

LUXEMBURG

GESELLSCHAFTSANALYSE UND LINKE PRAXIS

I SHALL BE LUTZ BRANGSCH | MICHAEL BRIE | MARIO CANDEIAS |
DRUCILLA CORNELL | ALEX DEMIROVIĆ | GAL HERTZ | MIRIAM PIESCHKE |
TOVE SOILAND | INGAR SOLTY | UWE SONNENBERG | JÖRN SCHÜTRUMPF



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Publisher: Board of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung

Managing Editor: Barbara Fried

barbara.fried@rosalux.org

Tel: +49 (0)30 443 10-404

Editorial Board: Harry Adler, Lutz Brangsch, Michael Brie, Mario Candeias, Judith Dellheim, Alex Demirović, Barbara Fried, Corinna Genschel, Christiane Markard, Ferdinand Muggenthaler, Miriam Pieschke, Katharina Pühl, Rainer Rilling, Thomas Sablowski, Hannah Schurian, Jörn Schüttrumpf, Ingar Solty, Uwe Sonnenberg, Moritz Warnke and Florian Wilde

Contact: luxemburg@rosalux.org

Editorial Office: Harry Adler

harry.adler@rosalux.org

Franz-Mehring-Platz 1, 10243 Berlin

Telefon: +49 (0)30 443 10-157

Fax: +49 (0)30 443 10-184

www.zeitschrift-luxemburg.de

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EDITORIAL

Rosa Luxemburg is one of the iconic faces of the socialist movement. She is also one of the few women, possibly the only women, whose key role in the movement is unquestioned. She continues to impress us to this day as a brilliant author and clear-sighted theoretician; she was an inspirational speaker, artistic chronicler and passionate comrade. Rosa Luxemburg represents a stance that brings together resolute dedication to political struggle and 'tender humanity'.

Luxemburg is not only the eponym of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, but also the inspiration for this journal. Her unique way of combining theory and practice, analysis and transformation, strategy and active intervention in her life is what the *LuXemburg Magazine* aspires to, as the mouthpiece of a left-wing project for society.

100 years after her murder, almost everybody today knows who Luxemburg was, and many are familiar with her dictums. However, even among the Left, few people actually study her writings more than superficially, and hardly any courses focus on her works, which are rarely discussed in detail. Some of her quotes, such as 'the freedom of those

who think differently' have made it into the political mainstream, and have been expropriated and re-interpreted as anti-socialist slogans. With this anniversary issue, we hope to revive Luxemburg's thinking and political action. What can she offer in the face of today's challenges? In the struggle against the right-wing, the deep crisis of the political and the great weakness of the Left?

How did Luxemburg conceive of the relationship between party and movement? What did she make of internationalism? Was she a feminist – or how can we, as left-wing feminists, refer to her? Many today continue to wear themselves out haggling over small political differences, as well as in large and significant struggles. What stance did Luxemburg take when confronted by such challenges? How did she deal with the paradox of reform and revolution? And what can we learn from her on the decisive question of political organisation?

We follow her firm conviction that our society can and must change – and her optimism that a future of radical emancipation is possible, even in the face of political defeats: **I was, I am, I SHALL BE!**

STOP OR WE WILL SHOOT!

WHY THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION OF 1918/19 HAD TO END IN POLITICAL REVOLUTION AND ULTIMATELY LOST IT AS WELL

INGAR SOLTY, UWE SONNENBERG, JÖRN SCHÜTRUMPF

One of the most vivid images of the events surrounding the 1918/19 revolution in Germany is that of soldiers holding up a sign with the unambiguous message: 'Stop or we will shoot!' STOP! they call while cordoning off public spaces. This is the reality in Germany after January 1919.

'BROTHERS! DON'T SHOOT!'

Just two months before nobody could have seen this coming. People had danced celebrating the end of the devastating war. On 9 November 1918, Germany's emperor had abdicated and, fearing prosecution, fled to the Netherlands. The young republic, depleted of resources by the war, would later send him a substantial part of his private fortune, a unique feature in the history of Europe's way of dealing with toppled monarchs. The rapidly established Council of People's Representatives implemented long-standing worker

movement demands such as universal and women's suffrage and the eight-hour day. Within hours an entire order seemed to tumble. Economic power and property relations remained intact, yet within a matter of a few hours, by adopting a new form of government; Germany had become a republic.

For this November 1918, the pictorial memory of the revolution still reminds us of the urgent plea: 'Brothers! Don't shoot!'. In stark contrast to the atrocities and violence of the First World War, the revolution by and large began peacefully with the Kiel sailors' mutiny on 3 November 1918, and the (double) declaration of the republic by Philipp Scheidemann and Karl Liebknecht on 9 November. Yet on 6 December 1918, the military commander of Berlin, Otto Wels (SPD), positioned machine guns on Berlin's Chausseestraße street, and let

guard fusiliers open fire on an authorised demonstration. Simultaneously, counter revolutionary units in the city centre attempted to arrest the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils – since 10 November the revolution's highest organ – and proclaim the councillor of the people's representative Friedrich Ebert (SPD) as 'President' by granting him dictatorial powers. When both of them failed, the marauders moved on to the office of Rote Fahne, the paper of the Spartacus League, although at the time an independent organisation, but still organised within the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) which had split from the SPD due to its opposition to the war. This would not be the last visit. The tensions between revolutionary and reactionary forces grew, the readiness to use force was growing on the side of counterrevolutionaries. Three weeks later, the skirmishes at the Berlin Schloss occurred, followed by the Spartacus Uprising 1919 and the state-ordered massacres during the general strike in March resulting in over 1,200 dead workers and sailors. Finally, in April and May, this set the scene for the military quashing of the Council Republics that had been established during the course of the revolution on German soil (cf. Demirović in this edition).

But how did it come to this outbreak of violence? How can we explain the shift from the slogan 'Brothers, don't shoot' to 'Stop, or we will shoot!', the move from

a peaceful revolution to the outbreak of massive violence over the following months? And what – beyond accusing individuals of having committed treason – can help us understand why the governing Majority Social Democrats, after they had striven to change capitalism through revolution before the war, now in coalition with anti-democratic forces opposed the revolution in an authoritarian way?

After 1910 at the latest a revolution was no longer on the SPD's agenda. Instead, the SPD in coalition with the other more or less liberal parties represented in the Reichstag focused on the role of the monarchy in parliament. In early October 1918, these efforts had at least succeeded in toppling Ludendorff's military dictatorship. Initially, this was all the majority of social democrats had intended. People like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht who clung to the Marxian heritage and the prospect of revolution, were gradually pushed to the SPD's margins during the war and forced out of the party. Like Rosa Luxemburg herself they were sent to jail, organised themselves as the Zimmerwald movement (1915) or the Spartacus League (1916), and finally in 1917 as the cross-spectrum anti-war USPD. The Council of People's Representatives established after 9 November 1918 with an equal number of representatives from the SPD and USPD was worse than a marriage of convenience. It was quite simply a forced marriage coerced by the revolutionary

wave which either the election of a National Assembly or a good marital row needed to dissolve.

However, the road to this National Assembly was neither predetermined nor was it direct. It had to be cleared first. The German November Revolution 1918 was driven by an idea which was inspired by Russia: Across the country, in a matter of fact way which is hard to understand nowadays, councils arose as mostly exclusively proletarian ruling bodies. They were the symbols and banner-bearers of the revolution. Five weeks later however the vast majority of delegates at the first All-German Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (from 16 to 20 December) decided to hold elections for a constituent national assembly. Unwittingly, with this decision the councils had decided to give up their power.

The refusal by the paramilitary Volksmarineteil (People's Navy Division) to clear the Berlin Schloss and the subsequent assault ordered by Friedrich Ebert on Christmas Eve was the perfect excuse for the SPD people's delegate to dissolve the unloved partnership with the USPD and to promote the development of often extreme right-wing Freikorps paramilitary groups – on top of the inferior regular troops. The USPD, in turn, could have become the natural hegemon of the revolution. Yet, after 9 November, like the other revolutionary forces, the USPD had no idea how to pave the way into the new

republic and create the foundations for transformation into a socialist society. When the coalition in the Council of Peoples Representatives collapsed, the USPD proved unable to defend itself and ultimately resigned itself to its fate.

At the same time, the Spartacus League split from the USPD and became one of the source groups of the KPD which was founded on 30 December 1918. By this time, however, the counterrevolution had also gained strength. On 1 December the Anti-Bolshevist League, which was financed by industrial magnates and banks, and its "General Secretary for Studying and Combatting Bolshevism" was launched. In mass publications it clamoured for the murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Only later would the alliance which dated back to the early days of the revolution between Ebert and lieutenant general Wilhelm Groener acting on behalf of the Supreme Command of the German Army (OHL) become known. De facto, this alliance had pulled the strings behind the scenes since the beginning, not least by its joint agreement to stop left forces from driving the revolution forward by force if necessary. In other words: hardly one day after calling to soldiers at the Garde-Ulanen barracks for fraternisation with 'Brothers! Don't shoot!' behind the scenes the slogan was already: 'Stop or we will shoot!' The call to renounce from violence was therefore only valid for as long as Ebert saw himself on the defensive and the revolution did not go

beyond the limits of a political revolution. However, the active revolutionaries did not know about this.

On 15 January 1919 after the quashing of the Spartacus uprising, members of the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division* murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on the order of the German officer Waldemar Pabst. How deeply the interim government was involved in the assassination can no longer be fully reconstructed. It is only certain that Gustav Noske (SPD), first as a people's representative councillor and later as minister of defence, covered for Pabst and that the justice system did a great deal to prevent the case from being solved.

BEYOND THE HYPOTHESIS OF BETRAYAL: ROSA LUXEMBURG, *TRASFORMISMO* AND THE QUESTION OF THE USE OF FORCE

The question as to why the SPD ended up allying itself to the old elites during the revolution to prevent a fundamental transformation of society remains a legitimate one. For a long time, social democratic historiography justified the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, as the clearest example of the shift from 'Brothers! Don't shoot!' to 'Stop or we will shoot!' with the need to prevent a Russian-style civil war. However, not only social democratic, but also bourgeois conservative and communist historiography have all distorted history in their own way. In all three narratives, they die as bolsheviks. Conservative and social

democratic historiography exaggerate the role played by Luxemburg and Liebknecht as well as the Spartacus League or the KPD in the January 1919 Spartacus Uprising. They created the myth of an adventurism bent on liberating a bloody civil war in Germany to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat based on the Russian model.

Analysing the Spartacus uprising as an expression of revolutionary adventurism is, however, a disastrous, historically powerful legend. The November Revolution actually comprises a longer cycle. It neither ends in November 1918, nor with the National Assembly elections on 19 January 1919, and nor with the coming into force of the Weimar Republic constitution on 14 August 1919. In a historically relatively open situation, it continued with the second revolution until 1920 at the latest, if not indeed until 1923. It was more than a merely political revolution; it was social in nature and anchored in the masses. Moreover, it was not limited to Germany, but embedded within a global revolutionary cycle, which – as revolutions historically often correlate with wars and in particular lost wars – stretched geographically from Ireland and the uprising against British colonial rule (1916) to central Asia, where, in February 1917 the Uzbeks, Kirgiz, Turkmens and Kazaks stood up to compulsory Russian military service.

The effects of the myth of the Spartacus Uprising, however, continued to be felt right into the 1930s and 1940s.

In conjunction with the ‘stab-in-the-back’ myth that explained Germany’s defeat in the First World War as a consequence of a ‘Judaeo-Bolshevist conspiracy’ by the enemy within, it was allegedly ‘again’ the case in 1944/45 to prevent a socialist revolution behind the front lines of the nation at war. Following the defeat of fascism and the onset of the Cold War, this position of the Nazis regarding the 1918 revolution, also referred to as the *November Syndrome*, was transformed in the German Federal Republic’s national conservative historiography into the narrative that the end of the Weimar Republic was not due to the counter revolution started in 1918 and the SPD’s alliance with the reactionary old elites, but rather that it had been crushed from both the Left and the Right. It was not until the 1960s that a new generation of historians discovered the council movement’s democratic potential and began to ask new questions regarding the history of this revolution.

In communist historiography, Luxemburg and Liebknecht appear as the great leaders of an uprising against the SPD’s betrayal of the revolution and its alliance with the powers of the old regime. It suggests that it was only because a strictly hierarchical communist cadre party was not in existence that the January 1919 uprising had been defeated. Not two weeks after its founding, the KPD simply did not yet have that kind of revolutionary organisation. As defeated socialist revolutions could not exist in communist historiography, the

November revolution was subsequently interpreted as a bourgeois revolution through proletarian means.

In reality, however, Luxemburg had been against a civil war. She distrusted the evolutionism of the centrists surrounding Karl Kautsky, who had come out with the slogan that the SPD was ‘a revolutionary party but not one that leads revolutions’ before the First World War. Luxemburg also recognised what Gramsci would later call *trasformismo*, i.e. the gradual inscription and co-optation of the social democratic opposition into the existing ruling system. The SPD as well as the unions became subject to it in the process of their institutionalisation. It was precisely this development that caused the party leadership to break with the anti-war internationalism of the socialist movement in 1914, and the process also helps understand, why the SPD and the unions with their millions of members maintained the status quo with the *ancien régime* for so long, even after, hegemony-politically speaking, the war on the home front had been lost in 1916 due to the catastrophic food situation, which also led to the butter uprisings of 1915.

The large mass strike movements between June 1916 and 9 November 1918 highlighted this context. They nurtured Luxemburg’s hopes of overturning capitalism and ending the imperialist war, as well as for a socialist transformation of society. She trusted the spontaneity of the democratically active or potentially



active masses. However, she envisaged the transition to socialism, among other things, through the process of compensated expropriations. She probably correctly judged that the revolution in the capitalist-developed West with its broader scope for political integration as well as the power resources of the state, meant that a revolution would have to develop in a different way to that under the conditions of the authoritarian czarist state brought down by the Leninist-conspiratorial avant-garde party (see Demirović and Pieschke in this edition). Had she believed that civil war was the only option to further the revolution, Luxemburg herself would not have opposed a revolutionary civil war and would even have fought it. Yet, when on 6 January 1919 Liebknecht followed the call of the Revolutionary Stewards for a general

'Brothers don't shoot!', Calling for fraternization in front of the Garde Ulanen barracks on 9 November 1918, © SPK/ Bildstelle GStA PK

strike and an overthrow of the Ebert and Scheidemann government, she opposed him. She was nonetheless murdered and according to the dominant narrative died as a bolshevist.

The course of events of January 1919, however, did not depend on Luxemburg and Liebknecht. The historic events, from the mass mobilisation of Berlin workers, the occupations of the newspaper quarter and train stations, the use of military force, through to the massacres of revolutionaries would probably – even though the demonisation of Liebknecht and Luxemburg likely lowered the reservations against the use of military force – also have occurred without them.

Only two KPD members, Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck, formed part of the revolutionary committee established on 5 January. Politically speaking, the protesting masses tended to be behind the USPD. Compared to the KPD's circa 300 supporters, the USPD had around 200,000 supporters in Berlin. After the extreme violence of the Christmas uprising in 1918 and the – SPD ordered – dismissal of the police chief and USPD member Emil Eichhorn on 4 January 1919, the USPD, too, became more radical.

Looking back at history, Rosa Luxemburg was right but it cost her her life. She died due to the existing power relations: an eroded hegemony called for revolution and socialism as a current in society still had a mass basis at this time, but the integration of the SPD and the party's corresponding alliance with the ancien régime blocked such a transformation. The German writer Arnold Zweig (1919, 75) probably expressed this best in his text *Graveside Speech to Spartacus*, where he described Luxemburg after her murder as the bearer of an unfulfilled vision (for the future): 'As an antipode to violence, the idea prevails by sacrificing one of its bearers [...]. Alongside the victims of December and January, the bodies of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg lie at the foundations of the German Republic, the socialist freedom. The republic will need great achievements to prove itself worthy of them.'

THIS IS GOING TOO FAR!

After the First World War, with its millions of victims, socialism was on the agenda. The second revolution, borne out of the disappointment of the results so far, was able to count on a broad social-revolutionary mass basis for its demands (democratisation of state structures, expropriation of the nobility, co-determination in companies, socialisation activities, transition to a socialist mode of production, as well as cultural, sexual and artistic emancipation). This momentum, to go ahead now and not only secure the results of the revolution, but further the revolution itself, is found also at trade unions and in their discussions about possible bases for a new economic and social order.

