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PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION

Part II - WHY HEGEL? WHY NOW?

Chapter 2 - Marx's Transcendence of, and Return to, Hegel's Dialectic

INTRODUCTION

As established Marxism has proven more than once, the attempt to sunder Marxism by separating its "scientific materialism" from its "Hegelian idealism" does not cleanse its advocates of "Hegelianism," but, on the contrary, leads them directly to the same mire where Hegel ended: glorification of the state, the "mediator" between opposing forces that remain irreconcilable. Because Marx had foreseen the possibility of just such a development -- and due not merely to personal opportunism but for the vastly more substantial reason of a fatal flaw within the given philosophy of freedom -- he warned his co-revolutionaries: "We should especially avoid re-establishing society as an abstraction, opposed to the individual. The individual is the social entity." This statement in the essay, "Private Property and Communism" is part of the now-famous Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts, 1844.

The year, 1844, was a crucial one both in objective developments, such as the revolt of the Silesian weavers,² and as the point of origin of Marx's historical materialism.³ Thus, two forces, quite distinct from each other and unbeknown to each other, working independently in vastly different spheres of endeavor which seemed worlds apart, were each "preparing" for the revolution that would, in four years, cover the entire continent of Europe. The coincidence of the spontaneous proletarian outbursts and a worked-out theory of liberation fairly riveted the world's attention on the author of the Communist Manifesto, as a revolutionary, as founder of a new world view of history, a new unity of theory and practice that very nearly transformed the world.

Not a trace of Hegelian "language" seems to have been left in the new philosophy of revolution. And, indeed, as against both Marx's theory of liberation and the actual freedom struggles, Hegel's mere concept of freedom, even where it reflected a historic drive, was history as finished, as past events, not as present, much less as anticipation of future. Yet it was no accident that Marx

1. Gesamtausgabe, Abt. 1. Bd. 3, where these 1844 Manuscripts are included, have been translated into English by Martin Milligan, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1959, and issued in Great Britain through Lawrence and Wishart Ltd. They have likewise been translated by T.B. Bottomore and issued in the U.S. by McGraw-Hill Co., 1963, and include, besides the Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts, 1844, two other essays by Marx from that same period: "On the Jewish Question," and "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction" and bear the title, Karl Marx: Early Writings. Except where otherwise noted, I am, however, using my own translation, especially the one of "The Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic," as they appeared as Appendices to Marxism and Freedom, Twayne, N.Y., 1958, first edition.
2. Here is how the young Marx hailed this uprising: "The wisdom of the German poor stands in inverse ratio to the wisdom of poor Germany... The Silesian uprisings began where the French and English insurrections ended, with the consciousness of the proletariat as a class." (quoted by Franz Mehring, Karl Marx)

saw the emergence of revolution not only as result of empiric, i.e., immediate class struggles, but out of the logic of class struggles, out of the dialectic of historical development, for Marx's vision was rooted in the idea of a philosophy of history which Hegel had propounded. And it was the Hegelian dialectic which he recreated and which gave his materialist conception of history so distinct a quality that he could separate himself not only from "idealists" but from "materialists," Feuerbach included. Because the dialectic was not, as with Hegel, restricted to thought, but was the dialectic of actual history, he was enabled also to see as the "subject," as the "negativity" that would transform the world -- the proletariat -- and with him propelled to shape the future instead of merely "contemplating" the past, or present. There is no doubt as to its originality or world-shaking significance. But it would not have come to be without Hegel. Nor could he have fought Hegel's idealism without Hegel's dialectic. But it was not out of mere indebtedness to Hegel that Marx presented his view, not as mere opposition of materialism to idealism, but as their "unity." Rather it was the positive in his revolutionary vision that led him to write, in his "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic," that "thorough-going Naturalism, or Humanism, distinguishes itself both from Idealism and Materialism; and is at the same time, the truth uniting both... only Naturalism is capable of grasping the act of world history."

Section 1: The 1840s: From a Critic of Hegel to the Author of the Communist Manifesto

Within little more than a decade since Hegel's death, in 1831, Hegelianism, as a philosophy, was not only splintered between conservative Old Hegelians and radical Young Hegelians, but -- and this is what is truly decisive -- was being undermined by the new objective situation that was bringing unto the historic stage a proletariat more mature than Hegel had ever confronted. Marx's debt to Hegel, however, began not so much on the day he became a Young Hegelian in college, but, on the contrary, on the day he broke with the whole of bourgeois society, Young Hegelians included, and began settling scores with his "philosophic conscience." It turned out to be "A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" and, as all the other works of that period -- 1844-1847 -- this turned out to be a critique also of Hegel's critics. He no sooner stated that "man makes religion; religion does not make man,"³ then he moved away from atheism, as such, as well as from philosophical materialism (Feuerbach) and all existing tendencies, to throw out a Promethean challenge: "The immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, is to unmask human self-alienation in its secular form now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form...It is with good reason that the practical political party in Germany demands the negation of philosophy." Its error lies in thinking "that it can achieve this negation by turning its back on philosophy, looking elsewhere, murmuring a few trite and ill-humored phrases...you cannot abolish philosophy without realizing it."³ Just how thorough he himself was can

3. Marx himself never used the term; both "historic materialism" and "dialectic materialism" were coined by Engels. Marx himself preferred the more precise, though longer phrases such as "the mode of production in material life" or "material base", and "the dialectic method" or, simply, "revolutionary." In the essays under discussion here he calls his philosophy "humanist," later it was "Communist," still later, "Internationalist," and at all times "revolutionary." Nevertheless, as a shorthand term, and because the quintessential

clearest be seen as he grappled with Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind and Encyclopaedia in his next essay, "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic."

This essay is a work of such "seriousness, suffering, patience and labor of the negative," to use a Hegelian phrase, that, though the reader too "suffers" (since he is presented, not with ready-made conclusions, but with the act of creativity itself), he finds that he has been made witness to the origination of the Marxian dialectic, Historic materialism.

Once Marx reaches Hegel's Phenomenology, he states its simple facts -- "Hegel regards human essence, Man, as equal to self-consciousness. All alienations of human essence is, therefore, no more than alienation of self-consciousness, -- but elicits the contradiction within: "the actual alienation, which appears as real, is... nothing but the appearance of the alienation of actual human essence..." (quoted in Marxism and Freedom, p. 311) No wonder that what was "regarded as the essence of alienation, which is posed and to be transcended, is not the fact that human essence materializes itself in an inhuman manner in opposition to itself, but the fact that it materializes itself from and in opposition to, abstract thinking." (p. 309) Now that Marx has shown the inadequacy of Hegel's strongest point, his theory of alienation, he brings about a confrontation between the great merit of Hegelian philosophy -- "its thoroughly negative and critical character..." and the fatal flaw inherent in a philosophy which appropriates objects only as thought and movements of thought for: "hidden in embryo (is) the latent potentiality and secret of uncritical positivism and equally uncritical idealism... philosophic disintegration and resurrection of extant Empiricism." (p. 311)

Having thrown a glaring light on the development that will result, Marx moves back to hammer away at the contradictions already existing: Despite, for example, its phenomenal achievement -- "The dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principle" -- which enabled Hegel to grasp "the essence of labor and conceives objective man, true, actual man as the result of his own labor." (p. 309); despite "the positive moment" -- "transcendence as objective movement" -- the limitations of abstract thought, the restriction of knowing only mental labor, the fact that "knowing is its sole act," all lead to reducing transcendence to mere appearance. "Thus, after transcending, for example, religion, after the recognition of religion as a product of self-alienation, he still finds himself confirmed in religion as religion... Man who has recognized that in law, politics, etc., he is leading an alienated life, pursue in this alienated life, as such, his true human life." (p. 317) Marx now hammers away at the "lie of his principle:... Thus reason is at home in unreason as unreason."

In effect, what Marx is now saying is that the total dichotomy between the philosophic world where alienations were "transcended" and the actual world where they are as big as life is proof enough that the philosophic world is bereft of practice, that existence didn't enter the world of essence, and Hegel's Absolute, far from achieving a unity of thought and reality, only compelled accommodation to reality. And the Other of that world of beautiful Reason, abstract rationalism,

distinction always was historic as both movement and change, i.e., not permanent but transitory, we will here use the term, historic materialism, to designate the materialist conception of history which was specifically Marxian.

4. Karl Marx, Early Writings, p. 43

5. Ibid. p. 44, 50

is total irrationality of the true, existing world. The manuscript breaks off before Marx has carried through the promise that "We will see later why Hegel separates thinking from the subject." (p. 323) But, in the process of his struggle with Hegel's concepts on Hegel's ground, he has pointed to how different the problems would be when "actual corporeal Man, standing on firm and well rounded earth, inhaling and exhaling all natural forces" becomes "Subject" and the philosophy, Humanism, that has Man at its center would be "capable of grasping the act of world history."

This, however, is not the culminating point of the essay, which is the last of the 1844 manuscripts that had dealt with alienated labor, private property, capital, communism. In these he not only criticized natural scientists whose "abstract materialism" blinds them to the fact that "To have one basis for life and another for science is a priori a lie." (p. 300) But also took issue with political economy which begins with labor as the source of all value but proceeds to attribute nothing to labor and everything to private property." Marx holds that:

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that any kind of object is ours only when we have it, i.e., when it exists for us as capital, or when we possess it directly -- eat it, drink it, wear it, live in it, etc. -- in short use it... in place of all the physical and spiritual senses, there is the sense of possession which is the simple alienation of all these senses... seeing, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, thought, perception, experience, wishing, activity, loving... To such absolute poverty has human essence had to be reduced in order to give birth to its inner wealth. (p. 297)

He naturally levels his attack against the capitalist "or whatever one calls the lord of labor" and has already introduced a totally new concept as his theory of alienation, though based on Hegel's, moves to the solid ground of production and alienated labor as the center of its development. This new term, which we will see in its most mature form in his greatest theoretical work, Capital, is "reification," transformation of man into thing, which the capitalist process of production does to the laborer. But an ambiguity was apparent when he stated that "communism, as such, is not the goal of human development, the form of human society" since Marx also gave Communism high praise: "It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself as this solution."

