

REB MINUTES OF DECEMBER 14, 1981

Present: All, plus Neda by special invitation; Diane, sitter-in, excused.

Agenda: I- G&V; II-From Dec. 13 to Jan.2; III- N&L Deadline and Assignments; IV- Ongoing Activities and Correspondence.

I- G&V

R- Raya said that she felt that, both because the overview of the whole book that she gave on Sunday was so long and extensive, and because it is very important to single out what is new, she would like to give a very much abbreviated report focusing only on the new. This will have three divisions: 1- The new in the summation of the book; 2- What have we gained from the classes and what is the task now; 3- How do the archives fit in with the perspectives on a most concrete level of the 1980s.

The overview of the book given on Sunday began with Poland, not only because it is important to constantly practice dialectics by testing ourselves in relation to the latest headline, but because it permitted a review of the 74-75 economic crisis in relation to our very first analysis of the 1950 economic crisis -- stemming from the new stage of production, Automation -- and all of it cast so new a light on the purpose and method of the book that I want to review it here, too. I'm not very sure that what we all knew from the Preface (the three events that prompted the new book) were seen in that new light. For example, the first event -- the relationship to the Ethnological Notebooks -- was here seen not so much related to the totality of Marx as to transforming "post-Marx Marxists" from chronology to category. The second event -- Women's Liberation Movement today -- was not related here to the EN but to the difference in attitude to the revival of the Luxemburg studies against what those studies represented in the 1960s. The third event -- the 74-75 economic crisis -- was this time focused not so much on the manner in which Stalinist-Trotskyists like Mandel truncated Marx's Capital, but instead was focused on the new type of revolutions. By new type of revolutions I mean the actual revolution in Portugal and "its" African colonies were so inter-related that it was impossible to say which force sparked the revolution in Portugal -- the Africans who were taunting the Portuguese army or the Portuguese who were ridding themselves of fascism. In a word, "who? whom?" stresses what is very different in a revolution: the economic "cause" or the actual freedom struggle. This relationship of causality to freedom is the proof that the philosophic question, far from being an abstraction, is the one that defines the political perspective, and the actual resolution of the contradictions.

This continued throughout the 70s, but where it was of the highest importance because it hit directly at the U.S. behemoth was in Iran. There it was not only against the Shah but against U.S. imperialism and above everything else it showed that the determining facet in the Middle East was revolution, not oil. The same relationship of causality to freedom, with

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its direct hit at U.S. imperialism, can be seen in the Latin American revolutions, be it where they were successful as in Nicaragua, or where the genocide is still continuing as in El Salvador. That's why I called the Preface in my presentation "Purpose and Method of the Book", and this was continued by bringing into it the very conclusion of the book -- "A 1980s View," so that we should be aware of the fact that it is not just "the book" but the objectivity of world reality. Thus, the two-fold relationship of Subject and Object was carried through all three parts of the work.

For example, in Part One of the book, 1910 to 1911 was made inseparable from methodology -- the Absolute Method, which has a single dialectic for objective and subjective. Whereas it has long been obvious that 1910 -- which I had originally intended to have as the climax of the book since it was in that period when Luxemburg was greatest, with her prescience of imperialism and her struggle against the opportunism in the German Social Democracy, when other great revolutionaries (like Lenin) still followed the GSD as the true Marxists -- was no longer the climax, because it had not led RL to break with the GSD; this time the Absolute Method showed that Luxemburg's analyses, though correct, were only descriptive, phenomenological rather than philosophic, with a Subject. Here is what I mean: When Hegel says "Nothing is known in its truth unless it is completely subject to Method," and where Marx interprets that to mean that the Subject comes out of the actual struggle, it is imperative that we do not at that point simply have to say, as Luxemburg said, "long before" the collapse of capitalism because of lack of non-capitalist lands to exploit, the proletariat will bring it to its doom. Luxemburg, however, because she did not see that the new Subject -- the exploited nationalities -- would become the actual "gravediggers" of imperialism, limited her Subject to "the proletariat."

Heretofore, I went immediately into a sharp critique of the WLM for not recognizing RL as great revolutionary. This time, because RL ended by criticizing Marx, himself, both on accumulation of capital and on the national question, I could bring in another new element. I refer to the fact that there was a revival of Luxemburg studies in the 1950s; but it was not Luxemburg "the feminist", but Luxemburg "the spontaneist" that was the problematic then. It is only with the rise of the new WLM, despite the fact that they did not recognize Luxemburg, that it was possible for us to bring out what no one had done before -- that there was no separation between Luxemburg the revolutionist and Luxemburg the feminist, even if she herself had not fully recognized the total significance of her struggles not only for the right to the vote, but against the war. This, furthermore, illuminated how she had brought into the anti-imperialist, anti-military struggle the question of Penthesilea. In truth, both the

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reference to Pentesilea and her anti-imperialist struggles, and the sharp distinction she made between the bourgeois women whose "world is their home" and the proletarian women whose "home is the world". This distinguished her as an original character as much as did her break with Jogiches. Today's "WL", though they have a great deal to learn from her remain the ones who brought out the unique feature of today's "WLs" by refusing to keep silent on the question of male-chauvinism within the Left. The expression "at one and the same time", as well as the stress on "overview", made it possible for the book to connect yesterday, today and tomorrow in such a way as the Black dimension all the way from 1831 through the Nigerian women's war of 1929 to today's Black dimension, without separating it from such other revolutionary women as Margaret Fuller. In a word, the criticism of the WL was in one sense muted in relationship to RL, but in another sense sharpened so that it would be impossible to consider that question outside of Marx's Humanist philosophy.

