

## Organizer's Report, 10/1/2020, by Franklin, Chicago

### I. Retrogression vs. the Reach for the Future

*The Third Attitude* "would always recur when, in the process of battling contradiction, the Subject becomes impatient with the seemingly endless stages of negation it must suffer through, and therefore, instead, slides backward into Intuition." – P&R

The Draft Perspectives we put out in April laid out the objective and subjective situation and the effort to philosophically comprehend that situation and how it is grounded in the current stage of capitalism and revolt against it. That was largely framed around the struggles sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic. I don't want to repeat much of that today, but I would argue that it continues to be key in comprehending and responding to the situation we are in. There is, of course, one very big new element: the multiracial Black-led mass revolt, together with the backlash it provoked. The last two issues of *News & Letters* help orient us to that changed situation. And I want to return to chapter 1 of P&R in an effort to deepen this view.

This is an extraordinarily dangerous moment. Already in a year of pandemic, climate, and economic disasters, we are haunted by the specter of pre-emptive counter-revolution before revolution has erupted. The Trump era has moved from the fascist march in Charlottesville in 2017, when counterprotester Heather Heyer was murdered, to the hundreds of white supremacist terrorists operating hand in hand with the police in Kenosha this August, when protesters Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber were murdered, again by a right-wing terrorist. There have been hundreds of violent right-wing attacks against protesters this year, including over 100 incidents of driving vehicles into crowds. The far right has easily infiltrated and recruited within police forces across the nation, notably the brutal, notoriously racist BorTac unit of the Border Patrol, which was one of the federal forces used to viciously attack protesters in Portland.

Too many are reluctant to utter the word fascism even as it makes itself plainer and plainer. Fascist terrorists are on the streets and killing people. Trump's strategy is clearly to provoke violence and to rally the forces of racism and fascism. He used the Sept. 29 "debate" as a platform to call on the far right to "stand by" and be ready to take arms to the streets if he loses the election, as well as to call on his supporters to swarm polling places to intimidate voters. The fabricated list Trump presented at the "debate" of Obama actions to prevent Trump's ascension to the White House was actually, in Hitler-Goebbels fashion, a forecast of his own intentions. He was never running to win a majority, and this year gave up on the idea of even winning the electoral college with the aid of the normal kinds of disenfranchisement baked into this so-called democracy from its founding.

Power is not only a matter of who wins elections, and fascism needs a mass base. As one of our July-August lead pointed out, "Wherever fascism has taken power, the police have been a crucial part of its mass base." Another crucial element is the propaganda network, much of which is so fevered that it makes Fox News look mainstream, but which is amplified by Facebook and other social media, state disinformation operations, and the actual mainstream corporate media.

It's true that Trump is desperately flailing because he knows he's losing the election, but that makes it no less dangerous, especially when significant parts of the military, the police, the courts, and, of course, virtually the entire Republican Party, are all too willing to back up any

and every illegal act by his administration, and we have seen checks and balances failing again and again.

This counter-revolution is not a personal choice made by Trump but rather the excrescence of state-capitalism in deep crisis. Trump has merged his own desperation to hold onto power with the fear of reactionary middle-class whites of losing their favored position and the rulers' fears of being cast down from the summit. His flailing mirrors the desperate flailing of the capitalist system haunted by its own looming self-destruction. It is destroying itself both by undermining the environmental and economic conditions of its own reproduction and by the opposition it is spawning from below.

That in turn has divided both the ruling class and the middle class. Some have recoiled from the rush to destruction and chaos. Division of the ruling class has long been held by Marxists such as Lenin to be a prerequisite for revolution. What we see is a loose convergence in first negation: opposition to what may or may not be recognized as a 21st-century U.S. flavor of fascism on the rise, at the same time that fascism is rearing its head in many countries. That convergence is an uneasy alliance of those who want to salvage the Clinton-Bush-Obama normalcy with people who are reaching for the future. The latter has been manifested in this year's deep and persistent nationwide revolt, as well as in the many, many strikes that have erupted—I haven't seen official statistics but it is clearly far more strikes and unofficial labor actions than we have seen in any year since at least the 1980s. In fact, class struggles over the pandemic sparked the first global strike wave in many years.

