

1/11/47

Dear Natalia:

Last week I finally got a copy of your letter to Sara which contains your criticism of my article on the Russian economy. I was happy indeed to receive it. Do you realize that the Johnsonites have been writing on Russia for over five years, and that this is the first time we have been answered? I hope that it will be possible for you to expand your criticism and to make it public. I wish to assure you that it was of great assistance to me, and hence I wish to answer it in as serious a manner as it was given.

The major burden of your criticism is at the same time an affirmation of Trotsky's analysis of Russia, and resolves itself, I think, into three major points: (1) all of Trotsky's works have been built on the categories: economics, classes, state, party; (2) his analysis of Stalinist Russia, as in the case of Stakhanovism, showed clearly his awareness of the fact that in it were concentrated "the methods of capitalist exploitation"; and (3) he traced most profoundly, and long in advance of his present-day critics, "the striking growth of inequality and bureaucratic wilfulness in defense of its own interests." Therefore you conclude that the lack of understanding does not lie with Trotsky ("object under criticism") but with his critics.

I wish, first of all, to separate myself from the critics such as those expounding the official Workers Party line who, in breaking with Trotsky's analysis of Russia, broke, I think, with a good deal of Trotskyism. The severity of my criticism of Trotsky's analysis was, on the other hand, induced precisely by the fact that I wish only to change the Russian line but to retain the revolutionary heritage he left us--his perspectives of world revolution, of revolutionary strategy, tactics and politics--for to me Trotskyism is 20th century Marxism-Leninism. In an official document on the international question that the Johnsonites presented to the last convention of our party, we stated that the Johnsonites are revising Trotsky's Russian position in terms of the Leninist-Trotskyist analysis of our epoch, whereas the official Party position, unfortunately, is trying to revise the Leninist-Trotskyist analysis of our entire epoch. However, because I do wish to revise the Russian position, the major burden of my criticism was precisely a refutation of the third, and crucial, point, to wit, that Stalinist Russia is what it is today because of "inequality and bureaucratic wilfulness."

My contention was that it was not these two phenomena that brought about state capitalism. But that this inequality of distribution was merely the reflection and the natural result of the existing production relations and subordination to the law of value, which is a law of the world market. That, furthermore, it would have been impossible for a Marxist of Trotsky's stature to have left us so false a position of Russia as degenerated workers statism had he based himself on what economic laws and production relations were characteristic of Russia. Instead, despite parenthetical (parenthetical not in the sense that they were merely incidental but in the sense that they were not the basis of his position) remarks as to the capitalist elements that pervaded the Russian economy, he in actuality remained on the superstructural level of property forms and historical origin of Soviet Russia. It was this which made him dismiss the concept that Russia might be state capitalist, although, theoretically, he maintained that such a development was conceivable. It is this position of workers statism which is keeping the Fourth International so hemmed in the present indefensible position of defensism.

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If, in the development of my criticism, it became too sweeping, I am deeply sorry. But, although I may not have given sufficient weight to the passages in Trotsky's various analyses of Russia which dealt with the capitalist elements present in the economy, it is not true that I "avoided the testimony of the Russian Bulletin." Although, in the main, I tried to give English references--"Revolution Betrayed", "In Defense of Marxism", etc.-- I also specifically refer (1) to Rakovsky's analysis of the First Five Year Plan, (2) Trotsky's general agreement with it, as stated in the Russian Bulletin, and then proceed to show that, in the further development of his Russian position, Trotsky dropped this originally more basic approach. Part of the reason that you think that I have not quoted from old sources may not be your fault since (1) the translator of my article into Russian has told me that he did not translate the footnotes wherein references are contained, and (2) you did not have at hand the first series of articles which I considered Part I and which dealt at greater length with Stakhanovism and the Constitution and which was partly the reason why in this series I merely make reference to these phenomena and pass on to draw my conclusions. It is true that even so I did not spend as much time as these matters deserve. But that too is not altogether my fault. My original thesis consisted of 150 pages, or 45,000 words. This had to be cut down, to two series of articles, the first consisting of the statistical data and taking up 12,000 words, and the second consisting of my political conclusions and representing another 9,000 words. You can see how much I had to leave out.

