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THE NEWNESS OF OUR PHILOSOPHIC-HISTORIC CONTRIBUTION

June 15, 1969

Dear Richard:

Now that your return from Europe, and my hinting to you that there were serious errors in your 12-pager ("Some Notes on Dialectic") have both receded into the past, we can let the Hegelian principle -- "Error is a dynamic of truth" -- direct our confrontation with error.

Let me confess at once that I am not at all sure that I understand what it is you were trying to do in your talk to the New York Philosophy and Revolution study group. You stated that the sessions of the class were to be a "two-way road" between author and the class members who were to become the book's "co-authors". Since, however, your talk conveyed neither what I had conceived (and taped) as the introductory lecture, and since (outside of a reproduction of the contents page) you made no textual references to the book, the draft of Philosophy and Revolution became, it seems to me, no more than, as you put it, "a jumping-off point for our own theoretical self-development." But can the new ever be fully internalized if it is conceived as no more than "a jumping-off point?"

It seemed to me that another salient angle protruded to lessen the impact of the philosophic journey of discovery when you said:" Let me begin by stressing philosophy AND revolution." Along with this stress on the conjunction came emphatic articulation and rearticulations of the phrase, "preparation for revolution", without you ever calling attention to the fact that phrase was "theoretic preparation for revolution." The omission of the word , theoretic, could not help but divert from the need of a philosophic study. The proof is in the predilection for phrases like "albeit through philosophy.". Indeed, you state that "under Hegel we will actually be dealing with the problems created by the Great French Revolution." But this is precisely what the author has not done. Marxism and Freedom did that.

What distinguishes Philosophy and Revolution from Marxism and Freedom is that, instead of dealing, primarily, with revolutions, and, secondarily, with the underlying philosophies; instead of so bemoaning the intellectual sloth that has accumulated in the revolutionary movement since Lenin's death that one decides to wait for others to come with us on that journey of discovery of Hegelian philosophy, we here take the plunge ourselves, deep, deep into "absolute negativity". No one since Marx, not even Lenin, went that deep. (More on that later.)

In any case, Philosophy and Revolution, though dependent on Lenin's Abstract of Hegel's SCIENCE OF LOGIC(1) is far from being a mere reproduction and update of Lenin's work. Nor is it a mere popularization , or a summation, of Hegel's major works -- Phenomenology of Mind, Science of Logic, Philosophy of Mind -- though it needs to be noted, also, that our new work is the first Marxist work that grapples with all three fundamental works of Hegel. (Outside of his Philosophy of Right, which, by being an "application" of his fundamental philosophic theses, is, to me, not strictly

philosophic--and which in any case was already analyzed by Marx, his very first grappling with Hegelian philosophy when still a Left Hegelian and which led directly to his discovery, historical materialism--all other works of Hegel were lectures or early drafts that had not been rechecked by him before publication.) Rather, Philosophy and Revolution is so new a reinterpretation of Hegelian dialectics, so totally belonging to our age, and so linked to the revolutions-to-be, that none but Marxist-Humanists, specifically us, could have written it.

So much for introductory remarks, except to add that you, Dick, are by no means the only one that hasn't caught all the new. But you alone are so over self-confident as to let the cat (that all others merely peered at) out of the bag. The references, therefore, are to your formulations, although in fact, I am addressing all study groups. I will limit myself to the philosophic section of your 12-pager -- pages 6 to 8 -- singling out the two most serious errors. (Frankly, I believe it would be best for you to eliminate those three pages since even where the argument is cogent, it is so intertwined with that which is not, that they cannot lead to anything but confusion.)

