

May 1968

Dear Alan:

Because I was impressed with the seriousness of your critique of the rough draft of my work, "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Liberation", I hurried at once to acknowledge receipt and assure you of its publication, although I had no time at the moment to comment on the points you raised. Now that I have a free moment I wish to analyze what you call the "uncanny structure" and I call the self-movement of the subject-matter. I do not mean to say that I have succeeded in giving precise expression to the dialectic emerging from the subject under discussion. Rather, what I am saying is that, unless a critic compares results with aims, critic and author are likely to talk different languages. The point is to see that we do understand each other.

Your thesis seems to be that "in its present form, the chapter seems to offer little ^{to} is not known about the Third World to even the most cursory observer of the situation." May I ask who, in discussing the subject, holds that the tragedy of the African Revolutions is due neither to neo-colonialism alone, nor to internal corruption alone, and that, therefore, what is needed is to work out the relationship between the compelling objective forces and ruling ideologies of the East and West, on the one hand, and the mass quest for universality, on the other hand? I know none but myself ~~to~~.

Note, please, that both the objective forces and the ruling ideologies (used in the strict Marxian sense of false consciousness) are put to one side, while the proletarian ("mass")-peasant striving is placed at the opposite pole. This means that on the side of philosophy and revolution stand only the masses while ~~the leadership~~ a question mark is placed over the leadership of these masses, as is clear from my constant repetition of the isolation of these leaders from the masses the day after the revolution.

What has been happening ever since the death of Lenin is that no leader of revolution has faced that which first appeared with the Russian Revolution--the division between leaders and masses the day after the revolution; the administrative mentality that then overcame even the most theoretical of Bolsheviks like Bukharin who were all too eager to once again make "subjects" of these Subjects of revolution: "the masses." For years we argued with Trotskyists, Stalinists--and yes, anarchists and syndicalists on the question. When it comes to the question of the Third World we have entirely new types of revolutionaries and we wish to pose that crucial question, not as if they must bear the brunt of the past, but, rather, on the basis of the new reality.

You dismiss the new reality--isolation of the leaders from the masses, the very ones who made the revolution. You dismiss the actuality as a "may have been." You say, "Amen", to my analysis of the compelling objective forces, but what you do is the very opposite for you indulge yourself in a list of "probables", ranging from plots by CIA agents to international cartels: "ganging up on Ghana." This substitution of subjectivity for objectivity reaches its climax when you take official Soviet figures (used by me merely to show that, relatively, even these show that Mr. Big--the U.S.--gets bigger and bigger while their satellites vegetate, even as do the decolonized around the former colonial power) to arrive at some unfounded conclusions, to wit, that the Third world could show a comparable phenomenal growth "even without a massive infusion of capital." This flies not only in the face of reality but also in the face of such non-comparables as a pre-revolutionary Russia, occupying one-sixth of the world's space, some 200 million people, and, though technologically backward as compared to western Europe or the US, was still one of the biggest empires on earth, on the one hand, with such tiny newly-decolonized states as Ghana Guinea, on the other hand.

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III
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I am belaboring the obvious not in order to win a "debater's point", but in order to get you back to the subject in dispute--the relationship of the dialectics of liberation to economic reality as it appeared in the late 1950's and early 1960's. For that problem--the working out a new relationship between theory and practice--a methodology is needed which is independent of existing state power but rather flows from THE greatest "energizing principle"--the mass quest for universality, the Third World fight for freedom, total freedom, that is to say, one that refuses to accept class structure within a country to any "two camp theory" as/the struggle between the "East" and the "West" is the one that will liberate the wretched of the Earth."

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To get back to the point at issue, the task History has set for our age, our age and none other, permit me, dear Alan, to ASK you some more "who's". I began my comments on your thesis by asking who (except Marxist-Humanists) poses the questions relating to the Third World in a way that, both objectively and subjectively, takes its point of departure and return from where the masses are--what they do, what they think, how they propose to solve the contradictions, including those between leaders and rank-and-file intellectuals and workers? May I now add: (1) who (except us) holds that to plan or not to plan is no longer the pivotal question? (2) who (except us) holds that affluence notwithstanding, not only do the poor countries get poorer and the rich richer, but within the technologically advanced countries the crises deepen since even the good old capitalistic principle (so profoundly analyzed by Marx as the lifeblood of capitalistic "progress") of new economic growth made possible on the basis of the destruction of capital only leads to (a) unprecedented militarization, (b) chronic poverty and unemployment, (though attenuated from Depression days, it is organic that it seems impossible to shake it off even at its most affluent points), (c) planning even where denied, i.e., under private capitalism, (whether this be DeGaulle France or USA) on the one hand, and planning where admitted (both in "socialist" countries and in the Third World) equally helpless to solve the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, private and state, since the law of value cannot be abrogated except through a total reorganization of relations of production at the point of production?