With its firm resolve to prevent *further steps* towards revolution, the Weimar Coalition then really unleashed counterrevolutionary violence. During the general strike of March 1919, which around one million workers from Berlin took part in, at the order of the government Freikorps paramilitary troops killed at least 1,200 workers in the Lichtenberg district, most of them without trial. Many of them were simply lynched. These unprecedented events were accompanied by unparalleled mendacious propaganda, including the claim that the planes that the government used to bomb the heart of the revolt in East Berlin had actually been flown by Spartacists. Yet, both in Berlin, and in the military quashing of the Bavarian Council

Republic, previously unthinkable violence was unleashed against the population. In this case too, most of the victims were summarily shot or murdered after the events, in excess of ninety per cent of cases by government troops. This exterminatory violence, officially legitimised by Gustav Noske's state of emergency, which was exercised in the name of reason of state, against chaos and for peace and order and in particular against demonised minorities and the political opposition, anticipated in the eyes of many historians the violence of the Nazis.

The acts of government socialists significantly contributed to cementing the fatal split between the social democrat workers' movement and communists. 'Only with the help of the emperor's generals were the social democrats Ebert and Noske able to quash the Spartacist revolts in 1918/19. From this moment on, a deep blood filled divide split the German workers that subsequently proved impossible to bridge', writes for example Wilhelm Hoegner (1945, 22). Contemporaries such as the left-wing social democrat Heinrich Ströbel (1919, 275) – who was fired as editor-in-chief of *Vorwärts* in 1916 for his critique of *Burgfrieden* and had been a member of the revolutionary Prussian cabinet until 4 January 1919 – very early expressed his desperation over the split: 'The mistake is [...] that the government's concessions came far too late. It should have shown its goodwill for socialisation months ago. If it had nationalised

pits, monopoly corporations and other companies ripe for socialisation it would have appeased significant distrust and taken the wind out of the sails of Bolshevism.' What Ströbel and others could not have known was that the fateful alliance between Ebert and the old elites of the emperor's army ruled out any progress from the outset, and this implied that anybody who did try to take steps in this direction, would be shot.

The resulting persistent mutual hate between the two wings of the workers' movement prepared the ground as much for the KPD's social fascism theory after its bolshevization in 1928, as it did the SPD's position of red-equals-brown. In 1920, after they managed to put down the Kapp-Putsch, both of their stances prevented the workers' movement from stopping the transfer of power to Hitler. They were now more engrossed in fighting each other than fighting their shared enemy together. After 1933, they would wake up in the same concentration camps.

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1 Högner was Minister President of Bavaria between 1945 and 1946 and again from 1954 to 1957 for the social democrats.

A NEW CIVILIZATION

ALEX DEMIROVIĆ

Rosa Luxemburg continues to provoke irreconcilably controversial reactions even today. Many within the SPD leadership believed she was too radical and democratic. The same can be said of many of those who followed her in the KPD leadership. Ruth Fischer discredited Luxemburg's understanding of freedom as the freedom of those who think differently as a *syphilis bacillus*. From the same reasoning, Ernst Thälmann fully agreed with Stalin that *Luxemburgism* established a bridge to bourgeois ideology and social fascism, and therefore needed to be rooted out (Bierl 1993, 9f).

In turn, the extremism studies expert and political scientist, Eckhard Jesse, put forward the critical view that Luxemburg's critique of Lenin has caused many on the Left to see her as a kind of shining light and representative of democratic socialism. But many were merely deluded. 'Had she

not [...] been murdered, she would hardly have enjoyed the kind of nearly panegyric adoration she then enjoyed.' (Jesse 2008, 83) Her extremism is not compatible with the maxims of a democratic constitutional state – the November Revolution in conclusion should therefore not be seen as an *opportunity lost*, but rather as *catastrophe prevented*. (ibid., 79).

THE WHOLE AND THE PARTS

In *The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg*, Georg Lukács presents one of his central ideas: it is not the primacy of economic motives to explain historical processes which distinguishes Marxism from bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. (Lukács 1971, 27). At the end of the text Lukács attempts to gain benefit from the consideration that the totality is of greater importance than the individual, to draw something positive

from Luxemburg's murder. He does not deny that her death is linked to the defeat of the January 1919 revolutionary struggles, however, he views her death as 'the crowning pinnacle of her thought and life'. The standpoint of totality provides the methodological certainty that the historical process 'regardless of all temporary defeats and setbacks' (ibid., 216) will come to fruition.

Lukács was obviously endeavouring to prevent any feelings of resignation from taking hold in the movement in Germany following the murder of one of the leading figures of revolutionary social democracy. He opposed the opportunist point of view whereby, due to the weakness of the labour movement, the attempt at a revolutionary transformation should not have been made in the first place. Despite impending defeat, Luxemburg's readiness to stand her ground with the masses and share their fate was consistent with the unity of theory and practice – or, in other words, a justified and meaningful sacrifice for the whole (which was still to come). This argument which aims to embolden people, but fails to consider the full potential of Luxemburg's specific political work and ignores her as an individual, at the same time suggests that theorists dispose of this Whole, and have the right to mandate over individuals in its name. Not for one moment does he grant any consideration to the strategic thought that her death had actually contributed to irreversible defeat and that, put differently,

it would have been more important for Luxemburg to survive because it could have opened up scope for revolutionary democracy in Germany, have kept strategic options open and have given the process a different direction. The term totality is used in conclusion. It renders the text strangely callous.

Does Lukács do Luxemburg's theory and political practice justice? Yes and no. Rosa Luxemburg knew that as a fighter for proletarian freedom she could end up in jail, yes, she even anticipated her murder. For her, this was all part of the struggle (Caysa 2002, 30). She would not have left Germany even if threatened to be hanged – 'for the simple reason that I believe that it may well be necessary to make our party get used to the idea that sacrifices are part of being a socialist' (Luxemburg 1914, 339f). In a similar situation in the summer of 1917, Lenin had taken a different decision and fled because he thought that to continue the revolution it was more important for him to live. In Luxemburg's case, the *Vorwärts*, which had contributed to the general atmosphere of lynching, would probably have laughed about her cowardice, nevertheless it would probably have been better for her to have gone into hiding.

TENDER HUMANITY ...

Lukács again fails to recognise the dialectics at work in Luxemburg's thinking. A few days after being released from jail in November 1918, she delivered on her promise to her fellow prisoners

by publishing a text in the *Rote Fahne* in which she demanded the abolishment root and branch of the existing justice system that only breathes the barbarism of capitalism. As this would require a new economic and social foundation, she demanded at least a sweeping reform of the penal system and the abolition of the death penalty. When the government, the workers and soldiers councils, failed to act accordingly, Luxemburg (1918a, 405) interpreted this as an indication of their true nature: 'Alas, how German this revolution is! How prosaic and pedantic it is, how lacking in verve, in lustre, in greatness! The forgotten death penalty is only one small feature. But how often precisely such small features betray the inner spirit of the whole.' This is diametrically opposed to Lukács' way of thinking. Luxemburg's point of reference is not the totality, it does not cross her mind that a change to the penal system could wait until the whole system has changed. On the contrary, the fact that a *small feature* is not considered becomes a measure of the whole. During the war, imperial genocide had shed so much blood already. This should therefore not be allowed to continue. 'One world must now be destroyed, but each tear that might have been avoided is an indictment; and a man who hurrying on to important deeds inadvertently tramples underfoot even a poor worm, is guilty of a crime.' (ibid. 406) Therefore the totality needs to change in order to prevent the offences of

negligence and indifference out of respect for the individual, 'Ruthless revolutionary energy and tender humanity – this alone is the true essence of socialism.' (ibid.) I interpret humanity as an awareness for the individual parts that withdraws legitimacy from the crime of indifference that can be committed in the name of the totality. Luxemburg (1971, 369) unites approaches that are not easy to bring together in one sentence, a rigorous transformatory practice, 'the highest idealism in the interest of the collectivity' and the strictest attentiveness to the individual part. How does that work? The totality needs to be changed ruthlessly precisely to withdraw the foundations from this cold lack of sympathy and bring the individual parts to the fore at the global historic level. Luxemburg (1917, 177) feels as much sympathy with the pain of the Jews in the ghetto as with the victims of German warfare in Southwest Africa: 'I feel at home in the entire world, wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears'.

... BUT STILL MAINTAINING A DISTANCE

Luxemburg therefore consciously navigates within contradictions. And there are more of them: spontaneity and party organisation, between the laws of history and the intervening will, between the rigorous rejection of war, terror, 'murder' and revolutionary violence (1918b. 446f). How to deal with these contradictions, when the

one side is relevant or when the other is relevant remains unclear. Luxemburg did not elaborate a materialistic theory of dialectics, but her position is clear: she does not uphold one side at the cost of the other, but rather defends the need to work with the tensions resulting from the contradiction between totality and its individual parts. Appreciating small pleasures, rejoicing in the magic of life from the smallest things, submerging oneself in the details of revolutionary transformation, living without expecting historic justice or a higher meaning, simply the way one feels is right, she nonetheless makes a claim to maintain a distance and not to overestimate the actions of individuals. When the world descends into chaos, she wants to make sense of it instead of moaning and complaining. She sees theory as a part of the struggle. The concept helps to gain a posture and sovereignty that allows her to reject the hold of power on her person, feelings, mood and thinking. 'A fighter is precisely a person who must strive to rise above things, otherwise one's nose will get stuck in every bit of nonsense.' (Luxemburg 1917, 367) It is a specific way of maintaining distance to everyday events, lest you are sucked into history as it occurs, into fear, routine, parliamentary cretinism, party misery, which cloud political judgement, but to keep focused on the long-term aim. "Disappointment with the masses" is always the most reprehensible quality to be found in a

political leader. A leader with quality of greatness applies tactics, not according to the momentary mood of the masses but according to higher laws of development, and sticks firmly to those tactics despite all disappointments and, for the rest, calmly allows history to bring its work to fruition.' (ibid, 374) Luxemburg repeatedly refers to an objective logic of history that must be given time. She firmly believes in the need for patience. She believes in sovereignty vis-à-vis external forces, a sense of wider developments. Restlessness and fuss about trivialities were not useful. She called for the calm of a scientist in research and observation (ibid, 322).

Luxemburg's trust in history, in revolution, is not based on a mechanistic understanding of the development of society (Luxemburg 1899, 64). It would be wrong to accuse her of a wait-and-see attitude. She has a specific view of the class-struggle efforts made by the working class. These do not take place at the final moment, when the conditions are ripe; they always occur too early. As the class struggle is not separate from social developments, these non-synchronised interventions impact the historic process and create the conditions for success in the long term. It was precisely this lack of overlap which convinced Rosa Luxemburg that dramatic turning points are always possible. Even when the situation were to appear hopeless and desperate, fundamental, well-hidden springs could cause fortuitous processes, for which one

should ready oneself. She said that the masses are always on the verge of becoming something totally different from what they appear to be (Luxemburg 1917, 176).

THE PULSE-BEAT OF THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE MASSES

Numerous statements reflect Luxemburg's radical democratic resolve. Peter Bierl (1993, 78f) argues that almost until the last day of her life, Rosa Luxemburg considered that the democratic republic was the most suitable institutional form for the transformation to socialism. However, she does not explain how she sees the relation between council and parliamentary democracy. She rejected the dissolution of the Russian constituent assembly by Trotsky and Lenin. She expected the representative body to provide ground for the productivity of joint actions and public discussions over collective decisions to flourish: 'And the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence [...]. To be sure, every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy which Trotsky and Lenin have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come

correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammelled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.' (Luxemburg 1918c, 356) In the weeks following Germany's November revolution, however, she firmly opposed a national assembly. She argued that as a vestige of the bourgeois revolution this form of democracy was now obsolete. Everyday parliamentary politics, concerned as it is with majorities and compromises in which the bourgeoisie always prevails and without a directly active working class, corresponds to a balance between classes. Luxemburg maintained that the November revolution had put an immediate transition to socialism on the agenda, merely instituting a national assembly would therefore be a step backwards. As far as she was concerned this was the time for rule by the people. Initially she argued in favour of a worker's parliament, later for councils. Immediately before the 1st German Congress of Workers and Soldiers Councils in mid-December 1918, she drew up the basic outlines of a council democracy. Workers' and soldiers' councils would replace parliaments and municipal councils, delegates from the local councils would elect a central council for Germany, which, in turn, would elect an executive council with legislative and executive powers. The total population of adult-aged city and rural workers of both genders would hold

voting rights for the workers councils and soldiers with the exception of officers would have the right to vote for the soldiers' councils. The delegates of the central council, which would have control over the executive council, would be recallable (Luxemburg 1971, 372). Only two weeks later, at the KPD founding meeting, she again advocated participation in the national assembly elections because of the broad support it enjoyed among workers and the fact that another decision had marginalised the party. Depending on the constellation, she reaches different assessments. This suggests that she did not care too much about the concrete political form – parliament, workers' parliament, or council – her concern was a basis for democracy which was as broad as possible: 'The Spartacus League will never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany [.]' (ibid., 450)

AUTONOMY

Radically fighting for each individual part, for the democratisation of the social conditions people create through their work, living with contradictions – all of this prepares the ground for a 'new Marxism' (Caysa 2002, 34). Rosa Luxemburg's thinking was far ahead of that of her comrades and the politics of the time, she anticipated civilizational progress which has not yet been fulfilled. Whereas bourgeois society freed the



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wood, canvas, paper, ink, 100 x 150 cm

individual from the estates enabling them to conceive of themselves as free and equal, with their own mind and reason, these conditions nonetheless set limits to individuation. Competition, the state and modern bourgeois law individuate and individualise individuals: they gain rights, an identity and are encouraged to see themselves as sovereign in deciding their actions and are attributed to them. However, they

only enjoy their rights negatively, as rights that distinguish them from others, suggesting to them to be indifferent, cold and hard to the consequences of competition and the exploitation of arising 'opportunities', their own failure and that of others.

Notwithstanding the negative consequences, bourgeois society continues to navigate within the tight confines of this concept of freedom. The opportunities to widely expand the realm of freedom – to overcome violence, poverty and hunger and establish a life of idleness and pleasure – were and continue to be wasted. In the Marxist tradition, cooperation is the decisive criterion to envision successful collective forms of living. Humans co-operate and they survive as a species only in this way, only collectively can they create objects that go beyond their individual or group skills. Over millennia, this co-operative potential was harnessed by a few for their own ends and developed quite unilaterally. That's because they also had to ensure that those who co-operated did not do so freely and autonomously. To appropriate the end results and determine the forms of co-operation, co-operation had to be put under the rule of power and its productivity limited. Individuals were subjugated under the forceful laws of history and universalities (the market, state, nation and religion) to lead them and strip them of their freedom and rob

them their life opportunities and creative capacity. In Luxemburg's view (1918d, 436), this is what socialism opposes and aims for something completely new in the history of civilisation: zest for life, beauty, dignity, responsibility, glow, enthusiasm for the common good, inner clarity, compassion, courage, resilience and endurance in the face of the toughest odds. She hints at such a perspective – autonomous collective living: 'The essence of socialist society consists in the fact that the great laboring mass ceases to be a dominated mass, but rather, makes the entire political and economic life its own life and gives that life a conscious, free, and autonomous direction.'

(Luxemburg 1971, 368) Co-operation is to be liberated, individuals individuated far beyond the capacity of bourgeois society. Marx and Engels conceived of freedom in a new way when they wrote: 'In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.' (Marx/Engels 1848, 62) In this vision individual freedom is the basis of everything. However, the focus is on the development of individual freedom by promoting the freedom of the associated others and not self-realisation of the potential within the individual. In the socialist tradition, such an understanding of freedom remained marginal. Like Lukács, many were willing to subordinate

the individual to the collective, with the promise that everybody would then be better off. The idea of freedom was reduced to a variable of political rule. 'Freedom cannot represent a value in itself (any more than socialisation). Freedom must serve the rule of the proletariat, not the other way round.' (Lukács 1971, 292) The critique aimed mainly at Luxemburg's phrase that freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently (Luxemburg 1918c, 359). This would grant those aiming for a fundamental social transformation to make a claim for this freedom. However, Luxemburg was opposed to a tactical relation with freedom. Hers was expressly not a liberal approach based on any norm of justice, which becomes clear when she wrote that freedom could not be the privilege of any single person, but that it had to be granted precisely to those who think differently. Only this way could freedom be the freedom of each and everyone (cf Brie 2002, 66f). Only then can freedom prove itself and permit autonomy. 'All that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom' would be lost, 'if it became a privilege' (Luxemburg 1918c, 359). In making use of freedom, the co-operative, communicative productivity that is a constituent element of a free association can flourish. This is based on the aforementioned democratic theoretical and political conviction that socialism cannot be brought about and maintained

in an authoritarian way, but rather depends on the beliefs and practices of the overwhelming majority of people (Schütrumpf 2018).

