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FOR THE RECORD

The Johnson-Forest Tendency, or
Theory of State-Capitalism, 1941-51;
its Vicissitudes and Ramifications, 1972

BY

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Includes: A Critique of Johnson's Facing Reality (Letters from 1958, sent to a comrade then in France)

and

A Critique of C.L.R. James' Notes on the Dialectic, (Excerpts from a letter to a professor's inquiry)

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INTRODUCTION

For a long period -- ever since the 1955 split between Johnson (C.L.R. James) and Forest (Raya Dunayevskaya) which was immanent in James' studied silence on the 1953 letters on the "Absolute Idea"* -- Johnson has been rewriting the history and development of the theory of state-capitalism in the U.S. On the whole, we have taken no notice of it, as the Record spoke for itself.** This record, however, is unknown to the new generation of revolutionaries. One former SDS grouping (Radical America) that is moving to Marxism has undertaken its journey by hiding James' record. (See Radical America 11/12/71, not to mention the ads for Tendency documents, such as State-Capitalism and World Revolution, which James has republished under his own name.)

To set the record straight, we publish, below: I- "Radical America Starts its Marxist Path by Rewriting History"; II- the 1958 Letters I wrote when C.L.R. James' Facing Reality was first published as having been written by Grace C. Lee, Pierre Chaulieu*** and J.R. Johnson; and III- the letter I recently wrote to a professor who had asked me to comment on James' 1948 "Notes on the Dialectic". Setting the record straight has never been only a question of correction of mistakes. It has always involved a method of thought, the dialectic or self-movement which emerges precisely because it cannot be held in isolation from the totality which gives action its direction. Like the class nature of a phenomenon, the mode of thought determines the inseparability of philosophy and revolution. To attempt to separate these by speaking abstractions, as do the Johnsonite authors when they speak of the end of "a" philosophy (Facing Reality, pp. 65 - 70) as if Marxists were interested in any philosophy but that of dialectics is to doom that method of thought (empiric) even as the factual errors doom its "historicity."

July, 1972 -- R.D.

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* See Letters on the Absolute Idea, May 12 and May 20, 1953 (republished by News & Letters, June 1971)

**The documents, as originally published, are on deposit with the Wayne State University Labor History Archives, under title, "The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection", which carries the documentation through to the split of Johnson and Forest, and the establishment of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S. as News & Letters Committees.

*** I should also report that Pierre Chaulieu denied having either written or signed that document. C.L.R. James is expert both at naming authors who aren't and not naming authors who are. (See how my analysis "The Nature of the Russian Economy" is listed on p. 169, sans authorship.)

I - RADICAL AMERICA STARTS ITS MARXIST PATH BY REWRITING HISTORY

In announcing its conversion to Marxism, Radical America (11/12/71) set its goal as nothing short of "the creation of a view adequate to modern conceptions -- the whole of modern life -- pointing toward a conception of the world which Marxism since Marx's time has almost consistently lacked..." (p.2) To make up for this 100-year lack, we are presented with James' "all-sided theory and practice ... the breadth of James' labor from the American working class to cricket, from Lenin to literature." Fearing that any narrow-minded American may not think cricket a way to revolution here or in England or the whole of what was the British Empire, the editors hurry to assure us that "Here we offer a more specifically political selection reflecting James' status as a major Third World Marxist theorist..." (p.3) The "specifically political selection" consists, mainly, of the publication of an unpublished 1967 document, titled "Peasants and Workers" as proof of just how far in advance of "Western Marxism" is the work of C.L.R. James, "more than the work of any other living figure.." (p.2). Black Jacobins is cited.

Young Radical America may have read only the 1963, revised edition of Black Jacobins, which finds striking similarities between Cuba, 1959 and Haiti, 1970, and judge C.L.R. James to be a "Third World Theorist". But Black Jacobins was originally published in 1938 when CLRJ was a proud Trotskyist -- that is to say, the work was researched and written in a "Western Marxist" context. It took him a quarter of a century to make his discoveries. For the sake of argument, we will grant him the right to predate them to 1938. But how does the fact that he has a right to his discoveries, his development, his re-interpretation of the Haitian Revolution, give him the right also not only to rewrite his interpretation of the 1917 Russian Revolution, but also its history? And, to climax it all, to transform that world-shaking proletarian revolution into the type of peasant mass activity that, at one and the same time, reverts back to the 18th century and much much earlier, then gallops into the future -- so that, in 1917, they acted out his 1967 triple vision?

