

November 6, 1975

Dear Friends:

How can you adequately summarize the series of lectures on "Women as Thinkers and as Revolutionaries" that we have just concluded in Detroit at UCAE, when it had a scope so vast that the participants in the class were sometimes unable to even formulate their questions afterwards, because they were "overwhelmed", to use their own words? There was not a single question facing the movement for freedom today -- whether it was the relationship between spontaneity and organization, between theory and practice, between philosophy and revolution, between workers and intellectuals, or the relationship between the races, the sexes, or the historic ages -- that the lectures did not illuminate.

The running theme throughout the entire series was the dual rhythm of revolution -- as it is expressed in the movement from practice to theory AND the movement from theory to practice -- seen in the movement of women throughout history. The lectures were thus the kind of extension of Philosophy and Revolution that deepened it so greatly that Raya is now considering these as the framework of a whole new book. In fact, she extended an invitation, during the lectures, to others who would wish to work with her on it, and made it as exciting an organizational development for this year as the HSA lecture was for last year.

First, let's take the question of the fantastic amount of sheer "facts" Raya unearthed in her voluminous reading for the course. (The bibliography for the series is an education in itself -- and Raya expanded it greatly at every lecture -- ask John, who carried all the books to class for her each week). Never was it clearer to me what Hegel means when he describes facts as "emerging out of ground". Reread paragraph 2 of p. 11 of our Perspectives Bulletin and think of the way Raya took both the "facts" that have been buried in the countless different books she read, and the facts that all of us have heard so often we may think we know them by heart, and presented them in so new a relationship with all the other facts of history and philosophy that something totally new is seen in them.

Take the two lectures on Working Women and on the Black Dimension, which we may think we know so well already. Raya traveled in the lecture on WORKING WOMEN all the way from 1647 (when the first maid's petition was handed to the British Parliament to demand "liberty every second Tuesday") all the way to our own period of the '50s, '60s and '70s (when she deals with the seamstress Rosa Parks who started the Black Revolution, the electrical worker Angela Terrano who talks about Automation in M&F, and the recent developments in CLUW) -- all to show how critical it is to grasp what comes from practice and from "gaining a mind of one's own". As Raya puts it, though intellectuals may love the expression "in the beginning was the word", the truth is that in the beginning was labor; the word -- and not just as source for someone else's word, but as Subject. Raya takes us from the 17th century through the 18th, and we meet everyone from the indentured servants of the American Revolution to Mary Wolstoncraft -- but she dwells on the 19th and 20th centuries because it is there that we have, finally, the mass movements as creative power. The first great women's strike in America of millworkers in 1824, and the climax in the First Female Reform Association in 1844, the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the Seneca Falls Convention in America, are all put in the historic framework not only of Marx's discovery of a new continent of thought, but of Flora Tristan's call for a Workingman's International that predated Marx's call by two decades, to demonstrate that when the

5363

5 3 6 4

desire for freedom is this powerful, it is "in the air" everywhere at once and the intellectual catches it in thought because so many workers have done it in deed for so many years before. And the story does not stop there. We see what happens when the revolutions of 1848 are defeated. The counter-revolution takes its toll, but something new that has been born cannot be totally crushed, it still stirs underground -- and it burst forth in everything from the Taiping Rebellion in China to the Civil War in the U.S. only after which can the National Labor Union arise. This great bursting forth of the labor movement is not "impersonal" -- we see it in the struggles of Augusta Lewis who helped to organize the first printer's union when the Knights of Labor had 50,000 women members, and Clara Lemlich who called for the first general strike the East Coast ever saw, and Rosa Schneiderman who organized 120,000 as a funeral for the 143 women who died in the Triangle Fire, not only to mourn but to express solidarity with the unorganized workers of 1911. And you cannot help but think of what it shows of "counter-revolution" not only from without but from within, that the NYTimes this Sunday reported ^{the unorganized} are an "expanding majority" -- with four out of five workers in the U.S. still unorganized, a great majority of them, obviously, women.

