



# Discussion Bulletin

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## CONTENTS

Page

<b>FOR AN INTERVENTION INTO THE GAY LIBERATION STRUGGLE</b> , by David Thorstad and Kendall Green, Upper West Side Branch, New York Local	3
<b>AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PARTY ON THE RESOLUTION "FOR AN INTERVENTION INTO THE GAY LIBERATION STRUGGLE"</b> by Steve Beren, Detroit Branch; Kendall Green, David Keepnews, John Lauritsen, Lee Smith and David Thorstad, Upper West Side Branch, New York Local	9
<b>AN OPEN LETTER TO COMRADE LEW JONES</b> , by Bill Massey (Internationalist Tendency), Chicago Branch	9
<b>APPENDIX: Letter from Bill Massey to Jack Barnes</b>	10
<b>POSTPONE THE CONVENTION TO ALLOW A FULL DEBATE</b> , by Bill Massey (Internationalist Tendency), Chicago Branch	11
<b>PROBLEMS WITH NOVACKIAN PHILOSOPHY</b> , by Jan Garrett, Twin Cities Branch	13
<b>APPENDIX: Book Review Submitted to the ISR</b>	22

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FOR AN INTERVENTION INTO THE  
GAY LIBERATION STRUGGLE  
by David Thorstad and Kendall Green,  
Upper West Side Branch, New York Local

*Introduction*

The gay liberation movement represents the eruption into the arena of political and social struggle of a sector of the oppressed whose anger, pent up and suppressed for thousands of years, is now beginning to be released on a scale never before seen. This layer of the oppressed is placing blame for its oppression where it belongs: on the social and political institutions of society.

In contrast to the general approach of the pioneering gay groups, the current gay liberation movement is not requesting mere tolerance and integration into this unjust society. Rather, gays are demanding that society abandon its exclusive heterosexual norm, grant them full civil and human rights, and allow for the full acceptance of their sexual orientation as no less valid than that of heterosexuals.

In the four years since New York's Stonewall riots, gay liberation has entered the national and international political scene on a scale sufficient to show that the curtain of silence with which capitalism suffocates the cry for gay freedom can successfully be pierced. Not only, in fact, has the curtain been pierced, but for the first time in history there are indications of a truly mass-scale support for the just demands being raised by the gay movement.

It is testimony to the depth of the current radicalization that it has brought tens of thousands of gays into open struggle against their oppression and that it has begun to instill the idea in millions of others that their lot can be improved.

The gay liberation movement is a struggle for full civil, human and democratic rights. It is a struggle against a form of oppression that is rooted in the need of capitalist society to suppress homosexual behavior both as part of its general repression of sexuality and because homosexual behavior conflicts with society's exclusive heterosexual norm. This norm is reinforced by all the institutions of capitalist society, beginning with the family, and continued in the schools, churches, and synagogues. Members of society who refuse to conform to this norm are threatened with jail, physical extermination or mutilation; in advanced capitalist societies, they are driven into the underground subculture of the big cities where they are exploited and preyed upon by the syndicates and the police.

While partial concessions can be wrested from the capitalist state by the struggle of large numbers of gays for their rights, so long as society is predicated on the need to suppress homosexual behavior, the full rights of gay people will not be achieved. The partial removal of some of the legal restrictions and discrimination alone will not mean freedom for gays; nowhere in the world where such reforms have been achieved are gays really free.

The gay liberation movement demands changes that

not only pit it against bourgeois morality and deeply instilled prejudices, but bring it into direct conflict with the capitalist state over the right of persons with a homosexual orientation to control their own bodies and destiny. The oppression of gays is so deeply rooted in the needs and fabric of capitalist society that nothing short of a socialist revolution can win their liberation.

*I. Rise of the Gay Liberation Movement*

The stage for the current wave of gay liberation was set by the struggles of the civil rights, antiwar, and women's liberation movements. While many gays had participated in these movements, and for years in the left in general, the sight of other oppressed groups fighting for their rights gave gays the confidence in their own ability to do the same. They were further encouraged by the general attitude of questioning sexuality and sex roles that has been a part of the current youth radicalization.

The women's movement did more than any other single movement to inspire gays with this confidence, in part because it raised the issue of sexual oppression, in part because it helped to undermine heterosexual male supremacy, and in part because it inspired lesbians within its own ranks to extend the scope of the struggle for liberation to the battleground for homosexual rights.

The shock waves of the June 1969 Stonewall riots and the New York Gay Pride march of 6,000 the following year reverberated around the world. They were felt within our party, too. The first important sign of this was the decision to eliminate the antigay exclusion policy that had evolved during the 1960s as an anachronistic hangover within the revolutionary party itself from the McCarthyism of the 1950s. In the two and a half years since then, we have been grappling with the question of how to relate the program and purpose of the revolutionary party to this new phenomenon. Our recognition of the justice of the struggle for gay rights is reflected in the May 25, 1971, Political Committee motion of "unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights, including civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism."

Gays responded to the freer atmosphere created by the developing radicalization and the example of other oppressed groups struggling for their rights by refusing to relegate the struggle for their own rights to low priority—behind the needs of other, more "legitimate" and less controversial, struggles of the oppressed. They also began to abandon the stance of pleading for tolerance that had characterized most of the earlier "homophile" groups like the Mattachine Society, ONE, and Daughters of Bilitis. They began to demand that their rights be granted immediately. The fear and loathing on the part of heterosexuals and the threat of reprisals, which only

months earlier had still been sufficient to prevent all but a few gays from daring to reveal their sexual orientation, were no longer so intimidating.

Gays began to reject society's claim that they are sick and inferior—some kind of genetic, psychological, sociological, or historical aberration—thereby rejecting the major myth society uses to force gays to internalize their oppression and keep them in a state of self-hatred and demobilization. They began to redirect that oppression outward at the society from which it originated, and to assert that their sexual orientation was in no way inferior to a heterosexual orientation. They asserted that it was not gays that needed to be changed, but the society that oppresses them. The tone of the new wave of gay militants was reflected in the irreverent leaflet calling the first meeting of the New York Gay Liberation Front: "Do you think homosexuals are revolting? You bet your sweet ass we are!"

This new mood of self-affirmation popularized the slogan "Gay is Good!" and the concept of gay pride. The slogan had originated with a motion by Frank Kameny to the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) in 1968 asserting the right of homosexuals to live their lives openly, fully and freely, without pressure to convert to heterosexuality and without legal or extralegal penalties for their sexual activity. The slogan plays a two-fold role in developing political consciousness among gays. First, it is an appeal to closeted gays to reject their feelings of self-hatred and struggle openly for their rights. This appeal is also expressed in the slogan "Out of the Closets, Into the Streets!" Second, the slogan asserts that gays will no longer accept the myths society uses to justify and perpetuate its efforts to suppress homosexuality. These myths range from the theological notion that homosexuality is "unnatural," to the Stalinist-inspired view that it is a product of "bourgeois decadence" (or the variation that it is a product of class society), to the various "theories" of bourgeois psychiatrists that homosexuality is an illness. From the very beginning, the gay liberation movement has found it necessary to challenge such myths and prejudices because they function as the main "theoretical" underpinning for society's anti-gay edifice.

In June 1970, the first gay pride march was held in New York City to commemorate the Stonewall riots. More than 6,000 gays, representing all layers of the gay community, turned out for this affirmation of gay pride. The following year more than 25,000 demonstrated in cities throughout the United States, with the largest number in New York.

The 1972 marches saw the introduction of new features in gay pride demonstrations. In Philadelphia, where some 6,000 marched, a large number of sympathizing heterosexuals joined in behind a banner proclaiming "Straights for Gays." Half of the demonstration consisted of Blacks. And in Los Angeles, the march went beyond the usual gay pride focus to include four demands: (1) Repeal all statutes regulating sexual behavior between consenting individuals; (2) No "crimes" without victims; release all persons convicted of so-called sex offenses; (3) End discrimination against gays in all areas of life; (4) End police harassment of gays.

Such demonstrations of thousands of homosexuals openly and proudly proclaiming their sexual orientation

have a powerful political and social impact that we welcome and support. The gay movement, however, also needs to develop campaigns and programs that can involve large numbers of gays and sympathizers in political struggles to fight for gay rights and wrest concessions from the ruling class.

### *State of the Gay Movement*

There are more than 600 gay organizations throughout the United States, a large proportion of them campus groups. Their particular focus varies considerably from group to group, ranging from counseling, legislative lobbying, and religious activities, to confrontation and political activism. Many provide some kind of social setting, such as lounges, dances, or cabarets, at which gays can be themselves with other gays. The very existence of a gay group on campus frequently leads to a struggle for recognition or funding. They are often the largest and most active political group on campus.

The gay liberation movement has been struggling around a number of issues during the past four years on essentially a local or statewide basis. These issues, around which continued struggle can be expected in the future, has been the following:

1. *Antigay laws.* Sodomy laws, which are usually entitled "crime against nature" or "unnatural copulation" laws, still provide for the punishment of homosexual acts between consenting adults in 42 states. Penalties range from three months in jail to life imprisonment. In many states, the sodomy laws are formulated in such a way as to proscribe certain heterosexual acts as well, though they are used almost exclusively against gays. Since 1961, eight states have dropped such laws; revisions of the law are under consideration in other states. While these laws are enforced infrequently and selectively, their very existence serves to reinforce and provide legal justification for discrimination and oppression in other areas.

In addition to the sodomy laws, other laws are used to victimize gays, including cross-dressing, solicitation, lewd behavior, and loitering statutes.

In a number of states, there have been demonstrations against these laws. Gay groups from throughout New York state, for example, were joined by groups from Connecticut and New Jersey in marches on Albany in 1971 and 1972 demanding repeal of the sodomy, solicitation, and cross-dressing laws.

While the sodomy laws are universally opposed by gays, and while their abolition would represent an important civil rights victory, the demand for their repeal has not been the primary focus of the gay movement. There are a number of reasons for this: First, however unjust these laws are, few gays come into *direct* conflict with them, as long as they restrict their sexual activity to private quarters; second, the reformist leaderships in the gay movement have tended to refrain from organizing mass actions, preferring to focus on lobbying activity; and third, there is an ultraleftist tendency among some to spurn struggle for law repeal as reformist.

While a major campaign has not developed in the gay movement to fight these antigay laws, the potential for such a campaign exists in some areas. Where the potential exists, the main obstacle to developing such campaigns remains the reformist gay leaderships. Victories in fighting for the repeal of these laws can be won and

would help provide further impetus to the developing gay liberation struggle.

