

HEGEL IN THE MIRRORS OF SOVIET PHILOSOPHY¹

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Abstract. The attitude towards Hegel in Soviet philosophy was contradictory and depended to a considerable extent on the ideological state of affairs. Waves of love and hate for Hegel alternated periodically. At different times, emphasis was placed on the “revolutionary” method, or on dialectics, or on the “reactionary” system, the justification of the old world. On one page, Lenin would admire Hegel’s logical discoveries, on the next, he would scold him in the most vulgar language for his idealism, mysticism and “goddikin.” The present article draws a parallel between the stylistics of Lenin’s philosophical works and the avant-garde artists and poets who gave a “slap in the face” to public taste. In Lenin’s hands, philosophy becomes the servant of politics; later on, the “principle of partisanship” would turn into the credo of Marxist dogma and the criterion of the truth of philosophical doctrines. The Hegelian wing of Soviet Marxism was formed in the 1920s. The party leader of the “Dialecticians,” Abram Deborin, initiated the publication of Hegel’s *Collected Works*, which was published with a number of large and small interruptions over the course of 30 years (and the last, 15th volume never saw the light of day). After the defeat of the Deborinites in 1931, Hegel’s popularity gradually declined. However, some original studies coloured by love for Hegel appeared. Vygotsky used Hegelian concepts of “mediation” and “cunning of reason” to create a cultural-historical psychology; he believed that Hegel “walked lamely to the truth”. Mikhail Lifshitz regarded Hegel as a “great conservative of mankind,” and György Lukács, who came to the Soviet Union, wrote his famous *The Young Hegel* here and defended this book as his doctoral thesis (1942). Lifshitz and Lukács concentrate on Hegel’s “historical dialectic” and on his comprehension of the revolutionary events of his epoch. By the end of the Second World War, Hegel’s philosophy had been declared an “aristocratic reaction to the French Revolution” (Stalin), and hatred of Hegel became reflexive. The party of persecutors of *Hegelianshchina* was led by Moscow State University Professor Zinovy Beletsky. It was only after Stalin’s death that serious research into Hegel’s philosophy could be resumed. Evald Ilyenkov interpreted dialectics as “the method of ascent from the abstract to the concrete” and traced how this – materialistically reinterpreted – method works in Marx’s *Capital*. It was the Neo-Hegelians who brought the category of the concrete, understood as “diversity fused into unity” (Ivan Ilyin), to the fore. In this respect, Lenin was in complete agreement with them. In parallel with the European Marxists, Ilyenkov criticised the interpretation of dialectics as a universal picture of the world, a new metaphysics cultivated by *diamat* and *istmat*.

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He did not, however, share the anti-Hegelian sentiments of the schools of Galvano Della Volpe and Louis Althusser. For Ilyenkov, Hegel is the greatest revolutionary in logic since Aristotle. At the end of the article are the facts showing that interest in “Soviet Hegel” is still alive today.

Keywords: Soviet Marxism, dialectics, idealism, concrete, revolution, Hegelianism, pathos

Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie,
And young affection gapes to be his heir.
William Shakespeare

Russian revolutionary democrats were always ambivalent towards Hegel. His philosophy seemed to them a paradoxical combination of “the great and the insignificant,” “the progressive and the reactionary,” a slavish apology for the present and at the same time “the algebra of the revolution.” During Soviet times, depending on the ideological situation, any of these could have come to the fore. Hegel continued to evoke strong and contradictory feelings.

First was love. Not romantic love, mind, as there are too many critical reservations. Vladimir Lenin first found Hegel, specifically his *Science of Logic* when he was in exile in Siberia in the late 1890s. Yet the traces of his Hegelian studies are barely evident in his 1909 book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Hegel is mentioned by name on a few occasions, but the Bolshevik leader does not venture beyond Engels’ celebrated musings on the “end of classical German philosophy.”

Reading Hegel, the materialist, as Lenin sees it, should be able to pick out the “pearl” of dialectics from the “dungheap of absolute idealism” (Lenin 1968: 256). One person Lenin lauds for his ability in this excavation “universally to discard, absolutely to eliminate, the Absolute Idea” is Ludwig Feuerbach (Lenin 1968: 244). It is not difficult to refute this “theological invention of the idealist Hegel”: ideas do not exist without humans and their brain. Check, and indeed mate, Professor. “The ordinary human idea became divine with Hegel when it was divorced from man and man’s brain” (Lenin 1968: 238–239). Down with the “goddikin,” and this “lifeless idealist abstraction” too!

