

FRANK JACOB (ED.)

# ROSA LUXEMBURG: PERIPHERY AND PERCEPTION



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## Rosa Luxemburg: Periphery and Perception



Frank Jacob (Ed.)

**Rosa Luxemburg:  
Periphery and Perception**



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Rosa Luxemburg: Periphery and Perception

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*For  
Ottokar Luban*



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# 1 Introduction

## The Actuality of Rosa Luxemburg

*Frank Jacob*

The 150th birthday of Rosa Luxemburg stimulated new research activities as much as the further publication of her writings in English and other languages.<sup>1</sup> Her writings have lost nothing of their actuality and still appeal to people around the world, although there seems to be a particular interest in Rosa Luxemburg in the Global South,<sup>2</sup> as some of the chapters in this volume highlight in some detail. The contributions collected and presented here are the extended presentations of an International Rosa Luxemburg Conference held at the Faculty of Social Science, Nord Universitet, Bodø, Norway in March 2023, co-organized by Nort Universitet, the International Rosa Luxemburg

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- 1 Recent works include Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schütrumpf (Eds.): *Rosa Luxemburg*, 2 vols., Marburg 2021; Frank Jacob: *Rosa Luxemburg. Ein Leben für die Revolution*, Leipzig 2021; Frank Jacob: *Rosa Luxemburg. Living and Thinking the Revolution*, Marburg 2021; Peter Hudis/Axel Fair-Schulz/William A. Pelz (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 3. *Political Writings 1. On Revolution, 1897–1905*, London 2022; Peter Hudis (Ed.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 4. *Political Writings 2. On Revolution (1906–1909)*, London 2023; Michael Löwy: *Rosa Luxemburg. The Incendiary Spark*, ed. by Paul Le Blanc, Chicago 2024. On the Chinese edition of Luxemburg's work, see the chapter by Xinwei Wu in this volume.
  - 2 See, for example, Jigisha Bhattacharya: *Tracing Rosa Luxemburg's Legacy. Economic and Political Debates within Contemporary India*, in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schütrumpf (Eds.): *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2. *Nachwirken*, Marburg 2021, pp. 17–52; Nguyen Hong Duc: *Rosa Luxemburg's Viewpoint on Democracy and Its Lessons for Practicing Grassroots Democracy in Vietnam Today*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 389–408; Hernán Ouviaña: *Reading Rosa Luxemburg in Latin America: From Her First Reception to Today's Popular Struggles*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 431–444; Hernán Ouviaña: *Rosa Luxemburgo e a reinvenção da política*, São Paulo 2021.

Society, and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. Scientists from all parts of the world met at this event and discussed the work, life, impact, and legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, and it was obvious that there seemed to be two main topics of special interest during the discussions. One was the periphery, comprising both Rosa Luxemburg's views on it and the periphery's views on her. The other topic was that of perception. The Polish socialist is still perceived in many different ways and is presented as an important political thinker, a progressive revolutionary, as well as a dangerous and radical mind, to name just a few perspectives on Luxemburg's legacy. This broad variety of interpretations of Luxemburg's life and work and how she was actually perceived outside of the European and global centers of the modern world is consequently the main focus of this anthology.

## Periphery

The first section deals with the periphery within Europe and, more importantly, with different geographical contexts of the Global South or spheres that exist(ed) outside of Immanuel Wallerstein's core<sup>3</sup> that were particularly important for the accumulation of capital, which Luxemburg also tried to explain in detail.<sup>4</sup> The first chapter by *Ankica Čakardić* deals with Rosa Luxemburg in Yugoslavia and shows how intellectuals in a socialist country outside of the Soviet bloc dealt with the Polish socialist and her writings, which were often particularly challenging for those who wanted to critically discuss the nature and future of socialism. That Luxemburg was always somehow problemat-

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3 On Wallerstein's theoretical approach and its particular value in the 21st century, see Frank Jacob (Ed.): *Wallerstein 2.0. Thinking and Applying World-Systems Theory in the 21st Century*, Bielefeld 2023.

4 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital (1913)*, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/index.htm>. Also see Rosa Rosa Gomes: *Rosa Luxemburg's Accumulation Theory and the SPD. A Peripheral Perspective*, in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schütrumpf (Eds.): *Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 1. Leben*, Marburg 2021, pp. 215–248.

ic from orthodox perspectives of and within the political left is shown by *Steinar Aas*, who discusses Luxemburg's position and role within the Norwegian Labor Movement, which was not only geographically peripheral but also politically quite different from other social democratic and socialist contexts in Europe.

After these two interesting and somewhat peripheral European perspectives, the other chapters of the first section move topically on to the Global South and present critical insights into the role Luxemburg played and still plays there today. First, *Selene Aldana Santana* and *Amada Vollbert Romero* contextualize Rosa Luxemburg in the Latin American periphery by providing a detailed analysis of her role and impact in Abya Yala. They show how the historical context and experiences of the region determine the role of the Polish socialist and revolutionary for modern-day protest formation and critical counter-proposals for a better society in the future. Afterward, *Alex Adamson* and *Rosa Rosa Gomes* focus their attention on Argentina and Brazil, respectively. While Adamson discusses the role of the feminist strike in South America's second-largest country, Gomes offers a Luxemburgian analysis of the preservation of cultural heritage in the Brazilian context. In the final chapter of the first section, *Xinwei Wu* offers a critical insight into the translation process of *The Complete Works* of Rosa Luxemburg into Chinese and explains the role the socialist intellectual plays in present-day China, another geographical and political context where an interest in Luxemburg's ideas seems to have increased in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Xinwei Wu: Rosa Luxemburg's Dialectics of Socialist Democracy and Its Enlightenment to China, in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schüttrumpf (Eds.): Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 2. Nachwirken, Marburg 2021, pp. 409–430.

## Perception

The anthology's second section focuses more on different historical and contemporary perceptions of Rosa Luxemburg. The first four chapters offer reflections on Luxemburg's political position and considerations about republican agitation or revolutions and how they were perceived by her contemporaries as well as other representatives of the left between the early 1900s and the Cold War. First, *Ben Lewis* discusses the relationship between the German Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD) and Luxemburg in 1910, with a special focus on the mass-strike debate. *David Guerrero* and *Andrea Pérez-Fernández* then emphasize Luxemburg's role as a "republican agitator" and show the extent to which she shaped German social democracy due to her activities and interventions. That Luxemburg's actuality appeals not only to social democrats or socialists these days but also to other representatives of a broader left is not surprising, as some of her thoughts were quite similar to those of others, in particular her ideas about revolution, freedom, and equality, which were shared by Emma Goldman, the famous Russian-American anarchist. In his chapter, *Frank Jacob* shows how far Goldman and Luxemburg had similar hopes and dreams about the power of revolutions to shape a better future. Although this does not mean Luxemburg was an anarchist, it shows that Luxemburg's perception as an important intellectual goes far beyond party or other demarcation lines.

Luxemburg's thoughts have not lost any of their actuality and can appeal to many people in quite different contexts. In his chapter, *Uli Schöler* emphasizes this from the perspective of SPD politician and German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who also had an interest in Luxemburg and her legacy. Brandt was one of those who accepted that there was something to learn from the famous revolutionary, although many other Germans might disagree in this regard. Nevertheless, the works of Rosa Luxemburg offer a rich variety of thoughts that can be useful in our globalized and hyper-capitalized world, and

*Ingo Schmidt's* chapter shows the interrelationship of economics, education, and experience and thereby explains the value of Luxemburg's writings for the formation of the working class.

Rosa Luxemburg was and still is, without any doubt, inspiring in many ways. The last two chapters highlight this, albeit from two quite different perspectives. First, *Gunnet Kaaf* shows how Luxemburg's works influenced Samir Amin, another theoretician who thought, wrote about, and contributed to world-systems theory as well as underdevelopment theory. Last but not least, *Julia Killet* analyzes how Luxemburg's life has been portrayed by German filmmakers and what inspired them to present the famous thinker and revolutionary to a broader audience.<sup>6</sup>

This anthology's contributions offer perspectives that already highlight the broad diversity of perspectives on Rosa Luxemburg, an undoubtedly inspiring example whose legacy must be considered more important than exclusively tied to the political left. Anyone willing to spend some time with her letters, articles, essays, and, of course, political writings will be able to realize the power of her texts beyond their rhetorical quality.<sup>7</sup> That these texts continue to inspire people around the globe is not surprising, but this is probably as much an expression of Luxemburg's skills as a writer as it is related to the fact that the problems she addressed have not yet been solved. We are still struggling with the consequences of hyper-capitalism and commodification, the exploitation of workers, the destruction of nature, and the inequalities that determine the daily lives of so many people who are suffering due to their gender identity, ethnic heritage, or personal beliefs. As long as these sorrows are part of our society(s), Luxem-

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6 See also Kathrin Nachtigall: Arbeiterfreundin, Intellektuelle, Märtyrerin: Charakterisierung Rosa Luxemburgs durchs Film-Szenenbild, in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schüttrumpf (Eds.): Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 1. Leben, Marburg 2021, pp. 315–350.

7 Dietmar Till: Klassenbewusstsein und Aufklärung: Zur Funktion sozialistischer Rhetorik bei Rosa Luxemburg, in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schüttrumpf (Eds.): Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 1. Leben, Marburg 2021, pp. 249–273.



burg will not lose her actuality. The world needs even more of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas and demands for a better future, one determined by freedom and equality, which can only be secured through a democratic form of socialism.

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**PART I**  
**PERIPHERY**



## 2 Walking on the Edges

Rosa Luxemburg in Yugoslavia

Ankica Čakardić

*“In Dalmatia today, you can still see a woman carrying a heavy load on her back with a strong man complacently riding his donkey alongside, puffing away at his pipe.”*

Rosa Luxemburg, *Introduction to Political Economy*<sup>1</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg is one of those authors who is often invoked under the most diverse circumstances. The same sentiment applies to the fact that she inspired many political organizations, yet no large-scale movement has ever been defined by her theoretical perspective.<sup>2</sup> Insofar as she is written about, a myth surrounding her personality is often created on the basis of several random episodes from her private and public life.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a variety of ideas are ascribed to her texts, and specific readings of her ideas and theories are often given in a personal tone. In one of his essays, Paul Le Blanc illustrated this phenomenon vividly:

“I have heard people describe Rosa Luxemburg essentially as a utopian radical-feminist or as a rigidly ‘Marxist’ anti-feminist. I have heard people talk about her – and quite positively – as if her thinking was compatible with Emma Goldman’s anarchism or Eduard Bernstein’s social democratic reformism or Deng Xiaoping’s bureau-

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1 Rosa Luxemburg: *Introduction to Political Economy*, in: Peter Hudis (Ed.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg I. Economic Writings 1*, London 2013, p. 123.

2 Peter Hudis: *Introduction. Luxemburg in Our Time*, in: John Peter Nettle: *Rosa Luxemburg. The Biography*, London/New York 2019, p. ix.

3 This paper is a shortened and slightly adapted version of Ankica Čakardić: *Rosa Luxemburg in Yugoslavia: A Fate of Five Footnotes*, in: Čakardić: *Like a Clap of Thunder. Three Essays on Rosa Luxemburg*, Belgrade 2019, pp. 83–106.

cratic state-capitalism. She is also very frequently cast in the role of Lenin's Most Magnificent Enemy in some cosmic morality play. ... Among some on the Left, on the other hand, she is criticised as a woolly-minded 'spontaneist' who does not understand the need for organization in the revolutionary struggle. Luxemburg was qualitatively different from, and more interesting than, any of this, and she deserves better from us."<sup>4</sup>

Sidestepping the intention of offering a more ambitious, comprehensive analysis of the representations of Rosa Luxemburg and her works in general, I would like to take this opportunity to analyze Luxemburg's presence in socialist Yugoslavia. More precisely, I will try to answer questions such as: Did her ideas form a serious point of reference in Yugoslavia in either a theoretical or political sense? How much was written about her and how? Were her works translated into Serbo-Croatian? I will not include the period after the 1990s, i. e., the breakup of Yugoslavia, as this task would be pointless due to decades of silence and the lack of a more serious interest in Luxemburg. This attempt to systematize the presence of Luxemburg and her works in Yugoslavia should be understood as just an intervention, a contribution to more serious future research on Rosa Luxemburg in Yugoslavia.<sup>5</sup> This undertaking is not merely a historical one but rather com-

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4 Paul Le Blanc: *Rosa Luxemburg and the Actuality of Revolution* (2019), online: <https://links.org.au/rosa-Luxemburg-and-actuality-revolution>.

5 While I will focus on just a few of the most accessible texts written about Rosa Luxemburg from 1945 in this essay, it is also worth drawing attention to some of the less accessible archival materials. It is interesting to note that many workers' and communist newspapers wrote obituaries just a few days after the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and also marked the anniversaries of the murders in the years that followed. Let me refer to a few examples from the earlier years in the period I researched from 1919 to 1929. Year 1919: Karl Liebknecht i Rosa Luxemburg, in: *Radničke novine* [Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, The Workers' Newspaper] II/1919, no. 4; Roza Luksemburgova, in: *Naprej* [Rosa Luxemburg, Forward] III/1919, no. 137; Lipkneht i Luksemburg, in: *Radničke novine* [Liebknecht and Luxemburg, The Workers' Newspaper] XVII/1919, no. 6; Karl Liebknecht i Roza Luxemburg, *dvije žrtve revolucije*, in: *Sloboda* [Karl Lieb-

bins different notes on the history of ideas related to Luxemburg. With this in mind, let me begin with an answer to the final question

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knecht and Rosa Luxemburg: Two Victims of the Revolution, Freedom], *Zagreb III/1919*, no. 7; Liebknecht i Roza Luksemburg ubijeni. Berlin, 3. januara, in: *Epoha* [Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg Murdered. Berlin 3 January, Epoch] *II/1919*, no. 10; Karl Liebknecht i Rosa Luxemburg, in: *Radničke novine*, *II/1919*, no. 3 [Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, The Workers' Newspaper]; Dvije lješine, in: *Radničke novine* [Two Corpses, The Workers' Newspaper] *I/1919*, 9; Roza Luksemburg, Libkneht i njihove ubice, in: *Sloboda* [Rosa Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Their Killers, Freedom], *Novi Sad VII/1919*, no. 7. Year 1920: Karl Liebkecht i Roza Luxemburg: 15. siječnja 1919–15. siječnja 1920, in: *Radnička riječ* [Karl Liebkecht and Rosa Luxemburg: 15 January 1919–15 January 1920, The Workers' Word] *2/1920*, no. 3; Dva mučenika, in: *Komuna* [Two Martyrs, Commune] *1/1920*, no. 6; Živko Jovanović: Posle jedne godine, in: *Radničke novine* [After One Year, The Workers' Newspaper] *18/1920*, no. 16; Sima Marković: Spomen več u slavu K. Libknehta i R. Luksenburg, in: *Radničke novine* [The Eternal Memory and Glory of K. Liebknecht and R. Luxemburg, The Workers' Newspaper] *18/1920*, no. 14; Herojima revolucije: Karlu Libknehtu i Rozi Luksenburg, in: *Radničke novine* [To the Heroes of the Revolution: To Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, The Workers' Newspaper] *18/1920*, no. 11; Sima Marković: Slava herojima revolucije!, in: *Borba* [Celebrate the Heroes of the Revolution!, The Struggle] *1920*; Život i rad Karla Libknehta i Roze Luksenburg, in: *Radničke novine* [The Life and Work of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, The Workers' Newspaper] *18/1920*, no. 11; Živko Jovanović: Rozi Luksenburg, in: *Radničke novine* [For Rosa Luxemburg, The Workers' Newspaper] *18//1920*, no. 11. Year 1921: Uspomeni Roze Luksemburg i Karla Lipknehta, in: *Socijalist* [In Memory of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Socialist] *1/1921*, no. 11; Posmrtna svečanost: za spomen na Rozu Luksemburg, in: *Radnička borba* [A Post-Humous Ceremony: in Memory of Rosa Luxemburg, The Workers' Struggle] *14/1921*, no. 7. Year 1922: Roza Luksemburg: glas iz groba – 15.1.1919. – 15.1.1922, *Slobodna riječ* [Rosa Luxemburg: a Voice From the Grave – 15.1.1919–15.1.1922, Free Word] *1/1922*, no. 3; Umorstvo u Eden hotelu, in: *Slobodna riječ* [Murder in the Eden Hotel, Free Word] *1/1922*, no. 23. Year 1923: 15. januar 1919. godine, in: *Borba* [15 January 1919, The Struggle] *Zagreb, II/1923*, no. 1–2; Četirigodišnjica smrti Karla Libkehta i Rose Luksemburg, in: *Radnička štampa* [The Four-Year Anniversary of the Death of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, The Workers' Press] *3/1923*, no. 44. Year 1926: Dva junaka, in: *Gideon* [Two Heroes, Gideon] *VII/1926*, no. 1, pp. 34–37; Mirko Kus-Nikolajev: Profil Rose Luxemburg, in: *Bankarstvo* [The Profile of Rosa Luxemburg, Banking] *III/1926*, no. 5, pp. 235–237. Year 1927: Konstantin Atanasijević: Pre osam godina, in: *Novi istok* [Eight Years Ago, The New East], *January 1927*, no. 1; Na grobu Spartakusa, in: *Novosti* [At Spartacus' Grave, News] *VII/1927*, no. 1880. Year 1928: Karl Liebknecht i Rosa Luxemburg, in: *Bor-*



implied above, namely, what Yugoslav translations of Luxemburg's entire works are available to us today?<sup>6</sup>

## Translations

The first translations of Rosa Luxemburg in the pre-Yugoslav territory emerged very early on while Luxemburg was still alive. The texts *Crkva u monarhiji i u republici* [*The Church in the Monarchy and in the Republic*] and *Dva metoda u sindikalnoj politici* [*Two Methods of Trade-Union Policy*] were translated as early as 1908 in *Radničke novine* [*The Workers' Newspaper*].<sup>7</sup> Since this was a daily newspaper, the original print of these translations unfortunately cannot be obtained today. In addition, as the communist press rarely listed the translators' names, we can only guess that this translation was completed by Dimitrije Tucović. As *The Workers' Newspaper* was printed at a press coordinated within a section of the Communist International and the first translation of Luxemburg available to us today is precisely that of Tucović, it is possible that he also translated the two aforementioned unsigned articles.

Tucović translated the essay *Jedinstvo pokreta* [*The Unity of the Movement*], published in Belgrade in 1909, as part of the Socialist Bookshop.<sup>8</sup> This was released in a publication with the name *Partija i*

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ba [Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, *The Struggle*] Zagreb, III (VII)/1928, no. 3; V spomin Karlu in Rozi: 15.1.1919–15.1.1928, in: Enotnost [In Memory of Karl and Rosa, Unity] Ljubljana, III/1928, no. 3. Year 1929: Kraj Lipknehta i Rose Luksemburg, in: Samouprava [The End of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Self-management], 16/1929, no. 7.

6 Although I have researched the existing available translations, it is entirely possible that this list is not complete.

7 *Crkva u monarhiji i u republici*, in: *Radničke novine* [The Church in the Monarchy and in the Republic, The Workers' Newspaper] 8/1908, no. 25; *Dva metoda u sindikalnoj politici*, in: *Radničke novine* [Two Methods of Trade-Union Policy, The Workers' Newspaper] VI/1908, no. 143, pp. 2–3. The second essay was originally published in the *Die Neue Zeit*, October 24, 1/1907, no. 4.

8 The Socialist Bookshop was a printing house run by Tucović himself. It was a press coordinated within a section of the Communist International and served as

*sindikati* [*The Party and the Trade Unions*], in which, besides Luxemburg, Tucović included his translations of Karl Kautsky and Anton Pannekoek. This exceptional endeavor should not surprise us at all, as Tucović was one of the founders of the Serbian Social Democratic Party (Srpska socijaldemokratska partija – SSDP), which was a member of the Second International. Thanks to this linking of organizations, Tucović directly collaborated with Luxemburg, Lenin, Kautsky, and others and occasionally wrote for *Die Neue Zeit* and *Vorwärts*. The extent to which Tucović's SSDP stuck to the Spartacist line at a decisive moment is evidenced by the following details. Prior to World War I and when the majority of representatives of the European Social Democratic Party approved their governments' loans, the SSDP was the only party of the Second International, which publicly declared itself as being completely against the war, voting against the war loans in its national parliament.

One of the first confirmed translators of Rosa Luxemburg after Tucović was the writer Antun Branko Šimić.<sup>9</sup> He translated one of Luxemburg's prison letters sent to Sophie Liebknecht in the middle of December 1917, and it was published in the second issue of *Književnik* [*Writer*] in 1924.<sup>10</sup> Alongside the translation of the letter, Šimić commented: "In Karl Kraus' paper, *Die Fackel*, I found this letter from Rosa Luxemburg, which she wrote to Sophie Liebknecht in December 1917 from Breslau's prison. An ordinary letter, but an extraordinary example of humanity and poetry."<sup>11</sup>

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a place to print socialist literature, primarily the magazines *Radničke novine* [*The Workers' Newspaper*] and *Borba* [*The Struggle*], both edited by Tucović, but also translations of Marxist classics and other important current socialist texts.

9 We should also mention the unsigned translation of the text from 1920, entitled *Štrajkovi masa* [*The Mass Strike*], published in the magazine *Nova istina* [*New Truth*] II/1920, no. 82, p. 8. *New Truth* was the mouthpiece of the Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia and the Central Labour Union Council for Croatia and Slavonia.

10 See Antun Branko Šimić: Jedno pismo Roze Luksemburgove [One of Rosa Luxemburg's Letters], in: *Književnik* [*Writer*], I/1924, no. 2, pp. 63–65.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Ten years would pass from Šimić's translation to the printing of a collection called *Knjiga o Marksu* [*A Book about Marx*], which Milan Durman translated in 1934.<sup>12</sup> This collection is important because its original editor, David Ržazanov, included Luxemburg's text *Zastoj i napredak u marksizmu* [*Stagnation and Progress of Marxism*], among other contributions. This translation was republished in 1974 in Belgrade on 6 October, with a foreword by Vera Pilić, from which we learn about the collection's first edition.<sup>13</sup>

While Šimić was one of the first to alert us to Rosa Luxemburg's letters, only after World War II was more of her correspondence translated. Two different editions of the same prison letters that Luxemburg wrote during the period from 1916 to 1918 were published in 1951. The Zagreb version was published by Zora [The Dawn], the letters were translated by Vera Georgijević,<sup>14</sup> and the afterword was written by Ervin Šinko. The Serbian Cyrillic version was published by Kultura [Culture] and translated by Ivan Ivanji, with a foreword composed by Mitra Mitrović, politician and one of the founding mem-

12 It is worth mentioning some of Luxemburg's less available texts translated in the Yugoslav press from 1919 to 1932: Protiv nemačke socijalne demokratije [Against German Social Democracy], in: Radničke novine [The Workers' Newspaper], XVII/1919, no. 138, pp. 1–2; "Porazi revolucija" (Iz eseja "Red vlada u Berlinu") [The Defeats of Revolution, from the essay "Order prevails in Berlin!"], in: Omladinska borba [Youth Struggle] II/1924, no. 1–2, p. 3; Borba masa. Štrajk masa, partija i sindikati ["Mass Struggle: The Strike of the Masses, Party and Trade Unions"], in: Omladinska borba [Youth Struggle] II/1924, no. 1–2, p. 5; Vloga militarizma v akumulaciji kapitala [The Role of Militarism in The Accumulation of Capital], in: Zapiski delavsko-kmetске matice [Notes on Worker-Peasant Heritage], 1925, no. 1, pp. 3–4 (this text from The Accumulation of Capital is found in this reprint: "Vloga militarizma v akumulaciji kapitala" [The Role of Militarism in the Accumulation of Capital], in: Delo [Work] VII/1926, no. 271 and Vloga militarizma v akumulaciji kapitala [The Role of Militarism in The Accumulation of Capital], in: Prosveta [Education] 19/1926, 174); Jedno taktičko pitanje [One Tactical Issue], in: Radničko jedinstvo [Workers' Unity] 8/1932, p. 12.

13 Vera Pilić: Predgovor i uvod drugom izdanju [Foreword and the Introduction to the Second Edition], in: Knjiga o Marksu [Book about Marx], Belgrade 1974, p. XXIV.

14 Some of her translations of letters were later published in the journal *Polja* [Fields] IV/1958, pp. 28–30.

bers of the Women's Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia (Antifašistička fronta žena Jugoslavije). Only four years later, in 1955, Kultura also released a translation of Luxemburg's most comprehensive work, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Economic Explanation of Imperialism*, with her *Anti-Critique* added as a supplement. Milan Gavrić was responsible for both translations into Serbo-Croatian and wrote a foreword for the occasion.

In the 1958 collection *Marxism and Revisionism*, edited by a member of the Yugoslav Praxis School, Gajo Petrović, Luxemburg's text *Social Reform or Revolution?* was included alongside articles by Bernstein, Lenin, Plekhanov, and Bebel. The manuscript was translated by Roland Knopfmacher, and the collection was published by Naprijed [Forward]. This translation would later reappear in another collection of Luxemburg's most famous books, pamphlets, and polemics, published by Naprijed under the title *Selected Writings* in 1974. The collection was edited by Ljubomir Tadić, another member of the Yugoslav Praxis School, who also drafted a foreword for this edition.<sup>15</sup> In this collection, besides the above-mentioned text *Social Reform or Revolution?*, we can find the following articles translated by Hrvoje Šarinić: "Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy"; *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*; *The Junius Pamphlet (The Crisis of Social Democracy)*; "What Does the Spartacus League Want?," and *The Russian Revolution*. The final text in the collection, "Order Prevails in Berlin," was translated by Tadić.

Besides the mentioned titles, there are two other translations of the complete works of Rosa Luxemburg in Yugoslav publishing. The first is *Introduction to Political Economy*, published in 1975 by the Zagrebački centar za kulturnu djelatnost omladine [Zagreb Center for Youth Cultural Activities], authored by Nadežda Čačinović-Puhovski and Žarko Puhovski. The final known Yugoslav translation of Rosa

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15 A shortened version of this foreword can be found in Ljubomir Tadić, *Da li je socijalizam naša sudbina? I druge rasprave i polemike o naciji, socijalizmu i federaciji* [Is Socialism Our Destiny? And Other Debates and Polemics on the Nation, Socialism and Federation], Belgrade 1986.

Luxemburg emerged in 1976.<sup>16</sup> Once again, it was the essay *Social Reform or Revolution?*, with the text “The Militia and Militarism” added to it, translated by Milan Tabaković. A foreword to this edition was written by Predrag Vranicki, another member of the Yugoslav Praxis School. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Belgrade publishing house Rad [Labour] also published Paul Frölich’s study of Rosa Luxemburg in 1954 (*Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Work*), translated by Božana Milekić.<sup>17</sup> Despite all its possible faults, this book remains – alongside J.P. Netti’s two-volume biography – one of the most important studies of Luxemburg’s life and works.

If we take all the aforementioned Yugoslav translations of Rosa Luxemburg collectively, including her books, letters, and shorter works, we can say that these old translations permit a fairly decent overview of Luxemburg’s legacy. However, translations become outdated, and many of her previously unpublished works have been found in the meantime, mostly in Polish and German.<sup>18</sup> Organizing new translations and editions is of vital importance. Yet alongside the above-mentioned primary literature, what about secondary sources? How was Rosa Luxemburg written about, if she was written about at all?<sup>19</sup>

16 We should also mention the 1982 Slovenian translation of one part of the second chapter of Luxemburg’s dissertation *The Industrial Development of Poland: Russia’s Economic Policy in Poland*, in: *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* [Journal of Critical Sciences] X/1982, no. 49, pp. 74–89.

17 Some of Frölich’s texts were also translated into Macedonian on the 40th anniversary of Luxemburg’s murder and were published in *Nova Makedonija* [New Macedonia] 15/1959.

18 In addition to Luxemburg’s newly found texts (of which some are anonymous or written under a pseudonym) included in the 6th and 7th volumes of the German *Collected Works*, there are a further 3,000 pages written in Polish that have not even been translated into German. As concerns English translations from German and Polish, which make Rosa Luxemburg’s works more accessible to a global public, Verso’s publishing project *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* should be noted. This project plans to translate and publish all of Luxemburg’s works (not only those that already exist in German, but also those written in Polish, Russian, and French) in 17 volumes. However, it should be mentioned that only about 15 % of all materials have been translated into English so far.

19 Consider also the following works that we will not be able to cover in detail in this essay, which mostly consist of obituaries and texts connected with Luxemburg’s

## A Fate of Five Footnotes

When preparing a text on the reception of certain Marxist theories and authors in the Yugoslav context, and hence also on Rosa Luxemburg, the point of departure is usually *Praxis*, the most important journal of Marxist theory and Marxist humanism in the Yugoslav space.<sup>20</sup> Alongside publishing a journal, the *Praxis* members also organized the Korčula Summer School, an annual philosophical Marxist meeting in which many of the most respected international Marxist philosophers participated, including Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Henri Lefebvre, Ágnes Heller, Karel Kosik, Jürgen Habermas, Erich Fromm, Lucien Goldmann, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Shlomo Avineri, and Kostas Axelos, to name just a few.

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letters: Zorislav Ugljen: Marginalije uz 'Pisma iz zatvora' Roze Luxemburg, in: Naprijed [Notes on the Margins of Rosa Luxemburg's 'Prison Letters,' Forward] 8/1951, no. 41; N. S.: Sveščica poezije i čovječnosti, in: Književne novine [A Fascicle of Poetry and Humanity, Literary Papers], 4/1951, no. 43.; Suđenja Libknehtovima, Bebelu i Rozi Luksemburg, in: Borba [The Sentencing of Liebknecht, Bebel and Luxemburg, The Struggle] 20/1955, pp. 304–305; Milan Gavrić: Uspomena na Rozu Luksemburg i Karla Lipknehta, in: Oslobođenje [In Memory of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Liberation] 16/1959; Vladimir Milanović: Lenjin–Libkneht–Luksemburg, in: Narodna armija [Lenin–Liebknecht–Luxemburg, The People's Army], 16/1959, no 1.; Drago Mitrović: Uspomena na Vladimira Iljiča Lenjina, Rozu Luksemburg i Karla Lipknehta, in: Prosvjetni list [In Memory of Vladimir Ilych Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Educational Papers] 8/1959, 131; Dušan Nedeljković: "Karl Lipkneht i Roza Luksemburg," Politika [Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Politics], 15-I-1959, LVI; Bosa Pejović, "Lučonoše proleterske revolucije," Glas rada [The Torchbearer's Proletarian Revolution, The Workers' Voice], 16- I-1959, XV, 3; Ljubomir Milin, "Smrt spartakovaca," Dnevnik [The Death of the Spartacists, Daily], 1 do 18-V-1959, XVII; Ervin Šinko, "Karl Liebknecht i Rosa Luxemburg," Polet [Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Upswing], 1959, VI, 7, pp. 393–397; Erna Muser, "Dve veliki revolucionarki," Medicinska sestra na terenu [Two Great Women Revolutionaries, Nurse at work], 1960, VII, 1, p. 46–50. (On Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg); Andrija Đujić, "Neka gledanja u međunarodnom radničkom pokretu na diktaturu proletarijata i sovjetski politički sistem povodom Oktobra," Mogućnosti [Some Views on the International Workers' Movement, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Soviet Political System in October, Possibilities], 1964, XI, 8, p. 792–809.

20 All issues of *Praxis* are available online in PDF format: <http://www.praxis-arhiva.net>.

In the introductory “Opening Words” of the Korčula Summer School, published in *Praxis* in 1969, Ernst Bloch, writing with his typical style and warm spirit, stated:

“[T]here is something in Marxism with its own moral background, which pushes into fantasy, and with the help of its own revitalising moral and fantasy, it forms a warm current in Marxism. It is this which brings forth revolutionary rapture, which drives people, without scorn of death, to go to the barricades, for a transition from a realm of necessity to a realm of freedom, in which violence and power become redundant, in which ruling over people switches to managing things. Finally, there is space for the more important concerns that we have, when in place of the freedom to earn, a freedom from earning emerges, where leisure and muses become sisters of freedom. ... [This warm current in Marxism] evidences itself in Rosa Luxemburg as a person, in a concrete utopia called Marxism.”<sup>21</sup>

So as not to be led in the wrong direction by Bloch’s quote, with its warm concluding gesture about Luxemburg, it should be stated that it does not in any way represent the general state of the reception of Luxemburg among Yugoslav *Praxis* School members. It is rather an exception. In fact, in the ten years of its existence (from 1964 to 1974), *Praxis* did not publish a single text relating to Rosa Luxemburg, nor an overview or a review of any of her works. If we go through the journal issues in more detail, we find a total of five lonely footnotes in which the members of the Yugoslav *Praxis* group refer to Luxemburg. In his text *Pojam revolucije* [The Concept of Revolution], Mihailo Marković mentions *The Accumulation of Capital*,<sup>22</sup> and in the same issue, in the essay *Socijalistička revolucija i politička vlast* [Social Revolution and Political Rule], Ljubomir Tadić states in a footnote that Luxemburg,

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21 Ernst Bloch: Opening Words of the Korčula Summer School, in: *Praxis* 1/1969, no. 2, p. 5.

22 Mihailo Marković: *Pojam revolucije* [The Notion of Revolution], in *Praxis*, 1969, no. 1/2.

“in a famous polemic with the Bolsheviks, decisively challenges the significance of the Jacobin model for proletarian revolution, calling it a bourgeois dictatorship.”<sup>23</sup> In his review of Bloch and Lukács, Predrag Vranicki refers to Luxemburg but focuses primarily on Lukács’ interpretation of Luxemburg’s theory.<sup>24</sup> Zagorka Pešić-Golubović, in her article *Ideje socijalizma i socijalistička stvarnost* [The Idea of Socialism and Socialist Reality], notes Luxemburg’s polemic with the Bolsheviks in a footnote and mentions *The Russian Revolution* in that context.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in his overview *Sociologija i ideologija* [Sociology and Ideology], Nebojša Popov states that “the revival of Marxist theories of revolution and revolutionary practices found its dignified representative in Rosa Luxemburg, in her revolutionary activities.”<sup>26</sup>

If we take a closer look at the topics in which the Yugoslav Praxis School refers to Rosa Luxemburg, we can see that it is mainly her theory of revolution and critique of reformism that are involved. Luxemburg’s text *Social Reform or Revolution?* is explicitly and implicitly important for the Yugoslav Praxis School, which uses it in formulating its critique of the bureaucracy and technocracy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. The legacy of revolutionary thought from the beginning of the 20th century was a vital point of reference for the Yugoslav Praxis School, closely related to the fact that the Praxis members themselves were active in the People’s Liberation Front of Yugoslavia. Although one cannot speak of an absolute acceptance of the entire legacy of Lenin, Luxemburg, or Gramsci, it seems that for the Yugoslav Praxis School in general, recourse to the theories and practices of the aforementioned revolutionaries was of great importance in order to conceptualize their philosophy of revolution as a unity of

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23 Ljubomir Tadić: Socijalistička revolucija i politička vlast [Social Revolution and Political Rule], in *Praxis*, 1969, no. 1/2, p. 251.

24 Predrag Vranicki: E. Bloch i G. Lukács, in *Praxis*, 1969, no. 5/6.

25 Zagorka Pešić-Golubović: Ideje socijalizma i socijalistička stvarnost [The Idea of Socialism and Socialist Reality], in *Praxis*, 1971, no. 3/4.

26 Nebojša Popov: Sociologija i ideologija [Sociology and Ideology], in *Praxis*, 1972, no. 3/4, p. 445.



theory and practice, as a critique of dogmatism and Stalinism, and as an affirmation of Marxist humanism. One more reason why so few texts dedicated to Luxemburg's theory is a surprise.<sup>27</sup>

There are several places in *Praxis* in which Luxemburg is casually mentioned simply by name and without any elaboration of her ideas,<sup>28</sup> most often in a self-explanatory manner alongside Lenin, Bukharin, Trotsky, or Lukács. Similarly and without a more thorough analysis, in his essay on Svetozar Marković and Dimitrije Tucović, Miladin Životić stated that, in his understanding, Tucović, "in everything he wrote and did relating to the national question, ... was closer to the views of Rosa Luxemburg than Lenin."<sup>29</sup> If we search for *Praxis* articles that take Luxemburg's political and economic theory into account more seriously, we will come to the realization that members of the Yugoslav Praxis Group did not write such studies.<sup>30</sup>

How, then, do we interpret the fact that the most prominent Yugoslav Marxist journal found itself in a position where it did not dedicate even a single article to Rosa Luxemburg? The phenomenon is highly unusual and multi-layered. On the one hand, Praxis members such as Ljubomir Tadić and Predrag Vranicki wrote more serious articles on Luxemburg elsewhere,<sup>31</sup> while Tadić, Puhovski, and

27 For more on the issue of the Yugoslav Praxis School, see Ankica Čakardić: Praxis škola i feminizam: marksistički humanizam i nevolje s rodom [The Praxis School and Feminism: Marxist Humanism and the Gender Troubles], in *Tragovi: časopis za srpske i hrvatske teme*, 6 (2023), no. 2, pp 102–136.

28 E. g. Danko Grlić (1964, no. 1); Predrag Vranicki (1964, no. 1; 1964, no. 2); Dragoljub Mićunović (1965, no. 4/5); Ljubomir Tadić (1966, no. 3); Antun Žvan (1967, no. 5/6); Vjekoslav Mikecin (1969, no. 3/4; 1973, no. 3/4); Zoran Vidojević (1970, no. 5/6); Trivo Indić (1972, no. 1/2); Veljko Korać (1973, no. 3/4).

29 Miladin Životić: Patriotizam i socijalizam (S. Marković i D. Tucović o nacionalnom pitanju [Patriotism and Socialism (S. Marković i D. Tucović on the National Question)], in *Praxis*, 1972, no. 3/4, p. 515.

30 More serious references in *Praxis* to Luxemburg's theory can be found via these authors: Iring Fetscher (1969, no. 1/2); Franz Marek (1970, no. 1/2); Ernest Mandel (1970, no. 5/6); Lucien Goldmann (1971, no. 2); Jean-Michel Palmier (1971, no. 6); Daniel Guérin (1972, no. 1/2); György Lukács (1973, no. 3/4).

31 See Predrag Vranicki: Predgovor [Foreword], in: Roza Luksemburg, *Socijalna reforma ili revolucija?*, Belgrade 1976. The foreword by Vranicki states that this

Čačinović-Puhovski translated Luxemburg, as emphasized earlier. However, as far as *Praxis* is concerned, Rosa Luxemburg's works were reduced to five footnotes. We can pose the perfectly valid question of whether this issue was sexist: was the editorial board aware of its "gender troubles"? Not only did *Praxis* fail to publish articles in the fields of the philosophy of gender and feminism, despite the extremely strong Yugoslav and global feminist movement and theory before and during the time when *Praxis* was publishing, but there was also a second problem – in the ten years in which *Praxis* operated, only 15 female authors published original academic articles in the journal.<sup>32</sup>

It is possible that there was a combination of problems of a gender-political nature since the emphasis was always on Lenin (who, in an almost self-explanatory manner, stood alongside Marx and Engels), while Luxemburg only appeared as an accessory. Or could it have been the specific nature of Luxemburg's theses and positions, her radicalism not always being in harmony with the dominant party line, which meant she therefore came to be of secondary or even tertiary importance? Finally, perhaps the problem was epistemological, as *Praxis* focused less on economic topics, which Luxemburg wrote about most frequently. It is difficult to isolate a single reason with absolute certainty. Indeed, it was surely a combination of the mentioned phenomena. Regardless, there are evidently very few texts on Rosa Luxemburg in *Praxis* – at best, we may speak of barely ten pages – and from these, we cannot read anything of theoretical relevance about Luxemburg's work in Yugoslavia. Therefore, the following section tries to give a number of examples from other published texts from the fields of literary criticism and socialist, feminist, or anarchist literature.

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text was taken from his book *Historija marksizma* [A History of Marxism] (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1969) rather than being written especially for the book on Luxemburg.

32 Svetlana Knjazeva, Zagorka Pešić Golubović, Ágnes Heller, Ljerka Šifer, Vera Horvat-Pintarić, Marija Kraljević, Blaženka Despot, M.V. Ivanova, Raya Dunayevskaya, Jasminka Gojković, Eleonora Prohić, Erna Pajnić, Nadežda Čačinović, Rada Iveković, and Judith Adler.

## Yugoslav Writers and Feminists on Luxemburg

Let us begin this intervention with a single lesser-known detail. One of the most significant Yugoslav intellectuals of the 20th century and probably the most influential Yugoslav writer and communist, Miroslav Krleža, wrote a poem just a few days after the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. It was published for the first time in 1919 in the third issue of the revolutionary journal *Plamen: Polumesečnik za sve kulturne probleme* [*Flame: Bimonthly for all the Cultural Problems*]. This journal was edited by Krleža and the writer August Cesarec and based on a Soviet model, Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky's journal *Plamya* [*Flame*]. It advocated for avant-garde, mostly expressionist poetics and Leninist revolutionary ideas. A poem with the name "Good Friday 1919: In Memory of Karl Liebknecht" ends with a strong revolutionary message: "The Dawn. / International." On the level of ideas, it offers a faithful rephrasing of the New Testament legend of Jesus Christ's crucifixion on Golgotha.<sup>33</sup> History repeats itself in its desperate errors ("The bloody nails once again muck a man's hand") as Krleža curses the mindless, reactionary world. An unmistakable comparison between Golgotha and Berlin is drawn in the lines: "In battle with a horde of false and guilty Gods / the Son of Man fell. / The crosses of Golgotha made by a circus / from the Leperlands of Judea to the emperor's Berlin."

Without waiting for days to pass from the horrific tragedy that befell Liebknecht and Luxemburg, Krleža recorded his poetic obituary dedicated to the revolutionary, which would be reprinted over the coming years to mark the occasions of the anniversaries of Liebknecht and Luxemburg's murder. In the same issue of *Plamen*, his associate August Cesarec wrote the essay "Pobeda duše" ["Triumph of the Soul"]

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33 Miroslav Krleža: Veliki petak 1919. Karlu Liebknechtu u spomen [Good Friday 1919. In Memory of Karl Liebknecht], in: *Plamen: polumesečnik za sve kulturne probleme* [*Flame: Bimonthly for all the Cultural Problems*], 3/1919, pp. 81–82. This poem was also reprinted in *Pjesme III* [Poems III], Zagreb 1919 and, in its final version, in *Poezija* [Poetry], Zagreb 1969.

in which he describes how at the very end of the First World War, the “revolutionary spirit and international communism” of the Spartacus League’s leaders was violently suffocated, “with the impact of that painfully echoing pellet of Karl’s following and the screams of the manic lynching of Rosa Luxemburg.”<sup>34</sup> Cesarec figuratively concludes: “The racket and noise on earth is loud, but many, many have no hearing, they are deaf and do not hear anything, and will not hear anything.”

Other literary figures wrote about Luxemburg. In his very measured and poetic essay dedicated to Luxemburg and her prison letters, Ervin Šinko (the writer and founder of the Department for the Hungarian Language and Literature of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad) wrote the following: “[Rosa Luxemburg is] always selfsame, and so powerful, so broad in nature, that she can be in the same person a poet and theoretician, an aesthete and sociologist, wise and playful, sentimental and sober, gentle in her sentimentality and tough in her intransigent consistency [...]”<sup>35</sup> In concluding his essay on Luxemburg and emphasizing the importance of reading the letters in the context of the socio-historical conditions in which they were written and always in relation to the entirety of Luxemburg’s theoretical opus and politics, Šinko says: “Her letters are precious to us precisely because, instead of some abstract heroic perfection, they reveal the individual and close-up female character of a big hero in the struggle of the proletariat, in humanizing an inhuman society.”<sup>36</sup>

Another Yugoslav literary figure who wrote about Rosa Luxemburg is Izet Sarajlić, who wrote about her works in his 1985 book *Uz ponovno čitanje Roze Luksemburg* [*Reading Rosa Luxemburg Once Again*].<sup>37</sup> While the title strongly points to a serious critical-theoretical

34 August Cesarec: Pobjeda duše [Triumph of the Soul], in: Plamen – polumesečnik za sve kulturne probleme, 3/1919, pp. 82–86.

35 Ervin Šinko: O Rosi Luxemburg [On Rosa Luxemburg], in: Rosa Luxemburg, Pisma iz zatvora [Rosa Luxemburg, Prison Letters], Zagreb 1951, p. 79.

36 Ibid., p. 81.

37 Izet Sarajlić: Uz ponovno čitanje Roze Luksemburg [Reading Rosa Luxemburg Once Again], in: Sabrana djela 2 [Collective Works 2], Sarajevo 1998 [1985], p. 50.

study and, with it, it could be said, intentionally cautions against the marginalization of Luxemburg's legacy, it conveys a dedication in the form of a poem made up of two broken verses. In that poem, Sarajlić, in a worried and somewhat downcast tone, notices how the working class has forgotten Rosa Luxemburg and reminds us of how she, as "an outstanding militant of the international workers' movement," foresaw her own death before she was "savagely murdered." The first verse begins with a mention of Luxemburg's prison letters, and the second verse goes as follows: "[O]n the trams, / on the underground, / on the trains, / I have seen many workers relishing novels by / Agatha Christie / and not one, / I repeat, / not one / who would hold in her hand Rosa Luxemburg's / book."

A completely different approach to Šinko's essay, displayed above, can be found in a short text by Lydija Sklevicky, a Croatian feminist theorist, historian, and sociologist who was the first Croatian scholar to address the social history of women from a feminist perspective. In contrast to Šinko's well-measured approach, it sketches the relationship between the private and public life of Rosa Luxemburg. The essay is called *Drugovi i ljubavnici* [*Comrades and Lovers*] and was published in 1988. In it, the author bases her account primarily on the romantic relationship between Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches.<sup>38</sup> This short essay is really difficult to digest; all we can learn about Luxemburg in these few pages based on her correspondence with Jogiches is that she "wished to become a mother," that she was "unhappily in love," that she was "extremely emotionally fragile," and that she required her "lover's attention." Sklevicky depicts Luxemburg and Jogiches' relationship as a constant fight and competition and focuses too much on episodes of jealousy from their lives. It is almost as if we are reading a bad soap opera. Finally, it was important to Sklevicky to point out that "Jogiches suffered from guilt over the rich annuities off which he lived," while for Luxemburg, "that

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<sup>38</sup> Lydia Sklevicky: *Drugovi i ljubavnici* [*Comrades and Lovers*], in: *Svijet* [*The World*], 9 (12 April 1988), pp. 42–43.

fact, as well as her inattentiveness to money” was no more to her than a “small difficulty.” Along similar lines, from the sea of available letters and quotes, Sklevicky selects precisely those in which Luxemburg tells Jogiches how she wishes to settle down “as members of the middle class” and that she feels like a “kitty who wants to fondle and be fondled.” In addition, Sklevicky approvingly quotes Nettl’s description of the relationship as “one of the great tragic love stories of socialism,” which is precisely the worst part of Nettl’s biography, written in a particularly non-feminist tone, as certain feminists had already warned.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the problem is that Sklevicky paid too much affective attention to the problem of “femininity” in a rather unconsciously patriarchal way. This is also because she focused her texts on the intimate story, a “myth” about Luxemburg, and not Luxemburg’s theory or another, less intimate topic.

The antifascist militant Mitra Mitrović, mentioned earlier, also wrote about Rosa Luxemburg. In her interesting text “Jedna nezaboravna žena” [“An Unforgettable Woman”], published in issue 27 of *Žena danas* [*Woman Today*; the magazine of the Women’s Antifascist Front of Yugoslavia] in 1940, Mitrović showcases the political life of Rosa Luxemburg across several pages. She briefly recounts Luxemburg’s revolutionary life story and emphasizes her key role in the history of the communist movement. Addressing the subject of Luxemburg’s death in the concluding section of her essay, but also in several other places, Mitrović cannot help but feel that Luxemburg was “ugly” and therefore unhappy: “And so the life of this intelligent, determined, honorable, sickly, and ugly great woman ended. A woman not a single man loved (which is unusual for the famous women spoken of by history teachers) yet a woman loved by millions.”<sup>40</sup>

39 Raya Dunayevskaya: *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*, New Jersey and Sussex 1982, p. 93.

40 Mitra Mitrović: *Jedna nezaboravna žena*, in: *Žena danas*, 25/1940, pp. 15–16. The extent to which feminist interpretations sometimes focus on the intimate aspects of Luxemburg’s life is astonishing, as well as how they draw various problematic conclusions in line with their dispositions, whether along the lines of Sklevicky

Along similar lines, in an essay published in February 1951 in issue 80 of *Žena danas*, Liza Bihalji-Merin wrote: “Her portrait hangs in the flats of revolutionary workers: her long face, replete with slender sensitivity, perhaps not beautiful in an everyday sense, but beautiful in its power of expression, warmth, and the intensity of her big dark eyes.”<sup>41</sup>

Apart from these rather unusual approaches to Rosa Luxemburg, there are other more suitable and somewhat more reserved approaches from the socialist tradition. The socialist and feminist Nada Cazi, in a book she wrote in 1974, *Društveni položaj žene* [*The Social Position of a Woman*], in the thematic section “Učešće žena u radničkom pokretu” [“The Participation of Women in the Workers’ Movement”], highlights that Luxemburg was “one of the most consistent militants and brightest characters in the international workers’ movement.”<sup>42</sup> In this brief intervention, we learn of, in Cazi’s words, “several valuable theoretical contributions to the Marxist economy by Luxemburg.” This is a praiseworthy approach, especially when we compare it with the usual portrayals of Luxemburg, which are primarily political comparisons with Lenin or the retelling of random episodes from her private life. Cazi, concisely and with the correct emphasis, summarizes Luxemburg’s biography as follows:

“Rosa Luxemburg was one of the initiators and leaders of the rising masses of German workers in the years before the outbreak of the First World War. She was a founding member of the Spartacus League, an organizer of the Spartacus Uprising in January 1919, and the founder

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or Mitrović. Given that these details were probably not available to Mitrović, it is worth mentioning that we can read about Luxemburg’s love life in her letters in Adler/Hudis/Laschitza (Eds.) 2011. If it is important at all, of all Luxemburg’s preserved “love” letters, most were addressed to Leo Jogiches or Kostia Zetkin, the son of Clara Zetkin.

41 Liza Bihalji-Merin: *Roza Luksemburg. Borac protiv rata i imperijalizma* [Rosa Luxemburg. A Fighter Against War and Imperialism], in: *Žena danas* [Woman Today] 80/1951, p. 5–6.

42 Nada Cazi: *Društveni položaj žene* [The Social Position of a Woman], Zagreb 1974.

of the Communist Party of Germany. Rosa Luxemburg's life path was that of a consistent revolutionary in the top militant ranks of the workers' movement. This path resulted in her persecution, imprisonment, and torturous murder after the uprising collapsed."<sup>43</sup>

Besides the classical socialist approach, in the foreword to *Revolucija nije partijska stvar* [*Revolution is not a Party Matter*], Laslo Sekelj, taking a specifically anarchist tone, highlights Luxemburg as "a born leader in the communist critique of Bolshevism."<sup>44</sup> In this book, the text *Ruska revolucija* [*The Russian Revolution*], previously published in the aforementioned edited collection by Tadić, was included in its entirety. Besides comparisons between Luxemburg and Lenin, Sekelj stated that Luxemburg "in accordance with Marx's thesis on universal emancipation, demanded a dictatorship of the proletariat, as an all-encompassing class action, and not that of a single socialist party, faction, or group of professional revolutionaries."<sup>45</sup> Without going into a more detailed analysis of the validity of certain theses stated by Sekelj in his account of Luxemburg, we can say that this short text is a powerful entry point to a kind of anarchist interpretation of Rosa Luxemburg and an interesting contribution to Yugoslav Luxemburgian studies.

Finally, let us mention two more texts. If there is one text that ought to be highlighted as offering a broader overview of Luxemburg's work, it is Ljubomir Tadić's essay "Život i revolucionarno delo Rose Luxemburg" ["The Life and Revolutionary Work of Rosa Luxemburg"].<sup>46</sup> In its twenty-something pages, this essay offers a sketch of Luxemburg's biography and her key ideas. Moreover, if

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43 Ibid., p. 24.

44 Laslo Sekelj: *Revolucija nije partijska stvar. Komunističke kritike boljševizma* [*Revolution is not a Party Matter. Communist Critiques of Bolshevism*], Belgrade 1987, p. II.

45 Ibid., p. 12.

46 Ljubomir Tadić: *Život i revolucionarno delo Rose Luxemburg* [*The Life and Revolutionary Work of Rosa Luxemburg*], in: *Rosa Luxemburg: Izabrani spisi* [*Selected Works*], Zagreb 1974.



we were to single out the best Yugoslav overview of Luxemburg's critique of political economy, it is surely Milan Gavrić's text from 1955,<sup>47</sup> in which he emphasizes: "Every reader with even the slightest education will immediately notice that with *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg emerged from under the feathers as a thinker of great capacity and the broadest level of culture."<sup>48</sup> Later, Gavrić writes: "Reading *The Accumulation of Capital*, we can see with what theoretical conscientiousness and dedication this great revolutionary worked on the text. Underpinning it lay the essential need for the further development of revolutionary thought, will, and actions on the part of the international workers' movement."<sup>49</sup> Gavrić's interpretative template of *The Accumulation of Capital* is a rare example of a more serious analysis of Luxemburg's economic theory in Yugoslavia, both then and today.<sup>50</sup>

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47 Milan Gavrić: Predgovor [Forward], in: Rosa Luxemburg: Akumulacija kapitala: Prilog ekonomskom objašnjenju imperijalizma [The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism], Belgrade 1955.

48 Ibid., p. V.

49 Ibid., p. VI.

50 I managed to locate a further four texts on *The Accumulation of Capital*, of which two were written by Gavrić: Milan Gavrić, "Roza Luksemburg: Akumulacija kapitala" [Rosa Luxemburg: The Accumulation of Capital], Belgrade 1955, in: Ekonomska politika [Economic Policy], 1955, IV, 170, pp. 538–539; Milan Gavrić, "Roza Luksemburg: Akumulacija kapitala [Rosa Luxemburg: The Accumulation of Capital]," Književne novine [Literary Papers], 15-VIII-1955, VI, pp. 9–10; Radivoj Davidović, "Roza Luksemburg: 'Akumulacija kapitala,'" [Rosa Luxemburg: The Accumulation of Capital], Ekonomist [The Economist], 1955, VIII, 2, pp. 416–24; Ana Žilić Jurin, "Rosa Luxemburg: Akumulacija kapitala," [Rosa Luxemburg: The Accumulation of Capital], Politika [Politics], 12-VIII-1955, LII. See also my texts on the subject: Ankica Čakardić: "From theory of Accumulation to Social Reproduction Theory: A Case for Luxemburgian Feminism", in: Historical Materialism 25/2017, no. 4, pp. 37–64 and A. Čakardić: "Teorija akumulacije i suvremena luksemburgijanska kritika političke ekonomije" [Theory of Accumulation and Contemporary Luxemburgian Critique of Political Economy], Filozofska istraživanja, 138/2015, no. 2, pp. 323–341.

### Peripheral Notes: Instead of a Conclusion

If one adds it all up – what translations are available to us today in the post-Yugoslav space, how much has been written about Luxemburg and her work in Yugoslavia, and in what way – one cannot help feeling that the study of Luxemburg’s work is rather modest and insufficient. Short works in the manner of obituaries and commemorative texts dominate, while the number of texts based on an analytical discourse linked to the interpretation of her theories or political ideas constitutes the by far smallest portion. Articles about Luxemburg have generally dwindled since the 1970s, and over time, the collective memory of her in Yugoslavia has disappeared ever more slowly but surely. As Yugoslavia grew older, Luxemburg’s presence faded, and after the collapse of Yugoslavia, she disappeared completely from theory, practice, and political imaginaries. We could describe an analysis of Luxemburg’s legacy in Yugoslavia as “walking on the fringes,” as moving between a kind of initial rapture and euphoria due to knowledge of early works about her and early Yugoslav translations and the anxiety that comes with the realization that Luxemburg is too little present in the Yugoslav space today. She exists merely peripherally, be it politically or theoretically.

Instead of a more comprehensive and definitive conclusion, I would like to conclude by sharing three extraordinary pieces of information that link Rosa Luxemburg and Yugoslavia. The first is connected with North Macedonia. This country was under Turkish rule until 1912, but after the Berlin Congress of 1878, there were repeated uprisings and unrest in Macedonia. In 1893, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) was founded. This was a secret organization supported by Macedonian socialists, in the framework of which revolutionary secret groups of women were also founded.<sup>51</sup> Macedonian women became involved in the socialist movement early

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51 Neda Božinović: *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku* [The Women’s Issue in Serbia in the 19th and 20th Centuries], Belgrade 1996, p. 98.

on, with Rosa Plaveva among the first prominent socialist women. She gathered Macedonian and Turkish women in her flat, where they discussed various feminist issues and the communist struggle.<sup>52</sup> An incredible detail is that Plaveva corresponded with Luxemburg, and in 1917, when the Committee for the Liberation of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht was founded, she also organized the gathering of signatures for their liberation. Neda Božinović writes that “the petition was signed by about a hundred women, which was an impressive number at that time – during the First World War and the Bulgarian occupation.”<sup>53</sup>

The second detail refers to Pula (Croatia). It was in this town that the first communist women’s club was founded in early 1920 under the name of Rosa Luxemburg. The club gathered about 60 women, and meetings were held every week to discuss political and social issues.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the third little-known detail relates to the Yugoslav streets. In two cities in the post-Yugoslav area today, two small streets have kept the name Rosa Luxemburg: one in Belgrade (Serbia) and another in Maribor (Slovenia). The street in Split (Croatia) with the current name Mihanovićeve ulica bore the name Rosa Luxemburg before the memory of her was erased from the post-Yugoslav public space. There had also been a Rosa Luxemburg Street in Zagreb since 12 May 1980. As was to be expected, however, it was renamed in 1993.

After the economic crisis of 2008 and other social and financial crises that followed, including the environmental and refugee crises and the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Palestine, there is a growing interest in the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg, especially as we marked the centenary of her assassination in 2019 and made many of her works

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52 Vera Vesković-Vangeli: Plaveva, Rosa, in: Franciska de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi (Eds.): *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, Budapest/New York 2006, p. 411.

53 N. Božinović: *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u XIX i XX veku*, p. 98.

54 Marija Šoljan: *Žene Hrvatske u radničkom pokretu do aprila hiljadu devetsto četrdeset prve* [Croatian Women in the Labour Movement Until April 1941], Zagreb 1967, p. 81.

more accessible thanks to the projects like the *Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*. After almost a century of bitter experiences and 30 years after the breakup of Yugoslavia, few leftist political and economic analyses could deny the fact that Luxemburg's theory and policies are a valuable and important reference. The first step toward a more serious engagement with Luxemburg's work in the post-Yugoslav space is to move her legacy from a secondary footnote and casual mention to an indisputably deserved political and scholarly focus. This endeavor is perhaps best summed up in her own words: "I want to affect people like a clap of thunder, to inflame their minds not by speechifying but with the breadth of my vision, the strength of my conviction and the power of my expression."<sup>55</sup>

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55 Rosa Luxemburg's Letter to Leo Jogiches, 19 April 1899, in: Peter Hudis/Kevin B. Anderson (Eds.): *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, New York 2004, p. 382.

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### 3 Syndicalism that Was Not

#### Rosa Luxemburg and the Norwegian Labor Movement

*Steinar Aas*

#### Introduction

One Norwegian Labor Party historian, Nik Brandal (1973–), claims that Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, and Germany were the most influential labor movements impacting the Norwegian Labor Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*, henceforth Labor). Regardless of such a generalization, the respective influences differed through different periods.<sup>1</sup> One obvious anomaly in the development of the labor movement in Norway is that Labor, as the only workers' party in Scandinavia, joined the communist Third International (Comintern) in support of the Bolshevik revolutionaries in Moscow in 1920. Consequently, the historiography of the Norwegian labor movement became packed with debates about the reason for this turn. The debates were advanced particularly during the 1970s, but they had already started in 1922 with the writings of the Norwegian historian Edvard Bull (1881–1932), a member of Labor and a historian at the University of Oslo from 1917.<sup>2</sup> In his article about the shift, Bull took a comparative approach, and his hypothesis was that the industrialization process was more dramatic and rapid in Norway than in Denmark and Sweden. This abrupt process was explained to have uprooted the ownerless classes of the traditionally peasant population into a new and more radical proletariat around industrial towns, mining communities, and urban areas.

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1 Nik Brandal: *Socialdemokratiet, fortid, nåtid, framtid*. Oslo 2011, p. 20.

