

June 28, 1985

Dear Peter:

For a change, I have a problem that I am going to saddle on you, instead. After all, no matter what I pretend, I CANNOT pass for a youth but you can. I don't mean "pass" as if you aren't, considering the age of most of our few youth, but frankly you were so politically-philosophically cadre in every aspect from philosophy to organization that we "declared" somebody else youth. I do not know whether you know that I was very, very opposed to the designation the youth put on themselves as "International Marxist-Humanist Youth Committee." I "capitulated" with the single change of "international" to "internationalist", by which I meant to convey the manner in which academic scholars use the word "Africanist" -- that is to say, not claiming to be Africans but studying Africa. The reason I so opposed was simply that we didn't deserve it. We certainly couldn't even show that we had international relations when even the British youth, who did call themselves Marxist-Humanists, were so proud of their "independence" that the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism was the last thing they focused on, much less practiced in their own relations or their own reports on objective events.

What makes me write to you for this Plenum is the following most concrete, most urgent, and yet least understood category, when we speak of the very category, Youth. Here is what I mean: When I first developed it as if it were something new in the world, just, so to speak, to counter-act the whole concept of "Beat Generation," I really meant what I said -- that it was not just a question of counter-action as slander. Rather, it meant that in this period of post-World War II, when the greater part of the "old radicals" were being swallowed up by careerism or just plain tiredness and doing nothing to try to fill up the philosophic void since Lenin's death, the Youth's attack, not only on the Establishment but on us old radicals, must not be taken as an insult to us, but as a challenge.

I remember how ambivalent our Youth were -- and, believe me, they really were very young; I always preferred highschool to college and grammar school to high school youth -- when I suggested "New Beginnings" as a title for a column. Did I get insulted? No, I thought: "This damn pragmatism this country is afflicted with. No one even knows that it is not ABCs Hegel was speaking about, but new epochs in world thought." I think that is what the early youth did catch, once they consented to the title. I am sorry to say I do not think that they think in that direction now.

This is where you come in for this specific Plenum. It happens that I have wanted you to actually make some sub-report to the Plenum itself. But specifically that could not be found, even though I am very anxious that the REB be aware of the move to Chicago for you, that I will first inform them about during the Leadership Report, or maybe during Perspectives in the pre-Plenum reports. But this problem about the youth makes me think that it will be possible both to help the youth and to have a reason for my introducing the question of your move to Chicago next year. In any case, it is very important for the youth, whether or not it can also be used as ground

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for my other discussion.

Here is what I wish you would tell me, if you are prepared to do it. The Youth are to report to the REB on July 29. Diane, as REB rep to the youth, will share in the report with Sheila. But actually I would like your report done in letter form next week -- it would revolve around the fact that you would like to contribute an article to the Youth Bulletin, both to tell something about when you wrote a column and more importantly to tell the way you see the youth tasks now that we have the Call. In fact, I would like that to be part of a discussion you would have with Gene before he leaves. But you would need to have it written out before talking to him, so that he can also see what is in your mind in Black and white.

For example, I did not bother to tell the youth, except about two sentences to Sheila, that I was not happy with the issue of N&L which reported all the new activities of the youth, because I thought it was way too exaggerated to pose what had happened on divestment activities as if on a level of the many activities of the 1960s youth, from Black to Free Speech and anti-Vietnam War. The question mark over her column "Has a New Generation of Revolutionaries been Born?" didn't look like a question when you see facing that "official" youth page was a whole page taken up with reports of all the divestment activities, as if thousands were involved in any place other than Berkeley. I am not referring only to the fact of numbers. I am referring to the impact that those youth had on the whole generation of youth. I thought that if N&L was going to have that many articles then surely the only one we had on anti-militarism in Chicago should have been on that page in place of one of those divestment activities. In other words, I was hungering for any one who displayed a vision that could be related to something that stood as the opposite of and what it keeps oozing out in its thoroughly retrogressionist ideology.

In a word, we are back to dialectical void. How would you approach that question in relationship to our own youth? "In general", they certainly are in agreement, but I fail to see any projection of "it" whether it is on the question of divestment, or for that matter just a "class" on any of Marx's works, even when it concerns his journalism when he was a youth. How can you project internationalism, not just as something that you believe in, again "in general", but actually have a relationship to? Think of a youth page and see how very far distant the few articles we did have on our philosophy seem to be from any relationship to what the Youth were doing, or that you thought you could project to them.

Or take the question of Latin America. Take even the fact that it seemed to have been impossible for you -- and I'm damn sure you are trying and have more contacts than anyone else -- to penetrate the present popular frontism or outright Stalinism. Perhaps you could take that as a jumping off point.

Or take the fact of Gene thinking that, if you weren't around and he spoke only on Black, the Black youth would come. Has he really learned from the experience ~~that some people who are only in it for the money~~ that some people who are only in it for the money

that none came, that it really isn't Black only that is the drawing card, that they themselves have a passion for philosophy -- and that they didn't think they would get it from him?

I remember that I once looked sort of skeptically at Gramsci's statement that all humanity are philosophers, and that the only thing that is really separating the people from philosophers is the simple question of lack of articulation. But, in fact, that is the only way to avoid the concept that "that masses are backward." Keep digging to find in yourself how to project that philosophy of revolution and that appreciation of thought that will not make the masses feel that you are an intellectual and they are in a different world. If I had the answer I wouldn't have to appeal to you to give it to me. But I am certainly very anxious that, at the Youth Conference, they not talk as if they are internationalist Marxist-Humanists when we have no international relations with Youth as Youth; and that they know exactly how to approach the fourth book as more than "salespersons."

My main point (which I evidently did not project fully enough) was this: If I project the dialectics of revolution with the concentration on a single topic, WL, then each one of our Marxist-Humanists should know how to project the dialectics of revolution and of thought as related to any one of the four forces of revolution -- be it Black, Labor or Youth.

Why can't you see if you could take up a few instances that were in your own experiences, whether that is of the 60s, 70s or 80s, and show that whereas you were not conscious at any one period that any such question as dialectics of revolution and of thought were involved, they were. What were you debating with the Trotskyists about? I remember I was very impressed at that first meeting when I heard your report; and what I did at once was to say that it should be an article for N&L, and at the same time said that the question (I don't remember if it was organization or philosophy?) was one of showing you that the whole relationship of Marxist-Humanism doesn't end there but that it is only the start of a relationship with ~~Marxist~~ Humanism.

I don't really care what you choose for your topic. My whole point is that you are the only one who is young enough to speak their language and yet be listened to because you are a theoretician. Can you do this briefly for this week and a little talk with Gene (incidentally, the youth did write him and are scheduling a meeting while he is here), and then announce that your article will be ready for the Bulletin within the next month?

Yours,

Raya