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ROSA LUXEMBURG, WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND MARX'S
PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION

by Raya Dunayevskaya

Author of Marxism and Freedom...from 1776 Until Today

Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre
and From Marx to Mao

Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the
Afro-Asian Revolutions

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I'm telling you that as soon as I can stick my nose out again I will hunt and harry your society of frogs with trumpet blasts, whip crackings, and bloodhounds -- like Penthesilea I wanted to say, but by God, you people are no Achilles. Have you had enough of a New Year's greeting now? Then see to it that you stay human...Being human means joyfully throwing your whole life 'on the scales of destiny' when need be, but all the while rejoicing in every sunny day and every beautiful cloud. Ach, I know of no formula to write you for being human...

Rosa Luxemburg, 1916

The infinite degradation in which man exists for himself is expressed in this relation to the woman as the spoils and handmaiden of communal lust. For the secret of the relationship of man to man finds its unambiguous, definitive, open, obvious expression in the relationship of man to woman, and in this way the direct, natural relationship between the sexes. The direct, natural, necessary relationship of man to man is the relationship of man to woman... From the character of this relation it follows to what degree man as a species has become human...

Karl Marx, 1844

Everything depends upon the historical background in which it finds itself... If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting for a communist development.

Karl Marx, 1881-82

Introduction

Three very different types of events in the 1970s have prompted this work. One was the transcription of the last writings from Marx's pen -- The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx -- which created a new vantage point from which to view Marx's oeuvre as a totality. This cast so new an illumination, both on his first (1844) historic-philosophic concept of Man/Woman and on his last (1881-82) analysis, as to undermine the long-held view of post-Marx Marxists that Frederick Engels' The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State was a "joint" work of Marx and Engels. What became as translucent, when out of the Archives had come Marx's unpublished draft letters to Vera Zasulich, was Marx's concept of permanent revolution. This made clear, at one and the same time, how very deep must be the uprooting of class society and how broad the view of the forces of revolution. It led Marx to projecting nothing short of the possibility of a revolution occurring in a backward land like Russia ahead of one in the technologically-advanced West.

Two. It cannot be altogether accidental that those writings came to light in the period of the emergence of an historic objective event -- the transformation of Women's Liberation as an Idea whose time has come into a worldwide Movement. However, it is not only the objectivity of this event that led this author to focus on Rosa Luxemburg more extensively than on any other/post-Marx Marxist. First and foremost, it was Luxemburg who raised

so forcefully the question of spontaneity of the masses that it impinges on an urgent question of our day: what is the relationship of spontaneity to "the Party"? The total disregard of the feminist dimension of Rosa Luxemburg by Marxists and non-Marxists alike calls for the record to be straightened on that dimension in Luxemburg as well as the need of today's Women's Liberation Movement to absorb her revolutionary dimension, not for history's sake but for their demands of the day, including that of autonomy.

Today's Women's Liberation Movement has introduced new and unique aspects that had never been previously raised by non-Marxists or Marxists. But the very fact that the task remains unfinished points to the need further to study Luxemburg's works both as feminist and as revolutionary. And that means grappling with Marx's works, not just as "writings" but as a philosophy of revolution. To do anything short of that impedes the development of the Women's Liberation Movement to its full potential as Reason as well as force.

Three. In this age when the myriad crises reached a global climax with the 1974-75 economic crisis, there is no doubt whatever that, far from being a question of the 1970s, it is a question of what Marx called "the law of motion of capitalist society" to its collapse, the rise of the Third World, and the imperative need for a totally new society on truly human foundations. Even small matters like publications of newly-discovered unpublished works and new English translations of old works, including a new translation of Marx's greatest theoretical work, Capital, restoring to it Marx's own "Hegelian" language in "economics," point to the intense, con-

tinuous interest in Marxism. It far transcends any single decade's pre-occupation, or any single revolutionary force's aspirations, be it Labor or Woman, Youth or the Black Dimension. It discloses a passion for revolution, as well as for a philosophy of revolution, that would assure its continuance also after the conquest of power.