The grotesquely aggressive style of Lenin’s philosophical works is reminiscent of the paintings of the Russian avant-garde artists, or Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Manifesto of Futurism* (which was also published in 1909). All these revolutionaries deliberately broke canon and shocked the public. Like the Futurists, Lenin sought to destroy the old world and glorified the world of the future in which technological progress would make human labour free and “every cook” would be able to run the state – until it “withered away” altogether.

Lenin turned philosophy into a direct continuation of politics and started throwing lexical bombs at the camp of “bourgeois philosophy,” stating quite openly: “non-partisans in philosophy are just as hopelessly thick-headed as they are in politics” (Lenin 1968: 303). Lenin’s “militant materialism” (or, more correctly, “philosophical terrorism”) would go on to serve as an example to follow throughout the Soviet era.

Lenin returned to Hegel in the year the World War began. Here, he expands his studies beyond Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* to include the “New Hegelian” literature. But his party interests remained at the forefront. Lenin searches for arguments from Hegel in his battle with the Kantians and positivists.

At the same time, Lenin never tires of exposing “mysticism” and fiercely defending materialism. He literally becomes enraged, for example, by Hegel’s criticism of Epicurus: “nonsense! lies! slander!” he writes in the margins. Lenin’s response to Hegel’s claim that “In Epicurus there is no [...] wisdom of a Creator” is “he pities God!! the idealistic scoundrel!!” (Lenin 1969: 267).

What attracts Lenin in Hegel’s *Logic* is the principle of correctness, in which he sees the “spirit and essence of dialectics” (Lenin 1969: 91). In this respect, Lenin sides with neo-Hegelians such as James Hutchison Stirling and Benedetto Croce. In 1918, Ivan Ilyin’s two-volume work *Hegel’s Philosophy as a Teaching on the Concreteness of God and Man* was published in Moscow (Ilyin 1918). Lenin came across the book at the height of the Civil War and, according to many, he was extremely impressed, despite the word “God” in the title.

Lenin delved deep into Hegel’s work during the World War, a fact that clearly benefitted his philosophical thought. He started talking about “intelligent idealism” and discovered that “It is impossible completely to understand Marx’s *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel’s *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!” (Lenin 1969: 162). This last statement should undoubtedly be applied to the author of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Lenin even admits that during his battle with the Machists, he, like all the other Marxists, did not fully understand Marx’s seminal work. There is no point even talking about Lenin not fully understanding Hegel’s philosophy, as he only truly got to grips with the whole of Hegel’s *Logic* in late 1914.

In the final years of his life, Lenin called for the editors of the new journal to *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* (“Under the Banner of Marxism”) to “arrange for the systematic study of Hegelian dialectics from a materialist standpoint” (Lenin 1970: 30).

“[W]e can and should elaborate these dialectics from all aspects, print in the journal excerpts from Hegel’s principal works, interpret them materialistically [...] In my opinion, the editors and contributors of *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* should be a kind of “Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics” (Lenin 1970: 30).

Lenin's philosophical bequeathment was published in the third issue of the journal in March 1922. However, there is not a single (!) article about Hegel to be found in the following 16 issues. Attention is rather paid to the ardent materialists Ludwig Feuerbach, Denis Diderot, and Georgi Plekhanov. Then, Abram Deborin's policy article "Marx and Hegel" was published in three parts starting with the August 1923 issue (Deborin 1923a: 8–9, 5–20; 1923b: 10, 5–17; 1924: 3, 6–23). This is the first in-depth Marxist reading of Hegel's *Logic* in Soviet philosophy. The article is written in an academic style, almost completely free of ideological clichés and swearing. Deborin's reading can hardly be called deep and original, but it is an extremely good introduction to Hegel's *Logic*.

Deborin would soon become editor-in-chief of *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and Director of the Institute of Philosophy. Until 1930, he was the leader of the Dialectics Party, the most influential person in Soviet philosophy, until Stalin put an end to his career. Almost all of Deborin's students and comrades died in the Gulag. He himself survived, but he was no longer able to publish any of his writings, and his books were pulled from circulation.

