CHAPTER TEN

CRITIQUE OF THE GOTA PROGRAM: MARX'S CRITIQUE
OF A SO-CALLED SOCIALIST PROGRAM; HIS PROJECTION
OF COMMUNISM; WHAT IS ITS MEANING FOR TODAY?

The real historic-philosophic outline Marx sketched for future generations.
—Raya Dunayevskaya

The burning question of the day remains: What happens the day after? How can we continue Marx's unchaining of the Dialectic organizationally, with the principles he outlined in his Critique of the Gotha Program? The question of “What happens after?” gains crucial importance because of what it signals in self-development and self-flowering—“revolution in permanence.” No one knows what it is, or can touch it, or decide upon it before it appears. It is not the task that can be fulfilled in just one generation. That is why it remains so elusive, and why the abolition of the division between mental and manual labor sounds utopian. It has the future written all over it.
—Dunayevskaya, “Year of only 8 Months.”

In a remarkable organizational document, Critique of the Gotha Program (CGP), Marx provides us a crucial foundation for thinking about what will be needed for the destruction of capitalism, the entrance into communist society and its concrete realization. His focus in these “Marginal Notes” was not on the totality of social relations in need of uprooting transformation, nor a “blueprint” for the future. Rather, the concentration was on labor in the transition from capitalism to full communism: What would be needed to free labor from its capitalist value integument? What would be required to transform labor into a creative, fully human activity? What principles would a revolutionary organization need to be based upon to join with the working masses to bring about such a uprooting/transforming change?

Three themes within the CGP seem crucial: 1) The CGP was a critique of a supposedly socialist program, the doctrines of a proclaimed revolutionary organization. Marx was raising the question of the relationship of organization and principles (philosophy). 2) The CGP spoke of the immediate need to transform the mode of production, that is, the destruction of value production. To break with the law of value signaled the abolition of commodity production characteristic of capitalism, and thus the entrance
into what Marx designated the lower phase of communism. 3) A discussion of what would be needed to reach the higher phase of communism, humanity’s long-held dream of “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” followed Marx’s remarks on the lower phase.

Since the end of the 19th century the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (CGP) might have served as an important point of departure for thinking about revolutionary organization, though the first generation of Marxists post-Marx hardly saw it or probed it in this context. Those for whom it was directly written, leaders of the Social-Democratic Workers Party in Germany, ignored and/or rejected it, suppressing its publication for a decade and a half. The critique was not only of a particular socialist tendency, but of an entire school of thought, Lassalleanism. In the first decades of the 20th century, admiration for Lassalle’s founding of the General Association of German Workers was such that Rosa Luxemburg held Lassalle’s national organization on a seemingly higher level than Marx’s work with the First Workingman’s International. (See “The Philosopher of Permanent Revolution Creates New Ground for Organization,” Chapter XI of Dunayevskaya, 1982)

It was Lenin who felt compelled to more fully explore ideas from the *Critique* in his 1917 *State and Revolution*. Two writings from the 1870s, *Civil War in France* and *CGP*, became extremely concrete for him on the eve of October. In *State and Revolution* Lenin brought to the fore the profound relationship between Marx’s recognition of the need to smash the state and replace it with the non-state state of the Paris Commune and his *CGP* with its views on labor in a post-capitalist society. Nonetheless, what was not on Lenin’s agenda was probing *CGP* as an organizational document, one which could have spoken to the question of the revolutionary party in Russia.

Later generations of revolutionaries in various organizations have been attracted to Marx’s expression, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” in the *CGP*. And yet, they failed to deeply probe the barriers that would have to be overcome in the lower phase of communism to achieve the destruction of value production, or to fully grapple with Marx’s brief sketch of the needed transformation of the labor process to make the higher phase of communism a reality.

The “real historic-philosophic outline” Marx penned in 1875, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, had been written in response to the draft of a unity program formulated by the two existing German workers’ organizations—the