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MARXIST-HUMANISM,

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA



Raya Dunayevskaya

Raya Dunayevskaya is not new to Chicago, for as a young Russian immigrant she landed in this city in 1922, and soon began her life-long involvement in the revolutionary movement.

She greets me in her red dress, wearing a red button with a picture of Rosa Luxemburg — "The Red Rosa" — and takes me on a tour of her library. It would be difficult to guess that this warm, affectionate, lively woman in her mid seventies is one of the major thinkers of our time. Her study is packed with volumes of Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg in several languages. There are vast sections on women's history, Black and labor history, Eastern European and Third World countries. The *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, a 7000 page collection of her numerous writings, is stacked up neatly in gray boxes in several rows in the library. In addition there are rows of her major works, *Marxism and Freedom* (1958), *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973), and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1982), works which have been published in several languages — French, Italian, German, Spanish, Japanese, Persian, and smuggled to mainland China and behind the Iron Curtain. Finally, she shows me bound volumes of the Marxist-Humanist monthly newspaper, *News & Letters*, a paper and organization which she founded 30 years ago in Detroit, though since 1984 *News & Letters* has been published in Chicago.

In the one and half hour interview she speaks as easily of Emily Bronte and Herman Melville, as of Hegel's "negation of the negation," or the struggles in New Caledonia, and is constantly reaching for a book to quote me selections of it. It is all part of the dialectical flow of her thought which is so characteristic of her writings. We began by discussing her association with Leon Trotsky.

CLR: I know that your writings stress that the only biography you are interested in is the biography of an idea. But since Trotsky was such a historic personality, would you tell us about the period when you were his Russian secretary?

Raya Dunayevskaya: I do not deny what history has granted Trotsky. I certainly consider him great, whether we speak of his statements, or his actual role in the Russian Revolution, and I consider the period I spent with him in Mexico in 1937-38 great. But the reason I would prefer to speak about my own views and the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism is precisely because my real development was not when I was Trotsky's secretary but began with the break with Trotsky. It is not only a question of discovering new ideas, but the method in which you approach your task is key.

You see, in 1938, I had wanted to join the Americans who were fighting the fascists in Spain. But I was turned down because I was a woman. That was when I went to Mexico to work with Trotsky as his Russian secretary.

This was the period when the greatest frame-up trials in history were taking place in Russia, two years during which Stalin killed off the General Staff of the Russian Revolution. Inside Russia the workers faced the most Draconian anti-labor laws, including forced labor camps. And in foreign policy it was the period which ended in the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact, an agreement which in effect gave the green light to Hitler to start World War II.

To my utter shock and disbelief, I realized that with the outbreak of the war, Trotsky, who had been fighting the Stalinist bureaucracy for over a decade, would now turn to the workers and ask them to defend Russia, because it was a "workers' state though degenerate." Here was this man who had helped make two great revolutions, the 1905 and the 1917 Revolutions, and I couldn't believe that I was saying to Trotsky, "You are wrong and I am right." Actually I lost my power of speech for two days.

But precisely because it was so great a break and challenge to what I used to consider Marxism, I had to prove it. I was not only opposing the Hitler-

Stalin pact, I was opposing Trotsky's conception that nationalized economy equalled workers' state.

I was quiet for three long years, and then I went back to the three original Five Year Plans of the Russian economy, which had been published at the outbreak of World War II, but I also returned to Marx, because I felt Trotsky did not understand Marx, especially the philosophic Marx. So, my first essay on the nature of the Soviet economy, called

Russia as a State-Capitalist Society, was also based on what I later discovered was one of Marx's 1944 *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*, which are today known as the Humanist Essays.

CLR: I had a chance to look at some parts of your latest work in progress, *Women's Liberation and Dialectics of Revolution: Reaching for the Future*, and it seems that the question of alienation in man/woman relationships, and the women's struggle to change society is a main theme of these collected essays of yours. Could you discuss that book?