Deborin did manage to set the wheels in motion for the publication of Hegel's *Collected Works*. At the time, there was only one good Russian translation, namely N. G. Debolsky's translation of the *Science of Logic* (Hegel 1916).

The Russian edition of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* prepared by V. Chizhov in 1861–1868 can hardly be called a translation. Rather, it was an adaptation of Hegel's text that had been heavily abridged, and the translation of the second part, "Science of Nature," remained unfinished.

Hegel would not be translated into Russian again for almost fifty years after this, when *The Phenomenology of Spirit* was published just before the outbreak of the First World War (Hegel 1913). The book was translated by five graduates of the Higher Courses for Women under the guidance of their mentor Ernest Radlov. One of them, E. Amenitskaya, wrote an impressive preface to the work, in which she proved the "vitality of Hegel's philosophy" despite the prejudice of materialists and positivists and the "hopeless point of view" of Sergei Trubetskoy that prevailed at the time.

Deborin made the decision – for "pedagogical and systemic" reasons – to include the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* in the first three volumes of Hegel's *Collected Works*. In the Preface, the editors noted that they hoped to complete the publication of the *Collected Works* within three years. But it ended up taking a full thirty years (1929–1959). Of the seven translators, only one, P. Popov, had the honour of being there from start to finish. He was wholly responsible for translating the 14th and final volume of the *Collected Works*.

Deborin supervised the publication of the first volume (he would soon have bigger things on his mind than Hegel). His introductory article "Hegel and Dialectical Materialism" is full of references to the three founders of Marxism and Feuerbach. The editorial preamble offers a harsh partisan assessments of Hegel's Preface to the second

edition of *The Shorter Logic*: “It is related to logic only very distantly and is essentially purely theological in nature (Hegel 1930: X). Thus, the editors write, “we allowed ourselves the small liberty” of moving the unreliable Preface to the very end of the volume (with the poorly concealed hope that the average Soviet reader would never make it as far as this sedition).

These were different times. Philosophy had become nothing more than a handmaiden of political ideology, a weapon in the struggle for power. Any serious study of Hegel was fraught with danger. Deborin was vigorously attacked by the protégés of the Institute of Red Professors, which he himself led. The children of workers and peasants, whose level of education was modest at best, did not take well to being forced to pore over Hegel’s texts, which they were not capable of understanding anyway.

The reasoning of the young philosophy professors went something like this: if Marx had already *gone beyond* Hegel, flipping him “on his head” and removed the “mystical husk” from his dialectics, then why are we being forced to return to him today? Is Comrade Deborin (who used to be a Menshevik, by the way) thus trying to separate philosophy from the practice of socialist construction and hinder our philosophical understanding of pressing political problems? Stalin was most impressed with this line of thought and praised the young scholars for waging this war against “Hegelianism.”

The word “Hegelianism,” coined by Lenin, had become the kiss of death of political labels and had been attached to the fascist neo-Hegelians Giovanni Gentile, Julius Binder, and Ivan Ilyin on the one hand, and to the party of Abram Deborin on the other.

A year later, after the Deborinites had been destroyed, the collective monograph *Hegel and Dialectical Materialism* (1932) was published on the centenary of Hegel’s death. The authors had clearly set out to spark a new trend in Soviet Hegelian studies. Gone was the universal love for Hegel, although he was perfunctorily given his dues as the forerunner of Marx. After all, in the preface to *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, the author openly declared himself a “pupil of that mighty thinker.”

The main emphasis is on the party struggle for Hegel’s ideological legacy. “Let the ideologists of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, the priests, the fascist *Kathedersozialisten*, the social fascists and the Menshevik idealists² flog the dead horse of Hegelianism, the absolute idea, the *goddikin*, the idea of the bourgeois state, law, and so on; the movement of pure, ‘dialectical,’ ‘concrete’ thoughts – the dialectical materialists, the Marxist–Leninists know that Hegelianism is dead and will not be resurrected” (Raltsevich 1932: 122).³

² This is how Stalin described Deborin and his supporters, who were accused of “bringing dialectical materialism closer to Hegel’s idealistic dialectic” and “underestimating the Leninist stage in the development of philosophy (Deborin even dared to call Lenin a disciple of the Menshevik Plekhanov in philosophy). Hence the label “Menshevik idealists.”

³ The author of this article, Vasily Raltsevich, would be persecuted and eventually executed several years later.

