

WEEKLY POLITICAL LETTER: JUNE 21, 1961

On the 20th Anniversary of the State-Capitalist Tendency

Dear Friends:

Both the objective situation arising from Automation, on the one hand, and the US-USSR struggle for world power, on the other hand; and the objective attempts of regroupments on the ever fluid (and disintegrative Left) compel a balance sheet of the political tendency that arose 20 years ago and called itself state-capitalist.

The state-capitalist tendency that arose in 1941 differed from all previous uses of that term in the following fundamental ways:

1) as contrasted to its first statement in Marx's works, where, of necessity, it was treated "abstractly", i.e., as the logical development of the laws of concentration and centralization of capital to its ultimate "in the hands of a single capitalist or capitalist corporation", this new political tendency dealt with state-capitalism as a concrete phenomenon of actually developing capitalism that followed from the world depression:

2) as contrasted to its second statement in Lenin's writings in 1916-1919, where it was conceived as split in two -- economically as capitalism, politically as soviet (i.e., workers') state control -- we pointed to Lenin's later writings, 1921-1923, where, having fought the early bureaucratization of the workers' state, and the newly-found Communist "passion for bossing", he treated it profoundly as "a return backwards to capitalism." It is true he still thought that the actual overthrow of the workers' state could only come from outside, from imperialist attack, but there was no further doubt in his mind that unless "the party work was checked by the non-party masses", the differences between Trotsky and Stalin were symbolic, or could become, actual class differences, and in that case nothing at all could save the new workers' state from collapse. (See Marxism and Freedom, pp. 205-212 on Lenin's Will; and footnotes 192, 195, 196, 205, and 206);

3) in contrast to the anarchists, who had begun using the term, directly after the November Revolution had succeeded, as a mere swear word without any solid theoretical foundations, the state-capitalist tendency had undertaken a concrete study of the Five Year Plans in Russia, as well as a theoretic re-evaluation of the economic and philosophic concepts in Marx and Lenin;

4) in opposition to Trotsky, who had treated state-capitalism as a "possibility" that "might" develop, but not as anything that had actually appeared -- thereby introducing empty talmudist distinctions between "state intervention" into the economy, and "state capitalism as such"-- we insisted we must look at the world as it is, both in Russia and in the world as a whole;

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5) in opposition both to those in the 1920s and early 1930s, who had been semi-Trotskyists, and had used the words "state capitalism" -- but without either a concrete study of the economy (satisfying themselves only with a study of the bureaucracy as bureaucracy), or relating it to methodology -- we insisted that when one departs from strict Marxist categories, one, at best, will end as Rosa Luxemburg by revising Capital to explain imperialism; or, at worst and more inevitably, by departing entirely from class conceptions. This is what happened to those tendencies, in the 1940s, which had no direct connection with the 1920 or 1930 opponents of Russian Communism, but which refused to accept the state-capitalist designation (like the "Bureaucratic Collectivists of the Shachtman variety; and the Retrogressionists who did supposedly accept state-capitalism but refused to accept workers' revolt as inseparable from it). We, on the other hand, never separated the new stage of capitalism from the new stage of opposition to it -- workers' revolt in the form of wildcats, and underground movements whether slowdowns as in Russia or as they developed in Nazi-occupied Europe;

6) finally, in contrast to others, we related ourselves to the methodology Lenin used in Imperialism, before which study he had returned to Hegelian philosophy; we stressed, however, that the new in our age demanded that such Philosophic Notebooks not remain private as with Lenin, but become public and extended beyond "the party" to the proletariat outside.

In a word, in contrast to all others, we were not abstract but concrete; we were not dealing with it as a "Russian Question", but as a world problem; we were not separating concrete from theoretical, but were returning to our origin in Marx and Lenin as well as its roots in Hegel, which, however, we had barely studied ourselves; finally, and above all, we never for a moment separated the economic analysis from the workers' revolt. This was sufficient for the 1940s, when the post-war strikes and political demonstrations gave every appearance that Western Europe would certainly rid itself of capitalism.

The decade of the 1950s, made even this comprehensive analysis insufficient to the challenge of the times. First, and most important, because the new stage in capitalist development was not only from competition to monopoly to state, but, directly at the point of production, from what Marx called Machinofacture to Automation. This Second Industrial Revolution was concretizing the workers' revolt against it by moving it from the economic and political fronts to the philosophic. They, the workers, began to ask such questions as, "What kind of labor must man do?" In the 1949-50 miners' strike their restatement of the question of alienation in positive terms uniting thinking and doing, the fight against the labor bureaucracy, and the fight against the now

permanent army of unemployed compelled, on our part, a return to the Early Essays of Marx and to Hegel's Absolute Idea. To the extent that we were not able to break that down into the concrete terms of Humanism and the new world stage demanded by the revolutions in the Afro-Asian world, the tendency itself broke into two -- one escaping to "Facing Reality" without Marxist continuity, the other (ourselves) moving to a restatement of both the Humanism and the American roots of Marxism in Marxism and Freedom.

Second, in the appearance of a workers' paper edited by a production worker, News & Letters could open itself in a manner that deepened the workers' own struggles and resulted in Workers Battle Automation, thus uniting theory and practice both on the production line and in the after hours' struggle.

Third, two other phenomena appeared in the world that did not separate theory from practice, that is, the movement from practice that has the full dimensions of a revolution: 1) the Hungarian Revolution which combined a Marxist-Humanist banner of struggle against totalitarianism with Workers' Councils; and 2) the African Revolution which combined its struggle against Western imperialism with a new universalist conception of how that continent would try to by-pass capitalism.

On the other hand, the counter-revolution -- whether in De Gaulle's France, or in the Russian suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, or in the US-JN domination of the Congo which led to Lumumba's murder -- was sharpening its fangs on all fronts. With the Sputnik the old US-USSR struggle became "equalized". That is to say, where the 1949 Russian discovery of the A-bomb eliminated America's monopoly, and where the 1954 H-bomb made "the reign of terror" the new deterrent, the 1958 Sputnik (with the concomitant ICBMs) made the Russians "first" and therefore capable of making of peace only another form of war.

The period, 1958-1961, which has placed humanity within orbit of nuclear holocaust has finally re-awakened the Left -- only to have them return neither to the foundations nor to the new developments of humanity that began with the First Industrial and French Revolutions. Instead, each looks for some "abstract", and therefore meaningless, newness which would treat history as if it isn't there. A Hitler with his "Mein Kampf" could break with history; the workers' movement cannot.

-- Raya Dunayevskaya

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