

The International Marxist-Humanist

Journal of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization

Summary: Slightly abbreviated version of our 2018 Convention Call, covering issues like the global neo-fascist threat and its roots in racism, xenophobia, and sexism; forces of opposition like the West Virginia teachers; skyrocketing economic inequality alongside a declining rate of profit; and the responsibilities of Marxist-Humanists this year, on the 60th anniversary of the publication of Raya Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom* - Editors

World Contradictions in the Trump Era and the Tasks of Marxist-Humanism

Steering Committee of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization
April 9, 2018



International Marxist-Humanist Organization
Email: arise@internationalmarxisthumanist.org
Web: www.imhojournal.org

Official Call for 2018 Convention

To Work Out the Philosophical, Political, and Organizational Perspectives of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization

April 2, 2018

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

—Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (1932-33)

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” versus “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.

—Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Coal Miners’ General Strike of 1949-50 and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.* (1984)

To the Members and Friends of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization:

I.

Two years ago, as we prepared for the gathering of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization on the eve of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, our Call for Convention warned that Trump’s ascendancy was a symptom of a possible shift in global politics that could signal a new stage of intensified racism, xenophobic nationalism, and misogyny. Two years later, it is clear that this shift has become actualized.

Far-rightist and neo-fascist tendencies have grown in power and influence in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Brazil, and (more recently) in Italy, while authoritarian regimes that openly dispense with even the pretense of democracy have consolidated their power in China, Russia, Turkey, and the Philippines. Ethnic cleansing and outright genocide define the Myanmar government's assault on the Rohingya people, while the Assad regime in Syria continues its murderous assault on the civilian populace in a war that has already claimed the lives of over 400,000. The gravest threat of all is posed by the Trump administration, which has ratcheted up its militarist rhetoric to the point of making a nuclear war with North Korea not only thinkable but increasingly possible—not to mention the threat of war against Iran. Among Trump's wild and bellicose gyrations, his open threat last fall to destroy North Korea, a country of 25 million, with nuclear weapons stands out as the truest expression of the horror of what we face in an era of militarized state-capitalism.

In Syria, the situation is absolutely tragic, as revolutionary forces are facing strangulation from several angles. (1) The murderously authoritarian Assad regime, with strong air support from Russia and a massive number of ground troops from Iran, is in the process of extinguishing the last major slice of territory held by the rebels, the Ghouta area outside Damascus. While the last few years have seen the

ascendancy of Islamist militias in Ghouta, in an earlier period a variety of leftist tendencies, some of which were influenced by Rosa Luxemburg, had an important presence in this community.¹ (2) The Syrian Kurds are also under attack, with extremely anti-Kurdish Turkish forces having moved across the border into Afrin, where the socially progressive and pro-feminist People's Protection Units (YPG) have been in power in alliance with some Arab forces since 2012. Turkey's attack could not have happened without the tacit support of both Russia and the U.S. Tragically, the YPG allowed pro-Assad militias into Afrin in a futile bid to blunt the Turkish advance. Instead, Afrin fell nonetheless, while a deeper wedge was driven between Syrian Arabs and Kurds. The international left has generally supported the Kurds, but less so the overall Syrian revolution. However, as Zachary Medeiros put it recently, "If you oppose the Turkish-led assault on the Kurds in Afrin, we call on you to oppose the Assadist attacks on Ghouta and elsewhere in equal measure."²

In China, President Xi Jinping has rammed through measures allowing him to rule in perpetuity, breaking with the two-term limit in place for more than two decades.

¹ Christophe Ayad, "Mort en détention de Omar Aziz, père des comités locaux de la révolution syrienne," *Le Monde* 2-27-13; see also Leila Shrooms, "Syria: The life and work of anarchist Omar Aziz, and his impact on self-organization in the Syrian revolution," *Tahrir-ICN*, 8-23-13.

² "For the People of Eastern Ghouta, Syria," *Coalition for Peace, Revolution, and Social Justice*, March 1, 2018 <https://cprsj.wordpress.com/2018/03/03/for-the-people-of-eastern-ghouta-syria/>

Every day, the crackdown on political activity and speech grows tighter through the use of innovative forms of electronic surveillance as well as old-style police brutality. At the same time, while selectively targeting corruption among the powerful, the regime showed its true state-capitalist class colors in December by evicting tens of thousands of poor people in the middle of winter from their homes in Beijing and closing down their children's schools. A new ideology combining Maoist and Confucian authoritarianism is being put forward.

