

January 21, 1987

Talking to Myself (For Individual study, not for reading to the Locals)*

Dear Colleagues, the above title may sound strange but it is one way in which I make notes for future development, not only on the book-to-be on Organization, but in all of my works when I have not yet worked out a definitive form in which to present the issue. That is why I have noted, parenthetically, that this is not to be read to the locals; it is for individual study only. I do feel, however, that I need now to write up the parenthetical promise on p. 3 of the Jan. 12, 1987 REB Minutes which noted that I will do so, and do so not mysteriously, but so that you can work out for yourself the references to the 1953 philosophic letters on the Absolute Idea. The focus is on page 2 of the May 12, 1953 Letter on the Absolute Idea, as excerpted in the 1982 edition of Dialectics of Liberation. The point is to catch the dialectical flow of the Self-Determination of the Idea, paragraph by paragraph.

The first paragraph on p. 2 calls attention to p. 483 of the Science of Logic, which shows how the stage of "exteriorization" is also that of intensification, i.e., "interiorization", i.e., objective manifestation makes the inward extension more intense.

The second paragraph on p. 2, which attacks impatience in "an absolutely uncompromising Bolshevik" manner, I attribute to Hegel, after which I quote from p. 484 of the Science of Logic:

That impatience whose only wish is to go beyond the determinant... to be immediately in the absolute, has nothing before it as object of its cognition but the empty negative...or else would-be absolute, which is imaginary because it is neither posit^{ed} nor comprehended

The dialectic flow of this quotation is in no way related to the two names quoted in the preceding paragraph of the letter, but even if said unconsciously, has everything to do with what I follow the Hegel quotation with:

I am shaking all over for we have come to where we part from Lenin. I mentioned that, although in the approach to the Absolute Idea Lenin had mentioned that man's cognition not only reflects the objective world but creates it, but that within the chapter he never developed it. Objective world connections, materialism, dialectical materialism, it is true, but not the object and subject as one fully developed.

*The references to the Science of Logic in 1953 were all to the Johnston & Struthers translation. The penultimate Idea of Cognition, which includes the Idea of the Good, is covered in Vol. II, pp. 460-465; in the A.V. Miller translation, it appears on pp. 818-824. The Absolute Idea in Johnston & Struthers is pp. 466-486; in Miller, pp. 828-844. The specific paragraph on impatience occurs on p. 483 in J&S; in Miller it is p. 841; while the "idea freshly releasing itself" appears on p. 485 in J&S, and p. 843 in Miller. So far as Nature in the Smaller Logic is concerned, Paragraph 244 is the final paragraph of the Encyclopedia outline of the Science of Logic.

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Stop for a moment. Hold tightly to the fact that ever since 1948-49, when I first translated Lenin's Abstract of the Science of Logic, I have done nothing less than extolling Lenin philosophically, specifically on the Science of Logic. There is no question about the fact that it was Lenin who created the Great Divide in Marxism in 1914-17. Our present changed perception of Lenin's philosophic ambivalence shows here that I actually did have some philosophic differences as far back as the early 1950s.

The fact is that it was not only Lenin who, by keeping the Philosophic Notebook to himself, separated philosophy from politics. When we broke politically with the concept of the vanguard party, we kept philosophy and politics in two separate compartments. What this 1953 Letter shows now, is that imbedded in it was a sharper critique of Lenin's philosophic ambivalence than shown in Marxism & Freedom. In 1953, on the other hand, as we saw above, I had stressed that in the chapter on The Idea of Cognition Lenin had not concretized the objectivity of Cognition.

Here I wish to introduce something totally new from what I reported to the REB on Jan. 12. Since then, Mike and Olga have completed going through another box of archival material, and from it came out a letter to me from Grace Lee dated August 31, 1952. With her usual hyperbole, here is part of what she wrote me:

You have mastered Hegel. You write in your letter of August 29 as you have never written before. Instead of that one-to-one correspondence where you impose a movement on the Logic, you are now inside the movement of the Logic, caught up in its rhythms. The number of people in the world who can do that can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand. You are absolutely right in characterizing Herman's (Johnny Zupan) search for the party as the Logic of the "Idea of the Good"--which stands in its own way and hence must in the end turn against itself.

We haven't found my letter of August 29, 1952 which produced that enthusiasm a year before I broke through on the Absolute, but it is clear from what she said on August 31 that I had evidently been writing on the penultimate chapter from the Science of Logic, "The Idea of Cognition." She further points to that specific chapter because, very clearly, I had been relating the Idea of Cognition to the concept of Organization. What was facing the JFT now that it finally broke fully with Trotskyism was the question: What kind of Organization now? This took a most ominous turn as I was coming to a break with Johnsonism, 1950-53. The specific objective event that precipitated the crisis in 1953 was Stalin's death.**

**The same type of crisis as occurred in March-April 1953 over the JFT's attitude to Stalin's death reoccurred with the first issue of Correspondence in Oct. 1953, for which I had written the lead on the Beria Purge. Reexamining this in 1987, I realize that what looks like the "Russian Question" -- that same old "Russian Question" which caused the first break with Trotskyism at the approach of World War II and reoccurred in 1950 on the Korean War--was, far from being on the "Russian Question", was actually on the decisive question of War and Revolution which has always marked that new continent of thought and revolution of Marxism from its birth. 1917 designated its move to the twentieth century. It was Stalin's counter-revolution that gave it a narrow nationalist stamp. Why the hell have all of us been caught in that linguistic web?