Such magical feats would hardly interest us if thereby Radical America didn't help James rewrite the history and theory of the state-capitalist tendency of which I was co-founder, and which, over the period 1941-51 was known as the Johnson-Forest Tendency. To set the record straight, we must look at the Big Lie as it unfolds anew in 1971-72.

The prefatory paragraph to "C.L.R.James, I: PEASANTS AND WORKERS" reads: "The following consists of two major excerpts from 'The Gathering Forces', written in 1967 as a draft for a document to appear on the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Never published, this abortive document was to be the third major statement of James' group (following State-Capitalism and World Revolution in 1949, and Facing Reality in 1958)." (p.5)

First of all, as is well known except, evidently, to Radical America, there was no such thing as a "James' group" and not merely because James used the pseudonym of Johnson, but, mainly, pivotally, because, as the

historic record shows, two (two, not one) individuals -- J.R. Johnson and Freddie Forest (who first used pseudonym Freddie James[1])-- enunciated, in two different localities, New York and Washington, D.C., the formulation of a new political tendency, the tendency which enunciated the theory of state-capitalism. As it happened -- and this, in its way, shows that it was not the result of a joint discussion -- the first article, by each of the founders of the state-capitalist tendency bore the same title: "Russia is a State-Capitalist Society." (Workers Party Discussion Bulletin, 1941).

Secondly, since at the first convention of the WP, the state-capitalist tendency only got one and a half votes, and since the WP then assigned[2] Johnson to do some organizational work in Missouri, Forest was to concentrate her research work in the Slavic Division of the Library of Congress on the economic nature of Russia in order not to leave the debates on the class nature of that state to be only political. It soon became clear that economics, as well as politics, did not exhaust the ramifications of "the Russian Question."

(I remember, for example, way back then, making on-sight translations from the Russian material at the Library of Congress both from Marx's Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts and Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks. See attached letter on C.L.R. James' "Notes on the Dialectic".)

Thirdly, even when the Tendency did grow, had a "grouping", it, for good and substantial and principled reasons, having nothing to do with whether James or Johnson was the "real" name of a founder, called itself the Johnson-Forest Tendency. This became fact in 1945 in the WP, persisted after the Tendency broke with the WP and returned to the Socialist Workers Party in 1947, and, indeed, reached its high point as theory in 1950, when the Johnson-Forest Tendency handed in to the SWP the summation of its position under the title of State-Capitalism and World Revolution.

Now then, if Radical America wishes to be known as "James' group", that, of course, is its business. Since, however, we are informed that "RA will now seek the next logical step in its development: the combining of the full implications of a methodological critique with the class critique" (p.2), it should at least inform itself of the fact that "the second major statement of the positions of the James' group" -- Facing Reality --(a) was not the logical step from State-Capitalism and World Revolution; (b) came after the Tendency split and the rewriting of

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1- When I discovered Johnson's real name, I promptly changed mine to Forest, but I couldn't do it before submitting my discussion piece, as I was unaware of the other's document.

2-The new James myth about just how he came to work in Missouri makes it necessary to underline that word, assign. Not only did he not go there because of his position on the "peasantry", not to mention the "Third World", but when he stopped in Washington on way to St. Louis, we interpreted that "Shachtmanite assignment" as a way to keep James from being at the center, able to organize a "grouping", and to keep us two apart, now that we knew we had the same political position.

its origin and development began, as witness its Appendix ; and (c) was the most glaring contradiction within the Facing Reality Grouping which has yet to face reality.

(See my 1958 Letters. Actually, all anyone has to do to gauge the depth of the philosophic divide separating James and Dunayevskaya is to set that most ambivalent pamphlet, Facing Reality, signed jointly with the unacknowledged bureaucratic collectivist, Pierre Chaulieu, alongside Marxism and Freedom ... from 1776 until Today.)

As for the "third major statement" which RA so proudly prints because it is supposed to prove their claim to James's work being "more than the work of any other living figure", the new Marxism, that, too, was produced after still another split, this time with the co-author of "the second major statement", and, precisely, it should be added, because of "Third World" questions in general and the Black dimension in particular which James now raises as pivotal, but which, earlier, had led to the split between C.L.R. James and Grace Lee.

