

REPORT BY THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN TO NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES ON
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... TOWARD A UNITY
OF THOUGHT AND ACTION
By Raya Dunayevskaya

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By Raya Dunayevskaya

1965 is a terminal year and a point of transition. It ends a decade which, in the United States, began with the Montgomery Bus Boycott; a new type of Negro self-activity, while in eastern Europe, the undercurrent of revolt took the form of thought-clarification. Within a year the search for Marx's humanism emerged as the Hungarian Revolution. The Russian military might, which crushed this revolution, was politically and ideologically reinforced by Chinese Communism. But while Communist state power regained domination over the proletariat in its orbit, the schism within world communism has reached such titanic proportions that Russia and China stand divided and, as hardly more than by-standers, look on while the United States murderously attacks their Communist ally, North Vietnam.

The Negro freedom struggles in the United States, on the other hand, have reached a new high stage with the Watts revolt last month. In examining this, we must hold, as a single unit, both the movement of thought and movement of action, which are part of the world struggle for freedom. Only thereby will we be able to grapple with what is meant by "a point of transition". Transition to what? is the question crucial to an elaboration of perspectives.

I- The Ramifications of the Watts Revolt

From all sides we are hearing a great deal these days about just how "isolated" Watts was. What all the analysts fail to grasp is that the Negroes in Watts gained their strength, not because they were isolated, but because they acted collectively. It was a disciplined strength. Thus, despite all talk against "Whitey" (and some beatings) not a single white who happened into the area was shot at, excluding, of course, the cops, but then these are the most hated representatives of the exploitative, prejudiced, vicious power structure.

No, it was not the Negro who was isolated; it was the white power structure that was isolated. And within the Negro population, it was the middle class Negro, not the Negro mass, who stood isolated, even as it was the Negro leadership, who, precisely because they were outsiders, felt isolated.

There is good reason, however, to be suspicious of the word, "class", when it becomes very nearly a cliché in an outpouring of analyses by bourgeois ideologists. One is compelled to question the sudden embrace of "class" analyses. It certainly was not the result of a sudden conversion to Marxism. The very opposite is the case. The sudden discovery of "class not race" as the basic cause of Negro self-activity is only the latest manifestation of how the vanquished always try to worm their way back in. When Karl Marx, after the Paris Commune, was confronted with the situation that every conceivable political tendency wanted to become part of the first Workingmen's International Association, he wrote: "The old always tries to reconstitute itself inside the new forms." And so it is with the present misuse of the concept, "class."

The Watts revolt was certainly and unmistakably a class question. It was equally a race question. It will not do to try to separate what the actual events have welded together.

It was not for purposes of releasing the creativity of the masses -- class and race -- that the class structure of society was suddenly "discovered". Rather, it was an adventuristic attempt to make the people who were in revolt forget what was new: the self-discovery of their own creativity; the confidence in mass power; the differentiation from all others -- the Negro middle class as well as the absentee landlords, the absentee grocery owner as well as the self-appointed but equally absent leaders.

In a word, the new discoverers of the class basis of revolt aimed at nothing less than to stop the mass search for new beginnings in leadership, in action, in theory.

Yes, theory. Listen:

"We don't belong to any organization. We meet in the street and talk. When it happened, we knew what we wanted and we knew what we would do about it. We'll start all over again if we don't get it."

"We haven't lost a thing, and now we know where it hurts Whitey."

"I would do it all over again even if my own house burns alongside Whitey's store; my house was no good nohow."

"We have the power to upset the city, break it wide open. We got the power."

The revolt was both spontaneous and conscious of itself. Moreover, where, in the revolt in Harlem, which likewise was spontaneous (although not as thoroughgoing), Maoists at least tried to claim credit, in Watts they were nowhere around. Nor were the Du Bois clubs. Nor, for that matter, were the established civil rights organizations, although these, at least, showed after the events.

