

December 8, 1969

Dear Nick,

No doubt, you have by now received the photo offset of the sections of the Grundrisse that I sent you, along with the translation done in New York (sent them registered). I think that it will help place the two sections in the proper frame-work if I tell you not only something more about the Grundrisse, but also how those particular sections have been used (I should really say abused) in recent years.

The Grundrisse, as you no doubt know, is the original draft of what became, after a further decade of work, Capital. If you take time out to read the chapter on the Structure of Capital in Marxism and Freedom, you will recognize that, to me, the critical part concerned what is theory, and the new, the unique answer by Marx. (By "answer", I do not mean that he asked the question formally and answered it formally.) The answer consisted of the whole of the structure of Capital which showed how great and pivotal history, actual live history of the class struggle, specifically the one for the shortening of the working day, and the actual history of the two most important events in that decade -- the Civil War in the United States and the Paris Commune. For that end, I showed the pagination of the original draft and the pagination of Capital, which revealed that the first had no section on the working day, while the second had something like eighty pages devoted to this subject; and that all of what became later Volume IV., or Theories of Surplus Value was removed from Part I. all the way to the end of the three volumes of Capital.

In a word, I was concerned with what we can learn from Marxist Methodology and his transformation of theory from a dispute between intellectuals to a ~~thin~~ history of production-relations themselves, that history being the actual transformation of society by the working class.

This was not the concern of the intellectuals, whether they called themselves Marxists or otherwise, in the 1950's when they "suddenly" discovered the Grundrisse. In 1953, when the Grundrisse were published in East Germany, two factors predominated. One was Mao and the fact that the Chinese Revolution had succeeded. There was definitely one theoretical aspect of Marx which China, ever since the Communist Party there was born in 1921, was superior to all of the Western analysts, again including Marxists, who had nevertheless been deaf and that was Marx' revolutionary view of the Orient as against the popular concept of Marx which referred to the Orient as "despotic". And that is that China discovered the articles written for the Tribune in New York by Marx, which took up the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion and sided with the Chinese as against Western Imperialism. The Russians, on the contrary, had been referring to Oriental Despotism and now that Mao had won, they had to change the superficial popularization which led to the "discovery", not only of the articles, but of the section in the Grundrisse which led to the publication of this section, under the title Pre-Capitalist Formation. As for

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the Western Analysts, who are not Marxists. Oriental Despotism by Wittfogel is all they ever knew and all they are still interested in. In any case, that section of the Grundrisse which became the basis for lengthy and not very fundamental discussions among Communists did not reach the English speaking world until 1964 when Hobsbawm published them with a fantastic introduction, which tried to play them down.

The 2nd section of ~~Capital~~ Grundrisse that became relevant to the current debates is the one dealing with machines. Herbert Marcuse has misused that section, or more precisely a single paragraph of that section to try to make it appear as foundation for his ridiculous theory of the one-dimensional Man. It has never been translated into English. Or, rather I should say that, outside of the paragraph, a few pages were translated into English, if you go into student publications and reach a magazine called Sublation in Leicester University. So proud were they of the translation of pages 582-594 that they made a world copyright of it. Yet I noticed (when it was finally republished with an exaggerated-in-importance introduction by Martin Nicolaus in the New Left Review #48, London, March-April 1968) that even such simple but very important words, like surplus in surplus-labor, is translated as "superfluous", which I hardly need express is totally wrong. In any case, I did feel it would be important for you to ~~remember~~ see different kinds of translation, at least in key paragraphs when these overlap the pages that we are translating. I, thus, enclose two pages, and, of course, you have the full translation and there, too, I called attention to some phrases which may be correct insofar as English translation for specific German words, but are not the ones that have become "standard".

Now I want to answer, briefly, the question you raised in your first letter on Czechoslovakia. I don't doubt that there were old-fashioned West German Capitalists, merchants trying to move into Czechoslovakia with their wares. And, of course, as you saw from the Czechoslovak pamphlet, the genuine revolutionary Left in Czechoslovakia had no use for Dubcek, except recognizing that he had let loose forces that he certainly couldn't control, and, therefore, taking advantage of his popularity and of the actual freedoms he had allowed for free expression. In all cases of such varied tendencies, the point is to recognize which is the dominant one, and where it is headed for. There is no doubt whatever, and I am sure you agree with us, that the West German merchants was not the dominant one, that the Russian Communists, who very deliberately misrepresented it as such, are the very ones who are now all too anxiously establishing new relations, capitalist relations with this same West Germany. I doubt anybody fools themselves on the question and gives the ground for this fact that Willy Brandt is the new Premier. Russia is in such total crisis that they have been dying to establish relations with West Germany. Not enough ground was set for such a reversal when Khrushchev first proposed it and had his head cut off for it. Then Eastern Europe tried it and had their heads cut off for it. But, now Brezhnev has decided he's had all he can stand for Ulbricht's "dogmatism" and has put him in his place."

Yours,



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