2. *Equal rights legislation.* The best example of this kind of legislation is Intro 475, a bill in New York City that would ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in jobs, housing, and public accommodations. First introduced into the city council in January 1971, it has been kept bottled-up in committee ever since. Despite impressive support from community, union, and political leaders, it has been defeated three times in committee votes. Intro 475 has been an important focus of New York gay groups, particularly the Gay Activists Alliance, and has prompted numerous demonstrations, organized largely as last-ditch efforts when behind-the-scenes lobbying reached an impasse. In spite of a certain demoralization resulting from the repeated defeats of the bill in committee and the failure of the reformist forces in the gay movement to provide proper leadership, Intro 475 remains a key issue in the New York gay movement. The outcome of this struggle will have repercussions in the gay movement throughout the country and in Canada.

Similar, though not so encompassing, legislation has been enacted in East Lansing, Ann Arbor, and San Francisco. Public hearings on a similar bill were held in Washington, D. C., in May. While there have not yet been any efforts to push for a national Equal Rights Amendment-type campaign to extend civil rights legislation to include sexual orientation, such a future development cannot be ruled out.

One excuse used by opponents of municipal legislation like Intro 475 is that the existence of state sodomy laws contravenes such local legislation. This argument merely highlights the interrelated nature of the fight for such legislation and the struggle against the state sodomy laws.

3. *Police harassment.* This is a constant feature in the lives of gays and one that has often sparked protests by gay groups. The harassment takes many forms, including bar raids like the one that set off the Stonewall riots, entrapment, beatings, arrests for solicitation or lewd conduct. Such harassment, which serves to keep gays from coming together to fight their oppression, continues to be a problem in states where the sodomy laws have been repealed. Protests over cases of police harassment have occurred in cities all across the country.

4. *Campus recognition.* The right to form gay groups and propagandize for gay liberation is far from having been won. Recognition battles, often victorious, have been fought from coast to coast. Such struggles were important issues this spring in Kansas and Missouri, for example. A gay recognition fight at New York's Fordham University was one of the most important struggles on that campus last year. In addition to recognized gay groups, an increasingly common phenomenon on American campuses has become gay studies course. As the gay movement grows, the struggle for such programs can be expected to spread.

5. *Job discrimination.* Few jobs are open to known homosexuals. This forces the overwhelming majority of gays to hide their identity as a matter of survival; it makes a dual existence necessary for millions. Job-related discrimination is one of the most intense forms of oppression faced by gays of both sexes. The mere suspicion that one is gay is often enough to get one fired or keep

one from being hired in the first place. Employers, the police, insurance and detective agencies, and the military often collaborate and exchange information that is used to prevent prospective employees who happen to be gay from being hired. Some cities explicitly ban gays from working in certain jobs, such as bartending, taxi driving, and teaching.

Many cases of job discrimination have been fought by the gay movement, with techniques ranging from court suits, to protest demonstrations, to organizing within unions. Under pressure from GAA zap demonstrations last year, the New York Taxi Commission agreed to abandon its policy of requiring gay taxi drivers to undergo yearly psychiatric examinations. Broad support was organized to defend gay activist Michael McConnell when the University of Minnesota refused to hire him as a librarian. The case also spurred gay librarians to set up a special task force to fight for gay rights inside their national association. Gay teachers announced the formation of a gay caucus for similar purposes at last year's convention of the National Education Association.

6. *Oppression by the psychiatric profession.* The use of aversion therapy or other related methods of torture is common throughout the United States, including on a number of college campuses and in prisons. The underlying assumption of such "therapy" is that human beings, unless tampered with, are "naturally" heterosexual.

Since homosexuality is officially viewed by the psychiatric profession as a sickness, it is considered professionally ethical for psychiatrists to experiment in all kinds of barbaric techniques, including electric shock treatment, in an effort to discover the elusive "cure" for the "illness."

The gay liberation movement is fighting this vicious, self-fulfilling branding of homosexual behavior as an illness. It has done so through its propaganda, through protest demonstrations, and through direct intervention in the main professional institution responsible for perpetuating the sickness "theory"—the American Psychiatric Association (APA). After several years of campaigning to get the APA to remove homosexuality from its official diagnostic category of mental disorders, the issue became a major focus of attention at this year's APA convention in Honolulu in May. Although there is increasing support for the gay movement's stand within the profession, however, it has still not acquiesced. This derogatory labeling of gays by psychiatrists is used by other institutions as a rationale for continuing their own discriminatory policies.

7. *Elections.* The U.S. gay liberation movement first forced capitalist candidates to take public positions on gay rights during the 1970 campaign in New York. By confronting the campaigning candidates, it succeeded in forcing several Democratic candidates and one Republican candidate to issue public statements of support. Within two years, gay liberation had become a significant enough issue for gay delegates at the Democratic Party national convention to be given time to raise the gay rights issue before the delegates and on national television. Today, lip service to gay rights is common for candidates of both capitalist parties in areas where a vocal gay movement exists.

The apparent resilience of the Democratic Party under the demagogic McGovern campaign heightened the illu-

sions of large numbers of gays, including gay activists, in the ability of capitalist politics to serve as an effective vehicle for bringing about changes that would benefit gays. The McGovern campaign temporarily demobilized the gay liberation struggle, and the effects are still being felt today.

The overwhelming defeat of the gay rights plank at the Democratic Party convention, however, and the subsequent widespread disillusionment with McGovern himself, have increased suspicion of politicians among gays and left pro-Democratic reformist leaders in the gay movement in a more vulnerable position than before. Their reliance on the goodwill of individual capitalist politicians has held back gay liberation by discouraging gays from organizing mass-action campaigns for their rights. Their strategy can only lead to demoralization and defeats for the gay movement.

Our party's position has been one of unequivocal support to gay rights. Such a plank has generally been included in our campaign literature. We have tended, however, to treat gay rights as an afterthought in our campaigns. With the exception of the Sally Anderson campaign in Los Angeles, we have not run openly gay candidates with a special appeal to the gay movement to support our campaign. Our failure to fully utilize our election campaigns as effective tools to fight for gay liberation, and our nonintervention in the gay movement, have seriously hampered our ability to combat the efforts of the reformists to demobilize and coopt the gay movement.

#### *Forces in the Gay Liberation*

There is no central political force in the gay liberation movement. Of the various tendencies, however, the reformists are clearly dominant. The ultraleftists of the early Gay Liberation Front stage of the gay movement enjoy no significant influence today; their groups have generally dissolved.

The attitude of the reformists (reflected in the approach of the leadership of New York's GAA and in the editorial policy of the Los Angeles-based gay newspaper *The Advocate*, for instance) is a bankrupt one of abstaining from mass mobilizations and concentrating on supporting "good" guys and opposing "bad" guys. This policy leads directly into the liberal ballot box and encourages the oppressed to run after crumbs from the table of the oppressor. The failure of their approach is clear from the snow job at the Democratic Party convention and the cynical refusal of the liberal "friends of gays" in the New York city council to pass Intro 475 even after signing statements promising to do so.

The only effective alternative to the approach of the reformists is a strategy of struggle that places no reliance on capitalist politicians and that can reach out to mobilize gays and their supporters in mass action against the oppressive laws and institutions of the capitalist system.

A small section of the gay liberation movement, believing that homosexual behavior *per se* is more progressive than heterosexuality, advocates homosexuality or bisexuality as the road toward emancipation and the abolition of the family. Others seek personal solutions to oppression that is ingrained in the social fabric of capitalism by "dropping out" and developing "countercultural" lifestyles. But the oppression of gays is rooted in the capitalist

system itself, with its norm of exclusive heterosexuality, not in individual heterosexually oriented persons. Gays cannot escape their oppression in an elusive "gay culture."

This escapist approach leads away from mobilizing the oppressed to fight for their rights and toward attempting to change one's own head rather than change a rotten society. As Marxists, we see the emancipation of homosexuals as possible only through the destruction of the entire system that fosters their oppression and through its replacement with socialism.

Other political tendencies, for the most part, do not regard gay liberation as a valid or important question to relate to. With the exception of the "gay caucus" of the Youth Against War and Fascism (which is occasionally seen at gay demonstrations), and International Socialists (which is pulling back from an earlier flirtation with gay liberation), our opponents abstain from or are openly hostile to gay liberation. The Stalinists, the Maoists, and the Workers League virtually echo the worst positions of the bourgeoisie.

#### *International aspects*

The gay liberation movement is an international phenomenon. This phenomenon can be expected to increase because the causes of gay oppression are rooted in a patriarchal system that is worldwide and because the impact of the gay movement cannot be restricted within national boundaries. A directory of gay organizations published by New York's GAA this year lists some 200 gay groups in twenty countries other than the United States. The nature of these groups varies, including old-line homophile groups, groups with independent mass-action struggle perspectives, and ultraleft and spontaneist groups.

The growth of these groups has been uneven and has occurred without any kind of international coordination, although initial steps toward some coordination have been taken, such as a gathering of European groups in Denmark last September. The lack of such coordination makes it difficult to assess the actual state of the gay movement on an international scale, but the trend appears to be on the upswing. Gay pride actions are scheduled this year for the first time in New Zealand, for instance, and radical gays in Norway decided this spring to embark on a campaign to win the leftist parties to active support for gay liberation. The effects of this campaign can already be seen in sympathetic coverage in the left-wing press, even including the newspaper of the main Norwegian Maoist organization.

The struggle for gay liberation can also make itself felt inside the workers states, where the prevailing Stalinist attitude toward homosexuality makes the life of gays unbearable. In the Soviet Union, where homosexual acts can bring three to eight years in jail, the democratic movement has thus far held back from actively defending gay rights because, however just, it is still considered too unpopular an issue, according to the former democratic activist Valery Chalidze, who told the *New York Times Magazine* (March 4) that he had attempted to win the movement in Moscow to such a stance. As the full truth about the Stalinist counterrevolution in the area of sexuality becomes more widely known—as it will, in part, through the efforts of the gay liberation movement in the capitalist countries—there is no reason not to think

that the gay movement will make a useful contribution to the struggle for a political revolution inside the Soviet Union.

The issue of the increasing persecution of gays in Cuba has already had a considerable impact within the American gay movement. This issue will gain in importance if the new draft penal code—which even provides for the death penalty for some homosexual acts—is adopted.

The oppression of gays in Cuba and the Soviet Union has been one of the most important causes of hostility or skepticism toward socialism among American gay activists. Only a Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism and Bolshevism, coupled with an active intervention by revolutionists in the gay liberation movement, can effectively combat these attitudes.