The first Hegel congresses in The Hague (1930) and Berlin (1931) evoke the fierce contempt of the authors of the collection. The Soviet delegation applied to take part in the Berlin congress, but the application was rejected. The leaders of Hegelian Union (Hegelsbund), in turn, despised Marxists). “It would have been absurd to try and find Hegel’s doctrine of pure spirit in the materialistic soullessness of Marxism,” Georg Lasson remarked at the congress.⁴

In his review of the congress, M. Mitin called it a “religious-fascist demonstration” that became a “mirror reflecting the crisis, decay, insanity, senile weakness, and complete impotence of bourgeois science” (Mitin 1932: 75–76).

Obscene language and personal insults became the norm in Soviet philosophy, particularly in works on Hegel. Stalin was declared the new gold standard in world philosophy – “the best student of Lenin, the greatest materialist and dialectician of our era” (Mitin 1932: 96).

M. Arzhanov’s book *Hegelianism in the Service of German Fascism* was released the following year (1933). It was written after Hitler had come to power in Germany. The key idea of the book is that the shift in philosophical thinking from Kant to Hegel that took place around the turn of the century reflected the political and economic evolution of bourgeois society. If neo-Kantianism was the philosophy of “classical capitalism,” then neo-Hegelianism was the philosophy of imperialism and fascist militarism. Hegel’s idea of the “end of history” is a premonition of the coming demise of bourgeois civilization. “Breathing its last breaths, capitalism raises as its ideological banner everything that is reactionary and rotten from its past, and indeed from the past of humankind, including the reactionary views of Hegel” (Arzhanov 1933: 4).

Amid the overall degradation of philosophical research in the Soviet Union, dull signs of a creative understanding of Hegelian ideas were nevertheless starting to appear.

The founder of cultural-historical activity theory in psychology Lev Vygotsky constantly refers to Hegel and uses his logical apparatus. He is irritated by the relentless criticism of the German philosopher for his idealism. “Hegel is an idealist, the sparrows shout this from the rooftops [...] There are problems that cannot be reached by flying, you have to limp to get there [...] Hegel walked lamely towards the truth” (Vygotsky 1982: 336). But Marxist psychology runs around in circles. It has no working methodology for psychological research at all. Marxists were looking for a “ready-made formula for the psyche in other people’s works,” Vygotsky notes, and are passing down “sentences from the heights of Hegel,” in the name of dialectics, instead of searching for specific solutions to scientific problems.

Vygotsky’s “instrumental psychology” of the latter half of the 1920s brings the category of mediation (*Vermittlung*) to the fore. All higher forms of mental activity – something that distinguishes people from animals – are mediated by artificially created tools and signs. According to Hegel, this kind of mediating activity is what constitutes the “cunning of reason” (*List der Vernunft*).

⁴ These words appear in Pashukanis’ article (Pashukanis 1932: 215), although no source is given.

“Hegel was right to give the most general meaning to the concept of meditation, seeing in it the most characteristic property of reason. Reason, he says, is as cunning as it is powerful. The trick is in the mediating activity, which, having allowed objects to act on each other in accordance with their nature and exhaust themselves in this process without intervening directly in it, nevertheless realizes its own goal only” (Vygotsky 1983: 89).

Around the same time as Vygotsky, the young Mikhail Lifshitz would also turn to Hegel in his attempts to understand *the logic of revolution* in modern culture.

Lifshitz wrote his first works on Hegel’s historical dialectic in 1931 (the topic would become popular in the West a few years later thanks to the lectures of the Russian émigré philosopher Alexandre Kojève). Lifshitz’s elegant literary style is quite unlike that of other Soviet philosophers of that time. He writes thoughtfully and with absolute calm about the Hegelian congresses and pays no attention to the debates of “red professors” about the philosopher.

“As far as Deborin and his school were concerned, Hegel was a vapid, abstract philosopher of the armchair variety,” Lifshitz would later recall. The most respected Marxist thinkers of the time “effectively amortized Hegel’s philosophy to the point where all that was left of it was a certain scheme of logical categories [...] Our interest in Hegel was of a completely different nature. What was important for us in the German thinker’s teaching was the actual content, and his deeply tragic attitude to the events of the French Revolution and the post-Revolutionary period” (Lifshitz 2012a: 84).

