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By William F. Warde and John G. Wright

The differences between us and the Johnson-Forest group are not minor. They do not hinge on disagreements about tactics or appraisals of this or that situation but reach far deeper. They involve nothing less than the tested principles which are the foundation of Trotskyism, the Marxism of our epoch. Our rich and varied experience with attempts to discredit the ideas of our movement and push it onto another road has taught us to inspect with rigorous care any and all substitutes for these principles.

Johnson-Forest have proclaimed that "Trotsky's method of analysis and system of ideas are wrong." Hence the "chaos" and "crisis" in the world Trotskyist movement. Hence the need to break with Trotskyism, for otherwise the "chaos. . . will continue to grow" until and unless a new method and system of ideas are substituted. These Johnson-Forest are ready to supply. We are thus dealing with self-avowed revisionists who present nothing less than a new world outlook differing with us from the heights of theory through economics and politics right up to such burning issues as the nature of Stalinism, the role of the revolutionary party, and much else.

The list of Johnson-Forest disagreements with us is long. We will deal here only with the major ones, namely: their attitude to theory; their theory or philosophy itself; their views on sociology and economics, particularly in connection with imperialism and the Russian question; the class struggle in our epoch and the place of the national question in it; and finally, the role of the party.

Johnson-Forest Attitude to Theory

Marxists are distinguished from all others by the indissoluble connection they establish between theory and political practice. For Marx and Engels, for Lenin and Trotsky, theory is above all A GUIDE TO ACTION in the class struggle for socialism. A theory that obstructs such action or does not lead to fruitful action was wrong and harmful in their eyes. Moreover, it is not enough just to interpret what is happening. The most important task is to intervene, at each stage, with utmost vigor in order to effect the maximum of progressive and revolutionary transformations possible, "to change the world," as Marx said. Our theory does lead to such action.

Johnson-Forest incline strongly in the opposite direction. Their primary concern is in constructing an ideal system that satisfies them and their followers. What chiefly counts with them, as with all "system" builders, is their peculiar interpretation of events, not effective political participation in them. If the realities of the class struggle fly in the face of such interpretation, so much the worse for the class struggle, for the system-builder has scant regard for reality. Come what may, the schematist has his single all-embracing system to console him. "It is precisely the character of our age and the maturity of humanity that obliterates the opposition between theory and practice. . ." Johnson explains. (State Capitalism and World Revolution, page 66.)

Such an attitude renders those who hold it helpless in the face of situations which demand action. Johnson-Forest are no exception. Instead of seeking openings to participate in struggles as they arise, they are turned away from them because the struggles fail to conform to their arbitrary, preconceived and immutable standards. This political helplessness expresses itself in aloofness from the contending forces in the actual events (as in the case of the Yugoslav, Korean and Chinese revolutions) or, which amounts to the same thing, in a minimizing of partial demands (as, for example, the wage struggle), or rejection of such transitional slogans as "Independent Socialist Poland," etc.

Starting with the boldest and most sweeping of assertions, Johnson-Forest time and again end in timid and limited practical conclusions. In reference to the Soviet Union, for example, they refuse to draw any distinction between imperialism and the degenerated workers' state and are thereby automatically relieved of any political obligations in the event of armed collision between them.

Johnson-Forest's views, and especially their politics, bear the indelible marks of sectarianism which is satisfied with the emptiest of abstractions; which simplifies complex and contradictory developments; which distorts reality by manufacturing distinctions where none exist and by wiping away distinctions precisely where they must be sharply drawn. It is impossible to erect a self-sufficing system or justify a sectarian outlook in any other way.

In political terms Johnson-Forest represent a non-Marxist type of reaction to the monstrous manifestation of Stalinism and the resulting aggravation of the world crisis, including the political crisis -- the crisis of leadership -- within the ranks of the world labor movement.

On the plane of theory, Johnson-Forest'ism is another expression of the general ideological decline that comes in the backwash of all reactionary periods. "Reactionary epochs like ours," Trotsky observed in his pamphlet, Stalinism and Bolshevism, "not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through."

Johnson-Forest recommend their views as the most advanced product of Marxism. Actually, as we shall show, their thinking belongs to a museum of pre-Marxist antiquities and would, if adopted, throw our party far back and cancel any possibility of movement forward.

The "New" Philosophy

It would take a treatise longer than Anti-Duhring to deal comprehensively with the errors and confusion of Johnson-Forest philosophy alone. We will here touch briefly on two of its distinguishing traits: its simple-mindedness and its backwardness.

First is their obliteration of decisive differences which results in lumping together virtually everything under the sun into a single undifferentiated heap (or, logically speaking, into a single category). Johnson-Forest say:

"All previous distinctions, politics and economics, war and peace, agitation and propaganda, party and mass, the individual and society, national, civil and imperialist war, single country and one world, immediate needs and ultimate solutions -- all these it is impossible to keep separate any longer. Total planning is inseparable from permanent crisis, the world struggle for the minds of men from the world tendency to the complete mechanization of men." (Same, page 66.)

This sort of reasoning which annihilates "all previous distinctions" by declamation, is far more akin to mystical vision than to scientific method. Visionaries may close their eyes to actually existing differences and deny their validity. Nevertheless these differences continue to exist and demand to be recognized and coped with. Marxist thinking does not consist in disclaiming objective differences between "politics and economics, war and peace. . . national, civil and imperialist war," etc., as Johnson-Forest do, but in examining and analyzing each one of them, explaining their development and interrelations, devising ways and means of dealing with these contradictory features of reality.

To the Johnson-Forest world of indifference there corresponds an attitude of indifference to the complex realities of political life. This can be seen, for example, in the position taken, or rather not taken, on so important a question as the Tito-Stalin split. On one hand, Johnson-Forest deny that any divergent class interests are at the bottom of this break growing out of the whole crisis of world Stalinism. On the other hand, they establish a complete and false identity between Russian Stalinism and the Yugoslav Communist movement.

This blindness to real differences in the real world breeds not only political inertia but also profound pessimism. This is not obvious at first glance because the pessimism is of a peculiar sort. Its bearers are comrades animated by genuine zeal to reconstruct society. But the kind of world Johnson-Forest picture where "all previous distinctions" fall away can lead only to the most pessimistic conclusions, if consistently developed, because they attribute the most prodigious powers to forces other than the proletariat.

Since they themselves are unaware of this self-contradiction in their world outlook, it will be necessary to unfold it for them. Let us assume that the Johnson-Forest universe where politics and economics, parties and masses, single countries and the planet, etc., are all one and the same, is not imaginary but realized in life. It could have come into existence only through some human agency or agencies. These differences are the products of long historical development over which men's will have had no control and which took place behind their backs. How then, and by whose activities, have they been done away with?

Johnson-Forest would agree that the workers are not responsible. There then remain only the capitalists and -- the Stalinists. If either or both of these had actually accomplished all of the above, they would have exhibited such super-historical powers as to justify the deepest pessimism. Indeed, if either the Kremlin or the imperialists actually wielded just one of these powers, namely the power

to wipe out any distinction between themselves (or their "parties") and the masses, then mankind would be doomed.

Happily the situation is neither so bleak nor so hopeless. Powerful as the imperialists and Stalin may be, they are not possessed of such superhuman strength. These and other miraculous properties have merely been ascribed to them by a stroke of a pen that has been and should be put to better uses.

