

Towards an Organizational History of the Philosophy of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.

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Of all the problems and contradictions that have afflicted the radical movement since the time of Marx, those pertaining to the dialectics of organization has proven to be the most difficult and perplexing of them all. Leftist groups and radical tendencies of various sorts have come and gone over the years, but the effort to develop revolutionary organizations on the basis of the insights of dialectical philosophy remains a task to be done.

“That which Hegel judged to be the synthesis of the ‘Self-Thinking Idea’ and the ‘Self-Bringing Forth of Liberty,’ Marxist-Humanism holds, is what Marx had called the new society...it is on this basis that we are asking those who agree with our principles to join us and take organizational responsibility for projecting Marxist-Humanism because, in truth, philosophy itself does not reach its full articulation until it has discovered the right organizational form.”

—Raya Dunayevskaya, “On Listening to Marx Think as Challengers to All Post-Marx Marxists” (June 5, 1984), Raya Dunayevskaya Collection [RDC], 8183

“What I’m driving at on the 1953 breakthrough [on Hegel's Absolutes] is that it embodied a totally new element of form, structure and politics for the organization and the paper, and the missing element of philosophy in what we now define as post-Marx Marxism.”

—Raya Dunayevskaya, “The Organization, the Paper, the Book—All Equal Philosophy of Marxist-Humanism” (May 11, 1987), Supplement to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, 10920

Introduction

Of all the problems and contradictions that have afflicted the radical movement since the time of Marx, those pertaining to the dialectics of organization has proven to be the most difficult and perplexing of them all. Leftist groups and radical tendencies of various sorts have come and gone over the years, but the effort to develop revolutionary organizations on the basis of the insights of dialectical philosophy remains a task to be done. Why is this still the case, and what can be done to help resolve the problem?

In order to tackle this question, we must first of all define the scope of the subject of investigation. Our primary subject in tackling the relation of philosophy and organization is not the forms of organization that emerge from mass movements for freedom, whether they are created by workers, women, national minorities, or gays and lesbians, many of which emerge spontaneously. No forward movement for freedom is possible or has ever been possible without such organizations, despite the pretenses of many radicals who imagine themselves the “vanguard” or leading force in generating social change. History shows that the leading force in social transformation has always been

grassroots, spontaneous forms of organization that arise in response to specific grievances. No one can predict the specific form or content that such spontaneous mass organizations will assume before they arise, and no one should attempt to define their scope or purpose independent of their actual emergence and development. The task of serious activists and thinkers is not to substitute their theory and practice for the self-development of spontaneous forms of revolt, but to develop their ideas and practices in light of them.

However, while the form and content of spontaneous organizations neither can nor should be delineated ahead of their actual emergence and development, they are not the only kind of organizations involved in efforts to transform society. There are also non-spontaneous forms of organization (parties, political groups, etc.) based on theories or ideas of liberation that aim to provide direction to the difficult task of uprooting capitalist social relations. History shows that when masses of people move in a revolutionary direction they do not only create organizations dedicated to their specific, everyday struggles. They also seek out groups and organizations that can address long-range questions such as “What happens after the revolution?” “How can a truly non-capitalist society be created?” “How can we avoid the problem of some new bureaucracy or totalitarian regime taking over after a social

revolution?” Such idea-based organizations that aim to develop and project a comprehensive theory of liberation are as important for social transformation as spontaneous ones.

The problem many freedom struggles and revolutions have encountered over the past 100 years, however, is that the groupings of the organized Left—be they political parties or more informal groupings—have often sought to take over and control spontaneous mass organizations instead of providing a response to such questions as “what happens after the revolution?” There are many reasons for this. Some radicals lack confidence in the creative abilities of masses of people and so look down upon spontaneous forms; some become consumed by a desire for power and prestige and seek to control mass organizations; and some turn away from having an idea-based organization altogether.

Whatever be the specific reason, many revolutionaries misconstrue their role by assuming that they do not need to focus on such questions as “what happens after the revolution.” Instead of providing theoretical direction to the movements based on a comprehensive response to such questions as “what happens after,” they either try to take them over or avoid giving them any direction at all.

To illustrate this, we need to keep in mind that the traditional models of leftist organization—whether the “Leninist” vanguard party or anti-Leninist decentralized forms that oppose the vanguard party model—were not

developed with the integrality of philosophy and organization in mind. Although Lenin wrote on philosophy at various points in his life, he never sought to make dialectical philosophy the defining feature of organization. Although he modified aspects of the elitist theory of organization elaborated in *What is to be Done?* in the years following its composition in 1903, he never broke from the hierarchical model of a “vanguard party” to lead. Most important, he never published or made the basis of organizational deliberations his 1914 “Abstract of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*,” in which he broke from the vulgar materialism of his earlier *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. “Dialectics,” even when it was raised or discussed, remained in a separate compartment from organization. Nor did such indifference about the relation of philosophy and organization characterize only Lenin. It was also the true of such great revolutionaries as Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Pannekoek.

Anton Pannekoek opposed Lenin’s elitist theory of the “party to lead” by arguing that the vanguard force in social transformation was workers’ councils. For Pannekoek and other Council Communists, “all power in the hands of the workers” was not merely a political slogan that could then be disregarded for the sake of preserving the privileges of the “vanguard party.” Pannekoek conceived of workers’ control at the point of production, exercised through

decentralized councils, as the organizational form best suited to the effort to uproot capitalism. However, when it came to matters of philosophy, Pannekoek criticized aspects of Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-Criticism while ignoring Lenin's break with his vulgar materialist past in his 1914 "Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic." Despite his differences with Lenin, Pannekoek never engaged in a serious study of Hegelian dialectics and failed to progress beyond the vulgar materialism and historical determinism that characterized the first generations of Marxists after Marx. Organization and dialectics remained as far apart for the Council Communists as for the Leninists. For the Second, Third, and Fourth Internationals, "dialectics" was treated as little more than a slogan denoting "dynamism" and historical evolution, and little direct study of dialectical concepts (including Marx's debt to Hegel) was undertaken or encouraged.(2)

While other currents of Marxism in following years, such as the Frankfurt School, made important contributions to the study of dialectics, these were undertaken from outside the workers' movement and developed in complete disregard of the problem of revolutionary organization.

The historic legacy of post-Marx Marxism has therefore resulted in nothing short of a void on the dialectics of organization and philosophy. This void characterizes all wings of the Marxist movement and remains the greatest

challenge to any effort to reconstitute a Marxian perspective for the 21st century. The gap between philosophy and organization remains to be filled.

This does not mean there have not been attempts to fill this gap. The most important attempt was by the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism, founded by Raya Dunayevskaya in the 1950s. Dunayevskaya was a pathbreaking philosopher who sought to integrate revolutionary dialectics into the development of a revolutionary organization, News and Letters Committees (N&LC), which she headed from 1955 until 1987. While a valiant attempt was made to continue these efforts by her followers in the next two decades, by 2007 it had become clear that N&LC had failed to live up to the challenge of uniting philosophy and organization. In response, the effort to achieve continuity with Marxist-Humanism and overcoming the gap between philosophy and organization has now been taken up by a new organization, the U.S. Marxist-Humanists. This essay is part of an effort to work out how to begin anew by rethinking the relation of philosophy and organization in light contributions of Marxist-Humanism, on the one hand, and the lessons contained in N&LC's failure to live up to the challenge of dialectics of organization, on the other.

As noted earlier, the focus of this essay is not the nature and form of spontaneous mass organizations, important as that issue is in its own right. The masses will move when they

will move, and no amount of preaching or posturing by radicals will change that by one iota. What we can determine and control is to develop organizations that focus on working out such questions as “what happens after the revolution” before it occurs, so that movements can have a direction when it comes to uprooting capitalist social relations in their entirety. However, leftist organizations will not be able to provide such direction if they are bereft of a philosophy than can address “what happens after.”