As to your criticism that my article was built on two narrow an economic level. To that I plead guilty, but only to a limited extent, and, again, due to "technical" reasons. As you know we Johnsonites are a Minority, and the space at our disposal is limited. Consequently, we deliberately divided the Russian question between Comrade Johnson who deals with the political and philosophical aspects, and myself who deals with the economic side. If you will look at all we have written since 1941 you will see that it is by no means as narrowly constructed as would appear from reading but one of this series of articles and resolutions.

There is only one point in your criticism that I found unkind, and that was your reference to my "emancipation". No, Natalia, I do not think that I am "emancipated", nor do I wish to emancipate myself from Trotskyism. I have, in my view, found a serious error in Trotsky's analysis of Russia; this I wish to correct. But I do so with what I consider to be the Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist methodology of revolutionary internationalism. I consider Trotsky's analysis as the only serious one, and I have so openly stated in my party and showed that their position on Russia is not only wrong, but the manner in which they arrived at it is non-serious, and because of that it has resulted in a deviation from Marxism. Hence, we maintained, their approach to many problems, such as for instance the problems of 1920-23 dealt with by Trotsky in "The New Course", has resulted in irresponsible article by Howe. Johnson and I have not only criticised this article in the National Committee, but we may need to do so in public now that Com. Erber's criticism of Howe's article reveals a striking similarity in methodological approach, and is very feeble indeed.

One last word regarding your postscript on Chernoff. Yes, I am well acquainted with his views and those of Kautsky and the Social Democracy in general which has maintained that Russia has never been anything but capitalist because the 1917 revolution was a bourgeois revolution. This I categorically deny. The fact that the failure of the world revolution to come to the aid of the isolated Russian Revolution, on the one hand, and the existence of the world market and Stalinist counter-revolution on the other hand, has brought into existence state capitalism in 1935-37 does not offer the Mensheviks a shred of evidence for the contention that Russia was state capitalist in 1917. If the Fourth International

should tomorrow come to the conclusion that Russia has in 1946 become state capitalist, would that have anything in common with the Chernoffs? Of course not! In that respect you might find it interesting, if you are not yet aware of it, that the Mensheviks are changing their position on this question; before Hilferding died he left a manuscript stating that Russia was not capitalist but "totalitarian". Last summer this text was reprinted in the *Communist* and a discussion on it is going on in their ranks.

I wish again to assure you that your criticism was very warmly welcomed by me. There enters of course a "personal" element; I love you the more when I see you actively and vigorously participating in the shaping of a Fourth Internationalist line on the problems confront us. You have much to contribute, and the Fourth International will learn this simple fact. Ever since my return from Mexico I have done everything to spread the news of your intellectual virility, and it makes me feel very good indeed to be the recipient of your views, although they happen to be in criticism of my own views. That is the only healthy --healthy from a revolutionary point of view--way for a common line to be worked out, and I do not doubt at all that in the general line that will finally be worked out we will be together.

Now a few words on some other matters. Evidently, my hopes of getting you here have been dampened. I hear also, and it worries me, that you are again feeling ill. Is there anything at all I can do? There is some one from Europe here and I have spoken to him of you. It is so very necessary for you to get a visa, and a change of atmosphere as well as the necessary care, and it is impossible to reconcile oneself to defeat. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could come with me to Europe? I do hope to get to the World Conference next summer.

Com. Johnson sends his warmest greetings; he has at hand your criticism also of his article, and greatly appreciates your views. He will write you himself.

All my love,

*JW*

P.S. Sara was nice enough to let me see the letter Louis sent you. She also called to tell me of your latest letter, and she wishes to be remembered.