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PHILOSOPHIC AMBIVALENCE OF LENIN  
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13210

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The simultaneity of the outbreak of the first world war and the German Social Democracy's voting war credits to the Kaiser's government took from under Lenin the philosophic ground on which he had stood and had thought so impregnable. August 4, 1914 had smashed to smithereens the concepts that all tendencies in the Marxist movement had held in common. Up to August 4, all had agreed that the material conditions laid the basis for the creation of a new social order, that the more advanced the material conditions, the better prepared would the proletariat be for taking over power from the bourgeoisie, and the larger the mass Party and the more mature its Marxist leadership, the surer would be the road to revolution. The material was the real and the explanation for the ideal. To believe anything else was philosophic idealism, bourgeois apologetics, clerical obscurantism.

After August 4, however, Marxist revolutionaries had to face a shocking new reality -- Marxist leaders (recognized as such by the whole International, Bolsheviks included) at the head of the largest mass party, "The great German Social Democracy", in the most technologically advanced land, were the very ones who had ordered workers, not to destroy world capitalism, but to slaughter each other across national frontiers for "the defense of the fatherland." In the face of this collapse of all his previous conceptions of the relationship between the material and the ideal, subjective and objective, the universal and the particular, Lenin was forced to search for a new philosophy. If Hegel had never existed, Lenin would have had to invent Hegelian dialectics to reconstitute his own reason.

It wasn't that Lenin experienced a single instant's hesitation about his own revolutionary opposition to the imperialist war. On the contrary. Where other revolutionary opponents of the war were so overwhelmed by the collapse of the Second International that they considered it necessary to limit "the struggle for peace" to that which would unite all tendencies who had not betrayed, Lenin was adamant in his opposition to "indiscriminate unity"<sup>(1)</sup> and would not move from the most extreme and unequivocal slogans — the defeat of one's own country is the lesser evil. Turn the imperialist war into a civil war. In a word, insofar as Lenin was concerned, what was needed was not the picking up of the pieces of what once was. What had become imperative was the total reparation from the Second, the creation of a Third International. The shattering experience did not put into question his Bolshevik politics and organization. What had been put into question was the old materialism that lacked "the dialectic proper," the principle of the "transformation into opposite." This is what Lenin was to single out in the Hegelian dialectic.

As the holocaust enveloped the World and other opponents of the war were running about without reorganizing their own thinking, Lenin, the moment he reached Bern in September, 1914, repaired himself to the library to grapple with the works of Hegel, especially his Science of Logic. For an uncompromising revolutionary like Lenin to spend his days when the whole world, including the Marxist movement, was going to pieces, in the Bern Library mist, indeed, have presented a strange, an incomprehensible

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(1) The phrase appears in Lenin's Letter to Kollontai: "You emphasize that 'we must put forward a slogan that would unite all.' I will tell you frankly that the thing I fear most at the present time is indiscriminate unity which, I am convinced, is most dangerous and harmful to the proletariat." (Quoted in Memories of Lenin, Vol. II, p. 160, by N. K. Krupskaya.)

sight. But, day in and day out, for a whole year (2) Lenin would not be moved. Just as his political slogan, "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war," became the politically Great Divide in Marxism, so his Abstract of Hegel's Logic became the philosophic foundation for all serious writings that Lenin was to do for the rest of his life, from Imperialism and State and Revolution on the eve of November, 1917, through the work of the actual Revolution, to his Will.

Lenin turned to Hegel warily enough, forever reminding himself that he was reading him "materialistically," and, as a materialist, was "con-signing God and the philosophic rabble that defends God to the rubbish heap." At the same time, however, he is hit by the shock of recognition that the Hegelian dialectic was revolutionary, that Hegel's dialectic, in fact, preceded Marx's "application" in the Communist Manifesto. "Who would believe," Lenin exclaimed to himself, "that this movement and self-movement is the core of 'Hegelianism,' of abstract and abstruse (difficult, absurd?) Hegelianism?... The idea of universal movement and change (1813 Logic) was disclosed before its application to life and society. It was proclaimed in reference to society (1847)\* earlier than in relation to man (1859)\*\* (3)

To grasp the full impact that this reading of Hegel had upon Lenin we must keep in mind that Lenin did not know Marx's now famous 1844

Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts.

(2) Actually Lenin spent two years--1914-1916--in the library. But he completed the Hegel studies in 1915 and began the gathering of material for writing Imperialism.

\* The reference is to The Communist Manifesto.

\*\* The reference is to The Origin of Species.