Nor is this all. In the above outlook there is a discernible admixture of the idealistic school of philosophy. This is most clearly evidenced in the Johnson-Forest scheme for world history. According to them, the events of the last two thousand years have a "universal" link -- it is the link between Christianity and Communism. "International socialism," they claim, "is the concrete embodiment of the abstract principle of Christianity" (Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity, page X).

This is indeed a revelation! Scientific socialism owes exactly nothing to the theological doctrines or traditions of ancient Christianity. But were not early Christians equalitarians? "Christianity," Engels pointed out long ago, "knew only one point in which all men were equal: that all were equally born in original sin -- which corresponded perfectly with its character as the religion of the slaves and the oppressed. Apart from this is recognized, at most, the equality of the elect, which however was only stressed at the very beginning. . . . Within a very short time the establishment of the distinction between priests and laymen put an end even to this tendency to Christian equality." Far from having anything in common, or being directly linked together, the "equalitarianism" of Christianity is poles apart from Communist equalitarianism.

But did not early Christians advocate and practice community of goods, and does not this suffice to make them ancestors of modern Communism? Not at all. "The traces of common ownership," insisted Engels, "which are also to be found in the early stages of the new religion (Christianity) can be ascribed to the solidarity of a proscribed sect rather than to real equalitarian ideas."

Some heretical tendencies and communist sects of the Middle Ages and the Reformation harked back to this "communist" and "equalitarian" spirit of early Christianity in justification of their own rebellions. Later, the great French Utopian Saint-Simon advocated the need for science and industry to be united by a "new Christianity." Marx and Engels put an end to all such fictions as the basis for socialism.

Christianity and Socialism are completely incompatible. On the other hand, Christianity was able to become a state religion under the Byzantine Empire, to be the ruling power in feudal Europe, and later a mainstay of capitalism.

Marxism -- proletarian Communism -- no more embodies or concretizes any principle of Christianity than of Judaism, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Confucianism or mumbo-jumboism. At most, this derivation of international socialism from Christianity would thrust us back to the infancy of Utopian Socialism. But there are worse consequences

in identifying Communism in any way with Christianity. Johnson-Forest embellish religion by referring to "the freedom implicit in Christianity" (Same, page XVII). There is no freedom either implicit or explicit in Christianity; it arose as opium for the enslaved; throughout its history, as today, it serves as a reinforcement of social and mental enslavement. Only clerical and capitalist reaction can benefit from such confusion.

This false assertion that modern Communism originated in early Christianity and this preachment that socialism has come, not to prepare the conditions for the removal of Christianity along with any and all forms of religion but to fulfill its principle of freedom, are component parts of a broader misconception. This is a special version of historical development since the rise of Christianity. Marx and Engels found the motive force of history and the key to its interpretation in the class struggles. Whether they realize it or not, Johnson-Forest seek to bring forward another driving force. According to them, "the mass quest for universality in action and in life. . . is the motive force of history" (Same, page XVII). What is the gist of this pompous formula: "the mass quest for universality"? It is nothing more than a generalization, an abstract idea. It is an ideological and not a material motive force.

How remote this interpretation of history is from that of historical materialism which sees the masses impelled by the quest for food, clothing, shelter and their other material wants and needs; and with classes arising in accord with the specific techniques and modes of production. The ultimate causes of historical changes are to be found in the changing ways and means of satisfying, or failing to satisfy, these material wants and needs -- and not in any fanciful quest for an abstraction of "universality."

The master key to history offered by Johnson-Forest comes from other locksmiths than Marx and Engels. They took it from Hegel, who also viewed history as the process of realization of "universals" (Hegel called them "absolutes"), among them the principle of freedom implicit in Christianity. The Hegelian dialectic of history, drastically curtailed, is likewise taken over in its purely idealist form. Early Christianity gives birth to the "universal" of freedom, which of necessity is still limited. Successive revolutions embody more and more of this universal but still leave it incomplete. Now at last, through the proletarian revolution and the consequent release of mankind's energies and the full flowering of its capacities, this universal of freedom contained in Christianity will be perfected under socialism.

Here Johnson-Forest go back not only to Hegel but to Proudhon. For it was Proudhon who specialized in manufacturing a philosophy which viewed contemporary history as a mechanism for realizing the ideal aims of past generations. "Of course, the tendency toward equality," Marx explained to Proudhon in The Poverty of Philosophy, "belongs to our century. To say now that all former centuries, with entirely different needs, means of production, etc., worked providentially for the realization of equality, is, first, to substitute the means and the men of our century for the men and the means of earlier centuries and to misunderstand the historical movement by which the successive generations transformed the results acquired by the generations that preceded them."

This by no means exhausts the Johnson-Forest philosophy. But it will afford comrades a glimpse of the extent to which this grouping seeks to impose ideal standards upon the living historical process, instead of analyzing the specific material forces at work within it. It illustrates how outmoded and retrogressive their ideas are. We are confronted here with a case of theoretical relapse which takes not a step forward from Lenin and Trotsky, as it claims, but on the contrary, is moving backwards even from Marx and Engels.

Johnson-Forest Political Economy

Johnson-Forest believe that their position is especially strong in economic theory compared to ours. But it is not hard to show how weak and non-Marxist their views are in the field of political economy. Here Johnson-Forest transfer the same method employed by them in philosophy. They lump together different qualities through the simple device of disregarding the differences between them, or by claiming that these differences are unimportant or non-existing.

But even these architects of an undifferentiated world cannot operate in life without feeling the need for differentiation. And since the need cannot be escaped, the differences they introduce are just as arbitrary or lop-sided as their obliterations of all important differences. To construct their own system of economics, Johnson-Forest begin by counterposing a "sociology based upon relations of production" to a "sociology based upon form of property" (State Capitalism and World Revolution, page 19). The first is the "Marxism of our period"; the second Stalinist, they say.

There is no warrant whatever in Marxism for drawing a sharp separation between productive relations and property forms, and least of all for trying to establish an opposition between them. These are not two polar relations but two expressions of one and the same relation. Productive relations are the real foundation, the material content of property forms, which in their turn are simply the legal expression of the productive relations. The productive relation of master and slave is contained in and expressed by slave property; the productive relation of lord and serf is contained in feudal property; and that of capitalist and wage-worker, in capitalist private property. The productive relation of the economy transitional to socialism is contained in collectivized property.

Marx and Engels are clear on this point. Not only do they insist on the identity of productive relations and property forms but they go further. They establish an altogether different polar opposition, and hence contradiction, between productive relations at the one extreme and the productive forces at the other. "At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or -- what is but a legal expression for the same thing -- with the property relations within which they have been at work before," says Marx in his famous preface to the Critique of Political Economy. And that is absolutely correct.

The Johnson-Forest opposition between productive relations and property forms is fictitious. The real opposition is between material things (productive forces) and productive relations (or property

relations). Out of this opposition arises the basic contradiction which in the final analysis has determined the movement of society in history.

Private property lies at the root of capitalism (which is itself an economic category), just as serfdom lies at the root of feudalism (another economic category). Capitalist production, exchange, accumulation could not take place without the private ownership of the means of production any more than slavery could operate without chattel slaves or feudalism without serfdom. When the growth of the productive forces collided with slave property, the latter gave way to feudalism. In our day the further growth of the productive forces is fettered by capitalist property forms (or productive relations). New property forms are required, nationalized property. That is why Marx and Engels insisted that the transition to socialism could not be achieved except through centralizing "all the instruments of production in the hands of the state."

