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OUR ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE DIALECTIC OF THE ABSOLUTE IDEA AS  
NEW BEGINNING: IN THEORY, AND LEADERSHIP, AND PRACTICE

Presentation by the National Chairwoman to the expanded East Coast NEB  
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This is a very preliminary form of what I intend to present, not just to the Convention, but to a very special session of the Convention, the executive session. I'm calling it, at this point, "Our Original Contribution to the Dialectic of the Absolute Idea as New Beginning: In Theory, and Leadership, and Practice."

The reason I am anxious not to take up any "minor" questions--and I don't think the organization is minor, but for this particular chapter of our development, it is--is because we have not grasped Chapter 1 of Philosophy and Revolution at its origin and root, much less thought of working out its ramifications.

Because the originality of our philosophic contribution is not fully grasped, the whole discussion on "philosophy, not philosopher" is misunderstood, so that the historic responsibility each one must work out is totally neglected. We have yet to develop what I call a nucleus of philosophic leadership.

I am stressing these facts of the leadership, not because I intend pitting the membership vs. leadership, or the leadership vs. membership, but because it has been a fact that the leadership is so busy competing with the membership on its level of activity that it doesn't even seriously pose the question, either in relation to Philosophy and Revolution or in relationship to the organizational author--and I'm stressing organizational author--much less to its politicalization. The whole new series of political-philosophic letters was started as one of the ways to get to the philosophic nucleus that is so very badly needed. We have to get down to it in order to know: 1) what is this original contribution; 2) how does it relate to a philosophic nucleus; 3) why is politicalization one of these ways of getting to a philosophic nucleus?

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This discussion is divided into 3 parts. This introduction can be called "What, How and Why." The 3 parts are:

I. The new in our contribution, first as it relates to Marx and Lenin; secondly, as it relates to Chapter 1 of Philosophy and Revolution.

II. The needed philosophic nucleus which will be leadership, proletarianization, politicalization.

III. The problems at the Convention, which in one respect simply repeat politicalization, proletarianization, and Chapter 1, but in another respect, spell out the question of what is meant by totality as a new beginning.

I. We have to begin with what is new in our contribution, because we have been so anxious to stress we are a continuity from Marx and Lenin (and we certainly are), and we've been so anxious to stress that we couldn't possibly have been without Marx and Lenin (which again, we couldn't have been), that we have underplayed what is absolutely new, not just in relationship to a lot of nobodies who call themselves Marxists, but in relationship to our founders themselves. And because we have overemphasized their contribution, without which we couldn't possibly have been, it is necessary to then think backwards right now.

No one was greater than Marx. No one needs to be convinced of that fact. However, when it comes to the Absolute Idea, it isn't only that the young Marx got so thoroughly disgusted with Absolutes by the time he discovered his new continent of thought, that he said that's the end of that, I'll return to it some other time. It is that when he did return--and in his greatest work he did--it was already as practice, and not as something that would help us grasp it by having a foundation.

For example, at the height of Capital, we see him breaking up the Absolute Idea by speaking about the general absolute law of capitalist accumulation. But its opposite was always taken to be only the unemployed army--and not the absolutely, totally opposite which we take it to be now. Marx only mentioned it as "the new passions and new forces for the reconstruction of society." The negation of the negation at that point certainly wasn't spelled out.

Lenin certainly paid a lot more attention to Absolute Idea. We have that chapter commented on more than any other chapter in Science of Logic. But he, too, had to concentrate, as all of us have to concentrate, on what is concrete for our age. What was concrete for his age was, as we know, the transformation into opposite. But he threw out the last half of the last paragraph of Absolute Idea and said, that doesn't make any difference. It did make a difference, and my Letters on the Absolute Idea of 1953 spend something like 12 pages arguing against him for leaving out that last half a paragraph.

Even more important, Chapter 1 of Capital was always in Lenin's mind as he was reading. We have stressed that Lenin says Universal, Particular, Individual was exactly what Marx had in mind when he wrote Capital. But Lenin never says anything about fetishism. When he was referring to Universal, Particular and Individual, he was referring to the section just before the fetishism of commodities, when Marx explains how we came from barter to sales to money to capital.

