

Friday, Dec. 7

Dear Rae:

I had already sent off, registered, your MSS, when I received your card. I made some small notes in the margins, and caught all the typos a careful scrutiny allowed, while reading for "content" at the same time.

There were a few things I wanted to ask about, though - such as: in Part II, p. 66 - where you ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ speak of the fact that even revolutionary theoreticians, because removed from actual production, at a quiet period, can "lose" something vital - but at the moment of revolt once again finds himself at one with the workers' practice I think you are making the distinction between the truly revolutionary theoretician and the mere "radical intellectual theoretician." But I think it could be and deserves to be made, more precise. What I mean is that I "stopped" me for a few readings, until I realized that you were speaking of the Marx or Lenin, who found himself at one with the workers' practice, and had to make a break with his past. But it was only because they were on so solid ground, and so truly revolutionary, as theoreticians, that they could do it. Otherwise, the theoretician would not recognize it, and proceed with his own thoughts. Is that not just what distinguishes the rev. theoretician from the radical intellectual, at the moment of revolt?

Also, on p. 73, I did not make a note on the MSS because I wanted to check the quote and couldn't find it promptly - but the word "representatives" was omitted from the MSS after the word "democratic" in the first sentence of the quote from the 18th Brumaire.

In Part III, p. 340, there is only one part in that magnificent chapter that "stopped" me. It is the part where you say that "although unemployment was so great, the comol was creating great towns?? I didn't follow the idea, and have an impression that is not what you meant. I believe that what you were stressing was the idea that the automatic finer was frightening in an entirely new way - not just the old grievances and hazards, not even just unemployment. ~~It was recognized as a "man-killer" in a way that was~~ ~~soon to prove itself the horror" - the ceaselessness of its operation, the drive, ~~and~~ that men with seniority by today are trying to use their seniority to stay off of it and are saying they'd rather be laid off than have to work on it.~~ 7

On p. 352, end of 2nd para., I think the idea could come through more clearly that the sit-down of the French workers you write about was created by the "non-political" Am. workers. Perhaps a very simple change, such as: "The French thought of nothing better than the same sit-downs which the American workers had created some ? period earlier." Or something like ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ that???

And one other "small" suggestion - that is something I can't seem to help thinking about constantly. It is the tremendous lessons of the Hungarian events, which have so "universal" a story to tell. What I mean is that whenever I think of a problem of American workers, I think of Hungary. (On p. 363 I made a note to myself, about the 3rd para., which I can't remember very precisely now without the MSS before me... but my note read, "Hungarian events? Could they be brought in again here - even briefly - and the lessons they revealed for the world working-class? The strike, the pivot of the "point of production"..." Perhaps you will be able to see better what I mean with that part before you.

And one other very "small" thing. In Chapter II, on p. 35 where you mention the "Eleventh Hour" I wondered if that might not deserve a footnote to explain what that "theory" was?

All other notes are right on the MSS margins, I think.

As far as any "big suggestions" I just don't have any. The MSS reads magnificently to me. That first part I thought was wonderful - and plunges you headlong into the real heart of the book, as much as living in 1956 plunges you headlong into the crisis our world must meet, and answer. I cannot write you any long letter on any "suggestions" to change or clarify a thing.

But I would like to write you on the idea of an "introduction" and on what you wrote John in your letter of Nov. 27, about "various reactions. I do not mean that I have any question about ~~XXX~~ your permission for him to "criticize to his heart's content," and your not wanting agreement. My only bafflement is how he makes the distinction to himself about the true-ness of your dialectical approach and ~~XXX~~ your "notion" of the proletariat.

It is like (to me) those who say Hegelian dialectics can fit any argument. I know it is not the same - his approach and that of the "sophists". But I just can't understand how you could interpret Hegel and his dialectic any other way than as the book does. Or how on earth you could say "You are so excellent in handling the dialectic except when you deal with the proletariat." When the proletarian activity is shown so objectively and traced so concretely, and what on earth does he mean about "romanticizing" workers???

It is not that it makes me angry - it just baffles me - completely. I can understand how an intellectual would have some doubts before he read the book, if he did not know any workers - but I just can't understand how the book would fail to give anyone anything but your convictions and understanding, after he read it. I just be very naive about intellectuals after all. But I just don't understand it.

How could the dialectic method show anything else? If the Hegelian dialectic does not reveal the questions and the answers we face today, and the role of the proletariat today - if it cannot be applied to the history of the world today, as Hegel applied it to the whole of history to his day, what kind of dialectical method do you have at all? I just can't see the separation between the method and the application. (Which is what not "seeing" the workers boils down to, to me.)

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As far as in "Introduction" goes - I keep thinking of the short introduction you wrote to be circulated with the original draft. You called it "Introduction and conclusion" - and I not only like that introduction very much, but I like the idea of calling it both "Introduction and Conclusion."

What I wonder whether would be appropriate for an introduction such as you have in mind, also is the method you used in writing the book. I know that although I didn't quite understand what you meant precisely when you said a long time ago, that the Absolute Idea and Automation were to be the two axis for the book (although I never thought you were "crazy" as you once said some who heard your idea did) - I believe I know just what that means by now. I would like the introduction to say something about that, - and about how it is constantly necessary to "reinterpret" - which does not mean "revision" or ~~fixing~~ altering Marxism, but rather developing it to incorporate the new stage. And today most of all, because this is the "Age of Absolutes".

And how the method of the relationship of "theory and practice" today required the even "technical" (I don't mean that in the craft sense, but can't think of another word) method you used - of speaking to workers and listening to workers after they had listened to you and rewriting and all the rest.

I see any introduction as something which should be read after reading the book as well as before - as something which will not truly be understood until after the book is read and studied. I don't know if I am way off your line of thought or not. But that is how I see it when I try to think of what it should "say."

There is one other thing I must tell you - because it made me feel so wonderful. It was the short paragraph on p. 64, where you speak of the "new human dimensions" one attains with such a philosophy as ours, to enable the individual or the group, as a political tendency, to become as tall as the proletariat..... I really felt physically that idea when I saw it in print. It was so very concise, and yet so very precise in stating of what I feel we mean and what we are!

I don't know that these few ideas will be of any help to you at all. Perhaps I shall be able to write more later. But I feel that the book is truly tremendous - and rather than having an effect of (I-don't-know-how-to-say-it) becoming "used to" the ideas or taking it as "I know, I've read it before" - instead, each reading means more each time. I hated to send the MSS off!

All for now, though
As ever,
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P.S. The check just arrived - hooray! Enclosed is our check to you. I'll send another for \$25 to the office.