

NEWS & LETTERS

2832 East Grand Boulevard • Detroit, Michigan 48211 • Phone: 873-8969

October 11, 1983

TO MARXIST-HUMANISTS, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, AND
FRIENDS OF CHARLES DENBY, EDITOR OF NEWS & LETTERS

Dear Comrades:

Death has such a finality about it that it is very difficult to hold before one's eyes that ideas of freedom never die, and that one who-- in struggle and in thought-- lived such a life, and in death lives in us, is Charles Denby, editor of News & Letters from its birth. In mourning his death we remember his life, and want to make sure that it is his life, in all its revolutionary ramifications that we now recall, so that this generation achieves the final overthrow of this capitalist, racist, sexist society and helps truly new human relations come to be.

Take the fact of how Denby came to choose Indignant Heart as the title of his autobiography. Re-read the frontispiece to Indignant Heart, where Wendell Phillips speaks of the inseparability of the world freedom struggle from India to Hungary to Ireland to Black America: "It is said that the earthquake of Lisbon tossed the sea in billows on the coast of Cuba; so no Indignant Heart is beating anywhere whose pulses are not felt on the walls of our American bastille". The Black Dimension in all its international ramifications had Denby find an affinity with the great abolitionist Wendell Phillips, and thus also with Marx. At once what comes to life is the very American roots of Marxism in today's Marxist-Humanist global struggle.

Now read his very last statement to our Constitutional Convention, which will be published in Denby's "Worker's Journal" column in the next issue of N&L, and see that nothing had changed in the 75th year which closed his life. Indeed, precisely because in Marx's last years he had expressed what Charles Denby was expressing in the Marx centenary, the November "Worker's Journal" will end with Marx's statement on the birth of his grandson when Marx himself was already facing death:

(Children born today have before them) "the most revolutionary period which human beings have ever had to live through. It is not good to be so old that one is capable only of foreseeing and not of seeing".

(Karl Marx to Jenny, April 29, 1881)

-- The Resident Editorial Board

16035

October 12, 1983

In Lieu of REB Minutes of the Special Meeting on Charles Denby's Death

Dear Friends:

A special REB meeting was held the day following Charles Denby's death at 4:30 PM Oct. 10, 1983. As much as we all feel the tragedy of life's end, none can feel it as sharply as Effie, and it is to her that our hearts go out. We will naturally do everything we can to help her in this period.

The family is conducting his funeral on Saturday, Oct. 15th. Our special in-memoriam meeting will be held on Sunday afternoon November 6th. To that News & Letters-sponsored memorial meeting we will wish to invite friends who were associated with Denby in all periods of his life and struggle, from the shops to the support for Lowndes County, Alabama civil rights actions, and a few from other tendencies. We are asking the locals to suggest people who should be invited and written to.

The discussion at the REB reflected how very, very difficult it is to separate the editor from the continuance of N&L. While Raya's statement to "Dear Comrades" was unanimously approved, and all found it "tremendously moving", every REB member was moved in very concrete ways from their own relations with Charles Denby. Thus Jim read out the last part of a letter he had just written to Sheila: "The truth is that when it comes to Denby and youth, the generation gap dissolves, a fact that we keep discovering anew. That won't stop because new, young lives are still attracted to new ideas which the name Charles Denby will always represent-- as a worker's way of knowing, as a Black militant, and as editor of Marxist-Humanist N&L. Because those elements in the organization were so inspiring to me, the first letter I ever wrote to N&L was to Denby himself when I was in high school. Though he's gone now, I'm confident we'll see the world he could only foresee."

Diane recalled hearing Denby speak to college students, and how he could tell a story in a way that it illuminated a whole world. Those who debate the difference between Part I and II of IHBWJ don't understand how it expresses Universal-Particular-Individual. In Chap. 1 of Part I we meet an individual born in a particular place and a particular time-- Lowndes County, Alabama in the early years of this century. You read the whole book, and experience Denby's life, all his thoughts and struggles, and at the end of Part II you see the entire world freedom struggle, you see a whole philosophy of freedom.

