

Minutes of REB Meeting, June 21, 1983

Present: All but Denby, ill; Jim, excused; Diane (sitter-in) working

Agenda: I. Report by Andy on Proposed Pamphlet on 1949-50 Miners General Strike; II. Report by Lou on BCM Conference; III. Report by Mike on Ongoing Activities; IV. G&W

I. Andy said he had a lot of difficulty in putting this report together, which stemmed from the fact that the 1951 strike seemed to him an important extension of what was set in motion and perceived in 1949-50, on the one hand; and because he had been unaware of the many organizational relationships and disputes going on at the time, involving WP, SWP, and JFT, on the other hand. (He had joined only the year before.) Andy briefly presented the history of the miners' struggles which were continuous, both right during WWII and in 1946 immediately after the war when workers erupted in strikes throughout the whole county, Truman nationalized the mines, and the Taft-Hartley law was passed. It was in this period that a W. Va. local was born when five young revolutionaries from the WP, all JFT, went there to establish one, and developed relationships especially with Black miners and with students. Andy was one of those students who joined them (Frank and Raymond were among the original five) and went into the mines. Less than a year later he had been in the mine explosion that put him in the hospital for many months. He was released just before the 1949 strike erupted and just in time to participate in it, and he briefly described what John L. Lewis' tactics had been up to then -- calling one district out at a time, while others went back to deplete supplies of coal above ground. But in the Fall of 1949 the miners who were supposed to go back refused. Andy described the mass meeting at the largest local in the whole area where the decision was made by the rank and file not to return.

It was during this period that RD was working on translating Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks (Andy said that he did not know anything about this, although there had been great excitement the year before when CIRJ's "Nevada Document" was produced) and was in Pittsburgh. It was RD who was considered the leader of the cadre not only for Pittsburgh, but for W. Va. (CIRJ was, of course, considered by all to be the leader of the Tendency, but he was very far distant -- in fact, non-existent -- insofar as the miners or the strike was concerned.) We had left the WP and were in the SWP -- indeed, we had joined the SWP because they were supposed to be for and expecting the American Revolution; but Andy noted that the W. Va. local, which was all JFT, was considered by the SWP to be "anti-leadership." During all this period what was known was RD's activity in W. Va. and with the strike; what was not known was the work RD was doing around the Philosophic Notebooks -- including her critique of CIRJ for not going as far as Lenin in his Nevada Document.

Andy then described some of the actual strike situation: The Taft-Hartley law has to be a point of reference here -- for it was that law that the operators and the government were holding over the miners' heads. Sitting in that mass meeting, where the miners rejected Lewis' order to go back to work, you could not fail to catch the tremendous release of passion and energy when the miners went beyond Lewis' dictates. It was because of Taft-Hartley that the miners were cut off from getting any funds from the UMW. As 1950 dawned, the miners and their families were desperate for food. What

was needed was how to get a bridge from the miners to other workers, and for that some sort of organization of the miners was required. It was RD who made the proposal to set up a Miners Relief Committee. Andy had found the minutes of the meeting (he had taken them, as Secretary) when that motion was passed -- and gave a picture of how many events were all happening one on top of the other, and how many forces were coming together at this point. (Raymond had sent in seven pages of his remembrances, including the way in which our students had taken up a collection for the miners at a WVU basketball game. Frank had sent in several things from his files and a long letter on how he sees the events with the eyes of 1983. All of these things will have to put into some form for the actual pamphlet.)

In no more than two weeks some \$16,000 was collected for miners relief, and the caravan from Local 600 in Detroit was on its way -- all the while there was increasing red-baiting as the movement and the support for it grew stronger. By the time the caravan from Detroit was actually on its way, the local labor coalition which would have nothing to do with the "red-tainted" committee up until then, wanted to join the and "get in on the act." Andy recalled the way a Black miner got up to say, "To hell with them, this is our victory. Tomorrow, we'll affiliate, but today it is our caravan." That adjourned the meeting. The strike was over in a week after the caravan arrived.

In back of everything, Andy said, is the continuous miner. The miners knew it would mean terrible unemployment for them, that it was a man-killer, but their struggles were shackled because they had no seniority clause. Even to get benefits from the Welfare Fund you had to have 20 years seniority -- and miners could be fired two days before they reached that with no recourse. It was to keep away from working on the continuous miner that they wanted to use seniority, in many cases. That question of seniority was the center of the 1951 strike that followed 49-50 so quickly.

