

The
**Philosophic
Moment**
of
Marxist-Humanism

two historic-philosophic writings

by

■ Presentation on Dialectics of
Organization and Philosophy,
June 1, 1987

■ Letters on Hegel's Absolutes,
May 12 and 20, 1959

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Preface

"There truly is no separation between theory and practice, and this indeed was shown as our unique characteristic from the original 1953 breakthrough on the Absolute Idea as comprising the unity of both the *movement* from practice that is itself a form of theory and the *movement* from theory that is itself a form of philosophy and revolution."

—Raya Dunayevskaya¹

In the last year of her life, 1986-87, Raya Dunayevskaya, founder of the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism, was at work on a new book she had tentatively titled "Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy: The 'Party' and Forms of Organization Born out of Spontaneity."² In the course of this work, Dunayevskaya turned once

¹ This is from a letter of Dunayevskaya of Jan. 13, 1987. See *Supplement to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, Vol. 13, #19726, which forms part of her Archives, titled *The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection—Marxist-Humanism: A Half Century of its World Development*, on deposit at Wayne State University Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs. Dunayevskaya's Archives are available on microfilm.

² At the time of her death on June 9, 1987, Dunayevskaya had not written this book, but her many notes for it have been collected and deposited in the *Supplement to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, Vol. 13. See especially the 272 page Section 1.B, "Talking to Myself": Dunayevskaya's Notes for the 'book-to-be.'"

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more to a re-examination of her May 12 and 20, 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes. In her Presentation on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy of June 1, 1987, Dunayevskaya created a new philosophic category, singling out these 1953 Letters as the "philosophic moment" which had determined her development of the body of ideas of Marxist-Humanism from the 1950s to the 1980s. She there wrote, "In Hegelian dialectics, the philosophic moment is a determinant; even if the person who was driven to articulate the Idea of that 'moment' was very nearly unconscious as to its depth and its ramifications, it remained the element that governed the concretization that follows the laborious birth that poured forth in a torrent nevertheless." We have chosen to issue this publication in its present form—with the Presentation on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy appearing first, followed by the 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes—because it is Dunayevskaya's 1986-87 view of her 1953 Letters which enables us to see what she called the "many Universals inherent" in them for today.

Integral to Dunayevskaya's work of 1986-87 was her concentration on a crucial problem of our era—the relation between the search for non-elitist forms of organization and the dialectics of philosophy. That relation is crucial to work out if we are to overcome the legacy of unfinished, aborted, transformed-into-opposite revolutions. In singling out these 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes as the "ground and roof" for overcoming the separation of philosophy from organization, Dunayevskaya's June 1, 1987 presentation speaks to all those searching for pathways to overcome the division between theory and practice in the struggle to uproot this racist, sexist, class-divided society.

The depth of today's objective-subjective crises has

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brought new challenges to the task of transforming reality. As Dunayevskaya wrote in her last "Theory/Practice" column, "The abysmal lower depths that the Reagan retrogression has sunk the world into throughout the seven years of this decade has polluted the ideological air, not only of the ruling class, but has penetrated the Left itself. Such a deep retrogression urgently demands that, along with the economic and political tasks facing us, we look for philosophic new beginnings."³

Each of Dunayevskaya's "trilogy of revolution"—*Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 until Today* (1958); *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao* (1973); and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1982)—was written to meet the need for such philosophic new beginnings. Each of these works represented a concretization of, and a return to, the 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes. In her Presentation on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy of June 1, 1987, Dunayevskaya re-examined this 1953 philosophic breakthrough once more, this time in relation to the dialectics of organization and philosophy—in Marx, in post-Marx Marxism, and in Marxist-Humanism. In this presentation, which had three parts—*The Philosophic Point; Dialectics of Organization; and Untrodden Paths in Organization*—Dunayevskaya created a whole new philosophic category, pinpointing her 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes as the "philosophic moment" from which all Marxist-Humanist originality has sprung. The challenge that is issued by Dunayevskaya's last writings is to work out philosophic new beginnings by re-creating Marxist-Humanism on the basis of the new illumination

³ See Raya Dunayevskaya, "On Political Divides and Philosophic New Beginnings," in *News & Letters*, July 25, 1987.

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that the category of the 1953 Letters as the "philosophic moment" sheds upon her entire body of ideas.

