

2-6-3-7

BULLETIN  
NO. 2

DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE BOOK  
*MARXISM AND FREEDOM*  
METHOD, HERITAGE AND PRINCIPLES

*june 1958*

2637

7 6 3 8

Draft Resolution on the Book

MARXISM AND FREEDOM: METHOD, HERITAGE AND PRINCIPLES

Introduction

At the founding convention of NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES we both established the paper and set for ourselves the task of putting forth our own interpretation of Marxism in book form.

In our Constitution, which we adopted then, on July 8, 1956, we wrote: "We hold that the method of Marxism is the guide for our growth and development. Just as the struggle for the shortening of the Working Day and the Civil War in the United States gave shape to Marx's greatest theoretical work, CAPITAL, so today, Marxism is in the lives and aspirations of the working people. We hold it to be the duty of each generation to interpret Marxism for itself because the problem is not what Marx wrote in 1843 or 1883 but what Marxism is today. We reject the attempt of both Communists and the Administration to identify Marxism with Communism. Communism is totalitarianism and the exact opposite of Marxism which is a theory of liberation.

"Heretofore, American radical groups have failed to establish the theory of Marxism on native grounds despite the historic contributions the American workers made to Marx's thinking. We have therefore undertaken to set forth our own interpretation, in book form. It will express," we said, "Marxism as a world view and as an exposition of the workers' struggles in America in this period of Automation. Our concern is, of necessity, with the American workers and their strivings for a better life."

What was projected in July 1956 is a reality today. The book has been written, published, and a tour to publicize its ideas was undertaken. It opened avenues never before reached by NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES.

I--Toward A New Unity of Theory and Practice

With the publication of MARXISM AND FREEDOM in 1958 we have laid serious claim to become founders of a new Marxist Humanist movement. Here, in brief, are its fundamental contributions:

1) For the first time Marxism is re-established in its original form of a new Humanism. This is not made a matter only of historic past, but integral to our own age of Automation.

2) For the first time the American roots of Marxism have been set forth seriously and fundamentally. From it we can see clearly both the impact of the Civil War in the United States on Marx's greatest writing, CAPITAL, and our own dual tradition of Abolitionism and Marxism.

The Negro Question has ever been the most critical one in this country. Again, this is not made a matter of recounting past history but a question of the present struggles of the Negro masses today. Nor is it left as a "Negro Question" but is included as an integral part of the struggle for total freedom.

The American roots, moreover, were, even in Marx's day firmly connected with the struggle of labor in general for the 8 Hour Day. The struggle around production relations remains decisive. For example, after building the CIO, in a heroic movement to control their own lives and conditions of labor, the American workers found themselves shackled the more firmly to capitalist production discipline by the labor bureaucracy. The workers' ceaseless efforts to abolish what Marx called the "barracks-like" discipline of capitalist production relations with their inevitable consequences of brutal speed-up in the factory and mass unemployment are recorded in this book both as past history and as present struggles against the labor bureaucracy.

3) For the first time dialectical philosophy is established as integral to us in 1958; as it was to Lenin in 1914-24; and as it was to Marx in 1843-83. This is further concretized by the fact that what Lenin kept private -- his Philosophic Notebooks -- have now been published in English as an Appendix to the book.

What is altogether new in this total philosophic approach, what

-3-

could only come to be because of the maturity of our own age, is the consciousness of the fact that there is a movement not alone from theory to practice, but from practice to theory. This opened our eyes to see how far the workers had advanced in the three decades since Lenin's death while the theoretical movement had come to a near standstill. Just as there is a logic to the development of the objective movement, so there is one to the development of thought. The new in this truism spelled out for our generation is that workers have thoughts of their own. The questions they posed in America on the kind of labor men are to perform, while those in East Germany raised the question: Can man be free in this age of totalitarianism? serve as those "compulsions to thought" that forced us to open, so to speak, the last chapter of Hegel's Logic on the Absolute Idea. A materialistic reading of that, presented in Marxism and Freedom, does for our age what Lenin did for his age with the analysis of the law of transformation into opposite. But, whether or not the Absolute Idea, as "the unity of theory and practice," is the ground on which the new Marxist Humanist movement is to stand, the point is that philosophy can not be left as the province of the theoreticians. The integrality of philosophy to Marxism must be explicitly, and not only implicitly, acknowledged. It is as crucial for our age as are the world-wide historic traditions of the class struggle.

