

CONVENTION CALL

June 1, 1982

To all Members of News and Letters Committees
and British Marxist-Humanists

METHODOLOGY AND POLITICALIZATION: New Forms of
Revolutionary Opposition in the Nuclear Age of
Capitalist-Imperialist Degeneracy

I. Reaganomics, Reganpolitics, Reagan the Retrograde

So critical are both the deep economic Recession in the U.S. and the disintegrative state of NATO -- i.e., Reagan's foreign policy -- that any crisis, no matter where, immediately takes front center of the historic stage. Thus, the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, which first gave Reagan the illusion that he could play a "neutral" game between Britain and Argentina, soon became, instead, the total expose of NATO's "Atlanticism" as it revealed one more display of global imperialism with its outreach spelling out its death agony. It is this which is compelling Reagan to place his counter-revolutionary "urgencies" in Latin America on the back burner. In a word, each crisis, no matter in which part of the world and no matter whether, on the face of it, it seems inconsequential, soon reaches the edge of that total global conflict between the U.S. and Russia that does not exclude a possible nuclear holocaust.

Indeed, the U.S. rulers never did depart from the Cold War, not only against Russia, but reaching into Africa where, from the very start of the African revolutions, U.S. imperialism was engaged -- with the connivance of the UN -- in plotting the murder of Lumumba. Just as the so-called "Atlantic" Alliance had long since designated Japan as "the West", and just as the U.S. declared the Persian Gulf to be its "national" interest when the Iranian Revolution burst forth, so now Reagan's retrograde politics are deepening in the U.S. itself against rank and file labor, Blacks, youth and women.

The Democrats may think that this gives them the chance to recoup some of the powers they lost in the 1980 Republican sweep by calling for the re-establishment of some aspects of Roosevelt's New Deal along with Johnson's great delusion during the Vietnam War that U.S. imperialism could have both butter and guns. All they reveal is that they are still laboring under the grand illusion gained from World War II that this is supposedly the "American century." What has, instead, been the reality of the Vietnam War is that they "lost" Vietnam (which was never theirs), not only because Vietnam defeated U.S. imperialism on the battlefield, but because within the U.S. there arose a strong and massive anti-Vietnam War Youth movement, which had been preceded in 1960 by the Black Revolution and was followed by the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement.

At the same time, the U.S. lost the air of invincibility with their co-capitalist West European rulers. By 1973, the Arab-Israeli War was soon followed by a shocking four-fold increase in the price of oil (which is now 12-fold!). That spelled the end of cheap oil and raw materials on which imperialism had gluttonously enriched itself. By 1974-75, it all added up to the deepest recession ever since the Depression. This was by no means an ordinary economic cyclical crisis followed by a boom. It was so internal, so structural, so deep in the vitals of the capitalist production system that it

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spelled out the truth of capitalism in its death agony: there would be no more booms.

The reality now is: 1) 10 million unemployed -- and that counts only those who still receive compensation, not those who have exhausted theirs and given up any hope of getting work; 2) The situation of the youth, who have it hardest of all (and not only students whose tuition costs have risen to unconscionable heights), is seen the most starkly among Blacks, where the unemployment rate is now 60 percent overall in industrial centers, and 85 percent in Detroit; 3) Women, who were among the first to lose their jobs, have retained what jobs they still hold because they get the lowest pay; 4) There is also such deep discontent among rank and file workers who have been forced by the labor bureaucracy to accept all kinds of concessions and give-backs, that nobody doubts that the winter of discontent, far from being over, is sure to flare up to revolt dimensions as the recession deepens.

This is why we must not stop at the analysis of the immediate problems only. The need is to probe further what caused these structural changes in the economy ever since the new stage of automated production was introduced in the early 1950s. Its continuance in the mid-1970s to the stage of robotics has further deepened the decay of capitalism. Why have the new forms of workers' struggles against automation not been further developed theoretically? After all, these workers' battles against the predecessor of robotics had resulted in General Strike in the mines and wildcats in the auto plants as well as totally new questions those workers were posing concerning what kind of labor -- manual/mental -- should men and women do? In East Germany, where the first revolt from under totalitarian Communism occurred, they combined the struggle against both work norms and political tyranny and issued the slogan "Bread and Freedom." It came to a climax in Hungary, 1956, with outright revolution and the bringing onto the current historic stage of Marx's 1844 Humanist Essays. Where the capitalist ideologues had declared the 1950s to be the decade of the "end of ideology," the masses in motion displayed a passion for a philosophy of liberation as powerful as the actual battles. Both spread like wildfire throughout the world with the emergence of a whole new Third World in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, as well as new forms of Black, youth and anti-war revolts in the technologically advanced world, including the U.S. itself.

