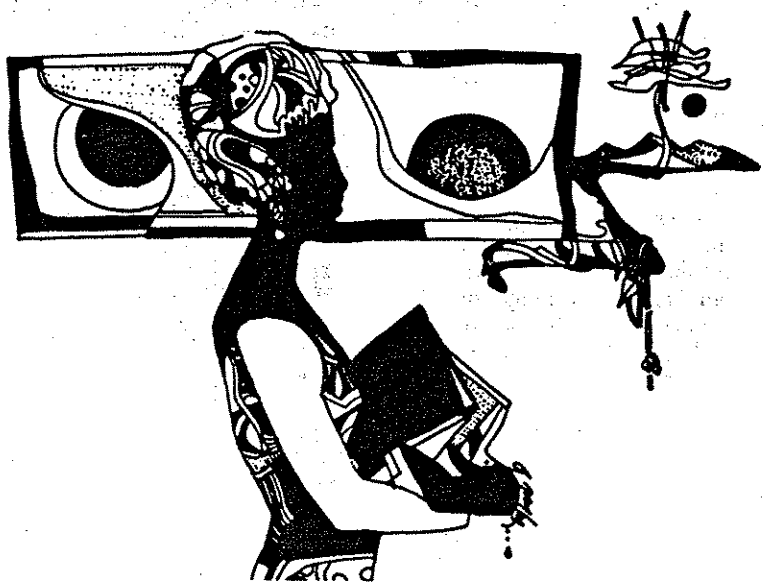
AFRICA TODAY

The Cultural Boycott of South Africa

VOL. 29, NO. 4
1982 4th Quarter

Published: 15 June 1983
Bookstand price:
$3.00

A Look at Books



Insightful Marxist Analysis: Dunayevskaya's Perspectives on Africa

Kevin Anderson

Raya Dunayevskaya, ROSA LUXEMBURG, WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND MARX'S PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1982), pp. xii, 234, $19.95 hardcover, $10.95 paperback.

Raya Dunayevskaya, PHILOSOPHY AND REVOLUTION: From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1982, orig. 1973), pp. xxvii, 372, $10.95 paperback.

Raya Dunayevskaya, MARXISM AND FREEDOM: From 1776 Until Today (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1982, orig. 1958), pp. 381, $10.95 paperback.

THE RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA COLLECTION. Marxist-Humanism: Its Origins and Development in the U.S., 1941 to Today (Detroit: Wayne State University Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, 1981), pp. 6561+, $60 microfilm.

The titles listed above constitute the bulk of a forty year contribution to political and social theory by the well-known Marxist humanist writer Raya Dunayevskaya, who in 1982 completed her third book on Marxist theory. This

Kevin Anderson is an Adjunct Lecturer in Sociology at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York.

writer is already familiar to long-time Africa Today readers through her first-hand reports on The Gambia and Ghana (July and December, 1962). The new editions of her work by Humanities Press (1982) and the Wayne State University microfilm collection (1981) have finally made the whole of it easily accessible to interested scholars. Each work listed above offers theoretical and empirical insights for Africanists. This review will look briefly at each to get an overview.

Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution centers around analyses of women and non-Western society in relationship to overall theoretical issues in Marxism. In the section on Luxemburg, she unearths valuable and new material on the relationship of Africa to the disputes inside the West European left, particularly the German SPD. In 1911, when Luxemburg broke with the conservative SPD leadership three years ahead of Lenin, Dunayevskaya shows that it was Luxemburg's opposition to German colonialism in Africa that precipitated the split and the ensuing debate. In 1911 Luxemburg had criticized the party leaflet on Morocco thusly:

> "Let us add that in the whole of the leaflet there is not one word about the native inhabitants of the colonies, not a word about their rights, interests and sufferings because of international policy. The leaflet repeatedly speaks of 'England's splendid colonial policy' without mentioning the periodic famine and spread of typhoid in India, extermination of the Australian aborigines, and the hippopotamus-hide lash on the backs of the Egyptian fellah."(25)

She also traces Luxemburg's concern with the question of Namibia. Having shown that, Dunayevskaya goes on to present a critique of Luxemburg's position on national liberation, where Luxemburg opposed national independence movements as utopian and reactionary in the era of imperialism. She also gives an incisive critique of the philosophical and economic underpinnings of Luxemburg's great work on the theory of imperialism, **The Accumulation of Capital.**

In the section on women's liberation, Dunayevskaya discusses the relevance of early African women's revolts such as the 1929 Igbo Women's War against British imperialism to present-day struggles of women in the Third World. She analyzes women's participation in modern upheavals in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau as well as Portugal in the 1970s, and goes from there to a critique of the Chinese and more recent Third World revolutions from the vantage point of women's liberation. She views women as a crucial and newly emergent "revolutionary subject" in the 1980s.

The last section of this book deals with Marx. Much of it centers around his last writings on Russia and on non-European society such as his little-known **Ethnological Notebooks** and his 1881 letter to Vera Zasulitch on the possibility of a direct transition to socialism from the Russian pre-capitalist communal village. Dunayevskaya shows that all of Marx's major last writings, including the last edition of **Capital**, Vol. I (Paris: 1872-75) which he personally prepared for the printer, show the importance of this theme of alternate paths to human emancipation. Dunayevskaya quotes Lafargue's 1882 complaint to Engels that, after his trip to Algiers, "Marx has come back with his head full of Africa and the Arabs" (191). She concludes the book by arguing that with these last writings "Marx's legacy is no mere heirloom, but a live body of ideas and perspectives that is in need of concretization."(195) Nowhere are such late writings of Marx more relevant than to African studies, where Marxist class analysis is increas-

ingly being applied. Dunayevskaya's new reading of Marx shows an openness on his part seldom found in post-Marx Marxists. She shows that he intended much of the framework of **Capital** only for America and Western Europe and was working at his death on new approaches to non-European society.

