

CHALLENGE TO THE YOUTH ON THE-NEEDED TOTAL UPROOTING OF THE OLD
AND THE CREATION OF NEW HUMAN RELATIONS

"Human concepts are subjective in their abstractness, separateness, but objective as a whole, in the process, in the sum-total, in the tendency, in the sources."

-- Lenin, Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic (Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 208).

"I love all men who dive. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go downstairs five miles or more; and if he don't attain the bottom, why all the land in Galena won't fashion the plummet that will. I'm not talking about Mr. Emerson now -- but that whole corps of thought-divers that have been diving and coming up again with blood-shot eyes since the world began."

-- Melville, Letter of March 3, 1849

August 13, 1983

Dear Youth:

Because of my deep confidence in the youth striving to be "thought-divers" (whether or not they are superb swimmers just by being young and strong), I'd like to appeal to you to dive into the battle of challenging post-Marx Marxism. That battle will reveal the much greater maturity of this historic period as against that of the generation of the 1960s. It is true that they were so massively active in that decade that 1968 had reached the threshold of a revolution. The fact, however, that it remained an unfinished act made it clear to the following generation that they had better probe deeply into how the lack of serious theory vitiated activism's goals. The idea that activity, activity, activity would absolve them from the hard labor of recreating Marx's theory of "revolution in permanence" for their age and that theory picked up "en route" would solve the totality of the economic-political-social crises, as well as end U.S. imperialism's war in Vietnam ended in total failure.

Nevertheless, one of the most famous debates in that period was that between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss (not exactly youth themselves, but accepted as gurus by the youth movement), as the 1960s generation continued to follow new philosophies like Existentialism and Structuralism, instead of trying to find the historic link of continuity with "old" Marxism. While Lévi-Strauss critiqued Sartre's adherence to dialectics, holding that Structuralism required the analytic, empiric, scientific

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method, Sartre -- since he, himself, was enamoured with Structuralism and had as ahistorical an outlook as Lévi-Strauss -- could hardly win the argument for meaning as against Lévi-Strauss' emphasis on non-meaning. Here is how Lévi-Strauss put it:

"In my perspective, meaning is never the primary phenomenon; meaning is always reducible. In other words, behind all meaning there is a non-meaning, while the reverse is not the case. As far as I'm concerned, significance is always phenomenal."

A profound critique of Lévi-Strauss' Structuralism came, not from Existentialism, but from an independent Marxist anthropologist-dialectician, Stanley Diamond:

"The ethnologist is actually saying that he is not interested in meaning (significance), which he regards as merely (and always) phenomenal. For him, the primary phenomenon is not meaning, but the non-meaning which lies behind meaning and to which, he believes, meaning is reducible." *

The point is that the life-blood of the Hegelian dialectic -- when it is not diluted by Existentialism but seen in its essence as a ceaseless movement of becoming, disclosing the meaning of history -- is exactly what saved Hegel from the Kantian, impenetrable "Thing-in-itself" and its absolute idealism. Though Hegel may have wanted to confine history to history of thought, the single dialectic which characterizes both objectivity and subjectivity moved Hegel to objective idealism. That single dialectic became the ground for Marx's dialectic of revolution.

It was this, just this, which led proletarians to accept dialectical development, not alone for its "dynamism" but for its meaning in historic confrontation. Contrast the non-Marxist, intellectualistic, abstract approach to dialectics with that of a Marxist-Humanist proletarian attitude -- and consider that it was precisely on the question of phenomenology. That does not mean phenomenal but the science of phenomena, of experience. I am referring to Charles Denby, the Editor of News & Letters and his favorite quotation from Hegel:

* See "Anthropology in Question" in Section 6, "The Root is Man: Critical Traditions" of Reinventing Anthropology (Vintage Books, Random House, 1974).

"... Enlightenment upsets the household arrangements, which spirit carries out in the house of faith, by bringing in the goods and furnishings belonging to the world of the Here and Now."

-- Phenomenology of Mind, p. 411

The whole point of Denby's interest in the Hegelian quotation was this: What does philosophy have to say on the relationship between reality and revolution? It was because he saw Hegel introducing reality into the critique of the Enlightenment that Denby's attraction to Hegelian dialectics deepened. He could then see that dialectical development signified the transformation of reality.

It is true that revolutionaries like Mao also ^{tried} to escape confrontation with actual social revolutions aimed against his state-capitalist regime which he called Communist. But the Chinese youth saw how empty was the word "Proletarian" before "Cultural Revolution." At the very height of the Cultural Revolution, the dissident, revolutionary youth in Sheng Wu-lien hit out against their rulers by calling them "the Red capitalist class". They concretized the kind of commune they aimed to have as against what existed in China by calling for one like the Paris Commune of Marx's day: "Let the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie tremble before the true socialist revolution that shakes the world," declared their Manifesto. "What the proletariat can lose in this revolution is only their chains, what they gain will be the whole world!"

