

ROSA LUXEMBURG AND MARX'S PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION

A Presentation by Raya Dunayevskaya Given at Wayne State University on International Women's Day, March 8, 1979

Good evening. What a magnificent day to hold an International Women's Day celebration. It's the Iranian women who decided that the way to celebrate today was to have a demonstration in opposition to Khomeini trying to send them back to the veil. That, in fact, not only starts the second chapter of the revolution that overthrew the Shah, but puts a todayness on the fact that we are going to roll history back 52 years -- we come to today to begin with -- in order to show you the very greatest of the International Women's Day celebrations: the Russian Revolution, the Five Days that toppled tsarism. And in order to really feel that this intercommunication between the ages has an in-person type of knowledge and activity today, I want you to meet three very magnificent women, and about four revolutions, and one American general strike.

The first woman is Rosa Luxemburg. Note that it is not a photograph. It is a self-portrait. And it is not to show that she was an artist (she was a good one, but she considered it a hobby). But it is in order to show that she herself, and only she, and the counter-revolution, understood who she was. That is why they ~~knocked her down, shot her, beheaded her, threw her into the river and then let her rot -- it was three weeks before they found her -- in order to behead the 1918 Revolution.~~ knocked her down, shot her, beheaded her, threw her into the river and then let her rot -- it was three weeks before they found her -- in order to behead the 1918 Revolution.

Her colleague and elder was Clara Zetkin. I want you to know that Clara Zetkin knew Louise Michelle. Louise Michelle was the greatest revolutionary in Marx's day. She was not only a leader of the Paris Commune, but she was the only one of those that were sent to exile who, when she was there and there was an uprising of the Polynsians -- even the Communards said that really is backwards compared to France -- she was with them.

Now compare this picture with what ^{seems} practically bourgeois, Clara Zetkin. But the difference is that this is the picture the cops took while she was in prison (and that is when we try to look very bourgeois.)

That in itself -- those three women -- get us to be from Marx's day, the greatest revolution of his day, 1871, the Paris Commune; through the first great mass movement of women in Germany that Clara Zetkin organized; to the fact that the Triangle shirtwaist workers were locked out, in sympathy with them, there was the uprising of the 20,000 women marching in New York. And they were the ones that declared that March 8, 1908, was Women's Day.

15151

What Zetkin did the next year was to make it International Women's Day. She brought that fact up to the Second International (on account of how everybody was a Second Internationalist) and declared it to be an International Women's Day so that both the struggle for the 8-hour day, for equality for women, and for outright revolution were joined in a way that will lead us to what it was that happened 62 years ago. And this intercommunication between the ages will show that, at one and the same time, we want to show the relevance for today, and yet show that unless there is a continuity of history with that new continent of thought which Marx had discovered, we are going to have a lot more soured revolutions rather than successful revolutions.

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What happened 62 years ago this very day? It was a very, very miserable day in Russia. There was a war going on. There were not only bad conditions of labor, and especially so for women, but there was starvation, there was an imperialist war, there was inflation -- all the things you think that are today. And so the women gathered to celebrate -- or so all the revolutionary men thought -- International Women's Day. There was only one trick in the game. They weren't coming for celebration. They were coming to try to make their own revolution. So they made a motion that instead of sitting in their room celebrating, they better declare a strike: the textile workers would go out on strike.

Here is what happened with all these great theoreticians, especially male theoreticians. The Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, the anarchists -- every tendency you can think of -- said to the women: look, you obviously don't know anything. You don't know how horrible tsarism is (as if the women weren't suffering!). They will mow you down. So we suggest that you just celebrate this day and go back to work the following day. The women said no, we are not going back to work. So the decision not to go back to work was the first day of what would become a spontaneous and great uprising, as against all the political tendencies who were telling them what to do.

When they began to march the next day and not to report to work, and everybody was saying , they found that they were suddenly 20,000 and not just a few hundred in a march. The housewives, the prostitutes -- everyone who was not a worker and who was a worker marched in this particular time.

