CCNFEREKCE CN WOMEN'S LIBERATION HELD IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN FEBRUARY 21, 1971 — A BRIEF SUMMARY

Anne welcomed the friends attending this Conference with Raya Dunayov3kaya, who had accepted the Invitation to ccme to help bsn invthe writing of the final chapter of her new book, Philosophy and Revolution, which will deal with ’Hew Pa salons and New Forces". Those who had come included both students and workers, both black and white, 20 women and 5 men, more nan-members than members of News & Letters.

Raya began her presentation by pointing out that the core of the

dialectic as a movement is the number two, and then went into some of the dangers in this number twos We live, in an age when even those opposites that are not antagonistic contradictions such as capital end labor are, nevertheless reveal the struggle of opposites: men and women; workers and

intellectuals} theory and practice; spontaneity and organization; philosophy and revolution. This duality in reality is the knot to be unravelled and we therefore might as well make it the focal point of this discussion as well.

Everything can be divided today into: I- the Idea ae such, and II - the Idea whose time as eome. For the Idea as such there are two dates - in history to take up: 1844 when Marx wrote his famous Eoonomlo and Ihiloaophic Essays, and 1247 when these' essays were translated into English by Raya Eunayevskaya, For the Idea whose time has oome we will have to take up 1965 when it was the "new", and 1971 when we must begin to consider our perspectives,

Marx called hio philosophy a "new humanism". In those 1844 Essays ho lashed out against both capitalism and vulgar communism. In the Essay on "Private Property and Communism" he said that the moat fundamental relationship of all human relationships is that of man to woman.. In 1947 whon Raya translated the Essays, however, what she stressed was Marx's anti-capitalism and onti-vul gar-communism, ao she was exposing the true state-capitalist nature of Ruscia which called itself "oommuniat". She did take up the rac/wonaa aspoote of the

Essays twice. Once was In a discussion In 1947 with a professor who argued

that It was not true that all contradictions are class contradictions\*

Raya pointed to the Essay on the five senses, where Karx says that

"seeing, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, thought, perception, experience,

wishing activity, loving" are all human relations to the world —• and that

it is private property that has made us so stupid that we **think** an object

**1b** ours only when we possess it directly — "eat it, drink it, wear it,

live in it, etc, — in short use it\*" Eeya had pointed out the **elaco**

nature In even such a thing as "taste" by comparing the difference of , As for "human nature", there is noi human nature except to be free# hunger to a starving child or to a gourmet, / She other time Raya

had taken up the zoan/vomon relationships as fundamental was in 1949 when

the West Virginia miners were on strike, and only men came to a party that

had been arranged, The men were promptly sent home to get their .wives,

without whom they could never have maintained their strike;

**She transition point between "Idea as suoh" and "Idea whose time has cane" is 1959? when Hews** & **Letters Committees wrote their Constitution and women were singled out as one of the forces of Re volution.** We alone

did that, and even reserved a special section of our paper for Women, Just as we had for Black voices. But because the women’s **movement,** had not yet appeared it nevertheless remained "Idea as such,"

**But the 1960\*8 is a totally new stage.** It is true that we have always pointed out the inter-relationship of the Abolitionist Movement end the Women’s Movement, It is. not denigrating'that, tremendous page in history to stress the "new\* that has now appeared, and is different from all the past, There have been women’s struggles throughout history, but the simple truth 1**b** that none before ever, did what the new women are doing today, These new women had many things in their favor from the start:

1. They were young, and I am not stressing that as a "generational aspect", but to emphasize that it eliminated from the start any nonsense that they were having troubles with males beoause they "couldn’t get one,"

2# They were from the Loft, so they didn’t have to be self- conscious about any charges that they weren’t concerned with "humanity,"

% The Blaok dimension, was present — that is, Black women Joined in the oharges against rale-chauvinism — so they didn't have to worry about charges they were anti-Black if they charged Black males with rale—chauvinlem, too,

4. They had no illusions about being-a "majority", oven though there are more women in the population than men, because far from a majority of all these women shared their views, The women represent different classes, with very different outlooks on many of the most basic goals.

