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Not So Random Thoughts On:

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY? WHAT IS REVOLUTION?
1789-1793; 1848-1850; 1914-1919; 1979

I

It sounds so abstract, so easy to say, with Hegel, that philosophy is the "thinking study of things"! (para. 2) It surely sounds oversimplified to say, at one and the same time, that "Nature has given everyone a faculty of thought. But thought is all that philosophy claims as the form proper to her process ..." (Para. 5) When, however, you realize that this is the Introduction to Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences; that it was written after the French Revolution, which made popular an actual "permanent revolution" -- no revolution is ever its first act alone -- you can begin, just begin to grasp the meaning of Hegel's expression, "second negativity." Furthermore, Hegel had not found articulation that easy until after Phenomenology of Mind, until after the Science of Logic, until after he tried to summarize all of his works, including the 2,500-year history of philosophy. Then, of course, you realize why, when Hegel is speaking of philosophy, it is not an abstraction, that even though he limits it to thought and not activity, he can conclude in that very same Introduction:

> "This divorce between idea and reality is a favorite device of the analytic understanding in particular. Yet strangely in contrast with this separatist tendency, its own dreams, half-truths though they are, appear to the understanding something true and real; it prides itself on the imperative 'ought' which it takes especial pleasure in prescribing on the field of politics. As if the world had waited on it to learn how it ought to be, and was not!" (para. 6)

And that same paragraph further stresses that "the Idea is not so feeble as merely to have a right or an obligation to exist without actually existing."

When a new objective stage arose in 1844-1848 which was proletarian, and not just semi-proletarian as with the enrages of the French Revolution, the young, new, revolutionary philosopher and activist, Marx practiced Hegel's Idea of freedom by realizing it in an outright revolution. He had told his young Hegelian friends who were becoming materialists: You cannot become a true new Human-

ist by turning your back on Hegel because he was both bourgeois and idealist and because he limited the revolution to a revolution in thought. The truth is that Hegel's dialectic was not just any idea, but the Idea of freedom, and must, therefore, first be realized in an actual material way. We must be specific and shout out loud who the forces of revolution are. What the Reason of revolution is. And how we can achieve freedom. I, said Marx, say it is the proletariat, because they are at the point of production where all things are created. I say that in issuing the challenge that will cause the whole capitalist world to tremble, we need to unfurl a totally new banner of philosophy as well as of revolution. And the philosophy of revolution now -- that is, after the bourgeoisie has betrayed us in this 1848-9 Revolution, and it is necessary to depend only on our own forces -- must be "REVOLUTION IN PERMANENCE." (Address to the Communist League, 1850)

This revolution in permanence, he continued, is not the generality it was in 1789-93. This revolution in permanence is on the basis of these new forces of revolution, and this new philosophy of revolution I unfurled in the Communist Manifesto dealt with a total uprooting of the old, a total creation of the new, showing not only what we are against, but what we are for. In a word, even though we have now challenged not only the mode of production but also the form of the family and dug into the fundamental relationship of man/woman, we must go further into the dialectics of revolution , i.e. into "the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principle" of Hegelian philosophy. (Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic, 1844)

Internationalism is not telling other nations what to do. It is solidarizing and fraternizing with those sent to shoot you -- and having them turn their guns on their own officers. Finally, in very nearly the last work of Marx -- the 1881 Preface to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto -- that permanent revolution gets spelled out on a still higher level -- that is, internationally as well as nationally. It is there that it is concretized as the relationship between technologically advanced and technologically backward countries -- i.e. that backward Russia could have its revolu-

tion ahead of "West Europe" -- provided : 1) the revolution is accomplished within the context of European revolutions; and 2) the new forces, in this case the peasant communes, are never out of context of both internationalism and dialectics of liberation. The Idea is the power because it is concrete; it is total; it is multi-dimensional; and at no time is the Individual made just to tail-end the State or "committee." Rather, let us never forget the principle: "the Individual is the social entity" and society must never again be counter-posed to the Individual.