What is the source of Johnson-Forest's error? They have confused material objects outside us with those relations between men which are expressed through these objects. This is a common error. The French economist Proudhon, for example, constantly confounded material objects with economic categories because the categories were expressions through things of specific social relations between men. Proudhon had a special aversion for machinery which to him was the "logical antithesis" of humanity's quest for equality, freedom, etc. He counterposed the machine to other economic categories. "Machinery," explained Marx to Proudhon, "is no more an economic category than the bullock that drags the plough. Machinery is merely a productive force. The modern workshop, which depends on the application of machinery, is a social production relation, an economic category." Clearly, when Johnson-Forest substitute productive forces (or material things) for economic categories (or "productive relations") they are simply repeating in their own way and under different circumstances, a widely prevalent mistake of the past.

Among those who have committed the same error is, incidentally, Shachtman. According to the latter, the Stalinist bureaucracy has "established new property relations while retaining more or less intact the old property forms (i.e., state property) and thereby set up" a "new social order." (New International, September 1942). The conclusion Shachtman draws differs from that of Johnson-Forest but their basic theoretical premise is the same.

Having drawn a false distinction between productive relations (or economic categories) and the juridical name for these same relations (or property forms), Johnson-Forest proceed to elevate property forms into a devil-idol whose name is Stalinism and whose content they characterize as "state capitalism."

So far as it is possible to grasp their views in this connection -- and it is often not easy to follow their positions -- the central theme of the Johnson-Forest criticism of Trotskyism is its alleged idolization of a specific "property form" -- nationalized property. In their opinion, to bring the property question to the fore, especially nationalized property, is Stalinist, anti-Leninist, anti-Marxist, "economist," bureaucratic, petty-bourgeois and what not. To this

stress on the property question, Johnson-Forest counterpose the revolutionary "self-mobilization of the proletariat." This is another artificial construction.

All of us had thought that the socialist proletariat aimed to gain power precisely in order to end private property in the means of production and convert them into collective property, whose first form is state-ownership. It is news to us that the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat was or could be at odds with or periled by the principle of nationalizing private property. Or that there was something sinister about stressing the importance of the property question.

In blasting people who see something progressive in state-ownership of property, Johnson-Forest are as categorical as any anarchist. "The vanguard pursues with utmost relentlessness any theory which implies that a state reorganization of property by any agency whatever contains in it anything else but an intensification of the fundamental antagonisms of capitalist production and the degradation of all classes in society," they say. (Invading Socialist Society, page 57). If so, then their quarrel is not only with us 20th Century Marxists. The first target of such a relentless pursuit will have to be the founders of Marxism.

The Communist Manifesto is unambiguous on this score. It states that "the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property." In order to replace it by what? By nationalized property.

"The proletariat," explains the Manifesto, "will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible."

Surely, this is not hard to understand. The abolition of private property is the political means of liberating the workers from wage slavery, just as, conversely, the statization of the instruments of production is the political means for establishing a new set of economic institutions enabling men to enter into new productive relations, as the means for introducing socialism.

By divorcing capitalism from its private-property base and by denying the organic bond between the struggle for proletarian power and the nationalization of capitalist property, Johnson-Forest sever the reactionary movement to maintain capitalism from the opposing historical movement to abolish it. This unavoidably leads them to distort the actual unfolding of the proletarian revolution. One conspicuous example of this is their account, in The Invading Socialist Society, of Lenin's program from February to October 1917.

To believe Johnson-Forest, in 1917 Lenin's preoccupation was with the self-mobilization of the masses and with denouncing those who pressed for the confiscation of capitalist property. "In fact," they write, "the leaders of the October Revolution specifically excluded confiscation of property from their immediate program. They were concerned with something else -- the democratic, i.e., self-mobilization of the masses." (The Invading Socialist Society, page 5.)

"Specifically excluded"! "Concerned with something else"! What were the actual facts? On his return from exile, Lenin, in order to rearm the Bolshevik Party, demanded the revision of the party program to conform to the actual development of the revolution, a task which was entrusted to him. In that revised program submitted for adoption on June 2, 1917, Lenin inserted, among others, two demands: one for the nationalization of banks and trusts; the other for the nationalization of land. (See Volume VI of Lenin's Selected Works, page 109, English edition.)

As is well known, once the Bolsheviks were in power, Lenin, Trotsky and their associates carried out this part of their program in life. In short, the leaders of the October Revolution demanded and did what Johnson-Forest claim they were opposed to!

How is this flagrant blunder to be explained? It is not a deliberate falsification but the unavoidable result of their confused, lopsided and erroneous approach. It is simply one misunderstanding among many others of theirs.

For Marx and Engels, for Lenin and Trotsky, the acquisition of political power by the workers and the centralization of property in the hands of their state are parallel phases of the socialist revolution. To Johnson-Forest the "fundamental universal" is proletarian power which arises exclusively from "the self-mobilization of the proletariat," which in its turn "is the economics and politics of socialism." In this way, that which should be separated is merged and that which belongs together is cleaved asunder: the mobilization of workers for action is opposed to the statification of property and to the resulting economic planning which alone can do away with capitalist anarchy.

But this confusion and error are indispensable to Johnson-Forest. For only by divorcing private property from capitalism and by divorcing the workers' power from state property are they enabled to create, on paper, that supernatural devil-idol of theirs: "Bureaucratic State Capitalism."

Imperialism: The Nature of Our Epoch

For us Lenin's Imperialism is Marx's Capital brought up to date for the Twentieth Century. "For the Communist Manifesto," Trotsky explained, "capitalism was -- the kingdom of free competition. While referring to the growing concentration of capital, the Manifesto, did not draw the necessary conclusion in regard to monopoly which has become the dominant capitalist form in our epoch and the most important precondition for socialist economy. Only afterwards, in Capital, did Marx establish the tendency toward the transformation of free competition into monopoly. It was Lenin who gave a scientific characterization of monopoly capitalism in his Imperialism."

Johnson-Forest present their "analysis" of modern capitalism as a continuation of Lenin's. They seek to convert Lenin into an anticipator of their theory of "state capitalism" as a totally new stage of capitalist world economy, superseding imperialism and with its trends embracing all countries from the USSR through Yugoslavia to the United States.

In accrediting their errors to Lenin, Johnson-Forest confine themselves to the assertion that Lenin arrived at the recognition of "state capitalism" as early as 1917! As "proof" they cite certain of Lenin's remarks concerning state-capitalist trends and forms which are torn out of their original context in his speeches and writings and completely misinterpreted.

To be sure, Lenin like Marx and Engels before him, knew that collectivist trends must first find their expression precisely within capitalist economy itself. The new social system -- socialism -- could never replace capitalism before the latter had itself set the stage and created the prerequisites for it. This, is just what happened with the rise of monopoly or finance capital to dominance.

As Lenin put it, capitalism in its highest or imperialist stage brings society to the very threshold of socialism.

But neither Lenin nor Trotsky ever held that the collectivist tendencies in capitalist economy, most sharply exhibited in the tendency of finance-monopoly capital to fuse more and more intimately with the state, could or would attain their full completion under capitalism on a world scale. The most that imperialism is able to produce and reproduce in the sphere of fusion of monopoly with the state is fascism and kindred dictatorships. These, far from doing away with the rule of monopolies and finance capital, on the contrary, represent their most bestial political overlordship.

