

December 18, 1957

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Dear Gen. Debona

MARXISM AND FREEDOM has just come out of the bindery and I have promptly air mailed you a copy of the book. Three more copies will be sent you by ordinary mail.

I was very glad to get your last letter and see that you are working both in Italy and now France to find a publisher. If a new Marxist Humanist movement is to be founded, serious theory must be its foundation, and this constant splintering of the movement at every critical juncture will be stopped; at least it will be stopped for personality and other nonsensical reasons. The theoretical void since Lenin's death has lasted long enough. Nor can we begin just where Lenin left off; this is 1957, not 1923.

It is time also to stop repeating that each generation must interpret Marxism for itself as if that meant an analysis of the economy. Without the Humanism and Dialectic of Capital, the theory of state capitalism would mean far less for our generation than The Development of Capitalism in Russia meant at the turn of the century. Because the world crisis is total an urgency has been imparted to philosophy that heretofore has been reserved only for bread and butter questions. Because the workers, on their own, have raised the question of the kind of labor, theoreticians will ignore the movement from practice to theory at their peril, or, to borrow an expression from Marx, "under the penalty of death."

It is true that Lenin himself did not limit his contributions to economic questions, but made the original contribution of the theory of the party. But, just as neither the Humanism of Capital, nor its structure, was held significant enough to make these, not the "inevitability of capitalism's downfall", the foundations of established Marxism pre-1914, so the concept of the party has been so ossified as to hide its moving parts--the deep, organic relationship of the party to the spontaneity of the mass movement. Unfortunately, after 1917, Lenin himself did not concretize this further, nor could he in 1923 give more than the most general indications. That is why, as monumental as his Will was in its analysis of leadership, (and not only Stalin and Trotsky, but the young, beloved theoretician Bukharin who did not quite "grasp the dialectic" and thus was not fully a Marxist) it itself was addressed to the leadership, and not to the membership, much less the great masses in the grand manner in which Lenin did it in 1917 when he offered his resignation to the National Committee and threatened instead "to go to the sailors." As for Rosa Luxemburg: despite her free words with praise of spontaneity, she was so totally the prisoner of old categories that she did not even know how to function with the spontaneously formed Stewards Movement, but demanded of them to fight the labor bureaucracy "from within."

No, the task of really clearing away all the old rubbish on party has been left to those who have lived through the 1930s of the Spanish Revolution and CIO, the 1940s of the National Resistance movements and Negro demonstrations, and the Russian Sputnik and American H-Bomb as the only bleak perspective for those who will never listen to these new impulses, but always be ready "to lead." To us here this book is of such paramount importance--and not only because of the American roots but, above all, because of its world concepts--that we want finally to concretize our relations abroad by sending some representative there next summer. I hope that by then the Italian and French translations will be off the press. Do let me hear from you. Yours, Dave

9410

Nov 9, 1958

9411

Dear Com.Damen:

Luciano Bianciardi is doing a good job on the translation. Today I received a letter from him that he has now completed the work and is sending me the 105 pages I have to check. I assume, however, that you have been getting a copy of the translation without needing to wait for the final revision. I am naturally anxious to see what you write in your Preface which will determine my Introduction to an extent. Unfortunately, the Italian friends do not seem to be prompt correspondents and have not answered my various letters which have asked questions of the Italian masses on the modern scene. This means that, of necessity, my brief Introduction for the Italian readers will be, of necessity, general rather than particular. Do let me hear from you on this whole question.

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I do not know whether you are acquainted with Com. Munis; he was one of the leaders of the Trotskyists in Spain during the 1937 Revolution; then he emigrated to Mexico, where I met him. Our positions on state capitalism were similar, but on other questions, such as nature of vanguard party we disagreed. I saw him again in Europe in 1947, shortly after which we both broke with Trotskyism. A couple of years ago I heard that he had returned to Spain, worked in the underground a few months, and was promptly thrown into jail. Finally, this summer he made his way back to Paris, where Bessie saw him a few hours before her departure home. Since then we have corresponded--he is sort of collaborating with the Socialisme ou Barbarie group, although he disagrees with them fundamentally. The last I heard from him he had written the World Outlook thesis we had presented to the conference in Milan, and was very interested in the concrete proposition to establish an International Center of Correspondence for exchange of information, documents, etc. I was surprised that Vega would not have informed him that this is not just a "proposition", but was unanimously accepted and, I assume, established with you as one of the Secretaries. In any case I took the liberty of giving him your name and address so that he could correspond with you directly since he wishes the Spanish group to adhere to it.

