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PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION - - Part II WHY HEGEL? WHY NOW?

Chapter 3 - - The Shock of Recognition and the Philosophic Ambivalence of Lenin

It is the nature of truth, said Hegel, to force its way up when its "time has come." He should have added, if even only in a murky form. But then he couldn't have known how much a state-capitalist age can excrete to make it impossible to see truth even when it surfaces. No conspiracy was even needed between "East" and "West" to keep Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks on Hegel's Science of Logic out of the hands of the masses. It was in the very nature of the administrative mentality of our state-planning automated era to consider Hegelian philosophy to be "gibberish" and both not to sense the significance of Lenin's concretizations of Hegel's abstractions and yet keep them as the private preserve of those in the know. Although, in the one case, they bowed before the founder of their state, and in the other case they sneered at his non-professional status as a philosopher, both poles found it convenient to conclude that it was, after all, sheer accident that Lenin had turned to Hegel in 1914.

The truth is that if there had been no Hegel, Lenin would have had to invent Hegelian dialectics to reconstitute his own reason from the shattering experience of witnessing the collapse of the great German Social Democracy at the outbreak of World War I. That is to say, no political line, no materialist analysis could possibly fully explain the organization's betrayal, a revolutionary organization which, before the outbreak of war, had agreed both on the economic analysis of capitalism, the root of imperialist wars, and on the political principles of opposition to such wars. Something more than politics, something more than economics was needed to illuminate the simultaneity of the downfall of established Marxism and capitalism. Lenin alone, among all the Marxists who were, at the very moment of betrayal, searching out new ways of re-establishing international proletarian solidarity, was fully aware of the totality of the collapse of European civilization as it had been before the holocaust. No "peace without annexations" slogans for him. Nothing short of "Turn the Imperialist War Into a Civil War" could possibly reverse the tide of history.

Marxists trained to look for serious causes of such catastrophes would be expected to begin the study of the objective reasons for the betrayal and Lenin too would start searching for the "why". But that, too, wouldn't exhaust the matter unless the method for studying the economic and political development of imperialism could encompass the whole of reality -- the objective and the subjective -- it would be impossible to meet the enormity of the tasks facing genuine Marxism. For whatever reasons Lenin turned to Hegel, it was certainly not because he there expected to meet answers, least of all on the question of the real driving forces in history. He kept reminding himself that he was reading "the idealist Hegel" materialistically.

1. Lenin had been asked by the Grant Encyclopaedia to write an essay on Karl Marx.
2. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 141

All the greater, then, was the shock when he met with all the emphasis Hegel put on the question of "self-movement" as "the principle of all movement." "Spontaneous, internally-necessary movement." (Both emphases are Lenin's) "Who would believe," Lenin writes alongside Hegel's analysis of the Law of Contradiction where Hegel stresses self-movement, "that this is the core of 'Hegelianism,' of abstract and abstruse (ponderous, absurd?) Hegelianism?"² Lenin tries to cushion the shock of recognizing that the revolutionary is in the Hegelian dialectic by adding: "This core had to be discovered, understood, rescued, laid bare, refined, which is precisely what Marx and Engels have done." But his new appreciation of Hegel will not be easily stilled. He concludes the paragraph with: "The idea of universal movement and change (1813, Logic) was conjectured before its application to life and society. In regard to society it was proclaimed earlier (1847)³ than it was demonstrated in application to man (1859)."⁴

To grasp the full impact that this reading of Hegel has upon Lenin we must keep in mind two other facts. One is that Lenin did not know Marx's 1844 Manuscripts. So little did the heirs of Marx and Engels think of philosophy that they had not bothered to publish Marx's Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic. Indeed, it would take nothing less world-shattering than the Russian Revolution — and a Marxist scholar living in that milieu— before Ryzzanov could pry these manuscripts from the vaults to which the Second International had consigned them; they were first published after Lenin died.

The other determining factor in the shock of recognition is to know that, until 1914, the attitude toward the Hegelian dialectic, before which everybody bowed but none bothered to study seriously in its original form, was twofold: that of Karl Kautsky, the theoretician of the International, who, under the guise that Marx proclaimed no philosophy but the end of all philosophy,⁵ wouldn't even intervene in the debates on Revisionism when Bernstein attacked Hegel and declared himself to be a neo-Kantian. What philosophy one espoused was a "personal" matter which allegedly had no relationship to "Materialism."

