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 PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION -- by Raya Dunayevskaya (Draft)

PART TWO -- THE INTERREGNUM: Void and Retrogression vs. Movement from Practice

Chapter I -- On the Eve of World War II

A. The Depression and the Theoretic Void

The Great Depression kept the world in shambles. Early in the 1930's, things began to fall apart not only in the economic and political sphere, but also in thought. The breathing space capitalism had gained in the 1920's from the defeat of all the revolutions that had developed in the wake of the successful Russian Revolution, was insufficient to stop bourgeois democracy's self-movement to destruction. Civilization had evidently reached the end of something. Everything was being transformed into its opposite. With Nazism, it became clear that the highest barbarism was being perpetrated not in the far out, "backward" regions of the world, but in the heartland of technologically advanced "civilized Europe." Economically, the chaos was so overwhelming -- and the army of millions, tens of millions of unemployed, so persistent in trying to break out of the capitalist stranglehold -- that competitive capitalism, in democratic and fascist states alike, gave way, one after the other, to state intervention in the economy. Still, capitalism wasn't saved thereby.

In Spain, where the revolt of the workers had developed into full-scale proletarian revolution, the revolution lay crushed not alone by the victory of fascism, but by the stifling of its spontaneity by Stalinism hovering over a Popular Front government in which all democratic forces, including Anarchists, had participated. Yet, none of the revolutionaries among the theoreticians, not even those who both opposed the Stalinists and had no illusions about the revolutionary nature of the Popular Front government, made a new category. That is to say, none thought that the manner of the Spanish workers, in creating new forms of workers' rule by the occupation of the factories during the very heat of the struggle against fascism, that this combination of economics and politics, had disclosed a new dialectic of liberation.

In Russia, where State Planning was total, the state apparatus had absorbed, not only the economy, but the trade unions. The workers were saddled with the most Draconic anti-labor "labor legislation," including forced labor camps, the fitting climax to the retrogressive movement in foreign policy -- the Hitler-Stalin Pact.

Now (the 1960's) that a state power, Communist China, had duly certified as "Marxist-Leninist" the designation of Russia as a state-capitalist society, state capitalism has become a veritable cliché. It was not so at the outbreak of World War II when it would have made a decisive difference in the strategy of world revolution to have designated Russia as an integral part of the new stage of world capitalist development. Instead, not only Stalinist Russia or Mao's so-called Chinese Soviets, but Leon Trotsky, who had already been fighting the Stalin bureaucracy for over a decade, called for the defence of Russia as a "workers' state," though degenerate. State property, the State Plan, had become the fetishes for which the workers were asked to lay down their lives.

Just as that fixed particular, state property, substituted for any elaboration of a new universal regarding Russia, so the determination of what was new in China in 1937 was buried in the old category that Mao was only echoing Stalin's class-collaborationist view of a block of four classes that he expounded in 1925-27. Mao's new offer of collaboration with Chiang Kai-shek did flow from the concept of a block of four classes. But, China in 1937 was not China of 1927, not only because the Chinese Communist Party, Stalinist or otherwise, was now a mass force but, above all, because of the objective world situation created by Japan's invasion of China. For Trotsky to treat the situation in China under those circumstances as if it were only a replay of the 1925-27 disaster is not only to credit Stalin with omnipotence. It is to reveal one's own

European outlook. And that is very central to the whole theses. Trotsky's outlook was too European-centered.

This is not to say that Trotsky was not a true internationalist. He had always been a world revolutionary. He had never shown any national egotism, Russian or European. Indeed, the question is not a geographic question at all. It is neither European nor Oriental nor, for that matter, so much a world question, as a question of what is a self-developing subject. Thus, "European-centered" is used here as a manifestation of failure to grasp a new self-developing subject that in this case turned out to be the Chinese masses, mainly peasants.

To further stress this crucial point, let us look at Marx who, likewise, was, of necessity, European-centered, both in where he lived, the historic period in which he lived, and the subject matter of his most serious theoretic studies, which was England in the mid-19th century. This did not, however, stop him from hailing the Taiping revolution as a possible new point of departure in world development. On the contrary, he held on to this new point of development, not only in the 1850's when it could be contrasted to the quiescent 1850's of the European proletariat, but also in the 1870's and 80's when he began to study Russia, a country he had heretofore treated both as the greatest European barbarism and semi-Oriental. Now, in his correspondence with Russian revolutionaries, he began to open altogether new possibilities of revolution in backward Russia, provided it would be supported by the European proletariat. The same attitude to the concrete unfolding of the dialectics of liberation characterized Marx's writings on the historic significance of the Oriental commune, despotic or otherwise. In a word, the question of "understanding the dialectics" wasn't ever for Marx or Lenin merely the understanding of a philosophic category but the question of working out the actual dialectics of liberation. Every Marxist naturally aims at that, but since there is no immediate 1:1 relationship between the subjective and the objective, between philosophy and revolution: since the test can only come in life itself, it is the actual reality in the period between Lenin's death and Trotsky's death to which we must turn in examining the relationship of political theories and philosophic concepts.