Lou spoke of how alive Denby was even at the end, of how he kept saying that a sailor never knows when a storm will come and shake a calm sea. He kept hoping for revolutionary possibilities even at that advanced age. In his life we see that it is the long association with a philosophy of revolution that sustains you. Suzanne appreciated Raya re-telling how Denby came to choose the title for Indignant Heart; it explains much about his view of life. I feel the most fitting tribute and profound expression of our love for him is to see that his life's work continues in us, that not one beat is lost.

Mike felt that Marx's letter on wanting to see rather than only foresee went to the heart of Denby's life, in telling what we are living for-- a new, human world. The growth and development of an individual is also the development of all of us. Denby in Lowndes County in 1982 was presenting a world view that had he glimpsed when he chose that Wendell Phillips quote. Eugene had just come from telling of Denby's passing to an older Black worker, whose response was that Denby's "powerful life is not over". I think of the last two

76001

16036

years when he was not able to be so active, yet his world impact continued through his book and the correspondence with readers all over.

Andy remembered his own rich experience working with Denby on Part II of IHBWJ, and of the work with the Stinger, the shop newspaper Denby edited at Chrysler Mack during the Black caucus period of the late 1960s. There are several people from that period we would want to invite to the memorial meeting.

Tommie recalled how she was given a copy of the 1952 edition when she first came around N&LC, and what a great affinity she felt for what he wrote. Here was a worker, yet he expressed everything in his life story. Denby's life makes you remember that the point of production is where you have to uproot capitalism. Neda said that she came to know Denby through "Worker's Journal", but that most of all it was the life-long relationship of Denby and Raya that helped her understand how movement from practice and movement from theory are inseparable. Bob was thinking of all the factory distributions he had been on with Denby at Fleetwood after Denby retired from Chrysler. He never separated thought from daily activity, whether distributions or running off the wrappers for mailing out N&L. What other editor ever did that?

Lou read the Press release on Denby's death that he had prepared for the daily press. He will deliver it in person in the hope that one contact will wish to write a more extensive piece than the usual obituary. This was approved, and is enclosed.

Raya and Mike then listed the many changes that will characterize the Nov. issue of N&L soon going to press. The first and foremost is that the whole of page 1 will be devoted to Denby. Denby's statement to the Convention will go into his "Worker's Journal" column. The Lead will be on Denby's life and will be written by Raya. We have not yet decided where the Lead originally assigned to Peter on the crisis in the Phillipines will appear. Eugene said that clearly, with all these changes, we will have no space for the Introduction to ACOT we intended to publish in this issue. It will be held for the Dec. N&L.

There are many other ramifications of the tragedy that has befallen News and Letters Committees, and we will need further discussions. Thus, one aspect of this, like the idea that we would wish to carry, in the last months of the Marx centenary, a full chapter, or excerpts of several chapters, of Indignant Heart in "Worker's Journal", we will need to take up at the next REB meeting. At that time we will return to the topics originally scheduled for this week's agenda: the discussion of Andy's draft of the 1949-50 miners' strike pamphlet, as well as Raya's Appendix to it. That final REB discussion on carrying-out Convention decisions will be held next Tuesday, Oct. 18.

A list of names was then compiled for possible invitees to the in-memoriam meeting we will hold Nov. 6th. NEB members who had been called last night will inform the whole membership. Our brief statement and this In Lieu of REB Minutes will this time be sent to the locals by Express mail.

Meeting convened 7 PM. adjourned 9 PM

Yours,
Raya for the REB

88001

16037

Received Oct. 26, 1983, from Glasgow:

Dear Raya:

Please permit me to join with you and the other comrades in paying respect and recalling the work done by Charles Denby over many years. I first heard his name come from your lips when you visited our city a number of years ago. I can remember how pleased you were about having a Black man as Editor of "News & Letters." There is nothing more saddening than the final departure of one who not only shares our views but regards them as of vital importance to the welfare of Humanity as a whole.

He is a loss to all of you who knew him so well. I met him in Toronto when, with other firends, he came to meet me. I had hoped to see him again. He impressed me. I think I could have got on well with him. It is our job to get on with furthering the only cause that matters. My sympathies are with you all. Our goal still lies ahead. I share your loss.

Harry McShane

16038