

December 12, 1978

Dear Sheila:

Thank you for your letter of Nov. 23, both because it brings us together on the question of organization and for working out new ground for women's liberation. Not only do I agree with you on the stress for activity and, indeed, new relations with the estate, but also with your statement that IS/SWP's "classical of theory has become a dismissal of thinking over new areas." I would add, however, that it isn't only dismissal of new areas, but refusal to face the reality of reexamining the old. If you remember the central point I make in SWP after I have shown the collapse of the Second International and the break in Lenin's thought, the "Form of Organization" takes up the whole of Chapter 11 and covers three different periods in Lenin's concept. As against 1903 and the stress on centralism, came the 1905 Revolution and Lenin's stress on the masses being more revolutionary than the leadership. As against the dependence, total dependence, on the Party, in the 1917 Revolution, there was not only the threat that if the Party doesn't put on the agenda the question of the conquest of power, he would not only resign but be happy "to go to the sailors". Not only that, "All Power to the Soviets" was not just tactics, such less opportunism or popular frontism but a totally new relationship of Party to non-Party. Indeed, his very last address to the last Congress he attended was that the non-party masses would be the only ones who could stop the bureaucratism within the Party. You couldn't depend on Communists; he invented a new word to describe his co-Communists and their type of reporting: "comrades." And, finally, both in relationship to the Trade Union debate with Trotsky and in the will, he wrote a pretty sharp indictment of his co-leaders. Which doesn't mean he was always right, and least of all, on the so-called "woman question". That man was really scared of the very question of sexuality and learned only one thing from Zetkin and that was to have a working woman's mass organization. We have plenty of work to do here.

Presently, as you know, I'm working on a new book, Rosa Luxemburg, Today's Women's Liberation Movement and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution. I sent Harry Hopkins a copy of the galley, and I hoped he would send them to you. Has he? If not, please tell me and I'll see that you get a copy. On the face of it, it seems very far removed from Rosa Luxemburg -- and it will certainly not be the first chapter. I felt an urgency to do it because too many women's liberationists accepted Engels, especially as brought "up to date" by hidden male chauvinists. To me, the whole nonsense about patriarchy was one more attempt to raise us up to Madonna status so that we could once again be left on a pedestal -- a dead pedestal -- and thus not have to be bothered with us living revolutionary subjects who wish to uproot and re-organize this society, including that most holy of holies, theoreticians for both the status quo and those who "wish" to overthrow the status quo and yet keep shackling that overthrow with all sorts of priorities that invariably come ahead of women as Reason. Yet I didn't intend to go into Engels' Origin of the Family, since the focus must be today. I then discovered Marx's Ethnological Notebooks and found that his views were quite different from Engels' and do, indeed, create new ground for us. In any case, I would very much like to hear your views on that chapter.

I was quite interested in what you said about the Althusserian Structuralists. That he is the most arrogant and over-estimated theoretician doesn't bother me, but that women's liberationists, basing themselves on his theories, accept everyone from Freud to Mao and are forever talking of "over-determination" via any single "structure" so that you have absolutely no direction, objectively or subjectively, is, as you say, a real pain. Do tell me more about the concrete activity they are engaged in now in the Women's Liberation Movement.

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You are much deeper in activities in the WLN than I am, and I wondered whether some back and forth between us couldn't develop while I'm writing the work on Lenin which will concentrate, first on the 1907 Congress when all tendencies -- Bolshevik, Menshevik, Trotsky, the Bund, the Polish -- were for once discussing in the same forum some of the problems of the 1905 Revolution, and where Lenin's supported Lenin on most of the points); and secondly, on the 1917-1918 period, when Lenin was all alone in breaking with Bukharin, in developing her own theory of accumulation, and in bringing into the question of spontaneity onto the German scene. When I get some chapters done I will try to send them to you, if you wish. I have not received what you refer to as your speech you had planned to duplicate for me.

Driving

I'm a great believer in a "room of one's own" and that includes one for you and a separate one for Bill. My heaven, isn't the British movement and your own writings take responsibility for seeing that you have a larger apartment?

Yours,

P.S. Under separate cover I've sent you a copy of my Philosophy and Revolution.

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