

Sept. 15, 1970

Dear MM:

It was great hearing from you; I thought you had forgotten me and the Absolute Idea. Instead, you had been involved in a real movement from practice--hurrah for Yugoslav workers!

I will be forwarding to Gajo Petrovic the chapter on Lenin and Hegel so that what I say on Hegel doesn't sound abstract, and it is 1970 and the 200th anniversary of one and 100th of the "Other's" birth. I will believe that the free flow of ideas does include such independent Marxists as myself when I see myself in print there. I should have thought that, from my Marx's Humanism, Today, that was included in the Fromm volume on Socialist Humanism to the pamphlet, Communism, Pan-Africanism, Marxist-Humanism and the AFRO-ASIAN REVOLUTIONS there would be quite enough of material that the Yugoslav audience would be interested in, and perhaps the other magazine you mention has so decided. In any case, it is all in your hands, and I have full confidence in them.

Sorry to say that I do not share your exalted views of Ernest Mandel; I debated him in 1947 when the Fourth International allowed me to present the views of state-capitalism to their Congress, and found him supercilious. He did, of course, develop in all these years, but the work that gave him all that high standing as a Marxist economist I considered both apologist for Stalinism and underconsumptionist, as you can see from my review which I enclose. Yes, he is erudite, etc. etc. but, as I express it in the review, he has read too many bourgeois books and is thoroughly fascinated with the latest market devices. I do not know how he has developed as an orator, so you may be right there, but our comrades who had attended the Socialist Scholars Conference were not all that impressed even when he came over to our literature table and asked that he should be remembered to me. Having heard the "Old Man" himself I am not likely to consider the orators of our day as phenomenal. The main point is the content of what he said. What was his topic? What did he aim for in addressing an East European audience? *No doubt a little T-15m for a long way ahead & we're glad to see it.*

Do you suppose you ever will find time to resume our discussions on Philosophy and Revolution? Have you thought of any chapter on the relationship of philosophy to revolution in East Europe from Yugoslavia's break with Stalinism till today that could fit into my work as symbol of solidarity in this free flow of Marxist ideas through national channels? If yes, then I will send you the final part of the draft of my work and see how we could work that in. How much of the draft of the book did I give you? Has it the section on "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Liberation" which analyses the economics of the technologically advanced and technologically underdeveloped countries. Though it concentrates on Africa, I actually "hungered" for an East European section.

Will you have any opportunity to visit Czechoslovakia? I am so very anxious to meet you, and I am sure you understand how very sad and isolated one feels. Am looking forward to hearing from you re your editorial meeting September 8th and on all other matters ideal and material. Give my very warmest regards to Christina. I miss you both.

*Handwritten signature and initials*

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The *Objective Logic* (which discusses Being and Essence) deals just as much with God as does the *Subjective Logic*, but with this difference; in the *Objective Logic*, the Absolute has not attained self-consciousness. "Objective Logic . . . comprises . . . metaphysics, in so far as [metaphysics] attempts to comprehend with the pure forms of thought certain substrata primarily taken from sensuous representation, such as Soul, World, God; and the determinations of thought constituted what was essential in the method of contemplation. [Objective] Logic, however, considers these forms detached from such substrata, which are the subjects of sensuous representation; it considers their nature and value in themselves. The old metaphysic neglected this, and thus earned the just reproach of having used these forms uncritically, without a preliminary investigation as to whether and how far they were capable of being determinations of the thing-in-itself, to use the Kantian expression, or, to put it better, determinations of the Rational."<sup>33</sup>

In other words, traditional metaphysics merely conceived Being and the World, as mere abstractions, externally related, whereas their truth consists in their dynamic, and organic, internal relationship. Put differently and more concretely, through a contrast: For Hegel, as for Aristotle, God's knowledge is reflexive — but Aristotle's Being only knows himself and not the world; whereas Hegel's God, in knowing himself, knows the world.

THE FIRST TELOS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE:  
"THE NEW MARXISM"

Waterloo, Ontario, October 8-11, 1970

A *Telos* Conference is, at first sight, a contradiction in terms. *Telos* is essentially a radical anti-establishment journal devoted to — among other things — demolishing most of the present-day nonsense that goes under the name of philosophy while at the same time rediscovering things such as what has been called the "hidden dimension" of the continental philosophical tradition: European Marxism. Conferences, on the other hand, are bourgeois institutions for professional academicians who must periodically escape their boring routine (preferably with their mistresses) to far-away and exotic places where these meetings are usually held. Consequently, a "*Telos* Conference", if not a put-on, would indicate the embourgeoisification of the journal and the sanitification of its staff. Neither is the case (or so we hope). In order to really understand what happened, it is necessary to recapitulate briefly the history and present status of *Telos*.

Once upon a time (around Spring 1967) a group of graduate students in philosophy found themselves in a *nouveaux riche* university which, as a result of the political ambition of the state's governor (Rockefeller), had been "nationalized" from a provincial private institution into a major educational showpiece — a worthy feather for the cap of any would-be president. Since universities, unlike oil fields, cannot be drilled into the ground in a couple of days, the great "State University of New York" project turned out to be an institutional dinosaur with academic credentials as large as a flea's brain. Thus,

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any actual political movement. Gross tried to explain this inaction in terms of the objective lack of meaningful alternatives during the late 20's and 30's, when the only possibilities were Stalinism and Social Democracy. The apology, however, did not go over well; and the discussion petered out in a polemic about the meaning or meaninglessness of hope among Hansen, Kosok, and Piccone.