The seal of the bankruptcy of thought on the part of the old radical movement was, of necessity, not confined to thought. It can be seen most clearly in the fact that orthodox Trotskyism is ending as the left cover for Communism, while Shachtmanite Trotskyism is hurrying back to the Social Democracy. Thus each has chosen one of the two poles of world capital to hold on to. The filling of the theoretical void in the Marxist movement has thus become a matter of the greatest urgency to the very struggle for liberation from exploitation, as well as for the global struggle for the minds of men.

4) For the first time since the workers state in Russia was transformed into its opposite -- a state capitalist tyranny -- the question the workers have been asking -- WHAT HAPPENS AFTER? -- was answered frankly and comprehensively both with an analysis of the trade union dispute of 1920-21 and the relationship of the so-called vanguard to the masses. Thus the whole question of "vanguardism" was taken out of its fetishistic frame and placed in the concrete historical development of the two decades, 1903-1923, so that any contemporary Marxist group has a solid foundation against which to measure itself.

5) For the first time the analysis of Russia as a state capitalist

system -- which was a first in its field when it was done in 1941 -- was tied firmly not only to the actual production relations in Russia but to the revisions of Marx's CAPITAL as well as his Early Philosophic Essays.

6) For the first time not alone the economy -- state capitalism -- but also the technology -- Automation -- are analyzed comprehensively. Moreover, it is done in an entirely new way -- the attitudes of workers themselves as written by workers in NEWS & LETTERS, as spoken by workers during discussions around various chapters in the book, as dictated by workers to correspondents during actual strike actions, including wild-cats. Thus our Marxist heritage of the unity of theory and practice is not an abstraction but is an actual reflection of the never-ending strivings to abolish capitalism's inhuman separation between mental and manual labor.

Finally, we established another first in the method in which the book was written. As the book's Introduction puts it: "No theoretician today more than ever before, can write out of his own head. Theory requires a constant shaping and reshaping of ideas on the basis of what workers themselves are doing and thinking ... Because we live in an age of absolutes -- on the threshold of absolute freedom out of the struggle against absolute tyranny -- the compelling need for a new unity of theory and practice...dictates the method by which this book was written." This is significant not only because the discussions the NEWS & LETTERS Committees have had around the drafts of the book for the past two years have made this a collective effort. That is important and a "first." But, above that, is the fact that the objective mass movement of the miners strike in 1949-50, the actual East German revolution of 1953 transformed the study from a Marxist economic study of Russian state capitalism to a Marxist Humanist study of 200 years of man's struggle for freedom the world over.

Just as NEWS & LETTERS is the daily, practical, present-day expression of the continuation of this heritage, so MARKISM AND FREEDOM is a link in the theoretical heritage. However, the fact that we are the rightful inheritors of Marxism does not make us into an "elite." Quite the contrary. As the book makes clear, we are only moving toward a new unity of theory and practice, toward which there are strong objective pulls and subjective movements, of which we are only a small part. While we hope to become a polarizing force, we recognize: (1) that there will be those "greater than us" who will come forward in this unification of theory and practice, and (2) that the only ones who can

possibly bring it to life are the masses themselves. Only when that is a reality do you have a new society.

## II--Opening New Avenues: Nationally and Internationally

### A. Nationally.

The conspiracy of silence that surrounded the publication of the book was unexpected in the sense that even we had not expected such total political control over nominally non-political channels of book reviewing. It became clear that since even ordinary channels are closed to us that we would have to force open some doors. We ourselves had to take responsibility for it and this turned out most successfully on the West Coast because the greatest amount of labor was put in there -- labor in thinking out new ways of approach and labor in persistent log-work. It paid off.

The West Coast tour cleared many roads that were not open to NEWS & LETTERS:

- 1) The most important was the response of the youth on university campuses -- response in numbers and response in the maturity of the questions asked. Two thousand were thus addressed.
- 2) The most spectacular, although very brief, was of course the TV appearance which is supposed to have reached a quarter of a million. Whether we take their own rating at face value or not, it is certainly true that many more heard of MARXISM AND FREEDOM through that medium than would have through any other means.
- 3) Radio. This was one medium that was not restricted to the West Coast, but also was opened to us in Detroit. However, where in Detroit, it was a panel -- and a rude and ignorant one -- where the author only had a few minutes of the half hour of radio time, in San Francisco nearly the entire 30 minutes was hers to expound the ideas of MARXISM AND FREEDOM.
- 4) One book review in a metropolitan paper appeared; one "interview" type of write-up; many campus lecture reports. Of the latter -- the

\*Not to be underestimated -- though many fewer in number -- is the breakthrough in the South, where addresses were made to two university classes in West Virginia.

one on the American roots of Marxism in the Berkeley paper, and the one on the Coming of a New Revolution in Russia -- were outstanding in showing the maturity of the thinking of the American youth. It certainly demands of us follow-ups and all sorts of ingenious ways to try to get to them if we take ourselves seriously as founders of a new Marxist Humanist movement.