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You glossed over asking these questions, much less looking for the answers, by, on the one hand, going into semantics rather than facing the reality of the human factor, and, on the other hand, asking your own "who's": "Who is this 'it' who 'has' totally different concept of a human social order?" Finally, what is meant by the 'struggle to break from the governing-law-of-value operative in the world market'? This seems to imply some sort of transcendence of objective reality!"

V

O.k. let's begin where you are. The "it", "the dominating force which governs also the still fluid situation in the underdeveloped countries as against the malaise in the developed countries" (p.6, not p.5, incidentally) is the human being, the mass force, the masses not only as physical force but "as Reason", to use Lenin's expression. You knew that all along, didn't you? But if you admitted that, (bad grammar notwithstanding) you knew all along that the human factor is the governing factor, is the social vision, is not only the future, but the present, then, first, you could not have rated the Soviet Union quite so high, quite so different from the US, and, second, the answer to your question about how to break the law of value, would likewise be obvious: THE HUMAN BEING. And, in conclusion, instead of putting an exclamation point alongside the allegedly impossible "transcendence of objective reality", you would have answered: But, of course, only when human beings, the oppressed human beings who create all values, transform themselves from the source of value and surplus value into the SUBJECT WHICH the day after the revolution

would abolish, or begin abolishing, the division between Notion and Reality, between Subject and Object, between Theory and Practice, between Philosophy and Revolution, between Mental and Manual Labor, and reconstitute the wholeness of the human being, thus putting an end to what Marx called "the pre-history" of humanity so that ~~that~~ (his and hers, but not its any more) true history can first begin and the new human dimension unfold.

This is what is known, in Hegelian terminology, as the second negation. (The first is "mere" overthrow of capitalism which looks so hard before the revolution, but the day after, that vanishes as a problem, and the second negation is what one must embark on.) In Marxian terms, it means the abrogation of the law of value, the beginning of a new unity of mental and manual labor, of which very nearly nothing is known. Historically, once the Paris Commune showed Marx that the whole fetishism of commodities, of value, is all in the form, the value-form which not only hides the exploitation of man by man, but, above all, is the fantastic form which is the reality of dead labor dominating living, of transforming the living worker into an appendage to a machine, of making persons into things—once all that became crystal clear to Marx, he summed up the heroism and achievements—all the achievements of the Paris Commune—in the simple statement that the greatest thing about the Commune was "its own working existence."

But there was no chance to concretize that "abrogation of the law of value" other than "freely associated labor" would decide everything since (1) the law of value is a law of the world market whereas the Commune existed in a single city, and (2) it lasted only 2 months whereas that is a protracted and most difficult struggle full of all sorts of lapses and what Lenin called historical deformations. But Lenin did live to see a successful proletarian revolution in a whole nation which, at his death, had lasted six years. He therefore had a greater historic experience and he concluded that (1) whereas that abrogation of value can begin on a national level, it cannot fulfill itself unless it will be done on an international level; (2) while working for the world revolution, the single revolution cannot rest still but must prove itself in the lives, conditions of working of the most lowly paid, doing the heaviest work, and (3) so simplifying the affairs of state that any worker can and does do them so that "all become bureaucrats and therefore none are. Finally, and not by any means least, Lenin left a Will in which he not only asked for the removal of Stalin, nor only pointed to the administrative mentality of Trotsky, but also said that the most beloved of all the Party and its greatest theoretician, Bukharin, just "didn't understand the dialectic."

