

Edited Draft: Raya's Presentation on First News & Letters Committees' Pamphlet -- Lenin's "Abstract of Hegel's 'Science of Logic'" and Dunayevskaya's 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes [January 1956]

First of all, let's get ourselves up to date. As I understand it, when we began the discussion on the Notebooks the last time, John introduced it as "very informal," and this one is informal, too. He tried to study very closely the circumstances under which they were written, rather than going into the Notebooks themselves. This time I want to go into the Notebooks themselves. But I want to review, so we know how much has been said before this.

John traced the period in which Lenin wrote his Notebooks: the collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of the First World War. The shock that Lenin had undergone [was] in seeing that the Workingmen's International, which was supposed to have fought the imperialist war, voted war credits -- the leadership voted -- for the Kaiser. It was this transformation of a working class organization into one that fought a bourgeois war that made Lenin say, I better re-examine the philosophic foundations of Marxism. They cannot be Marxists. And yet I have been with them in [the Second] International, and never recognized that this was going to happen.

Then [John] traced the same circumstances, but a different period, for the second part of this booklet, that is, the letters around the Absolute Idea that I had written. That was the period of 1950. He went along more swimmingly in that period, because it's the period of automation, and he had made a study of automation, not only when it was introduced into the mines, with the continuous miner in 1950, but in its very first stages in the auto industry.

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But particularly in 1950 was it important, because it had produced the great miners' strike of 1950 which, for the first time in a serious manner, separated Lewis from the miners. That is, the strike began with Lewis -- not contract, no work. But Lewis felt that he could not oppose automation; that's supposed to stand for progress. When the judge slapped that million-dollar fine on him, he told the miners to go back. And the miners didn't go back. They stayed out nine months.

From then on there began a period among the miners, which foretold all of the period of the American working class and what would, in three years, later be the German and the Russian working class: doing their own thinking, not following the leadership. It comes in the period of automation.

1953 happened to also have been the period when I returned to writing the book on Capital, which is the reason it had a double significance. In 1953, when the East German workers rebelled against the totalitarian rule of Russia and took matters into their own hands, and there was a revolt also of slave laborers in Russia itself, then all the world began not merely to breathe easier, but to see that the question whether man can be free when there's a totalitarian rule is up to man himself. It isn't a philosophic question with an answer in a book. They took matters into their own hands in the period when it's worst, under Russian domination, in East Germany and in Russia itself.

It was in that period, when the fermentation and thinking in the masses occurred in such an independent and pathbreaking way, that the letters were also written on the Absolute Idea.

On the whole, therefore, the only philosophic principle that was dealt with by John was the major one: transformation into opposite.

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How did it happen that a workingman's organization like the Second [International] was transformed into its opposite and betrayed the workers in 1914? And how can man transform that opposite -- the workers state which had become the Russian tyranny -- into a new stage of freedom? The Russian workers showed some way by the strikes.

Inez had pointed out that, so far as she could see, the thing that was most outstanding in these Philosophic Notebooks of Lenin was the fact that everything was connected with everything else -- the interconnection of all things in this world.

I want to emphasize that it is extremely important for method -- that is, a way of doing things -- that you pick out that which impresses you most, and not begin with all that which you do not understand. It's only when a thing is made concrete that people begin to see. That's why when a great man writes, every single age can get something different from him.

In the statement of Inez, even though she didn't quote a particular thing, I do want to relate it to what was in Lenin's mind about the connection of everything with everything else. And that is the National Question, national self-determination.

It was always a principle of Marxists to be for the freedom of all nations. But it was just something you put in a book. Nobody disobeyed it, but it wasn't real. In 1915, after Lenin had written these Notebooks, he began to fight for the thing he had always fought for -- the national self-liberation of the various nationalities oppressed by the Russian czar -- and demanded that everybody throughout the world do that. That's when he mentioned that the Negro Question is a National Question.

He said it wasn't only a principle. The war gave it an urgency which

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made it so important, that far from dividing the National Question and the working class fighting for total freedom, you have to see that the National Question could actually be the bacillus -- the fermentation -- to bring the whole proletariat on the historic scene.

You can't just say the workers will do it. [Lenin] gave the Polish [struggle] as one way he thought that it could be started, the Negro, and throughout the world. He demanded that from now, instead of just making it a principle which you could agree or disagree with -- Rosa Luxemburg disagreed with it -- it had to assume a great urgency. As we know, it became the important question it was throughout. That was one of the interconnections that hadn't been seen before -- that before had been avowed as a principle, but hadn't been seen in its direct relation to the working class itself.