II

Marx had spent something like 45 volumes in expressing his thoughts, in participating in revolutions, in leaving a legacy that was the very opposite of an heirloom. Instead, the new continent of thought became the ground for all future revolutions that would be filled out anew with ever-richer concrete and with ever-greater forces -- men, women, children of all colors, races, nations -- until we finally have achieved that type of total revolution and that type of total uprooting. Surely no one was more prepared, was more serious, was more experienced to help create such a total revolution than those who had "made" the 1905 Revolution -- Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky. And yet, and yet, and yet....

Comes World War I, and the shock of the simultaneity of imperialist war and socialist betrayal is so everwhelming that one and only one -- Lenin -- says, if I could have been so misled and considered that betrayer, Kautsky, my teacher, something is altogether wrong with my way of thinking. And while I will not stop shouting "down with the war -- turn the imperialist war into civil war," I will never again be satisfied with the "correct analysis" of a political situation without first digging into Hegelian dialectics. It could not have possibly been an accident that Marx, Marx's Marxism, was rooted in Hegel -- and after having broken with that, he returned to develop Hegelian dialectics into the Marxian dialectic. And so this great revolutionary, Lenin, spent his days in the library studying Hegel's Science of Logic, and his evenings preparing for revolution.

What did Luxemburg and Trotsky do? They surely were as revolutionary as Lenin. They surely opposed the imperialist war. They surely were trying to prepare for revolution. But without that rudder of philosophy, what came out of it? And in this case, because Luxemburg has no party on the scene today, but Trotsky does, it is on Trotskyism that I will now concentrate.

Trotsky counterposed his slogan "peace without annexations" and "mobilizing the proletariat for a struggle for peace" to Lenin's slogan "turn the imperialist war into civil war" which Trotsky rejected. What was even worse was Trotsky's rejection of Lenin's statement that the defeat of your own country is the lesser evil.

/I confess that having had a very warm spot for Trotsky -- and he did mean a great deal not only for my reorganization but for the generation that had to confront Stalin -- there were certain expressions in those years 1914-1917 that I just couldn't get myself to quote. This opposition to wanting the defeat of one's own country was such an expression./

Listen to Trotsky on the Russian Internationalists trying to achieve a unity, first under his peace slogan which Lenin rejected, and then on Lenin's slogan which Trotsky rejected. Here is what he said:

> "Under no condition can I agree with your opinion, which is emphasized by a resolution, that Russia's defeat would be a 'lesser evil'. This opinion represents a fundamental connivance with the political methodology of social patriotism, a connivance for which there is no reason or justification and which substitutes an orientation (extremely arbitrary under present conditions) along the line of a 'lesser evil' for the revolutionary struggle against war and the conditions which generated this war."

/I am quoting this from The Bolsheviks and the World War by Gankin and Fisher (Stanford University Press, 1940, p.170). I first read it in Russian in Trotsky's own work, War and Revolution, The Fall of the Second International and the Preparation of the Third, first published in Moscow in 1923. We must remember, however, that the period covered is 1914-1917; that Trotsky's specific article from which I quote above was dated Paris, Oct. 14, 1915. That article was part of what those Marxists who had not betrayed and who

tried to reconstitute themselves internationally/ not on the basis of Lenin's revolutionary struggle of "turn the imperialist war into civil war", but on Trotsky's "struggle for peace"-- wrote. Indeed, Trotsky was speaking in such general terms that he opposed the naming of Liebknecht specifically, saying: "Such a personification of tactical evaluations, conforming to German conditions alone, was inappropriate in the given document. Upon the insistence of the whole commission, it was withdrawn." This is why such pseudo-universalism is the way to skip over concrete realizations of freedom. Yet, in his 1919 Introduction, Trotsky stressed the internationalism and repeated that: "The March revolution liquidated these differences."

