

THE BLACK-RED CONFERENCE

Detroit, Michigan -- January 12, 1969

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News and Letters Committees
59 E. Van Buren #707
Chicago, IL 60605

A REPORT ON THE BLACK-RED CONFERENCE HELD IN DETROIT, JAN. 12, 1969

WELCOME BY CHARLES DENHY:

This is the first time that such a conference of black youth, black workers, black women and black intellectuals will have a chance to discuss with each other as well as with Marxist-Humanists, who lend the red coloration not only for the sake of color, but for the sake of philosophy, a philosophy of liberation. We hope that this will not be a one-shot conference, but a continuing dialogue of black and white, workers and intellectuals, adults and youth, men and women, that will lead to a true unity of action and thoughts. You yourself will decide at the end of the day how you will carry this out, what concrete motions you wish to pass, whether you wish to publish the discussion, or use it as a basis to start some concrete activities like black organizations, black caucuses in the unions, or in the black student unions, or unify a committee for the study of philosophy in the revolution. It is completely up to you.

To encourage the blacks to speak out, we have arranged a special seating at this conference, black in front, white in back. But in the afternoon session, we hope both will speak out, and arrive at some unified action on the floor. Many times black people have said they did not want to talk, but to listen. But one of the main purposes of this conference is to have the black people speak out. Everyone will have ten minutes. The author of Philosophy and Revolution will have an hour first, but the discussion will continue the entire day. We will hear revolutionary philosophy explained, and the author will show how she sees the revolutionary situation in the world, as well as right here -- and how she hopes you will help her write the final section of her work. To introduce her, I will turn the chair over to a black youth, Ray.

INTRODUCTION BY RAY:

Back in 1920, when nationalism among black people first took its roots, the U.S. government tried to suppress the propagation of radical ideas that the Russian Revolution, which had just taken place three years before, in 1917, had instilled in black people in this country. But small groups of black radicals retaliated to the government's attack by publishing the fact that socialism stood for the black man's emancipation and that the reformers in America couldn't do anything to better the conditions of black people.

In the words of Claude McKay, who was a black poet at that time: "I think that Afro-Americans have found that Marx had been interested and fought valiantly for black emancipation." And this is true. Marx was very interested in the black struggle of his time in this country. During the American Civil War, he criticised the American socialists and people who called themselves Marxists at that time, for not taking a part and supporting the black man's fight for freedom, just because it was not, as they considered it, a class issue. He also formed a workers' group which later became the First International, to go on strike in Europe in support of the North in America and close down any plant that used cotton from the South. The black struggle also played a very important part in all of his writings, and especially the writing of his most important book, Capital.

To Lenin, the black struggle in America was also important. He included it in his thesis on the National and Colonial Questions. To Lenin, the word "nation" didn't mean just a national group or a country that was being oppressed. It also included minority groups within a given nation. He stated that it was not enough to be for a revolution, but you must also solve any national question that exists within a national boundary. He said you have to support national struggles that developed along the lines of independent mass activity.

His criticisms of those who say they are for a revolution and do not support the national questions, apply also in this country. The so-called Socialists and Communists are not willing to face the full meaning of the national question here in America. Much has been written and spoken about the sameness of black people to the American Dream, in order to prove that the black people are not a nation. Then why does there exist a black question or problem today? It is because American radicals have failed to understand the fact or the Marxist principles and approach to the National Question. They must by now realize that black people are not waiting for them to wake up, but are moving on our own to resolve our problems.

The question is, can a genuine Marxism as practiced by both Marx and Lenin in their time, be applied to our day? The answer is yes, and that is what our principle speaker for today will be attempting to do, in her new book, Philosophy and Revolution. She is a Marxist-Humanist, and her name is Raya Dunayevskaya, the author of The Afro-Asian Revolutions and a book called Marxism and Freedom. I would like to turn the conference over to her.

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The 59 participants present represented not only black and white, but Mexican-American and Japanese activists in the freedom movement, as well. Young and old, workers and students, members of at least a dozen varied organizations, they heard the following presentation, and then discussed -- for six full hours -- almost every question discussed in the black community today.

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PRESENTATION BY RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA TO THE BLACK-RED CONFERENCE
held in Detroit, Michigan -- January 12, 1969

Let's talk -- not about the moon and the stars and the planets, and little homilies from outer space, as if we don't have enough trouble on this earth -- but about what is a great deal more important: the people, especially the working people, especially the black working people.

If the Administration thinks that because we have some astronaut heroes we will thereby forget about war, racism, poverty, and the world that needs some reshaping, we will have to tell it to him like it is. Because first and foremost is MAN and LABOR. It is not the moon that came down to look at us. It is we who went up to look at the moon. And the hardware that went into that is not only a problem of science. In fact, the reason you can go to the moon, but can't solve the housing problem right here in a little slum is because you have always had, in class society, this division between science and life. And Marx saw long, long ago -- some 130 years ago -- that if you're going to have a different principle for life and for science, you will be living a lie. That is just what we have been living all these years. And there are reasons why there is this great division.