**But despite.a**ll **these things in their favor, the Women's liberation Movement has found the need for ihilosophy**. The division in SDS was pre

cisely on philosophic questions. Their disintegration was the result of their total disregard for philosophy\* It has brought the Wit Movement to an impasse, too. But the movement is so objectively valid that no matter what, it will keep rising up, over and over again. The most important point of the whole Movement Is that the women are objecting to being **object**. Instead of **Subject\*** to use the Hegelian term. They are. seeking to become **whole human beings.**

There is a division of Theory into two stages, (if you want to read It for yourselves It is disoussed by Hegel in the **Ehenomen^lopy** on pages 77 and 80.) **He says that everything depends on grasping Truth not** • **as'Substanoe, but as Subjeot as wel**l. The Initial stage has to be alone, because otherwise the new will not come out. This Is why Lenin kept talking about the shyaees cf . workers} and why It was Important for Slacks not always to have some white standing over their shoulders. This Independence is, however, not for **separation,** but to be able to **develop to another stage**. Then there must be a return to philosophy to develope positions In your own organization. This ■ self-consciousness and "taking back cur heads" is being done to free everyone, not to make the same mistakes as men.

Ho one knows when the revolution will occur, it is spontaneous, nobody knows what will spark it\* That is not the question. The question we are discussing Is that you have to have something **new** to say, If you are serious about developing a -theory\* Haya took the article by Barbara B,

In our pamphlet, **Notes on Women's Liberationt We Speak In Many Voioss «** as an example of what happens when you are rot grounded in philosophy\*

\The article was 00 anxious to establish that Man was wrong that It claims that Engels'theory was what Marx drew on for his theocy of Historical Materialism. That is totally wrong factually, of course, which would be simple to prove even chronologically. But the moot important error is not the faotual one, but the methodology involved, Marx’s historical materialism demonstrated that exploitation of labor by capital is rooted not only In the division between mental and manual labor, but in the relationship of man to women. And Marx showed that all history was movement. History is not ’•past". It is present, too. Ill history is the history of class struggles. But you have to understand that part of the oppression is what the rulers do to rob you of your thought, as well as the fruits of your labor. They don’t want you to think just to work.- But the great truth is that no matter how much, they may be oppressed, men and women do think, and they think their own thoughts. In fact, the more alienated you axe, the greater you are, because the-greater is your quest for universality,

let’e take two theoretical works on women to examine what they do and what they don’t do. One is Kate Millett1 a Sexual Politics, and the other is Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, What is Mlllett\*s failure? HorB. is an excellent study, 'but because she is limiting her vision to only the woman aspect, she winds up saying that we had revolutionary activity up until women got the vote and then, after 1920, it was all counterrevolution, - That is a fantastic thing to Bay, when we have lived through the Spanish Revolution, the African Revolutions, revolutions all over the world. Moreover, she falls to see "transfonnation. into opposite,” Thus, she criticises Norman Mailer very correotly for many things, but fails to see that he was revolutionary at the end of World War II, His Naked and the Bead was one of the greatest works to oome out of that entire period. Incidentally, Mlllett likes Engeloj she appreciates him as a man who was looking at the exploitation of women and trying to do something about it, trying to analyze it, speaking up to expose it. But she is not a philosopher, and she thus misses tho mark as a result. In short, Mlllett wrote a great book, but it needs some oritioism «— and it is the sort of critique that we could do, not with any long, thesis, but Just a few short paragraphs making a few of the so important points\* Now take De Beauvoir\*. She doeanH like Engles, by the way# And she does mention Marx\* However, she, too, goes nowhere. We could definitely have something to say on her works# Again, not a long thesis — a oouple of paragraphs can say a great deal.

Finally, let\*s come to Philosophy and Revolution, my book-in-progresj, which you are here to help me finish# It has three major Barts# Bart I takes up Hegel, Marx and Benin# One of the most important parte for us here is the section that deals with how Marx concretized Hegel and at the sane time broke with the whole concept of what is theory# This is where history as process comes In# Bart II deals with Alternatives: Trot shy, Mao, and

Sartre\* And Part III is ^few Bassions and Forces” trhich deals with the Blacks, youth and women\* We have been able to show why the Black dimension and why the youth are these new passions and new forces, because, in fact, the Blacks throughout American history and specifically since the Montgomery Bus Boycott, as well as the Blacks in Africa, had raised questions of deep philosophic Import, whether it was Robert . Moses on education or Fanon on the whole African revolution# The same reason — that is, concrete questions that-were raised — enabled us to'show this on the part of the Youth, as well, whether it was Savio on alienation, or the French Revolt in May, 1968, where the new forms of student-workers committees were established# In the case of the Women, we have not succeeded In hearing quite that many new voioes# What we do know is that pelf-development means that you will gain a new dimension in-yourselves# will feel a totality in the new person you are becoming, as you give expression to what you are feeling and thinking. The proof of Maixist-Humanlsa will be in your own self-development#

