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THEORETICAL AND  
PRACTICAL  
PERSPECTIVES

WHERE TO BEGIN

JULY 1956

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W E L C O M E

In the name of the REB, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you. Whether you are members or friends, you will all have the same rights to the floor, for the next two days of the convention.

This is not a privilege we are extending to you. This is a privilege we are extending to ourselves. This is our first convention, and we want to be enriched by all that you have to say.

It does not matter whether you have taken part in any previous discussion on the questions before the convention--you can speak of your own experiences and aspirations. We are anxious to create the kind of spirit in which you will feel free to talk. Without such a free interchange of opinions, the resolutions would remain dry and inadequate, even as NEWS & LETTERS would have been only half filled if all we printed was what we had to say and not what others had to say.

The reports to be made here just as all the reports during the last two months only opened discussion. It will not close until all of us together at the end of two full days and one executive session have spoken out and collectively arrived at the decisions to be adopted.

This distinguishes us at once from all the old radical organizations who were so exclusive because they feared being captured by the masses on the outside. It distinguishes us from the pretensions of those who claim that they wish to drown themselves in the masses. If you drown, you drown. Corpses do not build a live movement - old or new. We would welcome being captured by the workers, not because we want to drown ourselves in the masses, but because we are confident that the Marxist ideas that we hold and the ideas of full freedom that you aspire to, are one and the same thing--a new society free of all exploitation and degradation.

When the young Marx first broke from bourgeois society, he had this to say to the editorial board of the magazine he wanted to publish: "We should avoid presenting ourselves to the world in a doctrinaire fashion and with a new principle, declaring: here is truth, bow down and worship it. We should develop new principles for the world out of its old principles. We must not say to the world: stop your quarrels, they are foolish, and listen to us. We possess the real truth. Instead we must show the world why it struggles, and this consciousness is a thing it must acquire whether it likes it or not." Marx summed up the program of the new magazine as follows: to assist the age to come a realization of its struggles and its wishes.

We of NEWS AND LETTERS call this the clarification of workers politics. In this, our first convention, we openly state that we cannot do this without you, and that is why we publish the kind of paper we do, and we conduct ourselves in our conventions in the manner we do. There is a lot of work for all of us therefore, in the next few days, and we had better get right down to it.

I declare this convention open.

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## THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES

### WHERE TO BEGIN

My topic, THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES, sounds very imposing. The sub-title, WHERE TO BEGIN, sounds simple. Yet both mean one and the same thing. It is a matter of laying a solid foundation for the decisions we are to make at this, our founding convention, on the following topics:

1) the continuance of NEWS & LETTERS as a workers' paper, as the recorder of the impulses from the deepest layers of the population, which is at the same time a new form of unity of theory and practice;

2) the FORM OF ORGANIZATION we wish to establish for ourselves, and its relationship to the working class as a whole;

3) our relations with workers abroad--the hunger of the European workers and the colonial masses for contact with the American working class as it is, not as it is portrayed by the Voice of America, is matched by the American workers' desire for knowledge of the world working people. Nothing, for example, got such a rise out of Negro auto workers as the information we carried, and which no one else carried, on the struggles of the Kenya people for their freedom;

4) finally, the book on Marxism as both theory and a weapon in the class struggle.

EXCEPT THE LAST POINT, all of the topics I listed will be discussed at separate sessions, but they are inseparable from the basic foundation we are laying here at this session, as the reason for our being.

Some of you have just finished wildcatting in West Va. and others have been doing the same thing right here in Detroit. We have another worker here from Pittsburgh who is out on a regular strike--steel. So that auto and coal and steel - the three basic industries - are out on strike or have been recently out. Although thousands of workers were involved in each case, it barely got reported in the daily press. Where it did, it was not what the men were saying that was recorded, but what the company and union leadership were saying. Yet this is the type of activity which is the essence of theory and organization.

One thing is clear already: it was a move both against the conditions of work and the union bureaucrats who are doing the boss's disciplining for him.

Two entirely different attitudes towards automation were displayed; in these wildcats:

1) On the part of the management, the attitude was the machine can almost run by itself, and the men are expendable.

2) On the part of the workers, the attitude was: this machine is a man-killer. Half of the men it throws out of work, and those it keeps at work it sweats so mercilessly that it would seem, that, far from running by electricity, it runs on the nervous system of the men themselves.

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As for the labor leadership, the miners summed it up when they said of John L. Lewis: "He is no different from an operator."

This is very different from the situation in '49 to '50, when the miners were willing to credit John L. Lewis' order to return to work as having been forced upon him by the operators, while he himself was really for the workers. I was not involved in the present strike, and cannot know all the implications which will first come out only after you have told your experiences. Although the ideas for this book had been germinating in my head for many years prior to 1949 and '50 strike, it first took shape only then because it was the actual concrete stage of the class struggle which gave it its form. The present experiences will enrich the book on Marxism further, before it goes to press.

Others of you here are not workers, but you have been part of the working class movement and know that there is no future for humanity outside of proletarian activity, which would break out of the confines of this decadent capitalist society and create a new social order and a new way of life.

I will call these non-workers, intellectuals. Since I am one myself, I feel free to tell you that the task of grasping the full significance of this book, will not be as easy for you as for the workers. It took me ten years of direct work on Marxist theory before the miners' strike of 1950 illuminated for me the form this book must take.

It is not a question of mere understanding. You easily grasp words and ideas and therefore think you understand more than you really do. The fact, however, is that you cannot shake off what is so inherent in our society -- that monstrous division of mental and manual labor.

To illustrate my point, and to emphasize that this is not an attack on any person, I will quote to you what passed for Marxism in other days. I will take Karl Kautsky who was the leading Marxist theoretician after the death of Marx himself and his collaborator, Engels. Until 1914, he was accepted by Lenin as his teacher. In fact, I'm sorry to report that it's Lenin himself who in 1902 quoted approvingly the following monstrous conceptions of Marxism. Here is what Kautsky wrote and Lenin approved:

"Socialist consciousness is represented as a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, Socialism, as a theory, has its roots in modern economic relationships in the same way as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and in the same way as the latter emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But Socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises out of different premises. Modern Socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for Socialist production, as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia. It was out of the heads of members of this stratum that modern Socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians, who

in their turn, introduced it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allowed that to be done. Thus, Socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without, and not something that arose within it spontaneously."

