

DRAFT THESIS ON PERSPECTIVES

ORGANIZATION:
PHILOSOPHY AND REALITY

AND DISCUSSION ARTICLE

"News & Letters, Concretely, as Our Problem", by John

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Draft Thesis

ORGANIZATION: Philosophy and Reality

I. The New in the Objective Situation and in the Mass Movement

The war hawks have won the day; they captured the non-existent mind of the presidency from "the doves" who had counselled against the United States escalating the Vietnam War to the brink of an all-Asian land war. Whether Mao will now enter the war, or whether (which seems more likely) he will let the Vietnamese fight to the last Vietnamese while he persists with his "theoretical" Sino-Soviet conflict, the Vietnam War will continue to circumscribe the civil rights movement in the U.S. Already, our double-tongued President and his equally hypocritical Attorney General have let it be known that they no longer care to continue the pretense of aiding the civil rights movement. As against his "we shall overcome" speech at the time of the Alabama outrages last year, the White House and "Justice" Department this year announced their support not of the Mississippi marchers, but of the brutal hyenas, armed to the teeth, donning gas masks, and, at one and the same time, releasing the harmful chemical into the unarmed, unarmored freedom fighters and kicking them as they fell to the ground.

Within the week it became clear that the President's indifference to the civil rights movement was but one side of the "new" decision-making Johnson. The other side of the Commander-in-Chief, who had ordered the bombing of the Haiphong-Hanoi complex, was revealed in his mailed-fist speech at Omaha on June 30. It is not clear whether this signifies a new period of McCarthyism, or whether this was aimed only at aligning behind his Vietnam policy opponents within the ruling class so that, together, they can "subtly" isolate the revolutionary opponents of the Vietnam War. What is clear is that the decision is not his or theirs. The kinship between that which passes for Yankee "democracy" in Vietnam and what is being dished out here by confederate-draped racists has become so obvious that the civil rights movement is beginning to play an important role in the anti-war struggle. Thus, we face an altogether new stage in the freedom struggles. As a first step, the underlying philosophy of the civil rights movement is being discussed openly for the first time: self-defense vs. non-violence, "black power" vs. integration.

Unfortunately, we also must face the fact that a slogan like "black power" is neither as new as it would appear at first sight, nor does it mean one and the same thing to all who use it. Thus, the Black Panther in Alabama originally was bound to freedom slogans. To demand power for the Negro where it is the majority was so natural a development that Black Panther felt no need to substitute "black power" for "freedom now." The same is true of some of CORE's projects like the Maryland Freedom Union, which concentrate on organizing the unorganized, the underpaid, the unskilled, who have been segregated and therefore are all-black when organized.

On the other hand, when Stokely Carmichael raised the slogan on the Mississippi March it was new because it was shouted in competition with the freedom slogan. It is this which made one rethink how he had gained the chair-

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manship of SNCC, not on the basis of a new philosophy, clearly presented, but in closed session, after John Lewis had been re-elected but, within four hours, was removed. Organizational maneuvers are never more suspect than when they are used to cover up some unstated (because unacceptable) "philosophy". In Detroit, for example, a meeting at which Carmichael was to speak was sponsored by a group with a past that is an admixture of black nationalism and adventurism and which had the hall decorated with innumerable pictures of Malcolm X. The speaker who substituted for Carmichael (who was still marching in Mississippi but who had sent them a telegram of greetings) was busy affirming black power as state power, as state power on a world scale, as state power bending to the "East Wind" to so preposterous a degree that he not only called for the return of Nkrumah to power in Ghana, but asked for support to Sukarno.

Evidently, anything, anything at all, was acceptable to this group so long as it was "colored" as opposed to white, "East" as opposed to "West". Things of this sort happen neither spontaneously, nor accidentally.