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Now then, to the two serious philosophic errors -- your summation of Lenin and Marcuse on Dialectics. They stem, it appears to me, from your too great desire at popularization, abbreviation, impatience to reach a conclusion, one that is easily explainable by "examples". Let's begin with Marcuse. You recommend his "A Note On Dialectic", the 1960 Preface to his Reason and Revolution, which was first published in 1941. You make no distinction between the two editions as if all the political changes in Marcuse over those two decades has not affected his "definitions" of the dialectic. All you seem to be concerned with is that, in one case, the participants in the study group would have to read fully half of the book to comprehend Hegel, while by reading the new Preface, they can grasp the Hegelian dialectic in 8 pages. Your preoccupation with brevity dulled your sensitivity to where the subtle changes in the "definitions" of the dialectic were leading, although Marcuse himself had made it clear beyond any peradventure of doubt, that his dialectics differs not only from Hegel's, but also from Marx's: "Those social groups which dialectic theory identified as the forces of negation are either defeated or reconciled with the established system."(p.xiv)

Note, please (if you thought that this was "only" his politics and everyone knows we disagree with Marcuse's politics) that this isn't just a question of "politics". Marcuse is making sure that his readers understand that his rejection of the proletariat as a revolutionary force flows from "dialectic theory" and its concept of "the forces of negation" as, of course, these will be reinterpreted by him. In a word, he is making this statement after he had made a very startling "innovation", the climax of many nuances he had introduced without bothering to tell the readers that the Marcuse of 1960 is not the Marcuse of 1941 on this very

pivotal question of the dialectic.

I cannot here go into detail as to how many times the Marcuse of 1960 has written the exact opposite of what the Marcuse of 1941 has written on the relationship of philosophy (Hegel) to "social theory" (Marx), on the indispensability of the Hegelian dialectic for Marx's concept of revolution -- not that it was ever separate from history or class struggle, but neither was it separate from dialectical development. For our purposes, it will suffice to single out the crucial violation of the very beautiful, profound, and integrated title:Reason and Revolution. Now, however, Marcuse throws us this curve:

"I believe that it is the idea of Reason itself which is the undialectical (sic!) element in Hegel's philosophy." (p. xii)

Marcuse, who is a very erudite "specialist" on the dialectic knows very well how perverse such a conclusion will sound to dialectians in general, and to Marxists in particular. Therefore, he turns to "reality", evidently in the hope that the shock of confrontation with the concrete world would make the reader forget not only the anachronisms involved in citing concdntration camps, gas chambers and nuclear preparedness in a discussion of the age of Hegel, but also the philosophic concept of Reason in Hegel and in Marx. In any case, whatever be the reason for his turning to "reality" at that moment, he writes: "It may even be justifiable, logically as well as historically, to define Reason in terms which include slavery, the Inquisition, child labor, concentration camps, gas chambers and nuclear preparedness." (p.xii)

Marcuse's shock treatment, I'm sorry to say, Dick, succeeded! Evidently totally unaware of Marcuse's perversion of the concept of Reason, you disregard not only his view that this is "the undialectical element in Hegel's Philosophy", but also what I am sure you know very well -- the objective compulsion which causes Marcuse's political deviations, his incomprehension of the objective world, that is to say, his failure to see that it comprises not only capital and automated machinery, but also a revolutionary proletariat that fights this "technological rationality". Instead, you yourself fall into the mire of subjectivism and write:

"Freedom then appears as this continuou negation of the world until all alienations are overcome, i.e., until the world is so transformed that it no longer exists independently of the individual." (p.8)

Since the world will not disappear, not even when all alienations have been eliminated; since the individual, to achieve universality in a new society, has need of that objective being -- the world -- may I humbly tell you that you never would have committed such a serious error had you adhered to the text of Philosophy and Revolution, retained your sensitivity to its logic, so that you at least realized that it was not accidental that I never refer to the 1960 Marcuse favorably?

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And, please, please, be not so preoccupied with brevity that you "automatically" choose brief summations over the comprehensive ones. Take Lenin's 5-pager, "On Dialectic." It is an excellent piece for a brief summation (especially if one talks to himself as Lenin did there), provided you have absorbed the whole. (Did you know that Marx categorically forbad the publication of his absolutely magnificent lecture, Wage-Labor and Capital until after the publication of Capital? In the subject we're discussing, Lenin's "definition" of dialectics, all you have to do is compare the single summation of the dialectic with the 16-point definition and you will understand at once why brevity will not do when something very new has to be explained.)

