

June 5, 1984

ON LISTENING TO MARX THINK
AS CHALLENGERS TO ALL POST-MARX MARXISTS

Dear Youth:

Please note that the three quotations below are all from our own writings and cover the whole of the 30 years of the existence of Marxist-Humanism. This is done not in chronological order. Rather it skips from the first period of the 1950s, which extends to the 1960s, and then skips to the 1980s. The 1970s, moreover, are quoted not from Philosophy and Revolution but from a talk about that work, given to a scholarly, non-Marxist organization, the Hegel Society of America. Each historic period, as it relates to Youth, has its own reason for being where it is, as you will see.

"We feel that the youth are a most precious source of our development. We recognize that even though the youth are not directly involved in production, they are the ones whose idealism in the finest sense of the word combines with opposition to existing adult society in so unique a way that it literally brings them alongside the workers as builders of the new society."

--1958 Amendment to Constitution of N&LC, adopted 1956

"That which Hegel judged to be the synthesis of the 'Self-Thinking Idea' and the 'Self-Bringing-Forth of Liberty', Marxist-Humanism holds, is what Marx had called the new society... it is on this basis that we are asking those who agree with our principles to join us and take organizational responsibility for projecting Marxist-Humanism because, in truth, philosophy itself does not reach its full articulation until it has discovered the right organizational form."

-- Combination of para. added to p. 195 of Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution and 1982 Perspectives of N&LC

"Far from the unity of the Theoretical and Practical Idea being an ultimate, or pinnacle, or a hierarchy, the Absolute Idea is a new beginning... This is not exactly a summons to the barricades, but Hegel is asking us to have our ears as well as our categories so attuned to the 'Spirit's urgency' ... that we rise to the challenge of working out... a totally new relationship of philosophy to actuality and action as befits a 'birth-time of history.' This is what makes Hegel a contemporary."

-- My 1974 Paper to the Hegel Society of America, included in Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy

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The reason for taking up a whole page with quotations arises, not because I'm trying to have quotations supply the answer which only a comprehensive outlook can provide, nor because I'm looking for some single "root cause". Rather, the reason is that each must be considered as reflecting the whole body of ideas. What I do then is to single out what needs concretization for the specific time and the particular problem. The methodology, the dialectics of development in both philosophy (Self-Determination of the Idea) and praxis, is what must meet the historic test. The 30 years of hard labor it took to answer the call of each specific decade, as it both summed up and was rooted in the continent of thought and of revolution that the founder of all of us, Marx, discovered, created the ground for anticipating the future. It is this, when measured against the objective situation, that reveals the future, not "prophetically" but as the future implicit in the present, that is to say, as it logically, dialectically flows from the present.

I. THE "WHY" BEHIND THE SINGLING OUT OF YOUTH AS REVOLUTIONARY FORCE
IN THE MID-1950s TO THE MID-1960s

The first quotation from the N&L Constitution, which singled out youth as a special category in our first decade of unique, philosophically-independent existence that was to become organizational in the mid-1950s led to the merging of two very, very different periods -- one from the reactionary McCarthy period that was designated by the tired radicals as "end of ideology"; and the other initiating the turbulent, revolutionary period of the 1960s. Hold in mind, also, that it was precisely when the so-called "beat generation" with "no ideology" reigned that it was not only the tired radicals, but the scholar-revolutionaries like Marcuse, who also declared the age to be one of "One Dimensional Man". We, on the other hand, hit out against such a fantastic and totally pessimistic concept. Instead, we declared that it was Marcuse's thought that was one-dimensional. The new generation that rejected the world they did not make, on the contrary, signalled a new age of revolutions.* It is necessary never to separate internationalism from nationalism. Had Marcuse (who certainly considered himself an internationalist) practiced international-

*Read my review of One-Dimensional Man in the Oberlin College student publication, The Activist, Fall 1964. Substantial excerpts were reprinted in News & Letters, March 1980.

ism, instead of considering the Hungarian Revolution just a nationalist opposition to Russia, he could have seen what was in those totalitarian countries of East Europe -- the youth initiating the revolution in Hungary. Indeed, some were mere children -- only 11 and 12 year olds -- who threw the Molotov cocktails at the very rulers who had taught them in the Communist schools how to make them.

Now reread that paragraph from the Constitution and tarry at the following words: -- "source", "idealism", "combined with opposition". Here I must stop to explain the history, the ongoing history, as well as the philosophy needed to fully understand "language". As against the political-economic use of the word "source" as something just material, Amilcar Cabral* used it in a unique way. He refused to separate it from the live Subject -- revolutionaries; he merged source with Subject; he stressed that the youth -- children, actually -- had passed out leaflets to the Portuguese soldiers asking why they were fighting African freedom fighters instead of fighting their fascist oppressors. Remember also that both Cabral and Eduardo Mondlane singled out women as well as youth. (See Mondlane's The Struggle for Mozambique, Penguin Books, 1969, which has a beautiful picture of the women's delegation at the FRELIMO Congress.) It's in that unique way that I used the word "source" in our Constitution when I wrote "the youth are a most precious source" of our development.