Then there was the "father of Russian Marxism," Plekhanov, who, while he did not disagree with the "fact" that the materialist foundation of Marxism was its quintessence, centered his own studies, not on economics, but on philosophy. The addition of the word, dialectic, to the word, materialism — Plekhanov was the one who originated the term, "dialectical materialism"⁶ — signified, however, not a concern with what Lenin in his Notebooks, was to call "dialectic proper," i.e., Science of Logic, but with a method of analyzing materialism, reaching back to the materialism of the 17th and 18th centuries, Holbach, Helvetius, and Spinoza being his favorites.

As for Lenin himself, up to 1914, not only were, philosophically, his works against the Narodniki dependent upon Plekhanov's philosophical works, but so was his

2. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 141
3. 1847 was the year Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto; it was published in 1848.
4. 1859 is the date of publication of Darwin's Origin of the Species.
5. "Ein Brief Uber Marx und Mach", quoted by David Joravsky, p. 16, Soviet Marxism and Natural Science, an altogether scholarly work that should be made must reading for both Communists and professional anti-Communists.
6. See Plekhanov, The Father of Russian Marxism by Samuel H. Baron

venture directly into the field of philosophy with Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, although by then, 1908, he had already split with Plekhanov politically. Which is precisely why he wanted to conduct his polemics with "Machism" "my way." As he explained to Gorky: "the Mensheviks will be reduced to politics and that is the death of them."⁸

When the outbreak of World War I and the collapse of established Marxism led Lenin in a search for the dialectic origins of Marxism directly in Hegel, he still moved gingerly along the idealist philosopher's path until, suddenly, in Book III, Subjective Logic, where he least expected to find an affinity of ideas, the Great Divide looms up, not against Hegel, but against Plekhanov and even with his own philosophic past. Those who refuse to accept that fact need to explain whom he did have in mind, when, alongside his aphorisms against Plekhanov and Marxists for having criticized "the Kantians and Humists more in the manner of Feuerbach (and Buchner) than of Hegel"⁹ He wrote: "Concerning the question of the criticism of modern Kantianism, Machism, etc." Whose work, other than his own Materialism and Empirio-Criticism centered so on "Machism"?

The real point is not the naming of names, but the new understanding of dialectics as against what it had always been on Marxist lips -- causation, scientism, vulgar materialism. Now he was looking, instead, at the universals -- notion, freedom, subjectivity -- not as "ultimates" or mere goals -- but the very means by which to gain knowledge of objective reality. Listen to Lenin: "Just as the simple form of value, the individual act of exchange of one given commodity for another, already includes in an undeveloped form all the main contradictions of capitalism, -- so the simplest generalisation, the first and simplest formulation of notions (judgments, syllogisms, etc.) already denotes man's ever deeper cognition of the objective connection of the world. Here is where one should look for the true meaning, significance, and role of Hegel's Logic. This NB,"

Let's retrace our steps back to the moment of the Great Divide in the section on the Syllogism and follow the movement of transformation: (1) Where, when Lenin first encounters the categories, Universal, Particular, Individual, he expresses himself in English thus "a best means of getting a headache,"¹⁰ he writes in an altogether different vein when he meets these categories in the syllogism: "recalls Marx's imitation of Hegel in Chapter I."¹¹ Two pages further he will formulate this as an "Aphorism: It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole"¹² of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!"¹³

(2) He bursts forth into the aphorisms against Plekhanov and Marxists for using a Feuerbachian rather than a Hegelian manner of criticizing Kantianism, Machism, etc. This, too, he will rephrase in even stronger terms later: "To be elaborated: Plekhanov wrote on philosophy (dialectics) probably about 1,000 pages (Beltoy + against Bogdanov + against the Kantians + fundamental questions, etc., etc.) among them, about

7. Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 277 (English)

8. Collected Works, Vol. 34, p. 339 (Russian)

9. Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 179

10. Ibid, pp. 178-9

11. Ibid, p. 176

12. p. 178

13. With the precision characteristic of Lenin, he lets us know very nearly the exact moment when it struck him so forcibly that one

14. Ibid, p. 180

the large Logic, in connection with it, its thought (i.e. dialectics proper, as philosophical science) nil!"¹⁵