(3) I happened to have been the first to translate Lenin's Abstract. I will be using, mainly, my own translation. (Appendix B, Marxism and Freedom, 1958 edition, hereinafter referred to as M&F.) For the convenience of the readers, however, I will also cite the pagination in the Moscow translation.--(V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 38.) M&F, p. 331; Vol. 38, p. 141.

What Lenin is thinking about concretely, as he is reading Hegel's Science of Logic, is Marx's Capital, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, his struggle with "vulgar materialism." Thus, even as he is arguing with Hegel and designating the section, Being-for-Self in the Doctrine of Being, as "dark waters," he follows it up with: "The idea of the transformation of the ideal into the real is profound. Very important for history. But also in the personal life of man it is evident that there is much truth in this. Against vulgar materialism. NB. The difference of the ideal from the material is also not unconditional, not überauswänglich." (4)

It is this discovery of the relationship between the ideal and the material, in Hegel, which had led Lenin to see that the revolutionary spirit in the dialectic was not superimposed upon Hegel by Marx, but was in Hegel. Lenin continues to grapple all the harder with Hegel's abstract categories. When he was still in the Doctrine of Being, he already stressed both the identity of, and transformation into, opposites: "D i a l e c t i c is the doctrine of the identity of opposites--how they can be and how they become--under which conditions they become identical, transforming one into the other..." (5) When we got to the Doctrine of Essence, as we saw, the stress was on the self-movement, first and foremost. As he continues his comments on The Law of Contradiction, his stress is not on the identity of opposites as on the transition from one to the other and the sharpening of the contradiction, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, such comprehensive knowledge of totality that even causality, that bugbear of "neo-empiricism," becomes but a "moment" of the whole:

"Cause and effect, ergo, only of every kind of interdependence, connection (of the universal), the concatenation of events are only links in the chain of the development of matter."

"NB All-sidedness and all-embracing character of world connection are only one-sidedly, desultorily and incompletely expressed by causality." (6)

(4) MLP, p. 353; Vol 38, p. 176. \*This sentence is in English in Lenin's text.

(5) MLP, p. 352; Vol 38, p. 143. (6) MLP, p. 335; Vol 38, p. 159.

new page 5

It was in this final section on Essence that Lenin broke with the kind of materialism and inconsistent empiricism that overstressed science and the category of causality to explain the relationship of mind and matter even as "iron economic laws" and "essence" had constantly been contracted to "appearance" as if thereby the totality of a problem had been exhausted. What became salient for Lenin now was the Hegelian concept of "moments":

"The essence is that both the world of appearance and the world which is in itself are essentially moments of the knowledge of nature by man, steps, changes in (or deepening of) knowledge." (7)

Lenin also kept up a constant argument with himself. Every time he was merciless against Hegel's "mysticism and empty pedantry," Lenin, at the same time, laid stress on the profundity of the dialectic, "the idea of genius." By the time Lenin reached The Doctrine of the Notion--and it is there that he broke with his own philosophic past--what Lenin was underscoring was that the elements of materialism were present in Hegel:

"When Hegel tries--sometimes even strains himself and worries to death--to subsume the purposeful activity of man under the categories of logic, saying that this activity is the 'syllogism,' that the subject plays the role of some sort of 'member' in the logical 'figure' of the syllogism, etc., then this is not only a strain, not only a game. There is here a very deep content, purely materialistic. It is necessary to turn this around: The practical activity of man, repeated billions of times, must lead the consciousness of man to the repetition of the various logical figures in order that these can achieve the significance of an axiom. This note bene." (8)

It is precisely because Lenin's Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic reveals a mind in action, arguing with itself as well as with Hegel, advising himself "to return to" Hegel, "to work out" ideas, history, science, Marx's Capital, current theories, jamming up opposites, and leaping into the Notion which he now translated as "NB Freedom subjectivity ('or') goal, consciousness, striving NB." (9) that Lenin's Abstract becomes an exciting experience also for his readers. Thus, Lenin no sooner designates the first section of the Notion as "These parts of the work should be called: a best means of getting a headache" than he also accentuates the following: "NB Hegel's analysis of the Syllogism (I-P-U, 'individual

(7) M&F, p. 555; Vol 38, p. 153. (8) M&F, p. 543; Vol 38, p. 190. (9) M&F, p. 536; Vol 38, p. 164  
\* This sentence is in English in Lenin's text.



particular, universal, 'P-I-U,' etc.) is reminiscent of Marx's imitation of Hegel in Chapter I." (10) Lenin will later develop the close relationship between Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic:

"If Marx did not leave a Logic (with a capital letter), he left the logic of capital, and this should be especially utilized on the given question. In Capital, the logic, dialectic and theory of knowledge of materialism (3 words are not necessary; they are one and the same) are applied to one science, taking all that is valuable in Hegel and moving it forward." (11)

But while he is still in section one of The Doctrine of the Notion, Lenin feels the need to separate himself, first, from Plekhanov, and suddenly even from himself. Three aphorisms quickly follow one after the other:

"(1) Plekhanov criticises Kantianism (and agnosticism in general) more from the vulgar materialistic than the dialectic materialistic point of view...."