Lenin never recognized such tendencies as comprising a distinct stage in capitalist development. In his lifetime it was people like Kautsky, with his theory of "super-imperialism," who advanced the false notion of a new and "higher stage" of capitalist development than that embodied in imperialism. Had Lenin changed his views, as Johnson-Forest claim, he would surely have called attention to so significant a development in the programmatic documents of the Third International and its first four World Congresses in his own lifetime -- from 1919 to 1923, not to mention his new preface to Imperialism in 1920. Our movement has always held with Lenin that imperialism is the highest, that is, final stage of capitalism. This is the basic premise underlying our revolutionary conclusions concerning the nature of our epoch and from it flow our strategy and tactics.

In their assumed role of "continuator" of Lenin's work, Johnson-Forest proceed entirely differently than Lenin when he brought Marx's analysis of capitalism up-to-date. Lenin did not begin by throwing the basic ideas of Marx and Engels out of the window. On the contrary. He showed how the domination of monopolies and finance capital grew organically out of the system of free competition of the days of Marx and Engels. He showed how monopoly, instead of doing away with private property, remains based upon it and how monopoly, itself a negation of free-competition, cannot do away with competition but exists alongside of it. In fact, he shows how monopoly creates a new self-contradiction, altering the forms of competition and on top of that bringing in the competition between international trusts and cartels; how monopoly, by limiting its "planning" to individual trusts, or individual industrial groups, intensified the anarchy of world economy and renders most acute the problems of "overproduction," "underconsumption," etc.

That is why Lenin concluded: "Imperialism is that stage of capitalism when the latter after fulfilling everything in its power begins to decline." The two basic factors in this decline were elucidated by Trotsky. "The cause for the decline," he wrote, "lies in this, that the productive forces are equally fettered by the framework of private property as well as by the boundaries of the national state."

Thus, in analyzing the highest stage of capitalism, Lenin did not depart by a hairsbreadth from the basic theory of Marx and Engels. On the contrary, he demonstrated just how all their fundamental propositions actually and specifically applied to capitalism in its imperialist stage.

In its "basic, purely economic factors," Lenin defined imperialism as embracing the following five essential features:

1. Monopolies "play the decisive role in economic life." And Lenin proves this, with facts and figures.
2. The rise of finance capital or "of a 'financial oligarchy' as supreme ruler of the capitalist world, nationally and internationally." This too is not simply asserted but proved with facts and documents in hand.
3. The export of capital becomes predominant over the export of commodities. Again, irrefutable statistical proof.
4. The international capitalist monopolies "share the world among themselves." And who has refuted this since Lenin died?
5. The completion of the territorial division of the whole world among the imperialists. Two world wars have been fought to redivide this already divided world, with a third in preparation.

What do Johnson-Forest do? With one gesture these "continuator" sweep all of Lenin's conclusions into the wastebasket. Listen:

"Leninism in World War I taught that the world was completely shared out, so that in the future only redivision was possible.

"In 1948 there is no question of division or redivision of the world-market. The question is posed in terms of complete mastery of the world by one of two great powers, Russia or the United States.

"Leninism in World War I taught that the export of capital has become decisive as distinguished from the export of commodities, owing to the fact that capital in a few countries had become over-ripe and needed to seek a higher rate of profit in colonial countries.

"In 1948 finance capital does not export surplus capital to seek higher profit. World economy now patently suffers from a shortage of capital and an incapacity to create it in sufficient quantities to reconstruct Europe and to keep production expanding. The distinction is symbolized in the qualitative difference between the Dawes Plan and the Marshall Plan.

"Capital therefore tends towards centralization on a world scale. But the tendency towards centralization on a world scale and with it, the end of the world-market and of capitalist society, can be achieved only by force, i.e., the struggle for mastery between two great masses of capital, one under the control of the United States and the other under the control of Russia.

"It is here that everything begins." (State Capitalism and World Revolution, page 37.)

If Johnson-Forest will permit us, this is not where "everything begins." We are already acquainted with their "total conception" which consists of obliterating that which is decisive and manufacturing differences or establishing identities where none exist. As unrevised Marxists, we are not persuaded by mere declamation that any of Lenin's "five essential features" of imperialism have been or can be so easily done away with or become "outmoded" -- except through the proletarian revolution. Least of all can we American Marxists be convinced that the imperialists no longer face the need to export capital; or that finance capital no longer rules either in Washington, or by the same token in other capitalist countries throughout the world.

On the contrary, since Lenin died in 1924, instead of diminishing and dying, every essential feature of imperialism and in particular, the need to export capital and the dominance of the monopolists-financiers, have become more pronounced, more clearly discernible, more acutely aggravated.

The only way Forest-Johnson are able to "outmode" Lenin is by doing violence to the facts of economic life today. To illustrate, here is the passage from page 9 of State Capitalism and World Revolution:

". . . Who in his senses today thinks that the world is suffering from an excess of capital? Where? In Britain, in France, in Italy, in Japan, in India, in Brazil, in China? Where, pray, where? From everywhere the cry arises for capital. The total mass of surplus value produced in relation to the total social capital is hopelessly inadequate." Then they say, in passing, "It may be useful (though we doubt this) to point out the fabulous profits of this or that company in the United States. This is no more than a variety of American exceptionalism. These profits will never be able to rebuild world economy."

Comrade Weiss has said in this connection all that needs be said:

"Everything is wrong here. Absolutely everything. . . A conscientious observer wouldn't list, under the heading of 'Where is there excess capital?' every country in the world except the United States, the colossus; the one country that has sucked dry the marrow, the wealth, of the world. The American imperialists have incorporated into their own system masses of capital. The whole world drive of American imperialism stems from that. They are now trying to subjugate the world militarily in order to exploit it more intensively. One doesn't deal with this pivotal question by an offhand reference

to a few corporations and their fabulous profits, and then evade the question, by saying these profits will never rebuild the world. We never said and Lenin never said, that imperialist export of capital would rebuild the world. On the contrary, this tends to tear it down. Only the proletarian revolution and the economy and society it will introduce will rebuild the world."

What is the motive behind this fantastic distortion of reality by Johnson-Forest? The same as produced their previously noted distortion of the history of the October 1917 Revolution. It arises from the needs of their "theory." They seek to establish an identity where none exists between the Soviet Union and capitalism. The Soviet Union, as everybody knows, does not export "capital." If anything, it is impelled to import it. Actually, under Stalin, it loots it. But the theoretical world of Johnson-Forest has no room for such discrepancies.

In the real United States capital clamoring for outlets has been piling up at a record-breaking rate and in terrific amounts. According to this year's report of the Securities Exchange Commission, U.S. corporate "working capital" since 1939 "has risen \$51.4 billion" to a staggering "high record of 75.9 billion dollars." If anything, this figure is an underestimate. This glut of capital is so critical that the American imperialists find the only available outlet is to vomit it out in military production.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union -- let alone the Kremlin-dominated countries, Yugoslavia, and most acutely of all, Mao's China -- is experiencing an intolerable lack of "capital" (i.e., already accumulated wealth as the basis for expanding the means of production). How obliterate this manifest and decisive economic difference between the United States and the Soviet Union? One way for Johnson-Forest is by abolishing the role of the export of capital in the real capitalist world.

In the Soviet Union the monopolist owners, the big profit producers, the private owners of the means of production were eliminated thanks to the proletarian revolution there. In the United States, the monopolist owners, the profiteers, the private proprietors retain their stranglehold on the nation's economy, on our working class, on our people as a whole. How obliterate this not so trifling social difference? Very simply, abolish the capitalist class and replace the private proprietor with the bureaucrat who runs state-owned property!