We will not tarry at the question: Why should a journal like Radical America, concerned with the most up-to-date modern conceptions, center its 11/12/71 issue around something written in 1967? And why should a document, written at the height of Mao's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution", when a genuinely revolutionary opposition to Mao from within China (Sheng Wu-lien) has arisen, not concern itself with that magnificent spontaneous concrete revolt from below, but, instead, pontificate about "the bewildering profundities of Chairman Mao." I will, however, say that one hundred and sixty years before the 1967 pronunciamento, that profound analyst of such artificers, Hegel, had the right word for such writings: "darkness of thought matched to the clearness of expression."

Now then, what is the new for 1972 that RA found so well stated in 1967 that it excerpted it for its readers? Here is what the unpublished "Gathering Forces" states in its key section, "Peasants and Workers" : "For us who celebrate the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, this political emergence of the Third World is a culmination of what emerged from theory into reality in 1917." (p.7) To create the spirit adequate to this revelation, we had been told in the Introduction (p.3) : "James expresses the intimacy of the relations of workers and peasants across thousands of miles by showing the direct relevance of Hegel's 'Slave-Master Relationship'..." for which James here (p.27) holds out fantastic claims: "The life and death struggle that Hegel talks of appears in the bitter character of peasant wars from those in Germany in the 16th century to the guerrilla struggles in Latin America and Vietnam, today."

C.L.R. James proceeds to roam all over the world, from Germany in the 16th century, through England, 1640-1648, where not only the yeoman farmers but the role of the leader of the army, Oliver Cromwell, is stressed mightily (p.27), on to France in 1789, Russia 1917, and China 1927 -- at which point, the "bewildering profundities of Chairman Mao" notwithstanding, we are solemnly told: "Mao Tse-tung was theoretically unprepared for the intricacies of the agrarian question." (p.33) What is the upshot of this globe-trotting through

the centuries? The generalization turns to the African continent: "Africa is in many ways key to the understanding of the role of the peasants in a world in transition." (p.35) Lest any one, however, conclude from this the advanced stage of consciousness of the modern peasant, CLRJ instead singles out a most disgusting male-chauvinist remark from a Tanganyikan whom he quotes as having said, "All these reasons combine to compel the rural African to return to the rural areas 'where men are men and women are proud of them.'" (p.39)

Enough lies are now being told about Africa that gained its freedom by its own hands and lives and thoughts without having C.L.R. James add his bit of rewriting and "original" discoveries. Instead of writing of Tanzania as if such male chauvinist quotations characterized it, why not tell the truly new of Tanzania which is not the sending of rural Africans to rural areas for such purposes, but the sending of city leaders to the villages for ujaama? The great African women are hardly limiting their role to being "proud" of others rather than being themselves shapers of history.

Ah, but that might leave no room for creating still another myth, that of James as "a figure of enormous stature in the expression of notions that were to be encompassed in the African anti-colonial struggles." (p.3) There is no end to the RA editors' discoveries as the introduction puts them: "Along with Du Bois, George Padmore, and a handful of others, James was a figure of enormous stature in the expression of notions that were to be encompassed in the African anti-colonial struggles." Not only that, but out of nowhere, we are suddenly assured that Soledad Brother is "a vindication of James' own theoretical method ... More important, the valorous existence of George Jackson is the best evidence of James' conclusion that we have reached perhaps (I love that word, perhaps, there, just there .. rd) a 'decisive and final stage' in the world revolutionary process." (p.4)

As for James' own analysis of George Jackson's book, he writes that "The letters are in my opinion the most remarkable political documents that have appeared inside or outside the United States since the death of Lenin." (p.54)

Be that as it might, the point that needs proving is James' "enormous stature". I dare say it is too much to expect such stratospheric fly-by-night flying as RA practices to pay attention to anything so "non-dialectical" as an empiric fact, but "ordinary" human beings may appreciate some simple facts. One is that the only particle of a grain of truth in that "along with Du Bois, George Padmore..." is that, in the mid-1930's, when James joined the Trotskyist movement in England, we were all fighting against Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. A committee was organized by Padmore and James to that end. By the time, however, that Haile Selassie reached England, the queen, herself, was prepared to meet the emperor.[3] The point is that, in trying to play up the

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3-See Hooker's biography of Padmore, Black Revolutionary: George Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism. On the question of Du Bois, see my "Negro Intellectuals in Dilemma" (New International, 1943, reprinted in News & Letters Feb. 1961. On George Jackson, see "Nixon and Mao Aim to Throttle Social Revolution" N&L report, 1971. Consult also my Nationalism, Communism, Marxist Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions, 1959, 1961.