Yes, the revolt was a stride toward theory. It ended one phase of activity and began a new one. The new stage is far more fundamental than a question of violence vs. non-violence as a method of struggle. The genuine leap was not in the tactics of struggle, but in the achievement of consciousness of self, of being able to make generalizations like "we know now where Whitey hurts" and thus to take the first step in the construction of universals about a new society. But it is a first step only, and, though a gigantic stride, it is not the end, but a beginning. The point at issue now is not so much "what next in activity, but what is next in thought". Without being able to make what philosophers call a category out of their experience, that is to say, to be able to conclude that it is not just an experience, but a stage in cognition, in ideas, the experience itself will not become part of an emerging revolution either in fact or in thought.

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The experience otherwise can be taken over by others, by those who thirst to lead, or perhaps I should say, to "mislead", not because they are "bad men", but because they are moved by forces ready to substitute for the workers' accumulation of their historic experience actions that have no relationship whatever to what the masses want, their quest for universality, i.e. for total freedom.

No doubt the established Negro leadership also wants to resume its role, and it too is moved by an ideology which may very well end in an apology for the status quo. But so long as the momentum of the struggle continues, the movement can easily replace this leadership. It is not easy to bypass the "radical" leaders, because they come out of the womb of one revolution and still use its language.

The overriding purpose of those who thirst to lead is to make sure that the masses are as much at the disposal of "the party" as the proletariat is at the disposal of capital.

What is of the essence, therefore, is to have a method, the dialectic method, the Marxist-Humanist method with which to grasp an immediate occurrence by its historic roots, not because we're interested in history "as such" but because it alone can so illuminate the present that we see it in its totality, feel the pull of the future, and try to realize freedom today.

Let's test this method on the Vietnam war both as to facts and underlying philosophies as well as its affect on the American revolution.

II- Opposition to the Vietnam War: Facts and Underlying Philosophies

At the beginning of February, when American imperialism bombed North Vietnam, the opposition to such militarism was widespread, instantaneous, and altogether novel in many of its methods, beginning with the all-night teach-in. In part, and only in part, the inspiration for this tactic was the FSM which had combined labor's strike tactic with the civil disobedience tactic of the Negro revolution.

Unfortunately, the similarity to this revolution ends almost as soon as it begins. Where the civil rights movement, looking in horror at Johnson's war, asked also, "Is this one more diversion in a never-ending series that began 100 years ago?", the intellectuals, without any questions about its relationship to the revolution on native grounds, simply plunged into the activity, looking neither for native roots, nor for that matter into all the aspects of the Vietnam war. Opposition to one's ruling class comes first, of course, but unless you also state not only what you are against, but what you are for, you cannot win the battle for the minds of men.

From nowhere, money appeared everywhere -- money for administrative purposes, which at once took precedence over all other work: offices, full-time personnel, endless newsletters, magazines, leaflets, and committees, committees, committees -- doctors, lawyers, churchmen, students, inter-university

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top committees that would front the debates with the top men in the Johnson Administration and thereby be under the illusion that those types of arguments could win the struggle for the minds of men.

The Committees were effective in exposing President Johnson's hypocrisies and ordered atrocities.

But MUM was the word for any atrocities committed by the Vietcong or Hanoi.

MUM was the word about any division between China and Russia.

And so ineffective was the Committees response to U.S. invasion of Santo Domingo that hardly more than MUM was the word for that totally unprovoked imperialist action nearer home.

Oh, of course, opposition to the invasion of Santo Domingo was always tacked on to the signs in the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations; individual speakers might have criticized the action or even criticized China, Russia, Hanoi -- ours surely did and not only in our own press, but also in the Committees themselves where we were and will continue to be active. But that was not the line that was selected in the multitude of material that came out from the official committees. This even included some fellow-Hispanists, writing, however, not on Santo Domingo, but on Vietnam.