## *II. Gay Liberation and the Struggle Against Capitalism*

Attitudes toward homosexuality vary from culture to culture and epoch to epoch. Many cultures condone or encourage it. Others, like our own, actively and viciously suppress it in all of society's members, regardless of age, sex, or frequency of indulgence. While this is an extreme attitude, it is generally shared by all cultures with a Judeo-Christian tradition.

The effort to suppress homosexual behavior is no accident. "Accidents" of such magnitude, so intricately interwoven into the fabric of society, do not repeat themselves for thousands of years without reason. Marxists recognize that such long-standing oppression reflects the needs of the society that fosters it, and we identify the source of that oppression as residing in the institutions and ideology of class society.

The effort of capitalist society to suppress homosexual behavior begins in the very first institution that most humans encounter—the family. It is there that antihomosexual fears and prejudices and society's exclusive heterosexual norm are first instilled, that sex-role training is first imparted, and that the repression of sexuality in general begins. This is all reinforced by the schools, churches, synagogues, the psychiatric profession, and the mass media. Anyone who deviates can be punished by the law, which enshrines the antihomosexual principle carried out by landlords, employers, and the police.

The first thing one is told when one discovers one's homosexual feelings is that one is "sick." Instead of being allowed to accept their feelings, gays are taught to deny them. This myth is the source of immense suffering for gay people.

Revolutionary Marxists oppose all forms of oppression of homosexuals. This includes rejecting the bourgeois and Stalinist—"theories" that are used to justify that oppression. We reject the notion that homosexuals are inferior to heterosexuals with the same contempt that we reject the allegation that Blacks are inferior to whites or women inferior to men. We do so because it is a vicious prejudice that divides the working class and instills self-hatred in the oppressed. We welcome the new combativity of the gay liberation movement and solid-ize ourselves with the affirmation of dignity and pride reflected in the slogan "Gay Is Good!"

Virtually all of the institutions of capitalist society are geared to make persons who engage in homosexual acts into social pariahs. To alter this situation and remove homosexual oppression will require a full-scale revolu-

tionary assault on the institutions of capitalist society.

The struggle for gay liberation is a struggle for democratic rights—equality with heterosexually oriented persons, and an end to discrimination, persecution, and oppression. The struggle for such rights has developed independently of the ruling class and its institutions; the thrust of the gay liberation struggle is directed against those institutions and is in the interest of the American working class. The struggle to win such rights will continue to play an important role in the radicalization and will be a significant part of the process leading to the socialist revolution.

The struggle against gay oppression has a useful contribution to make to the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

It will necessarily help to undermine bourgeois morality, a key prop of capitalist society.

Gay oppression has a conservatizing effect on straights as well as gays. Periods of reaction throughout history have used antihomosexual witch-hunts as a cutting edge. The struggle against society's ingrained antihomosexual norm can only serve to undermine the effectiveness of this tool for keeping the working class and the oppressed in line.

The struggle of gays against the constricting sex roles of capitalist society will be welcomed by many heterosexually oriented persons. This too will contribute to undermining the sexual repression that functions as one of the pillars of capitalist oppression and exploitation.

The struggle against gay oppression directly affects a large number of people. The Kinsey studies, for instance, show that at least 25,000,000 Americans have at least a few years' homosexual behavior during their adult lives. Large numbers of Americans engage in this activity in spite of the fact that it entails considerable personal and social risk. Homosexuality is not a rare, or even unusual, phenomenon restricted to peripheral elements of society. It is widespread, and so is the suffering and persecution that result from the efforts of society to combat and eradicate it.

Millions of homosexuals—including millions of gay workers—have been given a new sense of their own worth by the rise of the gay movement. Even if they never join a gay organization or demonstration, the self-confidence they have gained because of that movement will make them more combative in other arenas of class struggle. The powerful energy of the assertion of human dignity by those who have been denied it is a central driving force in the entire radicalization.

Moreover, it is virtually assured that, as the gay movement continues to struggle and begins to win victories, many more of those who are now its silent supporters and beneficiaries will step forward to openly join its ranks.

The ultimate impact and appeal of the gay liberation movement can only be understood on the basis of the fact that it involves a struggle not merely for the rights of a presently constituted minority who are defined as gay, but for an end to the built-in need of capitalist society to suppress homosexual behavior in all of its members. Homosexual oppression is reflected not only in the discrimination and persecution directed against persons who are either known or suspected to be gay, but also in the pervasive efforts of capitalist society to completely suppress homosexuality even before it may arise, and to threaten violators with severe reprisals both in this



world and the next. The effects of this oppression are felt on a far wider scale than merely among those who admit, whether to themselves or publicly, to being gay.

Millions who have never engaged in homosexual activities can and must be won to supporting the struggle for gay rights and liberation. The American working class, which will take upon its shoulders the task of transforming and directing the whole social order, can and will ally with all the progressive enemies of capitalism, put aside its prejudices to forge such alliances, and ultimately overcome those prejudices as it begins the evolution toward communist humanity. To believe that American workers cannot be won to support for gay liberation is to fail to grasp either the enormity of their historic task, or their revolutionary capacity to accomplish it, or both.

The attitude of increasing openness toward homosexuality that has developed with the youth radicalization's general questioning of sexual norms is indicative of the potential support for the gay liberation movement among radicalizing sections of the population. This new attitude is reflected, for instance, in the election of Jack Baker, an openly gay militant, as student association president at the University of Minnesota, one of the largest campuses in the country.

While the fear of homosexuality and antigay prejudice certainly remain deeply ingrained in the population, the main hindrance to winning the masses to active support for gay rights is the fact that the gay liberation movement itself has not yet developed aggressive, educational, and mass-action oriented campaigns. The gay movement suffers from a crisis of leadership. This is a crisis that revolutionists can and must help resolve.

### *III The Revolutionary Party and Gay Liberation; Our Tasks*

The SWP must intervene in and champion the struggle for gay liberation. Our doing so will benefit not only the gay liberation movement, but also the building of the revolutionary party.

Our approach should be flexible. While there is no single focus of action in the gay movement today, we should not let this deter us from seeking ways to support, help

build, and recruit from the gay liberation movement. We should actively relate to the gay liberation movement on a local level.

The following are some of the kinds of activities that we should be involved in:

- Propagandizing in favor of, and building, united fronts around law-repeal campaigns on a statewide level, where appropriate. We should encourage the formation of such united fronts and participate in them, putting forward our perspective of mass mobilization independent of the capitalist class. We should also support united-front fights to win equal rights legislation, whether on a local or national level.

The major forces behind such united fronts will probably come from campus and city-wide gay organizations, but efforts should be made to reach out and involve other forces, including such sympathizing non-gay organizations as unions, nationalist groups, and other political groups.

- Local issues, such as campus-recognition fights, free-speech fights, defense cases, gay pride marches, child custody cases, and struggles against job discrimination, police harassment and entrapment, etc.

- We should step up our use of election campaigns to champion the gay rights struggle. This is an issue on which we must speak out forcefully to educate those we reach through our campaigns about the importance of supporting the struggle against gay oppression. This will be the best way to differentiate ourselves from the supporters of capitalist candidates within the gay movement and to win gay activists to Marxism. Running openly gay candidates for public office can be an especially effective way of doing this.

- As Marxists, we seek to bring our entire program to the masses. This includes our analysis on why Marxists support gay liberation and why gays should be Marxists. Our forums, press, and publications should reflect our championing of and involvement in the gay struggle.

Our assignment of comrades to gay liberation work will be determined in accord with our overall program and campaigns, including our full support to, and championing of, the struggle for gay liberation.

June 22, 1973



AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PARTY ON THE RESOLUTION  
"FOR AN INTERVENTION INTO THE GAY LIBERATION STRUGGLE"

by Steve Beren, Detroit Branch; Kendall Green, David Keepnews, John  
Lauritsen, Lee Smith and David Thorstad, Upper West Side Branch,  
New York Local

We support the document "For an Intervention into the Gay Liberation Struggle," by David Thorstad and Kendall Green, as a counterresolution in opposition to the April 29, 1973, "Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement" (*Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 31, No. 3).

We ask comrades who support the general line of the counterresolution to seek discussion of, and a vote on,

"For an Intervention into the Gay Liberation Struggle" in their branches.

We call on the National Committee to include a point in the convention agenda for a discussion of, and a vote on, "For an Intervention into the Gay Liberation Struggle."

June 22, 1973

AN OPEN LETTER TO COMRADE LEW JONES

by Bill Massey (Internationalist Tendency), Chicago Branch

Dear Comrade Jones,

This letter is a contribution to the SWP and International discussion bulletins. Also you will find enclosed another contribution, "Postpone the Convention to Allow a Full Debate." In the past there has been some unexplainable delay in between the time we sent in material and when it came out in print. I do hope you have overcome the problems that cause such delays.

I have just learned that my letter of May 22 to Comrade Barnes was sent out to the National Committee. I find this very odd for two reasons. First because the letter was not for publication; in fact it stated that fact in the body of the letter itself.

"I do not submit this letter for publication at this time, if you wish to do so I would like to be consulted prior to your doing so—in order to make grammatical (editing changes)."

For instance I would have removed the last sentence, since it was in the nature of a comradely gesture and not in keeping with the serious nature of the letter.

Secondly, I have called you twice concerning this letter since I had heard that Comrade Barnes turned it over to you to handle. On neither occasion did you inform me that you were sending it to the National Committee. In fact the most clear-cut answer I received from you on the questions raised in the letter—and when we could expect an answer to them was "we're working on them." When I stated that it had nearly been a month and we would like to prepare ourselves for the convention (for which clarity on the convention agenda is a necessity),

you could, or rather would, give me no time to expect your clarification, except to say "I'm sure you'll get it before the convention."

If you could send this letter out to the National Committee, could you not give an answer to the questions raised by a comrade regardless of the fact that I represent a minority tendency in the party?

I now request that you publish as an appendix my letter to Comrade Barnes—without the last sentence, if you please.

The fact that a month goes by without receiving any response from our well-staffed national office is not untypical. This policy of keeping comrades, particularly comrades of a minority, waiting in the dark as to party procedures is a rather shabby performance practiced more by campus politicians than by those who consider themselves revolutionary leaders. Rather than setting up the situation for a debate of the political issues in dispute—for our mutual clarity—the organizational methods of the party's present leadership are geared to frustrate that end. You play games with a minority because they are a minority. You use your majority status in this party to make the expression of political differences as difficult as possible—and therefore to systematically demoralize any opposition in the party. This was practiced by the former Organization Secretary—now the National Secretary who passed it on to his successor in that post, Comrade Sheppard, and he has passed it on to you. It is not an inheritance to be proud of. Many comrades who have

left this party have been deeply affected by these undemocratic practices and have allowed their political clarity to be blinded by their justified contempt for your organizational methods. Some are now in other left organizations—some have been driven out of revolutionary politics altogether mistaking the caricature you present to be taken for how a Bolshevik organization would function. Is our party so rich in cadre that you can continue these practices? Is your fevered fetish for complete homogeneity so great that you can drive out those who have political differences but seek to function correctly but not slavishly? It would be well to remember the lessons of how honest radicals looked at the CP when its malodorous organizational practices became a scandal in the left circles.

