

May 23, 1983

Dear Suzanne:

Did you know that the year after Marx wrote the 1844 Essays, with that constantly quoted paragraph by us on Man/Woman, Margaret Fuller wrote Woman in the Nineteenth Century? Well, when I saw a facsimile of the 1845 edition of her work, I could not resist thinking of you at the Conference where you will have to fight so many enemies. I felt that the very 19th century-looking cover couldn't possibly keep me from buying you this present, especially if I covered my flanks by telling you that it was the year before that Marx wrote his Man/Woman essay.

But it isn't the past and the present but the future in the present that is the impulse for this note. I consider the fact that you were invited to this Conference very important, and I don't doubt that you will be magnificent in your presentation and stir them up beyond the point that they have come to hear you. At the same time, I feel we often forget our audience, because what we want to project is so very important for Marxist-Humanist development that we are likely to skip over the concrete reason why they came and thus fail to use that as our jumping off point. In a word, they are intellectual, they are middle class, they think they know everything and know absolutely nothing about Marxism, and they think they are way beyond the 1960s, when first they became Women's Liberation as a Movement. Making yourself conscious of that fact means you need to cover your flanks. For example, I consider that raising the question of Margaret Fuller as a revolutionary will get you exactly nowhere unless you first call upon other sources. I was thinking that the fact that Vivian Gornick is both an established writer and a recognized feminist who does not disregard psychoanalysis would make her a good source to quote quite early, since it is she, in her review of Chevigny's book who said that had the ship not sunk, we would no doubt have seen Margaret Fuller become the first revolutionary Marxist in America.

Intro
MF
PL
Your Introduction that would reveal the dialectical methodology would therefore express the fact that all history is today's -- that is, that we cannot help but read past history with eyes of today, whatever that "today" is for a particular age. And since it is Croce who made that point about how we read history, you will have thrown at them two non-Marxist-Humanists "intellectual" sources, and therefore created enough room for you to say all you want to say on your original analysis both of Fuller and the historic period in which she lived, which ended with her participation in the 1348 revolutions.

You will, no doubt, encounter even more opposition as you approach Rosa Luxemburg. You do have one advantage there, and that is that no matter how hostile people are, nobody doubts she was a revolutionary. What is new which they don't know

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about but reject without knowing, is that RL was a feminist. Perhaps you can disarm them by saying that she herself may not have known the extent to which she was a feminist when you recognize that she didn't make the statement, "What do you know, I have become a feminist", to Luise Kautsky until 1913. But the truth is that at the very first entry onto the German scene, when she rejected any attempt to pigeon-hole into the "women's department" she had gone on her first speaking tour and had reported to her lover, Jogiches, how she was accepted as an expert on the Woman Question by a young male socialist. It is at that point -- or for that matter, anywhere you feel like putting it in -- that you can bring in the fact that it is precisely ~~WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT~~ participants in such conferences as the one you are addressing who must look beyond the obvious and bring out what is inherent in someone's position.

In the case of RL, it is a fact that she alone of all revolutionaries in Russia or Poland, male or female, WMA included in her manifesto on the 1905 Revolution the demand for full economic, political and social equality of women. And she alone, with her flash of genius on the question of imperialism, so movingly wrote (in 1910 - 1913) of the Black women chased into the Kalahari Desert by General von Trotha, and at the same time saw the German women as the greatest force against militarism, that she became openly active in the fight for the vote, the autonomy of Zetkin's women's federation, and the need for independence and originality in facing reality not only in the manner in which Marx faced the reality of his day, but what was the reality of the 20th century. And finally, be absolutely sure to read out the quotation on Pentesilea.

The hardest of all your tasks there (and I'm sure they will all have their knives out for you at that point) is when you come to the present situation and try to get into the relationship of the Marxist-Humanists to the WIM, refusing absolutely to accept the standard attacks on Engels as if that meant that his were Marx's views. Moreover, at one point or another, you will need to make a concrete reference to RLWLKM, and they certainly will not accept that as an authority. May I suggest that perhaps two ways of approaching that that would disarm them a bit, would be the following. One would be to relate RL's greater appreciation of spontaneity than that which Lenin expounded to what Marxist-Humanists feel is indispensable in any revolution -- spontaneity as so characteristic of today's WIM that a Social-Democrat like George Lichtheim in his Marxism actually called it a "feminine characteristic".

Two would be the very fact that you have to mention that the task remains unfinished, when even so simple a matter as ERA failed to pass and there is retrogression on all the gains of the 1970s. It is all the more important not to be a single issue type of organization, and not to separate the struggle for women's liberation from a philosophy of revolution. Perhaps it is here you could say something about the RLWLKM, noting, however, that ~~RLWLKM~~ RD's call for a return to Marx's Marxism does not mean anything dogmatic but a need to reinterpret it for one's own age.

Yours,

Im enclosing some copies, should you feel like sending it to others who'll about the conf.

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WMA included

WIM

Marxist-Humanists

Engels

Marx

spontaneity

George Lichtheim

Marxism

feminine characteristic

ERA

RLWLKM

RD

Marx's Marxism

reinterpret it