

NEB MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 29, 1964
(Special Mtg. on Philosophic Problems of the New Book)

Present: All

Raya said that, besides the form of presentation being different here and ~~xxxxxxx~~ at the local meeting, she wants also to stress: I- the background of '53 to '63 since we first "broke" the Absolute Idea; II- mention one totally new thing of which she is not yet sure since she has only now worked it out, and that is placing Trotskyism philosophically, and not just politically:

I- the breakthrough in '53 meant, chiefly, two things: a-that there was a movement from practice to theory as well as vice versa, and b-the Hegelian expression: "the self-determination in which alone the Idea is, is to hear itself speak," as applied to listening both to workers, and the masses from the underdeveloped countries. These two elements were the foundation for the structure of M&P in 1956-57. However, as contrasted to the period after Stalin's death, but before the June 17 East German revolt, the book written after the Hungarian Revolution, but before the African year, had a central new point, that is to say the Humanism of Marxism. However, when we spoke about going to the concrete, not as a historic movement from practice, but as the actual, we left it quite loose, that is to say, we mentioned elements like the Little Rock and the wildcats and the need for a unity of theory and practice, but that's all. It was a challenge we hoped would be met, but none others, least of all American intellectuals, ran to meet the challenge.

In 1960-61 we did make several concretizations, in the pamphlets, on the Afro-A-ian Rev'n, and on the Freedom Rides, as well as Workers Battle Automation. However, when philosophically we tried to do the entire concentration of the Absolute Idea chapter on the single paragraph which dealt with overcoming the opposition between Motion and Reality residing in "subjectivity alone", and undertook the African trip to, so to speak, find the new subject, we found that reality was much more complex and that there were negative as well as positive developments in Africa especially insofar as the pull of the state-capitalist world was concerned. (In this case negative is used in the ordinary sense, and not in the sense of the strictly Hegelian concept of negativity, as the most revolutionary factor for negating the status quo.) Now with the new developments in Japan in 1962, where relations were established and the translation of M&P into Japanese was begun, we began looking for the new relations, or more correctly new stage of relationship between theory and practice, not merely in the underdeveloped countries, but in the developed countries such as Japan, especially since this had the added advantages of (a) being East instead of West, (b) being colored instead of white, (c) they on their own having come to look at the philosophical foundations of Marxism, and not just the economic-political, and finally (d) the fact that the Negro G.I. had a certain experience in Japan that would in turn help us in developing all the ramifications of the Negro question here. It was the year, moreover, of another type of concretization, the ACOT.

II- Trotskyism, not only as we dealt with it in one of the manuscripts of Trotsky as Theoretician, but as it appeared to the Japanese friends, who found themselves suddenly confronted with the fact that their breakaway from Communism, and other Zengskuren breakaway from Communism but without having reached the state-capitalist position, was suddenly being challenged by the Trotskyists who tried to win leadership of all the Left. It is this which sent me to what I said was totally new, and that is placing L.T. philosophically on the plane of Jacobi as Hegel analyzes it in the Third Attitude to Objectivity in the Encyclopedia. At this moment I'm ready only to refer you to the paragraphs 63, 76 and 77. (Raya actually went into a great deal more, but since she did not feel she had worked it out sufficiently to be pinned down to that framework, we are not recording it here.)

With both these in mind, we must look at the Absolute Idea not as an isolated chapter, but as a part of the entire Doctrine of the Notion. And in this respect, ~~xxxxxx~~ its best expression remains the manner in which I wrote it up, especially pp. 3 and 4 to HM, Oct. 27, 1964. She read this and expanded on some of the ideas.

Discussions: Olga said she was glad to see the development of why we have to attack Trotskyism philosophically, since she really failed to see why it was necessary to do so politically. If it were based on influence, then it would be more important to take a chapter out on Sartre, who does influence the youth not only of France, but here as well. She said she had reread the various outlines of the major works of Hegel that Raya had done in 1960-61, and

also the actual chapter which was called Part IV B2 - "The Dialectic of Liberation" -- which Raya had done at the time. In one respect it is fantastic, and we would have to blame ourselves for it, that as far back as 61 she had written actual chapters of the book, whereas now she is back to correspondence. However, after listing all that we had done in this period, she realized it could not be only a subjective reasoning and that objectively therefore, the reason for not proceeding with the book would have been everything from the Cuba crisis through the appearance of Japan. I'm not sure I understand all the questions now raised with the Doctrine of the Nation -- I have trouble even keeping straight all the categories, particularly the Universal, Particular and Individual. However, the series of discussions the KRB had in 61 does make clear the major points that concern us in the new books: 1-subjectivity obscuring objectivity; 2- discontinuous development especially as it related to the underdeveloped countries; 3- "its own other" both as it appears subjectively i.e. groupings, and as we see it in Capital by the new view we have of the chapter of Primitive Accumulation of Capital. What state-capitalism was in the 1940's, the Absolute Idea in 1953, Stakhanovism in 1957, we now approach the new beginnings which makes me especially excited because I remember that it was only 6 weeks after the Absolute Idea was tackled by Raya that the East German Revolt occurred, so I'm really looking forward to great things, but I have a lot of questions to ask. (She raised the question of second negation, of the stage in which the direct action movement of the Negro revolution is truly at the crossroads now, and the question of both the categories in the Nation, and those in Capital.)