2 Tor Ragnar Weidling: *Edvard Bull den eldre*, online: [https://snl.no/Edvard\\_Bull\\_-\\_den\\_eldre](https://snl.no/Edvard_Bull_-_den_eldre). For more information about his life and work, see Wilhelm P. Sommerfeldt: *Edvard Bull: Ein bibliografi*. Oslo 1960.



There has been a tendency to state that Norway was a space more disposed to radicalization. Consequently, the new Norwegian proletariat was socially and culturally more rootless and susceptible to the most radical wing of the newly established labor movement, which emerged toward the end of the 19th century. The differences among Norway, Sweden, and Denmark boiled down to the speed of the industrialization process. The Marxist influence was also of a more profound nature in Norway because industrialization and urbanization occurred simultaneously with the emerging distribution of the ideas of Karl Marx (1818–1883).<sup>3</sup>

Jorunn Bjørgum (1942–), another Norwegian historian, later studied the origins of the same radicalization process. One of her conclusions was that the labor movement in Norway was not as influenced by syndicalism as its counterparts in other European nations such as France, Italy, and Spain, as well as the United States. In an article in 1998, she claimed that the reason for this was that the strongest radical left opposition to the Social Democrat Labor Party leadership from 1910 onward was a partly syndicalist-inspired organization called “Fagopposisjonen av 1911.” The new left wing originated in Trondheim as a regional mobilization of radical ideas – thus, it was at first named “Trondheimsresolutionen av 1911.” The leader of the initiative was Martin Tranmæl (1879–1967), who later would use the movement as a stepping stone to power in the Labor Party.<sup>4</sup> However, Tranmæl was not only inspired by the international syndicalist movement. Bjørgum has also demonstrated Tranmæl’s connection with the international labor movement and, especially, how Germany, as Brandal claimed, played an important role in relation to its development in Norway. Later sections in this chapter

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3 Edvard Bull: *Arbeiderbevægelsens stilling i de tre nordiske land 1914–1920*, in: *Archive für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* 10/1922. Later printed in: *Det norske Arbeiderpartis forlag, Kristiania*, and reprinted in: *Tidsskrift for Arbeiderbevægelsens historie* 1/1976.

4 Jorunn Bjørgum: *Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringen av norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1906–1918*. Oslo 1998, p. 65.

will discuss the extent to which Tranmæl was influenced by Rosa Luxemburg.

The individual factors in this political movement were absorbed because, in the historiography of the radicalization process, there has been a tendency to emphasize the human factor and, in particular, the role of the leader of the radical opposition gaining ground in the labor movement between 1906 and 1920. On this topic, Bull concludes that the oppositional radical part of the labor movement was led by “a magnificent leader in the organizational power of Martin Tranmæl.”<sup>5</sup> Others have gone even further in their uncritical acclaim of Tranmæl; for instance, Aksel Zachariassen’s (1898–1987) 1979 biography is something of a fulsome praise of Tranmæl.<sup>6</sup> Bjørgum also concludes that the takeover of the revolutionaries during the power shift in the Labor Party of 1918 was unique. No established international social democrat parties other than the Norwegian one was taken over by the radical opposition.<sup>7</sup>

Tranmæl was discovered by the Labor Party leadership after the party’s national congress in 1906. The party had grown rapidly at the turn of the century, and its focus shifted to gaining parliamentary representation after Labor representatives won four seats in the Norwegian parliament – the *Storting* – after the parliamentary election of 1903. Tranmæl distinguished himself by being elected to the national board of the Labor Party in 1906, basically because he advocated non-reformist principles. He was also part of a younger generation rebelling against the established leadership in a general battle against “revisionism.” This can partly be considered a youth rebellion at that time, when the younger generation also established branches of youth associations in support of *Norges Sosialdemokratiske Ungdomsforbund* – the Labor youth organization. Bjørgum claims that this anti-revisionist attitude was part of international socialist trends, which

5 Bull: *Arbeiderbevægelsens stilling i de tre nordiske land 1914–1920*, p. 7.

6 Aksel Zachariassen: *Martin Tranmæl*, Oslo 1979.

7 Jorunn Bjørgum: *Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringen av norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1906–1918*, Oslo 1998, pp. 17–18.

strengthened in pace with the growing anti-militarism, reinforced by Labor at the beginning of 1900.<sup>8</sup> There was a vast debate on, among other things, militarism and anti-militarism during the 1906 congress, in which Tranmæl was a pronounced participant.<sup>9</sup>

The assembly in 1906 coincided with the initial phase of Tranmæl's appearance on the central stage of the Labor Party, and his interests in international matters were also pronounced. Bjørgum concludes that 1906 was an ideological breaking point for Tranmæl. Four months after the Norwegian Labor assembly, Rosa Luxemburg introduced her famous article "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions," and Tranmæl also adopted a mass strike as one of his main aims for the revolutionary movement and a cornerstone for "Fagoppositionen av 1911," in direct connection with the ideas of Luxemburg.<sup>10</sup>

The 1906 national assembly of the Labor Party was a playground for Tranmæl and his ideas. Although the party had been connected to the Second International for several years, Tranmæl was not satisfied with the recent actions of the party's representatives in international forums. He used the podium in 1906 to direct this critique at one of the representatives, Olav Kringen (1867–1951), whom Tranmæl considered useless. Specifically, Tranmæl targeted the lack of political critique of the "reformist" French delegates at the international convention. He also questioned why Kringen did not support the "Dresden resolution" against "revisionist tendencies." Kringen must have anticipated Tranmæl's attack because he was absent during the debate on his activities at the International.<sup>11</sup> Kringen had been one of the co-founders of the Second International in 1899 and the editor

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8 Ibid., pp. 41–42.

9 Det Norske Arbeiderpartis 19. landsmøte 1906, 28, The Archive and Library of the Norwegian Labor Movement (ARBARK), online: [https://www.arbark.no/Digitale\\_dokumenter\\_Landsmoteprotokoller\\_Arbeiderpartiet.htm](https://www.arbark.no/Digitale_dokumenter_Landsmoteprotokoller_Arbeiderpartiet.htm).

10 Ibid., 43.

11 Ibid., 28.

of the Labor Party paper *Social-Demokraten* in Oslo (then Kristiania) until 1906. Subsequently, he had a fallout with the party.<sup>12</sup>

The role of Tranmæl at the congress illustrates an emerging opposition within Labor and a growing radicalization connected to the generation shift. There was to be a change of organization illustrated by Tranmæl's approach, and this shift related to anti-centralism. Bull claimed that one reason for the bottom-up radicalization in the Norwegian labor movement was that the movement was more decentralized, as well as organized and managed in a more democratic way, than elsewhere. However, Tranmæl's personal influence was also evident. In addition, one reason for the strong position of the Trondheim initiative can be found in the region's socio-economic development at the turn of the new century. This rapid modernization accompanied Tranmæl's construction of an ideology and strategy based on new organization principles, and this bottom-up ideology found fertile ground among the new working class in the Trøndelag and Nordland regions, as well as in other peripheral emerging industrialized places or mining societies.<sup>13</sup>

Tranmæl's relations with trade unions and the industrialized communities within the regions were vital in this radical opposition. He built an activist approach, emphasizing face-to-face contact with the grassroots of these trade unions. One of his first visits as a paid agitator of the Labor Party was to the mining community of Sulitjelma in Nordland County in 1907. That year, he traveled to a remote place close to the border of Sweden in Salten, Nordland County, on a mission from the central board of the Labor Party to help newly established local trade unions organize local branches of the mining unions under the Norwegian Union of General Workers (*Norsk Arbeidsmandsforbund*). The journey was arduous, and the young, athletic agitator had to hike the last stretch between the port of call at Finneid and the mines in Sulitjelma, some 25 kilometers in-

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12 Arnfinn Engen: Olav Kringen, online: [https://nbl.sn.l.no/Olav\\_Kringen](https://nbl.sn.l.no/Olav_Kringen).

13 Bjørgum, Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringsen, pp. 18–19.

land.<sup>14</sup> Tranmæl's journey was later commemorated as a "ravage raid," as if he was a Viking warrior in the labor movement. The workers in Sulitjelma had recently rebelled against the Swedish mining company there, demanding the right to establish trade unions.<sup>15</sup> Now, the last obstacle had been removed, and the trade unions could be established; consequently, Tranmæl was seen as the instigator of the foundation and organization of trade unions for more than 1,000 miners in this northern mining society.<sup>16</sup>

Tranmæl was inspired by different political and ideological movements. One was the British New Unionism, which was related to the American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and German anarcho-syndicalism. However, from Bjørgum's perspective, the influence of the "internal opposition" in the German Social Democrat Party represented by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg was of more importance. Among others, Tranmæl became part of a socialist, anti-militarist Youth International, supporting "Rosa Luxemburg's mass strike order," Bjørgum states.<sup>17</sup> She adds that Denmark and Sweden experienced a similar development, that is, some sort of "youth rebellion," of which the 26-year-old Tranmæl was a vital part. From 1906, he was also part of the Labor Party newspaper *Ny Tid* in Trondheim, which promoted his ideas, inspired by Luxemburg as a journalist and later as the editor. He thus expanded his power basis even further and fortified his regional stronghold in Trøndelag and Nordland.

Tranmæl's ideological and political position was characterized as an alternative – a hybrid – to the positions of the social democrats and anarchists – "a third way." He saw the dangers in the polarization of the "parliamentarians" and the "revolutionary elements." To

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14 Zachariassen, Martin Tranmæl, pp. 74–75.

15 Steinar Aas: Male Radicalism in the Wake of Revolution and Antimilitarism: A Norwegian Case Study, in: Frank Jacob/Jowan A. Mohammed (Eds.): Gender and Protest. On the Historical and Contemporary Interrelation of Two Social Phenomena, Berlin 2023, pp. 125–148.

16 Ibid.

17 Bjørgum, Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringsen, p. 45.

fulfill his program, he sought an alliance with the trade unions and saw them as symbiotic with the party. Tranmæl's intention was to hold the trade unions in a permanent state of battle-preparedness and, simultaneously, prevent them from forming reciprocal relations with the capitalist classes, like in Germany. However, Tranmæl also seems to have been aware of the dangers of "oligarchical tendencies," as described by Robert Michels (1876–1936), where the leaders and elected members of the organization controlled and dominated the electors, the members, and the delegates.<sup>18</sup> Bjørgum concludes that this position was not related to syndicalism but was rather an expression of classic Marxism, connected to "antireformist" and "antirevisionist" Marxists such as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.<sup>19</sup>

The connection between Luxemburg and Tranmæl became even stronger in Copenhagen in 1910. There, Tranmæl participated at the Eighth Congress of the Second International and subsequently became part of the International's left wing. One of the Swedish participants, Fredrik Ström (1880–1948), later wrote in his memoirs about this opposition group, comprising himself and Zeth Höglund from Sweden, "Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Hervé, Kollontay, Tom Mann, Lenin. Perhaps also Tranmæl, a couple of Poles, Russians and Swiss," adding uncertainly, "I don't remember if Trotsky was there."<sup>20</sup>

It was during this conference that Tranmæl met important people in the German Social Democrat Party (SPD). From them, he got extensive information about their experiences in Germany and the internal conflicts between Kautsky and Luxemburg, as well as about the dealings with the trade unions in Germany.<sup>21</sup> One hypothesis in Bjørgum's extensive research on Tranmæl is that his knowledge about the situation in Germany, specifically the lack of unity between the

18 Stein Ugelvik Larsen, *Oligarkiets jernlov. Lov og Struktur nr. 1*. Bergen 1973, p. 1.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.

20 Fredrik Ström: *Min ungdoms strider. Memoarer*. Stockholm 1940, p. 322, cited in Bjørgum, *Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringsen*, p. 62.

21 Bjørgum, *Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringsen*. p. 62.

party leaders and the trade unions, paved the way for the strategy he chose in Norway. Consequently, the German question became the reason for the establishment of “Fagopposisjonen av 1911.”<sup>22</sup> Tranmæl chose, as did Luxemburg, mass action and mass strike as the main weapons of the Norwegian class struggle and, contrary to Germany, chose the Norwegian trade unions as the cornerstones of the future struggle for power. Tranmæl’s idea seems to have been to keep a firm hand on the party leadership through grassroots mobilization among the trade union members. His personal journeys to these trade unions gave him the conviction that they were the perfect basis for loyal support and could also be used as a battering ram within the Labor Party. This was one of the reasons for the use of his program in connection with “Fagopposisjonen av 1911” to garner support from the miners of the peripheral north. By using decentralized organizations connected to the trade unions, one could promote socialist goals in a national class war. For years to come, these bonds between the trade unions and the central level with Tranmæl were tightly consolidated with trade unions in mining communities like Sulitjelma.<sup>23</sup> This was also to be the foundation for Tranmæl’s power base of decentralized, loyal, and disciplined trade unions, contrary to the German experience.

The connection between Luxemburg and Tranmæl became even stronger due to the outbreak and during the early period of the First World War when the anti-militarism debate came to the forefront. A main item for the Norwegian Labor Party was actualized for years with the outbreak of the war, and there was a renewed focus on the armament of neutral Norway. Suddenly, young men had to do military service, while the food stock was reduced due to the rationing of necessities. Exports also became increasingly difficult, and the unemployment rate increased because of trade restrictions, contraband on Norwegian export to the belligerents, and German submarine

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22 Ibid., pp. 62–63.

23 Steinar Aas: Johan Medby – Frå “Sulitjelma-affæren” til Lillestrøm, in: *Arbeiderhistorie* 36/2022, no. 1, pp. 44–66.

warfare in the North Sea sinking Norwegian merchant ships. Apart from escalating the cost of living, the war created conditions for revolutionary sentiments in Norway, as it did in the rest of Europe. The tense political situation deteriorated between 1917 and 1919. Simultaneously, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) grew rapidly from 79,000 members in 1916 to 148,000 in 1920. This was the organization in which Tranmæl found his power base, especially after the unions' decision to support the "Fagoppositionen av 1911" at the LO congress in 1920.<sup>24</sup>

One episode that exemplified the tensions was the military expedition to Sulitjelma in 1918. When miners loyal to Tranmæl participated in a mass strike, the Norwegian ruling elites were convinced that the revolution had come to Norway, too. More than 1,000 miners prevented the police from arresting a conscientious objector who worked in the mines and sent the police force away with unfinished business. The authorities then responded by sending armed forces to set an example and set things straight in Sulitjelma. At this time, Tranmæl was supporting and communicating with the local trade unions, which were dominated by three youth associations – *Brandfakelen* (The Torch), *Lyn* (The Flash), and *Sulitjelma Sosialdemokratiske Ungdomsforening* (Sulitjelma Social Democrat Youth Organization).<sup>25</sup> However, communication between the remote mining society and the outside world was terminated by the policing authorities during the warlike campaign, and the local branch of miners subsequently organized actions on their own due to the censorship.<sup>26</sup> By setting this example, the ruling authorities gave Tranmæl experience in the rules by which the Norwegian class struggle was to unfold.

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24 Ola Svein Stugu: *Norsk historie etter 1905*. Oslo 2012, pp. 51–55.

25 Aas: Johan Medby – Frå "Sulitjelma-affæren" til Lillestrøm, p. 54.

26 *Ibid.*, 50.



## The German Labor Movement and Its Influence on the Norwegian Labor Movement

During these processes of tense class struggles, a state of revolution rocked other countries as well, culminating in the assassinations of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in January 1919. The killings did not go unnoticed by the labor movement in Norway; immediately afterward, there was a rise in awareness about what forces the labor movement was dealing with. The assassinations also sparked widespread political and historical commemorations of the two martyrs of class war and revolution. The narrative always tended to link Liebknecht and Luxemburg as a two-headed couple in Norway, which was helped by the alliteration of their names.

Labor responded quickly to commemorate the German revolution, as well as the assassination of the pair, that year. Soon after the revolutionaries' deaths, the party published a book titled *Den Tyske revolution, 9. novbr. 1918 – 9. novbr. 1919* (*The German Revolution, 9 November 1918 – 9 November 1919*). The volume was a critical showdown with ruling social democrat politicians such as Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925) and Philipp Scheidemann (1865–1939). The elites of the new Weimar Republic, together with the old ones of the German Empire, had crushed the Spartacist uprising but also demonstrated its incapability of handling the radical elements within its own political organization by not being able to prevent the assassination of either Liebknecht or Luxemburg. The editor of the Norwegian Social Democrat Party paper *Social-Democraten*, Olav Schefflo (1883–1943), illustrated this aspect in his chapter on the German military breakdown ending the First World War. His condemnation was directed at the right-wing nationalist and conservative elites, as well as at the reformist groups of members in his own party named “right socialists.”<sup>27</sup>

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27 Olav Schefflo: Sammenbruddet, in: Olav Schefflo/Edvard Bull/Jacob Friis/Morgan Phillips/Haavrad Langseth/Arvid G. Hansen (Eds.): *Den Tyske Revolution*, 9. novbr. 1918 – 9. novbr. 1919. Kristiania 1919, p. 7.

There has always been a tradition within the Norwegian labor movement to be associated with historians, particularly historians within the Labor Party dealing with contemporary history, due to the historical approach in the way the labor movement arose. Descriptions of the rise of the movement in itself also associated it with the historical change from an agricultural society to an industrialized one. In addition, Marxist theory has its foundation in historical materialism, and historians like Edvard Bull and his colleague Halvdan Koht (1873–1965) were heavily inspired by these theories. Both got positions as history professors at the University of Oslo – the only university in Norway before the Second World War. While Bull was appointed in 1917, Koht worked there from 1910. Furthermore, both were prominent members of the Labor Party and were later cabinet members of the Labor government in the 1930s.<sup>28</sup>

However, it was the Labor Party historian Jacob Friis (1883–1956) who wrote about the death of Rosa Luxemburg in his book on the German Revolution. Friis was both a journalist and historian, and in 1920–1921, he was the Norwegian Labor Party's representative on the Executive Committee of the Comintern. He cooperated closely with the left opposition of the Labor Party, especially with Tranmæl, during their years together in Trondheim (1915–1917).<sup>29</sup> Friis had lived in Berlin for an extended period in 1914 and had first-hand knowledge of the German labor movement.

The other contributors to the book on the German Revolution were Olav Schefflo, Edvard Bull, Morgan Phillips Price (1885–1973), Haavard Langseth (1888–1968), and Arvid G. Hansen (1894–1966). The publisher of the book of great current interest was the Labor Party.<sup>30</sup> It is worth mentioning that the British socialist journalist Morgan Phil-

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28 Åsmund Svendsen: Havdan Koht, online: [https://nbl.sn.no/Halvdan\\_Koht](https://nbl.sn.no/Halvdan_Koht); Tor Ragnar Weidling, Edvard Bull den eldre, online: [https://snl.no/Edvard\\_Bull\\_-\\_den\\_eldre](https://snl.no/Edvard_Bull_-_den_eldre).

29 Harald Berntsen: Jacob Friis, online: [https://nbl.sn.no/Jakob\\_Friis](https://nbl.sn.no/Jakob_Friis).

30 Schefflo, Olav, Edvard Bull, Jacob Friis, Morgan Phillips Price, Haavard Langseth and Arvid G. Hansen: *Den Tyske Revolution*. Kristiania 1919.

lips Price's chapter was on the Westphalian miners' strike. He was a Russian-speaking journalist and a close friend of Rosa Luxemburg. In 1914, Price traveled to Russia from Newcastle via Bergen in Norway, overland to Stockholm, and then to Petrograd (St. Peterburg).<sup>31</sup> Later, from November 1918 to 1919, he was imprisoned in Berlin during the German Revolution. There, he was given the choking news of the assassinations of Liebknecht and Luxemburg.<sup>32</sup> Though Price was acquainted with both Luxemburg and Liebknecht, it was Friis who wrote about the *Rote Fahne* and the Spartacist movement, as well as a chapter titled "Karl Liebknecht. Rosa Luxemburg. Leo Jogiches."<sup>33</sup>

In his chapter, Bull presented the background of the German Revolution and based his narrative on what he had learned from information given by George Ledebour (1850–1947). Ledebour was one of the German socialists arrested for supporting the Spartacist movement.<sup>34</sup> Bull was convinced that the information from Ledebour was "first-hand information from a participator," though he warned the reader about the potential subjectivity and one-sidedness of Ledebour's perspective. Nevertheless, Bull built a narrative in which the villain was the German First World War government of 1916, which was reluctant to meet the demands of the striking metal workers during their protest that year. This attitude strengthened the sentiments for revolution among the striking workers in Berlin, Bull claimed. As part of the anti-war demonstration of the Zimmerwald group, Ledebour was one of the few socialists in Germany protesting

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31 Colin Storer: Censoring an 'English Renegade' in Germany. The Case of Morgan Phillips Price, in: *The Historical Journal* 61/2018, no. 3, p. 771.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 767–768.

33 Jacob Friis: Spartacus, in: Olav Scheffo/Edvard Bull/Jacob Friis/Morgan Phillips Price/Haavard Langseth/Arvid G. Hansen (Eds.): *Den Tyske Revolution*. Kristiania 1919, pp. 16–40; Jacob Friis: Karl Liebknecht. Rosa Luxemburg. Leo Jogiches, in: Olav Scheffo/Edvard Bull/Jacob Friis/Morgan Phillips Price/Haavard Langseth/Arvid G. Hansen (Eds.): *Den Tyske Revolution*. Kristiania 1919, pp. 41–52.

34 Edvard Bull: Revolutionens forhistorie, in: Olav Scheffo/Edvard Bull/Jacob Friis/Morgan Phillips Price/Haavard Langseth/Arvid G. Hansen (Eds.): *Den Tyske Revolution*. Kristiania 1919, pp. 8–9.

against the war.<sup>35</sup> In 1917 and 1918, he managed to find support among the ammunition factory workers, whose strike intended to put pressure on the German government and parliament to force them to a “rightful peace.”<sup>36</sup> The protest was suppressed in a hardhanded fashion, and when the war developed into a disastrous defeat for Germany in 1918, the revolutionaries got more support than before. Consequently, the desperation led to the establishment of a broader regime aiming to salvage the monarchy. Some social democrats such as Scheidemann even participated in this rescue operation, Ledebour complained.<sup>37</sup>

Bull’s contribution had a strong anti-reformist tendency in line with Ledebour’s own experience with the betrayal of the emerging revolution from leading social democrats, whose ruling circles betrayed the navy soldiers of Kiel, as well as the workers in Berlin and the revolutionaries declaring the *Freistaat* (Free State) in Bavaria in 1918.<sup>38</sup> Ledebour likened the reformist social democrats’ attempt to stop the revolution by participating in a coalition government to a horseman bucking three horses in front of a carriage and three behind the carriage, facing the opposite direction.<sup>39</sup> However, Bull’s conclusion after his talk with Ledebour reveals how leading socialists in the Norwegian labor movement collected knowledge about experiences from revolutionary movements in neighboring countries. Consequently, Bull’s advice was to learn from the German Revolution for a future Norwegian revolution. Ledebour’s narrative was significant and instructive, illustrating the importance of weighing options carefully, as well as being systematic, when planning a revolution.<sup>40</sup> The

35 For a survey of the impact of the war on Germany’s socialist left, see the respective chapters in Frank Jacob/Riccardo Altieri (Eds.): *Krieg und Frieden im Spiegel des Sozialismus 1914–1918*, Berlin 2018. For another particular individual perspective, see Frank Jacob et al. (Eds.): *Kurt Eisner. Gefängnistagebuch*, Berlin 2016.

36 Bull, *Revolutionens forhistorie*, pp. 8–9.

37 *Ibid.*, 9–10.

38 Bavarian Prime Minister Kurt Eisner was also assassinated in February 1919. On his life and political role during the revolution, see Frank Jacob: *Kurt Eisner. Ein unvollendetes Leben*, Berlin/Leipzig 2021.

39 Bull, *Revolutionens forhistorie*, p. 14.

40 *Ibid.*

book was published during Labor's brief revolutionary period and is marked by this tendency to use the historical knowledge and experiences from Germany as a wake-up call for the Norwegian labor movement, aiming at a future revolution.

### Rosa Luxemburg's Influence on the Norwegian Labor Party

Jacob Friis' chapter on the Spartacist movement is more emotional than Bull's rather descriptive chapter. Friis' text is full of pathos and passionately supports the movement led by Liebknecht and Luxemburg. The deaths of the two heroes were considered martyrdoms by Friis,<sup>41</sup> who also considered the Spartacist period to have been just a first warning of a future revolution.

Friis described the struggle of the Spartacist movement during the days of revolution and cited the considerations of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, translated from the Spartacist publication *Rote Fahne*. He also translated the Spartacus program from German so that Labor Party readers could access the political and ideological content of "the second revolution." The next revolt should be a revolution of the proletariat, Friis stated, quoting the *Rote Fahne*: The second revolution would not be a "Shrovetide play" and would not be a struggle for or against the "Hohenzollerns" or the leadership of the Social Democrat Party; rather, it would become a struggle for or against socialism, he concluded.<sup>42</sup>

Friis' text also addresses the way Luxemburg and Liebknecht were treated by the German regime, particularly their passivity regarding Liebknecht's and Luxemburg's assassins and the way the investigating committee was treated.<sup>43</sup> It also touches on the connection between the "right-wing socialists" in power and proto-fascist organizations

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41 Friis, Spartacus, p. 16.

42 Ibid., p. 36.

43 Ibid., p. 34.

such as the paramilitary “Freikorps.”<sup>44</sup> Some of these groups even published recruitment advertisements in Social Democrat newspapers, Friis claimed, based on information from *Rote Fahne*. “Freikorps Dohna,” “Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division,” and “Freikorps Zloterie Thorn Grenzschutz Ost” were all strongly associated with the same regime, according to the newspaper *Vorwärts*.<sup>45</sup> It was among these groups that the assassins of Rosa Luxemburg were to be found. By establishing this narrative, Friis emphasized the inclination of the political leadership of the Social Democrat ranks to cooperate with right-wing elements to prevent class struggle and revolution. His main message was that the Labor Party had to consider this when the time was ripe for a similar revolution in Norway.

Labor’s leaders elevated the Spartacist movement as an ideal for the party. Friis and Scheffo were both sympathetic to the German movement, and while Bull slightly distanced himself from them, he still had a sympathetic approach to the German uprising and, in particular, the Spartacist movement. This aligned with their choices during the rifts within the Norwegian labor movement: Friis and Scheffo found their direction in the Norwegian Communist Party, while Bull stayed loyal to Labor after the closure with the Comintern. In Friis’ view, there was no doubt that the experience of the Spartacist movement was akin to what Norway could expect from both the labor movement and the reformist and parliamentary Social Democrats, as well as from the ruling elites of the Norwegian society, particularly the military, the police, and other enemies of the revolutionary classes. In his opinion, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were “spiritual eye-openers,” not leaders for a constituted revolutionary army; in other words, they were not “revolutionary leaders.” The way they were arrested and killed showed how unprepared they had been. In hindsight, the

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44 On the relation between para-military violence and the Freikorps, see Jan-Philipp Pomplun: *Deutsche Freikorps. Sozialgeschichte und Kontinuitäten (para)militärischer Gewalt zwischen Weltkrieg, Revolution und Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen 2022.

45 Friis, *Spartacus*, pp. 34–35.

Spartacist movement's two eminent leaders should have been hidden behind a strong force of revolutionary guardsmen protecting them with their blood. All of it was too romantic. Neither Liebknecht nor Luxemburg anticipated their assassination, and the experience was an eye-opener for the international revolutionary movement. Their assassinations had to be a wake-up call before the new era of conscious and organized action.<sup>46</sup> Overall, Friis' book provided strong reasoning and justification for the radicalization process of the Norwegian Labor Party in November 1918.

### The Norwegian Labor Press and the German Revolution

The connection between the Norwegian and German labor movements becomes further visible upon examining the public debate in Norway during the German Revolution of 1918–1919. Norway was about to witness a political trisection in the distribution of newspapers. The conservative, liberal-democrat, and socialist press outfits were the main rivals, sharing their readers nationwide. Even though there were papers with other affinities, the main pattern was this political trisection, and it was to be consolidated through the interwar period. The period was marked by an emerging party press promoted by the different political parties, and by 1918, most Norwegian regions had their own Labor Party paper. Martin Tranmæl was the editor of the Labor Party paper *Ny Tid* (New Times) in Trondheim (1913–1918), while Olav Schefflo was editor of the national paper *Social-Demokraten* (The Social Democrat) in Oslo between 1918 and 1921. Tranmæl took over as editor from 1923 and remained in charge until 1949.<sup>47</sup>

The national political papers distributed throughout Norway were predominantly connected to the three leading political parties – the

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<sup>46</sup> Friis, *Spartacus*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>47</sup> Einar A. Terjesen: *Dagsavisen*, in: Idar Flo (Ed.): *Norsk Presses historie*, bind 4, *Norske aviser fra A til Å*. Oslo 2010, p. 78; Trine Jansen: *Sørlandet*, in: Idar Flo (Ed.): *Norsk Presses historie*, bind 4, *Norske aviser fra A til Å*. Oslo 2010, p. 331.

Conservatives (Høyre), the Liberal Democrats (Venstre), and the Labor Party (Arbeiderpartiet). They jointly contributed to the foundation of a national network of papers, consequently sparking a public debate. Because most Norwegians read one or many newspapers, the public was informed about national and local debates and topics. The density of papers was huge, and small towns comprising 5,000–6,000 inhabitants could house as many as four or five different papers with their various political affinities. Most printed just two or three volumes a week; however, one of their main aims was to contribute to the public debate. The rise of mass democracy with universal suffrage since 1913 and the rapid development of communication, urbanization, modernization, and industrialization, combined with new technological inventions such as the telephone, telegraph, and printing press, promoted the reach and speed of information dissemination throughout the nation.<sup>48</sup>

Today, most papers are digitally accessible in the Norwegian National Library. By studying how the Labor Party papers addressed the German Revolution and Rosa Luxemburg's whereabouts, one can learn about the reception of the matter in Norway in 1918–1920. One specific subject that springs to mind is the way the Labor Party commemorated the Russian and German revolutions through its network of newspapers in the autumn of 1919. The central leaders of the party, Kyrre Grepp (1879–1922) and Martin Tranmæl, used the two revolutions to mobilize the party organization nationwide and took the initiative to present the two revolutions to the respective papers' readers.<sup>49</sup>

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48 Henrik G. Bastiansen: *Parti og presse – ulike skjebner*, in: Rune Ottosen (ed.): *Norsk presses historie*, bind 2, *Parti, Presse og Publikum 1880–1945*. Oslo 2010, pp. 57–70; Henrik G. Bastiansen: *Partipressen konsolideres (1920–1940)*, in: Rune Ottosen (ed.): *Norsk presses historie*, bind 2, *Parti, Presse og Publikum 1880–1945*. Oslo 2010, pp. 37–56. Rune Ottosen: *Da partiene fant sine aviser, og pressen erobret publikum*, in: Rune Ottosen (ed.): *Norsk presses historie*, bind 2, *Parti, Presse og Publikum 1880–1945*. Oslo 2010, pp. 7–13.

49 Kyrre Grepp/Martin Tranmæl, *Til Partiorganisationerne*, in: *Helgeland Fremtid*, October 23, 1919, p. 1.



The commemoration of the German Revolution anniversary was seen as an opportunity to address the internal problems within the labor movement concerning the question of strategies for the creation of a socialist society, namely whether the reformist or the revolutionary approach should be chosen. It served as a reminder for labor movements in other countries about the necessity of being prepared and agreeing upon set guidelines and general requirements. According to the Labor leadership, they gained knowledge from the experiences of the German Revolution, a revolution that had heavily influenced European politics.

However, interest in the German Revolution and Rosa Luxemburg's whereabouts was not limited to the Labor press: events in Germany were also dealt with extensively in both liberal and conservative papers. Europe was seen as being under siege, and the center-right papers also observed that two neighboring countries, Finland and Russia, were in the midst of a civil war created by a conscious class struggle. In April 1918 in Nordland County, a military expedition was sent to Sulitjelma to break up the protesting, anti-militarist, revolutionary miners. There was a consensus among the ruling elites in Norway that not only was Europe on fire but Norway would also be consumed in the inferno.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the conservative and liberal press observantly covered the international menace, where Rosa Luxemburg was a household name.

Nevertheless, when the center-right papers wrote about Luxemburg, she represented a threat to the societal order, whereas for the Labor press, she was a natural role model for societal change. Part of the Labor press narrative was that the assassination of Luxemburg illustrated the kind of counterforces the revolutionary movement suffered from when challenging the ruling conservative and liberal elites: One should never forget the risk of violent counteractions. Consequently, according to the leadership of the Labor Party, the labor movement had to join forces and choose a common revolutionary front.

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<sup>50</sup> Aas, Johan Medby. pp. 44–66.

The content of the narrative illustrates the attitude of the Labor Party at that stage in history. Jorunn Bjørgum emphasizes that the papers, particularly the editor of Oslo's *Social-Demokraten*, Olav Schefflo, were rather demagogic. Schefflo's perspective on the Bolshevik revolution was marked by a shallow defense of the revolution and its output, as he downplayed its violent, militant, and anti-democratic aspects.<sup>51</sup> In addition, he used his position as editor to promote the need for a strong militant unity, prepared for the ultimate struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie on a national level and internationally. Another historian, Eirik Wig Sundvall (1985–), states that the Labor Party press at that stage fashioned the entire labor movement into a streamlined and disciplined organization, resulting in Labor's admission to the Comintern in 1920.<sup>52</sup>

“The Norwegian Labor Party was shaken to its foundations when the 21 conditions of admission to the Comintern were made public in the summer of 1920. These conditions were based on the Bolshevik belief that the world was in a state of revolutionary civil war between the international proletariat and the international bourgeoisie, where the revolutionary movement needed iron discipline, military efficiency, and strict loyalty to win.”<sup>53</sup>

The knowledge gained from the German Revolution and the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg was undoubtedly embalmed in the Norwegian memory production of the events, indirectly contributing to the new, radical course of the Norwegian labor movement. When the Norwegian Labor Party became the only communist party in the Nordic countries, it also adopted a more militant approach. The

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51 Jorunn Bjørgum: Olav Schefflo og Moskvotesene, in: Øyvind Kopperud/Vibeke Moe/Vibeke Kieding Banik (Eds.): *Utenfor det etablerte. Aspekter ved Einhart Lorentz' forskning*. Oslo 2011, pp. 32–33.

52 Eirik Wiik Sundvall: Arbeiderpartiet og klassekrigen. Striden om Moskva-tesene i 1920 i en internasjonal kontekst, in: *Arbeiderhistorie* 21/2017, no. 1, p. 65.

53 Ibid.

revolution not only featured a battle against the bourgeoisie but also raised questions of firm actions against the social democrat and socialist factions with a reformist attitude who “betrayed the banner of the working class.”<sup>54</sup> In addition, the new communist Labor Party had to persistently fight these reformist organizations on an international level so that they could cleanse the communist parties of “reformist,” “social patriotic,” and “social pacifist” elements. One element in the struggle against the internal threat was to bolster “democratic centralism” to introduce “steely discipline” within the party leadership.<sup>55</sup> This, according to Bjørgum, was the principle promoted by Scheffo through the party press.

Evidently, the international situation influenced the internal debates in the Norwegian labor movement. However, the German experience gradually lost the Labor Party’s interest as its focus shifted to the experiences of the Russian Revolution and the ongoing attack on its new communist neighbor state – the Soviet Union. The Norwegian historian Hallvard Tjelmeland (1952–) concludes that the Labor Party must be considered a revolutionary mass party, showing no clear distinction from what the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet state stood for between 1917 and 1923.<sup>56</sup> The influence of the Soviet Communist Party and the new “workers’ state” became naturally dominant and seemingly successful, unlike the German Revolution experience. Tjelmeland adds that the more radicalized rhetoric during this period indicates that this new party was colored by the radicalization that took hold of the working class in the wake of four years of world war, in addition to the Russian Revolution.<sup>57</sup>

The internal conflicts between social democrats and more radical elements in the polarized labor movement mirrored international conflicts. One consequence of its admission to the Comintern was

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54 Sundvall, *Arbeiderpartiet og klassekrigen*, p. 66.

55 *Ibid.*

56 Hallvard Tjelmeland: *Arbeiderpartiet, bolsjevikpartiet og sovjetstaten 1917–1991*, in: *Arbeiderhistorie* 21/2017, no. 1, p. 86.

57 *Ibid.*

that the Labor Party was divided, resulting in a new Social Democrat Party being formed in 1921. Later, when Labor withdrew from the Comintern in 1923, another political party arrived on the scene, namely, the Communist Party.<sup>58</sup> By then, the Norwegian anomaly of having a revolutionary Labor Party was over. Before the Social Democrats and Labor merged in 1927, the workers' movement in Norway seemed to resemble that of the rest of Western Europe, with a Social Democrat Party, a reformist Labor Party, and a revolutionary, anti-parliamentary Communist Party operating side by side. From 1923 on, the Labor Party became increasingly critical of the Soviet regime and the political developments there.<sup>59</sup>

### The Commemoration of Luxemburg as a Revolutionary: The 10th and 20th Anniversaries in 1928 and 1938

The internal conflicts that escalated in the early 1920s were harmful to the perception of a person like Rosa Luxemburg. One main reason was the use of historical events and actors in all kinds of political projects and memory production regarding how the narrative about Luxemburg and her life was to be constructed. Communists who used Luxemburg in their arguments against social democrats would associate her name with the Bolshevik party and interpret her political views through their own lens, toning down some of her more critical views on the Bolshevik leaders. Others, as seen above, would use her to bolster the more radical approach within the Labor Party, making it difficult to nuance the perspective on the content of her political approach and ideological perspectives.

Luxemburg's name was particularly prominent among the Norwegian public in relation to the anniversaries of the revolution and the commemoration of her death. In any case, as in 1918–1919, the

58 Ola Svein Stugu: *Norsk historie etter 1905*. Oslo 2012, 82–84.

59 Tjelmeland: *Arbeiderpartiet, bolsjevikpartiet og sovjetstaten 1917–1991*. *Arbeiderhistorie* 21/2017, no. 1, p. 90.

narrative about Luxemburg was related to the development and conflicts within the Norwegian labor movement itself. As discussed earlier, Tranmæl and other leaders of the Norwegian Labor Party used the experiences of the German Revolution to strengthen their political projects within the party. The motivation driving the writings of Friis and Schefflo on the German Revolution published by the party evidences this perspective.

Anniversaries in connection with the assassination of Luxemburg were potent occasions for political demonstrations and demarcations from different environments, so let me demonstrate how some of these occasions were introduced to the public debate. The tenth anniversary of the deaths of Liebknecht and Luxemburg in 1928 was marred by conflict between communists and Labor Party members. The Labor Party press promoted Luxemburg as their own martyr. After the merging of the Social Democrats with Labor, it was equally important to link Luxemburg to the newly united Labor Party. The Labor press in Trondheim – *Arbeideravisa* – published the Swedish journalist and author Ture Nerman's (1886–1969) poem “Rosa Luxemburg – Karl Liebknecht,” while the Labor press in Oslo announced a great gathering in commemoration of the two dead martyrs; a lithograph of them both on the front page commemorated the “10th anniversary of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.”<sup>60</sup> The Labor Party commemoration bore the impression of competing politically with the communists as part of a strategy to assume ownership of the narrative about the assassinations. The two were thus Labor Party heroes and martyrs.

However, hostility toward the left wing of the labor movement was put aside. The Soviet diplomat to Norway and revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952), for instance, was interviewed and asked about her personal impressions of Luxemburg. The five-column illustrated interview was printed in *Arbeiderbladet* (former-

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60 *Arbeider-Avisa*, January 12, 1929, p. 2; *Arbeiderbladet*, January 14, 1929; *Fremover*, January 16, 1929.

ly *Social-Democraten*) on January 12, without any criticism directed toward communism or the Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the way the Labor Party press took ownership of Luxemburg provoked the communist press. For Norwegian communists, the commemoration of Luxemburg was an occasion to connect the history of the assassination with the memory of the “struggle toward opportunism.” This perspective was underlined by the central party paper of the Norwegian Communist Party.<sup>62</sup> It added that Luxemburg believed that the struggle for the “introduction of socialism could only start after the collapse of the capitalist social organization” and directed critique at the Norwegian Labor Party. The communist paper claimed in 1928 that had Liebknecht and Luxemburg been alive, they would have “battled against the treacherous politics of social democrats in all countries” with all their mental power.<sup>63</sup>

Ten years later, however, Olav Schefflo – by then a lapsed member of the Norwegian Communist Party – held a radio lecture on the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation on Rosa Luxemburg, for which he was later heavily criticized by his former fellows in the Communist Party. The radio program was announced nationwide by the Labor Party press, advertising that Luxemburg had been one of the main leaders of the international labor movement before and during the First World War. She was considered “one of the most prominent theorists within the left wing of the Second International.”<sup>64</sup> In a short notice in another Labor Party paper, she was characterized as “the well-known freedom- and anti-war fighter.”<sup>65</sup> During the 1930s, as many as 500,000 radio transmitters were sold in Norway, so Schefflo’s speech potentially had a national outreach, as the 45-minute-long

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61 Rosa Luxemburg, Aleksandra Kollontay meddelelser noen personlige inntrykk, in: *Arbeiderbladet*, January 14, 1929

62 Karl Liebknecht-Rosa Luxemburg 1919 – 15. Januar – 1929, in: *Norsk Komunistblad*, January 15, 1929, p. 1.

63 *Ibid.*

64 Schefflo om Rosa Luxemburg, in *Tiden*, August 5, 1938, p. 3.

65 Rosa Luxemburg, in *Folkets Røst*, August 6, 1938, p. 3.

program was announced as part of the national broadcasting schedule through the press.<sup>66</sup>

However, the reactions from the communist press afterward were generally negative. According to one communist paper in Oslo, *Arbeideren*, the content of the lecture was a “shameless attack on the legal system of the Soviet Union, its communist party, yes, and even on Lenin.”<sup>67</sup> The article was also printed in the communist paper *Arbeidet* in Norway’s second city, Bergen.<sup>68</sup> The communists of Norway, loyal to the Soviets, were especially provoked by the comparison between Luxemburg and Lenin. Previously, the opinion that Lenin was a stronger theoretician and leader than Luxemburg had spread widely, but Schefflo had changed this view in favor of Luxemburg. His argument for the change of understanding was justified in his judgment of her views on the role of the Communist Party during the Russian Revolution and how she assessed the organization of socialism.<sup>69</sup> This perspective aligned with Labor Party members’ general attitude toward communists.

The response from the communists was to label Schefflo as a “Trotskyist” in order to link him with another of the anti-heroes and enemies of the Soviet Union and communism in the late 1930s. To underline this, the communist press considered Rosa Luxemburg as having denounced Trotsky and his “detestable henchmen” in their “disruptive activity” against the USSR, the solitary socialist country on the globe.<sup>70</sup> The communist papers then established an alternative perspective on Luxemburg, claiming her to be inspired by “anarchosyndicalist ideas,” which often brought her into debates with “Bolsheviks.” Still, the Norwegian communists considered Luxemburg

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66 Stugu, *Norsk historie*, p. 69; *Dagens programmer*, in *Buskerud Dagblad*, August 8 1938, p. 4.

67 E. L.: Schefflos radioforedrag. *Arbeideren*, August 9, 1938, p. 3.

68 E. L.: En trotskist avslører sig i norsk kringkasting. Schefflos radioforedrag mandag var en skandale for bevegelsen. *Arbeidet*, August 10, 1938, p. 3.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*

“an honest revolutionary with a vivid enthusiasm for the young Soviet republic,” even though she did not live long enough to see much more than its birth. Nonetheless, the common goal of the labor movement was not to allow Schefflo and his comrades “to dishonor the name and memory of Rosa Luxemburg,” the communist writer concluded.<sup>71</sup>

### Uses and Interpretations of Luxemburg

As seen above, extensive research has been conducted on the radicalization process of the Norwegian labor movement during the last years of Luxemburg’s life. Politicians, especially from the left, publicly proclaimed their perceptions of Rosa Luxemburg at regular intervals. In most cases, it is easy to interpret the reasoning for their reflections. Most of them used her to strengthen their own political perspective to promote their arguments. The mighty party secretary of Labor between 1945 and 1969, Haakon Lie (1905–2009), explained why the labor movement had developed into a two-headed troll comprising the trade unions on the one hand and the political party organization on the other: through this well-knit amalgamation, disciplined trade unions and the parliamentary political branch joined hands for the sake of the whole labor movement. In Lie’s opinion, the movement developed in this direction because of the Social Democrat Youth Association’s anti-parliamentarian and anti-militarist inspiration obtained from Swedish anarcho-syndicalism and the Swedish Social Democrat Youth Organization. Later, he claimed, Liebknecht and Luxemburg served as the great ideals for the movement, with their belief in mass action and anti-militarism.<sup>72</sup> Tranmæl, one of the architects behind this organizational construct, was also inspired by Luxemburg, he concluded.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Hakon Lie: *Loftsrydding*. Oslo 1980, pp. 36–37.



In his 1980 book, Lie cites Luxemburg's confrontation with Soviet communism to justify his intense antipathy toward the Norwegian Communist Party. As a secretary of the Labor Party, Lie had been a fierce anti-communist – a Norwegian McCarthyist – during the Cold War era. This may explain why he used Luxemburg's critical writing on the development of Lenin's and Trotsky's ways of developing the revolution to consolidate his argument against the violent and anti-democratic trajectory of the Bolshevik revolution. According to Lie, the Soviet communist regime secured power using three cornerstones: the Communist Party, the Secret Police, and the Red Army. He then introduces Luxemburg into the picture to conclude that she criticized the Soviet leaders for "barbarizing society."<sup>73</sup>

As one can imagine, there was to be a struggle among different actors and factions within the Norwegian labor movement regarding the reputation of Rosa Luxemburg. Her whereabouts, ideological leanings, and political perspectives will probably continue to be part of the internal debates for years to come. Interest in her seemed to rise particularly during the founding of offshoots of existing political parties in the Labor movement. This was evident after the establishment of the Socialist Party (SV) in 1961, an offshoot of the Labor Party, and later with the foundation of the Maoist-inspired Workers' Communist Party, an offshoot of SV, in 1973.

Rosa Luxemburg was an important inspiration and direct contributor to the Norwegian labor movement from the beginning of the 20th century until 1923, when Labor withdrew from the Communist International. Still, the narrative around her remained critical to the development of the Soviet Union and other authoritarian, centralistic, and Stalinist organizations on the left wing. In recent years, her approach has inspired Norwegians toward socialism with some sort of human face. One well-known Norwegian historian – Yngvar Ustvedt (1928–2007) – has claimed that Luxemburg promoted a form of "anti-authoritarian communism" that was meant to liberate people from

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73 Ibid., pp. 72–73.

oppression, including from the authoritarian centralistic communist regimes of the 1970s.<sup>74</sup> Her legend in Norway seems to have been colored by the impression of an anti-authoritarian with a democratic attitude who launched an emancipatory project on behalf of the lower classes.

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74 Ustvedt, Yngvar: Rosa Luxemburg og den anti-autoritære kommunisme, in: *Sosialistisk perspektiv* 10/1973, no. 5, pp. 35–36.

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## 4 A Red Witch Travels through Abya Yala

Lessons from Rosa Luxemburg from the Periphery

*Selene Aldana Santana and Amada Vollbert Romero*

This article has been written by four hands, friendly hands that have embarked on a heartfelt academic endeavor based on mutual help.<sup>1</sup> Our purpose is to provide a reading of Rosa Luxemburg from the perspective of the Global South, and in particular from Abya Yala,<sup>2</sup> in order to identify which ideas and positions have had an influence in recent struggles against the system in the region, struggles that have mobilized different forms of being and thinking in our geographies and the world. We begin by presenting our epistemological position related to the revindication of Luxemburg as a thinker from the margins. Next, we conduct a historical review of the recovery of Rosa in Abya Yala, identifying three period-processes and placing them in this development. We finish the text by developing the lessons that we recognize the Polish revolutionary has bestowed upon our region and its feminist, ecological, anti-speciesist, and anti-colonial struggles.

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1 Translated from Spanish by Gilmar Visoni-Alonzo, Queensborough Community College, The City University of New York (CUNY). The editor would like to thank the translator for his invaluable support.

2 Abya Yala is a term adopted by some native peoples and organizations in order to replace the colonial name “America.” According to Francesca Gargallo, the expression comes from the Kuna language, a people from the Panamanian islands, and encompasses both the north and the south of the continent. Currently, the term is used to refer to the continent we live in using anti-colonial language. Francesca Gargallo: *Feminismos desde Abya Yala*, 3rd edition, Mexico City 2022, p. 30.

## Rosa Luxemburg: Thinker from the Periphery

In writing this, we start by embracing the teachings of feminist epistemologies from the point of view that, from a Marxist influence, refutes the positivist principle of objectivity, realizing that all knowledge is generated by a specific, situated, and partial life experience. Consequently, it is relevant to consider the position from which we experience the world since we do not see the same thing from above as from below, from the center as from the margins.

Historically, the dominant knowledge has come from the experience of bourgeois white males (androcentrism, i. e., to take the experience of the life of this hegemonic subjectivity as representative of the whole human experience). Feminist epistemologies, besides renouncing androcentrism, have found out that the experiences of marginal lives (as the ones that experience women who are racialized and live on the periphery) offer a privileged epistemic position to observe aspects of social reality. As Sandra Harding claims, “some types of social location and political struggles foment the development of a knowledge that is opposite to the dominant vision that affirms that politics and one’s position in relation to a local situation represent obstacles to scientific research.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we revindicate this marginal position as an empowering tool.

Given the characteristics of her birth, Rosa Luxemburg is a thinker who can be easily placed on the margins of society: a woman, Jewish, a native of Poland under Russian occupation, and with a limping disability. We could add, following Bolívar Echeverría, that she found herself with the “objective error of not being attractive.”<sup>4</sup> What is im-

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3 Sandra Harding: ¿Una filosofía de la ciencia socialmente relevante? Argumentos en torno a la controversia sobre el Punto de vista feminista, in: Norma Blazquez Graf/Fátima Flores Palacios/Maribel Ríos Everardo (Eds.): *Investigación feminista. Epistemología, metodología y representaciones sociales*, 1er ed, Mexico City 2010, pp. 39–66, here p. 41.

4 Bolívar Echeverría: *Rosa Luxemburgo. Espontaneidad revolucionaria e Internacionalismo* (1978), online: [http://bolivare.unam.mx/ensayos/rosa\\_Luxemburgo\\_espontaneidad\\_revolucionaria\\_e\\_internacionalismo](http://bolivare.unam.mx/ensayos/rosa_Luxemburgo_espontaneidad_revolucionaria_e_internacionalismo).

portant to point out is that her thought from the margins (periphery) is not necessarily equated to her birth conditions but to the identifications that she elected: she chose to remain single and independent; she chose to break the stereotype of femininity; she was a migrant, a communist of the most radical wing of her party; and she was jailed many times. Claudia Korol affirms that

“[e]ven though she was a Marxist shaped in Europe, she was from that part of Europe that had been systematically invaded by more powerful countries. The Marxism of Rosa has designs of peoples that have fought against foreign autocratic powers, peoples that have struggled against colonialism and imperialism and built their identity not as hegemony but rather as rebellion against hegemony.”<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, her marginal traits, by birth and by choice, defined Luxemburg’s thoughts and constitute an epistemological position, given that she “decided to adopt the point of view of the victims of capitalist modernity.”<sup>6</sup> We consider that because she wrote from this marginal viewpoint about oppressed subjectivities, Rosa Luxemburg left a valuable legacy to the Global South.

In this chapter, we do not want to unravel “what Luxemburg actually wanted to say” but rather seek to find a reading from the perspective of the marginalized Abya Yala in order to rescue those ideas that have resonance in the struggles of women in our region. This reading from the periphery includes a process of relocating ourselves as subjects marked by a matrix of domination whose dimensions (sex, gender, class, race, and sexuality) are inseparable. We do this reading from the assertion that we are colonized subjects with experiences occupying spaces of both oppression and privilege, touched profoundly

5 Claudia Korol: “Socialismo o Barbarie” Pensando a Rosa Luxemburgo, in *Diálogo de saberes y pedagogía feminista*. Educación popular, Buenos Aires 2017, pp. 343–359, here p. 344.

6 Michael Löwy in Hernán Ouviaña: *Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política*. Una lectura desde América Latina, Mexico City 2020, p. 180.



by the colonial experience (patterns of domination imposed upon colonized populations since the time of the conquest) tainted profoundly by the misogynistic model installed in the 16th century.<sup>7</sup> This process is not only about identifying ourselves as the results of an experience of domination but also recognizing that we are “agents of a long history of resistance.”<sup>8</sup>

This exercise of recognition and relocation is also an exercise in epistemological displacement: we are moving from the master’s house to the shack of the oppressed. Here, of course, we are recovering the image evoked by Audre Lorde, who talks about the master’s house and his tools to refer to the elites in power and their institutions.<sup>9</sup> Among these institutions, we can point out academia and its scientific-positivist canon, from which we propose to move epistemologically and relocate to a position where we can analyze the social world through the experience of oppressed subjectivities, just as Luxemburg did. Maria Alvarado and Maria Eugenia Hermida proposed the following in this regard: “Let us move away from the andro-North European-centered canon as inhabitants of our own skin ... with all the pain and power that this involves. Let us connect with the south that we are and inhabit, but not through the alienating task of thinking of our territory in North European-centered terms but from the foundation of our own feet.”<sup>10</sup>

In this way, we elect to do a reading located on the periphery. This is not just because of some of our birth traits, such as coming from working-class families, lower-class *barrios*, and one of the regions

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7 Yuderlys Espinosa/Diana Gómez/María Lugones/Karina Ochoa: Reflexiones pedagógicas en torno al feminismo descolonial. Una conversa a cuatro voces, in: Catherine Walsh (Ed.): Pedagogías decoloniales. Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir, Quito 2013, p. 414.

8 Espinosa et al., Reflexiones pedagógicas, p. 415.

9 Audre Lorde: La hermana, la extranjera (Extractos). Fusilemos la noche, Oaxaca 2017.

10 Mariana Alvarado/Maria Eugenia Hermida: Feminismos del Sur. Nudos epistemológicos para articular una investigación otra, in: PACHA Revista de estudios contemporáneos del Sur Global 9/2022, pp. 1–21, here p. 10.

most exploited by capitalism as well as most violently suppressed in the world, but also because we understand that there cannot be a center without the exploitation and spoliation of the peripheries, and we do not want to become oppressors. Of course, we do not want to be oppressed forever either. What we want is the absolute elimination of oppression. However, as long as oppression exists, we elect to identify with the oppressed women who rebel against the system that oppresses us, and we make this choice and epistemological position from which we re-read Rosa Luxemburg, seeking a teacher and a guide with lessons for the current struggles in Latin America. In this manner, we transform her into “our Rosa.”

### A Periphery within Peripheries: The Recovery of Rosa Luxemburg in Abya Yala

In this section, we address the historical periodization put forward by the Argentinian political scientist Hernán Ouviaña with regard to the recovery of Luxemburg in our region, given that he points out that “Luxemburg is far from being an author merely anchored in her time and specific context ... she presents herself to us very current and timeless ... in order to analyze and intervene in the struggles for emancipation ... that unfold in the Global South.”<sup>11</sup> Ouviaña talks about three period-processes in the cycles of struggle in the Global South during the 20th century in which Luxemburg’s thoughts contributed to “empower[ing] the anti-systemic struggles in our continent.”<sup>12</sup> We identify ourselves as part of this recent movement to recover Luxemburg.

The first cycle of recovery took place in the years following the assassination of Luxemburg in January 1919 in Berlin. In this period, in

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11 Ouviaña, *La revolución es magnífica*, p. 13. Also see Hernán Ouviaña: Reading Rose Luxemburg in Latin America. From her First Reception to Today’s Popular Struggles, in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schüttrumpf (Eds.): *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2. *Nachwirken*, Marburg 2021, pp. 431–444.

12 *Ibid.*

Latin America, the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui suggested the appropriation of Luxemburg's legacy, recognizing "her double capacity for action and thought." Besides Mariátegui, the feminist poet Nydia Lamarque wrote about and gave talks on Luxemburg, and another intellectual, Rosa Scheiner, presented Luxemburg in her magazine *Izquierda* "as a symbol of proletarian rebellion."<sup>13</sup>

In this first cycle, we also include a person we consider a margin in the center: the Hungarian Marxist György Lukács, whose interpretation of Luxemburg sparked many debates about the topic in our region. One example of this is his essay *The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg* (1921), where he points out three key elements of her thought: i) the centrality of the viewpoint of the totality, which "determines not only the object of knowledge but also the subject exercising the knowing," thus presenting a peculiar and Marxist form of understanding and creating science as a "historical and dialectic, unique and unitarian clause;" ii) the accumulation of capital as an issue that "transforms into a historical question regarding the conditions of accumulation and thus, in the certainty that unlimited accumulation is impossible;" and iii) a recognition of Luxemburg as a Marxist in which "the sign of the unity of theory and practice in her work and life" rests.<sup>14</sup>

The second cycle took place in the 1960s and 1970s, a moment when popular struggles re-emerged in a significant part of the Global South, a period when the work of Luxemburg provided analytical and militant tools that broke away from the dominant dogmatisms and bureaucratism: "In the crowded demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, next to the posters of Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara, the face of Rosa Luxemburg stands out."<sup>15</sup> It was during that period that the political-cultural Argentinian group *Pasado y Presente* published Luxemburg's books and articles (which had not yet been published

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13 Ibid., pp. 13–14.

14 Georg Lukács: Rosa Luxemburgo, marxista, en. Historia y conciencia de clase, La Habana 1970, pp. 59–75, here p. 74. In English online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/cho2.htm>.

15 Ouviaña, La revolución es magnífica, p. 15.

in Spanish.) The group mobilized in the city of Córdoba, “which experienced a massive political strike with insurrectional tones known as el Cordobazo.”<sup>16</sup> We also find references to Luxemburg in Mexico in 1968 through José Revueltas, a militant philosopher of the General Strike Committee at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Simultaneously, the theory of dependency, through the work of Ruy Mauro Marini, Vani Bambirria, and Theotonio Dos Santos, recovered Luxemburg’s anti-imperialist thought in order to formulate a dialectical reading of the relationship between the global center and periphery using Luxemburg’s notion of totality.<sup>17</sup>

Toward the end of this cycle, we find Bolívar Echeverría’s essay *Rosa Luxemburgo: espontaneidad revolucionaria e internacionalismo* (1978), the prologue to *Obras Escogidas de Rosa Luxemburgo* (published by Editorial Era in Mexico). In this essay, Echeverría demystified the image of Luxemburg, trying to recover what he called “the line of the communist Luxemburgian radicality,” which has been hidden through the fictitious image of an “almost Leninist Rosa” to whom her critics attribute the sins of spontaneity, catastrophic fatalism (the alleged foreseeing of the end of capitalism), and proletarian schematization (a debate on the relationship between the working class and the national question). Echeverría shows that all these “defects” are myths derived from purposeful misreadings of Luxemburg’s works. With all this, we can observe that, very often, it is political struggles that impel the recovery of historical figures and specific contents in academic circles, which, at the same time, nourish the political struggles, thereby fulfilling the Luxemburgian thesis about revolutionary spontaneity, which is “on a level that goes beyond the opposition between spontaneism and directism.”<sup>18</sup>

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16 Ibid., p. 15.

17 Ibid., p. 16.

18 Echeverría: Rosa Luxemburgo. Espontaneidad revolucionaria e Internacionalismo, pp. 4, 11 and 19, online: [http://bolivare.unam.mx/ensayos/rosa\\_Luxemburgo\\_espontaneidad\\_revolucionaria\\_e\\_internacionalismo](http://bolivare.unam.mx/ensayos/rosa_Luxemburgo_espontaneidad_revolucionaria_e_internacionalismo).

The third cycle indicated by Ouviaña goes from the 1990s to the present. In this new cycle of popular struggles against neoliberalism in Latin America, Luxemburg has been revitalized as a theoretical and political reference for diverse popular movements. In the book *La revolución es magnífica*, Ouviaña surveys the experience of dozens of organizations recovering the ideas of Luxemburg, such as Cátedra Libre Virginia Bolten (La Plata, Argentina), Colectivo Nacional de Formación del Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas (Brazil), La Tinta (Córdoba, Argentina), Movimiento por el Agua y los Territorios (Chile), and BASE-IS (Paraguay). The book *El marxismo olvidado* (2014) by Michael Löwy can also be included in this process since three of its six chapters are dedicated to the thought of Luxemburg (although he also discusses other Marxists like Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and Lucien Goldmann). It is not a coincidence that Löwy begins his book by talking about “the vast and disproportionate body of works by Rosa Luxemburg published since the mid-1970s, where genuine analysis of high quality coexists with the greatest confusion and arbitrariness,”<sup>19</sup> which confirms Echeverría’s thesis concerning the mythification of Luxemburg.