While South Africa has retained most of its liberal democratic institutions, it remains riven by bitter class conflict in the townships and workplaces. Of the 158 countries ranked according to income inequality by the Gini Index, it shows the greatest levels of inequality, while official unemployment stands at over 25%, in other words, depression levels. The country has also been hit hard by climate change, with the major city of Cape Town due to run out of water by this spring. Driving the corrupt Jacob Zuma out of the presidency has solved none of these underlying problems. His successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, an erstwhile militant trade union leader under apartheid, is today one of the richest men in the country and a leading proponent of "black capitalism." He played a secretive and sinister role in the events surrounding the police massacre of 34 striking

workers at a platinum mine in Marikana in 2012.³ This does not augur well for the future.

The U.S. faces equally deep contradictions, which helped bring Trump to power. His war at home against immigrants, Muslims, women, Blacks, Latinx and LGBTQ people, as well as the massive gift handed to corporate and wealthy interests through his tax “reform” and undermining of the Affordable Care Act, has placed him further to the right than any U.S. president in a century. There is every sign that he will move even further to the right, as he stocks his administration with ever-more hardcore reactionaries, including those (like his newly designated National Security Advisor John Bolton and new nominees for Secretary of State and Director of the CIA) who openly uphold the use of torture against those the U.S. deems “undesirable.” Small wonder that the neo-Nazis of the “alt-right” feel vindicated by his presence in the White House. However, it is a mistake to presume that Trump’s chaotic policies and behavior will lead to his imminent demise—especially given his imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum imports and threat to impose additional ones by pulling out of NAFTA and other free trade agreements. If anything, such moves will solidify, and even expand somewhat, his political base. After all, it isn’t as if the millions of workers whose living standards plummeted in the era of “free trade globalization”

³ John S. Saul and Patrick Bond, *South Africa: The Present as History* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2014), p. 215.

had an ally in “moderate” Republicans or “liberal” Democrats, who for the most part enthusiastically embraced such policies.

The defining feature of the far-rightist and neo-fascist tendencies that are gaining ground today, whether in the U.S., Europe, or the developing world, is the effort to use racism and sexism to convince the populace to agree to a more direct and brutal form of social control and capital accumulation. Misogyny is a central component of this, as seen in the gutting of health care services for women, the effort to weaken guidelines prohibiting sexual harassment, and allowing (in the case of the U.S.) unimpeded gun possession. It is no accident that almost all the perpetrators of the mass shootings over the past several years were men with a history of domestic abuse. This is now being given official sanction by the person holding the most powerful political office on the planet. Racism is no less a central component of this political shift, as seen in attacks on immigrants—*especially when they are people of color*. In Italy, the far-right League (originally called the Northern League) initially defined itself by racial animus towards southern Italians and Sicilians. It recently changed its name to appeal to those in southern Italy who are disturbed at the 600,000 immigrants from Africa and the Middle East who have immigrated to Italy over the last few years. It ended up with 17% of the vote in recent elections—more than

Berlusconi's center-right Forza Italia and about the same percentage as won by the neo-Nazi *Alternativ für Deutschland* party in Germany.

What we are seeing around the world today is not simply the weakening and dissolution of the “neoliberal consensus” that viewed free trade globalization and bourgeois democracy as a panacea for any and all problems. We are witnessing an effort to replace it with a far-more regressive social agenda based on xenophobic nationalism and misogyny. It is therefore no accident that the largest and most sustained pushback against these tendencies is coming from women and oppressed minorities.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of this was the March 8 strike of over five million workers in Spain in commemoration of International Woman's Day. It was the first explicitly feminist strike in the country's history and included participants from every section of the country—from Catalonia to Andalusia to Castile. Never before had something like this been seen in Spain. The same day, massive women's marches took place in dozens of other countries—Turkey, Brazil, Thailand, Taiwan, Poland, South Africa, and many more. It is hard to think of an International Woman's Day in recent memory that involved so many participants from such an array of places. They reflect a groundswell of organization and activism by women in

response to the ingrained sexism that so defines today's war against women.