At the same time -- that was the second day -- the women said, we really shouldn't be alone, and they addressed a letter to the metal workers. The greatest Bolshevik metalworker was Shlyapnikov. He was the head and was one of those who had been telling them, don't march, you'll be mowed down. But once he received the

letter, he said, we can't leave the women to take it themselves and we better join them. So by the third day they became 50,000. They didn't even have a leaflet. (The Bolsheviks mimeograph machine didn't work)

What happened at that moment was that they were facing the cossaks and the question was, are they going to shoot? It is true that the minute the Bolsheviks joined, they were arrested, so there was a hundred people back in jail. But the women, and the men this time, continued, and one said, let's tell them not to shoot us. They are our brothers, we are theirs, and why should they be in this war? That is one of the very, very beautiful passages in Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, when he describes how peculiar spontaneity and activity works when it is actual revolution that is unfolding, because the particular action was that a woman was crawling under the belly of the horse. She came up to the cossak and said don't shoot. And that was true -- they didn't shoot at that moment. Whole bunches of soldiers came over and joined. That's when they got their orders to shoot -- they were just finishing the fourth day and the fifth day, and there was the Revolution. It was too late, because the minute they had said to shoot, not only the fact that the soldiers had come over, but they themselves had arms, meant that the revolution had begun.

Here is an act of history, where for hundreds of years the miserable tsarist empire had existed and oppressed, and now it was in a world war. No one yet had any way of knowing or even thinking what would happen. In Lenin's good-bye to the Swiss workers as he was returning after this happened, he said, I don't know whether I will live to see the revolution, but you youth make it. So how can it be when something that great happens, they say...it was like this: the women didn't really know what they were doing. They were unconscious. After all, we all know that February is not November, and it took all the way to November before you got a social revolution and not just the overthrow of the Tsar.

It's absolutely true that February is not November. There was still April to come when Lenin would re-arm the Party, and there was still a counter-revolution to happen -- Kornilov. But if February is not November, neither could November have happened if it hadn't been for February. And not only that. Supposing that we said it wasn't conscious. They didn't have a program! it certainly wasn't yet the November Revolution. Please tell me how does it happen when even though February wasn't November, you are happy to say that 1905-06 was the dress rehearsal for November, 1917, 12 years later? And why do we still get very little of Rosa Luxemburg?

The Fifth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party was considering the revolution. It's in London, 1907. They've lost the 1905-06 Revolution. And every tendency is present because the Revolution did push the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, the Bund, the Poles and Trotsky together. This is the only existing document, (It is still not translated to this day, and it's very hard to get in Russian too.) in which you have a tendency, an ability to see what has happened in the thought of the people who had just been in the revolution. What are they saying, how are they preparing for the next, or do they feel defeat?

Not only has this never been translated, but to the extent that you do have it, it is, for example, Trotsky reproducing himself, and Lenin, only if you read the Collected Works -- Vol. 12 in the Selected Works. One-and-a-half pages is all there is on this Congress, and that is an excerpt of the resolution that was passed. Now we'll go into part of it. (This is from an East European Marxist-Humanist who xeroxed these three speeches of Rosa Luxemburg which will appear as an appendix to my book.) I want to begin with one of the paragraphs of what Rosa Luxemburg said in order to take into consideration not only what it meant and its relevance for today, but what they, in turn, thought was their jumping off point, the 1848 revolution. You see, we never get very far away from Marx.

The Russian Revolution (she's talking about 1905; in 1906 she was thrown into jail for her participation) was not so much the last act in the series of bourgeois revolutions of the 19th century; as the forerunner of a new series of future proletarian revolutions in which the conscious proletariat and its vanguard, Social Democracy, are destined historically to play the leading role.

When they're talking about the 19th century, it's not bourgeois revolution. They're talking about 1848. It started as a bourgeois revolution, democracy against feudalism. That was her point, and everybody was talking about that. The greatest part of the Congress is the fact that what they were talking about will show the Great Divide between Menshevism and Bolshevism, not as in 1903 on the question of organization, but the actual philosophy of revolution as the ~~theoretic~~ theoretic preparation for the actuality of revolution. It's a very, very different ballgame.

What Rosa was saying was, if you -- 'you' meant Plekhanov, and Dan, and all the others known as Social Democrats -- were trying to say that since it began as a revolution against feudalism, and since Marx was a part of that, saying that the workers should be with the bourgeoisie to get rid of feudalism first, that supposedly that is what they had to do in Russia in 1905, because it's a feudal tsarist regime and they're going to be

Luxemburg, Lenin, and in this sense, Trotsky too -- even though he separated on other things -- were saying that the last of the 1848 revolution, not the beginning of the 1848 revolution, is our jumping off point, and then it's just a jumping off point because we've got something new to say. What was the last? In the midst of the revolution Marx said, forget the bourgeoisie; they're going to betray you all over again. They're just using you to get rid of feudalism. Therefore we must have our own theory, philosophy; we must go into a real workers' state. And we must continue the revolution in permanence. That's his expression.