"(2) (At the beginning of the 20th century) Marxists criticised the Kantians and Humists more in a Feuerbachian (and Buchnerian), than in a Hegelian, manner."

"It is impossible fully to grasp Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, none of the Marxists of the past 2 century have understood Marx!" (12)

The epigons who deny that Lenin had himself in mind must answer what Lenin did mean by the additional remark alongside the first two aphorisms, "Concerning the question of the criticism of modern Kantianism, Machism, etc.," whose work more than his own Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, centered so

(10) M&F, p. 339; Vol 38, p. 178. Chapter I refers, of course, to Capital. It is the very chapter that Stalin, in 1943, when he decided to break with Marx's Analysis of the Law of Value as characteristic of capitalism and only capitalism, ordered Soviet theoreticians not to follow. (See the translation from Pod Znamenem Marxizma and my commentary on it and the debates around it in the American Economic Review, Sept., 1944 to Sept., 1945.) Ever since it has remained a subject of controversy whenever the question of alienation and the fetishism of commodities becomes the subject of discussion.

(11) M&F, p. 353; Vol 38, p. 349.

(12) M&F, p. 340; Vol 38, p. 180.

on "Machism"? The real point is not, of course, the mere question of naming names, much less whether the aphorisms contain exaggerations. Thus, none had written more profoundly than Lenin on Marx's Capital, especially Volume II, and Lenin certainly did not mean that all who wished to study Capital must, first, labor through the two volumes of the Science of Logic. What was crucial to him now, what he saw looming before him was a great philosophic debate, suddenly directed, not so much against Hegel as against Plekhanov and even sensing a contradiction within himself, his philosophic past. The proof is in the fact that he was now not fully satisfied, even with his essay, Karl Marr, that he had just completed for the Encyclopedia Granat.

In calling attention to the fact that Lenin's essay had begun with a discussion of philosophic materialism and dialectics, Krupskaya commented that "this was not the usual way of presenting Marx's teachings."<sup>(13)</sup> That certainly was true. What Krupskaya does not mention was that this departure from previous analysis had, by the time Lenin finished the whole of the Logic, not been concrete enough to satisfy his new comprehensions of the dialectic. The essay was written during July-November, 1914. Lenin had begun studying the Logic in September and completed it on December 17, 1914. This and the date on which he wrote a new letter to Granat -- January 14, 1915 -- helps us pinpoint when Lenin thought the great revolution in his philosophic conceptions occurred. In any case, with characteristic precision, this is what Lenin wrote Granat:

"By the way, will there not still be time for certain corrections in the section on dialectics?...I have been studying this question of dialectics for the last month-and-a-half and I think I could add something to it if there was time..."

The process of the break with old concepts is nowhere clearer than in his commentary upon the relationship between theory and practice.

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(13) Memories of Lenin, p. 155.



Thus, even when Lenin speaks about practice, he stresses that Hegel is here talking about practice "in the theory of cognition." Whereupon Lenin himself begins to scold: "Alas! Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it."<sup>(14)</sup>

How far we have travelled from the "photocopy" theory permeating Materialism and Empirio-Criticism! And yet it is not because Lenin had forgot his materialist roots, much less his revolutionary views on class consciousness. Rather it is that even on Marxist thought Lenin had gained from Hegel a totally new appreciation of the unity of materialism and idealism. It is this which will permeate Lenin's post-1915 writings, whether their topic be philosophy or politics, economics or organization. And being, at the same time, a man of the concrete, Lenin "translates" Hegel's phrase about the "non-actuality of the world" as follows: "The world does not satisfy man and man decides to change it by his activity."

In a word, it isn't that Lenin has gone into abstractions in gaining a new appreciation of idealism. It is that in gaining this appreciation, the Absolute Idea began to lose the attribute of all things evil. Naturally this is not due to any transformation of Lenin from revolutionary materialist to "bourgeois idealist," nor to any acceptance by him of Hegel's concept of God or some "World Spirit" unfolding itself. Rather it is that Lenin now sees that, though Hegel is dealing only with thought-entities, that the movement of "pure thought" not only "reflects" reality, but that the dialectic in the one and the other is a process, and the Absolute is "absolute negativity."<sup>(15)</sup> Lenin's profound grasp of the second negation which Hegel calls "the turning point"<sup>(16)</sup> leads Lenin to question Hegel's diversion to the numbers game--whether the dialectic is a "triplicity" or "quadruplicity," with the result that Hegel contrasts "simple" and "absolute." Lenin comments: "The difference is not clear to me, is not the absolute equivalent to the more concrete?"<sup>(17)</sup> Lenin now "translates" both absolute and relative as "moments" of development.