The third cycle has experienced a particular impulse in the last few years, given the effervescence of feminism in Latin American universities. In Mexico, this cycle started in 2017 when the University Feminist Movement expanded as a result of the femicide of Lesvy Berlin Osorio,<sup>20</sup> a movement that was consolidated in 2019 with the one-hundredth anniversary of the assassination of Luxemburg. This cycle, where we the authors place ourselves (as well as many reading circles, publications, theses, and discussions around Luxemburg and

19 Michael Löwy: *El marxismo olvidado*, La Plata 2014, p. 30.

20 On 3 May 2017, Lesvy Berlin Osorio’s body was found near the Universidad Nacional Autónoma in Mexico. The authorities tried to present the death as a suicide, but feminist collectives mobilized in order to force the investigation of the case from the perspective of gender. In 2021, Lesvy’s ex-partner, Jorge Luis Gonzalez Hernández, was found guilty of femicide; he had been denounced as a suspect by the victim’s mother since the beginning. This incident energized the university feminist process that had already been in the works for several years.

her comrades Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontái), was impelled by the empowerment of the feminist movement and *mujeres que luchan* (women who fight) in Latin America for what can be characterized as the “feminist recovery” of Rosa Luxemburg.

The struggles of women also surfaced in the education community of which we are a part, since in the classrooms of the Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, we encounter a momentum for the feminist reconstruction of the sociology that is taking place in diverse geographies. Within this context, in 2019, we established an educational intervention project called *La participación femenina en la sociología* in which we study classical sociologists with the purpose of including them in the curriculum for the BA degree. It is in this way that we rediscover the Marxists (Zetkin, Luxemburg, Kollontái), organizing reading circles related to their works (an introductory one in 2019 and a more focused one in 2022). Today, the faces of Luxemburg and Zetkin appear on the walls of our university as referents of the proletarian and feminist struggles that denounce the double or triple feminine working load, the persistent salary gap, and the exploitation of unremunerated care work.

As examples of the seeds that have bloomed in this cycle of struggle, we can cite the following: *Rosa Luxemburgo. Utopía y vida cotidiana* (2018) by the Costa Rican Rodrigo Quesada Monge; a compilation by Brigada para Leer en Libertad called *Su Hogar es el Mundo Entero* (2019), which contains the writings of Zetkin and Luxemburg regarding “the feminine question”; *Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política* (2020) by Ouviaña, which includes a chapter entitled “Women, Indigenous Peoples, and Nature in the Reproduction of Life”; the article “El feminismo marxista y la Sociología Clásica” (2020) by Teresa Rodríguez de la Vega; the translation into Spanish of *Diccionario Histórico Crítico del Marxismo-Feminismo* (2022); the thesis *El diagnóstico marxista de la modernidad en clave feminista* (2022) by Amada Vollbert Romero; the compilation *Mujeres, revolución y socialismo* (2023) by Ediciones IPS, with articles about “the feminine question” by Luxemburg, Zetkin,

Kollontái, Eleanor Marx, Inessa Armand, Karl Marx, Engles, Lenin, and Trotsky; the fanzine *Las marxistas recargadas* (2023) by Selene Aldana and Amada Vollbert; as well as books for young readers: *Rosa Lux*<sup>9</sup>. *La revolución en juego* (2019) by Vanesa Ripio and *La maravillosa vida de Rosa Luxemburgo* (2021) by Ana Iniesta and Daniela Beracochea.

Furthermore, many current and diverse organizations share Luxemburg as a point of reference, often presenting her as a grandmother, a witch, or a teacher who has left us a legacy of experience and wisdom. All of these endeavors emphasize the intersectional, ecologist, anti-speciesist, and anticolonial character of her thought. We now proceed with identifying some aspects of Luxemburg's thought in relation to the struggles of our region.

### Lessons for Feminist Struggles

Whether Luxemburg can be considered a feminist or not is a matter of debate. As we know, in the context of her life, the “feminist” label was reserved for the liberal suffragettes, who embraced a reformist position that claimed for bourgeois women the privileges that capitalism afforded to the men of their own class. Like Zetkin (the main leader of the working-class women's movement), Luxemburg considered that there was no possibility for collaboration between the suffragist movement and proletarian women. Therefore, both women rejected the feminist label. Nonetheless, the term “feminist,” beyond being a historical category, is also an analytical category that allows us to find shared tendencies in thinkers and activists of diverse eras. Consequently, the most recent moment of the recovery of Luxemburg's image has taken place through a feminist focus that has found elements of her life and thought that identify her as an inspiration to the struggles of the women of Abya Yala.

Her lifestyle defied the parameters of femininity of her time. She was a woman who remained single, independent, and childless, supporting herself with her work as a writer, journalist, and teacher. She

dedicated herself to the masculine occupation of politics, and by doing this, she defended her ideological positions, confronting even the leaders of her own party: “she dared to fall in love once and again, breaking social conventions regarding family ... daring to love even Kostia Zetkin, the son of her friend Clara, who was thirteen years younger than herself.”<sup>21</sup>

Beyond her lifestyle, Luxemburg embraces explicit affirmations that are close to feminism, such as when she adopted Charles Fourier’s notion that in every society, the grade of women’s emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation. However, as Ouviaña pointed out, “it would be a mistake to look at her contributions to feminism only taking into consideration the writings or letters explicitly dedicated to the topic,” since many of her other writings contain clues for the development of women’s struggle. For example, Drucilla Cornell argues that Luxemburg was an ethical feminist because she fought against all the structures that divided people between beings of first and second class.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, we can find lessons that Luxemburg contributes to recent feminist movements in Latin America. To begin with, her point of view of capitalism as a complex system of oppression may be considered a precursor to the intersectional focus that is so relevant to current feminism.<sup>23</sup> Intersectionality pretends to separate us from the essentialist idea of the universal woman in order to recognize the diversity of experiences of women as a plurality, configured by a particular inter-connection of the systems of hetero-patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and classism in their life experiences. And thus, the lives of women in Latin America unravel at a particular intersection of roads where different systems of oppression meet.

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21 Korol, “Socialismo o Barbarie”, p. 352.

22 Hernán Ouviaña: Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política. Una lectura desde América Latina, Mexico City 2020, p. 172.

23 Selene Aldana et al: Cuaderno de trabajo. La participación femenina en la Sociología Clásica, Mexico City 2021, p. 124; Amada Vollbert: El diagnóstico marxista de la modernidad en clave feminista, Tesis de licenciatura. Mexico City 2022, p. 113.



The totality of Rosa Luxemburg's perspective not only contains this approach but also goes beyond it. For her, each dimension of reality is a moment or edge of a concrete totality; therefore, it is not necessary to isolate each dimension but rather analyze its specificity from the dynamic totality. This outlook allows us to understand capitalism as a system of multiple domination in which different forms of oppression find themselves in a knot, reinforcing each other. For example, Luxemburg is one of the thinkers recovered in Chile by the *Movimiento por el Agua y los Territorios* in order to understand the "interconnected extractionism, patriarchy and colonialism" and, in its place, bring forth as a guide "the decolonization of nature and the consolidation of territorial economies from the perspective of a communitarian feminism."<sup>24</sup>

To look at the oppression that women experience only because of their gender condition is a partial view of the problem. It is for this reason that the *Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas* in Brazil has constituted itself as an autonomous movement of women that represents not divisions but rather a movement that sees the class struggle from the perspective of the feminine condition and the specificity of the peasant woman.<sup>25</sup> The movement sees itself as part of the building process of a feminism that is peasant, indigenous, and black in Latin America and the Caribbean, a popular peasant feminism.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Luxemburg recognizes certain characteristics in that totality that can enrich the appreciation of intersectional feminism. She points out that the totality is not static but rather finds itself in

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24 *Movimiento por el Agua y los Territorios: Desde los derechos de la naturaleza, la soberanía y autodeterminación de los pueblos se hace camino al andar*, in: Hernán Ouviaña (Ed.): *La revolución es magnífica*, Buenos Aires 2022, pp. 153–158, here p. 153.

25 *Colectivo Nacional de Formación del Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas: Mujeres que transforman el mundo. El encuentro del Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas con el pensamiento de Rosa Luxemburgo*, in: Hernán Ouviaña (Ed.): *La revolución es magnífica*, Buenos Aires 2022, pp. 79–88, here p. 81.

26 *Colectivo Nacional de Formación del Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas, Mujeres que transforman el mundo*, p. 84.

a process, in permanent motion and transformation. Consequently, the crossroads in which each woman finds herself is not fixed but in motion, which depends on the trajectory of the woman's life as well as the transformations of the social context in which she lives.

Luxemburg also believes that totality is contradictory since, in its interior, opposing, even antagonistic, forces exist.<sup>27</sup> This contradictory character of totality can help us understand the existence of intersectional identities through which a person can simultaneously belong to both oppressed and privileged groups whose systems overlap or co-articulate with each other. Totality also provides us with resources to understand and analyze the realities from which women in the Global North have been able to emancipate at the expense of the condition of the oppression of populations in the Global South. In fact, even some women in the Global South have been able to prosper through the exploitation of other women who exist in even more precarious positions.

Perhaps the most important point is that looking at that diverse and contradictory totality helps us separate ourselves from essentialisms, making the political agent plural without encapsulating the diverse struggles. The Workshop of Popular Eco-Territorial, Peasant and Indigenous Feminisms Towards the Construction of Eco-Social Horizons claims that

“our struggles, although they may have geographic differences, are always connected. What is important is when reflecting upon water, energy sovereignty, and food autonomy, in reality, there is no division of topics since they are all interconnected, even though, on occasion, we lose the panoramic vision to address them. Each one of us lives in this experience of depredation and suffering from our own territory, and capitalism seeks that we think in isolation to fall into the trap of individualism.”<sup>28</sup>

27 Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, p. 65.

28 Taller de trabajo e intercambio “Feminismos populares, ecoterritoriales, campesinos e indígenas hacia la construcción de horizontes ecosociales”: Feminismos

The political agent of women's struggles cannot just be found in the working women who participate in an organized movement or party; the agent is also the dancer in the music hall,<sup>29</sup> the homemaker, the unemployed, the defenders of the land, etc. It is for this reason that we consider that the contributions of Luxemburg's thoughts toward intersectional targets can also nourish the cause of transfeminism, as Sayak Valencia has called it in reference to the diversification of the political agent of feminism, which includes not only women but also all the other oppressed subjectivities such as sexual dissidents or people with disabilities.<sup>30</sup>

This diversification of revolutionary subjectivity opens the door to Luxemburg's trust in the masses, which, according to Ouviaña, is the principle of depatriarchization "that implies the transition from capitalist egocentricity to co-existing in community."<sup>31</sup> He called attention to the idolatry of political parties and recognized the revolutionary power of the spontaneity of the masses, which she saw as an antidote against reformism. As Rodrigo Quesada points out,

"[i]f it was not possible to attack it within parliamentary democracy, it was necessary to invent the means through which the masses could get rid of reformism, denouncing their complicity with the socially dominant groups, through strength in the streets, in the labor unions, through strikes, and through popular uprisings in the neighborhoods and centers of work, such as factories, mines, centers of agricultural production, and *cantinas*."<sup>32</sup>

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territoriales para una ecología popular, Mendoza, Argentina 2022, p. 47.

29 Rosa Luxemburgo: El voto femenino y la lucha de clases, in: Oscar de Pablo (comp.) Su hogar es el mundo entero, 1a ed. México 2019, pp. 61–72, here p. 68.

30 Sayak Valencia: Teoría transfeminista para el análisis de la violencia machista y la reconstrucción no-violenta del tejido social en el México contemporáneo, in: Universitas Humanística 78/2014, pp. 66–88.

31 Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, p. 173.

32 Rodrigo Quesada Monge: Rosa Luxemburgo. Utopía y vida cotidiana, Costa Rica 2018, p. 431.

In the current Latin American feminist movement, we also find this confidence in the masses and the recovery of the resource of the strike. This is demonstrated in the feminist strike of 9 March, which has taken place in many Latin American cities every year since 2017 in order to protest against the great amount of caregiver work that women perform without recognition or pay. We find an expression of self-consciousness of the mass character of current Latin American feminism in the name of one of the most important movements of recent years, *Marea Verde* (Green Tide), born in Argentina but with a presence throughout Latin America, dedicated to the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights. The metaphor of the tide, of course, is a reference to its mass-based character, which, as Quesada points out, results in an antidote against reformism; “until it becomes law” (referring to the de-criminalization of abortion), *Marea Verde* demands a non-reformist reform, just as Luxemburg believed could happen.<sup>33</sup> This reform preserves as its horizon the deconstruction of an anti-capitalist political project.

*Marea Verde* uses an aquatic metaphor that had already been used by Luxemburg in order to understand the social struggle: “sometimes, the wave of the movement invades everything; sometimes it divides itself into an infinite network of small streams; sometimes it emerges from the soil as a live spring; sometimes it gets lost inside the ground.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the most relevant parallel between Luxemburg and feminism consists in their bio-centrism, that is, in placing life at the center. This is a principle of thought and practice that becomes profoundly anti-systemic in the midst of capitalism, which places economic gain at the center, oppressing life among populations, species, and territories. The conception that Luxemburg places at the center of life and its defense has made her a reference for diverse feminist, eco-territorial movements that struggle for sustainability.

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33 Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, p. 137.

34 Luxemburgo in *ibid.*, p. 172.

## Lessons for the Eco-Territorialist and Anti-Speciesist

Luxemburg's biocentrism can be found in her love for nature. Her passion for plants and animals, particularly cats and birds, is well known (she could imitate the diversity of their sounds with great ability).<sup>35</sup> The woman who spent so much time behind bars as a political prisoner admired birds more than any other being. Claudia Korol points out that Luxemburg went beyond the Marxist slogan "nothing human is alien to me," given that "neither birds nor plants nor trees nor the blue or gray sky nor the stars, the moon, the river were alien to her"; this "makes us think of the intimate relationship of the socialist-feminist protagonist of 20th- and 21st-century revolutions with life itself."<sup>36</sup>

This special sensibility for nature was recognized by Luxemburg's friends. In the article *Rosa Luxemburg* (1919), her friend and comrade Zetkin describes her as:

"A delicate, deep, passionate soul that not only embraced as hers everything human but also extended her embrace to all other living things. Since, for her, the universe was part of a harmonious and organic whole. How often the woman that others called 'Bloody Rosa' would stop, tired and overwhelmed by work, and then come back to save the life of an insect lost in the grass."<sup>37</sup>

Luxemburg studied biology at the University of Zürich. Therefore, beyond sensibility, she had ample knowledge of the natural world, which we can observe in the herbarium that she built throughout her

35 Vincent Streichhahn: Gelebtes Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt. Fragmentarisches zum dialektischen Naturverständnis von Rosa Luxemburg, in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schüttrumpf (Eds.): *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2. Nachwirken, Marburg 2021, pp. 187–224.

36 Korol, "Socialismo o Barbarie," p. 348.

37 Clara Zetkin: *Rosa Luxemburg*, in: Oscar De Pablo (Ed.) *Su Hogar es el Mundo Entero*, Mexico. City 2019, p. 131.

life as well as the many letters in which we can see detailed descriptions of a landscape or precise information about species of birds and plants. In a letter dated 6 July 1917, written to one of her lovers, Hans Diefenbach, she writes:

“A little friend whose picture I’m sending you has made me see the light. This lad with an attractive beat, high forehead, and wise eyes is called ‘hippolais hippolais.’ I’m sure you have heard him somewhere because he prefers to nest in gardens and parks. I’m sure you have not observed him because men, in general, do not observe the most beautiful things in life.”<sup>38</sup>

We agree with Ouviaña that beyond mere “sympathy and passion for botany and herb knowledge,” there is an awn inseparable from her anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-colonial positions given that there is a conception of nature as an oppressed entity in her thought,<sup>39</sup> to which we add that there is, in Luxemburg, a biocentric political position opposed to the fundamental logic of capitalism. This makes her one of the first Marxists to recognize the importance of the defense of Mother Earth and animals as part of the anti-capitalist struggle.

Luxemburg draws parallels between animals and the working class, regarding both as victims of the same system of capital exploitation. In a letter that she wrote to Sonia Liebknecht from prison on Christmas Eve 1917, she describes the profound empathy that she felt with a buffalo that, like her, was a spoil of war, deprived of its freedom and forced to work:

“While they unloaded the car, the beasts remained passive and exhausted, and one of them, bleeding, had a sad expression. Its aspect and its big eyes, so sweet, had the expression of a child that had been

38 Rosa Luxemburgo: *Cartas de amor de Rosa Luxemburgo*, ed. and transl. Rosa Dubinski/Guillermo Israel, 4th edition, Buenos Aires 2018, p. 127.

39 Ouviaña, *Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política*, p. 180.

crying a lot, a child who would have been severely punished without knowing for what and not knowing what to do to free himself from the torment and the brutal violence. I was in front of the yoke, and the animal was looking at me; the tears that came out of my eyes were its tears. It is impossible to be moved more by the suffering of the most beloved of our brothers than the way I was moved by my impotence before that mute pain. The vast and fertile green prairies in Romania lost forever! The sun was shining, the wind blew, the birds sang in a very different manner, and the melodious call of the shepherd could be heard in the distance. Here, the horrible street, the suffocating stable, the hay mixed with rotten hay, and, above all, these ferocious unknown men and the blows, the blood that came out of an open wound... Oh my poor buffalo, my poor and dear brother! Here we are, both of us, you and me, impotent and silent, united by pain, impotence, and nostalgia.”<sup>40</sup>

This excerpt shows the sensibility that Luxemburg had for animals since she considered them, just like the working class, victims of the horrors of imperialist wars. We can see her “distant vocation from anthropocentrism, which views humans as a superior species and the absolute center of the universe, with the right to subdue and instrumentalize all other species and living things.”<sup>41</sup> We can then hypothesize that, in Luxemburg, there is “an elective affinity with the situation of numerous indigenous peoples, communities of Afro-descendants and peasant organizations that postulate that nature, just like human beings, has rights that cannot be trampled upon.”<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in the profound empathy and identification of Luxemburg with non-human living beings, we can find points of support for the struggles that today we call anti-speciesist, whose radical nature lies in questioning the system of production and consumption as a whole, departing from the premise that all human beings are valu-

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40 Luxemburgo in *ibid.*, p. 183.

41 Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, pp. 180–181.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

able. These positions have resonance in Latin American organizations, such as the Colectivo Nacional de Formación del Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas in Brazil, which claims that “class struggle also implies rethinking our relationship with nature and fighting off attacks on the land.”<sup>43</sup> The Movimiento por el Agua y los Territorios in Chile states that “defending waters and land is to defend the people’s dignity” and that “food and energy sovereignty represent communitarian forms of protection of nature, which are linked, in turn, with people’s self-determination.”<sup>44</sup> The Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas, which works toward an agro-ecology opposed to capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and colonialism, also claims that it shares Luxemburg’s sensibility toward the care of nature, of which humanity is part; consequently, the movement recognizes that “we must co-exist without predatory exploitations that seek profit above life.”<sup>45</sup>

Luxemburg’s biocentrism, as well as her perspective of totality, brings her closer to the anti-colonial position that she embraced throughout her life and also provides lessons for contemporary struggles in Abya Yala.

### The Lessons of Anti-Colonial Thought

In spite of being a critical approach to the social world, Marxism has not entirely sorted out colonialist thought in many of its political and theoretical schemas. An example of this is the proposals concerning internationalism in *Woman and Socialism* (1879) by August Bebel, where we can find a concerning tendency toward the homogeniza-

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43 Colectivo Nacional de Formación del Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas, *Mujeres que transforman el mundo*, p. 81.

44 Movimiento por el Agua y los Territorios, *Desde los derechos de la naturaleza*, p. 157.

45 Colectivo Nacional de Formación del Movimiento de Mujeres Campesinas, *Mujeres que transforman el mundo*, p. 84.



tion of the proletariat and its diverse cultural sources; we could even say that there are elements of an explicitly colonial way of thinking. In the chapters “Internationalism” and “The Question of Population and Socialism,” the book presents phrases like “civilizing mission,” adjectives like “barbarians and savages,” and political positions referring to “rational principles of colonization” and “domination of nature,” among other phrases, which, as we know, are not isolated opinions but positions shared by diverse members of the German Social Democratic Party.<sup>46</sup>

The case of August Bebel, one of the theoreticians and militant Marxists committed to the *feminine question*, helps us show that Marxism was also permeated with the racist and colonialist evolutionism of its time. Luxemburg, for her part, was critical of this linear conception of history where “everything that corresponded to savagery and barbarism was part of a shameful and value-deprived prelude to civilization, a semi-animal existence that civilized humanity today can only contemplate with condescending scorn.”<sup>47</sup> With this, she revindicates a rich anti-colonialist view of Marxism that manifests in the theoretical debates it poses as concrete political positions, such as the national question and internationalism.

### *Accumulation of Capital as a Permanent Process*

As we can read in the prologue of *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), the idea for this book emerged when Luxemburg was writing *Introduction to Political Economy* (1925), a didactic work conceived as material to provide support in her classes at the school where she was training members of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). During the course of this project (systematizing and translating Marxism’s most important ideas), Luxemburg was unable to pres-

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46 August Bebel: La mujer y el socialismo, Madrid 2018, pp. 664–689.

47 Luxemburg in Ouviaña: Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, p. 179.

ent the global process of capitalist production in its concrete aspect or its objective historical limits with enough clarity. This gave rise to a new direction in her research.<sup>48</sup> In these two works, deeply connected, she develops some of the key concepts to understand capitalism and its dependency in relation to the periphery (the name that was then given to European colonies).

Luxemburg denounces the fact that “capitalism needs to be surrounded by non-capitalist forms of production for its existence and development.” With this, we understand the original accumulation as a permanent process that destroys “natural economies” and disarticulates ecosystems and communities in the peripheries of the capitalist world. What we call neo-colonialism is a necessary and constant condition of capitalism, given that “every new colonial expansion comes along with a tenacious war waged by capital against the natural, social and economic forms, as well as with the violent appropriation of the means of production and its workers.” All of these neo-colonial policies result in a clash between capitalism and “the natural economy that presents ridged barriers to the needs of capital.”<sup>49</sup>

Here, Luxemburg has a dialogue with Marx’s views expressed in chapter XXIV in volume I of *Capital*, where he develops the notion of original accumulation as a necessarily violent process, describing with gloomy affirmation that “capitalism is born stained with blood and mud.”<sup>50</sup> Luxemburg reconsiders Marx’s concept as a constant process that gives impetus once and again to the periodical restructuring of capitalism as a global system:

“To extract permanently more products from a country than the ones given to it could only be done by a country that would have econom-

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48 Rosa Luxemburg: Prólogo, in: *La acumulación del capital*, 1a ed. México 1967, p. 9.

49 Rosa Luxemburg: Capítulo XXVII. La lucha contra la economía natural, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *La acumulación del capital*, Mexico City 1967, pp. 283–297, here pp. 283, 284–285.

50 Rosa Luxemburg: *Introducción a la economía política*, Madrid 1974, p. 25.

ic rights over it. These rights have nothing to do with a relationship among equals. Such rights and relationships of inter-dependency among countries exist, even if academic theories do not know anything about them. These relationships of dependency, in their simplest form, are those of a metropolis over its colonies.”<sup>51</sup>

With this analysis, Luxemburg points out the link between capitalism and colonialism, showing that the extraction of value is not reduced only to productive fields but extends to other zones of appropriation, such as colonies, nature, indigenous peoples, children, migrants, women, and other oppressed groups.<sup>52</sup>

Going back to Hernan Ouviaña, we can say that, for Luxemburg, the process of permanent accumulation includes the exploitation of colonies, nature, non-remunerated domestic work by women, the displacement of peasant and indigenous populations, as well as the privatization of common goods such as water.<sup>53</sup> As Francisca Fernandez of Movimiento por el Agua y Territorio states, “the mercantile and utilitarian form of discarding women’s bodies operates in the same way as the forceful taking away of land.”<sup>54</sup>

This turn that Luxemburg gives to the Marxist concept of original accumulation has provided new resources of understanding to activists and thinkers, who can now analyze the neo-extractionism that occurs in Latin America in its mega projects and processes of gentrification. In this sense, the Paraguayan organization BASE-IS recovers Luxemburg in order to understand the contemporary violent process of neo-colonialism through the use of bio-technology, agri-business, and the mono-cultivation of transgenic soy, since Luxemburg’s thought captures the intertwining between dispossession/exploitation

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Bajo Tierra Ediciones: A modo de presentación, in: Hernán Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, pp. 76–87.

<sup>54</sup> Francisca Fernández: Tejer con los pies en la tierra, in: Feminismos territoriales para una ecología popular, Mendoza 2022, p. 10.

and capitalism/colonialism/extractionism/patriarchy, and with this, the class struggle and the defense of land and life.<sup>55</sup>

### *Internationalizing from Diversity*

For Luxemburg, internationalism implied “a political and ethical attitude of strategic character that would have to be employed on a daily basis and in a militant form” when searching for solidarity among all the peoples of the world in their struggle against forms of capitalism exploitation, such as imperialism or chauvinism.<sup>56</sup> This solidarity, however, did not imply a homogenization of ways of life and struggles; rather, it consisted in the understanding of shared historical processes that would help “awaken and diffuse the historically global character of the communist revolution.”<sup>57</sup> This form of thinking about internationalism enabled Luxemburg to identify two fundamental principles: 1) the value of different forms of life to those of capitalist modernity, among them, our own continent prior to its European invasion, and 2) the notion that national historical narratives be viewed as part of shared historical processes places in a particular context.

In *Introduction to Political Economy*, Luxemburg devoted significant space to what she called “agrarian communist societies.” At different points, Luxemburg celebrates these societies’ organizational dynamics, showing in them the absence of “a state with co-active written laws/a division between rich and poor, between dominators and workers.”<sup>58</sup> In these societies, Luxemburg finds an affinity between the revolutionary impulse of the European proletarian masses

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55 BASE-IS Paraguay: Las luchas contra acumulación por despojo para garantizar la soberanía alimentaria en Paraguay, in: Hernán Ouviaña (Ed.): *La revolución es magnífica*, Ed. Buenos Aires 2022, pp. 159–166, here p. 159–162.

56 Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, p. 197.

57 Echeverría in Ouviaña, Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política, p. 199.

58 Luxemburgo, *Introducción a la economía política*, p. 45.

and the resistance of the aborigines against the colonial advances of European countries.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, in *The Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg denounces the process of colonization and dispossession suffered by India and Algeria, and at the same time, she describes the communitarian forms of life in those communities as based on “links of solidarity, mutual help, and equality.”<sup>60</sup>

When considering a historical understanding of national narratives, we encounter the debate over the national question in her country of birth, Poland, where there were two opposing socialist positions. On the one hand, the Polish Socialist Party demanded independence from the Russian Empire, and on the other, the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (of which Luxemburg was a member) proposed the union of the whole working class of the Russian territory against the absolutist government. Luxemburg demanded “the equality of all the nationalities that inhabit the Russian Empire, with guarantees of freedom in their cultural development, national education, and freedom of the use of their native language.”<sup>61</sup> According to Hernan Ouviaña and Maria-Jose Aubet, this is the demand presented by many peoples from Abya Yala who claim a multi-national state in which all languages and origins be respected through a process that aims to eliminate the racist and hierarchical logic of the nation-state as we know it.<sup>62</sup> For that reason, and as we have already stated,

“[b]eyond agreeing or not with the possibility of de-colonizing the nation-state through a multi-national state, what is important is to emphasize the points of concordance between the thought of Luxemburg and the contemporary struggles that are being fought on many fronts by indigenous peoples, women, sexual dissidents, the black

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59 Ibid., p. 56.

60 Luxemburgo, Capítulo XXVII. La lucha contra la economía natural, p. 291.

61 Rosa Luxemburgo, *La revolución rusa*, Madrid 2017, p. 224.

62 Ouviaña, *Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política*, p. 193.

movement, food resistances, and cooperatives, among the many entities who claim their individuality among the totality.”<sup>63</sup>

Like Ouviaña, we consider it pertinent to embrace the EZLN slogan of one world in which many worlds fit so that the possibilities of diversity in the unit can be accomplished.<sup>64</sup>

### Final Reflections

We consider that reading Rosa Luxemburg from the epistemological position of the margins empowers the author in a way that makes her relevant to the current struggles of Abya Yala. From this perspective, the thought of Luxemburg helps us to look into the multiple oppressions that affect us, and with that, we develop a complex anti-capitalist position. Her legacy, however, does not leave us without hope because she herself did not lose hope in the most difficult moments. Even in captivity, she embraced the joy and hope that came from observing a ladybug, as she narrates in one of her letters from prison:

“Dear Lulu: believe me, the time that I, like others, spend behind bars is not lost time. In some way, it has its own importance in the bigger context of things. Life gives me great joy ..., and every morning, I examine in detail the sprouts of all my plants, each day I pay a visit to a red ladybug with two black dots on her back.... I observe the clouds in their continuous transformation, ever more beautiful, and in general, I do not feel more important than that ladybug. And that sensation of insignificance makes me feel incredibly happy.”<sup>65</sup>

Besides being a convenient epistemological site, the margins or periphery constitute a politically powerful location that enables us to

63 Vollbert, *El diagnóstico marxista de la modernidad en clave feminista*, p. 101.

64 Ouviaña, *Rosa Luxemburgo y la reinención de la política*, 2020, p. 199.

65 Luxemburg in Korol, “Socialismo o Barbarie”, p. 354.

identify ourselves with many more struggles of the Global South, helping us defeat the isolation that capitalism tries to impose upon us. Our Marxist reading circle at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México brought together comrades from diverse fields, schools, and geographic locations. This experience has led us to affirm (paraphrasing the *Communist Manifesto*) that a red witch runs through Abya Yala, here referring to the feminist and anti-capitalist impulse that, in recent years, has made us turn toward Luxemburg as a guide and teacher. We do not invoke a ghost as Marx and Engels did but rather conjure “a witch” because she is a figure whom contemporary feminism is interested in analyzing, reinterpreting, and reclaiming.

In order to reorient ourselves in this context of dispossession and war in which we live, we have the teachings of our witch grandmothers, such as Luxemburg, who seem to converge as a single voice that impels us to bet on life. With this, we endorse the words of the First and Second International Gatherings of Women Who Struggle (2017 and 2019), where, finding ourselves in *Zapatista* territory, we agree on something as simple and complex as the following: “We choose to live.” In order to do that, we need to know that we are heirs to a long tradition of collective anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, and anti-patriarchal struggle that leads to Rosa Luxemburg.

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## 5 Rosa Luxemburg in Argentina

### The Feminist Strike as Struggle Against Femicide, Debt, Imperialism, and Fascism<sup>1</sup>

*Alex Adamson*

#### Introduction

While the reception of Rosa Luxemburg's work in Latin America is a history still being written, this paper focuses on Luxemburg in Argentina in order to show how she has been taken up in by the international feminist strike as theorized by Verónica Gago and the Argentine feminist organization Ni Una Menos. To contextualize the contemporary relevance of Luxemburg for Ni Una Menos and the feminist strike, I begin with an outline of Luxemburg's reception in Argentina in the 1970s during a reevaluation of Marx's thought for Latin America amidst mass uprisings that challenged some Marxist-Leninist orthodoxies. I argue that the ongoing relevance of Luxemburg's work, especially on political organization and strategy, is tied to her reevaluation of revolutionary Marxism that avoids the stagnation, dogma, and elitism that historically plagued many workers' movements. Contemporary revolutionary mass feminist movements have been inspired by her analysis of the mass strike and have taken it up within a new anti-capitalist feminist reading of violence and debt. It is unsurprising that Luxemburg's work continually reemerges during mass struggles seeking a path beyond mere party politics and liberal reformism, aiming to be internationalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial all at once. I conclude that the contemporary Luxemburg-inspired analysis of Gago, Ni Una Menos,

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<sup>1</sup> Major thanks to both Jose Rosales and Lia Bernhard for edits and comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

and the international feminist strike should be studied by anyone interested in feminist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-fascist organizing because it directly challenges the analysis of the debt crises, political crises, and social crises that fuel far-Right movements and ideologies.

### Reception of Rosa Luxemburg in Argentina

Luxemburg's text "The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Union" was first translated into Spanish by the Argentinian New Left organization *Pasado y Presente* in May of 1970.<sup>2</sup> Its publication came on the heels of a wave of mass strikes in Córdoba "involving the proliferation of barricades and confrontations with police forces, going beyond the union and party leadership through a healthy and combative spontaneity."<sup>3</sup> The collective, which included Jose Aricó, recognized the usefulness of Luxemburg's text despite its derision by Stalinists as it offered an analysis of strikes as a form of workers' revolutionary self-activity rather than merely the product of elite planning. *Pasado y Presente* also translated and published Luxemburg's "Organizational Problems of Russian Social Democracy" (1969), *The Accumulation of Capital* (1975), as well as the "Introduction to Political Economy" (1972).<sup>4</sup> Aricó would go on to say that his work translating and publishing Luxemburg took on two important meanings: "that of a tribute to the revolutionary assassinated by Noske's rat, and

2 Hernán Ouviña: Reading Rosa Luxemburg in Latin America (2020), online: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/publication/id/41712/reading-rosa-Luxemburg-in-lat-in-america>.

3 Hernán Ouviña: Reading Rosa Luxemburg in Latin America. From Her First Reception to Today's Popular Struggles, transl. by Liz Mason-Deese in: Frank Jacob/Albert Scharenberg/Jörn Schüttrumpf (Eds.): Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 2: Nachwirken, Marburg 2021, pp. 435–436.

4 "Introduction to Political Economy" would only appear in English for the first time in 2014 in Peter Hudis (Ed.): The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 1: Economic Writings 1, London 2014, pp. 89–300.

in turn that of rescuing a theoretical and political theory that is fundamental for Marxism, but was silenced for years by Stalinism.”<sup>5</sup>

Aricó’s groundbreaking book *Marx and Latin America* (1980)<sup>6</sup> offered a holistic and contextual analysis of Marx’s infamous biography of Simón Bolívar and his scant analysis of Latin America. Rather than the typical reading of Marx’s deriding remarks of Bolívar as only the consequence of straightforward Eurocentrism following Hegel’s racist and Eurocentric philosophy of history, Aricó shows Marx’s analysis of Bolívar to be a product of his *political* reading of the French Revolution and his *criticism* of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Where Hegel posited a constitutional monarchy as the political formation embodying the apotheosis of reason and freedom, Marx disagreed with this assessment and saw Bolívar as upholding bourgeois political values. While Marx was incorrect to equate Bolívar with Napoleon, it was a product of his fidelity to the autonomy of the working class to determine their lives, alongside his lack of study of the struggles leading up to and producing a Bolívar. As Aricó writes in the Epilogue to the second edition of *Marx in Latin America*:

“Latin America does not appear as such in Marx, not because the particular shape of the relation between nation and state in Europe clouded his view, nor because his conception of politics and the state barred him from recognising the different, [sic] nor indeed because the perspective from which he analysed historical processes led him to misunderstand societies beyond the reach of his explanatory method. None of these considerations, whatever their presence in Marx and their influence on his manner of engaging with reality, in themselves seem sufficient to explaining this phenomenon. All of them undervalue, curiously enough, the *political perspective* from which Marx analysed the international context, at the same time as they highlight his failings as an inevitable consequence of the rigidity of

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5 Jose Aricó quoted in Ouviaña: Reading, p. 437.

6 Jose Aricó: *Marx and Latin America*, Chicago, 2015.

his interpretative hypothesis. But it was not set theoretical schemas, but rather strategic alternatives considered favourable to the revolution, that led Marx to privilege one terrain or another or to prioritise some particular force ... The fact that, starting from a recognition of a perspective that transformed into a *political prejudice*, we can, *therefore*, trace to what point this prejudice was nurtured by his ideological spirit, theoretical conceptions and ideas originating in his ideological and cultural formation, does not invalidate the need to follow a *line of research* in accordance with the sense of Marx's *oeuvre* itself."<sup>7</sup>

Aricó ultimately argues that what Marx actually missed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* was that the "Americas," as we know them, entailed the condition of possibility for the development of European Modernity. Thus, Aricó writes, "Marx is no more Eurocentric than Bolivar, Martí, Sarmiento, Rosas, or anyone else: all America is Eurocentric, and in such a way that the category ceases to have any explanatory power with regard to the questions that concern us."<sup>8</sup> To understand Marx's political prejudices means to study his ideological positions as they emerged from both his theoretical conceptions and his cultural formation. This work contextualizing Marx's positions – while rendering some of his assessments problematically relative to his shallow understanding of social and political movements in Latin America – does not render his "line of research" or his body of work as a whole obsolete for contemporary movements in Latin America.

Marx's transformation on the national question would happen mostly clearly with respect to Ireland as he came to realize how imperialism severely circumscribed the revolutionary agency of the British proletariat. These insights about the necessity of Irish national liberation for the success of an internationalist proletarian revolution led Aricó to argue that (1) an anti-colonial analysis is necessary for the overthrow of capitalism and (2) this analysis is compatible with Marx-

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7 José Aricó: *Marx and Latin America*, transl. by David Broder, Chicago 2015, pp. 141–142.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

ism. As Aricó would put it somewhat enigmatically, “seek in Marx everything that betrays and denies Marx’s Marxism.”<sup>9</sup> Given this, it is not surprising that Luxemburg became critical to Aricó as a Marxist challenging stultified orthodoxies. Aricó writes,

“Rosa Luxemburg sets us on the right path in linking the issue of the ‘stagnation’ ... of Marxism to the processes of the development of the socialist movement, which – as is only logical – tends to alter the whole previous frame of reference and expose the holes in a given body of thought ... The crisis of Marxism, in consequence, rather than proof of its inevitable obsolescence, is, instead, an indication of its great vitality, the form adopted by the reversal of the relations between theory, movement and crisis: not only tidying up what existed previously, but also creating new, liberated possibilities in the very process of redefining theory in relation to its own history, social development and the historical character of capitalist development.”<sup>10</sup>

As Luxemburg would put it herself in the *Accumulation of Capital*, “[h]ere, as elsewhere in history, theory is performing its duty if it shows us the *tendency* of development, the logical conclusion to which it is objectively heading.”<sup>11</sup> Luxemburg was keenly aware of the dangers of approaching Marxism or the method of historical materialism in abstract and reified ways.

As she writes in her 1903 essay “Stagnation and Progress in Marxism,” the “scrupulous endeavor to keep ‘within the bounds of Marxism’ may at times have been just as disastrous to the integrity of the thought process as has been the other extreme – the complete repudi-

9 José Aricó quoted by Horacio Crespo: *The Latin-American Marxism of Aricó. Uncovering the Autonomous Role of Politics in Marx’s Fallacy*, in José Aricó, *Marx and Latin America* transl. by David Broder, Chicago 2015, p. ix.

10 Aricó: *Marx in Latin America*, p. 8.

11 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital, Or, What the Epigones Have Made Out of Marx’s Theory – An Anti-Critique*, in: Peter Hudis/Paul Le Blanc (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2: *Economic Writings 2*, London 2016, p. 446.

ation of the Marxist outlook.”<sup>12</sup> Luxemburg was militantly dialectical in her use of the method of historical materialism as the basis of Marxism. This meant she refused the bourgeois approach to history as a series of great men whom we should memorize and follow their words absolutely and abstractly regardless of changes in material conditions or new knowledge developed from the continued history of struggle. Aricó would take this to be critical to a reevaluation of Marxism against its own hegemonic iterations of his moment. Aricó, like Luxemburg, would not see Marxism as a completed theory of everything but rather a method that should continually evolve and transform to be capacious for all struggles against colonial imperialist capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

### Rosa Luxemburg, Ni Una Menos, and the International Feminist Strike

While the 1970s would be a high point for Luxemburg’s work in Argentina, there is again a resurgence of interest in her work today within the feminist movement, due in part to co-founder and scholar of the Ni Una Menos movement, Verónica Gago. As Gago writes, Aricó showed that “the ‘essentially statist’ character, or the construction ‘from above,’ of Latin American nations is what politically blocked Marx’s comprehension of the continent’s singularity ... replacing the ‘real movement’ of the Latin American social forces with the figure of Simón Bolívar, while not recognizing the ‘autonomy of the political.’”<sup>14</sup> By focusing on the relative “autonomy of the political” from

12 Rosa Luxemburg: Stagnation and Progress in Marxism, in: Mary-Alice Waters (Ed.): *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York 1970, p. 107.

13 For more on a Luxemburgian approach to history and dialectics in sync with decolonial struggle, see Alex Adamson: *Against a Single History, for a Reevaluation of Power. Luxemburg, James, and a Decolonial Critique of Political Economy*, in: Jane Anna Gordon/Drucilla Cornell (Eds.): *Creolizing Rosa Luxemburg*, London 2021, pp. 69–90.

14 Verónica Gago: *Neoliberalism from Below. Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies* transl. by Liz Mason-Deese, Durham, NC 2017, p. 224.

both state actors and private capitalists, Gago picks up where Aricó's Luxemburg-inspired Marxism leaves off.<sup>15</sup>

With respect to recent Argentinian history, the contemporary feminist movement is building on insights from the 2001 crisis and the *piquetero* movement, which successfully expanded the geography and composition of the picket line. Gago goes as far as to say that contemporary feminist struggles have a *piquetero* genealogy.<sup>16</sup> The roadblocks of the *piqueteros* represented

“a modality of struggle that brings together those who were expelled from the factories: unemployed workers seeking to solve problems connected to their own existence, reorganizing themselves on a territorial basis in extended zones ... the roadblocks [were] the consequence of the decomposition of the industrial base of the country.”<sup>17</sup>

While traditional pickets are connected to strikes by workers, the *piqueteros* represented the jobless. However, the typical term “unemployed” renders the jobless within a depoliticized framework of passive victimhood or someone merely seeking and desiring a job to re-enter the society of wage labor. Colectivo Situaciones instead characterized the term and subjectivity connected to the *piqueteros* as “someone conditioned by need, but not determined by it.”<sup>18</sup> Within

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15 It is of course true that Luxemburg advocated for building a revolutionary party as a key component of class struggle. However, she advocated that building and maintaining some sort of vanguard party was within the context of a viable mass-based socialist party that already existed within an international community of revolutionary socialist parties. Contemporary mass-based movements bringing forward class struggle in Argentina do not necessarily operate primarily through Luxemburg's conception of party politics, but her work has continued to be relevant because her analysis and political strategy are not reducible to mere party politics.

16 Verónica Gago: *Feminist International. How To Change Everything*, transl. by Liz Mason-Deese, London 2020, p. 43.

17 Colectivo Situaciones: *19 & 20 Notes for a New Social Protagonism* transl. by Nate Holdren and Sebastián Touza, Wivenhoe 2011, pp. 95–96.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 104.



the *piquetero* movement, structural unemployment became radically politicized; the *piquetero* “cannot deny her condition, but neither does she submit herself to it ... she appropriates her possibilities of action.”<sup>19</sup>

While unions have challenged the legitimacy of strikes outside unionized workers and the point of production, those who joined the mass protests in the 2010s are connected to the *piquetero* movement of the 2000s and do not necessarily see a contradiction between the feminist strike and traditional labor struggles. In a 2017 interview, Gago recounts meeting with Neka Jara, a founder of the Unemployed Workers’ Movement of Solano during the crisis in the 2000s, who said she saw many women from the *piquetero* movement involved in the feminist strikes. Jara considered the younger generation who showed up to the feminist strikes the “daughters of the *piqueteras*.”<sup>20</sup> The forms of self-determination emerging from this struggle revealed a strategy that questions traditional labor organizing as well as the state as a solution to all social, political, and economic problems while also not ignoring the use of traditional labor organizing or the state’s limited political capacities with respect to empowering workers’ self-organization or modifying the allocation of resources.<sup>21</sup> Gago links this revolutionary strategy directly with Luxemburg’s dialectical analysis of reform and revolution as a “revolutionary realpolitik,” describing both the politics of the *piquetero* movement<sup>22</sup> as well as the “realism of the assembly” of Ni Una Menos as examples of Luxemburgian realpolitik.<sup>23</sup>

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19 Ibid.

20 Amador Fernández-Savater/Marta Malo/Natalia Fontana/Verónica Gago: The Strike of Those Who Can’t Stop. An Interview with Verónica Gago and Natalia Fontana, transl. by Liz Mason-Deese, in: Viewpoint Magazine, March 21, 2017, online: <https://viewpointmag.com/2017/03/21/the-strike-of-those-who-cant-stop-an-interview-with-veronica-gago-and-natalia-fontana/>.

21 Gago: Feminist International, p. 36.

22 For more on the *piquetero* movement and the 2001 crisis in Argentina in both English and Spanish, see Colectivo Situaciones’ collected works: <https://autonomies.org/2020/08/colectivo-situaciones-complete-works/>.

23 Gago: Feminist International, p. 170–172.

This revolutionary *realpolitik* includes Luxemburg's insistence on the necessity of thoroughgoing democracy for the establishment of socialism while at the same time recognizing that bourgeois democracy is not sufficient to bring about the overthrow of capitalism, even while its achievement is only brought about with the help of radical and revolutionary working-class movements.<sup>24</sup> For Luxemburg, the distinction between bourgeois revolutions and proletarian revolutions is that a proletarian revolution "contain[s] working people fighting for their own cause."<sup>25</sup> It cannot be NGOs, non-profits, party leadership, union leadership, or government officials that ultimately bear the task of carrying out the revolutionary struggle, even if they play a role in it. Through autonomous struggle, Luxemburg insists the working class "*learns*, it educates itself."<sup>26</sup> This is the "autonomy of the political" embodied in the feminist strike and the "realism of the assembly" that Gago underlines as both the form and method of the contemporary mass feminist movement in Argentina:

"The assembly produces process: it gives continuity, it threads together moments, as markers of a flow that accumulates force. The assembly is where differences, in terms of experiences, expectations, and languages mix ... it composes a common space of encounter, of debate, of misunderstanding, of discordance ... the assembly's strength, then, comes from its capacity to function as a sounding board for a conflictiveness that continues growing in the face of systematic policies of austerity and layoffs."<sup>27</sup>

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24 As Luxemburg writes with respect to the history of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune: "From this we may conclude, first, that even a typical 'bourgeois revolution' needs the help of radical revolutionary action to reach and maintain modest results." Rosa Luxemburg: *Lessons from the Three Dumas*, in: Peter Hudis/Sandra Rein (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 4: *Political Writings 2*, London 2022, p. 390.

25 Rosa Luxemburg: *Critique in the Workers' Movement*, in: Peter Hudis/Sandra Rein (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 4: *Political Writings 2*, London 2022, p. 65.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 156.

Through the democratic process of the assemblies, the movement is able to become massive while also preserving its radicalness. Gago argues that the old philosophy of inclusion was “inclusion through radicalization,” which maintained only a small vanguard group of radicalized people. Ni Una Menos has taken an opposite approach: “it includes diverse struggles, narratives, dynamics, and conflicts precisely *because* they connect, they expand ... through its composition, which arises from the conflicts and by tracing their connections, the movement emphasizes radicality as a method of inclusion.”<sup>28</sup> This mirrors Luxemburg’s insistence that “*absolute freedom of critique and discussion lies at the heart of the interests of the workers’ movement*, and it must be pursued *at all costs* if ... the liberation of the workers is to be the creation of the workers themselves.”<sup>29</sup>

In response to the increasing rates of femicidal and machista violence, the Ni Una Menos movement was a catalyst for the start of a new wave of international feminist strikes alongside mass movements to legalize abortion.<sup>30</sup> From this mass international movement, Gago outlines a concept of “*feminist potencia*” that augers a new conception of power: “that of common intervention against expropriation, collective enjoyment against privatization, and the expansion of what we desire as possible in the here and now.”<sup>31</sup> Gago argues that feminist *potencia* has allowed the movement in Argentina to both be *massive* and *radical*, while the catalyst and process of this movement is the feminist strike, which Gago describes as

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28 Ibid., p. 173.

29 Luxemburg: Critique in the Workers’ Movement, p. 68. As Luxemburg further writes, the most important precondition for raising proletarian consciousness within the struggle itself is the exercise of the freedoms of assembly and of the press. That is to say, the proletariat fights for the freedom to gather, discuss its affairs, and, through freely printed publications, learn to know its friends and foes. Ibid., p. 66.

30 “Half a million women, lesbians, trans people, and travesties came out to the marches following the 2017 International Women’s Strike.” Gago: Feminist International, p. 1.

31 Ibid., p. 2.

simultaneously “political, subjective, economic, cultural, artistic, libidinal, and epistemological.”<sup>32</sup> By looking at the feminist strike as a process of “invention, rupture, and, at the same time, of the accumulation of forces,”<sup>33</sup> Gago explicitly names Rosa Luxemburg as her inspiration for the idea that “each strike has its own form of political thought and that our historical task is to theorize the strike that we have led.”<sup>34</sup>

The strike, as an analytical tool against fascism and neoliberalism, diagnoses precarity and maps different forms of work and value production across many different geographies. While strikes may appear, at times, to be spontaneous, both Luxemburg and Gago are clear that “spontaneous acts are always preceded by some kind of organization of thought.”<sup>35</sup> The strike is a practical tool challenging the invisibility of many forms of labor, “allow[ing] us to challenge and surpass the limits of what we are, of what we do, and what we desire, constructing a historical shift with respect to the position of victims and the excluded.”<sup>36</sup> With the slogan “*Trabajadores Somos Todas*,”<sup>37</sup> the feminist strike decoupled the concepts of exploitation and work from the wage form, challenging traditional definitions of “organizable” workers and the geography of the “point of production.”

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32 Ibid., p. 4.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 5.

35 Peter Hudis/Sandra Rein: Introduction, in *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 4, p. xxii.

36 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 5.

37 This slogan emerged during the Feminist Intersindical in preparation for the 2018 strike finally bringing together the five major union federations in Argentina with the feminist movement. Ibid., p. 159–60.

## The Epistemology of the Mass Strike and a Feminist Theory of Violence

While Ni Una Menos first began in 2015 as a mobilization against femicide, it has grown to seek the end of all forms of violence: sexist violence, economic violence (including the wage gap and unpaid domestic labor), the violence of exploitation, domestic violence, and the violence of defunding and looting public services, which puts even more pressure on those who do care and community work.<sup>38</sup> As Gago explains, “the strike becomes a specific apparatus for politicizing violence against women and feminized bodies because it connects it to the violence of contemporary capitalist accumulation.”<sup>39</sup> This new perspective uncovers the multiple forms of violence making rampant gender-based violence possible. The feminist strike generates a viewpoint connecting “households imploded by domestic violence to lands razed by agribusinesses and assassinated campesina and environmental activists, with the wage gap throughout industries and academia and invisibilized care work; it links the violence of austerity and budget cuts to women’s protagonism in popular economies and to financial exploitation through public and private debt.”<sup>40</sup> This feminist analysis of violence and neoliberalism goes beyond surface-level understandings of neoliberalism as mere privatization of social welfare, as if the state was not also a central manager of neoliberal exploitation, extraction, and violence. The ideology of self-entrepreneurship as a solution to social problems has been advocated for by the state at the same time that it claims all the reasons for austerity and struggle are external, thus fundamentally linking the phenomena of neoliberalism and neofascism. As Françoise

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38 Ibid., pp. 10–11. “Connecting violence creates a shared perspective that is both specific and expansive, critical but not paralyzing, that links experiences, producing a language that goes beyond categorizing ourselves as victims, that allows us to build our capacities and generate new alliances.” Verónica Gago: Rethinking Situated Knowledge from the Perspective of Argentina’s Feminist Strike, transl. Liz Mason-Deese, in: *Journal of Latin American Geography* 18/2019, no. 3, p. 204.

39 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 12.

40 Gago: *Rethinking*, p. 205.

Vergès writes, “while neoliberalism accuses individuals of their own failure, neofascism looks for scapegoats, but the two ideologies join in denying the role of the State and capitalism’s institutional violence.”<sup>41</sup>

By internationalizing this movement, the strikes become a global map, transforming “the traditional tool of the organized labor movement to mutate to be reconfigured, reconceptualized, and reused to reflect lives and work that escape the confines of the union (and its economy of visibility, legitimacy, and recognition).”<sup>42</sup> Linking again to Luxemburg, Gago focuses on the image of the strike as a “living body” and an “aquatic landscape.”<sup>43</sup> This imagery comes from Luxemburg’s text “The Mass Strike,” where she writes:

“The mass strike ... suddenly opens up new, broad perspectives for the revolution ... Sometimes it flows like a broad swell, surging over the entire empire; at other times it divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; sometimes it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring; at other times it seeps away into the ground, peetering out entirely. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstration strikes and militant strikes, general strikes in individual branches and general strikes in individual cities, peaceful wage struggles and street battles and struggles on the barricades – all these phenomena crisscross each other, run parallel to each other, intersect with each other, flow into each other; this is a perpetually moving, fluctuating sea of manifestations.”<sup>44</sup>

By following the geography of ebbs and flows of mass action, Luxemburg describes “the mode of motion of the proletarian mass, the form

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41 Françoise Vergès: *A Feminist Theory of Violence*, transl. by Melissa Thackway, London 2022, p. 21.

42 Gago: *Feminist International*, pp. 12–13.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37 and 187.

44 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions*, in: Peter Hudis/Sandra Rein (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 4, pp. 221–222.

of manifestation of proletarian struggle within the revolution.”<sup>45</sup> Gago sees this description as mapping directly onto the feminist strike: “the temporality and the movement itself of a historical accumulation of forces that, by starting from the practical criticism of violence against women and the reappropriation of the tool of the strike, proposes the challenge of weaving a new internationalism and political work at multiple scales.”<sup>46</sup> As a living collective body of resistance and creation, we see that the mass strike cannot be reduced to party leadership, electoral politics, or narrow trade union demands. This same aquatic language has been used by the Chilean feminist group Lastesis, the creators of the viral feminist protest song “Un violador en tu camino.” Lastesis explains the new mass feminist movement as follows: “A nonlinear, nonhomogenous fabric, as incendiary as it is oceanic. As solid as it is liquid, with the potential to be indestructible at the same time as it vanishes into air, into water, to adapt according to the paths we find.”<sup>47</sup> The connection between nature and revolutionary politics was clear to Luxemburg as she famously wrote about the injustice of animal suffering, studied birds, and even maintained an extensive herbarium.<sup>48</sup>

The mass strike creates a new temporality allowing for unprecedented alliances and opportunities for solidarity as a product of the “time of interruption.” In Argentina, this has manifested through assemblies bringing together not only “self-declared feminist organizations” but also “compañeras from unions, social movements, community spaces, organizations of Indigenous peoples or Afro-descendants,

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45 Ibid., p. 222.

46 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 38.

47 Lastesis: *Set Fear on Fire. The Feminist Call that Set the Americas Ablaze*, transl. by Camila Valle, London 2023, p. 91.

48 See Rosa Luxemburg: *Herbarium* ed. by Evelin Wittich, Berlin 2016; Richard Abernathy: *Rosa Luxemburg’s Birds*, in: *The International Marxist-Humanist August 14, 2020*, online: <https://imhojournal.org/articles/rosa-Luxemburgs-birds/>; Maria Theresia Starzmann: *Rosa Luxemburg, Nature, and Imprisonment*, in: *Jane Anna Gordon/Drucilla Cornell (Eds.): Creolizing Rosa Luxemburg*, London 2021, pp. 159–171.

student groups, migrant collectives, art groups, and others.”<sup>49</sup> In one meeting, Gago notes that many participants were workers from soup kitchens, and they talked about how they wanted to join the strike but felt they could not because they were responsible for feeding their communities. The impossibility of the soup kitchen strike was exactly the kind of labor that the feminist strike was meant to render visible.<sup>50</sup> One soup kitchen worker came up with the idea that they would pass out raw food instead of cooked food, thus “removing all the work of cooking, serving, washing,”<sup>51</sup> leading to a new slogan: “Today March 8, we distribute raw food – Ni Una Menos.” As Gago further explained, “the assembly thus became a way of evaluating the logic of the sensory qualities of things – of raw and the cooked – from the point of view of women’s labor.”<sup>52</sup>

While some union leaders saw the feminist strike as “identitarian” and merely “symbolic,” those who participated saw it as ending the activities that oppressed them and anticipating new social relations. The time of the strike involves both a stoppage of certain activities and, at the same time, opens time for new forms of activities. As Gago explains, “[w]e strike for a few hours in our workplaces and for the whole day we remove ourselves from the gender roles that assign us tasks of care. We strike and we make time for ourselves. That was a very powerful slogan: we organize ourselves to be able to dispose of our time, to free ourselves from daily obligations, and open up that time.”<sup>53</sup> This new orientation to time echoes the way that Marx

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49 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 39.

50 The austerity measures put in place by the dictates of imperial capitalist interests have had a differential impact on women, many of whom talk about decreasing their own food intake so as not to decrease the amount of food for collective distribution: “These women literally put their bodies on the line so that austerity is felt as little as possible in the daily lives of others.” *Ibid.*, p. 41.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

53 Verónica Gago: *The Strike of Those Who Can’t Stop*. An Interview with Verónica Gago and Natalia Fontana, in: *Viewpoint Magazine*, March 21, 2017. Online: <https://viewpointmag.com/2017/03/21/the-strike-of-those-who-cant-stop-an-in>



explains democratizing leisure time as a hallmark of a socialist society,<sup>54</sup> and Gago's analysis of the strike shows a path toward this future. Drawing on the legacy of the Wages for Housework campaign, the feminist strike not only frees up time but also shows the "unmeasurable quality of work time from the feminist perspective."<sup>55</sup>

### The Feminist International and Luxemburg: Debt, Imperialism, Fascism

In addition to Luxemburg's analysis of the mass strike, Gago also cites her critiques of war, imperialism, and debt as crucial starting points that Ni Una Menos uses to extend her analysis to study other forms of violence, including agribusiness, extractive industries, and the financialization of life rendering mere existence debt producing.<sup>56</sup> As Lucí Cavallero and Gago write in their book *A Feminist Reading of Debt*, Luxemburg analyzes global capitalist exploitation in terms of its ability to imperialistically appropriate the means of production and enforce capitalist labor relations, but she cites the struggle of capital

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interview-with-veronica-gago-and-natalia-fontana/ See also: Gago: Feminist International, p. 25.

54 As Marx explains in the *Grundrisse*: "Forces of production and social relations ... are the material conditions to blow this foundation [of capitalist production] sky-high. 'Truly wealthy a nation, when the working day is 6 rather than 12 hours. Wealth is not command over surplus labour time' (real wealth), 'but rather, disposable time outside that needed in direct production, for every individual and the whole society'... For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time. Labour time as the measure of value posits wealth itself as founded on poverty, and disposable time as existing in and because of the antithesis to surplus labour time; or, the positing of an individual's entire time as labour time, and his degradation therefore to mere worker, subsumption under labour." Karl Marx: *Grundrisse*, transl. by Martin Nicolaus, London 1993, pp. 706–708.

55 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 27.

56 *Ibid.*, 37 and 63.

to force the realization of surplus value.<sup>57</sup> Cavallero and Gago extend this analysis to contemporary dynamics of mass indebtedness as a strategy of global capital to realize surplus value as Luxemburg saw capital's need to dispossess land, end the self-sufficiency of peasant economies, and disrupt all aspects of non-capitalist societies. She identifies "the mortgage debts of American farmers and Dutch and English imperialist policy in South Africa against Black and indigenous populations as concrete forms of political violence, tax pressure, and the introduction of cheap goods."<sup>58</sup> Luxemburg even analyzes the debts between the Argentine Republic and England, as the English only offered loans to build railroads to expedite and increase the transportation of English exports. As Cavallero and Gago put it: "Debt is that apparatus that puts the focus on the problem of the temporal and spatial gap between the realization and capitalization of surplus value; and thus the necessity of *colonial* expansion."<sup>59</sup>

This contemporary Luxemburgian feminist reading of debt illustrates the connections between domestic violence, household debt, national debt, and international banking as it operates according to colonial logic. By connecting an analysis of debt and the increasing financializing of everyday life to social reproduction theory, the feminist movement in Argentina has revealed that the so-called "democratization" of society – as it has been reduced to the democratization of access to credit – has only worked to dismantle other ways of securing resources. The feminist movement has worked to reveal debt as a "counter-revolution" of everyday life: "generalized indebtedness *pays off* the crisis so that each person confronts rate increases individually and must spend increasingly more time working for ever less money."<sup>60</sup>

When the Women20 (the group of women the G20 organized to make neoliberalism palatable to women) met in Argentina in 2018,

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57 Lucí Cavallero/Verónica Gago: A Feminist Reading of Debt, transl. By Liz Mason-Deese, London 2021, p. 50.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., pp. 50–51.

60 Ibid., p. 14.

feminists mobilized to refuse the pinkwashing of neoliberalism, declaring, “we are neither victims nor entrepreneurs.”<sup>61</sup> In 2020, feminists across Argentina, Puerto Rico, Chile, and Spain used the international feminist strike as a platform to denounce debt with the IMF and private creditors for their impact on household debt. Taking inspiration from Luxemburg, this analysis shows that debt is not separate from the deadly conditions that led to the ongoing high rates of femicides and transvesticides. It maps the geographies of capital that impose “increasingly violent forms of dispossession and exploitation around the world,”<sup>62</sup> creating the foundations for concrete and direct forms of international solidarity.