That is Kautsky and that is what motivated everyone including Lenin, pretty much up until 1917.

Naturally we reject this separation of Marxism and the proletariat as existing side by side -- a sort of East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, except in battle. Nothing would have sounded more fantastic to Marx himself and we know from his development that, far from growing merely side by side, Marxism grew out of the class struggles. And yet in knowing that, how many of us grasp that so ACTIVE are the relations of theory and practice that there are moments when they can actually change sides with each other and indeed they do.

The simple question, WHEN DOES MY DAY BEGIN AND WHEN DOES IT END?, said Marx, was both the basis for the struggle for the shortening of the working day, and a NEW PHILOSOPHY, greater than the Declaration of Independence, or the Declaration of the Rights of Man and all the other grandiloquent phrases of bourgeois philosophers. Marx made this the philosophic axis of his greatest theoretical work, CAPITAL, and he thus broke with all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois conceptions of what is theory.

The fact that there are still those among us who separate the paper from the book, shows that we do not have this profound grasp of the active role of theory and practice. Again, to stress the objectivity of this analysis which is not a personal attack, let us take the case of Trotsky in his relationship to Lenin in 1917 and afterward:

When Lenin broke with Kautsky and the whole of official Marxism in 1914 because it had betrayed the proletariat at the outbreak of World War I, he felt that, to reconstitute his own reason, he must return to the philosophic foundations of Marxism in Hegel. We have first now translated his profound Philosophic Notebooks, but he drew from them the clarification of his ideas, made the theoretical preparations for the Russian Revolution of 1917 so that when his own Bolshevik Central Committee failed to put the question of workers power on the order of the day, he said: "The rank and file of the party is ten times as revolutionary as you, the leaders, and the great masses of workers outside the party is a hundred times more revolutionary than the party. If you do not put the question of workers power as the need of the moment, I will go to the sailors."

No one understood this statement better than the leader of the then revolutionary Red Army, Leon Trotsky. Yet, when Lenin died, his reputation of, and loyalty to Lenin's theses did not make it any easier to reintroduce the specific relationships of workers revolt to the so-called vanguard party. In fact, he failed entirely, despite the beautiful generalization that "Marxism is only the theoretic expression of the instinctive drive of the proletariat to reconstruct society on Communist beginnings". Any generalization, no matter how good, becomes its own opposite, when it does not change along with the constantly changing concrete. When communism became transformed into its opposite,

the Russian totalitarianism that we know today, such a generalization only played into the hands of the enemy. And not only played into, but went along with that enemy. Thus after 15 years of struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, when World War II did break out, Trotsky asked the workers of the world to defend that monstrosity Russia as a workers' state.

Now I hope that no one here thinks that because we have broken with Trotskyism and refused to defend that monstrosity, Russian totalitarianism, and were later able to analyze the new stage of world capitalism which made its appearance in the rather unusual form of Stalinism or, more specifically, state-capitalism with its State Plan, that thereupon we understood, in full, the active relationship between theory and practice that I have been tracing and which is the ESSENCE OF MARXISM.

The experience with CORRESPONDENCE is proof of the exact opposite. You see, any analysis of the specific stage of capitalism in which you live is certainly the basis for any forward movement. It is impossible to move a single step forward if you keep on repeating the truths of the competition stage when you have already reached monopoly, or the truths of monopoly when you have already reached state capitalism. You can't live by the truths of another era. That is the activity of theory and practice. You have to constantly re-interpret.

But having the correct foundation is not yet the whole structure. The building which is yet to go up is nothing less fundamental than your, the theoretician's, relationship to the working class itself as it evolves new forms of revolt to this new stage of capitalist domination. For example, we discovered state capitalism in 1941, and correctly placed it not as a Russian phenomenon, but in its world context. But the truth is that on a world scale state capitalism evolved, not in 1941, when we discovered it, but out of the 1929 crash and the complete collapse of "simple" monopoly capitalism. In response to that phenomenon, the American mind was split into two: on the one side the Planners, and on the other side the workers evolving their own form of organization, not as NRA, but as CIO. And on a European scale, it had in France too the form of sit-downs and the actual mass mobilizations which stayed the hand of fascism, and in Spain it was an outright revolution.

It is true that when we did finally catch up with the facts of the day -- and we were the only tendency that did -- and don't underestimate that fact, we connected the new stage of capitalism with the specific forms of workers revolt and hailed the 1943 miners' strike and Negro demonstrations that took place right in the midst of war as well as the general strike movement, the soldiers movements to return home, and the colonial revolts that followed World War II, we did that concretely and thought a lot of ourselves for doing so.

We accomplished quite a bit from 1941 to 1951, but the truth is: 1) that once we broke organizationally from Trotskyism, we did not know what to do and went into hibernation and 2) more important than even that is that something new had arisen in 1950. I CALL IT THE MOVEMENT FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY. IT WAS BORN OUT OF? OR RATHER REACHED A NEW INTENSITY WITH AUTOMATION WHEN THE WORKERS ON THEIR OWN BEGAN TO QUESTION NOT ALONE THE FRUITS OF LABOR BUT THE MODI OF LABOR, THAT IS, THE KIND OF LABOR ITSELF.



Let me be even more specific because generalizations just won't do. When state capitalism became not alone plan from above, from the outside, whether it was the New Deal or the Five Year Plan or Hitler's Three Year Plan or the Co-prosperity Sphere of Japan made by the bureaus of the state; when instead of that, it has reached the point of the inside drive of the machine itself, automation, the state capitalist theory was in urgent need of concretization, because this was a new stage right at the point of production. Once the workers on their own reached the stage of questioning the kind of labor, as the miners questioned the continuous miner in their 1949-50 strike, we, at best, tail-ended the worker, and, at worst, evaded the concrete question of the new relationship with this movement from practice to theory, with a lot of generalizations (and nobody is better at generalizations than Johnson and Stone) about this being the age of absolutes.

