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SOME NOTES FOR SATURDAY'S PRESENTATION TO THE REB

First, why the reference to the '53 letters on the Absolute Idea. The important thing to us has always been the "why", and I for one am not satisfied if I cannot figure out why a group that was one with us for so many years abandoned Marxism. I do not mean that it is a surprise, or rather I mean it is a surprise but it has happened often enough in history so that it is certainly not unprecedented, but I mean what objective reasons before the betrayal kept the group from making the philosophic break-through, especially where you consider how near to the break-through the group as a whole had been.

The reason for the failure to break-through is rooted in the objective situation, which before June 17, 1953 had not emphasized itself in a precise subjective form. To us, our object was negative - counter-revolutionary Stalinism. That was the enemy and remains the enemy. The point however, what is its opposite? All we could say before '53 was the worker would find their own form of revolt, and therefore the opposite to Stalinism was merely workers' revolt in the specific form of either workers' councils that had appeared in Hungary in 1956 or the philosophy of humanism.

Nonetheless, that was what was "in the air" in '53 on the eve of the June 17th revolt, and it is this which I caught in the May 12th and May 20th letters on the Absolute Idea. The proof (not proof in the sense of empirical proof, but proof in the historic sense of their being no accidents in history) is in the fact that the paragraph with which I began the discussion in the "Philosophy of Mind" was the one that directly followed the break in the manuscript of Marx' Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic. That Marx could stop there in 1844 and I could, without being at all aware of the coincidence until afterwards, begin in 1953 from the same place, as if stage-directed, shows the historic roots and limitations, as well as a leap forward at a time when the masses themselves are preparing in fact such a break-through.

Now if this explains why the Johnsonites couldn't break through before '53, it also explains that they must have indeed gone far away from the class path once the break-through was possible for them not to have taken it. At the same time, we must see why that first statement in '53 is too general for what is needed in '61. There was between '53 and '61 Marxism and Freedom, of course, but the philosophic chapters had to be muted, and now they must be expanded because the second book demands it. I will return to this point after I follow through as to the series of letters that we are dealing with today.

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The letter to Louis on October 12, 1960 presents an aspect that we had not heretofore considered at all, and that is Science. I do not know that we will be able to develop such a chapter yet - it depends on whether we have a scientist who is also a Marxist-Humanist - but I do know that the whole "leap forward" on the part of Russian scientists, and therefore also Russian production after World War II, is intimately related to the fact that they had to rid themselves of their vulgar materialism in order to deal with science in a truly dialectical fashion. What had kept them on the other side of Marxism was the fact that breaking with vulgar materialism would have meant Humanism, and that they certainly were not going to do. Consequently, until they are able to put one more division into dialectics, dividing the world of science from the world of human-beings, they couldn't get the theory of relativity. But what they accomplished with a new division will only prove in the end the end of state capitalism.

(a) The second letter on October 16th was to Marcuse, and that one pin-pointed what is new for us in the present approach to the Absolute Idea, the paragraph on Subjectivity. That is what also separates us from Lenin, who thought that the unity of "theory and practice" for Hegel relates only to the theory of knowledge itself. In this letter I stressed that the "African personality" also stops at the very beginning of the Absolute Idea. The whole division between the first and second negation is what we must break down. H.M. sees that in relationship to the natural sciences, but not in relationship to the "subject" - at least not insofar the subject is a live and kicking worker. That is how he wants to find the answer in technology, instead of technology at a point when .....

(b) On October 17th, I wrote to Saul and tried to draw the political conclusions from the so-called scientific letters. The essence is what I called discontinuous development, the background for which was the 1940-50 combination of science and the military and its production concomitant in 1950-60. The summations of Phenomenology and the Science is not so much for immediate use as constantly pin-pointing what is new - that is to say, what becomes urgent in a specific historic period. That is why the letter from Marcuse on December 22, 1960 is so very important. As an opponent, he immediately got the point of division, the new, the inescapable, the absolute, which is not really absolute in any metaphysical sense, but on the contrary absolute in the actual sense of having something concrete become absolute for our age, our times, our geographic framework - in a word on this earth and this hour, and it is the philosopher not wanting to make it concrete who like any politician knows that the best defense is an offense and who says "Why bother with the Absolute Idea when you translate it in the political terms?" Why indeed? Because without it, it would appear that there were only two different viewpoints equally valid, whereas, in fact, there are not two points of view equally valid, but only one point of view which is applicable and on the same path as the mass movement itself and the other one a derivation from it. Everything will be concentrated in this single word I referred to before as "when."