character of the "Third World" theoretician, not alone is not a word said about Ethiopia or Emperor Haile Selassie, but, more importantly, what is also skipped over is that James was very far removed from the African struggles in the mid-1940's. This was when the Pan-African Congress , with Nkrumah [4] in London, moved away from Du Bois' elitist Pan-Africanism and toward genuine mass reliance. When, by 1953, James informed Padmore he was returning to England, he got the cold reply that his new "American way of life" would hardly fit into the present concerns of Africans and West Indians in England. [5]

The points at issue remain, (1) whether the third "major statement" (in nearly a quarter of a century!) has anything fundamental to do with "the first", State-Capitalism and World Revolution (which I deny); and (2) why is the reader not given any explanation of why "this abortive document" of 1967 was "never published"? Was that when the split occurred with Grace Lee who penned the second document? And, if so, why is this not noted? Or did it signify the beginning of the disintegration of Facing Reality which never has faced reality? Or is this a matter of a new absorption -- into Radical America? One might ask who is absorbing whom? And where, in this, are "Friends of Facing Reality" who continue with still an older facet, the 1948 "Nevada Document", now re-published as "Notes on Dialectics: Hegel and Marxism" ?

Clearly, for those who reduce Thought, Tendency, Dialectics, to the Thought of One (C.L.R. James) dialectic unity, much less history, may mean nothing. But to us, the historic record is the essence, because the birth of a state-capitalist analysis of both Russia and the world at the outbreak of World War II, when Trotskyism tailended Stalinism is an historic event we will not see sullied.

March 15, 1972

-- Raya Dunayevskaya

4- By now, from Montreal to Ann Arbor, wherever James can find some who, knowingly or unknowingly, help in the rewriting of history, a tale is told of just how close CLRJ was with Nkrumah, and who introduced whom into the "intricacies" of every question from underground activities to.... But the simple fact is that I met Nkrumah when he came to my defense during a Harlem discussion on "A World View of the Negro" where the speaker, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois (who was then still NAACP educational director and about to appeal to the to-be-born UN on behalf of "the educated" in Africa) criticised me -- "the lady is obviously a Marxist"-- as if that, in itself, "proved" how wrong was my revolutionary view against the UN. I introduced Nkrumah to CLRJ who introduced him to... etc., etc. What the heck has any of this to do with what actually happened in Ghana, and with Nkrumah's development once he gained power?

5- Let the archivists who are so busy going back to cricket and all that James did before he became a Marxist find that letter. It is true that James and Padmore "made up" by the time the Gold Coast became Ghana and James was Secretary of a nationalist party in Trinidad, but all that is a very different story.

II - LETTERS OF 1958

June 27, 1958

Dear Bessie:

J.R. Johnson's "Facing Reality", 174 little pages of it, is off the press. How naive of me to have thought that the delay was due to the fact that he had sent it back to the press in order to have something to say on the coming of De Gaulle to power! The man who can write "It is agreed that the socialist society exists." need indeed never face reality: the convolutions of his own mind suffices, and so we have the key sentence of his reality that socialism already exists, and all we have to do is "to record the facts of its existence."

Moreover, that new society of his is broad enough so that we get as "the proof" of the new society "the new people": (hold on to your seat!) it includes "Nkrumah...(who) single-handedly outlined a program, based on the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Gandhi." Naturally that makes Gandhi new for he "introduced a new dimension into the technique of mass struggle for national independence and perhaps far more. His political genius, one of the greatest of our times". And of course if Gandhi, why not Nehru and "the Congress Party" or--for that matter -- why not Mao Tse-tung among the new: "If China has gone the way of Stalinist totalitarianism, it is because faced with the implacable hostility of US Imperialism,... it had no choice but to follow the pattern of its Russian ally" but that should not make us forget that "Mao Tse-tung and his fellow revolutionists built a party and an army in strict relation to their objective environment and the need of self-preservation." I do not know whether you are quite prepared for all "the New" but you cannot be surprised that the Russian Revolution is equated to those of China and Ghana, nor -- to the opposite side of the same coin -- that 1917 is equated to the single party state! But J.R. Johnson says both with as much ballast: "The Russian Revolution

shattered the structure of official Europe. The Chinese Revolution shattered the structure of official Asia. The revolution in Ghana has forever destroyed the structure which official society had imposed upon tropical Africa." "Beginning in 1917, the political form of the One-Party State, in direct contradiction to the aspirations of Europe for centuries, turn by turn has embraced such diverse areas as Russia, Italy, Germany and now China."

Perhaps I shouldn't have flung you so immediately into all his key passages and started you just with the signatures, for there are other signatures; indeed, Johnson has let them magnanimously precede his: Grace C. Lee and Pierre Chaulieu. If it surprises you that no explanation about how a Bureaucratic Collectivist and a State Capitalist theoretician can so fully merge, then know the extent of their honesty that somewhere it says that "doctrinal" differences notwithstanding, not that it specifies to whom that concerns. But then they have very few principles when there is no reference anywhere to state capitalism except when it mentions the title of the document "State Capitalism and World Revolution". I should have entitled the review: "A little honesty would have gone a long way; and a few principles even longer." The Appendix to that book is a masterpiece of double talk: 1) it says "the ideas and perspectives in Facing Reality are the result of 17 years of theoretical study", so we are back at 1941 and you would suppose it meant state capitalist theory, but you are wrong to think anything so simple and straightforward. It merely says that "the material, particularly that written before 1947, appeared only in mimeographed form" and that "the most complete file" is with "Socialisme ou Barbarie published since 1948." Then we hear that these intellectuals and workers "have governed all their activities by their conception that the main enemy of society today is the "bureaucracies of modern capitalism." Now, although state capitalism has gotten merged with bureaucratic collectivism

as "bureaucracies of modern capitalism," Johnson skips from 1948 all the way to the January-March 1954 issue of "Socialisme ou Barbarie", i.e., after the Master landed in Europe. Then these "landmarks" finish soon and we get this "Another series of publications is the work of the Johnson-Forest Tendency which developed as a body of ideas inside the American Trotskyist organizations. The supporters of this Tendency have since broken completely with Trotskyism and the Leninist theory of the party and the Tendency no longer exists."

"The body of ideas" is never specified, nor is the author (myself) specified of ""The Nature of the Russian Economy", also written in 1946, on the basis of an exhaustive analysis of all available data on the Russian 5 year Plans." But we hear that the "theoretical summation of the work of the Johnson-Forest Tendency is to be found in "State Capitalism and World Revolution," originally written in 1950 and reprinted in 1956 under the auspices of six Europeans representing three different countries". But it regrets that that document "has not made the complete break with the Leninist conception of the vanguard party."

We find that "Not until 1955 are theory and actual experiences of the working class joined together. This is in the account of the Shop Stewards Movement in Britain from which we have quoted extensively in the text and which is reprinted as an appendix to "State Capitalism and World Revolution"'. Now that joining together of philosophy and life is only natural for people who think that Shop Stewards are: "all-powerful", "the new society". No wonder then that their chapter on philosophy states that "Philosophy as such has come to an end," and while they condescend to say that previously philosophers at least "cleared away much that had become old and rotten and at least formulated the new. But the time for that is past" , that "Philosophy must become proletarian" and since the new society already exists

and all you have to do is "record" (an abysmally poor recording it is) they promise that what they wrote on philosophy is "a methodological guide but no more" (they should have added, and much less), "The organization will not seek to propagate it, nor to convince men of it, but to use it so as the more quickly and clearly to recognize how it is concretely expressed in the lives and struggles of people."

The Appendix continues its tale of how all the journals arose "along the lines set forth in Facing Reality", the first of these was Correspondence -- and then "In 1955 there was a split from Correspondence and another publication, News & Letters, was begun along the general lines of Correspondence." For people who have conveniently forgotten our origins and development as a state capitalist tendency and so eagerly give that up for a merger with Chaulieu, why speak of war and his capitulation to the pacifism and cowardice that overcame him during the Formosa Crisis when he abandoned his co-founder? Isn't it magnanimous of them to state that we publish "along the general lines of Correspondence" (God Forbid!). Why state such old politics as anti-war positions along Marxist lines.

Of course they also mention Indignant Heart as if it is theirs -- and then proceed to mention some bourgeois books to show "the new". The understatement of the year is the final one "This Appendix does not pretend to be in any way complete. It shows an attitude of mind." It most certainly does -- a pathetically dishonest and unprincipled attitude of mind, from its very first statement in the Introduction to that last sentence.

The Introduction starts with: "The whole world today lives in the shadow of the state power....This state power, by whatever name it is called, One-Party State or Welfare State, destroys all pretense of government by the people, of the people. All that remains is government for the people."

Now statism has become the evil -- not state capitalism or the world's division (not as this book suddenly finds -- into totalitarianism and parliamentary democracy, but into the two poles of world capital, fighting for world domination -- and we find that the "Hungarian people have restored the belief of the 19th century in progress." Then we find it was after all more than that and the Hungarian Revolution and its Workers Councils is made the key to all else -- only to find that when it comes to THEIR ONE GREAT AND SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION ("THE KEYSTONE OF THE ARCH IS INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL COMMITTEES. 'INDEPENDENT' SIGNIFYING THAT THESE COMMITTEES ARE INDEPENDENT OF THE ORGANIZATION.")-- they are in fact asking for much greater "independence" than just from the organization for they demand that each country and each independent committee become "chroniclers", "recorders", and all other things that "we and only we" can do in order to depart from making these great Hungarian Workers Councils the center. For example, in America, where the Hungarian Revolution was not quite understood because Emmett Till's murder was predominant -- why they should have the freedom to write what is seen by them as critical. Just like these people play up "the new" in all the underdeveloped countries who combine "Lenin, Marx and Gandhi" (Bess, I'm here reminded of U Nu who combines "Marx, Lenin and Buddha" on the ground that "Marx and Lenin answer all the problems of the earth and body" and "Buddha of the heaven and soul"!) -- so in the great land of ours that also has "the framework of Workers Councils" -- we nevertheless have special issues: 1) on skilled workers that broke away from the UAW, 2) on Motormen's Benevolent Association who broke away from the overwhelming majority of subway workers, etc. etc. etc. -- not to forget now their concern for "bloc clubs" and "homeowners" who fight against foreclosures!

What an utter mess! Even I wouldn't have believed that there could be such a complete collapse of any thinking in the 4 short years we have been apart, principles left behind, and complete impotence in the face of not being able to break through philosophically on the Absolute Idea. Oh, I should not forget that they flamboyantly also entitle one part "The Marxist Organization, 1903-1958" and after rejecting "root and branch" "The Leninist concept of the party", that we no further have use for "proletarian Jesuits" and assuring us over and over again, after fighting a lot of straw men of 1903 and never getting beyond that, that "Every nail in the coffin must be driven firmly home" and that they are Marxists "only to the extent" they then proceed to talk of themselves as "the Marxist organization" -- the genius, the contemporary nature, the "what to do and how to do it" all being summed up in "Independent Editorial Committee" that record and inform -- only to have such careless information in 1958 as "Khrushchev and Shepilow" -- too bad only one is in Siberia -- I'm sure Grace would see socialism there too!

Yours,
Raya

[From a follow-up letter of July 15th, 1958, we reprint the following footnote which deals with J.R. Johnson's statement that "Philosophy as such has come to an end."7

This "as such" reminds me of Marx's attack on the economists who said that since the machines "as such" do not come out to attack labor, that therefore there is no "exploitation" or "domination" by them. Marx's reply was that there are no such things as machines "as such". Truth is always concrete. The machines we are talking about are

the only machines there are and they are used in a specific way by the capitalists to exploit labor and indeed the capitalists themselves become just "agents" of this domination of dead over living labor. I know of no other machines in this society. The Johnsonite pronounciamento that philosophy "as such" has ended reflects the very specific fact that they as Marxist philosophers have come to an end. Philosophy "as such" or otherwise has certainly ended for them when they cannot get beyond a double-tongued abstraction of philosophy as freedom that is to be "used" but kept from the masses while the very concrete unity of theory and practice is reduced by them to "a single document" by a Shop-Steward-engineer-old politico: "Not until 1955 are theory and actual experience of the working class joined together in a single document. This is the account of the Shop Steward movement". This great masterpiece of a document which glorifies the British shop stewards as against the Vanguard Party (and we also have his word that they do not care for any political parties; that is why I suppose they vote by the millions for the Labour Party) is insane enough also to see shop stewards as "alive and vigorous" during the Nazi rule! "But I am as certain, utterly certain that in every German factory, even from 1933 to 1945, Nazis or no Nazis, the history and aims and methods of the shop stewards and committees must have been kept alive and vigorous, the genuine living tradition of the German working class, ready out at the slightest opportunity." Not only philosophy has come to an end; pure simple common sense has left them when this is presented as the missing link in "State Capitalism and World Revolution" which had "not made the complete break with the Leninist concept of the vanguard party" and which therefore needed reprinting in 1956 with this monumental addition of "theory and actual experience of the working class." No wonder the Absolute Idea could not penetrate such thick skulls -- the Nazis had been there first to utterly dismember thought!

* * *

III - LETTER TO A PROFESSOR

I typed James' "Notes on the Dialectic" back in 1948. At that time I thought it was "great", but to think that some who claim to write "not explanations" of the dialectic, but "directly the dialectic itself" would consider that out of the past two critical decades, nothing had emerged that would demand he rewrite it, is surely stagnant thinking, especially when one has ended on something so far from reality as: "The Stalinists are over-running China. They aim at Burma, Korea, the Malay States, Indonesia, Indo-China and India." (p.246)

The structure of these 246 pages is very lopsided, indeed. Thus, no less than 65 pages are devoted to the Prefaces, but the whole Doctrine of Being rates a mere 7 1/2 pages. The Doctrine of Essence (pp. 74-101) would seem to have gotten a more serious treatment, except that a reading of it shows that James began skipping as soon as he reached Ground (which is barely Section One, much less Sections Two and Three). Nevertheless, since we do here have the advantage that the references are to historic periods --not only 1948, USA, but roaming throughout the world from the English revolution of 1640-48 through the Great French Revolution, and down to "today", at which point the author sends us on a "Leninist Interlude" (p.102) which is followed as soon as he ends with Essence (p.145) by continuing into "Leninism and the Notion" (up to p.159) -- we can at least get to know what James thinks.

OK, that is a great number of pages, contains a serious study of Lenin. But that analysis is strictly political. The author obviously did not know Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks. Here is how he refers to them: (pp 102-103) "I remember on my journeys between Missouri and New York, stopping at Washington and R calling out an at-sight translation from Lenin's Russian notes, and my scribbling them down. I still have the notebook. I got plenty, but not nearly enough."

That certainly is true. The only two quotations James refers to are the ones Lenin writes on "Leap" against gradualness, and his excitement about the dialectic as "Movement and self-movement" (wrongly attributed by James to the remarks in the Doctrine of Essence whereas Lenin had made these conclusions long before he battled with the Doctrine of Essence.) This is no simplistic matter about "quotations". The point is that the one "leap" James makes is in The Doctrine of Essence, and so in love is he with Hegel's profound analysis of Contradiction that even in the "1971 edition" he has the third Observation by Hegel retyped as "Appendix". But, as James keeps repeating over and over again, that was <u>not</u> "the new" for our age, for our Tendency; his task was supposed to be to work out the Doctrine of the Notion. But the only (and it is the achievement, the only one James can chalk up) "working out" is the recognition that Lenin's slogan, "to a man", was the new Universal.

But what does he do with the Doctrine of the Notion, on that which he specified as his goal, that is, the relationship between spontaneity and organization? Well, first, he says "We have to get hold of the Notion of the Absolute Idea, before we can see this relation between organization and spontaneity in its concrete truth." (p. 125) Then (pp. 126-143), where he is supposed to develop the matter, we get no further than a heavy reliance on Engels' Dialectics of Nature: "Engels has what is in my modest opinion a very satisfying passage on the judgment." (p.127) He barely reaches further than just the categories themselves: Universal, Particular, Individual. As usual, just as he comes to a difficult passage in Hegel, he departs to the particular, in this case Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Unfortunately, though he achieves something by "applying" the fixed particular to Trotsky's theory of nationalized property= socialism, he seems to be able to do nothing at all with his theory of permanent revolution. Indeed, he now claims that the peasantry is the revolutionary force which he discovered. Yet, as we can see from these Notes, back in 1948, he leaves out entirely that critical question, the role of the peasantry on which Trotsky was most assuredly always wrong. But what he claims in 1971 was the furthest from his mind in 1948.

As for Hegel himself on the Doctrine of Notion, he hardly goes beyond that first chapter (p.256 to be exact). He had taken so many interludes on politics, without answering his question "What We Shall Do", at which point he does define Trotsky as "Synthetic Cognition" (pp.168-174). At that point it would appear, we will deal with Absolute Idea, if not with all that comes between p.256 and p.466. But here we have an abundance of quotations with hardly anything "direct" from James, unless by "directly" James meant quoting Hegel directly. Well and good! But the misplaced paean of praise to Engels hardly shows James knows much about the Absolute Idea, for it is buttressed by: "Engels has summed up once and for all, despite all the modern philosophers write: the fundamental distinction in philosophy is the primacy of materialism: being or idealism: knowing." (p.174)