At issue here is not proclaiming the need for a philosophy of liberation, nor is it a matter of asserting that one has a philosophy.(3) At issue is ensuring that organization is itself determined by the creation, development, and concretization of a philosophy of liberation that can meet the challenge of the times. That is a very difficult task to live up to. However, it is a task demanded by our life and times, when capitalism is everywhere in crisis and yet when a vision of a viable alternative to actually existing capitalism is nowhere in sight.

Part 1: The Practice of Marxist-Humanism in an Actual Organization

In reevaluating the history of Marxist-Humanism, two seemingly contradictory truths need to be kept in mind. First, developing an organization that is deeply rooted in dialectical philosophy remains an untrodden path in the entire history of the Marxist movement. Second, the

development of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S. over the past 50 years contains not only many guideposts but also a basis for uniting philosophy and organization. Keeping these two contradictory truths in mind is important in reviewing the following history.

Marxist-Humanism arose from the effort to rethink and recapture the philosophic foundations of Marx's Marxism in opposition to the way "Marxism" had become reduced to a crude dogmatism by the "socialist" regimes and their apologists. From its inception, Marxist-Humanism sought to develop an approach that radically differed from the centralism and elitism that had come to define the Leninist "vanguard party." It firmly supported spontaneous workers' movements, not only against western capitalism, but also against the state-capitalist regimes that called themselves "Communist." It was one of the first currents in Marxism to integrate racial and gender consciousness within a Marxian perspective, as seen in its view that the struggles against racism by African-Americans has proven to be the "vanguard" force in U.S. radical movements. It argued that the liberatory dimension of Marx's Marxism, which became progressively lost sight of in post-Marx Marxism, calls for a return to Marx's humanism and the Hegelian dialectic from which it arose. Genuine Marxism, Marxist-Humanism contends, is not only a theory of class struggle, even though class struggle is central to it; Marx's Marxism must instead

be reconstituted as a philosophy of liberation in light of the changing realities of each era.

These and other Marxist-Humanist innovations on philosophic questions were not developed in a separate compartment from considerations about organization. The two arose in tandem with one another.

This can be seen from the philosophic breakthrough that led to the birth of Marxist-Humanism, the 1953 “Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes.” These letters, written by Dunayevskaya to Grace Lee and C.L.R. James, probed into some of Hegel’s most abstract and difficult works, such as the concluding chapters of the *Science of Logic* and *Philosophy of Spirit*.⁽⁴⁾ Even though these letters primarily consist of a novel interpretation of Hegel’s Absolutes, they were written with the question of organization very much in mind—a matter that would appear to have been far from Hegel’s concerns. Dunayevskaya begins her 1953 Letters by stating that her study of Hegel’s Absolutes is part of an effort to comprehend “the dialectic...of that type of grouping like ours, be it large or small, and its relationship to the mass[es].”⁽⁵⁾ She goes on to explore this relation of dialectics and organization by focusing on how to articulate a vision of a new society. She affirms, as James did in his 1948 *Notes on Dialectics*, that the idea of socialism is not brought to the masses from the outside by intellectuals (a concept dear to orthodox Leninists), since “we have seen

socialism in the various phases” of such mass organizations as “the [Paris] Commune, the Soviets, the CIO...” However, she notes that while spontaneous organizations often point to a new society, they provide only intimation of it: “it is not yet IT for it can be it ‘only in its completion.’”(6) As she further explores the last chapters of Hegel’s Science of Logic and Philosophy of Spirit, she indicates that the full articulation of the idea of a new society to replace capitalism hinges on the hard labor of breaking down the concept of “absolute negativity” for ongoing freedom struggles. Everyday struggles provide us with “only intimations, approximations” of the vision of a new society that is “nevertheless all around us.” To make these intimations explicit, a direct plunge into the dialectic of philosophy is necessary.

In this sense, Dunayevskaya’s “1953 “Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes” contains the basis for a new conception of revolutionary organization that points beyond both the Leninist vanguard party and the notion that spontaneous forms of organization provide an answer to “what happens after” the revolution all by themselves. However, although many conceptions regarding organization were developed by Dunayevskaya as a result of her 1953 Letters, it was not until the 1980s that she began to focus explicitly on how these letters constitute the “ground and roof” for a new concept of organization. She never claimed that the

organizational form of N&LC fully embodied the philosophic breakthrough contained in her 1953 Letters. Nor did she offer the form or structure of N&LC as a model for other organizations to follow. She held that “dialectics of organization and philosophy” remained an “untrodden path” for the entire Marxist movement. However, she also argued that the extent to which the form and structure of N&LC was impacted, in part, by the 1953 Letters offer important guideposts for the future. As she wrote in 1986, “Whatever will be the ‘answer,’ i.e., the ‘conclusion’ of Dialectics of Organization, we cannot now know. It is high time, however, to dwell on the many ‘firsts’ we established with the break from Johnsonism and the establishment of N&LC.”(7)

Today we need to reflect on how Dunayevskaya shaped an actual organization, N&LC, along the lines of Marxist-Humanism’s core philosophic ideas. In doing so we will need to keep in mind the difference between forms or practices engendered by her that were contingent and are no longer relevant to the present moment and those that express universals that are still valid today.(8)

The letters written by Dunayevskaya in 1953 on Hegel’s Absolutes led to a new concept of organization and eventually to the specific form and structure of the U.S.’s first Marxist-Humanist organization, N&LC. This is indicated by the Constitution of N&LC, first adopted in

1956 and amended on three separate occasions (1958, 1973, and 1983). It is a most unusual document. It does not consist simply of by-laws spelling out organizational procedures. It contains a Preamble that focuses on working out what Marx's Marxism means for today. When the Constitution was adopted in 1956, Marxist-Humanism did not yet exist as a body of ideas; in fact, the very term "Marxist-Humanism" was not coined until a year later.(9) Yet the Constitution connected philosophy and organization from the outset by assigning the group to complete a book that would spell out what Marx's Marxism means for today. The book was published in 1958 under the title of Marxism and Freedom.(10) After the book came off the press, the Constitution was amended to have that work define the organization's principles. This marked the first time that a philosophic work was made integral to the organizational form of a Marxist organization(11).

The inclusion of Marxism and Freedom in the Constitution of N&LC was no mere rhetorical additive. It was part and parcel of an effort to see to it that the organization became structured in such a way as to manifest the Marxian principles of what constitutes a new society. This meant, most of all, that the separation of philosophy and organization—which is a reflection of the capitalist division between mental and manual labor—had to be directly

challenged by the very mode of functioning of the organization itself.

Here are some of the ways that the form of functioning of N&LC tried to embody the ultimate goal of a revolution that uproots capitalism and lays the basis for a new society: 1) Its first publication was the 1953 “Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes” and the translation of Lenin’s “Abstract of Hegel’s Science of Logic”—this at a time when N&LC was overwhelmingly composed of proletarians and had only one academic as part of its membership.(12) An attempt was being made to make philosophy the basis of an organization’s development. 2) Charles Denby, a Black worker, was made the editor of News & Letters (along with Johnny Zupan(13), a white worker). An attempt was being made to have the voices of the most exploited and least represented members of society have leading roles in a radical organization. 3) So determined was the new grouping that the organization make a break from the form of relations between workers and intellectuals that defines everyday life in capitalist society that a serious effort was made to have a worker be the National Organizer of N&LC(14); 4) For the first time in a Marxist organization, women’s liberation was made integral to the development of the newspaper and organization—as seen in there being three columns by women writers in N&L from its inception in 1955 that dealt specifically with issues of concern to

women. 5) Youth was spelled out as a revolutionary category, in 1958, in the Constitution—long before the 1960s.

