

REB MINUTES, JUNE 15, 1977

Present: All, plus Bob as siter-in

Agenda: I Leadership and Politicalization as Ground for Organizational Growth; by Raya; II Unfinished Business; III G&W

I-Raya said that the reason that the last point of a Plenum -- discussion on leadership -- is first here is due not only to the fact that the report I was supposed to make on West Coast NEB was, in the main, written up, but because both the objective world and the subjective world is permeated by the urgency of "Time is Running Out." And the theoretical void since Lenin's death -- a whole 53 years of it -- is to be considered when we talk about the weaknesses of the leadership this year. We will therefore divide this talk in three: 1) Europe (especially Portugal) and U.S.; 2) Needed politicalization; 3) What to do between June and September as well as a brief look into Perspectives following the Plenum.

1) There is no doubt that the highest point reached this year on the question of leadership was the trip to Portugal, especially the role of Bess. Eugene could speak more fluently and more comprehensively, and certainly knew how to project Marxist-Humanism without ever separating philosophy and organization, but Bess was the one, as an Old Bolshevik, who not only did not separate philosophy and organization, but politicalization was equally integral both to the presentations, the establishment of new relations, and taking the measure of both individuals and organizations. Naturally, we cannot forget that the reason we could get such a good hearing on the Absolute Idea as New Beginning, though we had not established organization-to-organization relationships is the fact that the objective situation brought us to a country where the revolution was not destroyed, not destroyed; it may not be altogether ongoing and they are forced to function under the whip of counter-revolution, but nothing, absolutely nothing, can substitute for the mass movement in a revolutionary situation, even when that revolution has not been finished.

On the other hand, we must be under no illusions about the abstract nature of Absolute Idea, not for us, of course, who always begin with "as new beginning" and never separate it from the concreteness of the activity and thought of NSL Committees. But it is abstract in the sense of they not being compelled to be concrete. They weren't asked to do anything except, at best, publish. They weren't asked to join an organization. And even the relations we did ask for were of necessity left loose. I repeat it in so many ways because we will not otherwise see the extreme urgency of needed politicalization, without which organizational growth would be all the more difficult. The best proof of that is England. Here is a place where, in Scotland, we have a full Marxist-Humanist who has been projecting Marxist-Humanism since M&F; and in London, we have a new full Marxist-Humanist who is young and does not have too much organizational experience, and yet it isn't that lack of organizational experience which makes it difficult to establish a Marxist-Humanist group -- it is the fact that the mediation between philosophy and organization is that needed politicalization, i.e. not just expressing Philosophy and Revolution "in general", but specifically the analysis of current events and battling with other tendencies. I think a new day is beginning. All agreed to have the new pamphlet of the four chapters on Capital from M&F, not only as a general topic as it was in M&F, but very specifically and integrally prefaced by an analysis of today's world crisis as related both to Marx's Capital and to an attack on Mandel's introduction to the new translation of Capital. It is also to have an appendix on Tony Cliff's Lenin, again related to Capital. I have written to Harry, asking him to please write a Foreword, and of course we want to have it a joint publication, which means not only our address and Harry's, but Dave's Post Office box in London.

Now then, Eugene asked what was the relationship between Absolute Idea as New Beginnings and the Spirit in Self-Estrangement, and I preferred at the moment not to give a direct answer, because we cannot until we have seriously grappled with:

2) Needed Politicalization. It's time we got down to the concrete weaknesses that I see as the main weakness in the leadership. Think of it. We have produced the Philosophic Political Letters which were supposed to be the transition point from Philosophy and Revolution to challenging other analyses on the world scene. We sold some and we certainly had local discussions on each and we no doubt know "exactly" what each says. And yet I insist we do not know them at all, because what we know are the results of, not a process, not the methodology, not a projection especially as a battle of ideas.

You know, there is one paragraph in the Phenomenology in the Spirit in Self-Estranged world, on the Ego's multitudinous alienations, as it battles that absolute contradiction between Individual and Universal that Hegel calls "self-absorbed uncommunicativeness". I hope that that doesn't pervade the leadership when it comes to projecting these PPLs; and certainly not to begin with the most empty reaction of "Oh, we have new things to analyze now"; you won't have them until the PPLs have been absorbed and projected as process, as methodology, as well as the philosophic ground for today's event.