II. The 30-Year Movement from Practice and Developments in Philosophy, in Theory -- 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, into the 1980s

By the 1960s, the movement from practice that emerged in the 1950s assumed a universal form. Instead of the post-Marx Marxists diving into new philosophic concretizations, however, they only tailed one state-power or another. Thus, Mao's China, which had so strong a pull on the new generation of revolutionaries in the West because it did criticise Russia, revealed that its criticism was purely nationalistic as it came to the defense of the Russian counter-revolution against Hungarian revolutionaries, warning the Chinese masses against doing anything similar. In a word, nearly all post-

Marx, Marxists, including some who had participated in the development of the state-capitalist theory, failed to meet the challenge from below that arose with the movement from practice that was itself a form of theory. We alone completed a comprehensive philosophic-theoretic major work, rooted in that movement from practice, with the publication of Marxism and Freedom. Moreover, it was preceded by the breakthrough on the Absolute Idea in 1953 six weeks before the actual outbreak of the first East German Revolt, on June 17. Marxism and Freedom is being reprinted this year, on its 25th anniversary, with a new Introduction to greet the 100th anniversary of Marx's death. Marxism and Freedom laid the ground for hearing all the new voices from below in the turbulent 1960s -- from Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves to Workers Battle Automation and the Free Speech Movement -- and working out new aspects of the Black dimension both on the American scene in American Civilization on Trial and on the African scene in the Afro-Asian pamphlet. At the same time, M&F had been the first to publish the English translation of Marx's Humanist Essays as well as the first English translation of Lenin's Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic.

Without such philosophic preparation for revolution, activism in itself, even when it reaches such a high point as 1968, cannot achieve a successful revolution. A new stage of cognition was reached with the end of the illusion about activism by itself and considering that theory could just be picked up "en route". The hard labor required to work this out laid the foundation for Philosophy and Revolution. A need for analyzing Hegelian dialectics, "in and for itself," analyzing all Hegel's major works and carrying this through in different historic periods, first with Marx and then with Lenin, constituted Part I, "Why Hegel? Why Now?" At no time did we forget the new voices from below, only this time instead of just creating a platform for them, we integrated them with the new stage in the breakthrough on the Absolute Idea, not only in seeing it as a movement from practice as well as from theory, but as a new unity of theory and practice so it would become a new beginning. The publication date was 1973, the eve of a new, deeper, objective, economic crisis in capitalism. The present republication of F&R with a new Introduction places the whole battle of ideas as well as the actual liberation struggles as an actual preparation for revolution. It is this which cleared the ground for finding the trail to the 1980s in the very last decade of Marx's life with the new work, Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution.

Just as we met the challenge of the objective situation, at the last convention, by both declaring 1980 to be "the year of the book," and intensifying our activities against the enveloping economic and political crises with an active intervention through increasing N&L from an 8-pager to a 12-pager -- and have carried that through for the entire last two years, indeed making it permanent -- so we must now carry out "3 books, not 1" as that preparation for revolution.

While we cannot here develop in full the concept of "3 books, not 1," which will be done in the Perspectives Thesis itself, we can and must develop the changes that occurred between 1980 and 1982 in the new book. At the same time, we must know so well the direction in which we are headed that we are able to single out which of the

four forces of revolution as Reason is crucial at this moment in its total opposition to Reaganism -- in economics, in politics, in internationalism, especially to Africa. Clearly, it is the Black dimension; and it is to that end that we are asking Lou Turner, who has done such a magnificent job in Los Angeles on Black and organizational growth, to move to the Center directly after the Convention.

Along with our activities around the book and the Black dimension stands our work in Women's Liberation and with the Youth. Indeed, the most critical of all activities, no doubt, will be with the anti-nuclear movement. Nothing more shows the power that movement already has than the fact that that war-hawk, Reagan, has had to at least pretend he is calling for nuclear reduction and take note of the great anti-nuclear movement in Europe as well as the U.S. which threatens to undermine his wild drive for nuclear missiles.