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The floor was opened for discussion to women only for this first session# Debbie asked for the distinction between philosophy and theory, and Raya explained that a new philosophy appears only very rarely in hietoryo Jean-Baul Sartre, for example, divided all modem philosophy into only three t Descartesj Kant and Hegel) and Marx# While Raya disagreed with Sartre on his divisions, the idea of the rarity is correct#

Tho Important point is that we are all living in the period of Marx1 a philosophy. He captured a whole age, and while his philosophy was based on the study of years and years of human activity, past and present, it contains the germs for the future. **Theory** means taking a **part** of the philosophy **and developing it for your particular period**. There are divisions in theory. You can anticipate, but only "in general", not the particular.

The important peri**od is when you are able to single out the new category,** for your age, Raya spoke of the development of the state-capitalism theory which was analyzed in 1941, but for which the humanist dimension was not re-established until 1947, Every new stage of cognition comes only . when a new stage of objectivity has been reached. Thus theory means recapturing the movement that was present in the philosophy, but not real yet. What it means is that when a new force arises, you can catch it **if** you are rooted in the philosophy,

**Leonida**, a 10 year old who was present, asked the last question in this first session by posing: What kind of 'freedom does Women1 s liberation want?

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The afternoon session wae chaired by the participant from los Angeles, Raya opened the session, which was to take up the **organizationa**l **questions flowing from the theoretioal groundwork**, by posing some of the concrete tasks of the N&L-Women’e liberation Committee specifically\* Part of the funotion of the committee was seen as:

1. Working with working class women In their' .-struggles, which encompassed fights with both management end the It- oor bureaucracy,
2. listening to the voloes from below, which is another way of saying that**"News & Letters** is a weapon in the olass struggle," . The pages of N&l, and of our pamphlets are the open forums whioh we invite the women to use for these struggles, just as we have for the struggles of Blacks, workers, and youth,
3. Working out a relationship with others, that is, the so-called

"unorganizational and apolitioal\*Voman and our. position with other

tendencies.

When we speak of "projecting our philosophy", that is, Maraist- Humanisn, what it means is: 1- how we work with individuals to demonstrate self-development of ourselves and of them; 2- how we guarantee a unity of theory and practice — one thing we might do is have a steady column for book reviews on each WIi page in N&L; another is a seotion of Readers\* Views right on that page in the paper, rather than in the RV section itself;

3- how the minutes will reflect what the committee is actually achieving0 One way to have serious minuter is to have serious meetings.

In the discussion Janice asked first for a definition of class, a broader definition that could encompass women; and it was explained that when Marx spoke of workers vs. capitalists, he didn’t separate alienation from class, and he was speaking of all oppressed people. Barbara and .. Leslie spoke of the work on their campus, Leslie pointing out that there ie an ingrowth that results in looking on demands for equal pay for equal work as "reformist", Sho felt that one of the greatest things about N&L is its concern with working people, and that this link with workers is what’ makes IT&L bo important to the movement. Mary was asked to tell the conference what is happening in New York, and she reported on the tremendous feeling that everyone had after' the torch last August, and the abortion victory — but by now there is the recognition that nothing really came out of all the victories. The torch was great because it wasn’t one group that participated, but all. Yet afterwards, eaoh went back to her own group. And the truth is that nobody seems too interested in the working women.

Debbie spoke of the situation in the movement in L.A., which at one time was also exciting, but which disintegrated into faction fights. There is a feeling, sho said, that the only relation to the cesses is to lead them when something happens. And sinoe there are no mass actions to "lead" right now, they are not doing anything, Susie was concerned that self-development sometimes seems to be taken to mean that you go off and "eelf-develop" In a comer all by yourself; and Anne spoke of the Importance of seeing self-development in rolation to an historical idea, contrasting that concept to the "philosophic conference" she had attended in Canada,' where the "philosophers" seemed to bo concerned only with their own Ego.