The birth of Marxist-Humanism therefore had important organizational consequences(15). Many aspects of its innovative attempt to integrate philosophic principles—including about a new society—into the form and structure of an actual organization were embraced by members of N&LC, such as having a worker as editor and encouraging direct involvement by rank and file workers and other forces of revolution neglected by the rest of the Left. However, the effort to integrate philosophy and organization by including Marxism and Freedom directly into the Constitution proved controversial. Close to half of the members of N&LC left the organization between 1956 and 1960. It isn't that anyone said he or she opposed the content of Marxism and Freedom itself, nor (so far as I am aware) was there opposition to including a discussion of it in the Constitution. But the implication of including Marxism and Freedom in the Constitution—that the organization would be directly governed by the specific concepts found in that work—proved a hard pill for many to swallow.

One problem was that those who joined Dunayevskaya after the split between herself and C.L.R. James in 1955 did so primarily over organizational issues that had little to do with a debate over differing ideas. Most of the members of the

Committees of Correspondence (the successor organization to the Johnson-Forest Tendency after the latter organizationally broke from Trotskyism in 1951) refused to follow James' decision to split from Dunayevskaya in 1954-55, largely because he acted like a bureaucrat in issuing anti-democratic orders (such as insisting without explanation that Dunayevskaya be "relieved" of her leadership responsibilities in the group).(16) The ground of the split in the eyes of most if not all members was democracy vs. bureaucracy.(17) Dunayevskaya, however, did not break from James on this basis. Upon being subjected to series of insults and attacks by James and his followers in 1954-55, she insisted on taking several weeks off to figure out the philosophic issues that motivated his unexpected behavior.(18) And even then she did not split from James: she instead called for a period of open discussion and debate. It was James who broke from her, not she who broke organizationally from him.

From the beginning there was therefore a marked difference within N&LC concerning attitudes toward James and Johnsonism.(19) Dunayevskaya considered the split from James to be based fundamentally upon conceptual issues—in particular, his refusal to accept the new point of departure contained in the 1953 "Letters on Hegel's Absolutes." The letters had indicated that a vision of a new society could not be elicited solely from the organizational forms that emerge

from spontaneous, everyday struggles. It suggested that the effort to develop a vision of a new society opposed to both existing capitalism and statist “Communism” required a deep exploration of the dialectic of negativity itself, including a direct confrontation with the concept of “the negation of the negation” as expressed in Hegel’s *Absolutes*. James, however, recoiled from this approach. Although he was personally interested in Hegelian dialectics and made a serious effort to relate dialectical philosophy to contemporary politics in his 1948 *Notes on Dialectics*, by 1955 James was moving in a different direction. James wrote little or nothing of significance on dialectics or philosophy after the early 1950s, choosing to emphasize instead how the “new society” emerges full-blown from everyday struggles. Yet it was by no means clear in 1955 that this is what the split between James and Dunayevskaya centered upon. Much of the membership of N&LC, not knowing about or being absorbed in the issues in the 1953 *Letters*, viewed the split in narrower terms. This basic difference, we argue, carried through the entire history of N&LC, including long after the 1953 “*Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes*” were published and discussed.

It is one thing to oppose James—or anyone else—because of this or that anti-democratic behavior. It is quite another to oppose James by ensuring that a revolutionary organization be based on a distinct body of ideas. Many of those who

went with Dunayevskaya in 1955 did not realize what would be expected of them once N&LC was formed. Once they found out, some of them dropped away. Which doesn't mean that everyone who stayed fully accepted the challenge of uniting philosophy and organization either.

Dunayevskaya aimed for a new kind of organization that combined two seemingly opposed determinations: one, an openness to all forces of revolution along with their questions, concerns, and demands; and two, a firm commitment that members adhere to a specific set of ideas and principles. As she often made clear, one cannot call oneself a "Marxist-Humanist" in lieu of following and developing the ideas found in Marxism and Freedom.(20) Though N&LC was founded as a decentralized organization, it was never intended that it be decentralized when it comes to being self-disciplined by its foundational ideas.

The fact that not everyone was on the same wavelength in N&LC when it came to the relation between philosophy and organization should therefore not come as a great surprise. At the same time, despite the differences between Dunayevskaya and many members when it came to the relation of philosophy and organization, she never sought to force anyone out of N&LC—even when they raised major objections to its ideas or practices. An effort was never made to "eliminate" members who "failed to tow the line." This is as integral to the Marxist-Humanist concept of

organization as the other factors concerning organizational form enumerated above. N&LC was defined not just by political positions but also by philosophic ideas. It goes without saying that it is harder to develop and agree upon philosophic concepts than political positions. Given this fact, a philosophically-grounded organization cannot help but produce intense discussion, debate, and disagreement among its members—at least so long as its members live up to the purpose of the organization. And yet how is the organization to avoid the tendency of peeling off members every time some new theoretic idea or debate comes to the fore? How is it to avoid splitting into pieces each time a new philosophic stage of development is reached?

Dunayevskaya was keenly aware of how the Trotskyists have been prone to endless splits—even though they largely limit themselves to political debates. So what can prevent such sectarianism from defining a group based on a philosophy?(21) What is needed to avoid a descent into sectarianism is an organizational form that makes it possible for the members to work together in the presence of implicit or explicit philosophic and political differences.

Dunayevskaya aimed for an inclusive organization that would not compromise its principles. Even those who did not want Marxism and Freedom to determine their organizational life were not encouraged to leave. On the contrary, she bent over backwards to ensure that they remain

members.(22) But she did so in such a way as not to allow their attitudes or positions to determine the organization's direction.

This took on even greater importance as work began on the next major philosophic work in U.S. Marxist-Humanism—*Philosophy and Revolution* (1973). The work to develop this book occupied Dunayevskaya from 1959 to 1973.(23)

Philosophy and Revolution represented a critical leap, for it centered on the dialectic “in and for itself.” Though written at the height of the mass freedom movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, it challenged its readers to directly plunge into dialectical concepts and categories by beginning with a dense analysis of Hegel's major works and its relation to Marx's Marxism—Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, the *Science of Logic*, and the *Philosophy of Spirit*. *Philosophy and Revolution* did not in any way disregard the new struggles that arose in the 1960s, many of which emerged spontaneously and expressed a desire for non-elitist forms of organization. Much of the book consisted of a careful analysis of the contributions and contradictions of such movements and struggles, especially the wildcat strikes of workers against automation, the civil rights and Black liberation movement, and the women's liberation and youth movements. The very structure of the book, however, in beginning with a study of Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, suggested that the search for new forms of struggle and

organization would remain incomplete so long as a philosophy of liberation remained a missing element in the movements against capitalist exploitation.

Dunayevskaya had tried to foster a direct study of Hegelian dialectics in N&LC from as early as 1955, as seen in the issuing of the 1953 “Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes” and Lenin’s “Abstract of Hegel’s Science of Logic” as its very first publication. She further tried to focus the organization’s interests in this direction through a series of lectures and discussions on Hegel’s Phenomenology and Science of Logic in 1960-61. This became further developed with *Philosophy and Revolution*, whose first chapter deals not with the movements from practice but with “Hegel qua Hegel.” This was certainly not in harmony with the interests expressed by the New Left of the 1960s, which tended to treat theoretical discussion with considerable disdain, or at least without much seriousness. Nor did it sit well with many members of N&LC, who were understandably enamored of Marxist-Humanism’s emphasis on rank and file initiatives, “voices from below,” and spontaneous freedom struggles. However, in contrast to some within her own organization, Dunayevskaya did not view the need to engage in philosophic exploration as contradicting the emphasis on rank and file initiatives and spontaneous struggles. As she repeatedly stated, masses of people struggling to change society are not only a force of revolution but also a form of

reason. The movements from practice, in posing all sorts of questions about how to create a totally different kind of society, are themselves forms of theory. One cannot measure up to the creativity of the movements, she contended, without contributing a philosophy of liberation—just as one cannot measure up to the creativity of philosophy if one turns away from a direct engagement with such movements.