Eric Heffer has also asked me whether that Centre is functioning since he also has not heard since the end of the conference. What, concretely, is being done?

Naturally, with my poor Italian, the checking of the translation relates mainly to my good Marxism, rather than fluency in the Italian language, and it means a lot of work--all of which I love. I believe it will be a very important basis for Marxist regroupment for it is a serious presentation, and a comprehensive one, which one cannot get otherwise than from a book. Newspapers and pamphlets just cannot deal with so crucial a task as theoretic foundation.

I have just returned from a most pleasant experience --a meeting in New York which was attended by no less than 1,200. It is true it was not under our auspices--NEWS & LETTERS, unfortunately, does not command such attendance. But the lecture was on Marxism and the present situation in Russia and it is the first time since the 1930s that such a mass turnout took place in America. There is definitely a rebirth.

November 17, 1958

International Center of Correspondence
Milano, Italy

Dear Friends:

We were very glad to hear that the Center of Correspondence has now begun functioning. Your letter of the 20th of October first got here November 15th and we would like to comply with the request for other groups who have not been at the Milan conference in July. I have already written to Com. Damen about the Spanish group in France that asked for information, and to whom I gave his address. I am not at liberty to give their address but material could be addressed to Vega in Paris and he asked to turn it over to Munis. Also, no doubt you heard that there was a split in the Socialisme ou Barbarie group and that the split from Chaulieu wish to carry on their own communication:

Mme. Mona Etienne
11 rue D'ulm
Paris 5, France

No doubt you have written to Eric Heffer in Liverpool. There now is a new group in London that is in correspondence with NEWS & LETTERS and wishes to be in touch with the Italian center:

Frank Williams
148 Wakefield St.
E. Ham., London E6, England

NEWS & LETTERS had written, immediately upon the return of Bess and her report of the conference, as to the historic importance of the decision of the Italian friends to issue an Italian edition of MARXISM AND FREEDOM. We do not doubt that that will aid greatly in the revolutionary regroupment of Marxists, but, of course, it must be supplemented by Resolutions, weekly analysis, etc. Therefore please inform us as to what has thus far been submitted by the various groups for circulation.

Fraternally yours,  NEWS & LETTERS

3412

Dec. 17, 1958

Dear Com. Damen:

Your letter of the 10th naturally disturbed me. It pains me to read that evidently there are such differences between you and Seniga that you are not working as a unit on getting MARXISM and FREEDOM published with the greatest despatch. Naturally I cannot from this distance intervene between you two. What I would like to suggest is this: 1) Write the Preface, whether or not you have seen the typescript in toto. 2) A Preface, especially when it is to introduce a foreign author to a native population, is not so much on the specific details of the work, as the general subject and the authority of the writer to deal with it. 3) In the case of MARXISM AND FREEDOM, which is not published as any sort of "program", but as a serious contribution for theoretical orientation, the very idea of having a re-evaluation of Marxism at a time when the Communists are perverting it is of greater importance than the differences between the anti-Stalinist Marxists who are undertaking to raise the banner of Marxist-Leninist Humanism. 4) The Italian working people have the greatest opportunity history has offered any one in Western Europe of escaping another lapse into fascism as DeGaulle and opening new vistas before the whole world, Europe and Asia and America and Africa, of breaking from the very party they joined in millions--the Communist Party of Italy--and starting on a new path of totally new social relations which would eclipse any of the previous historic actions of the proletariat from the Paris Commune to the Russian Revolution. With all due respect for the difference between practice which only actions can realize, and theory which appears to be only a clearing of one's mind, MARXISM AND FREEDOM is in the full tradition of the Leninist concept that there can be no successful revolution without a revolutionary theory. The Italian people have the advantage of having once suffered from missing the historic moment of revolution and entering instead the Mussolini counter-revolution. No matter how one evaluates the reasons for that, all must admit that the least Italian Socialism and Communism possessed at that time was clarity of theoretic vision. Naturally it was not limited to Italy. Lenin was as surprised as anyone by the rise of Mussolini--the world had never seen fascism before. But we who have lived through it cannot repeat the confusion and must arm ourselves with all the theoretical armor at our disposal in the world over. 6) The American working people have unusual experiences in actions such as wildcats that have made them famous the world over. With MARXISM and FREEDOM, they show that there resides there strands of the most profound theory as well, and the Italian friends have already shown their international solidarity by choosing to help make this work available to the Italian public.