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ROSA LUXEMBURG AS A SOCIALIST FEMINIST

DRUCILLA CORNELL

If there is a basic theme in Rosa Luxemburg, it is the rebellion against the domination of Man1 and Man2, what Wynter calls 'genre trouble,' rather than 'gender trouble.' (Wynter 2003) Luxemburg's contribution is that genre and gender trouble are inextricably tied together and therefore her thinking on how we might practice socialism is inseparable from what the great Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter much later will call the challenge to Man1 and Man2 in the name of the practice of the human that would free the human from its connection to imperialism, colonialism, and, of course, capitalism.

I am going to defend Luxemburg as an ethical feminist, in the sense that I have defined it, in that feminism is not simply about the struggle for the rights of women but it is also about the challenges to Man that allow any one of us to be

beyond the reach of supposed humanity (Benhabib 1994).

My central argument will be that Luxemburg's debates on how we are to think of socialist transformation are both a challenge to Man1 and Man2 and the racism inherent in both. There are not two struggles, one feminist and one anti-racist, for they are tied together in the challenge to Man1 and Man2. Luxemburg was way ahead of her time in calling for solidarity with women in the Global South. But let us turn first to her writings on women.

Luxemburg agrees with Charles Fourier, 'the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. This is completely true for our present society' (Luxemburg 1912, 242). She was a tireless advocate of universal suffrage, which would of course include suffrage for all women. She made class distinctions between women arguing

that bourgeois women were primarily consumers and therefore, in a sense, parasites. These were the women who had a class interest in voting against socialism. Even so, the proletarian women, who have during Luxemburg's lifetime gained the right to unionize and to assemble, had shown a political maturity which put them on the side of socialist politics. Their votes would outweigh those of bourgeois women. She was well aware that proletarian women would become immediately concerned with the absurd reality in capitalist that women's work in the home created no value for the capitalism system. To quote Luxemburg, 'From this point of view, the music-hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman's first task.' (ibid., 241)

DOMESTIC LABOR, OR: WOMEN'S LIFE UNDER CAPITALISM

The demand for wages for housework put forth by some socialist feminists would never have been accepted by Luxemburg. Such a demand would inevitably falter because of the laws of capitalism itself. For Luxemburg, and this is particularly evident in her letters, it would not just follow that

in socialism domestic labor would be socialized. The entire family structure, which inevitably includes the oppression of women, would have to be transformed. For Luxemburg socialism would demand radical transformation of all human relationships. And this is why as we will see she always insists that when a communist party seizes power, it must implement the most sweeping forms of democracy that can be imagined. As a result, yes, there will be socialization of what is now privatized. 'As a modern female proletarian, the woman becomes a human being for the first time, since the [proletarian] struggle is the first to prepare human beings to make a contribution to culture, to the history of humanity. For the property-owning bourgeois woman, her house is the world. For the proletarian woman, the whole world is her house, the world with its sorrow and joy, with its cold cruelty and its raw size.' (ibid., 243) Given Luxemburg's insistence on class difference, the debate between feminists in the 1990s and early 2000s over the relationship between justice and care would have been off point. Luxemburg's own radicalism about the need for thoroughgoing erotic transformation would not have allowed her to idealize the values that come out of women's domestic labor under capitalism. There is as much abuse as there is care in women's domestic labor under capitalism, and Luxemburg oftentimes uses words to describe women's home life under capitalism as 'stuffy, narrow, miserable, and petty.' (ibid., 241)

GENDER, RACE, AND CLASS

Class solidarity for Luxemburg always included uniting with women in the Global South whose oppression was integral to imperial domination. Given her insistence that imperialism is inevitable under capitalism, and therefore war also, it is not surprising for Luxemburg to emphasize this solidarity. 'A world of female misery is waiting for relief. The wife of the peasant moans as she nearly collapses under life's burdens. In German Africa, in the Kalahari Desert, the bones of defenseless Herero women are bleaching in the sun, those who were hunted down by a band of German soldiers and subjected to a horrific death of hunger and thirst. On the other side of the ocean, in the high cliffs of Putumayo, the death cries of martyred Indian women, ignored by the world fade away in the rubber plantations of the international capitalists. Proletarian women, the poorest of the poor, the most disempowered of the disempowered, hurry to join the struggle for the emancipation of women and of humankind from the horrors of capitalist domination! Social Democracy has assigned to you a place of honor. Hurry to the front lines, into the trenches!' (ibid., 245) The demand for peace can create solidarity between women who live in the metropole and women in the Global South. Luxemburg was one of the first then to recognize that the oppression of black people, and people of color more generally, is not an aside to capitalism but is fundamental to class rule, as is militarism. Racism is then integral to

capitalist class rule, and therefore there is no such being as a woman who is not always already racialized. The debates about gender, race, and class, and which comes first, miss Luxemburg's fundamental argument that as long as there is capitalism there will be war, imperialism, and therefore the fight against militarism is always part of the socialist struggle.

Here we come back to why I have called Luxemburg an ethical feminist in that her anti-elitism is integral to her argument that there are not gold and silver people, including an oppressive hierarchy between nations. But she takes her anti-elitism into a critique of Trotsky and Lenin's idea of a vanguard party. The party, in order to lead, has to be deeply embedded in the day-to-day struggles of the masses of people and this was why she rejected Vladimir Lenin's own conception of centralization. To quote Luxemburg, 'Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.' (Luxemburg 1904, 97) In more contemporary psychoanalytic terms, Luxemburg's criticism of Lenin and Trotsky and their notion of the party in relation to the masses is rooted in a phallic fantasy: a tiny group of men exercising supreme power to keep the messy movement from falling into opportunism and other forms of imperfection. Luxemburg's criticized certain basic policies after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, specially their policy of national

self-determination. Her point was that nationalism was often a perfect way for the defeated bourgeoisie in those nations given the 'right' to self-determination to come to power in such a way as to assert nationalist class rule against the new revolution. In language reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's own critique of the nationalist bourgeoisie in the liberation struggles against colonization, the problem with the nationalist bourgeoisie was that they sought only to replace white leaders with themselves – which did not in any way challenge the basic conditions of capital exploitation and colonization (Fanon 1963). Of course, Luxemburg's critique of the Bolsheviks party's policy of national self-determination was done in part because this kind of nationalism for her was inseparable from imperial militarism. But this policy is by no means the only one that Luxemburg critiqued.

FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

Famously in the months before their seizure of power the Bolsheviks had been at the forefront of the demand for an elected Constituent Assembly. The election took place but many who voted did not even know that the Bolsheviks had seized power. As a result, the Bolsheviks did not achieve the hoped-for majority in the Constituent Assembly that was elected. Their response was to shut it down with military force, under the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets.' But then when the Soviets got too uppity, they shut them down too. As Luxemburg points out, their voting law

made no sense at all because given mass unemployment the only people who could vote were those who lived by their own labor. For Luxemburg, revolutionaries have to risk – and yes, it is a risk – universal suffrage even as she recognized that certain members of the ruling class might have to be disenfranchised for a certain period of time. But both Trotsky and Lenin ultimately concluded that the mechanism of democratic institutions should itself be called into question. Luxemburg summarizes Trotsky's own view as follows: 'According to Trotsky's theory, every elected assembly reflects once and for all only the mental composition, political maturity and mood of its electorate just at the moment when the latter goes to the polling place. According to that, a democratic body is the reflection of the masses at the end of the electoral period [...] Any living mental connection between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate, any permanent interaction between one and the other, is hereby denied.' (Luxemburg 1918, 301) But for Luxemburg the opposite is the case. She did not think that the current Constituent Assembly should stand, given that the Bolsheviks had achieved state power. But on the other hand, she did not agree with its dispersal by armed force. Instead she argued that they should call for a new election and spend the necessary organizational time to win workers and peasants over to the new dispensation. She argues that masses of people involved in electoral politics can often lead to new forms of revolutionary

consciousness. Luxemburg's criticism takes us to her deepest understanding that we really have no idea of what socialism is and how radical the transformation would have to be in each one of us for us to be part of a socialist society. The powerful argument of Wynter is that we are materially immersed in Man1 and Man2 and all the forms of elitism, racism, and sexism that they manifest not as some outside ideology but in the materialization of the ways we live and work together. Lenin thought that it would be possible to take over the brutal disciplinary structure of the capitalist factory and use it to get the masses and workers to stay on a rigorous production schedule. But Luxemburg completely disagreed; work, the organization of the work place, families, how we even thought and talked to one another could not remain the same. Socialism is simply unknowable to those of us who grew up in a capitalist society. So, the only way forward is to create the greatest and most sweeping democratic forms possible so that we could begin to not only dream together but to realize new ways of being and living together. Without that, the revolution will be stifled by the very Central Committee that believes itself to be promoting a revolutionary program.

Famously, Lenin truly believed that the socialist state would simply be the capitalist state turned on its head. This kind of inversion is exactly what Fanon warns against and even the greatest fighters of the liberation struggle might not be the best leaders in the new revolutionary

order. Violence carries within it the danger of rephallicization; macho men strutting around with guns.

For Luxemburg, the basic democratic rights such as freedom of the press, freedom to assemble, freedom to unionize, are absolutely essential as we transform ourselves to beings that can live beyond relations of exploitation. For Luxemburg, a freedom that is only for those who support the communist party is not freedom at all and it blocks the imaginary and the effort to create new institutions and new forms of life that would be worthy of the name socialism: 'Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of "justice" but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when "freedom" becomes a special privilege.' (ibid., 305)

What Luxemburg continuously emphasizes is the need for thoroughgoing transformation of all social relations, but we simply cannot know in advance of the actual creative historical processes of the masses of people. 'The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of the dictatorship is this: that the Socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be

carried out energetically in practice. This is, unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately – not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of Socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. What we possess in our program is nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that. Thus, we know more or less what we must eliminate at the outset in order to free the road for a Socialist economy.’ (ibid.) As Luxemburg continues, the concept of dictatorship adapted by Lenin and Trotsky counterpoises dictatorship to democracy. The phrase “the dictatorship of the proletariat” was first used by Friedrich Engels in his writings on the Paris Commune. The Paris Commune of course had the most sweeping democratic institutions which included socialized childcare but under collective management of the women workers themselves. The Commune clearly unleashed the creativity of the masses of people who participated in its day-to-day activities. For its short life, it was indeed a permanent revolution and participatory democracy. So, for Luxemburg it is both a theoretical and practical mistake to counterpoise dictatorship to democracy. Corruption results from the kind of centralization of the party in which loyalty to the party is the basis of favors and this ultimately creates hierarchies. So, unlike

Lenin and Trotsky the solution could not be the increase of party control and measures such as the implementation of martial law. Instead, the revolution had to unleash the idealism of the people and this could only happen if their creativity was respected as the very heartbeat of the revolution. We need to be clear here that Luxemburg was a great supporter of the bravery and the daring of Lenin and Trotsky. Her criticisms were directed at two comrades and were not naïve. She knew the extreme difficulties that the Bolsheviks faced. At the heart of her argument was that the Bolsheviks had turned necessity into a virtue and a general theory into what was demanded by the transition to socialism.

ETHICAL FEMINISM AND THE POWER OF GENTLENESS

But the deeper question is why is her criticism of Lenin and Trotsky considered by me to be feminist? I have argued that she is what I have called an ethical feminist in that all forms of reinstating the division of gold and silver people, including through the rule of an elite party. In this sense, her trust in the masses is a feminist principle. Her vision of socialism is one of endless transformation of all of us from the ego-driven creatures we have become under capitalism to the human beings who could live together in respect and what I am now going to call, following the philosopher Dufourmantelle, “the power of gentleness.” To quote Dufourmantelle on gentleness, which in her writing is neither a philosophical construct nor a sociological

relationality but rather an evocative notion that points to a different relationship between humans and the entire world in which we live: 'Gentleness invents an expanded present. We talk about gentleness, acknowledging it, delivering it, collecting it, hoping for it. It is the name of an emotion of which we have lost the name, coming from a time when humanity was not dissociated from the elements, from animals, from light, from spirits. At what point did the human race become aware of it? What was the gentleness opposed to when life and survival were merged?' (Dufourmantelle 2018, 10) Ethical feminism is about aspiring to a nonviolent relationship to the other. But Dufourmantelle is too sophisticated to simply endorse an ethics of nonviolence; sometimes violence is a tragic necessity as it has been in almost all colonial situations. But it should not be idealized, nor should it be seen as the work of a tiny sect of macho men whom Fanon long ago saw engaged in the process of rephallicization. The fantasy is that we will take the phallus from the white Man and seize "ownership" by the oppressed but male colonized. And it is just that: a fantasy. And one that often promotes counter-revolutionary politics. Originally in *Feminist Contentions*, when I first defended ethical feminism, it was more limitedly about relations between humans. But I would now include the power of gentleness. Indeed, gentleness is an important feminist answer to critiques of Marxism by the posthumanists. They have accused Marxism as being just another

form of humanist hubris (Braidotti 2013). Often, their criticism emphasizes, to paraphrase Marx, that 'under socialism nature will be humanized and humans will be naturalized'. The alienation of capitalism would be overcome. But the focus is purportedly on human-to-human relations, and the dominion of humans over the rest of nature is not challenged. But in gentleness, understood as a power and indeed an exercise of power, we come to have a very different meaning that would reject any notion of the dominion of humans over other forms of being. To quote Luxemburg: I know that for every person, for every creature, one's own life is the only single possession one really has, and with every little fly that one carelessly swats and crushes, the entire world comes to an end, in the refracting eye of the little fly it is the same as if the end of the world had destroyed all life. No, the reason I tell you about other women is precisely so that you will not underestimate and disregard your own pain, so that you won't misunderstand yourself and have a distorted picture of who you are. Oh, how well I understand that for you every lovely melody, every flower, every spring day, every moonlit night represents a longing for, an allurements toward the greatest beauty the world has to offer.' (Luxemburg 2013, 449)

I bring up insects, although Luxemburg has also written beautifully about oxen literally being worked to death as she saw them in the prison yard and embraced them. But many of us are afraid of insects and

look very differently at killing them than we do in killing sentient beings like animals, but as we see with the example of the wasp, Luxemburg was different. 'And now I have work to do, as I do every summer: I have to climb up on a chair and, however far up it is, reach to the upper windowpane, take hold of the wasp ever so carefully, and deliver it once to freedom, because otherwise it would torment itself against the glass until it was half dead. They don't do anything to me; out in the open they even land on my lips, and that's very ticklish; but I'm worried about doing harm to the wasp when I take hold of it. In the end it all worked out, and suddenly it's completely quiet here in the room. Yet in my ear and heart a sunny echo still keeps buzzing.' (Luxemburg 1917, 389)

It is this gentleness that Luxemburg over and over again in her letters ascribes to the practice of being human, a practice we have to live out now even when living in the brutal reality. So, her ethical feminism is integral to all of her writings on nationalism, militarism, and her vision of socialism which challenges not only the barbarism of capitalism but also the elitism which inhered in the Bolsheviks policies in the Russian Revolution. Her feminism challenges us to think much more broadly about what feminism is and that it clearly goes way beyond the struggle for so-called formal equality and is part of the new practice of the human which can only be opened up through revolutionary struggle. Her biting remarks against bourgeois feminism should not be taken as a critique of feminism itself.

Instead she should be read against the class, and yes race, privilege of women in the metropole. She did not live long enough to see the struggles of the transgendered, gays and lesbians, but the sweep of her vision would clearly be against anyone being thrown under the bar of humanity because of how they lived their life as erotic and sexuate beings. She was way ahead of her time in envisioning a new practice of the human.

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'NO SENTIMENTALITY PLEASE'

AN ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE ON ROSA LUXEMBURG

GAL HERTZ

In June 1916, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the founders of the Spartacist League, were arrested for unpatriotic actions during the First World War. After being sentenced to two and a half years in prison Luxemburg commented on the devastation the war had caused, published in the *Junius Pamphlet*: 'But here is proof also that the war is not only a grandiose murder, but the suicide of the European working class. The soldiers of socialism, the workers of England, of France, of Germany, of Italy, of Belgium are murdering each other at the bidding of capitalism, are thrusting cold, murderous irons into each others' breasts, tare tottering over their graves, grappling in each others' death-bringing arms.' (Luxemburg 1916, 127)

During her imprisonment in Breslau, Luxemburg corresponded with the art historian Sophie Liebknecht, the wife of Karl Liebknecht. In these letters, her

typically programmatic revolutionary tone in analyses of Karl Marx's *Capital* such as *Reform or Revolution* (1899) or *The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy* (1916) gives way to a markedly poetic style. Prison was the place where a deep soul, which was open to the sound of life, raised its voice. At Christmas 1917 she wrote: '[...] on the ceiling can be seen reflections coming through the window from the lanterns that burn all night in front of the prison. From time to time one hears, but only in quite a muffled way, the distant rumbling of a train passing by or quite nearby under the windows the whispering of the guards on duty at night, who take a few steps slowly in their heavy boots to relieve their stiff legs. The sand crunches so hopelessly under their heels that the entire hopeless wasteland of existence can be heard in this damp, dark night. I lie there quietly, alone, wrapped in these many-layered black veils

of darkness, boredom, lack of freedom, and winter – and at the same time my heart is racing with an incomprehensible, unfamiliar inner joy as though I were walking across a flowering meadow in radiant sunshine. And in the dark I smile at life, as if I knew some sort of magical secret that gives the lie to everything evil and sad and changes it into pure light and happiness.’ (Luxemburg 1917, 455; reprinted in this edition, 34–39)

So how do we interpret this side of Luxemburg’s work? What link is there between her inner experience as a prisoner, the emotive descriptions of nature, flowers, i.e. her poetry, and her struggle for liberation and revolution? What would it mean if we saw in these descriptions of a creature’s suffering and her compassion not mere escapism or naïve sentimentality but a critical, moral position?