All of the history of mankind can be developed just on the history of labor. Even if we exclude science (which we can't), it would still be a fact that it is not only the hardware to go to the moon that labor has built. He has built the primary things on earth, which really make the world go around: food, shelter, clothing. Labor has built everything. But don't think that just because the working man has produced all of this, the only thing he can do is manual labor. That is what the capitalist wants you to think.

There is another kind of labor besides manual -- mental activity. And this mental activity is not restricted to scientists or to other intellectuals. In fact, what they think generally comes from this movement from below. What is most important of all is that workers think their own thoughts. And the thoughts that workers think are the thoughts that move the world.

It is all summarized in one word: freedom. There is no such thing as a thought that has any significance unless it is the thought of how to get freedom. All of man's history is various stages of the struggle for freedom. And though capitalism may be better than slavery, we still have a long way to go. So -- first, we have labor as a manual activity; second, labor as a mental activity. What gets everything changed is thinking how and by what means you can move to freedom, and masses actively moving toward freedom.

Besides labor and thought, we have some colors that are not accidental which we should talk about today: black and red. Black and red stand for the actual movement of society.

Let's start in 1831, Nat Turner's Revolt. That was the same year some whites in New England started a paper called the Liberator, stimulated by the movement of the slaves in the South. The coalescence of these two forces led finally to the Civil War. But that's not why I'm choosing 1831 for today's discussion. I'm choosing it for Nat Turner's Revolt -- he tried to be free and he was hanged for it -- and I'm choosing it because that was the year that a

man named Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel died. He was a German philosopher who dealt only with thought in ivory towers, yet what Nat Turner did and thought is related to Hegel, though they were of course quite unknown to each other.

Last year a prize was given to a white Southerner for a book about Nat Turner -- a horrible book. A lot of black intellectuals got very angry and answered the author, Styron. Theirs is not a bad answer -- but what is really great is Nat Turner's own Confessions. They were made to a white racist, and he stressed the fact that he had the right to fight for freedom. He had heard voices and they told him to do it. Now there was another revolt that took place at the same time, and the white rulers were sure that there had been a conspiracy. Turner denied it: "I see sir, you doubt my word. But cannot you think the same idea which prompted me might prompt others as well as myself to this undertaking? Here is a supposedly unintelligent man, and he recognizes that as great as is his own struggle for freedom, it is impossible that he, though he heard the voices from heaven, thought of it alone. He is absolutely sure that the Spirit, meaning the objective movement for freedom, and the people fighting for freedom are the same thing.

How these two movements -- objective and subjective, idea of freedom and people fighting for freedom -- function together, is what we are going to be learning today. It is called dialectics. We will see how they come to jam up against each other, and coalesce or not coalesce, depending on whether you win or lose. And if we can find out what it was when the Greeks established it, and what it was when Hegel established it, and what it is with Marx -- we will know all there is to know about philosophy.

Dialectics originally meant "dialect" or talking -- and the Greeks had a very high opinion of it if it was the philosophers who were doing the talking. They had the first democracy for the citizens, but not for the slave laborers. The idea was that if you, the philosopher, talked to someone, and he had an idea that opposed yours, and you then contemplated, you would finally come up with an idea that was totally different than either one originally was. And it is true that you get some movement that way, but because the talk that went on was the talk of only intellectuals, it was contemplation alone or the viewing of things, not the doing of anything.

What was different about it when Hegel got to re-establish it for our age? We had moved from 500 BC, when there was a slave society, to 1789 when there was a French Revolution, the greatest revolution that had ever happened. And the people, the sans-culottes, the enragés, the indignant hearts -- they had something to say about things. They were saying they were glad they got rid of Louis XVI, but did they get with the overthrow of the monarchy? Why was there still a distinction between "passive citizens" and "active citizens" -- especially when the so-called "passive citizens" were the ones who were doing all the work? They wanted to know why they all shouldn't be able to discuss things.

This French Revolution was such a challenge to the people in the ivory towers, like Hegel, that he couldn't help reflecting it. So that when he began to talk about dialectic, it didn't mean only thoughts bumping up against each other, it meant action. It meant development through contradiction, the development of ideas, and of actual history, and of the class struggle. It was this

development --not a process of adding up how many are here in this room and contrasting that with how many voted for Wallace, but of seeing what the people represent and how much motion they can get going when the idea of freedom inspires them -- that is of the essence.

Nevertheless, since he did restrict himself to ideas, even though his philosophy reflected actual history, something more was needed. When Nat Turner led his rebellion and Hegel died in 1831, Marx was 13 years old. He didn't know anything about either one of them. But 13 years later, in 1844 he created the greatest philosophy of freedom, humanism. And he built it on the dialectic. But he said ideas don't float in air. There are people who have ideas. Marx included man himself, men who think, who struggle for freedom, who try to unite the idea of freedom with the actual struggle for freedom. He refused to bow either to capitalism or to communism. He said that in place of either the profit motive of capitalism, or the collective form of property of communism, the important thing was the self-development of man.