Very obviously, the raison d'etre of the End the Vietnam War Committees had no need to wait upon any momentum to develop in this country before proceeding with its work. Very obviously its line was set by an underlying philosophy that gained its sustenance neither from the self-activity of the masses nor from all the facts of the actual dirty war in Vietnam.

Not as obvious, but equally true, it was not a so-called foreign philosophy; it was way too ingrained in the spokesmen for them to have merely been mouthing words written by others. Let's never forget that it isn't so much an intellectual's "cosmopolitanism" as his administrative mentality that catches the spirit of a state-capitalist age. Even where state-capitalism isn't as fully developed as it is in Russia and China, it remains a world phenomenon. For those not disciplined by labor subjected to state-capitalist exploitation, state capitalism appears in the form of "The Plan", and the indispensability of leaders to lead. What temptations for petty-bourgeois intellectuals!

Earlier, in speaking of the Watts revolt, I opposed absentee leaders. Let me assure you they are worse when they are present. And let me further assure you that I used the word "the Party" advisedly in my analysis of these leaders. This does not mean that all the intellectuals are Party men. I know very well that many of them never belonged. But what is of the essence is not whether one has a Party card, but whether one is firmly guided by its dogma that the masses are backward and it is therefore necessary "to lead them". It is this concept that they are the leaders, and the masses must follow, that blinds them from seeing that the crisis in production is rooted in the division between mental and manual labor. Since it is inconceivable to them that the only real solution to the crisis rests in the abolition of this division of labor in production, in society, in philosophy, they are led, by an objective, a remorseless logic down the path of transforming themselves from "representatives of the people" to administrators over the people. This,

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and this alone, accounts for the pragmatic disdain of serious dialectics. And this, but not this alone, accounts for the failure to face the Sino-Soviet conflict that is so pivotal to the continuing war in Vietnam.

Theory is a hard taskmaster even for serious theoreticians who do not separate theory either from practice or from the impulses of the proletariat that is the source of all theory. Eclectics, however, it leaves alone in disgust. A second look at the Sino-Soviet conflict will show you what I mean. None had done a more comprehensive analysis of it than we. (With the Vietnam war, which was not a fact then, in mind, I hope everyone will now reread "The Challenge of Mao Tse-tung" in Marxism and Freedom.) We had studied the labor-capital relationship in each country from every conceivable source, including the underground. We had worked out the theory of state-capitalism by a rigorous analysis of original sources of the Russian economy. Armed with the Marxist-Humanist philosophy, we followed through to their logical conclusions the ideological battles as well as the power struggle between the two combatants. We even postulated so extreme an hypothesis that it has not yet come to pass: the possibility of an actual war between Russia and China.

Yet look at the altogether new situation that life revealed: In the face of a common enemy -- U.S. imperialism -- and while bound to a common friend -- North Vietnam -- the statements by China and Russia differ so widely that they come into head-on collision at every turn, although they are not at war with each other.

Surely all this should concern the End the War in Vietnam Committees. Instead, confronted with so difficult a problem, they just closed shop, not on the statements they issue, but on the loud silence regarding the Sino-Soviet conflict. You can hardly end the war in the face of Hanoi insisting that they will continue the war "even if it lasts 10 or 20 or more years" -- a statement China heartily applauds, if it didn't actually write it.

You can hardly end the war if your "theory" (if you can call such hallucinations "theory") holds that you can "surround" the whole industrialized world -- Europe, Russia, Japan and the United States, "mountains, oceans and all" by "peoples' wars" in the non-industrialized world -- Africa, Asia, Latin America -- and led by yourself and yourself alone (since you alone have both the experience of protracted war and "the genius of Mao's Thought" -- can be victorious even as you won power in China by outflanking the cities.