RD: The essays include 35 years of my writings on the subject, and are divided into four parts:

- I. Women, Labor and the Black Dimension
- II. Revolutionaries All
- III. Sexism, Politics and Revolution — Japan, Portugal, Poland, China, Latin America, U.S. — Is There An Organizational Answer?
- IV. The Trail to the 1980s: The Missing Link — Philosophy — In The Relationship Of Revolution To Organization

You see, what I believe characterizes our epoch is what I have called *the movement from practice that is itself a form of theory*. Women's Liberation is one very important manifestation of this movement from practice. What I mean by this is that movements of our age, be they in the U.S., East Europe, or the Third World, have brought forth new revolutionary forces who at the same time have acted as Reason, as thinking subjects. Their mature demands, in turn, have posed a challenge to all philosophers, to work out the new stage of cognition philosophical.

For example, I look at the Black women from the period of the Abolitionists to today, and their magnificent leading role, which has been so historically and philosophically ignored — particularly as to the direction it can give to the movement — by feminist theoreticians.

CLR: I was first attracted to your writings when I saw that you as an American philosopher, in discussing the 1979 Iranian Revolution, related that to the 1905 Iranian Revolution and the role of women in that revolution. Even among those of us who supported the Iranian women, few would recall women in the 1905 Iranian Revolution!

RD: Historically, women have been ignored not only as revolutionaries but as thinkers as well. What I had been interested in was the impact of the 1905 Russian Revolution on the East. The Iranian women in a certain sense went beyond their Russian sisters. Russia at that time included as well Poland, and that meant Rosa Luxemburg. Nevertheless the Russian women did not establish a separate women's Soviet, whereas the Iranian women did, and called this new form of organization "Anjomens" or Soviets. In March 1979, a few days after the magnificent International Women's Day demonstrations of thousands of Iranian women, I was specifically critiquing the Iranian male Left who were ignoring the revolutionary role of women in opposing Khomeini. The point was that the Iranian Revolution could continue if, among other elements, the revolutionary feminism that was in the air was not stifled. Unfortunately it was.

CLR: This brings me to what I think is a central aspect of both your work in progress and your last book *Rosa Luxemburg Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*. How do you define the relationship between Marxism and feminism?

RD: From the very beginning, meaning Marx's break with capitalist society in 1843-44, he was very anxious to establish the concept of the man/woman relationship in his writings. The Humanist Essays show you how central this concept was to Marx. He was insisting that even though he was singling out what he thought was the most revolutionary force — the proletariat — you did not have to believe a single word of what he said on economics or on politics, to realize how alienated this capitalist society was. All you needed to do was to look at the relationship between man and woman. Why do you treat your wife, or your loved one, so miserably? Why is she the second sex? Why is she considered as not having a mind of her own? Why do you disregard her — whether she is in the home, or in the factory, or is trying to be a writer? If you recognize the truth of what you have done to women in all these years, you recognize that this society must simply be uprooted, lock, stock and barrel. And I believe that what he said in 1844 was characteristic of his life as a whole.

For example, in *Capital*, his greatest work, which is supposedly all on economics, he included no less than 80 pages on just "the Working Day," most of which is spent on women, their labor, how exploited they are. No matter how low the salary of the man is, the woman's salary is always lower. And he wasn't only speaking of working women. Take the case of Lady Bulwer-Lytton. She was author of a novel, *Cheveley or the Man of Honour*, and she had dared not only to differ with the views of her conservative aristocratic politician-husband, but decided to make her views public. Because she dared to go out on the hustings and attempted to rent a lecture hall to speak at, her husband and her son had her thrown into an insane asylum! In an article Marx wrote in 1858 called *Imprisonment of Lady Bulwer-Lytton* he defended her and attacked not

only the Tory press for its sexism but also the so-called radical press, which more or less had presented the same attitude.