The *hopelessness* of prison is no reason for Rosa Luxemburg to despair or give up on herself. Rather, it creates space for observations that seem to precede any ideological position. The *magical secret* she writes about expresses an existential perspective that not only allows criticism of nationalist ideology, but also becomes the basis for fresh hope, alternative relationships and solidarity.

In a comparative approach we could apply Luxemburg’s experience to the current situation in Israel by comparing it to the case of the Palestinian prisoner Walid Dakka. For his part in the murder of the Israeli soldier Moshe Tamam, Dakka

has spent his last 30 years in prison in Israel. In spite of his life sentence, and no means left to appeal, Walid Dakka has not only kept his hope, for over 15 years now he has been a vociferous critique of the national liberation struggle. From speaking with numerous suicide bombers that survived their attack Dakka concludes that the driving force behind the national liberation struggle is not simply devotion and faith but also contempt for life and a culture of death. He asks, how this can ever provide a basis for a perspective for the future. One hundred years after Luxemburg, Dakka again teaches us that a place that initially appears to be a dead end, does not inevitably have to be a breeding ground for hate and desperation but can lead to new ways of seeing the *other* and life instead despite the circumstances.

In May 1920, when Karl Kraus discovers Luxemburg’s letter in Vienna’s *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, he immediately decides to use it in his lectures. Two months later, in July, he publishes the letter in his journal *Die Fackel*, including a foreword that stresses the document’s importance: “I left the strongest impression ever in the hall when I read aloud the letter by Rosa Luxemburg, which I discovered in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* on Pentecost and had taken with me on my journey. In the Germany of independent socialists the letter was still completely unknown. Shame on and disgrace to any republic that does not, in defiance of all spelling book and ‘yellow cross’ Christianity, print



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Printed images, 51 x 71 x 7 cm

this document of humanity and poetry between Goethe and Claudius in its schoolbooks and to their horror about mankind of this time, does not, tell the youth growing out of it that the body that had enclosed such a divine soul, had been slain by rifle butts. The entire living literature of Germany does not provoke a tear and a pause for breath after the description of the buffalo hide, which *had been broken*, like this Jewish revolutionary can. (Kraus, 1920, 6)

Kraus's words take us back to the question of the relationship between moral critique and poetry. How can Kraus

refer to a personal and intimate letter that superficially deals with remote questions such as the suffering of a buffalo by one of the First World War's foremost critics as a *document of humanitarianism and poetry*? A closer look at one section of Luxemburg's letter clarifies this. From her prison cell she observes the arrival of heavily laden military wagons delivering torn military uniforms – some bloodstained – which the prisoners have to patch. Luxemburg's eyes are on the water buffalo harnessed to the heavy wagons – spoils of war from Romania, and domesticated by being badly beaten. She describes how on arriving at the entrance gate one buffalo could not pull the wagon

any further and a soldier remorselessly flailing it with 'the blunt end of his whip'. The blows are so hard that the buffalo hide, splits open despite its 'proverbial thickness and toughness' and begins to bleed, and 'had been broken'. Seeing the injured animal causes Rosa Luxemburg to feel deep compassion: 'Oh, my poor buffalo, my poor, beloved brother! We both stand here so powerless and mute, and are as one in our pain, impotence, and yearning.' (Luxemburg 1917, 458)

The breaking of the buffalo's hide is the image Luxemburg has of the 'entire panorama of the war' (ibid.) passing her by. Instead of battlefields and canons, gas and death in the trenches as symbols of destruction, she uses a random act of violence directed at nothing other than nature itself. This moment caused Luxemburg to reflect on the significance of war and violence. Neither does she make an attempt to expose the general immorality of war, nor does she demand an end to all wars. Her reflection focuses on the bleeding buffalo, whose suffering cannot be captured, justified or compensated for by any political position. There is no proportionality in violence. Innocent victims of violence are not stronger indicators of people's loss of a moral compass than guilty victims.

Through the mute suffering of the beast, Luxemburg shows that violence overrides perception and concepts, it destroys and breaks. Before we start to justify or condemn violence, we need to

pause and attempt to understand how this violence has already shaped us. Poetry is such an attempt, the perceptions and its forms of expression point to these volatile and seemingly meaningless incidences of violence. Nevertheless, poetry is not merely an expression of humanism, and should not be reduced to an accusation of lack of humanity. Poetry calls on us to analyse incidences of violence critically and not in a sentimental way.

It is precisely this link between sentimentality and violence which in August 1920 is addressed, in a reader's letter from a woman from Innsbruck to Kraus's *Fackel*, which derides Luxemburg's 'lachrymose descriptions' and Kraus's admiration. Let us now for a moment turn to a present day reader's letter to the Haaretz newspaper during the last Gaza war (2014). Following the killing of uninvolved civilians in an airstrike on Gaza during operation *Protective Edge 18*, the well-known Israeli journalist, Gideon Levy, published the article entitled *Lowest Deeds From Loftiest Heights* (Haaretz, 15 July 2014), in which he accuses the pilots of being nothing more than cogs in Israel's war machine. Levy's text, like many of his previous and subsequent texts, is part of his project to testify on a weekly basis about the violence of the ongoing occupation, thus exposing the policy of the Israeli government that always justifies military violence as a means of last resort and as a necessary reaction to enemy attacks from outside. His article triggered a

wave of furious reactions by Haaretz readers. On 23 July 2014 the letter by Kobi Richter, a former pilot and arms industry businessman, was published. Richter said he felt ‘ashamed’ of Levy’s irresponsible lack of judgement.

Based on a paternalistic rhetoric of security he argues that we need to understand the *circumstances* correctly. He speaks of a highly organised system of military decision-making that – if only they had a deeper understanding of security questions – even the bombed citizens of Gaza would approve of. By pretending that other options do not exist, Richter’s letter does more than merely legitimise the use of force in Gaza, it reveals the endemic violence latent within the social order of a society still only barely held together by democratic structures.

The example of Israeli fighter jet pilots highlights a fundamental problem for any criticism of violence. Authors such as Walter Benjamin can teach us that a critique cannot be built on the distinction between *justified* violence (in defence of the country) and *unjustified* violence (killing of uninvolved civilians). Violence is never proportionate and undermines any possibility for such a distinction. It destroys the houses of civilians; instead of armed fighters it kills unarmed Palestinian police officers (Gaza, July 2014); from a crowd of demonstrators it kills a disabled person in a wheelchair (Gaza, December 2017); it is also violence, when 16-year-old Ahed Tamimi, whose cousin was

murdered, is sent to jail for slapping someone in the face (Nebi Salach, January 2018). Levy’s stories are an archive of this order grounded in state violence – an order always justified by the distinction between illegitimate and legitimate violence and where we are made to believe that only the Palestinians ever *break the order*. Violence does not need any aims, reasons or explanations, it is never a means to an end but rather creates a self-referencing sphere which re-organises perceptions, desires and senses. We cannot base a criticism of violence on sentimental empathy. Instead, our critique should attempt to call into question the order underlying this violence.

Kraus helps us understand that Rosa Luxemburg’s letter does not reveal a defeatist stance, but to recognise an attempt to develop an alternative morality, whose starting point is not the imperative of reason but a different relationship to ‘creatureliness’: If we understand moral as a hierarchic order that structures and subdues nature and morality as the obedience by which we submit to this order, then the act of blind violence in Luxemburg’s example of the maltreated buffalo is precisely the result of such a system. In her text, however, the moment where these normative ideals become meaningless and a morality built on reason gives way to excessive violence, is also the moment when true morality emerges: the capacity to assess the normative order based on how it treats its

creatures; and an opportunity to recognise the violent consequences such an order permanently produces.

Why can such a position not simply be described as humanism? Because compassion here does not correspond to ideals. Through its focus on the suffering of a creature, it breaks out of its self-centredness. Such a critique of morals is not merely concerned with care and philanthropy, it is a position that can expose and undermine the existence and violent nature of social matters of fact. The critique formulated in Luxemburg's letter is a call to not only revisit the hierarchies between people, but also to call into question and re-define the division between man and creature (cf Cornell in this edition).

Before we can even think of taking on a moral position, we are confronted by the fundamental problem that the social order and the ideological discourse that supports it prevent us from recognising social ills and therefore feeling compassion. For Kraus the reader's letter he received as a reaction to Luxemburg's account is a convincing example. We should not understand his dissection of the letter as a dismissive polemic, instead he reveals himself to be fascinated by the skewed argumentation and the indifferent, hateful tone with which the author ridicules the compassion Luxemburg feels for the beast. By quoting the mean, core statement of the letter and laying it into the mouth of the beast, which 'could now itself be killed – one needn't always expect the

worse and as a matter of principle be sorry for people (and animals) without a clear understanding of the circumstances. This can do more evil than good'. – Kraus exposes the absurdity of her position. Within theatrical moments such as this inversion, he shows that it is nonsensical to denounce bourgeois-conservative morality, if the language itself is already corrupted and renders impossible any possibility of compassion. Literary descriptions such as those of Rosa Luxemburg can nevertheless achieve this. They can expose fissures and ruptures in the ideological discourse and offer starting points for a critique of morality.

This text is based on a talk held on the occasion of the publication of 'Die Kreaturen, der Krieg und die Zukunft der Dichtung: Karl Kraus und Rosa Luxemburg' at the Israel office of Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (16 February 2018).

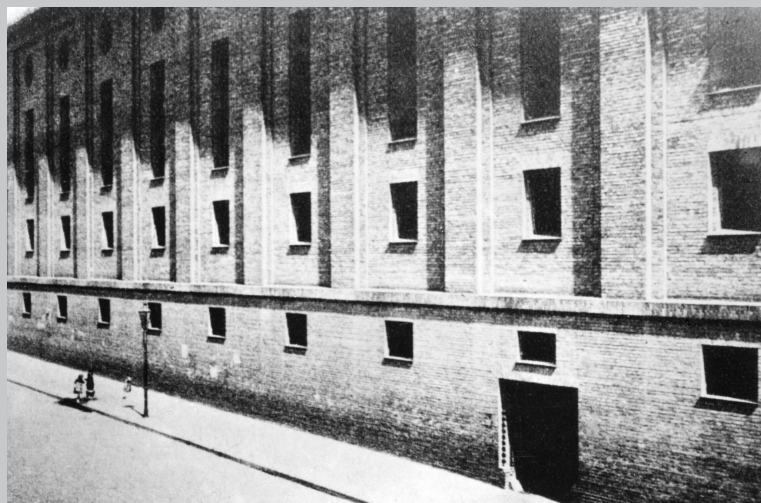
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ROSA LUXEMBURG

TO SOPHIE LIEBKNECHT

BRESLAU, BEFORE DECEMBER 24, 1917



[...] It has now been a year that Karl has been sitting in Luckau.¹ I have often thought about that during this month. And exactly one year ago you were with me at Wronke, and you gave me a beautiful Christmas tree as a gift... This year I have had one purchased for me here, but they brought me a completely shabby one with scraggly, skinny branches – there is no comparison with last year's. I bought eight little lights, but I don't know how I'm going to put them on it. This is my third Christmas in the clink, but you should certainly not take that tragically. I am as calm and cheerful as ever.

Yesterday I lay awake for a long time – these days I can't fall asleep before 1 a.m., but I have to go to bed at 10, because the light goes out then, and then I dream to myself about various things in the dark. Last night this is what I was thinking: how odd it is that I'm constantly in a joyful state of exaltation – without any particular reason. For example, I'm lying here in a dark cell on a stone-hard mattress, the usual silence of a church cemetery prevails in the prison building, it seems as though we're in a tomb; on the ceiling can be seen reflections coming through the window from the lanterns that burn all night in front of the prison. From time to time one hears, but only in quite a muffled way, the distant rumbling of a train passing by or quite nearby under the windows the whispering of the guards on duty at night, who take a few steps slowly in their heavy boots to relieve their stiff legs. The sand crunches so hopelessly under their heels that the entire hopeless wasteland of existence can be heard in this damp, dark night. I lie there quietly, alone, wrapped in these many-layered black veils of darkness, boredom, lack of freedom, and winter – and at the same time my heart is racing with an incomprehensible, unfamiliar inner joy as though I were walking across a flowering meadow in radiant sunshine. And in the dark I smile at life, as if I knew some sort of magical secret that gives the lie to everything evil and sad and changes it into pure light and happiness. And all the while I'm searching within myself for some reason for this joy, I find nothing and must smile to myself again – and laugh at myself. I believe that the secret is nothing other than life itself; the deep darkness of night is so beautiful and as soft as velvet, if one only looks at it the right way; and in the crunching of the damp sand beneath the slow, heavy steps of the sentries a beautiful small song of life is being sung – if one only knows

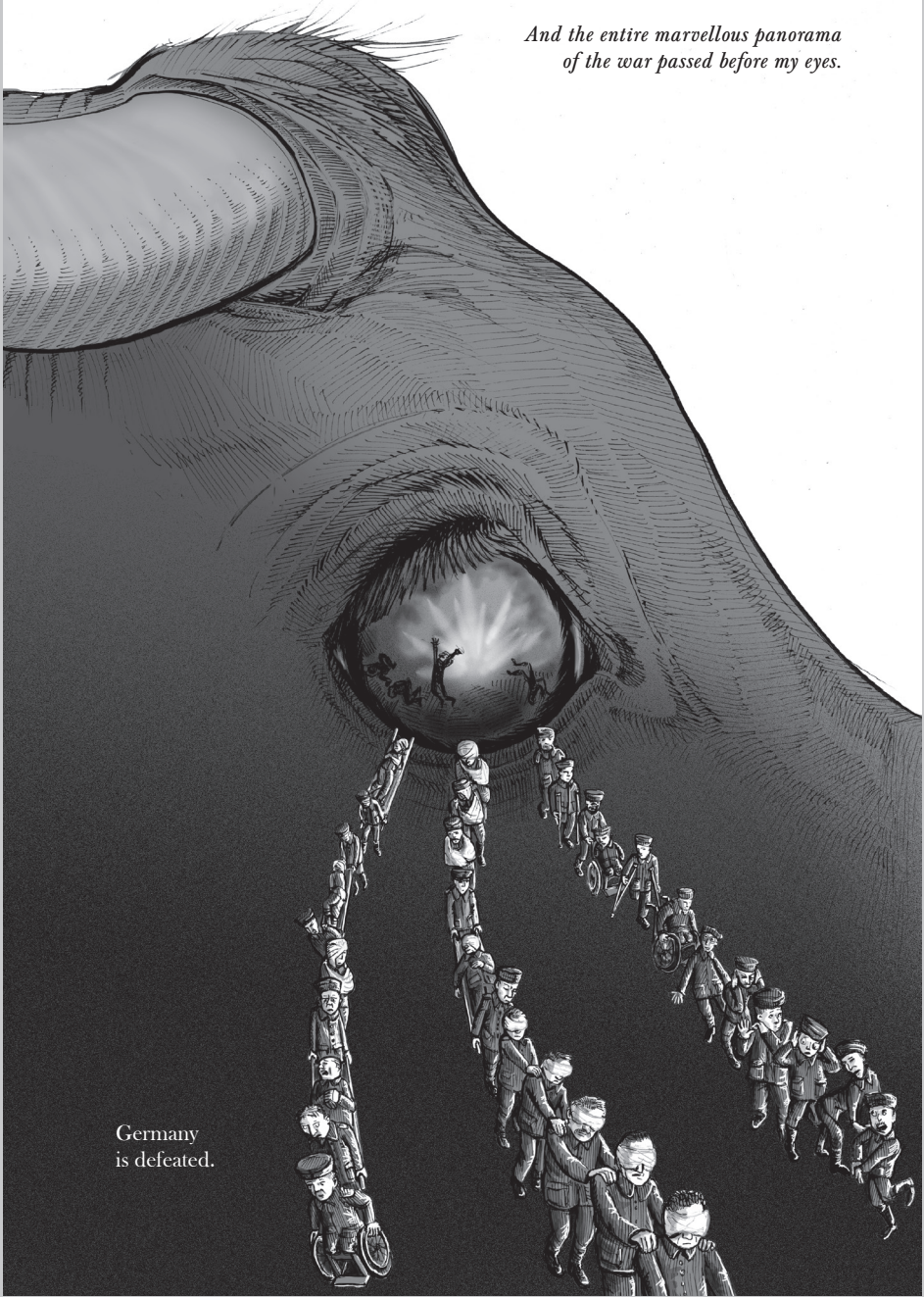
how to listen properly. At such moments I think of you and I would like so much to pass on this magical key to you, so that always and in all situations you would be aware of the beautiful and the joyful, so that you too would live in a joyful euphoria as though you were walking across a multi-colored meadow. I am certainly not thinking of foisting off on you some sort of asceticism or made-up joys. I don't begrudge you all the real joys of the senses that you might wish for yourself. In addition, I would only like to pass on to you my inexhaustible inner cheerfulness, so that I could be at peace about you and not worry, so that you could go through life wearing a cloak covered with stars, which would protect you against everything petty and trivial and everything that might cause alarm.