In creating this philosophy, he heard about and collaborated with the Abolitionists, black and white, in this country who were struggling against slavery. Some so-called Marxists said well, of course, they were against slavery -- but the slaves just wanted the freedom to be exploited by the capitalist. They thought they were much wiser because they wanted freedom from the capitalists, too. Marx showed them that they were crazy because freedom and thinking are always concrete. And in the actual dialectic of liberation -- that is, in the actual relation of thought to act, in the actual development -- you have to arouse and elicit from the population many, many forces. The greatest force is labor, but there are others, such as the youth, and in America the greatest of these other forces is the black masses. Marx told the whites who thought they were superior because they were free: Look at you, you don't even have a national labor union -- and you can't organize one because labor in the white skin cannot be free while labor in the black skin is branded. This wasn't only "dialectics" or "philosophy". This was the way it was. We finally had the Civil War in the U.S., and the first national labor union came after that.

It was by establishing labor as the center, and the unity of thought and practice as necessary, and by jamming up all these new ideas into a new philosophy of liberation that Marx was able to establish the First Workingmen's International.

Okay. Now let's get down to writing our new book, Philosophy and Revolution. To do that, there are two more dates, this time in the 20th century, that we have to consider, before we get to the 1960's and the "Economic Reality and Dialectics of Liberation" we came to discuss. One of those dates is 1920; the other is 1936.

First, 1920. Remember, please, that past history is also present history. All history is contemporary, because we always see past history with the eyes of today. It is important to remember that because today it is so hard to get communication started between black and red. The blacks who don't want to talk to the white imperialists wind up not talking to any whites. And the tragedy is that it inhibits their struggle, not the other way around -- because you have to have the majority of the people to win.

Harold Cruse has just published a book called the Crisis of the Negro Intellectual. He thinks the trouble is that the blacks don't remember their history, the real history of the 20's when we had the beginnings of the national-

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ist movement with Garvey and what was then called the "new Negro". He feels if they remembered their history, they would have their real rights. He is right and wrong at the same time. It is true you have to know your past — but the intellectuals who write today and try to tell you that DuBois and Garvey were great, but Marx is not, were as far removed from Garvey and the black masses in 1920 as anyone could possibly be.

The Garvey movement was the greatest movement America had ever seen in mass numbers. Garvey organized some six million people. The blacks who thought the South was horrible and came North, found that the North was the same thing in a different form. The Negro was supposed to be impossible to organize. Garvey showed that was a lie. (I know people don't like the word now, but it was Garvey who fought very hard to make everyone spell Negro with a capital N. They would never have won that fight without his movement.) But because they didn't have a total philosophy, and because they were so frustrated, where did it all end? "Back to Africa". It was fantastic. They were all Americans. This is where they had labored all their lives.

What is important to remember is that the black intellectuals didn't want to have anything to do with Garvey and his followers. The intellectuals considered them all ignorant. DuBois even went so far as to go to the State Department to demand Garvey's deportation. Who made people look at Garvey as a revolutionary? As important? As doing more to shake up capitalism in America than all the white and black intellectuals together? Lenin,

Lenin said it was a start. It was shaking up the regime. Not only that. He said to look around the world. He saw China and began to wonder if we could overthrow imperialism through the "National Question." So the actual movement, which was spontaneous as all great movements are, and which showed the true revolutionary role of the black people in this country, revealed that the only people who were trying to get a discussion started between the black masses and the black intellectuals were a few white radicals who kept saying: For heaven's sake, talk to each other — this is the real revolution.

DuBois was a very great researcher, but he never understood the black masses — or the white masses either, because labor didn't mean anything to him. When you remember Garvey, remember that the gulf was the gulf that separated the black masses from the black intellectuals; remember that the few beginnings that were started then, were started by the Marxists. Cause is trying to say that the "division" was all the communists' fault. But the Communists of the 1920's were not the Communists we saw later. The Communists had strength in 1920 because they understood the revolutionary forces. The blacks left the Communists later — and the black intellectuals didn't. The black masses left the CP during World War II. The minute Russia was in the war, it was supposed to have suddenly become a good war, and all the black people were supposed to wait until after the war was over to fight for their rights so as not to hurt the war effort. The black masses said: I've heard that story all my life; it's never today, it's always tomorrow. And they tore up their party cards.

The other year we have to consider is 1936 when the CIO was built. Today everybody knows the CIO as a great bureaucracy, but in '36 and '37 it was a great movement. The first industrial union couldn't have been built without the black

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workers, and everyone knew it. That was when you had the unity of white and black. You can't rewrite history. Being against white imperialism doesn't mean that all of white labor and the radicals are the same. What the black nationalist leaders are forgetting is plain history. Once you have that many blacks in the same union, you can't go around pretending you're not all in the same shop. If you're going to have a revolution, you'd better have it together, or you won't have it at all.

It's one thing to say you have to operate with a black caucus demanding various things, like upgrading and so on, but it is quite another to consider that the main enemy is not Ford or Chrysler or GM, but only Reuther. You have to recognize when Reuther became the enemy. It was World War II -- that was when both the Communists and Reuther became the enemy. And that was when the Marxist-Humanists said, no sir, we are not going to condone this war,

Now I think we have enough of history and theory (in the 19th century we saw it through Hegel and Turner and Marx; and in the 20th century through Garvey and Lenin and labor and the Marxist-Humanists of that time) to get down to the dialectics of liberation today, in the 1960's.

