MINUTES -- DETROIT PUBLIC MEETING -- FEBRUARY 4, 1979

Marx's and Engels' Studies Contrasted: RELATIONSHIP OF PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION TO WOMEN'S LIBERATION
Discussion meeting on Raya Dunayevskaya's Draft Chapter published in News & Letters Jan.-Feb. 1979

Present: All, plus Dan from Flint, and 16 visitors.
First public meeting in the new office.

Suzanne, as Chairwoman of Detroit Women's Liberation, N&L, chaired the meeting, welcoming all to our new office, new world center of Marxist-Humanism. She discussed the draft chapter in the context of the development of Marxist-Humanism, and the P&R classes to be given by Raya in April. Bob read the DF 1/30, then Suzanne introduced Michael Connolly.

Michael's Presentation is excerpted in the Discussion Bulletin, and no further attempt will be made to summarize it here.

The Discussion ranged over many points, not always in the strictest relationship to the Draft Chapter and the concrete, painstaking working-through that is required before "conclusions" can be reached. Only Raya's remarks are here included:

Raya: I do not want to speak on Women's Liberation -- except for one negative feature -- I want to speak on philosophy and revolution. Now the one negative feature on Women's Liberation is what brought about this chapter: that I am so mad at the WLM, at the socialist women, for not recognizing the greatness of Rosa Luxemburg, the greatest woman theoretician who was creating both on the question of spontaneity and on the question of organization, and on the question of "The revolution is magnificent, everything else is bilge"!! So you always begin with what is new and what is today; and what is new to introduce Marxism? It had to be today's WLM. And I got so mad at Sheila Rowbotham for not talking about RL but for accepting that horrible male-chauvinist Hal Draper who supposedly "summarized" Marx and Engels on women.

I never did like Engels, though I didn't want to criticize him much -- but I thought, The Origin of the Family couldn't have been Marx's view at all. And I suddenly discover that in the last two years of his life Marx returned to the question of Man/Woman as the fundamental relationship, through the origin of society. And Rosa Luxemburg at 15 years old was reading Morgan and Lubbock and so on -- she didn't get as much out of it as Marx did, but she was trying to find out: How in hell did we come to this stinking capitalist system? So it's the question of the digging into what it had meant for Marx to confront the question of the origins of humanity.

Steve: you're quite right when you question how I can call Marx an "empiricist". Marx was no empiricist. I should have said "empiric facts". But I wanted to shock everyone, that empirical facts are very important, if you have a dialectical Hegelian-Marxist methodology. Look at the difference between what Marx learned from the "facts" and what others learned. Everyone was in love with the Iroquois women, who had the veto power. But Marx said, That's a fake! Yes, they would veto, but they're not the decision-makers. And so what Engels ended up with was that the future society would be primitive communism on a higher stage -- add technology to primitive ccmmunism and we're there. But Marx said -- Like hell! We want an entirely new man, an entirely new woman, a totally different society.

But the end of everything is the methodology. You can't say that Engels wasn't a dialectician, or that he wasn't a revolutionary -- or that he wasn't loyal to Marx! Marx couldn't have been without Engels! But if you have that much in you as Engels had, as a revolutionary, as a materialist, but you still cannot do it once Marx is dead -- it's because you take for granted that you know everything. There is nothing worse in the world methodologically than taking for granted that you understand Marx or you understand Lenin and therefore you do not need to dig deeper into that once something new arises. When you confront the new you can't confront it as if there was no foundation.

Okay: I'll show you three "ifs", and you'll understand methodology. Consider the three revolutions in Marx's lifetime, and as he expressed it in the foreword to the 1882 Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto. He says: If the Russian Revolution would spark a West European revolution -- yes, you can have a revolution and you don't have to worry that you're backward. That's the first "if".

Now the second "if" is what he had said at the end of the 1848 revolutions: The revolution must go on in permanence. The revolution cannot stop at the bourgeois stage, or even at proclaiming yourself for the next stage. The permanent revolution means you have to continue with the class struggle till when you root out this capitalist system.

Now, if, in the case of Russia, you related not only to West Europe but want to know how to confront the primitive commune of the peasantry, to maintain it in a different form, you have to be entirely different -- and how can you do it? So the third "if" was: It's not only that the 1848 revolutions helped me to create the idea of the permanent revolution -- but in 1857 what did I learn? From those magnificent Chinese in the Taiping Revolution who were revolting against British imperialism while we were doing nothing? I learned, not only not to be so Euro-centered, as I had been in the CM, but I saw something in Hegel, in the dialectic, which I had always seen as an abstraction -- the absolute movement of becoming! What's abstract about that, if you take it out of Hegel and show that you never stop development -- that's what self-development is! So when he repeats in the Grundrisse the "absolute movement of becoming", he's not only talking about yes, Russia can have the revolution if it happens also in the technologically-advanced countries, and if it continues in permanence, but if there is an absolute movement of becoming.

Now there is only one way to constantly be this self-development and have this vision before you: if you don't divide the Individual from the Universal, and therefore what you have to do is not just see that there is no division between theory and practice, and philosophy and revolution, but you first begin to see that without a philosophy of revolution, your revolution is going to die before it ever gets completed.

Meeting convened: 3:25 p.m.; adjourned: 6:00 p.m.
Mariana, secretary