I'm interested that in Steglitz Park you picked a beautiful bouquet of black and pinkish-purple berries. The black ones must have been either elderberries – they hang in heavy, thick clusters among large feathered (pinnate) leaf fronds, surely you know them – or they were privet berries: slender, petite, upright panicles amid long, narrow, small green leaves. The reddish-purple berries hidden under little leaves could have been those of dwarf medlar: actually they are usually red, but often so late in the year, they are a bit overripe and starting to rot, and thus appear reddish-purple; the leaves are similar to those of myrtle, small, with pointed tips, dark-green, leathery above and rough underneath.

Sonyusha, do you know Platen's Fatal Fork? Can you send it or bring it to me? Karl once mentioned that he had read it at home. The poems by [Stefan] George are lovely; now I know where that line comes from that you used to recite when we were walking in the fields: "And underfoot the rustling of rusty stalks of grain." When you get a chance, can you write out a copy for me of "New Amadis"?² I love that poem so much – naturally thanks to the song Hugo Wolf composed from it – but I don't have it here. Are you reading further in The Lessing Legend?³ I've taken up Lange's History of Materialism again, it always stimulates and refreshes me. I'd like so much for you to read it someday.

Oh, Sonyichka, I've lived through something sharply, terribly painful here. Into the courtyard where I take my walks there often come military supply wagons, filled with sacks or old army coats and shirts, often with bloodstains on them... They're unloaded here [in the courtyard]

*And the entire marvellous panorama
of the war passed before my eyes.*



Germany
is defeated.

and distributed to the prison cells, [where they are] patched or mended, then loaded up and turned over to the military again. Recently one of these wagons arrived with water buffaloes harnessed to it instead of horses. This was the first time I had seen these animals up close. They have a stronger, broader build than our cattle, with flat heads and horns that curve back flatly, the shape of the head being similar to that of our sheep, [and they're] completely black, with large, soft, black eyes. They come from Romania, the spoils of war... The soldiers who serve as drivers of these supply wagons tell the story that it was a lot of trouble to catch these wild animals and even more difficult to put them to work as draft animals, because they were accustomed to their freedom. They had to be beaten terribly before they grasped the concept that they had lost the war and that the motto now applying to them was "woe unto the vanquished" [vae victis]... There are said to be as many as a hundred of these animals in Breslau alone, and on top of that these creatures, who lived in the verdant fields of Romania, are given meager and wretched feed. They are ruthlessly exploited, forced to haul every possible kind of wagonload, and they quickly perish in the process. – And so, a few days ago, a wagon like this arrived at the courtyard [where I take my walks]. The load was piled so high that the buffaloes couldn't pull the wagon over the threshold at the entrance gate. The soldier accompanying the wagon, a brutal fellow, began flailing at the animals so fiercely with the blunt end of his whip handle that the attendant on duty indignantly took him to task, asking him: Had he no pity for the animals? "No one has pity for us humans," he answered with an evil smile, and started in again, beating them harder than ever... The animals finally started to pull again and got over the hump, but one of them was bleeding... Sonyichka, the hide of a buffalo is proverbial for its toughness and thickness, but this tough skin had been broken. During the unloading, all the animals stood there, quite still, exhausted, and the one that was bleeding kept staring into the empty space in front of him with an expression on his black face and in his soft, black eyes like an abused child. It was precisely the expression of a child that has been punished and doesn't know why or what for, doesn't know how to get away from this torment and raw violence... I stood before it, and the beast looked at me; tears were running down my face – they were his tears. No one can

flinch more painfully on behalf of a beloved brother than I flinched in my helplessness over this mute suffering. How far away, how irretrievably lost were the beautiful, free, tender-green fields of Romania! How differently the sun used to shine and the wind blow there, how different was the lovely song of the birds that could be heard there, or the melodious call of the herdsman. And here – this strange, ugly city, the gloomy stall, the nauseating, stale hay, mixed with rotten straw and the strange, frightening humans – the beating, the blood running from the fresh wound... Oh, my poor buffalo, my poor, beloved brother! We both stand here so powerless and mute, and are as one in our pain, impotence, and yearning. – All this time the prisoners had hurriedly busied themselves around the wagon, unloading the heavy sacks and dragging them off into the building; but the soldier stuck both hands in his trouser pockets, paced around the courtyard with long strides, and kept smiling and softly whistling some popular tune to himself. And the entire marvelous panorama of the war passed before my eyes.

Write soon.

I embrace you, Sonyichka.

Your R.

Sonyichka, dearest, in spite of everything be calm and cheerful. Life is like that, one must take it as it is, [and remain] brave, undaunted, and smiling – in spite of everything. Merry Christmas! ... R.

Luxemburg, Rosa, 1917: To Sophie Liebknecht, in: Adler, Georg/Hudis, Peter/Laschitza, Annelies (Ed.): *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* (trans. by George Shriver), Verso, London/ New York 2011, 454– 458

Image, p. 32: Women's prison Barnimstraße, Berlin 1918, © Bildarchiv Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin
Image, p. 35: © Kate Evans, *Red Rosa. A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 2015

- 1 Karl Liebknecht was sent to the Luckau penitentiary on December 8, 1916, after having been sentenced earlier in 1916 to confinement in a penitentiary for four years and one month.
- 2 A poem by Goethe.
- 3 One of Franz Mehring's best-known works.

INNER COLONIES

THE CARE SECTOR AS A PLACE OF 'NEW LANDNAHME'

TOVE SOILAND

Neoliberalism is more than merely the privatisation of railways, electricity suppliers and postal services. Nor can it be reduced to labour market deregulation, global trade liberalisation and the associated dominance of finance capital. Neoliberalism is also, and possibly primarily, a fundamental restructuring of the way people reproduce. Globally increasing protests by women today calling for general strikes mean that left-wing politics ought to consider whether the most important anti-capitalist struggles today are maybe forming here. In any case, these struggles appear to articulate a current virulent contradiction round the world; that of the economies of accumulation and care. Women's strikes are also always strikes about reproduction in the sense that they are struggles over reproductive resources, for the simple reason as the feminist economist

Mascha Madörin (2019) points out, that, 'Even today the care sector remains a sector dominated by women, while men dominate accumulation-oriented economic activities.'

THE HOUSEHOLD AS A PRODUCTION SITE

Such a wording suggests that the capitalist mode of production is not *one* economy but one split into two parts that are connected in some way. To clarify this, Rosa Luxemburg's development of the Marxist theory of accumulation continues to provide a highly fertile basis for analyses today. In her main work on economics, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), Rosa Luxemburg famously objected to Marx's idea that the capitalist mode of production should be understood purely as the accumulation of surplus value, by postulating:

‘Accumulation is more than an internal relationship between the branches of capitalist economy; it is primarily a relationship between capital and a non-capitalist environment [...]’ (Luxemburg 1913, 398)

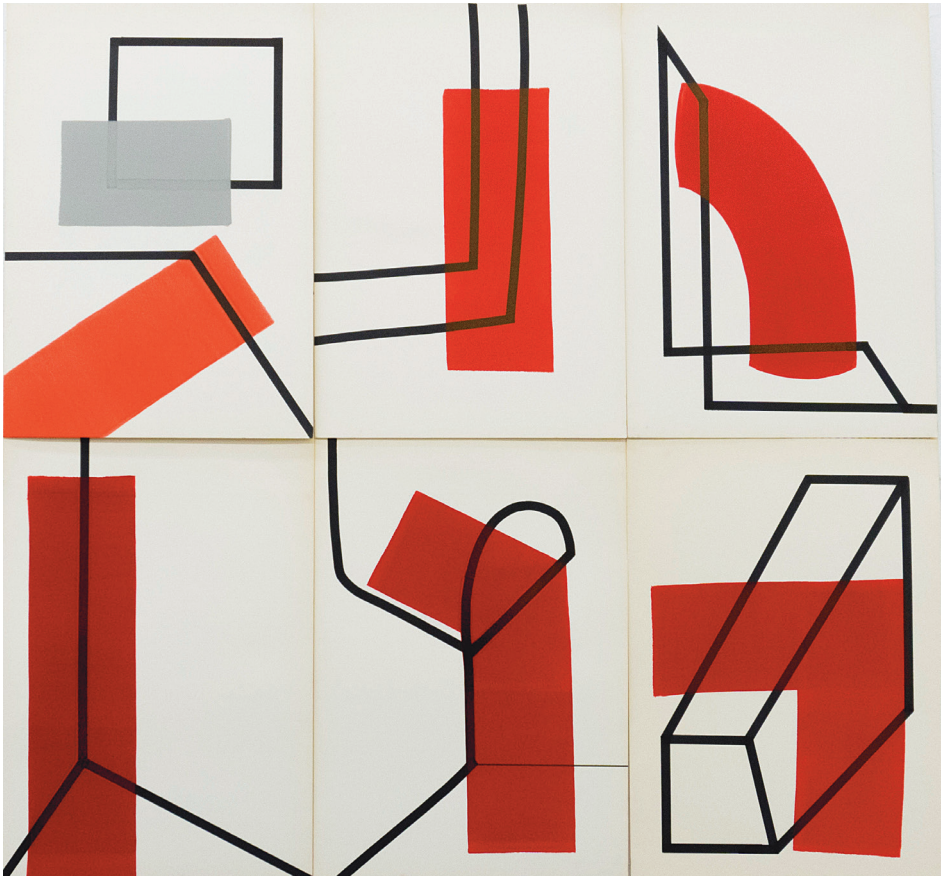
Her hypothesis that even ‘capitalism in its full maturity’ continues to rely on forms of accumulation in which appropriation is not grounded on contracts but ‘force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment’ (ibid., 345) contradicts Marx’s assumption that ‘primitive’ forms of accumulation, which Marx calls ‘primitive accumulation’, only played a role during capitalism’s early, nascent stages. Indeed, the First World War led Luxemburg to believe that the colonies and the violent exploitation that reigned there had to be analysed with regard to their economic function for the capitalist mode of production, and consequently needed to be seen as a form of ‘continued primitive accumulation’ (Mies 2009, 265).

Luxemburg’s hypotheses are today widely discussed as ‘*new Landnahme*’, stipulating that advanced capitalism in a way continuously internally produces such external colonies, ‘to take them back into territory’ again at a later date. The privatisation of public property is one such modern form of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2003, 137), as is the looting of public budget funds during financial crises. The current discussion about the commons is a reaction to this.

By and large, however, this debate tacitly overlooks that a feminist discussion of Luxemburg’s theories had already emerged during the 1970s. Domestic labour researchers, in particular the Bielefeld development sociologists Maria Mies, Claudia von Werlhof and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen argued that the domestic labour provided by women without payment was subject to such a form of primitive accumulation. Households produce the most important element of capitalist production – the commodity of labour power – and this is basically done for free.¹ On top of the unpaid work provided by women, they highlighted another form of exploitation directly connected to salaried work that not only takes place in the capitalist core but is constantly reproduced by capitalism.

The reception at the time did propose a reading of Luxemburg’s extended theory of accumulation that anticipated today’s discussions of continuing forms of primitive accumulation in economically highly developed societies and interpreted it also partially from a different angle: with their theory of ‘continued primitive accumulation’ the Bielefeld researchers were not looking (only) at the expropriation of goods but the tapping into a different form of production: that’s because production also takes place in households.

It is precisely regarding this point that Luxemburg’s analysis that the capitalist mode of production ‘depends in all respects on non-capitalist strata and



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social organizations existing side by side with it' (Luxemburg 1913, 417345) proves fruitful. By assessing 'that capitalism needs non-capitalist social organisations as the setting for its development, that it proceeds by assimilating the very conditions which alone can ensure its own existence' (ibid., 346) she makes clear that she conceives of this relationship as an *articulation* of different modes of production. By insisting that the capitalist mode of production both

appropriates 'means of production which are not produced by capitalist methods' (ibid., 337) and that the non-capitalist milieu uses this 'reservoir of labour power' (ibid., 349) she determines that this articulation is a distinct form of *Landnahme*. Moreover, she provides important suggestions as to how to potentially theoretically conceive of this articulation, namely as a form of subsumption in which subsistence production is subsumed under the capitalist mode of production. Although Luxemburg did not herself use the term

subsistence production, her choice of words ‘non-capitalist forms of production’ shows that she had in mind their resources for subsistence. In this sense, we could say that Luxemburg talks of a subsumption of subsistence production by ‘non-capitalist milieus’ under the capitalist mode of production.

PERMANENTLY UNPAID WORK

Based on this concept of an articulation of distinct modes of production, the Bielefeld sociologists reached the conclusion which is still pioneering today that the expansion of capitalism and the related spread of the wage form would inevitably lead to an expansion of subsistence production. They said that the global spread of the wage form would by no means therefore lead to a disappearance of subsistence production. This applies in particular to the most important transformation of reproduction which has taken place since Fordism went into crisis: the fact that some of the domestic labour provided for by women free of charge became paid for work. Not as anticipated and different to what had been expected by the women’s movement at the time, this change of form did not bring about a marked reduction in unpaid household labour.

As it creates little value, the care sector under capitalism inevitably remains a low-wage sector, where people barely earn a living income, and those working in the sector therefore greatly depend

on the unpaid work of third persons for their own reproduction.² A complex interlocking of paid for precarious care work and unpaid care work results: in the care sector in their majority women work as mostly migrant home helps, nurses or nannies for less than they need for their own reproduction. As they are often also the family breadwinner, they are forced to maintain themselves and their children through free reproductive labour. Often third women, who are themselves exposed to the same mechanism, provide this labour – an endless cyclical chain that passes the gaps in reproduction on ‘downwards’. This means that the conversion of previously unpaid labour by women into salaried work leads under capitalist conditions paradoxically to an increase in the demands to unpaid work. Apparently, capitalism does not merely produce its own ‘outside’ at least as far as reproduction is concerned. The system is also very interested in maintaining this outside to continue nurturing itself from its resources. This aspect is reflected far more precisely in the concept of articulation, in contrast with the image of *Landnahme*. To become a constant provider of invisible resources, the ‘outside’, while being dispossessed, must also be maintained.

INVISIBLE DISPOSSESSION

Using Bennholdt-Thomsen’s concept of ‘marginal mass’ (1981, 43) this transfer of resources can be described in such a way

I'LL BE BACK

Rosa Luxemburg



VOLKSBUHNE AM ROSA-LUXEMBURG-PLATZ

Michael Fielitz ① ②

that with the development of capitalist modes of production people reproduce themselves outside wage relations, insofar as the precarious wage form becomes generalised. This means that people reproduce despite being – or precisely insofar as – they are employed, mostly outside paid labour and within a second mode of production and therefore by using resources that are not covered for by their wage. The spread of precarious forms of labour in advanced capitalist systems integrally lives off the resources of subsistence production.

All precarious wage labour therefore in specific ways taps into reproductive labour resources and therefore a reservoir of additional labour outside of wage work, and flows back into it in the form of extra work (ibid., 34f). For Bennholdt-Thomsen, the significance of the ‘marginal mass’ therefore rests in the fact that from the perspective of capital it reproduces itself for free, but nonetheless remains available to capital when needed: ‘Segments of the population provide the necessary subsistence labour without leading to a cost for capital, greatly increasing capital’s opportunities to appropriate extra labour. [...] The marginal mass is not outside or at the fringes, rather, it is an integral element of the capitalist system.’ (ibid., 44) Bennholdt-Thomsen’s concept of ‘marginal subsumption’ is hence not concerned with the transformation of a form of unpaid into paid labour, but the maintaining of unpaid labour as a necessary element of the post-Fordist regime of accumulation, or, more precisely, the interdependent relationship between paid and unpaid care work that is constitutive for the post-Fordist system and jointly subsidises ‘normal’ wage labour. Madörin (2017, 39ff) for example calculates that in Switzerland paid and unpaid care together accounts for around two thirds of a GDP extended to include unpaid labour, meaning that these two thirds of economic activity are essentially the economic foundation which bears

the – seen this way – true ‘remainder’ of the economy.

