

Transcript: 'Philosophic Conference on New Book [Philosophy and Revolution]'
Raya Dunayevskaya Detroit: March 19, 1967
Introduction to Lecture (14 minutes)

All of this is very experimental not only because it is a conference of philosophy in general with non-philosophers -- in fact, I think it's the only way to have one -- but also because we are trying to do a great many new things. First, I simply want to introduce the three historic periods that we will cover so you will see how much distance you have to do in one [?]

You see in front of you on this board, it says "Hegel, French Revolution, 1789-1830" (he [Hegel] happened to have died), but the French Revolution was 1789-1792. Strictly speaking, it's only those. But so far as Marx was concerned, he didn't consider that the counter-revolution won until 1830, and even the next decade it was [?]

We are beginning in the French Revolution, and the greatest philosopher was not French, but German -- Hegel. And the big "U", "P", and "I" stand for U, Universal; P, Particular; I, Individual. That happens to be his three main categories. Everything great and big in what we are going to consider later on will revolve always.

For example, you take a Universal in any society in which you live -- capitalism. Then the Particular -- in the United States, capitalism would be private enterprise. The Individual would be the one that is going to overthrow that. In other words, when there is a contradiction -- and there is always a contradiction -- between what the Universal is, and what the Individual is, all your contradictions, all your class struggles, will take part under the "P".

In any case, he [Hegel] didn't talk about class struggles, and we for our purposes [?] the Universal as socialism; Particular as a specific type of socialism that came to be in the Soviet Union, state property; and Individual, that which they couldn't establish though they wanted to, that every one "to a man", the Individual, would be able to run the state and production. That is our U-P-I. The abstraction of socialism, the generalization; the particular form in

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which it came to live in the Soviet Union, state property; the individual, which means the concrete, which never was realized, but which we want to realize in our time. (We'll go through it a lot more. I'm just setting our historic periods.)

Chronologically, therefore, we should start with Hegel and the French Revolution. But precisely because we know more of Marx than we know of Hegel --we're proletarians, and you're not going to start with Hegel ... Marx has three different types of revolution. You have the 1848 Revolutions in Europe which for the first time said, I'm not going to make this revolution only for the capitalist state and bourgeois democracy, I'd like to get something for myself as a worker. The first proletarian revolutions are in 1848. That's the one Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto for.

Then he lived through the Civil War in the United States, and under its impact, he wrote both Capital, 1867 -- this is the 100th anniversary of Capital that we're celebrating this year, 1967 -- and established the First International. The greatest part of his life was the Paris Commune, those two months in which you had a workers' state -- not just a workers' revolution that failed, but the actual establishment of a workers' state that maintained itself for two months.

Then we have Lenin. You see it's a very big drop from Marx to Lenin, 1871 to 1914. The reason is, we're not considering the Second International except to yell at it ... That is more our period, World War I and the Russian Revolution. He [Lenin] died in 1924 ... These are the three names around which this conference is going to take place: Hegel, Marx, Lenin. The French Revolution; the European Revolutions and the American Civil War; and World War I and the Russian Revolution.

Most of us are acquainted with works by Marx and Lenin. But though we've heard a lot about Hegel, we haven't really looked at *what* his works were like, and even though that will be the second thing I want to do, I want you to see that this is what we're considering today ... Phenomenology of Mind, Science of Logic, and the Encyclopedia of

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Philosophical Sciences. This is Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks [and this is Marx's (?)] ... These are the four most difficult books in the whole history of philosophy since it started 500 B.C. until 1967 ...

Even though we are starting with Marx instead of starting with Hegel, so far as the introductions are concerned, I'm taking all three introductions: the introduction to the Marx [chapter?], the introduction to the Lenin [chapter?], and the introduction to the Hegel [chapter?]. Right now we're going to consider them. But I want to stress how new this particular conference is, even in relation to Marxism and Freedom.

We're the only people in the world that believe that a book is not written by an individual, even though he does the writing, but by a collective, in our case News and Letters Committees and their friends. But for Marxism and Freedom, even though we were new and we were the only ones that did it, of necessity philosophy was a small part of the book. The main book was Marx. Consequently, even in relationship to us, it wasn't that kind of a break as it is now.

I'd like to give you one little definition of philosophy, of thinking, and show you why it is that we consider it so important to begin with workers instead of with professional philosophers. Thinking, according to Hegel, "a thinking view of things" is philosophy ... and thinking is what he called "a simple mediating activity."

Everybody knows a mediator, or at least in the sense of somebody trying to make you [?] ,as somebody who is outside of yourself, and is trying to mediate two opposing forces. But to Hegel, mediation and mediating is absolutely the most important philosophic activity, because you force your mind to do the mediation between yourself -- your awareness, your consciousness -- and the world. There's all this big world, and there's poor little you facing all this big world, with all its contradictions and all its complexity, and how are you going to make it part of yourself? Hegel says through the mediating activity which

is thinking. You will think about the world in such a manner -- of its past, its present, its development -- that it becomes part of your own development.

The worker, who is placed at the point of production, does more thinking than anybody on earth, and he does it in a concrete way. He has the whole world as his opponent right there in the process. But the last thing anybody recognizes is that this man thinks. All they think about him is that he pushes buttons and produces their wealth, and he better push more buttons and produce more surplus value for them.

The simple mediating activity that the worker does by just being near this machine and having it, and considering it his enemy, is the one that is the most important as the response to whether this world will be, number one, an enemy like the Existentialists think of enemy -- and they think that any other person is an enemy ... -- or the enemy is the capitalist class, the one who really does the oppression, which makes you a Marxist.

The manner in which, therefore, you will consider that you get rid of this enemy, through revolution and through thinking -- not that the thinking will get rid of the enemy, but there cannot be a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory. So the thinking is necessary in order to settle down to how we will get rid of the enemy, and what you will do in the next [step?]. You have an overall view -- that is why you need philosophy.

When we are trying to say the capitalists are wrong in saying the workers don't think -- [you do think and I want to know?] -- it is not only that we are forcing you to do something that you actually want to do but you simply aren't used to it ... but that we don't consider this of great importance. On the contrary. We consider this a creative evocation of your actual talents, the creative bringing out of what your talents are. And without them we cannot write the book on

philosophy and revolution.

When we started News & Letters, for example, we said every worker can be a writer. All we have to do is to give him confidence that when he talks, he writes. It's the same [?] He just has to realize that. And if he's afraid of his spelling, we will write down what he says. But nobody can do his thinking, or substitute their experience for the worker's experience.

Now we have reached the stage where just as we say, if you can talk you can write, that every worker can be a writer, we say if you can think, and everyone thinks, then you are a philosopher. That is the stage that we have to go through in writing this book. Just as we made each worker a writer and an editor, now each worker has to become a philosopher, and see that nobody else does his thinking for him, and does his [setting up?] as to how he will get rid of his enemy.

(What follows is on Heine and the revolution beheading its philosophers; then Raya commences into the historic periods.)