Incidentally, may I ask why you posed only two variants -- 200 pages vs. 5 ? What about the 27½ very brief pages that appear as the Appendix to the first edition of Marxism and Freedom? Those 27½ "loose" pages contain nearly the whole of Lenin's Abstract, and, though it does omit Hegel, cites the pagination in Hegel that Lenin is commenting upon so that readers who wish to grapple with Hegel as well as with Lenin, can do so. Moreover, this Abstract has been tried out on workers even before the publication of Marxism and Freedom as they were mimeographed by us, precisely in order to try them out on workers and students, so that by the time M&F was published with this Abstract, workers and students actually began to use some philosophic categories to analyze conditions of labor and struggles for freedom. Why do you show so little regard for some of our own unique publications?

O.K., we will follow your procedure and limit ourselves to the 5-pager, or rather to what that limitation compelled you to write when you strove for a forced identity between the Individual and the Universal.

"The only way we can know the individual," you write on p.7, is through the universal, the category, the mental idea."

You can't possibly mean that the individual doesn't exist unless I have a mental idea of him. As for "knowledge" about him, that, too, would mean utter abstraction if it were wholly dependent upon "the universal", and could only serve to justify the Existentialist claim that their philosophy alone recognizes the uniqueness of the individual, his "irreducibility", and that, as against "today's Marxists", Existentialism alone can "reconquer man into Marxism."

I'm sure you know that the individual is the very soul of Marxism; that from 1843 when Marx first broke with bourgeois society, Marx never stopped reiteration that "the individual is the social entity"; that, in adding to his fight against capitalism, the fight against vulgar communism, Marx opposed the counterposition not only of the state against the individual, but freedom as some sort of abstraction, a "universal", or, as the Communist Manifesto put it, "The freedom of the individual is the condition for the freedom of all." Far from the universal "proving" the truth of the individual, the reverse was the case.

Just as Marx never departed from his "new Humanism" concepts 40 years later as he lay dying after he spelled out man's "quest for universality" in concreteness, transcending Existentialism's wordy rhetoric, so Lenin never stops stressing that, just as such simple statements as "John is a man" reveals the "identity" (2) of the individual and the universal, so dialectics as a theory of knowledge, "absolute human knowledge", is the process of the development of everyman. Insofar as the relationship of the individual to the universal is concerned, Hegel himself had phrased it most beautifully: "the individual is free of all that interferes with its universalism, i.e. freedom."

Knowing all this, as I'm sure you do, how could you have written so sloppily and in the section on Lenin at that? I repeat, it's all due to your impatience to get to the end, your desire "to know before you know."(3), a fear of being a mere follower as if originality for Marxists starts there instead of with a restatement for the specific age. Even Existentialism has been forced to recognize that "independence" (when the problems posed by Marx have not yet been resolved and will not be until a new society does arise) can mean anything but a return to pre-Marxism. Therein, precisely, is the genius of Marx, the superiority and indispensability of dialectical philosophy.

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Now then, for error to become a dynamic of truth, what is needed is a confrontation, what Hegel called "the suffering of the negative", and Lenin a shedding of over self-confidence. The case Lenin was referring to -- Trotsky -- came from the type of genius which, in military terms, saved the young workers' state, but would endanger it if extended to relations in the trade union and political fields. Fortunately, we face no such serious problems, or dangers. It may even sound fantastic to look at such historic and philosophic developments for illumination on such small matters as problems of a study group in Philosophy and Revolution. Nevertheless, dialectic methodology must become our daily practice, and the problem under discussion -- how to have presented the newness of our contribution without taking a shortcut through abbreviations and "definitions" of others on dialectic, does call for historic confrontations rather than presenting the new at the tailend: "Duneyevskaya is suggesting that 'Absolutes as new beginnings' is the one to look at for our time." Period. End. The time has been spent on the abbreviations which led to errors, and now there is nothing to do but say "If we don't begin, who will?" (p. 12)

