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BRIEF SUMMARY OF TALK GIVEN BY RAYA DUMAYEVSKAYA
TO WAYNE WOMEN'S LIBERATION ON MARCH 7, 1975 ON:

WOMEN'S CREATIVITY AND LIBERATION: NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

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Raya began her greeting to the audience by noting that it was on just such a miserable, cold, snowing day in 1917 in Russia that 50,000 women walked to celebrate International Women's Day, and that quiet 50,000 became 90,000 before the end of the day, and men joined them, and the Revolution started. But she did not want to start in 1917, and though we would be in 1975 very soon, she did not want to start there, either. She wanted to start in the middle -- and not because it was existentialist and we wanted to begin at a dramatic part, but because creativity is not just individual, but comes when masses are in motion to uproot society. Therefore, Women's Liberation, no matter where it is we start, and no matter whether or not they had an organization, is first of all current. All history is current history, not only because we are looking at it with contemporary eyes, but because all significance is what we make of it when we look at it for our period.

The three pages of history we would look at tonight were: 1946 West Germany, 1959 West Africa, and 1955 Montgomery, Alabama. It was on a morning in 1946 in Germany that the miners in the Ruhr got up and found no women at home, and no breakfasts ready, and no lunch buckets packed. When they got to the pits they found that the women had gone there to picket them with picket lines. It was the end of WWII and things were very bad economically and socially and the miners had been talking for months about striking, but never did. That was when the women decided to take matters into their own hands -- and closed down the mines.

It was the following year when RD was in France (which was still considered a most revolutionary country and was filled with everyone from Vietnamese to Camerouns, who had come to the CGT Congress to speak to those they thought were more advanced than they were. The Camerouns said that at the end of the war they were so happy they went about trying to find out how to run their own lives at last. They didn't even make out membership cards, and thought only a few would come out to the meeting they called. But everyone, men, women and children, the entire city, came out. The CGT told them some very stupid things about how they had to be a trade union first, and then could become a party -- all kinds of stages. But, meanwhile, because Africa is not a country, but a continent, the Camerouns told RD this story about what happened long before WWII and not by the educated men, but by the illiterate women. In 1929 the British imperialists in Eastern Nigeria decided to tax the women, and they got so furious that they went on spontaneous strike (which was, of course, called a "riot"). It was not only spontaneous; it was against all the advice anyone, including the educated males, gave them; it was not only against British imperialism, but their own African chiefs, who had not defended them; and they crossed all tribal lines. The combined force of British imperialism and the chiefs did not get "order" until after 40 women were killed and countless others injured, and the women held that the British had it was a "mistake" -- declared by York.

And what happened right here in the U.S. in 1960? The wonderful North Carolina youth sat-in at a restaurant lunch counter and started the magnificent Black Revolution. But the fact is that five years before 1960, one solitary woman, Rosa Parks, a seamstress, refused to give up her seat on a bus, and got arrested, and the incident so aroused the youth that the entire Black population behaved in a different manner than they had ever dreamed of. They decided they would all go to the courthouse, they organized their own transportation and boycotted all the busses, they inspired Rev. King to be with them, and they kept all decisions in their own hands by meeting three times a week.

If you can just pick out at random in such different parts of the world, and in such different years, such magnificent creativity, isn't it clear that creativity is not just a great artist but masses in motion that so uproot the old that a whole new continent is born. This is the kind of creativity we are talking about.

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There is another question we should ask ourselves. Why do we celebrate March 8? Why not July 19 and July 20? -- when the first women's convention was held right here in the U.S., in Seneca Falls, in 1848. I think I can see three reasons that this great date is either forgotten, or added as a footnote.

First, you would have to admit that it was the Black dimension that inspired that. And slaves, at that. The educated white women were brought to realize that they did not have a single right of their own by the Black women like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, and many others, who were the speakers and the generals of the Abolitionist Movement and started got only the fight against slavery, and for women's rights. And they soon found out that many of the men who were for Abolition were not for women's rights. The only man they could get to chair their first meeting was a Black man, Frederick Douglass.

The second reason revolved about the fact that the slogan of the Liberator of W.G. Garrison was "The World is My Country". This internationalism was not a question of 3 or 4 countries getting together, but exposing where Dr. Gordon is denied. It was at the Abolitionist convention in England, a year before 1848, that when they refused to seat the women and made them sit sit in the gallery, Garrison took his seat in the gallery with them.

