

Nov. 14, 1970

to the NBS

Dear Colleagues:

There are two reasons why I'm addressing you the day after I sent out both a letter and a full, lengthy chapter 2 (of Part I) to the whole organization. One is theoretical, or at least methodological insofar as writing the book as a whole rather than separate parts and chapters. The other is practical, exactly how do we practice theory at the very time we are supposed to be concentrating on proletarianization and growth of organization. It surely isn't just having educationals on the theoretical work such as I proposed we have on Marx to start off the new year.

First, the methodology. It is a way of warning that the chapters of Part II will by no means come as fast as Ch.2, though it will not take as long as Ch.1 I sent last year or beginning of this year (I really don't remember) which will remain the most difficult.

Here I am looking at the Trotsky chapter which is, more or less, the one that will start Part II. Well, it just can't be a simple rewriting or expansion. Now that we must see the work as a whole, it must be a great deal more philosophic. I don't mean vocabulary. I mean something a great deal more serious. I mean: what did all of Part I mean with its stress on the dialectic, on Why Hegel? Why Now? How do we develop the dialectic when we no longer have Marx and Lenin to guide us because both are dead; neither saw the period in which we lived; Trotsky remains the great "Man of October" and to prove he is not, as he certainly is not, the continuator of Marx and Lenin cannot be done just on state-capitalism, especially since state-capitalism likewise has split in two, and we have insisted that in fact it was but a transition point to Marxist-humanism. But Marxist-Humanism was not the concrete while Trotsky was alive. And to be centered around the pole of the peasantry, as it did in the draft and will again, must now take into consideration that the Maoists will say: Precisely, this is why we are the "continutors," etc., etc.

In a word, when one writes separate chapters, one can leave these questions to be answered in chapter on Mao. When one writes a book, no, it cannot wait till then. We must every single fundamental rooted in that Part I, and it doesn't make it easy since he had nearly nought to say on dialectics (except on "petty-bourgeois opposition" to which we will not stoop) and yet we must elicit it both from the objective situation of his period and the actual debates. I haven't worked out that transition. I've been at it a whole day and I'm not sure I know what I will do tomorrow either, so I decided to let you know it is no simple matter of writing a chapter out of context, so to speak, as I did in rough draft.

Now to the second point. You have very great responsibilities as leadership, leadership of an activist as well as philosophic-political tendency, not to mention that I will not be around for a few months. O.K., first there is proletarianization and black dimension, then there is women and youth. If all are equally affected by recognition of indispensability of philosophy, then we must know how to get members by presenting that question of theory as a practical activity. Contacts must feel that we are not only asking them for their story, but they must know that the N&L context in which it will be put "demands" that they know how they are growing and unique. For example, so simple a question as reporting on Angela Davis whom we surely must support against the Reagans and the Nixons must also report on what she could have elicited from the way she presented Marxism not merely on campus--no one needs to become a "teacher" for that--but the way she presented the whole question of the prisons to her young, idealistic, courageous bodyguard that would not have resulted in his young death. I remember reading once one sentence from Marx that rather surprised me. He was arguing with some non-theorist and alleged worker (he was a craftsman; I think it was Weitling) and getting nowhere on theory whereupon he suddenly turned on him and said: And how exactly do you propose to convince the workers should go out on strike and lose their livelihood unless....? Annenkov reports that everybody then walked out with Marx.

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In a word, unless you know how that simply to put the question of theory as being a practical question of class struggle that, both in the immediate and in the ultimate sense, leads to better conditions of labor, what's the point of theory?

That, naturally didn't mean Marx didn't proceed with developing theory "in and for itself" as well. It does mean that, each stage of its development, one must practice theory in a way that the latter appears as activity, and the practice as theory!

Or take NL, what is the point if my article in pamphlet remains only theory for those on the inside, whereas when you wish one to become a member, that contact doesn't see "proof" in every argument that it flows from a certain organization which has those views. There are no ideas that float about; there are only people who have ideas and they express them in a way that the contact begins to feel he wants to do it that simply too. We must therefore think of some action that we will propose and carry through, whether it be among youth or women or blacks or proletarians. I don't know what it is we were doing during this GM strike other than getting some stories, but I hope I'm wrong, and that some of the contacts we visited and are still visiting for those stories, hears something different from us than they did from SDS and their string of 4-letter words on the picket line.

It is peculiar how some who have no theory at all can make "contacts" feel that selling a paper (writing is way above what they ask of contacts!) is a great activity that is a way of "making" revolutions whereas we shy away from asking for such activities from others and think that unless we can lead a general strike we really aren't "active."

Specifically, on the chapter on Marx I sent. Of course, it will be a "lecture", but whoever does it must make the audience feel that he, in turn, and she, especially, can discuss on that level with her shopmates so that they could go about starting a shop paper soon, or make themselves responsible for seeing that the shop talk is reported in N&L regularly. Pessimism is out, not because Polyanna is the thing, but because it simply doesn't tally with the reality of what the workers strive for as against what they have to face daily. There is at least one good expression we should "steal" from existentialism: lived existence. It's very different from just existing.

And as a final "aside" which is very central to our growth: office work. Not just any office work. The office of the organization of the paper of the theory of Marxist-Humanism. What is the use of loving the word, "dialogue" when we talk either about the battle of ideas or self-development, and yet fail to see that the correspondence in the office, the telephone calls, the mailing list--yes, just the mailing list--presents innumerable challenges for dialogue, national and international, local and individual. Challenges and tests for your own creativity.

Yours,
Raya

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