Nor can we forget that our work with the Latino liberation movement must be sharply intensified. None can have any illusion that Reagan has given up his counter-revolution against the freedom fighters of El Salvador, or Nicaragua, just because he had to abandon Argentina which had promised to aid him in "destabilizing" Nicaragua. Quite the contrary. The very fact that the pretense of being "neutral" in the fight over Falklands/Malvinas was so rapidly and totally dropped is only further proof that the capitalist rulers will not permit any part of the Third World to choose the point of the final showdown.

Methodology and Politicalization, i.e. the concretization of a philosophy of revolution, is of the essence precisely because it illuminates the immediate as well as the ultimate problems. We must first consider this as it manifested itself in the new book.

III. Methodology and Politicalization: Difference Between the 1980 Draft and the 1982 Completed Work

In turning to the differences between the 1980 Draft which had 8 chapters (see p. 24 of our 25 Years of Marxist-Humanism) and the 1982 work which not only has 12 chapters, but three Parts, we must hold tightly to the historic new that arose simultaneously with the movement from practice and the new unity of theory and practice that I called: Absolute Ideas as New Beginning. This can rightly be called the Second Great Divide in Marxism even as the First Great Divide was Lenin's philosophic reorganization at the outbreak of World War I and the collapse of the Second International.

Let's begin with such a simple thing as moving the Afterword on Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution from Chapter 1 to Chapter 11. In the first case, it placed it in relation to how the theory was discussed at the 1907 Congress, although Trotsky's analysis carried it through the outbreak of WWII. In the second case, by appearing in Part III, Chapter 11, it means a direct confrontation of Trotsky's theory with Marx's theory of revolution in permanence both in 1850 and as he developed it in 1875 as a new ground for organization.

First to be noted is that nothing could have produced that change of place before a totally new category of post-Marx ^{was created} Marxism, as not just a chronological description but a rejection of all other Marxist theories -- of revolutionaries as well as reformists -- because even the greatest have divided what Marx had united: philosophy and revolution as inseparables.

Secondly, this involved seeing something new in Marx himself, who had developed his theory of permanent revolution after the defeat of the 1848-49 revolutions and had addressed it to a "Party", i.e. the Communist League. Thus he created the ground for organization which became, not just a great divide from all other tendencies (specifically Lassaleanism) but a whole new continent of thought and revolution: Marx's Marxism. This ground for organization in the Critique of the Gotha Program occurred in that pivotal year, 1875, the year of the final and crucial French edition of Capital, with all its new additions, including the concentration and centralization of capital in the hands of a single capitalist, which gave us ground for the theory of state-capitalism.

Seeing Marx's work as a totality made it possible for the first time to criticize revolutionaries as well as reformists, including Lenin who alone had reorganized philosophically and met the challenge of WWI and the breakdown of established Marxism, thereby creating ground for the November 1917 proletarian revolution, but who had not extended that philosophic reorganization to the old vanguardist 1902-3 concept of the Party, though he had often modified it. (We had developed that modification at great length in M&F in relating the question of forms of organization to forms of revolt.)

Chapter 2 on "The Break with Karl Kautsky, 1910-1911" was the climax, originally, for the new book. It was meant to be a climax, since those years of 1910-11 had shown in Luxemburg, at one and the same time, the flash of genius on imperialism and the sensing of opportunism in Kautsky four full years ahead of the outbreak of WWI and the Second International's betrayal. It was intended to "prove" that Luxemburg (Woman) was greater than Lenin (Man), who in those years did not see any opportunism in Kautsky. The actual working out of that period, which showed that the flash of genius on imperialism had not led Luxemburg to discover a new Subject in the resistance of the oppressed masses, forced the confrontation of Luxemburg not just with Kautsky but with Marx. The next Chapter on "The Inter-regnum" simply would not hold up in this confrontation of Marx and Luxemburg. Now look at the new Chapter 3, where that confrontation is direct, and see how it leads to the National Question and must of necessity relate to the dialectics of revolution.