Since Dunayevskaya's death on June 9, 1987, meeting this challenge has become even more urgent—and more difficult—than ever before. What makes it possible to meet this challenge is that Dunayevskaya's June 1, 1957 singling out of her 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes as the "philosophic moment" profoundly illuminates the unique historic-philosophic contributions of Marxist-Humanism.

The 1953 Letters were written in the midst of a new objective-subjective turning point in the post-World War II era. It was a period of rich theoretic development on the part of Dunayevskaya, who had been involved in a decade-long exploration of Hegel's dialectic and its relation to Marx and Lenin.⁴ At the same time, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, new stirrings for freedom by the masses were emerging. In the U.S., the introduction of Automation into industry was being met with new workers' revolts, while in Russia it was the period following Stalin's death, which would soon be followed by new revolts.

On the very day that Stalin died, March 5, 1953, Dunayevskaya wrote an analysis arguing that an incubus had been lifted from the minds of the Russian masses and that new revolts were sure to follow. When she asked Charles Denby, the Black production worker who became editor of *News & Letters* in 1955 until 1983, to find out the reaction of workers in his plant to Stalin's death, he reported one worker's statement:

⁴ For Dunayevskaya's decade-long theoretic work that preceded her 1953 Letters, see her discussion in *The Coal Miners' General Strike of 1949-50 and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.* (Chicago: News and Letters, 1984).

"I have just the man to take his place—my foreman!" It became a jumping-off point for a series of articles by Dunayevskaya on the world ramifications of Stalin's death, which sparked intense debates within Correspondence Committees (of which she was a co-leader, along with C.L.R. James and Grace Lee Boggs).

So deep was Dunayevskaya's search for an *absolute* opposite to this age of state-capitalist totalitarianism that, as she put it in 1983, "I was not satisfied with the economic and political analysis, but wanted to work out the philosophic ground. All these happenings couldn't be accidental; nothing that historic could be without reason; I felt I had to... work this out."⁵

Of crucial importance was Dunayevskaya's dialogue with Hegel's dialectic throughout the years 1941-53, which included studies of Lenin's 1914 commentary on Hegel's "Doctrine of the Notion" and Marx's re-creation of the Hegelian dialectic in both his 1844 "Humanist Essays" and *Capital*. Her dialogue with Hegel reached a new philosophic stage with her May 12, 1953 Letter focusing on the "Absolute Idea" in Hegel's *Science of Logic* and May 20, 1953 Letter focusing on "Absolute Mind" in Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*. As she later wrote, "I turned to philosophy and saw, in the Absolute Idea, the breakdown of the division between theory and practice—the movement to total freedom."⁶ Her philosophic breakthrough preceded by six weeks the first mass upsurge from within Communist totalitarianism, the June 17, 1953 East

⁵ See Dunayevskaya's In Memoriam to "Charles Denby, Worker-Editor," in *News & Letters*, November, 1983. This appears as an Afterword in the 1989 Wayne State University Press edition of Denby's *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*.

⁶ This quotation is from Dunayevskaya's Introduction to the 1956 edition of *Philosophic Notes*, which included her 1953 "Letters on Hegel's Absolutes."

German workers' revolt.

These 1953 Letters, Dunayevskaya wrote in *Philosophy and Revolution* (p. 300), "proved to be a new divide within Marxism" between those who stopped at the economic analysis of Russia as state-capitalist and herself, as she proceeded to develop the Humanism of Marxism for our state-capitalist age. Following the break-up of Correspondence Committees she established News and Letters Committees in 1955.

The 1953 Letters were the "ground and roof" from which Dunayevskaya developed Marxist-Humanism philosophically, organizationally, and politically; indeed, she had included them in the first publication of News and Letters Committees in 1955, in the mimeographed pamphlet *Philosophic Notes*. Nevertheless, News and Letters Committees never published them in a widely circulated form. At its Labor Day, 1988 Convention, News and Letters Committees voted to publish the 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes first in the pages of *News & Letters* newspaper, and then in this printed form along with Dunayevskaya's Presentation on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy of June 1, 1987.

What compels this publication now is a two-fold challenge: the need for philosophic new beginnings in the face of today's economic, political and ideological crises and the need to overcome the separation between an epochal philosophic breakthrough and its organizational expression. In issuing this publication we invite our readers to join us in the attempt to re-create Marxist-Humanism on the basis of its philosophic moment.

--The Resident Editorial Board
News and Letters Committees
January, 1989