

REB MEETING OF MAY 15, 1984

Agenda: I Youth by Jim; II. WL Report by Suzanne; III. Discussion on both reports; IV. Finance Report by Peter Mallory and Discussion; V. Ongoing Activities; VI. G&W

Raya spoke about one element, very involved and very complex, that concerned the kind of male chauvinism equally applicable to men and women -- the relationship to woman as founder and the relationship of founder to leadership, in general. It revolved about the fact that while women naturally accept woman as leader (in that they may be different from men), it is not true they make the serious distinction that is needed, to recognize Marxist-Humanism as body of ideas, between founder and leadership in general as well as membership. (She may develop this more fully for the Convention itself.)

16339

May 17, 1984

Dear Terry:

I decided to write to you without waiting to find free time just before the Convention, though I will keep my ~~AAA~~ meeting with you then, too. The point now is that it's not only that the preparation for convention is as important as the convention itself but that the direction at the convention cannot be gained only from me. Thus, the very fact that you had a good meeting when you listened to the WBAI tape with four non-members, that you now also have Diane in Chicago and will have Suzanne visiting makes it clear that we should not repeat "drawing conclusions" only ~~at~~ the event like we did during that Houston WL Conference, because when you do that, you only emphasize the impotence of ~~the~~ having influenced events.

Here, for example, is one point I'd rather discuss before than after: the question of self-criticism has never been grasped in full when it's after the event and concrete becomes a matter of discussion rather than action.

I was glad, for example, to hear that you were writing something on the Bartky incident and I'm sorry that I so abbreviated my remarks in the minutes of the REB, because I do think that what I tried to say is not only something against Bartky but something, unfortunately, that applies to many of us, so let me say it here:

WL-NAL was, formally, established in 1972, but in fact, if you will remember, -- and you are the one we wanted to win -- we had actually begun in 1968-69 when the Weathermen had arisen and there were so many movements from below that the striving for new, new, new got the philosophy for the new totally buried, or what is worse, is that we spoke in so many voices the movement sounded like a tower of Babel. Bonnie, for example, was so intent on capturing some non-members that I had to ask Anne to write a statement of ~~the~~ We Are and What We Stand For at that Conference where you were not yet a member and brought in that Manifesto of the Fourth International (or what was that called?). Did anybody bother to ask herself whether these new women's supposed search for a new philosophy wasn't a very deep anti-Marxism? Do you remember for example that Barbara at another conference issued a vicious attack on Frantz Fanon because he had dared say that since it was British imperialism that was removing the veil from the women the women must not follow that for they would risk being called British stooges?

The Stalinist women, from their end, with Leacock as their leader, insisted that Engels was Marx and outside of a few little updates Engels' Origin was the bible for all women today too. The reason I keep going back to such old stuff that has no effect on any of us now is due to the fact that the abiding anti-Marxism in all the "new" has not only persisted to this day, but they haven't

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even been challenged on the fact that at best, their new is Existentialism. Olga tried to show 2 years ago to show that what sounded like a magnificent article exposing Sartre became stuck in "its own" philosophy of "Other", since they too were Existentialists and appealed to Simone de Beauvoir to get them out of the mire, as if it was a question just of language. Do you think it is any different if any of our youth, in wanting to talk against Structuralism nevertheless begin on that ground?

What I'm drigin at is the question of our body of ideas. The seriousness of its challenge to all, all, all -- and the reason I say all, all, all is that it's not only all post-Marx Marxists but non-Marxist scholars as well and those who have discovered Marx's last decade but limit it to the peasantry and reduce him to a Populist. Here comes what I said in relationship to Bartky:

The question of male chauvinism/ a very, very subtle male chauvinism, and that not alone in man but in woman who certainly consider themselves superior since they do "accept" woman as leader and in fact they all are -- is a question of not knowing that philosophy is not Ego or Centralization or ~~MAN~~ "Personality" and that it must be projected nevertheless as unique, original, the source which is Subject as well. Without that, the projection will get nowhere because it is not a projection; it is not a challenge; it cannot win ~~adherents~~ adherents.

