

REB DRAFT THESIS

PERSPECTIVES

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THEORY IS A HARD TASKMASTER IN EVER-CHANGING PRACTICE

Part One: The Relationship of Philosophy
to Reality -- Today and 1950's

Part Two: The New Generation of Radicals
and Our Tasks

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PERSPECTIVES 1965-6:

THEORY IS A HARD TASKMASTER IN EVER-CHANGING PRACTICE

Part One: The Relationship of Philosophy to Reality - Today and 1950s

In October 1964, one month after the adjournment of our convention, three very different kinds of events took place which tested the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism. Two of these were world shaking phenomena: the fall of Khrushchev and China's first atomic explosion. They occurred within hours of each other on October 18th, seemed very closely related, and, since nothing succeeds so much as success, Mao's coming of age in a nuclear world had an immediate impact not only on the powers of the world, but on the revolutionary movements. Mao seemed to have a plan for everything, from exposing USA as "a paper tiger" to counterposing to Khrushchev's "revisionism" the real "storm centers of world revolution" -- the third world of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

That Mao's China has indeed a Plan for everything except proletarian revolution and the self-creativity of the peasant masses did not seem to lessen the revolutionary impact of this counter-revolutionary force. The fact that counter-revolutionary state-capitalism calling itself Communism can have a revolutionary impact in countries outside of its domination gave illusions to greater men than those who now lead "the New Left."

At the start of World War II, Leon Trotsky called for defense of the Soviet Union not only because it was a workers' state, "though degenerated," but also because the Red Army would "stimulate" revolutions. All it did, however, was let the uprising in Warsaw bleed to death while it stood outside the gates with arms folded. Only after the armed Nazi might destroyed the revolution and made a shambles of Warsaw did the Red Army march in -- to occupy it! By the end of the war, all of Eastern Europe was turned into satellites of Russia. When Tito took exception to Russia trying to run Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform and a campaign was unloosed against Tito as a counter-revolutionary.

Today Mao is playing the same type of counter-revolutionary Russian roulette with the fate of the independent, non-communist third world. Although President Johnson's barbaric, inhumanly fought imperialist war in Vietnam makes it easy for Mao to appear as a defender of self-determination, Chou En-lai's obscene insistence, the very day of Ben Bella's overthrow, that the "second Bandung" congress convene as scheduled exposed the simple truth that Mao's China is a great deal more preoccupied with its challenge to Russia than with its concern either for a revolutionary third world, or for a meaningful attack on American imperialism.

Theoretically Mao had designated the Afro-Asian lands as "the storm center of world revolution." Practically, Algiers, in July 1965,

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showed that Mao was all too ready to ancient counter-revolution itself provided only that he has his platform! And what is his platform? Far from being a shift from the proletariat in the industrialized West to the peasantry of the East, or an uncompromising principled all-out attack on the capitalist West, Mao was out to counterpose the third, independent non-Communist world, not so much to capitalist USA as to Communist Russia. Indeed the latter desire predominated over all other considerations to so total a degree that Mao curbed both his anti-American passion and the overriding need to mobilize a unified force against American imperialist war in Vietnam. Thus, it was not the capitalist West he was trying to displace; it was Russian communist influence. His arrogance, however, has no bounds, and so he dubs his challenge to Russia for leadership of the Communist world -- now openly extended to a struggle for domination over the independent third world, as nothing short of "Marxist-Leninist" world revolutionary struggles. And so decadent is the capitalist West that he has millions of listeners and followers.

Nevertheless, an African delegate was overheard to say he was as "weary" of the Sino-Soviet conflict, both of its wings, as of Western imperialism.

As against the new stage of the Sino-Soviet conflict marked by Mao's possession of the A-bomb, there occurred, in the same month of October, 1964, a student revolt at the University of California at Berkeley. This third, small event of that memorable month, so unrelated to the two international spectacles as to seem unrelatable to anything of truly eventful significance, nevertheless evolved in such a way that, by the end of the year, not only had the students' struggles with the university administration involved them in a massive sit-in, followed by a strike of thousands in support of the 800 arrested students, but the Free Speech Movement had wrought such basic changes in the political climate in the whole country that it was soon able to "produce" the teach-ins and demonstrations against the Johnson administration's bombing of North Vietnam. Thereby it had indeed become a national, even an international event.

