

REB Meeting of May 8, 1984

Agenda: I. The 49-50 Pamphlet as a Totality, and Quotes for going to Press; II. Ramifications of Center's move to Chicago, as it Affects NY and Bay Area; III. Draft Convention Report on News & Letters by Eugene; IV. Ongoing Activities; V. G&W

Generally, I speak at the end of a major report about the form. This time I want to speak about only one point and that is where Eugene said he had not yet worked out the last part. I consider the question of Theory/Practice as the unique characteristic of the whole N&L paper, of each writer and not just the columnist of Theory/Practice. I believe it is our weakest point. It is definitely both the most difficult to work out and the least understood, much less dialectically practiced. One of the events of the past which you may not know is that every one of the intellectuals -- and I'm referring to those who did sympathize and even helped support N&L -- opposed the Two Worlds column. It wasn't only Johnsonism that opposed my serious analysis of the Beria purge for the very first issue of Correspondence where I predicted that Khrushchev, not Malenkov, would replace Stalin. No, that type of attitude characterizes all intellectuals. They wish to discuss theory only among intellectuals (and without diving down too far) and "popularize" for the masses. When I established as a principle that a workers' paper was to be where theory/practice were broken down and insisted that if intellectuals were serious about theory they not only had to submit to a critique by the rank and file but had to begin where the masses were by contributing the highest kind of theory to illuminate, not "popularize", the objective situation Marxistically, they all went the other way. Now, when it comes to ourselves, we seem to all agree. In fact, however, we do not work hard at theory and keep taking it for granted as if repeating conclusions can be called theoretic development. What is worse, we portray activity as if that is theory. Theory is a very hard taskmaster. Taking it for granted instead of going through the "labor, patience, suffering of the negative" is what makes it hard to project the uniqueness of RLWLKM, the whole body of ideas of Marxist-Humanism, the trilogy of revolution, the challenge to post-Marx Marxists. It is this which needs further serious development, especially in the new home of N&L: Chicago. We had better begin to do so at the convention, whether it is for N&L's further development or the projection of the new collection of WL essays, or for bringing it into all of our activities.

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May 13, 1984

Dear B

You know, I'm sure, how not only sad we all felt at the loss of CD, who cannot be replaced, but also how we worried whether the two--Felix and you--we proposed take over the Worker's Journal as Workshop Talks would do as they shoulder that responsibility. I trust you're as happy as we are that has worked out so well. I wish especially to congratulate you both because you've done magnificently as worker and thinker and bringing in that new force--young, immigrant worker, sweatshops.

I do hope you're planning to contribute a discussion article to the upcoming Bulletin both about your experience these months of so important a task, and to the character of the NEWS & LETTERS as a whole. You may also wish to discuss with Inez how she remembers both the character of the paper and her experience as a columnist; it was not an easy job to convince her then that workers, specifically women workers and young, like she, could handle --and she came up with the title for her column, The Working Day, after we spent a few days on that chapter in Capital.

Your column in this issue made me think that perhaps the column, as Reason as well as Force, should have been bestowed on Workshop Talks, but then you had that magnificent quotation from Connolly when we did decide on the name of Workshop Talk and that great Irish revolutionary declared that when revolution is in the air, revolution is indeed the only practical thing to discuss and do.

Yours,

*Ray*

cc: Ann, Kevin, John, Ray

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June 19, 1984

Dear Eugene:

Because I just spoke to you, and definitely know that I will see you Sunday at 12:30 PM, and have already also given you an indication both of the imperative need for you to have "vacation" (!) so that you speak fully on your paper report for the convention & and by fully, of course, it means more philosophy), I can make this brief -- which I should have done by making this sentence into four. It will make it easier for us to spend those two hours if you know the subject I want to discuss with you.

