CHAPTER 11

The Beginning of the End of Russian Totalitarianism

In her writings on Russia as a state-capitalist society, Dunayevskaya’s analysis was not alone an economic one. Her “economics” were rooted, at one and the same time, in Marx—in his analysis of capitalism’s socially necessary labor time with its law of value, as well as its absolute opposite, freely associated labor—and in the resistance she discerned within the Russian working class, who of necessity had often to express it in secretive, underground ways. In Marxism and Freedom this was expressed in Chapter 13, titled “Russian State Capitalism vs. Workers’ Revolt.”

With Stalin’s death early in 1953, the revolt broke out into the open both in the satellite states under Russia’s bootheal and within the slave labor camps in Russia itself. In this chapter are three documents from Dunayevskaya on the early revolts—in East Germany, June 17, 1953, the Vorkuta prison camps uprising the following month, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. After the Hungarian Revolution, Dunayevskaya continued writing on the resistance to Russia’s rule, including Czechoslovakia’s Prague Spring in 1968, and the Poland of Solidarność in the 1980s.

East Germany, June 17, 1953

Marxism and Freedom

The myth that the Russian totalitarian State is invincible was suddenly and strikingly shattered. On June 17, 1953, the workers in the East German satellite took matters into their own hands on the questions of speed-up. They moved speedily, confidently, courageously and in an unprecedented manner to undermine the puppet state. Heretofore, absenteeism and slowdowns were the only weapons used by the workers against the intolerable conditions in the factories. But the struggle reached a new and higher stage of opposition in late spring of 1953. Here is a brief chronicle of the events leading up to June 17th and the days that followed:

Beginning with May 18th, the Communist government announced a new increase in work hours. The German workers broke out in open strikes. In one effort to stop the strikes the Communist government, on June 10th, offered concessions on all points except speed-up.
On June 16th, construction workers organized a protest march against speed-up from the Stalin Alee housing project. The government sent its supporters to join the marchers, apparently hoping to appear as sponsor. But as the marchers approached the government, joined en route by swelling numbers of demonstrators, the cry had become, “Down With the Zones—Down With the Government.” The government then admitted it had been doing “wrong” and issued an order revoking the speed-up. It was too late.

By the evening of June 16th, the workers had turned the streets of East Berlin into political centers. On block after block, hundreds of people assembled and discussed what to do next. Early on the morning of June 17th they acted.

Columns of strikers charged the main government buildings where the government bureaucrats cowered. Reluctant police moved into pre-arranged positions. Youth and workers tore down the symbols of Communist power—flags, posters, pictures of Communist leaders. Despite rifle shots, one young man clambered up the famous Brandenburg Gate and tore down the Communist banner. Dispersing on one street and surging up another, the swelling ranks of strikers chanted, “We will not be slaves.” For four hours the only power in East Berlin belonged to the workers. They, in fact, overthrew the East German government. They destroyed the police power, burning barracks, throwing policemen out of windows, and forcing them to flee to the West or to come over to the side of the workers.

At 1:00 p.m. the Russian command marched into Berlin with ten thousand troops and decreed martial law. Street gatherings of more than three people were forbidden. The people laughed at the order.

At the same time, in Jena, strikers from the Zeiss optical factory stormed the Communist Party and Communist Youth offices and hurled books, papers, typewriters out of the windows and burned them.

At the Kodak supplies plant, the workers took over and put strikers in charge.

State railway workers walked out, crippling zonal intercommunications and halting the shipment of reparations into Russia.

Construction workers cut power cables of both elevated and subway lines and blocked the tracks.

Twenty-five thousand workers at the Leuna Chemical plant (formerly I.G. Farben) at Halle set the plant afire. The workers at the Buna synthetic rubber plant burned it down. These plants were the chief suppliers of gas and tires to the occupation army.

The hard coal area at Zwickau was damaged beyond estimate. The demonstrators set fire to huge piles of coal between Halle and Magdeburg. They destroyed uranium mining facilities.

They opened prisons and concentration camps to set free the political prisoners. At Gera, an industrial city about the size of Cincinnati, near the Russian-operated