

Jan.15,1971

Dear Hill, Mike and Bonnie!

Though the Jan.4th letter was from Will alone, and he specified that the discussion between you three didn't always reflect the views of all but only of himself, I feel that I should address it not only to the discussants, but, perhaps, even send it to others since the questions raised reflect matters that evidently do concern all who are grappling with Philosophy and Revolution.

First, let us take up the question of language. None is more important than subject, whether we mean by that the Movement, or a specific group like NAL, whether we mean the workers or a single revolutionary; whether we mean WL, Blacks, Indians, "organization", it is clear that "Subject" is the one that is responsible for both theory and practice. Therefore, we must not say "subject must unite with its theory"; it is the subject who unites, or fails to unite, theory and practice. In a word, the proposition, "with", is wrong.

Perhaps part of the looseness of expression is due to my stressing how crucial theory is, that, as you put it, quoting me, "Philosophy is itself revolutionary." Yes, because the whole point of philosophy, of dialectics, both its point of departure and point of return, is Freedom. The trouble with philosophers, whether they were only thinking of Utopia, the Future, or of Thought as their special province, is that they limited the concept of freedom. That is why Marx says (it is the very first quotation one meets even before he turns to a single page of text in MAF) is that "Freedom is so much the essence of man that even its opponents realize it...No man fights freedom; he fights at most the freedom of others." O.k., Marx "took advantage" of this nature of man, and therefore his thought, the striving for freedom, and said of Hegel's dialectics, the greatest philosophy produced by bourgeois philosophy, that what we must do is "realize it" for by realizing this talk and thought of freedom, we will have it, be whole man. But, under no circumstances, does "philosophy is itself revolutionary" mean it will realize itself. Only living men and women can do that. In a word, it is no substitute for "Subject" any more than history is a substitute for history, too, means masses making it.

Now then, for us, for 1971, the great breakthrough came back in 1953 when we discovered in the Absolute Idea, a movement from practice not only to revolution, but to theory, to philosophy of liberation. I find that the Existentialists, on their part, and the Maoists, on theirs, never stop talking about being, existence, doing, practice, but the very last word they understand is Practice, for they are under the delusion that when they practice theory, that is practice, that is activity, that is when they "bring" it to the masses, and all the masses have to do is be smart enough to see it and accept it, then all will be heaven on earth. What I've been saying, at least since 1953, is the exact opposite, that practice is masses practicing and their practice is not only the doing of deeds but the thinking of thoughts.

THEREFORE, the 2 kinds of subjectivity, (the note on which I ended the 2nd edition of MAF, hoping thereby to indicate what I mean to do in Philosophy and Revolution) was not only a stress on proletarian Subject vs. Maoist or petty-bourgeois subjectivity but to show that in the proletarian Subject, in subjectivity, we including man as thought as well as man as being, AND THOUGHT, PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION, THE ABSOLUTE IDEA BREAKDOWN FOR OUR AGE IS ITSELF A FORCE FOR REVOLUTION.

It is a development, a VERY CRUCIAL and high stage of development, but a development rather than break, as was the 1953 from the Johnsonism or state-capitalism sans philosophy.

Of course, Marxist-Humanism is itself "subjectivity"; this is what we learned ever since 1962 when the trip to Africa, and 1965, the trip to Japan, showed that even revolutionaries closest to us, and even masses, great masses in revolt, will not take from our shoulders, our tasks, working out this

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dialectic of liberation, both philosophically in the book and practically in our everyday activities.

Of course it is a task of very great historic dimensions. But do you know any one else engaged in it? Of course, it is hard labor and blows the mind, especially of the youth, who are first getting used to the idea that they are revolutionaries, have broken with their past both as p. b. millieu, as parents, etc. as, to begin measuring themselves against history's gargantuan dimensions. I do not doubt, however, that we can become the catalyst for the revolutionaries who have had all the breaks from past, but did not think that first then they must create new theoretical foundations as well instead of having found them ready-made, if not in the bite-size Macist quotations, then at least as Marx did it. But he did it in 1843-1883, and we live in 1971, and while it remains our foundation, none can do for this age what only this age can do for itself.

Back to one more word on language. When you compare Marx, 1st Int., Paris Commune; VII, Bolsheviks, Russian Revolution; and then come to ourselves, you use the expression "I:1". I know what you mean, but it just so happens that, for a dialectician, there is no worse expression than one-to-one, for it means mechanical, statistical rather than human, alive, and being able to do so much more than what any one imagines who is brainwashed by capitalist ideology. So, it isn't only a question of escaping the complexities, but in order to always keep one's eyes on movement rather than something static, just avoid the expression, I:1.

The important thing is what you did mean even when you used ~~say~~ a "market" expression. First, take Marx's period: great as the First International was, it was "organized". Therefore for the new form of workers' rule which no genius, not even Marx, no human being, or god for that matter, can see it before it actually occurs, Marx had to keep plodding along, theoretically in Capital, practically, in First International, until the workers upsurged in the Paris Commune. Then he not only embraced it, as revolutionaries would, but made it the departure even of his theory. It clarified the "fetishism of the commodities" not just in manner in which he had already worked out theoretically--capitalist exploitation of labor and its reification into thing--but its opposite the new form, the universal form of how the workers mean to rid themselves of the fetishism by its creation of the Paris Commune.

The same came to be with Lenin--the Soviets were the new form for his age, and he was well prepared to see it and create the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" because, theoretically, he had already worked out a new universal--"to a man". BUT IT WASN'T ONLY UNDERSTANDING AND RETURN TO HEGEL THAT HELPED HIM: IT WAS THAT, TO BEGIN WITH, HE WAS ALWAYS A PRACTICING REVOLUTIONARY. So, insofar as the latter was concerned, were his Bolshevik colleagues. They all opposed the "April Thesis" and thought he had been too long an emigre to "understand Russian realities" BUT THE REVOLUTION SWEEPED THEM ALONG. WHEN THE REVOLUTION IS AT AN UNSTOPPABLE HALT AND YOU HAVE STATE POWER, you (that is the Stalinists) follow a very different path. But it isn't only because they didn't "understand" Hegel; it is because of the objective compulsion from the existing state surrounded by world capitalism, etc. etc.

Now then us, the practice of dialectics, both in theory and in fact, is something that no other "party" ever called upon its members to do, and it is hard as hell. But the very fact that we demand unity of theory and practice compels the two levels, of which the concrete, the daily practice, is of the essence.

One final point both on "troubles" with Part III, and objective transcendence transcendence has, in academia, both theological and philosophic meaning far removed from practice. But transcendence, as historic category, means people abolishing the old, creating the new; indeed it is the only real transcendence; all else is hogwash. Because this is so, I try to practice it even in theory, which is why there is so much return to Black/red conferences, etc. There are no "troubles"! On the contrary, I would like the "new passions and new forces" to be written by blacks, by women even as New Humanism was written by workers battling Automation.

Hope this has helped. I cannot do more so long as book is not finished, but when you get "New Passions and New Forces" next week, start practicing dialectics, and asking blacks, Indians, Chicanas, and write me their expressions. Yours, Raya

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