January 30, 1981

To REB-NEB (copy to all locals, and to WL)

Dear Colleagues:

One more new moment has arisen in relationship to the "RL book". Where, previously, I had insisted that WL was not a separate part, but only a chapter (and I did so, in order to stress that the book is a totality, rather than three different parts) , I have now decided that the totality is best seen when there is a separate part. Here is what I mean: What was Chapter 6, "Women's Liberation, Then and Now", is not only a matter of "Then and Now"-- i.e. different historic periods -- but also and above all, so totally different a concept that it transforms the whole question of "timing." Naturally, the different historic periods are important; but that can easily be seen by expanding the section,"Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." Indeed, that historic section will also be expanded, insofar as the Black dimension is concerned, to include Africa as well as the U.S. But we cannot limit the concept of Women's Liberation to a contrast of different historic periods, important as that subject is. Rather, Marx's concept of the Man/Woman relationship, which we quote so often, instead of being "taken for granted" must first be worked out for all periods.

We must roll the historic clock back, not just to questions of the women's movement, but back to the post-Marx Marxists, beginning with Engels himself. I now see that Engels' "philosophy", when it comes to Women's Liberation, is only a form of "biologism". Otherwise, he couldn't possibly have come up with that fantastic phrase about "the world historic defeat of the female sex", with which to explain the change from matrilineal to patrilineal society. Contrast that to Marx's concept of a totally new human being, man and woman, and so total an uprooting of capitalist relations that the dialectic itself totally changes from an Hegelian self-development of thought to a revolutionary (Marxist) self-development of humanity.

Clearly, the new Part II that I am now proposing will not be just a critique of modern women's liberationist theorists but a critique of all post-Marx Marxists, beginning with Engels' Origin of the Family. It may be an exaggeration to say that Engels had moved away from Marx's philosophy of revolution, but it is a fact that if you do not have as profound a concept of it as did Marx, it affects your whole interpretation of humanity's development, and you have thereby already narrowed the battle for the uprooting of the old, the creation of a totally new society. If just the change from matrilineal to patrilineal society was the great determinant in humanity's development, what happened to the whole history of womankind since that time? Have we or have we not been in all revolutions and created the subject of women's liberation? Isn't it a fact that instead of digging into history, actual developing history, and tracing all the new developments, Engels concentrated so totally on"primitive communism" that it began to look as if all one needed to achieve liberation was modern technology? In any case, the residue of this view, accepted by the socialist women, even including the Marxists, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg, remains in the movement to this day.

Now let's go to our time. In this case, I mean the period since the Humanist Essays of Marx were published, first in the late 1920s in German and in post-WWII in French. We have two such absolutely opposite personalities and philosophies as Herbert Marcuse, a Marxist scholar, and Simone de Beauvoir, the Existentialist : No one has written more profoundly than Mar use on the"Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic", and, indeed, the other essays. And yet he did not at all see what Marx was saying on the Man/Woman relationship. Simone de Beauvoir, on the other hand, singled out that section, exalted it, but ended by twisting it to mean hardly more than the Existential "Other". What united these two opposites was that in each case it was left as man's task.

Now go over to Sheila Rowbotham, who extolls the primacy of Woman and certainly doesn't want to leave it as man's task. Yet she designates Women's Liberation "as an organizing idea" as if all WLM's task today consists of is to write its own What Is To Be Done? ; as if the total opposition to elitism consists just of decentralization. What then happens to the new human relation ? Doesn't that become a mere construct of a new Superwoman in place of a Superman? And with it, endowing that force with a Supertheory?

The new Part II I'm proposing will probably be entitled: THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT AS REVOLUTIONARY FORCE AND AS REASON. Having two chapters instead of one for this Part II will affect also the section I called "Luxemburg's Activity in the Women's Movement". That is to say, the chapter will begin, not with Luxemburg's birth as a revolutionary, but with an historic, "geographic" background of where she was born, Poland , which is now in the headlines again.

Luxemburg's birthplace was where women were responsible for one of the first mass strikes, long before she was born. It was directed against the horrible, male-chauvinistic edict that women who worked in the factory must undergo the same sexual examination as prostitutes. No wonder that that type of patriarchal attitude caused Luxemburg, during her teens, to join the revolutionary movement and by 16 to read Morgan's Ancient Society.

Finally, when it comes to the modern period, I do not know how much of the latest news I will include. For example, before the Convention, I was excited enough about the new women dissidents in Russia to want to include them in Perspectives; whereupon I found out, before the actual opening of the Convention, about what Mamonova called, correctly, the "Christianization" of that movement. Presently, I have noted that Mamonova, in her call for an International Feminist Union, did not include socialism and concentrated on opposition to "totalitarian" male chauvinism as if "democracy" was not as guilty.

