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DUNAYEVSKAYA ON ROSA LUXEMBURG
WOMEN AND REVOLUTION:
A RESPONSE TO PETER BEILHARZ

Olga Domanski

Peter Beilharz's review of Raya Dunayevskaya's *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* in number 8 of *Thesis Eleven* demands a correction, not because it was a sharp critique, but because it bore, I believe, no resemblance to that work's content, form or thrust. The very first paragraph of the review contends that Dunayevskaya's work relates mainly "to the West", when the fact is that from the very first paragraph of her Introduction to the very last paragraph of the final chapter she centers our attention on the recently transcribed final writings of Karl Marx — his *Ethnological Notebooks* — with special emphasis precisely on what they have to say to us about what we now call the Third World.

What she develops in the final climatic chapter of her book (which she entitles: "The Last Writings of Marx Point a Trail to the 1980s") is a view of Marx in his last decade which reveals: (1) that his intense new study of pre-capitalist societies was so much more concrete even than his *Grundrisse* that, in his letter to Mikhailovsky, he explicitly denied that the "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" was a universal and insisted that he was there analyzing West Europe; (2) that he predicted nothing short of the possibility of the revolution coming first in an undeveloped country, both in his letters to Vera Zasulich (where he refers to Morgan's *Ancient Society*) and in the 1882 Introduction to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*; and (3) that in his *Ethnological Notebooks* he was digging into the question of women in pre-capitalist, capitalist and future societies as well as into the revolutionary role not only of the peasantry but also of the Black Australian aborigine. Indeed, Dunayevskaya's thesis is that these *Ethnological Notebooks* cast so new an illumination on the multilinear view of human development Marx was working out throughout his entire life that we can no longer fail to see the sharp difference between Marx and all post-Marx Marxists, beginning with Engels — whose *Origin of the Family* has been accepted as if it were a "joint work" when, in truth, the thrust of Marx's 254 pages of his *Ethnological Notebooks* is totally different.

What is even more incomprehensible is how the reviewer can write: "She (RD) views all struggles, including those related to gender and race, as emanations of the category labour" and "collapses feminism into marxism", when the fact is that the entire Part II is devoted to "The Women's Liberation Movement as Revolutionary Force and Reason". We are taken there on a journey that: (1) begins as far back as 1647 and travels through every period and every continent on earth; (2) refuses to separate the question of the middle-class Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller from the question of how we view Sojourner Truth; (3) jams up "two seemingly opposite facts — that the individuality of each woman liberationist is a microcosm of the whole, and yet that the movement is not a sum

of so many individuals but masses in motion"; (4) scores the male chauvinism of even a Nettl in his attitude to the breakup of Luxemburg from Jogiches; and (5) winds up with a collective "new voice" whose greatest uniqueness was that "not only did it come out of the left but was directed against it" and which demands, (100): "Don't tell us about discrimination everywhere else; and don't tell us it comes only from class oppression . . . no one except ourselves, as women, will get our freedom. And for that we need full autonomy . . ."

What I feel the review has missed is that recognition of the greatness of today's Women's Liberation Movement does not mean that it is not in need of serious critique. Far from "collapsing feminism into marxism", Dunayevskaya points out that, in looking for new forms of organization that are not elitist and don't separate theory from practice, Women's Liberation is a "Task That Remains to be Done" and that "without (Marx's) philosophy of revolution, neither Women Liberationists nor the whole of humanity will have discovered the ground that will assure the success of the revolution". (109)

Equally perplexing is the claim that Dunayevskaya views Luxemburg as "resembling" Trotsky "with reference to the theory of Permanent Revolution" when the fact is that neither of them discussed the theory of Permanent Revolution at the 1907 Russian Congress which is what you must have been referring to, and which Dunayevskaya takes up in her first chapter: "Two Turning Points in Luxemburg's Life: Before and After the 1905 Revolution". Here is what that first chapter actually says (10): "With much later hindsight' Trotsky referred to the affinity of Rosa Luxemburg's view to his on the question of Permanent Revolution in *My Life* . . . but Luxemburg had not spoken on the question of Permanent Revolution, which was nowhere on the agenda . . . It is more likely that what Trotsky suddenly found an affinity to, in Luxemburg's speech as Polish delegate, was her taking issue with Bolsheviks as well as Mensheviks . . . However, she did not at all like the idea that the Mensheviks and other non-Bolsheviks suddenly applauded her; she decided to re-emphasize what she thought was the essence of her speech . . ." (the relationship of the proletariat and the peasantry to the bourgeoisie).

What is important to make clear is that, while Dunayevskaya is certainly no Luxemburgist (devoting an entire chapter to a sharp critique of her theory of Accumulation of Capital, and another to her wrong position on the National Question), she asks today's Women's Liberation Movement to take a second look at Luxemburg "as original character, as revolutionary theorist, and as feminist: although she might sometimes appear as a reluctant feminist, she is always a revolutionary". (85)

As for Trotsky, the full nine pages Dunayevskaya devotes to a profound critique of his theories are specifically made an Afterword to the very Chapter XI in which she takes up how Marx, "The Philosopher of Permanent Revolution Creates New Ground for Organization," in order to emphasize that Trotsky's theory, far from being rooted in Marx's philosophy, failed totally to grasp the new point of departure of the many new, life forces of revolution constantly arising, which Marx never ceased digging into.

Above all, what is so serious a mis-statement in Beilharz's review that it comes close to slander is the assertion that an argument grounded in the profound, revolutionary analysis of the law of motion of capitalist society to its collapse — which Marx never for one instant separated from the dialectical creation of the "new forces and new passions" that would become capitalism's "grave-diggers" — is, according to the reviewer, "closer to the tradition of the Second International than to that of Bolshevism"!

Not only was every "economic" category Marx created at the same time a profoundly revolutionary *philosophic* category, but not a single one of the "new moments" Dunayevskaya saw in his last decade was in any way a break from what he had been developing throughout his entire life. Far from Dunayevskaya's position on revolutionary feminism being "a retrograde step", what would be truly retrograde would be to close the doors she has opened on Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, on Luxemburg's feminism, on the Women's Liberation Movement's need for a philosophy of liberation, on a new relationship between so-called advanced societies and the Third World. To close off discussion on those questions just because one disagrees with the doors she has opened would be to close the doors to discussion of what Comrade Beilharz himself calls for — "a potential resolution of the crisis of marxism".