Philosophy and Revolution has three parts. Part I is called "Why Hegel, Why Now?" and takes up the dialectic as the algebra of revolution, the methodology of what man has done in fighting for freedom. Once you get three things, you have the essence of it: 1) the dialectic -- the actual development, through actual class struggle, through actual contradictions; 2) the right Subject -- who is resolving these contradictions? Marx said it was the class force, but helped by other forces such as minorities, the black people, and the youth; 3) how does this movement from below for freedom, from practice, unite with the movement that comes from theory? In other words, the relationship of theory to practice.

In the chapters on Marx and Lenin I take up concretely how Marx did it for his era, and how Lenin did it for his. Up to a certain stage it seemed easy, because it was only capitalism they thought they had to fight. But Lenin found, with the outbreak of World War I that it was his co-comrades who betrayed. The fact that every unit in life has its opposite within itself, and that the counter-revolution came from within the revolution -- that was the shock and the recognition that made Lenin prepare himself correctly for what was to come later. Lenin saw the aristocracy of labor as a transformation into opposite that meant a break-up within labor. But he also saw that the way to transform that into its opposite was by going lower and deeper, and uniting with the minority groups. That became the "National Question".

Part II of the book is called "Alternatives". Those that are the most dangerous are again those from within the Marxist movement. Lenin had to deal with the betrayal of the Second International. We have to deal with the betrayal of the Third. The three alternatives are Mao Tse-tung (and Castro); Leon Trotsky; and Sartre. The first two are from the Marxist movement. The last from the intellectuals not connected with a party.

The important point to keep in mind insofar as Mao and Trotsky are concerned is that they are revolutionaries. Why did they have the wrong answers nonetheless? When you meet a new problem you can either stand still and say: this is what Lenin told me, or Marx, and nothing has happened that is new -- and this is what Trotsky did, what we call getting stuck in the fixed particular; or, as with Mao, you can say: we can't wait a thousand years, we're going to have to

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find some shortcuts, power comes from the barrel of a gun. But the shortcut has proved in life to be the longest way around. As far as Sartre is concerned, we find that what he wound up saying was that it was fine for all the workers to go into the Communist Party, but he wanted his own freedom as an intellectual -- and you get the concept of the vanguard party coming from the man who didn't belong to any party.

What you have to ask yourself is how it happens that blacks should follow Mao or Castro? Is it sufficient to hate and want to get rid of just your own specific capitalist? American imperialism is the enemy of Mao and Castro -- and it is your enemy. But is that sufficient reason to join with Mao and Castro? Or do you have to do what Marx did and raise up an entirely new banner that will say: No, I'm not only opposed to American imperialism, but also to Russian Communism and Chinese Communism -- I want an entirely new society.

Now Part III is the section that isn't yet written. It is to be called "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Liberation" and it is on two levels. One is the world level, which takes up the relationship between the advanced countries and the technologically underdeveloped countries. You see that here it is in the 1960's and never has America been so rich and powerful -- in fact, the whole world is divided into two great nuclear powers, so that we may all get blown up. And here are the African Revolutions. They didn't have arms, let alone nuclear arms; they didn't have power, not even industrial power. But they dared and they won.

DeGaulle got so furious when Sekou Toure defied him and dared to tell the mighty De Gaulle: "No, we don't want to be part of the French empire," that he even tore out the telephone wires to show the Africans they couldn't do without the white man. Why did Toure win anyway? First of all, he had the masses with him, the entire people. And they all said "No." They dared -- and a lot of white teachers and such said, "We'll help." And a lot of other blacks said, "If Toure can win, why can't we?" That's why the blacks are called the vanguard. The great force of an idea gained them freedom and reshaped the continent.

Why then have so many African nations moved back to a military regime by today? -- or taken a side either with American imperialism or the Russian counterpart? That's where the objective movement comes in. The strength and power of these two nuclear titans will get you sucked into the vortex, unless you rely only on the masses that brought you to liberation. Once they got power -- the Nkrumahs and Toures -- they said, we're just as smart as the whites and we can play politics, too. The minute they began to play that kind of politics, they were lost. They stopped having a continuing dialogue with their own masses.

But we don't have to go to Africa to see another great form of the dialectics of liberation. We have the blacks right here in this country. And if they shake up the world right here, all the world can be free. It was the recognition that in the most affluent society there was the greatest poverty, that in the most military power there was a revolutionary force, that made everyone turn to see what those few little black students in North Carolina were doing when they demanded to be served at a lunch counter and refused to move.

Between 1960 and 1965 the spontaneous movement of the black youth particularly, and some labor, was the moving force. It really all started with the Montgomery Bus Boycott -- and again we were the only ones who recognized it at that time, just as we were the only ones who recognized what the Mau Mau in Africa represented in the 1950's. We printed People of Kowe Speak for Them-

selves in 1955 because we recognized that in the blacks in Africa starting to throw out the white imperialists, they had started a new page in history that would reshape the world entirely, which it did, and in the shortest period of time, at that. In 1957, in Marxism and Freedom, we said the two greatest forces in the world for liberation were the Hungarian Revolution and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama. There was a great deal of ridicule at that time for the plane on which we had placed the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Nobody laughs at it now.