This expansion of feminism’s anti-capitalist critique makes it more inclusive and international in scope, even when reactionary elements may call this internationalization “foreignization.”<sup>63</sup> In the 2019 strike, 50 countries participated,<sup>64</sup> however, internationalization also requires what Gago calls “*complexification*.” Because the method of the feminist strikes begins from the concrete conditions and struggles of “all women as workers,” this movement has manifested differently in different places, whether in Brazil, Italy, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Columbia, Peru, or the United States.<sup>65</sup> What unites these disparate

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61 Ibid., p. 17.

62 Ibid., p. 47.

63 Gago. *Feminist International*, p. 45.

64 Gago. *Rethinking*, p. 206.

65 As Mexican feminist scholar-activist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar explains it: “There is already a very big effort to codify all of this as a fourth wave of feminism. I believe that codifying it as a fourth wave of feminism is dangerous because the third wave, the second wave, the first wave, although they refer to the efforts of women who preceded us in time, they are inscribed and codified in a segmented way. It was a women’s struggle for their rights. We are not fighting for rights. We are fighting to overthrow the way of living. What do we call it when people try to overthrow the way of life? It is called rebellion. Then, what did we call the efforts and uprisings of indigenous peoples? They are called indigenous rebellions. It is when you are trying to overthrow something. Now, that is codified in a state-centered strategy for taking power. No. But it does take care of restructuring aspects of the way it is governed, because it tries to produce and amplify the production abilities for political decisions from the social field. That is called rebellion. That

movements is “a common diagnosis of the forms of counterinsurgency that seek to weaken and divide us ... [by attacking] the subversive *potencia* of the transversal and diverse anti-biological-determinist and anti-racist alliances that are created through the international and plurinational organization of feminist strikes.”<sup>66</sup> This form of internationalism “challenges both the geographic imagination and the organization imagination, it is infused with transborder alliances and does not have a centralized structure, or a party organization coordinating everything from some commanding heights.”<sup>67</sup>

The feminist international diagnoses the growing global fascist tendencies as the product of both colonial imperialism and their links to a reactionary backlash to the mass liberation movements of the past three decades. As Gago writes, “since the feminist movement politicizes the crisis of social reproduction in a new and radical way – as a crisis that is in turn civilizational and a crisis of the patriarchal structure of society – the fascist impulse that is launched to counteract it proposes economies of obedience to channel the crisis.”<sup>68</sup> This feminist movement conceptualizes the patriarchal structure of this “civilization crisis” while also raising “environmental, Indigenous, immigrant, health, education, living wage, and multispecies justice,

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is what I can see today. That is what I sense with this wave of renewed feminism. An open time for rebellion. And, well, we have been thinking and discussing this among several women. Again, the comrades of Uruguay put it on the table. Some of us were using a metaphor, just a metaphor to describe it, saying that it was like inhabiting a tremor. Well, the tremor metaphor has been widely used when describing indigenous rebellions. That is to say, to think of this as a great rebellion, as a rebellion that entails a displacement.... A displacement of the place where you had been put. An encounter with other women in a renewed way. A possibility of formulating necessary issues, issues that have to be disrupted, issues that have to be overthrown. And an ability to remain and an ability to deal with the difference, to promote closeness, in order not to try to put themselves, immediately and directly, in a competition against each other.” Interview with Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar: En rebellion, in: La Tinta, December 3, 2019, online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvj\\_jZSjRwQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvj_jZSjRwQ).

66 Gago: Feminist International, p. 190.

67 Ibid., p. 181.

68 Ibid., p. 246.

as well as anti-extractive land and water protection.”<sup>69</sup> Building on the analysis given by social reproduction theorists<sup>70</sup> and the *piquetero* movement, the feminist strike “is not only the extension of an analytic of work that seeks to ‘laborize’ tasks of care, affect, and social reproduction, but a perspective that emerges from those labors that reclassifies the notion of work in a general sense.”<sup>71</sup> It is in this sense that the feminist strike re-thinks what is general about the “general strike” because “for the first time, it reaches all spaces, tasks, and forms of work.”<sup>72</sup> This truly international and general strike is now a critical strategy and tool for anti-fascist organizing – as demonstrated clearly in the successes of the uprisings in Chile in 2019–2021.<sup>73</sup>

The global debt crisis has created dire conditions that have emboldened fascist ideologies and tendencies while also pushing many people to question past Leftist economic and political strategy. As Rocío Zambrana has put it, “debt functions as a form of coloniality . . . it actualizes, adapts, reinscribes race/gender/class posited by the history of colonial violence that produced the modern capitalist world.”<sup>74</sup> The Right explains the increase of debt, erosion of quality of life, and access to necessary resources for life with appeals to “a mythic white past of law and order, anxiety about race and sexuality, anti-intellectualism, and misinformation campaigns and policy maneuvers that perpetuate a series of fabricated histories without addressing the fungible origins of property theft.”<sup>75</sup> The feminist strike, on the other

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69 Macarena Gómez-Barris: *At the Razor’s Edge of Democracy. Authoritarian Capitalism and Decolonial International Feminisms*, in: Alyosha Goldstein/Simón Ventura Trujillo (Ed.): *For Anti-Fascist Futures*, New York 2022, p. 101.

70 See Tithi Bhattacharya (Ed.): *Social Reproduction Theory. Remapping Class, Re-centering Oppression*, London 2017; Aaron Jaffe: *Social Reproduction Theory and the Socialist Horizon*, London 2020.

71 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 192.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

73 For more connections with the issues specific to the Chilean uprisings, see Gómez-Barris: *At the Razor’s Edge*.

74 Rocío Zambrana: *Colonial Debts. The Case of Puerto Rico*, Durham, NC 2021, pp. 10–11.

75 Gómez-Barris: *At the Razor’s Edge*, p. 104.

hand, radically re-conceptualizes debt and who exactly is owed a debt. While the combination of debt and guilt is a “fatal coupling, whereby the latter is maintained by a heteropatriarchal morality,”<sup>76</sup> it has been countered by the recent slogan: “*la deuda es con nosotras*” (the debt is owed to us). By revealing who is actually owed the debt – i. e., the global majority who has been exploited and expropriated – the feminist strike’s reading of debt becomes a critical anti-fascist tool against a Right that sees debt as marking “disposability by establishing culpability.”<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

The fantasy that so-called “inclusion” organized by the state (which is beholden to the interests of global capital) or by the international capitalist market via debt will assuage the demands and desires of the global majority is something Luxemburg, even in her time, understood to be impossible. As she wrote in 1908: “Under the current social conditions, given the advanced state of class struggle, the liberalism of the bourgeoisie is nothing but a desire to end the operations of the revolutionary proletariat.”<sup>78</sup> Luxemburg’s rigorous analyses of organizing strategies, capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, and militarism – alongside her consideration of nature and non-human life – make her continually relevant to mass movements re-evaluating revolutionary, i. e., an undogmatic but rather pragmatic, Marxism.<sup>79</sup> Building on Luxemburg, the analysis produced by Ni Una Menos and the feminist strike reformulates our understanding of class struggle, its geographies, and its central categories, and it both builds upon and furthers the relevance of Luxemburg’s work within the context of

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76 Gago: *Feminist International*, p. 248.

77 Zambrana: *Colonial Debts*, p. 43.

78 Luxemburg: *Lessons from the Three Dumas*, p. 391.

79 See in detail Frank Jacob: *Rosa Luxemburg. Living and Thinking the Revolution*, Marburg 2021.

Latin America.<sup>80</sup> This new basis for understanding what is revolutionary about the Marxist “line of research,” which has been stretched by mass feminist movements in Latin America, allows us to take a new perspective on the epistemology of the violence of our contemporary global capitalist imperialist system so that we can better connect disparate, formerly “single issue” movements into a mass internationalist feminist movement confronting the concrete struggles of their respective geographical locations. This new feminist theory of violence should be studied by anyone interested in feminist anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-fascist organizing. It directly combats and offers an alternative to the mythologies produced by the Right and explains the continuing immiseration of a global majority through racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, colonial tropes. When Luxemburg famously quoted Friedrich Engels’ articulation of the dilemma of humanity as “socialism or barbarism,” she was careful to spell out what was really meant by “barbarism”:

*“This world war means a reversion to barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture, sporadically during a modern war, and forever, if the period of world wars that has just begun is allowed to take its damnable course to the last ultimate consequence. Thus we stand today, as Friedrich Engels prophesied more than a generation ago, before the awful proposition: Either the triumph of imperialism and the destruction of all culture, and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery; or, the victory of socialism, that is, the conscious struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism, against its methods, against war.”*<sup>81</sup>

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80 In this sense, Gago argues that social reproduction may be seen as a “new form of Third Worldism, since it is linked to a reconceptualization of exploitation and it does so at the global level, while multiplying the notion of territory to which it refers.” Verónica Gago: *Is Politics Possible Today?* in: *Crisis and Critique* 9/2022, no. 2, p. 87.

81 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Junius Pamphlet*, in: Peter Hudis/Kevin B. Anderson (Eds.): *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, New York 2004, p. 321.

While much has changed since Luxemburg wrote these words – and the strategy of the international feminist strike is not a carbon copy of Luxemburg’s program for a Social Democratic Party – the stakes for ending the triumph of imperialism are the same. The victory of socialism rests on the shoulders of an internationalist mass movement of the working class – as described by Ni Una Menos: *Trabajadores somos todas, la deuda es con nosotras*.

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# 6 Cultural Heritage Preservation in Brazil

A Luxemburgian Analysis

*Rosa Rosa Gomes*

## Introduction

In 2018, the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro was set on fire in an unbelievable disaster that destroyed precious objects of Brazilian and the world's cultural heritage: mummies, unique crustacean fossils, records of indigenous people that do not exist anymore, and so many other things were consumed by the flames. The fire was caused by a shorting in the electric system. The firefighters took 40 minutes to arrive, and when they did, the fire hydrants around the building were out of water.

In 2021, a group set fire to a public statue in Sao Paulo. In some way, they were influenced by movements around the world that protested in the middle of the pandemic against police violence toward black people. These movements took down many statues of colonizers, especially in core countries like England. The statue targeted in Brazil was of Borba Gato, a monument in honor of this Bandeirante. Bandeirantes were people who lived in the modern region of Sao Paulo and used to hunt indigenous people to sell them as slaves, and they also looked for rare metals such as gold or silver. They were agents of colonization and were responsible for the death or contamination with European diseases of the many peoples with whom they came into contact. The statue was started in 1957 and inaugurated some years later. It has always caused some oddness among the city's people, most of all because of its aesthetics – the majority probably do not recognize the honoree.

The statue fire caused some discussion around this kind of action: should we destroy monuments that honor colonizers or give them a different perspective? Interestingly, the people involved in the action were rapidly arrested and sentenced months later, while in other matters, such as Marielle Franco's murder, we do not know who was ultimately responsible even today.<sup>1</sup> Another fact is that there was already an entrepreneur willing to donate money for the statue's restoration within a few days.

Lastly, in 2021, some days after the Borba Gato statue was set on fire, a warehouse of the Brazilian Cinematheque also burned because of a shorting, this time in the air conditioning unit of one of the rooms, according to the newspapers. This was the fifth fire in the institution's history and was directly related to the government's negligence since it had lacked specialized workers for almost one year. All staff had been dismissed by the company managing the institution in August 2020. This situation resulted from disagreements between the government minister Abraham Weintraub and the director of the managing organization, Francisco Campera. Because of that, the contract between the government and the organization was not renewed. Campera decided to retain the staff, and three months later, there was no money at all for staff, electricity, and so on. Workers mobilized themselves and organized strikes and public statements, but the government ignored the situation, and a secretary took the keys of the Brazilian Cinematheque after being escorted by policemen in the middle of a workers' demo. One week later, the workers were dismissed without receiving five months of overdue wages, and

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1 Marielle Franco was a councilwoman in the city of Rio de Janeiro. She and her driver, Anderson Gomes, were murdered in March 2018. They were shot inside the car by men in another car while in traffic in the middle of the town. Two men are in prison and awaiting trial. One of the accused is Ronnie Lessa, a former policeman known as a hitman. He lived in a condo in Vivendas da Barra in Rio de Janeiro, where Jair Bolsonaro also lives. The question raised by social movements after the imprisonment of these two men is this: Who had Marielle killed, and who ordered it? The investigations were suspended during Bolsonaro's presidency, but a new investigation was opened in 2023 by the Ministry of Justice.

the institution was closed, with only a few basic maintenance providers remaining. Almost one year later, one of the Cinematheque's warehouses caught on fire, and there was no specialized team to deal with it.

It took months, and a lot of pressure, for the government to draft a public contract, which ignored the previous staff and established a total amount of 10 million BRL per year to maintain and reconstruct the institution. The minimum budget necessary for keeping the institution running properly by then, however, was 20 million BRL. Crowdfunding was done during the crisis in 2020, and one businessman also donated money to help workers of the Brazilian Cinematheque while they were without wages and on strike, but no permanent solution was found for a year for either the workers or the institution. Furthermore, to this day, no one has been held to account for what happened, and there has been no public statement on what was lost and what really happened. Once again, why? What are the priorities of our society in relation to cultural heritage?

When looking at the formation of the nation-state, museums appear as an important institution, side by side with public schools, fulfilling functions in the same way: creating a national identity, standardizing language and habits, and creating and spreading a common history dating back to the first centuries. So, cultural heritage in the sense of a range of instances and institutions based on tangible and intangible assets that create a common idea, or identity, among a certain group of people has been crucial in the establishment of the modern state and bourgeoisie ruling power.

However, the above examples from Brazil – and we could list a lot of others – make this questionable for this territory. It seems that although we have our cultural institutions, they are not relevant to the maintenance and reproduction of society. When comparing the different responses to the above situations, and, most of all, when looking at the conditions of cultural institutions and their workers in Brazil, the questions of who decides what is or is not worth preservation and what the workers' role in all of this is gain momentum.

Furthermore, one has to ask what the role of cultural heritage in this society should be.

Rosa Luxemburg's thought is the theoretical background against which to unfold these questions and reflections. She analyzed social reality based on historical materialism in her critique of political economy. In this sense, the intention is to take a better look at two aspects of cultural heritage: one can be seen as more theoretical, related to the historical-cultural development of society as a whole, while the other is more related to the development of economic structures in capitalist history, with culture, as a layer of capitalist society, suffering the consequences.

### Rosa Luxemburg and Culture

During the centenary celebrations of Adam Mickiewicz's birth in 1898, a statue was inaugurated in his honor in Warsaw, and texts were published to commemorate his life. These included articles by Georg Haase and Rosa Luxemburg, the latter published in the social-democratic newspaper *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.

Luxemburg's article, "Adam Mickiewicz," located the Polish poet in history, describing the social conditions that made him possible and transformed him into an icon of Polish culture. Three points from her text are of interest here: 1) Mickiewicz's statue in Warsaw was approved by the Czar and the bourgeoisie and was therefore proof that nationalism was history, even for the ruling class, since the only class that could save the cultural aspects of Polish nationalism was the proletariat; 2) changes in the mode of production change every aspect of society, expressing its contradictions in every layer, including art, literature, and so on; and 3), related to the previous point, since capitalist development also reaches the cultural sector, it brings about the professionalization and, therefore, proletarianization of artists.<sup>2</sup>

2 Rosa Luxemburg: Adam Mickiewicz, in: Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke, v. 1/2, Berlin, 1974, p. 302–307

Today, it is possible to say that Luxemburg was more preoccupied with immaterial heritage, the poems and books of Mickiewicz, and, most of all, what he meant to Polish history and culture. He was a symbol of a moment where the fight for the constitution of a nation made sense and pushed other young men forward. However, in Luxemburg's view, he did not realize the moment this fight was no longer on the agenda and had become outdated.

In this sense, the statue inaugurated with the Czar's and the bourgeoisie's consent was of no importance. Mickiewicz belonged to the working class in a much higher way. Not because he was proto-socialist in some way, as, according to Luxemburg, some of her contemporaries tried to state, but because he represented a part of Poland's historical development and because his art was a masterpiece.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, his art belonged to the working class since it was this class' duty to give humanity back to itself: "Its source is the socialist final goal, which means rendering the whole human culture to the whole of humanity."<sup>4</sup>

Over the course of history, changes in society have affected all its sectors, including the cultural one, thereby also expressing society's contradictions. In Mickiewicz's period, this would have been the opposition between the "pseudo-classicists" and the "romantics," as Luxemburg called them.<sup>5</sup> The former expressed a time that had passed, and the latter expressed a society struggling to be born. As history develops in struggle, it was Mickiewicz's struggle in the literary field that counted for Luxemburg.

This development meant capitalist society surpassing the feudal system, which meant proletarianization. This also happened with artists, who were no longer dilettantes and had to work to sell their labor power in exchange for money. Luxemburg commented on this as follows: "The new bureaucratic system made specialized education

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3 Ibid.

4 Rosa Luxemburg: *Geknickte Hoffnungen*, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke*, v. 1/2, Berlin, 1974, p. 402

5 Rosa Luxemburg: Adam Mickiewicz, *op. cit*



a means of nourishment, school, journalism acquired a new significance for the nobility, a new social class emerged in Poland – the noble intelligentsia. This class no longer pursued literature as a hobby or court service, as was the case in magnate circles, but as a profession.”<sup>6</sup>

From what has been described so far, there are two aspects of culture: an intellectual/spiritual faction of society and an economic sector in the capitalist mode of production. When looking at other texts in which Luxemburg analyzes *litterateurs* and thinkers, the direction of her analyses is the same: she describes their historical and social moments in order to evaluate their work and life. This methodology is nothing more than historical materialism: she is looking to social, economic, and political transformations because they affect all aspects of life, including the spiritual one, and society’s contradictions will appear in every layer of it.

That is what appears in her review of Franz Mehring’s book on Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), her text about Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) as a social thinker, and her introduction to the German version of Vladimir Korolenko’s (1853–1921) autobiography. In her text on Schiller, she points out that the poet was not important to the working class because he was supposedly an “apostle of bourgeois revolution” despised by the bourgeoisie itself but because he meant an intellectual improvement of the class, and especially because the class had digested it in its own way. Most of all, Luxemburg argues: “What the working class needs above all today is to understand all phenomena of political and also of aesthetic culture in their clear, strictly objective historical-social connections as links to that general social development whose most powerful driving force today is its own revolutionary class struggle.”<sup>7</sup> Luxemburg thus contributed to studies on literature such as Franz Mehring’s, though she also thought people should read the original texts themselves.

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6 Ibid., p. 303.

7 Rosa Luxemburg: Rezension, in: Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke, v. 1/2, Berlin, 1974, p. 534.

Luxemburg analyzed works by Tolstoy and Korolenko in the way described above. For her, Tolstoy was a great critic of the conjuncture in his time despite being against the Russian Revolution and a supporter of a return to an idyllic past, something like primitive communism. Despite that, Tolstoy understood that true art was an expression of ordinary society and, in a way, an expression of the working class. Art was not, according to Luxemburg's interpretation of Tolstoy, a luxury but a historical form as important as any other form of relationship between people. As for Korolenko's text, Luxemburg drew a picture of literary history in Russia, describing its contradictions and relations with different political moments. As a result of the development traced by Luxemburg, modern culture was installed in Russia, and this, for her, was proved by Maxim Gorky's (1868–1936) path:

“The vicissitudes of his life are symbolic of the Russian proletariat as a class, which in the remarkably short time of two decades has also worked its way up from the uncultured, uncouth, and difficult life under the Czar through the harsh school of struggles to historical actions. This is surely quite inconceivable to all the culture-philistines who think that proper street illumination, trains that run on time, clean collars, and the industrious clatter of the parliamentary mills stand for political freedom.”<sup>8</sup>

From all that, it is possible to conclude that Luxemburg understood culture as an important aspect of class struggle and that works of art belonged to the working class since they had the duty to carry humanity forward toward a life where exploitation and oppression would not exist anymore. Furthermore, modern development was not limited by technological improvements but instead closely related to the spiritual or intellectual transformations of society, especially

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8 Rosa Luxemburg, *Life of Korolenko*, 1918, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Luxemburg/1918/06/korolenko.htm>.

of the working class. This is something Luxemburg wrote about in “Stagnation and Progress of Marxism.”<sup>9</sup>

Debating the matter expressed in the article’s title, Luxemburg concludes that for practical agitation, volume one of *Capital* was enough at that point in history because it explained the core of the problem, the origin of surplus value, and labor exploitation, which is the foundation of social revolution. The other problems of capitalism analyzed in volumes two and three were not yet of “direct interest” to the proletarian class struggle.<sup>10</sup> The complete advancement of Marx’s general theory would be fully seized by society after social revolution. For Luxemburg, the working class is limited in its creative activity by the capitalist system. It can only create or appropriate what is necessary for the struggle; workers are tied to the social conditions. Though this class has a thirst for knowledge, it is also limited by social conditions: “The workers’ craving for knowledge is one of the most noteworthy cultural manifestation[s] of our day. Morally, too, the working-class struggle denotes the cultural renovation of society. But active participation of the workers in the march of science is subject to fulfillment of very definite social conditions.”<sup>11</sup> In this sense, although the ascendant classes were capable in other periods of history of emancipating themselves firstly from a cultural perspective, this is not possible for the working class because it is absolutely dispossessed and, consequently, unable to create its own culture freely. Everything the working class creates in this sense is related in some way to the bourgeois culture, to the capitalist system, and therefore is not free. “Within that society, and so long as its economic foundations persist, there can be no other culture than a bourgeois culture.”<sup>12</sup> In this society, what is to be done by the workers in relation to cultural aspects

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9 Rosa Luxemburg: Stagnation and Progress of Marxism, 1903, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Luxemburg/1903/misc/stagnation.htm>.

10 Following the development of finances and stock markets and the dissemination of stocks to the middle classes, these problems are now of direct interest.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

is to preserve the bourgeois culture. “The utmost it can do today is to safeguard bourgeois culture from the vandalism of the bourgeois reaction, and create the social conditions requisite for a free cultural development.”<sup>13</sup> To fulfill this task, the working class must develop weapons for its liberation within the boundaries of the capitalist system, within the objective conditions that are imposed on workers, that limit creative intellectual action to social sciences, Marxist doctrine being the “monument of the proletarian culture of our days.”<sup>14</sup>

In this regard, culture as a historical development of society is something Luxemburg appreciates and considers central to social revolution. The culture produced by humankind is seen as something universal that everybody should have access to and which improves human development. As capitalism has a tendency to destroy everything in the cultural aspect, it is the task of the working class to safeguard this culture, even though it is not its own. Luxemburg did not think everything should be embraced and transformed – she had actually a conservative attitude toward art and literature – but the heart of the matter is that there is a part of bourgeois culture that should be considered humanity’s culture and, hence, preserved. What the latter is composed of, however, is open to discussion.

Here, the other aspect of culture as part of the development of economic structures in capitalism is introduced. In “Stagnation and Progress of Marxism,” Luxemburg stresses the social conditions of capitalism that determine the cultural participation of the working class. These conditions are based on labor exploitation and historically led to mass proletarianization, which also appeared in this sector, as she mentions in her text about Adam Mickiewicz. Moreover, the cultural sector also suffered from the threats of militarism and world politics and is oppressed by general economic and political actions much more than specific ones. In this regard, she wrote the following in “Bilanz der Obstruktion” (1899/1900): “Of course, so-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

cial democracy, as the guardian and champion of intellectual culture, is called upon above all others to defend artistic freedom with all vigor. But no one would dare to claim that the art paragraphs of the Lex Heinze posed the *greatest danger* to the developmental interests of the people and thus justified the use of the last weapons of defense. A thousand times more than by the shop window and socialist law, by the overthrow bill, the penitentiary bill, it is still threatened by bread usury, militarism and world politics.”<sup>15</sup> The Lex Heinze, a law presented in 1897/8 by Emperor Wilhelm II, attempted to criminalize activities such as pimping, but it also included the so-called *Kunstparagraphen* (art paragraph) that intended to censure plays and music. Socialists campaigned side-by-side with artists so that these paragraphs were withdrawn, but for Luxemburg, the greatest threats to cultural development were the capitalist politics of militarism, international exchange, and the limitation of political rights. She consequently understood culture as part of the capitalist machine. In this sense, as peasants became proletarians, artists also became workers, i. e., they had to sell their labor power. Therefore, all aspects of political economy that harmed the working class harmed artists as a part of this class.

In this sense, culture is also subject to the capitalistic processes of accumulation, including domination. Luxemburg mentions this briefly in “Militia and Militarism”:

“The State’s demand is distinguished by the fact that it is certain, that it orders in enormous quantities, and that its pricing is favourable to the supplier and usually monopolistic – all of which makes the State the most desirable customer and makes supplying it the most alluring business for capitalism. But what makes supplying the military in particular essentially more profitable than, for example, State expenditures on cultural ends (schools, roads, etc.), is the incessant

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15 Rosa Luxemburg: Bilanz der Obstruktion, in: Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke, v. 1/1, Berlin, 1974, p. 753.

technical innovations of the military and the incessant increase in its expenditures.”<sup>16</sup>

In writing this, Luxemburg implies that cultural expenditures are also a way of profiting from the state from the capitalist point of view. Thus, regarding economic structure, the cultural sector is also submerged in class exploitation and capital accumulation. There is, however, another aspect related to class domination that will be explored in more detail in the last part of this chapter.

For now, it is important to keep in mind the central points that have been unfolded so far. Luxemburg did not write about cultural heritage in those terms, though she talks about what we understand as immaterial heritage today. For her, this heritage is not only part of the possession of the bourgeois class but an essential element of humanity’s development in general. Therefore, it also belongs to the working class, which should embrace and transform it in its own sense. It should prevent this heritage from being destroyed by the bourgeoisie itself, a class which is compelled to self- and global annihilation. Another point is that as a sector of capitalist society, culture will be subjected to the same general rules: labor exploitation and capital accumulation.

### Cultural Heritage in Brazil: Case Studies

Considering this theoretical background, what is the role of cultural heritage in Brazil, and what constitutes the workers’ part in this respect? According to the Brazilian historian Caio Prado Junior,

“Seen as a whole, the colonization of the tropics appears one vast commercial enterprise, more complex than the old trading stations

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<sup>16</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: *The Militia and Militarism*, 1899, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Luxemburg/1899/02/26.htm>.

but retaining the flavor of these, the foremost objective being the exploitation of the natural resources of a virgin land for the benefit of European commerce. This is the true *meaning* of tropical colonization, of which Brazil is one of the results, and this explains the fundamental elements, both economic and social, of the historical formation and evolution of the American tropics.”<sup>17</sup>

Prado analyzed the general meaning of Brazilian history that has impacted all aspects of Brazilian society, including cultural heritage, until today, since it seems that its constitution began with the exportation of exotic taxidermized animals to Europe. According to Maria Margaret Lopes, the first heritage institution in Brazil, so to speak, was the House of Natural History, known as the House of Birds. This House was part of a complex of museums in the Portuguese Empire, and its role was to supply institutions in Portugal with specimens of Brazilian fauna and flora, especially botanical ones. Consequently, as Lopes remarked, “during its almost thirty years of operation, it was perfectly suited to its function as a colonial warehouse for sending products to the Metropolis, integrated as an essential part of the set that we refer to as the museums of the Luso-Brazilian Empire [the Museums of Coimbra, Ajuda, and the Academy of Sciences].”<sup>18</sup> So, as Brazil provided “sugar, tobacco, and certain other commodities; later gold and diamonds; then, cotton; and later still coffee,”<sup>19</sup> this territory also provided pieces and enriched European collections with specimens of tropical fauna and flora. Similarly, the creation of the first museum was an external demand born from an activity also directed overseas. It was not a consequence of national independence or the necessity to create a national identity for the people. The creation of the National Museum was related to the fact that the elite came

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17 Caio Prado Junior: *The Colonial Background of Modern Brazil*, Berkeley, CA 1971, p. 20.

18 Maria Margaret Lopes: *O Brasil descobre a pesquisa científica: os museus e as ciências naturais no século XIX*, São Paulo 1997, p. 38.

19 Caio Prado Junior: *The Colonial Background*, p. 21.

from Portugal, and this goes a long way to explaining why traditional cultural institutions, especially museums, still have difficulties today with attracting the lower strata of Brazilian society.

Cultural policies are closely related to the creation of nations in Europe. The bourgeoisie, on its path to power, needed to create a common identity. Public education and cultural institutions had a major role in this task. However, in Brazil, social relations were based from the start on violence and not on consent. Colonization caused and was thereby based on murdering the former inhabitants of this territory and bringing other people by force to work as slaves. When slavery ended, once again, other people were brought to work in Brazil, e. g., Italian immigrants, since racism did not allow national workers – most of them black and indigenous people – to be contracted. So, it is a history of the constant substitution and exclusion of people. The necessity to set a social agreement was not in place because an agrarian elite was making a lot of money the way things were.

In the 20th century, changes in the world's production and politics, as well as internal struggles, led to the development of some basic industries in Brazil, and the workers' movement gained force and grew bigger. A communist party was organized and turned into an influential political force in the 1950s. A debate around development was set in motion, too: part of the political establishment wanted to transform the country's economy into a more independent one, demanding the founding of structural companies and so on, while the traditional elite wanted to remain within the agrarian limits of production. This conflict led to many hectic moments in Brazil's national history, including coups, the development of a fascist movement, dictatorships, and rebellions. One of these moments was the revolution of 1930 that put Getulio Vargas in power. It is possible to state that a cultural policy had been set by this time. Getulio created the institution responsible for preserving cultural heritage in Brazil until today (National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage – IPHAN), besides other measures. But these policies did not last long; they did not turn into state policies but remained governmental policies, and the financing of culture,



specifically heritage preservation, has therefore always been unstable in Brazil, as can be seen from the two examples cited at the beginning of this chapter: the National Museum and the Brazilian Cinematheque.

The first museum to be created in Brazil was the National Museum in 1818 after the Portuguese court came to the colony, fleeing from Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808, which they named the Royal Museum. When royal staff arrived, they had to create infrastructure consistent with an empire's capital, which included the National Library and Royal Museum. This infrastructure was transformed many times over the centuries. In 1946, the Royal Museum was transferred to the university's administration, and it remains an agency of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). In 2018, when the institution celebrated its 200th anniversary, a fire destroyed the main building along with the majority of the collection kept inside, comprising more than 20 million items. The police concluded that the fire started after an air conditioning unit shorted,<sup>20</sup> probably as a result of the miserable condition the institution was in. Unfortunately, while the institution had signed a contract that year with the National Bank of Economic and Social Development (BNDES) for improvements, the money had not yet been released.<sup>21</sup>

The National Museum was the first scientific institution in Brazil. The universities were created at the beginning of the 20th century, and some faculties were founded in the 19th century as Sao Francisco Law School, later incorporated into the University of Sao Paulo. The museum focused its collectional and conservatory efforts on natural history, archaeology, and ethnography and created its collection

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20 Felipe Lucena: *História do Museu Nacional* (2020), online; <https://diariodorio.com/historia-do-museu-nacional/>.

21 Talita de Souza: *Incêndio no Museu Nacional, no Rio de Janeiro, completa três anos; relembre* (2021), online: <https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/brasil/2021/09/4947344-incendio-no-museu-nacional-no-rio-de-janeiro-completa-tres-anos-relembre.html>. The money was approved in 2015. UOL: *Com orçamento reduzido, Museu Nacional acumula cortes desde 2013* (2018), online: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2018/09/03/com-orcamento-reduzido-museu-nacional-acumula-cortes-desde-2013.htm>.

based on foreign and national expeditions over the years, each cycle corresponding to different conjunctural politics, resulting in a huge collection of endemic and exotic sorts of animals, plants, and traces of indigenous peoples that no longer exist, among many other things. It was, and still is, an international reference for scientific institutions and in the museology field since the first educational section in a museum was created there in 1927.<sup>22</sup>

An institution with such vast importance in many fields should have a minimum budget corresponding to its activities and maintenance necessities. In 2013, the federal government transferred an amount of 1.3 million BRL (US\$ 355,774.49 at 2018 exchange rates),<sup>23</sup> but in 2017, the transferred sum only amounted to 643,000 BRL (US\$ 175,971.54 at 2018 exchange rates), a reduction of 49.5 % in nominal values. From January to August 2018, the federal government transferred only 98,000 BRL.<sup>24</sup> This is a reflection of the economic, social, and political crisis in the country after 2013, but it also has its long-term causes since even 1.3 million BRL was not enough for an institution of this size. The technical report produced after the fire in 2018 by the Lower House of Congress says that the National Museum spent money on equipment and permanent materials, consumable goods, and outsourced services from 2014 to 2018. The total amount spent on outsourced services diminished from 367,000 BRL in 2014 to 44,000 BRL (planned) in 2018, marking an 88 % reduction.<sup>25</sup> This

22 Dominichi Sá/Magali Sá/Nísia Lima: O Museu Nacional e o seu papel na história das ciências e da saúde no Brasil, in: *Cadernos de Saúde Pública* 34/2018, no. 12.

23 The numbers here were calculated according to the Extended National Consumer Price Index (IPCA) for 2018, which is why the exchange rates are also from 2018. Reference numbers were taken from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, online: <https://data.oecd.org/conversion/exchange-rates.htm>.

24 This budget is comprised of three different sources from federal institutions. See Lucas Vettorazzo et al.: *Repasso federal ao Museu Nacional cai à metade nos últimos cinco anos (2018)*, online: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2018/09/repasso-federal-ao-museu-nacional-cai-a-metade-nos-ultimos-cinco-anos.shtml>.

25 Câmara dos Deputados: *Informativo técnico 172/2018 – CONOF/CD*, online: [https://www2.camara.leg.br/orcamento-da-uniao/estudos/2018/informativo-172\\_2018-museu-nacional](https://www2.camara.leg.br/orcamento-da-uniao/estudos/2018/informativo-172_2018-museu-nacional).

kind of service includes small infrastructure jobs, cleaning and maintenance teams, and technical support for academic activities, which perhaps means that the institution was also short of staff, not only money. In 2018, this kind of resource was no longer available since the institution did not have the budget needed to fully contract and execute basic maintenance works. According to the rector of UFRJ, Robert Leher, 2.5 million BRL (US\$ 684,181.72 at 2018 exchange rates) would have been enough to avoid the tragedy.<sup>26</sup>

Just after the fire, the museum started a campaign to raise funds to rebuild it. The project is estimated to cost 380 million BRL (US\$ 73,586,367.16 at 2022 exchange rates), but by June 2022, it had raised only 65 % of it.<sup>27</sup> The project aims to reconstruct and restore the building destroyed in 2018, restore the garden, develop a new museography, implement new exhibitions, reform the library, and implement a Research and Education Campus in the museum. Of the total amount obtained, 59 % was transferred directly by the government and 41 % was donated by two private companies (Bradesco and Vale), all through Culture Incentive Laws.<sup>28</sup> These laws allow companies and people to donate to projects they are interested in and to reduce partially or totally the value of the donation from their income tax; therefore, it is also funds for the government invested by private actors.

This global picture of the National Museum's recent history shows that the state is the major financer, protector, and diffuser of national heritage, which is not an uncommon situation around the world. However, it also shows that the money invested was historically insufficient. Following the history of cultural politics in Brazil with its ups

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26 UOL: Com orçamento reduzido.

27 Jaqueline Frizon: Museu Nacional comemora 204 anos com pedido de ajuda para captação de recursos (2022), online: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/museu-nacional-comemora-204-anos-com-pedido-de-ajuda-para-captacao-de-recursos/>.

28 Museu Nacional Vive: Report 2020–2021, online: [https://museunacionalvive.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/sanitize\\_report-mnv\\_2020-2021.pdf\\_240222-031646.pdf](https://museunacionalvive.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/sanitize_report-mnv_2020-2021.pdf_240222-031646.pdf).

and downs, it is clear that even in the most glorious times, so to speak, the money was not enough. A catastrophe was needed, the almost total destruction of one of Brazil's biggest collections, with more or less only 15 % remaining, for the state to act and transfer money to rebuild it. After that, how will it be maintained?

The National Museum's situation was not directly connected to the crisis that arose after 2013, but it got worse after that, indicating a more long-term problem exacerbated by the crisis. The Brazilian Cinematheque's problems in 2020 and the fire in one of its warehouses in 2021, on the other hand, were directly connected to the fascist government of Jair Bolsonaro. The Brazilian Cinematheque dates back to 1940 with the creation of the first film club in Sao Paulo, and it was officially established in 1949 with its installation as a film library at the Museum of Modern Art in Sao Paulo (MAM-SP). It eventually became the Brazilian Cinematheque in 1956. Over the decades, the Cinematheque created a significant collection, the biggest in Brazil, with more than 40,000 movie titles and a great archival center. The institution's history may reflect the history of Brazilian heritage too. First allocated to a building in the center of Sao Paulo, it then moved to a house in a park, then to another park, until finally it was transferred to an old slaughterhouse in the Vila Mariana neighborhood in 1992. This last address resulted from an agreement between the city government and the involved unions. As the collection grew bigger and bigger, another place was granted to the institution so it could expand its storage facilities: a warehouse in the Vila Leopoldina neighborhood. This district is known for its history of flooding, and the location itself was in a miserable state. However, the institution needed more space to store its movies, and the idea was to rebuild the whole place and give it reasonable conditions to safeguard the country's audiovisual heritage. This was never done, though, because the money invested was insufficient. As an example of this long-term situation, the institution only employed its first permanent staff in the 1980s; until then, employees held the status of civil servants.

According to a study done by the government in 2020, the Cinematheque cost 22.5 million BRL per year between 2008 and 2013 (US\$ 10,435,992.58 at 2013 exchange rates). The crisis initiated in 2013 caused contracts between the government, the institution, and its partner (Sociedade Amigos da Cinemateca) to be dissolved; almost all workers were fired, and only a few civil servants remained. Between 2014 and 2017, annual expenditure was down to 12 million BRL (US\$ 3,760,576.62 at 2017 exchange rates; civil servants are not included in this value). In those years, after a lot of talks and negotiations, the government, led by Michel Temer at that time, decided to transfer the institutional administration to a non-profit organization through a public bidding tender; the organization chosen was the Associação de Comunicação Educativa Roquette Pinto (ACERP). Many problems surrounded the assignment of ACERP's contract with the government to manage the Cinematheque. For one, ACERP already had a contract with the Ministry of Education, and Brazilian law prohibited it from holding two contracts with two different ministries (the Cinematheque is a federal institution and, at the time, was assigned to the Ministry of Culture). A solution was nevertheless found: the Cinematheque contract was transformed into a subcontract, added to the principle one with the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Culture would regulate the institution's activities. The administrative contract of the Cinematheque was supposed to last until 2020. However, the contract between ACERP and the Ministry of Education ended in 2019. Since the Cinematheque contract was now related to this one, it ended with it accordingly. The contract could have been renewed, but, due to problems created by disputes between different factions of Bolsonaro's government, it was not.

When Bolsonaro took office in 2019, different factions of the far-right gained influence under his rule. A faction affiliated with right-wing guru Olavo de Carvalho took office in the Ministry of Education, and some people from this group tried to take over the Cinematheque through leading positions in ACERP. In this new political context, ACERP appointed a director who was closer to the

new federal government, Francisco Campera. However, it seems that the Cinematheque was more difficult to run and use as a propaganda front than they had expected. The staff resisted some forms of interference, and audiovisual heritage proved not so easy to handle. It is not clear what really happened those days. In 2019, the Minister of Education was Abraham Weintraub, and it seems he wanted to take over ACERP to control a television channel to which the association had access. As Campera resisted pressure to leave his position, Weintraub did not renew the contract. Instead of warning the staff about the situation, Campera kept administrating the institutions until the association ran out of money and stopped paying all costs, including those for the employees. Cinematheque workers mobilized themselves and went on strike, but the government did not come to an agreement and took the keys of the institution in a scene that could have come from Hollywood: federal police, armed with big guns, arrived to confront a demonstration in front of the institution. After that, ACERP fired all Cinematheque workers, and each one had to look for justice in individual court cases. As of the time of writing, there is no news about anyone who has received four months of unpaid salary and other fees. After expelling workers from the Cinematheque, the federal government decided to close the institution, continuing basic cleaning and maintenance jobs without any specialized technicians. In the following months, the Cinematheque workers' movement issued many warnings about the risks this situation represented to the collection, which had already faced four fires in its history. On 29 July 2021, it suffered its fifth fire, caused by a shorting in the Vila Leopoldina warehouse. It is still not clear what was lost in this disaster, but workers knew that there were archives of different Brazilian audiovisual institutions dating from the 1970s onward in the most heavily affected storage locations.<sup>29</sup>

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29 As the documentation has not been analyzed yet, this date might change, but no public statement from the government or the institution has been made about the losses as of today, 12 July 2023.

Soon after the fire, the government decided to accelerate the process of contracting another administration organization in a contract that prescribed a transfer of 10 million BRL (US\$ 1,936,483.35 at 2022 exchange rates) per year from the respective union vault. However, a government study pointed out that operational costs were already at 8 million BRL, and the total estimate stated that 22.5 million BRL (US\$ 4,357,087.53 at 2022 exchange rates) per year were required for the following years. According to this study, the new administration could raise another 12.5 million BRL from selling services and so on. This had already been tried by ACERP, and the Cinematheque had started selling its production services before 2020, but the income was never close to the necessary level because the costs to preserve audiovisual heritage are too high. Also, the producers of films, i. e., consumers of this kind of service, were not happy to pay for it since the institution is a public one. Today, some workers have retaken their positions. The new staff are trying to get the Cinematheque on track again, but they have not given much information to the general public about how things are going. Additionally, no one cares about public accountability for what happened with the collection and paying what is due to former employees.

In the case of the Cinematheque, it appears on the surface that cultural heritage was not very important to the formation of the Brazilian State. The institution's history is one of small budgets, inadequate salaries (if any), being short-staffed, and fires. More significant investments happened in a short period between 2008 and 2013, but even then, they were not enough to build and reform everything that was necessary. Another point is that the audiovisual sector in Brazil is historically closely related to the bourgeoisie because it was an expensive form of art production. It is still expensive nowadays, but there are public funds and ways of making it cheaper. That is why the foundation of the Cinematheque is connected with an intellectual elite in Sao Paulo. Some of them have dedicated their lives to building and keeping the institution alive, but the bourgeois class as a whole did not really invest in giving the place some dignity. The State did so

occasionally, and in the worst times, the bill was paid by workers with dismissal and unpaid salaries, even though a large part of the Cinematheque collections are private and cannot be used by the institution itself without the authorization of the owners, who, incidentally, do not pay a dime to have their films stored there.<sup>30</sup> So, what has been preserved, by whom, and who is paying for it? It is a complex question involving many Brazilian laws with regard to the audiovisual sector. But what is to be stressed here is that even in collections related mostly to bourgeoisie history, the costs are paid by the working class.

In both cases, i. e., the National Museum and the Brazilian Cinematheque, cultural heritage is subject to political and economic changes. When the conjuncture becomes difficult, it is one of the first sectors to be eliminated from the budgets as it is seen as an accessory, not a right. In Brazil, it is consequently not a socially anchored state policy. Access to culture, to national history, is not universalized because the State never needed to invest in convincing people – in fact, quite the opposite sometimes. In some moments, the State's policy was to stress the differences between people living in the same territory, classifying citizens into first, second, and even third classes.<sup>31</sup>

One can argue that there are statues in the cities honoring colonizers, which could be seen as a form of building a history that praises the oppressor so as to justify the domination and exploitation. These statues have a negligible impact on the general population; most of them do not know who those people were since history is not open to broader or general access. They have an impact, it seems, on higher strata of society that come to their rescue at the first sight of harm, such as after the Borba Gato statue fire in 2021. A political group of non-white workers set fire to it to destroy the statue of an op-

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30 They are protected by copyright law, even when the film was produced by open calls and public money.

31 For example, after the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, when former enslaved people were excluded from society and white people were brought in to serve as workers; between 1945 and 1964, when illiterate people could not vote; and before 1989, when people did not have access to a public health system.



pressor and set up a public debate on what society wants to honor in public monuments. Two days later, the mayor of Sao Paulo announced that an entrepreneur had already stepped forward to pay the restoration costs.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, seven months after the fire in the National Museum, a campaign to rebuild it had only collected 1.1 million BRL (US\$ 278,904.66 at 2019 exchange rates), but 800.000 BRL (US\$ 202,839.75 at 2019 exchange rates) came from the German government and 150.000 BRL (US\$ 38,032.45 at 2019 exchange rates) from the British consulate.<sup>33</sup> Why is that so? What is the difference between the statue and the National Museum? What is the symbolic difference between the statue and the collection or the building itself? These questions are not intended to be answered here, but they need to be asked. One hypothesis is that the statue is in a public place that everybody passes through while the museum is distant even from part of society's higher strata because, in general, they do not need to be educated or to have some sense of bourgeois culture in Brazil. The bourgeoisie just exercise power through the economy and violence.

Some researchers point out this instability of cultural policies in Brazil, indicating that it began in 1930 with Getulio Vargas and the Revolution. The tendency of this kind of policy in Brazil has accordingly been a result of developments stimulated by the existence of authoritarian dictatorships. Antonio Rubim wrote that, in democratic periods, cultural policies tended to be depreciated. After 1945, for example, the State did not invest in it, which led to the private sector founding museums such as the Sao Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP) and the Museum of Art of Sao Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). Rubim assessed that the neoliberal policies of the 1990s

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32 Priscila Mengue: *Restauro da estátua Borba Gato será pago por empresário, diz prefeito de SP* (2021), online: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/agenzia-estado/2021/07/26/restauro-da-estatua-a-borba-gato-sera-pago-por-empresa-rio-diz-prefeito-de-sp.htm>.

33 Mirthyani Bezerra: *Baixas doações a Museu Nacional geram críticas e comparação com Notre-Dame* (2019), online: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2019/04/17/museu-nacional-doacoes-catedral-de-notre-dame.htm>.

demolished institutions in the State that financed and structured the cultural sector, giving the administration of public funds through Culture Incentive Laws to private entrepreneurship.<sup>34</sup> The Workers' Party (PT) continued this policy, complementing it with direct administration. As per this party's form of government, they conciliated public and private interests and gave a big impulse to the cultural sector in Brazil, maybe one of the biggest in the country's history. However, it was not transformed into a State policy, into something that would be continued no matter the government.<sup>35</sup> Even during PT governments, the budget was not enough to really safeguard Brazilian heritage. Research conducted by one Brazilian newspaper, *Folha de S.Paulo*, found 11 cases of cultural heritage fires between 2007 and 2021 in the Southeast Region of Brazil alone.<sup>36</sup>

Data publicized by the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2020 show that in 2009, the federal government spent 0.08 % of its total budget on culture, but in 2020, this dropped down to 0.04 %; that is, even at its height, the cultural budget did not reach 1 % of the total federal funds. In relation to workers, this same research shows that in the cultural sector, workers have a higher education level than other sectors but also have a higher level of job instability, and the average monthly wage was 3,595.26 BRL in 2019.<sup>37</sup> For December 2019, the Inter-union Department of Statistics

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34 Antonio Albino Canelas Rubim: Políticas culturais no Brasil: tristes tradições, in: *Revista Galáxia* 13/2007, pp. 101–113.

35 Since 2016, the year of the coup d'état against Dilma Rousseff, the culture sector has lost 85 % of its budget coming directly from the federal government, while the National Culture Fund has been reduced by 91 %, according to a report publicized by the transition office of Lula's third mandate.

36 2007 – Centro Cultural São Paulo; 2008 – Museu do Tropeiro; 2009 – Acervo Hélio Oitica; 2010 – Instituto Butantã; 2013 – Memorial da América Latina; 2016 – Cinemateca Brasileira; 2015 – Museu da Língua Portuguesa; 2018 – Museu Nacional; 2020 – Museu de História Natural da UFMG; 2021 – Cinemateca Brasileira; 2021 – Galpão Alke.

37 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística: Sistema de Informações e Indicadores Culturais 2009–2020, online: [https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101893\\_informativo.pdf](https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101893_informativo.pdf).

and Socio-economic Studies (DIEESE) calculated that the minimum necessary monthly wage in Brazil should be 4,342.57 BRL, but the established minimum monthly wage by then was only 998 BRL.<sup>38</sup> In short, it seems that the money invested in culture in Brazil is minimal, and workers receive much less pay than highly educated professionals in other areas.<sup>39</sup>

Stemming from these examples and data and reducing the analysis to cultural heritage specifically, questions arise from two perspectives. First, from the bourgeoisie's perspective, what is the role of cultural heritage in Brazil? Second, from the workers' perspective, it seems that, in a broad sense, they pay for heritage preservation since the greatest part of the money comes from taxes. But this class is under-represented in collections, and most decisions on what is to be preserved are made by higher economic strata. Furthermore, workers in this sector are underpaid and susceptible to instability in the national economy and within companies. It is, therefore, logical to ask what interests the working class has in preserving heritage in traditional institutions. What are the effects of this sphere on capitalist society? What are the struggles in this sector? How does it intertwine with structural economic reproduction methods: militarism, loans, commercial policies?

### Cultural Heritage in Brazil: A Luxemburgian Perspective

Let us return to Luxemburg's text on Adam Mickiewicz, in which she criticized his statue in Warsaw because it was permitted by the Czar and consequently, from her perspective, was not an expression of the people but of the dominant power. She also pointed out that

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38 Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos: Pesquisa Nacional da Cesta Básica de Alimentos: salário mínimo nominal e necessário, online: <https://www.dieese.org.br/analisecestabasica/salarioMinimo.html#2019>.

39 However, in comparison with all Brazilian workers, this salary is about 80 % higher than the average.

artists professionalize in capitalist development like any other worker. In relation to the Brazilian examples presented here, Borba Gato's statue is different since it does not honor an important legacy for the people but a murderer, an executioner. This raises the question of what is important in terms of cultural heritage to the dominant class and the working class in Brazil. The above examples also shed light on the situation of workers in Brazil in the cultural heritage preservation sector: capitalist development in Brazil tends toward more and more precarious conditions, with no rights, low salaries, and no perspective of retiring. This condition is historical in Brazil. It is not something new but dates back to the colony; the "inorganic worker," as Caio Prado Jr. named them, is structural in our society and has been part of Brazil's working class since the first traces of capitalism arrived on Cabral's ship. The inorganic worker is outside of society's dynamic center, that is to say, the relationships that move any society politically and economically; in the case of the Brazilian colony, it was the enslaved person-master relationship that was essential for the productions related to the foreign market.

According to Prado, Brazil's history and development is one of pure exploitation, with capitalist relationships implemented since the beginning of the colonization period with mercantile capital and exploitation through enslavement. These relations developed over the centuries, and when imperialism became a new form of capital in the international division of labor, overexploitation and many other factors remained from colonial society in Brazilian society after independence. For Prado, the Brazilian revolution means overcoming these relations and conquering a new place in the international market that would not be subdued but independent.

In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg stated:

"In reality, political power is nothing but a vehicle for the economic process. The conditions for the reproduction of capital provide the organic link between these two aspects of the accumulation of capital. The historical career of capitalism can only be appreciated by taking

them together. ‘Sweating blood and filth with every pore from head to toe’ characterises not only the birth of capital but also its progress in the world at every step, and thus capitalism prepares its own downfall under ever more violent contortions and convulsions.”<sup>40</sup>

In this quotation, Luxemburg summarizes what she developed in this chapter. Capitalism survives off two different relations: one with non-capitalist areas and another inside the pure system. Inside the production of surplus value, relationships are based in the economic process; violence is concealed behind this economic process because it appears as a pure transaction between equals adhering to the law. On the other hand, when it comes to relationships that allow the realization of surplus value – that is, with non-capitalist areas – pure, explicit violence prevails: “Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.”<sup>41</sup> In a way, it is the other way around; within colonies, violence concealed the economic process.

In relation to economic processes implemented in Brazil, let us recall what Prado wrote about it: this land was created as a provider of whatever the Global North needed; the meaning of Brazil’s colonization and birth as a State was an external demand. And the same happened with museum objects. It was very different in European countries since they were the external demand, and what prevailed there were “pure economic processes.” In those countries, the empowerment process of the bourgeoisie demanded the creation of a nation and its identity, the creation of a people. For that, museums had a major role and were, in this sense, in the dynamic center of that society. Cultural heritage, as it is, was hoarded by the Europeans to show power over other societies and unify their people against

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40 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital*, London 2003, p. 433

41 *Ibid.*, p. 432.

the other. This prompted the pillaging of numerous objects from other parts of the world, leading to the great museum collections of Europe. But center-periphery differences also appear here, so the role this kind of heritage has in the periphery is different from that in the center. In Brazil, the dominant class, the agrarian aristocracy, did not need to justify its power by convincing people they had the same origin, dating it back to centuries ago in an attempt to unify everybody despite social differences and oppression. Brazilian society was forged in violence, and so it remains. It created centers, such as museums and libraries, to emulate the European bourgeoisie, but they never had the same importance – for instance, a major role in mass education.

## Conclusion

From the examples and data presented here, it is possible to see two different relations: one showing institutions/collections that present a national heritage and another centering around an attacked statue. The attacked statue is a symbol against the domination process as it was and as it is. It demanded a quick reaction to restore its centrality and deny the opposition. On the other hand, the so-called ‘accidents’ in heritage institutions seem to be part of the dynamics of the State. It created uproar between people related to the areas of those institutions but did not generate accountability. It is like the fires were natural incidents akin to hurricanes; therefore, there is no need to investigate and identify the ones who neglected the seriousness of each situation. The answer is: let us try to raise money to rebuild, ‘restore,’ wherever possible. The outrage about the considerable losses of cultural and historical knowledge seems to evaporate in a celebration of new buildings and projects, a resumption (*retomada*), a term very much in vogue these days in Brazil. Why is that? Is the bourgeoisie itself concerned about the collections its predecessors gathered? Who loses here? As can be seen, the history of traditional institutions is

closely related to the history of the dominant class in Brazil. What is the difference, then?

In Brazil, and maybe in the majority of the peripheral States created in the 19th century, a nation was to be created after independence. But even maintaining the integrality of this territory was questionable: it was done by force and by the common interest in maintaining slavery while keeping a distance from what happened after former Spanish colonies gained their independence. According to Caio Prado Jr., this nation was never accomplished, and this should be the aim of the Brazilian revolution: “the constitution of a country and its population [should be] essentially turned in on themselves and organized economically, socially and politically according to their own needs and aspirations.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, it is possible to say that no former colony really became a nation; they are territories delimited by cartographic frontiers with no political and economic independence from international disputes and interests. One could also say that a nation is created by a unified territory, language, and people. The first two were accomplished through oppression to some extent, but the last one is in some way questionable. What is it to be Brazilian? What is the national identity? Nowadays, it makes no sense to talk about *a* national State but rather of a multinational State, considering that there are a lot of different indigenous nations in the territory. In any case, historically, the elite in Brazil’s territory never needed to create this national identity; as said before, on many occasions, their policy was actually to stress the differences, dividing people who were forced to live together in that same space. In this aspect of cultural heritage, museums were not needed as instruments for ruling. They served the curiosity of some foreigners and sometimes native persons, but they were not designed for mass education. But despite the way objects and knowledge were gathered, they constitute an important part of our sources for Brazilian history, the elite’s history, and the working class’ history. Losing this means losing part of humans’ production

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42 Caio Prado Junior: *A Revolução Brasileira*, São Paulo 1966, p. 211.

and knowledge on the formation of our working class, which is essential to understand the features of the Brazilian revolution or the tasks ahead. Based on the history of cultural heritage preservation in Brazil, it is a task for the working class and, in this sense, a front-of-the-class struggle to defend Brazilian society's historical vestiges and heritage and fight the relationships established by this mode of production.

Here, it is possible to see the aspects of culture in Luxemburg's thought stressed in the second part of this article and the history of cultural heritage preservation in Brazil. As a sector of society subjected to the capitalist mode of production, cultural heritage represents an area of labor exploitation and possible accumulation of capital since recent ways of financing and even so-called tragedies such as the National Museum fire represent areas of investment. These constructions are financed by public money and executed by private companies specialized in such services. This makes a lot of sense of the mentioned idea expressed by Luxemburg in the text *The Militia and Militarism*. Another point in this same aspect is the use of public money for private heritage preservation. Many institutions have been created in recent years with money from Culture Incentive Laws that are responsible for safeguarding bourgeois heritage (dishes, furniture, houses, and so on). Meanwhile, workers' heritage struggles to survive on extremely low budgets and voluntary work. Even so, it cannot be seen as a solid policy of the bourgeois class; if, at this moment, it is creating such institutions to preserve its own heritage, it is just because it is convenient. As seen in the examples, when it comes to major policies, the budgets for safeguarding the big institutions are far from the minimum.

As an expression of a spiritual/intellectual aspect of human society, culture, and specifically cultural heritage is a front in the class struggle, where workers should play a role not as the exploited but as stakeholders in deciding what is to be preserved and what is not, debating where the tax money should be employed, by whom, and in which conditions. This is in line with Frigga Haug's affirmation



that in relation to struggle, “Luxemburg is oriented toward the connection between the different media, i. e., fighting in Parliament, in the factory, in the street, in the cultural sphere.”<sup>43</sup> No front should be undermined as not worthy of class struggle because the world’s power belongs to this class and the oppressed in all its aspects and forms.

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43 Frigga Haug: Rosa Luxemburgo y el arte de la política, Buenos Aires 2020, p. 186.

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## 7 Let Rosa Luxemburg Speak Chinese

### The Project of Issuing *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* in Chinese

Xinwei Wu

#### Introduction

In October 2021, the first volume of the Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* was officially published by the People's Publishing House in Beijing.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* has eventually become a reality and also marks a new stage in the study of Rosa Luxemburg's thought in the 21st century: Rosa Luxemburg can finally tell us her own thoughts in Chinese. This important event means that Chinese scholars can now have a more comprehensive understanding of the development of her ideas.

From the official launch of editing and translating the Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* in 2014 to the publication of the first volume in 2021, the editing team of the Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* has worked hard. The reason for the long time span and the fact that only one volume has been published so far is that editing a Chinese version of Rosa Luxemburg's works is indeed a challenging task.

This challenge is mainly due to the difficulty of the work itself. As a symbolic figure in the history of international communism and Marxism, Rosa Luxemburg has been of concern for the theoretical circles dealing with her ideas for a long time. Since the 1950s, Chinese scholars have collated, translated, and published many of Luxemburg's im-

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1 Ping He & Ren'e Deng (Ed.): 罗莎·卢森堡全集 (The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg), Volume 1, Beijing 2021.

portant works, such as *The Accumulation of Capital*<sup>2</sup> and *Introduction to Political Economy*.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s, after the reform and opening up of China toward the West, the People's Publishing House also published *The Selected Works of Rosa Luxemburg*.<sup>4</sup> However, due to various reasons, namely, a lack of funding and researchers, *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* did not appear in Chinese before the 2020s.

Now, the editing and publishing of the Chinese translation has been successfully started, the first volume has been published, and the editorial team is preparing the publication of subsequent volumes. In light of this difficult project, this chapter intends to analyze the challenges faced in the process of editing and publishing the Chinese version of the *Complete Works*, explore the ideas and plans for editing and publishing further volumes, and take the first volume of the *Complete Works* as an example to explain the latest contributions of Chinese scholars to the study of Luxemburg's thought.

## Facing Challenges

Rosa Luxemburg was a prolific Marxist theorist who left a considerable body of theoretical work in her lifetime. There are eight volumes of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*<sup>5</sup> and six volumes of *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*<sup>6</sup> in German. Internationally, the English version has established an overall editing program of 14 volumes, and several volumes have been published,<sup>7</sup> and a Polish version is also being compiled and published. From the perspective of China, the

2 Chenshun Peng & Jixian Wu (Trans.): 资本积累论 (The Accumulation of Capital), Beijing 1959.

3 Chenshun Peng (Trans.): 国民经济学入门 (Introduction to Political Economy), Beijing 1962.

4 Central Bureau of Compilation and Translation of Marxist Leninist Works (Trans.): 卢森堡文选 (The Selected Works of Luxemburg), Beijing 1984.

5 Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke, Berlin 1970–1975.

6 Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Briefe, Berlin 1982.