Is this the future you prepare for our movement?

I must urge that you, and I speak to the "leadership team," cease and desist from further organizational maneuverings and other undemocratic practices referred to elsewhere. Start treating your own minorities with comradely democracy and collaboration. The lessons you teach the cadre now will either build our movement in the future or be its death warrant. Democratic practices in a revolutionary organization begin at home.

Comradely,  
s/Bill Massey

cc: IMT

June 19, 1973

## APPENDIX

### LETTER FROM BILL MASSEY TO JACK BARNES

Dear Comrade Barnes,

I write to you to raise certain problems that you should be aware of concerning the present tendency struggle in the party.

1) Our tendency, which will be supporting the positions of, the International Majority Tendency, will have a National Coordinator—myself. I will, in the course of the preconvention discussion period, have to travel extensively and therefore I wish to inform you of this fact. Realizing that this is not the normal procedure, I assume you would agree that the preconvention period (and in addition pre-Congress periods) are not the "normal" times and therefore we cannot adopt a routinist attitude toward them. I will of course allow the branch organizer here to know my schedules.

2) Finances—during the course of the tendency struggle the question of funds (and of course expenses) becomes a concrete reality. Travel to other branches to give reports, exchange of views among comrades who share basic political agreement prior to the submission of a document(s) to the preconvention discussion, national coordination of the tendency struggle, etc., cothinker tendency responsibilities, etc., all of these cost money. During the course of the preconvention period members of our tendency will, unless an alternative approach is presented, have to take on these political responsibilities, and other obligations, such as their current sustainers, will *temporarily* suffer. To avoid this I would propose for your consideration that the SWP adopt the methods of the Ligue Communiste—

that is that the national office of the party bear the expenses incurred by both the majority tendency and the minorities in getting all the points of view in dispute to the party as a whole. This would not only mean the documented or written material, an obligation that our party has traditionally fulfilled, but the oral presentations to each of the branches. In this regard it would also be my proposal that the party as a whole take on the joint expenses of the international majority and minority tendencies as they affect the participation of our party comrades in relation to these tendencies (as cothinkers of course since, as you know, the reactionary Voorhis Act allows only consultative observation at, not membership participation in international bodies). To be specific, meetings such as Santiago or meeting in Brussels cost funds but are necessary in working out the positions and actions of the tendencies. Travel expenses for bringing comrades from other areas to present either of the tendency positions to the party here in the course of the preconvention or pre-Congress discussion, should be borne by the party as a whole. If this is not done, then an alternative solution is necessary and the sustainer base of the party cannot go unaffected since we are not alchemists and possess only limited resources. I raise this problem not for public debate at this time but for consultation on your part—the problems are already real.

3) In the Convention Call the agenda refers to "World Movement Reports" and "Political Reports" as well as to a "World Political Situation Report" and a "Political Reso-

lution." As the coordinator of a minority in the SWP and political supporter of the International Majority Tendency it is certain that the party leadership represented by yourself do not share our conjunctural analysis at least, and this will be reflected not only in the "World Political Situation Report" and the "Political Resolution" but in the "World Movement Reports" and "Political Reports" as well, and I assume in the Organization Reports and Youth Report. Therefore in order to prepare the presentations of our ideas to the convention and in order to adjust this presentation to the form of the convention, we must have further

clarity on what the leadership plans. The agenda in the Convention Call is too ambiguous. We cannot under the present circumstances adequately prepare our presentations to the convention — please clarify.

Comradely,  
s/Bill Massey

cc: I. M. T.

File

May 22, 1973

### POSTPONE THE CONVENTION TO ALLOW A FULL DEBATE

by Bill Massey (Internationalist Tendency), Chicago Branch

During the last Socialist Workers Party preconvention period the *For a Proletarian Orientation Tendency* was attacked by members of the National Committee of the party for having issued its political counterresolution prior to having seen that of the party leadership. This was reflected in National Committee member Jean Tussey's contribution, "On the Discussion of a Proletarian Orientation," Vol. 29, No. 12, in which she states:

"Although the Cleveland Branch has been aware for about five years of some of the differences of three of the authors, since they were members of the branch, we could not assume that a document which they wrote before they saw the National Committee Draft Political Resolution would be offered as 'a clear alternative political orientation, a counterresolution,' until they said so. (Emphasis added.)

In addition, Comrades Jack Barnes and Barry Sheppard in their contribution, "The Real Meaning of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency," Vol. 29, No. 19, called attention to the issuance of the "For a Proletarian Orientation" document prior to the seeing of the leadership's Political Resolution in what one may consider a rather snide manner:

"Before seeing the draft Political Resolution presented by the National Committee to open the discussion, Comrades Gregorich, Passen, Massey and McCann submitted 'For A Proletarian Orientation.'"

These written criticisms by leading members of the party leadership were picked up by many of their local followers and drummed into the consciousness of the rank and file: "They submitted their document without even waiting to see the program of the party leadership." Of course the role and the politics of the leadership was very observable in action for the two years since the 1969 convention.

However there is a point to the Barnes-Sheppard-Tussey school of thought: the ranks of the party should have a responsible attitude toward the leadership and should give serious considerations to the perspectives outlined in the political resolutions that that leadership is delegated to present. Of course, the elected leadership has a duty to the ranks of the party — that is they have the duty to present these political resolutions to the ranks for their serious consideration.

In this year 1973 what has been the case? Our preconvention period was opened by the National Committee as of May 7, yet at this date, June 19, the leadership has still not presented to the ranks the political resolution containing their perspectives for the coming period. This is not the first such instance of extreme delay on the part of the most well-staffed leadership in party history. In 1969 it was August before the Political resolution saw the light of day. Complaints — quite justified complaints — have been raised in the Young Socialist Alliance over this same problem, over a period of many years.

By the time the political resolution (we are assuming there will be one) gets to the branches, almost a month and a half at the very least will have gone by without the leadership fulfilling its obligation in presenting its political line. Considering that we only receive three months every two years to discuss politics, this delay makes a sham of all the talk on the part of the leadership about the need to get documents out in the world movement discussion.

Let us apply the thinking of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency to the leadership in our own party:

"1. A democratic congress requires making the documents available to the membership well in advance so that the discussion can be properly organized. This ap-

plies not only to the main initial documents voted on by the leading bodies but also to the contributions that are made in response to them. The unfortunate fact is that we continue to be faced with inordinate delays in the preparation of documents and above all in translating them." (Statement by Juan on Reasons for Postponing the World Congress—International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Vol. X, Number 6—April 1973, page 24.)

Now of course we have no problems in translating material for our political resolution, unless it is the attempt on the part of the leadership to translate their conceptions of reality into a Leninist-Trotskyist framework. Perhaps the problem is that the comrades who are preparing the political resolution are among the myriad of world travelers sent to explain to comrades in various sections how undemocratic the International leadership is—because it does not get all the documents of the world movement out, RIGHT NOW! Perhaps the expenses entailed in sending these world travelers out on their missions has caused a crimp and the leadership is short of the paper it needs to put its political resolution out. We don't pretend to know and we have not been told. However, we do know that half of the discussion has gone by and the leadership of the party has still to fulfill its major responsibility of presenting the membership with its political resolution.

Regardless of the reasons for this lack of responsibility, the document is not out—and this cuts down on the time to consider, debate and discuss it and to prepare adequate alternatives in light of it. Therefore we would propose that the leadership explain the reasons for their lateness in formalizing, in document form, their projections voted at the last plenum of the National Committee. Secondly they should let the party know when we can expect to see their political resolution. Thirdly—based on the time when the document will *really* be available

to the ranks of the Socialist Workers Party—set a date for our convention that will return to the membership the full three months of preconvention discussion, guaranteed in our constitution and reflected in the Convention Call.

I have in my letter of May 20 directed to the Political Committee, mentioned the delay in opening preconvention discussion in several branches of the party. Add to the ones previously mentioned the fact that the Detroit branch of the party will not open preconvention discussion until this coming Thursday, June 21. That is one month and fourteen days after the opening of preconvention discussion. Or put another way, one month and fourteen days prior to the convention. The LTT maintains that there is a real need to maximize the discussion in the world movement. The international leadership postponed the world congress in order to accomplish this fact. Yet in Detroit, U. S. A., the branch leadership can afford to cut the discussion period in half. Is this a case of Detroit exceptionalism? Or since it as has been pointed out that this is a more general situation, —American exceptionalism? Is the need for more time for discussions and documents true everywhere in the world outside of the United States? The party leadership owes an answer to these questions. Not only to the comrades in our own party but to all those that they have been trying to line up against the international leadership on the basis of the fact that "A democratic congress requires making the documents available to the membership well in advance. . . ." These words have more application to the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party than to the international leadership. Since they are the words of the LTT, we would like to see them put into practice by postponing the SWP convention and by opening up discussion in the branches in line with the Convention Call and in harmony with the process taking place in the world Trotskyist movement.

June 19, 1973

## PROBLEMS WITH NOVACKIAN PHILOSOPHY

by Jan Garrett, Twin Cities Branch

George Novack's article "Shall We Junk Historical Materialism?" has provided me with an excellent opportunity to expand on some points covered all too sketchily in "The Marxist Theory of Activity" and to focus on others which he has raised in his response to it.

The article is organized as follows: clarification of certain factual questions which Novack has obscured by his reply; arguments against his attempts to refute various points already made in "The Marxist Theory of Activity" and replies to philosophic issues which he has raised afresh; and, finally, some observations on views to which Novack tried to link me and on his place in the "tradition" of "Bolshevik philosophy."

The division of the points in the central section was predetermined by the necessity of a polemical response to several specific charges and to the time constraints under which a writer for the discussion bulletin must operate.

### I. CLARIFICATION OF FACTUAL MATTERS

#### 1. *The Charge of "Smuggling"*

It is unfortunate that a part of the time and space of this article must be devoted to refuting Comrade Novack's charge of attempting to "smuggle" my "revisionist" ideas into the magazine.