In 1868, Marx, as head of the First International Working Men's Association, was instrumental in electing a woman, Madame Harriet Law, to its highest body, the General Council. Another example was in 1871, just before the Paris Commune erupted, when he had encouraged Elizabeth Dmitrieva to go to Paris, where she became active in the Paris Commune and organized the Union des Femmes Pour la Defense de Paris et les Soins aux Blesses, an independent women's of the First International.

In our age, the women's movement has raised very important questions which no others have raised. The American feminists saw that male chauvinism was not only a characteristic of capitalism, but that it existed in every society, including the pre-capitalist societies, and that it also existed within the Left movement. In the last decade we

have seen how women all over the world have insisted that the Left confront its male chauvinism. Let me show you how I express some of these voices in my *Rosa Luxemburg Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*:

Too many revolutions have soured, so we must start anew on very different ground, beginning right here and now. Under no circumstances will we let you hide your male-chauvinist behavior under the shibboleth 'the social revolution comes first.' That has always served as excuse for your 'leadership', for your continuing to make all decisions, write all leaflets, pamphlets, and tracts, while all we do is crank the mimeo machine.

I think it is important for the Women's Liberation Movement to come to grips with what Marx's whole concept of "Revolution in Permanence" meant. It was based on the fact that unless revolution continues through to full human self-development, we will not be able to get rid of all the alienation and frustration and exploitation that capitalism has left us with, in the mind as well as in reality.

For the 1980s I think that the Women's Liberation Movement, until it is seriously concerned with revolution, will not get anywhere. This was proven in the 1984 election when we couldn't even present a good minority point of view of women. I think women have shown that if they stick only to careerism, it is going to be the end of them instead of the beginning of a new society.

CLR: Earlier you mentioned Marx's 1844 Humanist Essays. You were the first to publish and discuss these Essays in English as part of your first work *Marxism and Freedom* in 1958. How do you think that the Marx we see in these essays is different from what is called Communism today?

RD: Not only is Marx's Marxism different from Communism, it is the exact opposite. Marxism is a theory of liberation or it is nothing, and Communism is a matter of exploitation now, though it wasn't that at the time of the Russian Revolution. The 'new humanism' which Marx spoke of in these 1844 essays was not a matter of counterposing materialism to idealism. He had rejected both the petty-bourgeois idealism of Hegel and Feuerbachian materialism. He was speaking of a new unity of materialism and idealism, and that out of a new relationship or practice to theory. From the very beginning it was not only capitalism that he rejected, but also what he called "vulgar communism." By "vulgar communism," he was referring to contemporary socialists of his time who had reduced the whole concept of socialism to a mere abolition of private property. In fact it is here that the question of the relationship between man and woman comes up again. Marx was asking: Is a woman going to be any freer if, instead of being the private property of her husband, she becomes the common property of all in "universal prostitution?" No, of course not! Marx was insisting that it was the nature of the relationship of man to woman that was the issue, not whether she was the property of one man or many. At the same time, he argued that to transform private party to common proper-

ty, without uprooting the alienation of labor, was no improvement. What had to be transformed were the relations at the point of production to end the most fundamental of all divisions, that between mental and manual labor. One hundred years after him, vulgar communism masquerading as Marxism in Russia, in China, in Eastern Europe, proves in actuality what Marx was only predicting.

CLR: In your *Marxism and Freedom*, even though you had no special chapter on women, you bring in the milkmaids of the Paris Commune, showing that they were all revolutionaries, that they sparked the greatest revolution in Marx's time. Your book was written in the 1950s, long before the Women's Liberation Movement arose. What made you single out those milkmaids?

RD: It really relates to what I was just discussing. Once I went back to the Humanist Essays, I began to look at labor not only as economic exploitation but as alienation of man from his own activity. In earlier societies labor used to be the activity of human beings and was not only manual. It was mental and manual at the same time. That was how they developed. Human beings had to define their relationship to nature, they had to make tools, they had to make themselves human rather than just having an animal relationship of running for food. They needed for example to make houses. It was a labor which exercised all of human beings' faculties, women as much as men. So I asked myself: Why is it that we always credit the men in every revolution, and what were the women doing?