It is most certainly true: when you reach the stage of automation and atomic energy, when civilization itself is at stake, and when the workers on their own are abolishing the distinctions between theory and practice, you have reached the age of absolutes. There is no doubt about that.

The point is: what is your task? The proletariat is doing its work and more: what are you, the theoreticians, doing to meet them even half way? All we did -- and that was our highest point of development as Johnsonites -- is to say there are no longer any strictly philosophic questions - the workers will change everything. Now that is true. Anyone can get up and say it and they will always be right, but they won't answer a single thing. The workers can change society and no one can do that for them, but we have a certain task. What is our relationship and where will we be? Not only that, but the workers have been trying to change it and they didn't fully succeed, but they too are moving toward this unity of theory and practice. They need us. It may sound very revolutionary to scream "Only the proletariat can" -- but in fact it is as much an evasion of the answer which you have to give yourself as any philosopher's retreat to his ivory tower. Neither retreat, nor "drowning yourself in the masses", will take the place of the actual working out of this new unity of theory and practice.

IF we had had a truly total view of this movement from practice to theory, our theory in turn would have developed to the point where it could have met this movement from practice to theory on its level.

Here is what I mean. Marxists used to think that all they needed to know was that there was a class struggle and all they had to do was wait for it to reach up to their theoretical level. That concept was smashed to smithereens in 1917. But, when the first workers state was itself transformed into its opposite, the old concept was reborn, as is natural when a new objective reason for being is born. This concept of the alleged backwardness of the working-class to achieve its own emancipation became the face of the counter-revolution.

We thought we were free of this because we had connected the specific stage of capitalism with the specific stage of workers' revolt. This held good until 1960, when new impulses were coming from the proletariat.

Johnson and his philosopher, Stone, certainly failed to hear that

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new voice and consequently could not reinterpret the old philosophic foundations of Marxist, specifically the form of the Absolute Idea as the form of the new society. You will find letters of ten years standing all of which says: this is the age of absolutes; our task is to reinterpret the last chapter of Hegel on the Absolute Idea materialistically. But that is all you will find. The fact is, as we all know that not only they never did anything about it, but they ran very much the opposite way, when I did interpret that which we have said was our task for about ten years. By 1953, when the East German workers and the slave laborers in Russia itself revolted without waiting for a war to spark it — Stalin's death was a good enough spark -- and answered affirmatively the question, can man be free, in this age of totalitarianism, the absolute contradiction within our own tendency was soon to show itself.

To this day, some of us fail to see this book on Marxism as something as new in its field as NEWS LETTERS is in its. They think it is a popularization of the old, with new American examples.

This is just what the book is not.

Unless we see the book as this something totally new, unless we listen to Marxism with the ears of workers who have just heard the name of that man, Earl Marx, for the first time, we will miss the truly new contribution we are making, miss our new point of departure, and thus fail to fathom our own role and relationship to the working class.

HOW MARXISM BEGAN

I started the discussion on Marxism from the vantage point of ourselves and our own age because that helps illuminate the past, but it is time now to gain from the illumination the past can throw on the present. To that we turn to the beginnings of our modern machine age and of Marxism theory in the three revolutions which gave birth to this age.

I mean not alone the Industrial, American and French Revolutions. They are the obvious ones, of course, and the actual forms in which the old feudal order was undermined and overthrown, and the new capitalist order born. But the modern totalitarian age — in America as well as in Russia, — has so degraded the word revolution, either to violence or conspiracy, that we must stop to emphasize that revolutions are not a question of shootings — though they may be that too — but they are mechanical, socio-political and intellectual revolutions. Nothing was left standing still, neither the feudal relations nor the philosophic thought. Once men do something — great bodies of men I mean, in revolt against intolerable conditions — then everything else, including thought, changes.

The bourgeois revolutions were preceded by what Marx calls the "primitive accumulation of capital" and which he described as follows: "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signalled the rosy dawn of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. On their heels trends the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre."

By the time the industrial revolution comes and drives the peasants from the land, takes the craftsman's tools away from him and drives him to work in a factory, England begins to look as if a tornado had swept over it, and the only thing in sight are the grim factories which suck in workers



as a mere "collection of hands", who have to bow to this new-fangled way of production. Here is how Marx summarized this new, capitalist mode of production:

"The separation of labor from its product, of subjective labor-power from the objective conditions of labor, was therefore the real foundation in fact and the starting point of capitalist production."

The American Revolution sounded the tocsin, said Marx, for the European revolutions, but the French Revolution was the greatest of the three revolutions that opened the era because the French masses had not only overthrown the aristocratic order, but had gone further in the process of the actual revolution and development to overcome first, the bourgeois leaders and petty-bourgeois leaders and the most revolutionary Robespierre. There is a sort of double rhythm of destroying the old and creating the new which bears the unmistakable stamp of the truly working-class way of knowing -- we read books and we know-- workers know through self-activity - it is their philosophy however, not just acting. This in fact was the greatest of all the achievements of the great French Revolution, greater than the establishment of the first European republic, this discovery of its own way of knowing, through its self-activity.

The double rhythm between the destruction of the old and the creation of the new was heard loud and clear, but its revolutionary leaders were not the ones to hear it. For it is as hard to hear the voice of a future society as to listen to a foreign language you do not know. We of the present age can understand better than anyone that voice of the fledgling proletariat, Listen to Varlet, who also was a leader, but the one closest to the masses and who is not as well known by any means as well as Robespierre. Here is what he said - and to Robespierre, not just to the king, who everyone agreed should be cut and not even just to the new order (so-called): "During four years, constantly on the public square among groups of the people, among the sansculottes, among the peoples whom I love, I have learned how naively and just by saying what they think, the poor devils of the garrets reasoned more surely, more boldly than the fine gentlemen, the great talkers, the bumbling men of learning; if they wish to gain scientific knowledge, let them go and move about like no among the people."

It took a Marx some fifty years later to hear this voice and to mold these French revolutionary doctrines into a new theory of liberation. But even in its own time, this self-activity made a great impact upon philosophic thought, especially upon the greatest bourgeois philosopher, Hegel. You know, you live in that age, you can't help learning something.