As for the word "idealism", it is all too often used as if it meant only bourgeois ideological thought, and as if it were the absolute opposite of "materialism." We, however, added to that word, idealism, "combined with opposition to existing adult society... brings them alongside the workers as builders of a new society." Again, bear in mind the historic period in which this was said --

* "When the 'return to the source' goes beyond the individual and is expressed through 'groups' or 'movements,' the contradiction is transformed into struggle (secret or overt), and is a prelude to the pre-independence movement or of the struggle for liberation from the foreign yoke. So the 'return to the source' is of no historical importance unless it brings not only real involvement in the struggle for independence, but also complete and absolute identification with the hopes of the mass of the people." (Amilcar Cabral in Return to the Source, Monthly Review Press, 1973 -- p.63.)

the Korean War, McCarthyism. It was the period also when Marx's Humanism first appeared and that period "objectively" was hardly a propitious period for our birth. Marcuse, for example, was then working on what became his One Dimensional Man, which at first he called "the new technological reality". He was rejecting our interpretation both of the youth and the proletariat, specifically Workers Battle Automation. So it wasn't only the category of youth as revolutionary force but the youth and the proletariat, and we were singling out youth at a very specific, historic period, showing that the future was inherent in the present. The future, indeed, came very soon, as the 1960s came to be, for which we had the philosophic ground in Marxism and Freedom.

The whole question of the late 1950s extending all the way to 1968 is the duality within the revolutionary movement, especially the youth who wanted just activity. We, on the contrary, showed that ^{what is needed is to} not be isolated from past as history and as thought. This first has to be rearticulated, not as super-original as Existentialism or Beatism or even just as Hegel describes alienation, but as Marx and only Marx restated alienation as that which characterizes capitalism. Second negativity, on the other hand, is the revolutionary element in the dialectic which he spelled out and saw in the praxis of the masses.

The greatness of our early youth, tiny as it was, was the proof of this dialectic methodology that led to the singling out of youth as a revolutionary category. It wrote the brightest chapter then because the newness of Marxist-Humanism was spelled out as a challenge to all others. This led to the issuance of The Young Marxist Humanist. It was issued on the most reactionary campus, UCLA, and at once produced a battle of ideas, not only with the Administration but with bourgeois thought as a whole. For example, it led The Humanist to claim that they had the right to the title, "proving" it by their "copyright". Eugene illuminated the uniqueness of our title, stressing it was Marxist-Humanist, and insisting that two very different worlds, indeed, existed in each country. No need here to go into what followed with Eugene's activity in going down to Mississippi and teaching American Civilization on Trial in the Freedom

our youth had Schools there. That was the type of pride/at a time when our body of ideas existed only in Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 Until Today, which traced through 200 years of history and showed how it all began in the age of revolutions -- the industrial, the American, the French, and the intellectual revolution in philosophy, i.e. the Hegelian dialectic -- all of which laid the ground for the new revolutionary philosophy of Marx's Humanism.

II. WHAT IS NEW IN THE 1980s THAT CREATED THE CATEGORY OF POST-MARX MARXISM?

Now jump to the 1980s quotation. The essence there -- and for us now that we have completed the trilogy of revolution with Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, which emboldened us to use the formulation "body of ideas" and "trilogy of revolution"-- is this: Not only have the objective and subjective merged, and not only have both been existing in the organizational form called News and Letters Committees, but this organizational form is now directly related to Marx's philosophy of "revolution in permanence" as its ground. The youth especially must realize (that is, practice) what we quote from the 1982 Perspectives: "philosophy itself does not reach its full articulation until it has discovered the right organizational form."

It is that organizational form, News and Letters Committees, which is the test of whether you fully understand what the "body of ideas" called Marxist-Humanism is. To discuss this year's expression of it is surely not an administrative matter (for example, who will do the column?). Rather, it is a question of: What ideas, what challenges are to be projected in the column? How will our work in Latin American support committees or the anti-nuke movement be expressed differently from other years when the uniqueness of Marxist-Humanism got subordinated to activity sans philosophy? Why can the critique of the committees we work with, which we express at our own meetings, not be expressed directly to those committees, not in an elitist manner but as ideas for them to consider? In a word, how could the body of ideas be expressed so challengingly by the early youth, when just one book expressed Marxist-Humanism, and we find it so difficult now, when we have the whole trilogy of

revolution in our hands? And, above all, how could self-development become so separated from the Universal, or what is even worse, made the equivalent of the Universal? Isn't it because the organizational form of Marxist-Humanism, of philosophy of revolution in permanence, isn't made primary in our own minds? Why should there be any hesitation in asking for subs to N&L?