(3) The references to the absolute begin to lose the designation of all things evil. On the contrary, he "translates" Hegel favorably: "The simplest truth obtained in the simplest inductive way is always incomplete, for experience is always unfinished. Ergo: the connection of induction with analogy -- with surmise (scientific foresight), the relativity of all knowledge and the absolute content in each step forward in cognition."¹⁵ And when he will have finished with the entire work and write those nine pages "On the Question of Dialectics," he will once again return to the relationship of the relative to the absolute and vice-versa: "NB: The distinction between subjectivism (scepticism, sophistry, etc.) and dialectics, incidentally, is that in (objective) dialectics the difference between the relative and the absolute is itself relative. For, subjectivism and sophistry the relative is only relative and excludes the absolute."¹⁶

The result of these breaks with the past, with the old concept of dialectics is that when he now proceeds "materialistically" to translate Hegel, he sees the seeds of materialism in Hegel: "Historical materialism as one of the applications and developments of the ideas of genius -- seeds existing in embryo in Hegel." By the time Lenin gets to Hegel's analysis of the Idea of Practice as "higher than the Idea of Cognition...for it has not only the dignity of the universal but also of the simply actual,"¹⁸ Lenin notes approvingly Hegel's concept of the "subject's" certainty of "its own actuality and the non-actuality of the world," adding: "i.e., that the world does not satisfy man and man decides to change it by his activity."¹⁹

This time the dialectic, materialistically understood, allows for no slip-backs into vulgar materialism. Far from it. There are passages in which Lenin appears more "idealistic" than Hegel: "Alias: Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it."²⁰ How far we have travelled from the "photocopy" theory permeating Materialism and Empirio-Criticism! And yet it is not because Lenin had forgot his materialist roots, much less his revolutionary views on class consciousness. Rather it is that on Marxist thought too Lenin had gained from Hegel a totally new appreciation of the unity of materialism and idealism. It is this which will permeate Lenin's post 1915 writings, whether their topic be philosophy or politics, economics or organization.

13. (cont'd) has to know the whole of the Logic to understand fully Capital. He had completed an essay on Marx for the Granat Encyclopaedia in November, 1914: the date on the last page of Logic is December 17, 1914. A letter sent to Granat, dated January 4, 1915, reads: "By the way, will there not still be time for certain corrections in the section on dialectics?... I have been studying this question of dialectics for the last month and a half and I think I could add something to it if there was time..." There wasn't, whereupon he proceeded to write those remarkable pages in summation of what he had just read in Hegel, entitled, "On the question of Dialectics," Collected Works, Vol. 38, pp. 355-364.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 361

17. Ibid., p. 190

18. Hegel, Science of Logic, Vol. II, p. 450

19. Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 213

20. Ibid., p. 212

You can feel his release from inconsistent empiricism to "dialectics proper" as he sums up the dialectic in the Absolute Idea itself. This is true whether he tries to comprise it in a single sentence: "In brief, dialectics can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites."²¹ Or whether he tries to detail it in 16 different elements by stressing "O B J E C T I V I T Y" as against mere "examples"; the totality of "r e l a t i o n s" and "d e v e l o p m e n t" as against mere quantitative analysis; the internally contradictory "T E N D E N C I E S" not alone as a sum but a "U N I T Y O F O P P O S I T E S"; the "S T R U G G L E" of form and content, of opposites as well as the "union of analysis and synthesis," not only the unity of opposites but the "t r a n s i t i o n s" of every determination, quality, feature, side, property into o v e r y other"; the endless process of discovering "N E W" sides and endless process of deepening man's knowledge; the movement "from co-existence to causality" and its repetition at a higher stage which gives it the appearance of mere return to the old whereas it actually is "negation of the negation."²² In a word, as he will rephrase it at the end, he is seeing dialectics not as if it were mere tool; "Dialectics is the theory of knowledge of (Hegel and) Marxism. This is the 'aspect' of the matter (it is not 'an aspect' but the essence of the matter) to which Plekhanov, not to speak of other Marxists, paid no attention."²³

The same holds true in his new concept of the unity of history and concept. When he calls to our attention that in Capital we see, as a single total view, "logic, dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism," he adds: "the history of capitalism and the analysis of the c o n c e p t s summing it up."²⁴

Now "concept" (Begriff) isn't just another name for "consciousness," much less "party consciousness" for which Lenin is supposed to be famous. Concept is a very Hegelian term to denote universal, the concrete universal, and Lenin is now holding on tight to the concept, the thought, whether or not it relates to class consciousness so that even when he hits out against "clerical obscurantism ('philosophical idealism') as a "sterile flower," he adds "but a sterile flower that grows on the living tree of living, fertile, genuine, powerful, omnipotent, objective, absolute human knowledge."²⁵