Not only that. Precisely because the Free Speech Movement was a force for freedom, it has emerged as symbolic of nothing short of a new generation of radicals ready to pull up by its roots a world it did not make.

The concrete development of the Free Speech Movement, which arose under the whip of the counter-revolution in the Bay Area, discloses how it gained this momentum and, in turn, imparted it to others. Its struggles against the university administration was only one side of the struggle. The other was its sudden, almost accidental, unfurling of a concept of alienation in which the student body could recognize itself. This shock of recognition of itself among the alienated ones, raised entirely new problems in education and in society among white privileged youth as well as underprivileged Negroes and found the activity on a labor picket line more meaningful than the academic course in sociology.

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Finally, and above all, the Negro Revolution which inspired the Free Speech Movement to practice civil disobedience, also led to a search for a new theory, a humanist theory, the positive counterpart to the theory of alienation.

Naturally we did not know, nor could we have known when we met in September 1964, that such an explosion was in the making, in Goldwater territory at that. But while the movement's very spontaneity precluded predictions, our philosophic preparations helped us "be" there. It is no accident that, in all the flood of analyses that have since been produced, ours and ours alone held as one practice and theory. This spontaneous affinity of ideas and activity led to Savio's consent to be part of the FSM pamphlet. Together with the Negro Revolution the student movement led to the following amazing development: Where, in 1964, we met under the whip of the counter-revolution also in the ossification of thought, we are now witnessing the beginnings of a movement toward the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism. This should mean a growth of N & L Committees. While the question of organizational growth is central to this plenum, it will be dealt with in detail in the organizational reports. Our concern here is with the philosophical and political implications of an emergent "New Left" -- and not only in the USA but in the world over.]

This is not only a national phenomenon. In Japan, for example, the elections have revealed two contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, an anti-Stalinist Left has appeared. On the other hand, it seems overwhelmed by the mass outpouring of votes for the CP. The question, however, is: will the world be subjected to an Oriental version of the tragedy of France? Won't we ever learn from the hard lessons of history -- that despite a mass CP, and votes sufficient in number to be a decisive force in a coalition government -- what resulted after more than a decade of pre-revolutionary situations and mass Communist strength was not a workers' but a Gaullist France!

Lest anyone be misled by the split in the Sino-Soviet orbit either to think of Maoism as a genuine revolutionary class force, or, for other reasons, to lull himself to sleep by thinking that a phenomenon similar to Gaullism "cannot happen here" (Japan), we must turn from the events of the day to both history and theory, especially the latter. The need is called for not only because the events of 1964 did not fall from the sky but are linked historically to the 1950s, but also because the death of Lenin as far back as 1924 has left a void in the Marxist movement that must, once and for all, be filled.

Theory is a hard taskmaster. It does not excuse great revolutionaries, whether martyrs like Rosa Luxemburg or leaders of an actual proletarian revolution like Leon Trotsky; or, for that matter, whether you think you're breaking new ground among the peasantry, be you a Mao Tse-tung of the Long March or a Fidel Castro of the short march. Practice always confronts theory and theoreticians with ever new situations. History does not discharge theory from its responsibility to transcend what is.

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What Is Theory? Our Contribution

As a theoretician you either measure up to the demands of both practice and history or you don't. None was more faithful and tried harder to measure up than Frederick Engels whose accomplishments were great both in publishing Volumes II and III of CAPITAL as well as his own works and in activity of "the party." Since, however, he was not the original thinker Marx was, his popularizations reveal him as considerably less of a dialectician than Marx. But he preserved the heritage and the movement did not suffer. Unfortunately for Trotsky, history had moved so fast that just "to preserve" the heritage was not enough; not to move forward meant to move backward. This is precisely what Lenin grasped when World War I smashed the Second International along with the bourgeois world of the 19th century. This is precisely why, at the sight of the collapse of the International, he felt an irresistible compulsion to break not only with the International which betrayed but with his own philosophic past which had been incapable of elaborating a methodology that would have anticipated it. Not for academic purposes but to regain his own reason he had to return to the origins of Marxism in Hegelian philosophy.