After the spontaneous movement of the black students between 1960 and 1965, there was not only a great deal of movement on the part of white students running South to help — but there was a movement of thought, as well. Each by itself is one-sided, theory and practice. And the thinking did not begin on the question of violence or non-violence. All the arms are in the hands of the capitalists. It is not the movement of arms that reconstructs society; only the movement of the masses does that.

The first movement on the part of Rev. King towards Humanism was when he brought the question in, in relation to the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who had expressed the idea that unless you recognize that it's not things, but human relations, which are the crux of everything, you will never get anywhere. (Rev. King didn't mention the Abolitionists, or the movement right in this country, much less Marxism.)

Yet, when he moved from the South to the North, he didn't know how to function with Northern labor. His philosophy got stopped because it had to have a relationship to labor, and to Marxist Humanism as a philosophy of liberation. What came to take its place? Black power.

Now black power may be good, but it isn't going to get you your freedom. In fact, the capitalists are trying to use black power against you. They want to put up a few little black capitalists and say they've done their part. No, it has to be a new unity of theory and practice, and of white and black. Black power can be corrupted like everything else. And you can be sure that capitalism will try to buy out whomever it can.

Instead of going back to the real roots of Marxism in this country, instead of trying to work out a new relationship, there is too much trying to grab a shortcut through Castro or Mao. The most disgusting thing I ever saw occurred in New York right after Rev. King was murdered. There was the first new appearance of black and white unity in the demonstrations after it had pretty much stopped in 1965. And right at that point, William Epton, the Maoist, got up to say: We don't mourn Rev. King — he was an obstacle to our freedom. For someone who is black to dare to do that, shows that his theory comes from a foreign land, indeed. (All the blacks who think they're different by following Maoism should read Mao's own thought. He is so used to using black as evil, that every other word is black guards, black counter-revolution... with all he wants to do in Africa, somebody should at least tell him that black is beautiful.)

Trying to be against all whites is to fail to see your real roots, and to fail to work out a new coalescence of black and white, and theory and practice. It is the present period I want you to talk about. And in becoming theoreticians, in creating a new philosophy by speaking for yourselves, you have to recognize that you speak, not as individuals (though the individual is very great) but as the new forces that are necessary — what Marx called the new passions for reconstructing society on totally new, truly human, beginnings.

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EXCERPTS FROM THE DISCUSSION AT THE BLACK-RED CONFERENCE, JAN. 12, 1969

The following summation of the discussion which continued throughout the entire day, was prepared by two young black workers who participated:

FIRST SESSION: (Only black participants took the floor)

Three participants asked questions: They say the Africans are throwing the Indians and Arab shopkeepers out. What is the significance in relation to blacks controlling their schools, shops, etc. here? What do you think is holding up the revolution for black freedom so long? What should take place where both black and white will gain the freedom of mankind?

Steelworker: I don't see why everyone is worried about where the black man's next move is going to be. It is true all over that when the black man better his condition, everyone benefits from his move.

Raya: I would like to hear about the different caucuses in the shops, and what they are concerned about.

Auto Worker: Most of the black caucuses in the shops have different names, but they are all primarily concerned with discrimination. Not too many deal with skilled questions, however, and this is a critical avenue to upgrading. Most seem pointed to getting on supervision rather than to elevating labor on the line. Others are getting sucked into the promise of capitalism. Nixon and the companies are talking about black capitalism, and suddenly everyone seems to think that the way to solve your problems is with a piece of money. Too many black leaders in the so-called revolutionary movement are selling out for this piece of silver.

Woman worker: Why is the company trying to destroy unity among the men?

Steel worker: The company is saying that if you have troubles you should not take them to the union. They say, bring them to us and we'll solve them. This is to stop men from uniting together for a real movement.

Woman worker: The union representative and the elected government officials are selling us out, at least most of them -- like Conyers and Diggs. On the other hand some are trying to get the message to other black men -- like A. Powell.

Working Woman: What can we do to cause less bloodshed in this revolution we're in?

CORE worker: Violence seems always to attend revolution. There is a lot of discontent, but we are not to that point yet.

One of the things that bothers me and many others is electoral politics...

Young Mechanic: Young people aren't hung up in electoral politics. We're not hung up on whether Conyers is good or not, we're against politicians, period. We're talking about throwing out the whole system. It's going to take violence to take power from those who have it, and put it in the hands of the people.

Activist: White and black worked together well in the early days of the Civil Rights movement, but since Black Power, most of the white people have been run out of the groups. We've found we are at a standstill. The leaders don't want to hear criticism, don't believe in anybody's ideas but theirs, don't believe in alternatives. I'm concerned about not having communication with white people.

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I feel we need all the revolutionary groups we can get, in order to change this society. How can we get the older black people, the militants and the white radicals together?

Working Woman: The first thing we should do is get together and unite our thinking instead of destroying each other. We never had civil rights because we were never accepted as people. Some people want to destroy others with different ideas.