Rosa Luxemburg’s thinking proves fruitful for feminist approaches precisely because she theoretically captured aspects that Marxist theory neglected, and therefore makes visible otherwise largely hidden forms of exploitation. The focus on the spectacular forms of dispossession, in the way it dominates the current discussion on new *Landnahmen*, therefore partially obscures the view on this transfer of resources which is hard to pinpoint and therefore occurs silently. This however does not constitute a straightforward theft, but a form of articulation of different forms of production for which no stand-alone concepts exist within left-wing theoretical debate to date.

Luxemburg’s thoughts in any case offer an understanding of continued primitive accumulation, which – if understood as the articulation of different modes of production – facilitates taking the situation of an expanding care sector in post-Fordism and the changing transformations of household labour in the post-Fordist regime of accumulation into account. The concept of the articulation is of such key importance because it allows us to conceive of reproduction in its paid and unpaid forms together as one mode of production which – under the dominant economic-political framework – is subsumed under an additional mode of production.

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1 The journal *The Commoner* (No. 15. winter 2012) refers to this older debate in its special edition *Care Work and the Commons*. This includes important documents from that time.

2 The care sector remains a low-wage sector because as labour intensive work the majority of care work resists rationalisation and therefore cannot benefit from the blessings of the capitalist mode of production – using technological innovations to increase productivity (Madörin 2017).

ORDER REIGNS IN BERLIN

ROSA LUXEMBURG



'Order reigns in Warsaw,' Minister Sebastiani informed the Paris Chamber of Deputies in 1831, when, after fearfully storming the suburb Praga, Paskiewitsch's rabble troops had marched into the Polish capital and begun their hangman's work on the rebels.¹ 'Order reigns in Berlin' is the triumphant announcement of the bourgeois Press, of Ebert and Noske, and of the officers of the 'victorious troops,' who are being cheered by the petty-bourgeois mob in the streets, waving their handkerchiefs and shouting hurrahs. The glory and the honor of the German Army has been saved in the eyes of history. Those who were miserably routed in Flanders and the Argonne have restored their reputation by this shining victory – over the three hundred 'Spartacists' in the Vorwärts.² The days of the first glorious penetration of German troops into Belgium, the days of General von Emmich, the conqueror of Liège, pale before the deeds of this Reinhardt and Company in the streets of Berlin.³ The massacred mediators, who wanted to negotiate the surrender of the Vorwärts and were beaten beyond recognition by rifle butts, so that their bodies could not even be identified; captives who were put up against the wall and murdered in a way that splattered their skulls and brains all over: in the face of such glorious acts, who is still thinking of the ignominious defeats suffered at the hand of the French, the English, or the Americans? 'Spartacus' is the name of the enemy; and Berlin, the place where our officers know how to win. Noske, the 'worker,'⁴ is the name of the general who knows how to organize victories where Ludendorff failed.

Who does not recall here the drunken ecstasy of that pack of 'law-and-order' hounds in Paris, the bacchanal of the bourgeoisie on the bodies of the Communards – the very same bourgeoisie who had only just capitulated pitifully to the Prussians and surrendered the nation's capital to the foreign enemy, only to take to their heels themselves like the ultimate coward! But against the badly armed and starving Parisian proletarians, against their defenseless wives and children – how the manly courage of the little sons of the bourgeoisie, of the 'golden youth,' and of the officers flamed up again! How the courage of these sons of Mars who had broken down before the foreign enemy spent itself in bestial cruelties against the defenseless, against prisoners, and the fallen!

'Order reigns in Warsaw!' – 'Order reigns in Paris!' – 'Order reigns in Berlin!' And so run the reports of the guardians of 'order' every half-century, from one center of the world-historical struggle to another. And the rejoicing 'victors' do not notice that an 'order' which must be periodically maintained by bloody butchery is steadily approaching its historical destiny, its doom.

What was this recent 'Spartacus Week' in Berlin? What has it brought? What does it teach us? Still in the midst of the struggle and the victory cries of the counterrevolution, the revolutionary proletarians have to give an account of what has happened; they must measure the events and their results on the great scale of history. The revolution has no time to lose, it storms onward – past still open graves, past 'victories' and 'defeats' toward its great goals. To follow lucidly its principles and its paths is the first task of the fighters for international socialism.

Was an ultimate victory of the revolutionary proletariat to be expected in this conflict, or the overthrow of the Ebert-Scheidemann [government] and establishment of a socialist dictatorship? Definitely not, if all the decisive factors in this issue are taken into careful consideration. The sore spot in the revolutionary cause at this moment – the political immaturity of the masses of soldiers who, even now, are still letting themselves be misused by their officers for hostile, counterrevolutionary purposes – is alone already proof that a lasting victory of the revolution was not possible in this encounter. On the other hand, this immaturity of the military is itself but a symptom of the general immaturity of the German revolution.

The open country, from which a large percentage of the common soldiers come, is still hardly touched by the revolution, the same as always. So far, Berlin is as good as isolated from the rest of the country. Of course, there are revolutionary centers in the provinces – in the Rhineland, on the northern seaboard, in Brunswick, Saxony, and Württemberg – that are heart and soul on the side of the Berlin proletariat. Still what is lacking first of all is the immediate coordination of the march forward, the direct community of action, which would make the thrust and the willingness to fight of the Berlin working class incomparably more effective. Furthermore – and this is but the deeper cause of that political immaturity of the revolution – the economic struggles, the actual volcanic fountain

which is continually feeding the revolutionary class struggle, are only in their infancy.

From all this it follows that at this moment a conclusive and lasting victory could not be expected. Was the struggle of the last week therefore a 'mistake'? Yes, if it were in fact a matter of a deliberate 'attack' or a so-called 'putsch'! But what was the starting point for the last week of fighting? The same as in all previous cases, the same as on December 6 and December 24: a brutal provocation by the government! Just as before, in the case of the blood bath involving defenseless demonstrators on the Chausseestrasse, or in the butchery of the sailors, likewise this time the cause of all subsequent events was the assault on the Berlin police headquarters. The revolution does not operate voluntaristically, in an open field, according to a cunning plan laid out by 'strategists.' Its opponents too have initiative; in fact, as a rule, they exercise it much more than the revolution itself. Faced with the shameless provocation of the Ebert-Scheidemanns, the revolutionary working class was forced to take up arms. Yes, it was a matter of honor for the revolution to repel the attack immediately and with all due energy, lest the counterrevolution be encouraged to advance further, and lest the revolutionary ranks of the proletariat and the moral credit of the German revolution in the International be shaken.

Immediate resistance came forth spontaneously from the masses of Berlin with such an obvious energy that from the very beginning the moral victory was on the side of the 'street.'

Now it is an internal law of life of the revolution never to stand still in inaction, in passivity, once a step has been taken. The best parry is a forceful blow. Now more than ever this elementary rule of all struggles governs each step of the revolution. It goes without saying, and it testifies to the sound instinct and fresh internal strength of the Berlin proletariat, that it was not appeased by the reinstatement of Eichhorn, that it spontaneously proceeded to occupy other outposts of the counterrevolution's power: the bourgeois press, the semi-official news agencies, the Vorwärts. All these measures resulted from the people's instinctive recognition that, for its part, the counterrevolution would not rest with the defeat it had suffered, but rather would be bent on a general test of strength.

Here, too, we stand before one of the great historical laws of revolution against which are dashed to pieces all the sophistries and the pseudo-science of those little 'revolutionaries' of the USPD brand who, in every fight, look only for pretexts for retreating. As soon as the fundamental problem of the revolution has been clearly posed – and in this revolution it is to overthrow the Ebert-Scheidemann regime, the first obstacle to the triumph of socialism – then this problem will recur repeatedly as a pressing need of the moment, and each individual episode of the struggle will broach the problem in its entirety with the fatality of a natural law, however unprepared the revolution may be for its solution, however unripe the situation may still be. 'Down with Ebert and Scheidemann!' – this slogan is inevitably heard in every revolutionary crisis as the single formula summing up all partial conflicts, thereby automatically, by its own internal, objective logic, propelling each episode of the struggle to the extreme, whether one wants it or not. From this contradiction between the increasing gravity of the task and the lack of the preconditions for its solution it follows, in an initial phase of the revolutionary development, that the individual fights of the revolution formally end with a defeat. But revolution is the only form of 'war' – this, too, is its particular life principle – in which the final victory can be prepared only by a series of 'defeats'!

What does the whole history of modern revolutions and of socialism show us? The first flare-up of the class struggle in Europe – the revolt of the silk weavers of Lyons in 1831 – ended with a severe defeat. The Chartist movement in England – with a defeat. The rebellion of the Parisian proletariat in the June days of 1848 ended with a crushing defeat. The Paris Commune ended with a dreadful defeat. The whole path of socialism, as far as revolutionary struggles are concerned, is paved with sheer defeats.

And yet, this same history leads step by step, irresistibly, to the ultimate victory! Where would we be today without those 'defeats' from which we have drawn historical experience, knowledge, power, idealism! Today, where we stand directly before the final battle of the proletarian class struggle, we are standing on precisely those defeats, not a one of which we could do without, and each of which is a part of our strength and clarity of purpose.



Armed workers behind newspaper rolls at the barricade fight, Schützenstraße Berlin 11 January 1919,
© bpk/Kunstbibliothek, SMB, Photothek Willy Römer/Willy Römer

In this respect, revolutionary struggles are the direct opposite of parliamentary struggles. In the course of four decades we have had nothing but parliamentary 'victories' in Germany, we have advanced directly from victory to victory. And with the great test of history on August 4, 1914, the result was: a devastating political and moral defeat, an unprecedented debacle, an unparalleled bankruptcy. Revolutions have brought us nothing but defeat till now, but these unavoidable defeats are only heaping guarantee upon guarantee of the coming final triumph.

On one condition, of course! The question arises, under which circumstances each respective defeat was suffered: whether it resulted from the forward-storming energy of the masses being dashed against the barrier of the lack of maturity of the historical presuppositions, or, on the other hand, whether it resulted from the revolutionary action itself being paralyzed by incompleteness, vacillation, and inner frailties. Classic examples for both cases are, on the one hand, the French February Revolution, and the German March Revolution on the other. The courageous action of the Parisian proletariat in 1848 has become the living source of class energy for the entire international proletariat. The deplorable facts of the German March Revolution [1848] have clung to the whole development of modern Germany like a ball and chain. In the particular history of official German Social Democracy, they have produced after-effects well into the most recent incidents of the German revolution – and into the dramatic crisis we just experienced.

How does the defeat in this so-called Spartacus Week appear in light of the above historical question? Was it a defeat due to raging revolutionary energy and a situation that was insufficiently ripe, or rather due to frailties and halfway undertakings?

Both! The divided character of this crisis, the contradiction between the vigorous, resolute, aggressive showing of the people of Berlin and the indecision, timidity, and inadequacy of the Berlin leadership is the particular characteristic of this latest episode.

The leadership failed. But the leadership can and must be created anew by the masses and out of the masses. The masses are the crucial factor; they are the rock on which the ultimate victory of the revolution

will be built. The masses were up to the task. They fashioned this 'defeat' into a part of those historical defeats which constitute the pride and power of international socialism. And that is why this 'defeat' is the seed of the future triumph.

'Order reigns in Berlin!' You stupid lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand. The revolution will 'raise itself up again clashing,' and to your horror it will proclaim to the sound of trumpets:

I was, I am, I shall be.⁵

Luxemburg, Rosa, 1917: Order Reigns in Berlin, in: Hudis, Peter/Anderson, Kevin B. (Ed.): The Rosa Luxemburg Reader, New York 2004, 373–378

Image, p. 44: Guards of the Volksmarindivision in front of the castle portal, Berlin, 24 December 1918, © bpk/Kunstabibliothek, SMB, Photothek Willy Römer/Willy Römer

1 A reference to the crushing of the Polish insurrection of 1830–31 by the Russian General Ivan Fyodorovich Paskiewitsch (1782–1856). His troops massacred thousands of freedom fighters upon entering Warsaw in 1831. In 1849 Paskiewitsch, also the Commander in Chief of the Russian Army, crushed the Hungarian Revolution, thus bringing to an end the revolutions begun across Europe in 1848.

2 On January 13, 1919, the Ebert-Scheidemann government sent troops against supporters of the Spartacus League who had occupied the headquarters of Vorwärts. The troops' victory over the revolutionaries marked the beginning of the end of the Spartacus uprising.

3 German General von Emmich (d. 1915) was Commanding General of the 10th Army Corps, which carried out the bloody siege of Liège, Belgium, in August 1914.

4 Gustav Noske (1868–1946), a former furniture worker, was right wing SPD member who was a specialist on military affairs before World War I. He became Defence Minister of the Ebert-Scheidemann government in 1918 and was responsible for the bloody suppression of the Spartacus uprising and also allowed the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

5 'Raise itself up against clashing' is a line from the poem Abschiedswort (a Word of Farewell) by Friedrich Freiligrath a close friend of Marx. Marx published it in the final issue of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung after the defeat of the 1848 revolution; the entire issue was printed in red ink. 'I was, I am, I shall be' is a line from Freiligrath's poem Die Revolution, written in 1851.

REVOLUTIONARY REALPOLITIK

MICHAEL BRIE | MARIO CANDEIAS

REVOLUTIONARY REALPOLITIK I

MICHAEL BRIE

An agonising contradiction drives many people on the Left; they know that a fundamental transformation of our societies is necessary, indeed, indispensable because of a lack of basic justice. The capitalist growth machine is taking us towards an ecological disaster barring billions of people from enjoying a life in dignity, the most life-defining questions are not decided in a democratic way, people are living their lives as illegal immigrants and wars destroy entire societies. In real terms there is very little they can do. In fact, even in the lives of Germany's most radical *Autonome* there are *reformist* aspects, they accept compromises (at work, when shopping or on holiday) that are diametrically opposed to their declared objectives. Trade unionists know all too well that only a fundamental transformation of society can ever promise to secure good

work and better lives permanently, yet all they can do is hope for progress within the existing structures – if at all. Left-wing parties write socialism into their manifestos, yet in government are acting primarily in administering the status quo in a more or less better way within the conditions of fierce competition of cities and regions for capital and high skilled labour force. The revolutionary break with the structures of property and power, with the whole mode of social development seems vitally important, and nevertheless only agonisingly little is possible in reality and often even reverses into the opposite. This even applied to the countries where revolutionary rupture occurred, in the Soviet-style *real socialist* countries.

THE TERM AS USED BY ROSA LUXEMBURG

Rosa Luxemburg herself coined the formulation 'revolutionary Realpolitik'

(1903, 373) featured in an article for *Vorwärts*, the SPD's official newspaper, on March 14 1903 although it was not attributed to her. It was on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. She never used this term again and the term played no further role in left debate of the time.