Philosophy and Revolution was originally issued in 1973 and has been republished with a new introduction. The core of this book's discussion of Africa is in the major chapter "The African Revolutions and the World Economy." There, Dunayevskaya maintains that: "The African revolutions opened a new page in the dialectic of thought as well as in world history"(213). She then discusses African nationalist leaders and theorists such as Nkrumah, Senghor, and Fanon. It is Fanon whom she finds the closest to her own view when she writes that despite the great achievements of the independence struggles, "we must soberly face the present bleak reality"(217). She concludes:

> "The greatest of these tragedies, however, is not the external but the internal one, the separation between the leaders and the led in independent Africa. It is to this we must turn because without masses as reason as well as force, there is no way to escape being sucked into the world market dominated by advanced technologies, whether in production or in preparation for nuclear war."(218)

The rest of the chapter explores the neocolonial relationship of the world economy to Africa and offers a critique of dependency theories as well as conservative development theories.

But its Marxist analysis does not end there. Instead, Dunayevskaya continues it by returning to where she began: the living human subjects who have the power, in her view, to alter economic relationships, the African masses. She argues that despite the world economy "neocolonialism could not have been reborn so easily in Africa had the revolutionary situation continued to deepen."(236) At the core of her analysis is the inter-relationship of political and economic factors:

> "Precisely because the African masses did, at the start, feel that they were not only muscle but reason, holding destiny in their own hands, there emerged what Marx in his day called a new energizing principle. This resulted in the growth of production even in societies whose economy was restricted to a single crop."(237)

Despite the setbacks of neocolonialism, she concludes the chapter by arguing that the situation in Africa was still "fluid" in that: (1) new revolutions were ready to emerge in southern Africa, (2) the youth had shown resistance to neocolonialist regimes, (3) the neocolonial social structures in Africa were hardly as firmly implanted as, for example, those in Latin America.[1]

But Africa has importance in **Philosophy and Revolution** far beyond the single chapter on Africa. Dunayevskaya's central concept is that of an "open" or "unchained" dialectic where, she argues, Hegel (and Marx) "present the structures

1. I have employed this framework in my paper "The Tanzanian Model of Third World Development: After Twenty Years," presented to the Eastern Sociological Society, Baltimore, March 1983.

not as mere fact, not as hierarchy, not as pinnacle, but as movement" (39), and view human reality as "one long trek to freedom"(43). The African revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s were, to Dunayevskaya, a key example of the centrality of a dialectic of freedom to human history. For such a Marxist, African revolutions are not a place to "apply" a ready-made theory, but a unique human experience out of which Marxist theory can be reconstructed for the present. **Philosophy and Revolution** also contains valuable discussion of Lenin, Mao, Marx, and Sartre, theorists not without relevance to African revolutionaries.

Dunayevskaya's first book, **Marxism and Freedom**, originally published in 1958, at first glance seems to contain little on Africa. But there is much of importance to Africanists, such as the lengthy economic and political analysis of the outcomes of two major revolutions, the Russian and the Chinese. In analyzing post-revolutionary Russia and China, Dunayevskaya uses with great subtlety her concept of state-capitalism, first developed in economic writings in the 1940s. But in keeping with her present Marxist humanist stance, she stresses not only economic and political categories, but also philosophical and ideological ones, as well as the relationship of spontaneity to revolutionary upheaval. The analysis of China reads especially well in 1983, given the collapse of the Maoist dream during the last decade. This section had earlier seemed too sharply critical of Mao's experiment to many readers. The concepts of state-capitalism and of spontaneity and humanism developed in this book offer many vantage points for a Marxist analysis of the contemporary African scene. Her overall concept of socialist humanism, first articulated here, was developed parallel to that of socialist humanists in Africa such as Nyerere and Senghor, and especially Fanon, who wrote during the same period.

The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection includes virtually all of Raya Dunayevskaya's voluminous other writings, plus many by people with whom she has worked, from her earliest days as secretary to Trotsky in 1937-38 to today. Of special importance to Africanists are the following documents: (1)Her 1959 pamphlet **Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions** (2688-2723); (2) her writings on West Africa in 1961 and 1962 before and after her trip there(2906-3153 passim, 3184-3251); (3) a 1976 series of "Philosophic-Political Letters"(5182-5300) which include discussion of the Portuguese and African revolutions of 1974-76, the civil war in Zimbabwe and the Soweto uprising; (4) the 1978 pamphlet **Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought** (5305-5363), written by two colleagues of Dunayevskaya, Lou Turner and John Alan, and introduced by her.

Taken as a whole, Dunayevskaya's three books and the Wayne State University collection contain an important contribution to African studies by a writer who has spent a lifetime as a political activist as well as a theorist. The passionate commitment to human liberation is never absent from Dunayevskaya's work, yet at the same time there is no lack of theoretical and analytical rigor.