In his writings, Belinsky transforms Hegel’s “idea” into the concept of “pathos,” thus expressing the objective force of historical circumstances. Lifshitz infuses “pathos” into Marxism. “So, if you do not find this ‘pathos’ – which stands behind every thinking head – you cannot understand the situation where the author is the speaker, nor can you even understand the private moments of his activity” (Lifshitz 1988: 270).

Lifshitz saw the socialist revolution as the clash of two eternal “pathea” – the anarchic passion for the destruction, “universal equalizing promiscuity,” on the one hand, and the force of cultural self-preservation, on the other. “In the minds of millions of people awakened by the fall of a thousand years of slavery, Bakunin’s passion for destruction clashed with the preservative power of Herzen” (Lifshitz 2015: 460).

This kind of emotionally charged view has little in common with the materialistic understanding of history. In fact, it is much closer to the binary mythology that Lifshitz himself criticized. He sees history as a drama of ideas and passions, although he does not offer a serious analysis of the relations of production behind them and does not attempt to derive new forms of social consciousness from the development of people’s economic lives. It is rather the view of the artist, his aesthetics *ex professo*. “History is a great poetess who writes her tragicomedies with iron and blood” (Lifshitz 2012b: 147).

Hegel, according to Lifshitz, is a representative of the protective force, “the great preserver of humanity.” Lifshitz makes every effort to emphasize Hegel’s rejection of abstract revolutionary spirit and “dumb” originality, devoid of universal content. Not a bare denial, but the concrete removal of all the wealth accumulated by the World Spirit – this is the general principle of Hegel’s philosophy.

In the *Science of Logic*, Lifshitz saw the crystallized experience of the Great French Revolution. “The categories of logic are the forms in which the red-hot lava of revolutionary events hardens” (Lifshitz 2012b: 62). “Hegel’s *Great Logic* is a system of categories that the author clearly conceived as a development of the ‘new principle’ established by the French Revolution” (Lifshitz 2012a: 85). Attempting to prove his thesis, Lifshitz resorts to sophisticated exegesis and reading between the lines.

At the same time, Lifshitz condemns the philosophical Thermidorianism of the later Hegel –imaginary reconciliation in the “idea” of opposing social forces and interests

György Lukács arrived in the Soviet Union in 1930, meeting with Lifshitz on his very first day in the country. Years later, Georgy Osipovich (as they called Lukács in Russian) dedicated his 1948 book *The Young Hegel* to Lifshitz. The book was written ten years earlier, in 1938, and in December 1942, Lukács defended it as a doctoral dissertation at the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR.

Like his close friend Lifshitz, Lukács devotes much of his attention to Hegel’s “historical dialectic,” his attitude to the revolutionary events of that era, but he draws on a much broader range of primary sources to do this. Lukács goes beyond political revolution to talk about industrial revolution too.

Meanwhile, clouds were gathering over Hegel again. Six months after Lukács defended his dissertation, Zinovy Beletsky’s *The Role of German Philosophy in Getting Germany Ready for World Domination* was the topic of discussion at a meeting of the directorate of the Institute of Philosophy. Beletsky was the party organizer of the Institute and a professor at Moscow State University – in other words, he was an extremely influential figure. In his work, he argued that Kant, Fichte, and especially Hegel were the forerunners of Nazi ideology. Beletsky refused to see German classical idealism as the philosophical source of Marxism. “Idealism in philosophy,” he wrote, quoting Lenin, “is a defence, sometimes extremely elaborate, sometimes less so, of clericalism” (Lenin 1973: 118). It thus follows that idealistic philosophy should be studied as part of a course on the history of religion, and in no way can it be the source of a scientific, atheistic worldview such as Marxism. Hegel’s mystical and anti-scientific dialectic was the direct opposite of Marx’s materialistic dialectic. It served the political interests of the Prussian Junkers, and now the fascists... And more like this.

All but one of the people at the meeting called Beletsky’s work illiterate and harmful. Lukács, whose Russian was not good, submitted a negative review in writing. “This is simply awful! He keeps shouting and shouting,” an agitated Lukács exclaimed (Department of Philosophy, Moscow State University... 2011: 377).

Beletsky's demarche had seriously alarmed the old guard of the Institute of Philosophy. These people have not forgotten that it was the ghost of Hegel that helped them overthrow Deborin. And now they were the ones who stood to be accused of "Hegelianism." Beletsky would be dismissed from the Institute soon after. The official reason was that he had not published anything and had not submitted his doctoral dissertation on time (Beletsky had been awarded the title of professor without defending his dissertation, as a graduate of the Institute of Red Professors).