By linking revolution, on the one hand, with *realpolitik* on the other, Rosa Luxemburg intended to draw a conclusion from the discussions within the German social democratic movement, which had been taking place since 1896 under the heading of social reform or revolution -, known as the 'revisionism debate'. This occurred within the context of the real contradictions within the social democratic movement and left-wing politics at the time. Towards the end of the 19th century, capitalism and the German Empire appeared to have stabilised. After the abrogation of the Anti-Socialist Laws, the SPD had returned to working on a legal footing. The party subsequently enjoyed immense parliamentary success (around a third of Reichstag MPs were SPD in 1914), a majority, however, was not on the horizon. A number of social reforms were implemented which Eduard Bernstein and others hoped could lead to the introduction of elements of socialism, planning, social security and public ownership: 'In the advanced countries we stand at the eve if not of the dictatorship certainly of a very substantial influence of the working class, respectively the parties that represent

them, it is therefore certainly not a waste of time to take stock of the intellectual tools at our hands with which we march into this era.' (Bernstein 1897, 165)

From the outset, Luxemburg believed that it was wrong to oppose reform and revolution. She wrote that, thanks to Marx, 'The working class has managed for the first time to transform the idea of socialism as the ultimate aim into daily politics' divisional coins and to elevate the everyday political detail work to the big idea's executive tool. There was bourgeois politics led by workers and there was revolutionary socialism before Marx. But only since Marx and through Marx has a socialist working class-politics existed that is at the same time and in the fullest meaning of both words revolutionary *realpolitik*'. (Luxemburg 1903, 373) She rejected separating reform-oriented *realpolitik* in everyday life under the German Empire and waiting for the '*Kladderradatsch*' (August Bebel) and revolutionary breakdown. The Russian revolution of 1905, which firmly took hold in her home country of, Tsarist-occupied Poland as well, provided her with new motivation. In 1906 Luxemburg wrote from Warsaw, 'The revolution is splendid. All else is bilge.' (Luxemburg 1906a)

Based on this experience, she seeks to organically fuse the direct struggles in defence of the interests of workers and suppressed regions of the world and a revolutionary transformation of society. As Frigga Haug writes: 'Within this context,

Rosa Luxemburg gives us a lesson in the art of creating linkages, dissenting and above all – self-criticism.’ (Haug 2009, 21) Right up to the founding of the KPD at the turn of the year 1918/19 she emphasized, opposed to those who insisted on boycotting national assembly elections: ‘they understand: either machine guns or parliamentarism. Our aim is a slightly refined radicalism. Not the coarse either or.’ (Luxemburg 1918a, 483)

Luxemburg seeks to combine reform, revolution and *realpolitik* in a different way to both the reformists and Lenin. Unlike Bernstein and others, Lenin threw his weight completely behind revolution. Yet all of them agreed, as did many other social democrats at the time, that the right consciousness, which in Lenin’s case was a ‘revolutionary’ consciousness, needed to be instilled in the masses of workers. This was politics on behalf of others. Workers were mainly a means to the end of their own liberation under the leadership of either a reform-oriented or revolutionary party. For Luxemburg, however, the 1905 revolution primarily highlighted one fact: ‘The living matter of world history, even in the presence of Social Democracy; and only if there is blood circulation between the organised nucleus and the popular masses, only if one heartbeat vitalises the two, can Social Democracy prove that it is capable of great historical deeds.’ (1913, 252) In *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906b) she summarised these

insights. Only a form of politics based on the actions of people, which is propelled by them, in which especially they are always experimenting with new forms and content, learn and draw their own conclusions, establish their own forms of organisation and demolish outdated ones can be revolutionary *realpolitik*. For her, a left-wing party and its leadership were valuable in as much as they support self-organisation and empowerment and encourage people to move forward when the time is right. She vehemently opposed the Bolshevik’s suppression of political freedoms because the *elimination of democracy*, ‘Stops up the very living source from which alone can come correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.’ (Luxemburg 1918b, 302)

IMPORTANCE TODAY

Over the course of the past 100 years, the Left has gained a lot of experience with revolutionary *realpolitik*. We could name the attempts for a unified or popular front during the 1920s and 1930s for a left historic block by the Italian Communist Party, for left-wing projects of transformation such as in Spain between 1936 and 1939, or Unidad Popular in Chile from 1970 to 1973, or most recently in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. Revolutionary *realpolitik* however also includes projects of immediate

self-organisation of workers in factories and companies (from Spain to Argentina), cooperatives or participatory budgeting first tried in Porto Alegre (Brazil). Finally, this list should also include approaches directed at new modes of production, exchange or living. These efforts include the housing projects in Red Vienna or in the Soviet Union following the First World War, yet also the communes of the 1968 movement, third world shops and peer-to-peer production.

Revolutionary realpolitik, however, is more than simply the sum of a set of projects. We should only talk about revolutionary Realpolitik, if actors consciously and purposefully work in such a way that such projects converge into a broader movement which takes the perspective of the disadvantaged, threatened and excluded; a movement, which would seek to implement its projects allied with a supportive middle class, have an anti-hegemonic orientation, wants to establish the greatest possible degree of self-organisation for those affected and endeavours to expand open spaces and democratic participation, to flexibly combine diverse violence-free (or in certain cases low-level violence) forms, which exploit contradictions within the ruling bloc and so forth. Such a politics would strive to strengthen tendencies in current society that transcend capitalism. It seeks out points of rupture capable of rendering such transformations irreversibly 'Towards a deeper

transformation of all of society' (Candeias in this text). Within this context, Joachim Hirsch (2005, 232) talks of *radical reformism* that transforms the relations of power in society and 'consciously opposes and transcends capitalist social modes'.

Structurally, left-wing politics is characterised by the antinomy of a demand for a change of system and the fight for reforms. Whether actors are capable of developing a revolutionary realpolitik depends on their capacity to find mutually supportive forms of handling these contradictions and adopt progressive solutions (cf Brie 2009). The contradiction between the radical, the revolutionary claim to transform all of society into a real life within the 'true', and work in the here and now cannot be *resolved*, it can only be worked on – individually, jointly with others, with initiatives, movements, in social organisations, through specific projects and through solidarity. Revolutionary realpolitik is practical politics specifically, with transformation-oriented objectives and means.

REVOLUTIONARY REALPOLITIK II **MARIO CANDEIAS**

Left-wing movements, groups and parties are divided regarding the question as to whether capitalism can be reformed or needs to be combatted in principle. However, this is a false set of alternatives. There can be no leap into *something completely different*. Strategies of transformation always begin with reform.

Whether they pave a way into a different society, as well as the relationship between short and long term perspectives, always has to be newly defined. Reform and revolution, as Rosa Luxemburg wrote, are not 'different methods', but 'different factors in the development' that mutually 'condition and complement each other, and are at the same time reciprocally exclusive, as are the north and south poles, the bourgeoisie and proletariat.' (1899, 89)

For many people on the Left, capitalism is a system based on exploitation, war, pauperisation and environmental destruction. It is a system that cannot be reformed, not at least in any meaningful way. All too often reforms have been used to multiply strategies of exploitation, water them down or foist the burden of violent relations of power on to other global regions and peoples. The only alternative therefore would be revolutionary transformation, even if the power relations contradict such an option.

Others point out that in the past socialist revolutions have either failed, brought about more repressive state socialist systems, or mutated into tyranny. Some are finding it hard to even conceive of an alternative. All too often, left-wing counter models for society have proven ineffectual, and the innovative dynamics of capitalism to quash alternatives and modernise leaves too strong an impression. Overcoming the capitalist mode of production and bourgeois rule seems a futile task.

THE LIMITS OF REFORMISM

Capitalism comes in different guises. In unfavourable conditions, reforms at least always served to improve the immediate situation of the exploited, subjugated and oppressed. In more favourable conditions, they allowed the Left to gain ground, expand and secure its scope for action. As with every reform, hard-won social advances such as limits to working time, salary increases, social security, ecological modernisation and progressive democratisation are fragile and innately contradictory compromises. They are the product of social struggles which could subsequently be integrated into the capitalist dynamic. A slowing of accumulation or a shift in the power relations threaten these achievements. Far-reaching measures fail if they reduce the profit rate, cost capital too much or threaten its power. Struggling for reforms is absolutely necessary, yet this struggle is limited to a pre-defined space within a framework which is compatible with the capitalist logic of exploitation. 'That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place and in contradistinction* to the conquest of political power and social revolution' limit themselves to 'the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of suppression of capitalism itself.' (Luxemburg 1899, 90).

There is no alternative to a struggle to limit capitalism's socially and environmentally destructive dynamics – however, such struggles have limits: in line with the thinking of the constitutional



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oil on canvas, 110 x 90 cm

theorist Nicos Poulantzas, the bourgeois state should be understood as a *condensation of societal power relations* which means that it can be reformed. It must however fulfil two functions: one general and one specific. The general function consists in securing social

cohesion in a society split into classes. Its specific function is to ensure the overall conditions for reproduction of capital accumulation (which provides its basis of existence through taxation). These functions exert limitations on reforms *within* capitalism. As soon as one function is no longer given, the state loses its legitimacy and viability.

The situation is similar to the limitations of regulating the market. Whilst the market is always politically created, it cannot be regulated at will, in other words significantly limited in its negative effects, without at the same time losing its ability to function. Likewise, the function of capital is not based merely on the innovative and efficient (re-)combination of labour power, means of production and resources, but also on the production of a *growing* surplus value, i.e. exploitation, and *continuous* accumulation, i.e. growth. If one of the two is limited, capital loses its basis of existence and therefore also its *innovative* moments. There is a contradiction between capitalist production and ecology and there are limitations to the principle of the welfare state in capitalism. Any left-wing politics has to analyse how to develop policies within these limitations, overcome these limitations and liberate and re-organise the *innovative* moments from the form of capital.

TRANSFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES

A realistic politics of the day ‘that only sets itself achievable goals that it pursues to obtain by the most effective means in the shortest time’ (Luxemburg 1903, 373) therefore falls short of the objective. What may appear unrealistic in daily politics is actually necessary from the point of view of the ‘historical tendency of development’ of a crisis-driven capitalism which always calls into question again all social advances, as Luxemburg writes in

her article on Karl Marx (ibid.). However, system-hopping is not possible. There is therefore a need for transformative steps that can be implemented straight away, which immediately improve conditions for individual people. Such instant measures at the same time need to provide a perspective and indicate the next steps towards a deeper transformation of all of society.

Revolutionary realpolitik according to Rosa Luxemburg solves the false contradiction between reform and revolution, or makes it possible to work with contradictions. *Revolutionary* refers to the sweeping, transformational form of a policy that gets to the root of a problem, and not so much the violent turning point of a revolutionary seizing of power. To wish for or talk oneself into such a point is not possible. Concentrating on a rupture would mean becoming politically incapable of acting, condemning yourself to *revolutionary waiting*. What appears radical is then no longer good for intervention.

Luxemburg’s reference to realism reinforces this: acting in full awareness of the social power relations, but within the perspective of their transformation; in connection with the realities and contradictions through which we all have to navigate, and the concerns and everyday interests of each individual; connecting to the individual interests and passions, but re-formulating them – ethically politically, as Gramsci writes – so that the immediate individual interests of the

diverse groups (still isolated from each other) and class factions can be overcome and generalised into the interests of other groups and class factions. The aim is to develop a perspective of transformation in such a way that it goes ‘in all the parts of its endeavours beyond the bounds of the existing order in which it operates’ – this is how Rosa Luxemburg describes the dialectics of revolutionary realpolitik (ibid.).

This is about the bigger picture, the shared control over the immediate living conditions and the shaping of futures. This is more than a desirable long-term objective. Rather, such a political compass prevents a return to corporatist, i.e. narrow group interests. Struggles or individual reforms have to be anchored within the perspective of a fundamental transformation of society, otherwise activists are ultimately threatened by even greater subjugation, namely that their individual interests become integrated into the dominant bloc in the form of compromises. The overall context of diverse emancipatory demands can always again be parcelled ‘from above’, to disarticulate social issues and isolate social groups.

A number of anti-systemic demands may protect against appropriation, yet this comes at the expense of an isolated, marginal position which cannot be connected. It requires a positive, transformational and integrating project that begins with reforms within capitalism and gives them a direction – and is capable

of conceiving of and bringing about *ruptures* within the existing system. The protagonist of such a process can only be a participation-oriented Left with the firm objective of transforming society that empowers individuals to take control of the rudder of their own history.

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ROWING AGAINST THE CURRENT

TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH ROSA LUXEMBURG

MIRIAM PIESCHKE

One of the many iconic images we have of Rosa Luxemburg depicts her at the SPD Party School, where she began to teach in 1907. Luxemburg stands on the left, apart from her there are only very few other women in the picture. Unlike her friend Clara Zetkin, a trained teacher, Rosa Luxemburg had no pedagogical background. Yet, as her texts quickly reveal, it was not only her knowledge and analytical acumen that qualified her for the job: it was her capacity to explain contexts and complex issues. This makes reading Rosa Luxemburg's texts a delight even today. She develops an idea, presents her arguments and dissects counter arguments. Her ability to get to the heart of complicated questions coupled with her wit meant she was an inspiring speaker, a highly influential journalist and probably also a good teacher. To many she remains a role model, whether

it's for her life, her stance or her writing. To what extent can she also be a reference point for political education? Can her writings serve as a basis for guiding principles of education?

LEARNING BY TEACHING

'While we teach, we learn.' Originally from the Roman philosopher Seneca, this quote is often attributed to Rosa Luxemburg. Initially hesitant to accept the job at the Party School, the minute she started teaching, she became enthusiastic and praised the vibrant atmosphere, eagerness for debate and the enthusiasm of students. In her biography of Rosa Luxemburg, Annelies Laschitza (1996, 292) writes that the students praised her teaching qualities although they also said that she was very demanding: 'She always demanded intensive self-study. She thought it

right not to teach in the afternoon to give students time to think about the morning lecture, go over their notes and read texts and books. These demands made Rosa Luxemburg as popular as she was feared.' Questions were a key part in her method of teaching, she would ask students questions and from their answers immediately derive new questions. Instead of simply testing her students' knowledge, she wanted them to think and in her lectures highlighted the salient points: 'Rosa Luxemburg never taught pure economic history, her lectures always included political events, ethnological and social theoretical aspects, a specific region's art and literature during a particular development phase. This way she also made new discoveries for herself.' (ibid., 290f)

Luxemburg herself therefore traced her chief work *The Accumulation of Capital* directly back to her teaching. In its foreword, she describes her 'unexpected difficulty' in attempting to write a 'popularization of Marxian economic theory' (Luxemburg 1913). 'On closer examination, I came to the insight that this was not merely a question of presentation, but that there was a problem that was theoretically bound up with the content of the second volume of Marx's *Capital*, and which simultaneously has a bearing on the practice of contemporary imperialist politics and its economic roots.' (Ibid.) And so the introductory

textbook remained unfinished, because Luxemburg continued to investigate her discovery. Teaching therefore significantly contributed to her process of understanding, leading to her theory of accumulation, a milestone of her thinking.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER: THE MASSES AND LEADERS

Luxemburg is perhaps best known for her reflections on the relationship between the masses and their leaders in the class struggle, movements and socialist parties. Her participation in the Russian Revolution 1905 to 1907 induced her to set out her arguments in favour of the mass strike in *The Mass Strike*, which according to her is not a *single* strike that can be called out by a party or union leadership (Luxemburg 1906, 118). Rather, it is a *period* of political and economic struggles which merge into each other, flare up and subside, are interdependent, reinforce or weaken each other. She was horrified by the way in which German union and party leaders believed they could not order a mass strike by decree, like whipping out some kind of pocket-knife. She called this 'abstract mental gymnastics' (ibid.) and was delighted that the German proletariat masses were 'applying themselves to this new problem with such keen interest' due to their 'sound revolutionary instinct and to the quick intelligence of the mass [...], in spite of the obstinate

resistance of their trade-union leaders' (ibid.). She did not presume here that the proletariat would understand everything required automatically due to its class position. Rather, she expected from the social democratic and union leadership the capacity to react both to this instinct and the specific development of events and take up the role as much of student as also of teacher, of leader and follower. In the case of Russia, this meant clarifying to the working class the 'international significance of the revolution' and preparing them for the 'the role and the tasks of the masses in the coming struggles' (ibid.). Luxemburg therefore called for learning from specific situations, she was concerned as much with the object *as with* the mode of gaining knowledge. 'Only in this form will the discussion on the mass strike lead to the widening of the intellectual horizon of the proletariat, to the sharpening of their way of thinking, and to the steeling of their energy.' (ibid.) For Rosa Luxemburg, revolutionary Russia made the case for a reciprocal relationship between the leadership and the masses in specific struggles. In some instances, events had pushed the local branches of the social democratic party and unions to take the leadership and overcome the fragmentation of the masses. In other cases, 'the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep pace with the spontaneous risings of the masses; the leaders scarcely had time to formulate

the watchwords of the onrushing crowd of the proletariat' (ibid., 128). This was due to the fact that both the leaders and the masses could only recognise the revolution as it unfolded (see ibid., 129). Leadership therefore meant: 'To give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at its every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat which is already released and active, will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the social democrats are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness and that they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it – that is the most important task of the directing body in a period of mass strikes.' (ibid., 149) Luxemburg describes the revolution as a process of learning in which the role of leadership is also limited by the fact that only certain circumstances will allow events to take their course that cannot be ordered by leaders even if they wanted to. From her observations and experiences of the Russian Revolution, Luxemburg developed her specific understanding of leadership that emphasises the two aspects of learning and teaching: 'During the revolution it is extremely difficult for any directing organ of the proletarian movement to foresee and to calculate which occasions and factors can lead to explosions and which cannot. Here

also initiative and direction do not consist in issuing commands according to one's inclinations, but in the most adroit adaptability to the given situation, and the closest possible contact with the mood of the masses.' (ibid., 148) This is what she calls the element of spontaneity: 'The revolution, even when the proletariat, with the social democrats at their head, appear in the leading role, is not a manoeuvre of the proletariat in the open field, but a fight in the midst of the incessant crashing, displacing and crumbling of the social foundation. In short, in the mass strikes in Russia the element of spontaneity plays such a predominant part, not because the Russian proletariat are "uneducated," but because revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them' (ibid.) Luxemburg's analysis is therefore not based on a single historical event; indeed she would later deepen her analysis of the relationship between masses and leaders in her writings on the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the German Revolution 1918 (cf. „Order reigns in Berlin“ in this edition).