(14) MEF, p. 347; Vol. 38, p. 212. (15) ibid, p. 200.

(16) Hegel, Science of Logic, Vol. II, p. 477.

(17) Vol. 38, p.

By the time Lenin lays down the Science of Logic, he is not even annoyed by the Absolute Idea "going to nature." Instead, he says that Hegel thereby "stretches a hand to materialism." He writes elatedly:

"It is noteworthy that the whole chapter on the 'Absolute Idea' scarcely says a word about God (hardly ever has a 'divine' 'Notion' slipped out accidentally) and apart from that - this NB - it contains almost nothing that is specifically idealism, but has for its main subject the dialectical method. And one thing more: in this most idealistic of Hegel's WORKS there is the least idealism and the most materialism. 'Contradictory,' but a fact!" (18)

Lenin felt none of the excitement that he had experienced in the Logic when he turned to Hegel's History of Philosophy. But it is there that he completes his final break with Plekhanov:

"He [Plekhanov] wrote probably nearly 1,000 pages (letters against Bogdanov against Kantians' basic questions, etc., etc.) on philosophy (dialectic). There is in them not a word about the Larger Logic, its thoughts (i.e., dialectic proper, as a philosophic science) at all!" (19)

Not only that. When he gets to sum up in a more organized form what the dialectic means now that he has gone through the major works of Hegel, he even criticizes Engels:

"The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts... is the essence of dialectics. This aspect of dialectics (e.g., in Plekhanov) usually receives inadequate attention: the identity of opposites is taken as the sum total of examples (for example, a seed, for example, primitive communism). The same is true of Engels. But it is in the interests of popularisation!" (20)

So great is Lenin's appreciation of dialectics that even his references to "clerical obscurantism," a "sterile flower," is expanded to mean "a sterile flower that grows on the living tree of living, fertile, genuine, powerful, omnipotent, objective, absolute human knowledge."

(18) Vol. 28, p. 234.

(19) MEF, p. 354; Vol. 28, p. 277.

(20) Vol. 28, p. 359, p. 363.

\* We do not have Lenin's Notes on Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, but the Notes on Imperialism show that he had read it while he was preparing the pamphlet on Imperialism. (The Notebooks are a massive 739 pages as against the short pamphlet that was actually published.)

new page 10

As against the comments by Lenin alongside works by others, mainly Hegel, the last quotation was from the only article by Lenin specifically "On Dialectics." Though likewise not prepared for publication, this, at least, has never been treated as mere "jottings." It is the last word we have from Lenin's strictly philosophic commentary of the crucial 1914-1915 period. Since Lenin had not prepared his Philosophic Notebooks for publication and they therefore remained "private," since Lenin seemed simply to have continued with his economic studies, political theses, organizational work; and since the factional polemics continued unabatedly, Lenin's heirs were not prepared for the imperative of facing a most confusing, totally contradictory double vision: on the one hand, the known vulgarly materialistic Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, and, on the other hand, endless references to dialectics--the dialectic of history, the dialectic of revolution, the dialectic of self-determination covering both the National Question and world revolution, the dialectic relationship of theory to practice and vice versa, and even the dialectic of Bolshevik leadership to theory, to the self-activity of the masses as well as to itself. Lenin's adherents as well as political opponents knew nothing, and cared less, about any great philosophic divide set up by Hegel's Absolute Method--the dialectic of development of "the pure movement of thought" and of reality battling its way, through contradictions, to so total a unity of object and subject, that the activist, the revolutionary materialist Lenin could copy out the philosophical idealist Hegel's concept of "subjective" and lay special stress on the last sentence:

"Each new stage of exteriorization (that is, of further determination) is also an interiorization, and greater extension is also higher intensity. The richest consequently is also the most concrete and subjective..." (21)

How could anyone conceive that the "philosophic neutralist" who, for a long period, accepted even "Machists" into the Bolsheviks just so long as they accepted "Bolshevik discipline," would now be under the spell of what he called "the dialectic proper," that this, just this, would become Lenin's underlying philosophy? For his part, Lenin was faced with the fact that he had to fight against not only betrayers and Mensheviks as well as non-Bolshevik internationalists like Rosa Luxemburg and "the Dutch," but also his own small Bolshevik group abroad. And he had to do so on, of all things, a subject that Bolsheviks had previously agreed to