* * *

Or take the lecture on the BLACK DIMENSION, which Raya presented as a good time to learn a new language -- the language of thought, Black thought. She developed the concept of "time as the place for human development" by concentrating on specific historic turning points and what they meant. It was because of their integral connection with each of those historic points that six Black men were brought into this lecture: Nat Turner, 1831; Frederick Douglass, 1848 and 1867; WEB DuBois, Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay, 1919; and Frantz Fanon, the 1960s. The theme throughout was the activity of Black women not only as bravery but as thought, and their story not only as suffering but as creativity, the creativity of new ideas and of new forms of struggle. Thus, it was after Nat Turner's hanging that the question to be answered was how to transcend the isolated slave revolts in order to end slavery, and the new form created was the Underground Railroad, of which the most famous conductor was Harriet Tubman. But when we hear of her in history, she is not presented as a thinker and a leader -- of both men and women, both Blacks and whites. In the same way when we hear of Sojourner Truth we hear of her courage, but not of her tremendous thought, or the philosophy she carried in her very name. Nor are we made aware that though only a Black man, Frederick Douglass, would agree to chair the first meeting of the women to discuss their rights as women, by the time it came to 1867 even Douglass said that though he agreed "in principle" that the women should have the vote, it was not the time. It was then that Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth refused to accept his leadership, terming even the Black man "short-minded", and remaining with the white women in their struggles to the very end.

When we get to the '80s and '90s and the Blacks are supposedly free but have not got their 40 acres and a mule, they got instead the KKK and lynchings as the way of white civilization, and a new stage begins. At the turn of the century DuBois begins to fight against Booker T. Washington's philosophy and the Niagara movement is organized. We do not hear of Ida Barnett-Wells, a co-founder of the organization, and editor of their publication -- but it was she who separated from DuBois because she thought the organization too mild. DuBois believed that every culture has its "talented tenth" and it is the Black intellectuals who will bring freedom to the masses. She didn't. And we will soon see how the talented tenth, in fact, worked against the masses. We will see that just as the 19 century was a century of genius, the 20th century divided into two, not on the question of "genius" but on the question

of nationalism and internationalism. The two Black men who enter history here are Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay. Garvey was a relatively uneducated West Indian and McKay was a poet, a Marxist, an internationalist. Like DuBois he was an educated intellectual, but unlike DuBois he recognized what Garvey represented -- the Black pride expressed in nationalism, and the creativity that saw six million Blacks flock to Garvey in 1919 when the KKK had blood flowing in the streets and everyone was saying the Blacks couldn't be organized. Contrast that to DuBois who was so ashamed of Garvey and the "uneducated" ones that he actually tried to help the government deport Garvey.

How clear it is that literacy has nothing to do with creativity is shown in everything from the 1929 Abu Riots in Nigeria, when the Nigerian women the British tried to tax defeated not only British imperialism and their own chiefs, but created a solidarity among all the tribes -- to the strike in North Carolina in 1937 when the Black tobacco workers were told by everyone that they couldn't win -- in the South, all women, and all Black -- and thereupon organized themselves and won. At every stage we have a history of the bravery and the thought and the philosophy of the Black women -- who have not hesitated, either, to break with their own Black men, whether it is Amy Jacques Garvey in 1919, who edited a woman's page in the Negro World and, criticizing the Negro man as too halting, wrote "Mr. Black Man, watch your step!" -- or whether it was the Black Panther women who challenged the Panther men when they were ready to give over the woman's time on an agenda to Aphthor.

The women who fill the '60s are so great and so many it is impossible to begin to name them, but they stretch from Gloria Richardson, Daisy Bates and Rosa Parks all the way to Joan Little. When we see, despite all this history, a book produced called Chronicles of Black Protest that does not include a single woman's voice -- not even Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth, who rate only a picture -- it becomes clear why Doris' question: "When the time comes to put down the gun, will you shove a broom in my hands?" is not a matter of putting a precondition on her activity for revolution, but a matter of posing the question of What Comes After? as the question we have to answer now.

* * *

It is again the relationship of theory to practice that is the red thread running through the lectures on Women Theorists Today and on Literature and Revolution, but the excitement is heightened, perhaps, because so much of the material Raya developed was totally new to all. At the lecture on the WOMEN THEORISTS TODAY we were told from the start that we would be discovering what is meant by theory rooted in philosophy and "theory" which is not. For that we had to turn first to Marx and grapple with the fact that even he, though he had already discovered his great new continent of thought in 1844, as late as the 1860s when he was writing Capital, still considered theory different from practice, an "argument with other theoreticians". It was only after seeing the actual struggles for the shortening of the working day, which Marx called greater than the Declaration of the Rights of Man, that Capital was reworked and that great new section added, while the arguments with other theoreticians was moved to the very end. The question we must ask is, what would your job be as a woman theorist, 100 years later, if you believed that Marx's concept of theory is the right one? Simone de Beauvoir spends one single sentence on the Paris Commune of 1871. There were 3000 members of the Committee for the Defense of Paris. And there were great women like Louise Michel, a poet, a teacher, a worker. Yet all Simone de Beauvoir can say is that for every Louise Michel (whose greatness she cannot deny) there were thousands of women who were backward! The Second Sex was published in 1949, when workers were posing highly philosophic question of what kind of labor human beings should do, but none of this enters her thinking. None of the revolutions or revolutionaries mean anything to her.