Suddenly, in the midst of the essay on Hegel, precisely at the moment when Marx -- (in opposition to Feuerbach's criticism of the "negation of the negation,") stresses the "positive moments of the Hegelian dialectic -- "transcendence as objective movement"-- he returns to the question of communism. He wrote that: "communism is humanism mediated by the transcendence of private property. Only by the transcendence of this mediation, which is nevertheless a necessary pre-supposition, does there arise positive Humanism, beginning from itself." (p.319-20)

The very idea of taking up the birth of "positive Humanism" as the result of the second negation after communism, in a defense of Hegel against Feuerbach who, at the beginning of the essay was credited with nothing short of having "transcended the old philosophy" is truly phenomenal. Here is Marx who had already broken with the Young Hegelians, who was so sharply antagonistic to Hegel's

abstractions which cover up loopholes in his theory of alienation and transcendence for accommodation to the irrational world that Marx calls the key concept of Otherness, of absorbing objectivity as nothing short of the "lie of his principle"; here Marx finally stood Hegel "right side up" after having long before parted ways with him in the analysis of the actual world — and yet it is at this fork in the road of philosophy "as such" that he turns to praise Hegel for his "insight, expressed within alienation...into the actual appropriation of his objective essence through the destruction of the alienated determination of the objective world, through its transcendence in its alienated existence," (p. 319) after which follows his settling of accounts with communism that he praises for transcending private property, but stresses that it is only after "transcendence of this mediation" that we will have a truly human society.

It is as if one watched an actual birth of a new world concept that finally separates him from all others, no matter how close they had been and no matter how they had served as transition points to this totally original idea, to this new fusion of philosophy and politics, theory and practice that is destined to be known as Marxism. It is at its point of origin so much remains to be done. Marx will work at it for the next forty years of his life, but since we have witnessed it as it emerged rather than as a finished product, it is worthwhile to tarry another moment, especially since what we are tracing is the relationship to Hegel, not only in the 1840s, but after he became "Marx the economist" of the 1850s, and "Marx the world revolutionary and head of the International Workingmen's Association," culminating in Marx and the Paris Commune of the 1860s, and 1870s. At the point in 1844, when Marxism is first taking shape when it is still a question of "pure" philosophy, what is the point that made it possible to transcend also Feuerbach's philosophic, contemplative materialism? Marx had, even when crediting Feuerbach with "genuine discoveries," noted that "Feuerbach regards the negation of the negation only as the contradiction of philosophy with itself, as philosophy which affirms Theology (Transcendentalism) after it had denied it... But that it is necessary to remember that since Hegel himself comprehends that immanent in the concept of "the negation of the negation" is "the only truly positive...an act of self-manifestation of all being, to that he has discovered, though only as an abstract, logical and speculative expression, the movement of history." (p. 305)

Now it is this "movement of history" that Marx never let go of not only because that was to be the body and soul of his philosophy, but because, even with the strict confines of "the old philosophy" (Hegel), Hegel had discovered a dialectic which, as he will tell us even as the author of Capital, is the "source of all dialectic."⁶ No matter how sharp the divergence, the dialectic will remain "the truth" of all movement so long as we live in an antagonistic, in a class society. Throughout the rest of the essay, as he hits at and laughs at the "absorption of objectivity" but limited to thought, "transcendence of alienation" which finds itself back "at home" though this is an insane, irrational "home" which he is supposed to have transcended so that reason itself lives "as unreason," he keeps reminding himself that "From the very nature of the activity

6. Capital, Vol. I., p.

of philosophy Hegel knows what all other philosophers have done -- viz., that they have conceived of particular moments of Nature and of human life as moments of self-consciousness..." (p. 310), that Hegel has "collected them, and instead of a determinate abstraction, has created the abstraction of its entire range as the object of the critical philosophy" (p. 323) but the promise that "Further down we will develop the logical content of absolute negativity" (p. 321) was not fulfilled as the essay remains unfinished. What he had, however, done -- and to this day this is precisely what established Communism fears as its main enemy -- is to show this absolute negativity at work on the very opposition both to Hegel and the actual capitalistic world, on communism, the transcendence of private property itself, overcoming this transcendence as well in order to create a truly human world, "positive Humanism, beginning from itself."

It is ironic that today's self-styled "scientific materialism" refuses to accept the 1844 date as the point of origin of historical materialism, although the fact is attested to by Marx himself and at a period when he became a "scientific materialist": "The first work undertaken for the solution of the question that troubled me was a critical revision of Hegel's Philosophy of Law; the Introduction to that work appeared in the Deutsche Franzosische Jahrbucher, published in Paris in 1844...The general conclusion at which I arrived, once reached, continued to serve as the leading thread to my studies may be briefly summed up as follows:... The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual process of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness." (Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.) And Marx's lifelong collaborator, Frederick Engels, repeated after Marx's death, in the 1868 Preface to The Communist Manifesto, wrote: "The Manifesto being our joint production I consider myself bound to state that the fundamental proposition which forms its nucleus belongs to Marx...This proposition.. we, both of us, had been gradually approaching for some years before 1845...But when I again met Marx in Brussels, in the spring of 1845, he had it already worked out..." No, it isn't a fight over a date that is at stake; it is a fight over Marxism itself, the philosophy of freedom that will brook no accommodations to an antagonistic reality just because it is now in the form of state rather than private property.

None can match this vision. And none can reduce it to their particular brand of Philistinism and/or power complex. It isn't a question of "proving" that Marx never jettisoned this Humanist vision by "quoting" Capital to show that the reign of freedom, too, begins only after the realm of necessity: "Beyond it begins that development of human power which is its own end..." It is that they jettisoned the whole of Marxism, beginning with its very first appearance and not ending with the "mature" Capital until it was transformed into its opposite; as we shall show at the end of this chapter.

We have spent so much time on the 1844 Manuscripts both because it is the only place where Marx wrote a detailed criticism of the Hegelian dialectic and because we see the ideas he will develop further during the four years preparatory

7. Capital, Vol III., p. 955

to the 1848 revolutions -- in The Holy Family, The German Ideology, The Theses on Feuerbach, and The Poverty of Philosophy, only the last of which was published in Marx's lifetime -- in what may be called their original state. Naturally, it isn't a single year in which so epoch-making a discovery as the materialist conception of history is born. Nor is it a question of it not having deepened through the years. Quite the contrary. What is quintessential is the stage preparatory to The Communist Manifesto, which didn't come full-blown out of the head of Marx or Zeus. Without seeing the theoretical preparation, one cannot fully comprehend the practical experience, the listening to the proletariat, "the negative representative of society" that would destroy the capitalistic world of unreason. In turn, these few German emigre workers living in England and calling themselves the League of the Just, listened to Marx's vision, his "type" of Communism, and renamed themselves the Communist League and "commissioned" him to write their Manifesto.

In unfurling the new banner of European revolution -- "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, Unite!" -- Marx didn't separate revolution. The very structure of the Manifesto shows this to be so, for inseparable from the will and movement to change reality is the critique of all other "tendencies" who wish to change the world but do not have so comprehensive a theory of liberation. Nor does Marx wait for Section III (Socialist and Communist Literature) of the Manifesto to distinguish his views from all others. But directly in Section I, "Bourgeois and Proletarians," which opens with the justly celebrated sentence, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," that Marx writes the equally famous but not nearly so well understood statements: "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the vast majority."

No where did Marx get that expression, "self-conscious," and what does it mean if it doesn't mean the inseparability of revolutionary thought from revolutionary praxis? It is precisely because the class problem is a human task, a task of the whole man, that this specific unity of theory and practice called Marxism is the creative drama of human liberation that it is. We will see this even more clearly when we get to the climax of Marx's life, Capital, on the one hand, and the Paris Commune, on the other. But, first, we must take an interlude with the economic work, Critique of Political Economy, which had only an economic crisis -- that of 1857 -- for impulse instead of that of revolution.

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Part One - WHY HEGEL? WHY NOW?

Ch. 2 - Marx's Transcendence of, and Return to Hegel

Sec. 2 - The GRUNDRISSE: The Missing Link between Marx's Humanism of the 1840s and "Economics" of the 1860s.

The period following the defeat of the 1848 revolutions Marx spent mainly in the British Museum. He had returned to the studies of economics on which he had started as soon as he broke with bourgeois society in 1843. A further decade of concentrated research into political economy as well as into the actual functioning of the capitalist system followed as Marx tried to discern the law of motion of capitalist development. It would take still another decade of study, and participation in the class struggles as well, before his greatest theoretical work, Capital, would be ready for the publisher in 1867. The commercial crisis of 1857, which Marx thought would lead to new revolutions, served as the impulse to attempt to give final form to the vast notebooks spread out before him then. In published form (not in his lifetime) they would total the equivalent of 750 printed pages of text, plus another 100 pages of extracts from Ricardo and other economists.

Marx complained to Engels about the "sauerkraut and carrots" shapelessness of these 1857-58 notebooks which have since become famous as the Grundrisse. At the same time, Marx called Engel's attention to his economic discovery and his methodology: "I have thrown over the whole doctrine of profit as it existed up to now. In the method of treatment the fact that by mere accident I have again glanced through Hegel's Logic has been of great service to me..." (Letter to Engels, Jan. 14, 1858). In a word, Marx's concentration on economic research and analysis, far from signifying an abandonment of "Hegelianism," meant, instead, a most rigorous analysis of the process of production and exchange by way of dialectics.

As it turned out, however, Marx used but a single chapter (Money) in preparing A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. The rest of the bulky manuscripts, he put away for re-working into a follow-up of the Critique. Under the title Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Okonomie they were first published, in the original German only, in Moscow, in 1939-41. The outbreak of the Second World War was hardly conducive to "abstract" economic discussion. In any case, copies did not become readily available until they were republished in 1953 in East Berlin, again only in German. Since, however, the stimulant for their publication was the success of the Chinese Revolution in 1949, discussion centered almost exclusively on a single brief section about the successive epochs of economic social formations. In fact, that section had been published separately the year before.

1. This is the only section which has appeared in English, after another decade's delay, under the title "Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations" (with an introduction by Eric J. Hobsbawm).

Why the delay of a half century since Engel's death before the heirs published so crucial a work by Marx and another quarter of a century before even serious discussion on it began?