There is nothing in our thought, not even in the thought of a genius, that has not previously been in the activity of the common man. And when Hegel defined his dialectical philosophy as the philosophy of self-development, it was in fact, the philosophy of the French Revolution. Where classical political economy had summed up its discovery by the recognition that labor was not something outside of man, but in the activity of man himself, Hegel summed up his philosophy with this statement: "everything depends on whether you view something as substance, that is to say a dead thing, or as subject, that is to say a living force."

Marx took these two great discoveries of bourgeois thought, the highest peak the bourgeoisie had ever reached, and after which it "perished". In a word, once the class struggle became really sharp, the theoreticians of the bourgeoisie turned from being scientists into what Marx called becoming prize-fighters for capitalist domination. The first thing Marx did, was to take the economic and philosophic discoveries out of the sphere of intellectual theorizing and make them into weapons in the class struggle.

He turned against Hegel for treating ideas as if thought floated somewhere between heaven and earth, instead of being part of the organisms of living beings. He accused him of de-humanizing ideas. Marx made concrete what Hegel left hanging in mid-air. He said: this self-developing subject you are talking about, is the self-developing working-class - what is the point of calling him the absolute negativity? He is the one who will develop all contradictions of capitalism. He is the one who will create a new order, free of what you call absolute negativity, and what is just another name for the exploitation of workers.

Marx turned against classical political economy and said: to say that labor is the source of all value is good, but not good enough. Labor isn't a source. Labor is activity of human beings, called workers. And while these workers create all your wealth, he becomes poorer and poorer, the more he creates. So, let's stop talking about source and talk about relations.

Finally, Marx turned against the Utopian Socialists with their schemes and said: the real class struggle, that is what you should be following. Anyone who sees workers in action as mere "mob" will never see the true course of history. Anyone today who watches the Polish workers revolt, can see through the hypocritical sympathy of the Polish leaders here, by just the way they cannot get away from the one word "mob". Marx, in his time said: you thereby miss all the great intellectual potentials of the workers, who are the only true inheritors of the achievements of Western civilization. Nobody else is achieving Hegel. In my tour, I had a lot of talks with intellectuals. They do not know how to read Hegel. You have to know Marx first. And Marx said you have to know the proletariat, that's why he was so smart. Thus the young Marx broke not only with bourgeois society, but with those intellectuals who thought they could now begin making schemes for the workers:

"Consider only the song of the weavers; (Marx wrote of the weavers' revolt of 1844) the striking, trenchant, ruthless and powerful way in which the proletariat hurls the battle-cry of its antagonism against the society of private property. The Silesian revolt began where the French and English insurrections ended, with the consciousness of the proletariat as a class. The whole action was of this character. Not only did it destroy machinery, the rival of the workers, but also the merchants' records, their property titles. In the beginning at least, all other movements were directed exclusively against the industrialists, against the banker, the invisible enemy. And finally, no English insurrection was carried out with the same courage, deliberation and persistence."

LaSalle said: that's a mob - we have to teach them how to act, they shouldn't act that way. Ruge said: why is Marx running after a few workers? And he said with great arrogance: Germany

will do very well without a few artisans that have escaped to France and that Marx is running after. But that's who Marx ran after - there weren't more to the Congress that listened to his Communist Manifesto than are right here in this room. I believe there were less. That is how Marxism began. Now, how did it develop.

#### How Marxism Developed

Both because of time limitation and because we're interested most in that part of the past which illuminates the present, I will limit what I have to say on Marx to the two central points, which are both integral to his greatest theoretical work, Capital;

1) How by tracing the law of motion of capitalism, that is to say, where it came from and where it is going, Marx could predict the problems of our day, which are unemployment, the degradation of the workers to a cog in the machine which would nevertheless train him for revolt, and the development of capitalism to its ultimate form as state-capitalism, which would solve nothing but only bring all contradictions to the extreme so that in society as in the factory itself, we are confronted with what Marx called "one single master."

2) How the class struggles of Marx's own day shaped his work and is thus a living demonstration of what I have been calling the active relationship of theory to practice or how the theory arose out of the actual class struggles, and not merely lay silently side by side.

Let's begin with the second point, the active relationship of theory to practice. After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, Marx returned to his study and worked out the main economic doctrines during the decade of the 1850's. But somehow, they did not take shape, or they took shape as Critique of Political Economy, not as Capital. The workers were quiescent and the various specific forms of revolt they were to evolve in their struggle with capitalism, were impossible to see. Beginning with John Brown's revolt in this country, and the movement of the slaves, a new era had dawned in the world. Marx saw it at once. What was even more important, the English workers began acting to stop their capitalists from intervening on the side of the South. The English bourgeoisie counted on having their workers with them in this, since their livelihood depended on cotton from the South, which was stopped by the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States. Instead, the British workers chose to starve, rather than do anything to perpetuate slavery on the other side of the ocean. So powerful was the monster meeting they called to stop the hand of their rulers, that England did not dare to intervene. Instead, the meeting was the basis of the First Workingman's International. The Polish insurrection against the Russian autocracy, the French workers rebellion against Napoleon III, and the Italian struggle for national independence, all joined together in London to form this organization based on the principle that workers have nothing to lose but their chains, and that their interests in every country, were the same. The head of this International was Karl Marx.

At the same time, the daily struggles of the European proletariat centered around the shortening of the working day to ten hours. The Civil War was no scener over than the American workers surpassed even their European brethren in the breadth and scope of their struggle for the

shortening of the working day to eight hours. Marx wrote:

"In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California. The General Congress of Labor at Baltimore (August 16th, 1866) declared: 'The first and great necessity of the present, to free the labor of this country from capitalistic slavery, is the passing of a law by which eight hours shall be the normal working-day in all States of the American Union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is attained.' At the same time, the Congress of the International Working Men's Association, at Geneva, on the proposition of the London General Council, resolved that 'the limitation of the working-day is a preliminary condition without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive... the Congress proposed eight hours as the legal limit of the working-day.' "

Note how proud Marx is that at the same time as he worked out this thesis, the American Workers in Baltimore on their own, came to the same conclusion he had spent 20 years to work out.