In the case of the Paris Commune, the men may

admit that yes, it was the milkmaids who were up early in the morning and stopped the troops from removing the cannons from Paris to Versailles. Okay but that is not all that is involved. They were up early, but what made them conscious that the soldiers were trying to remove the arms? What made them resist the soldiers, even when they were unarmed themselves? These women had already organized themselves in the months before, and now they were the ones who stopped the soldiers from carrying out the government's orders. As Edith Thomas tells us in her beautiful work *The Women Incendiaries*, Louise Michel was among the thousands of women who ran up the hill right at the soldiers.

This magnificent revolutionary feminist and poet, was exiled to New Caledonia because of her activities during the Commune. There once again Louise Michel proved her internationalism since she became the only exiled Communist who actually supported the revolts of the native Kanakas against the French colonizers. I want to read you a quotation from her writings while she was in exile, since the revolts of New Caledonia are so much in the headlines these past few weeks. She writes:

During the Kanaka insurrection, on a stormy night, I heard a knock on the door of my hut. "Who is there?" I asked. "Taisu," he answered. I recognized the voice of the Kanakas who brought us our provisions... They were coming to say goodbye before going across the water in the storm to join their people, "to

light had white people," they said. I ripped in my red scarf from the (Paris) Commune which had preserved through a thousand difficulties, and gave it to them as remembrance.

Louise Michel had also written some beautiful poetry as well, which I had discussed in detail in my lecture on "Women and Literature" on the occasion of the International Women's Year in 1975.

CLR: Can you tell us a little more about what you see as the relationship between literature, women and revolution?

RD: Periods of creativity, whether of literature or whether of masses changing the world, occur in two very distinct periods in history: At the very great crises, such as on the eve of a civil war, and at times following great social change, when there is a "release" of all sorts of new human thoughts and activity.

When you are at the eve of a major crisis, you don't know it is the eve of change. Literature at this period contains very new forms of expression because you have a new perception of everything. There is a deep crisis, and in order to be able to perceive reality in a new way, and not to go to suicide, you as an artist look at human beings in a way that gives you a perception not just of the period you are in, but of what will follow afterwards, what will come out of this period of crisis, in other words an anticipation of the new. All this occurs, even though you may not really be conscious in the political sense of this crisis, but just "feel" it.

Take for example *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, which was written on the eve of the 1848 Revolution, and it is comparable to the great Russian literature of mid 19th century. Russian literature of that period was so great because many of the writers were socialists, and were analyzing reality so creatively that they showed not only reality, but gave us some glimpse into the future. Bronte had created something entirely new both in the characters and in the atmosphere in which they lived. She catches something new both in the society, which certainly wasn't very great for her as a woman, and in showing Catherine, a woman, trying to step over all the obstacles though she still wasn't brave enough to marry Heathcliff.

RD: Lawrence, had of course written that a work is never beautiful, unless it in some way escapes its author, by that I think he showed that there is a movement to the creation of the plot and characters that makes you see more than you intended to see. In the same spirit, Marx had also said that you can learn more from great novels than from classical political economy.

The point, however, so far as women and literature are concerned, is that literature even at its greatest reflects the male-dominated society under which we live, which in turn affects all of us, women included. Whether we are talking of the women characters in Greek tragedies — Clytemnestra, Medea, Electra — or whether we look at Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth* or be it Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, or Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies*, we are all affected by this culture, and

we will not escape male chauvinistic speeches coming out of our mouths until we tear this alienated society up by its roots.

Virginia Woolf, in her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, which is absolutely the finest piece of criticism of women and literature, speaks not only about how different women are portrayed as characters in literature as compared to what history books said women were at the very same period, but also notes that often writers create these new characters, but no one recognizes them.

