

January 29, 1968

Mr. Russell Gilmore  
State Historical Society  
Office of Field Service  
State and Park  
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

Dear Mr. Gilmore:

From what Miss Dowanski has told me of your telephone conversation on January 25, I believe that you are not fully aware of the range and uniqueness of the documentation on the theory of state-capitalism that I possess. It could not be otherwise since neither Mr. Paul Buhle, who first interested himself in this material, and my secretary, Miss Dowanski, do not know all the material first hand. You stated, for example, that you have the Bulletins for the "year 1937". No doubt, you are referring Bulletins Nos. 1-12, July 17-September 29, 1947, plus three separate publications--Three Essays by Karl Marx, Trotskyism in the United States, 1940-47, BALANCE SHEET, World Revolutionary Perspectives and the Russian Question, all of which were published by the Johnson-Forest Tendency during what was called the Interim Period, that is to say, the period between leaving the Workers Party and entering the Socialist Workers Party.

There was, however, more to the year 1947 than those publications. Raya Dunayevskaya had begun a study of what would become, in 1957, Marxism and Freedom. In 1967, this work existed as a 30 page outline, entitled State-Capitalism and Marxism, which was submitted to Professor Joan Robinson. Although, Miss Robinson was hostile to my designation of Russia as a state-capitalist society, she was kind enough to make comments on my script. The type script with Miss Robinson's handwritten comments are available nowhere but in the documentation that I own.

Now then, as succinctly as possible, here is a listing of the documents at issue: (1) The theory of state-capitalism in the United States was born in 1941 by the submission of two articles, one by J. R. Johnson in New York and one by F. Forest (Washington, D. C.), both bearing the title "Russia: Is A State-Capitalist Society", since neither of them knew that either of them was developing such a position. The year 1941 concluded by the submission of a Resolution on the Russian Question by J. R. Johnson and published in the Workers Party Internal Bulletin.

(2) (2) Freddy Forest then began a study of the Five Year Plans from original Russian sources and these were published in the New Internationalist, December, 1942, January, 1943, and February, 1943. Since this was the first documented study from a state-capitalist viewpoint, these were widely quoted the world over. (See, for example, The Yogi and Comissa ser by Arthur Koestler.)

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93) 1944-1945, is characterized by the extension of the theory of state-capitalism to "pure Marxism, on the one hand, and to American questions on the other; Production for Production's Sake by J. R. Johnson, and A Restatement of Some Fundamentals of Marxism by F. Forest; Resolution on the Negro Question by J. R. Johnson, and Negro Intellectuals in a Dilemma as well as Negro in Revolution (New International, November, 1944 and May, 1945). At the same time, Raya Dunayevskaya began to publish in professional journals by having obtained (through a diplomatic approach) the Russian revision of the Marxist law of value and translated it with commentary for the American Economic Review, September, 1944. The debate caused by it lasted a whole year, was published in French and Italian, and happened to have been the one that had drawn the attention of many scholars in England, including Professor Joan Robinson. Johnson wrote on the National Question as well as Postwar America and Bolshevism.

(4) Outside of the 1946 articles by Johnson on on Historical Retrogression or Socialist Revolution and the articles by F. Forest on the Nature of the Russian Economy, which were reproduced in the Bulletin of the Interim Period, 1946-47, included also a series of five articles by F. Forest on New Developments in Stalinist Russia, which were published in Labor Action. An Outline of Marx's Capital, Volume I, which she did for the Education Department of the Workers Party, and a series of articles (April and May, 1946, New International) on Luxemburg's Theory of Accumulation of Capital, which produced wide debate especially with W. H. Emmett of Australia (February and March, 1947). Finally, the period 1946-47 included the Resolutions by J. R. Johnson on the American Question, Task of Building the Bolshevik Party, and the International Question, after which the names Johnson and Forest were officially joined as the Johnson-Forest Tendency and a letter to the Membership was signed by them jointly.

All of the material mentioned in the four numbered paragraphs above constitute Volume I, Birth of the State-Capitalist Theory of the series that I have entitled the Development of the State-Capitalist Tendency. I would judge that the documents that you have are the ones that constitute Volume II.

Volume III consists of two books; Book I are typescripts of translations from Marxist Archives and from Russian Communist Conferences which to this day remain unpublished anywhere although I intend to use some of it as appendicags for my new work, Philosophy and Revolution. They are the Theories of Surplus Value (Volume IV of Capital), the original ending of Capital, Volume I (the famous "Chapter 6"), all by Marx. Book II consists of the typescript annotated by Miss Robinson to which I referred to before and the first indication of the new vantage points for the work on Marxism, a discussion on February 15, 1950 which stressed (a) that the American proletariat would become central to this work, and (b) so would philosophy.

The last volume (IV) deals with the State-Capitalist Tendency in the Socialist Workers Party, concluding with the final document submitted to its convention, entitled State-Capitalism and World Revolution by "Johnston-Forest" which is a 28-page summation of the development of the tendency ending for the first time with a chapter on Philosophy in the Epoch of State-Capitalism. This "highest" point in the development of State-Capitalism as theory was at the same time, in true Hegelian fashion, the moment it "perished," that is to say, it ceased to exist as a tendency. It had been clear, ever since the first translation of the Humanist Essay of Marx that a division arose on the extension of economics to philosophy as well as on the question of the depth of the American roots of Marxism. These two points became central to the final version of Marxism and Freedom as published by me in 1958 but this is a different story, as easily available in print. This is not the issue of the matter between us; the issue is the period 1943-1950.

I am sorry to tell you that my final decision is that under no circumstances will I let the documents described in this letter leave my hands. If you can not find a fund to cover the expenses for bringing the documents to Wisconsin for microfilming and are unable to do the microfilming within a week or ten days, which is all the time I can allow myself to be away from my new labors, then there is nothing more to say. Miss Domanski had specified these two conditions to Mr. Buble and when he informed us that you would call, I assumed that they were acceptable. In any case, you now have a full description of the documents involved and I am sure that you appreciate their rarity and range.

Yours sincerely,

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