The Civil War in the United States not only laid the foundation for this great movement for the eight hour working day, but as Marx put it, "It sounded the tocsin for the European Revolution of the proletariat." By 1871, the Paris Commune, or the first workers state in history burst forth.

The spontaneous mass outburst that took the form of the Commune of Paris lasted only two months before the Parisian workers were massacred by the bloodiest terror in history. But in those two short months, the workers accomplished more miracles than capitalism had in as many centuries. The greatest miracle was its own working existence. It abolished the standing army and armed the people instead. It smashed to smithereens state bureaucratism, placed public officials on a workman's salary and made them subject to recall. It abolished the division between the legislative and the executive and transformed the parliament from a talking to a working body. It created new conditions for labor. On all fronts, the creative initiative of the masses had ensured the maximum activity of the mass and the minimum for its own elected representatives. It thus stripped the fetishism off all forms of rule: economic, political, intellectual.

Between the Civil War in the United States and the Paris Commune, the two editions of Capital were completed and published. Those two events didn't merely give a form to this great theoretical work; the two, the events and the book, were inseparable from each other. The very structure of the book, in which the struggle for the working day occupied some 75 pages, is a demonstration of the break from the bourgeois concept of theory, the inseparability between theory and the history of the class struggle.

Now, we can return to the first points I made on the significance of Marx's Capital. So alive are the logical laws of development of the capital-labor relationship, that passages upon passages in Capital sound as if they were written yesterday. Listen:

"An organized system of machines, to which motion is communicated by the transmitting mechanism from a central automaton, is the most developed form of production by machinery... The lightening of the labor, even, becomes a sort of torture since the machine does not free the laborer from work, but deprives the work of all interest...

"By means of its conversion into an automaton the instrument of labor confronts the laborer during the labor process, in the shape of capital, of dead labor, that dominates and pumps dry living labor power. The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labor and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labor, is...finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery."  
(Capital, Vol.I, p 377,423)

This is not a description of an automation machine, although it fits better than any modern description. Although written almost 100 years ago, so profound is the analysis of the capital-labor relationship and the laws of value and surplus value which they manifest, that the Russian working-class took a look at this and said: I can't see any difference between what he describes and calls capitalism and what I have to go through in my factory, and they call it socialism. The Russian bureaucracy thereupon in 1943, decided to break with the structure of CAPITAL and thus revise in theory what they had long since revised in practice the moment they began to substitute for the production conferences of workers the conference of the Planners.

THIS is the book that exposes their production relations so thoroughly that it hurts them to this day. Here is the historical and logical movement in the labor process itself as analysed in Capital:

#### COOPERATION; MANUFACTURE; MACHINUFACTURE.

The first thing workers recognize when they have been brought into the factory is that there are MANY of them WORKING TOGETHER. They thus see a NEW POWER in themselves. It is true that, as cooperators, they find they no longer belong to themselves, but to capital. But--and what is Marxist theory is, the fact the feelings of the workers--the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production that degrades them to a cog in a machine also disciplines, unites and prepares them for revolt.

Now, from what Marx calls machinufacture, which has in our day and age reached an entirely new quality which may logically be called AUTOMATION, the 2nd INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. From this stage of machine production, Marx notes two opposite absolutes and two absolute opposites):

1) The General Absolute Law of capitalism -- Unemployment, on the one hand, and 2) the absolute of the new society within the present -- New Passions and Forces within the proletariat.



The theoretical axis of Capital is the question of Plan, -- the despotic plan of capital versus the plan of freely associated men. The reason Marx could predict plan a hundred years ago, is because he saw that it does not come down from the administrative offices, it goes up from the the despotic relations in the factory itself to the top offices, and then comes back as ever greater speed-up, and as ever more tyrannical barracks discipline.

It took until the depression of this century before the capitalist theoretician admitted what could no longer be denied, that the system was headed for collapse. At the same time that the machine throws workers out of work, the big capitalists eat up the little capitalists. This Marx calls the law of concentration and centralization of capital. It is more familiarly known in our day as MONOPOLY and it is this growth of monopoly which reaches to the ultimate of concentration in the hands of one single capitalist or one single capitalist corporation, more popularly known today as STATE CAPITALISM.

The official Marxist theoreticians after Marx, who "saw" Marx's theory, but saw it as mere theory, were not much better than the capitalist theoreticians, as was proven in World War I, when the whole second International collapsed like a house of cards. You see, it is not enough, it is in fact nothing at all, to believe in a theory if you do not have this active relationship of theory to practice. That International predicted the capitalist collapse. What it didn't see was its own collapse.

#### The Great Divide in Marxism

I have no time to go into the betrayal of the proletariat by the Second International, nor even what I call the Great Divide in Marxism. All I can say is that Lenin saw, when World War I broke out, that without the philosophic foundations of Marxism, that is to say, the ever-deeper and lower layers of the proletariat as the motive force of the new society, their development, their self-development, as the only force for freedom, you only end up as the agent of capital, within the proletarian movement itself. That is why he turned to philosophy to reconstitute his own reason. That is why he grabbed on to the dialectical principle of transformation into opposite. And that is why he was not dismayed by the transformation into opposite of the 2nd International. He had no doubts whatever that just as the upper stratum of labor, its aristocrats, had grown out of this monster of imperialism and monopoly, so out of the deepest layers of the proletariat and the great masses fighting for national independence would come the fully new society. And he began with the national struggles. He said: look at that lovely Irish Rebellion of 1916. You are afraid that they are all shooting each other. Just look at them - the new society will come from them, too.

What he had to do as a theoretician was to lay the theoretic foundations which he did in IMPERIALISM & IN STATE & REVOLUTION, which were his preparation for the actual revolution as well as his preparedness to break with his co-leaders who, once the revolution was successful, sank into what he was to call in the last years of his life "Communism", a new bureaucracy which let the state machine drive it on the road backwards to capitalism in its new form of state capitalism. All Lenin could do is warn his colleagues of what is in store for Russia. Even he could not hold back the objective movement of history once the workers to a man

didn't run production and didn't control the state or check the work of the party. These were the only guarantees that Russia wouldn't return to capitalism.