You can't  
 do this  
 except by reading  
 Ideas as far as  
 realized of human  
 essence

First and foremost, when Hegel reaches the Absolute, he does not, ~~do so~~  
 not, and the negativity inherent in everything, including the absolute.  
 That is why we meet the negativity here first as the highest opposition within  
 itself -- in Personality, in Life, in Idea subjectively and objectively. In  
 a word, everything is subject to method -- i.e. the form of the Absolute Idea,  
 i.e. the new stage of identity of theory and practice; not previous, lower,  
 or other forms of cognition, but the Absolute Idea itself, so that the dialectical  
 moment is that it is "its own other"

To be "its own other" means that the plunge into freedom occurs from a new  
 beginning after one seems to have reached the highest point, which is just a  
 dead-end. Thus, when the universal and the individual, under capitalism, has  
 reached its highest, whether that be centralization of capital, or something  
 like causality, or imperialism, you get down to self-determination of  
 nations, lower and deeper strata of the population, self-relation in the sense  
 of one man like Lenin to the whole of Marxist philosophy at the point when all  
 seems to have been lost, and finally in our own period the new that arose when  
 the Afro-Asian Revolutions burst forth on the historic stage, just when it would  
 have appeared nothing came out of World War II.

What happened when technology in the form of H-bombs and ICBA's reached nothing  
 but the total capacity of mutual self-destruction? Isn't it true that the sloth  
 in ideas on both sides -- Stalinism or McCarthyism -- appeared on both world  
 powers and yet the new stimulus came not at all from a technologically advanced  
 country, but from the poorest of the poor. Hasn't that always  
 been true? 1917-1923, 1925-7, 1937, 1943, 1953.

Isn't it also true that philosophy itself, its highest point, came at a time  
 when Germany was the most backward of West European nations? If, as Marx stated,  
 it is the very backwardness of Germany which, not absorbing its minds in indus-  
 trial production, gave them free elbow room to think through to the end, then  
 wouldn't that account for the fact that thought is so much nearer to life than  
 any of us suppose? But life at a very specific and pivotal period? Thus, Hegel  
 working in backward Germany, but at a time when in Western Europe we had reached,  
 in fact already passed through, the French Revolution

Hegel  
 forms  
 dialectic

IV  
 Hegel  
 dialectic

III  
 Hegel  
 dialectic

I  
 Hegel  
 dialectic

II  
 Hegel  
 dialectic

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MINUTES OF REB MEETING FEBRUARY 4, 1961

Present - all.

- AGENDA: I. Minutes.  
II. The Paper.  
III. Half-hour intermission.  
IV. Discussion on philosophic letters.  
V. C/W.

- I. Minutes read and filed.
- II. Saul read the Lead in draft form. There was general discussion relating especially to the form and space to be given to education and segregation in the South, mass demonstration to celebrate the first-anniversary of the sit-down, the action of the few whites who did brave Southern segregationists and the world contact, especially the African World, in which the self-activity of the Negroes in America is taking place. Saul is to complete the Lead and hand it on Monday. C.D. made the report for the sub-committee going through the paper page-by-page. Because of the wish to reprint an old rather lengthy article on "Negro Intellectuals in a Dilemma" in order to show that we are no recent adherents to the Negro movement, but as Marxist-Humanists, have been in advance of all other tendencies in our analysis which, in this case, stands up after fourteen years, we will be very short of space for the regular articles. C.D. felt that probably M.D.'s column and the one on Negro History Week by Ed since the latter was on the same subject as both the Lead and the big article would have to be held over for another issue. The REB approved this action, and felt that the issue would be a significant one and should be widely distributed and sold.
- I. The meeting had convened at two and now it was three-thirty and, therefore, there was an intermission for coffee, to separate the business from the discussion.

- Rae made the presentation which she called "Why Study Hegelian Philosophy, or the Urgency of Marxist-Humanism for the 1960's". Because the discussion was taped for the NEB, and it is in general not easy to summarize such, only the presentation and summation will be made here for the record.

Rae said that she was very happy to announce that she has finally gotten a letter from one REB member -- Olga -- on all the letters and summations of books that she has been writing since October, and since Olga expresses it much more simply, she wishes to quote some parts here (Olga's letter will be answered in detail): "I think my first trouble was simply not understanding the Hegelian word and getting it confused with the psychologist's terms. In other words, when Hegel speaks of subjectivity, he means as related to his "Subject". To me this is objective subjectivity. Subjectivity meaning human beings actively doing something. The subjectivity which we think of as "bad" is the individual who begins with himself and determines everything else from that narrow vantage point. The subjectivity

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which is the "objective" kind (to me) is the human being beginning with the world and finding his unique and precious relationship both to it and to himself from that both broad and deep vantage point."

