on "tightening" the organization, demanded that it be thrust wide open, and later was to declare that whereas everyone attributes the split between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks to that 1903 Congress when it "technically" took place, he considered that it is 1905 where the two tendencies were opposites.

* Molyneaux does not specify the edition of Marx's Selected Works he quotes. His pagination does not hold for the 1909 edition, in which it appears at pages 175-6, and again, p. 183.

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Where Molyneaux discovered "the similarity between Marx's concept of the party...and Lenin's fifty or more years later derives in large part from the parallels in their situation," (p. 22) Lenin and the whole Social Democracy of the time saw parallels--and dissimilarities--between the revolutions themselves. To grasp the total ramifications all the way to our day, one has however to grapple with that 1907 Congress, the only one where all tendencies--Bolshevik, Menshevik, Luxemburgist, and even the Bund--argued the 1905 Revolution, its relationship to and departure from 1948. Quite clearly though that Congress was the most organizational in the sense that all tendencies were there, the battle of ideas was never separated from the organizational form and above all, the relationship of spontaneity to organization, both in Lenin's and in Luxemburg's speeches, was never more sharply expressed. That, however, is out of the purview of Molyneaux.

5) The further parts of the chapter on Marx do not deserve any notice, not only because they are so full of mistakes that it would take a heavy tome to unravel those 12 pages, but because Molyneaux diverts so totally from Marx that a reader would take for granted that Molyneaux has no claim to Marxism. Thus, as he approaches the so-called second period of Marx, 1850 to 1864, which Molyneaux calls "the years of retreat", ~~and~~ he allows all of two pages. Please keep in mind that this is the period in which Marx wrote a) the 1857-8 Grundrisse; b) 1859 Critique of Political Economy, and c) the 1861 second draft of nothing short of Capital itself, not to mention all the articles against colonialism and for the Abolitionists and the Civil War in the United States, which led him to reorganize the structure of his greatest theoretical work.

6) Even when one wants to so narrow Marx's organization that he is willing to disregard Marx's writings during the period that do not concern the party, party, party, one has to be careful with his dates. It is not 1850 when there was no "party"; Marx's Address was to the Central Committee of the Communist League, and he asked it to reorganize itself, and he didn't leave the "party" til 1852. Secondly, in the same two years there were meetings with both the Chartist and the Blanquists to discuss the founding of a "World Society of Revolutionary Communists."* In 1851 when he was already in the British Museum developing some very great new theories, he was still attending meetings of the London Council of the Communist League. And when members of the League were arrested and the 1850 Address was found on their persons, the Cologne Trial of all followed. While it never dawns on Molyneaux that Marx explained how important his theoretical work was to the party as Marx understood it: "A party in the eminent historical sense," he should have at least known of the May 1861 meeting Marx organized in London to protest the arrest of Auguste Blanqui by the French police. It is doubtful however whether he would recognize a party "in the eminent historical sense," or in the sense that Blanqui expressed his deep gratitude for what "the German proletarian party had done", with Marx answering:

* See Marx without Myth by Maximilien Rubel and Margaret Manale, p. 94 and pps. 171-2.

"No one could be more interested than I in the fate of a man who I always held to be the head and the heart of the proletarian party in France."

In rounding out the totality of his misconceptions of Marx, Molyneaux becomes arrogant enough to tell Marx all about "the essential starting point for a theory of the revolutionary party is rooted in what we called earlier the 'optimistic evolutionism' of his (Marx's) view of the growth of working-class political consciousness..." Then Molyneaux kindly releases Marx from any "blame" because Marx lived when reformism had not emerged as in any way a major threat. Therefore, says Molyneaux, it is "understandable" if Marx bent the stick "in the direction of economic determinism." (p. 35)

Molyneaux's arrogance has not yet reached its apex. Here it is: "But it is also necessary to understand that in the sphere of his theory of the party, the legacy of Marx's work, whatever its positive achievements, was something that had in time to be overcome by the marxist movement if capitalism was to be overthrown." (p. 35) As you can see, once an SWPer has surrounded himself with quotes from Tony Cliff and other leaders, he follows Hegel's analysis of what comes after one gains "power": "In place of revolt, comes arrogance," arrogance sufficient to demand the "overcoming" of the theory of the party Molyneaux attributes to Marx.