Andy felt that when the SWP was so incensed at the activity we were developing in that period, it was tied to the fact that all of our politics was grounded in the rank-and-file miners. What was being practiced, although the category had not yet been so named, was "masses as Reason." That was what was imbedded in all the proposals RD made. For the Militant to come out with an article during this strike calling for the miners to support Lewis and go back to work reveals how very far they were from the workers themselves. It was they who charged us with "small mass partyism" first -- a charge CLRJ accused us of again later in the 1951 strike. Insofar as we are concerned, Andy said, the most revolutionary moment in the philosophic history of American labor occurred during the 1949-1950 Miners General Strike which saw the miners' self-activity against their own union, against so powerful a leader as John L. Lewis against the whole government of the U.S., raising new philosophic questions for our day -- and the confluence of that activity with the presence and activity of RD who went on to develop the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism out of that ground.

In the DISCUSSION, Olga said that, in trying to get straight all the threads that are involved in this whole period, she had made a chronological listing of what was happening when -- and what stood out for her as the key was the series of letters written through 1949 and 1950 as correspondence among Raya, Grace and CLRJ, but which are pri-

marily by Raya, because you can see that they were the theoretic preparation for what happened in that actual strike. We have often talked about the fact that the 1953 Letters on the Absolute Idea were written six weeks before East German workers erupted on June 17; and there is something of that same relationship involved in the fact that it was Feb. 18, 1949 -- four months before the 49 miners' strike erupted -- that RD had sent CLRJ her translation of Lenin's Notes on the Doctrine of Being, and March 12 when she had finished the entire translation and must have shocked CLRJ by contrasting what he had done and what Lenin had done on Notion. It is a full year later (Feb. 15, 1950) when a worker (JZ) is invited to the meeting where the book that is to become M&F gains in RD's mind the two new vantage points: the American worker and philosophy. What has occurred in between is that momentous strike. Moreover, there is a letter (March 14, 1950) in which RD writes of Marx having been in the mine fields with her in such a way that it is mind-boggling to re-read it now, looking at 1950 with the eyes of 1983. Olga said that reading through the Archives this very week that she had been typing the Draft Perspectives for the paper, with its all-important Part III on "hearing Marx think", she suddenly had gained an entirely new appreciation for our Archives, as the opportunity for us to truly see the process of working out revolution-in-permanence for our age and to actually hear RD thinking. Andy was not the only one who didn't know anything about those letters on the Philosophic Notebooks -- they were certainly not "organizational property". We who are so accustomed to having the opportunity to see everything in process do not always realize that it is a way of functioning that is unique to us. Moreover, that 49-50 correspondence on philosophy was not added to our own Archives on deposit at WSU when we added new material in 1975 to "bring it up to date" since 1969 -- that is, with the volume we called "Philosophy and Revolution, From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao". It was when RD began work on the new book, Olga felt, that the significance of that philosophic correspondence made it important to add to the collection for all to share. It highlights the relationship of this pamphlet as one coming out of the new book.

Raya said that all the dates Andy had brought in to his report made her remember another date. This was the period when Yugoslavia broke with Russia and the SWP had wanted Raya to go down to the mine region to talk to Slavic miners about their position on Tito! It was the period just after she had returned from presenting the state-capitalist position in Paris with her head full of the Camerounians, and the dispute with CLRJ and Grace on Israel -- and she had been "isolated" to Pittsburgh. It was certainly a most eventful period in all respects.

Raya said that she would, no doubt, have to contribute something to the pamphlet either as Preface or as Appendix -- and that it was much too soon to try to work out any form. But she felt it would be important to trace the developments leading up to 49-50 -- from the miners' actions in 1943 right in the midst of WWII and at the same time as the Black revolts; through the 1946 strike; to 1948 as a transition point and the actual 49 strike, when there is the fight against the continuous miner, on the one hand, and Raya working on the Philosophic Notebooks, on the other hand -- to 1950 and that letter on Marx and on the restructuring of Capital. (It is true we will need not just remembrances, but will have to have some of the actual facts -- and it would be good to find and report both what Labor Action and the Militant were printing then -- and we might even want to do something with the bulletin where we were charged with small-mass-partyism.)

What we have to ask is what is the relation between new stage of production and new stage of cognition? Here is what I see: 1) The workers are raising the question, "What kind of labor?" -- and by the way they ask, they are telling you the answer they expect. 2) There is a new point in cognition when RD says that their question means they are challenging the division of mental/manual. 3) When they call the continuous miner a "man-killer" you have to ask yourself what is the relationship between that question and your theory of state-capitalism? Here is the root of the division between RD and CLRJ. 4) When you study Lenin's return to Hegel you hear what he discovered about the relationship of philosophy to economics and philosophy to politics.

It is clear we will need another meeting before we work out the kind of report Andy can give to the Convention (RD said she would want to have the REB schedule one more meeting, on August 9, for that subject); and that since Andy is making a trip to W. Va. in July and Raymond one in August it might be possible to meet with Raymond after his trip but before the Convention as well (though this would not involve the entire REB).