Needless to say, this analysis does not mean that we will not participate in these committees for we approve anti-war demonstrations. So many are the acts, however, that one must oppose in this reactionary land that unless we practice the method that can distinguish the activity, even where correct, from an underlying philosophy which is false, the revolutionary activity itself will be doomed. It is necessary to stress, over and over again, that any activity that seeks to separate thought from action is thoroughly capitalistic; it is only one further manifestation of the division between mental and manual labor which underpins all class societies, feudal as well as slave, state-capitalism as well

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as private capitalism. That opposition to war which limits itself only to being against without saying what it is for is so one-sided as to be of help to the ruling class -- though that ruling class may reside in Moscow or Peking rather than in Washington, D.C.

What is needed, therefore, is an all-sided approach, one that is adamant against being rent asunder between theory and practice, and is intent not only in demolishing the status quo, but in reconstructing society. It is this which motivated our choosing as our point of concentration, the Negro Revolution. Our Perspectives Report phrased this succinctly:

Since the postwar strikes, that is to say, very nearly two decades, nothing has happened on the American scene that can in any way compare with the Negro Revolution that began in earnest with the 1960 sit-ins and has gained momentum ever since. This is the most important development not only for the American Revolution, but also for world developments, since it touches both the basic relationship of a proletarian West to the East and a black revolution's impact on, and relationship to, the Afro-Asian-Latin American world. Therefore, to divert in any way from this development is, Marxistically speaking, criminal.

III - The New Generation of Radicals; Philosophy and Revolution

Now then, our Perspectives also stresses that the Free Speech Movement is symbolic of a whole new generation of radicals ready to pull up the world by its roots. I want to dwell a bit on that word, symbolic. It means, first of all, that this new generation is not exhausted in the category, student youth.

It means, secondly, that we must not forget that the origin and inspiration of the FSM came from the Negro Revolution.

The Negro Revolution was not thereby exhausted. It had a life of its own which preceded the FSM and one which followed the FSM, and it has not rested for a moment, South or North. The momentum it has gained from every developing situation, nationally and internationally, has been stopped not even by the indifference of white labor. It is its youth which comprise the new generation of radicals to a deeper degree than even the FSM. This is why our pamphlet on the FSM is entitled "The FSM and the Negro Revolution."

Symbolism, finally, signifies that the FSM's grasp of the theory of alienation was a break -- whether consciously or unconsciously does not matter at the moment -- from traditional American pragmatism. Now that it has done so, the movement cannot remain where it was before the break. It will either go forward or slide backwards and be reabsorbed, or at least dragged along by the old in the new generation. I am fully confident that the old cannot reabsorb all of the new. But it is necessary to explain what is meant by re-absorption into the old.

The split in world Communism is proof of the non-visibility of state-capitalism calling itself Communism as any type of "new" social order. No one need, however, be under the illusion that state-capitalism will just keel over and die. It has something going for it that private capitalism didn't have. As we noted previously, it was born out of a revolution and it still used the lan-

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guage of its origin. This means, for example, that once it returns to Watts -- or Harlem, or Chicago or the South -- it will, aided by the innocents, know how to exert a revolutionary impact, despite its present counter- revolutionary nature. It cannot, at the same time, fail to exploit, for its own purposes, the hatred against "Whitey" as well as the American predilection for pragmatic sneers against "ideology," all the while also building up the most sectarian vanguardist repository for itself -- I'm referring to "Mao's Thought" as a sort of "one and only universal truth."

The point I'm trying to make is this: Without knowing Communism's 40 year history since the death of Lenin; without being permeated by Marxism in its original form of Humanism; without keeping close to the masses and having confidence both in their spontaneity and in their thought; without being fully aware that not they, but the Negroes in America, the "100 flowers" that bloomed and contended in China against "Mao's Thought," the Hungarian Revolutionaries struggling for freedom from Communism and the African Revolutions wrenching themselves free of Western imperialism -- that all these forces, and not the Communists, wrote the new pages of freedom in history's book in our generation; I repeat, without being permeated by this history, this truth, the new generation of U.S. radicals could get itself so involved in many "non-ideological" activities that it would not even be conscious that it had, in the meantime, stopped thinking. This is what "reabsorption by the old in the new generation" means.