In a word, despite the pragmatism and disdain for serious theoretical discussion and exploration that characterized much of the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s, Dunayevskaya was undeterred from insisting that the dialectic “in and for itself” become the core of N&LC’s daily concerns. This was shown in 1973, when the Constitution was again amended to include Philosophy and Revolution among its core foundational principles.(24)

This proved far more controversial than the inclusion of Marxism and Freedom in 1958. Several leading members of N&LC—including one who did more to recruit people to the organization than anyone else in its history—openly criticized the emphasis of Philosophy and Revolution on the grounds that its “abstract” first chapter on Hegel would fail to resonate with the forces of revolution who were such an active presence at the time.(25) It was one thing to have Dunayevskaya write a book on Hegel and the dialectic, but quite another to ask the members to make such a book a major focus of their activity.

Once again, a number of people left N&LC. But once again, they were not encouraged to leave. Dunayevskaya moved forward by insisting that Philosophy and Revolution become “organization builder.” But she didn’t try to rid N&LC of those who found it hard to accept that perspective. In fact, she credited those who criticized Philosophy and Revolution on the grounds that they said openly what many others felt privately. A climate of open and comradely discussion and debate was encouraged, even as the basic principles were firmly upheld. This represented more than a mere personal inclination on her part, although it has often been understood that way. As we see it, her determination to encourage debate, discussion and disagreement at the same time as refusing to compromise on ideas was integral to her effort to create a new kind of grouping that avoided 1) subsuming ideas for the sake of false unity and 2) undermining the organizational cohesion needed to avoid a descent into vapid sectarianism.(26)

Nevertheless, Philosophy and Revolution did not permeate N&LC, regardless of who left or remained. A number of new members recruited in this period were drawn to its central message. However, despite some important contributions, it would be fair to say that the effort to make philosophy a central concern of the organization’s development didn’t quite take hold. The organization’s philosophic work tended to be placed on the shoulders of

Dunayevskaya alone, despite her repeated efforts to involve others in serious theoretic and philosophic activity. It was one thing to accept “the need” for philosophy, or to claim to “have” philosophy, and quite another to integrate it into one’s political activity.

These kinds of contradictions directly impacted the reception to the next major Marxist-Humanist work, Rosa Luxemburg, *Women’s Liberation*, and Marx’s *Philosophy of Revolution* (1982). One might expect that it would receive a better reception in N&LC since it dealt with women’s liberation, had much historical as well as conceptual content, and it focused on Marx and not as much on the admittedly more “abstruse” and difficult Hegel. However, in due course Dunayevskaya considered Rosa Luxemburg, *Women’s Liberation*, and Marx’s *Philosophy of Revolution* to be the least adequately projected book in the history of N&LC.

Why was this? It appears to be because the book touched directly on the relation of philosophy and organization—the issue that gave N&LC so much trouble throughout its history. *Marxism and Freedom* delved into the issue of organization by critiquing the vanguard party while singling out the need for a “Marxist organization of thought.” However, it did not discuss specific forms that could concretize such an organization of thought. That question was left open. *Philosophy and Revolution* did not directly deal with the issue of organization as such, focusing instead

the dialectic “in and of itself” and on the missing link of dialectical philosophy in Marxists after Marx (Lenin’s encounter with Hegel in 1914 was seen as the exception, but it held that Lenin had shown himself to be “philosophically ambivalent” when it came to making his philosophic breakthrough public). Rosa Luxemburg, *Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*, on the other hand, directly focused on the missing link of philosophy/organization in the history of post-Marx Marxism. It took issue not only with Lenin’s vanguardism and praised Luxemburg’s theory of spontaneity, but also took explicit issue with both of them for failing, in different ways, to directly connect dialectics and organization.(27) Most important of all, the book also explored Marx’s organizational contributions by discussing the organizational implications of his 1875 Critique of the Gotha Program.

Rosa Luxemburg, *Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution* argued that it isn’t true that Marx contributed little to the question of organization. While he never developed a theory of organization, it argued through a careful analysis of his work that he had a distinctive concept of organization that is especially visible in his Critique of the Gotha Program. This investigation was not simply for historical purposes. The thrust of the book points to the need for a new relation of philosophy and organization, as shown by the concluding sentences added

after its publication: “But, though committee-form and ‘party-to-lead’ are opposites, they are not absolute opposites. At the point where the theoretic-form reaches philosophy, the challenge demands that we synthesize not only the new relations of theory to practice, and all the forces of revolution, but philosophy’s ‘suffering, patience, and labor of the negative,’ i.e., experiencing absolute negativity.”(28)

Although Rosa Luxemburg, *Women’s Liberation*, and Marx’s *Philosophy of Revolution* was added to the Constitution of N&LC in 1983, it can hardly be said to have made a significant impact insofar as the organization’s overall development was concerned. This is not to deny that important work was done in this period in N&LC. *News & Letters* newspaper was expanded to a 12-pager in 1980, which marked a good beginning in moving towards an organization of “practicing dialecticians.” Some comrades even began to explore the problem of organization in light of the concepts contained in the 1953 “*Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes*.”(29 As a whole, however, the projection of Marxist-Humanism in the period following the publication of Rosa Luxemburg, *Women’s Liberation*, and Marx’s *Philosophy of Revolution* was lacking. As is stated in the 1984 letter to the Youth, “how could the body of ideas he expressed so challengingly by the early youth, when just one book expressed Marxist-Humanism, and we find it so

difficult now, when we have the whole trilogy of revolution in our hands?(30) And above all, how could self-development become so separated from the Universal, or what is even worse, made the equivalent of the Universal?”

These problems became even more acute after 1984. In 1987 she wrote of “an emergence of a difference between concept [of organization] and practice”(31) between herself and all of the members of N&LC. She now argued—not once but repeatedly in the spring of 1987—that the “unbridgeable gap” between philosophy and organization defined not just post-Marx Marxists; it had become true of N&LC itself! This shocking realization drove her in the last weeks of her life to write the “Presentation on the Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy” of June 1, 1987.

Why did N&LC experience such a profound limitation in living up to its founding principles? We need to ask this not for history’s sake but to meet the challenges facing us today. Dunayevskaya offers an answer in her 1984 letter to the Youth: “Isn’t it because the organizational form of Marxist-Humanism, or philosophy of revolution in permanence, isn’t made primary in our minds?”

Notice that she does not say the problem was restricted to a failure to understand the philosophy. She says the problem is a lack of attentiveness to the form of organization that served as the fulcrum or lever for developing Marxist-Humanist philosophy. Recall also that she states,

“Philosophy does not reach its full articulation until it has discovered the right organizational form.”(32)

Dunayevskaya never argued that the form of organization of N&LC was the right form of organization for all places and times. Yet she did view it as the right form for the stages of development experienced by the Idea of Marxist-Humanism from 1956 to 1987. As she wrote elsewhere in 1984, “Today I declare that Absolute Method, though it is the goal from which no private enclave can escape, is still only ‘the road to’ the Absolute Idea or Mind. That is still the only answer that transcends method—or expresses it, if you wish. And that needs concretization. That concretization is the name of the Absolute Idea for our age: Marxist-Humanism, further pinpointed as N&LC in the U.S., but by no means limited to the U.S. It is a world concept, a world concretization.(33)

In sum, a form of organization began to be developed in N&LC between 1956 and 1987 that was adequate to the concept of Marxist-Humanism. This unique form of organization created a compulsion to break down the separation of theory and practice, worker and intellectual, philosophy and organization. So why is it that N&LC encountered so many limitations? If the members of N&LC had access to the “right” philosophy and the “right” form of organization, why was there such a gap between her and the members of N&LC?