(21) Science of Logic. Vol II. p.483

13220

NEW PAGE 11

"In principle"--the self-determination of nations. (22)

Suddenly, Lenin found himself totally alone and, the little word--  
dialectics--kept springing up everywhere. It was no longer limited to "the trans-  
formation into opposite" insofar as either transformation of competition into mono-  
poly or a section of labor into the "aristocracy of labor" was concerned and which  
was also to explain "opportunism" and the collapse of the Second International.  
Now dialectics was extended to revolution itself. And the "enemy"--the theoretical  
enemy was none other than the Bolshevik theoretician, Bukharin. The stark new  
truth was that Lenin called the Bolshevik opposition to self-determination of nations  
nothing short of "imperialist economism." For our purposes the importance of this  
debate rests not so much in Bukharin's thesis as in his methodology, which Lenin  
kept referring to all the way to his death bed, as we shall see. Meanwhile, Lenin's  
ire was aroused by Bukharin's statement that

"The imperialist epoch is an epoch of the absorption of small states," that  
"therefore" it was "impossible to struggle against the enslavement of nations,"  
except, "of course," in a struggle for socialism, and that "therefore...any  
deviation from that road, any advancement of 'partial' tasks of the 'liberation  
of nations' within the realm of capitalist civilization was utopian and  
reactionary." (22)

It was the "therefore's" that Lenin most intensely opposed. He insisted  
that the horrors of the imperialist war had led to "the suppression of human  
reasoning;" how otherwise explain the Bolshevik "curious errors in logic?" Instead  
of their seeing that the very transformation into opposite of free competitive  
capitalism into monopoly imperialism and its suppression of national democracy would  
produce resistance; that the impulse to self-movement came precisely out of these  
contradictions, became the dialectics of revolution. To think otherwise, Lenin  
insisted, was to treat masses as object instead of subject of history. If the  
"therefore's" do not emerge out of the living contradiction instead of the dead  
substance, then socialism is nothing but an "ought." The truth is that

(22) I will be quoting Gankin and Fisher, The Bolsheviks and the World War  
because it was Bukharin's theses (see especially pp. 219-223). But the latest and one  
of the finest books on the battle against national chauvinism for the period after  
the Bolsheviks gained power is to be found in Moshe Lewin's Lenin's Last Struggle;  
and the most comprehensive on the National Question both before and after Bolshevism  
triumphed is The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism by  
Richard Pipes. See also my chapter on Stalin in Marxism and Freedom.

not only the proletariat, but new revolutionary forces--the national minorities-- were arising and making the fight for self-determination of nations not only a "principle" but a reality, as the Irish Easter Rebellion proved. There never has been a "pure" revolution and the national revolts were valid both in themselves and as the "bacilli" for the proletarian revolutions.

Dialectics, that "algebra of revolution,"<sup>(24)</sup> has been on many great adventures since Hegel created it out of the action of the French masses<sup>(25)</sup> and thereby revolutionized metaphysics. What had been, in Hegel, a revolution in philosophy, became, with Marx, a philosophy of revolution, a totally new theory of liberation -- the proletarian revolutions of 1848 culminating in the Paris Commune of 1871. Lenin's rediscovery of dialectics, of self-activity, of Subject versus Substance at the very moment of collapse of the Second International, disclosed, at one and the same time, the appearance of counter-revolution from within the Marxist movement, and the new forces of revolution in the national movements. Moreover, these new forces were present not only in Europe but throughout the world. What his economic study of imperialism revealed was that it had gorged itself on more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  billion people in Africa and in Asia. This was to become a totally new theoretic departure after the Bolshevik conquest of power, as the Thesis on the National and Colonial Question presented in 1920 to the Third International.\* But while the holocaust was most intense, and Lenin stood alone, he nevertheless refused to retreat an inch to abstract internationalism. The outbreak of the Easter Rebellion in 1916 when the proletariat was still slaughtering each other showed his position on the self-determination of nations to be not only theory but reality.

(24) Alexander Herzen, Selected Philosophical Works, p. 521.

(25) Jarring as this may sound to the professional philosopher accustomed to tracing the dialectic from the Greeks through Kant to Hegel in the realm of thought alone, the truth of the above statement has, in recent times, been carefully traced through in the works of Jean Hyppolite (Genese et Structure de la Phenomenologie de Hegel and Studies on Marx and Hegel) as well as the actual documents of Hegel's early development, Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung.

\* See Part III, "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Liberation," where I develop this thesis for the African revolutions in our age.



