

ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THEORETIC CHALLENGES

A Discussion Article by Raya Shnayevskaya

This year's Craft Perspectives is, as every year's thesis has always been, set in a world context. The emphasis, however, is on "The deeded American Revolution". This does not mean a diminution in our international relations, which have, by now, become a daily activity in the Center's voluminous correspondence, especially as it relates to those with whom we find a natural affinity of ideas as well as commonality in revolutionary activities. Last year, as we all know, was an especially high point in our development, as shown not only by the small eye-witness report on France, Spring, 1968 but by the magnificent pamphlet on Czechoslovakia written by Czechoslovak Freedom Fighters themselves, and which, at the same time, contained an Introduction both by News & Letters and the Scottish Marxist-humanist. I know of no revolutionary organization, many times our size, that came anywhere near our achievement here. In looking at 1969-70, it is necessary not to forget that the achievements of 1968 arose neither by accident, nor out of thin air. They rest on the solid ground of original theoretic contributions covering more than a quarter of a century. It is as well we take a backward glance as we look ahead.

I. "Pre-History"

Long before we were born as a Marxist-humanist organization, when we were but a faction within Trotskyism, we were recognized as a serious theoretic grouping, and, therefore, had worldwide contacts. Internationalism is, of course, of the essence for every Marxist tendency. But our unique hallmark was theoretical, a theory resting solidly on a new stage of economic development, and, inseparable from this objective foundation, was the subjective -- the new forms of revolt by proletarians, black, youth, women.

The outbreak of World War II had split the Trotskyist Fourth International, which had based its historic reason for being not only on the concept of world revolution, but on the "physical" continuity of Trotsky to Lenin. Trotsky's call for the defense of Stalin's Russia, then aligned with Hitler's Germany, on the ground that it was still a worker's state "though degenerate", of necessity, became a question not only over "tactics", but over the class nature of Stalinism, and the role of labor, as Subject as well as muscle, as force of revolution. (That this would later, also, lead to a split in the "state-capitalist tendency" we did not know then -- all of which goes to show how much more philosophy, the logic of ideas, anticipates than those who pose crucial questions are aware of. We cannot go into this here.)

That which caught the attention of Marxist revolutionaries at the time was that our analysis of state-capitalism was not limited to the Russian economy, but maintained that it was now the new stage of the world economy as it emerged out of the Depression. That is to say, that the breakdown of private capitalism necessitated state intervention into the economy as capitalism fought to escape the threat of proletarian revolutions-in-the-

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making. Since nothing less catastrophic and global was going on then than the second world war, there was no way of knowing how widespread was the impact of the theory of state-capitalism. This I was first to find out in 1947, and, again, in 1959, although in both cases the reference was to the war years. Because the two most exciting international repercussions -- among Vietnamese and Italian Resistance fighters -- have a relevance for today, I shall relate them briefly.

At the 1959 conference of state-capitalist tendencies, held in Milan, two auto workers from Turin, told me how, in 1944, my 1941 articles on state-capitalism had passed from hand to hand and aided them in fighting Stalinist domination of the resistance. (I have no idea how during such catastrophic events as Italian Fascism and World War II, a seemingly irrelevant article as my 1941 Analysis of the Russian Economy got into Italy -- soldiers and sailors do have a way of "international activity.")

In 1947, when I was in France to present the state-capitalist position to a conference of the Fourth International, I met some Vietnamese Trotskyists who told bitter stories both of the class-collaborationism of Ho Chi Minh, and his murderous Stalinist methods. The leader of the Trotskyists, Ta-thu-Tau, was assassinated by the Communists because the Trotskyists, not the Stalinists, in the 1930s, were the mass revolutionary organization. And in the 1940's, they fought the "negotiation tactics" of Ho Chi Minh with French Imperialism.

The addendum to the 1947 experience took place in 1959 when I was again in France. This time to see whether we couldn't get any group to hold themselves as responsible for a French edition of Marxism and Freedom as the Milan group made itself responsible for an Italian edition. One of the Vietnamese Trotskyists in the 1947 group who had held a state-capitalist position had come to hear me, though by now he had moved to semi-anarchism.

