

*Delia's Local*

FIRST DRAFT

(Not for circulation)

WOMEN'S LIBERATION, THEN AND NOW

"Life itself becomes too dear,  
So vast are one's dreams."  
-- Louise Michel

"A work is never beautiful,  
unless it in some way escapes  
its author."  
-- E.S. Lawrence

I. YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

We have reached a turning point in our work which can by no means restrict itself only to Luxemburg and Marx. We must go both backwards and forwards in history and cover the globe. I dare say, since life itself began, woman has had to struggle; and in order to see the dialectic of ~~development~~ development, both of our age and other historic periods, we will need to gather disparate strands that may, at first, look quite disconnected. I trust, however, that at the end ~~of the process~~ a direction will manifest itself. ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> phrases referring to "since life itself began" and "global" may seem ~~too~~ <sup>too</sup> pompous, <sup>but</sup> what I have in mind is quite simple. I'm referring to the ~~fact~~ <sup>never-ending rebellion,</sup> whether we begin in 1647 with the first Maid's Petition to Parliament for "liberty every second Tuesday"; or ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> jump to 1831 when, in the very year <sup>that Turner led</sup> the greatest slave revolt in the U.S. ~~named~~ <sup>named</sup> Maria Stewart, the first woman <sup>to</sup> ~~publicly~~ <sup>publicly</sup> speak, a Black woman <sup>spoke</sup> ~~spoke~~ out in Boston. <sup>white or Black</sup> ~~spoke~~ <sup>spoke</sup> out in Boston.

"O ye daughters of Africa, awake! awake! arise! no longer sleep nor slumber but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties... How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?... How long shall a mean set of men flatter us with their smiles, and enrich themselves with our ~~labor~~ <sup>labor</sup> without hard earnings; their wives' fingers sparkling with rings and they themselves laughing at our folly?"

Other "firsts" crowd into mind, whether we are referring to ~~the~~ <sup>who</sup> Flora Tristan, was the first to call for an International of working women and working men in 1844, the year that Marx discovered a whole new continent of thought; ~~or~~ <sup>we</sup> look at the 1848 revolutions in Europe and see that what looked of much lesser importance, the First Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, actually opened up a whole new force for revolution. That women did hear that call became clear in 1851, when Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland sent greetings to the Second National Woman's Rights Convention in Worcester, Mass. from the St. Lazare prison in Paris, to which they had been sentenced for their activities in and after 1848. On behalf of the Convention, ~~Ernestine~~ Ernestine Rose declared: "After having heard the letter read from our poor incarcerated sisters of France, well might we exclaim, Alas, poor France! where is thy glory? Where the glory of the Revolution of 1848?"

The Black dimension is the most exciting of all. Not only ~~did~~ it inspire the creation of the 1848 Women's Rights Convention, but it ~~did~~ <sup>did</sup> so through its own activity; that is to say, when the white middle-class women in the anti-slavery societies ~~had~~ <sup>saw</sup> the Sojourner Truths and Harriet Tubmans as orators and travelers and thinkers, while their ~~work~~ <sup>own</sup> work was reduced to auxiliary tasks, they ~~recognized~~ recognized what it means to be Reason as well as Force. This became especially crucial in 1867 after the Civil War in the U.S., when even the most revolutionary Abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass and Wendell Phillips, refused to help collaborate with the women's fight for suffrage on the grounds that this was the Negro year. Sojourner Truth hit back at her own leader, Frederick Douglass, calling him "short-minded." Not only did she separate from her Black male colleagues and ~~white~~ <sup>allian with the</sup> white women, but

it became clear that "short-minded" was more than an epithet. Rather, it was a new language -- the language of thought -- against those who would put any limitations to freedom.

In four years, the word <sup>L</sup> had, indeed, become witness to the greatest revolution of men and women for a totally new, classless society -- the Paris Commune. Why, may we ask, did it take nearly a century to learn all the facts of the breadth of women's actions, and why, even then, did it take a woman to write The Women Incendiaries? <sup>(5)</sup>

Nor should we forget -- even though, for space, we must skip many of the labor struggles -- that the American labor struggles, with very active participation by women, had been continuous since the very first National Labor Union was established in the U.S. and affiliated with the First International. However, it was <sup>not until</sup> 1908, when the infamous Triangle Fire took the lives of 143 women working in that sweat shop, and Rose Schneiderman organized no less than 120,000 in the funeral march -- not just to mourn but to declare solidarity with all unorganized women workers -- that it first reverberated to Europe. By 1911, Clara Zetkin <sup>'s proposal</sup> ~~presented~~ to the Second International for an International Woman's Day became reality.