Ann spoke of iha difficulty of Incorporating theory and practice In everything we do, which seams to be the most important thing to be able to do; and Estelle felt that the biggest problem of the ff&L-AVI Committee is how to relate to the outside, when some of the women we meet are skeptical of Marxiat^Humani am and we have not found out how to show them what Marxist— Humanism is\* Sandra spoke about men being auspicious of ffli because the concept of freedom to them is "power11, especially power to exploit others\* Olga spoke of how difficult it seems to both the old radicals and to the women who stand off from theory, to understand the individuality, and yet. universality, of WB; and she said that just looking at the writings of Raya on women, even though Raya has never been a "specialist" on that, shows how, if you have your ears tuned to the forces of revolution, you have the development of a theory\*

Esther emphasised the' importance of looking at today; and Effle spoke of the importance of people learning the "new" and-the fact that women, Blaok and White, know how men have kept them back, even though they generally do much harder work than men\* She felt that women will never go back to the old ways now, just as Black people will never go back\*

Bonnie spoke of how nobody else is working with working women, while that comes naturally to us; but that is where our work first begins — it Is how we relate that to our philosophy, and make it all concrete that we must work out\* Marlene was concerned with how to get women together, and with the fact that WI», even though it seemed like a great idea, just isn't going anywhere; and Celeste took up the question of the importance of child-care, whloh is essential for the working woman, or for any woman who is going to have time to be active outside her home\* She was concerned with the fact that this sooiety tends to "individualize" people in the sense of separating them from each other, and keeping them in the home is one way of separating women,

Raya asked each of the man present if he had anything to contribute to the discussion, and each one spoke briefly; Ron asked for further clarification around why the Idea of "all women are try sisters" Is wrong;

Hike contrasted the discussion at the Conference here to the sad state of affairs in the W1 Movement as it is reflected in the port that puts out the periodicals that N&L reooives in the offioej Pay frit that getting more working woman in the movement was one of the first necessities, and emphasized once more the great Importance of the Black dimension\*

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In her Summation\* Raya said she was going to concentrate on the News & Letters - flamers Liberation Committee, which is a very specific typo of committee, and which will demonstrate what we mean about "spontaneity" and "organization", and about the uniqueness of this committee in relation to the new book, and to the special page in N&L.

It sounds wonderful to say "unite all women" — but it is utopian to say we- should (or could) unite all women in a day-care-c enter issue.

What have we decided are the roost important elements in. the Movement today? Proletarian and Black dimension\* Therefore, concentrating on that, though it may sound "narrow", is the only way to really broaden the Movement\*

Why is it that after all the magnifioent demonstrations throughout the past year, we hear complaints that no group is doing anything? Because of the class differenoes in the Movement\* There Is "tokenism" of all kinds, on all kinds of questions — and some women are going to be allowed to break into new fields and get some good jobs — because the rulers are afraid of the real movement, from below.

What we are doing, because cur philosophy is a total one, is listening to these voices from below, and working out a theory for the Movement based on that\* What we have to do ±3 bring out the new diman edema of woman as revolutionary foroe\* The greatest strength of the movement is it3 spontaneity\* This is the time whan the objective time and the subjective situation have exploded\* The self-development we are talking about is not the careerist woman, but the woman who thought she didn’t knew how to speak. Nobody rise has a forum like News & Letters where all axe invited to write and speak — via the tape machine, if necessary. Ever sinoe we began News & Letters, over 15 years ago, the tope maohine has been the "magic box" that recorded what workers, Blacks, and women were feeling and thinking, and permitted uo to transcribe those ideas and put them in the Correspondence has alveye been considered of primary Importance to us, as well. Correspondence with others, to share our ideas, and elicit theirs. In fact, the history of News & Letters goes all the way back to the American Revolution on this question of correspondence —\* because it ms during the American devolution that Committees of Correspondence became one of the most important developments of the revolution. And that is exactly where our conception of our organisation as a new fom of “Committees of Correspondence" cams from.

We cannot forget, either, that it is no accident that ours 1b the only Left political organization whose theoretical founder is a woman.

As for the immediate perspectives of the N&L-WL Committee, .it may be that we have to find some way to guarantee that each meeting combines' both theory end practice. In the beginning, we may have to divide the meeting mechanically — so muoh time for this, and so much time for the other. You take up a concrete problem, like the AHA working women\* s case, and then you compel yourself to take up some aspect of theory. You will soon discover why correspondence is the most important aotivity. of all, as you discover that putting down your ideas in black and white, rather than expressing them orally, brings out some surprising things. And it forces you to clarify your thoughts.

The work ahead is not going to be easy. But it will be exciting because it will be breaking totally new ground. It is work that needs to be done, and nobody else is doing it. Don\*t forget that our magnificent organization did not come to be what it is easily. It took a lot of very hard work — and it is far from being finished.