Not Dmitrieva, not Flora Tristan, not Rosa Luxemburg. She says the women who began the 1917 Russian Revolution didn't really know what they were doing. And whom does she praise? Some of the greatest women, to her, were Stakhanovites! Her "theory" leads her to wind up calling women's oppression man's burden -- and because it is his fault, we supposedly must wait for man to free us. She has missed entirely the new stage of WL that began in the '40s when women were driven into the factories and then out again at the end of the war. She follows Sartre and his Existentialism every step of the way. Hell is other people and to her woman is other, the Second Sex, the subordinate one. Betty Friedan couldn't shine her shoes, but she got her number in the interview recently published in the Saturday Review of Literature.

Or take Kate Millet's Sexual Politics. She does see the relationship to history, but it is not the history of class struggles she recognizes. She divides history into two parts, all on the basis of women -- up to 1930, which she calls revolution, and from 1930 on, which she sees only as counter-revolution. But she thereby misses out on everything from the CIO to the Spanish Revolution in the '30s alone -- and when you come to the new stage today you cannot find where it comes from. She thinks Simone de Beauvoir is great -- which only shows that intellectuals "understand" intellectuals better than what comes from below.

If we move to Juliet Mitchell's Women's Estate we come face to face with Structuralism applied to the WIM. Althusser says if you combine the economics of Marx with Freud, you'll get great things. Mitchell sees the "moment" that produces revolution as when a great leader tells you what to do. She winds up being a real imperialist chauvinist, concluding that only the advanced women of the West can start the revolution, and she says that never does class consciousness come from being at the point of production; the party alone brings you class consciousness. She quotes Lenin's "What is to be Done?" disregarding the fact that Lenin changed his mind ten times after he wrote that.

What is there unifying all these women? The revolutionary petty-bourgeois intellectuals, themselves victims of the division between mental and manual labor, are always ready to hand over the role of workers' self-emanicipation to The Party. They do not see the human dimension as the movement of masses in the act of uprooting the old and creating the new, but as "the existential project". But the most serious to contend with is Sheila Rowbotham, who is a near-Trotskyist. She takes up 300 years of history, but one look at the titles of her chapters reveals that they are completely absent of any philosophy. She is an historian, but because she doesn't see any movement in history, her conception of revolution goes back to "consciousness." In the February Russian Revolution, the women were brave but not conscious of what they were doing. She agrees that women do have to organize autonomously, but she brings them right back to the need for the party and the consciousness that the leaders will bring. In 280 pages of history, Rosa Luxemburg is not even mentioned, just because she didn't write directly on women; there is no recognition that her theory of spontaneity is one of the most important for us to take up in our age, and especially on women. She winds up, like Mitchell, concluding that the Black and Oriental women are not up to the demands our age is making. For her "feminism and Marxism cohabit uneasily" and she gives us preconditions for revolution. Rather than WL being an Idea whose time has come, Rowbotham presents it as an abstraction imposed on women. To her, WL is a Particular form that concretizes the Universal of the new society. But, unless it is further concretized in the Individual, we will never get there -- and Rowbotham cannot move to that because she denies the four forces of revolution that we recognize -- the workers, the Blacks, the youth and the women -- and without those forces you have to wind up relying on the elite party to bring you socialism. Indeed,

this is what all the women theorists wind up with. And what contrasts them all to the new kind of creativity we have seen expressed by the Three Marias, and especially by Maria Barrono.