The third reason is the revolutionary age. It is certainly true that 1848 brings you face to face with Marxism -- but before that you have to see that it was the 1848 revolutions throughout Europe that inspired the women's movement in this country. Revolution was everywhere in the air. And I don't think we have a daily women's paper here yet, but the French women did -- La Voix des Femmes. And a few years before, another woman, Flora Tristan, in 1843, exactly when Marx was discovering a new continent of thought, was the very first to make a motion for a workman's international, an international of working men and working women, that would not separate mental from manual or theory from practice. She demanded the establishment of workers' palaces -- where you do not end the day when you end working, but go on to education and all other forms of activity. Why don't we hear of her?

What was this revolutionary age of the 1840's? It was not only that a new challenge had been opened, with the Communist Manifesto but that before that Manifesto, in breaking with bourgeois society, Marx did not break only on the economic question, that is, overthrowing the capitalist class. He broke on the question of a totally different way of being. He said that the most fundamental of all relations is that of man to woman. And unless we solve that, we will not have a new society. The reason he called his philosophy Humanism was to stress that he was against capitalism but did not think that negation was more than the very beginning of creating a new society, and totally new human relations.

We women in 1975 have not even yet got to the level of Sojourner Truth. She was born a slave, called Isabel. She ran away twice, and she spoke to God, and said he told her to travel -- sojourn -- and tell the truth of slavery. That's how she got her name. One single name had her entire philosophy, and not only for her life but for ours. Why shouldn't that become the basis for the re-organization of our thought and philosophy and actual revolution? Instead of revolution, today we are finding counter-revolution everywhere. How could it happen that in 1975 we have Boston with the racism of the whites in general on the school issue, and the conviction of Dr. Edelin. Look at Illinois, where you can't even get the ERA -- not that we are entirely uncritical of ERA ourselves -- but the people who are defeating it are the thorough reactionaries. What did we do in the 1960s that the counter-revolution is here in the 1970s?

We took our bodies back. But then we said we wanted our heads back, too. The activity wasn't going to stop at just being against the bourgeois exploiters, but was turned to our comrades in the Left who were content to let us just do the cranking of the mimeo machines. This was the first time that happened. And when you had all this activity going, how could you have such a backward movement?

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It was because we didn't have a philosophy of liberation along with the activity of liberation. The minute you separate theory and practice you end up in a reverse movement.

And the expose of male chauvinism is just one of the tasks that has to be done. We have to get to a criticism of ourselves. That is why I want to take up some of the woman ~~theorists~~ theorists, to see what they have achieved and what they didn't -- outside of the expose.

Take the Second Sex, by Simone de Beauvoir. What did she get all the credit for in the 60's? She was exposing certain things, not only in economics, and making sexuality a discussable subject -- but her conclusion was that since men did all these things to us, it was the man's problem, and they had to free us. A Black woman worker in N.Y. said that was crazy, she never knew of anybody who got freedom without fighting for it. But it is De Beauvoir's Existentialist philosophy that defines "Other" as the enemy -- why should woman be "Other"? There are some terrible things she concludes. She says of Rosa Luxemburg, the greatest theoretician we had, that she was "ugly" and that's why she didn't have to worry. Isn't that fantastic? I have known some of the most handsome men of all nationalities who told me they thought Rosa Luxemburg was the most beautiful woman in the whole world; she had such a great presence, she was such a great orator, had such great thoughts, and such great eyes, that once she was on a platform, if there were 10,000 people in the hall, nobody could look at anything else or hear anything but what came out of her mouth. But to Simone de Beauvoir, it was because she was "ugly"! What male chauvinist could be worse than that? Meanwhile she doesn't have to take up her views... she takes them up in passing. As if that isn't bad enough she says Rosa Luxemburg was brave, and was alongside Leibknecht. There isn't anybody who doesn't know that it was always Luxemburg and Leibknecht, not the other way around -- Luxemburg was the theoretician. But that didn't fit into de Beauvoir's style.

We don't have too much time to deal in depth with the Existentialists, or for that matter, with the Structuralists, like Julist Mitchell. But isn't it about time that all the people who are so hot against male domination explain why they are always following that kind of a thought? Mitchell has Freud -- who ~~may have~~ once been revolutionary, but isn't now. These French and English are supposed to be so much greater than we backward Americans, but at least we don't go for Freud.