That includes creative acts of resistance by postal workers across the country. According to a recent report:

“Mechanics in New York drew out the dismantling and removal of mail-sorting machines until their supervisor gave up on the order. In Michigan, a group of letter carriers did an end run around a supervisor's directive to leave election mail behind, starting their routes late to sift through it. In Ohio, postal clerks culled prescriptions and benefit checks from bins of stalled mail to make sure they were delivered, while some carriers ran late items out on their own time. In Pennsylvania, some postal workers looked for any excuse — a missed turn, heavy traffic, a rowdy dog — to buy enough time to finish their daily rounds. ‘I can't see any postal worker not bending those rules,’ one Philadelphia staffer said in an interview.”<sup>1</sup>

Through ups and downs, the revolt sparked by the police murder of George Floyd never ended. The latest outrage to reinvigorate it is the unconscionable but expected failure to charge any of the police for the killing of Breonna Taylor. As one protester in Chicago said, “This is how the system operates. It's not broken. When we fight for Breonna Taylor, we fight to destroy the system and create a new one.” The power of the revolt impacts everything from everyday conversation to national politics, though it is clear that at best electoral politics will deliver only a dim shadow of the seething from below. For revolt to turn into revolution and overcome counter-revolution requires the self-determination of the Idea of freedom. Thus, a small group like us has a role to play, so long as we recognize the self-determination of the Idea as our basis.

The reaching for the future has been manifested as well even before this year in outpourings of women, youth, Queer, immigrants, Blacks and Native Americans, such as in Black Lives Matter, the Women's Marches, the battle over family separations, the climate strikes, the March for Our Lives, and the struggle at Standing Rock. The urgency of defeating Trump and the fascists must not be allowed to cover over the way the system-preservers represented by the

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<sup>1</sup> “Postal Service Workers Quietly Resist DeJoy's Changes with Eye on Election,” by Jacob Bogage, Sept. 29, 2020, *Washington Post*.

Biden campaign want to harness, channel and tame the potentially revolutionary forces. The Biden slogan of “unity” means class collaboration under the guidance of the capitalist class. In other words, the battle is not only one of first negation but within that opposition to clarify and move toward a full negation of the negation.

The pandemic, of course, shows that the longing for a return to normal is delusional, and so does the overall ecological crisis that unleashed the pandemic. Every day we see effects of the climate crisis in the fires in California, Brazil and Siberia; hurricanes and floods; heat waves and locusts. A UN official for Humanitarian Affairs issued a warning to the Security Council that Yemen, South Sudan, Congo and Nigeria are on the verge of famine, and that is only the beginning. But returning to normal is not just a pious wish. It is being used as an ideological weapon in the battle for the future of humanity. The Draft Perspectives stressed how the urgency of negating so many crises generates the temptation to focus on the first negation.

## II. The Second and Third Attitudes to Objectivity within the Left as Barriers to Absolute Negativity

*“Finite things are finite because they do not possess the complete reality of their Notion within themselves, but require other things to complete it — or, conversely, because they are presupposed as objects, hence possess the Notion as an external determination.” – Hegel’s Science of Logic*

What I say here does not replace or supersede the discussion in the Draft Perspectives about post-Marx Marxism, ideological pollution of the Left, and their ramifications for approaching the question of what kind of socialism, what kind of revolution is needed, what happens after the revolution, and therefore the need for the philosophy of revolution in permanence. Rather I am trying to build on that.

The ideological terrain of the Left today shows that all of that is quite germane and essential. In this report I want to look briefly at two loose groupings of tendencies that I will refer to as manifesting Hegel’s Second Attitude and Third Attitude to Objectivity. Both Attitudes conceive of cognition as finite. The Second therefore shuns absolutes and universals and tries to limit subjectivity, cognition and action to finitude. The Third looks for a shortcut to the absolute by separating subjectivity from objectivity, reducing mediation to immediacy, and substituting will for cognition that is simultaneously objective and subjective, theoretical and practical.

For Hegel, according to Raya Dunayevskaya in *Philosophy and Revolution*, the retrogressive Third Attitude “would always recur *when*, in the process of battling contradiction, the Subject becomes impatient with the seemingly endless stages of negation it must suffer through, and therefore, instead, slides backward into Intuition....

