On Difference Between Sept.20,1962
Political Tendency and Political Movement
Dear Bessie: (Copy to RDB)

In a discussion with John last Sunday, he asked, "what, then, were 'J's great contributions'even in the creative period, 1941-58?" To which I suddenly replied, "Nothing but left-wing Trotskyism." "Even the state-capitalist theory?" "Yes, in the sense that it could have been accepted by Trotsky --and Trotskyists from Tony Cliff to Natalia since have--indeed this and this alone can explain why we remained in the Trotskyist movement a solid decade after elaboration of state-capitalist theory --and J counted precisely on the "logic" of this to get him to continue Trotskyism by being its head.

A great clearing of my head occurred at that moment not only because it removed the discussion from subjective basis of Johnsonism to an objective plane but also because it signifies that our previous statement, that even state-capitalism, unless "completed by Marxist-Humanism", needs restatement so that not the political tendency but the political movement predominates. Of course we call ourselves Marxist-Humanists and fully appreciate the positive, instead of the negative, concretization of our philosophy. But we have never pinpointed the difference between tendency and movement and thus seem to have arisen in 1941 when we were "Johnsonites" rather than 1955 when we finally did become Marxist-Humanists, or, more precisely yet, unfurled the banner of MARXISM AND FREEDOM. Therefore, I would like you to retrace with me, backwards and forwards, the difference between ~~the~~ a political tendency and a political movement:

1) Let me say at once that I now consider it no accident that the 1940 split from SWP found the to-be-JFT as an undifferentiated part of Shachtmanism-Burnhamism.

2) Nor was it only a "tactical" question (where not hypocritically for JPC's "American Revolution") that we returned to the SWP in 1947.

3)Nor, finally, that it was not 1950 with a SCWR Resolution splash, but 1951 with a miserable"moral"BSC, that we finally left. THERE WASN'T EVEN THE BASIS OF ANYTHING AS FUNDAMENTAL AS A MOVEMENT-TO-BE WITHOUT ITS OWN RAISON D'ETRE UNTIL MY LETTERS ON THE ABSOLUTE IDEA, May 12 &20, 1953, less than one month before June 17 East German Revolt.

Here is what these 3 points add up to. We were a political tendency and a tendency, though it tends in a direction separate and apart from the main tree, cannot really branch off as if it were a different tree, with its own seeds. No, our new thoughts were of a pattern that could be Trotskyist, as Trotskyist as either of its two wings between which we nestled fairly comfortably.

It is true Trotsky, when alive, had fought state-capitalist tendencies before ours arose and the Trotskyists came full force down upon us with his authority. But it is also true that, to the extent that Trostky allowed for state capitalism's possible appearance "if", we were not out of line as an absolute opposite. If we had been --and by SCWR we were beginning to be, which is why they, andnot we, had taken the initiative in driving us out of the party -- then the constant talk of the class nature of Stalinism would have meant that we would not tolerate being with those who whitewashed the class enemy.

The proof of our tolerance is not only organizational but philosophic: (1) As far back as 1947 (not to mention '41 when I first translated them directly from the Russian) we published Marx's Early Economic Essays. What did they mean to us? Certainly not Humanism, though Marx shouts it at us. No, it was "Alienation." What we chose to make into a philosophic category --and we were known to others and outselves by it -- was "Alienated Labor", so much so that we had later to begin yelling that "also" characteristic of Marxism was "cooperative labor" so as to keep our proletarianized intellectuals from feeling so "alienated" that they ran out of the factory without making a single friend in it.

(2) J then departed to write his "Nevada Document" or Dialectic Notes or Hegel's SCIENCE OF LOGIC. But the upshot of it was to continue to remain part of Trotskyism because evidently the point of the Logic for our era was "error as dynamic of truth" so that Trotskyism still had much to teach us of "truth." This was 1948.