No doubt this is not what Carmichael, much less McKissick, meant when they used the slogan. No doubt the fact that Rev. King, who opposes the slogan, was nevertheless also made to sound that way by the bourgeois press, shows the venom in press reportage which has first now caught the depth of the Negro's feelings against the white power structure. The same press is never attuned to the freedom fighters' universal search for a philosophy that would govern their actions, give them a direction. Unfortunately, what is equally true is that the leadership of the movement is not working out such a philosophy. Instead, they are grabbing at straws.

No slogan is a substitute for a philosophy; its very nakedness invites strange garb from all and sundry. History here has some lessons for us that we disregard at our peril. Thus that which sounds so new to some Americans -- "black power" -- is not new to Africans whose revolutions were, with historic legitimacy, made under the slogan of "Africa for the Africans." But less than a decade after the victorious conquest of black power, we are witnesses to a retrogression to military coups that cannot all, by any means, be attributed to neo-colonialism. Far from it. Take Ghana, and you'll see that what neo-colonialism couldn't achieve -- the overthrow of Nkrumah -- an internal military takeover did. Of course, the objective world situation which makes the poor nations ever poorer and the rich richer caused the mass discontent and made this overturn possible. Of course, the military regime will do less, not more, than Nkrumah did in the attaining of independence. But this does not disprove the fact that the masses who had made the revolutions turned from him after they had followed him both on the plane of "Seek ye first the political kingdom" and in his choice of the Eastern power pole rather than that from the West.

The answer does not lie in turning to the "West". There even the technologically advanced lands cannot escape the pull of the most concentrated, the richest. Witness DeGaulle's trying to disentangle French national capital from GM's, just GM's, much less the whole of United States capital. And when De Gaulle opts for "French glory", he turns to the other nuclear titan, Russia.

But neither is "Mao's Thought" the answer. The trouble with such a "theory" -- that all the technologically advanced countries, Russia included, will gang up on the underdeveloped, and "therefore", the third world should let these nuclear titans blow themselves up -- the trouble with such a "theory" is that it itself stems from a state-capitalist land calling itself Communist, that its motive force of production for production's sake interlaced with never-ending class struggles, can lead in no other direction than where capitalism is leading now. What is left of this world, if anything, after the nuclear holocaust, would be more barren than what we started with, barren in material goods, in thought, in men.

No, the only answer is neither pole of capital, and include in that China, can break the underlying principle of capitalism -- exploitation of the masses. The only way out is to place the development of man as pivotal to all else. It is this which the masses did when they embarked on the revolutions in the third world. It is this which made them win, despite the poverty, despite the smallness of the individual countries, despite the might of the imperialist enemy. And it is when the Nkrumahs forgot the human factor which assured victory, when they began choosing sides, the "lesser evil" -- and disregarding the masses, their self-development; their allies, the workers, East and West; their goal, full freedom, that these leaders found themselves without a mass base and lost.

That what at first has appeared as a shortcut to a new society has all too often turned out to be a shortcut to disaster has recently been proven all over again in Indonesia. There that strange admixture of opportunism and adventurism called "Mao's Thought", which the PKI chose to forbear, led only to a military counter-coup and the mass slaughter of 300,000 alleged Communists.

If there be those to whom this sounds far, far away from the Mississippi March, let them take a second look at the Detroit hall where Stokely Carmichael was to speak, count the display of the innumerable pictures of Malcolm X, and reflect both on the echo of "Mao's Thought" with its "East wind will prevail" theme, and on the reason for the Trotskyists' glorification of Malcolm X, although they are by no stretch of the imagination black nationalists. To reflect on these facts is to see that it is not only a matter of the opportunism of Trotskyists who consider glorification of Malcolm X to be a shortcut to "mass organization." One must also conclude that such "radical" politics does, indeed, exercise a pull over any mass organization whose actions are not governed by a comprehensive philosophy of freedom. To refuse to learn from these lessons of history is to doom mankind to repeat its tragedies. The way out is, once and for all, not to separate philosophy from organization.