Women throughout the world have participated to the #MeToo movement that started as a campaign to make more visible the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault in women's lives. As a result of this visibility, a number of prominent men have lost their jobs and some social prestige. This movement has made clearer for many the extent to which women have been devalued from a social perspective and illustrates a new chink in the armor of patriarchal domination. Moreover, it has in some ways changed the tenor of discussion as it seems as though it is less possible to dismiss women's claims outright as has been the case in the past. It is unclear exactly how far this movement will go, however. Some have rightly noted that while it has done a good job of pointing out individual cases of sexual harassment and assault, what is largely missing are the voices of the most marginalized groups such as women of color, those of working women and sex workers. Nonetheless, it has opened up discussion on one of the key elements of patriarchal domination.

It is also no accident that some of the most militant and creative efforts to challenge today's xenophobic nationalism is coming from communities of color. Dozens of new organizations, formed by Black and Latinx youth in particular, have sprung up in the U.S. in the past several

years, and several efforts are underway to connect struggles against police abuse with issues of environmental justice, immigrant's rights, and labor struggles (such as the Resist, Reimagine, Rebuild Coalition in the U.S.). New struggles against police abuse continue to rise, the latest being the protest march in Sacramento, California on March 22, sponsored by Black Lives Matter, against the police killing of Stephon Clark, an unarmed 22-year old father of two who was killed by police while in his grandmother's backyard. Police fired 20 shots at him (many of them in his back) and then waited to call ambulance until he had died. The protesters shut down Interstate 5 for several hours as part of an ongoing series of events.

Thousands took to the streets of Brazil in March to protest the assassination of Marielle Franco, a Black feminist leader affiliated with the far-left Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL). Franco, a member of the City Council of Rio de Janeiro who had attacked the military occupation of the favelas and the resultant murder of civilians, had just spoken at a meeting about empowering Black women.⁴

In Italy in February, a far-right League member carried out a drive-by shooting that wounded six African immigrants. In response, the League leadership refused more than a

⁴ For background, see Rhaysa Ruas, "Brazil's Racial Capitalism: Further Disruption of Democracy and Fall of the Left Increases the Risk of Fascism," *International Marxist-Humanist*, Feb. 2, 2018 <https://www.imhojournal.org/articles/brazils-racial-capitalism-disruption-democracy-fall-left-increases-risk-fascism/>

perfunctory condemnation of these racist attacks. Soon after, mass demonstrations broke out across the country, including one in Rome attended by thousands of workers, women, and youth.

Given today's objective situation, which is defined by sections of the ruling elite seeking to extend its tenuous support among the populace by invoking racism and sexism, it hardly makes sense to proclaim a "class first" approach that views struggles against racism and sexism as secondary or epiphenomenal considerations. Such an economic reductionist standpoint can only succeed in isolating revolutionaries from a new generation of activists who are opposing the specific form assumed by this stage of capitalism. Marxist-Humanism is better equipped than any other standpoint to speak to the present moment, precisely because it rejects the notion that Marxism is reducible to a theory of class struggle. Marxist-Humanism holds that *genuine* Marxism is a *philosophy of revolution* that views struggles against racism, sexism, and class domination as integral to the creation of a "new humanism"—a transformation of all alienated and reified structure of the social relations.

II.

To meet the challenge of a new stage of cognition, one has to have full confidence in the masses, not only as force but

as Reason—that is to say, confidence that their movement from practice as a form of theory does, indeed, signify that they can participate in the working out of a new theory. — Raya Dunayevskaya, Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism, and the Afro-Asian Revolutions (1959)

That different forces move at different times, and that at certain junctures the struggles of women and oppressed minorities serve as the *vanguard* of the freedom movement, does not invalidate or downplay the importance of the class struggle. On the contrary, it provides the condition for the possibility for its successful outcome.

A new page in class struggle was recently written in the U.S., when 34,000 public school teachers went on strike in West Virginia—and won. The strike started in response to an effort to limit pay raises and cut health benefits. (Teachers there are among the lowest paid in the U.S.) After they walked off the job in all 55 counties for nine days, the three unions representing them announced a tentative deal with the state legislature. But when the latter balked at signing the agreement, the teachers defied them *and their own union leadership who told them to go back to work*. The wildcat strike, which was organized on a decentralized basis, forced the state to give in to all of their demands.

