Not So Random Thoughts On...

What is Philosophy? What is Revolution?

1789-1793-1848-1850-1914-1919-1979

By Raya Dunayevskaya, 1961-1982

I.

It sounds so abstract, so easy to say, with Hegel, that philosophy is the "thinking about things." (para. 2) It surely sounds over-simplified to say, at one and the same time, that "Nature has given everyone a faculty of thought. But thought is all that philosophy claims as the form proper to her process..." (para. 3) When, however, you realize that this is the Introduction to Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences; that it was written after the French Revolution, which made popular an actual "people's politics," it is an abstraction, that even though he limits it to thought and not activity, he can conclude in that very same Introduction:

This divorce between idea and reality is a favorite device of the analytic understanding in particular. Yet strangely in contrast with this separatist tendency, its own dreams, half-truths though they are, appear to the understanding, strength true, and real, prides itself, on the imperative 'ought' which it takes as an especial pleasure in prescribing on the field of politics. As if the world had waited on it to learn how it ought to be.

And that same paragraph further stresses that "the Idea is not so feeble as to have a right or an obligation to exist without actually existing."

When a new objective stage arose in 1844-1848 which was proletarian, and not just semi-proletarian as with the emergence of the French Revolution, the young, new, revolutionary philosopher and activist, Marx, practiced Hegel's Idea of freedom by realizing it in an outright revolution. He had told his young Hegelian friends who were becoming materialists: You cannot become a new Humanist by turning your back on Hegel because he was both bourgeois and idealist and because he limited revolution in material thought. The truth is that Hegel's dialectic was not just any idea, but the Idea of freedom, and must, therefore, first be realized in an actual material way. We must be specific and shout out loud who the forces of revolution are that we are fighting and what the barriers we must achieve freedom. I heard Marx, say it is the proletariat, because they are at the point of production where all things are created. I say that in issuing the challenge that will cause the whole world to wake up, we need to unfurl a totally new banner of philosophy as well as of revolution. And the philosophy of revolution now—that is, the bourgeoisie has betrayed us in this 1849-R Evolution, it is our freedom that depends only on our own forces—must be REVOLUTION IN PERMANENCE. (Address to the Communist League, 1849)

This revolution in permanence, he continued, is not the general sort of "changing" and "turning," but rather is an actual, specific, what is to be done in order that we can achieve freedom. I heard Marx say, it is the proletariat, because they are at the point of production where all things are created. I say that in issuing the challenge that will cause the whole world to wake up, we need to unfurl a totally new banner of philosophy as well as of revolution. And the philosophy of revolution now—that is, the bourgeoisie has betrayed us in this 1849-R Revolution, it is our freedom that depends only on our own forces—must be REVOLUTION IN PERMANENCE. (Address to the Communist League, 1849)

Internationalism is not telling others what to do. It is solidarizing and fraternalizing with those sent to shoot you—from having them turn their guns on their own offices. Finally, in 1849, the last of Trotsky's works, the 1818 Preface to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto—that permanent revolution gets spelled out on a still higher level—that is, international, not just on a national level. It is generalized as the relationship between technologically advanced and technologically backward countries—i.e. that backward Russia could have its revolution ahead of "West Europe"—provided: 1) the revolution is accomplished within the context of European revolutions; and 2) the new forces, in this case the peasant communes, are never out of context of both internationalism and dialetics of liberation. The Idea is the power because it is concrete; it is total; it is multi-dimensional; and at no time is the Individual made just to tall-end the State or committee. Rather, let the principle: "the Individual is the social entity" and society must never again be counterposed to the Individual. We

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II.

Marx had spent something like 45 volumes in expressing his thoughts, in participating in revolutions, in leaving a legacy that was the very opposite of an heirloom. Instead, the new continent of thought became the foundation for all future revolutions that would be filled out anew with ever-richer concrete and with greater forces—men, women, children of all colors, races, nations—until we finally have achieved that type of revolution and that type of total uprooting. Surely no one was more prepared, more serious, was more experienced to help create such a total revolution than those who had "made the 1905 Revolution" in Luxemburg and Trotsky. And yet, and yet, and yet....