What Les Evans' letter of December 14, 1972 (which Novack appended), did not mention was the origin of my relations with the *ISR* on the Novack-Lukacs question. Immediately upon the publication of Novack's review in the January 1972 issue, I wrote a lengthy critique of it and sent it, not to the *ISR*, but to the national leadership of the party. If memory serves me right, I did not ask that it be placed in the *ISR* but rather that we open an internal discussion on the matter. In a sense, of course, I was wasting my time, because the chances of this were very small at the time, some 18 or so months to the next convention. But I hope no one will deny that I was within my rights to make such a proposal to the national leadership.

Barry Sheppard wrote back on March 8, 1972:

"I gave your rebuttal of Novack's article on Lukacs to the *ISR* editors. They have read it, and considered whether or not a version of it should be printed together with an answer by Novack. They came to the conclusion that such a debate would of necessity be quite long, as there are many points you raise which they felt would have to be answered. Given that conclusion, they felt that this dispute would be given unwarranted weight in the magazine, and would squeeze out too many other important subjects."

He then ruled out the scheduling of any internal discussion on the matter outside of the regular preconvention discussion.

For some reason Barry did not inform me that a public debate in the magazine was "ruled out"; or that such a thing would go contrary to a tradition established "within

the SWP in the dispute with Shachtman and Burnham in 1939-40." In fact, *he* raised the possibility of an *ISR* debate, and it was ruled out *only* for space reasons, if we are to believe him. The letter by Comrade Sheppard led me to believe that the *ISR* might have room enough for a certain scope of contributions on philosophy.

Perhaps Novack thinks that I, being in the Trotskyist movement only a couple of years less than Comrade Sheppard, should have learned the "lessons" of 1939-40 more thoroughly than he. I should then have regarded his submitting my article to the *ISR* for consideration as an aberration on Barry's part.

But Novack, not Barry, misinterpreted the 1939-40 decision and read into it a precedent that does not seem to be there. I have checked over the documents in Comrade Cannon's *Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (1943 edition). As far as I can tell, the relevant letters begin on pages 122 and 125. These documents tell us that: (1) the 1939-40 fight centered around a dispute on international politics, mainly the question of the character and defense of the USSR; and (2) that the attacks of Burnham and Shachtman had already reached a factional frenzy, including vicious personal attacks on majority comrades.

These conditions are completely lacking in my criticism of Novackian philosophy and certain related ideas held by party leaders. If either were present, the party would be absolutely correct in rejecting *a priori* any proposal to discuss these differences in the magazine.

Although I did not find anything rejecting a discussion in the magazine with Burnham regarding his rejection of dialectics, even if such a precedent existed it would not apply at present, for I have not challenged dialectics, I have only questioned Novack's somewhat watered-down version of it. If I have placed a question mark over certain statements that frequently are given as examples of one or another kind of materialism, that is only because I am concerned about making the philosophic basis of Marxism as rigorous as possible.

\* \* \*

After this exchange between Barry and myself, of course, Etienne Abramovici responded to Novack and his critique was printed in the *ISR*. Shortly thereafter, having read a newly published book by Enzo Paci, I submitted a review of it to the *ISR*. The text of this review is found as the Appendix at the end of this article. It was intended to give an objective treatment of Paci's arguments, to let them stand on their own merits despite the brevity of the review, and to let *ISR* readers read the book itself if my nonpolemical exposition of it interested them in it and they had the cash or a convenient library.

The *ISR* editors, however, discovered a "veiled polemic" with Lenin and Engels. Les told me that while the book review was unacceptable as such, I should resubmit it as a letter, implying that I would have more freedom

to speak my mind there. In so doing, I sought to relate the book to something in the experience of *ISR* readers. Most letters to periodicals do that, you know. So I added the following at the beginning of the letter:

"A footnote in Georg Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* has occasioned at least a significant part of the debate about this book, including the exchange between Novack and Abramovici in the *ISR*. I refer to the question of the dialectic of nature.

"Novack's argument that nature has 'existential priority' shows that he has made just the mistake that Lukacs was trying to avoid. ('Existential' has more than one meaning once you leave everyday speech.) Novack has confused temporal priority, prior historical occurrence, with logical priority, or priority in terms of the actual evidence. The evidence must be captured in the first person, by us, in the present. (As Marx's 'materialist' predecessor Feuerbach put it, 'Agreement is the first criterion of truth; but only because the [human] species is the ultimate measure of truth.')

"If Marx had thought it necessary to start from a position of temporal priority, he would have started his economic researches not with a dissection of generalized commodity production, but with the first human societies or perhaps the 'dialectics' of simple molecule formation."

The letter was then rejected in *principle*, for if only the introduction was objectionable, I could have resubmitted it again. The rejection concerned not the introduction but the body of the book review even as a letter. I consider this action, after it had been suggested to me to write the letter, as somewhat disloyal.

In trying to make the book review into a letter, I did what was necessary to effect this transformation. Having done so, I was finally told now I was treading in an *international* discussion where I had no right to be. By the fact that the French comrade's rebuttal to Novack had been printed, I had lost my right to hope to say anything on any related topic. Thus I learned that the national leadership considered the philosophic dispute a stiffer "line" question than originally appeared. I did not know this in advance, and Novack cannot prove that there is anything in the literature on the 1940 faction fight that would have enabled me to deduce it.

What I desired was a calm and, necessarily, drawn-out discussion of the issues, in connection with which people could read some works that they would not be likely to otherwise. If that desire is a sin, well, so be it. By relegating the discussion completely to pre-convention time, Novack, *et al.* have succeeded in abbreviating it. And Novack's response to my contribution on the "mediation theory" gives you an idea of how calmly he wants to discuss it.

## 2. *Evolution of a Position*

Novack recommends that we all learn the ABC of Marxism in philosophy. I heartily concur. I even have recommended that those who have only a little time for philosophy should read Novack's works. That is better than nothing or than never being exposed to Marxist philosophy in any form.

What Novack is "at a loss to understand" in my case is that, for years, I studied almost nothing but "the Marxist classics" he exclusively recommends. I also read everything Novack wrote which was readily available and some

that was not. All I knew of Sartre's position, for example, was what I read in Novack's *Existentialism Vs. Marxism*. To this day I have read only a few more short pieces by Sartre. I have similarly been inoculated against Sidney Hook, thanks to Novack.

But I never did passively absorb Marxist theory. I took it 'seriously enough to try to fill in the gaps in my understanding after reading the "Marxist classics" that were available. Eventually it became clear that some of the gaps were in these works themselves. I then tried to fill them in myself, using Marxist method as I understood it. The first problem I noticed concerned Engels' theory of the origin of European feudalism. It is impossible, from his account in *Origins of the Family, etc.*, to understand how feudalism arose dialectically out of chattel slavery. (His related account attributing the rise of romantic love to the influence of Germanic barbarian customs is also very problematic.)

My occasional correspondence with Novack started on the question of the origin of European feudalism. This correspondence, to which Novack referred to justify the rancor of his reply to me, only demonstrates that at each step of the way I was willing to listen to arguments, consider facts that I had not yet encountered and read relevant books that were recommended. But Novack was apparently more interested in keeping me from wavering in allegiance to the detail of the "Marxist classics" (Engels in this case) than in genuinely working to fill in the gaps.

If in the course of the last ten years, some of my hypotheses have been false starts, Comrade Novack himself must take part of the blame. His style of philosophizing seems to create a sort of internal *Index* in the minds of comrades, a list of books that young socialists would be wasting their time to read, unless, like those eccentrics who like to read the Workers League press so they can get laughs by quoting it, they don't have anything better to do. I am at least aware of this danger now and am more confident of my own hypotheses than I was, say, a few years ago.

What is to be done? Marxism aspires to be universally applicable in explaining history. If there are gaps in historical explanation, then Marxism must try to fill them. Philosophy, which provides science with method, in turn receives its own justification from scientific practice. Thus it may be that as one pursues the solution of a so far unresolved question, one may be obliged to revise certain elements of one's philosophy, always, however, ascertaining that this doesn't negate the philosophy as a whole but strengthens it.

Marx did something like this, as Mandel has shown in his book *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx*. Lenin did it too, when the events of 1914 forced him to take a long, hard look at what he had been told by Kautsky *et al.* was Marxist methodology. Novack refuses to admit this possibility, at least in certain areas where he is supposed to be an expert. His influence tends to render our work there uncreative and sterile.

I returned to the problem of the origins of European feudalism when, in the late 1960s, I tried to tackle the unresolved problem of why Europe rather than Asia or Africa developed capitalism first. (I do not think Mandel's attempts to solve this problem are complete, although I do not dispute the factualness of the links in this process

he has described. Nor do I agree that Japan was only quantitatively behind Europe, although my knowledge of Japanese history is too skimpy to say for sure.)

A solution to this problem was, and remains, a prerequisite for the disarming, on the theoretical level, of the imperialist "white man's burden" ideology. No Marxist has published a satisfactory solution of this problem, to my knowledge. I have the "arrogant" notion that I could contribute to a discussion of it, if comrades were interested. I do not claim I have a magic wand to clear up all the difficulties. Even to come close would have to be a collective effort.

To track down the character of Europe's preconditions for capitalism, you have to distinguish the cultural, social and economic totality of Euro-feudalism from other "feudalisms," such as those which crop up within the "Asiatic mode of production." Here we must take into account the more or less total smashing of gentile society by Roman slavery, a social fact which "barbarian" immigrations did not reverse.

Secondly, we must understand the role of Christianity, not just as a superstructural ideology but rather as an active, cohesive force, almost a political party, in the gradual reconstruction and development of Europe on the basis of a servitude which contains within it almost all the elements of modern private property.

Engels completely missed this last point in *Origins of the Family*. This omission cannot help but become more glaring as we probe the origins of today's patriarchal culture and the contributions of the Catholic Church to it.

Could Engels' oversight here have methodological roots in "historical materialism"? Perhaps so, I thought. Although his loyalty to known facts prevented him from making a serious reductionist error when discussing recent history, he *tended* to view ideology as purely superstructural and thus illusory or even negligible in practice. He thus underestimated the contributions of the internal dialectic of the Romance-Catholic world and overestimated the "externally added" force, the Germans.

This, among other things, made me open to Lukacs' book. One of the things he argued for was this: Historical materialism does not apply to precapitalist society in the same way as it does to capitalist society. However Hook interpreted this, I thought Lukacs meant it as a plea for the grasp of the specific totality of a society in its own era, a point which was not foreign to Karl Marx. The way in which ideational patterns are formed within the class structure and alienation of capitalism will not tell us all we need to know about the way in which ideology was formed within the class structure of Roman slave society.

I do not think that Novack has avoided errors in this regard. I give as an example his use of the term "reactionary" to describe Plato's intellectual position as a whole. Undoubtedly, Plato and his teacher Socrates held some reactionary views; but the Athenian "progressive democrats," who poisoned Socrates because he asked too many questions and allegedly denied the existence of the gods, were at least as devoted to slavery as were Plato and Socrates. Were they really more "progressive"?

