

Theory/Practice

by Raya Dunayevskaya

This Theory/Practice column, entitled "On Political Divides and Philosophic New Beginnings," was completed on June 5, 1987. It is the last writing from her pen.

The abysmal lower depths that the Reagan retrogression has sunk the world into throughout the seven years of this decade has polluted the ideological air, not only of the ruling class, but has penetrated the Left itself. Such a deep retrogression urgently demands that, along with the economic and political tasks facing us, we look for philosophic new beginnings.

In the midst of the work I am doing on my new book, *Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy*, I have been digging into research on two opposed forms of organization—that is, our opposition to the vanguard party-to-lead, and our support of forms of organization born out of the spontaneous activity of the masses. Suddenly I realized that the relationship between these two opposed forms was exactly what I had posed back in 1982, on the eve of the publication of my third book, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*. I then (September, 1982) added a paragraph to Chapter 12 of that just-completed work. It was this articulation, which I reached only after the book was completed, that made me feel that the process of working out such questions demanded a book unto itself.

This became even clearer when I realized that though the book was already at the printer, and had dealt with forms of organization both in Marx's day and in the early 20th century—with Lenin, Luxemburg, and the council communists—I nevertheless felt compelled to write a Philosophic-Political Letter to my colleagues on this subject. I called it: "On the Battle of Ideas: Philosophic-Theoretic Points of Departure as Political Tendencies Respond to the Objective Situation" (October, 1982). Here I would like to take up two points from the Letter, which begins:

I am taking advantage of the fact that we do not yet have the new book in hand, which will plunge us into so many activities that we will have a tendency to forget "abstract" philosophic points of departure...

I returned to the final Chapter 12 of Rosa Luxemburg, *Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*. Its penultimate paragraph read:

It isn't because we are any "smarter" that we can see so much more than other post-Marx Marxists. Rather, it is because of the maturity of our age. It is true that other post-Marx Marxists have rested on a truncated Marxism; it is equally true that no other generation could have seen the problematic of our age, much less solve our problems. Only live human beings can recreate the revolutionary dialectic forever anew. And these live human beings must do so in theory as well as in practice. It is not a question only of meeting the challenge from practice, but of being able to meet the challenge from the self-development of the Idea, and of deepening theory to the point where it reaches Marx's concept of the philosophy of "revolution in permanence."

It was at that point that I asked that the following paragraph be added:

This is the further challenge to the form of organization which we have worked out as the committee-form rather than the "party-to-lead." But, though committee-form and "party-to-lead" are opposites, they are not absolute opposites. At the point when the theoretic-form reaches philosophy, the challenge demands that we synthesize not only the new relations of theory to practice, and all the forces of revolution, but philosophy's "suffering, patience and labor of the negative," i.e. experiencing absolute negativity. Then and only then will we succeed in a revolution that will achieve a class-less, non-racist, non-sexist, truly human, truly new society. That which Hegel judged to be the synthesis of the "Self-Thinking Idea" and the "Self-Bringing-Forth of Liberty," Marxist-Humanism holds, is what Marx had called the new society. The many paths to get there are not easy to work out.

I also suggested an addition to the Introduction of the book, to be added directly after I pointed out that "Just

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as the young Marx, in first turning to what he called 'Economics', had discovered the proletariat as the Subject who would be the gravedigger of capitalism' and the leader of the proletarian revolution, so, at the end of his life, Marx made still newer discoveries as he turned to new, empirical anthropological studies like Morgan's Ancient Society as well as to the imperial incursions into the Orient and the carving up of Africa."

Here is what I proposed to add at that point:

That seems to have been the first point so misunderstood by post-Marx Marxists, beginning with Frederick Engels, who, without having known of the massive Ethnological Notebooks Marx had left behind, undertook to write his own version of Morgan's work—his Origin of the Family—as a "bequest" of Marx. When Ryzanov discovered these notebooks, he rushed, before he ever had a chance to decipher them, to characterize them as "inexcusable pedantry." If an Engels, who was a close collaborator of Marx and without whom we could not have had Volumes II and III of Capital, could nevertheless suddenly have gotten so overconfident about his own prowess of interpreting Marx as to assume he was speaking for Marx; if an archivist-scholar like Ryzanov could, at a time when he was actually publishing those magnificent early essays of Marx (the 1244 Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts), spend a good deal of his first report on the Archives of Marx in asking for 20 to 30 people to help him sort these manuscripts out, and yet pass judgment before he dug into them—it says a great deal about literary hairs but nothing whatsoever about so great an historic phenomenon as Marx's Marxism. Isn't it time to challenge all of the post-Marx Marxists when even those who have achieved great revolutions—and none was greater than the 1917 Russian Revolution—did not, in thought, measure up to Marx? Isn't it time to dig into what Marx, who had discovered a whole new continent of thought, had to say for himself?