II. Philosophy and Organization

We have often correctly stressed the fact that no statement of Marx's has been more deliberately misunderstood than his famous dictum that "Philosophers have interpreted the world; the point is to change it." As if this pronouncement of the young Marx meant that philosophy had exhausted itself, as if all that was needed was activity, more activity, and yet more activity, the sentence has been repeated ad nauseum. If that were true, one would have to

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conclude that Marx wasted all the rest of his life -- very nearly 40 years of it -- in elaborating a new world outlook! The truth is, of course, that the statement was the beginning, not the end, of Marx's new proletarian, revolutionary world outlook. Or, as he put it: "It is not enough for thought to press toward reality; reality itself must press toward thought." In a word, his true point of departure was that only in unity does each -- theory and practice -- lose its one-sidedness.

Heretofore, however, we have laid such heavy stress on the spontaneity of the movement from practice that we have barely mentioned its organization, much less ours. This is where we must begin.

Each generation must restate Marxism for itself not only theoretically, but organizationally. It is true that the sequence cannot be reversed; the stillbirth of the Trotskyist Fourth International is proof of that. It is true, also, that the rejection of "a vanguard party to lead" cannot, can not, be transformed into wishful thinking that "the vanguard party to lead" did, in fact, "perish"; the disintegration of the Johnsonites is proof of that. In truth, they thereby only reinforced Trotskyism's disorientation of a whole generation of revolutionary anti-Stalinists who had been made to fight that most sinister enemy of the working class, Stalinism, totally unarmed.

The real course of the history of Marxism shows that, in each historic period, there has been a new relationship between the philosophy of human activity that is Marxism and its organization. Thus, the building of the First International, in response to the proletarian needs of the period of the civil war in the U.S., and the Paris Commune, of necessity, differed from the period of monopoly capital during which the Second International thrived. The Third International, with its roots in the 1917 Revolution, was built on entirely different foundations, theoretically as well as practically, than those on which the Second was founded. But that didn't prevent its transformation into opposite when a new material foundation -- State property -- was available for counter-revolution. Because it had no truly independent reason for existence, the Fourth International was a still-birth. Having refused to recognize the class nature of Stalinism, Trotsky, of necessity, was blind to the alien, i.e. exploitative nature of its ideology.

Thus Trotsky considered the monolithic Communist Party, not as the expression of existing state-capitalist society, but as mere bureaucratization of a "workers' state." Founded on the irreconcilable contradiction of being "for" world revolution, but in fact calling for the defense of Russia at the very time it was an integral part of an imperialist war, the Fourth International, despite the ripeness of the revolutionary situation of the post-war world, did not, and could not have, become the polarizing force for the revolutionary masses looking for a way out of capitalism, state as well as private.

Though the inescapable conclusion is obvious, we repeat: it is impossible to build an organization without having first filled the theoretic void left in the Marxist movement since the death of Lenin. A new International has to be built, but this cannot be done by fiat or outside of the ripening of the objective and subjective conditions for it; it must first be built on native

grounds. This task has fallen to us. It goes without saying that our theoretical contributions did not occur in a vacuum; they of necessity were the product of an organization, News & Letters Committees. But, though we had always considered ourselves as a nucleus for revolutionary regroupment, heretofore organization building was made subordinate to theoretic clarification.

The emphasis must now be reversed. In this sense, the present convention can be called a founding convention. It follows ten years of existence since we first established ourselves as an independent political-philosophic tendency -- charged with a dual task of publishing a workers' paper and restating Marxism both for our age and on native grounds.

The dialectic of our theoretic and practical existence has led to our singling out the Humanism of Marxism as the universal for our age. That this new universal was no subjective expression was borne out by the objective developments on a world scale, in both poles of world capital, circling the globe from the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 to the Cuban in 1959; from the African Revolutions, 1958-62, to the Negro Revolution in the U.S., 1960 and still developing; from the Asian and Middle East revolts to the present anti-war struggles the world over.

