

Nationalism, Communism, Marxist Humanism
and the

Afro-Asian Revolutions

RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA

with Author's New Introduction
to 1984 Edition

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New Introduction to 1984 Edition

"Our period is a birth-time and a period of transition."
— Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*

*"When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away,
what is wealth, if not universality of needs . . . the evolution
of all human powers as such . . . the absolute movement of
becoming."*

— Marx, *Grundrisse*

The emergence in our age of a new Third World, not only Afro-Asian but Latin American and Middle East, was no mere geographic designation, as massive and substantive as that was. Rather, Third World became synonymous both with new forces of revolution and with those new forces as Reason. These new revolutionary forces — peasants as well as proletarians, Women's Liberationists as well as youth anti-war activists — saw in that most exciting color, Black, so deep a revolutionary dimension and so intense an internationalism imbedded in their national liberation struggles that, far from being a "Third" World, it encompassed the whole world.

The world of the 1960s, indeed, was aflame with rebellion, North and South, East and West. The depth of the revolt that freedom fighters in East Europe unleashed against the Communist totalitarians characterized, as well, the new generation of revolutionaries in the West, rebelling against the bureaucratic, militaristic, capitalist-imperialist world they did not make.

JUST AS THE AFRICAN DIASPORA meant not only South Africa but South USA, and Black meant not only Africa — South, West, East and North — but also Latin America, including the Caribbean, so Black Consciousness, plunging into the struggle for freedom from Western imperialism did not stop at the economic level anymore than did the East European freedom fighters struggling against Russian totalitarianism calling itself Communism. By no means did this signify a forgetting of the economic impoverishment of the masses; while man does not live by bread alone, he must have bread to live.

Once in power, however, the division between the leaders and the masses, whose revolutionary spontaneity had achieved power for them, widened. What increased the distance between leaders and ranks was the problem of how to industrialize non-capitalistically, private or state; of how, at the same time, to expand political liberties and maintain worker control of production and the state. What was disclosed was a void in the philosophy of revolution. The banner of Marx's theory of liberation, which had been so great a pole of attraction, so powerful a force of mobilization and solidarity, was now narrowed to staying in power. Indeed, all sorts of shortcuts and substitutions, religion included, were indulged in. The revolutions were aborted.

As I put it in this pamphlet in 1959¹: "So powerful and polarizing a force is the Marxist theory of liberation that throughout the Middle East, the Orient and Africa, there are attempts by various religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Mohammedanism, to find a bridge to it, even as there is a similar attempt on the part of Communist China and Russia." I warned that because the petty-bourgeois leaders had not faced the realities of the new stage of capitalism — state-capitalism, and had not grasped the meaning of what the masses were doing in opposition to that new tyranny, they would inevitably fall into the old trap of thinking the workers backward and mislead them.

IT WASN'T ONLY AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI who transformed the 1979 massive Iranian revolution into its total opposite — a counter-revolution². It was the Left itself in Iran

1. First published by *News & Letters* in Detroit, in August, 1959, this pamphlet was republished in England in May, 1961 by the Left Group, Cambridge University Labour Club with a new Introduction and added material, as it appears here.
2. See the collection of my eight **Political-Philosophic Letters** on "Iran: Revolution and Counter-Revolution," written between Nov. 13, 1978 and Sept. 25, 1981, and translated into Farsi by Iranian revolutionaries. See also English translation of the Introduction to the Farsi edition of this pamphlet on the Afro-Asian Revolutions by Raha, which was printed in *News & Letters*, August-September, 1983. Of the many crises in the Middle East, the most horrifying is the disintegration and destruction of Lebanon, which began even before Israel's genocidal 1982 invasion. I am referring to the 1975-76 Civil War. See my **Political-Philosophic Letters** of 1976, especially Letter Number 6, "Lebanon: The Test Not Only of the PLO but the Whole Left." *News & Letters*, Detroit, MI.

who aided in that usurping of their revolution by bowing to the religious substitute for philosophy, whether that affected the workers, the peasants, the Women's Liberationists, or the question of education. For that matter, the same attitude of capitulation characterized the national liberation leaders in power who hung onto the state-capitalist Communist orbit of nuclear power.