My letter to my colleagues then concluded:

The fact that in my latest work, Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, I focus on Marx's "translation" of absolute negativity as the revolution in permanence, calling that the absolute challenge to our age, will draw still greater criticism from academia and outright attacks from post-Marx Marxists. This makes it necessary to be prepared, not only for that encounter, but for further concretizing that challenge. With this in mind, I decided to add that paragraph quoted earlier directly to the Introduction. For while it is true that the actual events of the 1970s—Women's Liberation on the one hand, and the publication of Marx's Ethnological Notebooks on the other—are what first led to a renewed interest in Rosa Luxemburg; and while it is true also that the Women's Liberation Movement helped disclose the feminist dimension in Luxemburg never before recognized; it is not true that that is the goal of the new book.

The need to see all post-Marx Marxists in strict relationship to Marx's Marxism is what revealed that even to great and independent a revolutionary as Rosa Luxemburg did not fully comprehend Marx's dialectics of liberation and thereby committed her biggest error—disregard of the revolutionary nature of Polish desire for national self-deter-

nation. Put simply, the determinant of the new book is Marx's philosophy of revolution. This is not for any academic reason, or any sort of orthodoxy, but the fact that his works disclosed a trail to the 1980s and revealed the problematic of this age. The totally new question that Luxemburg posed—socialist democracy after gaining power—pointed to a new aspect of Marxism itself.

The new moments in Marx that the book discloses and that center around what we now call a Third World are not limited to the manner in which Marx revealed an "Asiatic mode of production" in the Grundrisse. Rather, this is extended to the 1880s as Marx was commenting on Morgan's Ancient Society and other then-new anthropological works on India, on the Australian aborigines, as well as in his letters both on his visit to Algeria and his correspondence with revolutionaries in Russia on the ancient commune there and its possible transformation into an altogether new type of revolution. In a word, it is to revolution in permanence that the book keeps returning, whether the subject is Luxemburg, or Lenin, or Women's Liberation, or the Hegelian dialectic. At the same time, we must keep in mind that, whereas it is Marx who transformed Hegel into a contemporary, and transformed the Hegelian dialectic into the Marxist dialectic of liberation, the revolution is also present in Hegel. Hard as Hegel tried to confine this to a revolution in thought alone, he made his presence felt in history, even as he spoke of The Philosophy of Mind and History of Philosophy. As Hegel put it:

All revolutions, in the sciences no less than in general history, originate only in this, that the spirit of man, for the understanding and comprehension of himself, for the possessing of himself, has now altered

his categories, uniting himself in a truer, deeper, more intrinsic relation with himself.

Now return to our own situation, and think of the attacks that we will be facing in 1987, when we state openly that even the one post-Marx Marxist revolutionary who did reach deeply into philosophy—Lenin—nevertheless did not do so on the question of organization. In truth, he never renounced his position on the vanguard party set out in 1902 in *What Is to Be Done?*, though he often critiqued it himself. He profoundly extended his new breakthrough in philosophy to a concretization of the dialectics of revolution, and yet never changed his position on the need for the "thin layer of Bolsheviks" as a vanguard party organization. In 1982 in Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, we critiqued Lenin political-ly. To fully work out the dialectics of philosophy and organization for our age, it is now clear that that critique must dig deep philosophically.

The whole truth is that even Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program, which remains the ground for organization today, was written 112 years ago. What is demanded is not mere "updating," after all the aborted revolutions of the post-World War II world. "Ground" will not suffice alone; we have to finish the building—the roof and its contents. This is what I am working on now in the Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy. I would appreciate hearing from our readers on their thoughts on this.

—June 5, 1987