

Jan. 26, 1984

Dear Raya,

There has been so much new raised philosophically by you in the letters to Hegel scholars in the summer and fall, in your presentation to the REB of Jan. 3, in your Talking to Myself letter of Jan. 21, that I simply must begin a response, as partial and incomplete as it will be.

I want to begin with your new perceptions of Lenin's Philosophic Ambivalence because I see this as holding a key in working out how we regard the relationship of philosophy and organization both in the book to be historically and as projection or challenge to the movement, and within our own organizational practice in the period ahead.

On the one hand, the new perceptions of Lenin's philosophic ambivalence seemed both straight forward and profound. Where as in P&R philosophic ambivalence was rivited in Lenin's failure to make public the philosophic labor he was going through, and his failure to extend his philosophic labors to the question of the Party, the new perception encompasses the fact that Lenin's ambivalence rested as well in the fact that it was not so much a question of extension or "application" of his Philosophic Notebooks to the question of organization. It was that Lenin's PN (in and of themselves) ended in a short cut--extending a hand to practice--and never really fully ~~knowing~~ himself in the Dialectic when the Dialectic was the chapter on Absolute Idea in the Science of Logic. Earlier, that is in P&R, you had spoken of Lenin's shortcut as that last half paragraph of AI being dismissed and that Lenin's 16 points on the dialectic not really moving beyond point 9. Now you are working out how Lenin on the threshold of AI, in the Idea of Cognition, moved to the Smaller Logic and did not return to the AI in the Science of Logic itself.

On the otherhand, it isn't so straight forward as concerns your own journey on Lenin's philosophic ambivalence. Because in your Talking to Myself of Jan. 21, you take us back to the letters of May 12 and 20, as well as to your work on Lenin and the Idea of Cognition section (back in 1952) now with very new eyes. That is, the germ of what you are today working out was again present in the period of the breakthrough on AI in the early 1950s, but was not developed (was not seen?) in the decades of the '50s, 60 and 70s. Or put differently, what was concrete for us in breaking with Johnsonism and developing Marxist-Humanism was the philosophic breakthrough of Lenin which CLR and Grace so rushed past in the '49-51 period. It is only in the last decade--from post P&R's "Lenin as a Lassalleian" to today-- that Lenin on organization has taken on a new concreteness. That is, it is not enough to take Lenin's magnificent Great Divide and reject his vanguard party to lead, but what we are faced with today is the necessity to work out the philosophic source of the organizational question within Lenin.

This it seems to me involves an important self-critique of ourselves. Did we not see organization as only politics and not as philosophy? I mean by this, if the post Marx Marxists rejected philosophy and saw Marxism only as economics and as politics as perfected by Lenin, then on the other side of the coin, didn't those Marxists who did believe in philosophy as central to Marx, keep that conception of Marxism from entering the realm of organization? Didn't they from their point of view hold organization and philosophy separate from each other? I include ourselves partially. I don't know if this was a left over from Johnson-Forest, but if the emphasis was on movement from practice, then did we have a ~~whiff~~ within ourselves that the movement would itself "solve" the organizational question, instead of seeing the responsibility for philosophy to enter the realm of organization?

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I have before me two expressions -- 1) not a hint of partinost in the PN and 2) the State and Revolution has not a word to say on organization. This first concept you are full of praise for, the second, you are critiquing. Yet they are not in contradiction. We see both the greatness of the first, especially as contrasted to Stalinism, and the limitation of the second, especially in reference to Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program, as great a document as State and Revolution was. And yet we need further to work this out. It seems to me that the debris of post-Marx Marxism precisely on the question of organization is really emence, and that even those who recognized the Hegelian philosophic foundation of Marx's new continent of thought still always accepted organization as politics, never as philosophy. The uncharted paths that you are upon seem nowhere greater than in this terrain of organization.

Can't the movement characteristic of our age, that movement from practice -- with all its magnificent forms of organization from below, born out of spontaniety -- as a form of theory, be thought of, be expressed as, themselves searching for a philosophic expression that would join their spontaneous organizational forms and deepen them? What I am saying is that doesn't the movement from practice demand the non-separation of philosophy and organization, while the post Marx Marxists have continually insisted upon their separation, or actual abolition of philosophy and its substitution with party program?

It seems to me that your journey to new perspectives on Lenin's philosophic ambivalence has taken place here within the '80s ~~with~~ objective situations demand for new Marxist organizational forms. It has allowed you to return to 1953 and see something there that could not have been seen before. It means that something in our ongoing objective situation releases you to go back to '53 in a very new way. But, and this is most crucial -- it is a further realization of just how deep a new beginning were the Letters on AI in '53. They constantly yield they new, previously unseen illuminations.

Your Dec. 8 letter on the 3rd attitude to objectivity is thought provoking in two respects. (Though someone will accuse you of being with Hegel on the question of God!) 1) the ~~equating~~ equating of organization to principle, doctrine. In other words there is a kind of Faith (here confidence) that your organization represents a Body of Ideas and is not just helter skelter. I think about a lot of what you have been working for us to appreciate M-H as a body of ideas, and what Archives of M-H means. But this is not alone a question of what Hegel means by Faith as apposed to the intuitionists' faith. For that then puts us in with the Church or that concept of a body of ideas. Thus 2) your expression in this letter: "Rather, the attraction for me continued to be the Dialectic. Far from expressing a sequence of never-ending progression, the Hegelian dialectic lets retrogression appear as translucent as progression and indeed makes it very nearly inevitable if one ever tries to escape regression by mere faith." This is seems is like an arrow aimed at us as Marxist-Humanists. That is we cannot support this body of ideas by mere faith, otherwise we are not any different from the church. ~~But~~ the dialectic, the dialectic as AI as NB does not allow us to support this body of ideas as mere faith. Only the continual working out of the ideas, the ongoing nature of our Archives, our revolutionary perspectives, keeps us from falling into a form of the third attitude. You can't escape this regression by faith, only by renewal of the dialectic in reality.

And this to me then brings us to the heart. . . . of the Year of Only 8 Months, indeed the heart of the Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy as book and as this Marxist-Humanist organization. The only way to ~~not~~ reduce ourselves to faith is by concrete, universal Praxis -- and that has to be measured at this moment in work with the biweekly, in organizational growth. I think we have chosen a very difficult moment objectively/subjectively for this test of ourselves, But in many ways it is the best period to do it, because the test cannot be hidden by the high

point of a . . . movement from practice in this country which would make it easier to not work out our tasks. Rather we need to work them out now, when the movement is perhaps more quiescent, so that we will be very different Marxist-Humanists when the movement born of spontaniety moves toward new high points.

Eugene