

PS: PS to be read 15

July 1, 1973

Dear Friends:

Grundrisse has finally been translated into English and published in full. (Giga, of course, has sent away to Pelican Press to find out whether we could get a reduction from \$4.95 price.)

Unfortunately, this edition is burdened by so fantastic a foreword by its translator, Martin Nicolaus, that we must all over again divert from Marx to his interpreters. You, of course, have the chapter on the Grundrisse in Philosophy and Revolution and since you will soon have the whole of Marx's work, you could skip over the 60 pp. foreword. However, the foreword has a significance not only because it is by the youth whom in giving us a rigorous translation and having the advantage of being or knowing Greek, translated also all those passages that are always left to tantalize, but being New Left gives us an indication of all that will befall us in the battle of ideas.

By stating that his foreword is "fantastic" I do not mean it departs in any fundamental way from "Marxists", who with reformism, began demanding the removal of the "Hegelian dialectic scaffolding" of Marx's works, through Stalin who threw out "the negation of the negation" from the "dialectic laws", to Mao who perverted contradiction from the elemental class struggle to "principal" and "subordinate" forever changing places in "bloc of 4 classes". (The latter two, especially Mao, get praised to the skies, so that we read that On Contradiction and On Practice "are at one and the same time strictly orthodox in the Marxist sense and highly original." (p.43, fn.39) I mean that the pull of pragmatism, state-capitalism, & the administrative mentality that characterizes our age are so overwhelming that all the years put into the translation, the recognition that "The Grundrisse challenges and puts to the test every serious interpretation of Marx yet conceived," (p.7) and the subjective wish to be revolutionary, are still no shield from the subjective pull of state-capitalist age once your ears are not close to the ground so that you see all the elemental forces from practice uniting with the self-determination of the philosophy of liberation.

From the very first page, first paragraph Nicolaus announces that 1857-8 Notebooks that did not see publication in Marx's time, were kept from public eye till World War II when they were first published in the original German only in Moscow and didn't really reach front center stage until after Chinese Revolution and Korean War in 1953, and with lapse of 2 further decades before they reach Anglo-Saxon world, "display the key elements in Marx's development and overthrow of the Hegelian philosophy." (p.7, my emphasis.) With this as his ground, how could the translator possibly learn anything from the 893 pages? (Add to this false beginning also the 1st footnote on that same p. which shows the heavy dependence on Rosdolsky's work which Nicolaus himself later (p.23, fn.16) admits is exclusively economic and results in "the virtual exclusion of the question of method (and of Hegel) from the debates of this epoch" and, of course, in Rosdolsky himself. In that footnote 1 Nicolaus also quotes Rosdolsky as stating "that only three or four copies of the 1939-41 edition ever reached 'the western world.'" I myself, however, knew of more than that many copies in New York alone. While it certainly was no "mass" circulation, the truth was that so great was the hunger for philosophy, for Marx's original philosophy, so great the disgust with what the Communists made of it plus Trotskyists' disregard of it, that passages would be translated and passed around in small circles of revolutionary Marxists long before the current dissenters in Russia made Sovizdat, the popular self-publication a universal.)

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The next 15 pages of his Foreword Nikolaus devotes to background plus a few pages in trying to summarize the first chapter on Marx's On Money and into the first section On Capital, all devoted to the translator's view of "the structure of the argument" (p. 23) only to conclude: "All that follows in the remaining 400 pp. of the Grundrisse is built on the basic elements here outlined."

Having thus cavalierly virtually dismissed one-half of the book (he will later return in bits and pieces), he is off on his own. It is here, then, that we have search for his method and aim and originality of contribution. Quoting Marx on the difference between a method of presentation and a method of inquiry, which Nikolaus translates as "method of working", Nikolaus concludes that this is the unique feature of the Grundrisse. Directly after this he once again quotes Marx, this time Marx's letter to Engels (1/16/1858) on the fact that Marx did indeed find Hegel's Logic of great service "in the method of working." Unfortunately, neither this sentence nor the one he quotes from Lenin that it was "impossible to understand Marx's Capital, especially Chapter I, without having thoroughly study the whole of Hegel's Logic."