Some historians have tried attributing the neglect of the Grundrisse to the difficulties that modern students have with its "Hegelianisms." They flatter Marx's "brilliant analysis" but hold that Marx's unbroken internal logic in historical development is not history "in the strict sense."²

At the same time, those who wish to transform Marx into an economist and/or sociologist have likewise evaded coming to grips with the Grundrisse. Since nowhere not even in the philosophic essays, is Marx more Hegelian than in these "strictly" economic Notebooks which turn out to be sweeping historic sketches, of Mankind's development.

Even independent Marxist scholars, who are not ashamed of their "Hegelianism" and have declared the Grundrisse a most important missing link, the absence of which had hindered the perception of Marxism in its integral unity of philosophy and economics, materialism and the dialectic, have likewise themselves failed to do anything except using a quotation, here and there, to bolster their own analyses of today's reality.³

Since today's reality consists of such opposites as the birth of a third world of technologically underdeveloped countries, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the development of Automation in technologically advanced countries, the two sections of the Grundrisse that have become alive even to those who cannot read German are the sections, "Machinery" and "Progressive Epochs of Economic Social Formations." Crucial as these sections are, they are brief and knowing them hardly gives the reader a view of the Grundrisse in its totality, much less a perception of the inner identity of philosophy and economics in Marx's historical materialism. Under the circumstances, it becomes necessary here to give the reader, no matter how briefly, a view of the whole.

First, let us bear in mind that at the time of the writing of the Grundrisse Marx conceived the whole of his studies as consisting of six books, three of which -- Capital, Landed Property, Wage Labor -- constituted what later became three volumes of Capital plus The Theories of Surplus Value, and the three other books -- State, Foreign Trade, the World Market -- never were worked out as separate studies. The Introduction to the whole shows us that the historic sweep also extends to the question of the relationship of Greek art to "Modern Times," that is the mid-19th century. The Grundrisse consists of three uneven chapters. The Introduction numbers 43 pages, a chapter of 105 pages is entitled "Money," and a bulky one of no less than 512 pages, was entitled "On Capital."

2. Ibid. Hobsbawm, p. 11

3. Ironically enough, both the Communists who whitewash their State Capitalist regime as "Communism" and critics of Communism who hold that all technologically advanced countries produce one dimensional man have grabbed on to the section, Machinery, in the Grundrisse. (see especially Professor Edward Lipinski's "The Heritage of Marx": Social Effects of Automation" in Polish Facts and Figures; and Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man.)

4. An Italian translation was published in 1956, the French not until 1967, and to this date has not yet been published in English.

Marx never finished his Introduction because, as he tells us in the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, the only part of the reworked Grundrisse published in his lifetime: "I omit a general introduction which I had prepared, as on second thought any anticipation of results that are still to be proven, seemed to me objectionable..." The Introduction was, however, published in 1903, a full half century before the contents were published. It was forever quoted in any and all discussions on "dialectical materialism" without ever anyone grasping its import sufficiently to see that the whole is published. It happens that Marx had never used that phrase; it was Plekhanov's phrase. Marx was content to speak simply of "material production," stressing at all times the pivotal, determining role of history in dialectics as well as in material production. Engels referred to Marx's materialist conception of history as Historical Materialism. By whatever name, the mode of production, the movement of history, the historic determination of producing individuals, not in isolation, but as social beings is referred to, as what was important to Marx was the fact that man was not only "determined" but himself shaped history, though not out of the whole cloth. And, no matter how determining a factor "economics" was, it was "the sum total of these relations of production (that) constitute the economic structure of society."⁵

No narrow economist's vision this, no reduction of dialectic to a mere tool, much less a gathering of results arrived at by other means, by "inexorable economic laws" scientifically ascertained without regard to the human subject.

Marx considered the Hegelian dialectic "the source of all dialectic,"⁷ including materialist dialectics. The Grundrisse is the proof both of the indispensability and limitation of the dialectic. The limitation, however, is not caused by the deficiencies in the dialectic "as such" much less the need to replace it by another methodology. Rather, deficiency is due to the fact that the dialectic is not an "applied" science. It has to be recreated anew as it spontaneously emerges from the developing "Subject." Until the "Subject," i.e., the proletariat in the 1860s acted (the new class struggles in Europe and the Civil War in the United States) as against the quiescent 1850s, the dialectical analysis would, of necessity, remain intellectualist, isolated from the actual movement of history, — the masses. Precisely for this reason, Marx saw everything in a quite different light in the 1860s, and decided to start Capital ab novo. In structure, Capital is totally different than the Grundrisse, but this does not detract from the grandeur of the Grundrisse, its unifying vision, much less prove that Marx had "gotten over" his addiction to the Hegelian dialectic when he was a young man. It does the exact opposite. As a mature man working in a totally new field, Marx is more than ever the dialectician and here we see him actually at work recreating the dialectic in the field of economics. In the letter to Engels where he spoke of the "great service to me" that Hegel's Logic was, he also said: "If there should ever be time for such work again, I should greatly like to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence, in two or three printer's sheets, what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered but at the same time enveloped in mysticism." (letter dated Jan. 14, 1858).

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6. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 11

7. Capital, P.

The Introduction is the proof of this rationality of the Hegelian dialectic. A Marxist "theorist" may even be able to quote Marx's brilliant formulation that "the definite manner of participation in production determines the particular form of distribution, the form under which participation in distribution takes place." (p. 284) He certainly speaks fluently enough about the capitalist's exploitation of labor and proves that it is capitalistic domination over production which "determines" distribution, and exchange.

Yet, up to World War I, they were all quite satisfied in using only the economic, not the philosophic, "formulations." One and all they acted as if the Hegelian "language," if they understood it at all, was of no great importance. They did well enough without it. It took nothing short of the outbreak of the world war and a study of Hegel's Science of Logic to the very end for one, just one, (Lenin), to grasp the full significance of why Marx's economic categories were cast in the mold of Hegel's philosophic categories.

Without knowing Marx's Grundrisse, which had not been published in his time, Lenin had, once he studied Hegel's Science of Logic, grasped the similarity between it and Capital. In his Philosophic Notebooks, Lenin notes that the methodology used by Marx in analysing the universal character of the commodity money, was reminiscent of the Hegelian categories -- Universal, Particular, Individual. Only then did Lenin, not merely call attention to the resemblance of Marxian to Hegelian categories. Above all, Lenin stressed that it was impossible to understand Marx's Capital without understanding the whole of Hegel's Science of Logic.

It was first then that it became clear that not only could Hegel not be understood without Marx; but also Marx could not be fully understood without Hegel. Lenin was as alone, philosophically, when he came to that conclusion as he was alone, politically, when he first formulated the slogan, "Transform the Imperialist War into a Civil War."

All this is balderdash to his official heirs whose preoccupation is the practical needs of State Capitalism. What they did, in 1943, in violating the structure of Capital, in order to "prove" the need for a law of value "in Socialist Societies";* they now are doing on the question of automation in denuding it of its class nature.

The question Marx posed to himself in the Grundrisse was: "can the existing relations of production, and the relations of distribution corresponding to them, be revolutionized in the instrument of circulation, in the organization?" Marx's answer was not a simple "No." He went to the root of the "No." Turning from the Introduction to the Chapter on Money, Marx insisted that the separation of what was once identical -- labor and the means of labor, labor and property -- lead, not only to the independent existence of what was produced, but, above all, to the alienation of the producer, the worker. "Subjectivity's" (the worker) divorce from "Objectivity" (means of labor) was the root cause of all else in society. Money, Marx says, is a product of the dependence of the individual producers upon exchange, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the development of exchange as a process independent of the producers. Money does not produce

this contradiction. It is the development of this contradiction which produces money. Money, therefore, represents a universal social existence separated from the particular commodities and their natural (material) existence. Labor itself "is no longer grown together with the individual into one particular destination."

Where the economists saw only "harmony" in "free exchange" Marx saw contradiction, first of labor and capital, then of labor and its product and of labor's dependence on exchange to get back some of these commodities, the means of consumption. The development of these opposites -- particular commodities and the universal in the commodity, Money -- results in commercial crises.

Where the economists thought that the crises resulted merely from poor organization of exchange, Marx saw the crises resulting from the relations of labor and capital. The crises in the market resulted from the crises in production, and not vice-versa. "The economists fix on the abstraction of capital as raw material and instrument of labor," wrote Marx, "in order to present capital as a necessary element of production. Even the socialists say we need capital, but not the capitalists. The capital appears as pure Sache (thing) not as production relation..." (p. 205)

As he moved from the chapter on Money to the Chapter on Capital, dialectic logic opened new doors for Marx. The very productivity of labor, Marx went on, confronts the laborer as a "foreign power" while the capitalist waxes rich on this "alien labor." Ricardo and Sismondi did see that "only labor," not capital, is productive. But then they leave capital not in its specific form-determination as an intro-reflected production relation but think of Stoffliche (material) substance, raw material." (p. 221)

Peculiarly enough it is in the further expansion of the question of labor as alienated and capital, as not a thing, but a relation of production between labor and capital expressed through the instrumentality of things (machine) that Marx posed the question that led to the excursion on the questions of pre-capitalist societies. The first form of society, he said, is that in which human productivity is limited and natural relations of personal dependence prevail. This is the case under primitive communism. Personal independence, based on material dependence, is the second economic formation where for the first time the universal system of exchange is developed and so are the all-sided needs and universal capacities. This is the capitalist society. The third stage is free individuality based on the universal development of the individual. The second stage of social development creates the material conditions for the third but the antagonistic form and relations must first be abolished.

Marx begins by showing how it came about that the worker became "free." "This means, above all, that the worker must be separated from the land, which functions as his natural laboratory. This means the dissolution both of free petty land ownership and of the communal landed property, based on the Oriental Commune." (p. 68)

This is the opening paragraph of the now most famous section of the work dealing with pre-capitalist societies which had been made so famous by the birth of a new Third World in general and of Communist China in particular. This is

the section where the present becomes a point of intersection in history between future and past. For the future that imbedded in the past, that became present, and which is imbedded in the present to become future is unifying vision, a tremendous world historic view of a new society based on expanding human forces in a century when the whole cultivated world thought only of expanding material forces. Marx, on the other hand, as we saw, spoke of man yearning not "to remain something formed by the past but is in the absolute movement of becoming."