BUT THAT IS NOT TRUE. THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES ARE NOT "LIQUIDATED" JUST BECAUSE, IN FACT, YOU ARE A REVOLUTIONARY. Quite the contrary. Once the heat of the battle dies, the deviations from Marxism first come to plague you.

The truth is that the theoretical difference reappears in a most horrible form exactly when the next new, objective situation arises. You must then dig for new philosophic depth on the basis of the highest theoretic as well as practical point last reached. If, instead, you remain without a philosophic rudder, the supposedly "correct" political analysis becomes, if not outright counter-revolution, definitely no more than tail-endism. That was true of Trotsky in 1905. It wasn't true in 1917 only because the one he then tailended was Lenin. But it became dangerously true in our era as all the opposition and great fights against Stalinism led only to tailending Stalin once World War II broke out.

III

Perhaps, I shouldn't have asked only what is philosophy?, what is revolution?, but also what is anti-imperialism? Does the taking of low-level personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and designating them as CIA agents shake up the American empire? The truth is that neither Khomeini nor those students could have helped Carter more in achieving higher popularity than that allegedly anti-imperialist act, thereby dulling the mass struggle against U.S.

Calling oneself a "follower of the Imam" does not constitute a revolutionary act, no matter how many times one repeats that this is anti-imperialism. Nor does self-flagellation constitute a revolutionary act, no matter how many times those who commit it call upon the revolutionary youth of the U.S., who had previously participated actively in the anti-Shah movement. That kind of pseudo anti-imperialism, such as the taking of hostages, opens no new stage of revolution. Rather, it initiates a retreat from the original revolutionary perspective. It may give Khomeini a "red" coloration, and it surely helps him divert from the grave new contradictions in Iran itself, but it does nothing to solve the increasing crises since he came to power. The hardships on the masses intensify. The unemployment is greater. And so is inflation. As the Sheng Wu-lien found out, during Mao's Cultural Revolution, which they at first heartily endorsed because they thought it meant the displacement of the bureaucracy: "The more things change, the more they remain the same."

Concrete, in the Hegelian sense of the synthesis of diverse elements into a concrete totality, would show that, by no means coincidentally, the occupation of the Embassy paralleled the completion of the counter- revolutionary Constitution. Yes, the masses are anti-imperialist , but Marx didn't say that just because the masses were anti-feudal and the bourgeoisie was leading a revolution against feudalism, that therefore the masses should follow the bourgeoisie. Quite the contrary. He said: We were with the boungeoisie in that first act of overthrowing feudalism, but now count us out. Not only that. It is high time to deepen and develop the strictly proletarian tasks.

Luxemburg understood that very well , and applied it not only in Russia in an actual revolution, but tried to bring that concept of pure class struggle to Germany. And yet, when a new objective stage arose -- imperialism -- and despite all her prescience of that exploitative stage, she did not work out a new unity of force and reason with new revolutionary forces, that is, the revolutionary nationalists fighting for self-determination. Lenin had to

begin separating himself, not just from betrayers of the workers, but from revolutionaries who would not see the new concrete, whether that was a new revolutionary force in another country or his own. What he had learned from the Hegelian dialectic that made him so sharp against his own Bolshevik colleagues was that overthrow, first negativity, was not enough; that you must now see that counter-revolution can arise from within the revolution itself.

This and this alone made it possible not to stay at overthrow of Tsarism and bourgeois democracy calling itself "socialist", though headed by a so-called socialist, Kerensky, and even supported by genuine revolutionaries. Just as now, the Trotskyists think that they are the true revolutionaries in Iran because they hyphenate the name Khomeini with Bazargan and thus talk against capitalist government, as well as outshout anyone else in anti-imperialist slogans, so did the Bolsheviks before Lenin returned to Russia think that they were pushing the revolution forward by their critical support of Kerensky. It becomes imperative, therefore, to take a second look at these stages: February to April; April to June; July-August full counter-revolution; October. As soon as the overthrow of the Tsar occurs, and while this great, historic, spontaneous outburst achieved what no Party -- Bolshevik or otherwise -- could achieve, and though it was unanticipated by Lenin, he by no means let euphoria overrun him. Quite the contrary. He had already grappled with the Hegelian dialectic; he had already analyzed the new stage of imperialism, not just economically but seeing new forces of revolution; and he already began to work out what became State and Revolution, that is to say, have the perspective of not only overthrow but the total uprooting, so that only when production and the state would be in the hands of the whole population "to a man, woman, and child" would it be a new society.