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Closely tied to her concepts of the relationship between masses and leadership her thinking contains a further pedagogic idea that emphasises the role of experience. Already in 1906 she demanded: 'Absolutism in Russia must be overthrown by the proletariat.

But in order to be able to overthrow it, the proletariat requires a high degree of political education, of class-consciousness and organisation. All these conditions cannot be fulfilled by pamphlets and leaflets, but only by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight, in the continuous course of the revolution.' (Luxemburg 1906, 130) Experience creates a mental sediment, the cultural growth of the proletariat and in this most 'precious' lies the 'inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle.' (ibid., 134).

With learning from experience, which she describes as essential, Luxemburg does not only refer to the experiences made during struggles, but also to those made in everyday life. This was behind her strong criticism of the restrictions imposed by the Bolsheviks on public life and discourse during the 1917 Russian Revolution: Luxemburg emphasised 'untrammelled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people' (1918, 302) as a necessary corrective element to the limitations and shortcomings of bourgeois-democratic institutions.¹ Unlike bourgeois society, the dictatorship of the proletariat depends on the political education and training of the entire 'mass of the people', as 'the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist.' (ibid., 304).

In the eyes of Rosa Luxemburg, this made the restrictions to the right of

assembly and freedom of the press so worthy of criticism. Public life in her view was the source of political experience, in particular in situations in which the political leadership can only advance tentatively, and through experimenting. As neither the leadership nor the masses are capable of knowing everything, they depend on learning from experience: 'It is the very giant tasks which the Bolsheviks have undertaken with courage and determination that demand the most intensive political training of the masses and the accumulation of experience', as only experience is 'capable of correcting and opening new ways.' (ibid., 305) Public life and collective learning were synonymous for Luxemburg: 'Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative new force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress. (ibid.) Under bourgeois social systems, the impoverishment of public life bolsters those in power, therefore what is crucial for a socialist society is that the entire mass of the people participate in public life and public control, otherwise 'the exchange of experiences remains only with the closed circle of the officials of the new regime.'

(ibid., 306). Luxemburg was convinced that a transformation of society is only possible through 'a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering, etc., etc.' (ibid.).

While the Bolsheviks justified coercive measures by referring to the political and tactical requirements of the revolution, according to Luxemburg these requirements can only be met by granting the greatest freedoms: 'Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins.' (ibid., 307)

LEARNING AS A FORM OF ORGANISING, ORGANISING AS A FORM OF LEARNING

Learning and political organising are one and the same to Luxemburg, interdependent and in need of each other: through collective reasoning people become able to act collectively, through collective struggle they gain new understanding and knowledge. She readily acknowledges the challenges presented by capitalist society's conditioning and disciplining of human action and thinking, which hampers emancipatory learning and action. Moreover, this is why traditional concepts of teaching and learning are so seductive: some define the content, the rest follow. Apparently this seems to lead to rapid results. However, as the experiences of real socialist societies painfully highlight, such results are no less built on sand than the bourgeois order itself. Once people have been systematically discouraged from contributing by thinking and critical analysis, an irreparable damage has been done. How can we create a process of learning for organising that overcomes obedience, instead of using it for own ends in the name of party discipline? To accomplish this, left-wing political education must be oriented regarding content, methodology and framework conditions in such a way that, it can go *beyond* the existing conditions *within* the existing conditions (Brie and Candeias in this edition). Collective learning on individual

conditions of being, insights regarding how one is as individual bound into and suffering from the dominant social conditions constitute a first important step in this regard. Such emancipatory learning requires space, time and patience and presents great challenges to all teachers that have to prepare and guide such scenarios.

In particular in the face of severe defeats, Luxemburg held on to her convictions. 'I was. I am. I will be!', was her approach to learning from defeats. This optimism is the least teachers should take from Luxemburg.

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1 Trotsky for example had justified the dissolution of the constituent assembly alleging that it only represented the pre-revolutionary majorities. Luxemburg opposed this assessment of the cumbersome nature of electorates with the corrective element of public debate by referring to historic examples (Luxemburg 1913).

'NO COWARDICE BEFORE THE FRIEND!'

HOW DO WE CRITIQUE REVOLUTIONS?

LUTZ BRANGSCH

'As a revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg was, of course, supportive of the Russian Revolution. Yet support without criticism, without a critique of the politics of Lenin and Trotsky, was cowardice for Luxemburg – cowardice before the friend.' (Schütrumpf 2006, 1001)

The debates about the relationship between Lenin and Luxemburg played a fundamental role for decades particularly within the communist strain of the Left. The relationship between the two can very justifiably be described as tense, yet they were also united in their struggle against the opportunism of right-wing social democracy and their desire for socialist revolution. While the views they shared are uncontroversial, the significance of the contradictions between their positions is deemed to be more diverse. Whereas in a letter to Clara Zetkin Paul Levi emphasised that Rosa Luxemburg's position was 'On certain questions – this cannot be denied –

Rosa was opposed to the Bolsheviks, and it is precisely these questions that the course of the Russian Revolution has brought to the fore, and – I believe – strikingly confirmed Rosa's conceptions.' (1921, 219), Zetkin viewed the fundamental character of these differences very differently.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LUXEMBURG AND LENIN

Lenin, in his spurious obituary to Luxemburg, highlighted the essential differences in their opinions from his perspective. For him, they were Luxemburg's 'mistakes' and whether they could be legitimate differences, i.e. the possibility that Luxemburg could be right, did not even cross his mind. He attributed the differences to specific facts: 'she was mistaken in 1903 in her appraisal of Menshevism; she was mistaken on the theory of the accumulation of capital; she

was mistaken in July 1914, when, together with Plekhanov, Vandervelde, Kautsky and others, she advocated unity between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; she was mistaken in what she wrote in prison in 1918 (she corrected most of these mistakes at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 after she was released). (Lenin 1922, 210) Each of these statements would require a separate article because, in hindsight, Lenin too was *mistaken* about many points. Broadly speaking the differences can be grouped into three blocks.

PARTY AND EMANCIPATION

The first issue is the potential on the part of the masses to emancipate themselves, the role of the party and party apparatus vis-à-vis the masses and party members, as well as the breadth of perspectives that can be allowed within a revolutionary party. Rosa Luxemburg never contradicted the need for a disciplined party that takes on a role as leader of the proletariat. However, the specific format such leadership should take was under discussion. With reference to the Russian experience, Lenin advocated a centralised party capable of flourishing underground. By contrast, Luxemburg developed her position against the backdrop of the leeway a Western-European bourgeois democracy afforded. She accepted Lenin's course for moments of intensified class struggle, she was however opposed to the idea that this party model was universally, in all historical

circumstances, the correct one. In this context her wariness of organisational splits needs to be considered too. She believed her place was where the masses were and they were in the large parties dominated by opportunists. Revolutionary ideas needed to take hold among the masses through confrontation with the opportunists. For her, this had to happen *within* the party, not in a confrontation between different social democratic parties. She therefore remained in the party, even after the SPD's historic failure in 1914 and only broke with the party in 1918 when the scope for debate within the party ceased to exist.

MARX'S LEGACY

Secondly, the differences in position related to their respective understanding of the Marxian legacy (c.f. Dellheim 2018). In 1920, Lenin (334) was still describing Luxemburg as the representative of an 'unfalsified Marxism'. United in their rejection of Second International's orthodoxy, they nonetheless stood for different interpretations. Luxemburg, more than Lenin, perceived the incomplete in Marx more clearly, as well as the approaches still requiring development. Lenin, in turn, highlighted the harmoniousness of Marx's concepts and why to him Luxemburg's critique in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) seemed outrageous.

REVOLUTION

Thirdly, Lenin and Luxemburg represented different stances regarding the relationship



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between strategy and tactics in revolutionary action. Luxemburg's critique of the Russian Revolution sharpened the focus on these differences. She never opposed the revolution, power to the councils or the dictatorship of the proletariat. She was however opposed to quite specific decisions and measures taken by the Bolsheviks that she believed threatened to discredit proletarian politics. Superficially, this was about how to deal with power. Lenin unconditionally subordinated tactical decisions to a strategy of seizing power. He saw the Bolsheviks or his fraction within the Bolsheviks as the legitimate representatives of the proletariat and was therefore convinced that the power of the Bolsheviks coincided with the dictatorship of the proletariat. One consequence of this view was that this dictatorship could therefore turn against the proletariat itself.

Luxemburg was conscious of the fact that the power of classes during revolutionary processes is not always consistent and can fluctuate. She however rejected a permanent dictatorship by the party or even by the party apparatus against the masses as this would undermine the idea of socialism.

CONCEIVING OF THE REVOLUTION IN A DIFFERENT WAY...

With her critique of Lenin, Luxemburg asks us to shift our perspective, to distance ourselves from the fascination of the *revolution* as an event, of immediate victory and to assign the events their place within the process of the self-liberation of the working class. Hers was a critique and self-critique of global social democratic policies of the time. In her view, three perspectives were important; '1. The past, to answer the question of why. 2. The Russian Revolution to understand its teachings. 3. The future to grasp the new situation created by the war and the opportunities it offers and tasks for socialism'. (Luxemburg 1918a, 1092)

Her focus was always on the failure of the German proletariat and Karl Kautsky's role as a symbol of the Second International. Her criticism of Lenin and Trotsky was always also a criticism of the state of international social democracy. She believed the problem was not the strength of the opponent but 'the proletariat, its immaturity, or rather the immaturity of its leaders, the

socialist parties' (Luxemburg 1918b, 373). Accordingly she summed up the Bolsheviks' actions in the following terms: 'Bolshevism has become a cue for practical revolutionary socialism, for all working class attempts to conquer power. Having ripped open a social abyss in the heart of bourgeois society, internationally deepening and escalating class antagonisms, herein lies the historic achievement of Bolshevism. This achievement, within the larger historic context, undoes as unsubstantial all specific errors and mistakes of Bolshevism.' (Ibid., 371)

It is this dialectic of failure (of the international proletariat) and the merit of 'escalation' (by the Bolsheviks) that would define Luxemburg's analytical work from January 1918 onwards. In September she wrote, 'Any socialist party that comes to power in Russia today must pursue the wrong tactics so long as it, as part of the international proletarian army, is left in the lurch by the main body of this army. (Luxemburg 1918c, 391) She therefore raises the question as to how *the main body of the army* that is the international working class, could be won over, and revealed her doubts that the path taken by Lenin and Trotsky could achieve this objective.

Lenin, in turn, did not honestly ask himself this question. He hoped that the escalating contradictions and the diligent work of the party would drive the masses into Bolshevism's arms. His assumption

was not entirely wrong but this was not the way to achieve lasting effects.

... AND 'DOING' THE REVOLUTION IN A DIFFERENT WAY

Two points expose the problems related to the different approaches of Luxemburg and Lenin in their critique of revolutionary action. The first concerns the relationship between the general and the specific. 'The danger begins only when they [the Bolsheviks] make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them [the proletariat] by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics.' (Luxemburg 1918d, 309) Caught up in the praxis of momentary circumstances, Lenin could only interpret Luxemburg's criticism as an attack. On the one hand, he simply did not understand her (as for that matter was the case with the majority of readers). He followed other epistemological principles. Due to its isolated nature, he placed the emergence of Soviet power outside of the revolutionary process – and, although he occasionally said the opposite – conceived of it as the determinant of the general, i.e. the power of the Bolsheviks became the criterion for the liberation of the working class.

The events unfolded as Luxemburg had feared. As early as March 1919, the *Platform of the Communist International* was adopted in which no trace could be found of Luxemburg's differentiated

considerations (c.f. Hedeler/Vatlin 2008, 202ff). During the KPD's founding congress she had – based on specific German conditions – presented a different form of dictatorship of the proletariat and a different focus for the struggles. She had argued that the initial period of this revolution 'remained exclusively political. We must be fully conscious of this. This explains the uncertain character, the inadequacy, the half-heartedness, the aimlessness of this revolution.' (Luxemburg 1918/19, 367f). She emphasised the role of the councils in their original function as the self-organisation of the masses – at a time when in Russia they had already become party organs. In her view, the workers' and soldiers' councils had to be strengthened, not as party entities but as places of learning for the masses (cf. Pieschke in this edition). Luxemburg also set different priorities with regard to the format struggles should take: 'Socialism will not and cannot be created by decrees; nor can it be established by any government, however socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there they must be broken. Only that is socialism, and only thus can socialism be created. What is the external form of struggle for socialism? It is the strike.' (ibid., 368) Emphasising the character of the revolution which is necessarily democratic, Luxemburg argued that the National Assembly was as

much a 'counterrevolutionary bulwark' as an instrument, to 'deepen the intellectual revolutionisation of the masses' (ibid.).

A second reason for Luxemburg's and Lenin's diverging assessments of revolutionary action concerns the requirements in the time *before*, the question of preparatory policies. This is probably the most relevant point of these controversies. While Luxemburg traces the general aspects of the revolution to ultimately a single criterion, the proletariat's claim to emancipation and autonomous organisation, she also formulated demands for the left-wing parties of her time *before the revolution*. Here too, she drew on her controversies with leading SPD (and union) figures before 1914 on the one hand and Lenin on the other. Revolutions always take place at the *wrong* moment – how can such a *wrong* moment be transformed into the *right* moment?

Lenin in contrast, after 1918, put his bet completely on the triad terror against the capitalists and large farmers; education and occasional terror against the working masses and finally occasional terror and bribing of intellectuals and medium-scale farmers. Permanent civil war was the movement form of this type of politics. Conversely, the relationship sketched out by Luxemburg between a political and an economic struggle presupposed what she always demanded before and during the revolution: a *learning organisation* in today's terms.

DOES LUXEMBURG REVOKE HER CRITIQUE?

Luxemburg's comrade Adolf Warski, who was often referred to later, misunderstood the essence of Luxemburg's critique when he claimed that the manuscript 'The Russian Revolution' was 'a fragment of a resolved intellectual struggle by the author' (Warski 1922, 8). When analysing the manuscript for this text against her speeches at the KPD founding congress, it becomes evident that her critique of the revolution served to sharpen her theoretical and practical concepts for revolution. This concerns union policy, the role played by the councils and the national assembly, the relationship of political and economic struggle, the relationship between the masses and party as well as regarding the character of the party itself. In all of these points Luxemburg and her group stood diametrically opposed to the views held by the majority within the nascent KPD, inspired as they thought they were by the Bolsheviks.

Just before her death, she wrote: 'The masses are the crucial factor. They are the rock on which the ultimate victory of the revolution will be built.' (Luxemburg 1919, 378) She absolutely upheld her critique of Lenin's attempt to generalise the practice of replacing mass action by party action until her death. She was never willing to accept attempts to re-interpret the actions of a minority as the revolutionary action of a mass movement:

'for there is nothing so destructive for the revolution as illusions, whereas nothing is of greater use than clear, naked truth.'
(Luxemburg 1918/19)

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AUTHORS

LUTZ BRANGSCH is an economist and expert on democracy and the state at the Institute for Critical Social Analysis of Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. In addition, he has been engaged in the question of history and political education for a vibrant transformative Left for many years.

MICHAEL BRIE studied philosophy and is an expert for the theory and history of socialist transformation research at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Institute for Critical Social Analysis. He is a founding member of the LuXemburg Magazine.

MARIO CANDEIAS is the director of Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Institute for Critical Social Analysis and a further founding member of the LuXemburg Magazine.

DRUCILLA CORNELL Drucilla Cornell is a philosopher and feminist theorist and emerita Professor of Gender Studies, Literature and Political Science at Rutgers University.

ALEX DEMIROVIĆ studied philosophy and social sciences. In Germany he is known as one of the most vociferous left-wing intellectuals. He has taught at the universities of Frankfurt Main and Berlin, chaired the academic board of Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, and is a fellow at the Institute for Critical Social Analysis and founding member of the LuXemburg Magazine.

GAL HERTZ directs the 'Humanities in Conflict Zones' research project at the Minerva Humanities Center at Tel Aviv University. He received his PhD for his work on Karl Kraus and his research concentrates on modern German literature with a particular focus on the intersection of language, theatricality, violence and war.

MIRIAM PIESCHKE is a social scientist and civic educator. She currently works at the University of Magdeburg-Stendal in a subject scientific research project analysing right-wing populism. She is a fellow at the Institute for Critical Social Analysis at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung and member of the editorial board of the LuXemburg Magazine.

TOVE SOILAND is a historian and feminist philosopher. She teaches at universities in Switzerland, Austria and Germany focusing on feminist theory and political economy, as well as on the relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis.

INGAR SOLTY is an expert on peace and security policy at Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Institute for Critical Social Analysis.

UWE SONNENBERG is an academic project staff member for Revolutions at Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's history centre.

JÖRN SCHÜTRUMPF is an historian and heads up the foundation's research focus Rosa Luxemburg.