It is the last word we have from him in his Philosophic Notebooks of 1914-1915, before he plunges back to the analyses and activities on the world scene in preparing himself for the Russian Revolution to come as the stimulus for world revolution for he has left behind his concept of himself as mainly a Russian Marxist to become an international one and will soon (1917) create the new, concrete universal: "to a man." That the Russian Revolution will win because "to a man" the population will make it; that it will not take over, but smash the bourgeois state for, unless "to a man" the population manages both production and the state, there will not be a truly new social order that will once and for all reunite mental and manual labor and thereby assure both the new human dimension and the new society. Without knowing either Marx's

21. P. 223
22. P. 221-2
23. P. 363
24. p. 320
25. P. 363

Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic or the Humanist Essays, Lenin created, in the concept "to a man" a world view of a society on truly human foundations on a higher historical plane than the Paris Commune of Marx's day.

The point for us, however, is that, for whatever reason -- preparations for a revolution, the greatest in history, and living barely five years after its success are substantial enough reasons -- the Philosophic Notebooks were not published during his lifetime, nor were they worked up from the unfinished state in which he left them as notes for himself, into an unambiguous form for publication in a different form. All we have, besides the Notebooks, are the magnificent results -- for nothing he wrote after 1915, from Imperialism and State and Revolution before November, 1917, to the Declaration of the Toilers and the Will after the successful revolution, is not permeated with the new concept of dialectics. But results are not the process itself toward arriving at them and become, in the hands of Epigones, what Hegel called "pillow for intellectual sloth."²⁶ And thereby hangs the tale of the duality in Lenin's philosophy, and it is to this ambivalence we must now turn.

Much more harmful than the epigoni are, of course, those who, not only with malice aforethought, but from an objective base of state control over production which has transformed Russia from a workers' state to a state-capitalist society, Communist theoreticians have the power to give its stamp of "partyness" in philosophy to the philosophic works of Lenin. There is not a whiff of it -- not one single solitary word of any "Partyness" -- in Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, either in the crucial 1914-15 ones where he made the break with his philosophic past, or the old ones. That monstrous word, Partyness, was coined by Stalin and came only with him. Fortunately, we need not spend any time on what established Communism is trying to do to Lenin's philosophic heritage because a magnificent scholarly work has now been published -- Soviet Marxism and the Natural Science by David Jorasky -- which exposes fully not only the myth of Partyness as it has been expounded by Russian Communism, as it has been aided by Western ideologists; "In order to achieve this interpretation one must also disregard the fact that the original sources, including Materialism and Empirio-Criticism itself, never suggest what (Bertram) Wolfe and the Soviet scholars attribute to Lenin. The sources show that he had a political aim in writing the book, but it was not to join the philosophical and political issues that Russian Marxists were arguing about; it was to separate them."²⁷

No, what we are concerned with is not the uses to which those who have their own purposes are trying to put Lenin's philosophical heritage, but the duality in the heritage itself.

Lenin, it is true, did not consign his new appreciation of Hegel to the unpublished Notebooks; on the contrary, he addressed himself to the scholars who were to establish a new theoretical journal in Soviet Russia, thus: "The group of editors and contributors of the magazine Under the Banner of Marxism should, in my opinion, be a kind of 'Society of Materialist Friends of the Hegelian Dialectics'."²⁸ And a society

26. Hegel, Science of Logic, p. None are more adept at using this "pillow for intellectual sloth" and thereby end up as tailendists for Stalinism also in the field of philosophy than the trotskyists.

27. This appears on p. 34, but the whole chap. "Lenin and the Partyness of Philosophy" should be studied carefully.

28. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 53, p: 207 (Russian)

called Friends of the Hegelian Dialectics was actually organized. The Lenin Institute Library has records showing that, at the height of the civil war against the Bolshevik regime, Lenin continued his readings of Hegel's Science of Logic and Phenomenology of Mind. Lenin was in fact so moved by a work on Hegel by Ilyin that though the author was religious and an enemy of the Bolshevik state Lenin intervened to get him out of jail.³⁰

At the same time, however, although Lenin alone had concentrated on the Hegelian dialectic and Plekhanov had not, although he gave no quarter in his criticism of Plekhanov in the Notebooks as containing "nil!" on "dialectics proper," in his speech to the youth he actually advises them to read Plekhanov as the best there is on philosophy. The fact that the concrete workers' state, unaided by the European revolution on which Bolshevism based its hope of survival made Lenin altogether too conscious of Russia's backwardness, and the fact that he was unaware of Marx's Early Essays, does not make it any easier to build on the new in Lenin himself, when the published statements are so contradictory.

