

No. 16, 1964

Dear Peter:

I'm ever so grateful to you for your letter of the 12th, and more for your comments than for the translation from the Grundrisse, because it gives me a view not alone of your thoughts, which are important enough, but of the whole milieu of German Marxism. I do not begrudge Rosa Luxemburg her greatness as a revolutionary, and the originality of many elements of her thought. But you cannot be serious if you think Hegel meant little to her. She may not have liked him as well as the others who were full of praise of him, but did nothing serious, with the source of all theory: the proletariat. But one letter, among others, stands out in my mind because at that time—many, many years ago—I still had not rejected Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-criticism, and here she was writing to Louise Kautsky about the manuscript which evidently had just been received, to the effect that it is real sophomoric stuff, but since, no doubt, Lenin meant well, it is best not to insult him. I wish she had taken him seriously enough to write the most damning criticism. Then we really would have something to go on philosophically.

And it surely isn't true that Lassalle "knew" Hegel as well as Marx; he knew the terminology, that is all. Marx said it perfectly when he said he was trying "to apply" Hegel like a schoolboy, and, in the process, had chosen a bourgeois, instead of a proletarian hero, to dramatize. One cannot "apply" Hegel; one must recreate him on materialist, humanist materialistic basis à la Marx.

My "obsession" with Hegel reappears at each critical turning point in history when the concrete descriptions of Marx on capitalism have exhausted themselves—like the descriptions merely of concentration and centralization of capital had exhausted itself at the time of the appearance of imperialism and collapse of Second, which sent Lenin to Hegel. This time it isn't merely Marcuse that is befuddled by Automation; and the mere restatement of Marx on the declining rate of profit cannot stop everyone from Communists who pervert to the scholars who cannot grasp, to be "taken in" by the fact that machines, instead of men, are still the producers of value and surplus value. In the case of Lenin, what helped him restate both his problems was the "little" Hegelian law of transformation into opposite, unity of opposites, identity of opposites because it meant he could deal both with capital and labor, aristocracy of labor. In our age it is the unity of theory and practice, or the new "Subject's" relationship to objectivity, or the second negation—the whole Doctrine of the Notion as the realm of theory. Spinoza cannot help here, because he lived at a different age than Hegel who had the fortune of living in the period of the French Revolution and Napoleon, and therefore his thought included those absolutes: revolution and counter-revolution. I'll convince you one day as I approach greater clarification in the writing of the new book.

Marcuse understands nothing of economics—or the proletariat. But he is excellent in portraying the whole of the contradiction of the intellectual "wanting" revolution, but being an ivory tower so isolated from the factory that he goes for "language", including that of so-called "Soviet Marxism." The parts from the Grundrisse that he quoted was to show that Automation is not doing everything now, is not abolishing value production that is, because, under capitalism, it can only be "partial, arrested." (His emphasis) If he had confidence in the proletariat and none other abolishing value production, he wouldn't constantly have to run to the Grundrisse instead of CAPITAL which is all too clear on Working Day, on "negation of negation" as proletariat negating, on fetishism of commodities never having been fully seen even by Marx until after the Commune revealing the form, not only the fetishistic form of commodities hiding dead labor's domination of living labor, but and the free, spontaneous, form of the Paris Commune deciding everything for itself. More of that when I see you next.

Sorry I disturbed so, but thank you very, very much.

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Yours