And what Luxemburg was saying was that that's where we begin. And I can show you that we only begin, because look at what has happened. We have to answer those questions. How does it happen that illiterate peasants, who have so much belief in the tsar that they call him the "Little God", begin to march under a religious man, Fr. Gapon -- that's January, not November when they have the social revolution -- and ask for bread? It's something very simple, right? They got shot down by the cossaks. And overnight they became something very different than asking the "Little God" to give them bread.

So the first question that has to be answered is, has a new force of revolution appeared in those peasants? Lenin said yes -- it has to be the dictatorship of the workers and peasants. Trotsky said no, only the workers. And Luxemburg said yes: the workers supported by the peasants.

The second question is: if we would have just followed 1848, where would we have gotten in this grand idea of a general political strike? In other words, the strike that asks for the 8-hour day had suddenly become also a political strike; they tore up the tsarist manifesto and they demanded full equality for women, and not only better conditions and an 8-hour day. If that is so -- and we know that that is so; we all lived through the magnificent, spontaneous organization -- then obviously we have to reconsider entirely the question of spontaneity and organization. What is the relationship? Yes, Rosa Luxemburg believed in the vanguard. But there is something else. We cannot just say that. Something new has appeared here.

In addition to a new form of organization, in addition to a new force of revolution, we also have this question that we all call ourselves Marxists -- Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, Poles, and so forth. But we are very different. Plekhanov already says we shouldn't have really fought And Luxemburg, and Lenin, and Trotsky, who are for continuing, are nevertheless arguing, because it took Lenin an awful long time to finally get a majority, because the Poles voted with the bourgeois party and on the question, therefore, of the course of the revolution.

In this development, where 1848 was so big because you do recognize the continuity of history and how important that is, there is something in 1848 that happened that they didn't consider -- but we will, and we will see that if they didn't consider it then, they themselves did consider it by the time WWI broke out. And that's the Black Dimension and Women's Liberation, because that same wonderful year was the Seneca Falls Convention.

It wasn't only the first women's organization. It was that. It was the fact that the whole relationship of the Black Dimension both to the struggle for the shortening of the working day and to the struggle between men and women and to the struggle for the overthrow of slavery, in other words, preparing for Civil War in the U.S., was raised by women. (And again, we come to the question that if you're illiterate, you're supposed to have no intelligence. I'm not exactly for illiteracy but don't think that you can change your

) So the other women I want you to meet are Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman.

The point is that Marx, who hadn't mentioned the Black Dimension in the Communist Manifesto in the 1848 revolution, began saying 2 very new things in the 1850s: 1) on the Orient, because of the Taiping Revolution and 2) on the Black Dimension, that not only can labor in the white skin not be free so long as labor in the Black skin is in chains, but we have here an entirely new relation of Black and yellow and white. In other words, before he was Eurocentered; now he began talking very differently.

It is true that Luxemburg didn't mention it at that moment. But one of the great geniuses of Luxemburg is her smell and hatred of imperialism. The very first time that she gets to the great German historic stage -- the biggest Marxist movement -- she's fighting reformism. But she was already thinking of various speeches which are actually going to be in Accumulation of Capital much later. So here is the way she divides the period:

Around 1895, a basic change occurred. The Japanese War opened the Chinese doors and European politics, driven by capitalist and state interests, intruded into Asia. Constantinople moved into the background. Here the conflicts between states, and with it, the development of politics had an extended field before us. The conquest and partition of all Asia became the goal which European politics pursued. And extremely quick dismemberment of China followed. At present, Persia [Iran] and Afghanistan, too, have been attacked by Russia and England. From that, the European antagonisms in Africa have received new impulses, too. The struggle is breaking out with new force: Fashoda, Delagor, Madagascar. It is clear that the dismemberment of Asia and Africa is the final limit beyond which European politics no longer has room to unfold. There follows, then, another such squeeze as just occurred in the Eastern question, and the European powers will have no choice other than throwing themselves on one another until the period of the final crises set in with politics.

And in fact, in that 1905 Revolution, as they discussed 1848, what they were conscious of is that is the first time that the Japanese -- an Oriental country, a little country battling a big tsarist empire -- won the war. After all, that's what started the whole 1905 Revolution. And on the stage, to show the internationalism of the proletariat, there was Lenin shaking ^{the} hand of the Japanese Marxist, to show that they had nothing whatsoever to do with their country.