No single idea of Marx has been more represented than that which concerns the "Asiatic mode of production". Marx also opposed "advanced" capitalist production. Marx did not consider that there was nothing to the Oriental mode of production except "backwardness." As against the year in which he wrote the Communist Manifesto (1847), when he knew little of the Orient and extolled the Bourgeois revolutions for breaking down the "Chinese walls of barbarism," Marx, in the 1850s, wrote with disdain about Western society, and the opium wars they forced upon China and extolled also the great T'ai ping rebellion, writing in the New York Daily Tribune (June 14, 1853): "The chronic rebellions subsisting in China for about ten years past, and now gathered together in one formidable revolution, these order-mongering powers (England, France and America) which would attempt to support the wavering Manchu dynasty, forget that the hatred against foreigners... had become a political system only since the conquest of the country by the race of the Manchu Tartars?"

The immobility of man in Ancient China, the state bureaucracy which resisted all change in enslaving its population was naturally something that Marx castigated mercilessly but this did not mean that he was "for" the unique Germanic feudal regime which allowed for further development. What interested him in all these stages of development was when the contradiction between the productive forces and production relations reached the explosive point, "epochs of social revolution." The persistence of the Oriental mode of production, Marx explained in this way: "The Asiatic form necessarily survives longest and most stubbornly. This is due to the fundamental principle on which it is based, that is, that the individual does not become independent of the community; that the circle of production is self-sustaining, unity of agriculture and draft manufacture, etc. If the individual changes his relations to the community, he modifies and undermines, both the community and its economic premise; conversely, the modification of this economic premise -- produced by its own dialectic pauperisation, etc."

At the same time, while tracing the transition of the individual in the higher Germanic type of community, who comes in conflict with the community, escapes to the towns and in the conflict between town and country, "the age of dissolution" of feudalism begins, Marx asks how it is that the individual as a worker was stripped of all qualities except work. The separation of the toiler from the land and herding him into the factory was no golden page of history

8. Professor Wittfogel has created a veritable "universal" called Oriental Despotism. Not satisfied with the originality of this creation, he tried attributing it to none other than Karl Marx "before" he supposedly "betrayed" these early insights. On the other hand, George Lichtheim who has made a substantial contribution in tracing Marx's development on the question, and

and labor tried to resist it in every possible way: "History records the fact that it first tried beggary, vagabondage and crime, but was herded off this road on the narrow path which led to the labor market by means of gallows, pillory and whip. (Hence the governments of Henry VII, VIII, etc., also appear as conditions for the existence of capital.)" (p. 111)

It is clear that the "new society" when it is the birth of capitalism, is no golden age for labor. The very opposite, of course, is true. There has never been any doubt about that in any of Marx's writings. For those who chose to doubt that the criticism of the oriental mode of production was not perennial, and that this change of attitude to the Asiatic mode of production between the mid-1840s and mid-1850s, was not a "betrayal" but a real forward movement both in his knowledge and in his theories, should study the very last writings we have from his pen on the subject.

The urgent question of today as to the possibility of going from an "archaic mode of production" to socialism without going through capitalism and yet undergoing industrialization was precisely the question that both the Narodniki and the Marxists (in Marx's day) raised regarding the future of Russia. Marx, who had considered the Slavic communes as but a sub-variety of the Asiatic mode of production, answered in a most prophetic manner: "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development." (Karl Marx, Selected Works, Vol. I., p. 192) We will return to this problem in the final part of the book when we deal with "Economic Reality and Philosophy." Here we wish to follow Marx in the Grundrisse.

Marx had already stressed that "Asian history is a kind of undifferentiated unity of town and country which, by combining agriculture and manufacture and thus being a 'self-sustaining unity' had little need for trade or individual development. Over and over again, he stressed that by combining agriculture and industry and thus being self-contained, these 'self-governing villages,' inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the foundation of Oriental despotism." It isn't, as we see, only Oriental despotism but the primitiveness of the commune which allowed for the rise of the "highest unity," the "father," "the despot." It is this which made it a closed society so that the community "as a state," the state as "supreme landlord," "the centralization of power through irrigation works run by the state, plus on the one hand, absence of private property, and on the other hand, the state bureaucracy having command over the surplus labor of the commune and thus perpetuating its rule.

showed how tremendous a contribution that was to theory, nevertheless is himself so overwhelmed by the "uniqueness" of the Germanic, i.e., European contribution to civilization, that he tries to dismiss some of Marx's writings in the daily press. Thus, while he treats the section in the Grundrisse as "brilliant," he dismisses many of the articles in the New York Daily Tribune as "praise of the 'Chinese Revolution'" as if this was done only for journalistic effect. He fails to explain why, then, did Marx bring reference to the T'ai-ping rebellion into his greatest theoretical work, Capital; moreover, it was done as a footnote to a Chapter that had nothing whatever to do with China but a great deal with the fetishism of commodities.

Marx makes no fetish of the commune because, as he puts it, "free and full development of individual or society is inconceivable here for such evolution stands in contradiction to the original relationship." (p. 84) In a word, the centralized, i.e., despotic regulation of the basic economic activity accounts for Oriental Despotism even as "the despotic rule of capital" in the factory is at the root of the crises, wars, alienations, barbarism of capitalistic society.

Marx's point is that "man is only individualized through the process of history. He originally appears as a generic being, a tribal being, a herd animal..." (p. 96) The greatness of the Germanic mode of production was that it allowed for a new social order by creating the conditions for individualization: "Among the Germans, where single heads of families settle in the forests, separated by long distances, even on an external view of the community exists merely by virtue of every act of union of its members, although their unity existing in itself is embodied in descent, language, common past and history, etc. The community therefore, appears as an association not as a union, as an agreement, whose independent subjects are the landowners, and not as a unity. In fact, therefore, the community has no existence as a state, a political entity..." (p. 78)

All these profound observations were written by Marx almost as mere asides to Marx's main preoccupation — the analysis of capitalist development. Though they could form the basis for a theory of underdeveloped countries, the Communists are merely twisting them to suit a political line arrived at by quite other considerations than Marxist theory. As for the professional anti-Communists, to the extent that any scholar was interested at all, it was only to elaborate a theory on Oriental Despotism, the absolute opposite of Marx's, and then to accuse Marx of having "betrayed" his original insights.

The other characteristic of today's reality which has brought the Grundrisse onto the historic stage is automation. Just as the birth of the Third World has created a new urgency to the section dealing with the pre-capitalist societies, so the development of automated production in the technologically advanced countries has focused attention on the section on machinery. The two sections — both of which appear in the chapter, "On Capital" — are not, however, comparable. This is so, not because the subject matter differs, but because, while Marx did not revise the history of pre-capitalist societies, he did not stop revising the section on Machinery in the decade between those 1857-58 Notebooks and the final publication of Capital. Thus, the last word on the subject of Machinery is in Capital, not in Grundrisse. Not that there is anything "wrong" with what he said in the Grundrisse. It simply isn't concrete enough. And the truth is always concrete.

Thus, as against the emphasis on machinery as "monster" that the workers will overcome, there is too much emphasis in the Grundrisse on machinery as creating the material basis for the dissolution of capital as the workers stand alongside of production as their "regulator." Thus, as against the workers' resistance to the discipline of capital in the process of production itself so graphically described in Capital, the Grundrisse still stresses the material conditions for the solution of conflict and contradictions. Thus, there still is no separation of the general contradiction of capital and the falling rate of profit from the actual class struggle in the process of production.

In general, because the production process was not yet separated from and made predominant to the process of circulation; surplus value not yet separated from profit, rent and interest; and the worker as subject of reconstruction of production on totally new beginnings, appearing only "theoretically," Marx put the Grundrisse aside as he plunged into the building of the first First International Workingman's Association, which arose spontaneously under the impact of the class struggles in Europe and the Civil War in the United States.

Nevertheless, the Grundrisse has a magnificently unifying vision of what the future will be like after transcendence of the surplus value-oriented machine production. Once the reader remembers that it is not the present but the future Marx is talking about, then the description is very illuminating: "The surplus labor of the masses has ceased to be the condition for the development of social wealth just as idleness of the few has ceased to be the condition for the development of the universal capacities of the human mind. With this, the mode of production based on exchange value collapses and the immediate material process of production is stripped of its scantiness and its antagonistic form.

Thus it is not the reduction of labor time to create surplus labor but the reduction of necessary labor in society to a minimum which is then in accord with the artistic, scientific, etc., education of the individuals through the free time and the means created for everyman, for the free development of the individual... The measure of wealth will then no longer be labor time, but leisure time."

On the other hand, while production is still capitalistic, the highest technological development and growth of scientific power lead only to catastrophes: "Hence the highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide with depreciation of capital, degradation of the laborer... These contradictions lead to explosions, cataclysms, crises...those regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale, and finally to its violent overthrow."

The Communists think that they can escape this violent overthrow by declaring that automation is the millenium, that so long as the workers obey the dictates of the machine, so long as there is no private property, that in and of itself "surmounts alienation."* What great delusion!

It is impossible to read the Grundrisse, written by Marx, not for publication, but as monographs for himself, without awareness that Marx is at work, cutting out from virgin rock, original theories not only as regards economics, but of mankind's development. It is as if we were hearing Marx think out loud.