But how is it possible to reconcile with Marxism, especially Marxist economic theory, such a sweeping obliteration of basic differences and such a bald substitution of false identities in their place? Here we come to the subtlest feat of theoretical ingenuity exhibited by Johnson-Forest. Involved here are the broadest generalizations of economic science.

The device employed by Forest-Johnson to establish their fictitious identity between the capitalist system and the Soviet economy is to approach the economic process in both instances exclusively through the C/V relationship. This is the relationship between constant capital (C, or the means of production) and variable capital (or labor power).

Now this C/V relationship applies equally not only to capitalist society and to the Soviet Union but to every economy. "Whatever may be the social form of production," Marx pointed out, "laborers (or V) and means of production (or C) always remain its main elements. But either of these factors can become effective only when they unite. The special manner in which this union is accomplished distinguishes the different economic epochs from one another."

It is the special manner in which the C/V relationship is established that marks off capitalism from the transitional Soviet economy. Under capitalism this is manifested through and by an entirely different relation expressed in the following formula: S/V (where S represents the surplus value appropriated by the capitalist and V the wages paid to workers for their labor-power). In dealing with the C/V relation one remains in the general sphere of PRODUCTIVITY, equally applicable in this abstract form to any and all economic systems. In dealing with the S/V relation, we are dealing with one, and only one, economic epoch: that of capitalism.

What Johnson-Forest do is to shift the whole axis of the economic analysis of capitalism -- and therefore of the class struggle -- from the concrete plane of exploitation to the abstract plane of productivity.

The crux of the function of the capitalist class -- and by this token, the axis of the class struggle -- is the struggle by the capitalists to maintain the rate of surplus value (S/V) which meets the efforts of the workers to drive it down and eventually abolish it altogether. For Marxists, the existence and rate of exploitation (or the S/V relation) is the material base of the class struggle, the struggle which finds expression in class conflicts over wages, hours, intensity of labor, over living and working standards, division of the national income and the like. To Johnson-Forest this pivotal relation is a matter of theoretical and practical indifference not alone in relation to imperialism and to the Soviet Union but, as we shall later see, in the capital-labor struggles right here at home.

The magic wand whereby Johnson-Forest seek to distract attention from this theoretical feat of theirs is -- THE MACHINE. Fulminations against the machine run through their writings. They keep harping on the "domination of the machine," "materialization into instruments of labor which dominate over the proletariat," "complete mechanization of men," and so forth. They talk as though what is involved is not a struggle between living men grouped in antagonistic classes against the capitalist use of machinery in the social mechanism of exploitation, but between men and things, or between men and impersonal "large masses of centralized capital."

In this method of analyzing capitalism and its development Johnson-Forest are not "continuators" of Lenin. Although their own conclusions differ, in recoiling from the "machine" (simply another name for the means of production!) and in centering their examination of capitalism upon productivity to the exclusion of exploitation, Johnson-Forest hark back to the French Utopian, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, ideologist of anarchism and one of the earliest antagonists of Marx and Engels. (See The Poverty of Philosophy by Karl Marx.) Just as in their world outlook, in their philosophy of history, and in their

sociology, so in their economic method Johnson-Forest substitute the errors of pre-Marxist Socialists for the truths of Marxism.

The Soviet Union and Stalinism

In place of the Leninist analysis of imperialism and the Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union and Stalinism, Johnson-Forest seek to introduce their "total conception" of state-capitalism. Its first historical bearers, they claim, are the Stalinists and its most highly developed example to date is the Soviet Union. When Lenin analyzed modern capitalism, he showed how its stage of decay, imperialism, organically flowed from the entire previous economic development and took for his example not one of the most backward European countries, semi-colonial Czarist Russia, but the most advanced capitalist countries.

Standing Lenin on his head, Johnson-Forest effect their alleged transition from one stage of capitalist decay (or imperialism) to the next and higher stage ("state capitalism") by purely political means; worse yet, through a revolution which toppled capitalism in backward Russia.

The "new" capitalist rulers who emerge as the end result of this process have features no other ruling class in history ever possessed. Suffice it to cite three:

1. Their new ruling class remains capitalist in nature but is at the same time a mortal enemy of capitalist private property. A ruling class that is bent on destroying its own productive relations (property forms!) is indeed something new!

2. Their new ruling class plays no independent role whatever in production. It does not own the means of production nor is able to pass on this property to any legal heirs. It exercises purely functional duties "in the sense of administration, supervision, control," Johnson-Forest themselves admit.

Every system of production, from slavery through feudalism to capitalism, has known its "administrators," "supervisors," "controllers." In every case these were the agents of specific principals. Under slavery, they were the "administrative" agents of the slave-owners; under feudalism, the "supervisors" for the noble land-owners; under capitalism, "controllers" for the private owners of monopolies, like America's Sixty Families, for instance. To identify subordinate agents with their dominant class principals mocks not Marxism alone but even common sense.

3. Their new ruling class stands in just the opposite relation from the old capitalists on such matters as the need to export capital, development of agriculture, depression-prosperity cycles, and so on. What holds for the capitalist system, as Marxists know it, does not hold at all for the Johnson-Forest "new stage" of capitalism. Assuredly Lenin would never have recognized capitalism in this mirror which offers features diametrically different from the economy of imperialism.

It is not surprising or accidental that exactly on the question of Stalinism we find error piled on error, confusion upon confusion.

For the phenomena of the degeneration of the first workers' state in history and of Stalinism -- the agency through which this counter-revolutionary process has taken place there -- are indeed something new, something unforeseen by Marx, Engels or Lenin himself. Only Trotsky and his movement have followed, analyzed and elucidated this transitional Soviet society, which is far closer to capitalism than to socialism, but which, because of the surviving conquests of the October Revolution, still stands poles apart from imperialism.

Trotsky applied the method of Marxism step by step to the Soviet development. Events have proved that he saw further and deeper into Soviet reality than anybody else. Above all, he laid bare the main contradiction determining the movement of the Soviet Union: the absolute antagonism between the rule of an unbridled bureaucracy (which in the final analysis serves as the agency of imperialism but which can maintain itself only on the basis of proletarian property forms) and the economic and cultural needs of the country. With clenched teeth its peoples "tolerate" the hated Kremlin usurpers primarily because the proletariat of advanced countries has not come to their aid. In other words, the main contradiction in the Soviet Union is a political one.

In the capitalist world an entirely different contradiction operates: here the basic fetter on economic and cultural progress is an economic one. To enable the peoples under capitalism to move forward it is necessary to overhaul the economic structure from top to bottom; for progress in the Soviet Union, on the contrary, the economic foundation does not require basic or revolutionary measures. These are needed exclusively in the political field, which can be accomplished only through a political revolution.

To Johnson-Forest for whom the distinction between politics and economics is no longer valid there is, of course, no difference here at all. But for any Marxist who has learned to differentiate between politics and economics, all the better to understand the interrelations between them, nothing less is involved than a class difference.

To illustrate, Forest-Johnson call for "democratic control of production." This is a splendid measure. But it is by no means a panacea. It is essentially a political, not an economic measure. Moreover, workers' control is not enough; workers' management is at least equally as important. But observe the difference. The introduction of workers' control in the Soviet Union would signify a qualitative change there, the Soviet workers will have resumed mastership even to the degree of bringing about the downfall of Stalinism.

It is not so under capitalism. The West German workers recently gained not only partial control but also a partial share in management ("codetermination"). This is an important victory, to be sure, but a far removal from any qualitative change in German industry. The workers are not yet masters there; they are still the wage-slaves of the capitalist owners.