The Communist world, parading its state-capitalism as "Marxist-Leninism," still serves as a pole of attraction for some revolutionaries in the Third World. And while Reagan's description of Russia as the "evil empire" convinces none outside of Reagan's capitalist-imperialistic co-rulers, because U.S. imperialism is today's reigning world Behemoth, even an Ayatollah Khomeini has succeeded in presenting himself as "anti-imperialist" and the U.S. as the "Great Satan." None have faced world crises and realities from the vantage point of the freedom of the masses. It has resulted in the degradation of the national liberation movement itself.

TAKE GRENADA, which won power on its own and maintained it for more than three years, and yet tailended one of the world superpower orbits, which meant silence on the crucial question of dialectics of revolution. The result was both that philosophy of revolution was degraded to the question of "leadership methods" and that they were so dominated by the view of the "backwardness of the masses" that all discussions were kept a secret from them. Can the Left possibly not face the fact that the first shot of counter-revolution came from within the new Party, which thus opened the road for U.S. imperialism's invasion?³ Nothing can erase the stark fact that the shot that murdered Maurice Bishop came from his co-leaders in the Party, led by Coard and Austin. Nor can anyone skip over the infantilism of making the point of debate a question of Maximum Leader vs. collective leadership and "leadership method," instead of the dialectics of revolution and the question of which road to take out of the crisis in their country, a crisis determined by the myriad world crises.

3. See my **Political-Philosophic Letter** of November 28, 1983: "Counter-Revolution and Revolution: Grenada, The Caribbean Today, and the Challenge from 30 Years of Movements from Practice that were Themselves Forms of Theory," available from *News & Letters*.

As the analysis of the battle of ideas in **Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions** shows, from the very first emergence of the Third World, I held that to assure the forward movement of this new world it is as important to work out the new stage of cognition as the new stage of economic realities. It now becomes imperative for the Left to face itself; to take a deeper look at what was truly new in the last two decades since the first publication of this pamphlet when a new world had arisen. None of the mass revolts have suffered either from lack of daring or from initiative. Nor, for that matter, have they suffered from lack of sacrifice by both masses and leaders. Nevertheless, what the past two decades has revealed is a failure to meet the challenge from the masses. What was demanded was a totally new relationship of theory to practice which was grounded in the new movement from practice that was itself a form of theory.

Just as, from the start of the new stage of production — Automation, now computerized into robotics — the American workers have asked "What kind of labor should men and women do?" (by which they did not mean skilled vs. unskilled, but why should there be such a division between mental and manual labor?); and just as the East European masses fighting against "work-norms" have, from the 1950s right through to today, tried to throw off the shackles of the Single Party state-plan, and thereby placed Marx's Humanist Essays on the historic stage; just so the theoretician's task is to work out a new point of departure in theory, a philosophy of revolution.

THE TASK IS NOT SIMPLY to go in for ever more activism as if that alone could achieve a full, successful, social revolution. Theory is a rigorous as well as creative activity that cannot be picked up "en route." It gives action its direction. Each age must work out for itself the principles of Marx's Humanism.

The new generation of revolutionaries cannot avoid responsibility for that by indulging in shortcuts and weightless abstractions. When, in the last decade of Marx's life, he witnessed the unprincipled, empty rhetoric for unification of two socialist organizations, he insisted, in his

sharp critique, that only an internationalism unseparated from principles of revolution-in-permanence could become the ground for organization.⁴ Otherwise, Marx cautioned, the unity should be limited to unity of action against what is, while one continued to work out theory as ground for principled unification. First of all, it was necessary to clear one's head.