* By no accident, Professor Litinski had been put at the head of the Economic Council when it was established in January, 1957. By the '60s this learned Professor was going so far afield from Marxism that he could write that: "spare time creates a distinct type of constant capital in the person of man himself." (sic!) Interestingly enough, the Professor, who by no means limits himself to professional dissertations but is the one to draw up the plans for the economy which the workers are made to obey, bases himself on these very pages from the Grundrisse. So enamored is he with his perversions of the Marxian concept of

It is impossible not to be aware of the thoroughgoing dialectical nature of each of the parts of the Grundrisse as it is the sum and substance of the whole. Without it, Marx's "economics" would have been shorn of its lifeblood: a philosophy of history. The Hegelian dialectic was the crucible wherein materialism was transformed into a world historic philosophy of freedom even as the proletariat as "Subject" of man's self-emancipation that put an end to all class societies transformed the dialectic development of the pre-history of man into the elicitation of all men's potentialities so that his true history can finally begin. Therein lies also Marx's genius in grasping that the successive epochs of the economic social formations created the conditions for socialist humanism. If any there are who still consider historical materialism an economic or sociological interpretation of history, let them confront Marx's humanist vision here as it arises out of the material base, and let them listen to the "Hegelianisms" like "absolute movement of becoming" as Marx develops his materialist dialectic as the multi-dimensional self-development of man:

"... when the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc., of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature - those of his own nature as well as those of so-called "Nature." What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any previously established yardstick - an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?" ... (p. 84-85)

Once again as we see, instead of the mature Marx running away from Hegel's Absolutes, he sees in the "absolute movement of becoming" the ever-present historic spirit, the future immanent in today's reality. Because, to Marx, Materialism, or to be more precisely Marxist in language, the conditions of material production, meant the production and reproduction of actual, social human existence, history was never "a lifeless collection of facts" as it was for those Marx called "abstract empiricists;" It was masses in motion, transforming reality, shaping history anew.

the "automatic factory" that he degrades Vol. III. of Capital as mere "notes" (sic.) which were never published by Marx himself. The only thing he fails to add is that these "notes" that were prepared by Engels, had been written in the '60s and '70s, whereas the Notebooks called the Grundrisse were written at an earlier period and were the very ones Marx reworked, not only for what became Vol. III, which Engels edited, but Vol. I, which Marx himself prepared for publication in three different editions, each revised rigorously by himself, and that this final version which no one, friend or foe, has ever denied as being Marx's greatest work, over and over and over again describes this automatic factory, and the constant capital it sets into motion, as a "monster that is fruitful and multiplies," and "transforms man into nothing but "an appendage to a machine."

RD: October 23, 1968

Ch. 2 - Marx's Transcendence of, and Return to, Hegel's Dialectic
 Sec. 3 The Adventures of the Commodity as Fetish

No lesser historic turning points than World War I and World War II have brought the lowly commodity, as analyzed by Marx, into focus for our day. In 1914, it was Lenin who, in reading Hegel's Science of Logic, was so struck at the parallelism between the categories of Universal, Particular and Individual and those of Elementary, Expanded and General Forms of Value in Marx's chapter on commodities in Capital that he expressed his views on Marxists, himself included, in a most extreme way:

Aphorism: It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!"¹

In contrast to Lenin's new appreciation both of the Hegelian dialectic and of Marx's Capital, the Communist theoreticians, in the midst of World War II, suddenly laid hands on Marx's greatest theoretical work. On the alleged ground that it is both "sheer pedantry" and a violation of the "historical principle" to study Capital as Marx had written it, they proposed that the first chapter not be the first topic "taught." In thus breaking the dialectic structure of Capital, they sundered what Marx had united -- theory and history. Though Lenin by no means limited himself to comments on the chapter on Commodities, and the Communist theoreticians of our day did so only apparently, it is no accident that it is that chapter that is subject both to praise and attack for it is, indeed, crucial not only to Capital, but to dialectic methodology as a whole in every field as it has been used, and abused, by established Marxism since the death of Marx. The problems that Lenin faced in 1914, and those the Russian economists faced in 1943, are very, very far removed from the matters dealt with in Capital, and yet it is not accidental that each, though for opposite purposes, referred to the work. In order to understand this, as well as to illuminate our absorption with the question "Why Hegel? Why Now?" it is to Capital that we must now turn.

In the Preface to Capital, Marx warned: "Every beginning is difficult, holds in all sciences. To understand the first chapter, especially the section that contains the analysis of commodities, will, therefore, present the greatest difficulty...The value-form, whose fully developed shape is the money form, is very elementary and simple. Nevertheless, the human mind has for more than 2,000 years sought in vain to get to the bottom of it, whilst, on the other hand, to the successful analysis of much more composite and complex forms, there has been at least an approximation. Why? Because the body, as an organic whole, is more easy to study than are the cells of that body. In the analysis of economic forms, moreover, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both."²

1. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 181

2. Names are not given, not because I am trying to depersonalize them, but because whenever a fundamental revision is undertaken, the whole "Institute" rather than an individual becomes the signatory. The article was first issued by the chief theoretical journal Pod Znamenem Markizma, No. 9708, which later disappeared

But before "the force of abstraction" could emanate from, and encompass, the course of human development, the sheer mass of empiric data accumulated was astounding. The point of concentration was not 2,000 years, but the century since classical political economy did discover labor as the source of all value without being able to penetrate through to its value-form. The relentless digging in one place -- the process of production which endows the commodity with its "objective appearance" -- is truly amazing and cannot be relegated to a place "below" his original theories of value and surplus value or the law of the centralization and concentration of capital -- at a time when no one saw anything but laissez faire! -- or even the "general absolute law" of capitalist development, the unemployed army, which bourgeois economists were not to concern themselves with till the Depression! On the contrary, the difficulty of the birth of the last section of that first chapter, "The Fetishism of the Commodities and the Secret Thereof," (which wasn't completed in a manner satisfactory to Marx until after its first publication, until after the Paris Commune and his preparation of the French edition, 1872-75) only further testifies to the genius of Marx.

Marx began the chapter on Commodities in Capital more or less in the manner in which he began that chapter in Critique of Political Economy which had no separate section on fetishism, he calling attention to the fact that "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities, its unit being a single commodity. But he no sooner shows the commodity to be a unity of opposites -- use-value and exchange value -- than he calls attention to the fact that this dual nature of a commodity is but a manifestation of a live contradiction, the dual character of labor itself; "I was the first to point out and examine critically this two-fold nature of the labor contained in commodities...this point is the pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns..." Actually we will not see the laborer at work until we enter with Marx "the material process of production" itself and there see how the capitalist labor process reduces the myriad of concrete labors to one abstract mass. But we are shown how it underlies the duality in the commodity and we are thus enabled to trace the value forms from the moment a product of labor is offered for sale, be that even only barter, through the most developed form of exchange, money.

We are never allowed to forget, however, that, though the economist may not perceive the mystery of the value-form until it appears in its universal form of exchange, the mystification not only begins with its elementary form, but it is impossible to comprehend this mystery unless you do see it at its birth. For already in the exchange of, say, linen for a coat, we see the congelation of human labor as value, as having therefore "an objective existence, as being something materially different from the linen and yet something common to the linen and all other commodities."⁶

from the scene, but the revision there committed became dogma, and all textbooks as well as "original" base themselves on the revision as if there never was any other interpretation of Marx's Capital. See my translation of article and commentary upon it. (AER, Sept. 1944-45)

3. Capital, P. XVI

4.

5. Ibid., P. 1

6. Capital, P. 8

Lenin first grasped the full significance of the methodology used here when he reached the end of the Logic, even as he understood the Logic better by knowing Capital. This is why he then remarked to himself: "Just as the simple value-form, the individual act of exchange of a given commodity with another already includes, in undeveloped form, all major contradictions of capitalism, so the simplest generalization, the first and simplest forming of notions (judgments, syllogism, etc) signifies the ever-deeper knowledge of the objective world connections. Here it is necessary to seek the real sense, significance, and role of the Hegelian Logic. This NB."

By digging and digging* through all the forms of value, he finally discovered the fetishism of the commodity. Marx begins the section thus:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it... But, as soon as it steps forth as a commodity it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas far more wonderful than "table-turning" ever was.

The sorcery that starts the very instant the product of labor assumes the form of a commodity is not due merely to the alienation of this product from its producer, but from the form itself." This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the product of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities."

The point is that, in the process of production itself, before the products of labor is taken away from the laborer, the very activity of man has become so alien to him, that, whatever it is he will produce, and however it will be alienated from him, it bears the stamp of the absolute opposition between the concrete abilities man has and the socially-necessary time in which he is made to produce it in the socially-necessary time, in total disregard of his concrete abilities. It is he who must descend into the hell that is the factory; it is he who is subjected to the material process of production and its time-clock; and it is labor that is made into an adjunct of the machine and the machine that is master: "And just as in society, a general or a banker plays a great part, but mere man, on the other hand, a very shabby part, so here with human labor,"⁸ All human relations become reified, are turned into things.

7. Capital, p. 19

8. Ibid., pp. 41-2. A footnote here is left out from the English edition and yet it is not only important in itself, but to show how carefully Marx listened for all signs of workers' revolts and if he could not find any in Europe during the quietest 1850s, he heard it in the Taiping Revolt in China. The footnote reads: "One will remember how China and the tables began to dance when the rest of the world appeared to stand still pour encourager les autres." See also "Revolution in China and in Europe" and other articles on the Opium wars which he wrote for the N.Y. Herald Tribune and which have finally, in part, been published here. The American Journalism of Marx and Engels (New American Library, N.Y., 1966.)

9. Capital, p. 43

10. p. 21

It isn't because the act of exchange is an impersonal thing that "the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor." Rather it is "the peculiar social character of labor of these products" which causes "the character of men's labor to appear to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor."¹¹

Surely, the mystical character of commodities does not arise from the use-value. "Whence, then, arises the enigmatical character of the products of labor, so soon as it assumes the form of commodities? Clearly, from the form itself."¹² It holds every one in tow. Thus, even the authors of the epoch-making discovery that labor was the source of all value -- Smith and Ricardo -- have not only failed to carry their theory to its logical conclusion, that labor was, therefore, the source of all surplus value, but they themselves became the prisoners of the form of value. Nor is the reason for this due solely to the fact that they were "entirely absorbed in an analysis of the magnitude of value. It lies deeper. The value form of the product of labor is not only the most abstract, but also the most universal form taken by the product in bourgeois production, and stamps that production as a particular species of social production, and thereby gives it its special historical character. If then we treat the mode of production as one eternally fixed by nature of every state of society, we necessarily overlook that which is the differentia specifica of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity-form, and its further developments, money-form, capital-form, etc."¹³ In a word, they here met their historic barrier.