The more I think of the disregard of Luxemburg by the whole movement, including Socialst Feminists, the more I realize that, once you leave out revolution as the only way to uproot the old society, you are not only reducing Women's Liberation to "a new sensibility" but leaving the whole of humanity right within the capitalist framework.

Yours, RAYA

P.S. Please change the titles of what will now be Chapter 5 to "Spontaneity, Organization and Dialectics of Revolution", and what will now be Chapter 6 to "War, Prison, Revolutions." What was Part II on Marx now becomes Part III. And I am now calling the last chapter in that Part III "The Philosopher of Permanent Revolution Relates Theory to Organization."

14334

Jan 30, 1981

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14336

February 12, 1981

Dear Raya,

Each rereading of your Dear Colleagues Letter of Jan. 30th has given me new insight into the book, into women's liberation and into Engels, that I wanted to test them with you.

Foremost to me is that your creation of a new part of Women's Liberation is as fundamental as both the original change of two years ago where you said it must be a book not on Rosa Luxemburg, but on Luxemburg and Marx's philosophy of revolution, and the change which in the end flowed out of that, that there would be a full section on Marx's Philosophy of Revolution. So Luxemburg was riveted, tested by, that philosophy. Now I believe you have worked out methodologically how to do that with Women's Liberation. By no means do I mean to say, well WL will be happy because you have created a whole part on them. In fact they may even attack more when they see what you have created. No I mean objectively you have created the ground for WL to take its measure as revolutionary. And it is by no means only WL that is measured as revolutionaries here, it is a very very new way to measure all the "post-Marx Marxists," including Engels.

I really believe you have found the proper ground for a critique on Engels. I know that you had not liked his Dialectics of Nature, but had refused to join those who wanted to criticize Engels on this level. I think I now understand why. Even if Engels was completely wrong on nature, and much of what he said certainly was not correct, it would have been absolutely diversionary from the real task at hand to join that critique. What was at issue was not concepts of nature, or even origins of the family and private property. Yes, no doubt Marx would have a very different concept of nature and science etc. then Engels. But what was at issue was the "revolutionary self-development of humanity", that was the core of Marx, and it is only there where you have chosen to take your stand. Anything else is diversionary. So now when you are developing a critique of Engels, though again I know that is still not the main burden, but when it is done it is done precisely on the fact that "the world historic defeat of the female sex" is a violation of precisely that revolutionary self-development of humanity at its core, that is in negating several thousand years of the fight of women.

Thus the "then" in "then and now" is on one level how the first post Marx Marxists moved away from Marx's philosophy of revolution precisely on the question of Man/Woman relations. The timing there is what was their attitude to the Marxism of Marx.

And now I believe I have a very different understanding of now and the problems of my critique of your now in the first draft of chapter six. I believe I was missing the history of 1973-1980. But I think I fell into the trap of wanting 1973-80 "in itself" -- that is trace it, tell us what it means, critique it, which just becomes a type of popularization. Now I see that 1973-80 would be handled very very different -- this "now" "measured" against the "then" not of the earlier women's movement, but against Marx's concept of man/woman.

I love very much the concept of tracing how the first two generations of post Marx Marxists took up Marx's man-woman, that is took up the revolutionary self-development of humanity through man/woman, and then the "now" beginning with Marcuse, to De Beauvoir to Rowbotham against looking at how they grappled with man/woman as particular of the self-development of humanity. I believe you have found the way of critiqueing today's women's movement in such a way as to create a very revolutionary ground for them to develop if they will labor through

what you are doing.

At the risk of sounding a little abstract I wanted to pose some of this to you philosophically. What you call "a new sensibility" of WL which leaves all within the capitalist framework, is part of "spirit in self-estrangement the discipline of culture". But we live in the age where only absolute idea is genuine freedom. Women's Liberation is most certainly a new beginning. But the journey to be absolute idea as new beginning isn't alone the human subject as action, but the human subject as action in unity with the history of all of humanity, and that is what Marx's philosophy of revolution represents. No I don't quite mean that because then it sounds as if it is history as dead knowledge. The living history of humans as subjects of revolution has to be grasped by today's subjection of revolution, and can only be done so philosophically. Well I still don't think I've formulated it correctly, but I'll stop here.

But I do think that the new ground for putting for Marx's philosophy, and the new testing ground for today's WL movement as well as the test of all revolutionaries, is found within your formulations in the Jan. 30th letter

Eugene