What the Russian workers wrote into history 1917-1923 cannot be unwritten, neither by Stalin in his day, nor by Khrushchev today. But the workers of today must find a NEW BEGINNING even as the Russian workers in 1917 found a new beginning, and not a mere re-enactment of the Paris Commune of 1871.

#### Practical Perspectives

This new beginning is what we are taking up here. Every day, every hour of the day, we face two worlds. I do not mean Russia and America. These two capitalist giants out for world domination, each day look more like one another. If they are not identical twins, they are nevertheless two of a kind. No, the two worlds I mean are right within our own country. Each country has two such worlds in it.

They are the worlds, on the one hand, of speed-up, unemployment, guided missiles, H-bombs, capitalist tyranny. In a word, the world of big and little bureaucrats-- government bureaucrats, management bureaucrats, union bureaucrats. The world of exploitation and degradation and crises and wars.

The second world is the world striving for a new freedom, a total freedom, worthy of human beings. It's the world of wildcats, colonial revolts, and the self-activity of the Negroes in Montgomery, who easily enough found they could organize without any big brass to draw up blue-prints for them. Not alone to take care of their transportation needs, but to rise to the full dignity as human beings who will not be shoved around. The other day, I heard that when the NAACP was outlawed from the state of Alabama, the ingenuity of the Negroes to remain organized, quickly enough evolved a new form of organization. I understand they now call themselves The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights.

To answer the question -- where to begin -- for a group like ours means, first of all, to answer the question, What is Marxism. I do not mean what did Marx write in 1843 or 1883. I mean what is Marxism today, 1958.

A Detroit radio poll showed that, next to Russia, what the workers feared most was automation. It is not Marxists who have compelled society at last to face with sober senses the conditions of labor and the relations of men with each other. Today, as in everyday life on the practical questions of the day, so in every layer of society the great philosophic battles that matter are precisely those over production, the role of the working class, the one-party state, H-bomb rule. Or, to put it more simply, how, on the part of the capitalists, to get workers to produce more, and will civilization as we know it survive at all? The seal of bankruptcy of contemporary civilization, including the so-called Vanguard Parties, is the bankruptcy of its thought.

It is not only we alone who think we are filling the void in Marxism since Lenin's death. The great Marxist Hegelian scholar, upon reading the outline of my book, wrote me: "Your ideas are like an oasis in the desert of Marxist thought."

Of course, since he lives in an ivory tower and does not know the American masses, he thinks I "overestimate" their talents and abilities,

their power and potentialities. He may think the American masses are backward. What he doesn't know, or what he refuses to recognize despite my telling him so, is how much miners, steelworkers, autoworkers, housewives, young workers did to shape this book and how much the scholars did not. I hope that when this book takes final shape, every serious worker will be able to read it, and every intellectual who wants to understand it will be willing to work hard to understand a book, written not for intellectuals, but for workers. Anyone who thinks the workers will not understand, fails to recognize the quintessence of Marxism, that it is not in books, but in the daily lives and aspirations of the common man. To read the book will be like meeting a man in the dark who you think is a stranger, but with the first words spoken, you find a friend. Something like the first worker who was driven into the factory against his will and found thousands of others there in the same position and thus found they had a new power, that of cooperative labor and revolt. And don't make any mistake about it. Thousands of workers will read this book.

Not only the working-class, not only the colonial world, not only the Negroes or other minority people are striving for a new way of life. So total is the crisis that intellectuals, I mean even bourgeois intellectuals, are turning in horror away from their own world. If they could see a new social order arising out of the proletariat, if they could grasp its thought, they would align with this movement. It has always been so in great critical periods in history. It is so now, as the tour showed in part. The petty-bourgeois youth is significantly important because they are far from accepting the brutality of their elders.

But to reach all of these strata, beginning with the first and most important, the working people and extending to all who wish to break with this present society, we have to have the conviction, not merely of ideas, but of practice. Not to hide behind the generalities of a new social order, but to go into the practicalities of a paper, a committee, a book, a visit to a shopmate, a conversation with a next-door neighbor, a distribution before a factory gate, a drive -- I mean the inner drive from your own convictions -- to want to do the impossible, which is only seemingly impossible, to sustain these new beginnings.

The concrete Stage of Capitalist Production & Specific Form  
of Workers Revolt since 1900.

The void in the Marxist movement left by the death of Lenin illustrates how deeply dependant true Marxism is on the activity of the proletariat. Just to carry on is an impossibility. Trotskyism tried that, but failed miserably - you either move forward or backward - you can't stand still: Marxism isn't an heirloom to be handed down as a keepsake for your grandchildren. It is either a method to help us realize freedom in our day, or it is nothing at all.

Our point of departure must be the concrete stage of capitalist production itself. The crisis is in production. If you see it there, you can understand it everywhere else. If you do not see it there, you can understand it nowhere.

The totality of the crisis in production today is twofold:  
1) First is the role of capitalism. Just as the State Plan came out of the collapse of private capitalism, in face of the crash in 1929, so automation came as the capitalistic answer to the struggle over productivity

in the post-war years. However, the crisis in production is now so total and of such a world scope, that there is nothing from atomic energy to automation that is not simultaneously the property of every industrial country, and with America and Russia both having the H-bomb, the world has reached an impasse that is nearly breathless. There is very little time differential nowadays between their theory and practice too, but while they can only live by hiding and there is no chance to hide, THE WORKING CLASS WANTS TO BE HEARD AND URGES TOWARD A UNITY WITH THEORY. THE AGE OF AUTOMATION STRIVES TO BE RECORDED IN ITS PROLETARIAN IMPULSE.

