

A SUMMARY OF THE CONVENTION OF
NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES, JULY 7-8, 1984

Raya then asked
for the floor to speak directly on the pamphlet, The 1949-50

Miners' General Strike and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.
We waited so long to tell the story of that strike, which has been missing from history. And now Andy spent so much time on the other two pamphlets that the story still isn't told. I'm going to tell you what happened. You have to see what West Virginia was in 1949. There had already been a miners' strike in 1943, and the government gave them patriotic gibberish. The returning vets had to fight for everything they got, after the war. Andy was one of them. He came from a working-class family; he didn't have to go into the mines because they got the GI Bill. But he was so moved by ideas, and so associated with miners that he left the university to go to the mines, where he was sent to the hospital in an explosion. He was only accepted by the miners when he came back to the mines after the explosion. It is a magnificent pamphlet, and it shows you what it means to make no division between mental and manual labor.

After the miners had been on strike for six long months, and they are starving, Andy and "Red" make this motion, that instead of being bound by Taft-Hartley, or Lewis' opposition, they will spread the greatness of 100,000 miners on general strike. They have a tremendous responsibility. And they move that instead of bothering with all the bureaucracy, they will go directly to the rank-and-file autoworkers, and steelworkers, etc. and ask for support. You will read it in the pamphlet; but you have to know it in a way that people will beg you for a copy because they have their own struggles.

Or take Raymond. He got fired from the mines. And he has to get them help on the campus of WVU. So they go and picket a basketball game with the hardhats of the miners and ask for money. And there is Frank, who walked all over on one leg to get support. We are all members of the SWP. But they call us "adventurists" because they hear a lot of red-baiting. They call a Tri-state meeting to give us the line. But at the end they have to admit that we are fully backed by the rank-and-file. The point is that there is a new feeling. We have shaken up the union bureaucracy and the university. We have broken through on philosophy. Miners are asking "what kind of labor should man do?", "why should there be such a division between mental and manual labor?" They are men and women as real thinkers. It isn't just that they rejected the leaders; it is that they have become thinkers as well as doers. That is our pamphlet!

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At the conclusion of the discussion, Anne turned the floor over to Raya for her SUMMATION. Raya said she was glad to sum-up before the Finance session, because there is no way not to be concrete on finances. She said she wanted to limit herself to that word "concrete", but as an adjective only. That is because it can't be concrete unless it's a concrete universal. Those two are really one.

Raya illustrated that by calling directly on Inez to speak in the Executive session. Why do we have so many who are the most experienced proletarians, yet who are suddenly quiet because they think everything has been told. Inez just went to an academic women's conference, and I know she doesn't love such things, but that is exactly the point. Why shouldn't she report what she said as a worker? And she is a journalist of the first order. She had the very first women's column in our paper. Why shouldn't she speak on the Miners General Strike pamphlet, and not only on it as yesterday, but as today and tomorrow. Or why didn't anyone ask whether something was wrong that only Blacks spoke on Lou's report on Black and Third World? That is disgusting in our organization. We have to see what it means that Inez and Denby had their kind of relationship.

Remember Workers Battle Automation. They were working together on it, at the time the slogan against automation was "30 for 40" -- that is, 30 hours work for 40 hours pay. But Inez hated automation so much that she didn't want to compromise. She wanted the abolition of automation. She had a very Marxist position; she asked what is work when it is really self-activity? Then it is self-development that isn't only individual, but really universal. Marx's first slogan was for the "abolition of labor"! Inez says: I don't want anything to do with automation. Labor should be creative and artistic, with things done by hand. But she feels she can't compete with Denby. He has more experience; he's Black.

So I say what is wrong with both of you saying your views in the conclusion of WBA? Look it up in the pamphlet and see what was done. Now today you heard Lou describing his experience with Denby. You see what was involved in dividing up the column, and having both "Black World" and "Workshop Talks". Marcotte's articles on the Latino workers in New York remind me of the immigrant sweatshops in the 1920s. Back then you were forbidden to get a job in a union shop. That was already organized; you had to get a job in an unorganized shop. That was

your Bolshevik duty. But I don't have to talk about the 1920s because Marcotte is telling it as it is today.

Think about what it is to be a columnist. What do you think Danby felt about the split with CLR James? He had to break with his leader because he agrees with my humanism. That was a traumatic experience for him. So then you see when passion is also reason. We all have to feel that, even someone as young as Maria. She had no right to break off her speech when she was told she had only "2 more minutes". You have to find the self-discipline of the universal. You have to find out immediately what is the most important thing I want to say.

The most disappointing part of the Convention was the lack of response to Olga's report on the Classes in Perspectives. The report was magnificent. For the first time we are going to have classes, not on our books, but on Perspectives. Why? Because we are all supposed to be practicing method by showing how we worked it out every single year in Perspectives. And not once, but twice each year, two months apart. That doesn't happen in any other organization. You would have convinced me that "self-critical" meant something if, as soon as you saw those 10 years of Perspectives hung up on the wall here, you would have at least looked at them to remember what they were about. And then been ready when Olga got through to say, I agree or don't agree with what you propose, or I want to concentrate on a different year... Something concrete, that is the point. If you are self-critical, that is only the first step. If you don't go beyond that, you will just repeat it next year.

It's only when you work out concretely what you intend to do in relation to the Sub Drive, or anything else. Do you know what I did to be ready for the Convention? I re-read the entire new Bound Volume -- 7 years. Concrete and universal are opposites, yes. But Marxist-Humanism, through absolute negativity, lets you see that unless they are a totality, unless there is no division between theory and practice, you won't get it. With our paper and our organization, concrete and universal are not opposites. We prove that concrete is the concretization of the universal.