Trotsky felt no such compulsion at the sight of the Russian workers' state being transformed into its opposite; not when the infamous Moscow Trials staged the greatest frameup in history of the general staff of the revolution including himself; nor when the Hitler-Stalin Pact gave the green light to World War II; nor when war broke out and the Red Army showed itself to be no different from any capitalist army; nor earlier, when the anti-labor "labor laws" were enacted.

Where Lenin had grasped at the dialectic law of the "transformation into opposite" not alone to explain the movement of capitalism from competitive to monopoly but also to explain its workings inside labor, Trotsky satisfied himself with his economist analysis of any evermore "usurping" bureaucracy, leaving "nationalized property" as untouched as he left the class nature of Stalinism and its methodology untouched. No wonder that, where the result both of Lenin's philosophic studies and listening to the masses that were "100% more revolutionary than the party" led to "a new universal" -- to a man -- that the population "to a man" would either run production and the state or there would be no new society, Trotsky's constant repetition of what was in 1917 led to nothing more than tailending Stalinism. This, despite a decade and a half of criticism of the Stalinist bureaucracy for "usurping" power! Where Trotsky had failed, the epigones could hardly be expected to win. Having left them a stillbirth, Trotskyism could not become a polarizing force for the new forces and new passions for the reconstruction of society that came with the end of World War II and the creation of pre-revolutionary situations in Western Europe. Worse than that, he left the movement disoriented and split.

The first attempt to fill the theoretical void left by Lenin and meet the challenge of reality, was the analysis of the class nature of the Soviet Union made throughout the decade of the 1940s. By linking the economic laws of the actual development of the Russian economy to

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those analyzed by Marx in CAPITAL whose logic led to the concentration and centralization of capital "in the hands of one single capitalist or corporation" without basically changing the capital-labor relationship, the theory of state-capitalism accomplished a great deal more than a correct class analysis of the phenomenon of Stalinism. It re-established what is socialism, what is the role of labor, the conditions of labor, the development of labor without which there is no new social order, but only a new form of exploitation of labor. And, in place of the petty-bourgeois psychological exposes of the "gods that failed," the state-capitalist tendency, on the one hand, showed that, far from being only "Russian," state-capitalism was a new world stage, and, on the other hand, that it was inseparable from new forms of labor revolt with which Marxists must align themselves instead of tailending Stalinism.

Basic as this departure was from Stalinism and all its hangers-on, it was not complete because it left only implicit what was philosophically new. Without a new philosophic penetration, Marxism as the theory of liberation fails to concretize itself. The state-capitalist tendency did point to where it should be found, but it nevertheless kept eluding us. With the death of Stalin, however, as a movement from practice that was about to shatter to smithereens the illusion that workers under Communist totalitarianism could be "brainwashed" and could not, in any case, revolt, a philosophic breakthrough occurred.

This took the form of two letters - May 12 and May 20, 1953 -- that, at first, appeared quite abstruse and dealt with the "Absolute Idea."^{**} Nevertheless, with its pinpointing, six weeks before the actual outbreak of the unprecedented June 17th East German Revolt, of a movement from practice as integral to the unity of theory and practice contained in both Hegel's "Absolute Idea" and in Marx's concept of "new forces and new passions for the reconstruction of society," it prepared us "to be" there when it did erupt. That is to say, it enabled us to have our ears attuned to these new voices and enabled us to begin concretizing the philosophic breakthrough both in the type of workers' paper we wanted to publish, and in meeting the challenge in theory to work a restatement of Marxism for our age that would match the grandeur of the mass action from below. By 1955 the shape of the paper, as we know, was NEWS & LETTERS. By 1957 the theoretical statement became a whole book, MARXISM AND FREEDOM.