Then there is the great revolutionary writer and feminist Ding Ling, who was able to capture in a different period of history — that is before the Chinese Revolution of 1949 — the question of male chauvinism within the Chinese Communist Party in her most original essay *Thoughts on March Eighth*, and dared to challenge Mao directly in the 1950s. In that essay, she dealt directly with man/woman relations in the guerrilla center of Yenan itself, especially those of leaders and their wives. She saw the wives of leaders as cruelly taken advantage of as they became like Ibsen's "Noras who returned home". The moral of the story being that like Ibsen's heroine, who rejected her Doll's House, once you slam the door behind you, you must leave it slammed!

And on the eve of the Portuguese Revolution, *The New Portuguese Letters*, which was published in English under the title *The Three Marias*, presented a new form of literature in which a series of letters from one woman to another, exposed the patriarchal society and took up the conditions of women from the 15th century to the present, especially the relationship of man to woman. The form as well as content of the work was so revolutionary that the three authors were imprisoned.

Now it is true that a great writer — a Shakespeare, or a Tolstoy or a Melville — can envision the "human element" and "original character" and give us a glimpse of the future. What one sees in all these articulations, is when one age is disappearing and a new age is coming forth. It is what the philosopher Hegel called "a birth-time of history and a period of transition". It can be seen in the dimension Shakespeare created in *Hamlet* at the emergence of a new world of individualism — the historic emergence of capitalism. It can be seen in *King Lear*, at the death of feudalism or in what Tolstoy created as an "original character" in *Anna Karenina* and in what he presented as a historic period in *War and Peace*. And it can be seen in what Melville did in *Moby Dick* on the eve of the Civil War, and in his *Confidence Man* with his concept of the "original character" with original "instincts". Melville felt that the way to define this original character was to compare it to a "revolutionizing philosopher."

The point, however, that I want to stress, is that the great artist is not the same as that revolutionizing philosopher, or to put it more plainly, that "philosopher of revolution," Karl Marx.

Not being that philosopher of revolution, yet aiming to transform the reality of the world we live in, the writer or artist, more often than not, does not understand that masses in motion have inspired his or her vision. He or she remains the outsider looking in.

CLR: This discussion of philosophy brings me to your second major work. In 1973 after a decade of intense political writing and activity, of the 60s you wrote *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre, from Marx to Mao*. In that work you emphasized the Hegelian roots of Marxism and the question of returning to Hegel and for himself. Why do you think that today's generation of Leftist activists need to go back to Hegel?

RD: On the surface of it, any concern for Hegel might seem irrelevant and totally abstract in a period of Reaganomics, when the two nuclear titans have brought us so close to "Apocalypse Now". However, I think a careful examination of the totality of the crisis — economic, political, military, ideological — reveals to us a theoretic void on the part of the Left that is nearly as grave as that among the capitalist ideologues. This makes it so imperative that we work out a totally new relationship between the opposition movement from below — practice — and philosophy and revolution.

Now the one thing we learned from the turbulent 1960s was this: without a philosophy of revolution, near revolutions abort! It is a fact that because those near-revolutions had ended so disastrously, in particular France 1968, that the New Left finally ended their delusion that "theory can be picked up en route" and a deeper look into Marx's philosophy of revolution was begun by some.

The year 1970 happened to be the 200th anniversary of Hegel's and 100th of Lenin's birth, which saw a revival of both Lenin and Hegel studies, and gave me a chance to speak of both Revolutions and Dialectics in and for itself. Dialectics "in and for itself" is the question of Negativity, the power of negativity. How the fact that you object to what is becomes the very impulse to change it, and how negativity, as against the way it is explained to us, does not mean "not being positive". In fact, the "negation of negation" is the positive result of a double negation.

In other words, you need a revolution for the overthrow of the old and you need a revolution for the creation of the new. This double rhythm of revolution is what is so critical about the Hegelian dialectic, and how we constantly have to return to Hegel and then take that concept of negativity and concretize it for your own age. Your own age is what you concretize it for, not as an abstraction, but by showing that you are very solidly rooted in the ground and want to change this society.