“This retrogressive step is seen in the fact that Jacobi has reduced ‘mediation to the immediate, the intuitive’ with ‘its passwords, “Either-Or.”’ Hegel draws a sharp line between such reductionism and his own Doctrine of Essence, which he considers wholly ‘a discussion of the intrinsically self-affirming unity of immediacy and mediation.’ ” (pp. 20-21)

We see this prominently (but not only) in adventurist attempts by individuals and small groups to substitute their own militant actions—and “militant” is one of their most sacred words—to substitute that for the collective movement of masses in motion. As a result, they also downplay the importance of theory.

The Second Attitude, which encompasses empiricism and Kantian thought, is closely connected to the Idea of the True, with its analytic and synthetic cognition, in Hegel’s *Science of*

*Logic*. Kantian influence is everywhere in the part of the Left that engages in theory. The truth is that Kantian thinking pervaded the Second International and pervades postmodernism. Hegel almost seems to have had postmodernism in mind when he wrote about the Idea of the True:

“Accordingly, this cognition still retains its *finitude* in its realized end; in its realized end it has at the same time *not* attained its end, and *in its truth* has *not* yet arrived at *truth*. For in so far as in the result the content still has the character of a *datum*, the presupposed *implicit being* confronting the Notion is not sublated; equally therefore the unity of Notion and reality, truth, is also not contained in it. Oddly enough, it is this side of *finitude* that latterly has been clung to, and accepted as the *absolute* relation of cognition — as though the finite as such was supposed to be the absolute! At this standpoint, the object is credited with being an unknown *thing-in-itself behind* cognition, and this character of the object, and with it truth too, is regarded as an absolute *beyond* for cognition. In this view of cognition, thought determinations in general, the categories, reflective determinations, as well as the formal Notion and its moments, are assigned the position of being finite determinations not in and for themselves, but finite in the sense that they are subjective in relation to this empty *thing-in-itself*, the fallacy of taking this untrue relation of cognition as the true relation has become the universal opinion of modern times.” (Miller translation, pp. 784-85)

In the *Smaller Logic*, Hegel concisely summed up what is missing, or should I say, the resolution that the contradiction within the Idea of the True moves toward: “the universal, to be truly apprehended, must be apprehended as subjectivity, as a notion self-moving, active, and form-imposing” (para. 232).

Just a couple of examples from this year here:

1. The question of “allyship,” to which the relationship between non-Black people and the Black mass revolt is reduced. The theory—which is loudly proclaimed by some who want to lead but is contradicted by the humanism and one-worldedness expressed by many of the rank-and-file protesters, Black or otherwise—behind this implicitly or explicitly assumes an insurmountable finitude in subjectivity. It assumes that anti-Blackness is an ontological feature of our society and of non-Black people, so that the kind of coalescence between freedom movements posed in *American Civilization on Trial* is impossible. Thus whites—and in many versions others, even Native Americans and Latinx Americans—can only serve the movement by giving up their voices and unthinkingly obeying Black leaders. This of course also elides the anti-Black racism that exists among Black people, and it fosters an uncritical attitude to Black leaders and Black-led organizations, which in reality have plenty of contradictions. Mohammed Elnaïem and Mehmet Dosemeci critique the Afro-pessimism that this thinking is based on:

“In claiming that all non-Black people are complicit in Black suffering, new popular currents of thought imply that, at some level, the possibility of international solidarity is occluded. We argue instead that autonomous agency and international solidarity...are actually the ideas most worth revisiting during the present rebellion....

“It means taking to heart that people in more than 50 countries across the world have risen up to indict the institutional racism in the US.

“It means realizing that these global protests are connected to liberation struggles occurring all around the world, from Algeria and Sudan, to Iraq, Hong Kong and Chile.

“Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* ended with these famous words, ‘Let us reconsider the question of [hu]mankind. Let us reconsider the question of the cerebral mass of all humanity,

whose connections must be increased, whose channels must be diversified, and whose messages must be re-humanized.”<sup>2</sup>

What *American Civilization on Trial* puts forward is that Black masses in motion proved to be the vanguard at each historic turning point of development in the U.S. This vanguard role raises up new ideas, new relationships, new leaders, and new organizations as it leaves behind some of the old ones. It drives development forward when it leads to a coalescence with other forces of revolution: labor, women, youth, Queer, other oppressed minorities and international Subjects of revolt. This self-development is only hindered when the Subject is boxed into ontological pessimism. The infinitude of subjectivity is released when the self-activity of the Subject breaks down its separation from the Notion’s self-determination, when the Universal is “apprehended as subjectivity, as a notion self-moving, active, and form-imposing.” As Dunayevskaya put it in her introduction for the 1983 edition of *American Civilization on Trial*, “Yet it has become clear since the 1960s that even the greatest actions need the direction that comes from a total philosophy of freedom. What is needed now is to concretize such a philosophy of freedom as the reality for our age” (*American Civilization on Trial*, 2003 edition, p. 8; also in *Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution in Permanence for Our Day*, p. 220). So *American Civilization on Trial* is key to breaking the barriers of finitude and bringing out the humanism, the one-worldedness, the reach for the future, the passion for philosophy embedded in today’s mass revolt.

