

1/4/71

Dear Raya,

On Friday night, Mike, Bonnie, and I had a long discussion of the relationship of the book to the perspectives and to history. We all agreed that there were two big problems about the book, both of which must be related to history to be understood. These are 1. that none of us in the organization have yet understood your statement that "subject must unite with its theory of revolution" in order to make the revolution and the statement that you made that "Philosophy itself is revolutionary"...thus none of us have been practicing dialectics well nor have we been helping you with the book. And, 2. you have been having trouble with the section on "New Passions and New Forces" --- a problem which we think also relates to the idea of "subject must unite with its theory." So, I will try to reconstruct the conversation the three of us had in the hopes that it will help at least to outline the problems in historical-philosophic terms on our level.

Mike started the discussion by recounting that P&R grew directly out of M&F, that it took up with the question of philosophy which M&F left unanswered. He then pointed out that the first edition of M&F ended with the new passions and new forces that were arising from practice---the black movement here and the Hungarian and other Eastern European freedom fighters---it sort of ended on an optimistic note with these forces and threw down the challenge of philosophy to the Marxist movement. The second edition on the other hand, ended with Mao and the two kinds of subjectivity---the petty bourgeois subjectivity of Mao's retrogressionist philosophy of substituting himself as leader and his ideas for the bodies and minds of the masses who will make the social revolution...and the other subjectivity of these masses as subject. And here is where you said that if we are to overcome the voluntarism of petty bourgeois subjectivity of Mao and others, we must see that the revolutionary subject unites with its theory---the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism. (And, Mike pointed out here that this was a big break--- a philosophic departure if you will---in the thought of Marxist-Humanism because what you were now saying is that Marxist-Humanism is subject in the same way as the movement is subject and thus the urgency of writing P&R became so much greater because the ideas of M-H'ism are needed to make a revolution. The three of us agreed on this, but let me say that for young people such as myself this realization is so fantastic that it floors you because you are still getting used to what it means to be a revolutionary and to measure yourself against history ~~that~~ and you don't have the year, in the movement and the closeness with the ideas of M-H'ism which comes with being through the breaks and the development of the ideas. etc. etc. Anyway, I think problem number one for the members---the young ones at least---start with understanding this concept which Mike brought up.

At this point in our discussion I brought up the question of philosophy and organization as relates to the three historic periods that you have been stressing over and over again in so many different ways since the 1968 Convention: Marx and the International Workingman's Assoc. and the Paris Commune, Lenin and the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution, and You and News and Letters and the Needed American Revolution. Again, for me to make this one-to-one-to-one relationship in this way represents something big in my mind which really ought not to be so big because this is what I think you have been doing over and over again since '68. Anyway, we decided that in 1870 only Marx, not even Engels as you pointed out and not the Workingman's Assoc. ~~was~~ was able to meet the challenge of history when the Paris Commune broke out. He had to cross out the names of the Workingman's Assoc. and substitute Communards because only Marx knew what it meant for subject to unite with theory at that historic juncture. The new passions and new forces---the new organizational form of the proletariat -- was the Commune yet the others besides Marx couldn't practice dialectics so they couldn't see it. Now to Lenin and the Bolsheviks...here it is a sticky wicket...it is very true that there could have been no Russian

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Revolution if there had been no Bolshevik Party, but the historic question that I can't seem to answer is ...did the Bolsheviks understand Lenin's new universal "To a man" and if so why did they turn into their opposite so fast after 1917??? You have given us one answer---that only Lenin understood it because only he had studied Hegel and seen the dialectical core of Marxism to be self-development and second negativity---but then why were the Bolsheviks able to make the revolution, i.e., why were they able to understand the importance of the new subject and the new organizational form of the proletariat as subject, the Soviet?? It is true that Lenin had to win over the Bolsheviks to the idea of "All power to the Soviets" and it is also true that you have said that Lenin understood dialectics but failed historically by not letting the others know his method, thus they could not know how he arrived at the "All power to the Soviets" and the "To a man", but this explanation does not seem to be enough to go on---ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF TODAY AND NEWS AND LETTERS. Because today you are working on Philosophy and Revolution and trying to get us to understand dialectical method and yet we are having trouble both in understanding the book itself and in practicing dialectics...The more I think over these three historic periods, the more I understand the urgency of the book and why you are having so much trouble with it. But some big questions remain---~~first~~, if both the Workingman's Association failed and the Bolsheviks failed how can we expect to succeed? Again, you have given a clue to this when you explained to us about each age gaining a maturity that comes from ~~it~~ it being a later historical period...and also we are at least trying to understand method though we have not been doing so well. I don't feel I can answer this question although I think everything we are doing is on the right track. But, still, another question remains about Philosophy and Revolution which I brought up to Mike and Bonnie and which they did not agree with---that is that with Part III of the book on the new passions and new forces the element that seems to be missing that was present with the other two historical examples from Marx and Lenin is that of the new organizational form of the subject. It doesn't seem to me that either ~~in~~ in Eastern Europe or Africa or the US or anywhere we have seen a new organizational form of subjectivity to rival the Commune or the Soviets. And, is this why Part III is so hard to write?

*They didn't fail*  
*in fact*  
*they failed*  
*in any way*

To end this, I must relate that Mike stopped me here by saying that I have always had a tendency to put things off for the future as if time would tell the answer, but that Mike felt that the only answer to my question is not in the proletariat but in what we do everyday to practice dialectics. He became as concrete as I was abstract by saying how are we going to achieve proletarianization etc. etc. etc. And, he went back to history to show how the Bolsheviks had to show the Soviets the power which was implicit in them. This statement reminded me of something you said last week about everything being a question of making explicit what is already there... But, Raya, I know my abstract tendencies ~~and~~ as opposed to Mike's and I also understand that this is what Mao's subjectivity does---it puts off for the future what can only be accomplished by a working out of the dialectic -- but my questions still remain about the historic challenge for us as organization and the new organizational forms of the revolutionary subject.

*no*

I hope you will get a chance to shed some light on our discussion and that it might help you in writing Part III. I also hope that in the next few months I will better understand (transcendence as objective movement) and begin to work out the perspective of proletarianism in NY.

Best,

*Will*