That, Dick, is where you should have begun. Let's dive into the confrontation by answering, what, specifically, philosophically, marks off our age from that of Lenin. By the time of the collapse of the Second International, Lenin was sufficiently disgusted with "materialists" to stand in awe of "idealist" dialectics and write: "Cognition not only reflects the world, but creates it." Yet this isn't what he developed. That task is ours. His was, as you well know, transformation into opposite. To us, who have lived through Stalinism,to speak of transformation into opposite, could only evoke the answer: "So what else is new?" What was new was that the death of Stalin lifted an incubus from the minds of workers and intellectuals,

but first of all and most seriously, from workers. And precisely because workers were girding for actual revolutionary struggles, revolutionary intellectuals no longer feared the "ontological Absolute", but began seeing it, instead, as the concrete universal. That is to say, the new in the Absolute as a unity of theory and practice was that it was being disclosed as a movement from practice that was on its way both to theory and a new society.

This is what I discovered in Hegel's Absolutes in May 1953, a few weeks before the first revolt from under totalitarianism in East Berlin on June 17th, which had put an end not only to the myth of Stalinism's invincibility but to the capitalist democracy's myth of "brainwashing". This was the historic breakthrough to that which separates one era -- Lenin's -- and another -- ours. It proved also to be the point of division in the state-capitalist tendency which I co-founded and which had been working at the task of trying to break down that "last chapter" in Hegel, recognizing it was task for our age, but collapsing as it was being concretized. (4)

Its first concretization was Marxism and Freedom. Philosophy and Revolution begins where M&F left off by having singled out Marxist-Humanism as the philosophy of our age, and the American roots, with black as a new dimension, as the parallel of the Hungarian Revolution. Philosophy and Revolution begins where M&F left off and what we are all developing as our theoretic preparation for revolution is, on the one hand, the strictly philosophic problems in a comprehensiveness never attempted before, and, on the other hand, "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Liberation" appearing in so varied, contradictory forms as to fail to measure up to the challenges of the era.

You told me that some European comrades agree, more or less, with that part three, but ask: why the circuitous road to get to those conclusions? what's so new about the rich getting richer and the poor poorer? Empiricism has always produced just such blindness to the concrete -- concrete in the Hegelian sense of the whole, and not in the ordinary sense of the tangible. Thus, to this day, bourgeois scholars "prove" that Lenin's Imperialism was "not an original work", but merely an update of what the liberal economist Hobson, had done a decade before Lenin. "All" Lenin was supposed to have done was to have grafted "a priori" political conclusions onto "objective economic statistics." With such type of "objectivity", eclectics, including revolutionaries, become masters at fashioning blinders to shield against all philosophic foundation other than bite size, as well as against the process of working out revolutionary theory.

The result is that "facts" remain suspended in mid-air, the "subject", i.e. the forces of revolution, remain either unidentified or wrongly identified, and we end up with still one other defeat -- or the fantasmagoria of an academic like Marcuse who now excludes the proletariat, but welcomes the lumpen as the "revolutionary force", anoints a "biological solidarity" along with the youth, indeed invents a whole "biological foundation for socialism" along with an "instinctual creative force of the young radicals see in Cuba, in the guerrillas, in the Chinese cultural revolution." (An Essay of Liberation)

Or we are confronted with the opposite side of this eclecticism, dogmatism, which refuses to recognize anything that doesn't bow to "the vanguard Party", whether or not that did anything revolutionary. In this bowing to the "Party" there is no difference, as we saw all over again in France in Spring, 1968, between the Stalinists who played a counter-revolutionary role, and the Trotskyists who fought the Stalinists.

And the opposite of this -- the glorification of spontaneity that has purged itself not just of elitism, but of philosophy a la Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who thinks he can pick up theory "en route" -- only to end in "plagiarizing" (his word, not mine) the rabid, discredited, professional anti-Leninist , Chaulieu. (See Obsolete Communism.)

In place, then, of all these who indulge in what Hegel has profoundly analyzed as "the arbitrary caprice of prophetic utterance" what we say is needed is some "labor, patience, seriousness and suffering of the negative" which is what Philosophy and Revolution invites its co-authors to do. I trust, therefore, that you will allow me to conclude with a brief summation of that most difficult first chapter which, as all new beginnings, has been so troublesome not just to you, but to the whole organization.