2. Eight to Abolition: After police murdered George Floyd, Campaign Zero launched 8 Can’t Wait, advocating eight urgent reforms to curtail police violence. A group of police and prison abolitionists responded with the Eight to Abolition campaign, explaining:

“As police and prison abolitionists, we believe that this [8 Can’t Wait] campaign is dangerous and irresponsible, offering a slate of reforms that have already been tried and failed, that mislead a public newly invigorated to the possibilities of police and prison abolition, and that do not reflect the needs of criminalized communities.

“We honor the work of abolitionists who have come before us, and those who organize now. A better world is possible. We refuse to allow the blatant co-optation of decades of abolitionist organizing toward reformist ends that erases the work of Black feminist theorists. As the abolitionist organization Critical Resistance [recently noted](#), 8 Can’t Wait will merely ‘improve policing’s war on us.’ ”

Therefore 8 to Abolition advocates eight “non-reformist reforms,” explaining:

“We recognize that all police and prisons will not disappear tomorrow. Instead, we believe in the strategic importance of [non-reformist reforms](#), or measures that reduce the scale, scope, power, authority, and legitimacy of criminalizing institutions. We also recognize carceral agents’ constant attempts to co-opt and rebrand abolition through the language of harm reduction. We envision abolition as not only a matter of tearing down criminalizing systems such as police and prisons that shorten the lives of Black, brown, and poor people, but also a matter of building up life-sustaining systems that reduce, prevent, and better address harm. We seek a reparations model, wherein our communities that have been harmed by policing and mass criminalization for centuries are given their due from every corporation and institution that has profited from policing.”

The perspective of abolishing the whole mass incarceration/criminal injustice system is far more radical than what has been allowed in mainstream discourse for a long time. The fact that the language of abolition, including “defund the police,” is suddenly heard everywhere—

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<sup>2</sup> “Black Autonomy and Lessons from the Black Power Struggle,” Al Jazeera, June 22, 2020.

including in Trump's hysterical warnings about socialists controlling Joe Biden—reflects how much this year's revolt has opened up thought and pushed it in a revolutionary direction. But we cannot allow euphoria to dampen our critical perspective on the barriers to thought that remain within movements and theorizing.

While the 9 to Abolition reforms are worthy of support (without giving up a critical perspective on their limitations), the whole implies that reform without revolution is sufficient, precisely because it never mentions revolution<sup>3</sup> and relies on Andre Gorz's concept of "non-reformist reforms," which is after all a substitute for revolution proposed by the author of *Farewell to the Working Class*. Some of the abolitionists may in the abstract believe in revolution, but the fact that they put forward a program that implies the opposite shows how they are grounded in the assumption of the finitude of mass subjectivity, that is, the backwardness of the masses. This approach ends up with what Hegel called "self-determination applied externally."

That is why our July-August lead-editorial pointed out:

"It is only through the power of this revolt that reforms that seemed unthinkable yesterday are being passed today.... Previously hard-fought but ineffective reforms like body cameras became yesterday's news, and the words 'abolition' and 'systemic change' were on many lips.

"Abolitionists name themselves after the movement for immediate abolition of slavery, the greatest, most revolutionary movement of 19th-century America. Their agitation, countering the intransigent defenders of slavery, led to the Civil War, whose unfinished revolution still haunts us. The aim is to abolish not only the police but mass incarceration, which is the latest of many forms of racist social control imposed since the Civil War to maintain racial divisions and class exploitation.

"Speaking of abolition—creating a world without prisons or police—is abstract to the extent that it shies away from acknowledging that this requires abolition of the class society from which these repressive forces grow, and that it can only happen through social revolution from below and its completion in the reconstruction of society on truly human foundations. That abstractness leaves openings for tendencies and leaders that would limit and co-opt the reforms proposed by abolitionists.