(All this is taken up in State-Capitalism and Marxist-Humanism and, as I pointed out at end of section 1 of Ch.1, will become part of this chapter on economic reality and dialectics of liberation. Note also, please, that the chapter is also to include an analysis of Maoism—see New Politics for my latest on that—for "transcendence of objective reality" is not, is not Maoist voluntarism which skips over objective reality whereas masses transform objective reality through continuing revolutions)

I'm ever so grateful for your critique which forced me to clarify my thoughts, but I cannot answer your questions in their entirety without writing a new chapter. However, I cannot let pass the assertion that Marx's statement about man's "totality", within the context I give it in the second section of the chapter on Grundrisen, "is not a substantive conclusion." Two questions were singled out by me to substantiate the question of "totality." One referred to Marx's concept of history—historical conditions, historical working out of contradictions history as philosophy rather than "economics"; "And 'economics' is not referred to except as economic structure, which, in turn, involves the totality of relations, the conditions of production, with

in full Hegelian terms, fully "idealistic", fully "subjective", with revolution of one piece with that new human dimension which comes from that "absolute movement of becoming"; in a word, to sideswipe at Hegel in an Introduction to this work is, in truth, to attack Marx himself, only, shamefacedly, as Hobsbawm should indeed be a distinction made between material transformation and philosophic ones." Further to concretize this statement about what "historical materialism" meant to Marx I bring in the question of today—how what Marx said on machine-ism in the Grundrisse was, on the one hand, (by the Stalinists) reduced to "scientism" and "working harder", increasing "labor productivity" by bonding to the automation machine. And, on the other hand, transformed by Herbert Marcuse as leading to "One Dimensional Man," adding: "The irony is that it isn't only the proletariat that thereby gets degraded, and not only the intellectual, but philosophy too. The original title of One-Dimensional Man, when it was delivered as a series of lectures in France at the end of the 1950's and reproduced in Arguments was: From Ontology to Technology. In a word, Marcuse is saying that technology has overwhelmed thinking, thereby denying the very soul of the dialectic, of development through contradiction, that the more abyssal the degradation, the more intense is the quest for universality."

The whole point is that Automation, as the new stage of production, has produced two opposite class reactions. On the one side stands not only the capitalist but also the intellectual who thinks that all the productivity now comes from the machine, not man, that "scientism" is classless. On the other side stands the proletariat who not only shews that Automation has not lightened labor, not only has created the ever lengthening line of the unemployed even though, for the moment, hidden by militarization and actual war, but, above all, tends further to separate the mental from the manual powers. He therefore asks: What kind of labor should man do? Why the division between mental and manual? How to reconstitute the wholeness of man? We concluded that it was not accidental that the "backward worker", not the advanced, party-minded intellectual, even when he is a Marxist, raised the question of Humanism, made it the urgent question of the day. To summarize not only the chapter, Alan, but the whole of the book I propose the frontispiece to be used for reproducing Marx's statement on totality from the Grundrisse. And here it is again: "when the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc. of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature—those of his own nature as well as those of the so-called 'nature'? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which makes the totality of the evolution—i.e., the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any previously established yardstick—an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is the absolute movement of becoming?"

IT IS THIS "ABSOLUTE MOVEMENT OF BECOMING" THAT MAKES MAN INTO SHAPER OF HISTORY, THOUGH NOT OUT OF THE WEDDING CLOTH; A TRANSCENDER OF "OBJECTIVE REALITY" AS THE GIVEN REALITY OF A CAPITALISTIC SOCIETY THAT NEEDS TO BE TORN UP BY ITS ROOTS; THE PRESENT RECREATOR OF A NEW POSITIVE THEORETICAL GAIN, A NEW HUMANISM, I.E., HUMAN POWER WHICH IS ITS OWN END.

Yours
Alan

*It is not my economics which is questionable; it is existing poverty in "communist lands." Moreover, I quoted their own sources and their own need to explain the lower standards of living as compared to those under private capitalism by blaming it all on "technology."

**The Grundrisse section in Ch. I, as I already explained to you and in the covering letter, was put in out of context—it belong in the chapter on Marx—in order to make sure that I do not again forget to deal with it at length. These notes to myself, so to speak, argue against Hobsbawm's side remarks against Hegel, not because I am subjective, but because this is one work of Marx's which cannot be "written off" as belonging to the "young" Marx. It is the mature Marx, speaking