7 Peter Hudis (Ed.): The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg, New York 2014–2021.

China New Literary Society published Luxemburg's *New Economics* as early as 1927, translated by Shouseng Chen and revised by Hanmin Hu.<sup>8</sup> After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, more works of Luxemburg were translated and published, such as *The Accumulation of Capital* (Sanlian Bookstore, 1959),<sup>9</sup> *Introduction to Political Economy* (Sanlian Bookstore, 1962),<sup>10</sup> *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital* (Heilongjiang People's Publishing House, 1982),<sup>11</sup> *On Literature* (People's Literature Publishing House, 1983),<sup>12</sup> *The Selected Works of Luxemburg* (People's Publishing House, 1984),<sup>13</sup> *On the Russian Revolution. Letters* (Guizhou People's Publishing House 2001),<sup>14</sup> *Letters from Prison* (Huacheng Publishing House, 2007),<sup>15</sup> *The Selected Works of Luxemburg* (People's Publishing House, 2012),<sup>16</sup> etc.

Considering these Chinese and foreign materials, the major problem the Chinese scholars involved in the current project of publishing a Chinese version of the *Complete Works* have to solve is how to make effective use of these documents. In order to compile the *Complete Works*, the Chinese scholars initially worked on a detailed classification of the existing editions of Luxemburg's works. The process of collating these works, on the one hand, can complete the collection and arrangement of the *Complete Works* and, on the other, can deepen the study of Luxemburg-related research literature and complete Luxemburg's historiography.

8 Shouseng Chen & Hanmin Hu (Ed.): *新经济学* (New Economics), Shanghai 1927.

9 Chenshun Peng & Jixian Wu (Trans.): *资本积累论* (The Accumulation of Capital), Beijing 1959.

10 Chenshun Peng (Trans.): *国民经济学入门* (Introduction to Political Economy), Beijing 1962.

11 Jinru Chai (Trans.): *帝国主义与资本积累* (Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital), Heilongjiang 1982.

12 Yizhu Wang (Trans.): *论文学* (On Literature), Beijing 1983.

13 Central Bureau of Compilation and Translation of Marxist Leninist Works (Trans.): *卢森堡文选* (The Selected Works of Luxemburg), Beijing 1984.

14 Xuyi Yin (Trans.): *论俄国革命·书信集* (On the Russian Revolution. Letters), Guiyang 2001.

15 Weici Fu (Trans.): *狱中书简* (Letters from Prison), Guangzhou 2007.

16 Zongyu Li (Ed.): *卢森堡文选* (The Selected Works of Luxemburg), Beijing 2012.

First of all, Luxemburg's letters, manuscripts, and notes are the focus of the collection. In China, the published literature is first and foremost Rosa Luxemburg's own works, and almost all important works are published in the form of single volumes, while the large number of letters, manuscripts, and notes left by Luxemburg are rarely translated into Chinese. These letters, manuscripts, and notes are no less important than Luxemburg's writings, and a reading of them can deepen our understanding of her thoughts. Therefore, the scholars involved in the preparation of the Chinese edition of her *Complete Works* systematically collated and edited these documents and, in the process, examined the development of Luxemburg's thought in relation to published works.

Secondly, attention has been paid to the study of literature about Luxemburg. Since 2015, Chinese scholars have regularly held academic seminars on the research and publication of Rosa Luxemburg's works at Wuhan University, inviting experts from Germany, the United States, Poland, and China to conduct in-depth exchanges and discussions on the global dissemination and evolution of relevant literature. The conferences organized by Chinese scholars reflect a new trend in the current study of Luxemburg's thought in China as they attach importance to the research on Luxemburg, namely, her works and impact. For a long time, due to the influence of Lenin's criticism of Luxemburg, this work has been neglected by researchers in China. Today, the Chinese academic community hopes to rediscover the contemporary influence of Luxemburg's thought through the study of the history of her activity, the history of her ideas, and the circulation of her works. When editing the Chinese version of her *Complete Works*, Chinese scholars also follow this practice and pay attention to her life and the global translation history of her published works.

Thirdly, the editorial team closely follows contemporary developments in the study of Rosa Luxemburg. The importance of Luxemburg's thought is realized through the discussion and interpretation of her successors. When editing the *Complete Works*, Chinese scholars keep pace with the times and keep an open attitude to the study of

Luxemburg in the contemporary international theoretical circle. In recent years, Chinese scholars have done a lot of work in this field, not only by holding relevant academic conferences but also by organizing and researching the literature and even keeping an eye on unpublished Polish sources and related research. Chinese scholars have consequently incorporated these new developments and achievements into the editing of the Chinese version of the *Complete Works*. Newly discovered documents served as additional material for the Chinese version, and new research results are also recognized and used accordingly in the volumes.

Publishing *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* is nevertheless a very difficult task. The leading editor of the English edition, Peter Hudis, emphasized this as well:

“What we have learned in the course of this work is that there is much that we still do not know about Rosa Luxemburg, since at least 80 percent of her writings have never appeared in English. These include dozens of articles, essays and speeches that appeared in the five-volume German *Gesammelte Werke* that have yet to be translated into English. Moreover, even with the issuance of the 600-page *Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* in 2011 – the most comprehensive collection of her correspondence in English – less than 20 percent of the letters in her six-volume *Gesammelte Briefe* have so far been translated. Yet even this does not exhaust the amount of material by her that has yet to be absorbed.”<sup>17</sup>

In the process of editing the Chinese version, Chinese scholars also paid attention to this problem and combined the translation, sorting, and editing of Luxemburg’s documents to achieve the goal of publishing a truly complete version of her works in China.

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17 Peter Hudis: Rediscovering the Totality of Rosa Luxemburg’s Contribution, in: Xinwei Wu (Ed.): *Research and Publication of the Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, Beijing 2017, pp. 331–346, here p. 333.



## The Editorial Ideas Behind the Chinese Version of the *Complete Works*

After Chinese scholars made the problem of how to make use of Luxemburg's documents clear, the next problem to be solved was how to edit the *Complete Works*. Faced with this problem, the Chinese scholars involved<sup>18</sup> have made use of the existing international versions of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*. At present, there are two international editions: one in German and one in English. Chinese scholars take the above two versions of the complete works as a reference and fully absorb the advantages of the two versions at hand into their own work.

First, both editions seek to accommodate the entire literature of Rosa Luxemburg. In the German version, the complete works and Luxemburg's letters are divided into two parts. The first five volumes, published in the 1970s, are chronological collections of Luxemburg's writings, speeches, notes, and manuscripts from 1889–1919. Volumes 6 to 8 were later published as supplementary volumes containing newly discovered texts. The sixth volume contains Luxemburg's unpublished works from 1893 to 1906,<sup>19</sup> volume 7 contains unpublished works written between 1907 and 1918, and volume 8 is devoted to the entire literature written in Polish by Rosa Luxemburg. The arrangement of the *Complete Letters* is similar to that of the *Complete Works*, with the first five volumes arranged chronologically and the sixth volume being a supplement to the newly discovered letters. As a result, the German edition contains almost all of Luxemburg's works in 14 volumes. From the point of view of the English version, the editing work of the English version is behind that of the German version, and it is not yet complete. According to the plan, the English edition of the *Complete Works* will count a total of 14 volumes, which will

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18 The most important representatives among these scholars are Ms. Ping He from the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University and Ms. Ren'e Deng from the People's Publishing House.

19 Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke*, Berlin 1970–1975.

include both works and letters. The arrangement of the English version inherits the classification consciousness of the German version and implements it into the overall arrangement idea of the *Complete Works*. The whole collection is divided into three main categories: the first is political economy (volumes 1 and 2), which contains Luxemburg's major political economy works from the early *The Industrial Development of Poland*, and the second is political science (volumes 3 to 9), which contains works on political, national and imperialist issues. The third category, epistles (volumes 10 to 14), contains the entire epistolary work of Rosa Luxemburg. As of the time of writing, the full English edition has not been published and is still being edited.

Second, both versions are structurally unique. The German edition was published earlier, and the newly discovered documents could not be added to the published volumes, so the format of the supplementary volume was specially adopted to facilitate the reader's understanding of the circulation of Luxemburg's documents. The later publication of the English version allowed the editors to maximize their knowledge of the texts and thus arrange them chronologically as much as possible. Moreover, the English version edited the works and letters in a unified manner and added a large number of background introductions as annotations so that the complete collection has literary unity as well as reading and research convenience. Of course, in comparison, the German edition also has its own advantage, that is, the common practice of editing the *Complete Works* strictly in chronological order, highlighting the development of Luxemburg's thoughts. The English version is not as good as the German version in this respect because it basically classifies Luxemburg's texts according to their thematic model and completely separates her political economy and political literature, thus presenting a less comprehensive picture of Luxemburg's thought than the German edition.

Comparing the German and English editions of the *Complete Works*, we can see that the two editions do have their own merits. The two editions, although different in editorial style, have one thing in common: the editor invariably sees Rosa Luxemburg as a political

economist and political strategist rather than as a Marxist philosopher. Guided by this view, both editions adopted a categorical approach to the editing of Luxemburg's texts, separating works on political economy from those on politics. In doing so, her thoughts as a whole were effectively severed. Historically, Rosa Luxemburg was never a purely intellectual scholar but a theoretical thinker in practice and revolution. She studied at the University of Zurich, where she obtained a doctorate and received good academic training but also systematically studied Marx's and Engels' thoughts. Therefore, when she considered political economy and political science, it is inevitable that she used philosophical thinking, especially Marxist philosophy. Her analysis of the economic phenomena of imperialism and her criticism of Bernstein belong superficially to political economy and politics, but at a deeper level, they rather refer to philosophy. These texts resonate in today's society because they embody Luxemburg's philosophical wisdom. Since the new century, international studies of Rosa Luxemburg have paid great attention to exploring the philosophical implications of her thoughts. Contemporary scholars have reevaluated many ideological debates in Rosa Luxemburg's life from the perspective of the history of Marxist thought, such as the relationship between her thoughts and Karl Marx, the polemics between Luxemburg and Lenin, and Luxemburg's influence on Western Marxism. A symbolic evaluation is made by Jörn Schütrumpf, who argues that Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci have something in common: "they never had to exercise state power themselves, nor did they have to tarnish their name by participating in a dictatorial or totalitarian regime."<sup>20</sup> These new assessments show in many ways the profound influence of Rosa Luxemburg as a Marxist philosopher on the course of history since the 20th century. It is on this basis that Luxemburg should not be considered simply as a political economist or political scientist but as a Marxist philosopher.

To study her as a Marxist philosopher means that we should take Luxemburg's political economy, politics, literature, etc. as the content

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20 Jörn Schütrumpf: *Rosa Luxemburg or: The Price of Freedom*, Berlin 2008, pp. 9–10.

of her philosophical thoughts when we organize her works. Since the Chinese version of the *Complete Works* started to be edited rather late, Rosa Luxemburg's texts' publication has basically been completed, so Chinese scholars can adopt different editing ideas from the German and English versions. This approach draws on the strengths of the first two versions but is not constrained by conventions.

First of all, Luxemburg's thought as a whole, as well as the *Complete Works*, can be edited without a rigid separation of political economy and politics. The Chinese edition arranges the texts and letters in chronological order. At the same time, the method of classified editing is adopted in some details. For example, the articles and speeches of the debates between Rosa Luxemburg and Eduard Bernstein are arranged together so that we can have not only an overall grasp of the development of the former's thought but also a clear understanding of the important issues that concerned Luxemburg in a certain period.

Secondly, the latest results of international Luxemburg studies are incorporated into the editing of the *Complete Works*. The latest work here is twofold: the first is a newly discovered Polish text. According to the scholar and expert on Luxemburg's Polish works Holger Politt, Luxemburg wrote almost 6,000 pages in German and almost 3,000 pages in Polish: "In the most cases Rosa Luxemburg wrote her articles for the illicit Polish papers anonymously. An important source to identify the authorship are the preserved letters of Rosa Luxemburg, especially to the editor Leo Jogiches which were found by the Polish historian Feliks Tych in the archive in Moscow in the 1950s. The main topics in the Polish part of the works of Rosa Luxemburg are the Polish question, the relationship between the democratization of the internal political conditions in the Russia Empire and the social revolution which finally broke out in January 1905 in St. Petersburg, and last but not least problems of the development in the social-democratic workers' movement."<sup>21</sup>

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21 Holger Politt: Some Aspects about the Polish Work of Rosa Luxemburg, in: Xinwei Wu (Ed.): Research and Publication of the Works of Rosa Luxemburg, Beijing 2017, pp. 245–247, here p. 246.

The Polish works of Rosa Luxemburg will be properly included in the Chinese version. The second advantage of the latter is the inclusion of new perspectives from recent international research. Since 2000, the international study of Luxemburg's thought has made great progress, not only through the republishing of her works but also by providing new interpretations of *The Accumulation of Capital* and related letters.<sup>22</sup> In addition, new topics in the study of Luxemburg's thought have developed, for example, in the field of political economy, e.g., the study of Luxemburg's pre-capitalist theory, modern monetary theory, and world-system ideas. In the aspect of political philosophy, a rethinking of the relationship between Luxemburg and Lenin can be considered a breakthrough,<sup>23</sup> and researchers have provided in-depth studies of Luxemburg's socialist democratic thought, party theory, and relationship with other contemporary thinkers.<sup>24</sup> "Luxemburg discussed the problems of her time, i. e. politics and economic questions alike, and even kept track of the Russian Revolutions in 1917 while she was in prison."<sup>25</sup> All the problems she discussed have somehow become the subject of contemporary research. These new achievements are organically integrated into the editing of the *Complete Works*: newly discovered documents can be incorporated into the anthology, and new research results can be incorporated into *The Chronology of Rosa Luxemburg* or in the form of annotations to the *Complete Works*.

Third, the compilation of the Chinese version highlights Luxemburg's Polish background and her embeddedness in German Marxist philosophical tradition. Because she became famous in Germany, people have long tended to pay attention first and foremost to

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22 Riccardo Bellofiore (Ed.): *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy*, London 2009.

23 Paul Le Blanc (Ed.): *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings*, New York 1999.

24 Joke J. Hermsen: *A Good and Dignified Life: The Political Advice of Hannah Arendt and Rosa Luxemburg*, New Haven 2022.

25 Frank Jacob: *Rosa Luxemburg: Living and Thinking the Revolution*, Berlin 2021, p. 10.

Luxemburg's German background and ignore her Polish origin and this particular influence on her theory. The newly discovered Polish texts and the new findings on the spread of Luxemburg's theories in Poland flesh out this content. In addition, a focus on her study of German philosophy and the philosophy of Marx and Engels demonstrates the tradition of German Marxist philosophy.

On the basis of absorbing the above-named advantages, the editorial idea of the Chinese scholars is to divide all of Luxemburg's texts into three categories for the editing of the *Complete Works* in Chinese. The first is the published works, including articles, notes, speeches, and manuscripts. The second category is letters, including all epistle documents. The third category consists of unpublished works, mainly newly discovered Polish texts that are being collated.<sup>26</sup> In terms of the editing style, the Chinese version thereby absorbs all the advantages of the German and English versions. On the one hand, it edits all documents in chronological order; on the other, it does not rigorously pursue chronological order but fully explores the deep correlations between documents and ideas and concentrates on displaying the phased changes of Luxemburg's thoughts.

### The Latest Contributions of Chinese Scholars

In accordance with the editing ideas of the Chinese version of the *Complete Works*, the editorial team launched the first volume of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* at the end of 2021. The time span of this volume is September 1893 to November 1899, reflecting two extraordinary experiences in Luxemburg's ideological growth process: between September 1893 and May 1898, she studied at the University of Zurich and became a thought leader in the Polish workers' movement; between June 1898 and November 1899, Luxemburg entered

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<sup>26</sup> The arrangement scheme is as follows: the first category will be covered in volumes 1–8, the second in volumes 9–14, and the third in volume 15.

Germany after receiving her doctorate and developed her experience as a thought leader in the German Social Democratic Party. These two experiences mark the epitome of her transition from Poland's to Germany's Rosa Luxemburg and the prelude to her transition from Germany's to the world's Rosa Luxemburg. The original documents of volume 1 of the Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* are congruent with volumes 1 and 6 of the German version of the *Complete Works*. Of the 800,000 words of literature, 16 articles have been translated into Chinese before (some in excerpts), but the rest have been published in Chinese for the first time. The publication of the first volume of the Chinese version of the *Complete Works* marks a historic moment as well – on the 150th anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg's birth, she could finally tell the full story of her early thought in Chinese! Not only that, but by listening to her story, as Professor Ping He, chief editor of the Chinese edition, said, we can “grasp the ideological context of Luxemburg's theoretical creation during this period from the depths of history, and understand the internal connection between her and Marx's historical dialectics and the intrinsic consistency between her theory of the nation and the workers' movement and Marx and Engels' theory of the nation and the workers' movement.”<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the first volume of the Chinese version of the *Complete Works*, we can see that Chinese scholars have made two new contributions to the study of Luxemburg's thought, namely, (1) a further discussion of Luxemburg in Poland and (2) a reacquaintance with her, a theoretical novice in the German Social Democratic Party who became the thought leader of the German Social Democratic Party.

First of all, the Polish Rosa Luxemburg is represented in the first half of the first volume of the Chinese edition. These documents focus on her Marxist academic research and revolutionary activities during her time in Zurich. These documents can be roughly divided

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27 Ping He: Preface, in: Ping He & Ren'e Deng (Ed.): 罗莎·卢森堡全集 (The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg), Volume 1, Beijing 2021, pp. 12–44, here p. 43.

into two parts: political papers, mainly published from August 1893 to December 1896, and academic papers, written in the period between 1897 and 1898. Of these two parts, the first begins with Luxemburg's attendance at the Zurich Congress of the Second International in her capacity as a representative of the Workers' Cause and her presentation on this issue to the Congress of the Second International, drafted by her, which essentially deals with the fundamental questions of the Polish workers' movement. The latter part of the texts contains papers related to her doctoral degree, *The Treaty of States*, *Wage Fund Theory* and *Wage Fund Theory and Industrial Reserve Army Theory*, and Luxemburg's doctoral dissertation, *The Industrial Development of Poland*. Her treatise on the historicist approach to the socialist movement and the historical formation of the bourgeoisie in Poland is also included. The subject matter of these papers is also related to the Polish question, which is a scientific demonstration of the political views of the previous part.

The documents of the two parts are intrinsically related: the documents of the first part express Luxemburg's political position and viewpoint on the Polish question and the national question. The latter part of the texts expresses Luxemburg's theoretical scheme and method of thinking about Poland. During this period, she emphasized the position of the Polish Social Democratic Party to answer the fundamental questions of the Polish workers' movement. As a theorist of the Polish Social Democratic Party, Luxemburg adhered to the party's positions and views; however, she was not satisfied with stating its views but tried to give theoretical proof of these views. She criticized the Polish Socialist Party's idea of "rebuilding Poland" and believed that national liberation should be dialectically combined with the Polish class struggle and that independence should be fought on the platform of the class struggle of the modern proletariat against the bourgeoisie. This is her historical dialectic point of view in solving the problem of Polish socialism. She elaborated the basic principles of Marx and Engels concerning the Polish national liberation and combined these principles to examine the industrial and class bases of



the Polish socialist movement. Finally, Luxemburg proposed a theoretical scheme to solve the problem of Polish national independence and national liberation. This scheme was to combine the basic principles of the *Communist Manifesto* with industrial development and the socialist movement in Poland in the 1880s and 1890s, solidify class struggle as the program of the Polish socialist movement, and unite with the working classes of the three annexed countries in the struggle for Polish independence and national liberation.

Secondly, Luxemburg, a theoretical novice of the German Social Democratic Party, became the thought leader of that party, which is reflected in the second half of the first volume of the Chinese version. Since criticism of Bernstein's revisionism was the main line of theory in German social democracy at that time, Luxemburg entered Germany and actively engaged in the work of German social democracy, fighting at the forefront of the criticism of Bernstein's revisionism and writing *Reform or Revolution*.<sup>28</sup> She also became a leading figure and prominent theorist of the German Social Democratic Party. From this point on, Luxemburg acquired her second identity as a revolutionary and Marxist theorist in the German context of her life. This part of the texts consequently focuses on Luxemburg's criticism of Bernstein. In addition to *Reform or Revolution*, this volume includes a series of articles written after *Reform or Revolution*. These articles analyzed and criticized Bernstein's opportunist views on the practice of the trade union movement and the participation of German Social Democrats in bourgeois governments and parliaments. The volume also contains theoretical articles written by Luxemburg on the successful holding of the Hannover Congress of the German Social Democratic Party and her speech there.

In these texts, Luxemburg makes it clear that the participation of social democracy in bourgeois governments or parliaments is nothing more than a tactic for the class struggle, its aim being to make social

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<sup>28</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: *Reform or Revolution*, in: Ping He & Ren'e Deng (Ed.): *罗莎·卢森堡全集* (The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg), Volume 1, Beijing 2021, pp. 480–560.

reform a part of the whole social revolution, to make social reform serve the ultimate goal of the proletariat in overthrowing bourgeois rule and establishing a working-class state of its own. This constitutes Luxemburg's answer to the question of the Social Democratic practice of social reform. In theory, by refuting the theory of Marxist crisis, she stressed that the revisionist theory of Bernstein should not replace Marx's revolutionary theory and proved that the theoretical basis of social democracy can only be Marxist theory. These documents show that Luxemburg, both in theory and in the practical struggle, had been integrated into German social democracy at this time and that a theoretical recruit of the movement had now turned into a thought leader. At this point, Luxemburg achieved a major identity change in her life, transitioning fully from a Polish to a German context.

Another interesting aspect of the arrangement of this volume is that the editor has added an appendix at the end of the main text. This appendix contains six articles that were not written by Luxemburg herself but extracted from newspaper reports about her views.<sup>29</sup> The editor of the Chinese version considered it inappropriate to include these articles, which were not written by Luxemburg, in the text corpus itself. However, these articles reported her views accurately and, at the same time, reflected their social influence at that time, which both is a window for us to understand Luxemburg's thoughts and an important form of research on them. From this point of view, the publication of these documents in the form of an appendix is quite appropriate.

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29 These six articles are as follows: Defense of the Representative Status of the Social Democratic of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP) at the International Socialist Workers' Congress in Zurich (August 8, 1893), Speech on the Election of the Imperial Parliament (June 5, 1898 in Breslau), Current Policy and the Social Democratic Party (February 9, 1899, speech at a mass rally in Charlottenburg), Regarding the Tasks of the Party Congress (speech at the 12th and 13th district Party Congress of the Saxony Empire, August 29, 1899, in Leipzig), Speech at the Social Democratic Election Union's Third District Congress of the Berlin Empire, Discussion on the Upcoming Party Congress (September 5, 1899), and The Current Political Situation (speech at a rally in Magdeburg on November 22, 1899).

## Conclusion

To sum up, the publication of the first volume of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* in Chinese is a new beginning. It shows the academic circle that Chinese scholars have bravely met the challenge and seized the opportunity when editing the *Complete Works*, further strengthened the innovations of the existing German and English versions, and connected the editing and publishing of the *Complete Works* with the promotion of Marxist philosophy research. The work of these Chinese scholars shows that it is not enough to have thought alone to study Luxemburg's thought in the context of ideological history but also to have sufficient support from primary sources and documents. Only by organically combining the study of thought with the collation and examination of documents can the study of Luxemburg's thought be established on a reliable basis. This is the goal of the Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*.

The publication of the Chinese version of *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* will present her intellectual journey through a wealth of literature, which will undoubtedly deepen the academic research on her thoughts. In the past, many scholars had a one-sided understanding of her ideas, mainly due to the lack of research literature. For example, on the issue of her opposition to Polish national independence, we have long relied solely on her early limited literature on the Polish issue to understand. As a result, we only know that she opposed the use of the slogan of Polish independence in the Polish workers' movement; we do not know why she opposed the use of this slogan, nor do we know the basis for her own views. However, if we read her literature on the history of the Polish socialist movement, the history of the Polish bourgeoisie, and the history of Polish industrial development, we will see that she was using Marx's materialist view of history and dialectics to analyze Poland's history and reality. Now, these documents are presented in the Chinese version. With the help of these documents, we will have a better understanding of Luxem-

burg, a new understanding of Luxemburg, and, following Luxemburg's footsteps, develop Marxist philosophy in the 21st century.

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**PART II**  
**PERCEPTION**



## 8 The Good, the Baden and the Ugly

Rosa Luxemburg and the SPD in 1910

*Ben Lewis*

The mass strike has a long and rich history in the workers' movement. It forms a strategic anchor for much far-left practice today – from anarchism through to various strands of Trotskyism – and continues to provide inspiration for many an activist at a time when prospects for the advance of the cause of international labor occasionally seem rather bleak. Activists can seek motivation by reflecting on the past glorious struggles, successes and some of the pioneers associated with the theory of the mass strike – Rosa Luxemburg, Daniel de Leon, Henriette Roland-Holst and others.

Much ink has been spilled on the strategic place and role of the mass strike, particularly in terms of the debate that erupted within German and international social democracy in 1910. And there is certainly much at stake in revisiting this controversy both in terms of our historical understanding of what was unfolding at the time and its implications for revolutionary political organization over a century later. In her edited volume on the mass strike debate, for instance, Antonia Grunenberg claims that the controversy in 1910 should serve to undermine the notion that the German social democracy of August Bebel, Frederick Engels, Karl Kautsky and Clara Zetkin was initially a “revolutionary organization” that “‘betrayed’ its originally revolutionary character” in 1914.<sup>1</sup> For her, it is out of the question that the SPD was a revolutionary organization at *any* stage in its evolution. Notions

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<sup>1</sup> Antonia Grunenberg (Ed.): Die Massenstreikdebatte. Beiträge von Parvus, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky und Anton Pannekoek, Frankfurt 1970, p. 5.



of the “betrayal” or “renegacy”<sup>2</sup> of its radical heritage were merely a ruse by pro-capitalist social-democratic SPD leaders after World War II to distance the party from its past and to portray it as the safe pair of hands for capitalism that it has represented for over a century.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will draw on newly translated contributions to the mass-strike debate to challenge Grunenberg’s view that the SPD was never a revolutionary organization.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the nature of the debate within the SPD party press was – despite manifestations of bureaucracy, confusion over fundamental aspects of political strategy among leading SPD thinkers and the stunning advance of reformism within the German south in particular – generally reflective of a radical mass party. Based on its revolutionary Erfurt program, the SPD was getting to grips with an increasingly precarious political situation at home and abroad. Moreover, this chapter will demonstrate how Grunenberg’s homogenizing and teleological assertion that “all of the factors that led the political collapse of the SPD in 1914 become more or less visible” within the 1910 controversy is reflective of a stale Cold War historiographical consensus that continues to dominate discussions of the pre-1914 SPD today.<sup>5</sup> Finally, this contribution will make the case that this dominant historical narrative has created a skewed un-

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2 This claim overlooks the obvious fact that contemporary figures on the far left of the international workers’ movement such as Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Grigory Zinoviev spoke of the SPD’s betrayal of its earlier values. This is also true of a certain Vladimir Ilych Lenin, as we will see below.

3 In this regard, Grunenberg cites Erich Matthias’s essay “Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus,” which she views as having “analytical value” despite its barely concealed anti-Marxist character (*ibid.*, p. 6). As such, it is slightly odd that Matthias’s essay has emerged as a dominant point of reference for discussions of German social democracy on the left; Erich Matthias: *Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus. Die Funktion der Ideologie in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie vor dem ersten Weltkrieg*, in: *Marxismus Studien*, vol. 2, Tübingen 1957, pp. 151–197. For more on the peculiar reception of Kautsky’s political legacy, see Ben Lewis, Introduction, in Ben Lewis (Ed.), *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, Leiden 2019, pp. 5–17.

4 In recent far-left historiography, there has been something of a “primary source turn” to the original (German) source material to challenge such grand narratives. This paper is part of these endeavors.

5 Grunenberg (Ed.): *Die Massenstreikdebatte*, p. 6.

derstanding of what was actually at stake politically in the polemical clashes of 1910, with the mass strike question often viewed in abstraction from two other controversies: to wit, the issue of coalitionism in (local) capitalist administrations and the relationship between Marxism and republicanism. By concentrating on some of Luxemburg's writings on these matters that have been marginalized due to scholarship's overwhelming focus on the mass strike, these issues clearly come back into focus and allow for a more rounded appreciation of the controversy of 1910. Let us now set the scene by outlining what was unfolding in Germany in that year.

### Prussia 1910: The "Center of Political Life"

The spring of 1910 saw a wave of radicalization among the Prussian masses, with a swathe of demonstrations and mobilizations against the hated three-tier suffrage system. This electoral setup effectively disenfranchised the working class by tying the weight of an individual's vote to the amount of tax he paid, i. e., how much property he owned. Under pressure from the masses, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg produced a suffrage bill in February 1910. This tweaked the voting arrangements in this or that respect but actually retained the three-tier system. Luxemburg was scathing: "When this bill appeared in parliament, Homeric laughter could be heard across the entirety of the cultured world. Because, party comrades, it is impossible to imagine a more genuinely Prussian-bureaucratic mockery of the demands of the mass of the people on the suffrage question than what was passed off as electoral reform here."<sup>6</sup> The reactionary three-tier suffrage was decreed following the victory of the counterrevolution in March 1849, and Luxemburg was adamant that the forces of liberalism – some of

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6 Rosa Luxemburg: *Der preußische Wahlrechtskampf und seine Lehren*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Berlin 1972, p. 310. All my translations of the Luxemburg texts cited here will appear in the next volume of her English-language *Collected Works*, published by Verso Books.

which were making noises about opposing the bill and even joining the protests in 1910 – were ultimately responsible for this law coming into being: “The current Prussian electoral system is thus not a right that came into existence through legal channels, by legal means. No, it is a product of naked, brutal violence, a product of the *coup d’etat* and of [General Friedrich von] Wrangel’s bayonets – *a product of the cowardly betrayal of German liberalism in German freedom’s very hour of birth*.”<sup>7</sup>

Since then, so Luxemburg, the National Liberals and the so-called Free Thinkers in Germany had only degenerated further by becoming stooges of Otto von Bismarck in Prussia and happily waving through all reactionary legislation relating to militarism and colonialism. Here, Luxemburg was emphasizing how the fight for the expansion of democracy, as well as the struggle against war, fell to the revolutionary working class and its party in the form of the SPD. It was the fate of this party in particular that would decide the outcome of the struggles in Prussia and beyond.

And while Luxemburg and her mentor Karl Kautsky certainly sang from the same hymn sheet when it came to the need for the working class to pioneer the struggle for democracy, their differing responses to the Prussian suffrage struggle led to their estrangement as allies, with Luxemburg eventually breaking off working relations with him. The occasion for this split revolved around the question of “What next?” In short, could the growing movement be accelerated to find new expressions of struggle in mass, rolling and generalized strikes, which would perhaps lead to a widespread strike movement along the lines of Russia in 1905, or should the main strategic focus remain on the SPD’s tried-and-tested strategy of implacable opposition and building the party to win clear majority support? The latter would imply prioritizing the upcoming Reichstag elections that the government was seeking to postpone “just as the guilt-ridden sinner tries to postpone the enforcement of his sentence as much as possible.”<sup>8</sup>

7 Ibid., p. 318. Emphasis in the original.

8 Rosa Luxemburg: Rede am 28. Mai 1911 in öffentlichen Versammlungen in Eisleben und Hettstedt (1911), in: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7.2, Berlin 2017, pp. 674–677.

## Luxemburg and Kautsky

The polemical exchanges between Kautsky and Luxemburg have gone down in history as the “strategy of attrition” (or strategy of wearing out one’s opponent – *Ermattungsstrategie*), as (broadly) propounded by Kautsky, and the strategy of overthrow (*Niederwerfungsstrategie*) supported by Luxemburg. These catchwords are useful to serve as orientation in the debate, but they also tend to blur some of the concrete discussion points, with both Luxemburg and Kautsky making the case for elements of both in their respective approaches.

Luxemburg, for instance, never denied the importance of elections or the need to win a majority for support to overthrow the existing order. By equal measure, Kautsky would not deny the significance of mass strikes and demonstrations in facilitating working-class power. Where they differed on the mass strike was over the exact nature of the situation in Germany at the time and how this related to a revolutionary situation. For his part, Kautsky viewed such a situation as one in which the rulers are unable to rule in the old way, the masses are not willing to be ruled in the old way, and there is a party dedicated to revolutionary upheaval that enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority (a description adopted by Lenin, it should be stressed).<sup>9</sup> Luxemburg thought in similar terms, contending, however, that something approaching a revolutionary situation was potentially on the cards if the party could organize increasingly radical actions and bolder slogans. For her, the tragicomedy of the Prussian suffrage bill and the increasing threat of militarism and war reflected a new era of bitter struggle and a decline in the relevance of parliament and elections. Kautsky broadly agreed with this assessment but felt that the situation did not require a shift in the party’s underlying strategy. These questions were of fundamental significance both at the time and in subsequent developments within the German left, with judgment

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<sup>9</sup> On this, see Lars T. Lih: Lenin, Kautsky and 1914, in: *Weekly Worker* 784/9 September 2009, online: <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/784/lenin-kautsky-and-1914/>.

calls about the extent to which social struggles can be “pushed forward” or “escalated,” having occasionally fatal consequences for the revolutionary workers’ movement, as in January 1919 and March 1921. Luxemburg was initially opposed to the (so-called) Spartacus Uprising of January 1919 precisely because – unlike Karl Liebknecht, in this instance – she was committed to majority revolution and rightly worried that the Berlin masses had “rushed ahead” of the German population at large.<sup>10</sup>

Luxemburg became increasingly frustrated with the “Pope of Marxism” Kautsky for three overriding reasons. First, in the course of the polemic, she felt that he was making it rather difficult for her to publish her views within the pages of *Die Neue Zeit*, the main SPD theoretical weekly that he edited. That said, while Kautsky could certainly be accused of a brusque bureaucratic response to Luxemburg, evasively explaining that he would not publish her views until *after* the SPD’s Magdeburg Congress in September 1910, he did not *ban* or *ensor* Luxemburg – nor could he have. Indeed, he even noted that he had devoted almost the entirety of one issue of his journal to her extended polemic “The Theory and the Practice.”<sup>11</sup> But *Vorwärts*, the party’s main daily newspaper, also refused to publish Luxemburg’s ideas on the mass strike, forcing her to express her views in other party publications, not least *Die Leipziger Volkszeitung*.<sup>12</sup> Second, she noted a distinct softening of Kautsky’s attitude toward the mass strike

10 For more discussion, see Ben Lewis: Rosa and the Republic, in: Weekly Worker No. 981/10 October 2013 On the issues involved with “rushing ahead” in relation to the Communist Party of Germany in 1921, see Ben Lewis: Before, During and After March, in: Weekly Worker No. 1346/6 May 2021, pp. 6–8.

11 Rosa Luxemburg: Die Theorie und die Praxis, in: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 2, pp. 378–420. An English translation by David Wolff is also available online <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Luxemburg/1910/theory-practice/index.htm>.

12 I believe that this misleading impression of “censorship” originates with Carl Schorske: German Social Democracy, 1905–1917. The Development of the Great Schism, Cambridge, MA 1983, p. 196. He speaks of the “censorship” of the mass-strike question in *Vorwärts* and *Die neue Zeit*, but as we will see, a whole range of articles were published on this question in the pages of *Die Neue Zeit* – including from a radical pro-Bolshevik perspective.

when compared with his writings on the same subject in 1905. Third, and most significantly given its near complete disappearance in discussions of the mass strike, Luxemburg pointed out that Kautsky was turning away from the distinctly Marxist form of republicanism and the democratic republic as the “form for the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>13</sup> While Kautsky accused her of “dressing up” passages by Engels on the question of Marxist republicanism, Luxemburg countered that, as we will see in detail below, Kautsky was undermining the revolutionary spirit of Engels’s comments.<sup>14</sup>

### Luxemburg Travels to Baden (1910)

Meanwhile, in the South of Germany, there was a furor sparked by the SPD’s parliamentary faction in the Baden state parliament voting for a budget that would have passed without its votes anyway. In Kautsky’s words, this represented a “revolt against the party majority” from the right.<sup>15</sup> What is worse, some of the leading parliamentarians there had accepted courtly invites to the silver wedding anniversary of the Duke and Duchess of Baden, genuflecting before them dutifully. Conscious of the controversy surrounding the state budget in particular, the Baden SPD passed a motion banning any public discussion of the action of its deputies.<sup>16</sup>

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13 Engels’s phrase; Frederick Engels: *A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891*, in: *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27, London 1990, p. 217. Marx described the democratic republic as “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour”; Karl Marx: *The Civil War in France*, Paris 2021, p. 67.

14 On this, see Rosa Luxemburg: *Zur Richtigstellung*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 443–448.

15 Karl Kautsky: *Der Aufstand in Baden*, in: *Die Neue Zeit: Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* 28/1910, no. 2, p. 613.

16 This obviously amounted to a genuine, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to ban discussion in the party.

In August, in the extended run-up to the Magdeburg Congress, Luxemburg embarked on a speaking tour of Baden. Purportedly, this tour was a series of lectures on “Social Democracy and the Monarchy,” i. e., a critique of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s recent inflammatory and saber-rattling speeches, during which he stressed how his authority flowed from the divine right of kings, not parliament, assemblies or elections, and that peace in Europe could only be achieved by continued huge spending commitments to Germany’s army and navy. But the title of Luxemburg’s speaking tour was largely a pretext with which she could circumvent the Baden SPD’s gagging order and publicly lampoon the Baden deputies.

Interestingly, in terms of how the 1910 debate has been (mis)remembered in historiography, which we will explore below, Luxemburg’s argumentation against the Badenite rightists was not dissimilar to Kautsky’s. Both viewed the malaise in the party as an expression of the failure of the so-called “Political Bloc” policies, which entailed the SPD joining forces with the Liberals in opposition to the Catholic Center Party. This policy was developed and fronted by Wilhelm Kolb, whom Lenin later described as “an exceedingly consistent, honest and avowed enemy of the revolution.”<sup>17</sup> The Bloc was justified with reference to “positive” work, moving from “abstract” theory to concrete political action and creating a “party capable of governing” – a most familiar refrain among those seeking to join capitalist administrations at the time and ever since.

Today, Kautsky is often remembered as a fuddy-duddy reformist who had little or nothing in common with others within the wing of “revolutionary social democracy” in the Second International like Lenin, Luxemburg and Zetkin in 1910.<sup>18</sup> But it is worth recalling that at

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17 Vladimir Ilych Lenin: Wilhelm Kolb and George Plekhanov, in: Lenin: Collected Works, vol. 22, Moscow 1974, p. 142.

18 According to Tony Phillips, for instance, Kautsky apparently not only “opposed mass strikes” but also refused to print an article by Luxemburg in *Die Neue Zeit*, the SPD’s theoretical journal, “because it urged the use of the mass strike in the fight for democracy;” Tony Phillips: What Can we Learn from Kautsky Today?,

that time – before Kautsky *renege*d upon his earlier views on democracy and the state and provided centrist ideological cover for the SPD's support for the German war effort – he was absolutely unequivocal on the necessity of strategic opposition to the Kaiser state:

“Our party feels so strongly about this that in its resolution at the Dresden Congress [1903], it barred its MPs from taking up posts in the Reichstag Presidium if they were associated with courtly obligations, although it did note that the obligations bound up with being Vice-President of the Reichstag must not yet be regarded as a form of voluntary homage to the monarchy, but a mandatory aspect of the position. Kolb and [Baden deputy Ludwig] Frank also voted for this resolution, which still applies today. Today they are in favor of Social Democratic deputies taking part, without any kind of reason to do so, in events which do not merely acknowledge the monarchy as an existing factor in political life, but which revolve either around honest personal enthusiasm for the monarch or abject hypocrisy – events which a democrat should have nothing to do with.”<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, leaving aside the issue of the mass strike, both Luxemburg and Kautsky actually agreed on how the party should respond to the advance of the right within the party: they were both in favor of a split in principle but also recognized that the rot went far deeper than the small number of wayward deputies. Formal exclusions were therefore simply insufficient and may even have run the risk of the SPD being cleaved in two as a national organization. After all, the actions of these deputies had won majority support among the members of their state party and even from other “Southern” states. Such forces often asserted that the chasm between the authoritative

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in: *International Socialism* 167/13 July 2020, online: <http://isj.org.uk/what-can-we-learn-from-kautsky-today/>. My emphasis. As I demonstrate in this chapter, both claims are highly misleading and uncritically take their cue from Schorske.

19 Karl Kautsky: *Der Aufstand in Baden*, in: *Die Neue Zeit: Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* 28/1909–1910, no. 2, pp. 617–618.



political conditions of Prussia and the more relaxed political environment in the South occasioned a different approach.<sup>20</sup> This does not imply that Luxemburg and Kautsky were not incensed or even fearful of the possible repercussions of such behavior in Baden. Far from it. Luxemburg warned: “From the social-democratic point of view, after all, parliamentarians are mere servants, mere obedient implements of the educated masses of the workers, and the fact that a dozen people with a parliamentary mandate can have such a decisive influence on the masses of the party, that they are able to corrupt them in such a systematic fashion, is already a sure sign of relations in the party having become highly bourgeois.”<sup>21</sup>

She was adamant: “If the Baden approach is generalized across the country then social democracy will have ceased to exist.”<sup>22</sup> And although even the generally pro-Luxemburg Günter Radczun argues that her “faulty conception of the party ... tied her hands in the party struggle” and prevented her from “achieving the leading role of the party that she saw as necessary in the proletarian struggle for liberation,”<sup>23</sup> it must be noted that Luxemburg’s response was distinctly *partyist* in nature. She lambasted the party leadership for failing to implement the will of the party majority, as expressed at various congresses, and for its inability or unwillingness to crack down on such patent violations of the party’s program, discipline and basic “self-respect” witnessed in Baden. She also had a long and proud record of actively intervening against all manifestations of opportunism at party congresses, in pamphlets, on speaking tours (like the one in

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20 It cannot be denied that there were profound differences between socio-political relations in the North and South, of which this was just one manifestation. For the purposes of this article, the implications of this state of affairs for the national strategy of the SPD must be left to one side.

21 Rosa Luxemburg: Die badische Budgetabstimmung, in: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 2, p. 429.

22 Ibid., p. 431.

23 Günter Radczun: Vorwort, in: Ibid., p. 31. Apparently, Lenin stood alone in understanding this by developing the concept of a “party of a new type.” Ibid. We will return to this stubbornly persistent Stalinist fabrication below.

Baden) and in her regular column “Aus der Partei” (Party News). In fact, she expressed the desire that all party bodies should follow her lead on this:

“The party as a whole never concerns itself with the daily goings-on of the party leadership in the South, its parliamentary fraction or its press. When it comes to such crass violations of social-democratic politics as the neglect of all mass agitation to fight the reactionary reform of municipal suffrage in Baden, or the deferment of social-democratic demands during the discussion of the school law in the Baden state parliament, then our party press is silent and neither bothers itself with obtaining sufficient information on party life in the South nor with pertinent criticisms or counter-measures.”<sup>24</sup>

In the end, the party censured the Baden deputies and passed a resolution declaring “that the fight for suffrage in Prussia can be waged to victory only through great, determined mass actions in which all means must be employed, *including the political general strike* if necessary.”<sup>25</sup> This motion has not prevented historiography on both sides of the Cold War divide from making the issue of the mass strike – as opposed to the question of the republic, which we will soon discuss – into the great dividing line within the radical Marxist wing of social democracy that led to the estrangement between the “left” and the “center,” as personified by Luxemburg and Kautsky respectively. But this is wrong. Indeed, reflecting on the Magdeburg Congress, none other than Lenin was delighted to report that “in Magdeburg ... differences of opinion among the revolutionary Social Democrats of Germany did not play any appreciable role. The opportunists however gloated too soon. The Magdeburg Congress *adopted* the first part

24 Rosa Luxemburg: Die badische Budgetabstimmung, in: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 2, pp. 432–433.

25 Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Ed.): Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitagés der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands abgehalten in Magdeburg vom 18. bis 24. September 1910, Berlin 1910, p. 489. My emphasis.

of the resolution proposed by *Rosa Luxemburg*, in which there is direct reference to the mass strike as a means of struggle.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Lenin cited the uncompromising remarks made by veteran party leader August Bebel: “I believe that we are a party of Social Democrats, and if there are National Liberals here among us, then they ought to go, they cannot remain in the party.”<sup>27</sup>

Here, a brief aside is necessary to explore a further aspect of the 1910 debate that has disappeared within subsequent history: the assessment of the situation in Germany at that point within *Russian* social democracy. This has been twisted beyond recognition, particularly by those for whom “Marxism-Leninism” represented their political or even state ideology. Revealingly, in 1932, Luxemburg’s close comrade Clara Zetkin was disgusted by the attempts of Stalinist ideologues to portray Lenin as advocating a “party of a new type” within the Second International that was fundamentally different to the supposedly out-and-out reformist SPD. By contrast, Zetkin made clear how – whether right or wrong – she, Lenin and others were actually patiently trying to organize its revolutionary wing and make it the dominant force within the International.<sup>28</sup> The term “party of a new type” was never used by Lenin but has nonetheless become synonymous with his name. In GDR historiography, the term acquires the status of a religious incantation and is therefore omnipresent in East German publications on party history. It appears to have its origins in Joseph Stalin’s 1939 *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Short Course*,<sup>29</sup> which Lars Lih refers to as “the canonical expression of the now widespread ‘party of a new type’ interpretation of Lenin’s career.”<sup>30</sup>

26 Lenin: Two Worlds, in: Lenin: Collected Works, vol. 16, Moscow 1974, p. 313. In hindsight, Lenin’s optimism was slightly misplaced.

27 Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Ed.): Protokoll, p. 251.

28 See Ben Lewis: Clara Zetkin’s Spicy Letter on Party History, online: <https://marxismtranslated.com/2023/02/clara-zetkins-spicy-letter-on-party-history-1932/>.

29 Joseph Stalin: History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Short Course, Moscow 1939.

30 Lars T. Lih: Review of The Non-Geometric Elwood, by Carter Elwood, in: Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes 54/2012, no. 1–2, p. 213.

But a closer look at the debate within *Die Neue Zeit* provides a much better understanding of how Lenin and the Bolsheviks responded to the crisis of 1910. This controversy was sparked by an article written by the Menshevik Julius Martov, who dismissed Luxemburg's approach as typical of the Bolshevik "putschism" he allegedly witnessed among the Bolsheviks in 1905. He added that while nobody thought of the idea of a "strategy of attrition" in 1905, this is exactly what the Mensheviks were pursuing at the time, and the Bolsheviks had grudgingly been forced to adopt it in 1910.<sup>31</sup> In response, Luxemburg's close comrade Julian Marchlewski (Karski) defended the Bolsheviks: "Martov spoofs Kautsky's thought by claiming that Kautsky wants the 'strategy of attrition' to be applied always and under all circumstances! That is pure unadulterated opportunism. And when he refers to Kautsky in this regard, it really leads to a dreadful misunderstanding."<sup>32</sup>

I describe this fascinating clash between the contending factions of Russian social democracy in the pages of the main German-language journal of Marxism as the "international invocation of authority debate," with both warring wings appealing to Kautsky's intellectual esteem in the international movement to justify their contrasting approaches. This notwithstanding, Western historiography has, like its counterpart in the Eastern bloc, generally attempted to create an unbridgeable gulf between the forces of "revolutionary social democracy" in Germany and Bolshevism in Russia. This partly accounts for some of the misleading claims surrounding the 1910 controversy

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GDR historiography distorts not only Lenin's view of the party but also Luxemburg's. There is emerging evidence of her overly authoritarian and even sectarian maneuvers as a leader within Polish social democracy. See Eric Blanc, *The Rosa Luxemburg Myth. A Critique of Luxemburg's Politics in Poland*, in: *Historical Materialism*, 25/2018, no. 4, pp. 3–36.

31 See Julius Martov: *Die preußische Diskussion und die russische Erfahrung*, in: *Die Neue Zeit: Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* 28/1910, no. 2, pp. 907–919.

32 Julian Karski: *Ein Mißverständnis*, in: *Die Neue Zeit: Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, 29/1910, no. 1, p. 101. Both articles by Martov and Karski, as well as others by Mehring and Kautsky cited here, have been translated into English for the first time on my website: [www.marxismtranslated.com](http://www.marxismtranslated.com).

in the SPD. Carl Schorske's study of the "great schism" in the SPD, for instance, maintains that the mass-strike discussion heralded the SPD's collapse into the politics of "civil peace" in 1914. And while Schorske concedes that "in 1910 the principal conflict was still one over tactics" and that a "new crisis on the international scene to transform the *tactical* conflict into an *organizational* struggle, and thus to usher in the penultimate phase in the development of the schism," there are two problems with his approach. First, there is an undeniable teleology, a "reading backward" from the historic split in the SPD in 1914 onto previous conflicts and polemical disputes that are the outgrowth of a perceived shortcoming or "original sin."<sup>33</sup> The contingency and open-endedness of day-to-day political life is thereby lost in a preordained meta-narrative where the 1910 dispute prefigures, and maps onto, the party's crisis in 1914.<sup>34</sup> Schorske's account does not account for the fact that in summer 1914, the SPD leadership, which was then largely dominated by the right and not the left of the party, was engaged in clandestine operations to prepare a *general strike in favor of free suffrage in Prussia*. Jens Uwe-Guttel explains that

"by the early summer of 1914, at least in Berlin, a significant number of SPD leaders were willing to give serious consideration to extraparliamentary actions – with a mass strike as the most powerful weapon at their disposal – in order to democratize the Prussian voting system. This argument runs counter to claims expressed in both recent and older studies of domestic politics in Imperial Germany, which often portray the SPD as an essentially harmless organization integrated within the empire's political structure."<sup>35</sup>

33 This holds true of historiography on the Second International more generally. For a refreshingly different recent approach, see Mike Taber (Ed.): *Revolution, Reform and Opportunism*, Chicago 2023.

34 A left-wing variant of this can be found in David Wolff: Introduction to Rosa Luxemburg's 'Theory and Practice', in: *News and Letters*, April 1980, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Luxemburg/1910/theory-practice/index.htm>.

35 Jens Uwe Guettel: *Reform, Revolution, and the 'Original Catastrophe'*. Political Change in Prussia and Germany on the Eve of the First World War, in: *The Jour-*

Second, when it comes to the mass-strike debate, Leon Trotsky – an avowed opponent of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1910 – also recalled the differences between the Russian party and Luxemburg in a letter to none other than Kautsky himself. Trotsky wrote that there was no support for Luxemburg’s assessment within the Russian party, “not even among the Bolsheviks.” And while Trotsky expressed his admiration for what he called Luxemburg’s “noble impatience,” he deemed it absurd to elevate the mass strike to “a *leading principle* for the party.”<sup>36</sup> Yet this is *exactly* what left-wing historiography has tended to do – particularly among the supporters of a certain Lev Trotsky! *Left Voice* writer Nathaniel Flakin, for instance, wonders whether Marxists can diagnose a revolutionary situation “like a meteorologist determines whether it is raining or not.” The fact that his reading of 1910 is diametrically opposed to that of Trotsky does not prevent Flakin from invoking the authority of that same Lev Davidovich Bronstein to provide his readers with the supposedly ground-breaking insight that “revolutionary situations are based on the reciprocal effects of objective and subjective factors. They do not simply fall from the sky.” But, as we saw above with the example of Kautsky and Lenin’s shared definition of a revolutionary situation, a statement of this kind is a mere banality that all revolutionaries in the Second International would have agreed on. But for Flakin, as for much of modern-day Trotskyism that has increasingly morphed into a kind of voluntarist syndicalism, the real problem of the subjective factor of the SPD was that it did not call for the general strike and instead was “focused on the elections.”<sup>37</sup> Given how seriously Russian social democracy participated in, and responded to, electoral campaigns up to and in-

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nal of Modern History 91/2019, no. 2, p. 312.

36 See Richard B. Day/Daniel Gaido (Eds.): *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution. The Documentary Record*, Chicago 2011, p. 53. My emphasis.

37 Nathaniel Flakin: *Kautsky, Luxemburg, and Lenin in Light of the German Revolution*, in: *Left Voice*, 17 April 2019, online: <https://www.leftvoice.org/kautsky-luxemburg-and-lenin-in-light-of-the-german-revolution/>.

cluding in 1917, this assertion is all the more baffling.<sup>38</sup> After all, there is nothing innately opportunist about retreating from mobilizing for street and strike demonstrations in order to focus one's political resources on elections. What surely matters is the *politics* presented, the strategy that is championed.

And here we arrive at the more fundamental political-strategic question that came to light in 1910. Overemphasizing the *tactical/organizational* conflict by focusing on the issue of the general strike is to fail to see the strategic wood for the tactical trees in Luxemburg's critique of party relations at the time: namely her conviction that Kautsky's disingenuousness on the need to foreground revolutionary republicanism was grist to the mill of the rightward drift in the party. Given the significance of this often overlooked contribution, let us conclude by turning our attention to this matter.

### "Honest Opportunism" and Republican Reluctance

Just as Lenin later held up, word for word, what Kautsky used to say about "the revolution of our time"<sup>39</sup> before 1914 in order to compare it with Kautsky's later positions where he moved away *from* his erstwhile revolutionary perspectives, Luxemburg compared and contrasted what Kautsky said on the mass strike in 1910 with 1905/6. She undoubtedly scored some good points in this regard. We will now proceed in a similar fashion but shift the focus onto the issue of what Luxemburg had to say about Kautsky's attitude toward republicanism,

38 In this sense, Flakin's position is closer to that of Luxemburg in 1910, not Lenin's or Trotsky's. See Rosa Luxemburg: *Die badische Budgetabstimmung*, pp. 432–433. The best study of Bolshevik electoral strategy and its place within Marxism is August H. Nimtz: *The Ballot or the Streets or Both?*, 2 vols., Chicago 2019.

39 "Make sure of getting and rereading (or get someone to translate to you) Kautsky's *Weg zur Macht* [Road to Power, 1909 – BL] what he wrote there about the revolution of our times!! And what a scoundrel he has become now, renouncing all this!" Lenin to Alexander Shlyapnikov, 31 October 1914, in: *Collected Works*, vol. 35, p. 172.

as well as how she felt this entailed him moving away from the basic tenets of Marxist political strategy.

There were indeed several signs – most of which are picked up by Luxemburg in her polemics – that Kautsky was moving away from the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism in 1910: not (yet) in the 1918 sense of viewing the Weimar Republic as a form of working-class rule, which amounted to a radical departure from his earlier outlook, but in his soft-pedaling of the centrality of republicanism to Marxist strategy.<sup>40</sup> In 1905, for instance, Kautsky could claim that: “We are republicans for the very reason that the democratic republic is the only political form which corresponds to socialism. The monarchy can only exist on the basis of class differences and antagonisms. The abolition of classes also requires the abolition of the monarchy.”<sup>41</sup>

Just five years later, by contrast, when he was pressed on the matter by Luxemburg, he wrote in an evidently more guarded and cautious tone:

“It is true that our program does not explicitly mention the republic. But there is no doubt that one cannot be a good social democrat if one is not a good republican. We can have different opinions about the most appropriate way to express our republican point of view. But precisely because republican propaganda encounters so many obstacles in Germany, we must all the more carefully avoid anything that might awaken in the masses the belief that we have abandoned our republican convictions or even that we expect the monarchy to promote proletarian aims.”<sup>42</sup>

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40 Karl Kautsky: Guidelines for a Socialist Action Programme, in *Weekly Worker* No. 889/10 November 2011 and Ben Lewis: From Erfurt to Charlottenburg, in: *Weekly Worker* No. 889/10 November 2011, online: <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/889/>.

41 Karl Kautsky: The Republic and Social Democracy in France, in Lewis (Ed.): *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, pp. 157–158.

42 Karl Kautsky: Der Aufstand in Baden, in: *Die Neue Zeit: Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* 28/1910. no. 2, p. 614.



"This is clear evidence of a move from revolutionary republicanism to a more platonic republicanism. When Luxemburg argued, with reference to Engels's "Critique of the Draft Programme of Social Democracy" (1891), that Kautsky was downplaying the significance of republicanism in social-democratic thought, Kautsky accused her of "dressing up" the Engels quotations and removing them from the specific context in which the latter had developed his thoughts. In her reply, "A Correction," Luxemburg painstakingly showed how this was not the case and that what was actually at stake was far more than her "citation methods": arriving at clarity on this question was essential "because it is most important that comrades discover exactly what Engels's actual opinion on the matter was."<sup>43</sup> Convincingly, she demonstrated how Engels's insistence that the question of the republic be urgently discussed in the party in the 1890s was no fleeting concern but inseparable from the struggle against the rise of what he called "honest opportunism."<sup>44</sup> She correctly noted that the refusal of the party to foreground this issue was aiding and abetting the worrying rise of reformism in Baden that the party seemed either unwilling or unable to counteract.

Kautsky was not alone in soft-pedaling the significance of republican thought to Marxism in the pages of *Die Neue Zeit*. Franz Mehring, who would become one of Luxemburg's closest political allies during World War I, leaped to Kautsky's defense in July in the article "The Struggle against the Monarchy."<sup>45</sup> For Mehring, Luxemburg was suffering from "republican illusions," similar to those entertained by the "1848er" Karl Heinzen, who felt that the republic represented a

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43 Rosa Luxemburg: Zur Richtigstellung, in: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 2, pp. 445. For my discussion of the related issue of how in 1905 Kautsky was certainly aware of the full implications of Engels's critique for the development of a distinctly Marxist republicanism, see Lewis (Ed.), *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, pp. 30–37.

44 Frederick Engels, *A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891*, in: *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27, p. 217.

45 Franz Mehring: *Der Kampf gegen die Monarchie*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, Berlin 1977, pp. 498–501.

panacea for all social ills and who was pilloried by Marx for this view in a feisty polemic entitled “Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality.”<sup>46</sup> Of course we are republicans, added Mehring, but we are no longer in 1848, and so the issue of the day is not the republic, which is a mere “side issue,” but rather the social revolution itself. As such, it was quite right for the SPD newspapers to focus on the increased costs associated with the “Civil List” – i. e., public funding for the monarchy – as a way of tapping into widespread discontent and anger with the existing system.

In developing this argument, Mehring was doubtless looking to undermine Luxemburg “from the left” by referring to the social revolution that was on the agenda and by contrasting it with the “bourgeois revolution” of 1848. But as Luxemburg pointed out in her “The Struggle against Relics” – a wonderful demonstration of her keen sense of Marxist republicanism – the implications of Mehring’s argument were both economistic and *right-wing* in nature. She was adamant that the struggle against the monarchy had nothing to do with economics but instead the strategic place of the republic within the struggle for working-class self-emancipation:

“We refuse to vote for the Civil List not because it is a rip-off but because we are opponents of the monarchy, even if it were to cost half as much as it does. Hell, we would not want it even if it were for free! On the day we get rid of the monarchy, we would gladly vote to pay, say, 15 million toward this or that charitable cause – for all I care, the sum could go toward an idiot asylum. We prefer the most expensive republic to the cheapest monarchy, because for us this is not a matter of money: the monarchy is the most backward tool of class rule, whereas the republic is the most progressive one. And the more progressive the forms of class rule, the closer their terrible end.”<sup>47</sup>

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46 Karl Marx: *Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality*, in: *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, Moscow 1975, p. 312.

47 Rosa Luxemburg: *Der Kampf gegen Reliquien*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, p. 425.

Most significantly in terms of the themes of this chapter, she sought to account for the reformist crisis in Baden, as well as for the Kautsky-Mehring team's concessions toward it, as being rooted in the glaring absence of republicanism in the party's day-to-day agitation and work:

“Until now we have done bugger all for the supposedly ‘self-evident’ cause of republicanism ... If the slogan of the republic had been prioritized on all appropriate occasions, then systematic agitation would have sharpened the broadest party circles’ understanding that a social democrat is simultaneously a republican as a matter of principle. Then either it would have been impossible for such a flagrant self-humiliation like that in Baden to have occurred, or it would have had to cause a storm of indignation in the Baden camp. But for decades we have completely neglected republican agitation.”<sup>48</sup>

It is precisely this republicanism – unfortunately drowned out by the focus on the mass strike – that represents one of Luxemburg's major contributions to the controversy in 1910 and, indeed, that defines almost the entirety of her political career.<sup>49</sup> At the time, she was almost alone within the SPD in highlighting how Marxism is a republican body of thought not simply in the trite sense of opposing the monarchy but in the sense that the democratic republic – the culmination of the political demands of the Erfurt minimum program – is the political framework within which the working class will come to power.

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48 Rosa Luxemburg, *Die badische Budgetabstimmung*, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 430–431.

49 For a discussion of the strategic problems involved in her shift away from some of the core pillars of her republicanism during the German Revolution of 1918–19, see Lewis: *Rosa and the Republic*.