One possible factor is that the form of organization, while of critical importance, is ultimately effective only insofar as it is utilized in conjunction with an active and ongoing development of a philosophy that can meet the challenges of the times. In other words, the relation of form and content, while crucial, does not exhaust the problem of dialectics of organization. A given form cannot actualize a goal or aspiration, although it can provide the conditions for the possibility of such actualization. A form of organization is effective to the extent that individuals choose to take advantage of it by developing the creativity of cognition that lies at the heart of dialectics of organization and having that creativity serve as the foundation for organizational development itself. There are many reasons, however, for why a development of the creativity of cognition may be lacking. It can be due to an emerging disinterest in Marxist ideas, a move away from revolutionary politics, or becoming overwhelmed by the difficulty of the task of uniting theory and practice. Its development can be especially undermined by the lack of a passion for philosophy—the absence of the drive, desire, and willingness to think out the logic of ideas to their ultimate conclusion. Although it is an important question, my task here is not to pretend to have an answer as to why such willingness may be lacking (assuming there is one answer to begin with). My point is that the “right” form of organization is a necessary but insufficient condition for avoiding transformation into opposite. The form of

organization no more automatically creates virtuous revolutionaries than the form of political or economic structures automatically produces virtuous individuals. Everything depends on the willingness—or unwillingness—of actual individuals to rise to the historic challenge.(34)
“Only live human beings can re-create the revolutionary dialectic forever anew. And these live human beings must do so in theory as well as in practice.”(35)

Here is where the issue of organization comes once again right up against the concept of the new society which must forever be at the core of any consideration of a Marxian organization. As Dunayevskaya wrote in a different context, in one of her earliest philosophical essays dealing with the theory of state-capitalism, “For it is not the means of production that create the new type of man, but the new type of man that will create the new means of production, and the new type of activity will create the new type of human being, socialist man.”(36)

Part 2: A Stasis in Practicing the Marxist-Humanist Concept of Organization

With Dunayevskaya’s death in June 1987 N&LC faced its greatest challenge. It now faced the task of developing Marxist-Humanism on its own in the midst of one of the most important transformations in global politics of the past 50 years. Not only that, it had to do so faced with the realization that a serious divide had arisen between

Dunayevskaya and even her closest colleagues on the relation of philosophy and organization. What suddenly took on new concreteness was “how to begin anew” in a way that absorbs the highest accomplishments of a passing era while reconstituting Marxist-Humanism for a new one in such a way as to shed the limitations that had defined N&LC.

The challenge seemed awesome; indeed, it still does.

This much we can say: we began in the right place by undertaking a study of Dunayevskaya’s writings on “Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy”—especially her “Talking to Myself” documents of 1986-87. From 1988 to 1994 a number of members of N&LC engaged in series of probing explorations of these and other writings. This included discussion of her 1986-87 analyses of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit 1953 “Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes,” Marx’s 1844 Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic, and Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind.

This serious and engaged period of reflection produced in some of us a “shock of recognition” that Dunayevskaya’s work on the dialectics of organization reached for an organizational expression of her May 20, 1953 letter on Hegel’s Absolutes, which ended by stating, “We have entered the new society.” As she stated again and again in her writings of 1986-87, her commentary on ¶577 of Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind in 1953 ended not with the question of form of organization but with the new society itself. This,

we came to understand by studying her final writings, needs to be “fully concretized” for organization. Just as Marx “fully concretized” the vision of a new society found in his 1844 Manuscripts in his 1875 Critique of the Gotha Program, so we need to “fully concretize” for organization the vision of a new society that is found in the 1953 “Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes.”

This theoretic exploration was not disconnected from world realities. We explored these writings in the period when the “Communist” regimes collapsed in East Europe and Russia. Our attentiveness to the argument that post-Marx Marxists did not live up to the concept of organization found in the 1844 Manuscripts and Critique of the Gotha Program led us to see that the anti-Stalinist Left was failing to respond to the collapse of “Communism” by unfurling a viable vision of a new society. Our political critique of the shortcomings of the anti-Stalinist Left’s response to 1989-91 proved of enormous importance in providing N&LC with its direction throughout the 1990s. Yet it did not come out of the blue. It came out of our study of the problem of dialectics of organization.

I cannot do more than examine one aspect of the theoretic work in this period here—our effort to come to grips with her new understanding of the concluding paragraphs of Hegel’s Phenomenology. We focus on this issue here because we believe it illustrates both the strengths and

weaknesses that we encountered in our effort to continue Marxist-Humanism.

In 1986-87 Dunayevskaya had asked us to seriously explore the last paragraph of Hegel's Phenomenology, which twice mentions the word "organization." Hegel wrote: "The goal, which is Absolute Knowledge or Spirit knowing itself as Spirit, finds its pathway in the recollection of spiritual forms as they are themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their spiritual kingdom. Their conservation, looked at from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History; looked at from the side of their intellectually comprehended organization, it is the Science of the ways in which knowledge appears. Both together, or History (intellectually) comprehended, form at once the recollection and the Golgotha of Absolute Spirit..."(37)

Though Dunayevskaya had often referred to this paragraph, it was only in 1986-87 that she focused on the significance of Hegel's mentioning of "organization" twice in its final sentences. And it was only in May 1987 that she came to a startling new understanding of its conclusion. She wrote, "Heretofore the expression 'the two together' or both together, was taken to mean practice as well as philosophy. In fact it isn't practice, it is Science as well as philosophy, recollection as well as consummation, must undergo the Crucifixion and be 'born anew.' This is absolutely

phenomenal, and I don't mean phenomena. Marx certainly must have had something like this in mind when he wrote Freiligrath about organization in the historic as well as the ephemeral sense.”(38)

As we struggled to understand the implications of this new view of the conclusion of the Phenomenology, we came to the following realizations. First, “organization” does not only refer to contingent forms of organization that arise historically—the first mention of organization in the Phenomenology’s last paragraph. “Organization” also refers to “the unity of history and its philosophic comprehension,”(39)—the second mention of organization in the last paragraph, which equates to “Science.” Second, Science—the unity of history and its philosophic comprehension—corresponds to what Dunayevskaya had called (from as early as Marxism and Freedom) “the organization of thought that determines organizational life.” Third, since it isn't “practice” but “Science as well as philosophy” that undergoes Golgotha (the challenge of suffering “death” of being “born anew”), a new era poses the challenge to reconstitute a philosophy in the face of totally new conditions on the basis of the organization of thought that has been integral to that philosophy. Fourth, this is what it means to be organizationally responsible in the “eminent historical sense.”(40) This expresses the

fundamental distinctiveness of Marx's own concept of organization.

In other words, what is so “phenomenal” about the last paragraph of the Phenomenology is that it indicates that to meet the test of a new era it is necessary to reconstitute a philosophy on the basis of the organization of thought and the concept of organization that has been integral to its prior development. Simply repeating or replicating the specific form of organization that earlier existed will not do; instead, the organization of thought of a prior era must become so inwardized that the philosophy can be reconstituted with a new form and content that is adequate to a new one.

We were modest enough to acknowledge that we had to be careful about rushing to conclusions about Dunayevskaya's unfinished work on “Dialectics of Organization,” and we noted that her view of the last paragraph of the Phenomenology was especially difficult and needed further exploration. Nevertheless, we did come to an important understanding through our attempt (no matter how limited it may have been at the time) to come to grips with where her thought was headed on a crucial dimension of dialectics of organization.