* * *

The lecture on LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION was even more breathtaking in its scope, and none could miss the further light this lecture sheds on the discussion of culture at the Executive Session of our recent Plenum. We were shown that great crises, such as the one of Civil War or Revolution, permit the artists to perceive reality in a new way and that new characters that are created not only give a perception of that period, but an anticipation of the new. Raya started at the very beginning -- with 500 B.C. which was the height of Greek philosophy -- and the beginning of its end. From there she discussed everything from the Orestes in which your desire to see Orestes judged not guilty is so great you don't even recognize the male chauvinism in Athena's speech -- to Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own", which Raya considers one of the finest pieces of literary criticism ever written -- to all the personal relationships that are so different during great revolutionary periods. Thus not only did Blake borrow from Mary Wollstonecraft, and dedicate one of the finest poems to her, but we find that in the same group in London in 1792-93 there were Mary Wollstonecraft, William Blake, Tom Paine and William Godwin, all under the impact of both the American and the French Revolutions. Raya discussed in detail Wuthering Heights, written by Emily Bronte on the eve of the 1848 revolutions, which is recognized as important now, but only because it was by a woman writer; it has not yet been recognized as being on the same level of greatness, if not greater, than Thackeray or Dickens of her own age. De Beauvoir says that Kathy's cry "I am Heathcliff" is the greatest sentence in the book, but says nothing about Heathcliff's much more revealing cry for Kathy never to leave him. All miss that the author created entirely new characters and steps over tremendous barriers, by creating ghosts when necessary. Marx said you can learn more from great novels than from classical political economy. For when you are a genius, the tale escapes you; there is a movement to the creation of the plot and the characters that makes you see more than you intended to see. (Raya read the footnote in M&F on form and content -- fn 83 -- which, incidentally, is a footnote to the section in M&F on fetishism of commodities.)

She took up the greatness of the American Period on the eve of the Civil War, when Moby Dick was written, and elaborated on this period of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Brookdale Farms, with special attention to Margaret Fuller, a journalist, a historian and a great author who wrote directly on women in the 19th century. The sweep Raya covered was so great it cannot even be "listed", but it took up every century right up to our own day. And on the American scene she dwelt especially on the Black writers, and the Harlem Renaissance that developed between the first and second World Wars, with which the Black dimension brought us something entirely new in language. The Black women poets were seen as greater than the men, with Gwendolyn Brooks and Audre Lorde singled out especially and some of their poems read out. And finally, Raya related it all to how Hegel deals with literature when he takes up the Greeks and Shakespeare and sees that it is the stage of consciousness at a specific period that creates the form of expression, so that at one point there is the move from epic poetry to drama, and the chorus is seen as the whole people participating. When Hegel takes up tragedy we see that Lysistrata is not just a question of women vs. men, but women vs. war -- the women are definitely at a higher stage than the men. We see that it is when new societies are being created that new forms of literature are created. The question at the present moment is whether we, also, are going to have a new form appear. This is why Raya felt that the Three Marias is not only something totally new in literature, but perhaps the greatest thing that has arisen. The Marias see all of literature as one big letter one person has written to another, and in writing

to each other they reveal what women have been through the years. Raya read some of the most beautiful and powerful sections from this work -- and it was unmistakable that these women wanted a totally different revolution, that would not be distorted but be the beginning of something totally new, in all relations.

* * *

Which brings us, finally, to the very first lecture -- and to the final one; the two are as intimately connected, I feel, as were the first and last chapters of Philosophy and Revolution. The very first lecture on Russia 1917, Germany 1919, Portugal 1975, had plunged us into revolution as act, and as consciousness -- but so tightly merged that each became something other than what it started out, as dialectics led the participants to great, new creativity. Raya took up 1917 as Revolution, 1919 as Counter-revolution, and 1975 as on-going Revolution, which has yet to run its course.

Just the telling of the tale of the first five days of the February Revolution in Russia 1917 revealed how it was that the women textile workers in Petrograd who went on strike against the advice of all, including the Bolsheviks, not only transformed a quiet celebration of International Woman's Day into a revolution, but thereby transformed history. (Yet this is the very act that some of the women theorists are now saying proved only their courage; they "didn't know what they were doing".)