Having "overcome" that theory, Molyneaux, in the final chapter, sings the glory of the Party, "the revolutionary party today," and manages to throw overboard reality itself. Thus, he forgets... (it would be more correct to say never recognized...) that a whole new Third World arose from the mid-1950s and that it was in that period that the historic, first time ever, revolts from under Stalinism occurred in East Europe--he mentions neither the East German 1953 revolt nor the Hungarian Revolution which brought onto the historic stage then Marx's 1844 Humanist Essays. Instead he attributes to "the last decade"--I assume he is a young man and the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s is his decade--the appearance of a number of studies devoted to disinterring the marxist tradition on the question of the party and indicating perspectives for the present." (p. 163) But why then forget the revolution in Portugal, which did present ~~back~~ a revolutionary Marxist group (which as a matter of fact the SWP solidarized with) which came up with a beautiful new category: apartidarismo (non-partyism)? Is it that the SWP hardly focused on that word in its support of the PRP/BR, much less revealed that the head of the party was a woman, Isabel do Carmo? The sexism in Tony Cliff is matched by equally subtle racism in Molyneaux as he ~~characterizes~~ characterizes the reactionary fascist 1930s as "black reaction." (p. 128) If there is any color that characterizes Hitlerism, it certainly is not black. The master race was lily white. For someone to be so insensitive as to characterize that period as "black reaction" discloses a great deal. Peculiarly enough, even when he greatly admires and praises his leader, Tony Cliff, he ~~also~~ does so in mere footnotes. Thus footnote 45 (p. 184) ends with a reference to Tony Cliff, "who, in 1947, produced the first fully worked out analysis of state-capitalism in Russia." The trouble with that is that again it is...

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(As in the reference to Cliff, this great "discovery" is listed in a footnote, 44, p. 182.)
Needless to say, he never even tries to answer, the crucial question:
does a Marxist group have a historic right to exist?
Yours

incorrect. The first "worked out" analysis of state-capitalism was produced, ~~not~~ in 1941, not 1947. It was written by Raya Dunayevskaya, not Tony Cliff. Indeed, the six-year lapse between RD's study and Tony Cliff's could tell quite a story about non-cooperation with state-capitalists in the Trotskyist movement, ~~because~~ Tony Cliff was quite adamant about making such an analysis "purely economic."

Dear Raha--I hardly covered more than the first chapter and at best a little of the last chapter, and look how long it has become. I do hope that it has given you sufficient a form for you to know how to deal with the rest. The only other thing I will add is that part from my talk on Philosophy of Leadership.

Unless you recognize Marxism as a whole new continent of thought, you cannot but divide Marx up into economics, politics, a little bit of philosophy and--"no theory of the party." Now, whereas it is true he had no theory of the party as we know it since Lenin's What Is to Be Done, what he thought of as "party", i.e. organization as TENDENCY, political-philosophic tendency, so that the class nature of workers can become a movement from spontaneity to a "party of their own", so that it becomes what he described Communists to be, i.e., though an integral part of the working class, they have a view of the class struggle as a whole and not just of the immediate demands; and that they are internationalist and not nationalists.

After Marx unfurled that great historic class and international banner in the Communist Manifesto, and participated in both the 1848 revolutions and the greatest revolution of his day--the 1871 Paris Commune, he criticized unflinching the 1875 SDF program: the Critique of the Gotha Program, to which only V.I. Lenin measured up ~~and not with Party, but with State and Revolution...~~

When Molyneaux does get to mention Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, he has nothing to say, excusing himself on the grounds that he'll discuss philosophy when he deals with Gramsci. And when he finally deals with Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis, he does not return to Lenin, much less grapple with Lenin's statement, "Con-
dition not only reflects the world, but creates it." It doesn't even enter the Tony Cliffite mentality that that is exactly where the great tragedy comes in, that is to say, whereas Lenin reorganized himself, his position on State and Revolution, on Imperialism, on the National Question and Colonialism, on dialectics "proper," and on the Will, he has not reorganized his concept of the Party. Had John Molyneaux paid any attention to the single word, dialectic, that Lenin uses in his Will regarding Bukharin, he would have gotten a great deal further in comprehension of Lenin's concepts than the whole 188 pages of his book. His full Trotskyist mentality comes out most clearly when he deals with Luxemburg; he is so happy that there he can appear to be for spontaneity that he doesn't even know how economist he is and how he steps back into vanguardism as he attributes all of Luxemburg's mistakes to a single phenomenon--her supposed lack of appreciation for the "unevenness of development."