Nowadays, when the "New Left" acts as if self-determination for South Vietnam means uncritical and total support for North Vietnam as well as for the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, it is important to review our tactics. We have made it very clear that our total opposition to U.S. imperialism in Vietnam does not mean uncritical support to Communism. One of our earliest statements pointed out that North Vietnam had carried on as vicious a campaign against the independent revolutionaries there in 1956-57 as had Maoist China against the "blooming and contending hundred flowers".

Our "pre-history" shows the why of our uniqueness. Think of it -- revolutionaries in as far distant and varied lands as Vietnam and Italy, at the height of an imperialist world war, were relating themselves to a tiny, totally insignificant-looking tendency in the U.S.!! Do you know how many votes the state-capitalist tendency got at the WP 1941 convention? All of 1 1/2 votes! This fact alone would seem to justify going back to the "pre-history" of News & Letters Committees. But this is not why I have started the resume of our international relations to the 1940's. Rather, the reason

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for it is twofold. First, and above all, is its relevance for comprehending the relationship of theory to international relations today. Nothing as theoretically new as the analysis of state-capitalism and the re-establishment of Marx's Humanism for our epoch can possibly develop without, at once, becoming, if not a polarizing force, certainly a historic point of reference for world Marxism. (We will return to this point later)

Secondly, and this explains the philosophic reason for what appears to be a mere excursion into remembrance of things past -- Hegel had long ago placed the "going back" for beginnings, as related to the "Absolute", i.e. to the summation in which is embedded the elements of the future. Hegel concluded that every beginning must be made from the Absolute because "neither in actuality nor in thought is there anything so simple and abstract as is commonly imagined." Since 1958-1959 wasn't only where we met the past, but were led to new foundations for future international relations, both toward and away from Europe, we better start the review of specifically News & Letters Committees' experience on the international field with that period.

II. Under the Whip of the Counter-Revolution

1959 was a decisive year in our international relations. In preparing our Archives for the Labor Library, I came across one of the International reports that illuminates questions raised on "total organizational" purpose of the European tourists of today. The report happened to have been given by Jessie to the 1960 convention about the 1959 European contacts first gained in 1958. The two relevant paragraphs of her Report read:

"It was a voyage of discovery of the radical groups since the Hungarian Revolution. It was clear then that these radical groups had not become the polarizing force for the thousands who had torn up their CP membership cards in disgust. Some had found their way to Trotskyism -- actually few of them did. As the resolution on War and Peace shows, Trotskyism is the back door into CP for all of them. The people whom we did contact at the time did decide to establish a Centre for International Correspondence between America and Europe and since then you have seen some of the issues of Prometeo that published our theses. It was at that time also that we signed contract for the Italian edition of Marxism and Freedom.

An Jess's report shows, even so decisive, world-shaking historic event as the Hungarian Revolution had not been sufficient to shake the West European Marxist movement loose from its old categories, much less create a new, polarizing force for revolutionaries, though by the thousands, old and new Communists had been tearing up their membership cards in protest against the Russian counter-revolutionary crushing of the Hungarian Revolution. None, in Western Europe, had made that the reason for a restatement of Marxism for our age, as we had done with Marxism & Freedom. The Hungarian Workers' Councils, much as they were praised, were not used as a point of departure for theory. Much less did the philosophic banner of Marx's Humanism become a compulsive force for the return to Marx's philosophic origins in Hegel, as had been the case with Lenin when

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he faced the collapse of established Marxism at the outbreak of World War I.

As against this failure to come to grips with the new reality in 1957, the 1958 Gaullist victory did compel the European Marxists to face reality. Under the whip of that counter-revolution, those who opposed both poles of world capital -- US and Russia -- decided upon convoking a conference of state capitalist tendencies to consider what type of international relations could be developed. To the 1959 conference we attended, we issued a challenge for philosophically working out a new relationship of theory to practice. Although they did not accept Marx's Humanism as the statement for the age -- they, more or less, had a Trotskyist conception that those writings were by the young "immature" Marx -- the Italian comrades did agree to try to get Marxism and Freedom published in Italy.

