

DEC 18 1979

To: Political Committee

From: Mike Baumann

Subject:

Swiss LMR

The following is the gist of a full-page article in the December 8 issue of the Swiss comrades' paper La Brèche that purports to be a polemic with the French "New Philosopher" Bernard Henry Lévy.

The article begins by complaining that Lévy's new book Testament of God, while "very interesting" is also "very annoying" because its anticommunist diatribes don't distinguish between Stalinism and genuine socialism (as expressed, in particular, in the FI resolution on Socialist Democracy).

The article summarizes the prescriptions laid down in the Socialist Democracy resolution, including important role of television, etc., and then adds:

"Even the Bolsheviks' error in 1920 of strengthening the party by a provisional ban on the right to form factions cannot be used to discredit the struggle of the Trotskyists. For unlike Stalinism, revolutionary Marxism poses the need for preserving history accurately and has recognized this error [i.e., banning factions] and drawn the consequences from it."

The final section of the article calls for "opening a discussion on philosophy in the Fourth International." Here's why:

"We think B.H. Lévy is correct on two crucial points: his existential concept of man-the-individual on the one hand, and his concept of the need for a limit to the power of governments on the other. In other words, we think that a good constitution is one that grants the individual the inalienable right to [religious] belief and that recognizes the individual's inability to resolve the question of the meaning of life.

"This requires a clarifying reexamination of the concept of materialism. It is our personal point of view that Marxist materialism offers a scientific (consistent and pertinent) interpretation of historical and social facts, but that it does not necessarily imply or presuppose a materialist anthropology (definition of man), atheism, or the belief that the social relations established in a socialist society will enable the individual to overcome his alienation.

"Furthermore, metaphysical materialism which affirms that everything is matter in motion (as Ernest Mandel puts it in his "Introduction to Marxism") is in our view philosophical nonsense that revolutionary Marxists can well put behind them.

Unlike the Stalinist bureaucrats, revolutionary Marxists have no need for a dogma that denies the active role that the subject always plays in the interpretation and transformation of reality.

"It is also necessary to initiate a discussion on the concept of the individual. It is urgent that revolutionary Marxists cease seeing Freud as essentially an ally of Marx. Finally, it is necessary to initiate a discussion on religion.

"The question of religion cannot be resolved by criticism of ecclesiastical institutions or by taking up all religions as a whole. Each religion must be considered separately, carefully examining what each of them proposes to the individual as an understanding of himself. Catholicism and Protestantism, for example, set forth radically counterposed concepts of man, and you cannot simply ignore the latter after having laughed at the former.

"We are prepared to defend the point of view that Christianity, in its Protestant and Lutheran interpretation, is not an ideology and constitutes a system of beliefs equally as consistent and perhaps more pertinent than atheism (and than Judaism as well; this is our final point of disagreement with B.H. Lévy).

"A discussion along these lines must lead to explicit recognition of the right to belief [i.e., religious beliefs] and to a decision to never cite as an example of combat against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies (a necessary combat in the period of transition) the struggle against religion."

The editors of La Brèche add this one-paragraph note at the end of the article:

"The above article raises several questions rarely taken up by La Brèche and the revolutionary Marxist press in general. Some statements and criticisms made in it, in the final section in particular, call into question the traditional assessments of our current and certainly merit a reply. The editorial board of La Brèche is prepared to open up a discussion on these points and to publish articles in reply. Our readers will of course understand that, given the nature of the theme in question, a limited amount of space will be set aside for this purpose."