B. Internationally

The response in Europe, where the book has not been published, has, in many ways, been on a higher level than here. For example, it was immediately recognized as the foundation for a Marxist regroupment in Italy where immediate and continuous attempts at publication were made and which -- there is no doubt of this at all -- will be brought to fruition in the next few months.

In France no less than six different types of people are interested. There are those who are doing the actual work of trying to get a publisher. There are others who began serious correspondence with us just because they have recognized the fundamental contribution we have made here and wanted to associate with us and get our criticism of their works. One scholar pointed to the fact that he had found the chapters on the impact of the Civil War in the United States and the Illuminations of the Paris Commune very illuminating. For a Frenchman to say an American made a contribution there is high compliment indeed. Arrangements had been made to review the book by one of the outstanding Marxist research workers there when the Algerian coup took place. Whatever that does to MARXISM AND FREEDOM "as a book," there is no doubt at all what extraordinary effect it had on making us serious contenders for a focal point for Marxist regroupment. The great variety of letters that then began to pour into NEWS & LETTERS shows in practice the integrality of book and paper more than theory could do.

In England there have been some orders for the book but thus far no publisher, but the contacts are sufficient to make possible further inroads. From Japan there was an inquiry; from India an acknowledgement. It is only the beginning.

C. What Next: The Indispensability of Theory

We have sold approximately 700 books and the publishers probably no more than 500. With the books sent out for reviews it numbers 1500. Another thousand are still at the printers to be sold, for which we are

responsible for about 500. It is not, however, the debt we owe to the publisher or the sales as such, which must continue and on a more consistent and all-round basis than heretofore, which are the crucial points. The truth is--and unless that permeates each of us completely we will not be able to break through to a higher level of development--the truth is: we have singularly failed to grasp our own achievements and our further perspectives--the need to make explicit what is only implicit in the book. That is to say, theory as a continuous process that does not stop when put in the covers of a book; the paper as that continuing ground.

First is the failure to recognize that just as the proletariat has contributed more than the intellectual to the writing of the book, so he has gained more out of it. And that is true both in the organization and out of it. All one has to do to see that is read the columns of Angela Terrano, Charles Denby, Ethel Dunbar on the book, as well as the article by the steel worker on the termination of the UAW contract. There are many other ways to show this than in writing and, again, the workers are showing it in their own development. Since the intellectual is much more glib in both talking and writing, however, it is not easy for them to penetrate this. Yet, until they do, they will not really fulfill their role as intellectuals--and in this birth-time of history the intellectual is called upon to perform a greater role than ever before since the birth of Marx himself.

Second is the failure to grasp what is the Marxist intellectual's role and contribution. The empiricism of our American heritage is here no help. A complete break with it is what is called for. We have seen some evidences of this in reports like Barbara's and Morgan's, but there is no full comprehension of the two seemingly fundamental opposites in Marxism and Freedom: (1) that there is nothing in the thought of man, even that of a genius, that has not previously been in the activity of the common man; and (2) the indispensibility of theory and hence of the theoretician. The first relates to the fact that dialectics is the philosophic summation of the French Revolution. The second related to the fact that, despite the fact that Marx could not break through to the form of CAPITAL until the activity of the masses in the epoch of 1860-71, his theoretical activity thereafter not only summed up the past but anticipated the future, including the struggles of our age of state-capitalism and automation. But the future of necessity was anticipated only in general. To make it ever more concrete remains the daily task of the theoretician, be he worker or intellectual. Resistance to any recognition of both these truths is what keeps us from spelling out such perspectives as SELLING AS FOUNDERS. Yet this is the prerequisite to the actual building of a movement, which will be the preoccupation of the Resolution on Organization, The Paper and Finances. Here it is sufficient to conclude on the following concrete points:

- 1) The six "firsts" mentioned in Part I of this Resolution must be the basis of our selling as founders.
- 2) Opening New Avenues both as specified above and as letter writing and other much more ingenious ways must continue as the center of our activity.
- 3) The book must serve as the constant point of reference in educationalis which do not stop at merely "learning" but as innovators who can make explicit what is implicit only in the book. Thus, just as specialization on certain subjects, such as China, Latin America, was made the responsibility of the RSB, so it must be extended to the organization as a whole.
- 4) Finally, NEWS & LETTERS is to be taken as seriously for studying as it was taken by the authors of MARXISM AND FREEDOM when they were concerned with breaking down the division between theory and practice.