I have discussed elsewhere Comrade Reed's use of the term egalitarian to apply to preclass society, an error of the same type.

Please note how I have used Lukacs, not as a religion to replace Comrade Novack in my heart, but as a stimulus to research.

### 3. *Novack's Misquotes*

Comrade Novack's misquotes of my article are so crude and my original document so available that, were he not endowed with a certain halo because of his being presented for years as *the* leading thinker of the SWP, I would not assume that comrades would be dazzled, and I would not dwell on these misquotes. But compare these specimens of his art of quoting:

"Having picked up some odds and ends of faddish ideas from pseudo-Marxists and assorted academics, he has made a patchwork of them and presents that to us as nothing less than 'an even more profound methodology of which Marx himself was dimly aware.'" (Novack, Vol. 31, No. 8, p. 13.)

"The mediation theory I have tried to uncover here may be only a step in the direction of an even more profound methodology of which Marx himself was dimly aware." (Garrett, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 5.)

"[Garrett] argues that historical materialism justifies the rape of the environment because it identifies progress with the growth of the productive forces. . . . His claim that Marxism induces 'a negative attitude towards sexuality' is based on the false assumption that historical determinism leads inexorably to asceticism and repression of sexuality." (Novack, Vol. 31, No. 8, p. 12.)

"Historical materialism stresses, said Engels, that the ultimate basis of Marxist theory is the determinism of the production and reproduction of material life. It is possible, though perhaps not necessary, to draw from this a negative attitude towards sexuality, seeing its justification only through its role in the reproduction of the species. . . ."

If Engels' statement was taken "in a sufficiently broad sense," then "historical materialism might not be hostile to the ecological principle. However, insofar as progress is only identified with the growth of technological productive forces, historical materialism implicitly justifies the rape of the environment to meet production needs, even if it may, modified by the mediational concept of planning, dissociate itself from the extreme of capitalist pollution." (Garrett, Vol. 31, No. 2 p. 5.)

\* \* \*

## II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

### 1. *Spontaneity and a Theory of Human Nature*

Novack alters the meaning of sentences which normal quoting would leave intact. For example, he jumps with glee upon my statement that Marx "felt that human beings produce ideas to solve problems with which they *spontaneously* chose to deal." (Novack's emphasis added.) But then Novack shifts the ground: These problems were not "spontaneously," voluntarily, or arbitrarily chosen, he retorts.

Novack omits the immediately following sentence, which went: "This choice is, of course, weighted in the direction of a certain range of interactions between the human being and his/her more or less immediate environment."



One could accuse this of being abstract, but only malice could motivate one to suppose that I took this to be in contradiction to the idea that "the main practical and theoretical problems humans confronted in the course of their development from the hominid to civilized *homo sapiens* were set for them by their existing conditions of life and labor."

I never said, of course, that these problems were *arbitrarily* chosen. But "spontaneous" does not mean arbitrary; it means self-acting, deriving from an inner motive of a being. On this there can be little doubt as to what Marx's opinion was. Here are some quotes from the 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* in which this idea is either assumed or explicit:

"For labor, life activity, and productive life appear to man at first only as a means to satisfy a need, the need to maintain physical existence. Productive life, however, is species life. It is life begetting life. In the mode of life activity lies the entire character of a species, its species-character; and free, conscious activity is the species-character of man." (P. 294, Easton and Guddat, eds., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*.)

"Animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwelling places, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But the animal produces only what is immediately necessary for itself or its young. It produces in a one-sided way while man produces universally. The animal produces under the domination of immediate physical need while man produces free of physical need and only genuinely so in freedom from such need." (*Ibid.*)

"By degrading free spontaneous activity to the level of a means, alienated labor makes the species-life of man a means of his physical existence." (P. 295, *Ibid.*)

In the above-quoted passages, Marx was trying to come to grips with a problem which figures less prominently in his later works, especially those that were published in his lifetime. It is virtually ignored in the official Marxist movement in the quarter century after Marx's death.

Marx felt that labor, human being's defining characteristic, was essentially free, creative activity. Under class society, this freedom is alienated. But the potential of it is everpresent. Without its remaining as this potential at the very least, what would revolutionaries down through the ages have appealed to? What else is there that explains why, given the ripening historical situation, there is no layer so downtrodden, so alienated that it cannot be expected to rebel against the repression of its human nature, free (spontaneous), creative activity?

## 2. Is the Mediation Theory One of Pure Individualism?

On the occasion of Novack's speaking in Detroit some years ago on "Marxism and Existentialism," an NCer remarked to me that he thought existentialism in some ways did more justice to the individual than Marxism. I knew little about existentialism. Novack's talk, however, convinced me that I couldn't agree at all with the NCer. Today, though I don't agree with what the NC comrade said then, I at least understand what he was getting at. It is not so much Marxism or Trotskyism, as Novack's version of Marxist philosophy, that is weak when it comes to doing justice to the individual. He hasn't done too bad, of course, in showing how the accidental contributes to the necessary, the individual to the socially universal.

But he doesn't seem to be able easily to go the other way, that is, to show how the universal necessarily expresses itself in the individual, though in each from a certain point of view. And I don't think he shows how individuals in groups create the historical process instead of just bending it at times. Perhaps his weakness here is related to the fact that, unlike Mandel, Novack had his theoretical outlook completely formed before the general availability of Marx's main works on alienation. He does not seem to be able to supercede this fact of personal history.

The mediation model I introduced can be expanded to give account of the individual aspects of social experience, I think. But Novack is as wrong to label it as belonging to the Robinson Crusoe and Friday school of social theory as he would be to condemn Marx for the passages in which he speaks of a single laborer working all day for a single capitalist.

Like Marx in such cases, I was abstracting from the complex manifold of reality to highlight a few essential relations which have a life of their own within the bigger life of society. What is more, there *is* a sense in which labor is an individual as well as a social process.

Furthermore, Novack had only to read "Towards a Critique of 'Political' Anthropology" in the internal bulletin to realize that I am well aware of the pitfalls of explaining things by reference to some allegedly primeval state as social contract theory did.

The mediation model I presented had three aspects—the dialectic of labor, the social dialectic of cooperation, and the dialectic of individual and (collective) institution. This was an attempt to uncover the universal elements of social evolution. It is not, as Novack charges, a theory of isolated individuals coming together to form a society, as though such a process, with the three facets succeeding each other chronologically, ever really occurred like that.

At this point, I want to introduce a quote from Marx's *Capital* which should clearly point to one of the major sources of the mediation theory. It was a mistake of me not to include it in the original article.

"Labor is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord [i.e., "spontaneously"—J.G.] starts, regulates and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labor that remind us of the mere animal. An immeasurable interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labor-power to market for sale as a commodity, from that state in which human labor was still in its first instinctive stage. We presuppose labor in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor-

process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement." (*Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 177-178.)

### 3. *Novack's "Materialist Epistemology"*

Once Novack advocated a reflection or copy theory on the origin of knowledge. "The objective world which exists outside of us is the primary reality," he wrote in *Origins of Materialism*, "and the ideas are derived multiform reflections of its diverse aspects in our minds." (Emphasis added.) Despite "flexible" adjectives like "multiform" and "diverse," this passage is nothing but predialectical materialism.

Now Novack puts it forth as a correspondence theory, i.e., that ideas correspond to external material events, regardless of whether or not there is an interaction between them and these events. Now Novack is not even giving a necessarily materialist argument. He could be taken as a follower of the dualist belief that mental events parallel physical events without interaction, like two watches set by the same person which kept perfect time.

The clever example Novack gives of his correspondence theory, an individual's ability to avoid an onrushing car, is revealing on two accounts. First, the response is entirely individual—there need not be a driver in the car and we could substitute a falling rock without any harm to the example. Thus, Novack, who falsely accuses me of building an argument on isolated individuals, is guilty of this very error himself.

Secondly, I doubt that there is much in the way of ideas or conceptions involved in dodging a car. My gerbils would do as well in similar circumstances. Unless I am mistaken, however, they do not have ideas. Ideas come in only when I have to communicate my narrow escape to somebody who wasn't there, or when I review in my mind the story I am going to tell the insurance adjuster, or perform some such other potentially or actually social act using language.

One may argue that I could have chosen suicide, that my reaction would not therefore have been instinctual like that of a nonhuman animal. But in the case Novack introduced, I think this would be ruled out. Suicide must be planned; care is always taken to do it just so. A person who plans to end his life by jumping off a bridge, for example, will probably be more careful in crossing the street than most people. He is about to do his last social act and he doesn't want to muff it. His plans would dovetail with his instincts in avoiding the onrushing cars.

See what has happened to the "clarity" and "coherence" of the "correspondence theory of knowledge" when you think about it carefully. It would be better to promote an initially more complex theory which does not fall apart when you try to apply it.

### 4. *Is It True that No Alternate Theory on the Origin of Knowledge is Offered?*

Novack claims that in rejecting the "representative theory of knowledge" to which Lenin, at least at the time he wrote *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and Novack, at least at the time he wrote *Origins of Materialism*, adhered, I failed to give an alternate theory. Because Novack treats philosophy like politics, this charge appears to him especially damning. But this is only because he forgets

what he is discussing.

I do, however, have an alternate theory and I gave some idea of it in the article. It is really only the mediation theory taken from a certain point of view. I don't make the claims for perfection that Novack does for his theory. And I will not call anyone arrogant for not believing it. It goes like this:

An idea (a word, expression, or statement); (1) expresses the totality of human experience (history) and culture from a unique position within that totality and (2) is particularly closely related both to the groups and individuals who use it and to the activity and the objects of activity which they use it to communicate, focused on the unique aspect of that activity which gives it its primary meaning.

If this formulation is too Hegelian, let me present it again in the form of answers to the question: Do ideas originate from sense-experience?

Yes, in the sense that the knowledge of a kind of object depends on the experience of many objects of the kind, from the various vantage points by which the object can be perceived, grasped, used, etc.

Yes, in the sense that ideas are tied to language and language is learned by experiencing social situations as totalities.

No, if by this proposition we mean that an idea arises completely and purely from a specific experience or finite group of experiences unmixed with socialized mental habits passed down by earlier generations as part of the individual's cultural heritage.

No, if by this proposition we mean to imply that the mind is a passive recipient of sensation, that the human being's different purposive activities directed towards elements of its environment do not help to shape every idea or concept that arises.

Aspects of my argument here come from many different philosophers, contemporary and dead. But I believe it is very close, if not identical, to Marx's implicit position.