Since you didn't seem to be overly pre-occupied with such tasks last year, permit me to quote the final paragraph of my letter of Aug. 13, 1983: "When we talk about 'thought-divers' we can see that Marx was the greatest of all. That's what I'm really appealing to the youth to do. Becoming a thought diver and an activist in this period demands nothing short of practicing the challenge to all post-Marx Marxists, and thereby creating such new ground for organization, such concretization of Marx's revolution in permanence, as to find a new way to let the actual revolution be."

III. THE 1970s: RETURN TO THE PHILOSOPHIC SOURCE

In large measure, the compulsion I felt to return to the philosophic source explains not only the reason for the non-chronological way I presented the quotations at the beginning of this letter, but also the reason I felt the same compulsion to do that at the last class on the trilogy of revolution, and all over again, concentrate on Chapter One of Philosophy and Revolution, from Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao. Note one other peculiarity of my quotations, and that is that, instead of quoting from the magnificent Philosophy and Revolution, I quoted from a talk I gave about that work, specifically/the first chapter, particularly on Hegel's final chapter of Science of Logic, the Absolute Idea -- a talk in which I went through the whole 27 paragraphs without leaving out a single one, while adding not only the three final syllogisms (para. 575, 576, 577) from the Philosophy of Mind, but engaging great contemporary Hegel scholars in the battle of ideas.

This talk was delivered to a scholarly, specialized, very non-Marxist organization like the Hegel Society of America. In order here to show how to project Marxist-Humanism, even to a hostile audience on a non-Marxist topic such as Hegel's Absolute Idea, I there

stressed my view that Hegel's abstraction, "Spirit's urgency", gains concreteness by his deep historic sense, making it equivalent to "the birth-time of history," and to me the birth-time of history was revolutionary. The reason I emphasize that it was a non-Marxist audience that I was addressing was not, as you see, in order to have an excuse to keep far away from revolutionary language. Quite the contrary. I was most concrete in referring both to our age and to Lenin, who, I stressed, was "the most revolutionary of all materialists," showing how, nevertheless, "Absolute Negativity became Lenin's philosophic preparation for revolution" (p. 167 in Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy*). I dived into the challenge to those Hegel scholars even more directly when it came to speaking of our own age: "To this writer, Hegel's genius is lodged in the fact that his 'voyage of discovery' became one endless process of discovery for us. The 'us' includes both Marx's new continent of thought of materialist dialectics, and Hegel scholars, as well as the movement from practice... This writer has followed very closely this movement of revolt ever since June 17, 1953, and saw in it a quest for universality... a new point of departure in the Idea and in the movement from practice." (p. 172)

As I faced both the president of the HSA, Prof. Louis Dupre, and the most well-known of today's Hegel scholars, Prof. Findlay, I took to task also the most erudite intellectual dialectician, Adorno: "...the real tragedy of Adorno (and the Frankfurt School) is the tragedy of a one-dimensionality of thought which results when you give up Subject, when one does not listen to the voices from below... (when) one returns to the ivory tower and reduces his purpose to 'the purpose of discussing key concepts of philosophic disciplines and centrally intervening in those disciplines.' The next step was irresistible, the substitution of a permanent critique not alone for absolute negativity, but also of permanent revolution itself." (p. 173)

Please also reread (and very slowly) the new 1982 Introduction I wrote for Philosophy and Revolution, where I answered George Armstrong Kelly, who in his Retreat from Eleusis challenged me on Absolute Method. The reason, I must repeat, that I cite all these references, is to stress that there are many fundamentals that just can-

* Though not identical, substantially the same essay is what we have printed in our pamphlet New Essays as "Dialectics of Liberation in Thought and in Activity; Absolute Negativity as New Beginning."

not be "taken for granted" just because one knows the Marxist-Humanist conclusion. It is imperative that the youth grasp all this if they are to project this year's Perspectives as a challenge to all Left activists to adhere to the organizational form of Marxist-Humanism, News and Letters Committees. It's the only way the future can be grasped when it is still in the present. Indeed, it is only when one has total confidence that the future is in the present that one can project Marxist-Humanism's challenge -- and not only to post-Marx Marxists but to those, both proletarian and intellectual, youth as well as adult, who never were Marxists and still are terribly weighted down by "Anglo-Saxon" pragmatism.

To swim with history's "Self-Thinking Idea" and experience the "suffering, patience and labor of the negative" needed for the "Self-Bringing Forth of Liberty"; it is necessary to feel Self not as Ego but as self-movement of the masses, their self-development and historic self-transcendence. I'm confident that then we will surely rise to the challenge of the 1984-85 Perspectives, including its Organizational Conclusions, spelling these out as Youth praxis.

Yours,

RAYA

P.S. Now how about diving into what I did with Rowbotham's vanguardist "organizing idea" for WL and WL alone when I transformed it just by writing it out differently: "organizing Idea" for all revolutionaries.* Oh yes, try also to anticipate my talk at the final Executive Session on "The Self-Thinking Idea" and the Dialectics of the Body of Ideas: What is New in the Concept of Leadership?

(* I first developed this as I was working out my essay for the 1949-50 pamphlet at the point where I was analyzing the committee-form.)