Chapter 4, in now dealing with the "Dialectics of Revolution", leaving no room for Luxemburg to continue with her error on the National Question, creates new room for her magnificent revolutionary attitude on spontaneity. Moreover, this time the debate on the relationship of spontaneity to organization, far from being limited to the 1904 debate against Lenin (so beloved by Mensheviks) extends the debate to 1917 and the struggle against bureaucratism for revolutionary democracy, after the conquest of power. This is what makes Luxemburg so relevant, even urgent, for our day. It was

she who, in the very process of hailing the Russian Revolution, raised the question once again on the continuation of revolutionary democracy after winning proletarian power.

The subject of Women's Liberation, which in the 1980 draft was but a single chapter, has become a whole new Part II -- "The Women's Liberation Movement as Revolutionary Force and Reason" -- which has three chapters, allowing us to have an Overview both of the Black dimension and of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

At the same time, we get a totally new view of Rosa Luxemburg as original character, as feminist, viewed in the light of today. Indeed, it casts a new illumination beyond what Luxemburg herself saw. Finally, the very fact that today's WLM has not "solved" the question of women's liberation but leaves tasks to be done, remains a challenge both for Women's Liberation and for the needed total uprooting of the old and the creation of new human relations.

Now look at Part III: "Karl Marx, From Critic of Hegel to Author of Capital and Theorist of 'Revolution in Permanence.'" A whole new section on dialectics was introduced. It disclosed that Marx, who had not yet fully broken with bourgeois society as he worked on his doctoral thesis in 1841, had laid the ground in his first critique of Hegelian dialectics, once he discovered the proletariat as the Universal Subject, for Marx's whole new continent of thought and of revolution.

Part III reveals the first view of Marx as a totality, disclosing new moments in the last decade of Marx's life that point a trail to the 1980s and first reveal the needed break with all post-Marx Marxists who congealed Marxism to their dogmatism and failed to work out the new moments as a continuing development. Just as the publication of Marxism and Freedom laid the ground for listening and projection of all the voices from below, and Philosophy and Revolution laid the ground for such pamphlets as Frantz Fanon, America's First General Strike, and the Latin American Revolutions -- so there is no doubt whatever that the new book will increase our outreach and strength not only in general, but specifically on Rosa Luxemburg as a revolutionary spontaneist, on the Women's Liberation Movement, and on the totality of Marx, himself.

Clearly, in this year of the centenary of Marx's death, when finally we can see all of Marx's works as a totality, our contribution with "3 books, not 1," because now it is historically placed and synthesized with what happened objectively and subjectively for the past 30 years, manifests what we mean by the "Second Great Divide." The last paragraph of the book articulates most precisely the tasks Marx's Marxism demands from us:

"Marx's legacy is no mere heirloom, but a live body of ideas and perspectives that is in need of concretization. Every moment of Marx's development, as well as the totality of his works, spells out the need for 'revolution in permanence.' This is the absolute challenge to our age."

Now that methodology and politicalization have given us, at one and the same time, both an analysis of current crises as we intensify all our activities and one view of "3 books, not 1," we can see how much we must achieve in the two intensive days and evenings of discussion at the Convention. Fortunately, we will first have three full months of pre-Convention discussion to clear our heads and get down to the organizational preparations.

IV. Organization-Philosophic Preparations for Convention

The follow-up to the last section of the book which is called "A 1980s View" begins with this Convention Call, which opens the pre-Convention discussion period. The National Chairwoman, Raya Dunayevskaya, has been asked to bring in a Draft Perspectives Thesis which will be printed in the July issue of N&L.

A Plenary session will be held on Friday, Sept. 3, at 7 PM for the outgoing National Editorial Board. It will be preceded by meetings of the national committees of both Youth and Women's Liberation. The Convention opens officially on Saturday morning, Sept. 4 and continues through Sunday evening, Sept. 5.

The Convention will begin, as always, with the National Chairwoman's Perspectives Report. It will be followed by two Sub-reports on "The Book and Politicalization" and by a Report on the Paper, the Organizational Report, brief reports on both Youth and Women's Liberation which will be included in the discussion after the Organization Report, and a Report on Finances. A final executive session will hear the National Chairwoman's report on Leadership, and elect a new National Editorial Board.

All sessions except the Executive session are open to friends and sympathizers on the invitation of the locals in consultation with the Center. All invited will have full voice.

The Detroit local has been asked to host a party to greet visitors and out-of town members on Saturday night, as well as to host the entire Convention.

--The RESIDENT EDITORIAL BOARD