

Aug. 7, 1977

To the REB-NEB

Dear Colleagues:

Now that you have all studied the completed REB draft Perspectives and know the practical conclusions as well as the political-philosophic context of TIME IS RUNNING OUT, it will not merely help in knowing to whom we appeal this year to attend plenum--open discussion does not, of course, mean you chose those who are not sympathetic spontaneously to Marx's Humanism and its revolutionary perspectives--but, what is a great deal more important, how you practice being a philosophic nucleus, both as collectivity and SELF RE-ORGANIZATION. It is the latter that is of the essence before plenum convenes, after as well as the daily looking into that historic mirror. It is for this reason that I decided this year at the executive session, (and as a preliminary at last REB off-the cuff discussion) not so much to talk of philosophy, not philosopher, but as very specifically Marx's relationship to Engels, likewise was no Marx, though he had done not only most to continue Marx-ism, but we would not have had Volumes II and III of MARX'S CAPITAL without him.

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consciously in a word, I am taking no second rate, much less any one who merely deviated, or who didn't devote his whole life to the Movement. But that doesn't answer the question: why is there only one, even when Engels was the more "advanced" on economics when first Marx and Engels met as breakers with the bourgeoisie and its thought, and when, at first (1843-4) their writings were signed alphabetically--correct: Engels-Marx?

I don't believe that, intellectually, I ever got a bigger shock than when I read the letters Engels sent Marx as he was reading the galleys of CAPITAL. Very clearly, despite all the discussions they had on the work-to-be; despite all the letters from Marx to Engels as he asked some very specific questions on workers at point of production and technology of machinery; despite the military "superiority" of Engels; and "equally" arising from Hegelian dialectics, there was so much Engels did not understand that it was positively embarrassing as our age would have made a lesser person than Engels knew. And, once again, or, more correctly for the first time a point that is still the pivot: Chapter I, on which Engels says that it isn't always easy to follow what historical features from simple to expanded to universal form of exchange are meant as Marx develops the dialectics leading to Fetishism.

What I am driving out is that, yes, it is philosophy, not philosopher, (and it is why both Marx and Engels who first used the expression in a very derogatory way--"cult of personality"--did not individually sign Manifestoes of First International), but it is still a historic fact, (not just data but history) that the philosopher who first founded, etc.etc. is neither an accident nor can easily be replaced within same generation. Collectivity is of the essence for that transition period even as it remains important for after a Lenin did arise and the battle of ideas till revolution still pits the Luxemburgs, Trotskys, not to mention Plekhanovs" as equals.

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All of this means that the uniqueness and preciousness of a recreation of the dialectic for the new period each generation of Marxists must face is not to be easily thrown away, or made to look as if it were "equal" with other tendencies, or even "equality" among leadership. "New" is another feature which has been much misunderstood even among ourselves. Surely, I always start with methodology needing to take off from "the new". But, heavens alive, new isn't just factual! Yesterday I had to reread what I wrote on the 100th anniversary of the publication of Marx's CAPITAL--the pamphlet, S-C Marx's Humanism--

because I have to meet some stupid liberal professor who is writing a book on Shachtman & Olga called to my attention that on p.18, fn.14 I show how he changed what he meant with Bur. Collectivism in 1941 when he first wrote it and in 1962 when he was to the right even of the S.D. Well, in reading this 10 yr. old pamphlet, I saw that p.24 had a brief analysis of world economy, and p.37, an analysis of reification that would fit perfectly into the pamphlet-to-be on Marx's CAPITAL AND TODAY'S WORLD CRISIS and Manbi, and wondered why it was that ~~xxxx~~ even the leadership, when least "new" facts appear, think that that hasn't been answered instead of each working it out for himself/herself.

I don't believe there is a single tendency in the world that has so little regard for the production of our own theory and its constant development. Or, for that matter, take what is happened to that pamphlet, on RL, and see, whether thought is 31 years old, a line has to be changed methodologically or concretely, though much added factually.

No, battle of ideas, requires first and last such internalization of what we have produced the quarter of century, and that begins first and last--and there is no in-between--SELF re-organization. Take even so simple a thing as attitude to WL--simple that is for us who certainly do not suffer from "male chauvinism" or "male-dominated left", and yet, yet, yet....Shouldn't it be a challenge to men as well as women when I say that when "male chauvinism" is nowhere the type we all fight together, in the Movement, the male chauvinism, whether from IS or SWP, or Portuguese revolutionaries, what is near-fatal is the evasion of theoretical discussions, the escape from philosophy, the ever-so-slightly smiling silence. Has any one challenged some of the left males about this failure to enter the battle of ideas on its level?

Yes, TIME IS INDEED RUNNING ROUT AND THERE IS NO TIME FOR IMPATIENT INDIVIDUALISM THAT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE ITS INCOMPLETENESS OUTSIDE OF THE COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL FORM: NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEE.

I trust that as you spend these last few weeks with the outside, with the perspectives that take the practical form, whether that be FINANCES or SPIRIT IN SELF-ESTRANGEMENT (not philosophy "in general" but dialects as road to revolution in particular whether it be BLACK THOUGHT PAMPHLET or SEXISM, POLITICS OR REVOLUTION (yes, it is new), or the BI-LINGUAL pamphlet-to-be as well as bi-"national" Dr-MS--MARX'S CAPITAL AND TODAY'S WORLD CAPITAL as well as all the activities, and internationalization of P&R, proletarianization and "culture", again as road to revolution only--it is the historic mirror you will carry with you.

Yours,

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