"We have to confront the nature of the state as an excrescence of class society, which always requires force to maintain class hierarchy, and therefore requires the function that police and armies perform.

"History's model of an abolition of the police is the 1871 Paris Commune. While it lasted, it did not 'simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery,' as Karl Marx pointed out then. It smashed the state of which the police are a part, superseding it by a communal type of self-government. Only such a revolution that breaks down the hierarchical economic relations, including the separation of mental and manual labor, could achieve the kind of abolition aimed for today. Since the hierarchies of class, race and sex are intertwined, they must all be attacked together. The dialectics of liberation are such that all generate Subjects of revolution."

3. "War Communism." Far from wanting to abolish the state of which the police and prisons are a part, there is a mass of socialists, even "Leninists," who want to glom onto the capitalist state as the instrument of our salvation. Consider the curious case of the new book *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* by Andreas Malm.

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<sup>3</sup> Nope, not a single mention of revolution or class society. They do have a single passing reference to capitalism: "Prisons, police, and prosecutors work closely together to sustain white supremacist, capitalist, ableist, and cisheteropatriarchal systems of extraction and death." (<https://www.8toabolition.com/>)

Claiming to espouse an “eco-Lenin,” Malm wants to resurrect the “war communism” that the Bolsheviks administered during the 1918-21 Civil War after the Russian Revolution.<sup>4</sup> Its popularity, partly due to its author’s penchant for provocative formulations, is another sign of the degeneracy of post-Marx Marxism.

Out of all that we might learn from the historical experience of the Russian Revolution, why take as model the measures forced onto the Bolsheviks by exigencies, so that Lenin had to criticize some of his comrades for making a virtue of necessity? In Malm’s view, because looming climate catastrophe puts us in a state of exigency. He does talk about revolution, only it means radical measures, seen as anti-capitalist, taken by the state, although he blurs the capitalist state and the workers’ state, and disregards Lenin’s call to smash the state in favor of “seizing the state,” or, as it turns out, pressuring the state.

“But what state?” asks Malm. “No workers’ state based on soviets will be miraculously born in the night. No dual power of the democratic organs of the proletariat seems likely to materialise anytime soon, if ever. Waiting for it would be both delusional and criminal, and so all we have to work with is the dreary bourgeois state, tethered to the circuits of capital as always. There would have to be popular pressure brought to bear on it, shifting the balance of forces...” (p. 151).

This, of course, turns Lenin into opposite. Malm quotes Lenin from March 1917: “We need (for a certain transitional period) a state. This is what distinguishes us from the anarchists” (Malm, p. 131). He disregards what Lenin wrote on the very next page: “We need a state. But *not the kind* of state the bourgeoisie has created everywhere, from constitutional monarchies to the most democratic republics. And in this we differ from the opportunists and Kautskyites of the old, and decaying, socialist parties, who have distorted, or have forgotten, the lessons of the Paris Commune and the analysis of these lessons made by Marx and Engels.

“We need a state, but *not* the kind the bourgeoisie needs, with organs of government in the shape of a police force, an army and a bureaucracy (officialdom) separate from and opposed to the people. All bourgeois revolutions merely perfected *this* state machine, merely transferred *it* from the hands of one party to those of another.

“The proletariat, on the other hand, if it wants to uphold the gains of the present revolution and proceed further, to win peace, bread and freedom, must ‘smash’, to use Marx’s expression, this ‘ready-made’ state machine and substitute a new one for it by *merging* the police force, the army and the bureaucracy with *the entire armed people*. Following the path indicated by the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1905, the proletariat

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<sup>4</sup> “The future, then, is ecological war communism” (p. 167). Curiously, he only quotes texts from Lenin from before the November 1917 revolution, the year before war communism was born. He does not quote these from Lenin’s collected or selected works or from the broadly available Marxists Internet Archive, but from Zizek’s collection *Revolution at the Gates*, which is burdened with the Kantian/Lacanian neo-Stalinism of the introduction and “afterword,” which takes up more than half the book. Malm never comments on Lenin’s 1914 Philosophic Notebooks or on Zizek’s amalgam of them with *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, by means of which the post-Marx Marxist darling Zizek articulates a concept of the Subject that revolves around its inherent limits, its absolute finitude: “the thing that separates us from objective knowledge of reality is our very ontological inclusion in it. This, of course, in no way entails that the tracing of the difference between idealism and materialism is not more crucial than ever today....[O]ur ‘world’ is always disclosed to us within some finite horizon which arises against the background of an impenetrable self-concealment of Being” (Zizek, pp. 180, 181). The solution to this problem is, naturally, the vanguard party: “ ‘External’ intellectuals are needed because the working class cannot immediately perceive its own place within the social totality, which enables it to accomplish its ‘mission’—this insight has to be mediated through an external element....What is important about the Party’s knowledge is not its content, but the fact that it occupies the place of Truth....Without the form of the Party, the movement remains caught in the vicious cycle of ‘resistance’...” (Zizek, pp. 187, 188, 297).