For our purposes today, however, the significance of rolling history back to the 1950s is to see the simple truth that the workers' revolt in East Germany (which was followed in a few weeks by a revolt in

^{**}Along with the very first translation of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, these letters were reproduced in our first publication as an independent grouping called NEWS & LETTERS, November 1955. The introductory note called attention to the fact that the urgency of our times demands that we break also with the precedent set by Lenin who had kept his philosophic notebooks private: "It is high time to abolish the division between the 'theoretical leaders' and 'the rank and file' as well as between 'the inside' and 'the outside'...these notes and the letters are being published for all who are interested to read."

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the forced labor camps in Vorkuta inside Russia itself), and not the displacement of Stalin by other bureaucrats, first Malenkov and then Khrushchev began a new historic epoch, a new stage in the consciousness of freedom and the struggle to make it real. On the other hand, neither Mao's getting the bomb, nor the fall of Khrushchev, in 1964, initiated a fundamentally new movement in the world. On the contrary, the one and the other are but a continuation of what began in 1953 with the death of Stalin in Russia and the "victory" of Mao in Korea. Both were no more than the continuations of the Stalinist counter-revolution begun with the destruction of the worker's control over his conditions of labor.

Where the East German workers' strike against "work norms" wrote a new page of freedom in history's book, signalling the beginning of the end of totalitarianism, the fall, as the rise of Khrushchev, meant a counter-move to labor's liberation and its "advice" how to "de-Stalinize." Of course, once there was an open revolt against state-capitalist rule calling itself Communism, the latter, in turn, had to assume new forms of rule, a "softening." But there was nothing "soft" about the Russian might used to put down the revolt. Nor was there a return to Marxist theory. Quite the contrary. The year before formal de-Stalinization began, at the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, there was one more attempt to kill the very idea of freedom from Communism. The new attempt took the form of a philosophic "discussion," i.e., an attack on the Humanist Essays of Marx by one V. A. Karpushin. The year was 1955, the year of the first Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Bandung, which had given both Nehru and Chou En-lai such illusions of grandeur. It was also the year of our birth as NEWS & LETTERS, established on the occasion of the second anniversary of the June 17th East German Revolt. Without knowing the occasion for Karpushin's seemingly merely academic criticism, (the world had not been told that Imre Nagy, in his letter to the Central Committee of the CP, had raised the question of Humanism) we nevertheless stated that its significance was not exhausted by exposing its errors but by recognizing the simple truth that the underlying philosophy of the East German revolt had only been driven underground, not destroyed; that it was sure to reappear -- and not just in theory.

As the whole world now knows, the very next year the unrest over all of Eastern Europe came to a climax in the Hungarian Revolution which did raise the banner of Marx's Humanism. As we see, the historic relationship between philosophy and reality is not just a theoretical question. It is the way, the only way, to become the living subject in the dialectic movement for realizing the theory of liberation.

So the retrospective look is for purposes of illuminating the present revolts and aspirations and distinctions from the mere surface appearances. Let's stay one more moment in 1955, this time for purposes of viewing the new in the East. In contrast to Bandung's touting of "peaceful co-existence" and a "non-dogmatic" approach to the national revolutions (in both instances Mao's revisionism preceded Khrushchev's) we, by keeping our eyes glued to new movements instead of new governments, were also, in theory, both re-establishing Marx's philosophy in its original form of Humanism, and breaking new ground on the Afro-Asian

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revolution by following the new departure in theory which Lenin established in 1920 with his Theses on the National and Colonial Question. MARXISM AND FREEDOM was followed by a pamphlet on the Afro-Asian Revolutions which stated:

"The leaders of the African Revolution are not relying solely on the creative energy of the masses, proletarian or peasant or primitive, not because they are independent of 'doctrinaire Marxism,' but because they are dependent upon the capitalistic road to industrialization....

"The point is to start not alone with the economic situation -- the world stage of capitalism -- but with the maturity of our age. A people fighting and dying for freedom is mature enough to take destiny in their own hands, not alone politically, but precisely with the very ground of politics -- the kind of labor man performs. A proletariat advanced enough to question the kind of labor man performs at the stage of Automation has moved from the answer of more and more machines. They see that the class answer is the humanist answer....

"This (Lenin's) point of departure in theory -- industrialization without capitalism -- rested, of course, on a big IF, if the proletariat of the advanced countries came to the aid of their brothers in the underdeveloped countries."