All the revolutions that followed upon the success of the Russian Revolution of 1917 were defeated in the 1920's. Soon after, the German Revolution was, literally, beheaded with the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and Lenin turned eastward to see whether the colonial revolutions wouldn't become the new points of departure for world revolution. In 1920 he proposed to the second Communist International Congress two theses, one on the National Question and the other on the colonial and agrarian questions.

Lenin did not consider these new points of departure pure "politics." In presenting the theses, both on the Colonial and Agrarian questions as well as on the National Question, he asked the second Congress of the Communist International to work out the theoretic implications of these positions. As evidenced by his attitude to the Irish revolution in 1916, Lenin had always considered the national question a "bacillus" of proletarian revolution. In 1920, he added two new categories to that concept by including the Negroes in the United States and the Ghettoized Jews in Poland as part of the national question. The more immediate question in 1920, however, was the colonial and agrarian. Again, Lenin had always considered the peasantry, specifically the lowest, poorest, deepest layers of the peasantry as the indispensable ally, indeed, very nearly a co-leader with the proletariat, of the Russian Revolution. It was this he now extended to the whole East, not as a deviation from Marx's concepts of the dialectics of revolution in the Orient, but as an elaboration, or more precisely put, a matter of making explicit what had only been implicit at a different historic period (the period in which Marx lived). The underlying assumption was that, just as the masses "to a man" had become the new universal for the November, 1917 revolution, so the peasantry, the peasant revolutions, when they were supported by a workers' state, could become the new universal for the 1920's. In any case, he asked the Comintern

to work out the theoretic implication of the following new points of theoretic departure and the theses on the Colonial and Agrarian question:

- (1) If the Russian revolution is truly the first act of World Revolution, its internationalism must show itself in a willingness, not only to help, but, if necessary, to sacrifice itself for that new point of departure in world revolution -- colonial revolution.
- (2) The majority of the world's population is to be found, not in the technologically advanced West, but in the underdeveloped East. If it were possible to undermine world imperialism, via Peking, rather than Berlin, that could become a new point of departure for World Revolution and thus would reveal a new subject -- the peasantry as a motive force, in the dialectics of liberation.
- (3) With the aid of a technologically developed country, this new point of departure would mean that the Orient could, without going through capitalism, go directly to the building of Soviets.

The collaboration with Sun Yat Sen's China had begun when Lenin was still alive. The 1925-27 Revolution, however, was destroyed by Chiang Kai Shek's troops who sent the decimated "Red Army" deep into the vastness of China. As the decade of the 1920's ended, and Russia turned away from world revolution, turned toward what Stalin called "building socialism in one country," and what turned out to be capitalist totalitarian industrialization, the world as a whole had begun its descent toward the abyss.

The 1930's had ended like the 1920's, when all the revolutions in Europe that had followed upon the success of the Russian Revolution, had been defeated. The sharp contrast to the 1920's was that there was no new banner to follow. Where Lenin, after the beheading of the 1919 German Revolution, had turned eastward to see whether the extension of revolution could come "through Peking" where it had failed "through Berlin," Trotsky had left no new theoretic points of departure. Instead, not only had he repeated his 1905 theory of permanent revolution, but also failed to relate it to what was new in either the 1920's or 1930's, as if the world had stopped still in 1917.

To what extent had the failure to develop the theoretic implications of the new points of departure in theory, first outlined in 1920, been responsible for the defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution? And to what extent did the emergence of Stalin as victor over Trotsky influence the direction of the Chinese Revolution? To Trotsky, of course, Stalin was the betrayer and his policy would have led to victory. Not, of course that anyone thought that any theory could have escaped the actual world situation.

Where the point of departure and the point of return is always the self-developing subject, European-centered or Sino-centered are not impediments to grasping the dialectic of revolution as the dialectic of self-liberation and the concrete next development of any revolution. What bars entrance to a dialectical analysis of a revolution by a revolutionary -- and Trotsky was most certainly a great revolutionary -- is not the concept of what a leader is, but a concept of self-developing subject when the masses are the "subject."

Trotsky had not lived to see the Red Army standing outside the gates of Warsaw while the Nazis crushed the Warsaw Soviet but he had seen enough between the time the Red Army marched into Finland in 1939 and the time the GPU assassins' icpick had been thrust deep into his brain in 1940, and he knew full well that Stalin had been determined to have him murdered so that there would be no focal point for revolutionary regroupment at the end of the imperialist world war. All this did not stop him from calling for the defense of Russia and disorienting not only a whole generation of Marxists but also the many millions who were disillusioned with the capitalism of the 1930's who were turning toward Marxism.

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NOTE: HERE CONTAINS SECTION B: "Leon Trotsky As Theoretician."

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