## Conclusion

The issue of republicanism provides a more useful lens through which to view the estrangement between Kautsky and Luxemburg, as well as the worrying signs of a rightwing drift in the party, than the mass strike issue does. This is particularly the case because, at least in hindsight, both figures were vindicated: Kautsky because of the fact that escalation would have been counterproductive at that point,<sup>50</sup> and both of them because the fall of the three-tier suffrage system in Prussia did require a generalized revolutionary crisis within the state apparatus (i. e., the failure of the German war effort and the ensuing revolution). It is only in this changed emphasis on republicanism that we see *possible* foreshadowings of Kautsky's turn against the politics of revolutionary Marxism that he once brought to an audience of millions, *not* in his assessment of the role and place of the mass strike in 1910. After all, the forces of revolutionary social democracy internationally generally sided with his reading of the political situation back then and appear to have been vindicated in doing so. Contextualizing and critically approaching Luxemburg's contributions to the 1910 controversy actually makes it possible for us to call into question the stubbornly persistent distortions of Cold War historiography to discover what remains so insightful and enduring about her writings in 1910.

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<sup>50</sup> As such, Tony Phillips is wrong to claim that Kautsky here made the mistake of "exaggerating the strength of the Kaiser state." At least in the first few years of World War I, that state was strong enough to endure the societal stress test of that conflict, against which the social unrest of 1910 paled in comparison. Tony Phillips: "What Can we Learn from Kautsky Today?", in: *International Socialism* 167/13 July 2020, online: <http://isj.org.uk/what-can-we-learn-from-kautsky-today/>.

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# 9 Rosa Luxemburg as a Republican Agitator

Shaping Social Democracy in Imperial Germany

David Guerrero and Andrea Pérez-Fernández<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

*Without doubt Marx was a republican,  
and without doubt German social democracy is republican-minded;  
from this, however, it does not yet follow  
that it must fight monarchy from the wrong end.*

Franz Mehring, 1910<sup>2</sup>

In the last decades, the relationship between socialism and republicanism has become a fruitful field of study. There are many good scholarly reasons to welcome this approach to socialist and republican history of political thought – chief among them, the need to fill in the

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1 This chapter has benefited from original research shared by the members of the Rosa Luxemburg Working Group of the University of Barcelona (2020–2022). We want to thank the group for discussing an earlier draft of our text: Fina Birulés, Edgar Manjarín, Julio Martínez-Cava, Pau Matheu, Núria Sara Miras, Jordi Mundó and Pablo Scottó. The chapter also received relevant comments during the Rosa Luxemburg Conference held at Bodø in March 2023, especially by Ben Lewis. Frank Jacob commented on and thoroughly reviewed the text – we want to thank him for this in addition to his work as editor of this volume. This publication is part of the project of I+D+i MUVAN “Mujeres a la vanguardia del activismo entre siglos (XIX y XX): influencias en la filosofía femenina” (PID2020–113980GA-I00) and the project “Filosofía política, economía y ética de las relaciones fiduciarias: libertad, propiedad, bienes comunes y política pública” (PID2021–123885NB-I00), both funded by the Spanish Ministry of Research and Science. While working on this chapter, both authors held FPU doctoral contracts funded by the Spanish Ministry of Universities.

2 Franz Mehring: Der Kampf gegen die Monarchie, in: Die Neue Zeit 28/1910, vol. 2, p. 609.



apparent gap separating the 19th century from the earlier traditions of Western political thought. There are also good political reasons to welcome and contribute to this academic field. One is that studying the republican roots of socialism forces us to reconsider the real historical relationship between socialism and democracy. The democratic pedigree of the socialist tradition and the labor movement is not only often disregarded today in certain academic environments – where “democracy” is inaccurately attributed to the success of “liberalism” – but also in the public discourse – where the shadows of the Cold War and the Soviet Union also loom large in the definition of ideological camps.<sup>3</sup> Another reason is that the recovery of republican insights within socialism can serve to develop the latter as what it has historically been: a program of democratization of economic and political life. This, we think, is a much-needed approach to broaden democratic political imagination in a context of rising reactionary movements in many western countries – movements that often agglutinate conservative sentiments around an uncritical or nostalgic defense of earlier capitalist societies.

Our contribution to this field traces some of these connections – between republicanism, socialism, and democracy – by focusing on the case of Rosa Luxemburg’s calls for republican agitation during the struggle for the Prussian electoral reform (1909–1910). We analyze some of her texts during these years and, more concretely, her article “A Time for Sowing” – which caused a dispute with Karl Kautsky, who, representing the position of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) leadership, apparently prevented the publication of Luxemburg’s thoughts on republican agitation. We will consider one of the main arguments behind Luxemburg’s demand for socialist republican agitation. In her view, the party must make a “work of enlightenment” of

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3 On the relationship between liberalism, socialism, the revival of republicanism in contemporary academia, and the lasting effects of Cold War conceptual frameworks, see David Guerrero and Julio Martínez-Cava: *Between Tyranny and Self-Interest: Why Neo-republicanism Disregards Natural Rights*, in: *Theoria* 69/171, 2022, pp. 140–171.

the masses, an especially important task whenever the social circumstances of conflict breed an overlap between political and economic struggles. In the Prussian context of 1909–1910, Luxemburg saw republican agitation as a way of concretizing this “work of enlightenment.” That is, to prove the capitalist material roots of the monarchy and empire, and the other side of the coin: how the interests of the capitalist ruling class were protected and nurtured by the German imperial regime and its anti-democratic constitution.

In the following chapter, we point out, first, how the institutional architecture of the German Empire undermined political freedom and how, by the same token, it made the repeated electoral achievements of the SPD powerless. Second, we explain why the failed electoral reform in Prussia became, in Luxemburg’s account, an opportune moment to expose the anti-democratic nature of the whole system – the mutually reinforcing trends of German capitalism and German absolutism. Third, we delve into Luxemburg’s arguments about the relevance of republican agitation and show what her position could have meant for contemporary German socialists and her controversy with Kautsky. Fourth, we spell out Luxemburg’s call for republican agitation through what she calls the “work of enlightenment” of the masses in the context of overlapping economic and political struggles.

### The German Empire: “A Princely Insurance Company against Democracy”

One of the greatest obstacles to political freedom in Germany was the institutional architecture of the Empire. In the famous premonitory words of the socialist parliamentarian Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the founders of the SPD and father of Karl Liebknecht, the Empire was “a princely insurance company against democracy.”<sup>4</sup> This was the

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4 Quoted in Frank Lorenz Müller: *The German Monarchies*, in: Matthew Jefferies (Ed.): *The Ashgate Research Companion to Imperial Germany*, Surrey 2015, p. 56.

case, even though elections to the Reichstag, the national parliament, were based on universal male suffrage for those over 25 years of age – a national-level egalitarian franchise that became a vanguard of democratic reform in the West.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the good electoral results of the SPD (consistently the most voted party since its return to legality in 1890), the constitutional and electoral system worked against representative democracy, and specifically against the socialists. For instance, the design of electoral districts went back to the population distribution of the largely rural Germany of the 1860s: their boundaries had not been updated to the demographic changes of the last decades, such as the mass migrations of eligible male voters to the emerging industrial centers.<sup>6</sup> Take the illustrative example of Berlin, with more than 300,000 registered voters that chose one member of the Reichstag – one, the same amount of seats as the little constituency of Schaumburg-Lippe, with barely 10,000 voters. Therefore, the main urban strongholds of the SPD were extremely underrepresented in the imperial electoral results. Consider the 1907 Reichstag elections, the last ones before the events we will focus on. The SPD got almost 11 % of the seats with 29 % of the votes. The German Conservative Party, meanwhile, got 15 % of the seats with only 9.4 % of the votes.<sup>7</sup>

These tendencies against representative democracy were supported by lower-level institutions, as many Landtage (the legislative bodies of each of the states) still had limited franchise and anti-democratic electoral laws. Thanks to local coalitions with left liberals, the SPD brought about electoral reforms in some states over the years. However, in other cases, state-level electoral reforms went in the opposite direction, precisely to curb the achievements of the SPD in the ballots,

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5 Margaret Lavinia Anderson: *Practicing Democracy. Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany*, Princeton, NJ 2000, pp. 4–8.

6 Volker R. Berghahn: *Imperial Germany, 1871–1918. Economy, Society, Culture, and Politics*, 2nd edition, Oxford and New York 2005, p. 200.

7 Wilhelm L. Guttsman: *The German Social Democratic Party 1875–1933. From Ghetto to Government*, London 1981, p. 80.

excluding the political base of the socialists from equal voting rights. In this sense, many states saw coalitions of conservatives and liberals setting up new limitations to the franchise, gerrymandering, passing additional tax and property qualifications to vote, or establishing second ballot systems that allowed for multi-party alliances on further voting rounds whenever the socialist candidate had any chances of winning.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, since important legislative powers on taxation and property rights were only in the hands of the Landtage, the socialist legislative majority built upon the more democratic franchise of the Reichstag was ineffective on many issues of economic policy.

On top of all this, any of the electoral achievements and legal improvements that the SPD obtained since its legalization on an imperial level (and it got several, e. g., a reduction of the voting age, the secret ballot, salary for Reichstag members...) were indeed overshadowed by the imperial constitution itself. The institutional arrangement of the Empire rendered its legislative branch, the Reichstag, impotent *vis-à-vis* the executive, whose chancellor and cabinet were answerable only to the emperor.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the monarchy was a matter of great political relevance for socialists: it represented the core of the imperial constitution and the reason for the legislative incapacity of the huge social democratic parliamentary group.

For all these reasons, the call for a republic – that is, to engage in republican agitation – could be turned into a powerful tool of critique. Significantly, as we will see, republicanism could be something other than a bourgeois demand to reform the absolutist vestiges in the imperial constitution. Republicanism could also serve to make a socialist point against the legal-political setting that protected German capitalism from the labor movement. This was, at least, Luxemburg's view in 1910, as we shall see below.

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8 Thomas Kühne: Elections, in: Matthew Jefferies (Ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Imperial Germany*, pp. 77–90; Berghahn: *Imperial Germany*, pp. 199–201.

9 Katharine Anne Lerman: Imperial Governance, in: Matthew Jefferies (Ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Imperial Germany*, pp. 13–32.

## Electoral Reform in Prussia: An Opportunity for Republican Agitation?

As we explain below, the question of whether the SPD should engage in republican agitation – in other words, whether socialist propaganda should include demands for a more democratic constitution or even the abolition of imperial rule – was an old source of disagreement among European socialists. This debate, which especially affected the Germans as subjects of an imperial regime, reached one of its high points between 1909 and 1910 at the time of the change of chancellor and when the Prussian Landtag, which had one of the most anti-democratic electoral systems, was considering a very moderate reform.<sup>10</sup>

The new electoral law under consideration maintained the rudiments of the unequal three-class franchise in Prussia: segmentation of the electorate and weighted suffrage according to the voters' wealth, the public character of the elections (i. e., no secret ballot), and the same biased division of electoral districts. The only concession was to be the abolition of the electoral college system, which, if everything else was left untouched, would be a mockery of the democratic design of the electoral law, as Luxemburg pointed out. The result of the Prussian Electoral Law Commission, sponsored by the Zentrum party, was, in her opinion, equally reactionary and anti-democratic. In a speech delivered in April 1910, Luxemburg derided the negotiations regarding the electoral reform during those weeks as “the last act of the comedy.”<sup>11</sup> And she reminded her audience of the massive street mobilizations calling for equal suffrage that had taken place through-

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<sup>10</sup> For the general context of these years and why Luxemburg considered them a revolutionary moment, see the classic account in John P. Nettl: *Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1966, vol. 1, pp. 414–441.

<sup>11</sup> R. Luxemburg: *Das preußische Wahlrechtkampf und seine Lehren*, April 1910, in: *Rosa Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke* (henceforth GW), vol. 2, Berlin 1972, p. 307. We will quote and offer page numbers from English editions whenever available, followed by the location of the German texts if they are included in the GW.

out Prussia and other areas of Germany during that month thanks to the recently regained freedom of assembly:

“Only a few days before the Sunday demonstration, they tried to counter us with harsh police bans. At the last moment, however, the wind changed at the top. At the last moment, demonstrations were allowed everywhere. Why do you think that is, ladies and gentlemen? Did it happen out of late political insight, out of goodwill? Well, no! It was simply found that one must permit what one is no longer able to prohibit! It has been shown that social democracy is determined to lead large proletarian masses into the streets and that it will not allow itself to be deterred from this project by any means of violence.”<sup>12</sup>

“So far, in Prussia, [the masses] have conquered the right to take the streets,” Luxemburg continued, “and on the streets we will conquer universal suffrage.”<sup>13</sup> And as happened with freedom of assembly, the struggle for equal suffrage in Prussia was not merely a “regional” issue. Luxemburg noticed that there was the “closest link between Prussian and imperial politics.” “In view of the whole situation,” it was clear that “the present struggle [was] not only about the Prussian electoral law but ultimately also about the Reichstag electoral law.”<sup>14</sup>

There were good reasons behind this view of Luxemburg. Prussia was by far the largest and most populated state – its territories and inhabitants comprised a third of the empire. Prussia’s demographic, territorial, and economic superiority translated into disproportionate institutional power. Of course, the King of Prussia held the title of Emperor. And even more importantly from the point of view of electoral reform, the Prussian Landtag contributed 17 seats out of 58 to the Bundesrat, the high legislative chamber of the Empire, giving

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: Was weiter?, in: Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung 61–62/March 1910, in: *GW*, vol. 2, pp. 294.

the Prussian electoral majority a de facto veto power over any constitutional amendments.

Despite popular mobilizations for change, the parliamentary road to electoral reform – and any role the SPD could play in it as a party in the Landtag – was quickly exhausted. As early as the spring of 1910, the Prussian government had prevented a poor modification of the franchise – note how this must have been all the more outrageous given the political rights that Prussians enjoyed in the imperial elections, with universal male suffrage established for decades. According to Luxemburg, the strong opposition by the Prussian conservative bourgeoisie and the reactionaries to the demand for equal suffrage was a declaration of war against democracy and the working class. The rejection of electoral reform was a “blow in the face,” evidence that the Prussian establishment was involved in an “open struggle” against the mobilized masses.<sup>15</sup>

Luxemburg’s reading of the Prussian conjuncture is a great example of her historically minded political analyses. For her, the fact that the ruling classes rejected equal suffrage – one of the most elementary forms of the bourgeois modern state – showed the historical failure of the German bourgeoisie to fully defeat the Ancien Régime, the incomplete nature of the 1848 March Revolution. A historical record, she noted, that only proved the lack of bourgeois commitment to carry their own liberal and republican emancipatory values to their democratic logical consequences:

“[I]f German liberalism had smashed the rotten Prussian throne and the three-dozen other German thrones to pieces in 1848, it would have given a completely different turn to the further destiny of Germany. And these tasks were called into the conscience of German liberalism with a loud voice every day. It was none other than our great teacher, the creator of scientific socialism, Karl Marx, who in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* incited the liberals to fight the reaction and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 291–292.

warned of the threat of counter-revolution. But once again, it should become clear that the actions and deeds of entire classes and parties are not decided by the fine words written on paper in the program or spoken, but above all by the material interests of these classes. ... [S]hould [the liberals as a class] have armed the revolutionary proletariat in 1848 and led it to fight against the remnants of feudalism? But even then, the German liberal bourgeoisie hated and feared the rising working people more than the reaction.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1910, opposition to the electoral reform in Prussia put the issues of monarchy, counter-revolution, and absolutism back in the spotlight. And this time, there were also street demonstrations of the working masses demanding a change. Why should the socialists not make the most of the circumstances and support street mobilizations calling for electoral reform in Prussia and questioning the anti-democratic constitution of the Empire? “If even the bourgeois democrats ... are today holding street demonstrations!” Luxemburg exclaimed.<sup>17</sup> The wave of protests in Prussia had ignited other popular mobilizations across the country, setting the stage for what she considered a potentially revolutionary situation. It was already clear that the electoral reform in Prussia could not possibly be solved “through parliamentary means” – the conventional source of power employed by the SPD. Given the strong opposition, in the struggle for equal suffrage, only “direct mass action” could bring about change. The street masses without party leadership, moreover, had “objectively created a situation on the battlefield that leads beyond them.”<sup>18</sup> 1910, then, was a situation not unlike what had happened just five years previously, when the SPD had had to decide what was to be its role in the face of mass strikes and other forms of working-class extra-parliamentary politics, or just two years previously with earlier Prussian mobilizations. The

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16 Rosa Luxemburg: *Das preußische Wahlrecht*, in: *GW*, vol. 2, pp. 317–318.

17 Luxemburg: *Was weiter?*, p. 292.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 289–291.



recent events around the issue of electoral reform imposed, Luxemburg thought, certain “duties” on the party.

This is a strategic and theoretical point often neglected in many accounts of Luxemburg’s analysis of “spontaneous” mass politics: party leadership is necessary to make street mobilization successful. “Demonstrations can also exert effective pressure if they are backed by serious determination and willingness to resort to harsher means of struggle if necessary.”<sup>19</sup> And, importantly, she added that if, “at a given moment, the leading party lacks the determination to *give the necessary slogan to the masses*, then inevitably a certain disappointment takes possession of them, the élan disappears, and the action collapses.”<sup>20</sup>

### Luxemburg’s Call for Republican Agitation

What could be the “necessary slogan” that the socialist party was to give to the mobilized Prussian masses demanding equal suffrage? Interestingly, the answer to this question was not readily available to the readers of “Was weiter?” (“What Next?”) – the text quoted just above in which Luxemburg hinted at the “duties” the party had toward the street masses. We know that, for Luxemburg, the answer – the content of the “slogan” – was the vindication of the “republic.” We know that she thought that the demand for the republic must be represented in social democratic agitation to make the challenge to the existing order, including the economic order, more visible and clear – in short, that republicanism had to be a part of socialist politics.<sup>21</sup> But this argument, which most probably was in the original draft of “What Next?”, did

19 Ibid., pp. 289–290; on these party’s “duties,” see also pp. 295 and 299. Luxemburg explicitly connects the Prussian situation with earlier mass strikes of workers that acquired a political angle in Belgium (1893), Russia, and Germany (1905). See *ibid.*, pp. 292 and 294.

20 Ibid., p. 290. Our italics.

21 Rosa Luxemburg: *Zeit der Aussaat*, in: *Volkswacht* 71/March 1910, in: *GW*, vol. 2, p. 301.

not make it to the published version. Luxemburg saved it for another short article, “Zeit der Aussaat” (A Time for Sowing), published in a provincial Social Democrat newspaper, *Volkswacht*, on 25 March 1910. Before continuing with her arguments, let us delve a little deeper into the significance of the piece and the context of its publication.

The main controversy surrounding Luxemburg’s articles is that she had a hard time publishing them in the party press because they explicitly argued for socialist action against the monarchy. We know that the argument for republican agitation was part of a manuscript on the mass strike that Luxemburg had sent for publication to the SPD’s main journal, *Vorwärts*. However, the editors, jointly with the party executive and party representatives from Prussia, rejected Luxemburg’s text.<sup>22</sup> She then sent it to the party’s theoretical journal, *Die Neue Zeit*, edited by her friend and comrade Karl Kautsky. Yet Kautsky decided to postpone the publication of Luxemburg’s article (against her will), not only because he disliked its emphasis on republican agitation, as we will show, but also, apparently, because he wanted the next issue of the journal to pay more attention to the party conflict in Baden.<sup>23</sup>

Then, after one and a half rejections – that she definitely perceived as two – Luxemburg took her manuscript on the mass strike to the regional *Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung*, where it was finally published as “What Next?” She had modified the original manuscript, though. Concretely, she took out some passages on republican agitation – the paragraphs that Kautsky had criticized as needlessly dangerous in the face of imperial censorship, as we will see. Was Luxemburg following Kautsky’s advice by removing the excessively republican conclusions

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22 Nettl: Rosa Luxemburg, vol. 1, pp. 420–421.

23 It is noteworthy that the Baden conflict was partly related to the question of republicanism, although for different reasons than Luxemburg’s call for republican agitation – some local revisionist members of the SPD had passed a government budget of the Liberals in the Landtag and attended monarchical ceremonies of the Grand Duchy. On this, see Karl Kautsky: *Zwischen Baden und Luxemburg*, in: *Die Neue Zeit*, 28/August 1910, vol. 2, pp. 652–667. For a contemporary account of this episode, see the contribution by Ben Lewis: “The Good, the Baden and the Ugly: Rosa Luxemburg and the SPD in 1910”, p. 183–206 in this volume.

of her reflections on the mass strike? Not exactly. Instead of giving up on her original republican paragraphs, Luxemburg gave them even more prominence by expanding them into a whole article, the piece she sent to *Volksmacht*, titled “A Time for Sowing.”

Luxemburg gave her version of this controversy in a later issue of *Die Neue Zeit* in her well-known article “Theory and Practice,” quoting her private correspondence with Kautsky. In one of his letters to her, commenting on the original manuscript of “What Next?,” Kautsky had criticized Luxemburg’s ideas regarding republican agitation:

“[W]hat you want is an entirely new agitation which until now has always been rejected. This new agitation, however, is the sort we have no business discussing so openly. With your article you want to proclaim on your own hook, as a single individual, an entirely new agitation which the party has always rejected. We cannot and will not proceed in this manner. A single personality, however high she may stand, cannot pull off a *fait accompli* on her own hook which can have unforeseeable consequences for the party.”<sup>24</sup>

For reasons we discuss below, republican agitation was a thorny issue within the SPD. But was it an “entirely new” issue, as Kautsky put it? It is not by chance that Luxemburg starts her account of the controversy by attempting to capture the goodwill of her SPD readers. She does so by acknowledging that up to that time, republican propaganda had indeed played “a minor role” in social democratic agitation. Moreover, this was for “good reasons.” She added that “our party wished to save the German working class from those bourgeois, or

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24 Kautsky quoted in Rosa Luxemburg: Theory and Practice, in: Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (Eds.): *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (henceforth RLR), New York 2004, p. 209 (GW, vol. 2, pp. 378–420). For Kautsky’s version of the controversy, see Karl Kautsky: *Eine neue Strategie*, in: *Die Neue Zeit* 28/June 1910, vol. 2, pp. 332–41, 364–74, 412–21 and Kautsky: *Zwischen Baden und Luxemburg*, in: *Die Neue Zeit* 28/August 1910, vol. 2, pp. 652–667 (both can be found transcribed online on the Marxists Internet Archive).

rather petty bourgeois republican illusions which were (for example) so disastrous in the history of French socialism, and still are today.”<sup>25</sup>

Since there is a great deal of history of political thought and social history hidden in Luxemburg’s disclaimer, let us consider at least two of these “good reasons” against open socialist support for republicanism. We will call them the “French lesson” and the “German lesson,” two themes that shaped the attitude of the SPD toward active agitation for the republic.

### The French Lesson: Republican Worship, Socialist Distraction

To understand the first, we must go back a few years before Luxemburg’s open demand for republican agitation in Germany.<sup>26</sup> “A Time for Sowing” was published six years after the 1904 International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam, where the German delegates famously problematized again what they had already discussed in Paris in 1900: the strategy of French socialists known as Millerandism (i. e., having socialist ministers in a bourgeois government). In the view of many members of the SPD, Luxemburg included, taking office in a non-socialist government legitimized bourgeois constitutional regimes on the basis of a reasoning not unlike Eduard Bernstein’s revisionism (i. e., fostering the view that there was no need for a revolutionary break insofar as increasing social democratic power within bourgeois institutions could lead to socialism).<sup>27</sup>

25 Luxemburg: *Theory and Practice*, in: RLR, p. 210.

26 For a historical account of the mutually reinforcing relationship between republicanism and socialism in Europe during these decades, see Antoni Domènech: *El eclipse de la fraternidad. Una revisión republicana de la tradición socialista*, Barcelona 2004, pp. 123–228. For his illuminating analysis of Luxemburg’s “A Time for Sowing” as pointing to the limits of Marxist orthodoxy, the SPD and the Second International, see *ibid.*, pp. 190–191.

27 For an overview of the Paris and Amsterdam discussions, see G. D. H. Cole: *A History of Socialist Thought*, London 1963, vol. 3.1, pp. 37–59.

The first thing we want to note is that Luxemburg's articles of 1910, apparently defending the vindication of "bourgeois" forms of government (the republic) in the face of an upsurge of absolutism, are rather far from her earlier criticisms of the French strategy in the Amsterdam Congress six years earlier. In fact, her 1910s "new" arguments on the need for socialist support for republican institutions are not unlike the arguments of Jean Jaurès, the main French speaker in Amsterdam and a partial supporter of Millerandism. During the congress, the Germans had suggested that socialist ministers in a bourgeois government could be permissible under conditions of emergency, such as an invasion and its corresponding urgent need to defend the country's sovereignty. To this, Jaurès answered: "I wondered whether political freedom, individual liberty, the possibility of organizing the proletariat, were not as essential to the proletarian as their current fatherland."<sup>28</sup> And he then justified the French socialist support for the Third Republic as a way of "saving" a "republican democracy" from the *internal* dangers, including threats of a coup d'état, posed by "clericalism," "Caesarism," and "militarism."<sup>29</sup>

Jaurès argued that socialists must defend republican freedoms and order, even if they lacked a "social content," against the increasing powers of the reaction – a set of priorities very similar to Luxemburg's in 1910. A reason for Luxemburg's change of attitude with respect to 1904 may be the change of circumstances, or at least her reading of those circumstances. The idea that socialists should have a supportive attitude of "bourgeois" republican forms during a specially reactionary momentum – which was seen by Luxemburg and the Germans as invalid for the French in the early 1900s – could be seen in a new light given the reading of the Prussian context of 1910 – as we have just described, with an openly hostile attitude of the German ruling class, holding onto every vestige of ancient-regime imperial

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28 Jean Jaurès: Discours de Jaurès à Amsterdam, in: *Revue Socialiste* 237/1904, p. 289.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 291–292.

constitutionalism to prevent the slightest democratic and republican reforms, and so on.<sup>30</sup>

To explain why socialists are rightly suspicious of any enthusiasm around “the republic,” Luxemburg explicitly brings up these debates on the “history of French socialism.” Luxemburg’s views against Jaurès and his followers in France, which she arguably shared with most of the SPD leadership at the turn of the century, have often served to emphasize a rather un-republican (or even anti-republican) image of German socialism during the Second International: incompetent in basic issues of constitutional design, myopically obsessed with reinforcing its electoral majority in a powerless Reichstag, mechanistically focused on economic development without paying attention to democratizing political power, oblivious to the revolutionary lessons of the Paris Commune...<sup>31</sup> In the wake of the Amsterdam congress, some of them even got to complain about this accusation of “indifference to the republic, even of a certain preference for the monarchy.”<sup>32</sup>

The second thing we want to note is this misguided image of German socialism. Against accusations of excessive long-termism, economism, or anti-republicanism, reconsider the case of Karl Kautsky, the main intellectual figure of the SPD and a foundational figure of “Marxist orthodoxy” during the Second International. He was also, recall, responsible for preventing (or at least stalling) the publication of Luxemburg’s arguments for republican agitation in 1910. And he was, too, one of the most influential disparagers of the “republican superstition” of the French. Yet, thanks to recent work by Ben Lewis, it is today much clearer that despite these seemingly anti-republican credentials, Kautsky was also an active preserver of the French demo-

30 For Luxemburg’s view of the situation of French socialism in the wake of the Dreyfuss affair and her critique of Jaurès’ republicanism, see, e.g., Rosa Luxemburg: *Die sozialistische Krise in Frankreich*, in: *Die Neue Zeit*, 1900, in: *GW*, vol. 1.2, pp. 26f.

31 See, for example, J. Rees: *The Algebra of Revolution*, London 1998, especially pp. 130–138.

32 Karl Kautsky: *The Republic and Social Democracy in France, 1905*, in: Ben Lewis, *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, Leiden 2019, p. 157.

cratic-republican tradition, as he did in several texts published in 1905. This was, precisely, to reject that there could be a clear continuity between the revolutionary republicanism of 1793, 1848 and 1871 and the French Third Republic – the constitutional system that sparked the debate on Millerandism, a regime which Kautsky compares to a monarchy in disguise. Through the recovery and translation of these texts, Lewis' contribution serves to contextualize Kautsky's influential opposition to Millerandism in the debates of the Second International, though not as a socialist disavowal of the constitutional issues that contemporary republicans were interested in (e. g., anti-monarchism, strong accountability of the executive to the legislative, Church-state relationships, the relevance of "formal" civil and political rights, more powers for the legislative in international policy and the military, and so on). On the contrary, Kautsky's views are informed by a republican-democratic apology of the Commune of 1871, in line with Marx and Engels, and against the Third Republic as a regime born out of the repression of the *communard* proletariat.<sup>33</sup>

The point is that condemning the "republican superstition" of the French need not be an anti-republican stance. If this could be true for Kautsky, it could also be true for Luxemburg, who, for example, evoked the democratic-republican legacy of the "English Levellers" and the "French Jacobins," which, after proper adjustments, was being kept alive by Bolshevik revolutionary socialists.<sup>34</sup> In the same vein, Luxemburg's scathing criticism of bourgeois "formal" rights and freedoms – "[a]dmittedly, working people will still be exploited and oppressed in republics" – never prevented her from repeatedly vindicating their crucial role in the emancipation of the working masses: "the most beneficial system of government for the working class is a republic." "Thanks to the republican system," she insisted, "workers are free to mount a political struggle against the rule of the bourgeoisie, to denounce the bourgeoisie's behavior loudly and openly, and to orga-

33 For an analysis, see Lewis' introduction in Lewis: Karl Kautsky, pp. 1–42.

34 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Russian Revolution*, in: RLR, p. 290 (GW: vol 4., pp. 332–365).

nize and educate freely, without any obstacles.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, as Luxemburg made clear in her arguments against revisionism, only the socialist working masses and their anti-capitalist program are able to guarantee the republican institutions that the bourgeoisie promote only in name, giving them up whenever democracy threatens their power or whenever competition in world politics requires absolutism again.<sup>36</sup> This is, in our view, a *republican* criticism of republican superstition.

### The German Lesson: Imperial Censorship, Socialist Caution

But if Kautsky and others truly felt that socialists were the successors in an industrial age of earlier revolutionary republicans, why did such democratic-republican affinities not already surface in the SPD’s programs and agitation? The answer to this question leads to the second of the “good reasons” that Luxemburg must have had in mind to explain the SPD’s reticence to anything that could sound like republicanism. This time, however, the reason is much more practical than theoretical: imperial censorship. As historian Andrew Bonnell has shown, Article 95 of the German Penal Code, which prosecuted crimes against *lèse-majesté*, was ready to condemn any minimally republican slogan.<sup>37</sup> And because of the obvious political affiliation of the many editors, journalists and politicians prosecuted under Article 95, Kurt Eisner went so far as to say that *lèse-majesté* crimes were in

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35 Rosa Luxemburg: What Do We Want? A Commentary on the Program of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, January 1906, in: Peter Hudis and Sandra Rein (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* (henceforth CW), vol. 4, London 2022, p. 35. See also her opposition between moderate liberalism and revolutionary republicanism in the history of France: Rosa Luxemburg: *Lessons from the Three Dumas*, May 1908, in: CW, vol. 4, pp. 390–393.

36 Rosa Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution, 1898–1899*, in: RLR, pp. 152–155 (GW, vol. 1.1, pp. 367–466).

37 Andrew Bonnell: *Red Banners, Books and Beer Mugs. The Mental World of German Social Democrats, 1863–1914*, Leiden 2021, pp. 173–196.



fact another anti-socialist law in disguise – a comment which, incidentally, cost him nine months in prison.<sup>38</sup> Our point is that prudential socialist reactions to imperial censorship should not be mistaken for a socialist repudiation of republican ideals. The SPD of the early 1900s led by August Bebel inherited, precisely on the question of republicanism, the views of the Eisenachian faction of social democracy – that is, internal opposition to Lasalleanism and the prospects of a “social monarchy” in the 1870s. Before the SPD was founded, the so-called “Eisenacher” socialists led by Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht chose to avoid legal persecution by declaring in their program the establishment of a “free people’s state” (*freier Volksstaat*) since no party branch could be established if the “republic” was included in its statutes.<sup>39</sup>

This is why Luxemburg wanted to concede that cautious republicanism in a context of imperial censorship and repression was a reasonable choice for German socialists. In Kautsky’s correspondence with Luxemburg, he noted the “well-considered grounds” behind socialist prudence in regard to republican agitation.<sup>40</sup> He went back to the creation of the SPD when Marx, despite his severe criticism of the Gotha program of 1875, recognized that not having the courage to declare the republic – as the French had done – was in Germany something “very sensible, given that the situation calls for prudence.”<sup>41</sup> After the following years of persecution and illegalization of social democracy, it is then natural that, in its Erfurt program of 1891, the SPD did not include the demand for the republic either. This time, it was Engels who, despite his criticism on this particular point, recognized the legal barriers to an “openly republican program.”<sup>42</sup> For all these reasons, Kautsky denied the convenience of Luxemburg’s call for explicitly republican agitation in 1910. Luxemburg reminds him,

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38 Ibid., p. 180.

39 Ibid., p. 176.

40 Kautsky quoted in Luxemburg: Theory and Practice, in: RLR, pp. 208–232.

41 Marx quoted in *ibid.*, p. 209.

42 Engels quoted in *ibid.*, p. 209.

in turn, that although Engels recognized the prudence of not using republican proclamations in the party program, he thought it essential for such questions to be discussed internally “within the party.”<sup>43</sup>

In our view, Luxemburg accepted Kautsky’s remarks on how social conditions (e. g., imperial censorship) must be considered when defining the strategies of social democratic agitation. But for her, as we have shown above, the Prussian circumstances changed everything. Republicanism should no longer be a theoretical issue or a matter of antiquarianism for the SPD members – anyone aware of Kautsky’s oeuvre, and Luxemburg indeed was, should accept that many German socialists in fact saw themselves as legatees of the older European revolutionary tradition.<sup>44</sup> For Luxemburg, republicanism now meant something else. The Prussian events of 1909–1910 had turned republican agitation into an inextricable part of socialist *practice*:

“[I]t is more conclusive proof required than the most recent events, that in this matter the essential thing, the follow-up in practice, was not done? The increase of the Prussian civil list [i. e., the Kaiser’s and court budget] offered once again the most splendid opportunity imaginable, and at the same time laid the undeniable duty on the party to sound the slogan of a republic loud and clear, and to look to its propaganda. The insolent challenge of this government bill, following the ignominious end of the suffrage bill, should have been unconditionally answered by unfolding the political function of the monarchy and its personal authority in Prusso-Germany; by emphasizing its connection with militarism, navalism, and the social-political stasis; by recalling the famous ‘discourses’ and ‘remarks’

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43 Ibid, p. 213.

44 For two additional examples of German socialists from different generations recovering earlier republican history, see Eduard Bernstein: *Cromwell and Communism. Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution*, trans. H. J. Stenning, London 1930 [1895]; Arthur Rosenberg: *Democracy and Socialism. A Contribution to the Political History of the Past 150 Years*, trans. G. Rosen, London 1939.

on the ‘rabble of the people’ and the ‘compote dish’; by recalling the ‘penitentiary bill’; by revealing the monarchy as the visible expression of the entire imperial German reaction. The pathetic unanimity of all bourgeois parties in their Byzantine handling of the bill drastically shows once again, that in today’s Germany the slogan of a republic has become the shibboleth of class division, the watchword of class struggle. Of all this, nothing in the *Neue Zeit* or in *Vorwärts* ... not one syllable in our two leading organs has championed the slogan of a republic.”<sup>45</sup>

Considering Luxemburg’s arguments in “What Next?,” “A Time for Sowing” and “Theory and Practice,” our view is that she is advocating for a change of strategy due to the new circumstances of street mobilization sparked around the Prussian suffrage but not for a change of principles – her views on republicanism and those of many other socialists are much older than 1910! This is her argument against Kautsky, who stresses that Luxemburg’s call for republican agitation is proposing something “entirely new” for the SPD.<sup>46</sup> Against Kautsky’s accusations of novelty, she stresses the importance of adapting the content of socialist agitation – including republican agitation – to the changing political conjuncture. In our view, then, in this particular controversy, the question of republicanism was not so much a matter of principles as of different readings of the concrete political moment. That is, the dispute does not depend on whether being a socialist in imperial Germany meant also being a republican but on whether the social circumstances make it worthwhile to publicly proclaim one’s republicanism and use it to guide mass protests – thus risking fines, prison, etc.

Further evidence that supports our view is that Kautsky took prudence very seriously, also applying it to his own texts. In 1909, only a few months before the dispute with Luxemburg, he had agreed to

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<sup>45</sup> Luxemburg: Theory and Practice, in: RLR p. 214.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

modify the second edition of his *Road to Power* due to fears within the party that its republican content could lead to accusations of high treason.<sup>47</sup> But again, does caution in a context of censorship and repression necessarily mean a rejection of republicanism by socialists? Our answer is no – censorship must be understood here as shaping the public discourse of socialists.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the most illustrative example of this point can be found in one of Kautsky's letters to Franz Mehring in 1909. On the one hand, Kautsky acknowledged what we have called “the German lesson” above. Namely, that “one can well say that the present legal system makes republican propaganda impossible.” On the other hand, while this situation did not favor explicit republican agitation, Kautsky added that it still made it “very necessary for us to avoid anything which might be interpreted as a surrender of our republican convictions.”<sup>49</sup>

This is also why, for instance, Kautsky reprimanded the southern social democrats who participated during this period in ceremonies legitimizing the regional monarchies of their own *Länder*. Even though this was in some cases a form of local protest (i. e., claiming constitutional monarchical traditions against the imperial legitimacy of the Kaiser and the dominance of Prussia), Kautsky made it very clear to them that socialists should not support any form of monarchy. Against these “monarchical Social Democrats” from Baden, Kautsky went straight to the point: “The concepts of social democrat and republican remain identical.”<sup>50</sup>

To sum up our view, there are reasons to think that the dilemma around republicanism between Luxemburg and the establishment of

47 Bonnell: *Red Banners, Books and Beer Mugs*, pp. 192–193.

48 For a recent methodological reflection on censorship as an interpretatively relevant variable in the history of ideas (and not merely as the prevention or suppression of ideas), see Norbert Bachleitner: *Censorship of Literature in Austria 1751–1848*, Leiden 2002, pp. 1–28.

49 Bonnell: *Red Banners, Books and Beer Mugs*, p. 181 (quoting from A. Laschitzka: *Deutsche Linke im Kampf für eine demokratische Republik*, Berlin 1969, p. 162).

50 Kautsky: *Zwischen Baden und Luxemburg*, in: *Die Neue Zeit*, 1910, Year 28, vol. 2, p. 656.

the SPD boils down to conflicting readings of the concrete political situation – a chasm that would only grow in the years to come. Put differently, it is not about the “republican” Luxemburg at odds with the “orthodox Marxist” Kautsky – the former anxious about the lack of support for “bourgeois” forms of government, the latter alien to all constitutional reflection. They all were convinced republicans. For Kautsky, though, little or nothing had changed in 1910. As always, the next Reichstag elections were to be the main objective of the SPD.<sup>51</sup> Franz Mehring, who, despite his friendship with Luxemburg and his declared republicanism, came to Kautsky’s defense during the controversy, made it very clear that “the touching unanimity with which all bourgeois parties rally around the monarchy [he is paraphrasing Luxemburg] *is a very old story*.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, contrary to Luxemburg’s reading, the years 1909–1910 were nothing special.

### Why Republican Agitation? “A Work of Enlightenment”

But what did Luxemburg see differently? First, she thought that thanks to the decades-long stable activism of the SPD, the German proletariat was very well educated so as to prevent any “petty bourgeois republican superstition.”<sup>53</sup> Second, however, she argued that this educative work of “enlightenment” must continue. As we have already mentioned, in “A Time for Sowing,” Luxemburg states that the political situation had never been more favorable for the dissemination of social-democratic doctrines. For her, the question of Prussian

51 This is the position that Luxemburg attributed to him and criticized in *Ermattung oder Kampf?*, in: *Die Neue Zeit*, 1910, in: *GW*, vol. 2, pp. 344–377.

52 Franz Mehring: *Der Kampf gegen die Monarchie*, in: *Die Neue Zeit* 28/1910, vol. 2, p. 612. Luxemburg’s answer can be found in *Der Kampf gegen Reliquien*, in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* 182/August 1910, in: *GW*, vol. 2, pp. 421–426. See especially her principled rejection of monarchy compared to Mehring’s focus on the cost of the monarchy: *ibid.*, p. 425.

53 Luxemburg: *Zeit der Aussaat*, in: *GW*, vol. 2, p. 302. The same argument is found in *Theory and Practice*, in: *RLR*, p. 210.

suffrage had exposed the imperial architecture and, accordingly, the “bourgeois class state” appeared “in all its horrifying form, exposed, naked.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, the Prussian events of 1909–1910 meant a significant overlap of political and economic struggles – a feature she systematically attributed to revolutionary situations. That is why, in her writings of the period, she establishes a clear link between the current distribution of property and the German Empire under the rule of Wilhelm II. She connected socialist parliamentary impotence – a consequence, as we saw, of the imperial constitution – to the historic rule of the Junkers (i. e., Prussia’s big landowners), industrial-military interests and the repression of workers’ protests. Thus, the monarchy appears in her texts as the pivotal point at which the different legs of class oppression converge:

“The whole situation of Germany’s internal and external politics in recent years points to the monarchy as the focal point, or at least the external visible apex, of the ruling reaction. The semi-absolutist monarchy with its personal regiment has undoubtedly been for a quarter of a century, and more so with each passing year, the base of militarism, the driving force of naval policy, the guiding spirit of world-political adventures, just as it is the stronghold of Junkerism in Prussia and the bulwark of the predominance of Prussian political backwardness throughout the empire; at the end of the day it is, so to speak, the personal sworn enemy of the working class and of social democracy. The slogan of the republic in Germany today is therefore infinitely more than the expression of a beautiful dream of a democratic ‘people’s state,’ or of a political doctrinarianism hovering in the clouds; it is a practical war cry against militarism, naval ambitions, colonial policy, world politics, Junker domination, and the impoverishment of Germany; it is only a consequence and drastic summary of our daily struggle against all these partial manifestations of the ruling reaction.”<sup>55</sup>

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54 *Zeit der Aussaat*, in: *GW*, vol. 2, p. 301.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 302–303.

In such a situation, “[social democrats] need only point out the connections, the causes and effects, to make the clear realization of the class struggle ignite in millions of brains.”<sup>56</sup> At that time, republican agitation was about “enlightening” the masses – not only with the aim of broadening the proletarian camp but also to strengthen and deepen their socialist consciousness. For Luxemburg, it was time to “scatter the seeds of the enlightenment” (*die Saat der Aufklärung zu streuen*).<sup>57</sup> In her view, the “truth” of the class struggle was so evident at that moment that it was enough, she insisted, to point out “the causes, the effects, the connections between phenomena, its deepest roots,” to highlight their historical significance in the context of the existing class struggle.<sup>58</sup> She added: “And today, the doctrine of class struggle does not need to be brought out of the books as a gray theory; today it walks the streets in Germany, shouting its truth loudly and shrilly into everyone’s ears.”<sup>59</sup>

These quotes make an interesting connection, namely, the link between republican agitation and the knowledge that the proletariat acquires from its own revolutionary experience, two fundamental pillars of acquisition of class consciousness by the proletariat.<sup>60</sup> On the one hand, the SPD was responsible for using its knowledge of the political situation (but also of economic dynamics, parliamentary procedures...) to contribute to the acquisition of consciousness of the masses – the party has “duties,” as we mentioned above. This learning process takes place in terms of what Luxemburg calls a “work of enlightenment,” which points to the relationships between existing phenomena with the aim of bringing about autonomous thinking in the working masses. On the other hand, Luxemburg understands the

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56 Ibid., p. 301.

57 Ibid., p. 300.

58 Ibid., pp. 300–301.

59 Ibid., p. 301.

60 For an examination of Luxemburg’s idea of the “work of enlightenment” and its relationship with Bertolt Brecht’s dramatic theory, see Andrea Pérez-Fernández: Rosa Luxemburg, Bertolt Brecht y el problema de la ilustración de las masas, in: *Res Publica. Revista de Historia de las Ideas Políticas*, 27/2024, no. 2 (forthcoming).

political participation of the proletariat not as a simple demonstration of the force of the workers' movement or as a sort of mechanical reaction to propaganda but as a conscious and directed exercise in which the proletariat learns and is nourished by its own revolutionary experience. As she claimed in the foundational manifesto of the Spartacus League in 1918, the proletarian masses must learn "to turn themselves from dead machines that the capitalist placed in the production process into thinking, free and independent drivers of this process."<sup>61</sup>

A similar reasoning as in the case of Prussia in 1910 can be found in Luxemburg's earlier writings on the Polish situation in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1905. Poland also lacked, according to Luxemburg, a liberal bourgeoisie committed to its alleged historical role in the progression of democracy and republicanism. She complained, for example, that even in the favorable Russian revolutionary context of 1905, the Polish bourgeoisie was never really concerned with constitutionalizing tsarism; it settled for federal and nationalist prebends that in no way contributed to the abolition of absolutism. Thus, with deeply republican overtones, Luxemburg argued that any "freedom" achieved by the national Polish bourgeoisie in an absolutist context was a mere "gift," never a "right," coming from "the grace of the tsar."<sup>62</sup> Consequently, "one stroke of the pen by the tsarist thugs may at any moment turn things to ruin again."<sup>63</sup> Significantly, this was exactly one of Jean Jaurès' harsh republican criticisms of the SPD at the Amsterdam congress of the International in 1904. Jaurès noted that, unlike the French, the German proletariat "did not conquer universal suffrage on the barricades. It received it from above," thus making it possible for the hand that granted it to "take it away" at any moment – and he went on to mention what happened in one of the

61 Rosa Luxemburg: Was will der Spartakusbund?, in: *Die Rote Fahne* 29/December 1918, in: *GW*, vol. 4, p. 443.

62 Rosa Luxemburg: Dwa obozy, in: *Czerwony Sztandar* 26/May 1905. English version from George Shriver and Alicja Mann in Luxemburg: *Two Camps*, in: *CW*, vol. 3, p. 142.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 136.



electoral strongholds of the SPD, the Landtag of Saxony, that had lost equal suffrage in 1896.<sup>64</sup>

Luxemburg's thoughts of 1905–1906 on Poland illuminate the beligerence of her republicanism in Prussia five years later and the way in which she argues how the socialist struggle for republican political rights should look in the context of a bourgeois-absolutist state. In “To Arms Against the ‘Constitution’ of the Knout!” she argued:

“This ‘constitution’ and this ‘Duma’ are really the same absolutism, the same unlimited rule of the bayonet and the gallows, but covered with a miserable rag. So, it is clear that the interests of the proletariat, the interests of the revolution, require the *rejection* of this ‘gift’ from the tsar and the *thwarting* of this tsarist comedy. Working people in Poland and Russia must understand that the Butygin ‘Duma’ has basically not changed the situation even by a hair ... To explain this to the people with all our strength, to urge them on to further tireless struggle – that is the primary obligation of social democracy. To dispel, and destroy with a strong fist, all illusions about an allegedly ‘new era,’ the illusion that anything can be expected from the puppet show of popular elections and parliamentary rule – that is the most immediate task of our party that stands at the head of the revolutionary struggle.”<sup>65</sup>

Is not this a clear defense of republican-democratic agitation aimed at dispelling any chances of republican superstition among the Polish

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64 Jean Jaurès: Discours de Jaurès à Amsterdam, in: *Revue Socialiste* 237/1904, p. 310. On the case of “Red Saxony” and the rollback in political freedoms, see James Retallack: Antisocialism and Electoral Politics in Regional Perspective: The Kingdom of Saxony, in: Larry. E. Jones and James Retallack (Eds.): *Elections, Mass Politics and Social Change in Modern Germany. New Perspectives*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 49–91.

65 Rosa Luxemburg: Do walki przeciw ‘Konstytucji’ Knuta!, in: *Z Pola Walki* 13/ October 1905. English version from George Shriver and Alicja Mann in Rosa Luxemburg: *To Arms Against the “Constitution” of the Knout!*, in: *CW*, vol. 3, pp. 217–218.

proletariat? In 1905, the task of Polish social democracy, according to Luxemburg, was to

“make the masses aware of the needs and tasks of the revolutionary struggle ... [T]he axis of our agitational work must be to explain to the working population about the atrocities perpetrated under the continuing rule of the allegedly ‘constitutional’ knout, and to call for mass gatherings at which the hypocrisy of tsarist policy is continually exposed and the true demands of the proletariat are continually presented.”<sup>66</sup>

But how does this agitation take place? Luxemburg emphasized the importance of this learning process leading to autonomous thinking: the masses “must *weigh for themselves* which of these things is right, for such consideration is the basis for choosing what path to take.” They should decide on the basis of their own experience, properly channeled by the party, “who is a friend and who a foe.” Of course, for Luxemburg, only when civil and political rights, such as freedom of thought and expression, are guaranteed “may workers clarify the issues to themselves and develop their opinions.”<sup>67</sup>

It should be recalled that the completion of such processes of “enlightenment,” of consciousness-raising, is not a prerequisite for the systematic and necessary “seizure of power.” In *Reform or Revolution*, Luxemburg confronted the “mechanistic” conceptions of social development in which one tends to locate the triumph of class struggle on a specific date. The “definitive” victory of the revolution, she believes, is only the result of prolonged and intense struggles through which the proletariat will reach the degree of political maturity that will enable it to reach this horizon. Therefore, both in the “meanwhile”

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 218. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>67</sup> Luxemburg: Krytyka w rucha robotniczym, in: Czerwony Sztandar, n. 39, January 1906. English version from Joseph Muller in Luxemburg: Critique in the Workers’ Movement, in: CW, vol. 4, pp. 65–68.

and in the “victory,” democracy, or rather the processes of democratization, is a key factor in socialist politics.<sup>68</sup>

In other words, the political conditions of socialism do not exist a priori: they must be created through the conquest of state power (always necessarily “premature,” as she points out). These processes through which the masses learn from their own experience are nothing but movements aimed at altering the existing correlation of forces, which, in turn, expand their political rights, enabling them to imagine and carry out new assaults. In Luxemburg’s approach, democracy is both the political horizon and the progressively smoother terrain on which the privileges of the exploiters are undermined. As she stated in the final paragraph of “A Time for Sowing”:

“But let things take whatever turn they will, the cause of the proletariat will emerge victorious from the campaign if we have succeeded in exploiting the present period of hot struggle not only to arouse and incite but also to enlighten the masses, not only to mightily enlarge the army of our supporters, but also to deepen and fortify their socialist consciousness. If we now throw the seeds of socialism into the furrowed soil with full hands, the harvest will be ours – despite everything!”<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

For Luxemburg, the “most recent events” – many of them epitomized in the protests around the Prussian electoral reform – pointed “straight in the same direction”: the monarchy, the reaction and the imperial constitution.<sup>70</sup> This was no petty bourgeois or republican superstition. For her, in 1909–1910, the socialist critique of German capitalism was also a critique of the German Empire. Therefore, so-

68 Luxemburg: *Social Reform or Revolution*, in: RLR, pp. 155–160.

69 Luxemburg: *Zeit der Aussaat*, in: GW, vol. 2, p. 304.

70 Luxemburg: *Theory and Practice*, in: RLR, p. 211.

cialist agitation against economic injustice must involve agitation against what Luxemburg saw as its political and institutional roots: socialists must make explicit their democratic-republican vision of the German Empire.

The reasons behind this republican agitation, or the role that republicanism must play in the agenda of the SPD, can be explained along the lines of a view that pervades much of Luxemburg's political thought. The view is that socialists must engage in a "work of enlightenment" that helps the masses make the right connections between their "purely economic" class struggles and the legal-political setting that defined German capitalism in the late 19th century. Socialist parties, in other words, have the duty to channel mass mobilizations toward a socialist agenda whenever social circumstances create an overlap between economic and political struggles. Luxemburg focused on this argument in her well-known and influential reflections on the mass strike. Against the anti-political perspectives of some trade unions, she pointed out that socialists must turn "economic" struggles into "political" struggles.

Our text has focused on a case that presented the opposite challenge, so to speak. That is, the emergence of mass struggles for a "political" reason – the failed electoral reform in Prussia – that, in the view of Luxemburg, the SPD must have exploited in a socialist direction. This involved showing why the merely "political" struggle against Prussian and imperial institutions was also an "economic" struggle against the interests of the German ruling class and vice versa, or, put differently, why a republican agenda was important for socialists and vice versa. Luxemburg had emphasized this overlap of political and economic conflicts in other circumstances. Think of her support of anticlerical policies in the French Third Republic as a crucial part of the socialist program there,<sup>71</sup> the use of the mass strike as

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71 Rosa Luxemburg: Antwort auf die Umfrage über Antiklerikalismus und Sozialismus, in: *Le Mouvement Socialiste* 111/1903, in: *GW*, vol. 6., pp. 459–466.

a political tool in Belgium, Russia or Germany,<sup>72</sup> or her demands for republican freedom and constitutionalism as essential to developing a working-class politics in Poland.<sup>73</sup> In all of them, as in Prussia in 1909–1910, the “economic” analysis of working-class interests is not made in the abstract or only by considering a transhistorical dynamic of economic development but is always embedded in historically concrete social circumstances that are unavoidably shaped by “political” institutions.

Lastly, we have made an interpretive point. Was Luxemburg alone in this demand for republican agitation? As we have shown, republicanism was a thorny issue for German socialists. Luxemburg’s explicit republican agitation in the context of the Prussian electoral reform collided with the historical and well-grounded call for prudence within the SPD: in a context of imperial censorship, the republican affinities of socialists must remain underground. This cautionary advice can be traced back to Marx and Engels’ critical remarks on the party’s programs and is clearly behind the growing disagreements between Kautsky and Luxemburg about republican agitation, which became very open in 1910.

In our view, to deny or disregard the relationship between socialism and republicanism is to give imperial censorship much more credit than it deserves in the shaping of socialist thought and, additionally, misrepresent the awareness that many socialists showed about previous revolutionary and democratic experiences. Our thesis has been that prudential awareness against imperial censorship among socialists should not be mistaken for a principled rejection of republicanism. We do not see, as we have put it above, a “republican” Luxemburg confronted with, say, an anti-republican “orthodox

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72 Rosa Luxemburg: *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften*, 1906, in: *GW*, vol. 2, pp. 91–170 (English translation in *RLR*, pp. 168–199); Rosa Luxemburg: *Der politische Massenstreik und die Gewerkschaften*, October 1910, in: *GW*, vol. 2, pp. 479–480.

73 See the pieces quoted above or any of her many texts on the Polish conjuncture recently edited and translated in *CW*, vols. 3 and 4.

Marxist” Kautsky, uninterested in constitutional issues and political freedom. In our view, their differences were a matter of different readings of the concrete situation.

Lastly, as many researchers have recently shown, 19th- and, to a lesser extent, 20th-century socialists drew extensively upon the republican tradition in their politico-economic analysis of past and present revolutionary struggles.<sup>74</sup> Although the emergence of industrial capitalism exhausted the republican tradition in many significant ways, the old-time critique of absolutism and dependence was still up to the task in the post-revolutionary Europe of the late 19th century. It was a time in which the “new” powers of industrial capitalism were in a very explicit alliance with the “old” powers of state absolutism, monarchism, landlordism, clericalism, and militaristic imperial ambitions. In short, the traditional enemies of democratic republicanism had a synergetic relationship with the modern enemies of socialism. Luxemburg understood this, and that is why she added to the socialist toolkit any republican intuition that could serve the emancipation of the working class of her time.

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74 See the following for only a few examples of the broad literature on the topic in the last two decades. For the case of Marx, see Edgar Manjarín Castellarnau: *Marx y la tradición iusnaturalista en un mundo industrializado*, in: *Daimon* 81/2020, pp. 145–160; Bruno Leipold: *Marx’s Social Republic. Radical Republicanism and the Political Institutions of Socialism*, in: Bruno. Leipold, Karma Nabulsi, Stuart White (Eds.), *Radical Republicanism*, Oxford 2020, pp. 172–194. For the case of later German socialists, see B. Lewis: *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*; A. Bonnell: *Red Banners, Books and Beer Mugs*, ch. 8. For the case of England, see M. Bevir: *Republicanism, Socialism, and Democracy in Britain: The Origins of the Radical Left*, in: *Journal of Social History* 34/2, 2000, pp. 351–368; J. Martínez–Cava: *Enemigo a las puertas. La libertad política en el socialismo británico*, in *Daimon*, 81/2020, pp. 159–175. On France, see A. Domènech: *El eclipse de la fraternidad*, ch. 2 and 3; P. Scotto, *Los orígenes del derecho al trabajo en Francia (1789–1848)*, Madrid 2019, ch. 2. On the United States, see A. Gourevitch: *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 2015; T. O’Shea: *Eugene Debs and the Socialist Republic*, in: *Political Theory* 50/6, 2022, pp. 861–888.

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# 10 How "Anarchist" was Rosa Luxemburg's Understanding of Revolutions?

A Comparison with Emma Goldman

*Frank Jacob*

## Introduction

Rosa Luxemburg was an important left thinker and revolutionary who not only debated revolutions theoretically but actually participated in multiple ones.<sup>1</sup> She was without any doubt Marx's intellectual apprentice – Franz Mehring called her his “most brilliant follower”<sup>2</sup> –, although she was not an orthodox Marxist who believed that his writings should be uncontested, which led to “Marxist evaluations of Rosa Luxemburg [that] ranged from ardent advocacy to excommunication.”<sup>3</sup> When Luxemburg's understanding of revolutions is debated, it is often contrasted with the ideas of Lenin, whom she often criticized during her political career,<sup>4</sup> but in particular in her writings

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- 1 For a detailed analysis of Luxemburg's revolutionary thoughts and actions, see Frank Jacob: *Rosa Luxemburg. Living and Thinking the Revolution*, Marburg 2021. See also Michael Löwy: *Rosa Luxemburg. Der zündende Funke der Revolution*, transl. by Arno Münster, Hamburg 2020, pp. 55–72.
  - 2 Cited in Gilbert Badia: *Rosa Luxemburg, Marx y el problema de las alianzas: (En torno al problema de la estrategia revolucionaria)*, in: *Materiales 3/1977*, pp. 166–176, here p. 166.
  - 3 Jie-Hyun Lim: *Rosa Luxemburg on the Dialectics of Proletarian Internationalism and Social Patriotism*, in: *Science & Society 59/1995–1996*, no. 4, pp. 498–530, here p. 498.
  - 4 Gilbert Badia: *La place de Rosa Luxemburg dans le mouvement socialiste*, in: *Revue Historique 252/1974*, no. 1, pp. 107–118, here pp. 107–108; Dick Howard: *La teoría y la práctica revolucionaria: Rosa Luxemburg*, *Materiales 3/1977*, pp. 130–153, here pp. 132–133; Annette Jost: *Rosa Luxemburg y su crítica de Lenin*, in: *Materiales 3/1977*, pp. 196–222; Francis Moreault: *Hannah Arendt, lectrice de*

about the Russian Revolution in 1917 and with regard to the revolutionary policies of the Bolsheviks.<sup>5</sup> Tied to Luxemburg's own experiences during the Russian Revolution of 1905, she often emphasized the necessity of spontaneity and involvement of the masses for a successful revolutionary change of the historical course that should lead not only to a political change but also to one of society as a whole. In this regard, Luxemburg shared many thoughts with the famous Russian-American anarchist Emma Goldman,<sup>6</sup> who had similar ideas about the future revolution, although they never exchanged them with each other.<sup>7</sup> The political and geographical distance between these two revolutionaries seemed too far, but considering the similarities that can be identified, it makes sense to take a closer look at them to see the extent to which their concepts of revolution overlap. This does not necessarily mean that Luxemburg was more anarchist

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Rosa Luxemburg, in: *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 34/2001, no. 2, pp. 227–247, here p. 227; Holger Politt: *Unter Blitz und Donner. Zusammenstoß zweier Zeitalter*, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Arbeiterrevolution 1905/06*, ed. and transl. by Holger Politt, Berlin 2015, pp. 9–34, here p. 29. Ernst Vollrath: *Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of Revolution*, in: *Social Research* 40/1973, no. 1, pp. 83–109, here p. 88.