So they were conscious, and not only of that, because some of the speeches are magnificent in relationship to what is right now happening in Iran. Now you think of Iran and oil. Russia had oil then, and not Iran, and there were thousands and thousands of Iranians working in Russia as oil workers. And these thousands and thousands were watching these Russians in the revolution. And they said, that's a great idea, we should do the same thing. And they came back and overthrew the Shah (somebody brought him back) -- but they existed until 1908. In fact, it wasn't completely over until 1911. And what was fantastic in that revolution in Iran was that the women ~~are~~ -- they were all in veils; you can't see them, but they evidently knew very well how to have guns behind the veils, but in any case, they're supposed to be so backward, yes? -- they had anjumans in 1908 -- that's soviets -- of women and soldiers and workers.

(Do you want to know what they're now talking about, to go back to the Constitution? Let me tell you something about the previous Khomsini. The Constitution and the throwing out of the Shah was done by the masses, by the women. Do you know what they came in? Let's give the Shah a tiny bit of power because it really can work. So now, if they're talking about the 1906 Revolution, the Shah wasn't there. If they're talking about the Amendments in 1907, yes, the Shah was there.)

So you see, in the revolution, and in these activities, what I want to ask is, hasn't Rosa Luxemburg, the theoretician, the one who was with Lenin, the one who was both in the revolution and created both on the question of the general strike, on the question of imperialism, feeling it that soon -- wasn't she as much short-changed as the women who were supposed to be so unconscious about what they were doing in February, 1917, because they didn't have a membership card in a Marxist organization? Yes, she was.

And it continued, so that when the fight began, 4 years before WWI broke out -- 1910 -- 4 years before anyone thought someone could possibly take the place of Karl Kautsky -- and that included Lenin, who considered Karl Kautsky his great leader -- that great revolutionary woman theoretician broke with Kautsky, began

her own theses on Accumulation of Capital. I happen to disagree, but that is not the point. The point is that before the outbreak of imperialism, before Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution in 1905, she had raised already the question of internationalism, in relationship to a revolution that starts anywhere will not really be able to breathe and develop if it doesn't become part of a world revolution. And if we do not recognize that imperialism is on the road...that's the capitalists' "internationalism"...

Something else was occurring, and in this case, she herself wasn't conscious of how important it was. She didn't particularly care about the women's movement. Yes, Zetkin was her colleague, but let her stay in the women's movement. In one sense she was right; in other words, she was saying, you're not going to put me in the women's movement just because I'm a woman. I have many, many interests and I want to be part of the revolution. But in another sense, it was a question of the, really, immaturity of the age. But in any case, she was, so to speak, in the background. She let Zetkin run them.

Here is what happened, however, in the war. She gets thrown into jail for the 15th time. Now it's the imperialist war, and she's opposing the Kaiser and the Tsar, and she's back in jail. She writes to everybody, but the women are very much more both the actual friends and colleagues. The women she's most mad at are those who are Marxist, who still think they are. But if the husband capitulated by either voting war credits or just keeping quiet about those who did vote war credits -- in this case it's Mathilde Wurm -- she writes a letter to her:

I swear to you, let me once get out of prison and I shall hunt and disperse your company of singing toads with trumpets, whips and bloodhounds. I wanted to say, like Penthasalea, but then, by God, you are no Achilles. Had enough of my New Year's greetings? Then see to it that you remain a human being. To be human means throwing one's life on the 'scales of destiny', if need be.

Here are several important things about that letter. What in the heck is Penthasalea? She never even spoke about women. How does she suddenly bring out ~~the~~ the Queen of the Amazons? I asked some Germans who knew her very well. They said, of course, she's a very multi-faceted woman, so she may have known the Greek story. But there was also a great German poet who had written Penthasalea as a play, and it's a very different play. Here's what happens:

The Greek legend says Penthasalea, the Queen of the Amazons, considered the Greek and Trojan war a miserable war, and she ~~went~~ went and helped the Trojans. Achilles said, what a great and beautiful woman, but she's on the wrong side, and I'm going to kill her. And he did. He says she is brave, but he kills her. Now here is what the German poet did. The same war occurs, but Penthasalea kills Achilles. I asked, what does it matter whether Achilles killed Penthasalea, or Penthasalea killed Achilles?

The point is you're now considering myths, not as myths, but as actual historic facts. You are now considering women not only as force but as Reason, especially if she is the one that said that's a wrong war, what are you Greeks doing to the Trojans, and therefore taking a position on a political-philosophic question. It has nothing whatsoever to do with whether these individuals are myths or whether they actually occurred. And what is Rosa Luxemburg doing in 1917, that she thinks of that? She hasn't been paying attention to the women, has she? Because the greatest part of the German movement against the war were women. They had the majority in Hamburg. That was the biggest city and they were then prepared to throw down the Kaiser.