Rosa Luxemburg becomes central here, but if we try to begin at some alleged highpoint on what was considered to be the "Woman Question," ~~we~~ we will blind ourselves both to Luxemburg's multi-dimensionality and the newness that our age brought to the concept of women's liberation. Let's, instead, see what ground she laid in a letter that was, in the main, devoted to the anti-war work from which the revisionists stayed far, far away. In this letter, <sup>from Zetkin</sup> to Mathilde Wurm, seemingly out of nowhere, there suddenly appears a reference to the queen of the Amazons (and evidently, not as she is known in Greek legend as the one who was killed

14896

was told by the famous German playwright, Heinrich Von Kleist, who had Penthesilea not only kill Achilles, but eat him. ~~and~~ All this appears in a letter where she is so furious at her friend's defense of ~~the~~ <sup>revisionists?</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> position on the war <sup>like she writes:</sup>

"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 <sup>like</sup> Penthesilea. I wanted to say, but by God, you people are no Achilleses. 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 <sup>great</sup> 'on the scales of destiny' when thus it must 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..." ⑦

It's this need to throw your whole life on the scales of destiny, it's this passion for revolution, it's the urgency to get out of prison confinement and open entirely new vistas, <sup>it's</sup> this need "to be human" that has ~~been~~ characterized the whole of Luxemburg's vision, in struggle for a new society. It has put the stamp on all she ever did, and ever longed to make real. And it is this which ~~has~~ <sup>her concept of woman's liberation, which</sup> put so totally different a mark on ~~the~~ <sup>was called</sup> the Woman Question in her day, that it makes it possible for our age to first understand it fully, in a great measure, more fully than she herself was conscious of. ~~It is necessary with eyes of today to look at her activity from the beginning.~~

It is necessary with eyes of today to look at her activity from the beginning.

## II. LUXEMBURG'S ACTIVITY IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Luxemburg rightly refused to be pigeon-holed by the German Social-Democracy into the so-called Woman Question, as if that were the only place she "belonged", although she was a theoretician and the editor of a Polish paper as well as an activist when she arrived in Germany. Unfortunately, too many in the Women's Liberation Movement of today reveal their attitude to be the opposite side of the same coin by disregarding the greatest revolutionary because she had "next to nothing" to say on WOMEN.

Another ~~reverse~~ reverse put-down on the "Woman Question" is to act as if Luxemburg's friendship with Clara Zetkin, who is recognized by all as the founder of ~~the~~ Women's Liberation as a working class, mass movement, as well as theoretician and editor of the greatest mass circulation women's newspaper to this day, was "a burden" to Luxemburg, as Henriette Rolland-Holst characterized their relationship in her biography of Luxemburg. Although

it was not the "Woman Question" but the fight against reformism that the truth is that had brought them together. Luxemburg did not leave every question on women's liberation to Zetkin's responsibility. The truth is also that it was not only the fight against reformism but the revolutionary position on every subject that kept them together for the next two decades -- from the fight against revisionism to the fight against militarism, and from the fight against the bureaucratization of the trade unions to the anti-war struggle, and the revolution itself.

There is no doubt that Zetkin was nowhere as profound as Luxemburg, but there is also no doubt that she was a genuine revolutionary and she chose to concentrate on women's liberation, on organizing working class women, thus becoming the model not only for the Russian women's struggle from including the U.S. international on, but for the struggle the world over. She rightly had an international reputation and all based on activity as well as theory.



It becomes necessary, therefore, to set the record straight and thus discover one source <sup>in</sup> ~~which~~ today's ~~idea~~ <sup>is</sup> grounded, though <sup>our</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>does not</sup> altogether new dimensions to it.

Luxemburg no sooner arrived in Germany in <sup>1897</sup> ~~1899~~ than she was irred-  
lately confronted, despite the fact that she had won the editorship of  
a Social-Democratic paper, with the fact that the male members were  
not ready to grant <sup>to her</sup> ~~her~~ the same powers as <sup>to her</sup> ~~the~~ male predecessor. ~~Her~~  
Her complaint to Bebel, who was her friend at that time, did not help  
the situation, and in a few months she resigned. The fact that she did  
not make this part of the "Woman Question", did not mean that she did  
not record it in her own mind as such: Quite the contrary. Her friend-  
ship with Clara Zetkin, ~~which was~~ <sup>also</sup> deeply rooted in their  
common struggle against revisionism, ~~signified~~ <sup>also</sup> both her colle-  
aboration in the autonomous women's movement which Zetkin headed, and her  
writings for <sup>Gleichheit (Equality)</sup> ~~which~~ Zetkin edited.

Luxemburg was quietly developing a campaign on women's suffrage  
both in her writings and on her organizational tours. Thus in 1902  
she reported to Jogiches how a young weaver <sup>in Saxony</sup> named Hoffman was studying  
Lily Braun as well as Bebel on the "Woman Question", reading ~~the~~  
Gleichheit as well as arguing against the village elders who had maintained  
that "a woman's place was in the home": "When I agreed with Hoffman",  
she wrote, "what a triumph! There, you see," he replied, "The voice of  
authority has spoken for me!" In an article for Leipziger Volkszeitung  
that same year, she wrote: (9)



~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> revolution as on the Man/Woman relationship, it's all too easy for Marxists to quote abstractions rather than to dig deep into the dialectic of the concrete. And ~~the~~ <sup>find it</sup> women in the Marxist movement/a great deal easier to quote how serious Clara Zetkin was on the Man/Woman relationship at the very founding of the Second International in 1889, when she addressed it thusly: "Just as the male worker is subjugated to the capitalist, so is the woman by the man, and she will always remain in subjugation until she is economically independent." But when it comes to the effect of the Man/Woman relationship, not ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> economic terms ~~but~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~revolution,~~ <sup>revolution,</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> just blows out.