What has complicated an already complex situation has been first, the relatively long reign of Stalinism, and then its postwar expansion. It would be wrong to ascribe this, as so many superficial observers do, to any inherent powers of Stalinism -- and to deduce

from this its longevity or historical mission. The power of the Russian Revolution and the magnitude of its conquests is the main and real reason for the survival of the Soviet Union, and with it, unfortunately, of the parasite attached, Stalinism.

To define in brief and simple terms just what we have in the Soviet Union today is no easy undertaking. The question of the character of the Soviet Union has not yet been finally decided by history.

"To define the Soviet regime as transitional, or immediate," wrote Trotsky in 1937, "means to abandon such finished social categories as capitalism (and therewith 'state capitalism') and also socialism. But besides being completely inadequate in itself," he continued, "such a definition is capable of producing a mistaken idea that from the present Soviet regime only a transition to socialism is possible. In reality a backslide to capitalism is wholly possible. A more complete definition will of necessity be complicated and ponderous."

In this necessarily involved formula, Trotsky distinguished nine essential features:

1. "The productive forces are still far from adequate to give the state property a socialist character." Since this was written 14 years ago the Soviet Union has leaped to a position industrially, second only to the United States. Moreover, for the first time in Russian history, the urban population exceeds the rural. Nevertheless what Trotsky wrote in 1937 is still valid.

2. "The tendency toward primitive accumulation created by want breaks out through innumerable pores of the planned economy." Soviet living standards today are below pre-war. This tendency therefore has become aggravated.

3. "Norms of distribution preserving a bourgeois character lie at the basis of a new differentiation of society." This, too, has remained basically unchanged.

4. "The economic growth, while slowly bettering the situation of the toilers, promotes a swift formation of privileged strata." The gulf between the bureaucrats and the people has greatly widened. While bureaucratic powers and privileges and numbers have grown, the living and working standards of the Soviet masses have shown little, if any, improvement.

5. "Exploiting the social antagonisms, a bureaucracy has converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism." This truth, known to the Soviet people above all, is becoming more and more clear to thousands of European workers, in particular to those in Yugoslavia and in the so-called "buffer zone." However, it is as yet obscure to the millions influenced by Stalinism in Asia, in Western Europe and other places.

6. "The social revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and in the consciousness of the toiling masses." The victory in the war not only converted the USSR into the second world power but also temporarily strengthened Stalinism.

But it must not be overlooked that it had effects on the Soviet masses too. By proving its vitality on the military field, the social revolution of 1917 was also reinforced in the consciousness of the toilers. On the rim of the USSR both in the Balkans and in Asia, this is self-evident; the impact of this additional reinforcement of revolutionary consciousness within the Soviet Union has not yet manifested itself in observable ways.

7. "A further development of the accumulating contradictions can as well lead to socialism as back to capitalism." It will be noted that Trotsky stressed here the resumption of the road to progress just as much, if not more, than the retrogression to capitalism. We see no reason for any change here.

8. "On the road to capitalism the counter-revolution would have to break the resistance of the workers." The Soviet masses, having fought to the death against Hitlerism, will not, we may be sure, accept a capitalist restoration supinely, either from within or imposed from without.

9. "On the road to socialism the workers would have to overthrow the bureaucracy. In the last analysis, the question will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena."

To the above definition, it is now necessary to add several other new factors such as the Kremlin's role in the "buffer countries," its role in Western Europe, the Far East, etc. Last but not least to be taken into account is the unfolding crisis of Stalinism, which has already led to a significant break from Moscow in Yugoslavia and to uninterrupted purges in the Stalinist movement the world over. The Trotskyist movement is following, elucidating and trying to intervene with utmost vigor into these new developments.

A correct conception of the Soviet Union and the Kremlin bureaucracy is indispensable precisely for this practical political purpose. The Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union not only conforms to the complex and contradictory reality and has been confirmed by events; above all, it enables the vanguard to act most effectively in "the struggle of living social forces" now going on which will decide the fate of the USSR.

The Johnson-Forest representation, on the contrary, caricatures reality; flies in the face of events; and would disarm and misdirect the workers in their struggles. Let us explain these three points.

Johnson-Forest first of all flout reality by cancelling the class distinction between the imperialist countries and the Soviet economy. The trouble is that they seek to unite under the single, all-embracing formula of "state capitalism" two systems which from the economic, social and historical standpoints have opposing origins, foundations and directions. In the United States we observe the ultimate consequences of imperialist development; in the USSR a foundation for a socialized economy corroded by Russia's backwardness, cramped by imperialist encirclement, and mutilated by its bureaucratic administrators.

If nothing else was involved than superficial theorizing, this would not matter much. But far more is at stake. To take the recent past, if from the proletarian viewpoint there were no principled social differences between fascist Germany and Stalinist Russia, it was of no account which won in their war -- and so Johnson-Forest believe. What a misreading of events! Actually, the victory of the USSR gave a colossal impetus to the mass movements throughout Europe and Asia, however much the Kremlin and its agencies have tried to stifle their independent revolutionary promise since.

On the Johnson-Forest premise of their basic identity, the workers cannot be given a correct explanation of the deepening and irrespressible antagonism between the imperialist bloc and the Soviet Union. In case of war they cannot be advised on the right line of revolutionary policy to follow nor be shown what stake they have in its outcome.

Finally, the Johnson-Forest conception of a "state capitalist" Russia miseducates the workers on the true nature of Stalinism. "Now that European fascism is destroyed," they write, "Stalinism in various stages of development is the organic political superstructure of the day. . . Even if Stalinist Russia had never existed and the proletarian revolution had been delayed, some such political formation as the Stalinist parties would have appeared." (The Invading Socialist Society, page 17.) By thus designating Stalinism as the typical embodiment and forerunner of a new and higher stage of capitalist development toward which the whole world is heading in default of the victorious proletarian revolution, Johnson-Forest actually endow this transitory bureaucratic formation with a social and economic foundation of its own and with both an historical necessity and a future. That is why Johnson-Forest can see incipient bureaucratic capitalist forces of the Stalinist stamp arising and advancing everywhere today in the most dissimilar places: the American trade union officialdom, the Yugoslav CP, the urban petty-bourgeoisie in China.

Consequently, in their outlook, the central class struggle between the declining imperialist rulers and the revolutionary workers tends to become obscured, eclipsed and displaced by the struggle between the ascending bureaucrats and the masses. Johnson-Forest make this explicit when they say that the Stalinist bureaucracy "is the greatest counter-revolutionary force in the world today." (Same, page 57)

Stalinism undoubtedly heads the counter-revolutionary forces within the mass movements today and must be fought to the death on that account. But it must never be overlooked that "the greatest counter-revolutionary force in the world today" is not Stalinism but world imperialism. In fact, the power of the Kremlin depends in the last analysis upon the co-existence of imperialism and Moscow's counter-revolutionary policies and acts benefit imperialism the most.

On the basis of the Johnson-Forest misappraisal of the contending social forces, the workers would be unable to distinguish, for example, between the movements headed or influenced by the Stalinists or by de Gaulle in France, or by Ho Chi-Minh or Bao Dai in Indo-china. They could see no reason for supporting one against the other since they had no class criteria for distinguishing between the capitalist

counter-revolution and the first stages of an advancing proletarian revolution. Wherever the Stalinists had influence or control over the masses, any people inspired by Johnson-Forest would end up completely muddled and politically paralyzed.