Far from basing themselves on either, however, Nikolaus is on his way to construct something altogether different. First, he brings in a character from Brecht's dramas that, though Hegel could have been "one of the greatest humorists among philosophers, like Socrates... he sold himself to the state." Nikolaus concludes, "That is to say, Hegel's philosophy was at once dialectical, subversive, as was Socrates", and idealist, mystical like priest's." (p27) So satisfied is he with that red herring of old, that he reiterates, "it left Hegel towards the end of a philosopher-pope bestowing benediction, as popes must, on the temporal emperor." As for the dialectic, he returns us to the origin of the word in the "Greek, dia, meaning split in two, opposed, clashing; and 'logos', reasons; hence, "to reason by splitting in two.") But just as we are about to think he is finally, more or less, (that is, though it is in Greece and times of Socrates is rather than in Germany in the times of the French Revolution and Napoleon) on the right track, he develops neither contradiction nor self-motion, but jumps at once to Begriff (concept) as if Hegel didn't grasp that any more than he grasped that very unique Hegelianism, "moment" because allegedly, though Hegel much criticized Newton, it is from Newton, from mechanics, and not from history's self-movement, that he developed it. While this flies in the face of Marx's critique of the dialectic as rooted in history, self-development, the self-making of labor, Nikolaus stresses how "profoundly contrary to Hegel's method" is Marx's. (Nikolaus here limits himself to the concreteness of Marx's concept of time especially on the question of production, which is, of course, crucial, but we will see ~~that~~ later that what he leaves out, in turn, is the whole of Marxism: SUBJECT, self-development, masses as reason and not just as labor time.)

At the moment he was altogether too busy to deny Hegel: "The idealist side of his philosophy was that he denied the reality of what the senses perceive." (p.27) Not a word about the contrary that so great was Hegel's discovery, according to Marx, the second negativity, the creativity, and so on rooted in the revolutionary period, that he had to "throw a mystical veil" over that reality. It is of course at the reality where Marx did transcend ~~Marx~~ and so did the historic period of 1848 as against 1789--but, again it was the

Subject, the proletariat, that made the Great Divide between Hegel the bourgeois philosopher and Marx who had discovered a new continent of thought that was not merely materialism vs. idealism but the unity of the two in "the new Humanism" that carried through into Vol.III of Capital as "human power is its own end."

So preoccupied is Nicolaus with contrasting materialism to idealism (though he himself will later (p.34) need to admit that if it were only a question of "standing Hegel right side up" then that "was accomplished in the early 1840s by both Feuerbach and Marx ..."(my emphasis) that he forgets the true uniqueness of Marx to repeat outworn revisionisms about "Hegelian language" to tell us that "before Capital found its way into print Marx discarded most of this lexicon as baggage which had served for its journey but outlasted its day." (pp.32-3) Then what did that "service" that Hegel rendered Marx achieve? Nicolaus's answer is indeed the most petty-bourgeois intellectualistic idealism yet heard: "The usefulness of Hegel lay in providing guide-lines for what to do in order to grasp a moving developing totality with the mind." (p.33)

Now if it is nothing less than "guide-lines" that Hegel provided and if "getting a grip on the entire realm of the 'independent objective Mind' which Hegel had sent floating into the heavens...," and Feuerbach had already shown us such, what exactly was new in Marx's discovery and where was that proletariat Marx held on to as the subject for transformation of society, the shaper of history, the mass that is a product of history but also "makes" it? Nicolaus can't seem to see anything other than "standing right side up" and "removing mystical shell from rational core".