Now whether you consider the question of the force of revolution, the Reason of revolution, whether it was peasantry or women or whatever, and when you want to compare what each one did and what relevance it has for us today, you have to consider these questions that she had posed, even where she may have been wrong in what she gave as the answer. The relationship of spontaneity to organization, the relationship of theory to revolution, the relationship of various forces...and she had less than two months from getting out of prison, and the German Revolution started and she was murdered.

Now we can all start crying, yes? because it certainly was a horrible death, and this is a picture of her body when it was finally found in the Landwehr Canal. But that's the last thing she would want us to do, because it wasn't legacy. It is what we have for today. And she helps us, even when it's just a young girl of 15 and it's just instinct. What do you suppose she was reading when she was in high school, when she soon had to be thrown out of Poland and was in Switzerland? I love accidents because historic accidents really tell you the true course of history. She was born in 1871 -- the Paris Commune. And when she was 15, she decided to read the latest book, Henry Morgan's Ancient Society. Isn't that fantastic? It's the last thing that Marx had been working on. I'm not saying she understood at 15 what it was, but the idea that you want to suddenly see the course of revolution as part of the whole self-development of humanity: when did it start, and when did we have the freedom, and what kind of society -- that is what is important.

She didn't know the Ethnological Notebooks -- in fact, we're really just learning them for the first time right now. These are the Ethnological Notebooks. Now, Marx was doing something. Why was he returning to find out what was supposed to be the real origin, only in this case, a new science, anthropology? It was founded by Henry Morgan, in his study of the American Indian. We're certainly happy that we're returning back to America. Do you really think it was because

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 Marx was the least bit interested in the latest science of bourgeois society?
 No. Yes, ~~Zetkov~~ was conceited enough to say so, that was pedantry.

Engels thought he was carrying out the legacy. He had heard from Marx that there was a new book, and it was very important for historical materialists, and he could really find something. I'm sorry to say that by the time Marx died in 1883, and Engels finally found another copy of Ancient Society, and he's trying to get Kautsky interested, he says: Marx mentioned something about it to me a few years ago, but I was ^(busy) doing something else, and I paid no attention. Now I'm very interested and I found some of his notebooks.

Now look. This is 254 pages. Engels' Origin of the Family (which is only something like 120 pages, but it doesn't make any difference) quotes all of 4 paragraphs from Marx. So how can anyone say that's what Marx had written? It isn't that Engels was disloyal. No, he really did think he was carrying out a legacy. But Engels was no Marx, and unless you understand what it means to found a new continent of thought, you're closest collaborator doesn't mean the same thing as you. Let me show you what Marx was doing all his life, and Engels was his closest collaborator, and you will see there is nothing that stops, from 1843 when he breaks from bourgeois society, to 1883 when he dies.

What is the very first thing he does? A lot of people are asking him, what are you dissatisfied for? You're just out of college, you're already the editor of a paper, you're a bourgeois just like we are. And Marx answered, the root of mankind is man, and if any man is less than I, then I am not a man. And therefore I must go find out, why did those poor peasants steal some wood? You're telling me I'm a lawyer and I have to go and defend the law. This is fantastic -- they're so cold and they don't have any heat. So don't tell me I'm a lawyer and I have to defend the law. I'm going to find out why they haven't got heat. I have to look into this whole question of the relations in bourgeois society.

Now don't any women tell me that that shows, nevertheless, that he just swallowed all of us women in the generic "man." He said that, and two months later, what did he write when he unfolded that new continent of thought in the Humanist Essays? He said, supposing I let you forget all of this that I'm telling you about: that all of history has been a history of class struggle, and labor is the one who is going to overthrow you and be your gravedigger, and this system has to go -- it's no good. Supposing I let you forget all that. Just take an ordinary relationship. You'd all say it was fundamental. What's more fundamental than man/woman? I'll even let you have only the woman you love; I'm not going to tell you that you have to love all women. Now look how you treat her. Look what she is to you. Look how secondary, and all that. Now if

that is so on the woman you love, why should anybody want to defend this damn system of alienation and frustration and exploitation? So he uncovered man/woman. It has nothing to do with what he learns in 1880, yes? about the Iroquois women and how great they were, and that they had more freedom than the modern bourgeois.