The problem is that state-capitalist ideologues calling themselves Communists for too long have

tried to keep hidden the relationship of the Hegelian philosophy to Marx, and have tried to attribute Marx's Humanism to some idealist left-over from the "mystical" Hegelian "negation of the negation." Why do you think they have bothered to take issue with Marx's Humanism so strongly? Not because they are afraid of Hegel who died more than 150 years ago, but because they were afraid of the revolts in East Europe, which refused to accept that Communist totalitarianism was the same as Marx's Marxism. The first revolt against that totalitarianism was in East Germany in 1953, while the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 actually brought Marx's Humanism Essays out into the open and presented them to the world.

CLR: You also speak of the American roots of Marxism, especially in the Abolitionist movement. How do the two dimensions of Marxism and Black History relate to one another in your opinion?

RD: The reason I single out the Abolitionists is precisely because their whole life was dedicated to changing the character of America. The movement renounced all traditional politics. They were interracial and in a slave society actually practiced equality between Black and white. They were also supporting women's right to equality in an age when women had neither the right to vote, nor the right to property nor divorce. They were internationalists, and really added a new meaning to the word intellectual. Their intellectual creativity was an expression of precise social forces. And even though they were pacifists in philosophy, they were supportive of insurrectionists like John Brown, so that when John Brown attacked Harper's Ferry, they were all with him, and Wendell Phillips spoke in defense of the great martyr.

Now Marx certainly did not think John Brown was a Marxist and he did not single out his movement as class struggle. But he completely associated with John Brown and saw that insurrection as a "signal" for the Civil War in the U.S., as he pointed out in one of his letters to Engels in 1860.

The British working class came out in support of the Abolitionist movement, and many of them joined the First Working Men's International, which was headed by Marx. Marx's relationship to the Abolitionists, even though they were not engaged

in class struggle, shows how multi-dimensional Marx was, and how important he considered the American roots of revolution. He considered the American Revolution of 1776 the first national revolution, and wrote of the Civil War as the first international revolution.

On the question of the Black struggle carried to today, the whole movement of the 1960s whether the youth movement or the Women's Liberation Movement, came out of the Black Civil Rights Movement. It began 30 years ago, with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 when Rosa Parks, a Black working woman, refused to give up her seat on the bus. Then there were the young Black students who wanted a cup of coffee at a segregated counter in Greensboro, North Carolina.

In *Marxism and Freedom*, I place the Montgomery Bus Boycott on the same level as the East European revolts, which I just spoke of. It was no accident of course that these two world events were

inseparable from the birth of the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism and the creation of its organizational form in the U.S., News & Letters Committees. In an unprecedented act, we broke with the separation between worker and intellectual and elected a Black production worker from the South, Charles Denby, to be the editor of *News & Letters*. Denby whose autobiography *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* later received much international publicity and who remained a tireless revolutionary until his death last year, truly showed what we mean by worker not alone as a revolutionary force — as if he is only a muscle of revolution — but worker as a thinker who presents a totally different picture of alienation under capitalism than the intellectual. In a pamphlet entitled *Workers' Battle Automation*, as early as 1960 he wrote:

The intellectual — be he scientist, engineer or writer — may think automation means the elimination of heavy labor. The production worker sees it as the elimination of the laborer.

Then in 1976 in a joint introduction Denby and I wrote to a pamphlet *Franz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought*, we discussed the two way road of ideas that has historically existed between the U.S. and Africa, and took up particularly the international dimension of the Black as revolutionary thinker.

Take for example Franz Fanon, the magnificent world revolutionary from Martinique who became a leader of the Algerian revolution. Fanon looked at Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and the struggle between the master and the slave and he looked at the dialectics of that struggle when the master was white and the slave was Black. The truth of that matter was that Fanon was not only a Hegelian but he also criticized Hegel, saying the one concept he has to take exception to in that section on "Lordship and Bondage," was Hegel's conception of "reciprocity". Fanon wrote that in the case of the Black, it wasn't true that the Master and the Slave finally reconcile at all. Instead they fight themselves till death, and that is how they overcome Mastery or Slavery.