Comes World War I, and the shock of the simultaneity of imperialist war and socialist betrayal is so overwhelming that one and only one—Lenin—says, if I could have been so naif and considered that betrayal here, Kautsky, my teacher, something is altogether wrong, with my way of thinking. And while I will not stop shouting, "down with the war—turn the imperialist war into civil war," I will never again be satisfied with the "correct analysis" of a political situation without first digging into Hegelian dialectics. It could not have possibly ended an accident that Marx, Marx's Marxism, was rooted in Hegel— and afflicting but not entirely returning to develop Hegelian dialectics into the Marxian dialectic. And so this great revolutionary, Lenin spent his days in the library studying Hegel's Science of Logic, and his evenings preparing for revolution.

What did Luxemburg and Trotsky do? They surely were as revolutionary as Lenin. They surely opposed the war. They surely were trying to prepare for revolution. But without that rudder of philosophy, what came out of it? And in this case, because Luxemburg has no party on the scene today, but Trotsky does, just as the Left, now the party of the whole country, it was withdrawn. This is why such pseudo-universalism is the way to skip over concrete realizations of freedom. Yet, in his 1919 Introduction, Trotsky stressed the interdependence of the two: "The Marxian revolution liquidated these differences."

BUT THAT IS NOT TRUE. THETORICAL DIFFERENCES ARE NOT "LIQUIDATED." JUST BECAUSE, IN FACT, YOU ARE A REVOLUTIONARY. QUITE THE CONTRARY. The deviations from Marxism first come to plague you. The truth is that the theoretical difference reappears, in a most, horrible form exactly when the next new, second, new wave of doggery, new dog in, for new philosophic, denial, on the basis of the highest theoretical level as well, as practical point last reached. If, instead, you remain without a philosophic rudder, the supposedly enriched revolution, will turn to its counter—revolution, definitely no more than total—idealism. That was true of Trotsky in 1905. It wasn't true in 1917 only because the one he was then tailoring was Lenin. It was dangerously true in our era as all the opposition and great rights against Stalinism led only to tailoring Stalin once World War II broke out.

III.

Perhaps, I shouldn't have asked only what is philos-
of Qaddafi. And what part of the Koran will Khomeini embody in some brief sayings that all must repeat?

It is not a question that a leader must write fifty books, like Marx or Lenin—and I’m sure that Trotsky and Luxemburg wrote as many. It is a question of being serious about revolution and therefore the philosophy of revolution, and being responsible to history, which means men and women shaping history. No, you can’t throw out philosophy, and indulge in sloganswing. Even a good bourgeois philosopher, at least in the stage when the bourgeoisie achieved its revolution, a good Luther Hegel, who insisted all his life that he believed, had to submit to the dialectic drive of philosophy and subordinate religion to it. All his protestations notwithstanding—and “revealed religion” is pretty high in the sphere of the Absolute, nothing can change the fact that it isn’t the highest; that philosophy is. Needless to say, that evolution in thought initiated by Hegelian dialectics was transformed by Marx’s new continent of thought into reality. Ever since then revolution was successful that wasn’t grounded in a philosophy of revolution.

Every generation of Marxists must work this out concretely for its own age. The fact that our age is in such a total crisis makes it all the more imperative that we tailor no state power.

Raya Dunayevskaya

By Raya Dunayevskaya, 1961-1962

Marxist-Humanist Willings on the Middle East

ilication as we have known it—preparation for atomic war. Qaddafi and Khomeini and General Zia may think the Middle East as they define it will be the graveyard of U.S. imperialism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Just read, please, Osiama Falace’s interview with Khomeini in a recent issue of the New Times, and the one with Qaddafi in the current issue (12/16/79). Just listen to that demagogue, Qaddafi, try to take advantage of the fact that supposedly there is no government because there is no Parliament, and supposedly it’s a collectivist society because it calls itself Jamahiriyah, which means “a command of the people.” Is it they who decide everything? No, even the word committee, unless it’s revolutionary—and the word revolutionary means total uprising, is not the equivalent of destiny being in the hands of the people that is to say, with control of production in the hands of the workers. And so must the state be in their hands. To claim that there is no “government” because there is no Parliament to claim that Khomeini and Qaddafi are “just one leftist is fantastic. When you come to that retrograde stage, even if you are a Maoist who once was revolutionary and did lead a national revolution, you have done nothing but spell out the new stage of state-capitalism.

What new retrogressive stage are we in now, when religion usurps also political power? First it was the Little Red Book of Mao. And now it’s the Little Green Book of Qaddafi. And what part of the Koran will Khomeini embody in some brief sayings that all must repeat?

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