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In March 1953 I felt very strongly that an incubus had been lifted from the heads of the Russian and East European masses (evidently also from my head) and that revolts were sure to happen. It was a very exciting day in Detroit, both because the Black production worker, Charles Denby, and the head of the Youth, Ben, had independently thought that, no doubt, I wished to write a political estimate of that world-shaking event; they volunteered to work with me all night. When Denby appeared after his day at Chrysler he concretized this further, laughing jubilantly and saying that what all the workers were talking about, as the radio blared forth the news of Stalin's death, was: "I've got just the person to take his place -- my foreman." Denby asked if I had that article I was always talking about on the great trade union debate between Lenin and Trotsky in 1920 (on which I had been working since the 1940s). Denby felt that the workers would now welcome such a revelation; he wished to distribute it to them.

Think of the unpleasant shock that then occurred when Grace, who was in California and the responsible editor for that issue of the mimeographed Correspondence, felt that the Lead article could not be on Stalin's death, but on the "new" women around Selma who disregarded the blare from the radio announcing Stalin's death. Instead, they were exchanging recipes for hamburgers. Not only was that idiotic suggestion floated, but she undertook to censor my analysis on the significance of Stalin's death, so that it too sounded not so world-shaking. Such an attitude towards a world event produced such a struggle between me and Grace, that it actually affected the whole JFT.

What was CLR's "solution" to the crisis created by the different attitudes, both to Stalin's death and to the tasks of a Marxist newspaper? It was typically Jamesian: I was judged to be "politically" right, but nevertheless totally wrong because of my sharp attack on Grace. Grace was judged to be "politically" wrong, but absolutely right because she listened to the "new". After two months of this type of meaningless, diversionary, empty "solution" to both things happening in the objective world and attitudes to what are the tasks of a Marxist newspaper to objective events, I asked for a week off, left Detroit for Ann Arbor and out of me poured those Letters of May 12 and 20 on the Absolute Idea.

Now then, because the dialectic flow in the present singling out of p. 2 of the May 12, 1953 Letter points also to the relevance of looking at it with eyes of 1987, let me examine the new find, the 1952 letter which shows I had made a plunge into the Idea of Cognition, especially on the section "The Idea of the Good." Clearly, I definitely had Organization in mind. This was not on the level of James and Grace and their dialectic of the "Party", but on the question of Dialectic "in and for itself." While I do not remember where I raised the question that I wasn't quite happy with Lenin's 16 point definition of the Dialectic, I had called attention to the fact that Lenin says its final two points (15 and 16) are "examples of point 9." This, I felt, was a step back from proceeding with the Absolute Idea and returning to the Doctrine of Essence, Form and Content specifically.

At the same time -- and that's when I did get brave and started arguing with Lenin as if he were right there -- I began arguing with Lenin because he had asked the readers to disregard the last half paragraph of the chapter on the Absolute Idea while I insisted that had he suffered from Stalinism for three long decades he would have seen the relevance of following Hegel's Absolutes to the end. (This of course is taken up in the May 20, 1953 Letter, where I deal with the three final syllogisms, but for the present what is compelling is to trace the many ways of the development of the Self-Determination of the Idea.)

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Here is how the May 12, 1953 Letter manifested the dialectical flow on p. 2: from exteriorization/interiorization it lapsed into a would-be "absolute" which led Lenin to remain at the "approach to", i.e., on the threshold of, the Absolute Idea. This is the reason why Lenin preferred to let the Absolute Idea stop at Nature (Practice), crediting Hegel with "stretching a hand to materialism," instead of following Hegel to the last part of that paragraph when Hegel insists that the Absolutes had not been completed with the Absolute Idea, and must still go through the Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Mind before completion is reached with Absolute Mind. Put another way, in place of any self-criticism, or objectivity, Lenin left future generations without full illumination of what may befall them -- Stalinism. It is the generation that followed, our age that suffered through those three decades of Stalinism, that had to face the reality of what happens after. It is this point, this objectivity, this concreteness that emboldened me not to stop where Lenin stopped at the approach to the Absolute Idea, but to follow Hegel to the Philosophy of Mind. The Absolute Method opened new doors already in the Absolute Idea, which Hegel defined as:

The pure Idea, in which the determinateness or reality of the Notion is itself raised to the level of Notion is an absolute liberation, having no further immediate determination which is not equally posited and equally Notion. Consequently there is no transition in this freedom...The transition here therefore must rather be taken to mean that the Idea freely releases itself...."

Now stand up and shout: "The Idea freely releases itself." Shout this while a flashing light illuminates Reality and its meaning, philosophy and revolution.

Instead of placing a "No Entrance" sign over organization as "pure politics", we finally are in the process of working out dialectics of philosophy and organization.

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