must organize and arm *all* the poor, exploited sections of the population in order that they *themselves* should take the organs of state power directly into their own hands, in order that *they themselves should constitute* these organs of state power.

“And the workers of Russia have already *taken* this path in the first stage of the first revolution, in February–March 1917. The whole task now is clearly to understand what this new path is, to proceed along it further, boldly, firmly and perseveringly.”<sup>5</sup>

What prepared Lenin for both the theory and the practice of 1917 is not only *State and Revolution* but above all the philosophic break he made with his own past and with the Marxism in general of “the past half century!” But to Malm, that breakthrough did not exist, and even words like *dialectic* and *negation* are only adornments to his florid style.

For him, the state means control, and it is the only power strong enough to control the capitalists’ momentum toward catastrophe. He quotes, out of context, a line of Lenin from 1917: “All the state would have to do would be to draw freely on the rich store of control measures which are already known and have been used in the past.”<sup>6</sup> As opposed to Lenin, with Malm it’s always control, control, control, and not a word about who is controlling; not a word about Lenin’s concept of “to a man, woman, and child.”

And yet the very piece by Lenin from which Malm keeps quoting insists over and over again that it is a question of control by the masses, the exploited. Lenin hammers again and again at “control from *below*,” speaking of “the only control which is real—control from *below*, through the employees’ union, through the workers.... In point of fact, the whole question of control boils down to who controls whom, i.e., which class is in control and which is being controlled.”<sup>7</sup>

By separating control from “from below,” Malm decomposes Lenin’s dialectical approach. His pseudo-dialectic is left with a synthetic juxtaposition, coexisting, if not peacefully, then without transforming each other: “the dilemma of how to execute control measures in an emergency without trampling on democratic rights, but rather by securing, building on and drawing force from them.... There is one branch [of socialism] that has spent its lifetime mulling over [this dilemma]... anti-Stalinist Leninism” (pp. 165-66). Admitting that this Leninism has not come up with an answer, he weakly concludes: “There can only be a set of inviolable principles, first among them to never ever infringe on the freedom of expression and assembly” (p. 166). That is the closest his exhortations about turning revolution into pressure on the bourgeois state come to the question of what happens after revolution, and of course the thought of transformation into opposite never gets approached.

Once again, the intended solution is self-determination applied externally. As Eugene said of Malm’s recent *Jacobin* interview headlined “To Halt Climate Change, We Need an Ecological Leninism,” “Without raising Lenin’s philosophic reorganization, ecological war communism or ecological Leninism is only a certain political practice... without the philosophic foundation.”

As with many of today’s Marxists, there is a repeated emphasis on state power, the state, the state, as the only power big enough to rein in fossil fuel capitalists. So much of today’s Marxism is non-revolutionary pretending to be revolutionary. Just as some Third Attitude tendencies seek a shortcut to revolution through the Will, our Second Attitude examples seek a shortcut to the

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<sup>5</sup> Lenin, “Letters from Afar,” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/lf afar/third.htm#v23pp64h-320>.

<sup>6</sup> “The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It,” Sept. 1917, quoted in Malm, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> “The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It,”

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/ichtci/05.htm#v25zz99h-339>,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/ichtci/06.htm#v25zz99h-342>.



future that short-circuits revolution, precisely because they are mired in the assumption of insurmountable finitude of cognition and subjectivity.