Here was Mao, who had declared himself to be a Marxist-Communist and in 1949 led a great national revolution. If he was aware of how deep the uprooting of the old had to be as he openly declared the revolution to be bourgeois-democratic and the society itself to be state-capitalist, he revealed none of it to the masses. He assured them they had nothing to fear from the "Chinese who stood up," a regime that was headed by the Communist Party. By 1966, when he launched the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," he not only declared his land to be "socialist" but

designated it the "storm center of world revolution." The Chinese youth failed to be impressed as they felt his rule to be that of any capitalist (private or state) totalitarian ruler-exploiter.

The revolutionary youth of the Shang Wu- lien themselves caught the historic link to Marx's Marxism and the Paris Commune of Marx's day as the decentralized political form to work out the economic-political-social emancipation which would keep the power in the hands of the masses.

The Shang Wu-lien statement I quoted here can be found in Chapter 5 of Philosophy and Revolution. Please remember, dear Youth, as I appeal to you to engage in this battle of ideas that it is not only the post-Marx Marxists we challenge but all Alternatives to Marx's Marxism. Philosophy and Revolution critiqued not only revolutionaries like Mao and Trotsky, but also Jean-Paul Sartre, the "Outsider Looking In." It is true that I deal with him there as Existentialist and I deal with the structuralist Communist intellectual guru, Althusser, all too briefly, very nearly dismissing him in a few footnotes. I do not mention Levi-Strauss at all. Nevertheless, they ^{represent} the very same subject -- Alternatives -- that I began this letter with, and later I will contrast that to a true recreation of Marxism for one's age. For us that began in 1953 with the breakthrough on the Absolute Idea. It will be easier, I believe, to dig deep into that if we look first at what we are familiar with -- the Youth Revolt in this country, the FSM burdened by American pragmatism.* Revolutionaries though they were, they certainly resisted philosophy of revolution. Though they had asked me to address them on Marx's Humanism, the interest was more on the subject of Alienation than on philosophy of revolution.

It was all most exciting when Mario Savio was released from jail at midnight and arrived at 2 AM in a spot several miles outside of Berkeley to hear me

*See our pamphlet on the FSM and the Negro Revolution. Philosophically, the Black dimension, especially Frantz Fanon, far from being pragmatist, worked out its critique of Hegel's concept of reciprocity in a revolutionary-dialectical manner. See both Black Skin, White Masks and my Letter to the REB-NEB of Aug. 1, 1983.

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speak on Marx's Humanism. Though they were very interested in Humanism, and, indeed, related it to their own new life styles, Mario was the next day also going to meet Aptheker, because he had promised Battina, who was also part of the FSM, and he was open to "all ideas" and was not the least bit interested in any Party or organization. In a word, the supposedly non-partyist, non-elitist, non-organizational person who was only for activism, activism, activism, did not see the contradiction in organizational form that lacked a philosophy of freedom and that form, that was inseparable from a struggle for freedom, for revolution.

Permit me here to go back to 1953 to re-examine the process of working out, or seeing the emergence of, a new philosophic dimension. It is the year I first broke through on the Absolute Idea, removing its abstract, mystical veil and seeing it as not only a unity of theory and practice, but a totally new relationship of the two because a new historic beginning had been reached with this live movement from practice. This was the period we completely rejected both the designation of the youth as "the beat generation" and the pragmatic view of the epoch itself as "an end of ideology."

The breakthrough on the Absolute Idea helped us to perceive a new generation of revolutionaries in that so-called "beat generation" who were rejecting a world they never made; and to see in the revolts in Latin America and Africa the emergence of a Third World. Indeed, toward the end of the 1950s, retrogression and McCarthyism in the U.S. notwithstanding, we declared it to be a totally new epoch: in production (with Workers Battle Automation); in political freedom battles, whether that be the new Black dimension in the Montgomery Bus Boycott or in the East European Freedom Fighters against Russian state-capitalism calling itself Communism; a new stage of cognition as the Hungarian Revolution highlighted it by bringing Marx's Humanist Essays onto the historic stage. The breakthrough on the Absolute Idea was not only on the movements from practice and from theory but also on ORGANIZATION, as we held that its dialectic would illuminate also the dialectic

of the Party, as we had long since rejected "the party to lead" concept. We were here driven to go also to Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, and there, as we approached the three final syllogisms in Absolute Mind and tread on ground none had ever walked before, we felt that in place of a "dialectic of the party" we were, with Hegel's Self-Thinking Idea,^{with} the masses' Self-Bringing Forth of Liberty, face to face with a new society. After all, Marx had unchained the dialectic as he had recreated the Absolute Method as a "revolution in permanence."