So why did this exploration and discussion of the problem of dialectics of organization did not deepen and continue after 1995? Our study of this issue did lead to the creation of the book *The Power of Negativity*—surely one of the greatest

achievements of post-1987 Marxist-Humanism. Yet despite this, the discussion of dialectics of organization tended to fall away after 1995. In part, this may be explained by the dispute that emerged within N&LC when a number of members came out in support of the Million Man March in 1995. At the very moment when mass struggles were at one of their lowest points in decades, some were pulled out of a sense of desperation to embrace any kind of “mass” protest, even if it was led by a reactionary like Farrakhan and failed to include such basic voices as the demands of Black women. Yet the problem was hardly restricted to those who embraced the Million Man March and who left N&LC by 2000. Others in N&LC who could not accept uncritical support for that event expressed the same kind of desperation and lack of touch with reality when it came to evaluating the state of the mass movements and the overall political reality in the years that followed. Some members ceased to engage in political activity and retreated into themselves, treating the organization as a kind of insular sanctuary from the real world. They tended to look upon any effort to promote new ideas, or propose new courses of action, as somehow being disloyal to the legacy. Many visitors to our meetings often rightly complained that Dunayevskaya’s ideas were being reduced to ritualistic incantations instead of being developed anew in the face of the novel realities of our changed world.(41)

The gravest expression of this was that we did not become concrete about what we had discovered about the last paragraph of the Phenomenology by asking what specific new organizational form was needed for Marxist-Humanism today. It is one thing to say the passing of a founder poses a test to reconstitute the Idea of Marxist-Humanism on the basis of its organization of thought. It is quite another to do it. Some of us did try to at least raise the question by suggesting that N&LC could not simply carry over the same form of functioning that existed when Dunayevskaya was alive, since there was no one person or group of persons who could replace her. The specific form adopted by N&LC from 1956 to 1987 was in part predicated on the presence of the founder. However, if it is not “Practice,” but “Science” and Philosophy that must endure the test of “Golgotha” and be “born anew,” doesn’t this suggest that the specific form of organization cannot just be maintained from an older era? With the birth of a new era the forms associated with Practice go under, but “Science,” the organization of thought, must be born anew. Our minimal efforts to at least raise the question of the need to rethink the form of organization on the basis of the concept of organization, however, ran into a wall of opposition—including from some of the same people who run the shell of what calls itself N&LC today.

In sum, when it came to the specifics of organization (including the form of organization) nothing was seriously rethought. No one doubted that there was no “replacement” for Dunayevskaya. And no one disputed the idea that Marxist-Humanism as philosophy had to be redeveloped in light of new realities (whether they really believed it or were willing to attempt to do it is a different matter). But what dropped from the radar screen altogether was one of the most important dimensions of “how to begin anew”—the need to reconstitute the Idea in a new form and shape that befits the realities it now found itself in. Few seemed willing to face up to Dunayevskaya’s declaration, stated in 1985, that “The double edge of the dialectic is that the very new birth which contains the new stage of production means the perishing of all previous stages, so that the new dialectic can start from new beginnings, new passions, new forces, new Reason.”(42)

The problem wasn’t that there was a total lack of appreciation of the various contributions of N&LC to organizational matters in the years between 1955 and 1987. The problem is that in the absence of an active effort to re-think the form and content of organization in a “changed world,” “Recollection” tends to become rather selective. We earlier noted that those who differ from political or philosophic perspectives should never be forced out or encouraged to leave an organization. This is something

everyone “remembered”—and often with great fondness. Many joined N&LC in the hope and expectation that it would not become another left grouplet that went through interminable purges and splits. And their hopes were largely fulfilled. N&LC managed to avoid the rancorous discord and splits that often define small leftist organizations. As we noted, however, this is only one side of the Marxist-Humanist conception of organization. The other side is the need for a unified direction. Prior to 1987 the stress on openness and individual self-development was never allowed to substitute for a unified political-philosophic perspective.(43) This changed after 1987. By failing to reconstitute Marxist-Humanism in a new form adequate to an era in which “there is no one” to provide or develop the direction, the desire to avoid needless factionalism and infighting increasingly became transformed into conciliationist attitudes toward philosophy and organization. The need for a unifying perspective dropped away—until a number of those in N&LC, most of who are now members of the U.S. Marxist-Humanists, began in 2004 to delve seriously into the task of developing a philosophically grounded perspective of an alternative to capitalism, rooted in Marx’s Critique of the Gotha Program.

These intensive discussions on alternatives to capitalism from 2004 to 2007—developed in the pages of News & Letters, delivered at local meetings and study groups, and

presented to an array of national and international conferences—represented some of the most creative and vibrant work done in N&LC in decades. Those who pioneered this work, however, found themselves increasingly subject to underhanded attacks and opposition from those who opposed any effort to bring new ideas and perspectives to bear on the work of the organization. Two currents increasingly became evident in N&LC—on the one side, those who strove to work out a philosophically grounded alternative to capitalism, and on the other side, those who argued that the question of alternatives would be settled quasi-automatically by mass revolts (the nature of these was never disclosed). It was as if the issues that tore apart the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the mid-1950s once again began to tear N&LC apart. And once again, just when the discussion and debate was showing important fruits, the discussion was closed down by a series of actions that forced those who pioneered and led the discussion of alternatives out of N&LC.

In 2008-2009 the Marxist-Humanists who left N&LC engaged in intense discussion over what precipitated the degeneration of N&LC and the lessons needed to take out of that experience. Some who emphasized the need to work out the form, structure, and goals of a new Marxist-Humanist organization argued that conceptual differences were not the basis of the split, or at least were not as important as

N&LC's deficiencies on an organizational level. We differ from this viewpoint. We believe that conceptual issues were the basis of the split, in that those who rejected our work on Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program and related issues recoiled from centering organizational responsibility on a specific vision of a new society. They opposed or recoiled from actively accepting the challenge to "fully concretize" the 1953 breakthrough on Hegel's Absolutes for organization. That is a large part of the reason that they didn't like our work on Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program. Of course, no one either then or now said they were "against philosophy." But that is not the issue—any more than being "for" philosophy is the issue. The issue is taking philosophy for granted.

As we stated at the founding meeting of the Marxist-Humanist Tendency on January 19, 2007, differences over the concept of organization led to and made necessary the formation of the Tendency. However, it does not follow from the fact that differences over ideas precipitated the split that it isn't vitally important to work out the form, structure, and goals of a new Marxist-Humanist organization. In fact, we have been far too delayed—perhaps 20 years delayed—in doing so. "Philosophy itself does not reach its full articulation until it has discovered the right organizational form." We need to discover the "right organizational form" of 21st century Marxist-Humanism—otherwise our

articulation will be sorely lacking. At the same time, we must not become preoccupied with the question of form of organization to the point of immobilizing ourselves by engaging in purely internal discussions that have us lose touch with the forces of revolution that are the actual sources of theory—workers, women, Blacks and Latinos, youth, gays and lesbians.

Part 3: Some Preliminary Conclusions

That developing the proper form of organization is necessary does not mean that is sufficient. No form of organization—at least no revolutionary form of organization—can automatically generate appropriate behavior and philosophic development in the absence of the willingness of actual people to make use of that form to proper ends. But what stands in the way of demonstrating or actualizing that willingness? What stands in the way, it seems to me, is taking philosophy (or “Marxism,” or any body of thought) for granted. Any body of thought, like any set of ideas, can easily be reduced to a set of static conclusions that is bowed to but never absorbed, internalized, rethought, and re-concretized. A philosophy of liberation is not an heirloom that one inherits or owns; it is a body of ideas that cries out for constant re-development. When a set of ideas is reduced to a series of static or formal conclusions, it becomes impossible to develop an organization based on dialectical philosophy no matter what

may be the form, structure, or stated goals of that organization. The entire history of N&LC from 1956 to 1987, when a form adequate to the development of Marxist-Humanism existed, demonstrates that clearly. This helps explain why as important as the question of form of organization has always been for Marxist-Humanism it has never been considered higher than the concept of organization. “The organization of thought determines organizational life”—and that sense of organization cannot be reduced to being a synonym of the organizational form.