Woman Activist: I have a 19 year old son who wouldn't be caught dead here. He's out doing his thing. There is a terrific generation gap. But I try to listen. He's got an Afro and a chain around his neck. He's doing his thing. He's trying to change something. They're not worried about getting expelled. When you get expelled three or four times you have it made. I think black people ought to start listening to what their children are saying. When I was growing up, I had to obey or get put out. Now kids have a place to go. They can live with some other teen-ager. Our job is to keep them home and start listening to them. My son used to picket with me when CORE did that sort of thing. Now they're doing a different thing.

Young Worker: Old people are on the way out and want young people to accept what they tell them. But young people want to do it a different way.

Young Mechanic: The Afro has become like a trade-mark. There are a lot of people wearing Afros that are so up-tight with the system they will sell you out in a minute. It's not what you wear or how you look, it's what you think and what you do that counts. And it's not enough to sit back and listen. If that's all you do, you still have the thing going. You have to listen and then act.

Older Worker: Last week one of the black foremen fired so many people they had to bring in the union and company and everybody else to keep him from firing more. And he was firing black people, not whites. There is so much confusion today that you can grab any old idea and run wild with it. I've been trying to figure out the contradiction in Brooklyn in the school system. They have white teachers who would fight if a Negro moved into their neighborhood, so the Negroes say, get out and let us run our own school — and these whites are fighting like hell to stay in that school. And the black youth — if they don't accept the right basis for all their actions, they won't solve anything. That is, they won't change the society as a whole, even though they may change a few things within it. About politics, take the union. One day in a meeting, a worker got up and pointed to a bureaucrat who had just spoken. This bureaucrat had just said that we should support some politician, because even though everyone knew he was a politician, he was an honest politician. The worker said it reminded him of two men passing a cemetery. One looked at a tomb stone and said, "I thought there was a law against putting two men in the same grave — but here's one that says Here lies John Doe, a politician and an honest man."

Raya gave a brief summation just before adjournment for lunch; short excerpts of which follow:

You are clearing your heads to understand what comes spontaneously from the masses and what comes from theory. The first preparation is not activity alone, but thinking. There have been too many soured revolutions. To prevent another one, we need the unity of opposites — but it has to be a certain kind of unity. Take the question of age. The youth say, you old ones aren't listening to us, what's the use? The adults say, I want to listen, but I want you to do what I tell you. The adults have experience and the youth need that. But that experience has to be jammed up against the new things that the youth are saying.

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We also have to realize that actions have consequences, and the youth started a lot of actions and got a lot of consequences. The fight against racism and against the war even brought about LBJ's decision not to run for president...

What is hanging up the movement now? The Black Power slogan, for all the good it did in helping others to recognize that black is beautiful, and that unity is necessary among the black people -- is now being used by the capitalists. They're buying off a section of the movement. They want to try to divert it to mean voting for the good guys...

We have to find which opposites are correct. Why is it right to fight for a black caucus -- and right also to fight against the black foreman?

Take the question that was asked about the Africans chasing out the Indians ... We must know why. To what extent was it color, and to what extent was it class? There are divisions within the Third World, and we have to know them. In Tanzania, after they threw out the British, they threw out the Arabs, because they were the immediate exploiters....

We have to be careful not to fall into the trap of the "crime in the streets" question. It is not that we deny there is crime in the streets, but that we tell them it comes from their system, and once that system is changed, there won't be much trouble with crime. They would like to divide you into "good" and "bad"; and put you on a committee with them so they can make Uncle Toms out of you. We have to have a choice of the subjects that will move us somewhere. You know, Hoover, since he got his start in the "Palmer Raids" after World War I, has admitted that crime is getting worse every year. Yet they keep saying that they can't do without Hoover. Can those of you in the shops, imagine somebody getting up and admitting to the company that every year since he's been in charge things have gotten worse, and they wouldn't fire him?

After adjournment for lunch, we'll come back and see where we've come, and where we're going...

SECOND SESSION: (Floor open to all present)

White Student: Will the black man want to experience capitalism before he decides he doesn't like it? Will the black people knock capitalism before they get a chance to be part of it?

Black Worker: Under capitalism, you will find a majority of the wealth controlled by a minority. The question is whether this system is acceptable, and I think not. This system has to have a scape goat. You used to have the Italians as the most exploited, and they were all considered "criminals". Now all the black people are considered "criminals." This system has to go.

CORE worker: There used to be other systems, like feudalism. No matter what system we have, won't some always have more than others?

Black Worker: Consider China. That was one of the most impoverished lands. Yet the whole system was changed. People get tired of living in poverty, and that means there's going to be a change.

Black Worker: There is something wrong wrong with your priorities when you can spend money on dog tidbits, but not get a bill through Congress to get rid of

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rats. The bulk of our students in who are now in college are getting ready to oil the wheels of capitalism. A small percentage may become radicals, but winning more than that is difficult. We have to start looking to the high school youth for students we want to win to the cause.