It is because Marx discovered a whole new continent of thought and of revolution and because he so creatively held together in unison both concept and practice that grappling with Marx's Marxism has become a matter of global urgency. Whether one looks at the economic crises or their opposite -- the national liberation movements, even where they now are forced to function under the whip of counter-revolution -- the fact is that new forms of revolt keep emerging. They have erupted in Portugal; and in China in "the year of great troubles under heaven," when nevertheless there was the spontaneous great mass outpouring even before Mao had said his last hurrah. They have erupted in Iran; and in benighted South Africa where the Black Dimension is forever arising from the ashes. They have erupted from under Communist totalitarianism, as in Poland; and from under Latin American oligarchy propped up by U.S. imperialism, as in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

The greatest contradiction in all these cross currents stems from the very depth of the economic-political-social crises which produce a great desire for shortcuts to freedom. Instead of grappling with the working out of a philosophy of liberation for our age, theoreticians look only for "root causes" of oppression. This is good, but hardly good enough. It narrows the whole relationship between causality and freedom; it impedes the dual

rhythm of revolution that demands not only the overthrow of the old, but the creation of the new. In place of hewing out a road to total freedom, it gets hemmed in by one or another form of economic determinism. Which is why it is necessary not to be diverted from a return to the totality of Marx's Marxism, which never separated philosophy of revolution from actual revolution: each by itself is one-sided.

What Marx developed in his discovery of a new continent of thought is that Mind is free and, when tightly related to the creativity of the masses in motion, shows itself to be self-determined and ready for fusion in freedom. Indeed, before he openly broke from bourgeois society, Marx in 1841, though still a "Prometheus Bound" in academia, posed the problematic of the day: the relationship of philosophy to reality.

As against the familiarly-held view that Marx developed from providing a philosophic critique to an economic basis for his theory of revolution, Marx developed Historical Materialism as a theory of permanent revolution, not merely by standing Hegel "right side up" and "taking over" the Hegelian dialectic, but by going back to history's root of the Hegelian dialectic -- the problem which determined Hegel's dialectic, i.e. the dual rhythm of the French Revolution. It's the negation of the negation which Marx singled out as the creative force and Reason of dialectic methodology. It is that which Feuerbach failed to grasp, and Hegel himself had covered with a "mystic veil." In saving the Hegelian dialectic from what Marx called Hegel's "de-humanization" of the Idea, as if its self-determination was mere thought rather than human beings thinking and acting, Marx dug deep into revolution, permanent revolution. Marx's unyielding concentration on revolution, on

revolutionary praxis -- revolutionary ruthless critique of all that exists -- reveals that, in Marx, dialectic philosophy was the basis of the totality of Marx's work, not only in philosophy but in practice, and both in politics and economics. This being so, the transformation of reality remains the warp and woof of the Marxian dialectic. This dialectical principle will show itself, I hope, to be the unifying force for all three Parts of the book, that is to say, not only of Part Three -- "Karl Marx: From a Critic of Hegel to Author of Capital and Theorist of Permanent Revolution" -- but also Parts One and Two -- "Rosa Luxemburg as Theoretician, as Activist, as Internationalist," and "The Women's Liberation Movement as Revolutionary Force and Reason."

Gathering together the threads of the three Parts of this work was made relatively easy by gathering the threads of Marx's development because there we become witness, at one and the same time, to "how" Marx transformed Hegel's revolution in philosophy into a philosophy of revolution, and how sensitively Marx had his ears attuned to the voices from below, so that what he had named his philosophy -- "a new Humanism" -- was continuously developing. Just as the young Marx, in first turning to what he called "Economics," had discovered the proletariat as the Subject who would be the "gravedigger of capitalism," the leader of proletarian revolution, so, at the end of his life, he made still newer discoveries as he turned to new, empiric anthropological studies, to a study of imperialism's incursions into the Orient as well as to what was still referred to as "the New World" and what Morgan called "Ancient Society" -- the American Indian.

From the study of primitive communism he made still newer discoveries,

including, at one and the same time, a substantiation of his early Man/Woman concept and of the way he had, in his summation of the Paris Commune, singled out its greatest achievement -- "its own working existence." As will be clear from Marx's letters to Zasulich, in the very period during which he was working on the Ethnological Notebooks, he viewed the peasants not only as a "second edition" of the Peasant Wars to assure the success of the proletarian victory, but also possibly instrumental in still newer revolutions.

No wonder that our age too feels the impact of the problematic Marx grappled with in his day: the new revolutionary forces that do not easily arise ^{which} and are not easily imagined/were so profoundly posed in Marx's new continent of thought and of revolution. Whether or not our age rises to the historic task of transforming reality, of one thing there is no doubt: Marx had hewed out a road, not only for Luxemburg's generation, but for ours.

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