

City Limits (London)  
May 6-12, 1983

## Rosa

By Raya Dunayevskaya: 'Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution' (Harvester, £17.95 Hb. Paperback edition available for £6.95 inc. p&p, from 'News & Letters', Box 263, Seven Sisters Rd, N14)

'In *Ancient Irish Law* women had some power of dealing with their own property without the consent of their husbands, and this was one of the institutions expressly declared by the English blockhead Judges to be illegal at the beginning of the 17th century.' Thus Marx in the 'Ethnological Notebook'. It is this and similar statements which Raya Dunayevskaya uses to illustrate a fundamental cohesiveness between the theories of Rosa Luxemburg, the Women's Liberation Movement, and the later philosophy of Marx.

The first section is concerned with Luxemburg's political philosophy and activities. The second with the Women's Liberation Movement today, Luxemburg's feminism, and the value of the Women's Movement as a revolutionary force. The final section attempts to root this theory in the philosophy of Marx.

Dunayevskaya emphasises the independence of Luxemburg's thought: in particular, her disagreements with Lenin, and the consistency of her anti-militarist stance. She sees Luxemburg's internationalism as one of her strengths, and points to the anti-war movement (largely composed of women) as the most concrete manifestation of internationalism to survive what Luxemburg described in 1914 as the 'stinking corpse' of the Second International.

The years 1906-9, designated by Luxemburg's biographer Peter Nettl as 'The Lost Years' because it was then that Luxemburg separated from her lover Leo Jogiches, are shown by Dunayevskaya to have been some of the most theoretically fruitful. It was then that Luxemburg developed her theory of the importance of spontaneous action in revolutionary activity, the aspect of Luxemburg's theory which Dunayevskaya sees as most wholly consistent with Marx's philosophy of permanent revolution.

Feminists have got little joy from Marx, argues Dunayevskaya, because we have relied too heavily on the ideas presented by Engels in 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State'. Engels got Marx wrong, and we should read the 'Ethnological Notebooks' for the true version. Marx's visions of Man/Woman relationships — from primitive communism to the Paris Commune — was more subtle and firmly-grounded than a reading of Engels implies.

Despite sympathetic references to Marx's falling health while he kept the 'Notebooks', Dunayevskaya's account of the consistency of Marx's thought from 1844 and 1883 is disappointingly heroic. No reference is made to Marx's friendship with the degenerationist Ray Lankester, no tinge of biological pessimism is allowed to taint Marx's dialectical optimism. There is very little room for a revolution, even semi-permanent, in her account of Marx's thought.

Her book is worth reading, though, if only for the passing quotes from Luxemburg. 'For the propertied bourgeois woman, her house is the world. For the proletarian woman, the whole world is her house.' (Charlotte MacKendall)