For Engels, it was enough. He was so thrilled that you would think that all you had to do was add technology. Now we have both the Iroquois + technology and we have the new society. No. Marx was not satisfied on just adding that. And the other aspect of it was Engels saying that "the world historic defeat of the female sex" was the move from matriarchy or matrilineal society to patriarchy. That was no expression of Marx. Why? Because on the one hand, the women were probably just as responsible as the men for the misery that we have; in other words, we didn't uproot, and it has to be totally uprooted for a new society. But more important than that, what else had he learned in the 1850s, after the 1848 Revolutions had been defeated? Yes, in 1843, it was "the root of mankind is man;" in 1844, it's man/woman; in 1848, "all of history is the history of class struggle," and the bourgeoisie better watch out, "the spectre of communism is haunting Europe." Everybody thought it was a joke, but the Communist Manifesto didn't get off the press, and you had the 1848 Revolution.

What else did he say there? He said two things; one was very great and the other he changed his mind on. The thing that was very great was the family. The whole structure, patriarchy, is just as bad as private property in capitalism. That's going to go along with capitalism. The capitalists have already started on that by sending the women and the children into the factories. But in the other thing, he shows that he is European centered. He says that while we are doing all these great things, trying to overthrow capitalism, the Orient is "vegetating in the teeth of barbarism." (Good German, right?)

In 1853, when Europe is doing nothing -- they had just lost the 1848 Revolutions and they are all consierating with themselves -- the Taiping Revolution starts in China. He says, aren't they great! They're not only throwing over the Manchu dynasty. They are telling us European advanced workers, we'll encourage you, don't stop. Look at what imperialism is doing to us and we're fighting it. So he is changing his position.

Every time, the relationship of a philosophy of revolution shows itself in the attitude to a little book. Do you know no one knew the 1844 Essays, in which he not only said what I had said about man/woman, but also said he is opposed not only to capitalism which is, of course, the exploitation of man by man through the instrumentality of a machine, but opposed to vulgar communism, because if you think you have changed society by just changing the form of property from private to

collective, you're wrong. You're either going to end this whole nonsense of possession, to have, and you're going to realize what it is to be, and you're going to realize what it means that time is the space for self-development and not the hourly labor that you put into the factory in which he bounds you down to the appendage of a machine.

Why didn't we know that? It took the 1917 Revolution to get those out of the Archives, and even then it was so fast for Stalin to come in with the decade, that it was lost. It was only the 1956 Hungarian Revolution that finally brought them onto the historic stage of today.

What happened, 1853-57, when he was writing the Grundrisse? We didn't get that until the 1949 Chinese Revolution. Not only that. To this day, all these great anthropologists and ethnologists, including even Lawrence Krader who did a magnificent job in transcribing... (and you have to know about 12 languages to read them. It is not a translation, it is a transcription, and he goes from German to Russian to English to French. It still has to be translated. I hope we will have it translated by 1980.) No, what you have then is not only the Grundrisse and the so-called Asiatic mode of production that they're so interested in now -- that is, they're interested in for their own purposes, but since the Chinese Revolution, there's no doubt that people are interested -- was to once again return to the second negation of Hegel, that it isn't enough to overthrow something -- the first negation. You have to establish a new foundation altogether. And therefore... and that happens to be what I have as frontispiece of P&R, on the "Absolute movement of becoming":

...When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, of individuals... What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions... What if not a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?

There's no more Hegelian phrase anywhere.

Marx has done all that. He has now established the First International. He has been part of the Civil War. He now knows both the Orient and the Black Dimension, and has established all these matters, and has seen the greatest revolution in his time, the Paris Commune, and criticized the new form, the German Social Democracy, that formed by the Lassalleans and the Eisenachers, supposedly Marxists. What is he going for now? It certainly isn't to study a new science. Here is what he's going for:

He is seeing in primitive communism, and in the fact of the equality of

man, and the equality of women -- he doesn't have too many illusions -- for example, on the Iroquois, yes they were great. They had a lot more freedom than we have. But don't go ~~making~~ thinking that the veto power really meant that they could have a war. They had the veto power over the war council's decision to make war, but after they voted and vetoed it, they didn't go to make a new one. No, the men did, the beautiful macho men. They said, the women rejected us so we better find out some way we can get their vote. So he wasn't confused about what it meant.