Take even the one who is supposed to be a revolutionary socialist, Sheila Rowbotham. She writes on 300 years, starting in the 17th century, but you would never know it from her titles. Who would know that "Impudent Lasses" is supposed to be the 17th century. What does she say? That the revolutions have all been male defined, and that's what's wrong with them. Outside of doing away with woman's role as important, she winds up with vanguardism. Take 1917, where we started tonight. The action was started by the women, nobody else. In fact, everybody told them not to go on strike, even the Bolsheviks, because they were afraid they'd be mowed down. But the women went out on strike anyway, and the men joined them. There was no party, no organization "leading" them. Trotsky, in his History of the Russian Revolution writes of how great they were. It's true he says they didn't know what they were doing, but in five days Czarism, the greatest reactionary system in the world at that time was overthrown. Now you would think that if this was a male-defined revolution, and that's what's wrong with it, that you would have a different interpretation of 90,000 people walking out on strike. But what Rowbotham says is that they didn't know, it was only spontaneous, and apparently nothing is important until some intellectual leaders tell you what has happened. She is pushed in a certain direction with thoughts that have nothing to do with male or female. If you are burdened with the concept that the masses are backward, it doesn't matter if you are male or not.

The only time Rowbotham comes out against Marx is when she says that since Marx gave the correct interpretation of the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist, it was only economics. It isn't true. He named his philosophy Humanism in order to stress he was against capitalism, against Communism, and for new human relations. Not only did Marx help organize many women's movements, write 100 full pages on women and child labor in Capital, but he practiced what he felt. Who in the 19th century not only said they were for equal rights, but practiced it? He had Madame Law as part of the General Council of the International. Rowbotham has to disregard Humanism, disregard the dialectics of liberation which has entered into each part of the struggles, all in order to say that supposedly Feminism and Marxism will come home to roost when WL is made a precondition for revolution. Now, it is one thing to say that we have to practice not the day after but the day of and the day before -- but who can make "preconditions"? Does anyone know what will happen? The four greatest forces of revolution in this country are Black, Labor, Youth, Women. But to talk of "preconditions" means you think you have all the answers -- and that sort of thinking cannot come from anything else but the fantastic view that the masses are backward, and the women masses even more so because until they learn their politics from you they will never get anywhere.

As against non-understanding of what the Dialectics of Liberation means, let us look at some women who are very great. And the greatest at this moment is Maria Barreiros, one of the "Three Marias" who wrote ~~the New Portuguese Letters~~ the New Portuguese Letters. She gave a talk in the U.S. and made three main points:

- 1) The greatness of collectivity. The fact that three women in fascist Portugal just decided to sit down and talk together about a 18th century nun and what life was like today in Portugal. They decided from the first not to reveal who wrote which part; all three would have to go to prison if anyone did. The first collectivity was a form of individual development and gave them strength.
- 2) Sexuality. She said what was worse than even the prison was the liberals coming to interview them and asking "Is it just a feminist book, or is it political?" She said unless politics was a new way of relationships, a new culture, and a new way of doing things -- not changing little tiny things so women could do what men did before, but totally uprooting the whole thing, there was no point to it. Sexuality was a political question -- and the worst thing was that it was hidden.
- 3) And the third thing was finding Marxism. She said she was for feminism because it was the only hope for changing this society which she had. The Trotskysists who had given her a platform were very unhappy with the answer she gave when they said it was the revolution in Portugal that freed the women; she said she was glad there was the revolution, but it was not that that freed them, but the international movement of women who sent mass protests ^{well} ~~from~~ ^{in their own} throughout the world.

It is because you have to have that sort of feeling for creativity that comes out of liberation, for the new continent of thought that came with Marx, for knowing that when you talk about "leadership" like these women are talking about it they don't mean one more vanguard party. They mean the unity of theory and practice. If you get the philosophy of liberation as that unity of theory and practice then you won't be so worried about the philosopher -- is he man or is she woman? -- you will pay attention to what is the philosophy -- and whether that really means to change all the relations.

At this stage when we are functioning under the whip of the counter-revolution, whether that is in Boston or right here, it is important to see that we do not have just "mindless" activity, or even great activity -- but activity together with a philosophy of liberation.

Raya finished with a quotation from Chapter 9 of PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION on the New Passions at Forces. (P. 280 "The uniqueness of today's WL movement ... organism of liberation." and p. 290 "It is true, of course...from itself"; p. 291 "The new that characterizes our age... remains to be done.")