There is an alternate theory on the origin of knowledge, Comrade Novack.

### 5. *On Materialist Ontology*

Theory of the nature of being, or ontology, is an aspect of philosophy included within what is generally called metaphysics. The work of Kant, in one sense, and Hegel, in another, shook the philosophic world at the beginning of the 19th century to such an extent that metaphysics, which had been a big topic in the previous period, never completely revived.

Marx, the former doctor of philosophy, never tried to undo this philosophic turn. Plekhanov, on the other hand, as he tried to popularize Marxism for the Russian workers, had to do battle with Russian orthodox obscurantism. He found a source of assistance in the writings of the pre-Hegelian materialists of the Enlightenment. Some of his tasks corresponded closely with the anticlerical writings of the previous century in the West and he used them wisely.

But he identified this materialism too closely with Marx's "materialist dialectic." Plekhanov did not understand the full impact of the Hegelian turn, as Lenin came to realize in 1914 when he wrote his *Philosophic Notebooks*. When, earlier, under the influence of Plekhanov, Lenin attacked

the pragmatist Empirio-critics, he had used the pre-Marxian weapon of Enlightenment materialism.

Novack's horror at my lack of enthusiasm for materialist ontology as a philosophic axiom derives from a fixation at the stage of philosophic development of the younger Lenin. And I will horrify him still further by saying that I think that Trotsky, despite his fundamental attachment to dialectical Marxism, never completely came to grips with Plekhanov's *philosophic* weakness and so carried a little of it himself.

The basis of Marxism's claim that it is not metaphysical lies in the emphasis on the point of interaction between consciousness and action ("unity of theory and practice"). This interaction is realizable most convincingly in the present, in our own experience or at least with as few human intermediaries as possible between the observation and the report of the observation.

The "reports" of an event must be available in the present (in written archives, perhaps, or in recollections of older people, the curious structure of laws that were enacted by departed generations, fossils in the earth, and so on). From all such pale survivals or sedimentations of the past we partially verify our hypothesis that social and natural evolution went on prior to our existence and even that of humanity itself. If we eventually *conclude* this fact, it is still a *conclusion*, and not an article of faith, i.e., an axiom on the basis of which we start out.

\* \* \*

If one starts off from the dialectic of activity, of labor, as Marx sometimes did, one rapidly arrives in the social dialectic. Time, space, matter, necessity, chance, memory, purpose and so on—all the categories that pre-Marxian philosophy had disputed over—are here all presumed. They do *not* constitute the central objects of the inquiry.

Novack's claim for ontological materialism seems to read like this: Marxism stands on two legs, dialectics and materialism. The latter signifies that the universe is independent of individual and social consciousness. It existed before the human race, as Darwin's theory of evolution has shown.

Aside from the fact that Marx's theory antedates Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Marx never talked like this about his world view and I challenge Novack to prove otherwise. If Marx agreed basically with Darwin, as I think he did, he did not qualitatively change his world view when he became acquainted with Darwin's work.

#### 6. *Empiricism: From a Theory of Knowledge to a Theory of Being*

The skepticism of British empiricism and of the empirio-critics against whom Lenin polemicized is connected, I think, to the theory of knowledge which they shared with pre-Hegelian materialism and, according to Novack in his reply to me, with Marxism, too. (But Novack is not always consistent on this; sometimes, as on pp. 80-81 of *Empiricism*, he also expresses a more correct view, on the epistemology of the unity of theory and practice.)

But to pursue this topic, we have to enter into the subject matter of Novack's book on *Empiricism*.

One might divide the influences on early empiricism

as follows: (1) the influence of contemporary developments in science and industry; (2) the class position of the philosophers themselves; and (3) the internal self-criticism of philosophy, i.e., a philosophical dialectic between philosophers as such.

To admit these influences does not necessarily make one a Novackian "historical materialist." However, it is characteristic that Novack gives too little credit to (3).

Berkeley's empiricist idealism was, to be sure, openly enrolled in the service of the Church of England. The theism or deism of the other empiricist philosophers, too, must have been influenced by their class position. But the main body of their work was bourgeois *only* in the sense that all philosophic thought during this period was bourgeois, unless it expressed the theological leftovers of feudalism.

In France especially, materialism was a radical but undeniably bourgeois movement; in the generation between the encyclopedias and the revolution, the more socially radical petty bourgeoisie, influenced by Rousseau, tended to be deist.

Early materialism was, to a great extent, parasitic on idealism and empiricism for epistemology and ontology. For example, LaMettrie's *Man a Machine* may be seen as an application of Descartes' mechanism combined with Leibniz's notion of Substance as active, as Organism. Condillac's sensationalism, says Novack, was directly indebted to Locke.

The philosophic impasse in which the empiricists arrived, with the skepticism of David Hume, was predetermined by two hypotheses that dominated philosophy from the time of Descartes.

They are: (1) "(True) Ideas are distinct"; and (2) "There is a correspondence between (true) ideas and material events."

If ideas are distinct, then it seems to follow that they are separate from each other. Perhaps, thought Locke, they may be explained by reference to simple ideas and simple relations, with complex ideas being built up from these "simples."

The next move is to concentrate solely on "simples" as the input to perception. Given the second hypothesis, that there is a correspondence between material events (or sense-impressions, to use Hume's phrase) and ideas, then material events must be separate, too.

The only way, said Hume, that we infer that material events are connected is by the repeated association of sense-impressions of certain types in time and space. But such past perception is no guarantee for future, because we are not entitled to say that there is a substance (which we cannot see) underlying these qualities (which we do see).

What happened was this: The great empiricists, through logical consistency, drove themselves to an absurd conclusion. The materialists avoided this conclusion not by challenging and replacing the hypotheses but by turning their attention in different directions (the sciences, aesthetics, social theory) or, by simply ignoring the persuasive empiricist arguments, assuming the materialist position to be valid as a start and then piling up arguments after the fact to justify it.

I might agree with Novack that the willingness of the ruling English bourgeoisie to follow one line, and the interest of the French bourgeoisie, yet to come to power, to pursue more practical science and subordinate philosophy to it, is explicable in terms of the concrete socio-economic history of the two countries. But both lines had been prepared by previous history and *had* to be followed by somebody.

Hegel provided the impulse out of Hume's impasse by treating ideas as "organs" in a total organism of human thought and experience, each idea interpenetrating with but set against others and each expressing the totality from a certain useful perspective. Liberating "ideas" from an artificial separatism, he prepared the ground for Marx to attack the separatism of scientific realms, and the division of theory and practice in general.

Let us, therefore, going beyond Hegel, understand ideas (and the elements of language by which they are invoked) as sedimentations or deposits of totalities of social experience, including but not limited to sensations of objects from multiple vantage points at different moments in the flow of time. If we do this, then there is no temptation to question the existence of the world outside us. We do not reject the doubt about the existence of the world. The question never really arises. That, I think, is the dialectical answer to skepticism.

Because he has not definitely broken with the "correspondence" theory and has failed to grasp completely the above-mentioned contribution of Hegel, Novack's materialism does not measure quite up to Marx's. His anti-skepticism is too much like the early materialists' for him to be able to solidly refute empiricist skepticism.

Novack's ties to this pre-Hegel era was brought home to me recently when I realized that he often uses the term "ideas" exactly like Locke, Hume and Rousseau, i.e., as direct products of perception, distinguished from concepts or what those philosophers called "abstract ideas." Today, however, it is recognized that "abstract ideas" are the only kind of ideas; otherwise, dogs could think, as Rousseau was forced to conclude from recognizing that dogs are sentient beings. Interestingly, it is in the area of "abstract ideas" that the philosophers of that tradition are generally recognized as being very weak.

#### 7. *The Contradiction Between Dialectics and Novackian Materialism*

What epistemological materialism shares with historical materialism as it is often expressed is the following assumption. (Actually there are two assumptions, but they "reduce" to one when you translate "economic" as "material.") In the interrelation between non-mental, i.e., "material," events and mental events, the former have greater weight, influence or determining power on the latter than the latter have on the former.

So indeed Novack tells us, "Historical materialism insists that in the complex process of historical determination, economics and not politics, religion, morality, or military power is decisive in the last analysis and the long run." (Novack, Vol. 31, No. 8, p. 11.)

All this seems so obvious that one would have to be a Jesus freak or Rennie Davis to challenge it.

But let's wait a minute. Dialectics tells us that we cannot predict a specific event unless we know the totality of influences at work in a given process at a given time,

not only the tools and technology, the economic and social institutions, but also the consciousness and combativity of the masses and the nature of the groups or individuals competing for leadership. Because in the modern era the dialectical process has created a world-community, integrated *via* the world market, these processes are partly locked into place in a gigantic social organism; they take on the character almost of natural-scientific laws, and we can make predictions without knowing every little detail at every step of the way.

But this is less true as we extend our studies back into history. The social order is less uniform, less united, less subject to unifying processes. We are thrown back more and more to the study of the concrete totality. At each stage, material, economic, social and ideational conditions will all be present. Dialectics allows us to abstract from any one of them only "at our own risk."

And what about the future, socialism? Isn't the purpose of the socialist revolution the liberation of mankind from economic privation and thus from economics, so that economic science will wither away, as Mandel predicts in *Marxist Economic Theory*? I think Novack agrees at least with this, so I can only attribute some of his formulations to his being in a philosophical rut.

Materialism seems to authorize us to say, "We can abstract from processes in consciousness and still explain human acts," or, "We can abstract from processes in consciousness and still explain the ultimate results of history." To such notions I attribute the motivation for Novack's equation of progress with growth in the technological productive forces. The latter appear to be "material," i.e., non-mental, but because they are social products, they are actually connected with mental processes at every stage and in many ways. Some Marxist writers have even included human intelligence, science, and social structure (such as the bourgeois state in its heroic early days) as productive forces. And that has always made sense to me.

#### 8. *Is It Wrong to Speak of Political and Ideational as Well as Economic Alienation?*

While there is no doubt that Marx and Engels concentrated their studies on economic alienation, I do not see how it can be considered the sole source of alienation under capitalism; nor do I see how Novack can argue that preclass human beings were not alienated because the economic alienation of class society did not exist yet. People who perform human sacrifices, who kill a member of their clan who appears to be bewitched, or who worship trees (much as I appreciate the sensitivity to environment that this last shows and which, in a sense, it would be good to relearn ourselves) are alienated people.

The fact that Marx adopted the term *fetishism*, before then primarily a term of descriptive ethnology, to describe an aspect of his theory of economic alienation, would appear to reinforce this contention.