And yet it is there, just there, that something ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> born. A birth-time of history ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> manifest ~~itself~~ <sup>itself</sup> in an original character -- like a character in great literature who escapes its author because suddenly the author, too, is face to face with a human being representing a whole historic period about to be born. The revolution becomes the determinant not because there are "personal" differences in the attitude to revolution, nor because one wishes to play a different "role" than the other, but because the revolution is an overwhelming force that brooks no "interference" from anyone. ~~That is~~ <sup>The</sup> revolution for Luxemburg was so overpowering a force that not even imprisonment could dampen the ardor. Of one thing there is no doubt whatever: her great and most famous political analysis was the summation of the 1905 Revolution in The Mass Strike which she had written while Jogiches was still in prison. It was written during her stay in Kuckkala where Lenin and other Bolsheviks were endlessly discussing the revolution they had just lived through and which they still believed would revive.



Until then Jogiches occupied an important role in editing her manuscripts, but his hand is nowhere to be seen in this. Whether one has this or a different interpretation of the relationship of the revolution to their relationship <sup>to each other</sup> the period in which it happened cannot be rewritten. The fact that both of them were such objective politicians <sup>that</sup> they acted as one at the next (1907) Congress, where Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and all the other tendencies met, to draw conclusions <sup>and</sup> draw up perspectives for the future -- does not, can not, restore the former Man/Woman relationship, nor change the ground rules of revolution. As she, herself, put it excitedly: "The revolution is magnificent, and everything else is bilge." <sup>(1)</sup>

This may have ~~been~~ <sup>the</sup> been <sup>time</sup> time for a much needed pause. But as we saw when we first looked at 1907, it had become as busy a year as the year of revolution, prison and the writing of her ~~most~~ famous <sup>for</sup> Mass Strike pamphlet. Not only was it also the high point <sup>of</sup> all the <sup>socialist</sup> <sup>of the RSD</sup> tendencies -- from the Bolsheviks to the Bund and from the <sup>who met in London for nearly three weeks of</sup> Mensheviks to the Poles -- ~~the~~ heated, noisy debates; ~~but~~ it was followed by a highpoint, likewise, for the Second International <sup>which later</sup> met in Stuttgart, where the world Marxist tendencies debated and ~~where~~ <sup>and</sup> Luxemburg spoke <sup>not only</sup> in the name of Poland but of <sup>and</sup> Russia, <sup>was</sup> also a delegate from Germany -- a true, great internationalist in every respect. <sup>anti-war</sup> It was her <sup>speech</sup> ~~speech~~ that succeeded in getting the approval of the whole Congress. All this we saw when we first discussed 1907. What we haven't yet <sup>discussed</sup> ~~seen~~ <sup>is</sup> still another Congress -- the First International Socialist Women's Conference -- <sup>where</sup> ~~where~~ Luxemburg reported on the work of the International Socialist Bureau in a way that would hardly have pleased the RSD.

This Conference ~~was held in Stuttgart~~ had 59 women representing 15 countries, and it was clear that everyone from ~~Stuttgart~~ Bala Banoff who represented Italy to Kollontai who represented Russia accepted the leadership of Luxemburg and Zetkin and considered Gleichheit as the co-ordinating center for all. Kollontai did not exaggerate its impact when she said that the Conference "made an enormous ~~contribution~~ contribution to the development of <sup>e)</sup> working women's movement along Marxist lines." Independent, autonomous women's groups <sup>did</sup> begin functioning in other countries.

The Conference succeeded in ~~maintaining~~ maintaining ~~its~~ autonomy despite the fact that they were by then supposed to be subordinated to the International Congress. The manner in which it was accomplished was ~~not~~ typical of Luxemburg. In making the report of the ISB work, she managed to create sufficient "amusement" by first, referring to the fact that, since she was "the only one of the fair sex" on the Bureau, ~~she could assure them that~~ she could assure them that "the only comrades ~~who~~ who hold ... a high opinion of the International Bureau are those who know its workings from very far off." ~~She created further amusement~~ She created further amusement ~~when she said,~~ when she said, "I'm going to let you in on another little secret." This turned out to be a description of "four years of painful disappointment in the activity of the International Bureau." All these disparaging remarks were made with one goal in mind, <sup>to get the women to move</sup> that only "you will create this moral center of the International out of yourselves; and I can only wonder at Comrade Zetkin that she takes this additional workload upon herself." In a word, she was asking them to reject moving the International Socialist Women's Bureau to Brussels where the ISB was centered, and instead to remain in Stuttgart with the editor of Gleichheit.<sup>(2)</sup>

14903

This principle became central in 1910-11 when the break with Kautsky and Bebel occurred over the question of both General Strike and the "Brocco Incident" and Ulsichheit was an outlet for her revolutionary views. Indeed it later became the anti-war organ when World War I broke out and the International betrayed.