The three forms of the Absolute in Hegel -- Absolute Knowledge as the unity of history and its comprehension in the PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND; the Absolute Idea as the unity of theory and practice in the SCIENCE OF LOGIC; and Absolute Mind as the unity of the Individual and the Universal in PHILOSOPHY OF MIND -- are approached as new beginnings because our age of absolutes sees something in them that Hegel just guessed at and yet, as genius, caught in the air of the epoch of the French Revolution. Thus, though a religious man, he ends the PHENOMENOLOGY by a "Golgotha of Absolute Spirit", that is to say, to use a contemporary expression "God is dead." Philosophy which has been elevated above religion has reached this pinnacle, however, when it unites with History, when the remembrance of things past discloses "a new world" imbedded in the present, and "therefore" "Foams forth to God his own Infinitude."

Marx, who hit out sharply against any "Absolute", nevertheless stressed that Hegel, having grasped alienation as process, labor as self-becoming, actually created the dialectic not only as method but as a critique of reality which, however, is enveloped in "mystical form" and therefore requires historical materialism to disclose. What we did that was new, and could have only been seen in our era, was to grasp the division in the problems dealt with before and after the Revolution, in Hegel's case, the French Revolution, in our case, the Russian Revolution.

What we had singled out as new in the Absolute Idea in SCIENCE OF LOGIC was the manner in which the second negativity becomes "the turning point of the movement of the Notion ... for the transcendence of the opposition between Notion and Reality, and that unity which is the truth, rests upon subjectivity alone." With the birth of a new, third world, the question that had to be solved was: is the new subject of revolution to be found only in the African-Asian-Latin American revolutions, or by including in "subjectivity" not only force of revolution, but also theory in historic

whereby
continuity,/we retain both the proletariat in technologically advanced lands, as well as the Marxist-Humanism they brought anew unto the historic stage.

When Lenin finished reading the Science of Logic, he ended his analysis by stressing that Hegel, in having the logical idea turn to Nature, was stretching "a hand to materialism", and that therefore, the remaining paragraph was unimportant. Back in 1953, when I first broke through on the Absolute Idea, I at once took issue with that, insisting that we who had suffered through Stalinism couldn't so dismiss that last paragraph in which Hegel heaps praise on freedom, upon the Idea "that freely releases itself", "becomes utterly free" so that the "externality" of its release in Nature is but a step in its return to the "Philosophy of Spirit" where it will first "perfect its liberation". In a word, we are again confronted with how much more concrete for our age than for Lenin was Lenin's "idealism" on the question of cognition "creating the world."

Moreover, Lenin didn't follow Hegel into the Philosophy of Mind, Marx, who did, left the analysis unfinished as he pursued his thoroughly original discovery of Historical Materialism. It did, of course, reappear as he split the Absolute into two in Capital. But where it concerned "direct" contact with Hegel as the latter was tracing a process, a philosophic process, Marx happened to have broken off after he reached paragraph 384, though I didn't know this in the exhilaration over Stalin's death, when I chose to begin my analysis of the Philosophy of Mind with paragraph 385.

The whole point is that each age has a task, and the drive, the self-movement, from practice and from theory, suddenly makes one see points, get illuminations for the tasks that confront that epoch, even from so seemingly closed an "ontological system" as Hegel's. The truth is that it was at that point that Hegel had reached the unity of the Individual and the Universal in a way that it seemed no problem at all to depart from Hegel who used the philosopher as yardstick for measuring the development of mankind, where the true Subject is the mass in motion. But without this internal dialectic it would have been impossible to work out the concrete universal.

Naturally, this cannot be achieved in thought alone. Naturally men's actions alone can reconstruct society on new beginnings, can end the pre-history of mankind. Naturally Marx's concept of praxis -- the activity of men, mental and manual -- and not Hegel's "Absolutes", contains the answer. But everyone from Marxists to anarchists never tire of speaking of praxis without ever, at least not since 1917, achieving a social revolution. So a new beginning, a new point of departure, a new unity of philosophy and revolution must be worked out, and it is this we invite all to help us achieve so that freedom finally becomes reality. Now that we see eye to eye, let's begin again with a view to finishing the book this year!