The final section of the book is, clearly, not just a section. In fact, what was new in the presentation, at one and the same time, was: 1- the title I gave it -- Karl Marx, Revolutionary Organizer -- from a critic of Hegel to author of Capital to theorist of Permanent Revolution. This continued with 2- beginning to look at Marx even earlier than 1841, by showing his self-criticism on the question of Law in 1837 -- and in that respect bringing in Melville's expression about "abrupt inter-mergings." This carried through with 3- both the new moments of the last decade, where he left a trail for us to the 1980s, and the whole concept that he, alone, was the founder of a whole new continent of thought and of revolution. All others, beginning with Frederick Engels, were post-Marx Marxists, not just chronologically but as a category. Indeed, it is their failure to grasp the ramifications of that and his theory of permanent revolution that remains the challenge to our age.

It is that category which had to be emphasized, both as the permanent revolution's challenge to our age and as the organizational challenge which must first be worked out. One thing that must be put an end to once and for all is the idea that Marx was not an "organization man." This is why I went through all his practical "projects", beginning before he was a Marxist and yet made such a unity of philosophy and the need for organization to realize it that he considered himself a member of "the party of Prometheus." Such an attitude never left him, whether he was creating the Committees of Correspondence or the historic First International in 1864.

The challenge of permanent revolution that we must realize in our day is naturally not just ours alone but that of the age, and it's in that respect that I brought in the Archives all too briefly, so I wish to repeat here what it was that was new in the three-fold division I made of those 40 years:

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1- 1941-1950: The creation of the theory of state-capitalism is seen in a new way in Poland, right at this moment. Where it is important to recognize that the greatest enemy is at home, and that anti-imperialism cannot be used as a substitute for not fighting that enemy at home, nevertheless all of this period of 1941 to 1950 in our Archives is just Prolegomena.

2- 1950-1973: The core of our existence, where both the continuity with Marx's Humanism and the newness of our age as witnessing a movement from practice, begins with a new stage of production called Automation. By being in that period of the new stage of production and the workers' battle against it through the miners' general strike, sensing the vanguard nature of Black masses in motion as reflected in our own publication, Indignant Heart, and achieving a breakthrough in the Absolute Idea as a movement from practice six weeks before the actual East European revolt -- we had, indeed, created an historic new tendency, Marxist-Humanism in the U.S. The reason I have used a whole quarter century as one single sub-division is to stress that once a new stage of production has begun and the workers have shown a way to struggle against it, the developments also in thought show the creativity of a new stage of cognition, which not only helps meet the challenge from below but creates new ground for anticipating the future.

3- 1974 to today: The 1974-75 economic crisis has, in fact, not stopped and from that moment on we had stressed the severity of the global economic crises as being structural. As I showed at the very beginning of the presentation, the new this time was not limited to the criticism of those who truncated Marx's Capital, but to the focus on the new type of revolutions, be that in Portugal, Latin America, Iran, or Poland. The conclusion, therefore, was to ask all those present to join News and Letters Committees and help us meet the challenge of the age -- the realization of the revolution in permanence, by beginning the transformation of reality here and now.

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Now then, what have we gained from the classes? It is true there has been a self-development, and I was surely glad to see that the last meeting brought out a periphery, and we have gained some members -- especially in Los Angeles. But they have by no means brought out the organizational growth we looked forward to. Since this becomes ever more serious, we have to spell out new tasks, new ways of projecting and selling this latest work of Marxist-Humanism. It becomes imperative, therefore, first and foremost, to spell it out as activities. Both practically and theoretically, the expression has to be done on political matters and current events. Instead of classes as long-lasting as eight lectures, there should be, perhaps, no more than four in any series -- and they cannot be separated from analysis of current events. For example, take what is

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happening in Poland right now. Surely our 25 years of writings and activities around the East European revolts -- activities which will now be intensified -- have a relationship to the new book. Or take what is happening in Latin America and what Anne was able to establish and will report on to the REB with a different stress than the report in N&L; it will certainly create new openings for our activities here. This is even more true about the deepening economic crisis and the growing anti-nuclear movement which is truly global.

This all leads to the fact that my main report to the Jan. 2 Expanded REB will be a great deal more on the current scene than on the new book, with special stress on the fact that it isn't only Poland which is under the whip of the counter-revolution. So are revolutionaries everywhere, including the U.S. It is because of the urgency of the objective and subjective situations that the Expanded REB has been extended to include not only as many REB members as can come, but rank-and-filers have also been invited.

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