

November 10, 1978

Dear Harry:

I'm glad that you are looking into the question of anti-feminism within the movement, but I'm much more interested in that of today than that in the early 20th century.

I will have a very super special favor to ask of you, and I hope you will agree with me that you should do it. It won't have to be done until somewhere at the end of January, or maybe a few weeks before, if I decide to send you the galley-proofs rather than wait for the January issue of N&L. What I'm talking about is that a draft chapter of the book will then be published, and I'm very anxious that you (I want to stress that it should be you; it should have your return address; and it should be you because Dheila Rowbotham dedicated a poem to you) write Shiela a letter, in which you say that you not only thought that she would be interested in this chapter that Raya is writing, but that you are sure that Raya would be as anxious as you are to receive her comments.

The reason I'm writing this far in advance is, as the enclosed letter will show, that I want our comrades to know ahead of its publication what is involved. Heretofore, the so-called Marxists, have tried killing my thoughts by ignoring me. Our organization is small enough so that, on the one hand they could ignore me, and on the other hand, they really didn't know how to tackle the subject, since they know next to nothing of philosophy and don't care. What, however, will change with this chapter is that they will be under the illusion that now they can attack me vigorously because they will then be defending Engels.

You made one error because I had said that I kept away from taking issue with Engels because the people who were attacking him were doing so for bourgeois or anarchist reasons. That is true. What isn't true is that I meant that Engels was beyond criticism, or very nearly the same as Marx. Nothing of the sort is true. The tragedy is that, though he was a true collaborator of Marx, never betrayed, and his heart, so to speak, was in the right place, he nevertheless took fantastic liberties -- or, rather, deluded himself to thinking, once Marx died, that he was carrying out some sort of bequest, when it came to questions of anthropology, women's equality, and the whole question of Woman/Man relationship. Believe me, I have spent many sleepless nights when I discovered, by reading Marx's Notebooks on anthropology, that Engels deviated in the most serious manner from Marx, and that the worst of it is, that he was conscious of none of this. But how can that possibly bind us to silence?

Let me just give you one example, which seems to have no direct connection with any sort of woman question, and does, indeed, extend beyond it for, frankly, there is an actual element, if not of revisionism, then surely deviation, from Marx's Communist Manifesto:

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That very famous, historic, magnificent, epochal statement we all love to repeat from the Communist Manifesto -- All history is a history of class struggle -- was, after Marx's death, in 1888 to be precise, footnoted to read "all written history" and further expanded on in that footnote to call attention to the fact that when the Communist Manifesto was written, 1847, next to nothing was known about primitive communism, and that since then, especially since Morgan's Ancient Society, so much is known, etc. etc.


Now outside of breaking up the dialectic flow and diverting the reader to qualifying remarks which thereby also kills the revolutionary drive, it simply isn't true. First, even so far as Christianity is concerned, lots of jokes were always made in the movement about Jesus having been the first communist. And several other remarks before 1847 were made by Marx that were a great deal more serious about some sort of society having existed that was more egalitarian than slavery, feudalism, or capitalism. But more important than that was that Engels signed with Marx a new introduction to the Communist Manifesto in 1882, which was exactly the period when Marx was working on Morgan's Ancient Society, and he saw no reason whatsoever to change anything in the Manifesto. Nor was this only because, as Marx and Engels both remarked quite often, this was so historic a document that the authors had no right to take any liberties with the work, and that the readers would certainly know for themselves that such matters as "no night work for bakers" were not exactly the most revolutionary demand.

What Marx saw was revolutionary, was permanent, and was new and should be commented on was the fact that this Russian edition they were introducing was in a country that could, if the crisis was ripe; if the Western countries also had revolutions; and if the Russian masses were ready "to skip" some stages, they could be the first to have revolution.

(there is between Marx and Engels)
Now just think of what a difference/in attitude to revolutions-to-be, to challenges that are, and even to exaggerations that need to be stressed.

It just happens that the particular question -- women's liberation -- is what brought me to note that the works Engels wrote after the death of Marx in 1883 are just not Marx. You will hear from me as soon as we get the galley-proofs and at that point I will also get you Sheila's address.

Yours,



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