

Oct. 20, 1966

Dear Eugene:

Your letter of the 17th on my essay on state-capitalism is both "right" and "wrong." The quotation marks around the words, right and wrong, is to denote that they are not either in content, but some of the questions asked have that yes-no quality. For example, you ask where the state capitalist theory comes from, and, because, you and other "new" people have come to it from Marxist-Humanism (which you correctly see as more important), you think that it is this methodology I must first explain. Now, actually Marxist-Humanism as a methodology which every single one will be able to "use" will first come to be after Philosophy and Revolution is completed, that is to say, when the Absolute Idea is read "materialistically" and creatively developed in the manner in which Marx did to negativity.

This doesn't mean we do nothing until that new book is completed. Quite the contrary, and to prove that, I will give you the history of state-capitalist theory in the crucial epoch 1940-56, and you will see how that led to Marxist Humanism, not vice versa. You will also see what is meant by objective compulsion.

Now, then, in 1939 when, first the Hitler-Stalin Pact and then WW II itself brought no change about in Trotsky's position of "defend the Soviet Union, a workers' state, though degenerate", the contradiction between theory and reality had shattered apart Trotskyism and all that was left of Leninism that hadn't been transformed into its opposite, Stalinism. I remember clearly that I felt absolutely naked, theoretically speaking, and didn't know how to dare criticize "The Man of October" and yet couldn't help but do so, especially since I had so little an opinion of intellectuals, leaders, politicians that I didn't trust any of these categories to undertake it; only the activists who must continue their activity somehow will do it. In my case, I read or reread for the millionth time Lenin's State and Revolution, and then added 2 pages and said, more or less: if this is revolution, in theory and practice, and as Leninists we think so, then what is in Stalin's Russia is not; on the contrary, it is what Lenin described as Prussian state-capitalism. At the same time, CLW, who had more theoretical background, said: here is Capital; this is what it says capitalism is and I claim this is what is in Russia plus, politically, it is "fascist." Each, independently did chose the same title for their contribution, "Russia Is A State Capitalist Society."

While I was studying the "material base" of Russia through the Five Year Plans—I believe it was the end of 1941 when I got together with CLRJ and also read a new book, Reason and Revolution by Herbert Marcuse. The first part on Hegel meant nothing to me then, but the second part which dealt with Marx's Early Essays opened a new world to me. Since I was very, very self-conscious about my not knowing philosophy, I didn't tell a soul I was reading these in Russian, and immediately applied them to Russia. (Indeed, though "Labor and Society" was part of the Russian thesis I had worked out either in 1943, or even earlier since the economic part was completed in 1942, it was only in 1947 during the so-called Interim period between WP and SWP when I was in Europe that I received a letter from CLRJ which said they found the piece, thought it "perfect" and were only changing the translation to fit the one Grace was doing directly from the German text for a special bulletin, and were going to publish it in one of these bulletins.)

All this re philosophy I would call "pure" instinct on my part, that is to say, I knew my class struggle, so I always began with labor; I knew "economics" (CAPITAL) so I stuck to the labor theory of value, and, then, concretely, concretely, concretely, on step at a time, and a very slow step at that, I moved into philosophy, shocked that all this had never been brought to my attention though all my life I had been a Marxist revolutionary, and

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it first then dawned on me that I had never heard Lf say a single word either of Marx's Early Essays or of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks; in a word, it had meant nothing to him, much less to the little epigoni.

It was only in 1947 that philosophy became important and it was 1950 before I felt enough confidence in myself to undertake the translation of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks for "the public". (Neither SWP nor ~~the~~ Russian Institute of Columbia University to whom I offered them thought them important enough to undertake publication.)

1947 was the year I was in Europe and tried to get a hold of all Trotskyist dissidents; Chaulieu seemed to be the best find and I thought he knew philosophy; but he didn't know Marxian economics and, in any case, refused out of pride or what not to change his position on "bureaucratic collectivism", though he claimed to be the exact opposite in his views to those expounded by Shachtman. It was a fact, of course, that there were no communications or relations of any sort during the war. But this was post-war and daring was called for, of which Chaulieu had all. Then I came to England and Tony Cliff; he was such a "pure" economist that he didn't even wish to use the economic tables I had already worked out some years back on the Russian economy; instead, he went to bourgeois sources. Besides which the preponderant element in his mind was the "backwardness of the Russian economy, of the Russian proletariat."

Yet it would be incorrect to say that they (Cliff, Tsushima, and Chaulieu) would oppose, or not recognize at this late date, the importance of de-centralisation of power, state power. No, I believe they see that; and as politicians they see "workers' control of production" as essential and would therefore "favor it" and hence the Workers' Councils in Hungary. So did the SWP, (though not the Fourth International!) The point by 1956, however, became THE WHOLE MAN, THE WHOLE MAN, THE WHOLE MAN. To refuse to recognize the Humanism of Marxian not only as the quintessential but as concrete meant to cut your throat, theoretically speaking, which is what they have done.

(Which reminds me, do not forget the deadline next week for your column to be on the Hungarian Revolution, 10 years after; and also bring in its effects on those intellectuals who hardly mention it in Eastern Europe, but nevertheless were freed by it, as witness Socialist Humanism.)

When workers' resistance is not only to norms but to ideology in the true Marxian sense of false consciousness, then we have what we have had ever since the East German Revolt. The exciting part there, insofar as the moving together of theory and practice is concerned, is the period between March 23 when Stalin died, May 12 and 20th when I wrote the ideas on Absolute Idea, starting the very next paragraph after Marx broke off his critique of the Hegelian Dialectic in Philosophy of Mind without ever knowing that this was where Marx had stopped in 1844, and the actual revolt, June 17th. Those are the crucial dates historically.

Factionally, I have not to this day a clear view of what the hell happened to CERI those May days when I wrote the letters, when Grace away from his direct domination in IA had said those letters were the equivalent for us what Lenin's Notes were in 1915, and when he sent word I should stick to "organization" as he returned to England to expand "Mariners, Renegades and Castaways" into a study also of Dickens and Shakespeare (so help me).

So here we are in 1966 and it is the first time I have written up the state-capitalist theory as I have because, for the first time, it was not only that, philosophically, there has been great development, but to recognize that, when independently one comes to theory of state-capitalism, as Tsushima did, it simply answers no questions at all unless it is one of a piece with philosophy. And you the youth have the advantage of starting where we "end."

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