(3) 1948-49 saw a prodigious correspondence between J, G & myself on the Dialectic, with Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks which I had just translated as the center. It took some 2-3 months of oneway correspondence before I got anything out of those two, and I used to think it is only because I dared go into their philosophic domain. This is true, but not the whole truth. The greater truth is that they didn't understand Lenin's Notebooks. They did get "transformation into opposite" for its economic content as explained in monopoly capitalism but nothing at all of "Absolute Idea." Nothing. Nothing. This is why

(4) by 1950 and our greatest collective effort, SCWR, we singled out "contradiction" in Hegel and sayd that is what Lenin grasped first in 1915!

Worse than what we didn't grasp in Lenin or Hegel was where we stopped in our analysis of Trotskyist thought as "Synthetic Cognition." No wonder all those jokes from SWPites, "You mean LT didn't read the last chapter of the Logic?" If LT didn't accept the state-capitalist theory only because he made a 1917 phenomenon, statified property, into a "fixed category" and wouldn't see the changes that had occurred since, then all that is necessary is to make them see "reality", not to reorganize their very method of thought especially not since "synthetic cognition" not only contains correct analysis, but also relates this analysis of the concrete to the universal, the world phenomenon, but needs only to jam them to get the unity of the two and get the dialectic whole. This indeed is what we said. There is a duality in Trotskyism, world or permanent revolution we are for; statified property we oppose; but the former is the greater truth which demands our loyalty still.

IN A WORD, we remained a political tendency to the end and it went with us in the split as well! Just as had we not singled out the Humanism of Marxism in 1947, so we had not singled it out in the strike of the miners in 1949. It is true that I presented to J&G, with Johny Z. present, the first new view of what my book was to be: (1)its American roots in the strike and (2)L's Philosophic Notebooks as its center, but we were so far from concretizing or living by it, that in the BSC the whole strike appears only as proof that "women" (sic! me) were not "suppressed" as they were in SWP!

Now then this means that we can shed any illusion that a movement had been founded and that the "founder" (J) had a "co-founder" (N) whom he does not wish to acknowledge, and did so

only twice and only under compulsion, in 1947 when JFT meant he'd have a faction & in 1954 when he hoped to keep her imprisoned as "co-founder".

Forget the subjectivism, even when it is true, and you will see that objectively other state-capitalist factions arose, which did not stop the unbridgeable gulfs, from Munis's anarcho-syndicalism to Tony Cliff's opportunist LPism.

The truth is state capitalism is no raison d'etre for an independent movement any more than Lenin's Imperialism, by itself, would have been. He could build that with help both from Hilferding and even Hobbes --but for State & Revolution only he and Marx could have been its authors and hence founders of as new a movement in thought as the Communards and the Russian Soviet creators were in life.

Whether we could have influenced history if, in 1947, we had "caught" the Humanism of Marxism, or whether we couldn't in ~~as~~ have caught it because it "wasn't in the air" yet as the concrete it became in 1956 --we'll never know because it isn't possible to rewrite history. But is time we did write it!

Concretely, then, this is [redacted] the way things developed:
1) In May 1953 I wrote those letters on the Absolute Idea which Grace correctly analyzed as showing, for the first time, that there was not only a movement from theory to practice where practice meant either "verification" of theory or, at very best, "source" of theory, but an active movement whereby practice approached theory so that the two could unite. Moreover, said my letters, the Absolute Idea is not only unity of theory and practice, it is the new society, not just the dialectic of the party as the "knowing" of the proletariat, [redacted] nor just "forms of revolt", but the new society itself.
2) In June 1953 came the East German Revolt, not merely to put an end to the myth of invincibility of totalitarianism, but to re-establish the human factor as the center of all movement forward. It was the dress rehearsal for Hungary 1956, but we could not see it then not only because we are no prophets, but because we were still debating (a) Stalin's death vs. "the new" in the exchange of hamburger recipes at factory benches among a couple of women, (b) preparing to issue a new paper without giving the proletarian-editor-to-be a line, a principle, a perspective, a theory that is ready to abolish the division between theory and practice.
3) In 1954-55 we were forced into a split because [redacted] had understood those 1953 letters and, just as JFC understood SCWR and forced a split, so would I presently see that no new movement would be founded, not with his acquiescence. It must be frankly admitted we did not see it as such, although our instinct was right both on the immediate of war, politicalization of organization and proletarianization of paper as part and parcel of a theoretical unfoldment, and on "ultimate" by assigning the writing of MARXISM AND FREEDOM.

