

Political-Philosophic Notes

On Reagan's Visit to Bitburg

by Raya Dunayevskaya

The fact that the most massive, most militant of all the anti-Reagan demonstrations occurred in Spain following the actual eight-minute-studied-averted-look-away-from-the-SS-Nazi-officers-graves compels us to look into the great 1937 Spanish Revolution and its absolute opposite, the Franco counter-revolution that the West allowed to win. It was that revolution which pointed a way out of the gory Depression decade which was leading to World War II. Far from "Spanish culture" being the reason for the massive anti-Reagan demonstration, not just on Bitburg, but on his support of counter-revolution in Nicaragua, it was a remembrance of what the Spanish Revolution represented that was the real reason for the massiveness of this outpouring. Nor was it only a question of the past and the U.S. allowing Franco to win. It was Reagan's most recent rewriting of history when he dared to utter: "Most Americans were on Franco's side in the Spanish Civil War." The reaction of the Spanish masses was to burn the American flag.

IN A LETTER to my colleagues of April 30 I exposed not only the Reagan lie as to what type of "reconciliation" we face, with Germany remaining key to Western Civilization, to the international situation, if we follow Reagan and think of his reconciliation as world counter-revolution.¹ I also pointed out that philosophically and politically, the expression, "the key to the international situation," was used by Lenin to extend the class distinction wrought by the 1917 Russian Revolution to a world Great Divide which was dependent on the 1919 German Revolution for its international ramifications.

Once the predecessors of the Nazis—the Freikorps—

murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, thus beheading the German Revolution, the key to that international situation was thrown away, though many valiant attempts for a so-called Alternative were made. Of these, the greatest was the 1937 Spanish Revolution. The fact is that that great indigenous revolt of the masses for self-liberation in Spain is closer to us than the 1919-23 German period.

THE 1937 SPANISH REVOLUTION

That great revolution in Spain was a national, revolutionary socialist struggle which Franco destroyed. That Stalin's Russia likewise followed only its reactionary national interest, thwarting genuine national revolutionaries—anarchists, Trotskyists, international Marxist brigades from many countries—from achieving victory over Franco, cannot cover up the West's so-called neutrality that led to Franco's victory. As for Reagan, he is busy rewriting history, allowing his communications director Patrick Buchanan to formulate his demagoguery regarding the soldiers buried at Bitburg as follows: "They were victims just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps."²

It is true, as I have pointed out, that Stalin's Russia also used Spain as a pawn in its jockeying for a role in the struggle among the rulers for global dominance. This was glaringly evident once the shocking Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed and, with it, the green light given to World War II. But if Reagan thought that his imperialist concept of Russia as the only "evil empire" would mean that the world, especially the Spanish masses would forget that when Hitler's guns were turned on Russia, no less than twenty million souls lost their lives in helping to win victory over Nazi Germany, he found quite something else. When Reagan disregarded Russia's role as he celebrated the victory of World War II, wher

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1. See Anthony Lewis' "Now We See It," N.Y. Times, 5/18/85.
2. For the full letter to my colleagues, write to News & Letters, 59 E. Van Buren, Rm. 707, Chicago, Ill. 60606.

3. Anthony Lewis, N.Y. Times, 5/18/85.

he visited Bitburg where Nazi SS officers' bodies lie buried, the anti-Reagan protests throughout Europe and America spoke loudly and clearly.

Put briefly, all that was originally said in opposition to the trip when it was first announced—whether it was by the masses who were reminding the world of the Nazi Holocaust, or just the American vets reminding Reagan of what World War II meant to them, i.e. fighting Nazism—was true. Everyone opposed any legitimization of Nazi storm troopers buried at Bitburg under the guise of a gesture of "reconciliation," as if the German nation now makes no distinction between the Nazism that caused those atrocities and those who laid their lives down to fight Nazism.

A HISTORIC LOOK AT WEST GERMANY IN THE POST-WORLD WAR II WORLD

The void in Reagan's mind of any serious sense of history would hardly make him conscious of the fact that the post-World War II world has given birth to a totally new movement from practice that is itself a form of theory. It is this movement which over the last three decades has striven for truly new human relations. We will develop this further later.

For the moment it is necessary to deal with what was real for Reagan once De Gaulle came to power in 1958 and which matured by 1963 into the Franco-German Axis. That maturation had its own dialectic, and it is very far away from Reagan's perennial rewrite of history. It is true that, like Kennedy at the time, Reagan considered De Gaulle's idea that France could achieve a global shift in power by this axis, and thus suddenly become a ruling world power, a grand illusion. What is a still greater delusion today is Reagan's idea that his Pax Americana can be imposed upon the masses—counter-revolution on a world scale.

LET'S CONTINUE in the 1960s when Reagan, in terror against the birth of a new generation of revolutionaries, practiced his demagoguery in his nomination speech for Goldwater. The world shaking event at that time which bears the closest parallel to Reagan's present visit to a Nazi cemetery was the fall of Russia's Khrushchev in 1964, occurring almost simultaneously with China's first explosion of an atomic bomb. Khrushchev at that time had planned his first trip to West Germany. The possible shift in global power represented by China's bomb and Khrushchev's fall was seen by all. What none but Marxist-Humanism saw was the fall's relation to Khrushchev's proposed West Germany trip. (See my analysis in N&L, Oct. 1964.)