- 5 Rosa Luxemburg: *Die Russische Revolution. Eine kritische Würdigung*, ed. and introduced by Paul Levi, Berlin 1922; Rosa Luxemburg: *Die russische Tragödie*, in: Jörn Schütrumpf (Ed.): *Diktatur statt Sozialismus. Die russische Revolution und die deutsche Linke 1917/18*, Berlin 2017, pp. 358–364.
- 6 For the major biographical works on Goldman, see Joseph Ishill: *Emma Goldman. A Challenging Rebel*, Berkeley Heights, N. J. 1957; Richard Drinnon: *Rebel in Paradise. A Biography of Emma Goldman*, Chicago 1982 [1961]; Alice Wexler: *Emma Goldman. An Intimate Life*, New York 1984; Kathy E. Ferguson: *Emma Goldman. Political Thinking in the Streets*, Lanham, MD 2011; Vivian Gornick: *Emma Goldman. Revolution as a Way of Life*, New Haven, CT 2011; Paul Avrich/Karen Avrich: *Sasha and Emma. The Anarchist Odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman*, Cambridge, MA 2014; Frank Jacob: *Emma Goldman. Ein Leben für die Freiheit*, Leipzig 2021; Frank Jacob: *Emma Goldman. Identitäten einer Anarchistin*, Leipzig 2022; Frank Jacob: *Emma Goldman und das Streben nach Freiheit*, in: Frank Jacob (Ed.): *Emma Goldman oder: Freiheit um jeden Preis*, Berlin 2023, pp. 9–38.
- 7 Frank Jacob: *An Anarchist Revolution? Emma Goldman as an Intellectual Revolutionary*, in: *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 15/2021, no. 2, pp. 29–47.

than she is usually perceived to be or Goldman less anarchist than she would have admitted herself to be. Nevertheless, the comparison will show that there were some elements considered essential by both important female thinkers on the left, who had both been ostracized by society and their own political movements for their critical opinions about those who were willing to morally corrupt a revolutionary process to gain power.<sup>8</sup> The following chapter therefore attempts to compare some of Luxemburg's and Goldman's ideas, particularly those related to the role of the masses and spontaneous revolutionary action and post-revolutionary freedom.

### The Role of the Revolutionary Masses

Both Luxemburg and Goldman considered the role of the masses during a revolutionary process essential.<sup>9</sup> They thereby followed the theoretical claims of Marx and Engels, who emphasized, especially after the experience of 1848, that there could not be any successful revolution without the support of the masses.<sup>10</sup> That the masses, however, could be abused by a revolutionary leadership was not surprising

8 For Goldman's views about the Russian Revolution, which are quite similar to Luxemburg's evaluation of the Bolsheviks and their actions, see Frank Jacob: *Emma Goldman and the Russian Revolution: From Admiration to Frustration*, Berlin 2020. On the moral corruption of the Russian Revolution by Lenin, see Frank Jacob: *1917: Die korrumpierte Revolution*, Marburg 2020.

9 In fact, the mobilization of the masses is essential for any revolutionary process to come into existence. See Frank Jacob: *Revolution and the Global Struggle for Modernity*, vol. 1. *The Atlantic Revolutions*, London/New York 2024, pp. 20–24.

10 Karl Marx: *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, in: Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: *Werke* (henceforth MEW), vol. 1, Berlin 1976, pp. 378–391, hier 385; Friedrich Engels: *Einleitung zu Karl Marx' Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850*, in: MEW, vol. 22, Berlin 1963, pp. 509–527, here p. 523. On Engels' thoughts about revolution, see Frank Jacob: *Friedrich Engels and Revolution Theory. The Legacy of a Revolutionary Life*, in: Frank Jacob (Ed.): *Engels @ 200: Reading Friedrich Engels in the 21st Century*, Marburg 2020, pp. 49–90. For a discussion of the role of the masses within revolutionary processes, see Frank Jacob: *#Revolution. Wer, warum, wann und wie viele?* Marburg 2022, pp. 21–41.

and had previously been emphasized by the party sociologist Robert Michels, who claimed that “[t]he masses will consciously revolt from time to time, but their energy will always be reined in by the leaders. Only a policy of the ruling classes, which was suddenly blinded, could drive the party masses onto the stage of history as active actors and abolish the power of the party oligarchs, because direct intervention by the masses will always take place against the will of the leaders.”<sup>11</sup> Luxemburg, writing about the role of the masses during the Russian Revolution of 1905, also emphasized that social democracy needed to rely on the revolutionary potential of the common people in every moment, especially in terms of not wasting the latter’s wish and power to ignite changes, because

“[n]ot only are those moments in which bloody battles with the military are fought on the streets revolutionary times, but every moment, every apparently quiet day, in the current revolutionary phase. Therefore, social democracy should adhere to revolutionary tactics with iron consistency and remember at every step that revolution is not a time to argue with reaction but a time to crush it and, through the action of the conscious mass of the proletariat, to overthrow, a time to militantly assert the will of the proletariat.”<sup>12</sup>

In her text about the “Tactics of the Revolution” (“Taktik der Revolution,” 1906), Luxemburg also argues that a moment of revolution opens a window of opportunity in which, however, common rules for the political struggle could no longer be applied, as the “cage of ‘righteousness’ and ‘legality’ bursts like a cauldron that was too steamy”

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11 Robert Michels: *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie. Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens*, Leipzig 1911, pp. 156–157.

12 Rosa Luxemburg: *Taktik der Revolution* (23. März 1906), in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Arbeiterrevolution 1905/06*, ed. and transl. by Holger Politt, Berlin 2015, pp. 204–209, here 209. Translations from German are, if not stated otherwise, all by the author of the present chapter.

and makes the class struggle leak into the open.<sup>13</sup> This was in fact a necessary precondition for a successful revolution, as it could only be the masses that would eventually drive the revolutionary process further and far enough to establish and consolidate a new and better society in the name of a majority of the people. Luxemburg emphasized this as well when she wrote in "Blanquism and Social Democracy" ("Blanquismus und Sozialdemokratie," 1906) that

"the realization of socialism by a minority is absolutely impossible since the very idea of socialism precludes the rule of a minority. So, the proletariat will lose power to the majority the next day after its political victory over the tsarist rule. To put it concretely: After the overthrow of the tsar's rule, power will pass to the revolutionary part of society, to the proletariat, because this proletariat will take all positions and will remain in position until the power falls into the hands of those legally appointed to it, i. e., into the hands of the new government, which can only be determined by the Constituent Assembly, by the legislative body elected by the entire population."<sup>14</sup>

As the majority of the people, however, were neither conscious revolutionaries nor representatives of the proletariat, the possibilities for change were limited to concrete revolutionary situations; because "in society it is not the working class, not the proletariat that makes up the majority, but the petty bourgeoisie and the farmers, there will not be a majority of the Social Democrats in the Constituent Assembly, but of the peasant-petty bourgeois Democrats. We may find this unfortunate, but we cannot change it."<sup>15</sup> In this regard, Luxemburg somehow accepted the limitations of the revolution and that "[t]he working class in all countries only learns to fight in the course of its

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>14</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: *Blanquismus und Sozialdemokratie* (27. Juni 1906), in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Arbeiterrevolution 1905/06*, ed. and transl. by Holger Politt, Berlin 2015, pp. 214–219, here p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

struggle.”<sup>16</sup> She therefore demanded the use of a current revolutionary process to achieve the utmost possible change of the existent society because “[t]he ‘golden mean’ cannot be maintained in any revolution, its natural law demands a quick decision: either the locomotive will drive the historical climb to the furthest point at full steam, or it will roll back into the initial lowland due to its own gravity and tear away those who tried to stop them halfway with their weak strength, fell hopelessly into the abyss.”<sup>17</sup> While Luxemburg here argued for using the chances revolutionary momentum offered revolutionaries, as we will see later, she did not interpret such encouragement as an excuse to establish minority rule in the name of the proletariat and non-proletarian masses of the people whose actions were the actual driving force of change. In this regard, Luxemburg’s thoughts were quite similar to those of Emma Goldman.

From an anarchist perspective in general, the “core concept of revolution developed from the start in explicit opposition to statist forms,”<sup>18</sup> which is why anarchist revolutionaries or intellectual anarchist revolutionary thinkers were obviously “not interested in establishing a different centralized state in the aftermath of the initial upheaval of the masses, but in using the revolutionary turn to establish a rule by the masses without the interference of any state structure.”<sup>19</sup> It is consequently not surprising that Goldman believed that “the most powerful weapon, is the conscious, intelligent, organized, economic protest of the masses through direct action and

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16 Rosa Luxemburg: In revolutionärer Stunde. Was weiter?, in: Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 1.2, eds. Annelies Laschitzka/Günter Radczun, seventh edition, Berlin 2000, pp. 554–572, here p. 554.

17 Rosa Luxemburg: Zur russischen Revolution, in: Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 4, eds. Annelies Laschitzka/Günter Radczun, Berlin 2000, pp. 332–365, here p. 340.

18 Uri Gordon: Revolution, in: Benjamin Franks/Nathan Jun/Leonard Williams (Eds.): Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach, London/New York 2018, pp. 86–97, here p. 87.

19 Jacob, Emma Goldman and the Russian Revolution, p. 13.

the general strike."<sup>20</sup> She also was fond in her belief, to quote Clare Hemmings, "that revolution will be brought about through labour interventions (strikes, education of the masses), but also through individual and collective practices in everyday life that can inaugurate a different set of values, and from which the vision of a better world might arise."<sup>21</sup> When Goldman received the news about the Russian Revolution, she was at first thrilled about it as the Bolsheviks had "struck like lightning into the hearts and minds of the masses everywhere; yes, even the hitherto so contented and self-satisfied American workers."<sup>22</sup>

The famous anarchist supported the Bolsheviks at first and hoped that the American working class would soon join the world revolution.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Luxemburg, however, Goldman would have the chance to see what the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership would turn the Russian Revolution into for herself. Regardless of this difference, both Luxemburg and Goldman would criticize similar developments in their works about the events in Soviet Russia. They were particularly worried about a lack of freedom, especially for those who did not share the post-revolutionary visions of Lenin and his followers.

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20 Emma Goldman: What I Believe, *New York World*, July 19, 1908, online: [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist\\_archives/goldman/whatibelieve.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/goldman/whatibelieve.html). The American socialist Daniel DeLeon (1852–1914) wrote important texts on the general strike as a political weapon, and Goldman seems to have been familiar with these writings as well. Daniel DeLeon: What Means This Strike? (1898), online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/deleon/works/1898/980211.htm>. For a study of his life and work, see L. Glen Seretan: Daniel DeLeon. *The Odyssey of an American Marxist*, Cambridge, MA 1979.

21 Clare Hemmings: *Sexual Freedom and the Promise of Revolution*. Emma Goldman's Passion, in: *Feminist Review* 106/2014, pp. 43–59, here p. 49.

22 Emma Goldman: The Great Hope, in: *Mother Earth Bulletin* 1/1917, no. 4, online: [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist\\_archives/goldman/ME/mebulv1n4.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/goldman/ME/mebulv1n4.html).

23 Emma Goldman: The Russian Revolution, in: *Mother Earth Bulletin* 1/1917, no. 3, online: [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist\\_archives/goldman/ME/mebulv1n3.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/goldman/ME/mebulv1n3.html).



## Post-Revolutionary Freedom

That Luxemburg and Lenin had a different understanding of revolution theory, i.e., their interpretation of Marx in general and the “dictatorship of the proletariat”<sup>24</sup> in particular, does not need to be explained in detail here.<sup>25</sup> It is more interesting that Goldman, who experienced the post-revolutionary situation in Soviet Russia herself in 1921/22, later emphasized that some of Luxemburg’s worries in relation to Bolshevik revolutionary policy and rule had turned into a reality.<sup>26</sup> While imprisoned during the First World War, Luxemburg was not unaware of the events in Russia and was kept informed through different publications.<sup>27</sup> She wrote down her considerations about the Russian developments, although she did not intend to publish them. Nevertheless, in her work on the Russian Revolution, she left some of her thoughts about the revolutionary process and the role of the Bolsheviks, which, in contrast to Emma Goldman’s, were more critical from the start. However, Luxemburg confirmed that “Lenin’s party was the only one that understood the commandment and duty of a truly revolutionary party, which was represented by the slogan ‘All power in the hands of the proletariat and the peasantry!’ That ensured the progress of the revolution.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, as Luxemburg also emphasizes,

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24 Wilfried Nippel: *Diktatur des Proletariats: Versuch einer Historisierung*, in: *Zyklus* 5/2019, pp. 71–130; Mike Schmeitzner: *Lenin und die Diktatur des Proletariats. Begriff, Konzeption, Ermöglichung*, in: *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 14/2017, pp. 17–69.

25 Vincent Streichhahn: *Luxemburg und Lenin im Streit – Was bleibt? Eine Kontroverse im Spiegel ihrer Rezeptionsgeschichte*, in: Frank Jacob/Riccardo Altieri (Eds.): *Die Wahrnehmung der Russischen Revolutionen 1917. Zwischen utopischen Träumen und erschütterter Ablehnung*, Berlin 2019, pp. 361–386.

26 Frank Jacob: *Der Anarchismus und die Russische Revolution. Emma Goldman und Alexander Berkman im Kampf gegen den Bolschewismus*, in: *Ne Znam: Zeitschrift für Anarchismusforschung* 7/2018, pp. 3–66.

27 See in detail Jörn Schüttrumpf (Ed.): *Diktatur statt Sozialismus. Die russische Revolution und die deutsche Linke 1917/18*, Berlin 2017.

28 Luxemburg: *Zur russischen Revolution*, p. 341.

“The Bolsheviks immediately set out the entire and most far-reaching revolutionary program as the purpose of this seizure of power: not the securing of bourgeois democracy, but the dictatorship of the proletariat for the purpose of realizing socialism. In doing so, they have acquired the imperishable historical merit of proclaiming for the first time the ultimate goals of socialism as the immediate program of practical politics.”<sup>29</sup>

Lenin and his followers, in contrast to Western social democrats, initially achieved what previous revolutionaries had only dreamed of, and it is not surprising that the success of the Russian Revolution stimulated global admiration for the Bolsheviks.<sup>30</sup> Regardless of these facts, however, Luxemburg also had critical remarks that she wrote down while thinking about the revolution and its outcome in the Russian context. The increase of Bolshevik control and the moral corruption of the revolution by Lenin and his followers especially aroused her suspicion, leading her to express it with one of the most well-known sentences of her “often cited yet rarely read writing”:<sup>31</sup>

“Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for members of a party – no matter how numerous they may be – is not freedom. Freedom is always the freedom of people who think in a different way. Not because of the fanaticism of ‘justice’ but because everything that is invigorating, healing, and purifying about political

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> See exemplary David Featherstone/Christian Høgsbjerg (Eds.): *The Red and the Black. The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic*, Manchester 2021 and Brigitte Studer: *Reisende der Weltrevolution: Eine Globalgeschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Berlin 2020, pp. 58–99.

<sup>31</sup> Rosa Luxemburg/Paul Levi: *Die Russische Revolution*. Neuausgabe einer viel zitierten, aber selten gelesenen Schrift, ed. and introduced by Jörn Schütrumpf, Hamburg 2022. Unfortunately, Schütrumpf’s introduction can be called neither innovative nor well-reflected as it only includes older works and reflections in German and also seems to be stuck within older discourses that do not really offer any new insights.

freedom depends on this essence, and its effect fails when ‘freedom’ becomes a privilege.”<sup>32</sup>

With regard to her focus on freedom, Luxemburg expressed doubts that would later also be felt by Goldman, who arrived in Soviet Russia in January 1921 to witness how the Bolsheviks had transformed life after the events of 1917.<sup>33</sup> Initially, the anarchist was very optimistic and supported the Bolsheviks in the United States. From her perspective, “it was Russia to shed the first ray of hope upon an otherwise hopeless world.”<sup>34</sup> Everyone on the left, regardless of their respective self-identification as anarchist, communist, socialist, or anything in between, looked to the East because “[t]he October Revolution was the culmination of passionate dreams and longings, the bursting of the people’s wrath against the party that it had trusted and that had failed.”<sup>35</sup> While left revolutionaries cheered the success of the Bolsheviks, the American press had nothing good to say about the Russian Revolution, as the ordinary American journalists, as Goldman later remembered, were “never able to see beneath the surface, denounced the October upheaval as German propaganda, and its protagonists, Lenin, Trotsky, and their co-workers, as the Kaiser’s hirelings. For months the scribes fabricated fantastic inventions about Bolshevik Russia.”<sup>36</sup> Goldman herself, “[i]n the columns of the *Mother Earth Bulletin*, from the platform, and by every other means ... defended the Bolsheviks against calumny and slander.”<sup>37</sup> Goldman defended

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32 Luxemburg: *Zur russischen Revolution*, p. 359.

33 On Goldman’s and Alexander Berkman’s experiences in Soviet Russia, see Frank Jacob: *Anarchism and the Perversion of the Russian Revolution. The Accounts of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, in: *Diacronie* 33/2018, no. 1, online: [http://www.studistorici.com/2018/03/29/jacob\\_numero\\_33/](http://www.studistorici.com/2018/03/29/jacob_numero_33/).

34 Emma Goldman: *Living My Life*, New York 1931, ch. 47, online: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/emma-goldman-living-my-life>.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.* On Goldman’s role as an anarchist publisher and her journal *Mother Earth*, which, during the First World War, was published as *Mother Earth Bulletin*, see

Lenin and the other Bolsheviks, although they "were Marxists and therefore governmentalists"; hence, they were the ones who "had repudiated war and had the wisdom to stress the fact that political freedom without corresponding economic equality is an empty boast."<sup>38</sup>

Next to her own anti-imperialist protest against a new conscription law that brought her into conflict with the US government, it was her pro-Bolshevik attitude that made Goldman a special target of anti-left forces, like the young J. Edgar Hoover, who were eager to get rid of foreign anarchists as soon as possible.<sup>39</sup> It did not take long until Goldman was arrested and brought to trial. Again, she had to go to jail due to her protest activities, but this time, the US government did not let her off the hook. Instead, they sent her, together with more than 200 other "foreign radicals," to Soviet Russia.<sup>40</sup> After two years, however, Goldman, together with Alexander Berkman, left the homeland of the revolution again and began to criticize the Bolsheviks, who in recent years had filled "[t]he prisons of Russia, of Ukraine, of Siberia ... with men and women – aye, in some cases with mere children – who dare hold views that differ from those of the ruling Communist Party."<sup>41</sup>

Once again away from the revolutionary center of the world, Goldman turned into a fierce anti-Bolshevik who openly criticized Lenin's regime and consequently lost support from other left intellectuals. She had seen what Luxemburg could only speculate about before. Goldman was willing to tell others about her experiences to make sure people understood what she had seen in Soviet Russia:

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Rachel Hui-Chi Hsu: Emma Goldman, "Mother Earth," and the Anarchist Awakening, Notre Dame, IN 2021.

38 Goldman: *Living My Life*, ch. 47.

39 Frank Jacob: *Anarchistische Imperialismuskritik und staatliche Repression. Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman und die Kritik an der politischen Ökonomie des Ersten Weltkrieges in den USA, 1917–1919*, in: *PROKLA* 201/2020, pp. 681–695.

40 Avrich/Avrich: *Sasha and Emma*, p. 297.

41 Alexander Berkman/Emma Goldman: *Bolsheviks Shooting Anarchists*, in: *Freedom* 36/1922, no. 391, p. 4.

“What I actually found was so utterly at variance with what I had anticipated that it seemed like a ghastly dream. I found a small political group ... – the Communist Party – in absolute control .... Labour conscripted, driven to work like chattel-slaves, arrested for the slightest infringement ... the peasants a helpless prey to punitive expeditions and forcible food collection ... the Soviets ... made subservient to the Communist State ... a sinister organisation, known as the ‘Cheka’ (Secret service and executioners of Russia), suppressing thought ... the prisons and concentration camps overcrowded with men and women ... Russia in wreck and ruin, presided over by a bureaucratic State, incompetent and inefficient to reconstruct the country and to help the people realise their high hopes and their great ideals.”<sup>42</sup>

The Bolsheviks, whom Goldman later would refer to as “the Jesuit order in the Marxian Church,” had corrupted the Russian Revolution and thereby betrayed the masses while sacrificing the ideals of a possible revolutionary change and liberation. In Goldman’s view, “Communism, Socialism, equality, freedom – everything for which the Russian masses have endured such martyrdom – have become discredited and besmirched by their tactics, by their Jesuitic motto that the end justifies all means.”<sup>43</sup> With their actions, the Bolsheviks had somehow “driven a wedge between the masses and the revolution, betraying the former while corrupting the latter, and eventually ended any hope for a truly better world.”<sup>44</sup>

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42 Emma Goldman: *What I Saw*, in: *Emma Goldman Papers*, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, No. 284.

43 Emma Goldman: *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, London 1922, University of Warwick Library Special Collections, JD 10.P6 PPC 1684, p. 5.

44 Jacob: *Emma Goldman and the Russian Revolution*, p. 152.

## Conclusion

It remains questionable, of course, if Luxemburg would have drawn the same conclusions as Goldman, but if one considers the fact that the former never tried to evade a possible conflict over the future of socialism and the revolutionary course of the class struggle, it can be assumed that Luxemburg would also have criticized the Bolsheviks more openly if she had not been murdered in January 1919. And while Luxemburg can hardly be called an anarchist, this chapter was able to show that she and Goldman shared some essential values related to revolutions. Both hoped for a revolutionary upheaval not only of the working class but also of the masses that should be able to bring about change for all. At the same time, both women and revolutionary intellectuals were able to identify the danger of revolutions, namely their corruption in the name of an ideology by a small group of political "leaders" who would use their position to secure their own power, even if that meant betraying or even destroying the revolution as such.

Regardless of the fact that Luxemburg was not really an anarchist and Goldman was definitely not a Marxist, they shared some core values in their understanding of revolutionary processes and the world these were supposed to create. Similar ideas crossed their minds when they reflected on the Russian Revolution, one of the major events of their times. Although their experiences were quite different, they still reached similar conclusions, which shows that anti-Bolshevik criticism could also unite left intellectuals from different factions of the international left spectrum. Luxemburg and Goldman agreed independently of each other on several aspects of revolutions and probably would have continued to do so in the 1920s and 1930s. A revolution and its success needed to be measured by two things only: 1) Was it able to create equality, and 2) would it establish freedom for all people, especially since the wish for freedom must be considered the real reason for revolutionary ambitions?<sup>45</sup> Only a revolution that succeed-

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45 Hannah Arendt: *Die Freiheit, frei zu sein*, third edition, Munich 2018, p. 38.

ed without harming the individual freedom of others could truly be called revolutionary.

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# 11 Willy Brandt's View of Rosa Luxemburg

*Uli Schöler*

## Introduction

What the European statesman Willy Brandt tells us in a review of his early years, published ten years before his death, is unusual and not necessarily expected: “For a number of years ... there has been a sketch of the ostracized activist Rosa Luxemburg hanging in my study.”<sup>1</sup> This is certainly curious. Political practitioners and heads of governments rarely refer positively to historical figures who, in Rosa Luxemburg’s own explicit statements, have placed their theoretical work in an assertedly *revolutionary* context. This is particularly true, considering that Brandt – as we shall see in a moment – was extremely aware that Luxemburg was a personality whom the West German (Federal Republic) public viewed most unfavorably.<sup>2</sup>

## A Detailed Media Portrait in 1988

One may argue that hanging such a sketch in a private study says little about possible public acknowledgments. More significant in this respect is the fact that, six years later, Brandt again presented a detailed account of Luxemburg’s life as part of a series of broadcasts by the *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* titled “Portraits of German-Jewish Intellectual

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1 Willy Brandt: Links und frei. Mein Weg 1930–1950, Hamburg 1982, p. 19.

2 For a closer examination, see Uli Schöler: Rosa Luxemburg in der Bundesrepublik, in: Arbeit. Bewegung. Geschichte, Zeitschrift für historische Studien 21/2022, no. 1, pp. 109–121.

History,” which he also presented personally on the radio.<sup>3</sup> There is not enough space here to fully appreciate this exceptionally distinguished and knowledgeable lecture. In addition, much of what is presented in it is well-known to those interested in Luxemburg. Nevertheless, it certainly makes sense to deal with what is probably Brandt’s most important text on Luxemburg first. At the very beginning of his lecture, Brandt confronts his listeners with the massive rejection that Rosa Luxemburg had already been exposed to during her lifetime. “The Galician Woman was Beaten to Death” was a headline in a bourgeois newspaper that sought to exclude her linguistically and culturally in a contemporary context. At the same time, she was eloquent and linguistically gifted like barely any one of her adversaries. Her fatherland, she said, consisted of the great mass of working men and women and was thus greater than that of her Wilhelmine persecutors. In this sense, she saw herself more as a Jewish socialist than a socialist Jew.<sup>4</sup>

For Brandt, one thing was certain: after years of frequent changes in Luxemburg’s journalistic assignments, in times of instability, she had finally matured into a woman who had become a prominent figure of the European left in the years before the First World War. Her self-confidence was certainly not underdeveloped. Therefore, it did not take much for her to earn the reputation of an intransigent, pugnacious, and, among some opponents, a quarrelsome “wench,” as such a woman was called at the time. Her “holy anger” was not easily compatible with her immensely sensitive soul. She quickly turned out to be a speaker and publicist of passionate eloquence. Companions attested to that, but at the same time, she manifested a radiance of modesty and kindness.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Willy Brandt: Rosa Luxemburg. Sieben Jahrzehnte nach ihrem Tod, Lecture on 19 April 1988 in the Süddeutscher Rundfunk as part of the series “Portraits zur deutsch-jüdischen Geistesgeschichte”, in: Willy Brandt, *Im Zweifel für die Freiheit. Reden zur sozialdemokratischen und deutschen Geschichte*, edited with an introduction by Klaus Schönhoven, Bonn 2012, pp. 195–216.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 198–199.

Brandt thus clearly attaches importance to presenting Luxemburg not only and above all as a political being. What distinguished her for him was an arc of tension between hardness and tenderness, as well as “an impetuous objective commitment coupled with an aversion to narrowmindedness; impressive appeals to the many, but individual fears of the masses, scientific thinking mixed with artistic inclinations,” the latter including not only literature and music but also zoology and botany.<sup>6</sup>

Brandt sketches in broad strokes the development of Luxemburg within Polish, German and international social democracy. Here, too, there was no shortage of exclusionary, occasionally anti-Semitic rejections. Among other things, he quotes a German trade union newspaper, in which she was urged to go back to Russia and satisfy her revolutionary zeal there.<sup>7</sup>

### Luxemburg, Lenin, and the Russian Revolution in 1917

Two major thematic complexes form the basis of what Brandt deals with in more detail concerning Luxemburg's political positions: her controversies with Lenin and the political practice of the Bolsheviks after the Russian October Revolution of 1917, as well as her attitude toward the conflicts in and after the German November Revolution of 1918. With respect to Lenin, Brandt recalls that during the Revolution of 1905/06, she pleaded for open criticism as an element of an indispensably lively intellectual life, as an aspect of life especially for a modern workers' movement. Even after 1917, Luxemburg did not want to submit to a specifically Russian revolutionary model. As Brandt argues: “Social democracy, she believed, should not only be ‘connected’ with the workers’ movement but must be its own movement. It must be able to develop freely and should not be steered

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6 Ibid., p. 199.

7 Ibid., p. 200.

by ‘professional revolutionaries’.<sup>8</sup> In this context, spontaneity was something of a magic word for her, the ethical dimension contained therein difficult to reconcile with Lenin’s ideas.

For Brandt, these ideas, which were shaped early on, also gave rise to Luxemburg’s position on the October Revolution and the Bolsheviks’ practices of ruling. In principle, she perceived the Russian Revolution as her own cause and supported it with all her might. At the same time, she pointed out that the terror there also reflected the weakness of the European working class. Nevertheless, she characterized the practices of Lenin and Trotsky as catastrophic. At the center of her criticism was the indisputable fact that without a free press and without unhindered associations and assemblies, the rule of broad masses of the people was completely unthinkable. Brandt places the repeatedly quoted sentence about the “freedom of those who think differently” in this context, to which he adds the remarkable comment: “It is difficult for me to understand how it could be deduced by one side, then by another, that she did not want freedom (of expression) for non-communists.”<sup>9</sup>

### Luxemburg in the German November Revolution of 1918

Despite all his fundamental sympathy and recognizable understanding for her actions, Brandt’s view of Luxemburg’s behavior in the German revolution is much more critical. Her own behavior shows how difficult *realpolitik* considerations were for her and how little this deficiency can be remedied by idealism and emotion. The contrast with the leaders of the old party had increased to the point of hateful insults. A realistic program was not available to her. In all seriousness, she had emphatically expressed the opinion that minimum demands

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 206. A few years earlier, he had seen in the relevant passages of the prison pamphlet the anticipation of the postulate “No socialism without democracy.” Brandt: Links und frei, p. 188.

(for example, in the field of democratization) could be dispensed with; socialism was now the “minimum” that had to be enforced today.<sup>10</sup>

Looking back after seventy years, it was clear to Brandt that the subjective conditions in Germany were not ripe for the upheaval Luxemburg had in mind. He counts among her defeats a number of decisions she was only hesitantly involved with: the founding of the KPD as an independent party, the broad majority at the founding congress against participation in the elections to the National Assembly, and the founding of the Communist International.<sup>11</sup> What he cannot imagine, however, is that she would have endured for long in this new party, the KPD. Even though her friend Paul Levi had gone this way, the possibility of a return to what he calls the “social democratic mother church” does not really make sense to him.<sup>12</sup> So his conclusion with regard to both aspects – the criticism of Bolshevism as well as her actions in the November Revolution – remains ambivalent: There, in prison in 1918, the components of her rich personality had become so prominent that this diversity could not be achieved or even surpassed in such a short, highly problematic time: “the hermit and the thinker, the passionate interest in literature and natural sciences – and in everything, in and above all, the tragic figure of a passionate European revolutionary.”<sup>13</sup>

We should understand that it would be going too far to subject the detail of his assessments to a critical examination. In the following part, I would instead like to explore the question of how Brandt's specific view of Luxemburg's life and work is also biographically shaped. Willy Brandt, born in 1913, understandably did not have his own memories of Rosa Luxemburg. However, the manuscript of his lecture makes it clear that his view was essentially shaped by his political career as a young man during the transition from the 1920s-1930s.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 201 and 203–204.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 202 and 214.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 216.



## Willy Brandt's Political Impressions: The Leftist-Socialist SAPD

For our present purposes, the starting point is what motivated Brandt at the beginning of his youthful political career to associate himself with the left wing, first with the Socialist Workers' Youth (SAJ) and then with his friends in 1931 in the leftist-socialist SPD splinter party, the SAPD. Let us consider his view in retrospect in 1966 in the briefest form: "Like many young Social Democrats, I joined this group at the end of 1931. It had separated from official social democracy as a 'leftist' opposition. It was a separation that presented itself to us as a rebellion against a weak, powerless policy of compromise."<sup>14</sup> It can be assumed that the leftist socialist youth may have judged in this manner not only social democracy at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s but also the attitude and politics of the party in the years after the First World War. This becomes clear from another remark made elsewhere: "In my younger years, I assumed a little too surely that only the left within the left stood in the tradition of Bebel."<sup>15</sup>

If we are talking about the left within the left, then it should be reasonable to assume this was primarily in reference to the two "icons" of the left, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. It is certainly significant that Brandt's later mentor in the SAPD, Jacob Walcher, had already joined the Spartacus League during the war.<sup>16</sup> Liebknecht also enjoyed the highest reputation in the Youth International not only because of his antimilitaristic activities but also because of his youth-oriented political activities. As Brandt puts it in a nutshell: "For some of us boys, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were representatives of 'unadulterated' social democracy."<sup>17</sup>

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14 Willy Brandt: *Draußen. Schriften während der Emigration*. Ed. Günter Struve, München 1966, p. 63.

15 Brandt, *Links und frei*, p. 20.

16 On Walcher, see Ernst Stock/Karl Walcher: *Jacob Walcher (1887–1970). Gewerkschafter und Revolutionär zwischen Berlin, Paris und New York*, Berlin 1998.

17 Brandt, *Links und frei*, p. 188.

Just as the minority group of the right-wing communist KPO soon joined the SAPD, outspoken “Luxemburgians” such as Paul Frölich and Walcher also changed parties, and both of them exerted considerable influence on the young Brandt. In his review of the impressions on his political youth, Brandt vividly describes how the two men referred in different ways to Luxemburg in almost all conflict constellations but especially in their relationship with the Soviet Union of the 1930s and, later, the “war issue.” However, the dispute did not always have a positive stimulating influence on the young Brandt: “The repeated question ‘And what would Rosa have said?’ began to genuinely turn me off.”<sup>18</sup>

### On the Way to Becoming a Social Democratic Party Leader: Between Ebert and Luxemburg

However, this did not stop Brandt from dealing with Rosa Luxemburg time and again in the following decades – although with varying degrees of intensity. This distinguishes him significantly from many other actors of the political left in the context of their rise to the highest political offices, where the often-repeated motto is that as a young person, one is allowed to be a socialist or communist for reasons of morality, but among adults, this is only a matter for fools. I confess that this is a quality that makes him very sympathetic to me to this day.

His view of himself and his career is thus more reflective and differentiated at the same time. He later wrote: “The impulses of my radical youth were not destroyed. But they had grown a lot. Now I had also acquired the ability to no longer judge the leading men of the Weimar period lightly, but to pay tribute to Friedrich Ebert and his friends according to their historical rank.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>19</sup> Brandt, *Draußen*, p. 336. I have already dealt in detail with the tension between Ebert and Luxemburg in my lecture on Brandt's retrospective view of the No-

In a way, this sentence can almost be taken as programmatic for the way he encounters the quite controversial figure of Rosa Luxemburg in the years and decades of his political rise: no longer youthful admiration, but also no quick condemnation, yet also critical judgment, although here too we have to note the astonishing finding that his judgment (despite some cautious changes) shows a high degree of continuity – a state of affairs as astonishing as it is admirable.

Let us continue to pursue Brandt's preoccupation with Luxemburg and her Social Democratic opponents: a short passage from his work published in Stockholm in 1944 under the title *After the Victory* sets the tone. It says: "The revolution of 1918 had brought no real decision. The old social forces kept their heads above water.... The majority in the workers' movement was yielding, just as it had been soft on nationalism at the outbreak of war."<sup>20</sup> This short quotation shows that Brandt was critical of the behavior of the Social Democratic majority both at the outbreak of war (i. e., with the approval of war credits and the policy of civil peace) and at its end, in the treatment of power after the November Revolution, such that, in this respect, he continued to stand more with Luxemburg than with Ebert.

At the beginning of 1950, in a short text in the *Berliner Stimme*, he takes a closer look at the theme "Ebert, Weimar and Us," where we also find key passages for his later understanding (which at the same time refers back to Luxemburg). In it, he says:

"Friedrich Ebert symbolizes the great but unfortunately unsuccessful attempt to chart the path of a democratic and social republic for Germany after the First World War. The journeyman craftsman, appointed to be head of state and formed by the school of the political and trade union workers' movement, embodies the rise of the people from subjects to co-responsible actors and co-shaping citizens. In the

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vember Revolution. Ulrich Schöler: Gegen Ebert, für Luxemburg? Lecture held on 16 January 2019 at Forum Willy Brandt Berlin, Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, Berlin 2019.

20 Willy Brandt: Nach dem Sieg, Stockholm 1944; quoted in *ibid.*, p. 153.

Weimar Republic, the magnitude of this political and social process, but also its limitations, became apparent. The tasks of the bourgeois revolution were made up for – although not in all areas and with complete consistency.”<sup>21</sup>

With respect to the November Revolution, his judgment is even more critical: “Ebert approached the events of November 1918 with a basic attitude that can perhaps be called more socially preserving than revolutionary. His aim was to be able to return the bleeding and starving people to more or less normal conditions as quickly as possible. This process of state consolidation gave the forces of reaction opportunities which they soon knew how to exploit.”<sup>22</sup>

Brandt certainly considered Ebert's motivational situation, which must be appreciated positively, but at the same time, he does not refuse to look at problematic consequences: “It may well be that those [I would add: including himself, US] who considered the time had come for a radical transition to socialism at the end of the First World War were historically wrong. But even with more modest objectives, the possibilities were hardly used sufficiently to underpin the democratic republic economically and to secure it politically.”<sup>23</sup>

His assessment thus certainly takes into account the rational motives on the part of Ebert and his comrades-in-arms but laments the consequences of a too hesitant implementation of the will to transform the contemporary majority Social Democrats. In 1951, only one year later, we learn how he now assesses the actions of the extreme left around Rosa Luxemburg in the phase of the November Revolution. His short text about “grave desecrators” is actually a reckoning with the nefarious instrumentalization of Luxemburg and Liebknecht by the rulers in the other part of Germany, the GDR. While the two mentioned were internationalists, today, the Stalinist rulers act as agents of a new nationalism. While Karl Liebknecht was one of

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<sup>21</sup> Willy Brandt: Ebert, Weimar und wir, in: Berliner Stimme, February 28, 1950.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

the pioneers of a free socialist youth movement, columns of a drilled state youth group are now marching at his grave. While Rosa Luxemburg – who also came into conflict with the founders of the new Russian state – had defended the principles of workers’ democracy, “Luxemburgism” was now being fought there with the means of the concentration camp and the secret police.

His certainly new view of the two murder victims and their role in the phase of the November Revolution now reads as follows: “For however one may judge their political attitude in detail, what happened in Berlin in January 1919 happened out of a misunderstanding of the real situation – Liebknecht and Luxemburg were not terrorists. They were radical libertarian socialists. That is why they would not have participated in the further path of the Communist Party and its humiliation to the Foreign Legion. And that is why the Stalinists have no right to invoke Luxemburg and Liebknecht.”<sup>24</sup>

### Missed Opportunities of the November Revolution

It took several years for Willy Brandt to return to the topic of the November Revolution and its exploited and missed opportunities. The biography of Ernst Reuter, which he wrote together with Richard Löwenthal, could surely not have been written without this topic being addressed. Under the name Friesland, Reuter had been active in the young KPD during this phase. The two authors report in detail and competently on the disputes at the first Reich Councils Congress in December 1918, including the position taken by the majority there on the question of the demobilization of the imperial army under the control of the councils. Therefore, the delegates showed a deeper insight into the problematic situation not only as theoreticians of the Spartacus League but also as “realpolitikers” around Ebert. I quote further: “But it was precisely on the question of military force, hav-

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24 Willy Brandt: Grabschänder, in: Berliner Stimme, January 16, 1951.

ing become the real pivot of the revolution, that Ebert's attitude was determined according to quite different points of view from that of the vast majority of his followers among the workers and soldiers."<sup>25</sup>

The authors discuss the motivation of Ebert and his comrades-in-arms, for whom a coup by the Spartacists seemed probable in this chaotic time, but instead come to a different conclusion: This fear was unjustified since the leaders of both the revolutionary stewards and the Spartacus League were quite willing to respect the unfavorable majority decision of the Congress of Councils. They cited Luxemburg's draft of the Spartacus program, according to which one could not seize power until the majority of the working class had been won over to one's viewpoints. Ebert, on the other hand, saw the only sure support for his government in the command of the old officer caste, which mistrusted not only the left-wing radicals but also the majority of his own supporters.<sup>26</sup>

For Brandt and Löwenthal, however, the consequences of Ebert's policy of alliance were devastating:

“With this policy, he strengthened and embittered the radical opposition and thus created the conditions for the chain of bloody clashes between radical workers and counter-revolutionary *Freikorps*, which burdened the fate of the Weimar Republic from the very hour of its birth. From the outset, they concentrated the weapons in the hands of anti-democratic, nationalist and militarist groups, thereby separating the radical wing of the working class from the social-democratic leadership through a trench of blood, which enabled the Communist Party to maintain a massive base in Germany for years to come.”<sup>27</sup>

Let us be clear: In this reading, Ebert's policy bears the main responsibility for the bloody conflicts in the workers' movement of the

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25 Willy Brandt/Richard Löwenthal: Ernst Reuter. Ein Leben für die Freiheit, Berlin 1957, p. 117.

26 Ibid., p. 118.

27 Ibid., p. 119.

coming years and is, at the same time, the prerequisite for years of mass support in the working class for the KPD. If I understand correctly, this is Brandt's sharpest distancing from Ebert's contemporary politics (and, in this sense, an approach to Luxemburg's even harsher criticism). It certainly did not disappear in the following years, but it did become much more moderate. The effects of those failures of the majority Social Democratic policies are recorded by the authors as follows:

“On paper, it [the Weimar Reich Constitution, US] was one of the freest constitutions in the world. But the power of economic positions by heavy industry and large landowners had remained untouched. The professional army of 100,000 men provided for in the Treaty of Versailles, the *Reichswehr*, was put together from the *Freikorps*, whose members spoke with contempt about the ‘November Republic’ and its leaders, and the bureaucracy remained essentially the same. The revolution seemed to be complete – but large portions of the working class felt cheated of their hopes. Parallel to the consolidation of the new state, the radicalization of a significant part of the working class took place – understood not as an upsurge of the revolution but as an expression of disappointment with it.”<sup>28</sup>

### Exaggerated Fear of Bolshevism by the Majority Social Democrats

In a speech ten years later, when the empire had collapsed, to Ebert (as Brandt credits him for perceiving), the state was threatening to disintegrate.<sup>29</sup> However, this understanding probably does not go so far that he would have considered the threatening “Bolshevik danger”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 128–129.

<sup>29</sup> Willy Brandt: 1918 bis 1968. “50 Jahre danach”, Ceremony of the SPD on Sunday, 10 November 1968 in the town hall in Bad Godesberg, speech by SPD chairman Willy Brandt, p. 4.

repeatedly cited by Ebert and his comrades-in-arms at the time to have been a realistic description of the situation. In another speech 20 years later, we hear Brandt unmistakably say that he had always considered it a false assumption: “Despite all other relativizations, the thesis that after the end of the First World War the Bolsheviks were already in the forecourt of German state power with the help of the Spartacists has become a little-contested part of historiography. I consider this to be one of the false assumptions, if not even living lies, of our times. It would have best been put behind us long ago.”<sup>30</sup>

In 1988, Brandt leaves no doubt that this was not only a negligible error of assessment but also a misjudgment of fundamental proportions: “... this misjudgment was primarily used to leave the old powers largely untouched socio-politically, to call for right-wing extremist *Freikorps*, and to excuse the reluctance for thorough democratic renewal.”<sup>31</sup> The reverse misjudgment on the part of the radical left forces consisted in not recognizing that there could be no question of significant revolutionary potential in the true sense of this word.<sup>32</sup>

When Brandt questions the rampant fear of Bolshevism,<sup>33</sup> he does not doubt the fierceness of the contradictions within the various factions of the workers' movement. In this regard, he states:

“At the same time, there were the gruelling disputes about the content of the new order. It is an illicit simplification to see this merely as a problem of Bolshevism on German soil. The real contradiction was embodied at that time by Rosa Luxemburg, who must be under-

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30 Willy Brandt: *Deutsche Wegmarken*. Speech on September 11, 1988 in the Berlin Renaissance Theatre as part of the “Berlin Readings 1988”, in: Willy Brandt, *Schriften*, vol. 10, Bonn 2009, pp. 770–792, here p. 772.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 772–773.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 773.

33 See, among others, Peter Lösche: *Der Bolschewismus im Urteil der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1903–1920*, Berlin 1967; Uli Schöler: “Despotischer Sozialismus” oder “Staatsklaverei”? Die theoretische Verarbeitung der sowjetrussischen Entwicklung in der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands und Österreichs (1917–1929), 2nd edition, Berlin 2021.



stood as a revolutionary and as a humanist at the same time. She ... professed passionately a concept of freedom that stood in complete contradiction to what constituted the phenomenon of communism in the following five decades, with slight deviations. As is well known, she said: 'Freedom is always also the freedom of those who think differently.' It is obvious that this is a democratic socialist position, not a terrorist-communist one. But I don't want to overplay anything. The burden was so heavy then, 50 years ago, not only because there was no democratic tradition and no experience in leading a democratic state, but also because revolutionary utopianism and illusionism took up so many energies and laid them fallow."<sup>34</sup>

Brandt does not make it entirely clear that his criticism of utopianism and illusionism also referred in part to Rosa Luxemburg herself. As will be shown, this interpretation should be quite obvious. To those forces who had even more far-reaching ideas within the communist movement, who thought the only thing lacking in Germany at that time was the "radical" way, he countered, in Luxemburg's words, without naming her, that experience proves the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat "quickly and inevitably leads to the dictatorship of a party, a minority, a leading group, sometimes only one person – with all the terrible consequences that this entails. This could not be the way of the Social Democrats ..."<sup>35</sup>

Utopianism or dictatorial tendencies on the one hand, too hesitant handling of the means of power on the part of Ebert's MSPD on the other, Brandt stuck to this interpretation in his speech on the 50th anniversary of the November Revolution: "After bloody fighting, the democratic state could be built up for some time, but we have to admit that social renewal was almost at a standstill. Who wants to say with a clear conscience that he would not only have done things differently under the conditions of that time but also better? I only

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34 Willy Brandt, 1918 bis 1968, p. 4. In keeping with the times, it was not yet conceivable to speak of a (female) revolutionary or humanist.

35 Ibid., p. 8.

have the clear feeling that the question of power in the democratic state has not been asked clearly enough and that not only the domestic political opponents but, above all, the enemies of democracy have been approached far too hesitantly and squeamishly.”<sup>36</sup>

### The November Revolution as a Lesson in the Misguided Exercise of Power

In an article published exactly ten years later in the party organ *Vorwärts* on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the November Revolution, Brandt once again illustrates this “middle-of-the-road position” by taking a much closer look at the events themselves. I quote his conclusion in advance: “For the SPD, the November Revolution remains a lesson about failed power and about the prerequisites needed to exercise power.”<sup>37</sup> It is also significant that he already speaks of a “failed revolution” in the title. Another ten years later, he was to express more critically that what was called a revolution had remained more of a collapse.<sup>38</sup>

What is remarkable about his *Vorwärts* article in 1978 is, first of all, the fact that he perceives the spontaneous character of the revolutionary events as starting from below. For him, neither the political leaders of the Social Democrats in November nor those of the Spartacus League in January were at the center of events: “In the shadow of the military defeat, from autumn 1918 to the spring months of 1919, the masses rehearsed the uprising in many places in Germany. They demanded peace; they demanded bread. And they demanded – spontaneously and without a sophisticated program – democracy, many with socialist content. Measured by the result: without sustainable success. There is no way around the bitter insight that the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Willy Brandt: Die Lehren aus einer verfehlten Revolution, in: *Vorwärts* of 9 November 1978, in: Brandt, *Im Zweifel für die Freiheit*, pp. 217–223, here p. 223.

<sup>38</sup> Brandt, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 195.

history of the November Revolution is the history of its progressive withdrawal.”<sup>39</sup>

What does this assessment mean for his view of Rosa Luxemburg? First of all, how he looked back at the process of splitting the formerly United Social Democratic Party is important here. The actions of the USPD, he writes, were sufficient to bring considerable masses behind it in 1918/19 but not to conduct politics or write history. Due to its internal division, the party was unable to agree on a formative denominator (it, too, remained a child of the pre-war SPD). It could then only be a matter of time before the USPD was crushed between the social democratic majority wing and the later KPD. However, the real dividing line was not between the two social democratic parties but between them and Spartacus. And that it was drawn so was historically inevitable. On the other hand, he describes the dividing line that ran right through the middle of social democracy as disastrous in the true sense of the word. Here, what belonged together by its very nature had been separated.<sup>40</sup>

This assessment by Brandt must be surprising insofar as he later pointed out in his radio lecture that Rosa Luxemburg – like Leo Jogiches, by the way – was skeptical about the founding of the KPD as an independent party. The fact that this was an unavoidable dividing line is therefore not really conclusively developed. In this later text, he makes only a slight explanatory hint as far as Luxemburg is concerned: where she would have turned if she had remained alive, who can say? His answer is clear only in one direction: “That the Comintern would not have remained her political home seems certain.”<sup>41</sup> Brandt would definitely have seen his certainty confirmed if he had been aware of the sharp language Luxemburg had already formulated in her rejection of Leninism in a Polish-language text from 1912: “We cannot continue to cooperate with the Leninists because they are smashing this unity [of Russian social democracy] and ... ex-

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<sup>39</sup> Brandt, *Lehren*, pp. 217–218.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220–221.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

cluding from the Party all elements considered undesirable without the participation of the Party as a whole.”<sup>42</sup>

Brandt's political position between Ebert and Luxemburg described here is certainly biographically shaped and comprehensible but cannot be reproduced without criticism in toto as unproblematic. In a way, with his concentration on these two poles, he reproduces a view of history that he himself criticizes with good reason: the dichotomy between state-supporting social democracy and dictatorial Bolshevism.<sup>43</sup>

If one tries to project the position that Brandt occupies in his view of history onto the spectrum of the actors *at that time*, then it is necessary to understand this as a positioning of the so-called “Marxist center,” as it was essentially represented in the ranks of the USPD under its chairman Hugo Haase before the swing of the party majority to left-wing radical positions. Interestingly, however, and in a way that I cannot really explain, this positioning plays no role whatsoever in the historical and theoretical references that Brandt himself makes. But if he had been looking for people who had already positioned themselves similarly to himself decades later in the phase of the war and the November Revolution, he would inevitably have ended up with personalities such as Haase, Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, Rudolf Breitscheid, Rudolf Hilferding, and Heinrich Ströbel, to name only the best known and perhaps most important from this series. But such an idea does not really seem to have occurred to Brandt because he dealt far less with this strand of tradition in his party than with that of Ebert or Luxemburg.

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42 Rosa Luxemburg: Das Zerbrechen der Einheit in der Russischen Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei [1912], in: Jörn Schütrumpf (Ed.), “Mit den Leninisten können wir nicht weiter zusammengehen...” oder: Wie Lenin Rosa Luxemburg “besiegte”, Berlin 2022, pp. 5–11, here p. 9.

43 On criticism of this dichotomy, see in more detail, Uli Schöler/Thilo Scholle: On the Introduction, in: Uli Schöler/Thilo Scholle (Eds.): Weltkrieg – Spaltung – Revolution. Sozialdemokratie 1916–1922, Bonn 2018, pp. 11–32, here pp.18–20 .

## Looking Back on Old Friendships: A Broad Understanding of Social Democracy

What motivated Willy Brandt, who – as we have seen – repeatedly made references to Rosa Luxemburg in the decades before, deal so intensively with her legacy again in his later years? Clarification is provided by a fragmentary text that was published only a few years ago from the holdings of the Willy Brandt Archive in the Archive of Social Democracy at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

This text is the keyword manuscript for Brandt's funeral oration for Luxemburg's deceased student Rosi Wolfstein-Frölich, the wife of Paul Frölich,<sup>44</sup> from 1988. Brandt and the two knew one another from joint activities in and for the SAPD in exile during the 1930s. In this handwritten manuscript, Brandt opposes tendencies he observed at the time (and, I would add, tendencies that can still be observed today<sup>45</sup>), to limit the tradition of his party, the SPD, too much to the majority Social Democrats that approved war credits and supported civil peace. He notes: "[I] have always opposed it + do so today, in social democracy after [the] 2nd World War only the extension of the majority direction from the 1st World War. The SPD would make itself poorer if it had its historical benefits unnecessarily narrowed or shortened."<sup>46</sup>

Above all, we can therefore state here that it was Willy Brandt's understanding of the party in particular that made him insist that he did not want to see the tradition associated with the workers' movement exclude the name Rosa Luxemburg from the tradition of social democracy. In his understanding, therefore, both the war-affirming majority Social Democrats and the war-critical independents, such as

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44 On both, see Riccardo Altieri: "Antifaschisten, das waren wir..." Rosi Wolfstein und Paul Frölich. Eine Doppelbiografie, Marburg 2022.

45 See, among others, the example in Schöler/Scholle, On the introduction, p. 15.

46 Willy Brandt, Trauerrede für Rose Wolfstein-Frölich. Delivered by Willy Brandt on 12 January 1988 at the DGB House in Frankfurt am Main, in: Schöler, Gegen Ebert, für Luxemburg?, pp.40–45, here p. 43.

the founding group of the Spartacus League, belong to the tradition of social democracy, despite their enormous contrasts. He illustrates this once again by listing the names of those students of Luxemburg whom he had met as former Spartacists or KPD activists in exile and who had turned their backs on the Communist Party context in painful processes: Rosi and Paul Frölich, August Enderle,<sup>47</sup> Jacob Walcher, and Joseph Lang.<sup>48</sup>

This – as he calls it – “old left” before 1914 and afterward was right about many things, though not all. In this text, too, he counts it among their and thus Luxemburg’s errors to think that socialism was on the agenda in 1918/19. In any case, the coupling of militant and liberal socialist impulses in the thinking of Rosa Luxemburg and those mentioned remains “absolutely right.”<sup>49</sup> What is new about this double reference here is the emphasis on the militant alongside the liberal-socialist in the aforementioned line of tradition.

Willy Brandt is thus not one of those who – like many others in the European social democratic party family – understood the increasingly advanced integration of social democracy in recent decades into the political and economic conditions found (and at the same time changed by their own activities) as an adjustment process that could be accepted without alternatives. This is the only way to understand that he – unlike a number of other leaders of his generational cohort – fought vehemently in the late sixties and seventies for an opening of social democracy to the activists of the youth and student movement. In this context, therefore, it is also possible to say he did not forget his own youthful political impulses, which can be traced back to Rosa Luxemburg, among others, throughout his life.

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47 Unfortunately, he forgot to mention the man’s wife Irmgard.

48 Willy Brandt, *Trauerrede*, p. 44.

49 *Ibid.*

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## 12 Economics, Education, and Experience

### Working-Class Formation in the Works of Rosa Luxemburg

*Ingo Schmidt*

#### Introduction

Rosa Luxemburg was an economist, educator, and activist. To be sure, she was more than that: An emancipated woman who did not care much about the women's question. An internationalist Pole who opposed Polish independence. A secular Jew with no interest in Judaism, or what Isaac Deutscher would later call a "non-Jewish Jew."<sup>1</sup> A free-thinking mind in every respect. First and foremost, she identified herself as a socialist. That is what turned her into an activist, taking part in the Russian and German revolutions of 1905 and 1918–19, respectively. It led her to study the Industrial Development of Poland and write *The Accumulation of Capital* to better understand the economic conditions under which workers live and struggle. And it made her an educator who taught economics at the party school of the German Social Democratic Party and who wrote a textbook, *Introduction to Economics*, plus many, many newspaper articles on economic issues.

Whatever Luxemburg thought about the role of her economic work in the struggle for socialism, social democratic and communist critics dismissed that work as theoretically wrong and politically misleading. More precisely, as an economic worldview in which the unfolding of the laws of capitalist development would lead to economic breakdown and, in its wake, spontaneous working-class rebellion or even an automatic transition to socialism. According to

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1 Isaac Deutscher: *The Non-Jewish Jew. And Other Essays*, London 2017.

her critics, Luxemburg's works did not put enough emphasis on party organizing as key to socialist progress. Decades later, after social democratic and communist statism had produced its own discontents and the transition to socialism had stalled, a new generation of leftists found in Luxemburg's political writings early warnings against the ossification of working-class organization and stressed the role of workers' experiences in actual struggles in the making of working-classes and socialist movements. Others went even further and turned spontaneity charges into praise. Sharing old left interpretations of Luxemburg's works, these new left critics put all their hopes for change in a totally administered world into spontaneous rebellions.

Whatever new leftists thought about Luxemburg's political works, her economic works were still considered hopelessly economic. Lately, the economism charge has been extended to all currents of the old left, social democratic, communist, and various dissident currents of socialism. The defeat of new left mobilizations and organizing efforts triggered the turn from economic base to linguistic superstructures. What is odd about this turn, often dubbed a linguistic turn, is that it completely ignored the fact that Luxemburg, like pretty much all socialist intellectuals of the old left, divided their time between producing theoretical work, organizing, and educational activities. In other words, they were much more involved in the superstructures than with the economic base that was a main subject of their theoretical production. Moreover, at the same time as much of the left turned from economics to linguistics, neoliberal intellectuals played an important role in the capitalist turn from Keynesian accommodation to class struggle from above. If ever there was an economic worldview, it was theirs. However, it was facilitated, if not spearheaded, by the superstructures of capitalist society. What socialist intellectuals in the times of the First, Second, and Third Internationals and bourgeois intellectuals in the times of Mont Pelerin, Margaret Thatcher, and Ronald Reagan had in common was that they produced ideas that helped individuals to rally around shared worldviews and discuss strategies in pursuit of common interests. In the case of the socialist

intellectuals, their work as economists, educators, and activists played an important role in working-class formation. Neoliberal intellectuals were crucial in remaking capitalist classes in a way that allowed them to roll back the socialist challenge emanating from these working-class formations.

These days, when many of the economic analyses produced by socialists more than a hundred years ago seem to be confirmed by everyday experiences and neoliberalism has lost most of the persuasiveness it commanded in the days of Thatcher and Reagan, one wonders whether a new working-class formation will occur that could stage a fightback against the ongoing class struggle from above. One thing seems certain. If such formations emerged automatically, they would have done so quite some time ago. From the Asian crisis in the late 1990s and the end of the dot.com boom in the early 2000s to the world financial and economic crises in 2008/9, the legitimacy of neoliberal capitalism has worn thinner and thinner. But economic hopes, if anybody on the left harbored them after the linguistic turn, that economic crises would be sufficient to trigger class struggles from below have been disappointed over and over again, and there is no reason to believe the next crisis will eventually do it. It is true that economic crises were followed by a series of mobilizations that took discontent with neoliberalism to streets and ballot boxes. From the Pink Wave in Latin America to Occupy Wall Street, from the rise of Podemos and Syriza in Spain and Greece, respectively, and from Jeremy Corbyn's and Bernie Sanders' election campaigns in Britain and the US, respectively. However, all of them vanished as quickly as they appeared without leaving countercultures or organizations behind that could advance new working-class formations beyond high points of activism.

A fresh look at the intersection of economic developments, experiences, and education might help us understand how the interplay of economic crises and activism constituted working classes as collective agents of change in the past. And might do so in the future. Many socialists offered analyses of economic developments, worked as edu-

cators, or simply thought about the role of workers' experiences in creating collective capacities, but very few reflected on each of these factors of working-class formation as much as Rosa Luxemburg.

### Economics and Economism

As the economism charge weighs heavily on debates of Luxemburg's works and, worse still, the terms 'economism' and 'economics' are often used interchangeably in such debates, it is important to dissect the two before looking at the role Luxemburg assigns to economic theory in history, experiences, and education.

Her analysis of capitalist development revolves around the lack of effective demand within the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, capital accumulation relies on opening up new markets in non-capitalist milieus. The depletion of such milieus represents the final limit to accumulation. If it is reached, the capitalist economy will break down. Luxemburg develops these arguments on the basis of her reading of the schemes of reproduction Marx introduced in vol. 2 of *Capital*<sup>2</sup> in part one of her *Accumulation of Capital*.<sup>3</sup> In subsequent parts, she shows how the question of lacking demand has been discussed by various economists in different historical contexts and how it posed a concrete problem in her own times, during which colonization reached the geographical limits of capitalist expansion. On a strategic level, she insisted on the tendency toward breakdown as the basis of revolutionary and scientific socialism, which, she argued, would overthrow capitalism long before the final frontier of accumulation would be reached. Denying this tendency, e. g., by arguing that, in the footsteps of Say's Law, there will always be sufficient demand to realize everything produced, would turn socialism from an economic necessity into something that people may, or may not, wish for on purely

2 Karl Marx: *Capital*, vol. 2, London 1978 [1885].

3 Rosa Luxemburg: *Accumulation of Capital* (1913), in: *Collected Works*, vol. 2.2, London 2016, pp. 3–342.

ethical grounds. Many of the economic arguments fleshed out in *Accumulation of Capital* are already present in *Social Reform and Revolution*.<sup>4</sup> But in the latter, she is more explicit in counterposing scientific and ethical or, as she calls it then, idealistic socialism. She writes, for example, that “the scientific basis of socialism rests on three principal results of capitalist development,” the first of which is “the growing anarchy of capitalist economy, leading inevitably to its ruin.”<sup>5</sup> Denying this development and the inevitable ruin, or breakdown, of capitalism means that the “objective necessity of socialism, the explanation of socialism as the result of the material development of capitalism, falls to the ground.” In that case, socialism is no more than an “ideal whose force of persuasion rests only on the perfection attributed to it.”<sup>6</sup>

The same blend of theoretical analysis that claims to lay bare objective developments and strategic consideration that marks the works of Luxemburg can also be found in the works of her critics. Though representing different currents within socialism, criticisms during her lifetime and into the 1930s had one thing in common. They all rejected Luxemburg’s key argument that capital accumulation is constrained by a lack of effective demand. The Austromarxist Otto Bauer, for example, argued that Luxemburg’s interpretation of Marx’s reproduction schemes was simply wrong, that accumulation could continue, cyclical crises apart, indefinitely.<sup>7</sup> Socialism would not be brought about by capitalist breakdown but by conscious working-class action. This is exactly the kind of argument she rejected so strongly in Eduard Bernstein’s revisionism. Divorced from economic development leading toward breakdown, working-class consciousness is just an “ideal”; married to this development, it becomes the

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4 Rosa Luxemburg: *Social Reform and Revolution* (1899), in: Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, New York 1970, pp. 50–124.

5 Ibid., p. 58.

6 Ibid., p. 60.

7 Otto Bauer: *Rosa Luxemburg’s Accumulation of Capital: A Critique*, in: Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido (Eds.): *Discovering Imperialism*, Chicago 2012, pp. 713–744.