The point I am making is that there was no raison d'etre for an independent proletarian movement until MARXISM AND FREEDOM was complete

Yours,

Raya

9631

Sept.29,1962

Dear Bess:

I hope you are in the process of commenting on my letter to you on the difference between a political tendency and a political movement. Indeed I must insist that you do not take advantage of the difficulties you have in writing not to answer that letter(and this one which is a continuation of the other) because, in essence, it will form the foundation for our pamphlet, "Who We Are and What We Stand For." I have not sent copies to the newer members because first we who have lived through that period must arrive at certain conclusions. Then, when we see where it is we have reached, we will also bring in those members who are working on the basis of what we are now rather than what we were in the 1940's.

The disintegration of Johnsonism, first and most fundamentally, when we broke with it in 1955; and now when he pretends to return to Marxism and Grace goes to everything from peace to Muslim is proof of the fact that it had not developed into a total comprehensive theory for our time. But I still am interested in the positive contributinn --state-capitalism--and why it could not reach to Marxist-Humanism without breaking from Johnsonism:

1)1947, ~~xxxx~~ We published the Early Essays of Marx but could not see Marxist-Humanism, although it was precisely that which was in dispute in France between Existentialists who had perverted it as "materialists" and the catholics who of necessity wished to reduce it to "soul," Why did it only mean "Alienated Labor" to us then? It seems to me it was because despite our verbiage on "revolution" it was all either ~~xx~~ abstract or stupidly empiric as when J tried to equate it to Israel.

2)1948. J disappears into Nevada to work on the Absolute Idea but only comes up with "error as the dynamic of truth." Now, outside of the fact that, to Hegel, it was not the, but "a"dynamic of truth and then only if, by virtue of the lessons from error, we were able to overcome it, why did J see only that? We used to say it was nothing more than a rationalization for remaining inside theTrotskyist movement, and that remains true. But it is not the whole truth, The objective pull is always stronger than the subjective, no matter how strong-willed(or wilful, as you wish) the leader. And the objective pull was the preponderance of counter-revolution over revolution when the intiative and struggles of the masses in post-war world had now given way to the Marshall Plan.

Tc J, despite all he said about the inevitability of failure of Marshall Plan to re-establish capitalistic Europe, the counter-revolution stood out so sharply that he chose its evolution (reading it back all the way to French Revolution and Robespierre!) and its future, which is why he chose to concentrate on Ahab and relegate Marxism to a"subordinate" (me).

3)1949. With my translation of Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks and the correspondence between J, G. and me, J once again makes the counter-revolution predominate so that even when G reaches her highest point in the analysis of Hegel and what she called "the plunge into freedom", she stops short at "Personality" in the Absolute Idea --and by this time it means not just Ahab but J himself.

4) 1950. No wonder, then, that when we reach as far as it is possible to go with the state-capitalist theory without a concrete new philosophic universal --SCWR--that, despite all verbiage on self-mobilisation of masses, the crisis within (!) it sticks out like a sore thumb, and we insist furthermore: "One of the most urgent tasks is to trace the evolution of the counter-revolution within the revolution, from liberalism through anarchism, Social Democracy, Noske, counter-revolutionary Menshevism, to Stalinism, its economic and social roots at each stage, its political manifestations, its contradictions and antagonisms."

(Incidentally, J is a shifting liar when, in reproducing this 1950 thesis in 1956, he says its outstanding feature was what we said on the party. He is a liar because, far from "total repudiation" of the Leninist theory of party, here is what we wrote there on it:

"Upon the basis of its analysis of state-capitalism and Plan, the Leninist party must form its own revolutionary theory of the party. The party is, in Lenin's words, based upon the factory but upon the progressive cooperation aspect of the factory, unity, discipline, and organization of the working class, in unalterable opposition to the theory and practice of the elite."