To meet the theoretic challenge of a new stage of cognition, one has to have full confidence in the masses, not only as force but as Reason — that is to say, confidence that their movement from practice as a form of theory does, indeed, signify that they can participate in the working out of a new theory. That is exactly what was lacking in the leadership in Grenada as they debated so-called "leadership methods" instead of the dialectical methodology which flows from a philosophy of revolution. Without that, leaders inevitably fell into the trap of hanging onto one or another state power.

There are signs of a new direction in the attempts, East and West, North and South, to restate Marx's Humanism for our age. Thus, in Nigeria, among other African countries, the Marx centenary brought out no less than a thousand scholars, trade unionists, and revolutionary activists, to discuss the "body of theories, founded by Karl Marx," a discussion which was broad enough to also focus "on the way in which patriarchal and sexist prejudices are being increasingly propagated in Africa."⁵ This recognition of a new revolutionary force is a beginning but a beginning only.

THAT THIS PAMPHLET can aid in grappling with the task today of articulating, rethinking, how to develop the unification of theory/practice with these new forces of revolution has been proved by what we have learned from

4. See Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program and my analysis of this profound document in Chapter XI of *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*: "The Philosopher of Permanent Revolution Creates New Ground for Organization."

5. See report by Saidu Adamu, Conference Coordinator for the Steering Committee, in *Journal of African Marxists*, Issue 4, September 1983. The Conference was held March 14 to 19, 1983.

Marx's last writings — his **Ethnological Notebooks**.⁶ That is to say, the presentation of Marx's Marxism as a **totality**, as a new continent of thought and of revolution, has been verified by the publication of those writings which touch on the problematic of our day — the Third World. They round out Marx's break with capitalist society and his first discovery of a whole new continent of thought as Marx articulated it in the 1844 Humanist Essays, which did not limit his revolutionary challenge to capitalism only to what he was against and meant to overthrow. Rather, in unfurling the banner of revolution, Marx's magnificent vision disclosed the new human relations he was for, from a new relationship of Man/Woman to the end of the division between mental and manual labor. In the 1850s that vision pointed to the need for a "revolution in permanence"; and by 1857 his **Grundrisse** projected humanity's as well as the individual's development as an "absolute movement of becoming."

What the last writings reveal are the "new moments" which round out — that is, totalize as well as concretize — his philosophy of revolution. Thus:

1) Marx insisted that the climactic analysis of "The Accumulation of Capital," in his greatest work, **Capital**, was not a Universal which the East must follow, but the description and historic truth of West Europe; that other paths to revolution could come from technologically under-developed countries.

2) Marx's multilinear view of the four historic stages of human development — the "Asiatic Mode of Production" as well as slavery, feudalism and capitalism — opened so many new roads to revolution, in such concrete ways, that the 1857 "absolute movement of becoming" was spelled out in the last decade of his life — though only in notes — as a Promethean vision of the possibility of a unity of the two extremes — primitive communism and the future developed communist society of totally new human relations.

6. See chapter XII of my work, **Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution**: "The Last Writings of Marx Point a Trail to the 1980s," especially Section 2, on "The Unknown Ethnological Notebooks, the Unread Drafts of the Letter to Zasulich, as Well as the Undigested 1882 Preface to the Russian Edition of the Communist Manifesto."

This trail to the 1980s is not any blueprint, nor was it fully worked out for his age. It is there for us to work out for our age. This pamphlet has laid the ground for that task. When the capitalistic (private and state), exploitative, crisis-ridden imperialistic world of 1984 threatens to unloose a nuclear holocaust that would put an end to humanity as we have known it, it is clear that it is the urgency of the times which demands that this generation of revolutionaries turn to revolutionary praxis, to philosophy as action and action as philosophy.

Let us put an end to substitutionism and return to Marx's philosophy of "revolution in permanence" to create non-exploitative, non-sexist, non-racist, totally new human relations.

Feb. 15, 1984