

March 5, 1980

One More "Footnote" On the Concept of
Permanent Revolution--and another on
the Neue Rheinische Zeitung

Dear Friends: (Youth especially)

The reason for the quotation marks around the word, "footnote," is that, naturally, Marx's concept of permanent revolution, not Trotsky's should have been the subject of all the voluminous books on the subject still coming off the press. However, I am referring not only to that most profound 1850 Address to the Communist League, but this time focusing just on "tactics," on "little things" surrounding the "publication" of the Address. Since the 1848-49 revolution had already been defeated, it had to be done clandestinely. It was therefore issued as a "leaflet." (ALL YOU LEAFLET WRITERS JUST THINK OF PRODUCING ONE BUILT ON THAT MODEL!) In 1851, when the worker revolutionaries and leaders, Marx included, were arrested, the leaflet or circular was found on some of the arrested members. Whereupon a bourgeois newspaper decided to publish it. AND IN BOOK FORM IT WAS ISSUED BY THE POLICE OFFICIALS NAMED WERNUTH AND STIEBER!

I came upon this fact and others in the process of translating Luxemburg's speech at the 1907 Congress, which we have always praised and rightly so as she stressed there that 1905, far from being just a continuation of 1848, had initiated a whole series of totally new proletarian revolutions in the 20th century. Today, however, I became dissatisfied on one aspect which related to the Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Where both Luxemburg and we had always stressed what conclusions Marx drew from the 1848 defeat, Luxemburg here was putting too much emphasis, I felt, on the subtitle of Marx's paper, "Organ of the Democracy," as if "extreme left wing of The Democracy" as Marx used it, hadn't meant the proletarian class struggle. In any case, I decided to footnote the first mention Luxemburg makes to the Neue Rheinische Zeitung.

And here comes the exciting "discovery" of something we all know so well--Marx's WAGE LABOR AND CAPITAL. But, in getting reacquainted with the pamphlet the "new" fact that jumped out at me was that its first publication was as a series of articles in that "Organ of Democracy." Reading it this time as I was searching for some of the articles in Neue Rheinische Zeitung and feeling how very internationalist that "organ of the democracy" was--there was not a single revolution anywhere in Europe, be it France or Hungary, Germany or Belgium, that wasn't there subjected to an analysis as well as a lesson drawn for action; and then reading about its last, 301st number which came out in red coloring, which declared that its "final word will always and everywhere be the emancipation of the working class," I turned to Marx's introductory words to Wage Labor and Capital which declared since the paper addresses itself directly to the proletariat, "We wish to be understood by workers...and shall not presuppose even the most elementary notions of political economy." Whereupon it turns out that what he meant by "most elementary notions of political economy" meant he would not use academic jargon. Moreover, where we, even now, regard the pamphlet as an "economic work," Marx in that introduction was stressing that it is the political issues of the day that made him embark on this series since, first, what must be considered are "the colossal political forms in 1848," and, with it, the counter-revolution since "Europe, with the defeat of the revolutionary workers, had relapsed into its old double slavery, the Anglo-Russian slavery."

Now, please tell me, where, no matter how hard I looked at today, could I have found so relevant to the convention's projection of a new N&L combining

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theory and practice as the publication of Wage Labor and Capital in the popular daily, Neue Rheinische Zeitung on April 4, 1849. There is hardly a day that the work on the RL book doesn't throw some new illumination on the problematic of our day, be it on Iran or WL, be it on Theory/Practice or Youth, be it on Black dimension or N&L projection of a 12-pager. Naturally, this doesn't mean that the subjects, topics of the book, as such "call forth" such a relationship. Rather it is the way Marxist-Humanism recreates it. But, since truth is concrete, it is no accident whatever that it is these subjects and that historic period and this stage of our organization's growth and the way we prepare for the convention and the new tasks it will set that coalesced. Just listen, for example, to what those 1905 revolutionaries, this time Lenin, had to say in their impatience about the course of the revolution and its old guard: "Go to the youth, gentlemen! That is the only remedy! Otherwise--I give you my word--you will be too late (everything tells me that) and will be left with 'learned' memoranda, plans, charts, schemes, and magnificent recipes, but without an organization, without a living cause. Go to the youth!"

Yours, RAYA

I will have a great deal more to say on this and that at the convention and so, I hope, will you.

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