It isn't only a question that you left out Part IV, because even when you indicated it in your Bulletin V article, I really don't think you did project theory in N&L or what is new. Oh, you mentioned the new columns, the new subjects, and of course Chicago, but philosophically, unless new is projected as a new stage of cognition, a new stage of practice -- and if you'll pardon me, a new "personality"-- in self-development, the new that you list sounds like a mere list of new facts, and not in the Hegelian sense. Instead, I want to show you how all the facts you have amassed that do have to be told, could connect with the "old" and yet be so new as to be unique. Thus:

1) You could begin by saying that, of course, one cannot take up 30 years of N&L in 45 minutes, or even all that you want to say about this one year, and yet there is a way of remembering what from the very start established our uniqueness by saying what is the truth to this day. For example, the unique combination of worker and intellectual, the Black production worker as editor, the internationalism in the National Question, and the greeting of a new world stage as the movement from practiced as itself a form of theory, not only holds true today, but here is how the truly, truly totally new this year, which could have been presented as tragic, is not. We have lost our worker-editor. But when you look at the new that is manifested in the dramatic change on page 1, you can see how the principle holds and how we transformed the tragedy into a forward movement. Here you mention Workshop Talker and Black World and CD, having been for it and having helped it be in the last months of his life; then you ask them to look at the new logo "Theory/Practice" and you say that that certainly is a great extension of worker-intellectual, because now we are saying not just that RD has a column called Theory/Practice, but the whole paper is designated as such -- and you could see that coming the year before, with Essay articles, and with the fact of the transformation of an 8 pager to a 12 pager, where there was no separation between all the new voices from below and the unity of theory/practice, as showing a movement from theory as well as from practice.

2) Whether at this point you project into methodology, dialectics should definitely be stressed as not only a tool but the ground for the Absolute. And again, you give an example that is not abstract, singling out something like self-development and again pointing to the new -- the latest, which is in fact the first PTB, bulletin -- and MJ's development of queuing an indication of all four volumes of N&L. Or you could take as an example of I/U

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Chicago and WL as seen in the Eleanor Marx article. Indeed, take off from that to stress that ~~many~~ serious Essay-Articles can become mini-pamphlets; that certainly everything from ACOT and WBA and AA have first appeared in the paper -- that is another manifestation of the uniqueness of our paper.

3) There has to be a projection of next year, especially the new features, which includes sales and not just distributions of N&L, so again you can return here, too, to principles established from the start, decentralization and editing sessions in each local at least once a month, stressing that discussions of the previous issues should be whole, which they haven't been because the easiest thing to do is leave out the Theory/Practice column and that is exactly what should not be done. The character of the paper has certainly changed with each book, and yet that development of theory, far from "taking the place" of hearing the voices from below has in each case led to more stories from the shops, the youth, etc. -- as well as to a truly global extension both of what we reflect of world developments and what we project on Marxist-Humanism for the specific revolts in specific countries, from Grenada to Iran, from EE to Japan, etc. In a word, there is really a massive accumulation of events that is reported nowhere else. Furthermore, the internationalism likewise is not separated from philosophy or from organization; we remain the only ones who print our Perspectives directly in the paper. Take the question this year, and we begin this year with November, 1983, which ended the Marx centenary and printed the CD In Memoriam. That In Memoriam must be seen again as a concrete fusion of Theory/Practice and again both in the fact of his life, and what it continues to mean to us, and the fact that so many non-members could come to the In Memoriam and sound as if they were part of Indignant Heart.

4) Outside of the fact that we overburden Mike as much as we overburden you, I don't know why he didn't contribute a very serious article on RVs. Perhaps you can get together with him and find some way for you to ~~write~~ project the process in which RVs are composed. Composed is the wrong word. And you as chairman of the PTC should in any case have something to say on RVs as to what it means for the paper as a whole. Once again, we come to the question of principles from our beginnings. The very concept of RVs instead of ~~many~~ letters to the editor shows the complete abolition of the concept of the backwardness of the workers. At the same time, there is editing, plenty of editing, not because we change what they say but because we are conscious of philosophy of revolution and make sure that if it hadn't been said by a reader, who is not a member, it can be said by a reader who is a member. That immediately brings up the question of what we discuss when we sell papers, ask for subs, and tell them that we want their views; that they too are part of this paper.

Well, I must end this. See you Sunday.