Their main demand has been reported as a five percent pay increase. However, the strike was about more than wages. As Wendy Peters, president of the Raleigh County affiliate

of the West Virginia Education Association put it, “Wages and health benefits were almost a distraction. They were important, but there were five major stances we took, and we won all five.”⁵ These were: 1) defeating an expansion of charter schools; 2) stopping a proposal to eliminate seniority; 3) killing a “paycheck-protection bill” aimed at preventing unions from obtaining dues through payroll deductions; 4) obtaining a mechanism to fix the health-insurance crisis facing teachers; 5) getting the governor to promise to veto pending anti-union legislation.

It is important to keep in mind that West Virginia teachers lack collective bargaining and a right to strike. Nor is this a liberal bastion—Trump won the state with 69 percent of the vote. (That he has neither tweeted nor said a word about the strike is a statement unto itself.) In fact, it was the lack of collective bargaining rights that forced the teachers to take militant action. Faced with no legal recourse against the state’s efforts to impose austerity, they took action outside the “normal” channels.

Their actions may well anticipate future developments. As one analyst noted after the strike, “When [unions] are weakened, we’re more likely to see the re-emergence of

⁵ “The West Virginia Teachers Strike Shows That Winning Big Requires Creating a Crisis,” by Jane McAlevey, *The Nation*, March 12, 2018.

instability and militancy, and the kind of model that we're seeing happen in West Virginia.”

This is especially important because in a few months the Supreme Court is expected to strike down fair-share provisions, which require workers to pay dues to unions that negotiate on their behalf, whether or not they are members. Public service unions are the last remaining strongholds of the union movement in the U.S., and ending fair-share may reduce their union membership by 30 to 40 percent. The question is: will workers respond by accepting this massive setback, or will they mobilize, as did the West Virginia teachers, to press their demands outside of the framework that defines traditional union-management relations?

What is clear is that in the coming period enormous pressure will be brought upon those in West Virginia, as well as elsewhere inside and outside the U.S., to succumb to further demands for give-backs, cutbacks, and austerity. Everything about the present stage of global capitalism confirms it—regardless of whether the traditional neoliberals or the xenophobic nationalists are in charge. Yet this makes it all the more significant that the West Virginia strike did not limit itself to wages and benefits but also challenged *working conditions*. In doing so, their struggle reminds us of an earlier point in time, even if did not reach to its level—the 1949-50 miners' general strike in West Virginia, which helped give birth to Marxist-Humanism.

The strike of the West Virginia miners in 1949-50 (then the center of the coal industry in the U.S.) also took the form of a wildcat strike—against one of the most militant unions in the country, the United Mine Workers. It was prompted by the introduction of automation (in the form of the continuous miner), which the UMW did not oppose. In the course of a massive wildcat, the workers rebelled against the domination of their labor automated devices that they called “the man killer.” Our founder Raya Dunayevskaya, who was in West Virginia at the time, recognized that the strike showed that workers had moved from fighting for a fairer *distribution* of the products of labor to challenging the very *mode* of labor that is integral to industrial capitalism. She discerned in the miners’ activity a *theoretical* question—what *kind* of labor should human beings perform?⁶

By challenging the very mode of labor, the workers’ struggles were taking issue with the central problem of capitalism—the effort to confine human activity to the drive to augment value, or wealth in monetary form, as an end in itself. By taking issue with the increasingly thing-like character of their laboring activity, the workers’ fight against automation illuminated the *humanist* dimension of Marx’s critique of the logic of capital. This proved of

⁶ See Raya Dunayevskaya “The Emergence of a New Movement from Practice that Is Itself a Form of Theory” in *The Coal Miners’ General Strike of 1949-50 and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.* (Chicago: New and Letters, 1984), which states that the workers’ questions “went a great deal further than ‘the class question.’ The worker was grappling with the question of concepts as well as the relationship of subjective to objective” (p. 35).

pivotal importance in Dunayevskaya's development, by 1958, of a new philosophy that she termed "Marxist-Humanism," in the book *Marxism and Freedom*.

Class struggles, even when characterized by immediate demands for better wages, often raise questions that get at the heart of what is needed to transform the domination of capital. The same is true of struggles against racism and sexism, which have a trajectory that is often independent of the class struggle. As Frantz Fanon noted in speaking of national liberation struggles against racism, they too often reach for a "new humanism" that represents "an untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute."