He does get to two other philosophic concepts: where to begin? and Mediation. And, at one point I even thought he would get to a genuine divide, when he pointed to the difference between starting with the abstract Being and Nothing in Hegel, and the concrete Commodity--which Marx didn't reach till the very last page of the Grundrisse (p.881 but then became the beginning both of Critique of Political Economy built on Grundrisse, and Capital. But he was altogether too eager to stick at the "overthrow of the Hegelian system": "This is the critique of Hegel's dialectic method, therefore a critique of his theory of contradiction, hence a critique of the fundamental processes of the Hegelian concept, of Hegel's basic grasp of movement." (p.34)

The result was the self-paralysis, blindness to that crucial Ch.I of Capital, which (1) Lenin called attention to as requiring the whole of Logic but which Nicolaus reduces to zero stating "it would be a misreading of Lenin's intent to argue that...This is a project for a long term in prison." (pp.60-61) (2) He never once questions himself as to that constant reappearance of Ch.I at each revolutionary period and counter-revolutionaries demanding it be thrown out of the teaching of Capital, as Stalin did in 1943. Moreover, and above all, (3) what exactly is Ch.I, and its 1873-5 rewriting by Marx himself of final section "Fetishism of Commodities" and why did Marx asked readers of the German edition which did not have that essential read, please to read the French edition following the Paris Commune? Nothing, nothing whatever, is greater proof of the recreation of the dialectic on the basis of this elemental outpouring and the self-development of Marx's Begriff of Commodity. In my "nothing whatever" I include all the great dialectical developments in Grundrisse, even its Hegelian-Marxian "absolute movement of becoming." For the most mature, most

creative genius learned from the Parisian masses that that perverse form, a commodity, value-form of a product of labor, can never be stripped of its fetishism except by "freely-associated labor." So his beginning, as against Hegel's in Science of Logic, was not only concrete, tangible as against abstract universal or Being, but it was also the not-concrete, not-tangible Bourgeois fetish which reduced labor itself to the commodity, labor-power, and this was not only reproduction, exploitation, vs. market not equality, but not Absolute, the specifically capitalist stage of production, whose notion had to be split into two: bourgeois reification vs. freely associated labor showing it is all relations of production that must be uprooted and recreated on altogether other foundations.

Having "overthrown Hegelian philosophy" he goes into Mediation, a central category surely but not an Absolute, and furthermore long since cleansed by Marx of its "idealism" as once he stated "immediate identities leave immediate dualities intact." Nicolaus quotes that statement on p.39 only as preliminary to first going in on his own. By no accident, therefore, on the very next page (40, fn.36) though he wishes to criticize Althusser's "Over-determination" concept, he ends by saying that Althusser is "ambiguous." If anything can be said about Althusser, despite his deliberately obfuscating "complex" style, it is that he is "brave", not at all ambiguous, in his attack not only on Hegel but Marx whose affinity to Hegel he calls nothing short of "abrogation." No, dear Nicolaus, all your praise of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks mean nothing, nothing at all, once you straw consign anyone who wishes to study Logic to fully comprehend Capital to "a long term in prison" and think, now that you have presented (and how presented!) Grundrisse which Lenin hadn't known about, no further need is there for Hegel. Is there any for Capital or Grundrisse when you assure them that, in place of awaiting a long term in prison, "meanwhile much can be gained from Value, Prices, and Profit and On Contradiction" (p.61), having already (p.43, fn.39) assured is that Mao's essays are "at one and the same time strictly orthodox in the Marxist sense and highly original." In their universality, they surely are "highly original" for a Marxist, but shouldn't you ask yourself: how did it happen you went back to 1937 when, in fact, the Chinese Revolution is that brought "Pre-Capitalist Formations" (you more precisely do translate it as "Forms which precede capitalist production. (Concerning the process which precedes the formation of capital relation or of original accumulation.)")