In a word, years before Mao "discovered" Lenin's 1920 thesis in order to misread it for purposes of the Sino-Soviet conflict in the 1960s by claiming that the whole weight of revolution had shifted from the proletariat in the cities to the peasant army in the villages -- "the storm centers of world revolution" -- we had shown that the administrative mentality, that is to say, the intellectual bureaucrat, was the enemy of the unfolding revolutions in the city and in the country just as the labor bureaucrat was in the trade unions.

Objective developments in the 1950s made the whole question of the role of the intellectual a critical one not only where, as Mao put it, "the East wind prevails over the West," but also in the West, specifically Paris, 1958, when de Gaulle came to power. We then re-raised the question not merely in the form of a critique of Communism, Chinese or Russian, but of the non-Communist Left, not excluding ourselves. We felt it was high time not just to place the blame on others but to take on the responsibility for the unity of theory and practice ourselves.

In the August 1958 issue of NEWS & LETTERS we wrote: "Far from accepting his responsibility, the Marxist theoretician nowadays wants to shift all responsibility to the workers except that of leadership. It will not do....On the basis of now listening by him, and now doing by the proletariat, the theoretician can create a philosophy which the proletariat recognizes as the new quality of his own thoughts and aspirations for total freedom: freedom from economic exploitation and from political rule by a new intellectual elite. In a word, freedom to reconstruct the wholeness of man....Without unfurling such a banner as a

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first step to any truly new social order, why should workers listen to Marxist theoreticians any more than they do to 'their own' labor bureaucrats?"

Now, the rolling back of history to the 1950s to illuminate the present situation, whether that be in Japan or the USA, in Western Europe or in China, in Africa or Latin America, does not, of course, yet answer the question of today. In the same way, the tracing back our philosophic beginnings to 1953, and pinpointing our unique theoretical contributions do not yet answer the question what to do now. That is the heart of any perspectives.

Part II: The New Generation of Radicals and Our Tasks

It goes without saying that we continue our activities, at the top of which stand our participation in the Negro Revolution and anti-war activities. And it goes without saying that in neither case are they uncritical, though they may be as part of other organizations' activities. Thus, on the matter of the difference between the intense activities against the Vietnam war and the pallid ones against the US imperialist invasion of Santo Domingo, we were compelled to point out:

"Washington is also banking on the fact that other Big Powers will let it get away with the counter-revolutionary act in Dominica even as it let Russia get away with it in Hungary, and China in Tibet. Because each Big Power has its recognized 'sphere of influence,' a power grab in that sphere is protested by the other in words only, and no action follows the words. Unless the point of contention is either an integral element of its national interests or becomes pivotal to the global struggle for power, as Vietnam has become, the merely nominal protest unfortunately affects also the protest movements within the 'aggressor country.' Thus, where the demonstrations, marches, teach-ins, against the war in Vietnam are numerous, powerful, vocal, that is to say, loud and effective, whether voiced or written, those against the war in the Dominican Republic, which is totally unjustified but not pivotal to global power, are hardly more than whispered postscripts. Yet it is by this, just this protest which would thereby become an act of inter-American class solidarity that history will make its judgment on American revolutionaries.

"Outside of direct struggles, such as strikes for different conditions of labor and Negro struggles for full equality, no struggles for freedom are more challenging to the American ruling class than the struggles in Latin America. For it is by its imperialist adventures and not just by the 'expanding frontier' that American capitalism was enabled to deprive the workers of the industrial unionism they had won in Europe at the turn of the century, but had not won here until Depression hit the United States itself. America's plunge into imperialism at the end of the 19th century marked also its victory over Populism. Above all, its imperialist adventures, as that of all the West, was brilliantly white, and thus fastened on the Negro an inferior status North as well as South."

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Since the postwar strikes, that is to say, very nearly two decades, nothing has happened on the American scene that can in any way compare with the Negro Revolution that began in earnest with the 1960 sit-ins and has gained momentum ever since. This is the most important development not only for an American Revolution but also for world developments since it touches both the basic relationship of a proletarian West to the East and a black revolution's impact on, and relationship to, the Afro-Asian-Latin American world. Therefore, to divert in any way from this development is, Marxistically speaking, criminal.