Moreover, this ambivalence on philosophic questions characterized Lenin before the break with his philosophic past, before the establishment of a Soviet state when matters of war and revolution did not inhibit theoretical questions. He, more or less, followed a Kautskyan attitude of "neutrality" in such matters insofar as the views and exposition of them of those opposed to dialectics were concerned. Any one who said he was a Bolshevik politically could not only function in the faction freely, but could publicize his views everywhere -- or both he and those who opposed him would agree to publish none at all, leaving the philosophic field barren. This was actually the case with the Russian Machists and his collaboration with them. It was only after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, with the fact that 1908 defeatism and "God builders" or "religious atheists" -- as he began to call his Bolshevik colleagues who were Machists -- were beginning to infect the proletariat that he finally decided to strike out against them with the publication of Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. This is not a question about freedom of views -- that was all to the good both before the revolution and after. It is a question of propagating one's own views on so pivotal a question as Hegelian dialectics, Marxian strictly philosophic works, the concern that this remain not a matter only for intellectuals, but reachable by the deepest strata in the population, exactly as he did envisage when he asked the editors of Pod Znamenom Marksizma to constitute themselves as Friends of the Hegelian Dialectic and thus publish Hegel in a manner in which he will both be heard in his own words, and understood the more easily when concretized and applied to the current scene.

29. Adoratsky refers to them in his Preface to the Leninski Sbornik, XII, Russian edition, 1953: See also Deborin's introduction to the Leninski Sbornik, IX, 1929, Russian edition. It was Deborin who first published extracts of the Notebooks as far back as 1925, then published one part in full in 1929; then the mechanist faction took over. Unfortunately the introduction to neither edition casts much light, for they both rely only on the non-committal "great significance," "interesting," "leading indications regarding the direction in which further materialist dialectic should be worked out," but never a specific word on what direction.
30. The Philosophy of Hegel as a Doctrine of the Concreteness of God and of Man by Ilyin contains passages which illuminate the problem of concrete that Lenin himself was working on. Thus: "The first and fundamental thing that one who wishes adequately to understand and master the philosophic teaching of Hegel must do is

Finally, the fact that Lenin hadn't published his Notebooks didn't, of course, mean that they weren't published after his death. Since they are only notes, and since the reading is a process of grappling with problems and viewing them on different levels, it creates a field day to those who are out to confuse or to use them for factional purposes. Which is exactly what has been happening ever since. While Lenin couldn't possibly be held responsible for this, the truth is that, insofar as Materialism and Empirio-Criticism is concerned, it went through new editions during Lenin's lifetime, with no reference on Lenin's part either to His Notebooks directly or to a change in attitude on the mechanistic view about "reflection" and "transcript" of reality. So that when the Communist editors thrust in the magnificent piece "On Dialectics," written in 1915, into the 1908 book, or, as in the latest edition which we have used because it is "standard," everything becomes a hash as there are no breaks between the 1890s, pre-1914, post-1914. In a word, the reader must himself work matters out; there is no easy way to get around the ambivalence.

Lenin couldn't, of course, have worked out the problems of our age. Each generation has to face reality its own way and on the given historic level. For those who are seriously grappling with the current problems and with Hegel, Lenin 1914-15 Notebooks are an invaluable gold mine, even in its ambivalence.

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50. (cont'd) to explain to one's self his relation to the concrete empiric world... the term, 'concrete' comes from the Latin word, 'concrecere', 'Crescere' means 'to grow'; 'concrecere' - coalesce, to arise through growth. Accordingly, to Hegel, 'concrete' means first of all the growing together...The concrete empiric is something in the order of being (Sein), something real (Realitat), actuality (Wirklichkeit), something existing, (Existenz), something Dasein. In its totality, this reality forms a world, a whole world of things (Dinge, Sachen), existences (Existenzen), realities -- the 'objective' world, a realm of 'objectivity'. This real, objective world is also the concrete world, but only the empiric-concrete.