Laul stressed the importance of analyzing something even when it's only a footnote to history as Trotskyism is. For example, the Blanquists and Proudhonists of Marx's time are just that, and yet Marx spends a great deal of time on it. The same thing is true of Trotsky, who kept repeating the question of the Permanent Rev'n as a statement of faith that the proletariat would reorganize society, rather than as a theory which would constantly become enriched by the actual events. He questioned, however, whether the movement of ourselves between 60 - 63, and now could philosophically mean a step back since we dealt in the earlier period ~~with the A.I itself~~ whereas now we are going back to the Doctrine of the Nation. He said that in one respect he welcomed everything, and especially so placing L.T. philosophically with Jacobi as the needed confrontation with our own role. The whole question that Raya raised about the fact that by the time the book would be finished, no less than half a century would have elapsed since the Russian Rev'n which by no means can be considered a transitory moment, is central. Also the need to answer BM who thinks that "in absence of demonstrable agents" there is no way that theory and practice can meet. We think the exact opposite.

John pointed to the fact that only one single theoretical position ever became dominant in the Trotskyist movement, and that was socialism in one country. There was a half-hearted attempt, at the time of fighting Burnham to raise the question of dialectical materialism, but surely the way Cannon carried this through was not very serious. In fact, what Trotsky said about the social democracy, really characterizes him that all politics has been reduced to the "small coin of concrete questions". This alone shows how very different we are from Trotskyism and how necessary at the same time it is to have done with it in the way that others understand this.

Denby stressed two elements that were occurring in his shop that he felt had a great deal to do with philosophy, though he could by no means state it in Hegelian categories. These are the attitude of the workers that there will never be an end to the crisis of the Congo so long as Belgium is not thrown out of there root and branch. The other is that the Negroes in the shop -- many, many new ones were hired -- simply disregarded the established union Reutherite leadership, including its Uncle Tom's, and opposed them on the vote for stewards, winning in each case quite handily. Both these things mean that they are raising quite independent questions, having independent attitudes, and acting on these.

Johnny said that it's easy enough to understand Hegel when you read Rayn on Hegel. Unfortunately once he gets away from that he doesn't find that he can handle these categories in the way that would make things clearer, either for the proletariat or himself. The question therefore of why philosophy has to be dealt with from many different aspects until ~~it~~ finally ~~it~~ it appears as necessary to the masses as it is to us.

REN Nov. 29, 1964 page 3

Luiz raised two questions. One whether we could do something actually to stop the leadership of the civil rights movement from putting a brake on the Freedom movement by diverting it to simple political questions. She felt that if we had had further discussions of the section in ACOT on why imperialism needed racism, we might be able to work this out now. It just sort of scared her when she saw everywhere a movement get a momentum of its own, there were bureaucrats to put brakes on it, so that once again there seems to be a question about whether we can help change the course of history. The second question related to the African trip and our analysis of the one-party state. She stressed that she doesn't want to say that there have been only negative developments, but she does feel the urgency of the entry for theory and practice now, to such an extent that she wants to know our role in the stress on philosophy and need to have the masses grasp that.

Louise said that even though she does not have the philosophic language she does feel that we grasp the philosophic categories, even where we have not yet learned the language. She said however that two questions concerned her most: one, the point that Raya raised at the local when Olga presented the Perspective Report, and Ray said that when the old categories don't work, that's when you must return to philosophy to find new categories -- what ~~new categories~~ are the categories that don't work now? Secondly, on the question of Trotskyism and the third attitude to objectivity -- does that have a relationship to the matter raised at the convention that correct politics are not enough, one has to have a total view.

Andy said that he had gone back to grapple with Hegel himself, but certainly a lot more needs to be done, and he would rather deal with what he does understand. For one thing the question of the power of reaction is so great in this country that we must do two things at once, always look at the subjectivity of the masses, and not think that we can fill our minds with just categories, and two to recognize that even if such a Hegelian Marxist as H is can say such nonsense as objectivity absorbing subjectivity, instead of v.v., as if the machine could really swallow up the person, that makes all the more necessary for us to follow the class struggle in this country, especially since Automation. The fragmentation of the worker is not a mathematical problem and his subjectivity in dealing with day-to-day reality does show the direction that this activity will take and that will help us in seeing that the categories or notion does correspond to a reality that is not outside the working class. He felt also that a great deal of the answer lies in the trip to Japan because there we deal with friends who are confronted with the same problems we are confronted with, in a country that has even more contradictions than we face. Once we do look both at the self activity of the masses and the problems confronting our people in Japan and in Scotland, then the philosophic answers will come to us in a way that will enrich our theory.

Raya made a short answer. However, because it is still all in the informal stage and she did not wish to give a "finished" look to this, it is not here recorded.

Good and Welfare.

Meeting convened at 6PM, Adjourned at 9 PM

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