Iran has also seen mass unrest in some of the country's most impoverished and drought-stricken rural areas, where climate change and regime "development" policies have produced environmental catastrophe. A Marxist writing from inside the country during these protests alluded to "the gradual formation of an era of revolutionary uprising."⁷ Whether or not that proves to be the case, this winter's outbreaks centered on a deeper layer of society than the much larger 2009-10 election demonstrations. The winter 2017-18 slogans were also more radical. Demonstrators shouted "Down with the Dictator" and targeted economic inequality, unemployment, and massive corruption, as they

⁷ "Is Iran Moving Toward a Revolutionary Uprising?" *International Marxist-Humanist*, Dec. 31, 2017.

attacked and sometimes burned government buildings. Ethnic minorities like Kurds comprised a significant portion of the participants. During the same period and after, a series of young women also doffed their headscarves before cheering crowds. Something is definitely stirring among the working people and the women of Iran. As elsewhere in the world, the question arises: Will Iran's radical intellectuals and theoreticians—both at home and abroad—meet the challenge posed by these events?

The critical question is whether revolutionary theoreticians hear the theoretical questions posed by masses of people at specific turning points, and in addition, take them as the ground for developing a philosophically grounded alternative to capitalism. The importance of this philosophical labor, and the need for a revolutionary organization to embody it, is called forth by the nature of the world situation.

III.

Economic inequality between and within nations is a major characteristic of contemporary capitalism. It has an enormous impact on the life experiences and expectations of working people. It is a breeding ground for all kinds of racism, xenophobia, and right-wing populism and neo-fascist tendencies.

A recent report states, “Last year saw the biggest increase in the number of billionaires in history, with one new billionaire every two days. This huge increase could have ended global extreme poverty seven times over. Eighty-two percent of all wealth created in the last year went to the top one percent, and nothing went to the bottom 50 percent. There are now 2,043 billionaires worldwide. Nine out of 10 are men. New data from Credit Suisse shows that 42 people now own as much wealth as the poorest 3.7 billion.”⁸ However, this report says nothing about the *nature* of work and wage labor in capitalist society. Hence, these figures by themselves provide only the manifestation of the problem. We have to look beneath that, to see the fundamental problem beneath the manifestation. And for that we have to turn to Marx. The fact that 2018 marks the 200th anniversary of Marx’s birth provides the opportunity to do so on a variety of levels.

As Marx wrote in the Preface to the first edition of Volume One of *Capital*, “In bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labor—or value-form of the commodity—is the economic cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but they are of the same order as those dealt with in microscopic anatomy.” In other words, the cell-form, the commodity, is the fundamental building

⁸ “*Reward Work, Not Wealth*, Oxfam, January 22, 2018.

material for the whole of capitalism. That is why the commodity is the starting point of *Capital*, a work that has “the ultimate aim, to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society.”⁹ Its law of motion consists of achieving as high a profit as possible in relation to the capital invested by the capitalist class.

Today, multinational corporations are the most significant engines of capital accumulation. They are responsible for much of the inequality within and between nations. Leo Mayer notes, “Unlike the 1920s and 30s of the previous century, agricultural commodities and industrial commodities are primarily traded...through the rapid development of global production networks [or] global value chains. Multinational corporations have broken down their entire value creation process—development and design, subcontracting and manufacturing, assembly, marketing and distribution—and distributed them in global value chains in a way that best leverages their respective regional advantages.”¹⁰ According to the OECD, about 54 percent of global trade is made up of “tailor-made” products for these global value chains. This “new form of trade, the so-called intermediate goods trade, is the hallmark of today's world trade; in other words, the *globalization of production*, of surplus-value production, is the basis of world trade.” This has an enormous impact on the living standards of

⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 92.

¹⁰ Leo Mayer, “Die aktuelle Struktur des globalen Kapitalismus,” *ISW*, June 25, 2017.

workers, because global value chains work to depress wage levels and living standards in order to raise profits. They are the driving mechanism for privatizing public utilities and cutting health care and social benefits. This provides fertile ground for xenophobic politicians and rightwing populists.