In other words, the fetishism of commodities, as the dead labor sucking the living labor, and as the fact that you not only were exploited, but you actually had become an appendage to a machine--that was not concrete for Lenin. In fact, at one point--even though it wasn't at the stage where he was working with the Absolute Idea--he was "taken in," so to speak, by the Taylor system. He wondered whether that was just capitalistic, or whether it could be used if you had Soviets and you saw that it wasn't exploitative, and so forth.

So that whether we take our very founders, Marx and Lenin, or any of the Hegelian Marxists: Lukacs when he was at his best, Marcuse when he was at his best, Adorno when he was at his best, the East Europeans when they were at their best--in an actual revolution--no one, no one, had formulated or even given us any indication that if you are going to break you head over Absolute Idea, it would be as a new beginning. That's our original contribution.

It isn't only that we did this great thing by saying Absolute isn't absolute in the ordinary sense of the word--it's the unity of theory and practice; Absolute isn't absolute in the bourgeois sense of the word--it's the question of the unity of the material and the ideal. But who ever said Absolute was a new beginning? None but us. And if we don't understand that original contribution--that we have to begin with the totality--then we won't know what a new beginning is. A new beginning could just be that we discovered the four forces of revolution. We're certainly very proud of that--but that isn't all we're saying.

In fact, I would say that if there's anything we do understand, it's the movement from practice. We certainly have that imbedded in our being. We do understand that part of the Absolute. We do not understand the other part, Absolute Idea as second negativity. And until we do understand it, we will not be able to project. Therefore we must return to Chapter 1 of Philosophy and Revolution, and read it with altogether new eyes. It is not just that we're challenging, or threatening, or saying something that sounds great and philosophic, but all the ramifications of that.

Hegel died in 1831. He was the greatest philosopher that ever lived. It is now 1976, and it was 1953 when I broke through on the 3 last syllogisms in the Philosophy of Mind. I never bothered to look up the philosophic scholars. I was sure they had dealt with it in their bourgeois way. I found out that nobody in the world had done it. It was then I found out that Hegel himself hadn't put them in until 1830, the year before he died. He had left it at Paragraph #574 in 1817. I think the first time I saw anything written about it was in the 1960s and that was a whole decade after I developed it.

Paragraph #574 says "this is a summation of what I did, and what I did explains my conclusions, Absolute Idea." So why did he suddenly decide to add 3 paragraphs? To say "a summation" evidently didn't satisfy him the year before he died. In the first of the 3, Paragraph #575, Logic, Nature, Mind (the 3 volumes of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences) are not simply the names of what Hegel wrote. Nature, the center part, is not just the second book. The center part, the middle, contains the whole; it looks both forward and backward, and therefore, that is really the key point.

Marx said that any proletarian could have told Hegel that he should have begun with material things first. Everyone says it's a good thing Lenin didn't know that's what Marx said, because he wouldn't have dared say, "isn't that great that Hegel goes from Logic to Nature--he's extending a hand to historical materialism. Therefore, that chapter is the most central. The most ideal is really the most practical--terrific and magnificent!"

I came to this part and said, if it turns both backward and forward, it isn't just the remembrance of things past, but he's also seeing the future imbedded in there. That means there must be a movement from practice to theory that's itself a form of theory. This was on May 12, 1953. There hadn't yet been the June 17th revolt. Everybody thought I was crazy--all this worry about what Stalin's death meant and that it wasn't going to stand still. It is the period from March to June when Stalin died and when the East German revolt broke out that we're concerned with--these few months. When I broke through on the Absolute Idea, May 12 and 20, it was in anticipation of what was actually occurring.

In the next paragraph, #576, Nature becomes first, Mind becomes second, and Logic is the end. So now Mind is the middle, the mediation, the center, the greatness from which the whole flows. What did that mean to us in the JFT? I said it meant we had to dig deeper into philosophy; we couldn't stop with state-capitalism. We must see that this was new--this movement from practice and this movement from theory are a unity.