Most put out, Beletsky wrote a letter to Stalin, full of references to the works of "Comrade Stalin" himself and denunciations of unreliable colleagues. Stalin was on Beletsky's side. After all, was praising German philosophy a good idea when the country was at war with Germany? And Hegel of all people – a man who had excluded Russian and the Slavic peoples from world history. Stalin was not particularly fond of Hegel's logic, what with its dark tricks and all. He much preferred formal logic. After the war, he ordered formal logic to be included in the school curriculum.

Having invited Beletsky and his opponents to his office, Stalin announced his verdict: "Hegel's philosophy is an aristocratic reaction to the French Revolution and French materialism." At that was the end of the discussion. No one dared to stand up for the ideologist of the aristocracy and counter-revolutionary. Hegel was the reason why the second generation of leading philosophers lost their jobs. At least this time there was no Lubyanka or Kolyma. Although the man who wrote the chapter on Hegel in the third volume of *The History of Philosophy*, Boris Chernyshev, did die of a heart attack not long after he had been attacked for his ideological leanings.

The publication of Hegel's *Collected Works* was shelved even before the war began. The Russian translation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* by Gustav Shpet was buried in a desk for 20 years, while Boris Focht's translation of *The Philosophy of Spirit* sat gathering dust for ten. These two volumes (Vol. 3 and Vol. 4) were considered the most reactionary.

Hegel's rehabilitation started almost immediately after Stalin's death. It was during this time that Evald Ilyenkov came to prominence as the leading figure of the philosophical "thaw" in the Soviet Union. Ilyenkov defended his dissertation and started teaching at Moscow State University the same year Stalin died (1953). He understood philosophy as the science of thinking and thought – as Logic (which he liked to write with a capital L).

He was even given the nickname "Hegelenkov" for his fondness of the philosopher. In a wall newspaper, Ilyenkov's friend Alexander Zinoviev painted quite the picture of how he spends his nights digging Hegel out of the grave in which Stalin and Beletsky had buried him.

At Moscow State University, Ilyenkov and his students would translate the "Young Hegel." They started corresponding with Lukács, who pointed them in the direction of Lifshitz. Ilyenkov was involved in the revising and editing of the translations of *The*

Philosophy of Spirit and *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. He and A. V. Gulyga would then set about planning the final, 15th volume of the *Collected Works* that was supposed to include Hegel's correspondence and his early works, including *Jena Realphilosophie*.

Ilyenkov especially liked the pamphlet "Who Thinks Abstractly?" He translated this small work twice, 16 years apart, complete with comments.

Unlike Lifshitz and Lukács, Ilyenkov is primarily interested in Hegel's method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete (to use Marx's expression). He develops a materialist version of dialectics, comparing Hegel's Logic with the method used in Marx's *Capital*.

This is the subject of Ilyenkov's first monograph, *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Scientific Theoretical Thinking*. Ilyenkov was expelled from Moscow State University while he was working on it, stigmatized as a Hegelian epistemologist. And when the book was ready for printing, the Director of the Institute of Philosophy and Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union Pyotr N. Fedoseev ordered the typesetting to be destroyed. But the manuscript ended up making its way to the West and into the hands of the Italian publishing house Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, along with Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Ilyenkov was almost kicked out of the party as the philosophical equivalent of Pasternak. Huge sections of the book were cut or rewritten – the biggest casualties were the passages that were considered the most "Hegelian" and Ilyenkov's criticism of formal-logical thinking. Almost half of all mentions of Hegel's name were removed in the final version, and the title of the book was also shortened to *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* (1960).

The Italian translation of the book appeared in 1961, with a preface by Lucio Colletti, who welcomed Ilyenkov's appeal to the logic of *Capital* viewed through the prism of the abstract and the concrete, an issue that Italian Marxists of the Galvano Della Volpe school had long been interested in. However, their goal was to cleanse Marxism of the pernicious influence of Hegelian dialectics, which meant that Colletti did not approve of Ilyenkov's affinity for Hegel.

"The section critiquing Hegel," writes Colletti, "lacks clarity and profundity, although here too Ilyenkov turns out to be one of the least 'Hegelian' among modern Soviet dialectical materialists, and one (this is not a paradox) who demonstrates first-hand knowledge of the *Greater Logic*" (Colletti 1961: LVII–LVIII).

