

May 5, 1955

Dear Herbert Marcuse:

Now that the school season is drawing to a close perhaps you will take that trip to Detroit, and thus see that it is not a question of "my" direct translation of idealistic philosophy into politics, but the dialectical development of proletarian politics itself as it struggles to rid itself of its specifically class character in its movement to a classless society. That is why I "translated" Absolute Kind as the new society. You seem to think that I thus minimize the "negation" which the application of the Hegelian dialectic to political phenomena presupposes. But surely Hegel's Absolute Idea has nothing in common with Schelling's conception of the Absolute as the synthesis or identity in which all differences are absorbed by the "One". Lenin sort of put a period in that chapter when Hegel speaks of the Idea as Nature, pointing out that Hegel was stretching a hand to materialism. That was as far as 1915 could reach. It was far enough for his transformation of everything into its opposite was no abstraction but the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war.

But this is 1955, and if 4 decades does not mean all new, we should surely start at least not with Lenin on the eve of revolution but Lenin after conquest of power. 1927-3 shows how hard Lenin labored to find the something which would make his Universal--that everyone "to a man" run production and the state--a reality. He came up with the notion that what is needed is that "the work of the party must be checked by the non-party masses". No small thing for the creator of the party as the knowing of the proletariat!

30 years later when neither the state withered away nor the party checked itself but, on the contrary, turned into the one-party state, we must see that the point to day is the liberation from the party. The withering away of the state (Doesn't Hegel's phrase about the "falling off" of the Idea remind you of this?) is no overnight job and the party not in power does remain the knowing of the proletariat and hence a much more complex job, its withering away or "falling off". But in that contradiction does lie the movement toward liberation and theoreticians can least of all allow themselves to be enslaved by any divisions between philosophy and politics. In truth, only when you do have the "translation" in mind; antiposit the proletariat, the freely associated proletariat, as the Notion, can you hear the Idea at all. What is it that Hegel phrases it? "The self-determination in which alone the Idea is to hear itself speak!"

Do I sound brash when I say: do come here and listen! Without this new impulse from the proletariat the theoretician is not just the absentminded professor inhabiting an ivory tower. He is dead and doesn't know it. What is needed in this age of absolutes is not the separation of politics from philosophy but its integration. We must in fact go a step further than Lenin and where he first saw that his Marxist colleagues, himself included, had not really understood Capital before 1915 for they had not understood the dialectic and urged us to see Capital as our Logic, we must include in that logic also history and politics. I don't go in for quantitative distinctions: which is the worst evil--the Kautskyans always "teaching" Marx or the Stalinists "applying". 1955 compels that where Hegel made it the job of philosophy to elicit necessity under the semblance of contingency, today's intellectuals must elicit the new society present in the old by seeing the human freedom totally unfolded in freely associated labor alone deciding its own fate.

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Yet when I tell my theoretical brethren that I want the two poles of the book on Marx to be that of automation and the absolute idea, they look at me as if I were talking a foreign tongue not yet invented, which is a polite way of saying I talk gibberish. But the worker, in his opposition to automation, is counterposing his full development which is at the same time the only total technological development to the mechanical solution (mechanism and chemism) the industrialists and engineers seek to make of automation. The reason this is the Age of absolutes is that the objectivity, all objectivity, is now in the proletariat himself. That is how I read Hegel on the Absolute Idea freely releasing itself.

Enough! I don't know what got into me unless it is the fact that it is a beautiful morning to have evoked this outburst from me. When I sat down to the typewriter it was only to welcome you here.

Or is the outburst just an evasion of writing an actual outline of the book itself? I doubt I will have time to do anything like that before the fall. (Does that end your publisher's possible interest in it?) However, I do want you to see not alone the strictly philosophical letters that I showed you, but some of the economic ideas as I ~~xxxxxxx~~ outlined them when I intended to write the work on state-capitalism that I spoke to you about for all my writings are built on the necessity, nay, urgency, of not treating dialectics as if it were an adjunct to Marx's economic theories. I enclose the outline of that work, which I will ask you to please return to me.

Would you be so good as to send me the name and address of that friend of yours you wished me to meet when I was in NY? I mislaid the piece of paper and thus have been unable to write to him; it was impossible to see him in person as I left but a few hours after I left you.

Has your book, including corrected proofs, gone to press and are you now a free man?

Yours ,