Yours,

RAYA

FOOTNOTES:

(1) I am using Lenin's own title, Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic, in order to stress that I am dealing with this, and only this, work because it is this, and only this, which discloses the break in Lenin's own philosophic development. What the Stalinists call Philosophic Notebooks (Vol.38 of Lenin's Collected Works) contains, besides this Abstract, a typical hodge podge of anything philosophical Lenin wrote, except, of course, the overly touted and whole book by itself, Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. Neither the latter nor Vol. 38 makes it possible to see how Lenin changed. To this day there has been no work, or a good-sized article, that has grappled with Lenin's philosophic break. Trotskyists, as well as Stalnists, are all too anxious to take undue advantage of the fact that Lenin made "only notes for himself" as he read Hegel, and "therefore" there has been no break in Lenin. Academics play the same game.

(2) Your formulations on the category, identity, are imprecise. First, insofar as the relationship of opposites are concerned, there is, of course, not only identity of opposites, and unity of opposites, and transformation into opposite, but also struggle of opposites. Each has a distinct meaning and none is "higher" than the other; the specificity of the stage of development, of crisis, determines identity's "height". But, secondly, and in this case, more importantly, the category, as category, -- that is to say, when it is not related to the very high stages of opposites -- is of a rather low calibre. Thus, in the Doctrine of Essence, the three governing categories are Identity, Difference, Contradiction, with Identity as the lowest and Contradiction as the highest. In a word, you shouldn't have defined identity abstractly, but only in relationship to whatever was the issue in question. I cannot go into it any further here.

(3) "To know before you know" is the phrase Marx used against political economy when it asked to know the conclusion before knowing the process by which one arrived at the conclusion. To this day, not only bourgeois ideologists, but many radicals, expect the conclusion to be stated -- in the introduction!

(4) Johnson made it impossible to publish the original letters (May 12 and May 20, 1953) on the Absolute Idea not only by himself refusing to discuss them and stopping Ria Stone from continuing with her complimentary letters on them that she had written when she was away from him, but also because he had singled out for attention, not the revolutionary forces striving to be born, but the counter-revolutionary phenomena -- the Ahabs, Hitlers, Stalins. It happens that at the moment he happened to be leaving the country and preferred not to reveal his political identity, and to keep his literary image kosher. Soon thereafter the class enemy chose to open an attack on the Tendency whereupon he chose, from his safe English haven, to desert the co-founder of the state-capitalist tendency, and break up the American organization.

We did, however, once we were free and able to establish NEWS & LETTERS, publish the first English translation of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks (The Abstract, that is, of Hegel's Science of Logic) as well as the Letters on

the Absolute Idea. It turned out to be our very first "best seller". Perhaps we should try to reproduce those letters since they are out of print and they do have a historic value, though we have developed a great deal more concretely with Philosophy and Revolution.

I should also add that C.L.R. James is busy rewriting history, is signing, as an individual, documents written, signed and published as "Johnson-Forest". I just saw an advertisement by the "Facing Reality" group about a "forthcoming" publication: State-Capitalism and World Revolution "by C.L.R.James". This is the second time he has tampered with the authorship of that historic 1950 document originally handed in to the SWP by our tendency. The first tampering occurred in 1956 when it suddenly appeared in England with a new preface and a list of signatories; not a single one except J.R. Johnson himself, had anything to do either in creating the tendency or even agreeing with it. For example, Chaulieu was a bureaucratic collectivist, not a state-capitalist theoretician. The others, too, soon "disappeared".

We are taking steps to preserve historic authenticity. The friends should use this knowledge, and the footnote in the Afro-Asian pamphlet on the question of Johnson's apologia for Nkrumah, should they suddenly be confronted with other disguises of what was once a state-capitalist tendency but has, after the split, disintegrated into nationalism, non-Marxism, and now claims to be Marxist, "grouped around author C.L.R. James", as Martin Globerman last defined it in the Guardian.