The establishment of the first International Women's Day and the general revolutionary struggles in the period made 1911 central both for Women's Liberation and for Rosa Luxemburg. However, since Luxemburg refused to make any reference to what we would now call male chauvinism, during the hectic debates with Kautsky and Bebel, the two sets of activities remained in separate compartments. No doubt she did not know the specifics of what went on in the letters between Bebel and Kautsky which we quoted in Chapter 2, as they tried to reduce the sharp political differences to a "Woman Question"; she was positive that their opposition to her had very little to do with that and everything to do with their sharp move away from Marxism. Nevertheless, just as she wrote to Luise Kautsky in 1907 and asked her "to keep active" in the women's movement, so in 1911 she wrote <sup>to her</sup> "Are you coming for the women's conference? Just imagine, I have become a feminist! I received a credential for this conference and must therefore go to Jena." (12)

### III THE MASS MOVEMENT AND ANTI-WAR ACTIVITY

March 1911 marks the first celebration of the International Women's Day that Clara Zetkin had proposed to the Second International. In Germany it was the height of the socialist women's work for suffrage. To coincide with the first International Women's Suffrage Conference that year, two and a half million leaflets demanding the vote for women were distributed, and tens of thousands of women demonstrated throughout Germany.

Her did the activity stop in 1911; it reached its climax in 1912, and, as is clear from Luxemburg's important speech on women suffrage that year, it was not just a struggle for suffrage. Just as her activity in <sup>the</sup> 1905 revolution was by no means exhausted in her Manifesto's call for "full emancipation for women", so her "tactical struggle" for women suffrage was related both to the General Strike and to revolution itself.

Her speech concluded with: "The present forceful movement of millions of proletarian women who consider their lack of political rights a crying wrong is such an infallible sign, a sign that the social bases of the reigning system are rotten and that its days are numbered... Fighting for women's suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat." (14)

A few months before the outbreak of World War I, she was still writing on the need for women's suffrage, emphasizing the ~~importance~~ <sup>woman</sup> importance of proletarian women: "For the propertied bourgeois ~~woman~~, her house is the world. For the proletarian woman the whole world is her house... Bourgeois women's rights advocates want to acquire political rights in order to participate in political life. The proletarian women can only follow the path of the workers' struggles, the opposite to winning a foot of real power through primarily legal statutes. In the beginning was the deed for every social ascent... The ruling society refuses them (women) access to the temple of its legislation... but to them the Social-Democratic party opens its wide gates." (15)

These doors were quickly shut when the war actually broke out and Gleichheit continued its anti-war propaganda, making it clear that it was not just anti-war rhetoric before a war, but putting their lives on the line after war had been declared. By then there were 210,314 woman workers in the Free Trade Unions and no less than 175,000 women belonged to the SPD. The circulation of Gleichheit had jumped to 125,000, and the anti-war work of the women went on not only nationally but internationally. Indeed, ~~the~~ first International Anti-War Conference was organized by women. It was to be held in Holland and Luxemburg was to accompany Zetkin, but on Feb. 18, 1915, Luxemburg was thrown into jail. (16)

~~She~~ The tremendous anti-war activity, which had to be carried on illegally, <sup>did not stop</sup> ~~never~~ after Zetkin, too, was arrested in August. Early in 1915 the chauvinist SPD leadership had been made to realize that they had to reckon with the mass opposition.



of revolutionary women. One incident gives the flavor of the subjective as well as objective situation: It was the day the Executive Committee of the SPD was meeting on the food crisis, <sup>and</sup> refused to allow 100 women protesters into the meeting to air their grievances, whereupon the women burst into the meeting, cursing the male Social-Democrats. One of the leaders, Philip Scheidemann, described the meeting as follows:

Ebert (while ringing his bell): "What do you wish here?"

First woman: "No came here to speak."

Ebert: "Are you all members?"

Many woman (shouting): "Yes, indeed, and able, not like you."

Ebert: "If you are members, you must know that we have parliamentary order at our discussions."

Chorus of Women: "Ah, now we will speak! You have nothing to say!"

Ebert: "I forbid you to speak." (17)

Ebert had to adjourn the meeting, but ~~the meeting was adjourned~~ <sup>found</sup> the stairs and corridors were filled with ~~many~~ <sup>many more</sup> women who had arrived by then.

Rosa Luxemburg was not there, of course; she ~~was not present~~ <sup>was not present</sup>. But she never rested from producing not only leaflets but <sup>theoretical</sup> the first great ~~anti-war~~ anti-war pamphlet to come out of Germany, which she called The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy and signed "Junius". Every since, it has been referred to as the Junius pamphlet.