### III. The Politics, Philosophy, and Organization of Absolute Negativity

*“It is the nature of the fact, the notion which causes the movement and development, yet this same movement is equally the action of cognition. The eternal idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as Absolute Mind.” – Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind, para. 577.*

*“[T]he attraction for me continues to be the Dialectic. Far from expressing a sequence of never-ending progression, the Hegelian dialectic lets retrogression appear as translucent as progression and indeed makes it very nearly inevitable if one ever tries to escape regression by mere faith....I see the dialectic flow in the Third Attitude to Objectivity from a critique of the one-sidedness of the Intuitionists to organizational responsibility.” – December 8, 1986, letter by Raya Dunayevskaya to George Armstrong Kelly, in P&R, pp. xlii-xliii, xliv*

The Dec. 8, 1986, letter just quoted, written by RD in the midst of her work on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy, articulates her insistence, not only on the inseparability of organization and philosophy, but on the crucial role of organizational responsibility for an objective body of knowledge, a body of ideas, and for her that body of ideas meant the philosophy of revolution in permanence. So what does that mean about the role of a small group like us? We have often quoted the June 1, 1987, presentation on the philosophic moment of Marxist-Humanism:

“I must have felt dissatisfied, since that is where I went, and precisely, I might say, on the question of what we [the Johnson-Forest Tendency] called ‘dialectics of the party,’ specifying however, that I wasn’t interested either in the mass party, which the masses will build, or in the elitist party, which we definitely oppose, but in what happens to a small group ‘like us’ who know that nothing can be done without the masses, and are with them, but they [small groups] are theoreticians and they always seem to be around too. So, what is the *objectivity* which explains their presence, as the objectivity explains the spontaneous outburst of the masses? In a word, I was looking for the objectivity of subjectivity.”

It is easier for us to say what we are not—vanguard party, mass party, spontaneous mass self-organization or a substitute for it, cheerleaders, study circles, armchair critics—than to say what we are, or are supposed to be. If we are not here to lead the masses as a vanguard, or just to follow them, or drown ourselves in the mass movement, then how do we as an organization actively aid the Idea and movement for freedom?

We can look to the whole three decades of RD’s practice of revolutionary Marxist-Humanist organization as well as her writings on it, which did not begin only in 1986. Marxist-Humanist organization is founded on the power of masses in motion and the power of the Idea of freedom. However, that is not merely an “and” but rather the comprehension of how the power of masses and the power of the Idea are two sides of one concrete totality. At the same time it demands comprehension that we constantly have to fight the forces that tend to break them apart. In so doing we have to fight the division between mental and manual labor, knowing that the division

cannot be abolished without abolishing the whole class society, but at the same time that confronting what happens after revolution means that we have to begin the breakdown of the division here and now. That realization, which is incorporated in RD's May 1953 letters on Hegel's absolutes, was central to the founding of this organization, News and Letters Committees.

Hegel expressed the relationship between the power of masses in motion and the power of the Idea in his own way in the last syllogism of his *Philosophy of Mind*: "It is the nature of the fact, the notion which causes the movement and development, yet this same movement is equally the action of cognition." P&R holds that "Lack of confidence in the masses is the common root of *all* objections to 'idealistic, mystical Hegelianism.'...they are blind to the relationship of theory to history as a historical relationship *made by masses in motion*."

That is from P&R's last chapter. Let's return briefly to the first chapter, "Absolute Negativity as New Beginning: The Ceaseless Movement of Ideas and of History."

What I want to focus on is the negation of the negation, or absolute negativity. That is, according to RD, "the turning point of the whole movement of the Notion—the second negativity which will finally transcend the opposition between Notion and Reality. To be prepared for this critical negation, Hegel writes:

"To hold fast the positive in its negative, and the content of the presupposition in the result, is the most important part of rational cognition.'..."

"Nor is subjective any longer separate from objective; the negation of the negation 'is the innermost and most objective moment of Life and Spirit.'..."

"Of necessity we are propelled forward, not just to the first, but to the second negation, *the* turning point of the whole movement: 'It is the simple point of negative self-relation, the innermost source of all activity, of living and spiritual self-movement, the dialectic soul which all truth has in it and through which it alone is truth; for the transcendence of the opposition between Notion and Reality, and the unity which is the truth, rest upon this subjectivity alone' " (pp. 25-26, 30).

RD returns to Hegel's account of the Idea of the True in a way that illuminates both the Left tendencies that confront us today and how to get beyond their problems. The dialectic goes beyond the limitations of the Idea of the True by relating "the concept of facts to the facts themselves, the universal to the particular. The 'defective' element resided in the fact that before the 'absolute method' engaged in battle, those opposites sort of *peacefully coexisted*. Instead of allowing the negation of the negation to transcend the opposition, they were lying alongside each other, or, as Hegel expressed it, they came 'before consciousness without being in contact.' Now that 'the dialectic moment' has arrived, the movement will be ceaseless...."