Naturally, Com. Damen, I am not formulating your Preface for you. What I am trying to do is to show that in writing it, you need not necessarily have the typescript--although I hope you can get it--since you already know the main points of the work and the reasons for publishing. As a matter of fact your letters to me from the very moment the American friends decided to publish MARXISM AND FREEDOM spoke exactly in this vein. In any case, I trust that whatever your final decision as to whether to write the Preface, with or without seeing the typescript in Italian, we shall not delay LA NUOVA ITALIA in coming out with the work soon.

Now, as to your comments on Centro Internazionale di Corrispondenza, I must confess I am confused as to the remark on financing it. It was my understanding from our friends who attended that when the Centre gets functioning, they would write the participating

9413

groups what it cost to run the office and make the translations of documents, etc.etc., and then all of us would help financially. But we have heard nothing from the centre of correspondence except that it has finally been established, and did we have names of other friends, who did not participate, and who would wish to have knowledge of it. I promptly answered and gave some new names. If there are any financial difficulties, then the participants should be informed at once, and I am sure the American friends would not shirk their duty.

It seems to me highly wrong to plan for a conference in Paris. I do not know under what illusions the French friends are functioning ~~now~~ just because DeGaulle is supposedly following some "democratic" parliamentary channels and allowing opposition parties to live. But no one can mistake the fascist trend, and those, like us, who are aware of it, should certainly not plan to meet in that city as if every day there won't be changes for the worse and all radicals can go on as before. The time, April, is also completely unworkable for us. I am not saying that we can attend if even it is moved to June we are quite strained financially. But there certainly is more opportunity to be there in summer than in Spring, which is out of the question altogether.

Moors,

Raja

P.S. As for your remark on Dante, I would certainly not interfere with Engels' judgment. Neither Marx nor Engels were ignorant of the fact that Dante was of the middle ages and his political views on the empire were not ours. They nevertheless held Dante to have anticipated the contemporary universality that followed the breakup of the "Dark Ages." Marx chose Dante as his favorite poet, Aeschylus and Shakespeare as the favorite dramatists, etc. because they felt that in the art world those who anticipate new forms of expression because the epoch in which they lived are "birth times of history" have something important to say also to the "politicos." They refused to worry over Hegel's reactionary views and took his dialectic method and made it their own. And if more politicians in other years had had the same attitude to art the movement would have gained, not suffered, from what appears as "incorrect" views. In any case I would not think of tampering with Engels' view because my only point in mentioning Dante at all is to show that the Renaissance came to Italy ahead of any other country and that not alone the Renaissance as such but that even prior to it, as in Dante, when the world was still medieval, much that was new (not in politics of which I do not speak at all) but in art and mind was in this man's poetry. Do allow me this seeming "ignorance."

Feb. 24, 1959

Dear Com. Daman:

I would like to take up with you informally the question of the International Correspondence Center and a possible conference this summer. The reason I propose it informally rather than formally to the International Correspondence is due not only to the fact that, in fact, the center doesn't function very actively, but, more important than that, the basis for its establishment was too tenuous. If one person —Gino— who had promised to be financially responsible for its first few months of functioning in order to have a way of billing the various adherents, can start acting anarchistically as he has and thus upset the whole structure, the structure for it couldn't have been very sound. What I mean is that the objective situation the world over demands something more than mere informational exchange among various state capitalist tendencies.

It was correct for the various ex-Trotskyist groups to sound each other out and try to break through their isolation, at least among other co-thinkers. It would have been incorrect had they attempted right from the start to issue pronouncements that pretended to be the call for any revolutionary mobilizations. The groups are small and know it. More than that, they know that unless there is a massbase, all such calls would be empty indeed. This does not, however, mean that they have no historic responsibilities theoretically to somewhere they stand. To me it is no accident nor mere "temperament" that Gino can act so irresponsibly toward the Italian edition of MARXISM AND FREEDOM; he seems to be unaware of the need for so solid a theoretic foundation for any revolutionary Marxist regroupment. Yet we old ones know that neither a 'perpetual mobile' kind of activity which ends in running oneself dizzy, anymore than an evasion of class struggle activity, can substitute for a clearing of the heads and taking the cobwebs out of over-dusty old theses that no longer apply to the world of our day.

Or take the SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE group. Here they had as sharp a turn in the national scene as DeGaulism, and they do make a pretense to "theory" with their journal, and now one to "practice" with their mimeographed bulletin, "Provoir Ouvrier". Despite all this they are a lot emptier and more irresponsible than anything some of the Italian friends may venture on. For they act as if all theory had already been decided upon and that journalistic verbiage is a substitute for an accounting of Marxism, theoretically, organizationally, and practically, especially during the period since the end of World War II when the break from Trotskyism did take final shape.