I remember that [Donby] had said that what he liked most was the idea of the creativity of the working class, the self-movement and the self-activity. Because that is the whole essence of Hegel and of Marx, that will occupy most of the time later on. But I want to spend one minute on what Leroy had brought up: 'can't you translate this into some sort of language that would make sense?'

It isn't only that it's important to study what a man says in his own words. The book* will certainly not be written this way. It will be written, I hope, so that the average man can understand. But I do want to emphasize that it isn't as difficult as it appears, if only you put out a little effort.

For example, I want to read the first paragraph on p.1**, and then

* The book Dunayevskaya was writing, Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 Until Today, was published in 1958.

**Page reference is to the first News & Letters Committees pamphlet.

show you that if you read it in a certain way, it could be one single, very simple sentence:

Logic is the doctrine not of external forms of thought but of the laws of development "of all material, natural and spiritual things," that is, of the development of the total, concrete content of the world and of its knowledge, that is, the result, the sum, the conclusion of the history of the knowledge of the world.

If you will take that sentence and just say, "logic is," and then avoid all the "buts" and the "that is's," you will see that the sentence reads: Logic is the law, the sum, the conclusion of the history of the knowledge of the world.

In other words, philosophy is actually the same thing as history, except it's a summation, it's of the very essence. [Lenin] doesn't separate [them]. That's why Hegel could be so great. He was bounded by history even though he had [drawn conclusions?]: Logic is the law, or sum, of the history of the knowledge of the world.

Take [the sentence]: "The idea of the transformation of the ideal into the real is profound. Very important for history." Then ^[Lenin] ~~he~~ says, "note," it is "against vulgar materialism." What ^{he} is saying is that you think the ideal of socialism is just an ideal. Everybody says it's really when a man has money, and all he wants is wages. If you watch history, what was ideal in one period became transformed into the real. That's what made it important. The ideal of the slave who ran away, who followed the North Star to freedom, became the reality. It was the impulse to the Civil War.

[Lenin] emphasizes that not only is it a truth, but if you're supposed to be a materialist, and only the money in your pocket defines your thinking, you are completely wrong, not only in relation to knowing

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what this man wants -- his hopes and aspirations -- but in relationship to history. The fact that the ideal has been transformed into the real through the actual activity of man is what has moved history forward throughout the ages.

Here is a man [Lenin] who throughout the period -- and we know that all Marxists do -- emphasizes that it's the objective, the real world, the actual world that counts, not what you want subjectively. But he doesn't really mean that in relationship to the activity of the proletariat. He means that in the sense that it's a fact, that it's the movement of history objectively.

For example, even though he emphasizes that the world is real and objective -- and it's not the thinking of this man Hegel that has made it so, but his thinking merely reflects what has already happened in the world and what is real -- he says: "Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world but creates it."

In other words, you don't only through your thinking reflect what you've seen in life, but you create another world because you have decided you don't like what you've seen, and you change it through your activity. Now look:

The activity of man, composing for itself an objective picture of the world (first you have to have an objective picture of the world), changes the external activity, transcends its determinations (transcends what's real before it, the obstacles, the state), changes these or other of its aspects and qualities, and thus takes away from it the traits of show, externality, nullity (nothingness), gives it being-in-itself and for itself, objective truth.

By changing the world, you also change your thought, so you created really a new world with it. And that became the new objective truth. Through your changing Mind, which is supposed to be subjective, you have arrived at a new objective truth. Then at the end of that page: "The

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unity of theoretic ideas and practice -- this NB (note well) -- this unity precisely in theory of knowledge for the result is the 'Absolute Idea'." He says Absolute Idea ^{equals} so far as he's concerned, "objective truth."

There's something I want to call to your attention. I make a notation and say: "Later in this same translation, that is to say, quoting Hegel, and side by side rephrasing him materialistically, Lenin concludes on the certainty of man's own actuality and of the non-actuality of the world."

Look at the concept of this man. He's just gotten through telling you that only when it exists in the world is it real. Then he says, when man has decided he doesn't like it, then his own actuality -- his own thinking -- that's what's actual, that's what's real, and the world is unreal because it's no good. The non-actuality of the world is the most terrific concept in all of society. Hegel said it philosophically, Marx said it philosophically and actually, and the working class has changed it.