Over and over again, throughout the section, Marx, in showing how "fantastic" must indeed be a form which makes relations between men assume the appearance of a relations of things, stresses that, nevertheless, under capitalism they sound most natural: "The categories of bourgeois economy consist of such like forms. They are forms of thought expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production, viz., the production of commodities."¹⁴

Whatever else can be said of other forms of society, they had one advantage over capitalism. There was nothing mysterious about the class relations in other exploitative forms of society. No slave ever thought himself the equal of his master. But so perverse are relations under capitalism, and so totally thing-like is the medium of exchange that those supremely unequal classes, labor and capital appear as equals.

Popularizers have ever since said that the failure of classical political economy to see the inequality arising out of equal exchange came from the failure "to understand the class struggle." If that were all there was to it, Marx would have left the analysis where it was when he first broke with bourgeois society instead of unyieldingly persisting in digging out, over a period of more than two full

11. Capital, p. 43

12.

13. Ibid., pp. 52-53, fn.

14. Ibid., p. 43

decades, the precise inner connections between thought and production, between various economic categories "as such," and from it finally extract the form of value as the "differentia specifica". To prove exploitation, Marx's theory of value and surplus value, accumulation of capital and the decline in the rate of profit, crises and the "general absolute law" of unemployment were more than sufficient.

Nor was the remark about the human mind, for 2,000 years, not being able to get down to the bottom of the money-form a mere taunt. The fact that the greatest thinker of antiquity, Aristotle, couldn't figure the common denominator which makes such different use-values and chairs and cloth exchangeable, a fact any schoolboy can tell him now, is further proof that a historic barrier is a great deal more complex than "knowledge" of the class struggle. What Marx is saying is the exact opposite. Slavery made the existence of classes all too obvious, but, because all labor was done by slaves, Aristotle couldn't see labor as the equalizer, the leveler, the source. On the other hand, the very fact that the Industrial Revolution created the possibility for reducing the myriad of concrete labors to one single abstraction so that their only distinguishing mark was that they were human labor, the form it then assumed by being materialized into a thing became a fetish, blinding the new science of political economy from seeing that human relations have been reduced to "material relations between persons and social relations between things."¹⁵

This is what Marx dug up, the simple but blinding fact that human relations under capitalism appear as things because "that is what they really are."¹⁶ It cannot be otherwise in our reified world.

The supreme example of this alienation is that even living labor takes the form of a commodity. And, as Marx was to explain in one of the last things we have from his pen, "The peculiar characteristic is not that the commodity, labor power, is saleable, but that labor power appears in the shape of a commodity."¹⁷

The perversity of appearance isn't, however, mere show. It is both putrid essence and the necessary form of appearance. It is the sum and substance, the whole life and spirit of this historic, that is to say, transitory mode of commodity production. This is its truth. And because this is its truth, a commodity is not just a unit of wealth, nor only a composite of the opposites, use-value and value. Its value-form does more than "hide" a relationship between men, in the final analysis, between classes. It is the manifestation of the perverse relationship of subject and object, and because machine masters man it becomes the religion of capitalism as capitalists and as ideologists: "The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men and is consciously

15. Capital, I, p. 45

16. Ibid.

17. George Lukacs was one of the very few Marxists who saw both the depth of the alienation of labor to itself and the relationship between theory and reality which makes possible the unity of theory and practice. That he, therefore, made of the revolutionary function of theory, that he, therefore, made of consciousness the whole, and practice of the proletariat itself the subordinate, paved the way for his capitulation to Stalinism. Nevertheless, he should miss his cap-dropping work, Guaylente und Klassenbewusstsein, which in 1927 he wrote as a central essay of the Internationale Sozialisten, been translated into English, and published in Internationale Sozialisten, Spring and Summer, 1965.

18. Capital, Vol. II, p. 37

regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan."¹⁹

Only freely associated men can destroy the fetish because only they know it from the inside, from within the process of production and thus only they have both the power and the true knowledge of reality. It is not in the process of exchange, but in the process of production, that the act of perversion of subject to object was committed. And it is in society itself that the very concept of objectivity which is false. The "magic" of the fetish, as we see, is not exhausted in its origin. On the contrary, the reification of human relations is so overpowering a fact that it dominates the whole of society, including capital itself and the thought of the period.

Deceptively simple, the commodity makes its rounds as the most common of all things and yet it is an opiate which reduces all consciousness to false consciousness so that even "pure science" cannot penetrate through it to a true knowledge of reality. Having reduced "pure" Ideas to mere Ideology, commodity, as fetish, becomes the golden calf before which one genuflects while being under the illusion that he is doing nothing untoward at all. This is capitalism's Geist, and this is all its Notion is.

What to the bourgeoisie was a fetish became in Marx's theory a flash of light, a flash that illuminated the whole of capitalism, its production, its exchange, its thought. No doubt the transformation of phenomenon to notion could not have been without the Hegelian dialectic, but it was transcended dialectic, the inner core, internal dialectic that Hegel was unable to extract not only because he lived only in the realm of thought, but also, to the extent that he saw the actual world, it was still as a philosopher, as someone outside of it. Marx alone could see this dialectic emerge out of the concrete data of functioning capitalism and the praxis of its gravedigger. In a word, it wasn't only "materialism" in the sense of Marx seeing the actual course of history through changes in material production rather than through the so-called progress of the mind. It was that, in the analysis of capitalist production and the degeneracy of its thought, to see also the proletariat as freely associated men creating new beginning for other than value production and new beginnings for thought as well, for Marx never separated direct action from its underlying philosophy. Both being and consciousness would be transformed. Only to pragmatists, or "abstract empiricists" as Marx called them, was life a collection of lifeless facts. To historical materialists the inseparability of facts and ideas, of action and critique of other philosophic interpretations of the world, of philosophy and revolution were the only way to destroy the false idols that kept you imprisoned under capitalism.

As it took the collapse of established Marxism to make Lenin see the intrinsic relationship of Capital to Logic, so it took the fascisation of capitalism to make one profound Christian philosopher comprehend precisely what it is that Marx was driving at in Capital: "A phenomenological analysis of this universal problem (duality, conflict, rd) is given in the first portion of Das Kapital, in which

^{19.}

Marx exhibits the mercantile character of everything we produce. In merchandise he revealed the basic ontological structure of our entire physical world, its 'mercantile form.' It characterizes both the alienation of man from himself and the alienation of the world of things from him." 19A

On the other hand, with the transformation of Communism into its opposite, state-capitalism, the Russian theoreticians began to feel as if Marx had indeed branded the mark of Cain on the very form of all products of industrial production, and felt they must somehow rid themselves of the Marxian notion of commodity, that which Engels called its "particular distinctness", before they could revise also the Marxian law of value as applicable only to capitalism. If they could separate the dialectic from "history" and show that commodities existed before capitalism, during and after; if, if, if...They did achieve one feat by denuding or trying to denude the economic categories of their class content, they cleared a path for their state-capitalist explanations for machinery "as such" as if technology were not the very axis around which all of capitalism revolved.

* * * * *

19-A. Karl Lowith, From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought, p. 154. I do not have at hand the original German edition so I do not know what terms Mr. Lowith used for "mercantile," "merchandise," etc., but it has been most annoying to this writer that American translators are so little acquainted with Marxian terminology that his most famous expression, "commodity fetishism" has been most often translated as "mercantile" or "merchandise" fetishism. The essence of Mr. Lowith's analysis is clear enough, however.

4 3 5 1

PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION: Part II -- WHY HEGEL? WHY NOW?
Chapter 2 - Marx's Transcendence of and return to, Hegel's Dialectic
Section 4 A Concrete Universal: Marx's CAPITAL

If Marx did not leave behind him a "Logic" (with a capital letter), he did leave the logic of Capital... In Capital Marx applied to a single science, logic, dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism (three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing).

-- Lenin
Philosophic Notebooks

As we saw, there is a great deal more to Marxian methodology than the "application" of Hegelian dialectics to economic data. To whatever extent, the dialectic method enabled Marx's "free movement in matter" insofar as refusing to accept the given concrete -- in our case, a commodity -- as the real, the truth is that Marx could not have disclosed the fetishism of commodities except by transcending both Hegel and Ricardo, both "abstract materialism" and historian-compilers of a collection of lifeless facts. Put differently, it is the uniqueness of Marxian materialist dialectics, which is both class rooted and Humanist, and that enables it to see the praxis of revolutionaries, of freely associated men in the Paris Commune "storming the heavens," establishing both a new social order and stripping from the old its fetishism of commodity. It is this uniqueness which has something vital to say to us today, and on no question more cogently than on "Machines," to which Automation has imparted a new urgency. On this question, as in all else concerning Marx as theoretician and as revolutionary, the 1860s, are the crucial years, the decisive years when theory and practice fused into the philosophic whole we know as Marxism.

It is of the essence, therefore, not so much to hold fast to the "results" as to follow the process of change so that we can ourselves work out its implications for our age. Thus, it is easy enough to trace the changes in the very concept of technology from its appearance in the Communist Manifesto as the instrument of bourgeois revolution, through its manifestation in the Grundrisse as the material foundation for the proletariat's use in abrogating value production, to its full-blown essence and notion in Capital as "a mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories, and whose demon power, at first veiled under the slow and measured motions of his giant limbs, at length breaks out into the fast and furious whirl of his countless working organs." But there is no easy answer to whether what has been written before the 1860s, was discarded. For the answer is two-fold, is contradictory, and yet is true in both of its parts.

1. Capital, Vol. I, p. 377. Throughout it is the International Publishers edition that is used here; add 40 pages to find it in Kerr edition.

Technology, Methodology, and Workers' Revolts

History does nothing; it "possesses no colossal riches," it "fights no fight." It is rather man - real, living man - who acts, possesses and fights everything. It is by no means "History" which uses man as a means to carry out its ends as if it were a person apart; rather History is nothing but the activity of man in pursuit of his ends. - -

Marx, The Holy Family

There is no doubt whatever that the period between the 1857-1858 Notebooks (that were not intended for publication and that have since become famous as the Grundrisse) and the 1867-75 editions of Capital was a period of total change, both of the method of presentation and of what Marx presented on the subject of Machines. Thus, the restructuring of the Grundrisse and the Critique of Political Economy as they developed into Capital meant a great deal more than the fact that the material had grown into 4 books. It meant a separation of analysis of the spheres of production, circulation and the forms of the process as a whole, in which would also be included the history of the theories of surplus value. Of necessity, this signified not only a sharp and fundamental distinction between the essential function of machines in production and their appearance in the market, but that there be no rush to deal with their possible function in a non-value producing society for the need was to be concrete, historically precise, and, far from skipping stages to get to the end, to keep eyes rivetted on men in history; at work.