Clearly, the demonstrations that developed in Germany were not only for bread but for freedom, as is



demanding, "Bread!" Whereupon that slogan was drowned out with, "Down with the war!" By this time, the third day of the strike, there were 240,000 strikers. The Bolsheviks issued a call for a General Strike. The police opened fire and some fell dead, but the Cossacks had not yet unleashed a fury against them. The women went up to the Cossacks to ask whether they would join them. They did not answer but, wrote Trotsky, "the Cossacks did not hinder the workers from 'diving' under their horses. The revolution does not choose its paths; it made its first steps toward victory under the belly of a Cossack's horse. A remarkable incident!" (16)

On the decisive fifth day, ~~the prisons were~~ the prisons were opened and all political prisoners were freed. At the same time, the mutinous troops descended on the Tauride Palace. "Thus dawned upon the earth the day of destruction of the Romanov monarchy." (17) By November the Kerensky government was also overcome <sup>and</sup> the Bolsheviks took power on Nov. 7. - One year and two days later, the German Revolution began.

Rosa Luxemburg was freed from jail and at once plunged into the developing revolution, creating the theory of revolution that incorporated the Russian experience but made it distinctly German. She was reliving what had always been the great turning point in her life -- the spontaneous 1905-06 Russian Revolution -- at a much higher point of history. <sup>But we</sup> ~~must~~ limit our view of it to seeing it <sup>)</sup> ~~with eyes of today, and as it relates to Women's~~ Liberation.

IV THE NEW CONTRIBUTIONS OF TODAY'S WIM

The 75th anniversary of the first Russian Revolution brought a new emphasis to that revolution because what was muted then -- its impact on the East, Persia especially <sup>now</sup> became the focal point in 1980, ~~when~~ <sup>with</sup> the unfolding revolution in Iran. We had, in fact, been seeing it in daily headlines because Iran kept referring to the 1906 Constitution they would model themselves after, whereas the <sup>Iranian</sup> woman who had participated in the revolution were marching for their full freedom, and some were recalling a very different aspect of the 1906-1911 Iranian revolution which had created, for the very first time anywhere in the world, a women's anjumani. <sup>30</sup> The fact that, for the moment, the Iranian women have lost out all over again, and that that seems to be the order of the day, makes it imperative to take another look at the WIM -- especially ~~in terms of the U.S.~~ <sup>in terms of the U.S. -- ~~to see~~</sup> <sup>what</sup> distinguishes it not only from other periods but from what too many of the old Left still cling to.

They never tire of bringing us the example of the German socialist women's movement, stressing how many women Clara Zetkin organized, how proletarian was <sup>the movement's</sup> character, how wide the circulation of Gleichheit, insisting we cannot compare to them either in class composition or "mass" <sup>nature</sup>. The implication seems to be that we had better hold our tongues. At the same time, they show ~~great~~ great opportunism (and ~~not~~, not only on the part of the men, but many of the women) by vying for "membership growth" through their great activities on single issues that are the most popular, like abortion, sexuality, equality, and protection of battered wives. What they don't proclaim that openly ~~is~~ but keep as their

underlying philosophy, is that the women in the "Marxist movement" had better not bring the subject into the party and thus break up the "unity" needed against capitalism by diverting to "strictly personal, strictly feminist" matters which play such a ~~center~~ <sup>center</sup> point for bourgeois women. It's at this point that they are trying to use Luxemburg as "proof" that true revolutionaries don't ~~transform~~ transform personal problems into political issues. ~~These "vanguardists" are not~~ <sup>These "vanguardists" are not</sup> Luxemburgist when it comes to spontaneity; ~~they~~ <sup>they</sup> simply use (I really mean abuse) her name to roll ~~back~~ <sup>women's liberation</sup> back to what it meant in a different historic period.

Rosa Luxemburg did not live to see the first workers' state in history transformed into its total opposite of state-capitalism. She did not suffer through either Stalinism or fascism, though she died at the murderous hands of the Freikorps, predecessors of the ~~SS~~ <sup>Nazis</sup>. Nor was the question of the reactionary power of religion, which she certainly did know, the equivalent of the total state power we know today. So powerful is the idea of Women's Liberation today that everywhere women are speaking out, ~~like the~~ <sup>like the</sup> Moroccan feminist, Fatima Mernissi, ~~who has~~ <sup>who has</sup> exposed the role which the Muslim religion has played in woman's dehumanization, pointing to how the Koran's concept of woman has been used "to give a divine stamp to female exploitation." (21)

We are, indeed, at a different stage. We have, indeed, raised altogether new questions, and made new contributions. In a word, we are restating Marx's Humanism for our age. What is decisive in any age is to be concrete. ~~Truth~~ <sup>Truth</sup> is always concrete.



U. We. miss  
 learn to hear the concrete new that came out. It's like learning a new language. <sup>(1)</sup> The ~~greatest~~ greatest point of the new came from the women in the Left itself, and yet ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> bog line in the meeting <sup>was</sup> when ~~a~~ <sup>our</sup> woman <sup>denied</sup> raised the existence of male chauvinism "right here" and tried to back her statement <sup>up</sup> by asking why there were no women in the leadership, and why ~~were~~ <sup>were</sup> women ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> always "cranking the mimeo machine instead of writing the leaflets themselves."