To put it briefly, I believe that a conference of the groups who participated last summer and those who, like the Spanish and Greek, wish to do so now, should meet not only to hear reports of the activities in the various countries but to face soberly their theoretic responsibilities historically as Marxists. Time is not forever. The Berlin crisis, the moves toward the right in Italy, the African Revolution and the American-Russian war-like gestures may very well make this the turning point in history.

Yours,

P.S. I assume you are doing all you can on that Italian edition of MARXISM & FREEDOM, and that I will hear from you by return mail as to what I should do from here to proceed to make the publication a reality.

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May 8, 1959

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Dear Com. Damen:

I have just returned to Detroit after my annual lecture tour. It was a most successful one, and shows that both among the student youth--I spoke both in California and in the Midwest (Chicago) to large university audiences, about 1200 or more--and also among workers there is a great deal of questioning and searching for new philosophic foundations.

At the same time I became involved in Chicago with a new Italian translator since I was quite dissatisfied with the full translation which Bianciardi had sent me, and which showed he had not introduced the changes I had called to his attention, the whole paragraphs that he had missed, etc. The new translator agrees that we better leave Bianciardi's name stand, however, because otherwise both he and the publishers LA NUOVA ITALIA may present to us more difficulties than we would want to cope with, and that would thus further delay the Italian edition. Nothing must delay that edition, so I hope you agree with me that I acted right when I sent the first 50 pages of the new translation as if it were merely a retyping for the printer of the old translation. I am now waiting for a reply from LA NUOVA ITALIA, whom I asked to bring it out in September.

Your letter reached me while I was on tour, and so I merely limited myself to the question of the Italian edition, and not to the other questions you raised.

First of all, once again then on the question of the vanguard party. It is not a question, as the American friends see it, of making the role of the party of "marginal importance." It is a question of seeing what, at each specific stage in history, the question of the party meant. Now it is true that, because we feel that the concept of the "party to lead" has done more to mislead the proletariat since Lenin's death than any other factor, we prefer the formulation "a new unity of theory and practice." But whether you call Marxist regroupment "a new unity of theory and practice" or "the role of a vanguard party", the truth is that at each period in Marx's time and in Lenin's time that role was defined differently. Thus, (as I document it in Chapter XI of MARXISM & FREEDOM, on the "Forms of Organization: The Relationship of the Spontaneous Self-Organization of the Proletariat to the Vanguard Party"), in 1902-5, Lenin thought of vanguard more or less in traditional terms of fighting economism with politics. 1905, however, revealed how far in advance of "the vanguard" was the proletariat, so he changed his position on the fact that the proletariat could not gain socialist consciousness except through a vanguard. Again, in the period of reaction, when he had to return purely to underground work that concept meant something else, than it did in 1914 when the German Social Democracy betrayed. From April 4, 1917 through November, it was a question of constantly urging his party "to catch up" with the advanced masses. After they gained power, it became still something else for early bureaucratism was evident. I cannot see, therefore, that we can merely repeat: one must accept the Leninist conception of "the role of the party". Everybody, including the Stalinists, could agree "in general" and then we would first have to erect barricades and blood would literally flow between state capitalism masquerading as "Communism" and the proletariat fighting for a truly new, human order.

I will write again tomorrow on the question of Humanism and what I mean by theoretic foundations. --Yours, Raya

May 9, 1959

Dear Com. Damen:

Your last letter dealt ^{with} the difficulty of presenting a programmatic statement to the friends who had attended the last international conference in Milan last year. I did not, however, mean a programmatic statement. I meant a theoretic unfoldment of a banner. Let me explain further: you are right when you say that each group in each country, basing itself on the experiences in the particular country, seems to come to a different conclusion. But you are not right when you think that the "Humanism" of Marx either is due merely to the American experience or bears any sort of resemblance to the "neo-Humanism" of the Stalinists during the Resistance movement. In my view, only he who fully understands the class struggle as the first step to breaking down the division between mental and manual labor characterising class societies can fully comprehend the Humanism of Marx. That is to say, abolition of private property and nationalisation of the means of production do not mean a truly new social order. The tragedy of the Russian Revolution lies precisely in the fact that it was impossible to proceed to Lenin's conception of production and the state ~~itself~~ would be run by the population "to a man"; all his exhortations in his debate with Trotsky and Bukharin against the "administrative mentality" that did not fully comprehend the dialectic and thus were not "fully Marxist", failing to understand the "lackadaisical" nature of the intellectual, and how far more complex was the breakdown between mental and manual labor than the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