Thus the decision to make room, in the first volume of Capital, for a new section on "The Working Day" meant, at one and the same time, a dramatic and basic shift in the concept of theory, from one of counterposing one's theories to those of other theoreticians, to that of watching the birth of theory emerging out of the developing class struggles. Insofar as the subject of technology was concerned, deep insight into the transformation of subject to object, of the perverse relationship of machine as "subject" dominating man as "object" naturally entailed seeing the machine as "the enemy." Indeed, the greater part of the first volume of Capital -- Parts II through V, or some 400 pages devoted to the process of production -- is, precisely, this; the method of analysis is nothing other than the process of development of essential relationship of subject to object. It is therefore totally and completely opposed to the idea that the worker is already that of "watchman and regulator," a phrase used in the Grundrisse.

Thus, finally, the many new developments in Marx's theoretical discoveries, his creation of original categories, in the decade between the two works, would seem to have torn everything up by its roots. For example, to the extent that, at the time of the 1857-58 Notebooks, the dual character of labor had not been fully worked out as that unity of opposites from which all development proceeded, there was, of necessity, the tendency to be altogether too brief with the stage

described in Capital as the stage of manufacture where "capital celebrated its orgies."² It is certainly true that, in the Grundrisse, there is altogether too much emphasis on the material, that is to say, the technological, foundation of the new social order. At the same time, there is also no doubt that Marx, at no time, was looking at the expanding material forces as they were "the condition, the activity, the purpose of liberation;" but that, on the contrary, he was talking of the expanding human forces as "the motive force of history." They and they alone could abrogate the exploitative value relations of capitalist society; their activity and theirs alone would resolve contradictions and it is for them and them alone that the expansion of the material forces was intended. Marx spoke eloquently enough on this subject in the Grundrisse:

The exchange of living labor against materialized labor, i.e., the existence of social labor in the form of the antagonism between capital and wage labor, is the last stage in the development of the value relationship and of production based on value. It presupposes the decisive factor in the creation of wealth is the amount of direct working time...But the more modern industry develops, the creation of wealth becomes less dependent on working time...Labor no longer appears so much enclosed in the process of production but rather man relates himself to it as watchman and regulator...Once direct labor has ceased to be the direct source of wealth, labor time must cease to be its measure, and, consequently, exchange value the measure of use value. The surplus labor of the masses has ceased to be the condition for the development of social wealth just as the idleness of the few has ceased to be the condition for the development of the universal capacities of the human mind. With this, the mode of production based on exchange value collapses and the immediate material process of production is stripped of its scantiness and its antagonistic form. Thus it is not the reduction of labor time to create surplus labor but the reduction of the necessary labor of society to a minimum which is then in accord with (entsprechlich) the artistic, scientific, etc., education of the individuals through the free time and the means created for everyman, for the free development of the individual...The measure of wealth will then no longer be labor time, but leisure time.

That any one could conclude from this that it is Automation, here and now, which is creating "the material foundation" for the new, with or without the proletariat doing the overthrowing of the old, is only further proof of the fact that our age is ridden with such irreconcilable opposites as to have produced the disintegration of thought. We see this range before our eyes from those who see our times to be "the end of ideology," the age of the "one-dimensional man," "the critique of dialectical reason" leaving us all to accept terror as the way to communal life! So overwhelmed by the total mechanization of life that Automation seems to imply are philosophers even close to Marxism that they seem

2. Ibid., p. 264

3. The section is entitled "Die Letzte Entwicklung des Wertverhältnisses und der auf dem Wert Vorherrschender Produktion" pp. 591-2; 599-6

to have embarked on a search for some new principle of reality apart from either materialism or idealism or its unity in Humanism. Jean-Paul Sartre has even introduced the question of sexuality into the machine as the daydream of the worker subjected to automated production. Naturally, he opposes such dehumanization. Naturally, he wants, not to reject Marxism, but to revivify "today's Marxism" by making the human being central to it. But to the extent that neither he nor the other philosophers close to Marxism go down to where the worker is in the process of production or listen to his thoughts, the result is that, instead of holding on tight to the fact that Man alone is Freedom and Reason, they endow technology with rationality and capacity to be its own transcendence, or they consider "the Party" to be able to do so for Man. Philosophers who, yesterday, saw in the movement of Reason the tendency to go beyond ontology, i.e., beyond philosophy "as such," today very nearly degrade ontology to technology. All the more reason for us to watch Marx at work on technology:

"I am enlarging presently the chapter on Machines," Marx writes Engels on January 28, 1863, "There are many problems there which I had bypassed in the first draft...In order to clarify myself I reread in full my notebooks (extracts, on technology and am attending a practical course (experimental only) for workers... I understand the mathematical laws, but the simplest technical reality demanding perception is harder for me than to the biggest blockhead." Four days prior to this letter he had written Engels that he found himself "in great difficulty" because he didn't understand "what was the work of the so-called spinner before the invention of the self-acting mule" and, again questioned: "in what then does the interference of the motive force of the spinner express itself in relation to the forces of power?" (All these requests for information on "motive forces" and "forces of power" are soon to result in Marx's creation of a new category, "labor power.")

Marx had been plying Engels with questions about "categories of workers in your factory" for months prior to these questions. But then it was for purposes of showing the falsity of Adam Smith's view of the division of labor as if that which was true in society -- competition, independence, "equality" -- held in the factory. Marx would show that, in the factory, it is not competition that rules the division of labor, but the authority of the capitalist, his "despotic plan," the hierarchic structure of capital itself. Moreover, his materialist conception of history notwithstanding, he seemed constantly amazed to find that scientists and philosophers would in all but their own specialty, accept the given as the real. Thus, on June 18, 1862, he wrote Engels: "Remarkable that Darwin in the animal and plant kingdom reveals anew his English society with its division of labor, competition, opening of new markets, 'inventions' and Malthusian 'struggle for existence.' This is the Hobbesian bellum omnium contra omnes, and this bears a resemblance to Hegel in his Phenomenology in which civil society is described as 'the spiritual kingdom of animals' while with Darwin the animal kingdom represents civil society." He was to put a similar thought directly in the section on Machines in Capital: "A critical history of technology would show how little any of the inventions of the 18th century are the work of a single individual... The work points in abstract materialism of natural science, a materialism that

excludes history and its process, are at once evident from the abstract and ideological conceptions of its spokesmen, whenever they venture beyond the bounds of their speciality."⁴

In Marx's case even "pure research" was never restricted to "science as such," but included the study of the Blue Books, those reports of the British factory inspectors Marx made so famous, "practical courses," history of all class struggles and some histories that had not yet been written, so that once he settled down to work out the actual relations at the point of production, new categories emerged. Once he entered the process of production and saw that machines had indeed no other existence than that which they fulfill in the factory, then the domination, utter and unquestioned and oppressive, of capital over all else was seen in the very change of title for his main work from that of Critique of Political Economy to Capital. His two major original categories -- constant capital and variable capital -- showed that not only do machines in the factory exist as capital, but so does living labor, the only distinction between the two kinds of capital being that one was constantly undergoing a variation in magnitude, that is to say, living labor was exploited, made to produce many unpaid hours of labor.

The fact that he wouldn't permit the publication of his own lecture on "Value, Price and Profit" until after he completed Capital is further proof that only the latter contained the whole of his theory, without which no single element could be fully understood. Take his category, labor power, which was not in the Grundrisse or Critique or the pamphlets; in a word, hadn't been fully worked out until Capital itself was. The non-existence of the category before his main theoretical work was completed was surely not due to any question about his "knowing" or not "knowing" about the vital differences between labor, as activity, and labor, as commodity. He no sooner broke from bourgeois society back in 1843 than he knew that. He kept writing about it, lecturing on it, publishing his lecture, "Wage-Labor and Capital" in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung when the 1848 revolutions were still fresh. What was at issue, in his mind, was the fact that a new stage of generalization, a new stage of cognition that gives birth to an original category, liberates you both theoretically and practically; it is a sort of point of intersection in history itself which permits a view of the future because the past and present have been so fully comprehended that the future inherent in the present can emerge. And with that category, labor power, it was not only its appearance as a "name" for a commodity, a most unique commodity, the only one that was constantly exploited to produce more, and produced all the value and surplus value, but that it was a power as well. It was a power not only because it then became conscious that the machine that was exploiting it had feet of clay, could drive labor, but itself could do nothing but "yield up" what labor was already materialized in it, for though "loaded with value" it itself "creates no value."⁵ It was a power also because, as contrasted when labor first entered the factory and found his voice "stifled in the storm and stress of the process of production,"⁶ it now united with others right at the point of production, in the cooperative

5. p. 365
6. p. 216

4. Capital, Vol. I., p. 367 ftn.

labor process machinofacture had to introduce, and was further not only disciplined by that instrumentality, but united to act, inside and outside the factory. Marx's decision, therefore, to add a section on "The Working Day," a decision he didn't make until 1866, had further consequences in expanding the power of the proletariat as historic and philosophic force: "In place of the pompous catalogue of the 'inalienable rights of man' comes the Magna Charta of a legally limited working day which shall make clear when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins. Quantum mutatus ab illo!" (What a change in the picture!)

Naturally, all these decisive factors of reality, as contrasted to mere research or arguments with other theoreticians in the 1850s, led to a change also in the concept of technology: "It would be possible to write quite a history of the inventions made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class."