(He is a shifting liar because he is forever shifting the axis of his undisciplined verbiage from one central point to its opposite without any serious explanation and on the wrong foundation since he tries to use the theory built up for one purpose for an entirely different aim. And thus with the party. At no time in the WP or SWP were we opposed to"the party". On the contrary, we were forever telling them now to build it correctly instead of the wrong foundations they had. Even when we developed the "mass mobilization" concept, it was not in opposition to "the party", but only in relation to it. We began, only with BSC, to speak against "the party to lead" (and correctly so) but even then, as was evident from the constant reiteration of the quotation from Lenin where he shows that only the thin stratum of the Bolsheviks kept the dictatorship from collapsing, it was not against a Marxist party (and again correctly so) but against what it was, in Stalinist state-capitalist hands first, and then in Trotskyism. The "total repudiation" he was to discover only after we broke and his total departure from Marxism, just as he now, in his "Marxism and Interllectual", begins to cry about a return to Marxism and the need to "explain" the role of small groups, etc.etc.)

5)1953. THIS IS THE REAL BREAK BECAUSE PHILOSOPHICALLY I FINALLY STUMBLED ON THE NEEDED INTERPRETATION OF THE ABSOLUTE IDEA AS THE MATERIALISM AND HUMANISM OF OUR AGE. To break this down, as distinct from the stage he & C had labored on it,1947-52, (MEC):

a)In contrast to the fact that, as he put it on 5/20/49 "I got nothing" from reading Philosophy of Mind, I went straight from Absolute Idea to Absolute Mind and said it was "the new society."*

*This is hilarious. Until I wrote this word down just now I had forgotten that that was the phrase in my 1953 letters and their stupidities in "Facing Reality", and thereafter naming the main column in Correspondence "New Society", must have had its origin there, but, as under Stalinism which claims it is "the new society", so the impotent Johnsonites scream "the new society is here and all we need to do is record its existence."

b) This was, furthermore, in contradistinction to his equating the Absolute Idea to "the dialectic of the party." He had written, in fact, that "The party is so much the expression of everything" that it was no longer necessary to concentrate only on the logic of Capital, or on the dialectic, "but the whole theory of knowledge" resided in the dialectic of the party, whatever that meant.

c) I was separating myself not only from Johnson, but I separated our age from that of Lenin himself, saying that where Lenin could stop 2 paragraphs short of Hegel's conclusion of the AI, we could not

because by 1953 : (i) there was a movement from practice to theory, (ii) so that when this movement xxxx met up with the movement from theory

AS HEGEL HAD FORESEEN IN HIS ABSOLUTE MIND,**

we would have historic proof of the totality of freedom by virtue of the fact that it would no longer be a "possession"--to have it by virtue of education, or property, etc.--but an "is"--to be free xxx through development of a new human dimension .

(Thereby were we prepared in 1955 "to catch" Humanism.)

Now, no matter what it is J & G plotted after he dissuaded her from her enthusiastic letter on my Letters which she had previously compared to Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, his rejection of them was no mere subjective reproach. He sent her with a note that I was up in the philosophic heights from which I better descend " in order to pay attention to the organization, be concrete in its building". What he meant was that, if I build it on the positive aspects, instead of the negatives he had traced in the evolution of the counter-revolution, then "the public" would reject me. The public rejected Correspondence all right --but it was because of lack of any clear line, or, more correctly, the multiplicity of lines.

It is the contrast of the periods, 1947-52, vs. 1953-7 (publication of M&F), that will be of the essence in "Who We Are and What We Stand For." What do you think?

Yours,
Raya

**You will recall that I also brought out the parallel between that paragraph in Hegel with a similar paragraph in Marx's "Accumulation of Capital" chapter in CAPITAL where he anticipated Volumes II & III. Remember also that he never did finish the last chapter, "Classes", ofvolume III and that in M&F I show how the American workers are finishing it for him. But at this point the important point is that CAPITAL is incpmplete without his "Civil War in France" even as Lenin's "Imperialism" is incomplete without "State and Revolution" and the theory of state-capitalism is incomplete without the philosophy of the Humanism of Marxism.