Paragraph #577 is even crazier than #575 and #576 were. Hegel has lived all his life on Logic, but when he comes to #577, instead of turning it to let Logic now become the center, Hegel just throws it out altogether. He says what we're dealing with is Self-Thinking Idea. In the whole thing, he has one single tiny sentence on eternity after the Self-Thinking Idea which has thrown out, replaced, Logic.

Now if that's what it means--and Hegel throws out his Logic--what could be greater? He says the Self-Thinking Idea is the self-bringing forth of liberty. That's when we already have it, the revolution is here, and everything is ready for not putting things off for the day after. It's right here and you better go do it and think it and everybody be part of the dialectic.

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What do we mean by the cogency of dialectics of negativity for the period of our period of mass revolutions? What do we mean by Absolute Idea as new beginning? When we keep stressing, correctly, that it's a unity of theory and practice, we do not know the double negation as being within each one. In one respect, a new person helps--in this case, Tyran. I have stated many, many times that second negativity is not just when you come to the Absolute Idea, but that you experience second negativity at every single stage--and since everybody's always saying, "don't give your first reaction, wait for second negativity," you would think we certainly understand second negativity. But until it becomes concrete, we don't. (Ed. note--There was a presentation and some discussion in LA with Tyran on Fanon. Since he is printed here in his own words, Raya asked that this section of her presentation be left out.)

There is one thing that I want to include here, in relationship to Sartre and Fanon on the question of Particular. We've always talked against the fixed Particular, nationalized property-socialism. But

Universal, Particular and Individual are the three main categories of the Doctrine of the Notion. Particular is your first negation of the Universal when it's abstract, and Individual is the total concretization when it's Individualism which let's nothing interfere with it's Universalism, that is, Freedom.

The idea is that when it's not fixed, Particular is the way to get to the second negativity; there is no other way to get to it. And what Fanon expressed so passionately was that he did not mean that Negroes are not a Particular. He meant that Negritude is the Particular which is Universal. That is what he meant by "national consciousness that is not nationalism but is a form of internationalism." He certainly did some very beautiful things on the difference between national consciousness that makes you proud of the heritage or makes you realize that this is a contribution, and nationalism which he absolutely rejected because he was a total internationalist and revolutionary.

I think that part of the politicalization will also be on that. The fixed Particular is absolutely wrong and will kill you. But when it's not fixed, when it's a stage in the development of the concretization, that is the only way to get to second negativity.

What I'm trying to stress here now are certain stages in Chapter 1 which must be grasped as concrete. You have to say to yourself: if Absolute Idea means new beginnings, it means that in talking to such and such a person, I have to present the whole of philosophy and Marxist-Humanism. It is not enough to say, "we agree with you on the question of welfare or whatever." The question of welfare or whatever becomes a way not only of you learning something from them, but of them having an awful lot to learn from you, because they get an entirely new interpretation of the problem that had been bothering them.

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II. We would have leaped very much ahead if we knew that, and therefore did not take "philosophy, not philosopher" to mean, "good, I don't have to depend on Raya or somebody; isn't that great, I can be myself." If instead you recognized what the historic and organizational responsibility means if you are going to be the philosophy and the philosopher, we would have a very different situation than what we do.

For example, on this particular tour, we had the experience of Isaac in LA writing the lead, with the help of Eugene and myself, and Kevin writing the lead here. I'm sure that Kevin has a very different appreciation of what it means to write the lead when you do not separate the Universal from the Particular, or from the very tiny technical thing, as to how many inches there are on a page and, therefore, you better learn how to express the greatest ideas possible within that little tiny space. That is the most important thing we will have to consider at the Convention.

Let's break down the question of politicalization. When we have to answer state-capitalists, and they're CLRJ's kind of people, it's easy. We say he couldn't work out the Absolute Idea; he refused Marxist-Humanism--and state-capitalism without Marxist-Humanism is simply abstract. But one of our discussions on state-capitalism in California was with ISers, and they think that the only reason they reject philosophy is because they want a short-cut to revolution, and they think they are better organizers than we are, and therefore, they can make it. They think they can show us how to popularize our Absolute Idea.

