

Oct. 12, 1960

Dear Louis:

Herewith is the summation of Ch. 5 on Modern Science of Gustav Wetter's "Dialectical Materialism", which may be rather inadequate when you consider that the summation was made by one who knows next to nothing about science. Nevertheless I know my Marxism and therefore wish to warn you against the following in looking at this work or, for that matter, "strict" scientific works:

1) The fragmentation of the worker in our society brings with it the fragmentation of the intellectual. Thus this work leaves out the great revision of 1943 because that one was in the "economic" field whereas he is concerned with science. But the value theory involved dialectics in the following fundamental sense which would have thrown a great deal of light on his precious science: a) the structure of CAPITAL was changed--even if you should leave out the Humanism of Marxism, the "bones" alone reveal the inseparability of economics, history, dialectics. Thus when you throw out Ch. 1, as you were asked to do by the Soviet economists, and allegedly substitute for the unit of capitalistic wealth--the commodity--the "historic" development of commodity, you at one and the same time rob of its class content and the point at which the leap is made from mere surplus above consumption which is bartered in primitive societies to surplus value extracted from laborer which is invested in ever greater production a la state capitalism. For science, which is Wetter's subject, this meant being unaware of the breaking point in Russian attitudes to the empirical sciences, of which more later.

2) The Russians divide Marxian philosophy in 2: dialectical materialism and historical materialism. Taking his cue from that, Wetter concerns himself only with the former, not with the latter as if that were possible. (The Russians do it for the very same reason that they broke the structure of teaching Marx's CAPITAL--to hide both the inner springs of their society and to transform history itself into an abstraction. That is to say, you consider "societies": slave, feudal, capitalist, "socialist" without seeing the SELFDEVELOPING SUBJECT, the PROLETARIAT, who alone can bring about "the negation of the negation" and establish a society where the individual is the social entity and only proof of its freedom. The Communists as state-capitalists and Wetter as Jesuit want to disregard that "subject".) Suppose we let them do it because we "really" want to study science "objectively." The very history of science itself would give the lie to that not only because, taking it from Planck through Einstein, the historic period would have a great deal to say on the subject, but because the very inner dialectic of science depends on its continuity and accumulated knowledge.

3) Proof is in the "strictly" dialectic chapter when, of all things, the 1955 revision of the negation of the negation is treated as a re-establishment (sic!) of that law. The reason? Technical Stalin just began omitting that basic law from his "principal features of the dialectic" because, of course, he feared its connection with the overthrow of his state. Long before Khrushchev and his Destalinization however it became quite evident that the chauvinism, "new dialectical law of criticism and self-criticism" which of course meant disregard of real actual world, its objective development was leaving Russia far behind. The A-bomb awoke Stalin with a start and he began screaming at the scientists. Empirical data, technology, etc. etc. and in a few years they had it. Now in 1955 when "negation of negation" was not just abolition of state "in general" but concrete Humanist philosophy as its banner,

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the Russians found they "couldn't" attack it because it had been left out altogether of the various editions of Marx's works since it was first published in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as... Karpushin, while writing against Marx's Early Essays, must ask for their republication. "Negation of negation" now begins to reappear especially in the sciences because they are beginning to deal with the relativity theory and so we get the following in 1956:

"The nihilistic attitude towards the science & culture of bourgeois society which has long been in evidence was having a negative effect upon various aspects of our own practical work. The Plenum of the Party C.C. of July 1955 forcibly condemned such an approach to the achievements of the capitalist countries & called for an application of the best of these achievements in the fields of science and technology in the interests of communist construction." The Russians called this article "Some Problems Concerning the Law of the Negation of the Negation" and it is this Wetter (and many who are not Jesuit, believe me, do the same) as proof of "re-establishment" of law of negation of negation as primary.