What is worse when it comes to women is the very thing they are proud of -- the greater sensitivity that women have when compared to men, whether that be on the question of "pure" emotion, "pure" life relations, life and death, -- which they consider a stumbling block to "objectivity". "Therefore", it is the man who really sees, even when totally blind to the question of what used to be called "the woman's role." The truth, however, is -- and nowhere clearer than in Bartky -- that it is they who have put the greatest divide between life and thought. Somewhere a South African great writer, Mphahlele, in explaining why he returned from lush America to the South African ghetto, said that unless you can "feel history", it is impossible to either be a great writer or be part of history or anything but an exile, an escapist. (And it was he who underlined "feel" and repeated the expression "feel history". No wonder I ~~MAN~~ have felt such an affinity with Blacks before ever I saw a Black.)

Now then, on projection -- sorry, I always have a critical suggestion to make even when I think something is nearly perfect, and wanted to begin by congratulating you on the beautiful re-production of Eleanor Marx in Chicago. I trust my suggestion is not only constructive but dialectical and needed for all projections. I'm referring to the fact that, instead of thrusting the reader directly into a four-page analysis at one full sweep, I think it would have been greatly enhanced if before starting and directly after

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Eleanor's picture, three questions were posed, each on a separate line, such as: 1) The Chicago ~~MEMO~~ of Eleanor Marx and how this relates both to Labor and to Women's Liberation Today.
2) Eleanor Marx "Speaks American" and Practices Marxism.
3) New Directions for Us.

Let me return for a minute to the question of objectivity and feelings and the male chauvinism in women, but this time with organization. It isn't only Bartky who is not a Marxist-Humanist, who saw "for the first time" what had been in RLWLKM for more than the books' publication since the very first chapter (not Chapter 1 in RLWLKM, but what was printed as the first draft chapter in NAL on the Ethnological Notebooks and the attack on Draper. It is very nearly all WL-NAL. Take two things: One is the question of how long that Praxis article has been distributed and indeed featured at your last pre-convention WL Conference. Did a single one of you either discuss it seriously in relationship to how you would project it and work out all the new, either at the conference or the whole year after?

Two is the very unique way in which I transformed Sheila Rowbotham's "organizing idea" when she wrote it and meant it and I attacked it and meant it as just one ~~EM~~ more form of vanguard partyism, only her type of Lenin's "professional revolutionaries" were women, women, women. What I did by using the very same words but making organizing small and Idea caps and underlined was to make Idea as the subject for organizing. I doubt a single one of our women caught anything in that, considered it a challenge, or connected it with "revolution in permanence" as ground for organization. Had they done so, then I would have considered them great projectionists of the Marxist-Humanist body of ideas, true originals and not just adherents, and of all things not ready at once to ~~EM~~ shout out against men, against "being told" instead of listening for ideas.

Yours,

16342

June 2, 1984

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Dear Raya,

As you must be able to guess, from the time it has taken me to begin to try and answer your letter to me of May 17, I found it very difficult and think there is much in it that I have yet to understand. I feel it would be wrong of me to wait any longer to try and reply so these first few sentences are to apologize for taking so long and to emphasize how tentative I am about the rest of the letter.

Let me begin by talking of the May 19 REB minutes where you talk of the male chauvinism equally applicable to men and women--the relationship to woman as founder and the relationship of founder to leadership... (W)hile women naturally accept woman as leader,... it is not true they make the serious distinction that is needed, to recognize Marxist-Humanism as body of ideas, between founder and leadership in general as well as membership." In trying to figure out what that was all about, I thought, it has to do with the fact that us M-Hist women didn't work out the questions posed by our founder, even (or especially?) ones specifically on women's liberation, e.g., Rosa Luxemburg 1905 Revolution/1907 break with Jogiches, or why the first draft chapter was on the EN and the relation of that to chapter 12. In your letter to me you bring in two more things that aren't only not working out direct questions, but reflect an attitude (as does not working out questions I think) which you characterize as male chauvinism: the way the Praxis article has never been taken up as well as your critique of Rowbotham and the new articulation of how the WLM "was searching for a decentralized form of organization that would be founded on an organizing idea."