(2) Yes, mistakes have been made by the women who moved away from the vanguardist organizations, not because they "burned bras", but because like the ~~post~~ <sup>post</sup> generation they fell into the trap of the existential Other and considered Man the enemy. That attitude of simply turning the other side of the coin reached its most fantastic stage <sup>with</sup> what we will call the history of the absurd. I'm referring to Gerda Lerner who moved away from the magnificent documentary that she issued on Black Women in White America ~~etc~~, calling that "a detour" while she proceeded to the supposedly main road of "women-centered" analysis: "What would the past be like if man were regarded as woman's Other?" Far from "Placing Woman in History", The Majority Finds its Past wrenched women out of it. (2)

(3) Far from Black being a detour, we know that it has been the keystone of all of American history. Just as the first Woman's Rights Movement arose on the shoulders of the Blacks, that is to say, in working with Blacks against slavery, the middle-class American woman learned the value of organizations and established the first Woman's Rights movement. And just as the Sojourner Truths and Harriet Tubmans learned to separate from what they called their "short-minded" leaders who would not fight for woman's suffrage in the "Negro year" of fighting for Black male suffrage, participation in so the new Women's Liberation Movement arose from the Black freedom struggles

of the 60s, and the Black women, in turn, ~~made their own declarations~~  
made their own declarations.

"We are often asked the ugly question, 'Where are your loyalties? To the Black movement or the feminist movement?'" is the way a spokeswoman for the National Black Feminist Organization put it when the NBFO arose in 1973. "Well, it would be nice if we were oppressed as women Monday through Thursday, then oppressed as Blacks the rest of the week. We could combat one or the other on those days -- but we have to fight both every day of the week." <sup>(23)</sup> Their Statement of principles declared: "We will encourage the Black community to stop falling into the trap of the white male Left, utilizing women only in terms of domestic or servile needs. We will remind the Black Liberation Movement that there can't be liberation for half a race."

The movement had been reminded of that long before, in action, when the First National Conference for a United Front Against Fascism, called by the Black Panther Party in 1969, had tried to pre-empt the time scheduled for a panel on women's liberation to allow Communist theoretician, Herbert Aptheker, to talk on/<sup>long</sup>past his allotted time. The shouting, clapping women made it clear they had no intention of being silenced; their panel proved the best part of the whole conference.

It is not only that it had been ~~trated~~ as "accidental" that Black women were among the earliest leaders of the movement -- from Rosa Parks who had initiated the whole Black Revolution in the South in 1955 by refusing to give up her seat to a white man, to Fannie Lou Hamer whose work had been ground for the critical Mississippi Freedom Summer. It is that a woman like Gloria Richardson, the recognized leader of the movement in Cambridge, Maryland, had been told by the male SNCC leadership to step back when they arrived on the scene, because "nobody would accept a woman

14913

as leader." Not only did these Black women not "step back", but scores of other Black women rose to lead further struggles and demonstrate that women's liberation was not only those groups who called themselves that, but included Welfare Rights mothers and nurses aides marching in Charleston for better conditions, as well as cleaning women in New York in the 60s and 70s who complained that men were being paid more and, when asked what they thought about Women's Liberation, replied, "We are women's liberationists."

Nor was it only Black women who embraced the struggle. Very early in the U.S., Chicana feminists, North American Indian women and Puerto Rican women organized their own groups.

~~Cuba~~ is that exciting dimension which signalled a new Third World not only in the U.S. but throughout the world. In East Timor, Rosa Muki Bonaparte organized the Popular Organization of Timorese Women as a group with ~~in~~ Fretelin in 1975, when the East Timorese people were trying to end 446 years of Portuguese rule. She declared:

"The ideology of a system in which women are considered as 'inferior beings' has submitted Timorese women to a double exploitation: A general form, which applies without distinction to both men and women, and which manifests itself by forced labor, starvation salaries, racism, etc.... Another form of a specific character, directed to women in particular." The objectives of the ~~OPMT~~ <sup>OPMT</sup> were "the total destruction of all forms of exploitation" and "to restore to women the position and rights due to them in the new society which we are building through revolution." (24)

In the Congo ~~the~~ the women formed a Union for the Emancipation of the African Woman, whose aims were: (1) "to struggle against all backward customs which shackle women," (2) "to promote the participation of women in all national endeavors," and (3) "to raise the level of awareness of women to involve her in the economic life of the country." The Zulu women, too, called the African ~~rebellion~~ <sup>woman's</sup> rebellion against polygamy "sister to women's liberation." ~~the~~ The most important thing we must learn to hear of the ~~so much~~ Afro-Asian, Latin-American struggles is not the rhetoric at the Tri-Continental Congresses as the simple words of the Black American woman who wanted to be sure that ~~others~~ <sup>others</sup> meant the same thing she meant by the word "freedom":