Nor was the discernment of the Humanism of Marxism as this epoch's governing universal a mere intuitive jump into some empty absolute. It manifested itself only after much "labor, patience, seriousness and suffering of the negative", including a split within the state-capitalist tendency when a part (the Johnsonites) moved away from Marxism. This freed us for a comprehensive restatement of Marxism for our age which would, once and for all, neither stop short of philosophy nor separate the small theoretic group from participation in the mass movement. The totality of view -- economic, political, philosophic in a complete interpenetration of objective and subjective -- emerged only after we had established, over a period before the founding of News & Letters, many "firsts" in the Marxist movement.

Thus, in the early 1940's we had been the first to analyze the Five Year Plans concretely and in detail as well as in strict relationship both to the new stage of world production and the economic law of motion of capitalism as analyzed by Marx in his greatest theoretical work, CAPITAL. We had also been the first to bring to the attention of the American public -- and to attack -- Stalin's revision of the Marxian law of value and consequent break with the dialectic structure of CAPITAL. We thus anticipated, by no less than four years, Zhdanov's demand that "the philosophical workers" substitute for the Hegelian dialectic of objective law of contradiction, a subjective "new dialectic law" -- "criticism and self-criticism".

In the early 1950's we had, in the manner of Lenin, not only returned to the origins of Marxism in Hegelian philosophy, but discerned in that unity of theory and practice -- the Absolute Idea -- a movement from practice to theory. Thus we anticipated the first workers' revolt from under Communist totalitarianism both in East Germany and in the forced labor camps of Vorkuta in Russia itself. Thus did the death of Stalin act as catalyst for a new revolutionary epoch in thought and in life. By 1958, when Marxism and Freedom, which

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re-established the Humanism of Marxism for our age, was published, we had shown how deep were the American roots of Marxism historically as well as in our age, as manifested in the American workers' battle against Automation which raised the question of the kind of labor man should do. Nor is it an accident that we discerned, in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, not just one more battle against discrimination, but the beginning of the Negro Revolution; we were looking for it.

Finally, throughout the ten years of existence since we first established ourselves as News & Letters Committees we practiced what we preached in creating the form for workers, Negroes, youth to speak for themselves not only in the pages of News & Letters but in pamphlets: Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves, Workers Battle Automation, Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution. Nor can we for a moment forget the fact that theory, too, is continuing development, as witness Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions, American Civilization on Trial, Marx's Humanism Today. Precisely because these relate not only to national but to international problems and events, many of our works have seen publication in England, Italy, Japan, as well as in Africa through the French-English publication, Presence Africaine. Indeed, when you consider the extent of our influence on a world scale, this must reinforce the need for organization building. We can no longer postpone this phase of our development.

III. Reality and Organization

Whether we take as our point of departure of the need for organization building, the balance sheet of the Free Speech Movement, whose leader came close to the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism, but, having refused to draw any organizational conclusions therefrom, left the field clear for the Stalinists, or we turn to the SDS and analyze its phenomenal growth when it looked as if a few marches would end the war in Vietnam -- and the equally phenomenal drop in membership when that proved not to be the case and the SDS itself became the bone of contention between "old radicals"; whether we observe the civil rights organizations, now at the crossroads, or turn as far away -- and to as different an organization as Japan's unambiguous anti-Stalinist Left -- we cannot escape the conclusion that never was there more need of philosophy, never less understanding of it, and therefore the floundering about in varied organizational forms. It is time Marxist-Humanism had a home, an organization, for the truth is that philosophy, like organization, is each, by itself one-sided. Only in unison can they shape the course of history; it is this which defines our new role.

We had raised the organizational question at the last plenum, but not as crucially as at this one. Though the Free Speech Movement was seen by us as symbolic of a new generation of radicals, we did feel the need for caution, and therefore dwelt on that word, symbolic: In the Chairman's Report to the Plenum, "Toward a Unity of Thought and Action" we said:

"It means, first of all, that this new generation is not exhausted in the category, student youth. It means, secondly, that we must not forget that the origin and inspiration of the FSM came from the Negro Revolution... This is why our pamphlet on the FSM is entitled The FSM and the Negro Revolution. Symbolism, finally, signifies that the FSM's grasp of the theory of alienation

was a break -- whether consciously or unconsciously does not matter at the moment -- from traditional American pragmatism. Now that it has done so, the movement cannot remain where it was before the break. It will either go forward or slide backwards and be reabsorbed, or at least dragged along by the old in the new generation."