No, he was looking for the very thing that he had traced through CAPITAL, as from the primitive accumulation of capital, to feudalism, to capitalism, and the new society. This is the form. The working class will do it; they would be the vanguard and then we would see what else. He sees something happening with the Taiping Revolution, so he says, if they're that advanced, the maturity of the age is such that there's no point in looking at how illiterate somebody is. Capitalism is always going to leave plenty of illiteracy around. We better see what is the Subject, the living, breathing person who makes the revolution.

There is Zesulitch, one of the founders of the Russian Marxists, and she writes a letter to Marx. She says, we're having a lot of trouble with those populists. They keep saying that since we still have parts of the commune, we don't have to go to capitalism; we can skip the whole thing. We want to know what do you think? You never saw so much trouble with such a little question. Please read it; we now finally have at least one of the letters. It's 10 long pages for the first draft, and the one he sends is about two paragraphs. And what he bothered about is, what is the relationship, whether you have a communal form or not? What happens to a backward country, when they're proletariat or they're peasantry, somebody there is very advanced and is ready to go? So the question is the historic circumstances, the historic process, what really happens in the reshaping of history by living men and women, and what is their relationship ^{to} both the philosophy that guides them and directs the revolution? So he suddenly says, of course you're very backward, technologically. And of course the peasant commune isn't really quite ^{as} communal as you think. But don't follow my way in CAPITAL. That was for Western Europe. And therefore you could have a revolution, provided it was just the first -- in other words, provided you then united with Western Europe or somewhere that has technology; provided it is international, as well as relating ~~to~~ technologically; and provided what is the vision, which way are you going?

So what he was studying with those Ethnological Notebooks was to try and relate from the origin of man and woman, through all these technological and other stages, to the various philosophies that guided or gave direction to the

revolution. What are you going to do now? Not only is the "world historic defeat of the female sex" an expression of Engels, not Marx, but what is a lot more important is people are just plain lazy. What are we women doing about trying to find out what he said?

Let me end -- and I hope that will only be the beginning and not the end -- on 2 levels: 1) I want to read you part from my latest chapter on the Ethnological Notebooks, and from P&R, and 2) is to see that if you see this development of 40 years, are you going to try and say it's really not a book, it's unfinished, and therefore we don't know? Yes, we don't know, but what in the hell are we going to do? Isn't there something for us to do? And haven't we made a contribution? We're not as great as Luxemburg, and she may not have paid attention to women, so we're at least better than her in one respect, but what in the hell is happening to the Women's Liberation movement at this very moment?

We were good in exposing male chauvinism -- it certainly needs exposing -- but you'll be left back again at the first negation. What are you going to put in its place? Have you recognized how total the uprooting must be? What were we greatest at? We were greatest in the fact that we said no, you're not going to tell me that the day after the revolution you're going to give me the answer to the woman question and that first we have to overthrow. I want to know the answer right now, and I want to see how you behave in your own organization, and I want to see ~~how~~ what relationship you make in relationship to non-party people. But posing the question isn't answering it. What has happened is that we can do these things, if we don't isolate ourselves. I don't mean only from men -- but from philosophy.

What has happened -- and several of the women have asked me why have you paid so much attention to Hal Draper and his nonsense -- I'm not interested in Hal Draper. I'm interested in the fact that Shelia Rowbotham, who is the best of all the Women's Liberationists in the fact of great historic understanding and showing throughout history how women have resisted, goes and says that this horrible creature has summed up Marx. Why? We're going to leave economics to the men? That's why you go and say you'll accept that, because you only want to answer the question of male chauvinism or whatever particular question we're fighting for now? That's just fantastic.

Look at even when you just quote something from someone else, when someone as great as Marx does. In addition to Morgan, there was also Maine and Lubbock. Marx is quoting Lubbock, a bourgeois anthropologist: "among many of the lower races, relationship through females is the prevalent custom." He's already established that were lower -- that's when you had matriarchy. And in addition to

that, we have to consider man's heirs. Here is Marx saying, if it's a patriarchy, what do you mean, man's heirs? You've traced yourself back through the woman, you're not tracing back through the man. Marx says, "but then they're not the man's heirs. These civilized asses cannot free themselves of their own conventionalities." Now in addition to that fact, he has many things I cannot go into here. But what I'm continuing when I draw in as to how Marx writes even little things, to what we have to do to see that we don't fall into the trap of the Drapers, and even Engels -- we certainly couldn't shine Engels' shoes...