Because I do so recognize myself in this critique, I want to reject the label of "male chauvinism" even if it's "very, very subtle." I keep thinking of the critique you've developed of Engels. Wasn't his attitude to Marx at least similar? What I'm thinking, but maybe this is too personal, is that where the male chauvinism comes in is both in attitude to founder and to ourselves. Perhaps I can explain what I mean by talking personally about the Praxis article. I had great difficulty with it, first of all because it wasn't what I expected (which means it wasn't going to do it all for me, that is, all I would have to do is show it to women and they would love it and join). That article is a tremendously difficult, compact presentation that covers an incredible amount of time, facts and movements; where each paragraph--sometimes each sentence--is a summary... I didn't understand why you wrote it in that form. (I'm putting it in the past tense because I think I'm beginning to work out that question.) So doesn't the attitude come in both in relation to you and to myself in not taking that question of why this form, seriously; letting it drop for a year?

In trying to get out of all this the paragraph in your letter that seemed key is where you define this "very, very subtle male chauvinism" that's in the women too as, "a question of not knowing that philosophy is not Ego or Centralization or 'Personality' and that it must be projected never the less as unique, original, the source which is Subject as well. Without that, the projection will get nowhere because it is not a projection; it is not a challenge; it cannot win adherents." I was struck with your repeated use of the word "projection." In your letter to the "Revolutionary Sisters" that is also the word you use, set off by dashes: "I would like to propose that you take advantage of the pre-convention period to write out a sort of balance sheet from which a new concretization--I mean new projection--of Marxist-Humanism for the WLM can flow." I think if we would at least try to work out the questions you have posed along with developing a more serious attitude to you as founder and to ourselves as Revolutionary sisters, that would

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I like very much your suggestion for projection with the Eleanor Marx article. (I want to give some credit to Eugene because he did the lay-out and picked that beautiful blue paper. I accept the criticism because he showed it to me before he ran it off so I certainly had my chance for input.) I used those 3 questions to begin the talk I gave at UIC on Eleanor Marx and they not only helped the audience (small as it was) see the todayness of EM, but also helped me in deciding what to add to the article for the talk. What always sort of knocks me off my feet is when you talk of something in philosophic terms, as you talked of "projection" in your letter, and then you do it and it comes out appearing so "simple"--like adding 3 questions so the reader isn't thrust "directly into a four-page analysis at one full sweep" and one that starts with IWD to boot.

In your May 17 letter you state that "the direction at the convention cannot be gained only from me." I hope that my Dear Sisters of May 17, that crossed with yours to me, is some of what you had in mind. I have gotten several replies just recently to that letter. Tommie reports she is writing a review of RLWL&MPR as do Susie and Sheila. Susie's is to go to Women's Review of Books and Sheila's to Women's International News Network. They also write of where they have sent reviews and Sheila gave review copies to two professors and thinks one might actually come through with a review in a poli. sci. journal. But what just struck me in reading over their letters is that where as each one mentions the Praxis article, saying they liked what I wrote about it, none of them mentions reviewing that newest of our pamphlets (or for that matter any of our new pamphlets).

I am sorry that I won't be able to write a contribution for the WL bulletin. I have yet to start writing my organizers report. What I will try to do for the Convention is have a review of the Praxis article (we really will have to begin calling that something else) and at least begin to try to work out some of the questions you have posed to us this year.

Love,

Terry

16344

June 6, 1984

Dear Terry:

The third paragraph of your letter of June 2 so impressed me that I was simply going to retype it and send it in as "my" contribution to the WL bulletin. But then I decided that would be a cop-out, too. So let me explain what I saw in it, first by quoting what I consider the key part of that paragraph and part of the next so that all can see what you say and then I will explain what I think is of the essence. You take issue with my expression on "male chauvinism" but correctly state: "Where the male chauvinism comes in is both in attitude to founder and to ourselves. Perhaps I can explain what I mean by talking personally about the Praxis article. I had great difficulty with it, first of all because it wasn't what I expected (which means it wasn't going to do it all for me, that is, all I would have to do is show it to women and they would love it and join). That article is a tremendously difficult, compact presentation that covers an incredible amount of time, facts and movements; where each paragraph -- sometimes each sentence -- is a summary. I didn't understand why you wrote it in that form. (I'm putting it in the past tense because I think I'm beginning to work out that question.)"

