

Sept. 24, 1978

TO ALL TEACHERS, STUDENTS, READERS
AND RE-READERS OF MARXISM AND FREEDOM

Dear Colleagues:

I should like to call your attention to p. 89, par. 2 of Marxism and Freedom: "He who glorifies theory and genius but fails to recognize the limits of a theoretical work, fails likewise to recognize the indispensability of the theoretician." Although the last five words of the sentence is underlined, it has heretofore had little attention since the other underlined word, "limits," had to be stressed in this section on "The Working Day and the Break with the Concept of Theory".

However, it has to be stressed now that, first, I then had only a bowdlerized* version of the Grundrisse. Indeed I began stressing that as soon as I was able to get Grundrisse translated for me at the end of the 1960s, at which point I was so anxious that all others read it that I made it a condition for preparing Philosophy and Revolution to be published, at which point it was to be an Appendix. That became unnecessary to insist upon, as by then, 1973, a full translation appeared in England. Needless to say, far from agreeing with Nicolaus's Introduction to it, I wrote a special section on it for P&R: "The 1850s: The Grundrisse, Then and Now". I now propose that those pages (61-75) of P&R be made part of the study of Marxism and Freedom, as without it, the 1850s are incomplete in M&F, which concentrates on what followed the Grundrisse, i.e. Critique of Political Economy.

From those pages in P&R you will see that, while everything said in M&F is correct on the question of the relationship of history and theory, on the discarding by Marx of these first forms of Capital, to which the actual movement from practice of the 1860s was indispensable. Yet, the fact that "the indispensability of the theoretician" could have been slighted over shows that, until the actual Grundrisse was known, it remained an abstraction. As we know, not only from P&R, but from the objective world situations of the 1950s-- the Chinese Revolution, which forced Russia and European Communism to turn back to just how Oriental society had brought a new stage of revolution to the European stage 100 years ago, the Taiping Revolution-- the self-development of the Idea, in Marx's hands, went a great deal further than Marx gave himself credit.

Put another way, Marx was absolutely right to be dissatisfied with the form of the Grundrisse, to feel he was only "applying" the Hegelian dialectic, not recreating it on the basis of his own new continent of thought and the dialectic that came out of the Civil War in the U.S. and the Paris Commune. But once he had worked out that magnificent form of Capital, he had to discard much of the historical material of the Grundrisse. That not only did not mean that what he discarded was "wrong", but in fact could and indeed, would, have been rewritten for Volumes II and III, which remained incompleting. Those who

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taught us that, in their own truncated form, were the Chinese revolutionaries; at least for them what Marx said on Oriental society was both concrete and crucial. For our age-- and here I am referring to the post-1968 period-- it became as crucial as Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, which is why both subjects became crucial for P&R.

There is another reason for my proposing that the Grundrisse section in P&R be taken up in the study of M&F. (Incidentally, I don't know whether you received from Eugene his outline of the classes in M&F that LA will conduct at Compton College; it is good, except that I suggested it have an extra lecture on the 1850s. In fact, it was not seeing it that led to my present proposal for all.) That reason concerns Marcuse. In his Preface to M&F, though he praises me highly for taking Marx's Humanism further than ever before, he excuses previous failure on the ground that "a most decisive link was still missing, the Grundrisse..." from 1939-41 when it was first published, without explaining why then till 1957 when M&F was going to press? I thought we were nevertheless talking the same language when he said that Marx departed from Hegelianism, not only the old, but the "Young Hegelians", of which Marx had been a member, and I gave Marcuse credit for doing a pioneering work (footnote 30, p. 358). It turned out, however, that whereas I had taken for granted that it meant what we called a new continent of thought, Marcuse had reduced it to Frankfurt school type of sociology. Which proves all over again "don't take matters for granted" when it comes to serious theory.

Yours, Raya

*I found the Grundrisse about the same time Rosdolsky did in the immediate post-W II period; we probably both used that same copy. In any case, I asked Grace to translate it and she presented 12pp. of quotations which were so busy proving that Marx, 1857, was not Marx, 1867, on two-fold labor and the decline in the rate of profit that she left out entirely the crucial section on Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations-- in fact she seems to have skipped all the way from somewhere in the 300s (pages) to the 600s. That was way back in the mid-1940s, and I rediscovered that section in the early 1960s as I was working on the Third world, especially China.

P.S. I would also recommend that everyone reread my July 1, 1973 letter on the English translation of the Grundrisse. It was reproduced in part as a Two Worlds column in Nov. 1973.