For whatever reason Lenin, in 1914-1915, turned to Hegel "the bourgeois idealist philosopher," it certainly wasn't to find the driving forces of revolution. And yet Hegelian dialectics illuminated more the actions of the masses taking fate into their own hands in Ireland in 1916 than did the debates on the National Question with his Bolshevik colleagues. (26) 1917 should have ended the opposition to national self-determination, but, in fact, it only took on a new form. This time Bukharin contended that it was impossible any longer to admit the right of self-determination since Russia was now a workers' state whereas nationalism meant bourgeois and proletariat together and "therefore" a step backward. In his admission that "in some cases" he would be for it, he listed "Hottentots, the Bushmen and the Indians." To which Lenin exclaimed:

"Hearing this enumeration I thought, how is it that Comrade Bukharin had forgotten a small trifle, the Bashkirs? There are no Bushmen in Russia, nor have I heard that the Hottentots have laid claim to an autonomous republic, but we have Bashkirs, Kirghis... We cannot deny it to a single one of the peoples living within the boundaries of the former Russian Empire." (27)

Bukharin, for whom all the questions from "self determination of nations" to state-capitalism were theoretical questions, may not have suffered from Russian chauvinism. But he created the theoretical premises for Stalin, who did turn the wheels of history straight back to capitalism. At the last moment—too late as it turned out—Lenin broke totally with Stalin—and, theoretically, refused to depart in his debates with Bukharin from that single word, dialectic, as the relationship of subject to object, dialectics as the movement from abstract to concrete. In place of the mechanistic bifurcation of subject and object, Lenin joined the two in a new concrete universal—TO A MAN.

(26) "I do not attribute significance to the desire to hold onto the word, 'Bolshevism,'" Lenin wrote in his reply to Bukharin, "for I know some 'old Bolsheviks' from whom may God preserve me." The Bolsheviks and the World War, by O. Gankin and H. Fisher, p. 235.

(27) Lenin, Selected Works, Vol. VIII, p. 342. The whole of Part IV, "The Party Program (1918-19)" is very valuable for the theoretic points in dispute and have the advantage of being cast more in a theoretical frame than the factional bite of the Trade Union Dispute which can be found in Vol IX.



Abstract revolutionism was the methodological enemy. Bukharin's theory of state-capitalism, the obverse side of his theory of economic development under a workers' state, is that of a continuous development, a straight line leading from "unorganized" competitive capitalism to "organized" state-capitalism. On a world scale, it remains "anarchic," subject to the "blind laws of the world market." Anarchy is "supplemented by antagonistic classes." Only the proletariat, by seizing political power, can extend "organized production" to the whole world. The fact that Bukharin believes in social revolution does not, however, seem to stop him from dealing with labor, not as subject, but as object.

Quite the contrary. 1917 notwithstanding -- and despite the fact that Bukharin played no small role in the revolution -- his concept of revolution is so abstract that all human activity is subsumed under it. Thus, he is inescapably driven to preclude self-movement. Which is exactly why labor remains an object to him. As object, the highest attribute Bukharin can think of assigning labor is its becoming an "aggregate." People were referred to as "human machines." (28)

For a revolutionary intellectual to have become so entrapped in the fundamental alienation of philosophers in a class society, identifying men with things, is a phenomenon that laid heavy on Lenin's mind as he wrote his will.

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(28) Draft CI Program, included in Ataka, p. 121, "Collection of Theoretical Articles by N. Bukharin" (May, 1924, Moscow, Russian). Unfortunately, neither Bukharin's Economics of the Transition Period, nor Lenin's Commentary on it is available in English. (I've used the Russian texts.) However, other works by N. Bukharin are available in English. These are: The World Economy and Imperialism, Historical Materialism, and individual essays are included in other works, those against self-determination in The Bolsheviks and the World War (edited by Gankin and Fisher, Stanford U. Press, 1940) and elsewhere.

So totally did Lenin disagree with Bukharin's method of presentation that even when he agreed with the specific points, he felt it necessary to criticize. Thus, there was certainly no disagreement about the major achievement of the Russian Revolution — the destruction of bourgeois production relations. But the minute Bukharin tried to make an abstraction of that, tried to subsume production relations under "technical relations," it became obvious to Lenin that Bukharin simply failed to understand the dialectic. Thus, when he quoted Bukharin's Economics of the Transition Period to the effect that, "Once the destruction of capitalist production relations is really given, and once the theoretic impossibility of their restoration is proven," Lenin hit back with: "Impossibility" is demonstrable only practically. The author does not pose dialectically the relationship of theory to practice."