At the same time, we had two groups in England. The one in London had arranged a debate between myself and the editors of what is now the New Left Review. They then considered themselves "Humanists". Some had broken with the CP; others were totally new to the movement, but all had come to Marxism under the impact of the Hungarian Revolution. The London group, moving toward us, asked for a special page News & Letters which they would edit for England. (They did for one year). The greatest achievement for Marxist-Humanism, however, occurred, not in London but in Glasgow. Harry McShane, who was a worker founder of Communism in Scotland, as a result of his youthful participation in the great general strike there in 1919, had later become an editor of the Daily Worker there, but by 1953 lined up with the new youth's struggle against the CP bureaucracy. We began contacts when we were publishing Correspondence. But only after the split with Johnsonism did this fully working class group declare themselves to be Marxist-Humanists.

The positive results of the totally organizational tour in 1959 are obvious enough in everything from the Scottish Marxist-Humanist to the Italian edition of Marxism & Freedom, not to mention the other quintessential, that because of these events, we have never lacked correspondents who contribute to News & Letters, as well as engage in serious dialogue with us on developing situations in Europe. Even in its negative aspects, the trip had positive results, that is to say, we knew that state capitalism no longer was sufficient basis for international relations. The reason for this was the birth of a whole new Third World. The Committee for International Correspondence, which existed as a special section in Prometeo, as well as in organizational correspondence, centered precisely on the question of the new world phenomenon known as "national revolutions" considered by the "orthodox" as something "below" Marxian internationalism. We, on the contrary, considered it imperative that Marxism and Freedom, so deeply rooted in West European and American experience, be extended on two fronts: (1) on the African Continent. This was done in the pamphlet, Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the African Revolutions, and (2) in relationship to the Orient as a new chapter to be added to Marxism and Freedom to be called "The Challenge of Mao Tse-tung". Both new theoretical developments, first published as special supplements in NEWS & LETTERS, proved to be the indispensable foundations for the next two stages of international relations, first in West Africa, then in Japan and Hong Kong.

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III. Under the Impact of Third World and Eastern European revolutions

A totally new foundation for international relations was created, not by the existence of Marxist theoretical groupings but by the actual revolutions in Africa. The "algebra of revolution" was being concretized in a totally new way. A new "Subject" was emerging on the world scene, and that is of far greater importance than that of existing Marxist organizations. Indeed, the latter can only justify their right to historic existence if they meet the challenge from practice, from below. That became so crucial for both our theory and our organization that we decided not only to make a tour of Africa, but actually to suspend judgments even on principles that we had previously lived by, such as, total opposition to the single party state. Since, in the African context, it was not what it was under Stalinism, we proceeded to carry on a great deal of correspondence, not on this subject, but in listening to what the Africans had to say.

Naturally, this doesn't mean that they didn't know our views since both the pamphlet on Nationalism, Communism, Marxist Humanism and the African Revolutions as well as the special supplement of Notes & Letters on "The Challenge of Mao Tse-tung" was sent as widely as we could. But the emphasis was on the Africans' and our very wide experience in the Negro revolt here, both as present and as past. For that matter, 1943, the so crucial year in the US when, for the first time in the very midst of war, there was both a Negro uprising, and a general miners' strike, was also the year in which I met W. E. B. Dubois and from that moment on began a two-way communication. Nor was Negritude separate from Humanism.

Again, this was not only a phenomenon that appeared openly in Africa in the early 1960's, but goes back to the 1940's when I first became aware of the now much celebrated, but then unknown, writings of Marx. Humanism invariably became a topic of conversation with Africans I met here and in England as students, with whom I continued to correspond, and the new avenues opened up with an Africanist Congress in Boston, just prior to my departure for Africa in 1962.

I cannot go into detail here. However, now that our Archives will become available to all through library facilities, the new members can acquaint themselves with both my Political Letters from Africa as well as what had been published in Africa Today and Presence Africaine as well as the two interviews that are included in our most fundamental statement, American Civilization on Trial. Negro as Touchstone of History, written after my return from Africa.