"I'm not thoroughly convinced that Black Liberation, the way it's being spelled out, will really and truly mean ~~my~~ <sup>my</sup> liberation. I'm not so sure ~~when~~ when it comes time 'to put down my gun' that I won't have a broom shoved in my hands, as so many of my Cuban sisters have." (25)

Ever since, at the turn of the century, when Luxemburg's prescience on imperialism made her not only look twice but demand that the SPD fight its very emergence, the Black dimension had become a touchstone for measuring the internationalism of socialists. She would tolerate no diversion from it. Here is how she answered Mathilde Wurm who tried, instead, to make the conditions of the Jews the priority:

"What do you want with this particular suffering of the Jews? The poor victims on the rubber plantations in Putumayo, the Negroes in Africa with whose bodies the Europeans play a game of catch, are just as near to me. Do you remember the words written on the work of the Great General Staff about 'roths's campaign in the Kalahari desert' 'And the death-rattles, the mad cries of those dying of thirst, faded way into the sublime silence of eternity.'"

"Oh, this 'sublime silence of eternity' in which so many screams have faded away unheard. It rings within me so strongly that I have no special corner of my heart reserved for the ghetto: I am at home wherever in the world there are clouds, birds and human tears..." (26)

(4) The demand, or just form <sup>for the present</sup> if you wish, for small informal groups for decentralization, is not to be disregarded as if it were just a question of not understanding the difference between small and large, and large is better. Nor can this be answered in this bureaucratic age by <sup>Women's Liberationists</sup> trying to attribute to ~~the~~ that what they "really", "in the final analysis" mean is ~~the~~ a belief in ~~the~~ private property, petty home industry, and "of course" Mother Earth. Nothing of the kind. What is involved is nothing short of the two pivotal questions of the day, and, I might add, questions of tomorrow because we're not going to have a successful revolution unless we do answer them. They are, first, the totality and the depth of the <sup>needs</sup> ~~the~~ of this exploitative, sexist, racist society. Second, we must <sup>never</sup> ~~not~~ forget the dual rhythm of revolution. It is not just the overthrow of the old, it is the creation of the new. It is not just the "objective", "material" foundations that have to be re-organized; it is the "subjective" personal freedom, creativity, talents that need to be released. In a word, there must be such appreciation of the movement from below, from practice, that we never again let theory and practice get separated.

\* \* \*

It is true that Luxemburg made no special category out of the "Woman Question," considering that socialism would do it all. But <sup>who</sup> we have seen altogether too many transformations into opposite, will not be put off until the "day after" -- it must be answered the day before the revolution.

What must be brought out is that Luxemburg's alleged ~~disinterest~~ disinterest in Woman flies in the face

14916



of concrete activity ~~was~~. The ~~fact~~ fact that the concrete activity on women's liberation became pivotal when the war broke out, and (the fact) that ~~the~~ women were central to all the anti-war activity <sup>to write</sup> ~~for~~ Henrietta Roland-Holst ~~was~~ directly after repeating the alleged disinterest; " but now she wants to help everywhere where people try to reconnect the torn threads of the web of international connections." <sup>27</sup> ~~Women~~ <sup>Women</sup> became central to ~~the~~ <sup>for</sup> ~~the~~ concept of internationalism.

Is it accidental that the male ~~leaders~~ <sup>leaders</sup> in the SPD so easily plunged into ~~the~~ <sup>those</sup> ~~malodorous~~ male chauvinist remarks ~~when~~ ~~Luxemburg~~ broke with Kautsky and Bebel? ~~And could it be accidental that the male Marxists of this day, with and without female support, first resisted the establishment of an autonomous women's movement and now try very much to narrow it by forever bringing out the priority of the Party, the Party, the Party? Here is the rub.~~

It is necessary to turn to the question of form of organization and not to demean that question as if what women liberationists mean is "coffee klatches". ~~This question is by no means~~ <sup>also</sup> ~~one raised only by Women's Liberationists. It came out~~ of a genuine revolution when the PRER in Portugal gave articulation to that new word: apartidarismo. Precisely because that is so serious a question, it can by no means just be tacked on to this chapter. It must be developed separately and it is to that question that we are now turning.

FOOTNOTES

- 1- Sheila Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p. 15.
- 2- Black Women in 19th Century American Life, edited by Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin (Phil.: Univ. of Penna. Press, 1976).
- 3- Feminism, edited by Miriam Schneir (New York: Random House, 1972).
- 4- See especially Earl Conrad, Harriet Tybman (New York: Paul S. Erikson, 1943) and Narrative of Sojourner Truth, an Ebony Classic (Chicago: Johnson Pub. Co., 1970).
- 5- Edith Thomas' Women Incendiaries was published in France in 1963, and in the U.S. in 1966 (New York: Braziller) but is long out of print; and there never was a paperback edition.
- 6- Union WAGE (Berkeley, Cal.) issued two pamphlets in 1974 by Joyce Maupin -- Working Women and their Organizations, 150 Years of Struggle and Labor Heroines, Ten Women Who Led the Struggle.
- 7- This letter, written Dec. 28, 1916 is included in Briefe an Freunde, edited by Benedick and Kautsky, 1950 edition, pp. 44-46.
- 8- The letter to Jogiches of Feb. 11, 1902 is included in Stephen Bronner's The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg (Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), p. 90.
- 9- April 4, 1902. See Gesammelte Werke, <sup>Vol. 1</sup> ~~XXXXX~~, p. 184.
- 10- It is included in Dick Howard's Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).
- 11- Letter of July 18, 1906, included in Briefe an Freunde, p. 44.
- 12- See Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 2, pp. 233-34.