You then quote my definition of a "very, very subtle male chauvinism" as a "a question of not knowing that philosophy is not Ego or Centralization or Personality and that it must be projected never the less as unique, original, the source which is subject as well. Without that, the projection will get nowhere because it is not a projection; it is not a challenge; it cannot win adherents." I was struck with your repeated use of the word 'projection'. In your letter to the 'Revolutionary Sisters' that is also the word you use, set off by dashes: 'I would like to propose that you take advantage of the pre-convention period to write out a sort of balance sheet from which a new concretization -- I mean new projection -- of Marxist-Humanism for the WM can flow.' I think if we would at least try to work out the questions you have posed along with developing a more serious attitude to you as founder and to ourselves as Revolutionary Sisters, that would help our projection tremendously."

You have put your finger right on the spot when you express the fact that people were reading, and not only the Praxis article, but all my writings, as if it was meant "for" them and when they didn't feel it was so, that ended the matter. The real question is why, that is to say, why should they have thought that whatever it is they had in their minds would have brought numbers and generally expanded our outreach instead of trying to work out that "different form" which I used to write? And more important still, why am I judging that to be a "very, very subtle" kind of male chauvinism in our women? Here is the point: The question never entered the Marxist-Humanism women's minds because they all "love" me. And they used that feeling not to probe into what was involved philosophically in the form in which I expressed,

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not myself, but the philosophy at stake. It certainly would never have dawned upon them, had I been Man, to use the word "love". On the contrary, they would have taken for granted that "Leadership", accepting the man as leader, had nothing to do with love or comradeship or not that man's writings was written for them. Rather, they would have known it was written for the world, for the new stage of cognition, as well as for the new stage of releasing the masses to move forward and then they would have dug, dug, dug until they reached the spot -- and that with great patience and not impatiently looking for an immediate answer. The challenge for them to keep diving until they found the single dialectic for both the objective and the subjective would also not have kept them from projecting the "great thought" that they themselves had not yet fully grasped, but nevertheless KKKKK confident that someone, (probably because we are not an elitist organization and create all that space for RV's for those who are not Members) would grasp it.

All this digging and diving and allowing others (the "outsiders") participate in "goal-setting-making" -- that is, working out the thought that the leader projected -- would have had them stretch and stretch until they reached that height. Instead, the KKK-VL women just let it go, without any reorganization of themselves, without concern or even questioning whether they should be concerned that the attitude to "the Man" was different from what it was to the woman founder.

The worst thing of all this is that they themselves ~~themselves~~ did not become challengers to all other tendencies, such as realizing that it was not a question of "his" or "her" woman it comes to thinking. Where they should have shed the very question of ego and worked out a dialectic of women's liberation as one of four forces of revolution, they wanted to look at only one, typically unconscious of the fact that any elitism was there involved. There is no way on heaven or earth that anyone can know which of the four forces will be "vanguard". That is why we use the phrase "masses in motion as vanguard" and that only the revolution can reveal, and that revolution will be successful only when it's united with a theory that has reached the point of philosophy.

That I'm saying for now is that though you haven't worked this out for the bulletins, you will make it your imperative task to work it out for your Conference, Friday, July 6. We cannot let another conference go by by telling the convention in five minutes that the whole afternoon didn't really take up the fundamentally new perspective other than to increase activity. What, for example, will be done to make next year's mini-tours for the National Caucus women something that has the dialectical ground of having worked on the trilogy of revolution in the intervening months, and that by not separating it from the ten-year Perspective reports on the new classes and realizing the dialectics of the PVL as now evidence develop in the objective situation?

Yours,

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