

Oct. 18, 1977*

Dear Therese:

May I engage in a philosophical-historical on the question of women's liberation with you? The idea for it began not only on the basis of your great presence here at our conference, but because a simple question I was going to ask about Edith Thomas (an awfully Anglophobe name for a French woman author of that great event of Paris Commune with ages of French resistance movement of our age, called The Women Incendiaries). Though the work is certainly the first ever on the role of French revolutionaries of the 19th century, I do believe she may be a Communist (Stalinist I mean), though she sticks strictly to the events of 1871, and it was especially great to hear of Marx at a period when all other "New Lefts" were so busy on "male chauvinism" exposes that they could think no further theoretically than to rid ourselves not just of male domination but of the liberation theories that were the products of Marx, Lenin, etc. In any case, though I still would like to know from you what you know or can find out in Paris of Edith Thomas's background and present ideas, many other questions crowded in.

For example, in 1968 I heard that the Parisian would finally publish a truly total view of 1871, and not just by the Old Left that always appreciated that first workers' state, but finally academia too. I assume it has appeared and is too expensive, but could you find out whether a special section on the women's role --and not only Louise Michel who was the tops both in bravery and poetry and intellect--is in it, in most concrete terms with names, deeds, writings? On that same event, Marx and his daughter, Eleanor who was busy translating Lissagaray's work, were certainly aware, indeed related to the core of the P.C., women esp. since it is they who headed the First International French section that saw more in common with Marx than that abhorrent male chauvinist, the most famous Proudhon. Yet, how is that statement I have always grounded myself in, when Marx summed up the greatest achievement of the Paris Commune as "its own working existence" did not spell out women's role though they obviously were a core of that very "working existence"? What was available in Marx's day? Did any then think of themselves theoretically, whether as originals or "followers" of Marx?

Now when it comes to our age and Women's Liberation as 20th c. thinks of it --in a total way as well as Woman as Reason-- how is it that Simone de Beauvoir who was "discovered" a decade after she wrote Second Sex (which expressed a good many truly sexist remarks, though the open discussion of sexuality was so attacked, first, and embraced later) was so far removed from any Movement that she actually wrote of Rosa Luxemburg's being a theorization as if it were all due to the fact that, being "ugly", she was let be by men? Actually, in the early 1950s when that work first came out in US was, with Black working women I talked to and read to, opposition to de Beauvoir was very sharp because they felt that just speaking against male domination and exploitation and "therefore" they need to free us was exactly like "white man's burden" thrust at them in the Black. Naturally they insisted no one ever gave you freedom; only those who fought for it could get it. Self-Emancipation, moreover, was not an individual matter only, or artist's, or the usual cultural arrogance of the intelligentsia, French especially, but a social, revolutionary task and vision.

In France, on the other hand, post WW II French women got even such simple matters as voting, not via Left, but people like De Gaulle. I remember actually being told that French women were so conservative and so Catholic, that if the vote was given to them, they would all vote for bourgeoisie, etc., etc.

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The cultural arrogance is shown not only in Existentialism, but French women communists who are now getting high, well, fairly high government positions with d'Estaing, must be effecting the small revolutionary groups of Women Liberationists for I hear neither of types like we have in the US, nor the mass movements in Italy. What is the state of Women's Liberation in France now? Is any single group raising the theoretical questions? Does any single group or individuals you may know see historic relations to Paris Commune? or philosophic relations to Hegel?

One of the people that I will wish you to visit or find out about is the Hegel Study Research Center by one Jacques d'Hodt, author of a work, "From Hegel to Marx", which is certainly far superior to the Hegelians in the US who are almost all conservatives. In any case, about a year or two ago I sent him my Philosophy and Revolution as well as my talk to the Hegel Society of America on Hegel's Absolute Idea that I later included in New Essays. He had sent me a very friendly letter and thanks, but then the correspondence stopped, and naturally I never raised any question of Women's Liberation since Hegel himself was not exactly a model on the question. In any case, though that is not the question I am interested regarding d'Hodt, I am interested in knowing more about him before I write again. Can you find out?

Also, who the hell is that horrid Stalinist bourgeois political economist who attacked MARXISM & FREEDOM in Le Monde and then refused to publish my rebuttal?

What is new with you since your return home? When, exactly, will you be in Los Angeles? For how long? Naturally you will see Bessie and Eugene and by then we may also know more about next Spring and when Mike will get there and what you could do before his arrival?

It was a pleasure to meet you all grown up, and I'm most sorry I did not get more of a chance to talk with you personally, but I'm also sure you know what conferences are and thus understand. Warmest greetings to your parents and brother Yours,

*The letter, though dated today, will not be mailed till end of week Sun. when I will have returned to Detroit (I'm in Canada) and will thus be able to include both names and French titles of books & publishers rather than the English titles both as to 1871, and today.

Originally Women Incendiaries was published in France by Gallimard in 1963 as LES PETROLEUSES by Edith Thomas. The book jacket identified her as having been born in Paris in 1909 & having founded the Nat. Counc. of Clandestine Writers during Resistance & since 1948 having been kept at National Archives, Paris.

Professor Jacques d'Hodt is at Universite de Poitiers, but at this moment don't approach him, though I would appreciate knowing whether he considers himself a Marxist.

One reason it is so difficult to "recommend" is that intellectuals keep moving to Right. Thus I noted that Edgard Morin, 3 Sifflet, has now said those awful "new philosophers"—Bernard-Henri Levy, etc should be discussed "seriously" since Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago has brought out fact of forced labor camps, etc. And what about Henri Lefevre who always gave an address c/o Mme. Delbo, 33 r Lacedepe, Paris 5; where has he moved to? Were you able to locate the translator of MARXISM & FREEDOM? She would be both young and in some political grouping—probably Trotskyist—and may be of help? And is LE CHAMP LIBRE under new management?

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