You can't just be against idealism because it's thinking. Man's idealism has made, transformed the world, where the world has become unreal, and a new objective truth arose.

Now I want to actually go into the self-movement and the practice through the whole definition. [Lenin] has 16 points, which he says could be 14, which give you the definition of the dialectic. Let's go through every one very carefully. First, before we go through by reading, I just want you to notice the words he underlines. Even just the words he underlines will immediately create a framework for you:

1. Objectivity, the objectivity of the notion. 2. Relation.
 3. Development. 4. Tendencies. 5. Unity of opposites. 6. Struggle.
- Unity of analysis. Then he says, each thing connected with every other.

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Now let's go through and read them all, and you will see why I emphasize them.

1. "The objectivity of the notion (not examples, not digressions, but the thing in itself)". He doesn't only mean an example from history, or from our personal life. He means all of the concepts, all of the ideas. They're objective.
2. "The whole totality of the manifold relations of this thing to the others." Manifold means variety. Notice the word relation is underlined. You remember when we discussed Marx's Capital, we said that he had transformed the whole science of political economy from being something that deals with things -- like money, wages and profits -- into something that deals with relations, production relations.
3. "The development of this thing" -- any concrete thing that you would have in mind; we have the class struggle -- "(respective appearance), its own movement, and its own life." Not an external thing. You take a party and do something with it, or you take even a trade union -- your own movement of the class.
4. "The internally contradictory tendencies." Every single thing will be a unity of opposites. You have capital and labor. They are your opposites. In another sense, Hegel calls it a different attitude to objectivity. Each one looks at the objective world differently, depending whether you're a boss or a worker. But in this case, a tendency is within the labor movement, between the production worker and the skilled, between the labor bureaucrat and the worker.
5. "The thing as sum and unity of opposites." He begins by taking for granted there'll be opposites. But he'll show which of the opposites is the movement, and which therefore he wants to connect with.

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6. "The struggle respective the unfolding of these opposites, the contradictions of the impulses." Now you not only have a class struggle, but each one will have a certain impulse to do something. The Civil War in the United States was supposedly [over] the Emancipation Proclamation of Lincoln. I said, look [at] that miserable slave who didn't know how to read nor write. His impulse to freedom, his following the star to the North -- that's what produced the Civil War.

You always have to look at the impulse. We have paid a lot of attention in our own paper, because that's what News & Letters is built on: the impulse of the worker, precisely because he's over here in production and everything's forced upon him.

7. "The unity of the analysis and the synthesis, -- disintegration of the particular parts of the totality, the summation." Let's break it down. You have analytical cognition or thinking when you just say, 'this is what it is today.' You have synthetic when you say, 'this is what it is today, but when it's related to what it was yesterday, or what it is in relationship to another organization, there is a certain movement.' Then you disintegrate all the parts. You break it down, and instead of relating it, you say, 'this doesn't hold anymore.'

For example, let's take up the Trotskyist definition: workers' state is supposed to equal nationalized property. Maybe at one time workers' state was nationalized property. That's your totality. But when you disintegrate, when you break it up, it was also soviets, it was workers' power. You break it down to where you can't give such a definition.

The "disintegration of the particular parts" means whatever is only a characteristic and does not contain the totality of the thing. The

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"summation of these parts together." Only when everything jives can you say it holds; the workers' state has to be the workers having freedom and ruling.

8. "The relation of each thing is not only manifold" -- varied -- "but general and universal. Each thing (appearance, process) is connected with every other." I gave the example of the National Question being connected with the international question of bringing the proletariat onto the scene. [Lenin] specifically made it very general so that each one could fit in what applies to his situation.

9. "Not only unity of opposites but transitions of every determination" -- every analysis or particular -- "quality, characteristic, side, feature into every other." [Lenin is] now saying that not only is there unity of opposites -- capital and labor -- but there is a transformation, a transition to something, and the transition is the most important of all because just as you can transform an imperialist war into a civil war, or a workers' state into a totalitarian state like Russia, you can transform it back again through the activity of man. The important point is the transformation into opposite, and not what opposite you're confronted with that exists in the world.

10. "Infinite process of unfolding of new sides, relations." That's the only significance of new, incidentally, all of you who had to suffer from Johnsonism. There is always a new side that opens up and has a movement. If it isn't that, then ^{anybody} can use 'old' and 'new' just to mean nothing.

