

Feb. 8, 1986

Dear Cyrus,

Your letter to the Iranian comrades of 1/27/85 excited me, and I would like to participate in that discussion. I felt that your attitude was exactly like mine when you expressed "the urgency in all of us to show this moment is tied with Marxist-Humanism which is deeply indigenous to the Iranian experience." You're correct again on the questions I asked on why the underestimation of meetings in the mosques and why... the Grand Mosque takeover in Saudi Arabia. We could ask for a better reaction now that you report that you had begun looking into material on the clergy and what you had found. I would suggest that you add a third tendency to the two you mentioned, of Homa Naetegh who holds that the clergy has always been reactionary and the popular front like Tudeh. It isn't true that popular front was the "nature" of the CP that created that line for that historic period, and popular front has to be considered separately. The third tendency I propose is that vanguardists should not be confused with popular front; though popular front was used by the vanguardists, the actual nature occurred during the transformation into opposite of Stalin as it turned from Marxism's internationalism, to "socialism in one country". It didn't look like nationalism, but because of the word socialism and because he definitely wanted the whole International to subordinate itself to that socialism. But it was nationalism expanding itself into a not so new form of imperialism.

It is this new appearance which long before the betrayal in '53, when the East European Revolts started which made some intellectuals temporarily turn away in the West like the Universities and Left Review in England, plus Trotskyists etc. who seemed to be for the revolts but actually ended up exactly like what they were, left Stalinists. The "Left" side being popular frontism, were each one got swallowed or used it--all for getting into power.

At the end of World War II I suddenly got very interested in the Middle East with Khrushchev's successful trip of arms selling against the "West". (somewhere in the 60s that was my first letter on the awful contradiction and new type of reactionary nationalism who nevertheless want freedom from imperialism. Whereas these kind of popular fronts bifurcated into "vanguardists" who were ready to consider everyone socialists who was against the West, and straight West U.S. liberals were busy exposing how reactionary the clergy, how opportunistic was everybody else, except they, who wanted to be for the West against Russia. (At that time, Walter Laquer, though he was among those exposing the retrogressive nature of both Stalinism and the old Middle East politics as he was for Palestine becoming Israel, manifested friendliness enough to our tendency and he got it from Maria Kaufman, and did collect all platforms of the tendencies, in I believe, Middle East in Transition (or perhaps a different title) and should be studied.)

This part is important for understanding what so many Iranians, who were actual revolutionaries, considered Shariati, a truly new philosophy close to humanism, and would take advantage of my not knowing Farsi to see I really don't know all he stands for. His turning to the clergy proves that there are no alternatives that are truly a new philosophy, except Marxist-Humanism.

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You are so correct when you show the while the 1953 betrayal made some intellectuals turn away from Tudeh, but since they remain on a different ground ideologically they end up and so forth and so forth.

Here I wish to take ^{exception} to what has become a habit for most of us, and that is to use ideological as if it were synonymous with philosophy and the Idea of Hegel. IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO. First let's remember that Marx, created a whole category of ideology as false consciousness, bourgeois consciousness. And he certainly understood Hegel's Idea and what he did to transform it into a "new Humanism" by uniting the idea with reality, actuality, a goal of classlessness through the final class, the proletariat overthrowing the bourgeois. Secondly, I have discovered what I think will help us (god knows how many years from now) make it possible to so distinguish philosophy from theory as to make it easy to understand, but that is for another time. The point here is that whereas loosely, in ordinary speech we use all use ideological when we mean philosophic, but the truth is that when you use it with ground, which is a very philosophic term, it is bound to sound exactly like it sounds when we use it against Reagan, dogmatic.