The fact that the mid-1960s also gave birth to a new Women's Liberation Movement, as both force and reason, makes it necessary to study the finally published notebooks of Marx on Morgan, Maine, Phear and Lubbock. As theoretic preparation for the American revolution, it is of more than passing interest that what preoccupied Marx in his last years was a study by an American anthropologist, Morgan, centering on the Iroquois Confederacy. Of course, each generation of Marxists must work out its own problems. But Marx's philosophy of revolution is so total a concept that it cannot be just heritage. Rather it is the philosophy ~~we must grapple~~ for our age. We will continue to grapple with it.

and in P&R, where I take up the question of Women's Liberation as an Idea ^{whose} time has come, I say only if, instead of isolating ourselves from both the total philosophy and man, we are able to work out for our age what it means, because our age

is the age that can meet the challenge of the times when we work out so new a relationship of theory to practice that the proof of the unity is in the Subject's own self-development. Philosophy and revolution will first then liberate innate talents of men and women who will become whole. Whether or not we recognize that this is the task history has 'assigned' to our epoch, it is a task that remains to be done.

March 10, 1979

Dear Friends:

On my way to the talk in celebration of IWD that I was to give on "Rosa Luxemburg and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution", came the news of the most magnificent international event: tens of thousands of Iranian women were demonstrating against Khomeini, shouting "We fought for freedom and got unfreedom!" Naturally, I began the talk with a homage to those Iranian women's liberationists who had, with this act, initiated the second chapter of the Iranian Revolution. Thus, my very first sentence stressed the today-ness that this mass outpouring had placed on our topic, though it was to begin with rolling back the clock to 62 years ago, when the Russian working women transformed International Women's Day into the first of the five days that toppled the centuries-old Tsarist Empire.

The point was not only to single out great revolutionary acts, but to demonstrate that even in the first Russian Revolution of 1905, a great theoretician, Rosa Luxemburg, was as "shortchanged" about her thoughts as were the Russian working women, en masse, who were later to be played down as allegedly "unconscious" about their historic act which began the second Russian Revolution. Toward that end, I read from the still-unpublished speech of Rosa at the famous 1907 Congress of all Russian Marxist tendencies, which pointed to the fact that 1905 was but the first of a series of 20th century revolutions. (The tape was sent at once to New York, who will send it next to Bay Area -- and Olga will describe the meeting itself, below, which was the best we have ever held, while I proceed with the story of last weekend.)

Having spent the following day, March 9, talking with an Iranian male revolutionary, developing ideas not only of the revolution but how we must be prepared for the counter-revolution that is sure to arise in Iran as Khomeini holds onto power and gathers not only men but some women to consent to turning back the clock to Islam's reactionary viewpoint on women -- and by no means only on the question of dress -- I singled out the historic points in the development of the Russian Revolution, which moved from the February events through Lenin's April Thesis to Kornilov's July counter-revolution, and only after many laborious and bloody months arrived finally at November. In a word, we were discussing my next Political-Philosophic Letter on the Iranian Revolution.

March 10 was still a newer day when, but half an hour before the Iranian's plane left, I came up with the idea of translating into Farsi Ting Ling's "Thoughts on March 8th", which would carry also a message of solidarity with the Iranian women of today, stretching back to 1905 on native grounds:

"In Spring, 1908 -- when the 1906 Constitutional Revolution everyone is talking about today was still alive, and a Women's Ajumani (Soviet) was still most active, especially in Tehran -- New York garment workers declared March 8 to be Women's Day. In support of the locked-out Triangle Shirtwaist Makers, the mass outpouring that became known as the "Uprising of the 20,000" so inspired the German Working Women's movement that its leader, Clara Zetkin, proposed to the Marxist International that March 8 become an International Women's Day. Today, you -- the daring women of Iran -- have opened a new chapter in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. In homage to you, and to express our solidarity with your ongoing revolution, we are here translating the thoughts of still another opponent of the status-quo, this time in China -- Ting Ling who opposed both Stalin and Mao (who purged the great writer) as she expressed herself creatively in Thoughts on the Eighth of March."

The friend who volunteered to do the translation felt that, indeed, the simple act of translation would thus express a totally new Man/Woman relationship.

15166

-2-

The rest of the story may sound very nearly humdrum as I called Anne in New York to have a copy of Ting Ling's story delivered for the translation, and meanwhile discussed the column which she (or she and Terry?) were to devote to the Iranian women's revolutionary actions. The PTC which had also met on Saturday likewise discussed the act as pivotal to the page. Whether or not I have time actually to work out the Political-Philosophic Letter on the Iranian Revolution for this issue, the REB will meet Friday, March 15, to make final decisions on the April issue of N&L.

Yours,

RAYA

15167