The most difficult relationship to work out when one has state power is precisely the relationship of theory to practice for it is not only on the National Question but especially in relationship to the working masses that a gulf does open between Bolsheviks in power and the working people. And the party would surely degenerate — "To think that we shall not be thrown back is utopian." What Lenin feared most was the sudden "passion for bossing" taking command. Unless they practice the new concrete universal "to a man," they will be doomed:

"Every citizen to a man must act as a judge and participate in the government of the country. And what is important to us is to enlist all the toilers to a man in the government of the state. That is a tremendously difficult task. But socialism cannot be introduced by a minority, a party." (29)

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(29) Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. VIII, p. 520.

This study of Lenin's philosophic heritage is not the place to analyze the actual objective transformation of the workers' state into its opposite, a state-capitalist society, (30) much less Stalin's usurpation of power. Of all of Stalin's "theoretic" revisions, what is relevant to our subject is Stalin's perverse concept of partiinost (Partyness) in philosophy, which he and his heirs attribute to Lenin. Fortunately, there exists a most comprehensive and scholarly work on the relationship of Soviet philosophy to science which explodes the Communist and the Western ideologist myth of "Partyness in philosophy" in Lenin: (31)

"In order to achieve this interpretation one must also disregard the fact that the original sources, including Materialism and Empirio-Criticism itself, never suggest what [Bertram] Wolfe and the Soviet scholars attribute to Lenin. The sources show that he had a political aim in writing this book, but it was not to join the philosophical and political issues that Russian Marxists were arguing about; it was to separate them."

There is not a whiff of "Partyness" in the Philosophic Notebooks—not even the old concept of "the party of idealism," or "party of materialism," enters anywhere. What we are concerned with is not the monstrous myth of "Partyness" in philosophy. What we are concerned with is the duality of the philosophic heritage. Far from Lenin publicly proclaiming his philosophic repudiation of Plekhanov, or his break with his own philosophic past, Lenin advised Soviet youth to study "everything Plekhanov wrote on Philosophy...", and he reprinted his own Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. We need not go in for the simplistic explanation for these actions that one ex-Old Bolshevik offered when he wrote: (32) "And yet Lenin did not have the courage to say openly that he had thrown out, as useless, some very substantial parts of his philosophy of 1908." The reason for the "privacy" of his Philosophic Notebooks is both simpler and

(30) I devoted a good part of Marxism and Freedom to the study of Russian state-capitalism.

(31) Soviet Marxism and Natural Science, 1917-1932, by David Joravsky, p.34. The two sections most relevant to our study are "Lenin and the Partyness of Philosophy" (pp.24-44), and "The Cultural Revolution and Marxist Philosophers" (pp.76-89).

(32) Encounters with Lenin, by Nikolay Valentinov, p.256.

more complicated and neither has anything to do with an alleged lack of courage. The tragedy lies elsewhere, deep in the recesses of time, revolution -- and counter-revolution. Too short were the years between 1914 and 1917, and between 1917 and 1923. Too great the November Revolution in Russia, and too many the beheaded and missed revolutions elsewhere--and too overwhelming the concrete problems of this great historical event, objective and subjective, including what Lenin called cultural backwardness. The pull therefore was for "stage-acting" when to study what --first one reads Plekhanov, then Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, then... Lenin himself continued his Hegelian readings even at the height of the famine. (53) Lenin was so moved by one book on Hegel by Ilyin that, though the author was both religious and an enemy of the Soviet state, Lenin intervened to get him out of jail.

The duality in Lenin's philosophical heritage is unmistakable. But how can that excuse the failure to grapple with the Philosophic Notebooks on the ground that they are mere "jottings," "had never been intended for publication" and "therefore" it would be no more than "idle speculation" to conclude that Lenin wished to follow one road rather than another? In any case, no one can explain away the clear public tasks he set for the editors of the newly-established philosophic organ, Fed Znachenem Marxizma (Under the Banner of Marxism), to work out a "solid philosophic ground", which he spelled out as:

(53) The Lenin Institute has records for the year 1920, when Lenin asked for the Russian translations of Hegel's Science of Logic and Phenomenology of Mind as well as works by Labriola and Ilyin's The Philosophy of Hegel as a Doctrine of the Concreteness of God and Man. Deborin, in his introduction to the Notebooks when they were finally published in 1929 (Leninski Sbornik, IX), and Aderatsky in his preface to the 1933 edition (Leninski Sbornik, XII) refer to the Lenin Institute records and then, without telling anything about the intrigues in the delay in publication, proceed with platitudinous praise leading to nothing concrete: they are of "great significance," "interesting," contain "leading indications regarding the direction in which further materialist dialectic should be worked out."