CLR: Your relationship to the Black movement seems, from your works, to be almost a lifelong one. How did it all start?

RD: Well, it may appear to you that I am a newcomer to Chicago, since I have been here only six months. But the truth of the matter is that when I landed here first as a Russian immigrant child, I lived in the ghetto of Chicago, where the UIC campus is located now. Two years later I led my first strike at Cregler Public School against corporal punishment and anti-semitism. Later as a senior in high school I led a protest against the segregationist policies of Medill High School. I was still a teenager when the American Negro Labor Congress was organized in 1925 and I was allowed

to become a member of it. I was also the literary editor of the journal *Negro Champion* which was published here in Chicago. I cannot possibly trace all of my work with the Black movement, but your readers can read about it in the *Rays Dunayevs-*

kaya Collection, that is available on microfilm at Northwestern and University of Chicago.

By the way my affinity and close contact with the anthropologist Melville Herskovits from Northwestern University dates

to many years ago, when he established the impact of Black African culture on the American society, that is all of America Black or white, and showed that Black history and culture was not what it was considered to be in the academic circles as "just primitive", but that it had a great deal to contribute to the Western world, and had done so.

More recently the publication of Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* in the 1970s have shed new light on Marx's view of underdeveloped lands. You see, in the last years of his life, Marx was studying the underdeveloped lands, the Iroquois, Native American society, Ireland, India and Russia. He wrote that it was very possible that a backward country could have its revolution ahead of the most advanced country. In a sense he was predicting in the 1870s the Russian Revolution of 1917!

CLR: In your *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, where you write of the importance of these ideas for the Women's Liberation Movement and for revolutions in Third World countries, you speak of a "trail from the 1800s to the 1900s". What do you mean by this expression?

RD: Many intellectuals think that Marx gave up his interest in the question of dialectics and instead turned to economics in his later works, a misconception that could be traced back to Frederick Engels. But Marx did not give up any of the philosophic concepts he was taking up in his 1844 studies on Hegel. And I have traced this in detail in my works.

In the last years of his life Marx chose to focus on the primitive societies. Why did he do so? Marx took up the studies that Lewis Henry Morgan the American anthropologist had done on Iroquois Native American societies, as well as other new anthropological works. A few years later, after Marx's death, Frederick Engels, supposedly on the basis of the same studies, wrote his famous *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. But whereas Engels glorified primitive society and saw it as an egalitarian society for men and women, in Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, we have proof that he had no such conception. Marx was aware of the relatively higher status of women in these earlier societies, compared to the status of women in the so-called technologically de-

veloped societies, but he was also aware of the dualities and contradictions of the primitive societies.

Marx did not think that just because communal ownership of property existed in these societies, that they were therefore bereft of any contradictions. He certainly did not think that just by adding some technological development you would reach the new socialist society there!

The point that he had been tracing throughout the 1850s, on backward lands,

cause he saw that a leap forward could be made. Just as revolution could take place first in a backward land so they could transcend certain stages because it would be a communal effort and would include men, women and children. He was pointing out that there was no way for him to know the actual point of transcendence, but that the element of communal rather than private property, women's striving for equality in these societies as well as their culture, could all lead to a new process of development.