It's not only that we have plenty better examples about popularization than they do, from Engels down, and nobody can shine Engels' shoes. But the point is that unless we can present the totality of our philosophy in our politicalization, then the ISers can say, I agree with you absolutely--the problem is state-capitalism--which, in fact, means 1) they have reduced philosophy to economics, and 2) they refuse to grapple with philosophy "in and of itself," as if it is sufficient just to have it "in the back of one's head."

So the question keeps going back to the same thing: what would the transition point of politicalization in our form mean? On what level would we argue with other tendencies, which I'm certainly very much in favor of doing.

Take the IS position on Portugal. On the one hand, it seems we have gotten closer to them because we have, in a sense, critically supported PRP-BR. In the discussion I had with the IS people who wanted to talk to me, I said: isn't it a fact that you guys are so crazy about the party to lead that you certainly appreciate what a party is, you certainly appreciate what a leader is, and yet you don't even mention the woman's name who is the head of the PRP-BR that you support? I'm sure I'll find more to disagree about with her than you will. But you don't even mention her name. You don't pay any attention to the fact that she, at least, posed the question of a new relationship of theory to practice.

Their answer--as if it were a point of gossip--was that Tony Cliff is the biggest male chauvinist you ever saw. As if it were nothing that the biggest leader in your organization is the biggest male chauvinist! (I said I guess I didn't know it because I was so busy fighting them on philosophy and state-capitalism I never even realized there was anything else involved.)

We can't allow them at any point to use something like that as if it were just a point of gossip. We have to say that politicalization to us means that whether we take up Portugal or whether we take some other question in which no woman question is involved (though I don't know how many questions are possible that don't involve the women), what we have to raise is: what is the movement from practice to theory that we insist is itself a form of theory? What is the significance that the head of PRP-BR is a woman? And how can a leader so full of vanguardism and leadership, leadership, leadership, fail to note that simple fact? Isn't

that a deliberate, conscious, inevitable result of not seeing what arose from the movement from practice?

Until we ask those kinds of questions in a concrete proletarian and political way, we will constantly fall into the trap that "they are better organizers," and if only we popularized our philosophy, we could win them over philosophically too. They order their people into the factories and they go in. But what is the end of all these numbers that they achieved, while we only had 2 or 3? They have a lot of caucuses with the unions.

Whatever the line is on a concrete thing is written up by the leader at the center and nobody goes back to the original Marx or the original Lenin, much less the original of what do you think is making the contribution for your own age. There is nothing more important for us at this Convention than to see that we have a philosophic nucleus.

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III. We can't think that we are meeting that task by just saying, we recognize that it's not Substance but Subject. We certainly do know how to listen to the proletariat but that is not the whole task. A perfect example is seen in what we did with an interview Jane had with a Black woman worker, which she turned in along with her manuscript draft. Olga took excerpts from it when she worked on combining all the manuscripts for a final draft--but I called it "fragmentation" when I finally saw the original interview and realized how great it was. Here is a woman talking on everything about her life, and what did we do with it? We took the part on welfare and put it under welfare, another part on politics was put under politics--and the result was that you didn't see the total person.

I'm not saying we don't understand Subject, because I really do think that our comrades are better than anybody in the world on knowing how to listen, on taking down and not trying to editorialize what we listen to. But Subject isn't all there is to subjectivity, in a universal sense, because subjectivity in the universal sense includes the theory. It cannot be complete until you're just as good in taking down that self-determination of the Idea as you are at taking down the Subject talking.

I am hoping that the pamphlet will make the difference, because we do show individual people as people on all subjects and not dividing it up. And we do show masses in motion. But everything now depends on what happens between now and the Convention.