Older black auto worker: Capitalism is a dead horse. Fighting the stewards in the shops for not doing anything is another dead horse. You can fight Walter until you're sick, and you won't change him. What we want is a system that will give people life, and growth. Anything that doesn't grow will die. The capitalist system just kills off people. We're creating a whole lot of millionaires in this system... but at the same time, a whole lot of people are poor. It grieves me to know that there are some people who honestly think that somebody has to be poor. Why does someone else have to starve so I can eat well? It is ridiculous to think that this system offers human beings anything. The only compassion the companies have is for a buck.

Mexican-American: One of my questions is when does theory end and action begin? Capitalism exploits not only black people, but white, and Indian, and Mexican-American. Our problem is how to take over. Power is never given, it always has to be taken. When are we going to start planning to take over and give power back to the people?

White Student: It isn't a matter of counterposing theory to activity. What is needed is the unity of the two.

Raya pointed out that it was important always to be concrete, and since the question of Mao had been raised, we could be concrete about the Chinese Revolution to see what lessons we could learn from it. Mao made a revolution and achieved more in ten years than had been done in China in the 200 years before. But it soured again. Why? He wanted a shortcut and he thought it was his own thought that could provide the answers. What we have to consider is whether Mao or Castro were trying to elicit from the actual struggles of the masses? And why is the Negro the vanguard? Isn't because he is always on the move for freedom? You can buy a few leaders off, but capitalism can't buy a whole people off. What do we mean by the struggle for the minds of man? How can we break up the unity of the white man?

Young Black Worker: To try to get a coalition with the white workers is practically impossible because they are hung up in their racist bag, and don't even know the system is using them to oppress us. It makes them fear us for their jobs. But we can't wait. So we go into our own bag. We have the three S's: self-determination for all black people first; self-identity; and then self-defense. The man next to me in the factory is my equal because we suffer the same consequences, but the system tells him he's my enemy, and we just don't have time to try to convince these white workers that we're doing what we are for the benefit of all of us.

Older Black Worker: DRUM got Dodge management so concerned that they decided to tell these young fellows they were right -- where there is such a high percentage of Negroes, they should have a plant manager, and Negro foreman, and so on. But when one of the other workers asked what they would do about production, the company said, production will be the same as before. The company doesn't care whether it's a white man or a black man as long as they get the production out.

Black Woman Activist: The black students and the white students on campus both want a revolution. Why don't they get together? I wish they would tell us.

White Student: I think the black students are caught up in black culture. but

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that is only part of theory, it doesn't get beyond culture to the whole of society. And white students just don't seem to consider theory at all.

White Steelworker: People are trying to deal concretely with how to bring the white and black student movements together. San Francisco State is an example of that. It is the same in the shops. In our mill there is a group called the Committee for Equality. Their primary point was not to work through the union, but outside of it. The government gives our mill about \$50 million in contracts every year, and they wanted the government to stop it unless the company stopped discriminating. The company would be in bad shape if they lost those contracts, so they have begun to make all sorts of changes in the testing programs, and to talk about changing seniority units so black people won't be trapped in units that don't have any good jobs.

Instead of asking the white brothers to join with them against racism they got together as blacks because whenever they tried to work integrated before they lost. But they didn't work as a caucus within the union because there were two different locals that were affected, and because the officers on the local level are consciously racist. They created a dual union, but it was tactical and in this case I think it was right because they just had to find some way to shake everything up. And they did it.

Now, the interesting thing is that because they were effective in ending certain racist practices in the plant, there were a lot of white guys who had grievances against the local union too, who began to think differently about the black workers. The black workers invited a group of crane operators, almost all white, to join them in one of their marches. These guys were in the process of developing some kind of insurgency within the union. These fellows could have said, no, we don't want to associate with some raving black militants out to destroy everything. But instead they decided that these blacks had done something for themselves, so maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to associate with them. Now the whites can't wait for the next march.

Black Mechanic: We're missing the point if we don't get the unity -- not only the action and not only the theory, but both together at the same time. Take someone who says his only interest is in Dodge Main -- that doesn't change the community as a whole. Or take those who say we can't criticize Russia's invasion of Czechoslovakia because of the U.S. oppression of Vietnam. They may do plenty of acting, but they are missing out on theory somewhere. It is easy to get a cat's body. Uncle Sam does that every day and sends it to Vietnam. It's something else to get a man's mind. If you get his mind, you'll get his body with no problem at all.

White Student-Worker: Theory is not abstract, it is very real. Somebody was talking about the three S's. I have another one to add: self-development. To me that means everybody has a tremendous amount of potential, energy, creativity. And The Man's job is to stop it. They don't want you to think. Thinking makes you dangerous to them. And they are right about that. In the Maryland Freedom Union people saw the power of putting what they were saying to each other into print so everyone could read it. There are a lot of people here who wouldn't be here with us today if they had not seen their story in the paper or in a leaflet distributed to a plant.

White Student: We had ten thousand with us in Chicago, and in the streets, but what did it get us? Take what a lot of students are doing -- you get an issue, and you get some guys arrested, and then you get maybe 300 students out on the street uptight about it. So the university drops the charges, and where are you? The university knows when to appease the students.

The point is that we need contact with labor to get a worker-student-black alliance and shut down the whole system. I don't know a thing about labor, or about Hegel, either. But I know that we need a relationship to each other. We are still separated from each other. This meeting today is the first time I have ever seen this type of talking to each other that we need.