The only point that needs to be stressed here is that the expansion of our international relations went hand in hand with new points of departure in theory. Academic as the chapter title of Philosophy and Revolution like "Why Legal? Why Now?" may sound, the impulse came not only from a development in thought, but also as a concrete result of the African tour. Here, before the tour, the African Revolutions were considered by us to be a necessary part, a counterpart more precisely, to the "Eastern" concentration in Marxism and Freedom, after the three months I spent covering

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West Africa, the African revolutions became inseparable from the world as a whole.

Even on the minor level of "contacts", the one-world aspect of Marxist-humanism persisted. It was while I was there that Japanese Marxist-humanists, who had discovered Marxism and Freedom for themselves, contacted me. And it was as a result of one of the articles I wrote on Africa: "Marxist humanism, why not a new International?" that we established direct relations with Czechoslovakia, long before the "reforms". It is true that some who were only "committed non-Party members" had also based many of their arguments against Stalinism on M&F, and East Europe in general, became a new arena after my contribution to the international symposium edited by Erich Fromm. But the one who developed into a full Marxist-humanist was the one who had begun corresponding on the basis of my analysis on Africa.

Just as 1958-1959 was the high point in our relations in Western Europe, and 1961-1962 the critical point in Africa, so 1965-1966 became crucial for the Orient both because the Japanese edition of M&F with the new chapter on Mao Tse-tung came off the press in Tokyo and, on the objective scene, US began bombing Hanoi and thus West and East were united in opposing US imperialism. Actually, the beginnings of relations with Japan began in 1960 when those great mass youth demonstrations against Eisenhower's intended trip there created still another focal revolutionary development. Again, the needed brevity for this review of our major international relations makes it impossible to describe those exciting months. I must take for granted that those who joined us after 1966 would read the back Political Letters for themselves.

What cannot be left out, however, is the relationship of theory to organization. On the face of it, it would appear that no tour was more organizational. First, it was an organization -- Zenshin -- and not only the few Marxist-humanists there who invited me there. (Lennie went with me on this very exhausting tour.) They are much larger than we are and arranged meetings for me through the length and breadth of Japan. There were thousands who heard me, on and off campuses; in union halls and at political rallies; on other platforms than theirs since both the wide publicity (including the daily press) brought other political groups and peace groups in Hiroshima who asked that I address them or debate with them as well. At the same time Zenshin itself had translated and published most of our pamphlets, from Workers Battle Automation to all my Philosophical Essays in a single pamphlet, which is, indeed, more than we ourselves have done. And yet, I considered that, precisely because it was not our own organization that sponsored these meetings, there was more value in this tour for them than for us, though I had naturally expressed Marxist-humanist ideas, and not only "in general", or publicly, but because I insisted one week-end must be fully taken up with very specific discussions with their Political Committee on the points that divide us.

On the other hand, the trip to Hong Kong where I went "purely" for research work, where we knew not a single soul, turned out to be the most "organizational" part of the trip, that is, had results far exceeding

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anything we dreamed, much less planned. For it is there I met a refugee who had been both student at Peking University and a worker in one of these gigantic dam projects. She became so excited over the chapter on Mao, the first criticism from the Left, she had read or even knew existed. She volunteered to translate it at once and attempt to transmit directly to mainland China as she still had friends there. It was published in Hong Kong and I am sure it did make its way to Mao's China.

No doubt there are places in the world that N&L or N&F or our pamphlets do not get to, but there are none where great events have occurred that we haven't, to one degree or another, penetrated. It may not always be possible to be there in person, but the Center is quite creative in getting exchanges of publications, and in attempting on that basis to start a dialogue. Moreover, much comes into the office unsolicited, that is to say, some group or person has heard of us, though we have not heard of it or him. That, for example, was the way, years back before he became famous, we heard of Kurt Dutschke. He had written in, identifying himself as young German socialist who wanted to know about "the Movement" in the US. From Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, the contact was made via publisher in New York while the Japanese comrade who first read N&F, broke with the CP on that basis, and then decided to translate it into Japanese, after trying vainly to get my address from the publisher, finally (after a year of pursuit for "the author of N&F") got my name at an international anti-war assembly.