Let's take a second look at 1963. On Jan. 5, De Gaulle declared the Franco-German Axis to be the new center of Europe. He rushed to make the declaration before Kennedy had a chance to announce what all knew he was planning to announce: a new age was being signaled by "The Atlantic Community." To assure that the feat of the Franco-German Axis was his and his alone, De Gaulle made his declaration even before Adenauer got to Paris to sign the treaty. By that time

he waxed enthusiastic for the new axis being the center of not only Europe, but, as he put it, of the "universe." De Gaulle's face was as cynical as that of Hitler when he had declared Nazi Germany to be the center of the world, but the French of the cultured Fuchrer was impeccable.⁴

Reagan persists with his grand illusion that, this being a nuclear world, it assures the twentieth century being "the American century." After all, what else can it be when Reagan plays a Star Wars game and thinks he has West Europe in tow? As I wrote when the Franco-German Pact was signed: "If this is madness, as it is, it is not, however, the madness of an individual egomaniac. It is the madness of the state-capitalist age that has exuded a Mussolini and a Hitler..."

THE POST-WORLD WAR II WORLD: MOVEMENT FROM BELOW FROM PRACTICE AND FROM THEORY

What really did happen in the post-World War II world which all these European anti-Reagan demonstrations were trying to tell him?

What happened in East Germany this time, on June 17, 1953, was the first movement ever under totalitarian Communism—a mass revolt against what looked like only "work norms," more or less on the same level as the 1950 Miners' General Strike in the U.S. But in East Germany that opposition to speed-up was accompanied by a demand for freedom. The slogan was for both "bread and freedom." The revolt occurred shortly after Stalin's death and was a prelude to revolts all over East Europe.

Indeed, this birth of a new epoch was not confined only to Europe, or to America, or only to economic conditions. It was the birth of a whole new Third World, mainly in Africa where the fight for independence from Western imperialism was a demand for new human relations. What became clear by 1966, when it reached existing Communism and had brought forth Marx's 1844 Essays onto this new historic stage. Like Marx

⁴ See my "The New Franco-German Axis," News & Letters, March, 1963.

they also called their philosophy a new humanism, while in Africa it was called the African road to socialism. These movements contained a strong challenge to Marxist theoreticians to grapple with what was new in their age.

THIS CHALLENGE BECAME manifest in a different way with De Gaulle's assuming of power in 1958. A small dissident Marxist movement in America issued a call for an international conference of all those who opposed both poles of world capital, Russia and the United States. I saw the spectre of De Gaulle as a form of neo-fascism. My point was that theoreticians, leaders and ranks, must learn not only to listen to the new mass movements arising from below—those from East Europe opposing totalitarian Communism as well as those of the colonial revolts opposing Western imperialism—but also to work out anew the philosophic dimension. That is, they had to make dialectics of revolution inseparable from dialectics of thought.

The July, 1958 *News & Letters* carried a picture of the massive May 28 demonstration of 250,000 Parisians against De Gaulle and headlined its front page article, "France at the Cross Roads." That same issue of N&L contained contributions by Jean Malaquais, from the paper *Tribune Ouvriere* in France and from Battaglia Communista in Italy. All thought that I had greatly exaggerated the mass opposition to De Gaulle. In fact, these writers were themselves more or less quiescent and felt that the colonial masses were nowhere near as advanced as I said they were.

My "Two Worlds" column in that same issue, "Whither Paris?" summed up what I considered the task of revolutionary Marxists:

Where Marx removed theory from a dispute among intellectuals and made it into a weapon in the class struggle, the modern intellectual reduces theory to a word game reserved for intellectuals. Where the Existentialist intellectual thwarted the proletarian attempt to break away from Communism, the Marxist intellectual let it suffocate for lack of any comprehensive revolutionary theory with which to combat Communism. Where they did not thirst to lead, to sit in the seat of the capitalists and plan "for" the workers, they nevertheless did nothing to face their intellectual responsibility, to put an end to the intellectual sloth that has accumulated in the Marxist movement. Despite all protestations to the contrary, small theoretical groupings who did see Communism for the state-capitalist tyranny it is did nothing to re-establish Marxism in its original form of a new Hu-

manism. It is high time for a serious reappraisal.

The international conference did meet in 1959 and did decide to have an international dialogue in three languages—French, English and Italian—which was published in a special section with a distinct color in the journal *Prozeteo*. But so strong was their opposition to philosophy, that this dialogue hardly went further than what was said by Karl Kautsky, head of the Second International, who proclaimed, speaking for all post-Marx Marxists, that Marx's politics meant the end of philosophy.

By the 1960s, we had witnessed not only the East Europeans, who used Marxist language to call for a new Humanism, but as well the Africans,⁵ especially Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. However, none of this was ever real to these anti-philosophy Marxists. I, on the other hand, had by 1959, following my 1958 *Marxism and Freedom*, come out with a pamphlet on the *Afro-Asian Revolutions*. Again they chose to disregard this contribution.

In sum, these Marxists were unable to meet the challenge of the post-World War II age, either as the new movements from practice arising both in state-capitalist countries and in the colonial world, or as the rise of neo-fascism within Europe. Today, two decades later, we are still living under the consequences of this continuing theoretic-philosophic void in the Marxist movement.

To get back to the Bitburg ramifications in conclusion: To have Reagan now act as if he had to make that trip because Germany is the key to the "West" only proves how such an opposite as counter-revolution is passed off as if it were revolution, and that as "Western Civilization." All that that Pax Americana man aiming for world domination can see, be it in El Salvador or Bitburg, in Nicaragua or South Africa, is Russia. All else of the indigenous mass movement against totalitarian so-called democracy is subsumed under this myopic view.

5. Here is what I wrote in 1962: "Just as the fight for freedom on the part of the Hungarian Revolutionaries (who have been raised on Marxist theory only to be betrayed by its usurpers) has made them theoretical Marxist-Humanists, the plunge into freedom has made the African revolutionaries the active Marxist-Humanists of today. The Marxist-Humanists of other countries are ready to listen and, with our help, to establish that new international which will be free from state control and will aspire to reconstruct the world." *Presence Africaine* #48, Paris, 1962.