* * *

What follows are excerpts from the Summation by Raya following the day's discussion:

No matter how we try to be away from this society, we are part of it. Part of the thinking of the ruling class is in our thinking. One of the worst things about American society, aside from the racism, is that they think they are different when they say they don't like theory. But that is what America has always been. Here is the true historical materialist reason why. Let's understand it and get it out of our system:

This country was rich and racist from the very beginning; the lie began with the lie of the Declaration of Independence. It declared independence from Britain, but not self-determination. Jefferson understood this because he had slaves, and he tried to say something in the Declaration, but they stopped it fast. They got away with it for a long time because of the frontier and lots of other reasons. The capitalist felt, correctly, that he didn't need theory to do what he wanted to do.

What followed the American Revolution was a greater Revolution -- the French Revolution. Every revolution we have struggled with since comes from that Revolution. And the making of a methodology out of it was the result of the combination of first Hegel, and then Marx. Nowadays we think we are different. Some think that theory is talk between theoreticians. Marx showed that the simple statement of a worker asking when his day began and when it ended was a greater philosophy than the Declaration of Independence and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. They were abstract and sounded beautiful -- but meanwhile we still had slavery in this country. What the worker was saying was very concrete. Marx spent 80 full pages on that in Capital. And he ended that whole section by saying that labor in a white skin cannot be free so long as labor in the black skin is branded -- even though he had never seen a black man in his life when that was written. (Many years later, of course, his daughter married a black man.)

The point is that the concept that the source of theory is working people -- working youth, the minorities as well as the majority -- came from the activity. And why is theory important? Because instead of having to say, I hate Bill, or I hate Joe, you see that Joe and Bill are foremen and that is why you hate them, and that generalization releases you. Take the question of "passions" -- to Marx passion meant a striving after something. You can't get anywhere unless you have a passion for it. Marx said the "the new passions and new forces" are the negation of the negation.

Of course this is a racist society. But it is fantastic to say that the white youth are just the same as this white racist society. The blacks are better because they are doubly exploited, and that is why they don't let go. But we have to see all the forces that must unite. It is true, for example, that on the whole we are not for dual unionism, but in specific cases like the one our steelworker spoke about, it was correct -- and if the black workers there will let a white work with them, by all means, do it. Then bring it back to the white workers. Above all, you have to remember that the capitalists want to break up the black and white workers...

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The so-called riots stopped in 1967 because the capitalist class realized that they would be overthrown if they didn't do something. So they decided they had to break the blacks up. Don't think they didn't buy off plenty of black militants into the poverty program and elsewhere. When the capitalists get scared enough, they always look first to see who they can buy off. They want you to think that if you have a Black Madonna, everything is OK. But what had that solved? One of the black workers here told us some time ago that American Civilization on Trial should be in the textbooks in the schools. The capitalists would never allow that. They are willing to appease the black students with some black studies courses, and even that they would never allow if they could help it. But they will do it if they have to, because they hope that if they give in to you on this or that, you will not bother the rest of the institutions...

The students must ask themselves, why should the workers want to unite with you? They have the bigger power. But they will accept your help -- you will find that out...

Theory is not just a lot of talking. It is a clearing of your head -- it helps you to get the capitalist out of there. That is why it prepares you for your revolution. You will be part of the new book. Even if you don't want theory, theory is going to take you anyhow.

Everything is now up to you. What motions you want to make, you will make. The more tendencies and organizations represented, the better. It is ridiculous to think one has all the answers. But theory -- Marxist-Humanist theory -- is important because without a total philosophy you cannot fight and win...

It would be fitting to end with one phrase from a white Abolitionist, Wendell Phillips, who said that if you get six people in a room all discussing freedom, you have the first act of revolution. That is what you did today.

* * *

On this note, the Conference concluded with the passing of the following motions:

1- That a committee of five participants (representing both black and white, young and old, workers and students) prepare a summation of this conference to send to others who might wish to hold similar conferences.

2- That this Conference be followed-up by another within a year, to assure that it would be a continuing dialogue.

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May 29, 1986

Dear Friends:

On June 1, you will receive, by Express Mail, the Official Call for the Convention, which formally opens our 90 day pre-convention discussion period. The same Express Mail package will carry the minutes of the REB discussion of the meeting on May 27 where the Draft was read, discussed and voted on. Since both of these speak for themselves, there is no reason to try to summarize them here.

What does need to be singled out, let me point to briefly here: 1) The REB decided to reissue the 1969 Black/Red Conference Bulletin, which Charles Denby had chaired. Ray, N.Y., who made a valuable contribution to the new edition of Frantz Fanon Soweto and American Black Thought, is the one who first suggested we reissue it. That Conference, attended by more non-members than members, had voted to issue such a bulletin and include both the presentation there on Philosophy and Revolution before it was a book and the full discussion that had followed that presentation. That Conference resulted in the creation of the Black/Red column in N&L, which has been authored ever since by John Alan. Because the bulletin has such relevance to today but has been out of print for several years, we are re-issuing it in time to have a copy in each Convention packet.

Yours,

Raya

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