"I suddenly see that this new book is a "recruiting" weapon in a way. I did NOT see M & F. What I mean is this: the whole emphasis on "subjectivity" to me places an equal emphasis on the importance of the responsibility of each individual in the world to take his stand, to fill his own shoes, etc. To me that put it more sharply than ever before. Certainly more sharply than in M & F where the theoretician was challenged to meet in theory the practice and movement to theory on the part of the "freedom fighters" everywhere. I rather feel that the new book will spell out that "challenge" much more concretely to the intellectuals. Even much more organizationally."

I like Olga's use of the word "recruiter" for a theoretical book, because it shows that before ever it is written, much less published, we must recruit to the organization on such solid foundations. Hence, the Lecture Series; hence the Letters and Summations; hence, the need for a person in the office (Johnny will be ready to start February 27th) so that all concentration could begin this way, that is to say, where there is no division between organization of thought and organization of people who think such ideas.

A distinction was made between the period 1947-53, and 1953-55 in order to show that until a new activity on the part of great masses of people -- 1950 against automation and 1953, the East German revolt against Russian totalitarianism -- is either undertaken or at least "in the air", it is impossible to take a forward leap in cognition by theoreticians. The first letter on the Absolute Idea preceded the actual revolt by six weeks.

The greatness and dialectic of timing -- the WHEN in Hegelian philosophy and that in Marxist-Humanism in life can be seen by putting to one side the categories of Hegel's Logic when seen from the viewpoint of its movement; and on the other hand mass movements. Thus, Hegel's Logic, the categories in each section -- Being, Essence, Notion -- do not exhaust the movement through reaching an Absolute, but on the contrary, at the end of each section a new beginning is first discovered and, therefore, the categories change. To make it easier for us as politicians, to understand what is meant by not going to an Absolute, but starting afresh; let's think of the highest point of capitalist development -- state monopoly -- and then realize that when the workers achieve their revolution, it is not just a matter of "taking over" the absolutes of centralization of capital and state power, but on the contrary, smashing that and starting on the new basis of the self-activity of the masses. Or consider the dialectic of self-determination of nations just WHEN there seems to be the highest point of "internationalism", that is to say imperialism on the part of capitalism. The whole movement in Notion through Universal, Particular, Individual, is to stress that development in our era is not only through contradiction, but through the specific contradiction of the Universal of a new society through the Particular,

to the Individual, the Individual in the sense that Marx insisted was the only proof of freedom so that never again should society and the individual be opposites for "the individual is the social entity".

The reason that Hegelianism, despite its reactionary political conclusions, can be so revolutionary in its method, and historical movement, is that Hegel considered philosophy to be the "consciousness of freedom". Consciousness of freedom, moreover, which requires political freedom, for you could not have free thought where you did not have free institutions. It is too bad that his conception, his correct conception, that the philosophy is the thought ~~of its time~~ applied also to his own philosophy which found its limitations, politically and, therefore, philosophically in his non-recognition of the proletariat as the "Absolute Negativity", which would be the forward movement of history itself.

The question of timing, in the Marxist sense, depends heavily on this dialectic WHEN, which cannot be predicted in advance. For example, when the slave revolts in the South met up with the industrial North, we had the Civil War; on the other hand, the when in Guinea in 1959 was when their human revolt broke from industrial France. Or to get back to the past, the French Revolution, the Enrages in it, were much "lower-level" than the British proletariat of the moment where the industrial revolution had already taken hold, but it was the French who achieved the highest development. Indeed, it always seems that the lowest, the most backward, the deepest layer are the most revolutionary, and yet that that revolution cannot be successful except where it has also a material foundation for the new society, even if only that is only the world's state of technology.

Rae then dealt with the actual letters, the one to Louis on Science, the one to Marcuse on Philosophy, to Saul on some of the Political Problems, and finally to the Congo in the context of the fight between Russia and America presently. The essence and notion of the new book was contrasted to M/F because in the present case we would not be unfolding only a banner, but a world organization.

The central point raised by C.D. as to: (1) the dialectic of thought; the dialectic of practice; and dialectic of organization should be listened to directly from the tape and will become, of course, the preoccupation for the next period.

GOOD AND WELFARE: All organizational problems were left for the next meeting, which must also concern itself with the REB as it will function after the Class is over, within two weeks, and Rae departs for the tour.