Turning to Germany 1919, we examined the revolution not alone as act, but as leader, force, reason, and martyrdom. It is impossible to summarize briefly all the material Raya developed on Rosa Luxemburg both as activist and theoretician -- from her fight in 1899 against the revisionists, led by Bernstein; to her activity in the 1905 Russian Revolution and her development of the theory of the General Strike (which brought in the question of spontaneity and organization); to her return to Germany and the beginning of her fight with Kautsky in 1910, four long years before the outbreak of WWI and Lenin's break with Kautsky; to her 1913 theory of accumulation and discussion of imperialism, her wrong position on the National Question, but her unswerving hailing of the 1917 Russian Revolution, her long years in prison and the short two and a half months she lived after her release from prison in 1919, during which brief period she nonetheless managed to establish an independent CP and called for workers' councils. As Raya put it, there is nothing more stupid than those who do not take her up just because she did not write directly on women, for we can learn more from her greatest mistakes than from all their "wisdom". What stood out in Raya's recounting of Rosa's life -- and death -- was the complete inseparability of her activity and her theory. (Yet this was the woman that some of today's women theorists either ignore or, like Simone de Beauvoir, say merely "followed" Leibknecht. A self-portrait reproduced in Nottl's work which Raya displayed made it especially disgusting to think of DeBeauvoir's designation of her as "ugly". But what was one of the most provocative questions was the one Raya posed as to why there was no real collaboration between either Lenin or Trotsky with Luxemburg, no "camaraderie" between official meetings.)

The Third Act was the Portuguese Revolution of our own period -- in which we would see the revolution as masses in motion and face the question of "What happens after?" Having seen the revolution as Actuality in 1917, and as Reason in 1919, we now would see how, long before it appears, the revolution is present in the restlessness and the questioning from below. Raya reviewed what it meant for three women in fascist Portugal to get together and talk, and produce a great work, which was called "erotic" and for which they were thrown in jail. It was here that we had to turn to the question of what is a "philosophy of liberation" -- and return to Marx's discovery of a whole new continent of thought in 1844, and his Humanist Essays in which he had posed as the most fundamental relation of all, the relation

of man to woman. We were shown that from 1843 when Marx broke with bourgeois society, to 1883 and his death, whether it was the national question, or the relationship of man to woman, whether it was the dialectic of development in thought, or in action, what was fundamental was the dual rhythm, the second negativity, the breaking down of the old AND the creation of the new, which is the longer and the far more difficult task. It was this that we had to consider when witnessing Portugal, where the first WL demonstration after the 1974 overthrow of fascism was attacked, not by fascists, but by Communists. The establishment of new human relations could not be left for the day after the revolution, and WL cannot be viewed as a "deviation" from the revolution, but the proof that new human relations are being established.

* * *

It was this to which we returned again, directly, in the final lecture on PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION, as we reviewed the double rhythm of the movement from practice to theory and from theory to practice, each of which is irreducible, and the unity of which is what, alone, creates something new.

We were shown 1789 as more important for us than 1776 because 1789 was against the enemy inside, and created a new way of knowing. We were shown the French Revolution as not only giving birth to Hegel's great philosophy, but to everything from Mary Wolstoncraft's writing in Britain, to Beethoven's music in Austria. We were introduced to Hegel's categories in the Phenomenology of Mind and to the new alienations that Spirit is constantly experiencing. We saw tragedy as facing the fact that one age is passing and another coming, and great literature as arriving when you have these great crises in the objective world. We saw time as both the continuity of history and as the place for human development. We were faced with why none of the women theorists have seen what has come from the movement from practice, and how it is philosophy that creates the humus for everything else. We reviewed the three most important Hegelian categories of Universal, Particular and Individual, and saw Universal as what we are striving for, but as abstract; Particular as the first concretization; and Individual as the highest point of the concrete when you are actually living the new relations. We saw '68 as supposedly the highpoint of the New Left Revolution of the '60s, but were confronted with recognizing that '70 was the highpoint of the counter-revolution -- not because of Kent State only, but far worse because of Jackson, Mississippi and the break that came within the movement between white and Black. And we were able to see that this is what has also happened in the WLM, who have suffered from their own "fixed particular". After Raya went into Sartre's male-chauvinism with some amazing quotations from his works, we could understand that the fixed particular for Simone de Beauvoir was Existentialism, just as for the other women theorists it has turned out to be "party to load" because they all consider women as backward. Their maternalism is worse than paternalism -- and their direction is all away from the actual movement from below.

After the impact of these six tremendous lectures, the final paragraph of Philosophy and Revolution surely had a deeper meaning for all: "Ours is the age that can meet the challenge of the times when we work out so now 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 the 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."

* * *

What remains for us to answer is how we will use these six lectures, long before they become now book, as ^{you}ground to make "philosophy and revolution as organizational builder" a reality.

Yours, Olga