

Dec. 27, 1967

Dear Charles:

Thank you very much for your critique of the Trotsky chapter. You may be sure that I will study it very carefully before rewriting. However, I wish to discuss with you not so much the critique itself as related matters stemming from it because I consider methodology the central point and I'm not sure you've grasped the full ramifications of that question. Which is why you still can equate what Marxist-humanism offers you with what you get from a dissident Stalinist like E.P. Thompson, not to mention the lack of interest in any distinctions between me and Marty or N&L and ISC as if all these were merely intra-factional disputes or hair-splitting. Therefore I'll begin with a reference to what in your letter I agree with 100% and yet we draw such different conclusions from that agreement that we will be forced to go into methodology. The specific statement I refer to is on p. 3 of your letter of Nov. 29th where you quote your criticism of the ISC's position on LP which we learned nothing from the Black revolt. I couldn't agree more with your statement that this revolt hasn't "made the slightest dent in our theory" where ~~you~~ I disagree is that you think it comes merely from the ISC having a "static approach" which would be solved by facing reality dynamically.

Nothing could be wronger and yet sound so correct. One surely must face reality as against repeating old formulae. One surely should be dynamic, should see movement as against standing rooted in one spot. One should see theory as activity instead of seeing it as mere application or popularization of what has already been worked out by the founders of the movement. Why, then, do all these correct generalizations add up to one big concrete error? Well, for one thing, they have been used by reformists for whom facing reality meant ~~not~~ betraying the dialectics. (You're absolutely right when you say that here are people-- your friends who surely are neither Bernsteinians nor Hook-ites--still swearing by Hook on dialectics and seeing no connection between what the man said on philosophy and what he does in life.) For another, and more important reason, the revolutionaries who did "believe" in the dialectic, nevertheless didn't take it to make the demand on them as theoreticians to begin on new ground--the listening posts where the proletarian masses were standing--and the theoretic reworking of their own ideas. Thus both a martyr like Rosa Luxemburg and a mere aspirant like Marty who can talk ad infinitum on spontaneity, workers' control of production, anti-Party stand, without ever uniting theory and practice, methodology and conclusion (which, not accidentally insofar as the German language is concerned means also Syllogism).

How then methodology is used as if that were "only" method, that is to say, a "tool", "a guide" to action without necessarily the action and the conclusion flowing from the method. Or it is counterposed to the "mystical" Absolute whereas, to Hegel, it was the Absolute. And to Marx, twice after he broke with Hegel's Absolutes, he returned to transcend them and thus "retain". There is no way to resolve what sounds correct in the abstract except to test whether it is correct in the concrete. A glib writer like E.P. Thompson can write beautifully in the abstract and then suddenly slip in something which sounds like a "therefore" that must not be questioned because it, syllogistically, flows from all the presuppositions, and therein, in the concrete, contain all the errors as if Stalinism was Stalinism only when Khrushchev revealed Stalin's "crimes", or "presently" it doesn't exist, or "urgently" what we must do today must mean to begin from today, and not from the "past".

In truth, if I do "more story-telling" I do not convince, indeed I act criminally because I fail to develop what no one has even dared to do more than, at most, hint it should be developed, but then went on to other matters. Forty years and more for a theoretical void is altogether too long to worry about popularization. Which doesn't mean it shouldn't be popularized. Or I myself shouldn't write more simply. And it does mean that you, the youth,

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must popularize, but you must also first be willing to work very, very hard intellectually, and make distinctions, sharp ones that do not tolerate very different cutleaks to be all put into the one hopper of "the left, the independent left", etc.

Take, for example, the question of Trotsky not seeing the subject. It isn't at all that simple. He most certainly did see the proletariat as subject of revolution, acted on it in the actual revolution which is why he didn't go into guerrilla war shortcuts of his day, and not only when he began to fight Stalinism fought for workers' control of production. What he didn't see in proletariat as subject is self-developing subject to the point where he may wish to oppose workers' state both as nationalized property and as Party and as leadership. In a word, where the dualism inherent in the proletariat and its "vanguard" came to the surface which demanded that he, as theoretician and as revolutionary, must not only take the self-developing subject as the true foundation but must break with himself, that is when he became fixed in his thought, static not as static, but static as theory; theoretic reorganization rather than theoretic dynamism was at issue.

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So the difference between us is/that I'm more interested in the Trotskyist movement where you have no attachment to it, ~~perhaps~~ (not having been burdened by it in your past development), but that you think that the "before" Stalin and "after" the struggle with Stalin for power would contain the "real" Trotskyism. I specifically dismissed the oppositions to Trotskyism who thought the error in that theory lay in "subjectivism". The error also didn't lie in the fact that it was "always" there, unless by always you mean what I mean by the wrong methodology. But Lenin understood as little of dialectics as dialectics, that is to say, its own objectivity, its own validity, before 1914 as Trotsky and Luxemburg and Plekhanov. (Draper still swears by Plekhanov and Engels' Feuerbach not only as if nothing at all has changed in the world since the turn of the century but as if all these changes can occur without deepening our concept of dialectics and therefore demanding from us a restatement of it for our age.) But, as against Trotsky, Lenin wasn't afraid to admit that all Marxists, including himself, didn't fully understand the dialectic and therefore reorganization must begin with self-reorganization.

Enough as a started!

I don't remember what of the past chapters I sent you, but I will send you a chapter from Why Hegel? Why Now? And also ask Olga to send you the outline I have now made for classes in philosophy and revolution in the hope that not only you and Martha will study it, but you will be willing to have such a serious class with others, not allowing the "established" leaders who are supposed "to know more" direct it, but you yourselves as "Materialist Friends of the Hegelian Dialectic" (if not yet as full Marxist-Humanists) will run it independently. Do you suppose you can? That is to say, will?

Yours,

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