The National Question

Johnson-Forest refuse the slightest support to the struggle of the Yugoslavs, not excluding "the support of the struggle for the national independence of Yugoslavia."

"We did not arrive at this when Tito broke with Stalin," they say. "In 1947, in The Invading Socialist Society (page 31) we explained with great care why for Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Rumania and Hungary, the struggle for national independence since World War II is an illusion and cannot fail to have reactionary consequences." (State Capitalism and World Revolution, page 65.)

With reservations, they extend the same contention to colonial countries like Korea. By claiming that support of national struggles in Europe, Asia or on other continents is "out-moded" or "reactionary," Johnson-Forest quarrel directly with Lenin, whose disciple Trotsky was on the national problem.

Lenin engaged in a life-long struggle against all doctrinaires who denied that the national struggle, while most complicated, is nevertheless one of the extremely important forms of the class struggle in the epoch of imperialism. Trotsky pointed out how wrong it is to cancel out national struggles "by mere references to the future world revolution," or, as Johnson-Forest do, by references to "the tendency to centralization."

In the imperialist epoch genuinely democratic aims and principles -- such as the self-determination of oppressed peoples -- can be realized in life and safeguarded only by the proletarian revolution. That is why national struggles -- or what is the same thing: the democratic revolutions -- tend to combine with and pass over into the proletarian revolution. That is the gist of Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, confirmed for the first time in the Russia of 1917 when the February (or democratic) revolution combined with and was consummated by the October (or proletarian) overturn.

The Yugoslav experience, where the revolution begun as a national-liberation struggle immediately went forward to combine with the proletarian revolution, has come as a second historic confirmation. The Third Chinese Revolution, under different conditions, tends to follow the same course. Johnson-Forest say they adhere to the theory of the permanent revolution. But to declare that national struggles are "outmoded" and thereby to reject the decisive intervention of the proletariat in such struggles means to abandon the position of the permanent revolution.

In dumping Lenin's teachings on the national question, Johnson-Forest have adopted instead the sectarian viewpoint of Lenin's opponents who likewise argued in their day that new capitalist conditions made national struggles illusory and reactionary. The basic

theoretical error committed by Johnson-Forest is identical with the old Lassallean concept of "a homogeneous reactionary mass." Criticizing this concept, and anticipating the fuller development of the theory of the permanent revolution (see The Critique of Gotha Program, Engels' March 18, 1875 letter to Bebel), Marx and Engels repeatedly called attention to the importance of the allies of the working class, underscoring the enormous significance of the process whereby the democratic revolution becomes transformed into the socialist revolution. In his letter of Nov. 2, 1882 to Bernstein, Engels branded as clearly childish "the idea that the whole world will be divided into two armies -- on one side ourselves, and on the other the whole 'single reactionary mass.'" With minor modifications Johnson-Forest offer as the latest revelation the self-same "two-army" world picture.

In agreement with Engels, Lenin in 1916 wrote: "To believe that a social revolution is possible without the revolt of the small nationalities and colonies in Europe, without the revolutionary outburst of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the non-class conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against landlord, clerical, monarchist, national, etc., oppression -- to believe this is tantamount to denying the social revolution altogether. In the imagination of such people in one place will be lined up troops who will say: 'We are for Socialism,' and in another place will be lined up troops who will say, 'We are for imperialism,' and this will be the social revolution! . . . Those who wait for a 'pure' revolution will never live to see it."

Johnson-Forest reject as reactionary not only national struggles in Europe but even go so far as to condemn the use of such slogans as an "Independent Socialist Poland" as a conclusion from their "total conception" of bureaucratic state capitalism. Such "total" sectarianism flies in the face of the real needs and development of the struggle against both the Kremlin subjugation and the imperialist enslavement of nationalities like the Poles.

By thus arbitrarily outlawing the dynamic and progressive role of national struggles, Johnson-Forest are in practice driven to withdrawal from the most crucial revolutionary events of our day.

The Class Struggle in the U.S.

In line with their already mentioned shift of the economic analysis of capitalism from the field of exploitation into that of productivity, Johnson-Forest seek to supply a new and different main motive force or axis for the class struggle in the United States.

According to Marx and Engels, let us repeat, the struggle between capital and labor springs from the conflict over the surplus product -- or rate of extraction of surplus value -- over the work-week, take-home pay, and generally over the division of the national income. According to Johnson-Forest, the fountainhead of the class struggle lies in the domain of productivity (or the C/V relationship). It stems from the revulsion of the workers against the employers and the bureaucrats, they argue.

Now the workers unquestionably revolt against any intensification of their exploitation, including the speedup. But whatever may

be the immediate cause which sets the workers into motion, what they primarily combat is the very basis of exploitation which is expressed in the tendency of capital to drive down the wages, to apportion the workers a smaller share of their product, and thereby reduce their living standards.

That is why the majority of strikes in the history of unionism are for higher wages. This goes on today throughout the capitalist world, in India as in Finland, as here at home.

"The (union) bureaucracy inevitably must substitute the struggle over consumption, higher wages, pensions, education, etc., for a struggle in production. This is the basis of the welfare state, the attempt to appease the workers with the fruits of labor when they seek satisfaction in the work itself," write Johnson-Forest (State Capitalism and World Revolution, page 24).

From the standpoint of Marxism, the astonishing thing is the Johnson-Forest relegation of the struggle for higher wages to the sphere of consumption, as though it were a secondary factor. In reality, wage negotiations are first and foremost a struggle between workers and proprietors over the preconditions of capitalist production. What is means of production for the capitalist is means of existence for the worker. The outlay for wages is a part -- and the most crucial part -- of the productive capital of the industrialist. So that when a corporation and a group of workers argue over the terms of sale and purchase of labor power, they are disputing over the vital factor and central element of capitalist production, the source of its exploitation and profits. As the classic capitalist economist David Ricardo long ago understood, the higher the wages, the lower the profits, and vice versa.

So obsessed are Johnson-Forest with the intensification and alienation of labor that they minimize the significance of the specific relationship through which this is effected under capitalist conditions of production. This one-sided approach to capital-labor relations leads in turn to a false conception of the actual relations between the union bureaucracy and the ranks. "While the (union) bureaucracy provides the leadership for struggles over consumption, it is from the workers on the line that emerges the initiative for struggles over speedup." (Same, page 24.) In these words, Johnson-Forest apparently hand over the leadership to the bureaucracy in the struggle for higher wages, pensions, education, etc., on the ground that these pertain, after all, to consumption ("the fruits of labor") and are a diversion from the main front of struggle at the point of production.

This is not correct. First, it is incorrect to attribute to the bureaucracy "a new social program" revolving around the struggle for higher wages, etc. To be sure, union leaders are now and then prodded by the ranks to demand and even strike for higher wages. (Here, too, the real "initiative" emanates from below.) But the bureaucrats enter these struggles reluctantly, only under tremendous pressure and with the aim of speedy settlement on a minimum basis.

In the second place, apart from the incapacity of the union bureaucracy to conduct such struggles effectively, it would be suicidal for our party to regard the wage front as the predominant, if not exclusive, province of the officialdom. We have never done that and could do so only at the risk of forfeiting our job as the revolutionary vanguard. To concentrate our forces upon the fight against

speedup, i.e., better working conditions, and underestimate the importance of wage struggles, i.e., for better living conditions, as Johnson-Forest logically imply, would be a most damaging diversion from our tasks.