And, after expanding on the need to know Communism's 40 year history since the death of Lenin -- its transformation into totalitarianism both in Russia and China -- we concluded: "without being permeated by this history, this truth, the new generation of U.S. radicals could get itself so involved in many 'non-ideological' activities that it would not even be conscious that it had, in the meantime, stopped thinking. This is what 'reabsorption by the old in the new generation' means."

Though we had then raised the organizational question, the growth of our organization was made subordinate to the need to work in other organizations. Henceforth, the process must be reversed. Or, more correctly put, we choose our activity in those projects which so closely resembles specifically Marxist-Humanist activity that the work in them, of necessity, leads to the building up of our own organization. In the case of the Maryland Freedom Union, for example, the one cannot be separated from the other. Nowhere else does the principle established at the last plenum hold so true: "Our function is to elicit from the masses their wishes, to make explicit what is implicit in their acts. We are small. We have no illusions of substituting ourselves for the masses. Were we a large organization, we still would not do what only the masses can do. But we do practice what we preach; we do, in every facet of our work, break down the division between mental and manual work, between leaders and ranks, and destroy the concept that intellectual work is allegedly the prerogative of leadership. We have but one gift to give, and that is the elicitation of self-development. It is yours, free. Test us and see. Join us and experience it for yourselves."

It was natural for us, when we were confronted with Johnsonite cliquism, after so long a fight against Trotskyist elitism, that we should have drawn away in horror and made the decision that no organization would stand in the way any longer of the indispensable, urgent, time-consuming task of beginning to fill that long 40-year theoretical void in the Marxist movement with a re-statement of Marxism for our age. It is true, also, that this had never meant immersion only in theory. But, while we had been active in the mass movement, it had meant playing down the importance of the vanguard grouping; playing down not just "the vanguard party to lead" (that we still reject), but the role of a grouping of workers and intellectuals such as ours that is historically and objectively as sure to arise as any mass movement because they have a validity of their own. It is for this reason that the trip to Japan made such an impact on us; it showed the continuing necessity of two of the principles which Lenin had singled out: (1) the necessity of what we call full-time workers for the organization or movement, and (2) the need for a sense of organization -- not of other organizations, but the organization of what he called Bolsheviks and we call Marxist-Humanists.

We cannot continue to limit ourselves to the full-time work of only those who work for nothing. Despite our poverty, we must undertake at least

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part responsibility for keeping Mike full-time in the field so that he can build up a News & Letters Committee in Baltimore. Because this combines organizing the unorganized as well as building up News & Letters Committees, this becomes our most important organizational perspective for next year.

Secondly, while the work of the Detroit local, precisely because it is at the center, must continue to be in other organizations, it must now shift emphasis to membership growth from the mass organizations as well as from the factories.

Thirdly, while we need to postpone the setting up of a sub-center in New York, the New York local must continue to take responsibility not only for itself, but for the whole East Coast.

Fourthly, while continuing to work in other organizations, we must be armed with a pamphlet that tells Who We Are and What We Stand For, that is simple to read and can become an organizing agent for us. This is especially true for the Los Angeles local, which has done the best work in literature sales, but not in membership growth. Though there is absolutely no substitute for leg-work and personal contacting, the telling of our story in a single pamphlet becomes quintessential. (Points 2, 3 and 4 include also the proposal for a continuing class in Marxism and Freedom that is always related to the current events, and these will be dealt with in greater detail in the Report on Organization.)

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With the publication of Marxism and Freedom in 1958, we issued a challenge, not only Marxists but to all revolutionary intellectuals, to listen to the movement from practice and on that basis develop the new in theory. We hoped this would be done jointly with us. It goes without saying that we still hope others will join us in this indispensable philosophic work. But we cannot make the working out of the new relationship of theory to practice, philosophy to revolution, dependent on whether or not others join us in that historic task. PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION is therefore now made into a concrete assignment for Raya, to be presented no later than to our next convention. Because we hold Marx's view that theory, when the masses fully grasp it, becomes a material force for revolution, we consider that the writing of Philosophy and Revolution becomes an imperative. Its execution depends on the growth of the organization of Marxist-Humanism.