In this respect Ilyin's works are more revealing because you feel why his analysis of the concrete so influenced Lenin: "The first and fundamental thing that one who wishes adequately to understand and master the philosophic teaching of Hegel must do is to explain to one's self his relation to the concrete empiric world...the term, 'concrete', comes from the Latin 'concrecere'. 'Concrecere' means 'to grow'; 'concrecere'--coalesce, to arise through growth. Accordingly, to Hegel's 'concrete' means first of all the growing together...The concrete empiric is something in the order of being (Sein), something real (Realitat), actuality (Wirklichkeit), something existing (Existenz), something Dasein. In its totality, this reality forms a world, a whole world of things (Dinge, Sachen), existences (Existenzen), realities--the 'objective' world, a realm of 'objectivity.' This real, objective world is also the concrete world, but only the empiric-concrete."

(1) "the systematic study of Hegelian dialectics from a materialist standpoint, i.e., the dialectics which Marx applied practically in his Capital and in his historical and political works" (34)

(2) "Taking as our basis Marx's method of applying the Hegelian dialectics materialistically conceived, we can and should treat his dialectics from all sides, print excerpts from Hegel's principal works..." (35)

(3) "The group of editors and contributors of the magazine Under the Banner of Marxism should, in my opinion, be a kind of 'Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics.'" (36)

This was the year 1922, the year of his most intense intellectual activity, which stretched into the first months of 1923 and the last of his great battles against the top leadership. Most of all it was against Stalin whom, too late, he will ask to be removed. Most of all it was against Stalin's brutal, rude and disloyal acts, mainly against the Georgians, that is to say, once again on the National Question--"Scratch a Communist and you will find a Great Russian Chauvinist." Not accidentally Bukharin held the same position on the National Question.

As Lenin lay writhing in agony--not just physical agony, but agony over the early bureaucratization of the workers' state and its tendency "to move backwards to capitalism"--Lenin took the measure of his co-leaders in his Will. (37)

For our purpose what he says of Bukharin is what is most relevant:

"Bukharin is not only the most valuable and biggest theoretician of the party, but also may legitimately be considered the favorite of the whole party; but his theoretical views can only with the very greatest doubt be regarded as fully Marxian, for there is something scholastic in him. (He never has learned, and I think never fully understood the dialectic.)"

(34) Lenin, Selected Works, Vol. XI, p. 77.

(35) Consider the fatuous, greatly over-rated young French Communist philosopher, Louis Althusser, in our epoch proclaiming, "One phantom is more especially crucial than any other today: the shade of Hegel. To drive this phantom back into the night..." And read especially how studiously he writes of Lenin as if he never had written anything beyond Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. (Lenin and Philosophy) See Part II, "Alternatives," where I develop the consequences of not building on the foundations left by Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks.

(36) Selected Works, Vol. XI, p. 78.

(37) Since Khrushchev's Destalinization speech in 1956, Lenin's Will has finally been published in Russia and appears also in the latest edition (5th) of his Collected Works. However, I've the text which was first published by Trotsky, and I am therefore quoting from The Suppressed Testament of Lenin (1935).



Clearly, "understanding the dialectic" had become the pons asini for Lenin. Clearly, it was not an abstraction when used to describe the chief theoretician of the party. Clearly, "not understanding the dialectic" had become crucial. The head of the first workers' state in history, witnessing the emergence of bureaucratization and national chauvinism; of both Bolshevism and non-Bolshevism being so permeated with an administrative mentality as to call for the stratification of the trade unions, and the chief theoretician's views being non-dialectic and therefore not "fully Marxian"--all these traits of most unequal measure got jammed up because, in their totality, they all tended to stifle rather than release the creative powers of the masses. Nothing short of sensing this danger would have prompted Lenin to take such sharp measure of those who led the greatest proletarian revolution in history.

It is the nature of truth, said Hegel, to force its way up when its "time has come." He should have added, even if only in a murky form. But then he couldn't have known how much a state-capitalist age can excrete to make it impossible to see the truth even when it surfaces. No conspiracy was needed between "East" and "West" to keep Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks out of the reach of the masses --and then work to make it "beyond" their understanding. It is in the nature of the administrative mentality of our state-capitalist, automated age to consider Hegelian philosophy, at one and the same time, the private preserve of those "in the know" and to let it remain "gibberish" to the uninitiated. And, although in the "East" they bow before the founder of their state, and, in the "West" sneer at Lenin's non-professional status as philosopher, both poles find it convenient to keep apart what history had joined together--Hegel and Marx, Hegel and Lenin. In this 200th anniversary year of Hegel, and 100th anniversary year of Lenin, it is high time to begin listening both to the voices from below who are finding out the truth for themselves by attempting to practice the dialectics both of thought and of revolution.

Detroit, Michigan  
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--Sava Dunayevskaya

13229