11. "Infinite process of the deepening of man's cognition of things, appearances, processes, from appearance to essence, and from the less profound to the more profound essence." You not only have a deepening

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of your [cognition?], a different relationship. The essence of the thing is that there's always a more important thing, depending on what is the concrete situation. He says, "the less profound to the more profound essence." You can't ever stop just because you found the real thing, because the real thing will change within the next 5 minutes, due to the activity of man.

12. "From co-existence to causality." Somebody said the other day that they do not understand the word, "cause," the reason for something being. Take the simplest thing, a dress. Everybody knows it has a use value, because you wear it and it clothes you; and it has a value, a price. The Second International's whole thinking was based on the fact that they simply mentioned it. They didn't see a contradiction in it. The ordinary man will agree, and even the bourgeois, that this evidently has a use value, to wear, and an exchange value of price.

What they will disagree with is that in that little thing there is not a co-existence; they fight with each other. So far as you're concerned you're only interested in the fact it clothes you. So far as the man to whom you paid \$5.95, he's only interested in the price. This in turn reflects the fact that you have two different kinds of labor involved in it. You, as a human being, just wanted to make something that you can do, that you're skilled at. But that factory clock told you you must make 10,000. This set up such a murderous contradiction between you, that it actually reflects the fact of the opposition.

Lenin says here that the greatness is that Marx, from the minute he opens Capital and says a commodity is a use value and a value, has already put the fact that it's not a co-existence, but a contradiction -- that is, the cause of all the trouble -- into such a form that in essence,

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or in form; you see all of the contradictions of capital, because they all arise from the fact that the worker is one thing when he creates something and does something creative and wants to apply all his skills; and it's something else when he's just made into the appendage to a machine.

13. "The repetition at a higher stage of certain features, characteristics, of the lower." You don't get rid of it when you've made a struggle. For example, in 1914, the proletariat was confronted with the betrayal by its leadership. You think you're rid of it when you made the 1917 Revolution, because Russia definitely did not betray. Then Stalinism comes about, and all the petty-bourgeois intellectuals say, what good did it do, you? [Lenin] says, every stage repeats certain things of the other stage, until you have total freedom. It wasn't a world revolution. It was one stage, and we will start it on another stage.

The repetition's extremely important, because in all arguments, people will say, look at what it brought us -- another labor bureaucracy. You have to see that despite the fact that it brought a labor bureaucracy, there is always the movement forward. We're not what we were, even though it's a repetition of certain things before, and the worker has learned from this and is moving forward.

14. "The apparent return to the old." You only apparently return to the old, but you're in a higher stage. "Negation of the negation" is, of course, the complete fall down of the society.

15 and 16. [Lenin] repeats "the struggle of the content" and "the transition." He says they are the same thing as [9?]. Look at how he sums up all 16 points: "Briefly the dialectic can be defined as the

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doctrine of the unity of opposites. Thereby is the kernel of the dialectic grasped, but that demands explanation and development."

It most certainly does, but you have it all. When he says unity of opposites, all this he had in mind, and more. The necessity to have it sometimes in general terms, not in a particular way, is because if he burdened it down with exactly what it was in 1914, you wouldn't really understand it as much as you think you would. All you would understand is the facts. You have to learn to apply it to your age, and that is the only way it can possibly be proven.

He gives another definition of the dialectic: "The dialectic of Hegel is the generalization of the history of thought." It isn't only the history of thought. The reason it applies is because the history of thought, in turn, reflected the history of the world, and they're not separate at all. They're interconnected. That's why the dialectic, or the movement, the development of any thing applies to all things, whether it's thinking, the world, objective forms, or nature itself.

[Lenin] has also the criticism of Hegel:

Hegel, the exponent of the dialectic, was incapable of understanding dialectically the transition from matter to movement, from matter to consciousness -- especially the second. Marx corrected the mistake (or weakness?) of the mystic.

Now let's go through it very carefully, and we know when we'll add, "from practice to theory."

You have a certain development, and Hegel sees it very, very clearly. He lives in the period of the French Revolution, 1789. It ended in Napoleon, in other words, dictatorship. He's through with it. But he thinks. He's seen the laborer, and he says, 'that alienated person. I don't know what we'll do with him. Only the professors will be able

to finally get you an ideal world, which is the Prussian state.'