2) Second and most important is the role of labor in this, the age of automation, where the worker not only refuses to be a mere cog in the machine, nor take unemployment as a "natural" phenomenon, but on the contrary, raises the very basic question of the relationship of labor to life itself. As Angelo Terrano put it in NEWS & LETTERS:

"WORK WILL HAVE TO BE COMPLETELY NEW"

Man likes to work, to build something, but today work is so separate from everything else in your life. Each day is divided: you work, then you have some time in which to rest, forget about work, escape from it. What will be with automation? There is less work for man (as I think of work today), but there will be more time. I am scared of more time the way things are now because more time for the worker might be seven days a week with no pay check at the end of the week.

I used to be told that the fight for more leisure time was so that the individual could have more time for art, music, literature, for study in general. That doesn't satisfy me any more. Under a new society work will have to be something completely new, not just work to get money to buy food and things. It will have to be completely tied up with his life."

Ever since the 1929 crash which split the American mind as well as the world mind into two opposite poles, on the one hand the Planners, and on the other hand the self-activity of the workers, finding their own form of organization as the CIO, the movement from practice to theory, has developed to where it has now reached such intensity that it will not brook any separation on the part of the theoreticians. This is different than it was in 1941, when the state capitalist tendency first arose.

It was fine to write theses and to point out how the old parties were degenerating because they had neither correct theory nor were they based on their own rank and file.

But when it came to the simple question: what do we do now that we're independent; where do we begin now that nothing stands in the way of our meeting the proletariat on our grounds, how many different answers were there, written and unwritten, spoken and unspoken, thought out or just blurted out? Well, we had 60 or 70 people then and there were 60 or 70 different answers.

THE FAILURE OF CORRESPONDENCE IS THE FAILURE TO MERGE WITH THE NEW IMPULSES COMING FROM AUTOMATION ALTHOUGH WE WERE RIGHT THERE ON THE SPOT WHEN IT HAPPENED AND COULD SEE EVEN IN THE MOST CONCRETE WAY WHERE IT ALL HAPPENED WHEN THE MOST AUTOMATED MINE, THE CONSOL, WAS PRECISELY THE FIRST WHERE WORKERS BEGAN the great 1949-50 strike.

The theoreticians who thought they had prepared themselves sufficiently by the theory of state capitalism and workers revolt to receive now impulses HAD NOT THE SLIGHTEST CONCEPTION THAT THESE IMPULSES AT THIS STAGE IN THIS AGE OF ABSOLUTES WERE NOT MERE INSTINCT, BUT THOUGHT ITSELF AND NOT JUST RANDOM THOUGHT, BUT THEORY.

Indivisibility of the Book and the Paper

The indivisibility of the book and the paper as the life of the organization, its foundation and its expression is the answer to the question, where to begin. But this needs to be concretized. Take the book. How does it happen that we alone are doing it. What does the method in which we are doing it signify? That is to say, why did I feel inadequate to the task of doing it alone? Why did it have to become a collective venture, not only of our little group here, but of every worker and intellectual we could possibly reach? All of these questions can be answered simply by showing the significance of how much greater was the help of the workers than of the intellectuals, even our own intellectuals, in the accomplishment of this task. I repeat, the workers who had never read a word of Marxism, who had never even heard the name gave more of themselves to this book than did our own intellectuals. It is a hard thing to grasp especially since we are all so well-meaning and so glibly repeat that Marxism is not in books but in the daily lives of people. What do we do after we say that? How many of us say the paper can't be "just" a forum for the workers and thereby once again introduce the division between Marxism and the worker.

On the other hand, follow one worker's reactions: When Pete says: "You know, I laid there this morning about quarter to six. I looked out the window. I said to myself, "You just got to get up there and go, whether you feel like it or not." I just said it to myself. I didn't even speak it to my wife. I just said to myself, "Now you call that a free man?"

He isn't saying I hate to get up and go to work, although that is a good enough thing to say -- he is taking the word FREEDOM from out of the clouds and making it the stuff of every day life.

When Angelo Terrano says work will have to be something entirely different, she is doing more than exuding a good working-class instinct. She is stating the philosophy and the concrete slogan, if you please, which must be the axis of a paper like NEWS & LETTERS.

When Alex says: Will I have to be a subscriber for the paper to be able to buy the book, he is expressing a far greater need and far greater appreciation of a basic book that contains all of the working-class struggles for freedom than the intellectual to whom this is an interesting book, but there are many others and he wants time to read them all.

When Charles Donby writes about the changes in the shop which trace the evolution of the labor bureaucracy, and at the same time, says that the book will be the weapon in the class struggle, he is doing nothing less than what Marx himself did when he took political economy out of its intellectual sphere and made it both theory and weapon in the class struggle.



Compare this to the intellectual who does see the book as necessary, but fails to grasp the SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION that we AND WE ALONE are making in this restatement of Marxist fundamentals. The truth is, he has helped LESS in the writing of this book than the worker who is shy enough to think that only because he has never heard of Marx is the book new.

The truth is, the book is NEW and so are his feelings and aspirations because they are the feelings and thoughts and aspirations of the year 1956. Except in the most general sense, Marx could not have known them when he wrote.

We live in the age of absolutes. He did not.

The working-class of today is far more advanced than the Parisian masses of 1871 although the latter established in the Paris Commune, the first workers' state in history and we have yet to establish the workers' state of our day.

I don't doubt at all that the intellectuals will catch themselves and be able to make their contributions now and after the book is published when they spread it far and wide, and are not diffident about the role we have. The way to break down the division between worker and intellectual is to begin with the realization that in the book the intellectuals, even as the workers, have something new to learn. The intellectual can then spread the book far and wide in the full realization of the contribution we are making to fill the void in Marxism.

We are no elite, and we are not out to lead the masses. But we have a serious role to perform and no one else is doing it. Our point of departure is now. No one since Marx himself has done anything like it. We could not have been without Marx, but Marxism (I repeat) is not what Marx wrote in 1843 or 1883, but what it is today, 1956.

For Lenin, because he was fortunate enough to live on the eve of revolution, it was sufficient to begin with the results of his philosophic clarification and not the process of arriving at them. THE WORKERS OF THIS AGE WILL ACCEPT NOTHING LESS THAN A TOTAL VIEW OF EVERY ASPECT BEFORE POWER, AFTER POWER AND OF EVERY PROCESS ON THE WAY.