To avoid this, it is necessary once and for all to take the plunge into the Absolute Idea. This may seem far away from the immediate practical things which must be done in anti-war activities as in other fields, but none of the "simple" facts can be understood fully outside the context of dialectical philosophy if your approach to them is that of a revolutionary. The need for unity of theory and practice, demands that we begin to understand the innermost nature of Hegel's Absolutes.

Hegel's Absolutes and Marxian Philosophy

Hegel's Absolutes, or the "World Spirit", is simply but profoundly, the movement of self-development.

Freedom is the principle governing Hegel's view of world history. It is true that his point of concentration was freedom of thought, of spirit, or what he called the "self-determination of the Idea". But since every systematic stage of thought was itself a period of actual history, Marx found it fairly easy to concretize self-determination as self-determination of people, to see the masses in motion as the movement of self-development of the Absolute. And they alone were the true inheritors of Hegelian dialectics. They alone can "realize" freedom.

No statement is more misunderstood -- by Marxists and non-Marxists alike-- than Marx's famous thesis that the philosophers have interpreted the world, the point is to change it. Communists, of both the Russian and Chinese varieties -- and all shades in between -- work day and night to make it appear to mean activism per se as if thinking was not an activity and didn't undergo transformation along with objective reality.

It is Communism, not Marxism, which seeks to substitute for workers accumulation of their historical experience, immediate action on any and all occasions through never-ending lists of committees organized and led by themselves.

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It is Communism, not Marxism, which, with such a concept of activism, reintroduces the capitalistic division between mental and manual labor.

It is Communism, not Marxism, that seeks to place the masses as much at the disposal of the Party as the proletariat is at the disposal of capital.

It is Communism, not Marxism, which has reduced cooperative labor to a State Plan.

Where Marx reversed the Hegelian quest for universality in thought in order to place it in production, defining the quest as a need for the free and full development of all inherent and acquired talents, the mainspring of Communist planned production is the old capitalistic labor process for the creation of value and surplus value.

I began this Report with a reference to a year that began a new decade in self-activity and in thought. It was the year 1955. That is also the year of our birth. NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES are celebrating their 10th anniversary by continuing to practice the unity of thought and action.

Philosophy, Hegelian-Marxian philosophy is no idle speculation. Of course, only actual revolutions can resolve class contradictions, racial conflicts, and all the alienations which this mode of production and this mode of thought have exuded. But revolutionary theory, a Marxist-Humanist philosophy, has a task all its own. And it is a big one. It opens up a way to resolution of contradictions by revealing the actual tendencies inherent in a social situation disclosing the new "subject", i.e. the precise social strata who are the most revolutionary.

Because all roads now converge in Vietnam, we concentrated on that rather than all the world's crises from Algiers to Latin America, from Europe to the Congo, and from India to Japan. The point is that it is the totality of the crisis that also compels a philosophy.

We must not forget that despite Marx's transformation of dialectics from a science of logic to a science of revolution, he kept returning to its origins in Hegel. At each high point in his writings, he did so. Thus after he had, in 1843, already completed his critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and originated the theory of the materialist foundation of history, he first wrote the 1844 Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts, combining his critique of the Hegelian dialectic with the positive formulation of his own Humanist philosophy. And, again, after the 1848 revolutions he returned to Hegel in his Critique of Political Economy and the famous Grundrisse, 1857-59. Capital is the final proof of this return to the Hegelian dialectic even in transcendence.

This is why Stalin decided, in 1943, openly to break with the structure of Capital. This is why we remained true to the Marxian heritage. Marx remains our best reason for returning to Hegel.

Or take Lenin and see the altogether new avenues that were opened for him after he reread Hegel and began treating imperialism not just as a "stage" of

capitalism, but a manifestation of the dialectical principle of "transformation into opposite."