"[T]he method is the form of the Absolute Idea, self-movement as method. It allows no opposites merely to coexist peacefully or, to use Hegel's words, to come 'before consciousness without being in contact,' 'but engages all in battle' " (pp. 28-29).

From our vantage point, we should note that what she writes here implicitly speaks to the Marxist-Humanist concept of organization, of the means for unity of organization with the activity of the Notion: "Free creative power is the unifying force of this final chapter [of the *Science of Logic*] on the Absolute Idea, the unity of the theoretical and practical idea, to that form of life which is the activity of the Notion" (p. 32).

Keep in mind that concept of organization as RD comes to the three final syllogisms in Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*:

“Because that first Syllogism, in which Nature was the mediating agent, contained ‘implicitly the Idea,’ we were on the ground of the second Syllogism, in which Mind, as [quoting Hegel] ‘mediating agent in the process...reflects on itself in the Idea; philosophy appears as a subjective cognition of which liberty is the aim, and which is itself the way to produce it.’

“Clearly [RD continues], it is not that ‘on the one hand’ there is a subjective aim and ‘on the other hand’ there is a means. The integrality of aim and means, of philosophy and reality, all ceaselessly moving to freedom, shows history itself as well as consciousness as so many stages in the development of freedom” (p. 41).

Again, I want to highlight what it means for the concept of organization when she gets to Hegel’s final syllogism:

“The fact that either the Universal or the Particular or the Individual could be ‘the beginning’ gives yet another facet to the concept of subjectivity [and, I’m adding, to the concept of organization] *when* there are real [people] to carry through ‘the historic mission’ ...of transforming reality in theory and in practice....Here, where we are tracing the self-development of the Absolute as Hegel saw it, the self-thinking Idea is what it has always been: the self-determination of fact, reason, and reality, self-developing toward the ideal:

“ ‘It is the nature of the fact, the notion which causes the movement and development, yet this same movement is equally the action of cognition’ ” (p. 42).

So as she comes to the chapter’s conclusion, she makes this point that, again, I think speaks directly to our discussion of organization today:

“What is needed, it seems to this writer, is to be aware, even oppressively aware, of the simple truth not only that Hegel’s categories are saturated with reality, but also that the Idea itself is real, *lives, moves, transforms reality*” (p. 43).

So to return to my question, until someone gives a better answer, the objectivity of our subjectivity is to be bearers of the Idea, of its activity, to project it and help its self-development, to fight any separation between the Idea and the masses—examples of which were seen in Part II of this report. If that sounds like a tall order for a small group, it is. But what gives us confidence is that double confidence in the power of the objective subjectivity of the Idea and the power of the objective subjectivity of masses in motion. Those are giants whose shoulders we can stand on. And that is what the Draft Perspectives’s discussion of organization is about, how the Idea demands an organizational home.

I won’t repeat the whole discussion of tasks in the Draft Perspectives; consider that part of this presentation.<sup>8</sup> One task that is coming right up is finishing the *What Is Socialism?* Pamphlet this month, which we do see as a needed intervention in the movements from below and the battle of ideas.

In addition, I would like to make two proposals for improving our organizational communications and cohesion. The pandemic is not helping this. We have been experimenting with expanded REB meetings by including all the NEB members in conference calls. In that vein, I propose that all the locals continue having meetings in whatever ways they have worked out for the pandemic conditions, and in addition consider making some meetings, say one out of every month or two months, meetings to which they would invite any members, at large or in other locals, to participate. Also, we have implemented an online discussion forum, and I would encourage members to use it to enhance organizational dialogue.

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<sup>8</sup> The tasks taken up in the Draft Perspectives, Part IV, include new publications, work with the two recent books of selected writings by Dunayevskaya as well as the trilogy of revolution and *American Civilization on Trial* and *News & Letters* newspaper and website, participation in movements, and organizational growth.

Let us conclude by recalling the final paragraph of the Draft Perspectives:

“All of these tasks point to the tremendous need for active, concrete, critical projection of Marxist-Humanism as participants in ongoing movements, *and* for organizational growth, which needs to become more concrete. Because what it is all about is revolution in permanence, getting rid of this rotten society and establishing one with totally new human relations.”