His weakness is because he doesn't see the proletariat -- he couldn't have seen it; it was just the very beginning, 1816 -- as the active force in history, it makes him see only thinking as the important thing. He begins with consciousness. But before you think, Marx and Lenin say, you've done something. You've acted some way. You have been somewhere. You have related.

The movement is not only from thinking to doing something -- there is that movement -- but there is from doing something to thinking. You think in the first place because you've already done something a million times. Finally you say, I know what I've been doing all the time; this is what it means.

[Lenin] says [Hegel's] weakness was the fact that he didn't see the development from something that's dead, static -- at this time, even the proletariat at the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution -- to an actual movement. When that movement becomes, you have something. And "from matter," that is substance like the commodity, to a relationship.

The greatest of all is from practice to theory. That's the age which we are in. When a worker says, I've done these things, now I'm going to do my own thinking and I'll transform these things, that is precisely where Hegel stopped, where he found his historic barrier, not only as a bourgeois, but because at that time the factory proletariat had just begun, and all you could see was his misery. You couldn't see his activity -- that he is the one that will make, just a few years after Hegel's death in 1831, the great 1848 Revolutions. It was Marx who saw the 1848 Revolutions.

I want to say only a few words on the other part of the booklet.

and that is the Absolute Idea. It says here the Absolute Idea means the new society. We said here the fact that there has been a movement in the 1950s, on the one hand, of a new stage in production -- automation -- and on the other hand, a stage in thinking, by the German workers and the Russian workers who challenged the totalitarian rule. The worker doesn't only want higher wages. He wants a new philosophy of life. He wants to see that everything changes and there is no division any longer between theory and practice, leaders and ranks, and all moves to total freedom.

When Hegel comes to his last chapter, the Absolute Idea, he began to talk about a World Spirit. In his conception, a World Spirit moves, and that's why you think. Marx said it's because you work, that's why you think, and not the other way around.

The point was that even Marx and Lenin, when they came to the Absolute Idea, said Hegel is plenty good. He has now come to say that all of the theory he [has had ?] has to be in practice. He goes back to Nature. You have the element of what you would call materialism in Hegel. [Marx ?] stopped there, even though Lenin did not stop there [and] went considerably further. They thought that Absolute, therefore, is only Hegel's escape from the proletariat into the philosopher's world.

It is true that he escaped from the proletariat. But his concept, that man will be so great as to absorb all of the knowledge of the world before him, and move it forward in his own little lifetime; his concept that man would be so great because he would have knowledge, both human and divine; his concept that Jesus was greater than God, because he was both God and man -- made him carry all of his theses to a logical conclusion.

It's true he didn't say the proletariat, but he said freedom. And he

had to go back to history and contrast the difference between just having freedom -- either just because you're an educated man, or having freedom because you're rich -- and being free, that is, having all your natural capacities. Instead of stopping where they stopped before, in the last chapter, Hegel went back to history.

I want to read you one single paragraph from the Absolute Mind, and we will stop with that [from letter of May 20, 1953]:

When individuals and nations have once got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength, just because it is the very essence of mind, and that as its very actuality. Whole continents, Africa and the East (it's not true anymore), have never had this idea, and are without it still. The Greeks and Romans, Plato and Aristotle, even the Stoics, did not have it. On the contrary, they saw that it is only by birth, for example, an Athenian or Spartan citizen, or by strength of character, education or philosophy -- the sage (the philosopher) is free even as a slave and in chains -- that the human being is actually free. It was through Christianity that this idea came into the world.

Let him have his Christianity. It's the Industrial Revolution. Now here is what I say after I quote Hegel:

I'll be darned if for us I will need to stop to give the materialistic explanation here. I'm not fighting Hegel's idealism but trying to absorb his dialectics. Anyone who can't think of the Industrial and French Revolutions as the beginnings of modern society, or know that when will to liberty is no longer mere impulse but "permanent character," "spiritual consciousness" it just means and can mean only the proletariat that has absorbed all of science in his person, that person better not try to grapple with Hegel.

It can't mean anything else, and it's right in Hegel. He leaves it at Christianity, but he doesn't leave it in the next world, because we know what he had thought about Christianity before.

What I have tried to do in the 1950s, in bringing Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks up to date, is to show that the struggle for total freedom, in our particular age, is the realization of the Absolute Idea. That is completely understandable to the average man, and the worker, because that is what he is doing every single day of his life. All he has to do now is gain consciousness of the fact that he's doing it.