

Jan. 18, 1966

Dear Friends:

I should like to expand one of the points in my report on Japan that deals with Zenshin's attitude toward the vanguard party. The context in which I wish to discuss this point is the original, unique and, at the same time, profoundly Marxist nature--that is to say, the type of Marxism that has never let go of the historic continuity with the works of Marx himself--of our theoretical contributions over the past 25 years. (It is exactly a quarter of a century since I completed the first study of the Five Year Plans and the nature not only of the Russian economy but the new stage of ~~the~~ world economic development.)

The latest pamphlet that Zenshin has now translated of our works is a combination of the Afro-Asian Revolutions pamphlet and the various essays on the Humanism of Marxism--Marx's Humanism in America and African Socialism; The Theory of Alienation; Marx's Debt to Hegel; and Marx's Humanism Today. When you relate this to the first pamphlet they were impelled to translate on The Law of Value and the Nature of the Russian Economy and you realize that the latter were first published in the 1940's and that, above all, not only have these studies stood the test of time, but actually answer the problems the Japanese movement faces now, ~~not~~ because they are 25 years behind the times, but because, as a world problem, state capitalism is first now engaging the minds of men as a serious theoretical and practical problem, you can see that no political tendency anywhere can compare with us in theoretical development --and none will advance much without collaboration with us, standing on our shoulders!

And yet, and yet

They have the organization. We do not.

Nor can this be blamed on the "objective" situation. No doubt no other tendency lives in the most affluent and militaristic society, and none had to confront so retrogressionist a phenomenon as McCarthyism as late as the 1950's when even in a totalitarian land like East Germany workers rose spontaneously to put an end to the myth of Stalin's invincibility. And many, many more instances could be cited that were more favorable to theory than to organizational growth. But that would be searching for excuses and, though good ones, they amount to little more than rationalizations for failures to grow.

So I repeat, they have the organization; we do not. And this is the reason, in fact, that I frankly gave them when I said that my insistence that the 1903 Leninist concept of the party is dead and unburied only because the Stalinists and Trotskyists, for different reasons but with the same results, want to paint their elitist, ruling class concept of "party to lead" with Leninist colors, embroidered with revolutionary phraseology. Which does not mean that either the African Revolutions which based themselves on some vanguardist concept of party even while engaged in spontaneous revolt, or the revolutionary anti-Stalinist movement that is not seeking for power but for new foundations for human relations, have no valid causes for their insistence on the quintessential need for "building the revolutionary Party."

In a word, I wish to discuss the question, without either fetishisms for or totally against, "the Party." Building the Marxist Party without theory will get them nowhere, it is true, and none proved that more conclusively than Trotsky who had spent the 13 years between his expulsion by Stalin till his death to build

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"the vanguard party" only to have it end up the stillbirth it was at the end of WW II --and, since his death, has become but the leftwing white-wash of Communism, Russian and Chinese.

On the other hand, none know better than ourselves that theory cannot be separated from practice by some unbridgeable gulf. So let us put our concept of the unity of theory and practice to work in the consideration of what Zenshin has achieved by clinging to one or another form of vanguardism.

The most impressive fact, to me, was the seriousness with which, both in theory and practice, they live by the concept of "professional revolutionary", that is to say, the indispensability of a group of people who, literally, have no other problem taking up their time than the movement, building it. They no doubt have more than a couple of dozen of full-time workers for the movement. Don't tell me it's because they are a large organization and can afford it. They are poor. But not only at the center but in each locality, and no matter how few there are in that locality, the very first point on the agenda always is: how can we, somehow, support at least one whose full-time job it is to build the Marxist organization?

Now, it is true, that, in turn, that one or two or three lives on very little (and do you suppose any one could live on what Olga gets?), and, moreover, does everything possible to continue to do so for years. For example, it seems that it is possible to attend a university, be a student, for 8, not just 4 years. So --each one who can, tries not to graduate when the 4 years schooling is up, but somehow extend it to the maximum, where either a scholarship or a parent or a mate or some "private tutoring" (any time some comes along but not as a day in or day out affair, in a word more or less limited to examination times, etc.) can create for the student the time to continue his full-time work for the movement in and out of school.

And when they finally do graduate, it is not the academic career they search for, but how to become an organizer for the Marxist movement by either directly giving it full time, or working within trade union, or organizing on a side. It is nothing at all to pick yourself up and go anywhere at any time the organization asks because it is the other locality that is of importance to the class struggle or the anti-war movement or international relations.

The other is the organizational sense that permeates everything one does. For example, take a class in Marxism. Whether that is held for workers or students, these who attend know that it is not knowledge per se, not even when it is the history of the working class movement or of Marxism that one does not get in school and gets only from such courses. Rather, it becomes the means --not just a method of analysis/other events, but the method of "solving a concrete problem". Or, to put it differently, every student knows that at the end of the class he will know something the average worker does not know and he can therefore help the other worker to organize his shop, or direct a strike, or participate in a demonstration in a way that would rebound to this anti-Stalinist movement --and not to that. So that organizational consciousness goes with a pride in organization that is not easily persuaded that "marching under a different flag" in the same demonstration is one and the same thing.

Let this be
a starter for our discussions, and I don't mean waiting for convention discussions, but each local discussing this problem now, the points of full-time workers for the movement, and ways of transmitting organizational consciousness to those outside our movement. --Yours Rava

P8 Olga also mentions to Zenshin that the decline of the movement will be Thursday of the month as usual.