- 13- Letter to Luise Kautsky, included in Rosa Luxemburg: Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky, translated from the German by Louis F. Lochner (New York: Robert McFarlane & Co., 1925), p. 164.
- 14- Dick Howard, op. cit., p. 222.
- 15- From Rosa Luxemburg's "Die Proletarierin" ("Proletarian Woman"), included in Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 3, p. 411.
- 16- A postcard sent to her on Feb. 28, 1915 conveyed the resolution that had been passed at the Women's Day Meeting of the Socialist Party at Coshocton, Ohio. It read: "Be it resolved that we convey to Comrade Luxemburg our sincere sympathy with her attitude toward the present European war and that we express our admiration for her uncompromising devotion to revolutionary principles when the socialist movement of nearly all Europe was being corrupted by capitalist and nationalist influences." It is on deposit at the Hoover Institute of War, Peace and Revolution.
- 17- From Philip Scheidemann's Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten, Vol. 1 (Dresden: Carl Reissner, 1930), p. 333, as quoted in William Peltz's paper presented at the Conference on the History of Women, College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minn., Oct. 24-25, 1975.
- 18- Leon Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932/1937), Chapter 7, "Five Days," p. 105.
- 19- Ibid. p. 123.
- 20- In The Strangling of Persia (A Personal Narrative) (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968, copyright 1912), H. Morgan Shuster revealed the historic role of the women by the mere description of what happened: "The Persian women since 1907 had become almost at a bound the most

- 27 -

progressive, not to say radical, in the world. That this statement upsets the ideas of centuries makes no difference. It is the fact... During the five years following the successful but bloodless revolution in 1906 against the oppression and cruelty of the Shah, a feverish and at times fierce light shone in the veiled eyes of Persia's women, and in their struggles for liberty and its modern expressions, they broke through some of the most sacred customs which for centuries past had bound their sex in the land of Iran." (pp. 191-192)

This was discussed in my Political-Philosophic Letter of March 25, 1979, "Iran: Unfoldment of, and Contradictions in, Revolution," which was subsequently translated into Farsi by young Iranian revolutionaries. In 1980 my writings on Women's Liberation were translated into Farsi in a pamphlet entitled Women as Reason and Force of Revolution, which also included an article on women by Rosa Luxemburg and Ting Ling's "Thoughts on March 8", along with an introduction to the series of essays by an Iranian Marxist-Humanist woman, Neda.

21. - Fatima Mernissa, "Veiled Sisters", New World Outlook, Vol. 31, April, 1971, pp. 36-39. See also Doris Wright's article, "Black women oppose oppression in many lands," in News & Letters, Feb., 1972, which covered the flanks of the feminists' argument by pointing out: "Mohammed himself granted Muslim women what the Napoleonic Code did not grant French women until the late 1950s -- the right to possess property and to administer it without any interference from her husband," and then continuing, "To underscore the intensity of the Muslim woman's predicament, the Algerian writer, Fadela M'Rabet reports that the rate of suicide among young girls who refuse arranged marriages and seclusion has risen drastically since the end of the revolution." See also "An Iranian woman speaks: women and religion in Iran," by Neda, in News & Letters, Oct. 1979.

14920

Women's Liberation Movement inspired a veritable explosion of  
22 - The histories of women which include everything from studies such as  
Eleanor Flexner's Century of Struggle (New York: Atheneum, 1973) to  
works on Russia like Richard Stites' The Women's Liberation Movement in  
Russia (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978) <sup>Ballin and Lapidus'</sup> and Atkinson's Women in  
Russia (Stanford Univ. Press, 1977); and from Kate Millett's Sexual Politics  
(New York: Doubleday, 1970) to Sheila Rowbotham's Women, Resistance and Revolution  
(New York: Random House, 1972). <sup>by Ferraro, Dignan and Holmes</sup> Working Women for Freedom (Detroit:  
News & Letters, 1976). <sup>not only from history but from philosophy</sup>

23 - Margaret Sloan, as reported in Detroit Free Press, Jan. 28, 1974, p. 13.

24 - See "E. Timor women revolutionaries speak to our struggles today" by  
Holly Jackson, in News & Letters, Oct. 1976.

25 - Doris Wright, News & Letters, Aug-Sept. 1971.

26 - Stephen Bronner, op. cit., p. 178. Letter from Wronke i. P. Fortress,  
Feb. 16, 1917.

27 - Henriette Roland-Holst, Rosa Luxemburg (date to come).