

June 5, 1985

Dear Ted:

You are, I'm confident, aware of all the deadlines staring me in the face and will therefore forgive me for: 1) not commenting on your thesis on "Absolute Negativity, Labor, and the Dialectics of Revolution"; 2) not having time now either to make a serious contribution other than to say I was impressed with it and fully expect you to easily pass your field exam; 3) on the one thing I am concerned with, as an immediate, -- your suggestion in your letter of 5/25/85 of how you would change your title, if you were to extend this thesis into a doctoral dissertation -- I will comment now but even that will have to be very Briefly.

First, I have been working a whole month on the 30 years of N&L and have decided that I couldn't possibly cover it all in one article and so I'm submitting for the next issue only the part through the 1960s. Naturally, in one respect, it would be a guide for you, but, but, but... I really do not think that the way you propose to extend it is correct. Here is what I mean. The question of Labor and especially the unique combination of worker and intellectual we established for both theory and practice is not -- repeat, is not -- a question of the intellectual doing a piece on Labor other than as an intellectual finally appreciating that that is the source for his/her work, but it does not in any way relieve him/her of the responsibility for raising theory to the point of philosophy. Charles Denby was the worker; never once did I pretend to be that; Charles Denby was not only continuing with his sbrries and experiences but learning from me the appreciation for philosophy, so that he could conclude on his own what Labor, philosophically, signified. Do you have anybody approaching the stature of Denby? Do you have any worker, a production worker with whom you have established the kind of relationship where he would disclose his thoughts? The kind of relationship we each want to establish with workers would be both in their struggles or on the unemployment line. It is not for a doctoral thesis.

Take the simple word, Labor, and see why it is correct in the title of the research paper you wrote. That is to say, you were connecting Absolute Negativity and Dialectics of Revolution with it, and you were doing it as what you are. It would be wrong if you took that title and instead of Absolute Negativity substituted the word, Marxist-Humanism, and then thought that you as the intellectual Marxist-Humanist could speak "for" the laborer. I don't mean that you would want to do that, and I'm sure that you would argue that you don't intend to speak "for" by quoting what the worker says, but believe me everybody knows how to quote for their own purposes and the Stalinists who know Marxist language are experts at it. You had better think of concretizing and developing and arguing with others on the question of Dialectics, showing that there is a dialectic of thought as well as of revolution and that the two are inseparable, and that, indeed, would be a great contribution if that were your focus for extending your research into a doctoral thesis.

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I must also be quite hurried on the comments about suggestions for the Egyptologist. Naturally, I would love nothing better than being translated into Arabic, and if he can do that with RLWLKM that would be a genius of a stroke. But you cannot forget that the Middle East, to the Arabic side, has unfortunately, ever since the end of WWII, meant anti-Jewish, which they claim is only anti-Israel, but that doesn't really tell the story. For example, in one of my analyses of Nasser's The Philosophy of Revolution, which I did praise, and in fact, in trying to prove that it was not a racial conflict and that the abstractions of philosophy meant revolution and not just an officer coup, I laid great stress on the fact that it was Nasser, the young officer, who was carrying on negotiations for the Farouk government about its capitulation. (See what I wrote about Nasser in my June 8, 1967 Political-Philosophic Letter #2.) Nevertheless, up until Lebanon, in which, so far as I'm concerned Israel acted like a neo-fascist state, all my letters on the Middle East showed a bent toward Israel on the basis of what it was originally when they fought for freedom from British imperialism, and I hardly think that would endear me to an Egyptologist. When they like Humanism, it is always when I speak about it in other countries, not their own, and I imagine that is the attraction of RLWLKM to Egyptologists and, of course, the fact that I am very much for the Third World. I think you should just leave it there; getting RLWLKM translated into Arabic would be a great feat for Marxist-Humanism -- but I will leave it up to you whether you think anything else should be added to what he should take along.

I'm sorry this has to be so hurried, and I certainly don't want to end without saying that not only is the SLC local the "tops" with us right now, but I'm determined that you do not have any immediate plans of any sort to leave it at this stage, because you are the key to its growth, continuity, and development.

Yours,



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Sat. 5-25-85

Dear Raya,

I have been thinking that if the SLC local is to continue, and re-create the unique relation of worker to intellectual that characterizes N&Ls, one way to do that would be to force the organizer of the local to be more concrete on labor. So I am thinking that I might extend the essay I sent you by reviewing 30 yrs. of N&Ls on Labor in order to show the Dialectics of Revolutions as we have worked it out there. I would also need to begin with the quote from the 1941 essay "Labor and Society", carry that through the 44-5 debates in the AER, to the breakthrough in the 1949-50 Miner's General Strike which raised the question "What kind of labor is human?" I also am thinking of the new book where you say that the dialectics of revolution are true for other Subjects, as well as Woman. The process of writing the dissertation could also become part of the organizational activity of the local as non-academics might be consulted, that is on distributions of the paper, and follow through meetings. I may then want to change the title I am working with now to "Marxist-Humanism, Labor, and the Dialectics of Revolution". (I am submitting an abstract of the paper I have now to the Dec meeting of the ASSA in NYC) - What do you think of this topic?

I do not yet know how to work out the relationship of Marx's Math Mss. to Grundrisse and the break in the concept of theory, and it may be too much to try and work out in addition to 30 yrs. of News & Letters. Yet, I am meeting with Joe Johnson, a sympathizer who comes to meetings, (perhaps even convention), and he is working with me on the Math Mss. We will continue to discuss this, and his work criticizing science/education. He is an instructor in the Math Dept. here. Ernest Randa has agreed to chair my dissertation! He is a subscriber to N&L. He will be retiring this summer and his wife is trying to put him on a "greased chute" to Egypt where his son Ernie Jr. is doing research as an egyptologist. Randa is a great scholar of the Middle East, especially Egypt, and after teaching about that area for decades his wife is insisting that he go while his son is there to really get to live and feel Egypt. Anyway, he suggested to me that it was important that your work be translated into Arabic and published there. If he couldn't do that he suggested that his son, who has extensive contacts in the library and scholarly world there might introduce him to librarians who would order the Archives and our literature. Do you have any suggestions as to what he might take? So far he has focussed on RLWLKM, and he says that the amount of material he can take with him is limited. (Departing July 22)

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ps. I would re-work the essay I sent you as the first part of the dissertation and then extend that to Labor and Denby's contribution. Colletti, I hear, has returned to Marxism, this time as a Hegelian! I am no longer so interested in answering him or the Popperians, but look forward to showing what we are for.

Re-organizationally yours, Ted

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