Of course, activity in the many Vietnam organizations is not the type of capitalist diversion that President Johnson embarked on when he gave his civil rights bills and "war on poverty" programs the kind of spurious radicalism that would attempt to mobilize the country for imperialist wars in Asia or Latin America or anywhere else in the world. Nevertheless it is a diversion. And it is a diversion that may very well end in frustration for all freedom fighters once the Big Powers decide something is "negotiable" and unprincipled deals begin to be made. We cannot, therefore, under any circumstances put any activities above those of the American Revolution and the principles of Marxist-Humanism. It becomes imperative not to let what the new generation of radicals, white and Negro, have caught on to -- Marxist-Humanist philosophy -- remain only implicit. Unless it is made explicit, Marxist-Humanism will become degraded to the kind of idea that is too impotent to become real.

Philosophy is not a one way road. Just as it learns anew from every mass movement and newly-developing objective situation, so too must the practical movement have its ears attuned to organizational growth. Without it, even the unity of theory and practice would make us only half-men. To be whole men means to be so fully aware of our uniqueness as to accept no half-way house between the activity of the day and the "final aim." Marxist-Humanism is not just for tomorrow. It is daily activity. And by activity, as always, we include also that of thinking -- which will assure tomorrow's being. From the great French Revolution that ended in a Napoleon to the greater Russian Revolution that ended in a Stalin, there have been altogether too many soured revolutions. We cannot wait for the day after, when a bureaucracy has already formed, to ask what happens after we have won the battle.

What is new, what is precedent-breaking in a class way, is neither the Johnson administration's imperialist moves nor the pseudo-revolutionary words of Mao's China. What is new is this new generation of radicals which has emerged in the 1960s, which is unsullied by past compromises and refuses to compromise now, and which therefore was compelled to raise the philosophic question despite its predilection for "non-ideological" battles. Here, we alone, unconnected with any state power and armed with a comprehensive philosophy, can and must see that it becomes a movement which is not only against the status quo, but for a new, totally new society on truly human foundations.

The very fact that the struggles are concrete means that they

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cannot be separated from freedom in thought. Just as it is impossible to make freedom a reality only in thought, so it is impossible to make it a reality outside of the consciousness of freedom. All man's history, as the encyclopedic Hegel had fathomed, is a record of progress in the consciousness of freedom. The new dimension that Marx added was the earthiness of this freedom, the vision of the new society as the wholeness of man achieved through labor's liberation from the division between mental and manual labor imposed on man by class exploitative societies. The nuclear world we live in makes what was theory for Marx sheer necessity for us. No exchange of "East" for "West" or vice versa can achieve this. Only the self-activity of the masses can, and only their self-development can assure that the freedom of the individual is the basis of freedom for all. The energy and the uncompromising attitudes the youth have brought into the movement will help clear away the accumulated intellectual sloth in the movement. The very fact that the youth of today, as seen in the Berkeley revolt, among others, have rediscovered the theory of alienation and its converse, Humanism, holds the key to so new a relationship of theory to practice that it may well shape the course of future developments.

Three basic organizational conclusions flow from this:

- 1) The central point of our work for the next year must revolve around the youth both in the Negro Revolution and in the student youth anti-war movements. We alone can make explicit the Marxist-Humanism that is implicit in their recognition of the alienations of this society.
- 2) THE FREE SPEECH MOVEMENT AND THE NEGRO REVOLUTION, which captures that element in their own words as well as ours, must not only be our "best seller", which it already is, but must become an organizer for Marxist-Humanism both in N & L Committees and in autonomous groups should youth prefer these. Toward that end we should do all we can to establish roots in Berkeley.
- 3) This does not mean that we have moved away from the concept of NY as the market place of ideas which demands the establishment not only of a local but of a sub-center. It does mean, however, a flexibility in the timing and the concept of its relationship to the new book, PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION. For example, after the return from Japan, the Chairman could try to live part of the time in NY provided there is such full appreciation of the quintessential importance of the book that the NY friends, both rank and file and leadership, instead of burdening the Chairman take full responsibility for the organizational work.

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