A key aspect of rightwing and populist parties is promoting economic protectionism as an answer on the problems produced by these global value chains. What will be its effects? First, multinational corporations can cushion themselves against protectionist measures and regional segregation. By operating a complex network of independent suppliers, vendors, and service providers of all kinds, they can respond to shifts in their value chain—such as by forcing suppliers to produce products in the U.S. even while maintaining factories elsewhere. Second, “Notwithstanding Trump's naive declarations about making America great again with protectionism and tariffs, our economic analysis shows that protective tariffs eventually make the country poorer ... If Trump should be successful with its mercantilist and protectionist trade policy, it will be the average Americans who will be punished—not Mexicans or Chinese. And while Trump's protectionism could potentially secure some U.S. jobs in the short term, its tariffs and other protectionist measures will inevitably lead

to even greater job losses, less wealth and a lower standard of living for the average American in the longer term.”¹¹

Global value chains are a new form of capitalist production, a new way of pumping out surplus value. But what still prevails is *alienated labor*. Dunayevskaya writes in *Marxism and Freedom*, “The basic contradictions of capitalism cannot be overcome until what is most degrading of all, and the cause of all other contradictions—alienated labor—is overcome.” Citing Marx, “In the alienation of the object of labor is only crystallized the alienation, the estrangement, in the very activity of labor,” she concludes “*This* is the essence of *all* that is perverse in capitalism,”¹² a society contrary to human nature.

Is there a way out? Is there an emancipatory alternative to capitalism? It may be tempting to presume that the answer to neoliberalism lies in a return to Keynesian economic policies that can boost spending on education, healthcare, infrastructure, and the environment. However, it is worth noting that “the democratic welfare-state capitalism of the three post-[World] War [II] decades, was with hindsight the only period in which economic growth and social and political stability, achieved through democracy, coexisted under capitalism.”¹³ The golden age of Keynesianism from

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 Until Today* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Books, 2000 [orig. 1958]), p. 59.

¹³ Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* (New York and London: Verso Books, 2015), p. 4.

the 1940s to the 1970s was the exception, not the rule. And it is unlikely to return. That is because while owners of capital have never been richer and more money is flowing through the system than ever, the rate of profit has not recovered from its pre-1970s level—even after 40 years of economic restructuring!

Profit rates did rise (rather slightly) in the 1990s, but most of the increase was in the financial sector; the rate of profit in manufacturing has not recovered (and is even lower in the service sector). This represents a serious problem, since while many capitalists make their money in casinos, capitalism cannot be sustained by operating financial markets as a casino. Monetary wealth (or value) that takes the phenomenal form of profit has to be invested, at ever-increasing rates, in industries that create new value—otherwise, it is impossible to pay off the debts incurred from previous capital investments. The tendency of the rate of profit to fall—pinpointed by Karl Marx as capitalism’s fatal contradiction—has seriously undermined the basis of progressive liberalism and Keynesianism.

But it is not only Keynesianism that doesn’t have a future. Neoliberal capitalism is also increasingly unsustainable. This is because, as Wolfgang Streeck argues, capitalism “must strive ultimately to commodify everything. Labor, land, and money, however, can be commodified only within narrow limits if they are to retain their use value: complete

commodification destroys them and thereby obstructs rather than enhances capital accumulation.” This doesn’t mean capitalism will just collapse; it may “hang in limbo, dead or about to die from an overdose of itself but still very much around”¹⁴ so long as an alternative political-economic conception of how to organize human life is missing.

Developing a viable conception of an alternative to capitalism is the *raison d’être* of Marxist-Humanism—both as philosophy and as organization. As creative as mass struggles are, we do not saddle them with the responsibility for developing an alternative. It is the responsibility of revolutionary theoreticians, both workers and intellectuals, who come together in an organization like the IMHO, to develop one as part of an ongoing collective dialogue.

IV.

All of our tasks for the coming two years center on this central goal and purpose. This is why we plan to issue a new pamphlet consisting of Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program* with a new introduction. But we cannot contribute to the development of a viable alternative unless we have a functioning organization. It is not preordained that we will have one, for this requires two preconditions: 1) Engaging in ongoing movement activities and the battle of ideas with

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

other tendencies and within mass movements, winning new members at an even greater rate, and raising the funds needed to continue and expand the organization; and 2) Becoming conversant with and rooted in the body of ideas contained in the development of Marxist-Humanism.

Marxist-Humanism is an *expansive* body of ideas, encompassing *decades* of development—from its origin in state-capitalist theory of the 1940s through the publication of its foundational works (*Marxism and Freedom* 1958, *Philosophy and Revolution* 1973, and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* 1982). These are more than a series of abstract postulates. Unique perspectives on political, social and economic issues are integral to Marxist-Humanism—from the role of class struggles in challenging value production to Women's Liberation as *reason* as well as force of revolution, and from the national question in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia to the concept of “Black masses as vanguard” in the U.S. This is seen in publications like Dunayevskaya's *American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard* and Charles Denby's *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*. The test of the validity of a body of ideas depends on the *politicalization of philosophy* in response to varied ongoing events like the war in Syria, the rise of the #MeToo movement or the mass support for Corbyn in Britain, as much as the journey into the dialectic in philosophy itself. It

also depends upon whether we can unite theory and practice in ways that, while transcending the elitist concept of the “vanguard party,” do not fall back into either immersing ourselves uncritically in spontaneous movements or clinging to what Lenin called the “circle spirit” of talking among ourselves without an objective relationship to ongoing struggles and battles of ideas.