Let me expand on this. Nicolaus stopped before he reached that crucial section (pp.471-514) of the Grundrisse which he barely mentions anywhere as if what he called "the structure of the argument" could possibly have been made on what preceded it. Clearly, the section was neither merely economy nor even "merely" historic, that is to say, history as past instead of as present and future. The dialectic in that historic period had all the elements of a new role for peasantry, a new role for so-called Oriental despotism, a more comprehensive view of becoming. For that reason, it is only with an actual revolution ongoing, and China having actually been first to translate that section, all the established Communisms had first to grapple with what Marx had written in 1857-8 and, insofar as "backwardness" is concerned, reiterated in the last year of his life, 1882-3, in the form of a prediction that Russia might, in advance of the "advanced" countries, have a revolution. The same type of attitude has to be made re the "Automaton" Nicolaus does mention that more often--and in fact translated it, if I remember right way back in 1960, at Cambridge in the very journal that had published my Afro-Asian Revolutions pamphlet. But, again, his hostility

to Hegel, and being stuck in the mud of our age's administrative mentality, limited his perception of that section as if it were only against the "New Left's" view that engineers will, with automation, invent machines who will replace the proletariat, etc. etc. In actuality it is the multidimensionality that Marx was analyzing and saw the limitations of both the Hegelian dialectic sans Subject and his own economic, great as it was, sans the passion in motion in the 1850's that made him discard all, start anew, and include both the Civil War and the Paris Commune, both the struggle for the Working-Day and the new Black dimension releasing labor that ~~xxxxxxxx~~ led to the restructuring of Grundrisse as Capital.

The max in the Grundrisse even now is not merely "method of working", great as that is, but the continuity of the affinity of the Marxian and Hegelian dialectic from the moment of break with bourgeois society, 1843, all the way through Grundrisse and total break with vulgar materialists not merely as utopians or Proudhonists but as Lassalleans, to Capital, and the First International. If, as Nicholas now claims, or at least questions whether "it is any longer necessary to read Hegel's Logic in order to completely understand Capital" when Grundrisse is finally available, and if Grundrisse is just to see a mind at work, great as that one is, then we are indeed the worst kind of petty-bourgeois "idealists" who are completely dead since the whole of the past 2 decades when from below, from the East German Revolt in 1953 on to Paris and Peking, 1968, as well as from "above", self-determination of idea finally catching up with self-determination of nations, even as "new passions and new forces" have arisen have passed us by! It surely has passed by progeny of the Stalins, Maos, not to mention the Trotskyists and all who thought they can catch theory "en route." The task for us, however, has just begun.

Yours,

RAYA

P.S. TO BE READ INSTEAD OF THE ABOVE

Dear Friends:

Because the above has become so long as to preclude reading it out at a regular meeting, I suggest that a meeting for it be set for another time.

Since I'm out of town and do not have either a mimeograph machine to send to each, nor everyone's address, I'm sending, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ as "Letter of Week", merely the above announcement about Grundrisse, plus the following bits of news:

- 1) TELOS has offered to send to its subscribers (about 2,000) a free ad about P&R. It had to obey certain size which we did not have and May at once made herself responsible for electronic stencil which they will get in time. (They gave us only 7 days.) We will also send some to locals later as it is good for many purposes of publicity.
- 2) Bert writes from Paris that he is making great contacts and sales; we will forward news from him next week when we will send out REB Minutes (I need first to return to Det. & hold mtg. at end of week).
- 3) ILP is holding its school this year in Scotland and Harry will speak there on "The Necessary Revolution". Also, an article by him on Marx and Smith where, as he put it, "I worked in a small quotation from a book with the title Marxism and Freedom", will appear in Scottish International journal.
- 4) The move of Conn. to N.Y. has been completed and since Ray and Anne are here this weekend we will have a chance to discuss at Fri.'s (7/6) meeting. Meanwhile everyone has by now received the latest issue of N&L and thereby we open "pre-convention" discussions in more ways than one. Yours, RAYA

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