DISCUSSION ARTICLE

NEWS & LETTERS, CONCRETELY, AS OUR PROBLEM

The presentation of the problems of the paper in Bulletin No. 1 gives us an excellent idea of where the paper should be moving --toward the written expression of the activities and ideas of the organization which shall spring forth from its pages as News & Letters Committees, the political organization of the oppressed, the workers, the Negro and the youth.

While it is true that in the past, News & Letters has expressed their ideas, it was not always true that there was a clear understanding about what the paper stood for, or how it happened to get published.

Every important issue in American public life is treated in the paper, not as a re-write of other published material, but as the result of intensive investigation, on the scene if necessary, as we did in Montgomery, Alabama, in Watts, the grape strike, every important development in the civil rights struggle. The same holds true in international affairs. We have had people on the scene in Europe, Italy, the British Isles, Africa and Asia. Producing a paper like News & Letters requires much more than the \$4000 a year it costs to print and distribute the paper. It requires knowing when and where to send a Marxist-Humanist to find out at first hand what is going on in the given situation.

In the civil rights struggle it has required innumerable trips to the South, at great risk, with members going through jail to get at the facts -- not to mention the financial costs to themselves and the organization. The costs of investigative trips to Europe, Africa and Asia, in the interests of the paper and of our body of ideas, have not been borne by the budget of the organization, but through individual contributions of members of the REB.

Whenever a member comes up with an idea that "we must do so and so" to further the ideas and the building of the organization, it must be obvious to everyone that the ways and means of accomplishing that goal must be embodied in the body of the motion, for finances are not separate and apart from the political activity which is so necessary today.

Our finances have suffered during the past year to the extent that it became impossible at a certain point to continue publication without assistance. Without disturbing the membership and their activities, the REB raised \$1000 extra to continue the paper. We visualize that a similar situation will arise during the next year unless the relationship of the finances of the paper are related to the activities of the organization, and both move forward hand in hand.

Publication of the paper alone costs \$4000 a year. Organizational activity that will build up the meaning of the paper is a cost that is in direct proportion to the activity and what that activity produces. We have plenty of opportunities to engage in activities that will produce favorable responses in the working class and the civil rights movement, if only we had more members. What must be changed is the degree to which those who sympathize with our ideas

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respond in terms of membership and of financial support.

When a paper is passed out at a public meeting, it in effect becomes a reflection of everything that we stand for, it is our published organizer. People will either become interested and seek to contact us, or throw it away. The degree to which they seek to contact us depends on all of us and how our ideas and activities are reflected in the pages of the paper. That is the real meaning of the ideas in Bulletin No.1.

The next task is to ensure continued publication. The 2 cents an unemployed member pays is an indication of his sympathy and support, but 25 cents will not see the continued publication of the paper. Each copy that we pass out free costs us about 12 cents cash. How can we pay for that??

I am proposing at the Convention that each intellectual or other person who can, pledge and pay \$200 toward the sustaining fund for the next year -- and that each worker pledge \$100 to the fund. This will have to be an obligation that is accepted in good faith and paid by the accepted deadlines if the resolutions of the convention are to be carried out in the manner that the membership expects, and if the paper is to survive.

Beyond personal contributions comes the conception that in working with people outside the organization, the same awareness be present on the part of our own members in relationship to new people. That is, that they make the effort to collect finances from the outside with the same diligence that they solicit participation in picket lines and demonstrations. The new people will understand that both forms of contributions are necessary for the success of the project involved.

The understanding and the results must begin with ourselves, and through our own understanding, the improvement in membership and finances will assure a growth in the organization that will enable us to undertake more ambitious projects in the period ahead.

-- John