Ilyenkov criticized the interpretation of dialectics as a philosophical "theory of everything" – a universal picture of the world based on three laws (or, in Stalin's view, four "features"). This anti-metaphysical line was pursued by the Italian Marxists, and then by Louis Althusser and his school in France.

However, when battling "Hegelianism," it is important not to ignore Hegel's logical discoveries. Hegel was the architect behind the greatest revolution in the history of logic since Aristotle. "While this revolution was the only one that the Germans would dare undertake at the time, it nevertheless bore fruit that was no less valuable 'for the improvement of humanity' than all of Napoleon's victories" (Ilyenkov 1962: 124).

Hegel is brilliant when he explores the world of ideas – the phenomena of spiritual culture, the laws and categories of thinking. But when he turns his attention to the material world, his dialectics immediately turns into metaphysics. “When Hegel takes on natural philosophy or the philosophy of history, he erects schemes and constructions that have no significance whatsoever for the genuine development of philosophy” (Ilyenkov 2016: 210–211).

Even with his harsh criticism of Hegel, Ilyenkov could not escape the accusations of “Hegelianism.” Although, of course, the consequences were not as severe as they were in Stalin’s times.

Ilyenkov presented papers at three separate congresses on Hegel: in Salzburg (1964), Prague (1966), and Berlin (1970). He was not allowed to attend the congresses in Paris and Antwerp.

The Tenth Hegelian Congress took place in Moscow in 1974. Althusser, an anti-Hegelian, brought a two-volume edition of *Lire le Capital* with him (Lire le Capital 1965), a first edition with a dedication to the Hegelian Ilyenkov: “To Ilyenkov, with deep esteem and as a sign of theoretical fraternity.”⁵ Unfortunately, the philosophical brethren never met in person. Ilyenkov wrote a lengthy paper on the relationship between language and thought in Hegel, but he never turned up at the congress. The new director of the Institute of Philosophy had decided to launch a hate campaign against Ilyenkov that year, plunging the philosopher into one of his many bouts of severe depression that would eventually lead to him taking his own life.

There were essentially two conflicting attitudes towards Hegel in the Soviet Union during the last two decades of its existence. On the one hand, he was the most popular and widely read philosopher in the country (not counting the classics of Marxism, of course). In the 1970s, new and improved editions of all of Hegel’s main works (except *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) appeared, as well as two volumes of *Works of Different Years*, including Hegel’s early writings and correspondence. Mikhail Lifshitz published a four-volume edition of Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Professional historical and philosophical research into Hegel’s legacy was finally appearing in the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, anti-Hegelian sentiments were growing in the philosophical community. The formal logicians, who had always been hostile towards Hegel, had been joined by an increasingly influential and party of “subjectivists,” whose number was growing rapidly. The latter criticize Hegel for associating thinking with being, for his “substantialism” (Genrikh Batishchev) and “ontologization of the processes of cognition” (Merab Mamardashvili), for his “monologism” (Mikhail Bakhtin), and for a whole host of other crimes. For liberal-minded philosophers, “Hegelianism” became a metaphor for totalitarian ideology...

⁵ “À Ilyenkov, avec la vive estime et en signe de fraternité théorique.” Althusser sent the books to Ilyenkov through the Congress Organizing Committee. Ilyenkov’s personal library also includes a copy of Althusser’s magnum opus, *For Marx* (Althusser 1965), which the author signed: “To E. V. Ilyenkov, as a sign of respect and fraternal reverence (en fraternel hommage).”

In summary, we can say that the Hegelian trend in Soviet Marxism was quite original and fruitful. Interest in Hegel persists even to this day. New volumes of works from Lifshitz's archive continue to be published, including his collection *On Hegel* (2012). Brill Academic Publishers has released a volume of Ilyenkov's selected works on Hegel in English [Ilyenkov, 2018] translated with a foreword and commentary by Evgeni V. Pavlov (Metropolitan State University of Denver). Ilyenkov's archival manuscripts have also been published, which include, among other works, his lengthy commentary of Hegel's *The Philosophy of Spirit*, where the writer first broaches the topic of personality. It is my hope that the works of the best Soviet philosophers on Hegel will find many more readers both in Russia and abroad.

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