

May 18, 1956

Dear Friends:

I was so completely exhausted yesterday when I completed the chapter on the dialectic -- The French Revolution and German Philosophy that I did not forward a covering letter with it. This is the most difficult chapter of the whole book and needs to be introduced formally by the local chairman in the manner in which the first discussion of the book was done. At the same time there is one concrete question that I will wish discussed. It is this: Now that I have the whole material before me I feel that after the convention and discussion I will wish to rewrite Chapter 1 on the Industrial Revolution and Classical Political Economy and this Ch. 2 on French Revolution as one chapter and call it either THE REVOLUTIONS AND ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL THOUGHT or THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS: Industrial, Social-POLITICAL, and Intellectual. The point would be to open the modern world with the revolutions which indeed laid its foundations and posed the questions as well of its ultimate development which we are now living through.

It is only when I actually started working out the philosophic problem on black and white in its strictly philosophic implications that it finally became possible to sharpen up the great divide in the state capitalist tendency between the Johnsonites and us. We did a thorough job on that politically. Now it suddenly became clear that one of the three fundamental attitudes, fundamentally false approaches to Hegel, was precisely the Johnsonite which is now placed along with the Communist and academic as the sheerest sophistry, one more aspect of the Existentialism which manipulates the dialectic to fit any arguments it wished like a Philadelphia lawyer arguing both, absolute opposite, sides of the question with equal glibness. Thus to Kaufman Hegel was both the philosopher of the counter-revolution and of the permanent revolution while "the Absolute" was both supposed to designate us and the Existentialists as incorporating all of past culture. No wonder we couldn't ever get back to the work on CAPITAL, that is, Marxism.

Each generation must reinterpret Marxism for itself -- Marx himself did for the 3 decades of his development and that of the working class movement of the 1840's through the 1848 revolution; the 1850's and the 1860's when a new dialectic came out of the very struggles of the workers in America and in France. Each period, as each thought; each activity as each appearance has its own dialectic, and this you cannot learn by rote, but only after you have absorbed the past, studied concretely the present, can you finally have a contribution to make on your own. Anyone who has ever been in any of the movements that call themselves Marxist has heard, and repeated by rote, that the 3 elements of Marxism are: Hegelian dialectics, Classical Political Economy, and the doctrines of the French Revolution. After which they proceeded to fight for 5¢ more in wages. In a word, it meant absolutely nothing to them for their day because it meant nothing they needed to relive of the past. The truth is that only with the present book does each period come alive in what it meant, then when it happened; what it meant to Marx; and what it means to relive it now.

Take now the French Revolution. It had a dialectic of its own. The development from the Bastille til the Enrages and a good way to remember the Enrages is to remember what it means: INDIGNANT HEARTS. Now the movement used to repeat only the Jacobins as the "Heroes"

12105

and as late as 1936 J made it "The Black Jacobins" while there are some men who would have seen the field hands rather than the coachmen as the greatest contribution. In any case, Marx saw at once, when he broke with bourgeois society and turned to study the Great French Revolution that it was the mass movement, the deepest layer, the self-mobilization of the urban poor, where lay the foundations for the future development of proletarian struggles. That is "one element" of the doctrine of Marxism that now comes to life and is the unifying element, of the other three. That is why for the first time with us "History" of the actual class struggles has appeared as if it were something altogether new instead of the lifeblood of the Marxian theory without which it means nothing.

Now the dialectic of the French Revolution insofar as the great bourgeois thinker was able to see was that it was a process of development, a constant overcoming of contradictions, you didn't get to freedom or the absolute at one full swoop but through meeting enemies and overcoming them, through contradictions with your own previous revolutionary leaders as the Jacobins, etc. The METHOD then, despite the fact that to him world history was a development of the world spirit to Hegel, of revolutionary human activity, dialectical development, is what Hegel discovered while all other philosophers, when they did sense contradictions, either tried to reconcile by "the will of good men" or mystical evasion of all reality and running to God. At least Hegel's Absolute, though only in thought, was on this earth, not in heaven.

Hegel may not have recognized materialism, but it is materialism dialectical materialism which can explain him for there is nothing in our thought that is not already imbedded in the activity of the proletariat and a genius as great as Hegel living in a period of the French Revolution and Napoleon could not but catch the impulse, though he himself could not see the masses as living subject working out their freedom by themselves, and worked out everything only for the elite philosophers. If it needed a Marx to stand Hegel on his feet, it needed a Hegel to lay down the prerequisites for Marxism.

One final word in this introduction to the chapter on the dialectic. It cannot be separated from the Absolute for it is the method of the Absolute. If at this day and age you think of absolute only as thought if at this day and age you cannot materialistically interpret that last chapter of Hegel, then you get to the freedom of socialism like a bolt from the blue, as pure empty agitation in the manner of the SIP or the Johnsonites. If, on the other hand, you have worked it out, then you have faced the task imposed to you by history, of reinterpreting Marxism for your own generation. When I first said that the two poles of my book would be the Absolute Idea and Automation people thought I was a bit off; by now I hope everyone can see what hard work awaits us now that we have recognized what specifically is our age and our job in it as part of the forward movement of the masses to full freedom.

Weaver

12106