Clearly, when he arrived in Russia in April, 1917, it was not 1905 slogans -- either his or Trotsky's -- that he was repeating. Rather, it was reorganizing his whole Party on the conception of State and Revolution. Once that became the basis for all the activities of the Party, there was no separating the revolution from the

philosophy of revolution. But the masses wanted to go still further, directly to the conquest of power; they underestimated the forces still in power, and it was the beginning of all the counter-revolutionary moves that still passed themselves off as revolution, accusing Lenin of being a German spy and saying that is why he called for the end of the war. The relevant point for us today is that when outright counter-revolution was initiated by Kornilov so that one still had to defend Kerensky, the manner in which it was done has all the answers against tailendism. It was at that point that whether it was the creation of a revolutionary military committee, which permitted no transfer of guns to the front unless they approved it, or whether it was such slogans as "All power to the Soviets," or whether it was "Land, Bread and Peace", there was no way whatever to confuse that Party with any other.

Contrast this to what everyone from Trotskyist to Qaddafi is saying to blur those new grave contradictions within Iran, the diversion from what threatens civilization as we have known it -- preparation for atomic war. Qaddafi and Khomeini and General Zia may think the Middle East as they define it will be the graveyard of U.S. imperialism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Just read, please, Orianna Falacci's interview with Khomeini in a recent issue of the New York Times, and the one with Qaddafi in the current issue (12/16/79). Just listen to that demagogue, Qaddafi, try to take advantage of the fact that supposedly there is no government because there is no Parliament, and supposedly it's a collectivist society because it calls itself Jamahiriya, which means "a command of the people." Is it they who decide everything? No, even the word, committee, unless it's revolutionary -- and the word revolutionary means total uprooting, is not the equivalent of destiny being in the hands of the people; that is to say, with control of production in the hands of the workers. And so must the state be in their hands. To claim that there is no "government" because there is no Parliament; to claim that Khomeini and Qaddafi are "just one" is fantastic. When you come to that retrogressive a stage, even if you are a Maoist who was once a revolutionary and did lead a national revolution, you have done nothing but spell out the new

stage of state-capitalism.

What new retrogressive stage are we in now, when religion usurps also political power? First it was the Little Red Book of Mao. And now it's the Little Green Book of Qaddafi. And what part of the Koran will Khomeini embody in some brief sayings that all must repeat?

It is not a question that a leader must write fifty books, like Marx or Lenin -- and I'm sure that Trotsky and Luxemburg wrote as many. It is a question of being serious about revolution and therefore the philosophy of revolution, and being responsible to history, which means men and women shaping history. No, you cannot throw out philosophy, and indulge in sloganeering. Even a good bourgeois philosopher, at least in the stage when the bourgeoisie achieved its revolution, a good Lutheran like Hegel, who insisted all his life that he believed, had to submit to the dialectic drive of philosophy and subordinate religion to it. All his protestations notwithstanding -- and "revealed religion" is pretty high in the sphere of the Absolute , nothing can change the fact that it isn't the highest; that philosophy is. Needless to say, that revolution in thought initiated by Hegelian dialectics was transformed by Marx's new continent of thought into reality. Ever since then no revolution was successful that wasn't grounded in a philosophy of revolution.

Every generation of Marxists must work this out concretely for its own age. The fact that our age is in such a total crisis makes it all the more imperative that we tailend no state power.

-- Raya Dunayevskaya
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