What has made this appeal to the youth appear so urgent to me is that, at one and the same time, we not only confront the objective situation of a nuclear world filled with economic recession and political retrogression as well as altogether too many aborted, unfinished revolutions turned into their very opposite, but also the fact that Marx's all-encompassing revolution-in-permanence, which desires to become ground also of organization, has, until Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, been left at the implicit stage.

Let's briefly, very briefly, trace and parallel the last 30-year movement from practice and from theory with our own philosophic development through the same period. What we call a trilogy of revolution -- Marxism and Freedom, Philosophy and Revolution, Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution -- has, in each period, singled out what was most urgent as measured by the objective crisis for that period. Though the dialectics of liberation, the philosophy of revolution, permeates them all, the particular, concrete need in each period is what determines the focus. Thus, our first comprehensive theoretic work, Marxism and Freedom, which, of course, was structured around our first original historic contribution -- the movement from practice to theory -- had its focus not only on Marx's American and Humanist roots, but also on Lenin's break with his philosophic past so that the fact that he had not extended it to re-examination of his vanguardist party concept^{meant it} was left unfinished. Here what is important is to watch the method and style of presentation as an indication of what should be further de-

veloped. Take the sharp break in style on philosophy and organization. In the case of organization, I dismiss the whole period of so-called classical Marxism--the Second International, 1889-1914 -- as a mere interlude, an Organizational Interlude that doesn't deserve classification as a Part; while in the case of the concept of a new relationship of worker and intellectual at a turning point in history, 1848-1861, that is made a whole Part though it occupies but a single chapter. Did anyone ask why? Well, the Iranian youth did single out that chapter to translate along with the Humanist Essays as necessary to their participation in that revolution.

But the new generation of revolutionaries in the U.S. were so pre-occupied with decentralization that the fatal contradiction between that and their failure to pay attention to the state-capitalist class nature of the Communist elitist party meant that very nearly everything was subordinated to activism. It wasn't until the 1970s, when the Women's Liberation Movement also kept stressing decentralization and, at the same time, refused to disregard the male chauvinism in the Left, that it became clear that the new form of organization could not be kept in a separate compartment from that of philosophy. It was then that we turned to Philosophy and Revolution, beginning with "Why Hegel? Why Now?" -- a Part which, at one and the same time, considered the Hegelian dialectic "in and for itself" not separate from both Marx's philosophy of revolution and Lenin's philosophic ambivalence. The youth, Women's Liberationists, as well as the Black dimension, however, appreciated Chapter 9, "New Passions and New Forces" rather than Chapter 1, "Absolute Negativity as New Beginning", which did get down to those three final syllogisms in depth.*

In the mid-1970s we finally got to know Marx's Ethnological Notebooks which let us hear him think. By not being a work finished for the press, it compels

*Peter, in his discussion article on "Organizational Growth and the Dialectics of 'Revolution in Permanence'" has made a truly original contribution in seeing more than any of us before had seen in the actual text of the 1853 Letters on the Absolute Idea.

us to work out, to labor at what Marx has only in notes. This is what we must all work at for our age. Here is why we so urgently need a new type of member and need to see ourselves as a new type of member to continue the development of what the new book, in completing the trilogy of revolution, has begun. In the process, let us not forget what that great revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, did for us, not only in letting us discover her unknown feminist dimension, but in posing the question of the relationship of spontaneity to organization so insightfully that, though she had not worked out the answers, she helped create an atmosphere that makes it impossible any longer to ignore all the ramifications of spontaneity.

Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme, when reread with the totality of Marx's Marxism -- where we found the "new moments" Marx experienced on what we now call the Third World and the new forces of revolution as Reason, be it WL, Flack or youth -- demanded a re-examination of all the great revolutionaries, especially Lenin and Luxemburg, who seemed to be so deeply divided on the question of organization. It was that re-examination in this year of the Marx centenary, in this nuclear world, in the imperative nature of the challenge to post-Marx Marxists, which would not let revolutionaries off scot-free of the organizational question.

The youth need also to dig into the first chapter of Part III to grapple with the Promethean vision of the young Marx before he was a Marxist, when he was still a Prometheus Bound, when he was still a young Hegelian (1839-41) just filling in some minor gaps in Hegel's monumental History of Philosophy -- and asking himself that imperative question: "where to begin." When we talk about "thought-divers" we can see that Marx was the greatest of all.

That's what I'm really appealing to the youth to do. Becoming a thought diver and an activist in this period demands nothing short of practicing the challenge to all post-Marx Marxists, and thereby creating such new ground for organization, such concretization of Marx's revolution in permanence, as to find a new way to let the actual revolution be.

Yours, RAYA

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