You are right again when you say on page 2 that it was not before the seventies when serious attempts were made to unearth the tendencies in the 1906-11 and the 1919-20 Gilan Republic, so that in 1978 it was "natural" to consider the mosque just a place and not question what the heck were the clergies' motives that permitted that. Okay, let's first get back to religion in the period of Marx himself. What do you suppose Bakunin was in addition to being an anarchist but pretending to be a First Internationalist? He wanted to yell to the skies that you must be an atheist and your program must say that. Marx, long before he met Bakunin, already had the fight with the Left Hegelians on the question of religion. Marx was certainly an atheist, but he did not misunderstand religion's power, by looking very differently to the masses who were so disgusted with the world that they had to believe in some other life, from which he concluded that not only must you show religion's two faces, but know that science will not succeed over religion in a single night. That, like the small private property of the peasant that you are certainly opposed to, would be a process after the ruling class is overthrown. Because even the great revolutionaries like Lenin did think that the most important thing was to get rid of religion, they failed to recognize that Father Gapon was leading a revolution against the Czar with that demonstration for the Czar. Do you realize that that is why it took from January, 1905 to very nearly October before the Marxists were aware of that very new form that was spontaneously organized by the proletariat, the Soviets. Even Trotsky who headed it did not see it as a form of revolution in permanence; his 1905 simply described what they were doing; it was only the Mensheviks, of which he had been a member but which he left, called his report of the St. Petersburg Soviet "permanent revolution" that he accepted it. Heretofore, Marxists not publicly, but in their private little conversations, would have a good time laughing at Marx for being so "utopian" as a youth.

To get back to Iran, the Russian Revolution of 1905 had these tremendous ramifications in Iran and when the first Soviet was built in Terhan in December 1905, no one was really developing that question till I believe on the 25th anniversary of 1905. I believe the essay is in Ivan Spector's 1905 Russian Revolution and its Impact on the East. And I had a great deal of trouble to convince anyone of the women's role because my information first came from a "bourgeois" source. Sultan

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Zadeh should certainly be studied very carefully, but critically. by critically I mean that there is no doubt he was a great revolutionary and an Iranian and knows a great deal more than anyone else, and the Stalinists have certainly destroyed him. But it doesn't mean that his view was exactly the same as Lenin's in the 1920 Congress or that of Roy. It appeared to me from a careful study of the Congress that Lenin was so happy to get indigenous Marxists in these countries and so consciousness that he was stepping on altogether new ground at that Congress and so anxious to have a new view of national revolutions but not for a moment to forget that it is only Russia and Marxism that succeeded that he did what he did on all those new question from Iran to the Negro in the U.S.

Oh yes, Bani-Sadr and the Mujahedeen and terrorism. People easily think that either that terrorists are either revolutionaries or out and out counter-revolutionaries. It isn't true that the opposition of Marxism to terrorism is based on either of those concepts. They are opposed because terrorism will simply not achieve a mass overthrow or created ground for new human relations. While there were times when conditions are so bad that "secretly" they would drink a toast to the one who the most hated officials of the Czar, Vera Zazulich was a terrorist, but she herself became a Marxist. I what happened to Bani-Sadr was was a alienated Left Parisian intellectual? First he did not have the slightest conception of what Khomeini stood for except the overthrow of the Shah, then he totally capitulated to Khomeini including such idiocies against women as accusing them of arousing passions by not wearing a chador on their head, and finally not only letting a terrorist ~~escape~~ escape, but actually make himself believe that one bomb against a few leaders would achieve the overthrow of Khomeini. And now look at the fact of Khomeini's power when the bomb got rid of his whole general political staff.

But don't call his power the power of ideas, Ideology and his ideas are religion, specifically Islam, specifically the Persian not the Arab type.

Finally two points. One concerns the illusion that power in any single country permits one -- I am new rulers -- to excapse. The world has two and only two polar nuclear powers-- the U.S. and Russia. I am referring to Afghanistan. The 1979 Revolution was indigenous, was spontaneous, and Russia played a very, very minor role. So when they had their little coups and different tendencies in the "Party" (like what happened in Grenada) the one that was with the army thought he could disregard Russia and elaborate all his own policies. The Russian army was even faster in putting an end to that than when there was a real revolution as in Hungary or as in Czechoslovakia or....

The other point, we are back to philosophy Marx's humanism and in this era Marxist-Humanism. It is of the essence not to think that when you speak of revolutionary forces as reason it is the total philosophy without philosophers; in otherwards it must be a new unity, a new relationship of these revolutionary forces who have a form of theory but not the whole; neither philosophy or forces are the whole by themselves. That is where it becomes so crucial to try and develop a way to concretize that theory has to reach a very different stage to become philosophy, and that it is in fact only in the unity of the two that it is the whole.

I was pleased by your final point about the correspondence being continued among the Iranian; I will be its most avid reader.

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W. R. Roy