Now there are some things from which Wetter suffers which do stem from his Jesuitism, such as being vulgarly spiritualistic to counter the Communist vulgarly materialistic approach. But, on the whole, he is helpful in seeing or helping his readers who are not as prejudiced as he to see certain of the relations of dialectical laws and natural science.

But I get neither from him, nor the Russians, nor the atheistic, sophisticated intellectuals answers to the following questions and I suspect that you as our new physicist alone will be able to give:

1) To what extent did dialectical materialism, even as perverted as it is by the Russians, help the Russian scientists strike out on their own in advance of "Western science". It was not only concentration while penny-pinching Eisenhower Big Business Cabinet headed by GM Wilson counted profits that produced the Sputnik. We are still behind Russians in thrust, and God knows what else.

2) When they did make their leap, did that, technologically, produce a discontinuous development so that, far from having "to catch up" in all spheres, they have sufficient knowhow in sufficient spheres to become "superior" in what matters in capitalist society: military, and perhaps even heavy industry.

3) Of course their downfall with Automation will be the same as here: that self-developing subject--the proletariat. But, narrowly, does it mean that, living in the age of "the unified field theory" (I have seen not a single reference to it, so perhaps it is too new and untried for books and exists only in articles) not only Russia, but even the underdeveloped countries (ah, there's the rub) could leap ahead.

In this respect, as I close, I want also to call attention to yet one more failure in Trotskyism and that is the concept that it is "the backwardness of the Russian proletariat" that allowed for the revolution to be lost to Stalin's counter-revolution. It was a trap that got even us, although we always tried to qualify it by saying it "technologically speaking." Tommyrot as all the African revolutions now show

"not alone" as revolutions, but in reconstruction of society, including

"technological projects" from Aswan Dam to the poor backs of Chinese peasants who are pushing that country's "leap forward."

Let me just give you a piece of pure Hegelianism here, and if it sounds like gibberish now, it won't by the time you have that chapter on science finished in the next 6 months or so:

"Consequently, the activity of the end is not directed against itself, for the purpose of absorbing and assimilating a given determination: it aims rather at positing its own determination, and by transcending the determinations of the external world, at giving itself reality in the form of external actuality." (Science of Logic, Vol. II, p. 461)

Yours,  
*Ral*

On second thought I will send a copy of this to REB, not for any "activity" but for people to read at leisure, especially people who will be doing this for the book, like John on engineering or rather technology as a whole, Saul on intelligentsia, etc.etc.

P.P.S. I am also attaching Wetter's latest article in DAEDALUS (Summer 1960) and wish to call special attention (p. 589) to this: "The critical reformulation of the theory of relativity demanded by A. Alexandrov primarily concerns the over-all structure of the theory. In the conventional structure of this theory one proceeds from the relative to the absolute. Aleksandrov insists on the opposite procedure. The starting point must be the material (real) connection bet. phenomena (i.e., the 'actions') and from these connections the general laws & concepts of space-time relations that arise from them are to be derived. According to Alexandrov, the general space time structure of the world is a manifestation of its cause-effect structure: the causal relations determine the space-time relations... The wish was expressed (at 10/58 conf.) that in future there should be separate discussions of the philosophical questions of the general theory of relativity, in which it would be necessary, to begin with to deepen philosophically the categories of dialectical materialism: absolute and relative, abstract & concrete, property & relation, content & form." (VOPROSY FILOSOFII 1959 #2, p. 77-82)

Now those last "wishes" can never be fully realized in Khrushchev's Russia because of their vulgar materialism which conceives not only that reality contains nothing but matter & that consciousness arose from matter by purely evolutionary means but, above all, because absolute for our age can arise only from SELF\*DEVELOPING SUBJECT, the proletariat, where both mental and class struggles unite to achieve "a negation of the negation" which is a very different society than that which exists in Russia. However, that will give me no difficulties whatever in my book whereas physics, to the extent that I wish to grasp it as part of the total view and the specifics of the competition with American capital which I call now discontinuous development will give me "troubles" & it is in this field I wish your collaboration.

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