Chapter Four

The Algebra of the Revolution

A Review of Raya Dunayevskaya, Marxism and Freedom

‘Hegel’s logic is the algebra of the revolution’.  
Herzen’s aphorism is often quoted, but rarely taken seriously. That Herzen had a real insight here is suggested by the fact that key periods in the thought of both Marx and Lenin followed hard upon a close reading of Hegel. The first classic statement of Marxism in The German Ideology was an outcome of Marx’s struggle with the Phenomenology of Mind in 1844. The re-evaluation of Marx by Lenin after 1914 follows on his reading of the Science of Logic:

It is impossible fully to grasp Marx’s Capital, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the whole of Hegel’s Logic. Consequently none of the Marxists for the past half century have understood Marx!!

What gives this crucial role to Hegel’s philosophy? Hegel’s picture of human activity as rational activity, and of rational activity as activity that has freedom as its goal. Certainly for Hegel this

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2 Herzen 1974, p. 237: The philosophy of Hegel is the algebra of revolution: it emancipates a man in an unusual way and leaves not one stone upon another of the Christian World, of the world of tradition that has outlived itself.
picture is ambiguous, hovering between assertions about the real human condition and statements of the ideal, not yet realised, form of human life. Certainly Marx had to transform Hegel. But the ferment of the concepts of freedom, reason and consciousness in Marx’s philosophy is the Marxist debt to Hegel. Hegel without Marx is unrealistic, and in the end obscurantist. Marx without Hegel would have been rigid, mechanical, inhuman. And when later Marxisms display these characteristics it is often a sign of a neglect of the Hegelian stimulus in Marx. ‘The question of Hegel was settled long ago’, said A.A. Zhdanov in 1947: ‘There is no reason whatever to pose it anew.’ When would-be Marxists talk like this, it is usually a sign that the freeing of human nature is no longer the central goal of their socialism.

This is perhaps the most important theme of Raya Dunayevskaya’s *Marxism and Freedom*. Miss Dunayevskaya was at one time Trotsky’s secretary. When Trotsky declared in the last war that Russia was genuinely a workers’ state which ought to be defended, she broke with him, and since then has played her own very individual part in the American labour movement. She only wrote the final draft of her book after earlier drafts had been discussed and criticised by groups of miners, steelworkers, auto-workers and students. A book that is the product of an interest in Hegel on the one hand and participation in a miner’s strike in West Virginia on the other promises to have unusual qualities. And this book is unusual. It has three great merits.

The first is that she has tried to write a history of Marxist theory in which the development of the theory is linked at every point to the corresponding developments both in society and in the political experience of socialists.

The second is that she has utilised some of the source material of Marxism more fully than any previous commentator. I have spoken already of her Hegelian concern. In this connection she has included in appendices translations of a major part of Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and of those portions of Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* which deal with Hegel. But she has also been in a position to make use of the stenographic

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4 Zhdanov 1950, p. 102.
5 For Trotsky’s final substantive statement of his position on Stalinist Russia (dated 18 October 1939), see ‘Again and Once More Again on the Nature of the USSR’, in Trotsky 1971.
7 The appendices to which MacIntyre refers were the first publication of these texts in English. Dunayevskaya excluded them from the second (1964) and subsequent