This kind of alienation was recognized by Engels when he wrote how the Social Darwinists got a social theory by transposing an idea from natural science, while Darwin himself had been inspired by Hobbes' social theory of the "war of each against all," which he transmuted into the "survival of the fittest." Each transfer gave the argument greater apparent authority to the extent that

the origins of the notion were forgotten.

One might argue, nevertheless, that *political* alienation represents an unnecessary hypothesis. I do not think so, although I am less sure about it than I am about ideational and economic alienation. What influences me to assign it a category of its own is the experience of the large-scale societies of the ancient Orient and West Asia. Private property was only partly developed there; the ruling group was held together by clan and tribal ties, what Ibn Khaldun called "group feeling." Yet tremendous inequality of power evolved, particularly in those areas where massive irrigation works were necessary for the continuity of the civilization. That economic factors are at work here as elsewhere does not make all the alienation economic.

### 9. On the Question of Progress

Comrade Novack challenged me to provide an alternate theory of progress. I had prepared to submit one but then realized three facts: (1) This is perhaps the most difficult question facing the philosophy, or science, of history, and it deserves more reflection than I have had time to give it; (2) Novack would perhaps be justified *then* (and only then) in comparing me to Herr Eugen Duhring, who tried to reduce all history to a single formula; though it is not true that a unitary view of history is neither desirable nor attainable; and (3) despite the sketchiness of such a large proposition, the text it would take to express it would double the size of this article. I have decided to let my empathy with those who are typesetting these bulletins express itself and not submit it.

However, if Novack is sincere in his challenge, let him propose that we keep the internal literary discussion on these questions open after the convention. I shall not disappoint him then.

I can, however, indicate some flaws in Novack's views on progress. I shall not discuss the problems of combining his views with Evelyn Reed's, with which I must assume he agrees since he has never expressed any criticism of them.

According to Novack, the two criteria of progress are the growth in productive technology and population. By Novack's criteria the period between 2600 B. C. and the end of the barbarian immigrations in the West after the fall of the Roman Empire would be a period of historical stagnation, because the overirrigation of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and the growth of social violence and class structures (slavery) had a negative effect first on productivity and eventually on population.

Then there is this question: How many members of the SWP recruited in the recent period can convince themselves that the slowdown in population growth in western countries is a sign of stagnation of society (which is not to say capitalist society is not stagnating in other ways)?

Then what if, after the socialist revolution, we were able to solve our material problems and then we decided, ecologically speaking, that it would be best to keep population size and social product constant and concentrate on cultural needs? Would Novack then label this stagnation?

Before dropping this issue, I must at least point out what is involved in a solution. The dialectical concept of progress is irretrievably tied up with the principle

known as the *negation of negation*: A system, by its very functioning, creates a force which enters into tension with it; finally, the increase in this tension leads to a breakdown in the old system and the re-creation of a system on a new basis. The favorite example of this is the creation of socialism by the revolutionary proletariat, itself the negation of capitalism.

What is not usually understood is that this principle is at work at all times, on a small scale as well as large, any time an event takes place within a real system of any kind.

A vital element of such events is *irreversibility*. This aspect of negation of negation arises from the fact that every event is conditioned by the entirety of past history (natural, economic, social, and intellectual history). Thus, the past that conditions an event changes when the event itself occurs. The event itself cannot be relived. The past is not exactly duplicatable. (Sectarians fail to realize this when they act as though Trotskyism faces the same exact tasks vis-a-vis Stalinism and the labor movement as in the 1930s or 1940s.)

Experimental science, however, is valid only to the extent that this truth can be abstracted from. Philosophies exclusively tied to experimental repetition will never grasp this contribution of dialectics. Neither will functionalism, which can describe interrelations between parts of a whole but never sense the necessity of a certain kind of change in these interrelations over time.

A general theory of progress must be able to deduce from a concrete understanding of the irreversible processes of history that it is aiming towards some kind of greater good for the human race. I do not believe that Novack, whose main article on progress did not even mention the negation of the negation, has pointed the way towards this theory.

### III. TRADITIONS AND ANTITRADITIONS

#### 1. *How Is My Argument Related to Hook and Healy?*

Whatever Hook's position in the 1930s was, I do not grant that the criticism of his book applies to me.

(1) It is an utter slander to imply that I have ever challenged the labor theory of value. A couple years ago, I debated the Young Americans for Freedom theoretician David Friedman, on behalf of the local YSA in defense of this very theory.

(2) I do not think that Marxist philosophy or method can be sealed off from concrete scientific studies in economics, sociology, history, etc. The fact that I have contributed an article on the patriarchy to the bulletin ought to indicate this.

(3) Something in Marxist method does apply to preclass and postclass societies. But I will not venture to guess that Novack and I could agree as to what it is, at least not unless he were willing to have a fraternal discussion on the subject.

\* \* \*

Besides granting me the 1973 Duhring Award for which I did not apply and linking me with the Stalinist Althusser with whom I have the "minor" difference that I defend the Hegelian element in Marxism, Novack threw me in an amalgam with Healy.

But the questions on which I differ from Novack are not frequently the ones on which the SLL theoreticians differ with him. Novack's philosophic writings, though superior to the Healyites', are closer, as a whole, to the Healyite position than are mine. An example of this is the similarity of the Workers League's review of Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* and Novack's. Novack was only slightly less uncomplimentary.

The Healyites believe in the correspondence theory, too, and because they are out to smash SWP "Pabloism," they feel they must also go after Novack. But if you accept their assumptions about correspondence, all you have to do is prove them wrong politically and their "dialectical materialism" automatically dissolves!

## 2. *Politics and Philosophy*

Novack lays great claim to correctness because of his association with the leadership of the SWP down through the ages. Likewise he denounced Lukacs' philosophy of 1923 in close association with Lukacs' agreement with the ultraleft "March Action" of 1921 and his capitulation to Stalinism after 1924. So quick to talk about uneven development in other circumstances, Novack seems to rule it out in the relation between politics and philosophy.

Although the ridiculous "dialectical materialism" of the Healyites expresses well the bankruptcy of their politics, neither the SWP's politics and Novack's philosophy, nor Lukacs' 1923 philosophy and his political career as a whole, correspond so neatly to one another.

The SWP (and thus Novack) may be correct vis-a-vis Mandel on numerous political questions. But the fact is that in the realm of theoretical practice, no member of the SWP, not even Novack, has anything to compare with Mandel. (I say this knowing full well that Comrade Mandel may not agree with some of what I've written in this discussion period.)

In identifying himself with the Russian Marxist tradition in philosophy, Novack embraced the heritage of a curious event when he wrote his review of Lukacs: The attack of Zinoviev, then chairman of the Comintern, on Lukacs and Korsch. Zinoviev was then already in

a bloc with Stalin against Trotsky; he was already engaged in bureaucratic moves within the International; and the virulence of his attack on Korsch and Lukacs already presaged the Stalinist attitude towards philosophies that did not toe the line.

Novack is surely in error to identify the SWP with this attack of Zinoviev's, by hailing it so uncritically. But at least he is consistent; his "reply" to me was almost as full of venom as was Zinoviev's to Lukacs and Korsch.

Finally, a word on the relationship between the party press and philosophy. We have seen an example of the political alienation I talked about in my first article. Having been entrusted by the party to express and defend the political line we have thoroughly debated at pre-convention time, the magazine's editors also defend with equal tenacity ideas which either have not been debated—or by their very difficulty cannot be thoroughly debated—in the three-month period allotted once every two years. You can argue that this is a necessary evil—and maybe it is—but it is not a necessary "good."

## *Conclusion*

Comrades who have come this far with me will perhaps understand better now what I am proposing: I would like to see a certain kind of philosophical discussion within the SWP and its press. Novack does not want to allow an iota of non-Plekhanovist philosophy in.

I do not advocate throwing the questions wide open. I am confident that a comradely discussion among proponents of different varieties of Marxist philosophy within the party could work out reasonable limits. If there is a will, we can find a way.

Many American comrades have, I think, wondered why the SWP, an example to the whole world on general political questions and organization, should have shown relatively little creativity on the level of theory. It is not the purpose of this article to provide an answer, but I do think that a less dogmatic, and more serious, application to Marxist philosophy would help us in theoretical practice and ultimately in other kinds of practice as well.

June 26, 1973

## BOOK REVIEW SUBMITTED TO THE ISR

*The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*, by Enzo Paci. Translated by Paul Piccone and James Hansen. Northwestern University Press. Evanston, 1972. 475 pp. \$ 15 hardcover.

This book, published first in Italy in 1963, is an attempt to develop the "transcendental" philosophy of Edmund Husserl in such a way that it coincides with dialectical Marxism. Part of the tradition loosely called "Western Marxism," Paci's book points out deficiencies in the work of others in this tradition (Marcuse, Sartre) and at the same time draws on the work of the great Italian Marxists Labriola and Gramsci.

Paci starts from Husserl's critique of "naturalistic" science. Beginning with Galileo, Husserl argued, scientists forgot that the mathematical models *they* created were in fact their own human creations. These products of human mental labor returned to dominate and deform scientific thought. Today this alienation is expressed clearly by atomic physicists who refuse to worry about the atom bomb. A return to the subject (according to Husserl), a socialist revolution (according to Paci) is required to end it.

Husserl further developed the distinction between the Life-world and categorial abstractions. The Life-world is the real world in which we all exist and function; it contains our material environment and other human beings. This world, however, contains our own subjectivity, our own purposeful activity, in an irreducible way. The categorial level refers to the abstract products of our

reflection in and upon the Life-world.

Paci argues that this Life-world is nothing but "the base" in Marxist terminology, and the categorial level is equivalent to the "superstructure." He quotes from Marx and Engels to show that they often began their theoretical analysis from the human social situation as it appeared prior to theorization—this was their difference with Hegel and Feuerbach—and that an irreducible aspect of this social situation is human labor, goal-oriented activity.

There are times, Paci admits, when Marx and Engels seem to hold the same position that Lenin immortalized in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, namely that the philosophic basis of Marxism is the dialectic of nature, which can be conceived without the existence of the human subject. Paci responds quite interestingly that there may well be a dialectic of nature, but it must philosophically start from the subject. Nature is contained in the self in the sense that the self is an expression of the entire development of nature to the present. And the conscious self relates to this nature in its own, and its social practice through the accumulated culture of the sciences; these, again, are expressions of purposeful human activity.

Paci's book is a profoundly optimistic work in the best tradition of Western thought. It pays, it seems to this reviewer, proper attention to the works of bourgeois philosophy without being trapped in it. It deserves to be read and taken seriously by students of Marxist philosophy, including the adherents of Lenin's view of dialectic of nature.

Jan Garrett  
July 26, 1972