To sum up, the "translation" of Hegelian philosophy into revolutionary politics does not obviate the need for Hegelian abstractness so long as we have not yet achieved a classless society. Abstraction, true, not false abstraction, is an historic event in thought, a historic continuum of universals grounded in the principle of freedom in society.

The concrete -- and Capital is concrete -- exhausts a specific universal -- the two terms may sound contradictory, but there is an absolute for every relative, for every historic period. The need to return to abstractness is for purposes of grappling with a new absolute, to make that concrete. In the case of Capital, for example, its extreme postulate -- state-capitalism -- has been reached in our age. For our age now to work out Marx's concept of new passions and new forces for the reconstruction of society on new beginnings, a reformulation of the whole relationship of theory and practice is of the essence.

Without working out anew the concept of a "Subject", of what is known as "the second negative", we run the risk of being diverted to a new object, a technique, a Sputnik, a party -- anything at all except the one and only force that can possibly create a new dimension -- the self-developing subject or mass force.

IV Our Tasks

This will be the central point of the new book, Philosophy and Revolution. It must also govern our every activity, our daily work, our growth; and not only ours. The masses too must practice theory in their daily lives as well as in the great moments of revolution in order to make sure that no one diverts their experience from the channels of freedom. The meaning in history, in their historic actions is for them to master for themselves, not for others to master "for" them. Such a new unity of thought and action would be the transition point to, nay, the turning point of the revolution itself, one that wouldn't sour.

This approach to a new unity of thought and action must govern all our tasks, big and little, immediate and "ultimate." The two major tasks for the present period are:

One, the participation in other organizations as well as the actual mass movement, especially the Negro Revolution, concentrating in all movements -- civil rights, labor, anti-war -- on the youth. The movements are now at the crossroads where they must face up to the theoretical challenges as well as the immediate tasks which likewise are on a world scale. We have a unique contribution to make in both theory and historical continuity.

Two, we have to concern ourselves with the growth of our own organization so that, in establishing the historic continuity with Marxism, we can concentrate on what is new, on working out the problems of our age, problems that did not confront Marx.

We do not have any blueprints. Our whole reason for being runs counter to such pseudo-solutions. No 4 or 8 or 25 point programs will undermine the existing society. Nor will Mao's theory of guerrilla warfare, with its fantastic concept of "surrounding" the USA, Europe, Russia, Japan -- the whole technologically developed world -- with the technologically underdeveloped world of Africa, Asia and Latin-America overthrow either through protracted warfare or by one fell swoop guided by that "world genius". No self-proclaimed vanguard can bring in a new society. The masses will either reconstruct society on new beginnings, or it will not be remade.

Our function is to elicit from the masses their wishes, to make explicit what is implicit in their acts. We are small. We have no illusions of substituting ourselves for the masses. Were we a large organization, we still would not do what only the masses can do. But we do practice what we preach; we do, in every facet of our work, break down the division between mental and manual work, between leaders and ranks, and destroy the concept that intellectual work is allegedly the prerogative of leadership. We have but one gift to give, and that is the elicitation of self-development. It is yours, free. Test us and see. Join us and experience it for yourselves. It is not only we who are in a period of transition. The whole world is. The U.S. is in a period of transition ever since the Negro Revolution began on a new level a decade ago. As the emergent new generation of radicals, and the new developments in labor and in thought converge with the Negro Revolution, we will have reached the beginnings of the American Revolution, of crucial importance to the world revolution.

It was Marx's contention, and it remains ours, that, instead of, as heretofore, a few chosen individuals, at each stage of development -- philosophers to Hegel, Party men to Communists, managers and politicians to private capitalists -- instead of an elite representing "World Spirit", the masses themselves would master the philosophy of self-development, of revolution in thought, and become not merely the "representative" of the "World Spirit", but the creators of a new human dimension.

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-- RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA