May 15, 1972

Dear John:

Finally I'm back home where I found two letters from you, one a rather strange one--it'll become clear later why "strange". Since I will not make up my mind on ppb.vs. hard cover till those who are reading it now will give their answer in July, I will not answer the one concerning Philosophy and Revolution.* but limit myself to the one regarding James's "Notes on the Dialectic" which I typed back in 1948. At that time I thought it "great", but to think that some one who claims to write, not [illegible] the dialectic but "directly the dialectic itself", would consider that these critical two decades nothing has emerged that would demand a re-writing is, surely, stagnant thinking, especially one ends on something so far from reality as "The Stalinists are overrunning China. They aim at Burma, Korea, the Malay States, Indonesia, Indo-China and then India."(p.246)

For one thing, the structure of these 246 pp. is very lopsided indeed. Thus, no less than 65 pages are devoted to the Prefaces (Contents page lists it as that of 1st ed. of Logic, but in fact it is both editions as well as Preface to the Phenomenology, and, of course, lots of illustrations, now referred to as "direct dialectic.") On the other hand, the whole of the Doctrine of Being rates a mere 7½ pp. The Doctrine of Essence (pp.74-101) would seem to get, [illegible] fairer treatment, except that a reading of it shows that the author has begun skipping as soon as he reached Ground so that, in fact, he has barely covered Section One, much less two and three. But we do have one great advantage and that is that references to the actual historic periods (not only 1948 but roaming throughout the world from the English Revolution (1640-48)through the French Revolution and down to USA "today") ~~would definitely related to~~ Lenin for so substantial a part of the whole book that we do get a grasp of James' thought, "dialectic" and all. So let's stay with the author from where he begins the Leninist Interlude on p.102 and doesn't in fact end even when he ends Essence (p.145) as he no sooner gets into Notion than he returns to "Leninism and the Notion" (pp.144-159).

O.k., that's a great number of pages, a serious study of Lenin--except that he obviously had not then read Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, ~~but~~ the analysis is strictly political. He does speak of them:"I remember on my journeys between Missouri and N.Y. 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."(pp102-3)

* You may, of course, add what you wish to your Preface, although I should imagine it would be best to wait till definite date for publication is set. May I say that one thing rather shocked me in your essay and that was the reference to Merleau-Ponty's"Humanism and Terror" which I consider pure apologia for Stalinism both in its timing--when both Moscow Trials and forced labor camps were hotly debated--and in "object":the attack on Darkness at Noon cannardly be considered "Leninism"?

**At end of letter there will be the background not only to the limitation of what was "great" in 1948, but the more specific and later relationship of"Johnson-Forest".

***References to "R" and "people listed as Grace, Rae, William,etc."(p.1)will likewise be explained at end. I don't want "history" to interfere with comments on the structure and logic of those "Notes on Dialectics: Hegel and Marxism." But I should call attention to that strange "Selected Political Glossary (quoted directly from the text",pp.257-260, which goes on to spell out AFL, CIO, explains that "Goethe--a famous literary contemporary of Hegel", not to mention showing such ignorance of Spanish Revcoution as to list Nuniz as a "Mexican Trotskyist leader"--for whom exactly is all this intended? a public that would also be enlightened by such definitions as "Johnson-Forest--The name of the grouping within the Trotskyists with which these Notes on Dialectics are associated. Johnson was the pseudonym for CLR James; Forest was Rae, co-leader of the group. Another term for the group was Johnsonites."?

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The only two quotations James does quote from Lenin are the "Leap" against gradualness and the "Movement and self-movement" (wrongly attributed by him to the Doctrine of Essence whereas Lenin much earlier and profoundly grasped that. This is no question of "quotations". More importantly is that the one leap he James, made is on Essence, and so in love with Hegel's analysis was he that he had, to this day, retyped the whole of Observation 3 on the question, and that he carries throughout. But that, as he himself writes over and over again, was not the "new"; the new, i.e.. that which was his task, or the task of the tendency, of the age was the Doctrine of Notion, and the question of "Universals", he brings in, and the finest on Lenin is James' recognition of Lenin's "to a man" as the new Universal.

Now then what does he do with the Doctrine of Notion, especially on his specified goal, of the relationship between spontaneity and organization? "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) Well, pages 126-163 in all we get on "at first", where, it turns out he still relies heavily on Engels' Dialectics of Nature:"Engels has what is in my modest opinion a very satisfying passage on the Judgment."(p.127) He hardly gets out of the chapter on the categories, Universal, Particular and Individual. He refers to "A note from G- here clarifies a difficulty which is not only of great philosophical but also of practical importance. The Notion is concrete. It is thought but it is concrete."(p.136 Well, and good. But he is off on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution not so concretely for, with the fixed particular of Trotsky's theory on nationalized property, which James rights well enough, he instead jumps into the question of the theory of permanent revolution which he does most superficially, leaving out entirely the critical question of the role of the peasantry which Trotsky was always wrong on, and whatever it is James in this year of 1972 jumps to as the most revolutionary force, is not even mentioned in 1948, or noted on in any way in 1966 "edition" or "1971 "edition". As for Hegel, having stopped on p.256--still in the first chapter on Notion, he is off to Leninism and the Notion which, once again, repeats the "Leap", then into politics, then into "What We Shall do, and on to :Trotskyism: Synthetic Cognition"(pp.168-174) when, finally, we do get to the Absolute Idea--only to find the dearth of quotations from Lenin to be nothing but quotations from Hegel with hardly a sign of his volubility here, unless you wish to consider the misplaced pasans of praise to Engels: "Engels has summed up once and for all, despite all the modern philosophers write: the fundamental dustinction in philosophy is the primacy of materialism: being or idealism or idealism: knowing."(p.174)

Is that all? And if that is all on the dialectic, 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, greatly praised. How can the hyperboles, so characteristic of James, possibly commit so fantastic a contradiction that the claim that "Without the party the proletariat knows nothing." I'm afraid you'll have to ask. Just such nonsensical formulations pepper the "book" and if you should call them to his attention, he'll find the exact opposite on some other page to quote, not the least of which is the sudden endless diversion to 1640-1648 for England and 1789-1793 for France where, believe it or not, the embryo of state-capitalism was born!

I know of no single publisher who would be interested in publishing this. But that is not the point. I know not what genuine contribution to the dialectic this can make in 1972, and for you to understand why I'm hardly the one to write James(give him "advice", as you put it), I must finally get back to what I began with regarding "the strange letter," and the "greatness" of those notes--in 1948. It was, as he J puts it on p.145 "en famille" , and was a stimulus to get down to Hegel"ourselves". I, for example, promptly got down to translating the whole of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks , which was my "gift" to James. O,yes, I am that

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hyphenated half of Johnson-Forest, not group but Tendency, that founded the state-capitalist analysis, first of Russia, and then of the world stage of capitalism, all tied closely to the analysis of its opposite, stage of workers' revolt.

Although not a founder, a leader --the third of the trio that formulated the analysis, not in 1941 when James did the political analysis and I the economic, but by the mid-1940's when Hegelian philosophy became more than a popular knowledgable radical phrase, but a matter of digging into Hegel directly--[redacted] who did the philosophic work generally was Grace Chin Lee. Since she was not an elected leader to the Trotskyists her name does not appear in the name of the Tendency, but no one doubted who "Grace" was nor was her name simply absent, for, as Ria Stone, she did sign many of the documents by the end of the 1940's, and, in fact, is the one that wrote the section on "Philosophy of State-Capitalism" in our major final document handed to Trotskyism in 1950 and called STATE CAPITALISM AND WORLD REVOLUTION, which I has been busy "republishing" under his own name alone, being fond especially of the philosophic section written by Ria Stone and the part on mode of labor in Russia and the US by myself. So be it! (All the documents as written have been deposited by me with WSU Labor History.*)

What does it have to do with "republishing" Dialectic Notes? Well, first Ria Stone criticized it from a strictly philosophic-academic angle. (She was the only trained philosopher and her phd. was in Hegelian philosophy.)I did not see that particular criticism as it was in form of personal letters between her and him. But a few weeks thereafter, when I completed the translation of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, a new correspondence started between the three of us--on a very much more concrete and, strictly, (paragraph by paragraph type of discussion)philosophic. It stopped in 1950 when, on the one hand, it all helped in formulating that final document, and, on the other hand, the great General Strike of Miners was on, and I proceeded to West Virginia to participate in it. (The Morgantown papers was tried playing up my "role", but this crucial strike erupted long before I got there, and my "role" was no more than working with one group of miners who did consider the Humanism of Marxism real and who, much later, did reappear in Marxism and Freedom speaking for themselves against Automation.)

In 1953, when Stalin died, I was elated enough to begin breaking down the Absolute Idea as that movement from practice to theory and a new society. Six weeks before the June 17th East German Revolt (May 20th, to be exact) Grace was so excited about these letters as to write that what Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks did in 1914, the May 12 and May 20th Letters on the Absolute Idea would do in 1953. That was the beginning of the end of the J-F T, although the actual breakup occurred only after James had returned to England and the government dédided to make that listing that so scared Johnson;though he was no longer under this government's "harrassment", he did break up the Tendency, then broke also with Grace, and his brand new reappearance does list "William Gorman" as still around for "Technical Help of". Why bother with "technicalities" when the Glossary lists Zinoviev as "inconstant associate of Lenin."

Yours,

*I thought I did turn over to you a listing of the Archives I there deposited (and available to libraries inasmuch on microfilm) under title of Marxist-Humanism: 1941-1969 which is divided in two Parts, Part One dealing with State Capitalism,1941-1955 when split officially occurred, and Part Two when the continuance of that original tendency developed into Marxist-Humanism.

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June 16,1972

Dear Friends:

One paperback publisher is asking me to come in for an interview at the end of the month; perhaps it will result in an actual contract. Never was the need for philosophy and revolution (sans capital lettering because that is what life itself demands) more urgent. It made me think that it is also necessary to draw a balance sheet of the past association with James, and I am preparing sometime during the preconvention discussion a piece to be called FOR THE RECORD (Radical America Starts its Marxist Path by Rewriting History). At the same time one strange thing happened last month when I received a letter from a professor which asked my comments on "Notes on the Dialectic" and asked me also to send my "advice" to its author, C.L.R.James.* (Which shows you in just what ivory towers these philosophers live in.) Since that particular "book" is truly his(as against those that were part of the Tendency and which he suddenly is republishing as if he is their sole author) I had not included a critique of it in "For the Record." Whether or not I will do so, I thought you would be interested in my letter to the professor, so here is most of it:

I typed James's "Notes on the Dialectic" back in 1948. At that time I thought it was "great", but to think that some who claims 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 overrunning 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 7½ 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) continues into "Leninism and the Notion"(up to p.159), we can at least get to know what James thinks.

O.k.,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.102-3) "I remember on my journeys between Missouri and N.Y. 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 get plenty, but not nearly enough."

That certainly is true. The only two quotations James refers to are the one 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 those conclusions long before he battled with the Doctrine of Essence.) This

*James had written to this professor: "I take the liberty of sending you a work of my own... a study of the dialectic of Hegel, not explanations of the dialectic but the dialectic itself...I regret to say that it is the only direct study of the dialectic that I know...I am concerned with trying to find out what qualified people think of my book and the possibility of normal publication." He sent him what he called the"2nd edition";it was mimeographed by "Friends of Facing Reality",1971. Obviously the professor thought I could take the matter off his hands.

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 [illegible] by Hegel retyped as "Appendix". But as James keeps repeating over and over again that was not "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.

Observation

But what does he do with theDoctrine of the Notion or 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 Engles' 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 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, if you happen to know that he now claims that the peasantry is the revolutionary force which he, "third world theorist", discovers, back in 1948, he leaves out entirely that critical question, the role of the peasantry on which Trotsky was most assuredly always wrong on, but what he claims in 1971 was the furthest thing from his mind in 1948. As for Hegel himself on theDoctrine 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 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,1789-193, where, believe it or not, he says the embryo of state-capitalism was born!

why

I must now get back to what 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 them "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, which I presented to James as my "gift". I am that half of Johnson-Forest, not group, but Tendency that founded the state-capitalist theory, tied closely to an analysis of its opposite, stage of workers' revolt....Grace Chin Lee

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(Ria Stone) was the third in the trio of leadership. (joined after we worked out state/captalism) Because she did not occupy a formal post of leader in the SWP, her name did not appear in the name of the Tendency, but it did appear on many documents, and, in any case, she was the only who had a formal philosophic education, Hegelian, and she carried on a personal correspondence with her in which she evidently criticized, from a strictly "academic" view, his Notes of Dialectic. 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 hands it all helped in formulating that final document we wrote in SWP, 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. (The Morgantown papers tried playing up "Trotskyist role" there, but, in truth, that magnificent strike not only erupted spontaneously and persisted for 9 long months and first nearly a decade later did I reproduce what the miners said against Automation before ever the word was invented in that last chapter on Automation and the New Humanism in Marxism and Freedom.)

In 1953, when Stalin died, I was elated enough to break down the [redacted] Absolute Idea as the movement from practice to theory and a new society. That was six weeks before the Historic June 17th East German Revolution. These letters of May 12 and May 20th (included in the Labor Archives of WSU where the RD Collection is deposited, as written, not as rewritten by James some two decades after the events) so excited Grace that, with her usual hyperboles, wrote that what Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks achieved in 1914, the May 12 and May 20th letters on theAbsolute 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 that so scared Johnson as to to make it his business to break up the Tendency. In any case, he had returned to England where he was safe from government's harrassment; then he broke also with Grace, and his present reappearance under "Friends of Facing Reality" and whatever bothers little about these "technicalities"; but why bother about a precise documentation when the "Glossary" to the Notes on Dialectic he sent you now lists Zinoviev as "inconstant associate of Lenin"?

Now to more important matters. N&L this issue will contain a historic, exciting document, to which we'll devote a whole page and have to leave much material unpublished. It is the actual discussion of the Polish workers with Gierek when they were on general strike last year. POLISH WORKERS SPEAK will give yet another dimension to spontaneity and revolution and philosophy in East Europe and should, also, be of great relevance to the new type of intervention in our present battle of ideas andactivities.

O,yes, it dawns on me that since we have many new members we should also inform you that, though non-members have same privileges other than voting at our convention, they come by invitation only. That is to say, each local recommends those they consider are moving in our direction, or wish to see the organization as a whole, but excludes, naturally, any who are associated with anti-Marxist-Humanist tendencies. We have to work out our Perspectives for the year, and we must do so [redacted] as a collective body in session, seriously concerned with our growth in the context of philosophy and revolution here and now.

Yours, Raya

from

**Since James is so fond of quoting/that document the final section on "Philosophy of State-Capitalism" which Grace wrote, and the"Mode of Labor in Russia" which I wrote, it is laughable indeed to see it in "republished" under his name alone. Ah, well, so be it for the time. Rewriting of history does not stand up for long ever.

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