The last paper of the day, after supper, was delivered by Raya Dunayevskaya on "Hegelian Leninism". Since the title was chosen by the organizers of the conference - she had not submitted one - she immediately complained and proclaimed a new one, "Dialectics of Liberation". The paper consisted of four main points. First was what Lenin meant by the dialectic. To the extent that Lenin *lived* rather than *wrote about* the dialectic, any such reconstruction, based on the scanty *Philosophical Notebooks* and some sporadic articles, necessarily ends up in a barrage of quotes more or less incoherently assembled indicating, at best, that Lenin did come to appreciate Hegel and that he had a great deal of respect for the dialectic. It would have helped, instead, to indicate how Lenin dialectically developed his politics, or what it was in its *modus operandi* that made it dialectical. Such an analysis would have indicated, among other things, the crucial role of theory for praxis, and the general relevance of philosophy to everyday life. Instead, Dunayevskaya chose to give a purely philosophical account which, given the nature of the subject matter, could not amount to much. The second point, dealing with the more concrete issue of Internationalism and the National Question, showed much better Lenin's dialectical way of dealing with political questions and that in this he found himself almost alone against the overwhelming majority of Bolsheviks. Yet, the presentation never made clear how Lenin's analysis emerged as more concrete in terms of the long-range goals of world revolution since, although he wholeheartedly supported struggles for national liberation against the popular Marxist slogans of abstract Internationalism, it is not altogether obvious that, ultimately, these separate and discrete struggles will produce anything close to the "classless" society. This point is extremely important today since the movement has yet to figure out concretely how, in the long run, to reconcile the various interests of Women's Liberation, Black Power, Chicanos, etc., even though it is easy to see how, in their opposition to the system, they are potentially revolutionary agencies. What lurks in the background is the question of revolutionary organization (the party) and the problem of reified and particularized consciousness, problems which necessitate a complete overhaul of Lenin's theory of the party and its political function which, in the classical Leninist formulation, reflects precisely those Second International assumptions that Lenin so strongly rejected after 1914. Dunayevskaya did not fully develop these points, but the development of her argument indicates that these were the problems which she had in mind since her third major point dealt with the collapse of Bolshevik leadership, presumably because of the failure in the early 1920's to resolve concretely the problems implicit in "the National Question" and the "question of organization." In fact, she saw the failure of Bolshevism as a result of its leaders' inability to fully grasp the dialectic. Although this view is largely correct, it fails to explain why it was *only* Lenin who could think dialectically and thus risks falling into a romantic theory of history in which everything hinges on the actions of a major historical figure, the Great Man.

Again, what is involved is the question of consciousness in regard to objective conditions, a question that Dunayevskaya was, once again, quite aware of, and with which she dealt in her fourth major point: "the Death of the Dialectic," i.e., the development of the USSR into a state capitalist system. When all is said and done, the only Marxist explanation for this phenomenon is that capitalism (or imperialism) had not quite reached its end of the rope in the 1920's and that, consequently, world revolution might have been premature at that stage. Thus, she warned over-eager activists to refrain from seeking to enlighten others as though that were all that was needed to precipitate a revolution: when conditions are ready there will be spontaneous expressions of this readiness, indicated by the experience of the last twenty years in Eastern Europe and by the student movements in the West. In conclusion, she called for a return to Lenin, as it were, against the Leninists who, by freezing the dialectic, have become fundamentally anti-Leninist.

The comments by David DeGrood concentrated on the philosophical continuity between the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and the Lenin of the *Philosophical Notebooks*. Also, he sought to salvage USSR from the charge of state capitalism by pointing out the temporary and transitory nature of this state of affairs, justifiable and worthwhile move in view of the achievements of the Soviet Union. Since the presentation of Lenin's thought as fundamentally unbroken has been a traditional Soviet maneuver meant to apologize for Stalinism as a last link of the official Marxist tradition spanning from Marx to Lenin to Stalin and all the way to Brezhnev, DeGrood's comments, coupled with an undisguised apology for the USSR, almost blew Dunayevskaya's mind. Her life's work, in fact, has been characterized by the attempt to rescue Marxism from the official Soviet stranglehold: even her thesis of the dual Lenin is meant to salvage the "real" dialectical Lenin from the flat icon usually sanctified by Soviet apologists. It is thus not at all surprising that she almost blasted DeGrood from the podium with charges of "petty-bourgeois academician," etc. Somewhat intimidated by such philosophical ferocity, the audience limited itself to simply asking clarificatory questions without even hinting at challenging her thesis. This might also be due to the fact that Dunayevskaya is probably the foremost North American Lenin scholar and has developed one of the most solid interpretations of Lenin available anywhere in the world.

By nine o'clock - the scheduled time for the panel on "Spontaneity and the Party" - everyone was beat, and a rumor was circulating that, instead of another session, there should be a "spontaneous party." In fact, by that time most of the participants in the conference had noticed that the twin towns of Waterloo and Kitchener were in the midst of the annual *Oktoberfest* and were aching to taste the free-flowing local brew. Furthermore, most of the "activists" had been somewhat baffled by the abstractness of the papers and were impatient to get hold of something concrete worth dealing with. Given this frame of reference, disruption had to take place, and it did.

The members of the panel were Stojanovic, Dunayevskaya, Breines, and Howard, with Bernie Flynn as chairman. But only Stojanovic was able to deliver his presentation. His main point concerned revolutionary organization, or the