This is not something that we have gleaned only from studying the last paragraph of Hegel’s Phenomenology. That concept runs through our studies of Marxist-Humanism in its entirety. It is integral to the 1953 breakthrough on Hegel’s Absolutes. Every determination of organization has to flow from a consideration of how to concretize the Hegelian-Marxian vision of a new society.

Yet we do need an effective form, structure and direction for a new organization, so what are we to do?

First, our new organization, the U.S. Marxist-Humanists, should be structured so that the organization has a unified political-philosophic perspective. An amorphous organization, like what N&LC became by the 2000s, does no good because it makes it impossible for an organization to be based on specific political and philosophic perspectives. This is not the same as “imposing” a “line.”

No perspective can or should be adopted without the broadest input from each member. But once a perspective is democratically adopted it becomes incumbent upon each member to make it clear that that is what the group stands for. Public disagreement with perspectives by members is completely permissible—so long as it is made clear that one differs from a democratically approved view of the majority of the members.

Second, our organization must not be defined too tightly or restrictively. We must be careful to preserve, nurture, and develop the emphasis on open, comradely discussion in which all members are encouraged to express and develop their views. Creating an atmosphere of respectful discussion and debate is all the more important given that we are trying to create an organization based on contentious philosophic concepts. If it fails to achieve this, any group will become defined by acrimonious exchanges and infighting that will lead to unnecessary splits. Unity must neither be maintained at all costs nor ignored.

Many of us are aware that Marxist-Humanism aims to combine two capacities that are rare to find in the same person—an insistence on holding to a singular Idea in an uncompromising manner while being open to all new objective and subjective developments, including when it comes to fostering comradely relations between individuals. Yet it would be a grave mistake to presume that the

difficulty for one person to fully embody both means that we must choose between either one or the other. That is to take the easy way out. Dedication to a singular Idea, even a correct one, leads to fanaticism in the absence of a sense of openness and collegiality—just as the latter leads to conciliation and a false sense of unity when it is not grounded in a singular Idea. Our challenge is for our organization as a whole to embody both elements.

It goes without saying that achieving this is unprecedented. No organization has yet successfully reconstituted the organization of thought of its founder in the face of new realities. N&LC tried to do so, but in the end it came down on the side of theoretic conciliation that avoided any commitment to a unified idea. The history of post-Marx Marxism is full of efforts to correct one organizational defect at the cost of creating an equally debilitating one in its place. We need to keep this in mind as we carefully consider our structure.

Third, for this reason, we firmly advise against having a “two-tiered” organization. Our organization should be structured in such a way as to require participation and input from all its members. But it would be wrong for those who can take greater responsibility to possess more power and input than others. Since those who are likely to give more time and energy to an organization often tends to be students and intellectuals, a two-tiered group will result in it being

defined by the social division of labor between workers and intellectuals. That is hardly befitting an organization that strives to live up to a vision of a new society that transcends capitalism. Conditions of membership must not be made so stringent as to exclude workers, women, youth, Blacks and other minorities who face specific time limitations because of work schedules, family situations, etc.

Fourth, we must place major emphasis on organizational growth. We must address how to overcome our present weaknesses when it comes involving women, Blacks and Latinos, workers, and gays and lesbians in our activities. A key part of organizational growth is the influence that we can exert in the arena of ideas through books, our website and print publication, and participation at conferences. These enable us to exert influence far in excess of our numbers, and we must work out ways to coordinate our work in this vital area.

Fifth, we need to encourage direct study, discussion, and exploration of the problem of dialectics of organization, based on an awareness that achieving a unity of philosophy and organization requires a creative engagement with both philosophy and organization. Nothing could do more damage than either engaging in dogmatic recitations of philosophic abstractions and conclusions or dogmatically adhering to specific organizational forms and structures untouched by dialectical thinking. We need to become an

organization of thought-divers that sees as its task making the creativity of cognition come alive for our times.

The ideas that we have put forward here represent only the beginning of what we hope will be an intensive exploration and study of the lessons to be learned from the contributions as well as the demise of N&LC. The form of our discussion will prove to be as important as its results, which is why we look forward to the fullest participation of our readers in working these matters out.

Notes

1. Parts of this essay originally appeared as “Towards a Critical Re-evaluation of News and Letters Committees in Light of the Body of Ideas of Marxist-Humanism,” a talk given to the conference of the Marxist-Humanist Committee, an interim group that has been succeeded by the U.S. Marxist-Humanists, in July 2008. The following essay has been considerably expanded and reworked from the July 2008 talk and contains a considerable amount of new material not found in it.

2. The exceptions to those are Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* and Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy*, both published in 1923. The impact of these works was largely muted at the time, however, by the fact that their authors were severely censored by the Third International. In any case, despite their many profound contributions, neither

work broke new ground when it came to the relation of philosophy and organization. Lukács followed a rather strict Leninist conception of the vanguard party in *History and Class Consciousness* and afterwards, while Korsch came to oppose the vanguard party model without offering anything in the way of a substitute for it.

3. The claim that one has achieved something by “having” a philosophy has long been an obvious sign of intellectual sloth. A philosophy is not something that one can “have” like a commodity; it is a way of thinking that seeks demonstration.

4. *The Philosophy of Spirit* serves as the third and final volume of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Though the title is often rendered as Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind*, we prefer to render “Geist” as “Spirit.”

5. See “Letters on Hegel’s Absolutes of May 12 and 20, 1953,” in *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx*, by Raya Dunayevskaya (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), p. 16.

6. See *The Power of Negativity*, p. 19.

7. “In Lieu of Minutes of Resident Editorial Board Meeting of August 5, 1986 on Executive Session,” Supplement to Raya Dunayevskaya Collection (RDC), 10665.

8. We do not presume that we can here give a definitive “answer” as to which one is which when it comes to each and every form and practice delineated in this report. This is an issue that needs much deeper exploration, which we see this report as initiating.

9. To our knowledge the first published use of the term “Marxist-Humanism” occurred in July 1957, in the course of critiquing the new challenge posed by Mao Zedong’s effort to revise Marxism in the field of philosophy. See “Only Freedom Can Solve The Crisis,” *News & Letters*, July 16, 1957.

10. See *Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 Until Today*, by Raya Dunayevskaya (Amherst, NY: Humanities Books, 2000). The book has also been published in Japanese, Italian, Spanish, Farsi, and Chinese translations.

11. This is “first” not only in regard to Social-Democratic, Leninist, or anarchist forms of organization, none of which ever based themselves on a body of philosophic work; it is first also in relation to Marx himself, who once argued against the idea that specific books serve as the basis of revolutionary organizations. Whether Marx’s practice of organization pointed further, towards the Marxist-Humanist concept of organization, is an extremely important question that we cannot take up here.

12. That individual, Morgan Gibson, played an important part in the editing of *Marxism and Freedom*. He left N&LC in 1964, and has since become renowned as an important poet and the world's leading authority on the work of Kenneth Rexroth.

13. Zupan left the organization shortly after the publication of *Marxism and Freedom*. The reasons for why he, as well as many others left the organization in the late 1950s, is discussed below.

14. The effort proved unsuccessful. Dunayevskaya tried to develop Angela Terrano, a production worker, as the National Organizer. When that effort did not succeed she asked Olga Domanski, an intellectual, to move to the Center from West Virginia in 1959 in order to take up the position of National Organizer.