Once capitalism has moved from the need to extend the hours of the working day to extract unpaid hours of labor, to being able to extract the surplus within the same working day -- and it is the development of machinery that has achieved this feat -- it is first then Marx begins referring to machinofacture as "the specifically capitalistic mode of production." Concrete, concrete, concrete -- this sums up the scrupulousness with which Marx follows the machine's development, never considers it outside of its historic, capitalistic context, and proceeds to show how "the machine which is the starting point of the industrial revolution, supersedes the workman."⁷ Because, says Marx, "Technology also discovered the few fundamental forms of motion...necessarily taken by every productive action of the human body,"⁸ the automaton could now become "an organized system of machines to which motion is communicated by the transmitting mechanism, from a central automaton"⁹ and thereby become "objective" so that "the laborer becomes a mere appendage to an already existing material condition of production."¹⁰ What is to be watched, however, is not the machine, but what it does to the workman who is subjected to the "uniform motion of the instruments of labor" for it is this which "gives rise to a barrack discipline, which is elaborated into a complete system in the factory,"¹¹ where capital erects its own code "like a private legislator."¹²

In a word, the whole system of capitalist production "based on the fact that the workman sells his labor power as a commodity"¹³ ends by having "the instrument of labor strike down the laborer": "Hence, the character of independence and estrangement which the capitalist mode of production as a whole gives to the instruments of labour and to the product, as against the workman, is developed, by means of machine, into a thorough antagonism."¹⁴

Throughout the ten sections of that single chapter, "Machinery and Modern Industry" Marx never lets go for a single instant the internal dialectic, the essential relation of subject to object, leading inexorably to the absolute, irreconcilable contradiction so that when he strikes out against the economists who

7. p. 238

8. p. 436

9. p. 370

10. p. 492

11. p. 377

12. p. 382

13. p. 423

14. p. 424

15. p. 431

16. p. 432

content that there can be no antagonisms since they cannot arise from the machinery "as such" we are left breathless that there would be any other view of machines than as capital, oppressive, domineering, exploitative, full of contradictions, perverse. But, far from thinking of Hegel, we think of this new world vision. Marx, however, a little later brings us back to Hegel when he laughs at John Stuart Mill for attempting "to annex" such irreconcilables as David Ricardo's theory of profit based on labor as source of wealth to Nassau Senior's "renunciation of abstinence." "He is as much at home in absurd contradictions as he feels at sea in the Hegelian contradiction, the source of all dialectic."¹⁷

We are in a very different world than the machines we saw in Grundrisse; it is the real world of capitalism. And, if even we wished to forget the strife of the workman and machine, we couldn't rid ourselves of the contradictions in technology for even "as such" they are productive of crises and economic contradictions. For the simple fact is that each technological change makes obsolete the machinery which yesterday was "perfect." Large-scale economics permitted by technological revolutions do allow for accumulation of capital and should make the capitalist happy, but, unfortunately, they also lead to competitive pressures to introduce still newer techniques and "big capital starts eating little capital." Moreover, each machine seems to have a "will" of its own in opposition to the motive force of capitalist production -- the production of value and surplus value. Marx calls this the "absolute contradiction between the technical necessities of modern industry, and the social character inherent in the capitalistic form,"¹⁸ which doesn't stop the capitalist from having many headaches about his machine "producing for production's sake," irrespective where there are "customers." Marx continues: "We have seen, too, how this antagonism vents its rage in the creation of that monstrosity, an industrial reserve army, kept in misery in order to be always at the disposal of capital; in the incessant human sacrifices from among the working class, in the most reckless squandering of labor power, in the devastation caused by a social anarchy, which turns every economic progress into a social calamity."¹⁹

But, from the capitalistic point of view, what is unexplainable is that, though he keeps investing more and more into these wonderfully efficient and ever rightier and labor-saving machines, and the less he has need of those workers constantly in revolt, there suddenly appears a decline in the rate of his profit, no matter how fabulous it grows in mass. Having gotten out of his crisis and started on the new level of production with a higher organic composition of capital -- more that is expanded for constant than for variable capital -- those machines seem to be destroying the very source of their value -- living labor itself. So he begins to concentrate his capital and centralize it and go in for more machines and again these monsters are the cause of "overproduction" and back goes the capitalist into ever deeper crises, till he has indulged himself in "colonization." "A new and international division of labor, a division suited to the developments of the chief centers of modern industry springs up, and converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part of which remains a chiefly industrial field."²⁰ This does not

17. P. 698n

18. P. 493

19. P. 493

20. P. 454

abrogate the law of concentration and centralization of capital into "the hands either of a single capitalist or a single capitalist company."²¹

All this Marx wrote in 1867 and 1872, but no one listened. It sounded so utterly out of this world at the heyday of capitalism when there wasn't even a single trust around to speak of "one single capitalist company" holding all the wealth and yet on its way to collapse that "the learned" paid no attention -- until 1929, when all came crashing about their heads, and then they all rushed not to learn the historic, dialectic method which enabled Marx to see technology as the mainspring of the whole process of crisis-ridden capitalistic production, much less the "historic motive power of society,"²² the proletariat which alone can resolve these contradictions, but only to learn "the mechanism" on which to spin their Business Cycle theories -- or technocratic mirages -- anything at all except the tearing up by its roots of value production. And, ironically enough, they were such, too much preoccupied with the "mysticism" of the "Hegelian language" as if that excused their not having seen where their society was headed for half century back. As Schumpeter put it: "I hold that the philosophic garb is removable..."²⁴ Somehow, in the process, they also removed both the class analysis and the revolutionary dialectic! But, not accidentally, they also seem to have much in common with Russian Communism which is also busy separating what Marx made inseparable -- technology and its actual historic contradictory development. Instead of the economic laws of capitalistic development, we hear instead of "the laws of nature" as "the objective basis of technology" and, like in the value controversy, alleged "disregard of the historical principle"²⁵ means donning it both of its universal class character and the dialectic of its development. Indeed, no private capitalist ever dreamed more fantastic dreams of factories run automatically with no need "for the intractible hand of man"²⁶ than do Russian Communists. We must, instead, return to the specific class, the proletariat, and its relationship to Marx's, if not Hegel's, Absolutes.

Marx's Absolutes

In circles of established Marxism there have been two variations in the "real story" of Marx's relationship with Hegel. One points out that even as a young Left Hegelian, Marx had really "finished" with Hegel and turned to the "real science of economics." The other variant admits a longer relationship, but makes it clear that it was strictly limited to "method" and even there Marx transformed the dialectic into "materialist dialectics." It is true, of course, that Marx had to break with Hegel's Absolutes before he could discover the materialist conception of history. But this hardly explains Marx's return to Hegel, and no simplistic, that it was only for purposes of "standing Hegel right side up," can possibly eradicate the deep organic, persistent relationship. Take the "proof positive," Hegel's Absolutes. It is certainly true that there the break was most decisive.

21. p. 654

22. p. 822

23. p. 513

24. Joseph Schumpeter, History of Economic Analysis, p. 31

25. A. Zverikine, "History of Technology As a Science and As a Branch of Learning," in Technology and Culture, Winter 1961

26. Prof. Urs, quotation by Marx.

Even there, however, it is worthwhile to take a second look since it is clear as he reaches the end of his analysis of the process of production and moves over to its "results" in the accumulation of capital, that the word, absolute, becomes crucial. The first of these absolutes, as we saw, was "the absolute contradiction between the technical necessities of Modern Industries and the social character."²⁷ And since "the mechanism of capitalist production so manages matters that the absolute increase of capital is accompanied by no corresponding rise in the general demand for labor,"²⁸ we must finally confront the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation: "The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labor, the greater the industrial reserve army... This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation... It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the laborer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse."²⁹

Now there is no doubt that, where Hegel's Absolutes are always unities -- of history and philosophy, of theory and practice, of subject and object -- Marx's are always total disruptions -- absolute, irreconcilable contradictions, whether that be of technical base and social character, or of accumulation of capital at one pole and misery and unemployment at the other, or of dead labor vs. living labor.

Where Hegel's Absolutes are always high points, Marx's are always collapses, as is the nature of the law of motion of capitalist society. And where Hegel's Absolutes are achievable within the existing framework, Marx's tear up the existing society by its roots. "The expropriators are expropriated."³⁰ The destruction of the old is total. "The negation of the negation"³¹ allows in but the faintest glimmer of the new; no blueprints of the future there, much less "The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as Absolute Mind."³² We approach the proletarian revolution and there stop; even for a sight of "the storming of the heavens"³³ we must read the historic works, not Capital.

But all this proves the exact opposite of what it is meant to prove. It is proof only of the fact that Marx did not go in for abstractions, that for him "the truth is concrete," and that he was concerned with one, and only one, historic social formation: capitalism. Its absolute is its downfall. The logic of Capital is the dialectic of bourgeois society -- state capitalism at one pole and the revolt of the proletariat at the other. But in the same manner as Marx's development of the form of the commodity were related to Hegel's syllogistic Universal, Particular, Individual, or the Doctrine of the Notion in general, so "the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation" is based on Hegel's Absolute Idea, made concrete for one very concrete, very specific, very transitory historic social order.

27. Capital, Vol. I., p. 493

28. p. 654

29. p. 660-661

30. p. 789

31. Ibid.

32. Hegel, Philosophy of Mind, para. 577

Marx would never have devoted no less than a quarter of a century to that "disrupt science," political economy, unless, in its Marxistically reconstructed form, it helped discern the law of motion of the capitalistic social formation. The reconstructed science meant, however, that not only did his original discoveries make the difference, but that these original economic categories were so philosophically rooted that it created a new unity out of economics, philosophy, revolution, on a specific historic plane. This new historic plane was not exhausted within the period of Marx's life not because he was a "prophet," but because the historic rationality Marx discovered as immanent in the life of man meant, in turn, that it is living men who work out the meaning of philosophy by making the theory of liberation and the struggle to be free a unity. So much is free man the true subject of history that Marx called the period in which he lived, and the one in which we still live, the pre-history of mankind for man's true history does not begin until he is free and gets to develop in full his universal talents. In a word, there is no separation between theory and practice, or philosophy and revolution. Rather, it is because historic rationality is immanent in the actions of men that we can get a glimpse of the future, and it is this anticipation which Marx left to us, not as prophecy, but as task.

Finally, Lenin who was neither as organic a Hegelian as Marx and surely no ivory tower philosopher found that he too had to return to Hegel, and not to work out the dialectic of economics, but because the political pressures of a world crisis in which, with the collapse of capitalism, also came the collapse of established Marxism. In examination of this we will first see why it was so easy for Marx to transcend political economy and "forget" it, that is, not wear its birthmarks, and why one could do the same with Feuerbachian materialism and utopian socialism but could not do the same with Hegelian dialectics.