Or, take the New Essays. It's true we tried to start a discussion by Mike's column in Two Worlds, but if it went anywhere I failed to hear about it. Who got the "new" in LT or Hegel essay? That was certainly both a concretization of P&R, chapter I, and a manifestation of how to battle revolutionary ideas even with the bourgeois intellectuals. And that doesn't mention either the Mac chapter, or the polemic on Marxism. If you think that "knowing" what it says and selling a lot, as N.Y. did, because other intellectuals want it for their polemics, means politicalization and challenges for membership, you couldn't be more wrong. The perfect proof of that is the failure to make anything out of the Interim Bulletin. L.A. was creative enough to produce, but none took it up seriously enough as if everybody was already glad the classes were over. The seriousness of this weakness, this needed politicalization, can be seen at the center, too. Let me make it as sharp as possible by seeming to talk on another subject -- popularization and why I oppose it at this stage. Just as Hegel saw an affinity between such seeming opposites as the Delphic Oracle and the witches in Macbeth because both were forked-tongued, so I see that popularization and artifice are akin, and please don't forget Hegel's definition of the artifice as "darkness of thought mated to clearness of expression". And another thing about Hegel, in this very period when we're emphasizing moving away from Hegel, (i.e. stressing the Marxism and the revolution, not just in thought but in life) is that this bourgeois who created such a great revolution in thought, and was so profound on absolute as unity of theory and practice, was the very one who not only attacked all the empty absolutes of his predecessors but would often stress concrete as against sinking into "the abyss of the absolute".

Bess had a wonderful expression at the expanded joint NEB meeting: "Philosophy has to have a home." And only when that home is a revolutionary organization can philosophy and revolution be one. It is of the essence that that becomes the philosophic ground for the Black Thought pamphlet, both as concrete and organizational, both as philosophy and revolution.

Finally, let me just give one difference between Chapter 1 in P&R and the HSA Essay, which would give you an indication of the relationship between AI as New Beginnings and Spirit in Self-Estrangement. You know, I'm sure, that in chapter 1, I speak of Absolute negativity as new beginnings, while in HSA I speak of Absolute Idea as New Beginning. The fact that I could bring in revolution, even when I did not speak of negativity, as the new beginning, shows how negativity totally permeates everything Hegel wrote and on which Marx built his new continent of thought and revolution. We want, however, to concentrate on negativity, and not only second negativity, as the absolute, which is already the new, but both first and second negativity as we face reality, that is to say, the Spirit in Self-Estrangement. It is out of this alien, real world, out of these absolute contra-

REB June 15, 1977 page 3

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dictions, in battling them, that we reach the roads to revolution. We cannot jump to the conclusion, go to the Absolute too fast, forget or in any way try to skip over any stages, any confrontations, the mediations to the Absolute. It is for this reason that we must stay with the Spirit in Self-Estrangement. After all, Marx "translated" Hegel's "Spirit's urgency" as Reality, necessitating Revolution.

3) Now let's break it down to what we'll do between now and September with the whiff of what comes after. First, beginning with the international reports, we must manifest that needed politicalization in the way we present these bulletins not only as formal discussion but to all contacts we visit and activities in which we are engaged, whether that be the Perspectives to "a factory unit" or the WFFF to a single woman's liberationist. Second, which is really first in that it is ground for everything else, is the preparation for the Plenum as an organizational question, stretching over everything from the relationship of spontaneity to organization to the attack on party-vanguardism. Third, Marx's Capital as presented in M&F and as it will be prefaced in the new pamphlet, is not to wait for discussion at the point of publication, but we must include discussions of it in the pre-plenary period. Fourth, and most important, organizational discussion on the pamphlet for 1978 -- Frantz Fanon and American Black Thought -- is to begin on the new form created in the West Coast discussion with the authors. I believe that the 1877 pamphlet suffered from the fact that everyone is waiting for it to be completed before discussing it. The June 25 joint meeting with Chicago and actual publication will, of course, set that right. But we must not delay that long for the Black Thought pamphlet. Finally, the needed politicalization, of course, is not restricted to the leadership; the organization will either not only absorb but practice that or we will not grow.

15063