Is that all? And if that is all on the dialectic, then what about James' own goal about spontaneity and organization? "The Party is the knowing of the proletariat as being. Without the party the proletariat knows nothing." (p.186) That sounds absolutely unbelievable in view of the fact that the whole section is, rightly, devoted to the expose of the degeneracy of the party and the need for spontaneity, always greatly praised. How, then, can such hyperboles (so characteristic of James) commit so fantastic a contradiction as to claim that "Without the party the proletariat knows nothing"? I'm afraid you will have to ask him. Just such nonsensical formulations pepper the "book", and, if you should call this to his attention, he'll find the exact opposite on some other page to quote, not the least of which is the sudden and endless diversion to the English revolution of 1640-48, then to France 1789-93 where, believe it or not, he says the embryo of state-capitalism was born!

I must now get back to why I referred to your letter as a strange one, why James would hardly appreciate my "advice", as you put it, and why, in 1948, I did consider the Notes "great". It was, as James does admit on p.145

"en famille"; it served as a stimulus to "ourselves" getting down to Hegel. I, for example, promptly got down to translating Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks in written form. I am that half of Johnson-Forest that founded the state-capitalist Tendency in the U.S. that never once separated the economic analysis of the new stage of world capitalism from its opposite, the stage of workers' revolt, and thus presented it as a dialectic unity of the concept of world revolution. Grace C. Lee (Ria Stone) was the third in the trio of leadership. She did not occupy a formal post of leader in the SWP, but her name did appear on some Tendency documents, and, in any case, she was the only one who had a formal philosophic degree and carried on a personal correspondence with Johnson, and criticized his Notes on the Dialectic as "academician."

The third step in that digging into Hegel followed in 1948-50 between James, Lee and myself, this time on a much more precise level, section by section in Hegel's Science of Logic and its relevance for our age. It stopped in 1950 when, on the one hand, it all helped in formulating State Capitalism and World Revolution*, and, on the other hand, the General Strike of Miners was on. I proceeded to West Virginia to participate in it. (My reports on that strike and role of women were published in The Militant, and then, as interviews with miners battling Automation before ever that word was invented, they became pivotal to the final chapter of Marxism and Freedom, "Automation and the New Humanism.")

Finally, in 1953, when Stalin died, I was elated enough to break down the Absolute Idea as the movement from practice to theory and a new society. That was six weeks before the historic June 17 East German Revolution. These letters of May 12 and May 20 (included in the Labor Archives of WSU, where the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection is deposited, as written, not as rewritten by James some two decades after the events) so excited Grace that, with her usual hyperboles, she wrote that what Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks achieved in 1914, the May 12 and 20 letters on the Absolute Idea would do for the Movement in 1953. That was the beginning of the end of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, although the actual break-up occurred after the government decided to make the listing...

Yours,
RAYA

May 1972

*(ADDENDUM written July, 1972 -- rd)

James had twice reproduced this document, once in England in 1956, to which was attached a group of names that had absolutely nothing to do with its writing, much less its state-capitalist theory; and the second time, in the 1960's under his own name, which, for the CLR James of 1972 remains the fundamental document. Now, supposing, for the sake of argument, we had said nothing about the fact that it was not a personal, but a Tendency document, and had not made a point about the fact that Facing Reality did not logically flow from it, but, in truth, was produced only after Johnson and Forest went their separate ways; supposing, furthermore, that we also would not have called attention to the fact that before "the third" 1967 document on the peasantry could be published, what had remained of the "Johnsonites" had undergone still another split, this time with Grace Lee; and supposing, finally, we allowed James to forget the not-so-accidental break with his co-founder -- how could all that possibly explain (1) the reproduction of the Tendency's 1950 document,

State Capitalism and World Revolution "as is" as if the subsequent two critical decades had produced nothing new in the theory of state-capitalism; and (2) how could it possibly absolve James of the conspiracy of silence, not only around Marxism and Freedom, but about the fact that the majority of the Tendency who had worked out that document he is so proud to keep reproducing had broken with him, to establsih the Marxist-Humanist paper edited by a Black production worker, the Black auto worker whose autobiography (Indignant Heart) signalled the beginning of that new dimension that made it possible, finally, to be totally independent of Trotskyism? In a word, State Capitalism and World Revolution is old hat not only in the sense that it was written in 1950, but in the more fundamental sense that it was argued within a Trotskyist framework, since the Tendency was then still part of the SWP.

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