For example, to my surprise, on the SF part of the trip there were nine women in a study group, only one of whom, Deb, was a Marxist-Humanist. The minute we said when we were finished that we have another meeting where I wanted to sum up, none of them came. Right away, poor Deb thought it was a complete failure. I was thrilled to death. I said, how can you underestimate that group when nine women who yesterday would

have walked out on me before I opened my mouth are now so anxious and feel so passionately the need for philosophy that they say, let us take a look.

I said this would really be proof of what we keep saying we want, an independent women's movement that would concentrate on those two things we told them: proletarianization and Black, and philosophy. Our women can't be considered because they're Marxist-Humanist already. So the challenge is whether we could convince those women that they have something to learn from us.

Let us put on the agenda that you have nothing more important to do between the moment the pamphlet comes out and the Convention, than have an experience in which you are responsible for transmitting all Marxist-Humanism and all that we mean by second negativity to the women to whom you sell the pamphlet. Then when we have a meeting before the Convention on that topic, it really would mean something. If you come with no experience, I'm not interested. You don't have to tell me how great the pamphlet is.

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(Below are brief excerpts from the summation following the discussion.)

The reason we don't have a philosophic nucleus is because we have not brought out the originality of our contribution. Until we do appreciate the originality of what we present, we cannot really bring out how great Marx is, or how great Lenin is, even though we have brought something new. The perfect example of that is Lenin and "lower and deeper." Do you know how many millions of times that man must have read that in Marx? But it was never presented as if it were original.

Before he returned to Russia, Lenin's interpretation of lower and deeper, to the extent to which he had repeated it at all, was--this is the latest thing we do. It did not mean to him a break: a total and complete and absolute break with trade unions and with every thing they were so proud of doing in the Second International. Marx had told them, once the Paris Commune appeared, that the British proletariat, as great as it was and as much as it had helped establish the First International, was good for nothing. Those he chose for lower and deeper were the unskilled workers, the Irish workers.

Until something becomes concrete for you because you have made such a great contribution yourself, you can't bring it out in the other person. Lenin couldn't have brought that out as the greatest thing in Marx as long as he was busy telling the workers they should have unions; they should also have political parties; they should appreciate the intellectuals that would bring socialism to them. The greatness of Lenin being ready to break with himself was what made him understand Marx in a way he never understood him before, and what made him write that you better know the whole of the Science of Logic, every single word of it, or you don't understand Chapter 1 of Capital.



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If we appreciate how great our contribution is, we really can make it clear to the people we talk with. We're not taking away from Marx by giving ourselves credit for our original contribution. We are showing that we in our age saw this and, therefore, first appreciated Marx. When Marx said, accumulation of capital on the one hand and the unemployed army on the other, he also said new passions and new forces. The "new passions and new forces" in Chapter 9 of Philosophy and Revolution is something that has been in Marx since 1867 and nobody saw it until we took it out this late in the game. That's what they must see. That's what I mean by not having a philosophic nucleus.

The greatest shock to Lenin when he became ill was that he didn't have anyone to leave his mantle to. It was too late.

We have to tackle the question of the Particular as the way to the real mediation, because I think that's what everybody is grappling with and it's very, very important to get it. That's why I want to develop this fetishism in relation to Lenin. For Lenin not to understand the fetishism of commodities is fantastic, because Lenin was always in economics. He was far above Luxemburg. She was in a very technologically developed country, and was already seeing imperialism. Because she hadn't seen the fetishism of commodities, Luxemburg was wanting to fight imperialism and being very conscious on that. But on the other hand, everyone failed on the fetishism of commodities, including Adorno. The point is that it is impossible to see fetishism until 1) it is very, very highly developed, and 2) until you appreciate that these new passions and new forces are the only ones that will really rip it out.

You have to know Chapter 1 of Philosophy and Revolution awfully well, and be able to work it out yourself, because you never know what to do concretely until it comes because each concrete thing brings out a million new developments. If we work at this Convention to be proud of ourselves and to work out what was absolutely new that wasn't there, we will also be able to explain Marx and Lenin. At this point, the philosophic nucleus is our answer, our problem, our task. This is the focus for this Convention, but you won't hear it until the executive session, so all the other time you will have to speak about experiences and activities.

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