15. We are not suggesting that the specific organizational “firsts” that arose in the period of *Marxism and Freedom* can or even should be duplicated today. The point is the underlying principle that has to be particularized in different ways for new eras and new situations—but without jettisoning the fundamental principle itself.

16. Part of the dispute in 1954 and 1955 also concerned finances. Space does not allow us to go into that debate here, but we may wish to return to it at a different time.

17. That this persisted right to through to the end of Dunayevskaya's life is seen in her dispute with Andy Phillips during the writing of *The Coal Miners' General Strike of 1949-50* and *The Birth of Marxist-Humanism* in 1984. See especially the conclusion of her "The Emergence of a New Movement from Practice that is Itself a Form of Theory": "What became imperative for revolutionaries in the state-capitalist age was to recognize the class nature of state-capitalism and not to limit the discussion of organization to 'democracy' vs. 'bureaucracy.' What was needed was not just a political rejection of the 'party to lead' but a whole philosophy of revolution as it related to organization." (p. 42)

18. One of the members at the time who wanted to break from James right away without waiting for that period of reflection was Olga Domanski.

19. This refers to the followers of C.L.R. James. "J.R. Johnson" was the pen name used by James during his foray within U.S. Trotskyism from 1940 to 1955; "Freddie Forest" was the pen name used by Dunayevskaya. The opposition tendency they co-led within the U.S. Trotskyist movement (first in the Workers' Party from 1940 to 1947, then in the Socialist Workers Party from 1947 to 1951) was "The Johnson-Forest Tendency."

20. Dunayevskaya's correspondence with Harry McShane, which discussed this issue in great detail, is of enormous

importance in comprehending her concept of organization. For more on this, see Harry McShane and the Scottish Roots of Marxist-Humanism, by Peter Hudis (Glasgow: The John McLean Society, 1992).

21. This problem becomes accentuated the more an organization's membership consists of students and intellectuals. The need to be attentive to this problem becomes grows in proportion to the organization's failure to meet its mission of recruiting proletarians.

22. Though this was surely her aim, the extent to which this was recognized as such by others is a different matter that cannot be taken up here. We note for now that her dialectical skill at handling organizational difficulties and contradictions was just as subtle and refined as her handling of the most complex philosophic abstractions.

23. See *Philosophy and Revolution, from Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao*, by Raya Dunayevskaya (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003). The book has been published in Spanish, Italian, German, Farsi, and Chinese translations.

24. This did not mean that knowledge of the Hegelian dialectic was posed as a condition of membership in N&LC—which would indeed have only ensured that N&LC become a marginal, intellectual sect. The inclusion of *Philosophy and Revolution* did imply, however, that the aim of N&LC was to become a group of practicing dialectics.

Which is why in the mid-1970s she spoke of the need to “transform” N&LC into a “philosophic nucleus.”

25. The individual was Richard Greeman, who has done important work as a translator and scholar of Victor Serge and an activist in many movements during and since the 1960s. For the specifics of the discussion, see Dunayevskaya’s “The Newness of our Philosophic-Historic Contribution,” in *The Power of Negativity*, pp. 166-172, which was originally written as a letter to Greeman.

26. The same kind of dialectic is evident in Marx’s organizational work. His *Critique of the Gotha Program* castigated those who had adopted principles at odds with his concept of a new society, to the point of threatening to break off relations with the Eisenachers (something which he chose not to do in the end). But he also took great care to warn against setting up isolated sects that counterpoise themselves to the movement.

27. Whereas Lenin delved into Hegelian philosophy but never related dialectics to questions of organization, Luxemburg attempted no exploration of dialectics at all, despite her superiority to Lenin’s approach when it came to many questions of organization. The earlier studies of “dialectics” by Engels and Plekhanov were rather superficial and even positivistic, and neither attempted in any case to relate it to questions of organization.

28. See Rosa Luxemburg, *Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), added paragraphs, p. xxxviii.

29. See "Letter to the Youth on the Needed Total Uprooting of the Old and the Creation of New Human Relations" for a discussion of Dunayevskaya's evaluation of one of these efforts. See *The Power of Negativity*, p. 294.

30. The "trilogy of revolution" refers to *Marxism and Freedom, Philosophy and Revolution*, and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*.

31. See her Presentation to the Resident Editorial Board of N&LC of March 23, 1987, which was entitled: "What has happened to our projection of Marxist-Humanism—that a difference seems to have emerged in two aspects of the dialectics of organization between 1) the concept, and 2) organizational growth as a 'practical' question?" See Supplement to RDC, 10727.

32. In 1986 she wrote, along similar lines, "Philosophy too, indeed, especially philosophy, at first appears only phenomenologically. To become a 'science'—Hegel's expression of a total philosophy—it has to have reached organizational conclusions."

33. "Responsibility for Marxist-Humanism in the Historic Mirror: A Revolutionary Critical Look" (Dec. 30, 1984), RDC 8334.

34. As we know from history, even those who do rise to the challenge can shatter themselves on the hard rocks of the objective or subjective limitations of the age. Many a revolutionary has passed the test of their times—only to fall down once a new reality emerges. We see this from Trotsky, who performed so brilliantly as revolutionary in 1905 and 1917 but failed to reorganize in face of the new stage of state-capitalism that emerged in the 1930s.

35. Rosa Luxemburg, *Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, p. 195. The emphasis in the quotation is my own.

36. "Labor and Society," *The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism*, p. 20. Emphasis is in the original.

37. *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie, p. 808.

38. "Talking to Myself: Crucial on Book, Yet 1953 as Concept vs. Experience," *Supplement to the RDC*, 10928-29. See also Rosa Luxemburg, *Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, p. 155, and Marx's Letter to Freiligrath of Feb. 29, 1860.

39. See *Philosophy and Revolution*, p. 286.

40. See especially Peter Hudis' "Toward a Dialectic of Organization and Philosophy" (June 1988), *Pre-Convention Discussion Bulletin 1*; "The Untrodden Path: Working out Full Philosophic-Organizational Responsibility for Marxist-

Humanism's Philosophic Moment" (June 1989), Pre-Convention Bulletin 1-B; and "Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy: The 'End of History' vs. Philosophic New Beginnings" (June 1994), Pre-Convention Discussion Bulletin 1. See also the version published in an academic publication, as Peter Hudis, "Toward New Philosophic Beginnings in Marxist-Humanism," Quarterly Journal of Ideology 13:4 (1989), pp. 87-94.

41. There were exceptions to this. In many respects the fight with those who supported the Million Man March sharpened our philosophic skills, in that it led us to openly critique the legacy of Johnsonism with a directness and determination that was not present prior to 1995. The editing of *The Power of Negativity* clearly sharpened our philosophic abilities, as seen in how we took issue with those who reduced Hegel's discussion of the 'Self-Bringing Forth of Liberty' in ¶577 of his *Philosophy of Mind* to a mere a synonym for the movement from practice.

42. "The Power of Abstraction," *The Power of Negativity*, p. 311.

43. We must stress that it was "never allowed to" because Dunayevskaya made sure not to allow it. There were many instances when members sought to "do their own thing" irrespective of the organization's goals and perspectives. For one such instance, see her May 30, 1976 "Dear Colleagues" Letter, written in part as a critique of the actions of a leading

member of N&LC who served as the Los Angeles Local's organizer at the time. She wrote, "No, we are not for 'whatever turns you on baby'! And that not only for the simple and sufficient reason that one's very joining N&LC meant Marxist-Humanism 'turns you on,' but for the deep down reason that it is our responsibility to see that self-development spells out, most specifically, 'Individualism that lets nothing interfere with its Universalism.'" See Supplement to RDC, 15016.