To be sure, we cannot live by the truths of a different era. Marxist-Humanism must constantly be developed and redeveloped in light of new objective realities. But that requires being acquainted with what it achieved in its historical development. If there is one thing we cannot afford today, it is a bad break between the generations when it comes to knowing, grasping, and projecting the content of Marxist-Humanism.

This year we have a special opportunity to meet this challenge, since 2018 marks the 60th anniversary of the publication of the first work of Marxist-Humanism—*Marxism and Freedom*. Comrades have already discussed holding special events and public discussions on the book in the coming period, and we look forward to hearing as many ideas and suggestions as possible about this in the pre-Convention discussion period and the Convention itself. At the same time, 2018 marks the 200th anniversary of Marx’s birth, which represents an opening to present what the *totality* of *Marx’s* Marxism means for today. Marxist-

Humanism has a distinctive view of the *internal coherence* of Marx’s revolutionary project—its critique of capital, its political analyses of subjects of revolution, its vision of a new society that transcends value production as emergent not only from developed capitalist societies but also from indigenous and communal ones—and we will want to discuss how to bring that to the attention of activists and thinkers today.

Our work of the past two years provided fertile ground for this, as seen in our membership growth in some locales and the spread of Marxist-Humanist ideas internationally. In the U.S., leftist and socialist organizations are growing—in some cases considerably—as a new generation looks for alternatives to both bourgeois democracy and the xenophobic nationalism that is increasingly embraced by global capital. At our Convention we will discuss perspectives on how to further our outreach and growth in this area. Since we last met in Convention in 2016, we have also projected Marxist-Humanism in new forums internationally, as seen in our participation in the Oslo Conference “Without Borders” and participation in a series of conferences and meetings on the 100th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the 150th Anniversary of Marx’s *Capital* in Brazil, China, the U.S., Canada, France, India, Britain, Germany, and Greece. In no way are these mere “academic” interventions: they have proved of critical

importance in putting us in touch with revolutionaries who are asking whether Marxism has a future in light of the collapse of established Marxism and the failure of earlier efforts to surmount capitalism. This has included vital discussion with worker-activists in India who are involved in a direct dialogue with us and are planning to issue translations of our works in Hindi. We have also been engaged with serious new friends of Marxist-Humanism in Brazil and Greece, who have translated our writings and more. Works by Dunayevskaya, Charles Denby and members of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization have also been translated or reissued in Portuguese, French, Italian, Turkish, Catalan, Polish, Persian, Tamil, and Greek in the recent period.

Each generation of Marxists faces the task of working out what Marx's Marxism means for today. As an organization of Marxists-Humanists we must examine our conditions of existence anew and discover the revolutionary social forces at play that can create a new beginning. These social forces offer the revolutionary impulses and real alternatives that will bring alive the dialectics of liberation for today.

However, the dialectic must not be confused with one-sided and abstract determinations. On the contrary, the dialectic is the immanent transcending of the fixed and finite determinations in which things appear to exist. Hegel argued that reality is composed of contradictory elements that can

only be understood through their opposite. Through the struggle of opposites the movement of history is brought forward. Yet the overcoming of opposites is not a single act but a constantly developing process through contradiction, in which the absolute must pass through mediation to become *substance as subject*. Therefore, for Hegel, dialectics meant achieving something positive by means of negativity; the process of breaking down and superseding the fixed and determinate conditions in which things appear to exist.

This means, as Marxist-Humanists, that we must avoid succumbing to a formulaic ideology that approaches any given phenomena with a series of fixed conclusions irrespective of existing realities. As Hegel affirms in the preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “The idea, which by itself is no doubt the truth, really never gets any farther than just where it began, as long as the development of it consists in nothing else than such a repetition of the same formula.”¹⁵

—The Steering Committee of the IMHO

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J.B. Baillie, p. 78.