IV. Spring, 1968, 1969

To bring the survey of our international relations up to date, we'll turn briefly to the latest two trips made to Europe -- in 1968 by Eugene and in 1969 by Dick. These were not "totally organizational." I do not mean that Eugene and Dick didn't spread the ideas of Marxist-Humanism as widely as possible and even participate in revolutionary events there. I mean, simply, that our organization had not voted for these tours to be made as a result of the fact that a specific stage in the development, theoretical or practical, of News & Letters Committee "called" for it. Once the opportunities for these individual trips arose, the REB not only approved them, but asked that specific tasks be undertaken. In the case of Eugene, the REB's original interest was in Germany because it was very anxious to get a German edition of N&F and wanted publishers visited. But, as everyone knows, the most exciting page in West European history broke out spontaneously with the general strike in France, and immediately France predominated over Germany as the main focus of our concern. Eugene's pamphlet describes these events and we discussed all this sufficiently at our convention last year, so there is no further need to go over the report here.

The detailed report of Dick's trip, on the other hand, the REB as well as the membership is getting for the first time. Valuable as were his efforts in spreading Marxist-Humanist ideas to new groups and gaining new contacts, (all of which the REB will follow through), they do not, in my view, warrant the conclusions he bases on them. I wish to limit myself to what I consider to be the three basic errors.

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First is the estimate of the objective situation. What is so obvious that it may sound like a cliché is, in fact, quintessential in determining the relationship of subjective relations to the objective situation. I'm referring to the all too grim truths, that a missed revolutionary situation is not a developing one; and, no matter how extraordinarily courageous resistance to counter-revolution is, the might of the victorious Russian counter-revolution will hardly tolerate open relations of those who oppose it with revolutionaries abroad. In a word, 1969 is not 1968, either in France or in Czechoslovakia.

Failure to grasp all the ramifications of the obvious in the changed objective situation has resulted in erroneous conclusions in the subjective field -- an over-estimation of the effects of participation in the great events in East and West Europe in 1968, and the under-estimation of the effects of the theories of activists. The second point inexorably led to the third era. "Nonetheless," Dick concludes (after describing how much of the old still clings to the "new forces") "what is needed is 'a certain new openness on our part ... so that we don't reject the new voices simply because, knowing no others for the moment, they are singing old tunes.'"

He cites no instances where we allegedly rejected the new voices. However, I should inform the readers that I had written Dick a note in which I stated that international conferences are very serious gatherings that require principled foundations, and that I did not consider either those whom he himself described as "Luxemburgist in economics and opposed to national liberation struggles, etc.", or Trotskyists, Maoists, or, as Dick himself puts it, the "most unlikely combinations (e.g. Maoism and anarchism)", to be "the new voices" just because they belong to the sons of the fathers we had so long opposed. There is no doubt that there is a difference between us on the question, whether the old, discredited theories with new intonations can all be attributed to "naivety and newness", or as I maintained that we need to look for more objective reasons for the re-appearance of the old in the new. But none of us has ever rejected new voices, even when they were either apolitical or related themselves to wrong theories. It is precisely because we have listened to the new voices, and because, in concentrating on youth work, we have unveiled a totally new banner for those "new passions and new forces" that we have made such strides with the youth this year. This, however, cannot be done so easily from abroad. To believe that the new, who are still tied to vanguardism, be it in the Trotskyist or Maoist or other elitist form, would rush to accept our "initiative" in undertaking a "permanent dialogue" with us is to display naivety, not to mention sowing of illusions on the question of how to develop international relations.

Far from concluding that our international relations must be "reviewed" as if they had been erroneous, I believe our international relations, not only as I detailed them here but in full should be studied in their depth and breadth, in their historic roots and todayness. In any case, this is the reason for this discussion article.

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Jaya

P.S. We just received an invitation from London to attend the bi-annual convention of International Socialism. We turned it over to our Marxist-Humanist group in Scotland. Harry McShane will attend, I'm sure.

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