There is nothing progressive, nothing proletarian, nothing Marxist about such a depreciation of wage and welfare issues. Of course, as socialists, the struggle for higher wages is not for us an end-in-itself but a springboard for organization, action and education leading the workers to the abolition of capitalist exploitation. But in order to guide that movement toward its goal, it is necessary to grasp the impetus imparted to the class struggle by the clash over the price of labor power.

Role of the Revolutionary Party

The problem of creating the requisite revolutionary leadership for the working class is for us the key problem of our epoch. It is moreover the reason for our own existence. Thanks to the experiences of the past fifty years both on a world scale and in this country, our movement has acquired very well-defined ideas on the proletarian party in its theoretical and practical aspects.

Briefly, the party is the decisive instrument of the class struggle. It studies, feels, absorbs the needs, the interests and the tasks of all the oppressed; invests them with the most conscious and rounded expression; and acts as the pole of attraction for the most energetic, courageous and intelligent elements in the workers' ranks.

The function of the revolutionary party in the United States is to intervene at all points in the mass movements; provide a guiding line for their conduct; raise the class consciousness of the workers; and organize and lead them to the installation of the socialist power. Thereafter it will serve as the indispensable agency in leading the transition from capitalism to socialism. This contest for leadership must be waged not only against direct representatives of the ruling class. It must also be waged against all rival forces within the working class, reformists, centrists, union bureaucrats and Stalinists, who in various ways and for various reasons buttress capitalism by holding back the workers and deflecting them from the road toward socialism.

The issue of the wage struggle in the United States, with which we have just dealt, is one instance of how the Johnson-Forest views on the role of the revolutionary party appear to diverge from ours.

Another example is their explanation for the defeats suffered by the proletariat since the 1917 victory in Russia. Involved here is the central problem of Marxist politics. For whoever does not grasp the reasons for these defeats, or conversely, for the triumph in Russia, cannot prepare for victory in the days to come.

The full position of Johnson-Forest in this connection is still obscure. But certain critical remarks in their document tend to explain the past defeats not by the failure of the leaderships but by the failure of what they entitle "the self-mobilization of the

proletariat." On the other hand, in the Russian Revolution, they would have to see not the revolutionary leadership rising to the level of the historic tasks, but rather the success of this same intangible "self-mobilization" of the masses which took place through political agents and agencies unknown and unspecified.

We cannot go along. For us, the decisive factor in the victory of the Russian revolution was the presence there of a party and leadership capable of organizing the workers for power, assuming and holding it.

The overriding reason for the reverses of the revolution elsewhere since Lenin and Trotsky's day has been the lack of such parties and leaderships at each critical turning point and the resulting betrayals of the struggles by parties and leaderships which served alien class interests and needs.

In Germany from 1918 to 1923, in China 1925-27, in Spain 1931-39, in France on the eve of World War II and throughout the whole of Europe following the war, the masses manifested in action their readiness to go through to the end. All of these offensives by the masses and their mobilization under the traditional leaderships and parties available to them were inspired by revolutionary aims. Each time these movements brought about crises in the respective countries, a crisis not only for their bourgeoisies but also in anarcho-syndicalism, Social Democracy, Stalinism and the centrist formations. And each time the masses suffered defeat.

If these defeats resulted not from the crisis of leadership but from some other cause, including "the crisis of self-mobilization," then all of the above situations in which the mass mobilization of the proletariat reached their highest intensity were doomed to succumb in advance. Revolutionists would have nothing of vital importance to learn from these past defeats. The triumphs of the fascist counter-revolution would have been historically predetermined simply because one condition or another within the working class itself -- separate and apart from the existing leaderships -- was lacking.

If Johnson-Forest really mean what they say on this point, then the main obstacle to the march of the socialist revolution since 1914 has been not the opportunist and treacherous policies of the Social-Democratic, Stalinist, Anarchist, centrist, trade-unionist leaderships, but some organic inadequacy of the working masses themselves. Isn't such a position the height of self-contradiction for those who envisage such "vast revolutionary upheavals stimulated in the proletariat"?

The hardest and greatest of problems is that of creating the requisite revolutionary leadership. But instead of emphasizing this central task Johnson-Forest underestimate its importance. This is implicit in what they write on page 33 of State Capitalism and World Revolution:

"The first sentence of the Transitional Program states that the crisis of the revolution is the crisis of revolutionary leadership. This is the reiterated theme," they say. Then they immediately add, "Exactly the opposite is the case. It is the crisis of the self-mobilization of the proletariat."

Drawn to its logical conclusion, this "exact opposite" contention could only mean rejection of our theory of the party and its decisive role, derived from Lenin's Bolshevism and underscored by the events of the last half-century. In practice it would mean the rejection of the contest for leadership inside the working class, and, in the final analysis, of the struggle to build the revolutionary party. This task would have to be assigned to the formless working class as a whole, with all its different strata and their different degrees of consciousness, and not to its vanguard organized in and by the party.

To justify their criticism of the Leninist conception of the role of the party, Johnson-Forest offer the following contention: "Lenin never conceived of a mass party of two and a half million people before the struggle for power" (Same, page 32). This can mean only that the unique feature of political developments in our day, unlike Lenin's, is that the proletariat mobilizes in huge mass parties. But far from being "unique," mass parties have long accompanied the march of the working class toward class-consciousness.

This happened with the German Social Democracy in the epoch of the Second International before World War I. Tens of millions were likewise mobilized after World War I in both the Third and Second Internationals and in the interval between the First and Second World Wars.

Nor is it even true that before the advent of "state capitalism," the proletariat alone had shown this ability to "self-mobilize" into huge mass parties. Before the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Russian peasants were organized into a huge mass party under the Socialist-Revolutionaries (who at one time adhered to the Second International). In China, under the Kuomintang (at one time a "sympathizing" party in the Stalinist International) there was a party of several millions. The success of the German and Italian fascists in "self-mobilizing" the petty-bourgeoisie hardly requires comment.

Johnson-Forest base their quest for a new "expanded" conception of the party on this misconceived novelty of mass parties. They argue that the Bolshevik Party of Lenin can no longer serve as a model because of their new epoch of "state capitalism." A party -- and an international -- of a completely new type are thus needed.

Just what this party would be like, they do not say. But if they remain vague, we must be clear and certain on the kind of party we are striving to build and why precisely that kind of party is essential. Only the Leninist type of party, such as we are building, can lead American labor to success in its struggles against the mightiest of the capitalist powers.

In Conclusion

We have set forth our disagreements on many key questions with the Johnson-Forest group. We have tried not to exaggerate these differences but to set them down and discuss them fully and frankly. It must be said that our differences are not inconsiderable. Nothing less than the traditions, method and ideas of scientific socialism here confront an attempt to revise Marxism which would drag the theory of our movement back more than a century and derail it politically.

Socialism is a scientific doctrine founded on a correct and all-sided analysis of social reality, its forces, and trends. A system of wrong ideas violating this social reality cannot be maintained for long without serious consequences for its adherents. The powerful pressures exerted by the contending social forces are bound to make themselves felt at every big turn of events.

Without realizing it, the Johnson-Forest comrades are gripped by a twofold contradiction: between their will to be revolutionists and their incorrect method and conclusions; and between their theoretical outlook and the objective realities of the class struggle. This is a basic weakness and an ever-present source of crisis for them.

The only way to resolve this contradiction is to bring their revolutionary aspirations and devotion into harmony with social reality and the tasks of the class struggle.

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