Now then the prerequisite for a programmatic statement is the clearing of the heads philosophically as well as politically in the manner in which Lenin did it in 1915. He did not limit himself to manifestoes against the war; he did not unite with all others-- (not even, in fact, with his own Bolsheviks, as witness his attitude to Bukharin and the "imperialist economism" of those who opposed national self-determination). He did first and foremost reconstitute his own reasoning, his own philosophic foundations, by returning to that alleged mystic, Hegel, and hold on anew to the self-movement, which is the mainspring of the dialectic in general and the workers movement in particular. A year back I asked you please to try to get some one to translate for you Chapter X of MARXISM AND FREEDOM, particularly section 1, "Lenin and the Dialectic: A Mind in Action" because I felt that once you understood that this is what I meant "by a clearing of the heads" on an international plane, we would see very similarly the perspectives for a revolutionary regroupment of Marxism.

It is with this in mind (now that you have the translation of MARXISM & FREEDOM) that I spoke of the fact that a new conference of the International Correspondence Center cannot just be what it was last year, but must be on this serious theoretic foundation, and for that reason I wanted to time any conference in Europe to the appearance of the Italian edition.

I have not yet heard from LA NUOVA ITALIA, to whom I sent the first 50 pages, and asked for a publication date in September. Otherwise, I would rather not try to come this year, leaving such a prospect till next April instead. No doubt you know that I have had to do very considerable retranslation of the one done by Bianciardi, because he was altogether too careless in his translation. However, to have no technical troubles on the other side of the Atlantic, I will leave his name stand as the translator. Have you heard from LA NUOVA ITALIA since they have received the Introduction and 2 chapters of MARXISM & FREEDOM? Do please keep me promptly informed.

yours,

9417

September 2, 1951

Dear Com. Damen:

Naturally I was disappointed that you had not been to get to Florence, especially since it is now a full year. LA NUOVA ITALIA signed contract and promised publication in 12 months. There is nothing to be done now but wait till I get there and we confront them jointly and make final decisions. Should there be any occasion for you to need to reach me while in transit: I sail on S.S. August September 9th from New York in Tourist Class, Cabin 409 and arrive in Genoa on the 20th. My ~~married name is~~ Mrs. M. Dwyer.

I do not believe I have ever reported in full to you how well our English friends are functioning--not the Tom Cc and others we were originally recommended to, but one who brought with that small group, Frank Williams. On the basis of MARX AND FREEDOM and NEWS & LETTERS, plus some mimeographed Bulletin put out irregularly in London, he has gathered a small group and done remarkable work in preparation for my arrival. For example, he has sent out 200 copies of pamphlet on Afro-Asian revolution plus a letter explaining the trip to Europe. The result is I will be speaking in England and in Scotland, both to worker and student groups, including a debate with Laase Deutscher. In all there will be 12 lectures I will give there and learn a good deal from the British workers. Of course language is no problem there, but in actuality so much could not be done in so brief a time without a full understanding of Marxist Humanism and some hard daily work among shopmates and student circles. I believe my first lecture is around October 15th so that I do not know whether I will get to France before I go to England, or not till November.

I am not sure the type of conference you are trying to arrange. As I wrote you some months back, I do not see where a conference of the type we had last year would get us. This is no time just to get national reports. It is time for some solid theoretical foundation for international work. We had offered, as a basis, MARXISM & FREEDOM. We had hoped serious contribution would be forthcoming from other groups. Instead, we had the example of the Greeks and I am rather surprised you mention him. Here is what I mean: Shortly after the Milan conference we began a correspondence on fraternal terms. Then Delfus, when he got to Germany wrote that 1) the Milan Conference did not mean similarity of views; he was not of the state capitalist persuasion as to analysis of Russia; 2) The Humanism of the early Marx was in contradiction to the "science" of the older Marx and both are contradictory and non-scientific because the age was such technologically; 3) Lenin was no better than Marx, said Delfus, and, as for MARXISM & FREEDOM, it is "counter-revolutionary" (sic!) and that the Greeks were Humanists but not Marxist Humanist. I enclose one letter that I. Rogers to whom he had first written as she is managing editor of NEWS & LETTERS, and one that I wrote to him. We have not heard since.

Naturally I will attend any conferences you arrange but I am more interested in you in particular and the Italian friends in general and my aim is to get to talk to some Italian workers and intellectuals for that matter on Marxian theory, and not concern myself with dilettantes like Delfus.

Well, soon we will finally meet and that will be great--Yours,

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