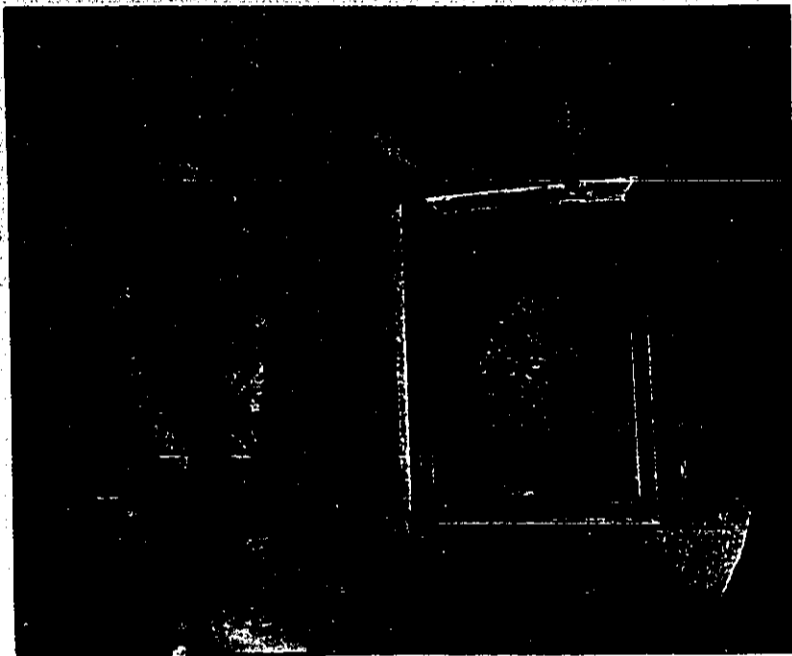


Photo by David Turnley

now became much more explicit, where he now saw they could have an entirely different transformation than the development experienced by Western European societies.

CLR: The revolutions therefore, in the underdeveloped lands, did not necessarily have to go through the classical path of Western European societies?

RD: Yes, in fact he criticized the scholar Mihailovsky for making a universal out of Marx's concept of human development in Western Europe. The reason Marx returned to dialectics and Hegel was be-

So he had recognized the possibility of revolutions happening in underdeveloped lands. He had recognized that the primitive commune could be more advanced on some questions than the technologically advanced countries, and this was especially seen in women. And finally, at the height of European ethno-centrism and only three years before the dividing up of Africa in 1885, Marx was immune to the prevailing concept of a civilizing mission and in fact showed a great application for the Black and North African culture.

In his *Ethnological Notebooks*, for exam-

ple, he ridicules the British anthropologists who considered Black Aborigines of Australia "backward". The Black man was considered backward because he would not accept the existence of a soul without a body, after death, which was preached by the Christian missionaries. To Marx, this indicated, instead, the intelligence of the Black and the stupidity of the scholar.

Marx went to Algeria in the last year of his life. The Algerians were of course by then under the rule of the French. Marx wrote of the dignity of "Mohammad's sons" and their hostility to the West. To his daughter Jenny he wrote, "Moslems in fact recognize no subordination, they are neither subjects nor administrative objects, recognizing no authority."

CLR: Finally, could you tell us about plans for your future writings?

RD: I am right now correcting the page proofs of my soon to be published work, *Women's Liberation and Dialectics of Revolution*, then on March 21st the Wayne State University Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs in Detroit where the collection of 40 years of my writings are on deposit under the title *The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection — Marxist-Humanism 1941 to Today Its Origin and Development in the U.S.* is sponsoring a lecture by me on the collection. They are also opening a month long exhibition of my archives in conjunction with the lecture. Following the lecture I will be presenting them with a new volume consisting of my documents from 1981-85.

I am also in the process of starting to work on a new book on organization. The question of organization was a question that the Women's Liberation Movement raised but did not answer. The questions of the Women's Liberation Movement, of a non-elitist group, of the necessity of democracy after the revolution have to be answered, and Marx's answer was "Revolution in Permanence" as ground for organization.

The point is that you should never separate organization or any other subject from revolution, which is inseparable from Marx's philosophy of Revolution. These need to be held together as one, or we will once again face more aborted revolutions.

I also would like to invite all of you who can come to Wayne State University in Detroit on March 21st to do so, and participate in that discussion on the philosophy of Marxist Humanism.