The young Marx said the task of the new journal should be to help the realization of the age. That is our task, with all the added complexities of the age of absolutes. YET IT CAN ALL BE SUMMED UP IN A SIMPLE SENTENCE-- CLARIFYING WORKERS POLITICS IN THE BOOK AND IN THE PAPER AS INSEPARABLES?

When Lenin in 1900 wrote his article, Where to Begin, and specified that beginning to be a newspaper, how many of his colleagues laughed and said, No, it should be an organization. Others said there should be only a newspaper, not an organization. Where others saw the two--newspaper and organization--as separates, Lenin saw them as inseparable.

It is easy to say today history has proven Lenin right. The point is what did you say as a contemporary of his when he said: This -- a national newspaper-- is where we begin.

IF you contrast the wrong start we made in 1951 when we broke with

the SWP only in order to go into hibernation (which the Johnsonites repeated all over again in the split of 1955) and our correct start in 1955 simultaneously with NEWS & LETTERS and a tour on the back, you will see at once what a long way we have come this year. In 1961 the decision "to examine ourselves" not only isolated us completely from the actual mass movement, but even from the development of any of our own ideas, so that when we finally came out to face the public in 1963 with Correspondence, it was barren of any contributions we as a revolutionary tendency had to make, other than that of filling our fountain pens. But it takes more than ink to fill a fountain pen, to find out what workers are saying. On the other hand, those of us who had worked out the significance of Stalin's death as the beginning of the end of totalitarianism, and were reinterpreting the movement of the Absolute Idea materialistically as the movement from practice to theory did have our fountain pens full and were ready to hear the new impulses and incorporate them immediately into the Marxism of our age, specifying that the two poles of the book would be Automation and the Absolute Idea.

The new type of intelligence in the world, Proletarian Reason, has its reflection, if you please, in our paper. All you have to look at is the list of worker columnists--from the editor himself, Charles Denby, to Angela Terrano, from Robert Ellory to Ethel Dunbar, and you will see at once that they all, including youth, came in the late 1940's and first got into their own stride revealing talents no one else knew they had, not even they themselves, after 1950 when jammed against the new in Marxism.

The conviction that this is so does not arise from my telling you so. The inner conviction can arise only because of a certain attitude to the working people, the unshakeable confidence that there are workers struggling for a new society every day of their lives, that the world does not begin and end with you, but with them. That you have something to learn from them, does not mean that they do not have something to learn from you.

If you have this conviction, then you can engage in the struggle for the minds of men, and that is what our century is, the struggle for the minds of men. The struggle for the minds of men at the time when the tendency to the complete mechanization of men has reached its acutest point with automation, just as it cannot be won with hollow slogans of democracy, so it cannot be won either with cutworn concepts of vanguardism, or intellectual abdication.

It is precisely the totality of the world crisis that compels philosophy, a total outlook. The working-class may not have created a new society yet, but they have undermined the old and smashed to smithereens all the old categories, believing neither in the rationality of the economic system, nor the political order.

The vanguard, on the other hand, has done nothing. It is stuck in the mud of old fixed categories, chief of which is the party to lead the masses. Where the worker begins with the question: what happens AFTER the conquest of power? Are we always to be confronted with a new bureaucracy? Is it all to end in the one-party state, the so-called vanguard says: first do this, follow me. That workers have already heard from the capitalists who say: Look at the wonders of automation--tomorrow the new world, but now follow me.

Everyone is ready to load. No one to listen. YET THIS AGE OF AUTOMATION DEMANDS TO BE RECORDED AS PROLETARIAN IMPULSE. This is what NEWS & LETTERS is doing. There is nothing but intellectual sloth on the side of the vanguard parties.

WHAT THEY ALL FORGET IS THAT A NEW SOCIETY IS THE HUMAN ENDEAVOR, OR IT IS NOTHING AT ALL. It cannot be brought into the world either behind the backs or outside the minds of the people. It is the people who will conceive it. It is the people who will build it. Or it will not be built.

Marxism is not in pathetic little or impressively big theses that are gathering dust on the shelves of old radical groupings or adventurers like Johnson. Nor is it a "conspiracy" that can be discovered and smashed. When people to a man take their lives into their own hands, there is no police force on earth that can stop them.

Marxism is in the everyday life of the workers, in their struggles and aspirations, their thoughts and experiences. The American worker has one advantage over his European brother: he is unencumbered by old radical political parties that have become bureaucratized-- whether as the totalitarianism of Russia or the democratic one of the British Labor Party, Bevanites included--are more free, beginning with production and ease of communication and association with his fellow men, than any other working-class on earth.

All we have to do is to have our ears attuned, our paper ready as platform for them and columns for us. We also have something to say.

This is not intellectual abdication. The new impulses can come only from those on whose backs all the oppression weighs. But once the theoretician has taken the impulse from the worker, his work does not end. His work first then begins. It is no small task to work out a new unity of theory and practice. It took Marx his whole lifetime. We are more fortunate than he and do not have to begin from the beginning. We have Marx to build on. We have the great divide in Marxism to absorb. We have the experience of more than three decades of working-class struggles since Lenin's death. And we have the present rich day to day struggles of the Negro masses. The movement from practice to theory cannot fail to meet the movement from theory to practice if we live our lives with the working-class and have our ears open.

If the history of the past means nothing to you, remember that today also is history. And today measures each man and woman, not according to his or her own views of himself or herself. And least of all according to the empty fancies in which the Babbitts luxuriate in a state of philistine, self-hypnotized inactivity, but by what each one does.

What we do today will make its mark and will manifest itself in our activities over the next year. Every practical question--and especially so the paper--will be taken up separately and in detail in the sessions to follow. What I have done is to show the necessity for the practical decisions because all that the knowledge of the past does is to lay the foundation for the present and infuse us with the confidence that this continuous thread from history is a sort of WIRELESS COMMUNICATION THAT WILL FIRST BE DISCOVERED IN OUR AGE WHICH WILL SEE TO IT THAT THE IDEA OF WORKERS FREEDOM IS NOT SO FEIBLE THAT IT WILL NOT ACTUALLY COME TO BE IN OUR DAY.