“simple intellectual reflection of the growing contradictions of capitalism and its approaching decline.”<sup>8</sup> Whether the development of class consciousness really is that simple will be discussed later.

On the question of the validity of Luxemburg’s economic analysis, Henryk Grossman, a member of the German Communist Party, drew on Bauer’s interpretation of Marx’s schemes to show that capitalist accumulation, if continued unimpeded by demand constraints, will lead to breakdown because of a falling rate of profit.<sup>9</sup> Nikolai Bukharin, at the time still a leading Bolshevik, also rejected Luxemburg’s demand-side explanation of the limits of capital accumulation and pointed, following Lenin’s theory of imperialism, to monopoly capital and imperialist rivalries as reasons for capitalist decay. As an additional factor, he added anti-colonial struggles that had intensified after the First World War.<sup>10</sup> The critique from Grossman and Bukharin came at a time when the Third International sought to eradicate so-called “Luxemburgism” from the communist movement and the German party in particular.

In the economic works of Luxemburg and those of her critics, abstract theoretical analysis, more or less supplemented by empirical data, exists side by side with strategic considerations. All claimed that their own theory represented objective realities and that the political conclusions drawn from it were therefore unavoidable. However, seeing how many different conclusions were drawn, one suspects that sometimes, if only subconsciously, already existing strategic positions shaped analytical designs to produce legitimacy rather than impartial analyses informing strategic debates. Soviet Marxism became particularly infamous for turning scientific efforts into a tool, albeit not a very successful one, to manufacture consent.<sup>11</sup> Interpretations of Luxem-

8 Rosa Luxemburg: *Social Reform and Revolution*, p. 60.

9 Henryk Grossman: *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*, Chicago 2022 [1929].

10 Nikolai Bukharin: *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*, New York 1972 [1926].

11 Oskar Negt: *Marxismus als Legitimationswissenschaft*, Introduction to Nikolai Bucharin and Abram Deborin: *Kontroversen über dialektischen und mechanis-*

burg's economic theory that were not burdened by the requirements of legitimacy production occurred only decades later when workers' organizations, due to their integration in state apparatuses in the East and, to a lesser degree, West, no longer served as points of reference for theoretical production of any kind.<sup>12</sup> More impartial analyses were clearly a step forward, but the retreat from practical engagement was a step back.

No doubt, the relationship between economic theory and political practice in Luxemburg's works is highly problematic. Problematic enough to justify the economism charge leveled against her by critics from different, if not hostile, currents of socialism? Leveled by people whose own work shows the same problematic relationship between economic theory and political practice. The question is difficult to answer as the term 'economism' has never been defined clearly and has been used in different ways over time. At the time that Luxemburg argued with Bernstein about the question of capitalist breakdown or endless accumulation and the strategic implications of either of these two positions, economism was the label Lenin used for a group of social democrats who suggested that Russian social democrats should abstain from political demands and mobilizations and focus on economic struggles over wages, hours, and working conditions instead. Lenin's critique of this kind of economism is well known because in it, he also sketched his basic ideas about the need and ways to organize a revolutionary party.<sup>13</sup> Luxemburg's *Social Reform and Revolution*, though written as a critique of Bernstein's claims that economic breakdown and class polarization were not key markers of capitalism at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, makes clear over and over again that she considers economic and political

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tischen Materialismus, Frankfurt am Main 1974, pp. 7–48.

12 Riccardo Bellofiore (Ed.): *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy*, London 2009; Riccardo Bellofiore, Ewa Karwowski, Jan Toporowski (Eds.): *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, Oskar Lange and Michal Kalecki, London 2014.

13 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: *What Is to Be Done?* (1902). Online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>.



struggles equally important. To give just one example, she argued that “as a result of its trade union and parliamentary struggles, the proletariat becomes convinced of the impossibility of accomplishing a fundamental social change through such activity and arrives at the understanding that the conquest of power is unavoidable.”<sup>14</sup> Not only does this quote confirm that Luxemburg could not be charged with economism in the sense of only engaging in economic struggles, but it also shows that Luxemburg considered workers’ experiences a key factor in developing class consciousness. Nevertheless, it is hard to see how experienced-based collective learning fits in with her claim that working-class consciousness is a “simple intellectual reflection of the growing contradictions of capitalism.”<sup>15</sup>

One might have thought that the “consciousness as reflection” formula would draw economism charges as it leaves no room for human agency beyond the execution of economic laws. However, it was the stress she laid on experiences in *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* and related writings that made her the target of economism charges.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the main charge was the alleged reliance on spontaneous working-class rebellions instead of organizing and education efforts. Accusations of economism played only a side role in this. Economism now meant waiting for economic breakdown as the trigger of socialist revolution. What her social democratic, and later communist, critics were missing was not workers’ agency but the leading role of the party, while Luxemburg was concerned that party organizations that tried to commandeer actions according to some plan worked out by party leaders would stifle workers’ agency, lead to bureaucratization, and therefore hinder working-class self-liberation.

Social democratic and communist critics were mostly concerned with Luxemburg’s alleged neglect of the party’s role in the struggle for socialism. The idea that the breakdown of capitalism and the tran-

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14 Rosa Luxemburg: *Social Reform and Revolution*, p. 82.

15 Rosa Luxemburg: *Social Reform and Revolution*, p. 60.

16 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906), in: Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, New York 1970, pp. 205–290.

sition to socialism are inevitable was present in many corners of the socialist movement from the First to the Third International. To be sure, it was also present in many of Luxemburg's writings. And it was proven wrong with each capitalist crisis, from the Depression of the 1870s to 1890s and the Great Depression of the 1930s to the stagflation of the 1970s. Crises much deeper than cyclical recessions occurred multiple times. However, what followed were capitalist transformations, not socialism. Since the 1970s, new readings of Luxemburg's work have pointed out that her often repeated argument that capitalist development will inevitably lead to breakdown and socialism can also be understood as an urgent call to action instead of an assurance that socialism will follow capitalist crisis automatically.<sup>17</sup> Such calls became particularly urgent, but also helpless, after Europe's ruling class was able to start the First World War without any resistance from the parties of the Second International. Militarization before the war convinced Luxemburg that crises could also take the form of political conflict instead of economic breakdown. During the war, she realized just how barbaric such a conflict could be. To avoid more capitalism-bred barbarism, she saw the struggle for socialism as even more necessary than before the war. This, in fact, was the opposite of any kind of economism.

However, the new readings of Luxemburg did not resonate very much. By the time they were initiated, political fashions on the left had changed. At the time of the stagflation crisis, Soviet communism had demonstrated its inability to break out of the bureaucratic strait-jacket it had created, and social democracy played a junior partner role in managing late capitalism. Hence, neither communist nor social democratic parties were able to lead the discontented masses that had taken the protest to streets and picket lines from the late 1960s onward into the battle for socialism as party ideologues in the times of the Second and Third International had said they would. Under

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17 Norman Geras: *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1983, pp. 13–42; Sobhanlal Datta Gupta: *Rosa Luxemburg*. Kolkata 2015, pp. 34–39.

these circumstances, the economism with which they had charged Luxemburg became the last hope for many new left activists. As crisis had arrived, rebellion ought to follow spontaneously. And it did. But only for a short time, after which left mobilizations went into retreat and neoliberalism began its ascendance. During that time, economism took on a much broader meaning. From then on, every reference to economic developments and conditions as at least one of the factors affecting agency, increasingly cleansed from references to class, was considered a denial of agency. Possibly projecting their own economistic past, leftists from the 1980s onward threw out the entire Marxist tradition as if it had all been the same and as if the bitter disputes between Luxemburg and her critics had never happened.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the left turned away from any engagement with economics at the same time as neoliberalism, reinstating economic laws as if they were natural and therefore needed to be followed by humans like the law of gravity, shows just how powerful economism can be – just not necessarily on the left.

It could actually be argued that the economism with which Luxemburg and, later, all Marxist socialists were charged did play a role in working-class formation in the late 19th century as it offered an ideational glue that individuals could use to make sense of their working and living conditions, identify with others as workers, and formulate common interests vis-à-vis the capitalist class. At a time, discontent amongst workers grew but revolution did not seem to be on the horizon, the belief that economic conditions would worsen to the point where it would come automatically or as a reward for patient union and party organizing was reassuring. However, the same economism that helped forge working classes during the ups and downs of late 19th-century capital accumulation turned out to be a detriment when war demanded swift action to stop escalating barbarism.

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18 Chantal Mouffe/Ernest Laclau: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London 1985.

## Elements of Working-Class Formation

Against the historical record of late 19th-century working-class formation and neoliberal hegemony one hundred years later, it is fair to ask whether economic theory is destined to become the ideational basis of economic ideology, as post-Marxists would argue. Or whether there could be ways of producing, distributing, and using theory in a way that helps not only to advance new working-class formations but also to serve as a critical guide to adjust socialist strategy to changing circumstances. This would include linking the production of ideas done by socialist intellectuals to workers' experiences through an education process in which intellectuals and workers contribute their respective knowledge to a collective education process so that both sides can learn from each other and develop capacities for strategizing and action.

### *Economics*

At the beginning of *Social Reform and Revolution*, written to defend the revolutionary class struggle against revisionist gradualism, Luxemburg declares as emphatically as apodictically: "The entire strength of the modern labor movement rests on theoretical knowledge." Just a couple of paragraphs further down in the same text, theories are presented as "images of the phenomena of the exterior world in the human consciousness," and class consciousness is presented, as already quoted above, as a "simple intellectual reflection of the growing contradictions of capitalism and its approaching decline."<sup>19</sup> A few years later, she confirmed her view that theory, more specifically political economy, is "above all the intellectual reflection of a specific period of economic and political development" but added that "it is more than just a reflex. The historical transition recognized by Marx cannot be

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19 Rosa Luxemburg: *Social Reform and Revolution*, pp. 55, 56 and 60.

completed without Marxian knowledge becoming social knowledge, knowledge of a specific social class, the modern proletariat. The historical upheaval formulated by Marx's theory presupposes that Marx's theory becomes a form of consciousness of the working class and as such an element of history itself."<sup>20</sup> The focus thus is widened beyond "discovering" concepts, a term she used for theoretical production in *Social Reform and Revolution*,<sup>21</sup> that help to understand capitalist development to workers embracing theory as "a compass" that the working-class can use to "fix its tactics from hour to hour, in its journey toward the one unchanging goal."<sup>22</sup>

In her *Introduction to Political Economy*, Luxemburg offers the most succinct discussion of the role economic theory plays in class formation, first in the making of capitalist classes and, once capital accumulation reaches its limits, the making of working classes also. She calls "the new science of political economy ... one of the most important ideological weapons of the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the medieval feudal state and for the modern state of the capitalist class."<sup>23</sup> A science that was "above all a means of acquiring self-consciousness, a formulation of the class-consciousness of the bourgeoisie and as such a precondition and impulse for the revolutionary act."<sup>24</sup> As capitalism becomes the dominant mode of production in parts of the world, the role of theory changes: "If it is the task and object of political economy to explain the laws of the origin, development and spread of the capitalist mode of production, it is an unavoidable consequence that it must as a further consequence also discover the laws of the decline of capitalism, ... the theoretical means of the bourgeoisie's domination" turn "into a weapon of the revolutionary

20 Rosa Luxemburg: Karl Marx, in: Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 1.2, Berlin 1988 (1903), p. 377.

21 Rosa Luxemburg: *Social Reform and Revolution*, p. 94.

22 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Junius Pamphlet* (1916), in: Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, New York 1970, p. 349.

23 Rosa Luxemburg: *Introduction to Political Economy* (1921), in: *Collected Works*, vol. 2.1. London 2016, p. 137.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

class struggle for the liberation of the proletariat.”<sup>25</sup> Responding to the rising socialist challenge, “bourgeois scholars ... [are] no longer pursuing the goal of investigating the real tendencies of capitalism, but only striving for the opposite end of concealing these tendencies in order to defend capitalism as the best, eternal and only possible economic order.”<sup>26</sup>

She never retracted her conviction that Marxist political economy was key to articulating the common interests of the working class and guiding strategies. Even in the *Junius Pamphlet*, written in response to the collapse of the Second International in 1915, she confirmed this view and, in passing, made clear that charges she would substitute organizing and mobilizing for passively awaiting spontaneous rebellions were entirely baseless: “In place of spontaneous revolutions, risings, and barricades, after which the proletariat each time fell back into passivity, there began the systematic daily struggle, the exploitation of bourgeois parliamentarianism, mass organizations, the marriage of the economic with the political struggle, and that of socialist ideals with stubborn defense of immediate daily interests. For the first time the polestar of strict scientific teachings lit the way for the proletariat and for its emancipation. Instead of sects, schools, utopias, and isolated experiments in various countries, there arose a uniform, international theoretical basis which bound countries together like the strands of a rope.”<sup>27</sup>

Crucially, this affirmation of views she had already expressed in *Social Reform and Revolution* was preceded by the following: “Self-criticism, cruel, unsparring, criticism that goes to the very root of the evil is life and breath for the proletarian movement.”<sup>28</sup> Ever since her embracing of mass strikes as the practical side of working-class formation was so strongly rejected by revisionists and the Marxist center around

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25 Ibid., p. 141.

26 Ibid., p. 145.

27 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Junius Pamphlet* (1916), in: *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York 1970, p. 349.

28 Ibid., p. 348.

Kautsky, she had realized that Marxist theory, instead of connecting otherwise scattered conflicts, can become an ossified ideology that loses touch with reality and hampers the advance of socialism instead of fueling it.<sup>29</sup>

The quotes above should make clear that Luxemburg saw economic laws as provisional, as a means helping to understand how economies will develop if the human beings that are part of them continue behaving in a given way. However, the formation of classes around theoretical ideas changes behaviors and thereby also changes the direction of development, to which theories either adjust to retain their role as reference points to articulate common interests and road map for action or become ossified ideologies that make it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve common goals.

### *Education*

Luxemburg's reflections on the role of economic ideas in class formation are very much a by-product of her work producing and distributing such ideas. It is certainly no coincidence that most of these reflections are found in *Introduction to Political Economy*, which is based on her lectures at the Social Democratic Party school, and in *Accumulation of Capital*, the theoretical magnum opus she wrote after stumbling across what she saw as inconsistencies in Marx's schemes of reproduction while preparing lectures on that topic. Reflections on the role education plays in producing and distributing ideas are rare.<sup>30</sup> However, from the few sources in which she presents her views

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29 Rosa Luxemburg: *Ermattung oder Kampf (1909/10)*, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Berlin 1988, pp. 344–377, Rosa Luxemburg: *Die Theorie und die Praxis (1909/10)*, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Berlin 1988, pp. 378–420. Rosa Luxemburg: *Das Offiziösentum der Theorie (1912/13)*, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, Berlin 1988, pp. 300–321.

30 Julia Damphouse/Sebastian Engelmann: Rosa Luxemburg and Education, in: Alpesh Maisuria (Ed.): *Encyclopedia of Marxism and Education*, Leiden 2022,

on education, it is obvious that her goal was “education for systematic and independent thinking” that should be encouraged through the “free discussion between the pupils and the teacher” as “only a lively exchange of ideas can catch workers’ attention.”<sup>31</sup>

Her goal of teaching individuals to think for themselves aligns with her views about party organizing, which relies on the “masses’ own insight into their tasks” as an “indispensable ... historical prerequisite for social-democratic action.” In other words, workers, individually and collectively, need to be able to make sense of their own conditions in order to change them. To the degree they can do that, “the relationship between the masses and the leaders is turned upside down. The only role of the so-called ‘leaders’ in social democracy is to enlighten the masses about their historical tasks.” This kind of leadership will lead to the “abolition of the [difference between] ‘leaders’ and the ‘led’ masses in the bourgeois sense, this historical basis of all class rule.”<sup>32</sup>

Luxemburg is aware that the Socratic pedagogy she advocates limits the number of participants in a course: “Discussions in which all students participate actively or even just by listening attentively can only be carried out with a limited number of participants.”<sup>33</sup> She nevertheless still prefers that pedagogy over the “rapid mass production” of trained activists that she considers “not suitable for a solid intellectual product.”<sup>34</sup> It did not even bother her that the free exchange of ideas she practiced in her courses was used by some participants to refine the kind of revisionist views she had fought against since she became active in the German socialist movement. The only thing that

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pp. 387–400; Nicholas Jacobs: *The German Social Democratic Party School in Berlin, 1906–1914*, in: *History Workshop* 5/1978, pp. 179–187.

31 Rosa Luxemburg: *Gewerkschaftsschule und Parteischule (1911)*, in: Rosa Luxemburg *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Berlin 1988, p. 550.

32 Rosa Luxemburg: *Geknickte Hoffnungen (1903/4)*, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1.2, Berlin 1988, p. 396.

33 Rosa Luxemburg: *Gewerkschaftsschule und Parteischule (1911)*, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Berlin 1988, p. 551.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 553.



did bother her was students who did not make full use of the freedoms they were given in discussions. A question she did not address was the impact a small number of activists who went through the party school could have on the socialist movement at large. Related to that is the bigger question of how to organize education in such a way that it could reach larger numbers but, at the same time, encourage each individual to think independently and contribute their own thoughts to larger groups to build collective capacities.

### *Experience*

Though she held theory in high esteem, when it came to masses of workers learning about capitalism, Luxemburg thought of protests and picket lines first and socialist theory second, stressing the “educational effect of rapid capitalist development and of social democratic influences” in a “revolutionary period.” This learning in struggle would start from a basic “class feeling” or “class instinct”<sup>35</sup> and eventually leave a “mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat, which ... offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle.”<sup>36</sup> She distinguishes between “theoretical and latent” and “practical and active” forms of class consciousness, valuing the latter much more than the former:

“In the case of the enlightened German worker the class consciousness implanted by the social democrats is *theoretical and latent*: in the period ruled by bourgeois parliamentarism it cannot, as a rule, actively participate in a direct mass action; it is the ideal sum of the four hundred parallel actions of the electoral sphere during the election struggle, of the many partial economic strikes and the like. In

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35 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906), in: Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, New York 1970, p. 264.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 234–235.

the revolution when the masses themselves appear upon the political battlefield this class-consciousness becomes *practical and active*. A year of revolution has therefore given the Russian proletariat that ‘training’ which thirty years of parliamentary and trade-union struggle cannot artificially give to the German proletariat. Of course, this living, active class feeling of the proletariat will considerably diminish in intensity, or rather change into a concealed and latent condition, after the close of the period of revolution and the erection of a bourgeois-parliamentary constitutional state.”<sup>37</sup>

The starting point of this sequence, “class instinct” or “class feeling,” seems plausible if seen from its endpoint, a developed class consciousness. If individuals share such a consciousness, see themselves and others as members of one class against another class, it is plausible to assume that this consciousness developed out of some sort of seed, a hunch that something is wrong in a world divided between haves and have-nots. However, historical processes of class formation show that a lot of hurdles needed to be overcome before individuals had something like class instincts or feelings. Most notably, they had to overcome the dominant ideologies they had grown up with – in capitalist societies, mostly a blend of liberalism, nationalism, and religion. Only if individuals came to challenge these ideologies, usually if their propositions diverged too drastically from everyday experiences, would they open up to new ideas that, as they are unclear and imbued with old ideas, may be called instinct, feeling, or embryonic class consciousness. In other words, there is no automatic sequence from instinct to experience to class consciousness. Whatever forms of consciousness individuals hold are expressed through one set of ideas or another. Whatever individuals’ experiences are, they are interpreted through the use of ideas. This is also true for processes of class formation from beginning to finish and even throughout processes of remaking classes. Of course, the ideas around which classes coalesce

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37 Ibid., pp. 265.

change through these processes. But so do the economic and social conditions and, therefore, individuals' experiences.<sup>38</sup>

If ideas and experiences, or, in more Marxist language, theory and practice, play a role at all stages of class formation, Luxemburg's distinction between theoretical and practical forms of consciousness becomes questionable. Undoubtedly, experiences gained from election campaigns and parliamentary struggles are very different from those gained from protest rallies and picket lines, but that does not mean that one is theoretical and the other practical. Both refer to different forms of practice and can, upon reflection, lead the individuals involved in them to different theoretical interpretations. More importantly, though, Luxemburg's distinction compares a non-revolutionary with a revolutionary situation without explaining why, at a certain point, the "masses themselves appear upon the political battlefield." In the Russian Revolution of 1905, they did that without living through a non-revolutionary time in which "theoretical and latent class consciousness" was "implanted by the social democrats." In other words, such theoretical preparation – in Gramscian language, one could say 'struggle over hegemony' – is not necessary in the first place. At a certain point, for whatever reason, the masses appear on the battlefield anyway. On the other hand, she argues that theoretical and latent class consciousness becomes practical and active once the masses appear on the political battlefield. But she does not say what makes them appear there in the first place. Her argument refers to German workers who went through an extended period of acquiring theoretical consciousness without much open class struggle. When such struggles intensified in the years prior to the First World War, they did not lead to revolution. Once the imperialist powers turned to war, whatever form of working-class consciousness existed did not

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38 Ingo Schmidt: Counteracting Factors. The Unmaking and Remaking of Working Classes in Europe, in: Perspectives on Global Development and Technology 14/2015, pp. 129–145; Ingo Schmidt: Economic Ideas, Capital Logic and Class Struggle: Reflections Towards a People's History of Economics, in: Society Register 6/2022, pp. 73–90.

stop workers from going to the imperial battlefield. Only after years of mass slaughter did they turn to protests, strikes, and, eventually, revolution. This historical development can be seen as confirmation of Luxemburg's view that real-life experience is key to working-class formation and politics. In a way, she saw it coming. Over and over again, she warned that a reified Marxism would neither excite the masses nor provide a proper understanding of the changing conditions to which social democratic tactics could adjust. In the *Junius Pamphlet*, she calls the "capitulation of the social democracy" a "world tragedy," pleads for "self-criticism," and reiterates her conviction that "the theoretical works of Marx gave the working-class of the whole world a compass by which to fix its tactics from hour to hour, in its journey toward the one unchanging goal,"<sup>39</sup> but she does not raise the obvious self-critical question of why the working-class abandoned its compass in the face of war. Luxemburg describes the social democratic turn from anti-war agitation to support of the war in great detail, offers an explanation of the war that draws on theoretical insights from *Accumulation of Capital*, and ends with a roadmap to rebuilding the socialist movement. Hence, on the question of why her work, and that of her allies, as an activist, educator, and economist failed to "fix tactics" in the face of war in such a way that the working class would continue "its journey toward the one unchanging goal," she remained silent.

## Outlook

Luxemburg did not flesh out a theory of working-class formation, but the question of how workers would come together and take history into their own hands was central to her work as a socialist activist and comes up in almost all of her works. Economic theory and experience can be identified as the key factors in Luxemburg's thinking

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39 Luxemburg: *The Junius Pamphlet*, pp. 348–349.

that impact working-class formation. The relations between those two factors remain unclear, though. One might think she would consider education as a factor that could mediate between economics and experiences. If theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses, the question of how that grip develops becomes crucial. Educating workers in such a way that they can use theoretical ideas to make sense of their experiences to open pathways to practice would surely be helpful. Luxemburg might have sympathized with such an approach but did not develop it herself. Her defense of applying Socratic pedagogy to a small number of activists, sympathetic as it is in light of capitalist ideology abandoning its enlightenment roots in favor of various kinds of irrationalism, is certainly not enough to enable masses of workers to use the Marxian compass to find a way to self-liberation.

The First World War was not the only defeat of the international socialist movement that neither enlightened leaders nor mass experiences could prevent. Fascism and the Second World War turned out to be even worse. However, despite these defeats, labor was, to paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm, on a forward march.<sup>40</sup> Although this march saw repeated waves of mass struggles, it was very much guided by leaders who had acquired government positions. In fact, the postwar era looked very much like the organized capitalism Rudolf Hilferding had envisioned in the interwar period.<sup>41</sup> After the war, governments adopted Keynesianism as a guide to secure high levels of employment in the West and advance catch-up development in the South. In the East, Marxism expanded its role as a guide to economic planning beyond the Soviet Union. If ever there was a period when economic theory played a practical role in economic and social developments, it was the postwar period. However, working classes were very much passive objects of top-down governance rather than agents of change. The statism that ruled the East, West, and South left no room for the

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40 Eric Hobsbawm: *The Forward March of Labour Halted?*, in: *Marxism Today*, September 1978, pp. 279–286.

41 Rudolf Hilferding: *Probleme der Zeit*, in: *Die Gesellschaft* 1/1924, pp. 1–17.

self-liberation of the working class; it was nowhere near Luxemburg's socialist vision.<sup>42</sup>

However, state-managed economies did not live up to their promises. Their top-down style of governance, exclusion of certain groups from material gratifications, and, eventually, economic crises that the application of Marxist and Keynesian ideas was supposed to prevent from happening caused massive legitimization problems. In response, most of the left, at least in the West, turned from economics to linguistics and adopted politics of recognition that left the distribution of income and wealth untouched.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the conceptive intellectuals of the capitalist classes forged a marriage between economics and linguistics. Appealing to the experiences of consumers and citizens, not workers, they used the cultural industries of late capitalism to propagate a market populism that gripped the masses in ways Marxism had never done.<sup>44</sup> Arguably, the market-populist appeal to everyday experiences and its interpretation through neoliberal theories was key to this success: If consumers cannot live beyond their means, neither can the state. If prices for a certain commodity go down, consumers, always short of cash, may buy them. So, if somebody cannot sell their labor, it is probably because it is too pricey. Taxes enrich welfare state bureaucracies at the expense of ordinary people in the same way the feudal state did. These propositions were persuasive because they contrasted the mystifications of capital, labor, and land as independent sources of wealth and the principles of freedom and equality that govern commodity exchange with state interventions violating those liberal ideals. Marx and Lukács theorized

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42 Ingo Schmidt: Updating Rosa Luxemburg. The Accumulation of Capital and the Statist Detour of 20th Century Socialism, paper presented at the Socialist Studies Conference, May 30 – June 2, 2017, Toronto.

43 Nancy Fraser: Fortunes of Feminism From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis, Part II. From Redistribution to Recognition in the Age of Identity, London 2020.

44 Ingo Schmidt: Market Populism, it's Right-wing Offspring and Left Alternatives, in: Stephen McBride/Bryan Evans/Dieter Plehwe (Eds.): The Changing Politics and Policy of Austerity, Bristol 2021, pp.

this capitalist ideology *sui generis* as commodity, money, and capital fetishism and reification, respectively.<sup>45</sup> However, they would probably have had a hard time imagining the scale on which this ideology gripped the masses under late capitalism.

However, recurrent crises, far from signaling a breakdown of the capitalist system, have loosened that grip to a degree where alternatives become thinkable. If neoliberals could link the experiences of people in their role as consumers and citizens to their brand of economic theory and help to unmake previously existing working classes, why would socialists not be able to link the experiences of workers, who, of course, are also consumers and citizens, to alternative economic theories and thereby help to remake working classes? In place of the cultural industry that neoliberals were able to mobilize for their project of unmaking working classes and whatever gains they had won along their forward march, socialists would have to create spaces in which educators listen to workers talking about their experiences, frustrations, and aspirations and engage in dialogue so that both sides can learn from each other. This may build on the Socratic pedagogy Luxemburg was so fond of but would seek to reach beyond a small number of activists and make experiences a building block of collective learning. This would be more in line with Paulo Freire than with Socrates.<sup>46</sup>

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45 Karl Marx: *Capital*, vol. 1, ch. 1.4: *The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret* (1867), London 1976. Karl Marx: *Capital*, vol. 3, ch. 48: *The Trinity Formula*, London 1981 (1894). Georg Lukács: *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* (1923). Online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/>.

46 Paulo Freire: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York 2018 (1970).

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# 13 Rosa Luxemburg and Samir Amin

## Theory of Accumulation, Imperialism, and the Socialist Challenge in South Africa

*Gunneth Kaaf*

### Introduction

Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism continues to have resonance in contemporary debates on imperialism and struggles for socialism in the 21st century. In summarizing Luxemburg's theory of imperialism, Samir Amin points out that Luxemburg argued that capitalist accumulation, which happens through the realization of surplus value, implies relations of exchange between capitalist societies on the one hand and pre-capitalist social formations on the other.<sup>1</sup> In other words, she concluded that the (fully developed capitalist) centers and the (incompletely developed capitalist) peripheries formed two groups necessarily associated through all stages of capitalist expansion, which is accumulation by dispossession.

Luxemburg is undoubtedly a pioneering thinker of capitalism as essentially a global system. Tadeusz Kowalik is correct when he asserts that *The Accumulation of Capital* by Luxemburg is a thorough study of connections and contradictions between developed economies and what today is called the Third World.<sup>2</sup> For Luxemburg, this was fertile soil for wars, revolutions, or at least for the permanent instability of the world economy. After more than a century of bitter experiences of global polarization and unequal development between centers and peripheries, not many political and economic analysts would deny that these questions continue to be of utmost importance.

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1 Samir Amin: *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*, London 1990, p. 8.

2 Tadeusz Kowalik: Introduction to the Routledge Classics Edition, in Rosa Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital*, London 2003.

Helen Scott observes that Rosa Luxemburg is one of the most significant political figures of the 20th century: she developed an analysis of imperialism that apprehended not only its economic and political but also its social, cultural, and human dimensions; she resolutely opposed capitalist militarism; she was a leading theorist and strategist; and she was an activist, from her first party work among miners in Upper Silesia, through her speaking tours to mass crowds after the 1905 Russian revolution, to her agitation among revolutionary workers on the streets in the final days of her life.<sup>3</sup>

This contribution discusses Rosa Luxemburg's theory of accumulation and imperialism and reconstructs Luxemburg's relevance to today's struggles for a socialist path in South Africa as a country in the periphery of the global capitalist system. The work of Samir Amin shall be extensively relied upon, given that Amin continues Luxemburg's theory of accumulation on a global scale marked by unequal exchange from a Global South perspective. Perhaps what is common between Luxemburg and Amin, which makes them unique in their respective generations, is that they put imperialism firmly at the center of the process of capitalist accumulation. There is also a lot that is common in their political backgrounds. For example, they were both university-trained intellectuals with PhDs in economics who were committed communists for all their adult lives.

Luxemburg was a party leader and intellectual who wrote articles to develop socialist strategy for her times and conducted political education lessons at the party school of her movement, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Like Amin, she did not start and end with Karl Marx. Unlike most followers of Marx, she clearly understood that she did not necessarily have to end with him. Though he was a genius, Marx did not develop a template that we must simply apply eternally. Marx's opus remains open-ended and incomplete. That is why she sought to advance Marxism and develop it further in

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3 Helen Scott: Rosa Luxemburg and Postcolonial Criticism: A Reconsideration, online: <https://spectrejournal.com/rosa-Luxemburg-and-postcolonial-criticism/>.

light of the changing historical and social reality. In fact, she wrote her magnum opus, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism*,<sup>4</sup> in that mode of thinking. While drafting her *Introduction to Political Economy* for the party school, she came up against a difficulty in how the capitalist reproduction process happened according to Marx's expanded reproduction schema or model.

Samir Amin was a renowned Marxist thinker and economist who passed away in August 2018 in Paris. Born in Cairo on September 3, 1931, to an Egyptian father and a French mother, he obtained his initial education in Egypt before moving to Paris, where he obtained his doctorate in economics. Drawn to the cause of socialism from his student days, Amin soon became a member of the Egyptian Communist Party. Between 1957 and 1960, he worked at the Institute for Economic Management in Cairo before Gamal Abdel Nasser's growing repression of the communists drove him out of Egypt. He eventually settled down in Dakar, Senegal, first as the Director of the UN African Institute of Economic Development and Planning and later as the Director of the African Office of the Third World Forum.

Paying tribute to Amin, Prabhat Patnaik correctly points out that two characteristics set him apart from most other Marxist intellectuals of his time.<sup>5</sup> The first was his total and absolute commitment to praxis for the cause of socialism. He was not a mere armchair theorist who used Marxist tools to analyze the contemporary reality as a form of detached intellectual activity. On the contrary, he was a passionately committed activist for whom intellectual activity was quintessentially an aid to praxis. He was forever trying to organize fellow activists to make effective interventions to bring about change and was closely associated with real movements, both the communist movement in

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4 Rosa Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism*, in: Peter Hudis/Paul Le Blanc (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. II. *Economic Writings 2*, New York 2015 (1913).

5 Prabhat Patnaik: *In Memoriam: Samir Amin*, online: <https://www.networkideas.org/news-analysis/2018/09/in-memoriam-samir-amin/>.

Senegal and several NGO movements, all of which looked to him for help and guidance.

The second characteristic was the centrality he accorded to imperialism in his Marxist analysis, which is so different from what one normally finds both among First-World Marxists (with rare exceptions like the *Monthly Review* group) and also among many Third-World Marxists who, oddly, see in neo-liberal globalization a withering away of imperialism. Amin, in contrast, not only saw imperialism as central to capitalism but placed it firmly within the framework of the labor theory of value through his theory of unequal exchange, the law of worldwide value, for which he is justly celebrated.<sup>6</sup>

### Theory of the Accumulation of Capital

As Jan Toporoswki points out, Tadeusz Kowalik's book, *Róż'a Luxemburg Teoria Akumulacji i Imperializmu (Rosa Luxemburg: Theory of Accumulation and Imperialism)*, published in 1971, the English language edition of which only came out in 2014, is probably the best monograph devoted to Luxemburg's masterpiece in 20th-century political economy, *The Accumulation of Capital*.<sup>7</sup> In this book, Kowalik explains Luxemburg's attempt to correct Marx's analysis of capitalist reproduction. But the book goes far beyond an exposition of Luxemburg's theory. While dealing with the criticisms that the latter's work aroused and the many weaknesses in her argument, Kowalik demonstrates her analysis of the link between Marx's schemes of capitalist reproduction (in Volume II of *Capital*) and mid-20th-century macroeconomics. Kowalik's book therefore puts forward Luxemburg's major theoretical work as the foundation for a critique of 20th-century political economy.

It was while lecturing on political economy at the SPD political school that Luxemburg first realized that there was something wrong

<sup>6</sup> See Samir Amin: *The Law of Worldwide Value*, New York 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Toporoswki: Preface, in: Tadeusz Kowalik: *Rosa Luxemburg: Theory of Accumulation and Imperialism*, New York 2014.

with the way in which Marx resolved the problem of how profits are realized as money (as opposed to surplus commodities). The result was her book, *The Accumulation of Capital*, in which she identified the key flaw in the standard interpretation of Marx that seeks to derive the characteristics of capitalism from exploitation. Luxemburg tried to show that it cannot explain the monetization of profits. She came to the conclusion that the conversion of surplus value into money can only be achieved by finding external markets for capitalism or by the armaments industry. The search for external markets and militarism together lead to imperialism.<sup>8</sup>

As Kowalik shows, her attempt was not altogether successful or consistent.<sup>9</sup> However, it was the first crack in the then-standard underconsumptionist interpretation of Marx, the notion that capitalist depression and crisis arise because the worker is not paid the full value of his or her labor. This interpretation reached its apogee in Paul Sweezy's widely respected *The Theory of Capitalist Development* but seems to be revived every time capitalist countries fall into depression, for example, in the 1970s, as well as in the more recent preoccupation with the 'wage share' among radical economists. Luxemburg was initially widely regarded as an underconsumptionist; indeed, Sweezy memorably referred to her as "the queen of underconsumptionists."<sup>10</sup> He later changed that view in *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*,<sup>11</sup> which he jointly wrote with Paul Baran. This book marked a shift away from the underconsumptionism of Sweezy's 1942 book and recognized the vital role of business investment and government expenditure in the realization of profit along lines similar to those originally put forward by Kalecki.

8 See Chapter 32: Militarism in the Sphere of Capital Accumulation, in: Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital*.

9 See Chapter 3: Aggregate Demand and the Accumulation of Capital, in: Kowalik: *Rosa Luxemburg: Theory of Accumulation and Imperialism*.

10 Paul M. Sweezy: *The Theory of Capitalist Development: Principles of Marxian Political Economy*, New York 1942, p. 171.

11 Paul A. Baran/Paul M. Sweezy: *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, New York 1966.

Kowalik's book presents a much more complex analysis based on the theory of his second mentor, the great Polish Marxist economist Michał Kalecki, whose business cycle analysis of the capitalist economy ironed out previously existent theoretical inconsistencies. Kowalik's book is a guide to Luxemburg's work and explains the background of the debates about the future possibilities of capitalism in Russia between the Narodniks and the 'Legal Marxists,' of whom the most important was Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky, who put forward pro-cyclical shifts in bank liquidity as a cause of financial crisis and instability in ways similar to Luxemburg's analysis of the role of international banks in financial crisis. However, in the course of writing the book, Kowalik brought into his analysis the key figures of mid-20th-century political economy in a strikingly original way. Not only does the structure of that political economy become clearer, but it is also integrated around the critical questions in Luxemburg's analysis of capitalist accumulation.

For Kowalik, the central figure through whose work all these very different writers are connected is Kalecki. Kowalik gives Kalecki a much more central role as the link between the Marxian political economy of Luxemburg, Tugan-Baranovsky, Rudolf Hilferding, and others and mid-20th-century Keynesian political economy. In his *Essays in the Theory of Economic Fluctuations* (1939), published on the eve of the Second World War, Kalecki expressed this connection in relation to Rosa Luxemburg as follows: "The theory cannot be accepted as a whole, but the necessity of covering the 'gap of saving' by home investment or exports was outlined by her perhaps more clearly than anywhere else before the publication of Mr. Keynes's *General Theory*."<sup>12</sup> In his book, Kowalik challenged the underconsumptionist interpretation of Luxemburg's theory and identified himself with Kalecki's interpretation that under-investment is the critical problem of modern capitalism.

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12 Michał Kalecki: *Essays in the Theory of Economic Fluctuations*, London 2023 [1939], p. 46.

Kowalik's reconstruction of capitalist political economy around Marx's schemes of reproduction led him, in the second part of his book, to reject the idea that Kalecki was a mere 'precursor' of John Maynard Keynes. Rather, Keynes saw in an imperfect way what Kalecki realized much more clearly from Marxist discussions about the work of Luxemburg.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Kalecki's theory of macroeconomics is substantively different from Keynes's theory, even though there are similarities. These differences go beyond the timing of their publication; for clarity, Kalecki published his basic ideas in 1933 and 1935, whereas Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* came out in 1936.

In his two-volume intellectual biography of Kalecki, Toporowski discusses in detail the differences between Kalecki's and Keynes's theories.<sup>14</sup> In *Studies in the Theory of Business Cycles*, published in Polish in 1933, Kalecki clearly stated the principle of effective demand in mathematical form. In 1935, he outlined his theory of employment, demolished the orthodox remedy for depression – that is, wage-cutting – and pinpointed the importance of investment for economic dynamics. Thus, although his training had been in Marxist economics, he succeeded in anticipating the system elaborated in Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. As Robinson has pointed out, Kalecki's claim to priority of publication is indisputable, although he never mentioned this fact.<sup>15</sup> The interesting thing is that the two thinkers came from completely different political and intellectual starting points. Kalecki's analysis of the dynamics of the capitalist economy was inspired by the labor theory of value, Marx's reproduction schemas, and class-based economic analysis, and thus,

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13 See John Maynard Keynes: *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, London 1936.

14 See Jan Toporowski: *Michał Kalecki: An Intellectual Biography*, vol. 1. *Rendezvous in Cambridge, 1899–1939*, Basingstoke 2013; Jan Toporowski: *Michał Kalecki: An Intellectual Biography*, vol. 2: *By Intellect Alone*, Basingstoke 2018.

15 See Joan Robinson: Introduction, in: *Mikhail Kalecki: Essays on Developing Economics*, Plymouth 1974, pp. 7–8.



his conclusion was socialist, looking forward to the overthrow of capitalism. While Keynes's theory of aggregate demand was a rupture within the neoclassical economics that legitimate capitalism, he never really outgrew the neoclassical method and remained largely trapped within the capitalist framework.

Ernest Mandel praised Luxemburg, though he still criticized her:

“Rosa Luxemburg well understood that the form of the reproduction schemas applies only to capitalist commodity and value production, and that the laws of motion corresponding to that form can have no validity in non-capitalist societies. But even she erred by attaching to the ‘equilibrium proportions’ derived from the schemas an a-historical, eternal validity which they do not and cannot possess.”<sup>16</sup>

Mandel goes on to make his second point about Luxemburg's analysis, namely that if a socially appropriated surplus product is substituted for surplus value, then the equilibrium formula takes on a new form that expresses the different social goal of reproduction, corresponding to the changed social structure. Surplus value, according to Mandel, is not simply a part of the total value of commodities produced under capitalism, nor is it just a fraction of the newly produced value product (the national income). It is also the goal of the capitalist production process. As such, it is much more than a mere symbol in a reproduction schema intended to represent reality at a high level of abstraction. For Marx, the schemas refer to the reproduction of quantified use-value and exchange-value in a given proportion. But they also express the reproduction of capitalist relations of production themselves.

Mandel concludes his critical assessment of Luxemburg's intervention by conceding that, on the third level, i. e., the actual historical process of capital accumulation, the Polish-German socialist seems to be fundamentally correct. The final balance sheet of Luxemburg's

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<sup>16</sup> Ernest Mandel: Introduction, in: Karl Marx: Capital, vol. 2, trans. by David Fernbach, London 1978, pp. 34–35.

critique, then, must be a nuanced one. We cannot say baldly that she is right or wrong. While many of her partial theses, as well as her final answer, are inadequate, she certainly poses relevant questions and puts her finger on real problems that volume 2 of *Capital* does not and cannot answer. In particular, the contradictory character of capitalist growth, a discussion of which was stimulated by her seminal *The Accumulation of Capital*, cannot be simply subsumed under the formulas “anarchy of production” and “disproportionality.”

In his paper “Rosa Luxemburg and Finance,” Toporowski highlights Rosa’s contribution to the role of finance in the accumulation of capital.<sup>17</sup> He reminds us that Luxemburg is best known for her attempt in *The Accumulation of Capital* to show that capitalist accumulation requires external markets in order to overcome a tendency to stagnation. However, in Chapter 30, “International Credit,” Luxemburg examined the role of finance in capital accumulation. This analysis was perhaps peripheral to her argument. But it has sufficient critical elements to warrant a place for her among the pioneers of critical finance, while the fate of that analysis among Marxists reveals how the most important school of radical political economy in the 20th century came to an attenuated view of finance as a factor in capitalist crisis. Toporowski argues that Luxemburg put forward an analysis of international finance that not only allows for a disturbing character of finance but also anticipates important aspects of Hyman Minsky’s analysis of the destabilizing role of finance in the capitalist economy in the second half of the 20th century.<sup>18</sup>

Luxemburg also observed the destructive role of debt that developed capitalist states of the Global North use to keep countries of the Global South under their tutelage. Accordingly, she anticipated the debt crisis through which finance capital has recolonized countries of the Global South since the 1980s and, in a way, predicted theoretical discussions about underdevelopment and world-systems theory.

17 See Jan Toporowski: Rosa Luxemburg and Finance, in: Riccardo Bellofiore (Ed.): Rosa Luxemburg and The Critique of Political Economy, New York 2009, pp. 81–82.

18 See Hyman P. Minsky: Stabilizing An Unstable Economy, New York 1986.

“In the imperialist period, sovereign bond issues play a fundamental role as a means by which emerging capitalist states can become independent. The contradictions of the imperialist phase are tangibly manifested in those of the modern system of international credit. International credit is indispensable for the emancipation of the emerging capitalist states, yet at the same time it represents the surest means by which the older capitalist states can keep the emerging ones under their tutelage, retain control over the latter’s finances, and exert pressure on their foreign policy and their policies on tariffs and trade. International credit is the means of choice for opening up new spheres of investment for accumulated capital as a whole; yet the same process acts to restrict this scope by creating new competitors for the older countries.”<sup>19</sup>

Samir Amin therefore continued Luxemburg’s approach of treating capitalism as essentially a global system in a deeper and systematic way.<sup>20</sup> Amin engaged in a unique lifelong mission of 60 years, starting in 1957 with his PhD dissertation, “The Origins of Underdevelopment: Capitalist Accumulation on World Scale,” of analyzing global capitalism as a system of accumulation marked by a polarization between developed countries of the Global North and underdeveloped countries of the Global South. The unequal exchange implies an unequal development that blocks the rapid economic development of countries of the Global South, especially in dynamic sectors of

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19 Luxemburg: *The Accumulation of Capital*, p. 305.

20 Amin has articulated these views in many of his works over the last 50 years since he published his magnum opus in 1974, *Accumulation on A World Scale*. His other major works include *Unequal Development: An Essay on Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (1976), *Class and Nation, Historically and in its Current Crisis* (1980), *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World* (1990), *Maldevelopment: Anatomy of Global Failure* (1990), and *Eurocentrism* (2009). But for ease of reference regarding my discussion here, I refer the reader to the following works: *Delinking* (1990), *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* (1998), *The Law of Worldwide Value* (2010), *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?* (2011), and *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism* (2013).

industry. This accumulation of countries of the Global North by dispossessing countries of the Global South creates a center-periphery hierarchy and domination that makes a catch-up development for countries of the Global South to be at the level of the Global North impossible. South Korea is the only country in the Global South that has fully developed to become a true high-income country after the Second World War. However, even in this case, there was the geopolitics of the Cold War, in which the US wanted to encircle China with its allies; thus, South Korea was given easy access to capital markets to finance its development.

Amin identified five monopolies of global capitalism that maintain an unequal exchange between center and periphery:

- technology;
- access to natural resources;
- finance;
- international communication and the media; and
- means of mass destruction.<sup>21</sup>

In the unequal fight of the world system, states from the center use their control over these five monopolies. When taken as a whole, these monopolies define the framework within which the law of globalized value operates. Amin further suggested new approaches to a Marxist analysis of the crisis of late capitalism of generalized, financialized, and globalized monopolies following the financial collapse of 2008.<sup>22</sup>

Amin developed a law of worldwide value that extends Marx's law of value, with innovative improvements by Sweezy and Baran, to a form of monopoly capitalism whose accumulation is driven by the concept of economic surplus. The accumulation of this monopoly capitalism is driven by three departments instead of two. In this model, Department I produces capital goods and Department II produces

21 See Samir Amin: *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*, Cape Town 1998, pp. 4–5.

22 See Amin: *The Law of Worldwide Value*; Samir Amin: *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism*, New York 2013.

consumer goods, as outlined in Marx's reproduction schemas. Baran and Sweezy added Department III for the absorption of capital without investment outlets. This department is mainly made up of state expenditures and the arms industry.

The concept of an imperialist rent through which the Global North dominates global trade is central to Amin's theory. In this regard, the value produced in the Global South is transferred to the Global North. This is done through the huge profits that accrue to corporations of the Global North that have operations in the Global South. The vast differences between the wages of workers of the Global South and those of the Global North with the same productivity explain not only the sizeable cheap labor available in the South but also the super-exploitation of workers in these regions. The capital investment in the countries of the Global North is mobilized from local markets, savings, and sovereign capital markets, whereas production in the Global South is driven by foreign capital investment. That is the asymmetry of the global system.

The "development of underdevelopment," a phrase coined by Amin, is consequently the trajectory of developing countries because they are subjected to an "accumulation by dispossession," a phrase coined by David Harvey deriving from Luxemburg's analysis.<sup>23</sup> That is why I think Amin is the intellectual who best continued Luxemburg's theory of the accumulation of capital, particularly from the perspective of the Global South. The crisis of capitalism, which is a crisis of accumulation, has worsened since the Great Recession of 2008/09, becoming a long depression, as Michael Roberts shows, made worse still by the Covid slump.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Harvey is now one of those Western Marxist intellectuals who advocate for the abandonment of the concept of imperialism in favor of a more fluid understanding of competing and shifting hegemonies within the global state system, which was Giovanni Arrighi's position. See David Harvey: A Commentary on A Theory of Imperialism, in: Utsa Patnaik/Prabhat Patnaik: A Theory of Imperialism, New York 2017.

24 See Michael Roberts: The Long Depression: How It Happened, and What Happens Next, Chicago 2016.

## Luxemburg's Theory of Imperialism

Luxemburg's theory of imperialism, which derived from her theory of the accumulation of capital, shows that capitalist accumulation requires external markets to overcome a tendency toward stagnation. Unlike some senior leaders of the SDP and Second International,<sup>25</sup> she did not think of colonization as having a civilizing effect on the peoples of the Global South. In fact, as Paul Le Blanc points out, the destructive impact of all this on the cultures of the world's peoples was emphasized by Luxemburg as by no other Marxist theorist of her time: "The ravenous greed, the voracious appetite for accumulation, the very essence of which is to take advantage of each new political and economic conjuncture with no thought for tomorrow, precludes any appreciation of the value of the works of economic infrastructure that have been left by previous civilizations."

A special feature of Luxemburg's contribution in this regard is her anthropological sensitivity to the impact of capitalist expansion on the rich variety of the world's peoples and cultures, which one cannot find in the key works of Hilferding,<sup>26</sup> Lenin,<sup>27</sup> or Bukharin.<sup>28</sup> Her survey of capitalist expansionism's impact in *Accumulation of Capital* includes such examples as the following:

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25 Le Blanc documents instances where leaders of the European socialist movement were promoting revisionist concepts such as "progressive" colonialism and downplaying the significance of colonialism in polarizing the world by propagating a static understanding of Marx's perspective while still being inclined to see imperialism in terms far less grim than Luxemburg would allow. Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky are cited as leading protagonists in this regard. See Paul Le Blanc: Introduction: Rosa Luxemburg and the Global Violence of Capitalism, in: Peter Hudis/Paul Le Blanc (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. II. *Economic Writings*, London 2015, pp. xiii–xiv.

26 Rudolf Hilferding: *Finance Capital: A Study in the Latest Phase of the Capitalist System*, London 2006 (1911).

27 Vladimir Lenin: *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, London 2010 (1916).

28 Nikolai Bukharin: *Imperialism and World Economy*, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1917/imperial/>.

- the destruction of the English peasants and artisans;
- the destruction of the Native American peoples (the so-called Indians);
- the enslavement of African peoples by the European powers;
- the ruination of small farmers in the midwestern and western regions of the United States;
- the onslaught of French colonialism in Algeria;
- the onslaught of British colonialism in India;
- British incursions into China, with special reference to the Opium Wars; and
- the onslaught of British colonialism in South Africa, with lengthy references to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, a conflict between the British Empire and the two Boer Republics over the Empire’s influence in South Africa.<sup>29</sup>

According to Amin, imperialism is based on a center-periphery polarization of the global system in which accumulation by dispossession occurs. He contends that Lenin and Bukharin considered imperialism to be a new stage (“the highest”) of capitalism associated with the development of monopolies. With the benefit of hindsight, Amin highlights the limitations of their analyses. He then questions their theses and asserts that historical capitalism has always been imperialist in the sense that it has led to a polarization between centers and peripheries since its origin (in the 16th century), which has only increased over the course of its later globalized development. The 19th-century pre-monopolist system was not less imperialist. Great Britain maintained its hegemony precisely because of its colonial domination of India. Lenin and Bukharin thought that the revolution that began in Russia (“the weak link”) would then continue in the center (Germany in particular). Their hope was based on an underestimation of the effects of imperialist polarization, which de-

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<sup>29</sup> See Le Blanc: Introduction, pp. xv–xvi.

stroyed revolutionary prospects in Europe as the center of global capitalism.

Amin identified the US, Europe, and Japan triad as the leading imperialist collective after the Second World War, replacing the imperialism of individual powers of the pre-Second World War era (Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and the US).<sup>30</sup> In this triad, Europe and Japan are subordinate to the United States. The latter's hegemony, however, is in decline. Two factors still keep its hegemony afloat: the US dollar and the US army.

There is a two-fold challenge confronting the peoples and states of the Global South: (1) the lumpen development that contemporary capitalism in all peripheries of the system has nothing to offer three-quarters of humanity; in particular, it is leading to the rapid destruction of peasant societies in Asia and Africa, and consequently, the response given to the peasant question will largely govern the nature of future changes and increase poverty in urban centers; and (2) the aggressive geostrategy of the imperialist powers, which is opposed to any attempt by the peoples and states of the periphery to get out of the impasse, forcing the peoples concerned to defeat the military control of the world by the United States and its subaltern European and Japanese allies. Some nevertheless draw two correlates from the thesis of the emergence of a globalized production system: the emergence of a globalized bourgeoisie and the emergence of a globalized state, both of which would find their objective foundation in this new production system.<sup>31</sup> Amin's interpretation of the current changes and crises leads me to reject these two correlates. There is no globalized

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30 Samir Amin: *Contemporary Imperialism*, in: *Monthly Review* 67/2015, no. 3.

31 Even Bukharin thought the economy's concentration and centralization would lead to a universal cartel: see Chapter XII, in *Imperialism and World Economy*. Hilferding also thought global capitalism would stabilize through the creation of a single cartel that guides global production. See Hilferding: *Finance Capital*. Hardt and Negri posit that an empire has emerged, defined as a global power without borders and transcending nations. See Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri: *Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2000.



bourgeoisie (or dominant class) in the process of being formed, either on a global scale or in the countries of the imperialist triad.

Amin then emphasized that the centralization of control over the capital of the monopolies takes place within the nation-states of the triad much more than it does in the relations between the partners of the triad or even between members of the European Union. The bourgeoisies (or oligopolistic groups) are in competition within nations (and the nation-state manages this competition, at least in part) and between nations. Thus, German oligopolies (and the German state) took on the leadership of European affairs not for the equal benefit of everyone but, above all, for their own benefit. At the level of the triad, it is obviously the bourgeoisie of the United States that leads the alliance, once again with an unequal distribution of the benefits. The idea that the objective cause – the emergence of the globalized production system – entails ipso facto the emergence of a globalized dominant class is based on the underlying hypothesis that the system must be coherent. In reality, Amin argues, it is not possible for it to be coherent. In fact, it is not coherent; hence, this chaotic system is not viable.

The advantage derived from the triad's dominant position (imperialist rent) allows the hegemonic bloc formed around the generalized monopolies to benefit from a legitimacy that is expressed, in turn, by the convergence of all major electoral parties, right and left, and their equal commitment to neoliberal economic policies and continual intervention in the affairs of the peripheries. On the other hand, the neo-comprador bourgeoisies of the peripheries are neither legitimate nor credible in the eyes of their own people because the policies they serve do not make it possible to “catch up” and most often lead to the impasse of lumpen development. The instability of the current governments of the peripheries of the Global South is thus the rule in this context.

Just as there is no globalized bourgeoisie even at the level of the triad or that of the European Union, there is also no globalized state at these levels. Instead, there is only an alliance of states. This alliance,

in turn, willingly accepts the hierarchy that allows it to function: general leadership is taken on by Washington, and leadership in Europe by Berlin. The nation-state remains in place to serve globalization as it is. South Africa, on the other hand, is a microcosm of global contradictions that derive from capitalist imperialism, such as acute wealth and income inequality, racism, foreign capital domination in the economy, gender oppression, xenophobia, urban decay and extreme poverty, rural underdevelopment and pauperization, mass unemployment, climate change, and ecological crisis. That is why South Africa is the storm zone for social and political struggles that should crystalize new internationalism, thereby posing a formidable challenge to global capitalism.

Patrick Bond contextualizes Luxemburg's imperialism better, arguing that, for South Africans, Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* offers a profoundly relevant contribution to the Marxist theory of imperialism partly because she drew on primary accounts of this country's super-exploitation. Those were written during the critical period of primitive accumulation, and as a result, she considered the context for land and natural resource dispossession, migrant labor, and ethno-patriarchal rule. In the process, she described and theorized how settler colonialism's primitive accumulation was not a one-off affliction. Instead, it was, and remains, a systematic way to arrange capitalist and non-capitalist relations to the benefit of the former, as a means of addressing internal contradictions within the accumulation process, albeit in a context of growing resistance.<sup>32</sup>

South Africa has experienced three historical phases of imperialism. The first phase was the period of external colonialization, during which it was colonized by the Netherlands through the Dutch East India Company from 1652 until 1806. After the Napoleonic Wars, it was annexed by Britain and was run as one of its colonies from 1806 until 1910.

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32 Patrick Bond: Luxemburg's Contemporary Resonances in South Africa: Capital's Renewal Super- Exploitation of People and Nature, in: Drucilla Cornell/Jane Anna Gordon (Eds.): *Creolizing Rosa Luxemburg*, Lanham, MD 2021, p. 287.

The second phase (1910–1994) was that of internal or settler colonialism when Britain ceded colonial power to white settlers of both Boer (Dutch) and English origin following the Anglo-Boer War. Then, in 1961, South Africa became a republic and switched currency from the British pound to the South African rand. The coming to power of the National Party in 1948 represented a qualitative turn of the consolidation of the Afrikaner's political power with their racist policies of apartheid, which lasted until 1994. Amin's comments about South Africa's position within the global capitalist system are interesting in this context:

“South Africa is not easy to place in any of the usual categories: it is a kind of microcosm of the world capitalist system, which brings together in a single territory a number of features peculiar to each constituent category of that system. It has a white population which, in its lifestyle and standard of living, belongs to the ‘first world’, while the urban reserved for blacks and coloureds belong to the modern industrial ‘third world’, and the Bantustans (now ex-Bantustans!) containing the ‘tribal’ peasantry do not differ from the peasant communities in Africa’s ‘fourth world’.”<sup>33</sup>

The only addition to make to this quote is that a relatively large black middle class has emerged over the last 30 years; however, the income and wealth of this black class are still much lower than those of the white middle class.

Some of the best political economy writers on South Africa's historical capitalism pre-1994, within the Marxist tradition, include Bernard Magubane, Harold Wolpe, Ben Fine, and Zavareh Rustomjee. Magubane makes a broad sociohistorical assessment of the evolution of racial inequality and oppression in South Africa, seeing it as inextricably linked to the development of modern capitalism. He focuses specifically on the Bantustans, the gold-mining industry, urbaniza-

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33 Samir Amin: *Beyond US Hegemony*, New York 2006, p. 95.

tion, imperialism, and apartheid.<sup>34</sup> Wolpe's classic essay, *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid*, locates the central position of cheap labor in South Africa's capitalist accumulation.<sup>35</sup> In *The Political Economy of South Africa: From Minerals -Energy Complex to Industrialisation*, Fine and Rustomjee offer an essential read for an understanding of the historical trajectory and dynamics of South Africa's capitalism.<sup>36</sup> The central theme of their argument is that what they term the minerals-energy complex lies at the core of the South African economy, not only by virtue of its weight in economic activity but also through its determining role throughout the rest of the economy.

The third phase of imperialism was the consolidation of the neoliberal capitalist restructuring following the 1994 victory of the national liberation struggle over apartheid. This came with a neoliberal reinsertion of South Africa into the global division of labor as a dependent periphery without a sovereign development project. The African National Congress (ANC) government played a decisive role as an agency for implementing neoliberal economic policies and a linkage to international finance capital. Finance capital is the leading and dominant capital in the age of neoliberal capitalism. The neoliberal capitulation watered down the radical potential of the victory of the national liberation struggle, which was pregnant with revolutionary advances. Had a bourgeois insubordination to the global system been rejected through a delinking strategy, better development outcomes would have been realized instead of the intolerable poverty, underdevelopment, and inequality reproduced in South Africa since 1994. There should have been consciousnesses among ruling elites emerging from the national liberation movement that for South Africa, a

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34 Bernard Magubane: *Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*, New York 1979.

35 Harold Wolpe: *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid*, in: *Economy and Society* 1/1972, no. 4, pp. 425–456.

36 Ben Fine/Zavareh Rustomjee: *The Political Economy of South Africa: From Minerals-Energy Complex to Industrialisation*, London 1996.

country in the Third World, the option of the bourgeois vision of the market represented a crisis, given the polarising nature of global capitalism. South Africa needed and still needs a national popular development project to delink from global capitalism.

Amin never conceptualized delinking as an exclusion or an autarkic retreat but rather as a strategic reversal in the face of both internal and external forces in response to the unavoidable requirements of self-determined development.<sup>37</sup> Delinking promotes the reconstruction of a globalization based on negation rather than submission to the exclusive interests of the imperialist monopolies. It also makes possible the reduction of international inequalities.

April 1994, as a moment of victory against apartheid, was a moment of revolutionary promise to build a new equal society through a sovereign development project that breaks away from apartheid legacy and delinks from global capitalism. Sadly, no meaningful social transformation was pursued in the interest of the majority after the official fall of apartheid in 1994. The legacies of colonialism and apartheid were never addressed. Instead, they perpetuated alongside new inequalities and underdevelopment contours of the social context of the capitalist neoliberal restructuring of post-1994 South Africa. These legacies include establishing inferior and harmful social relations for the black majority in South Africa through land dispossession, forced cheap labor, economic deprivation, underdevelopment, impoverishment, cultural humiliation, racial exclusion, and discrimination.

The removal of official racist policies that defined apartheid social relations was not replaced by a sovereign development project to build an equal and non-racial South Africa that delinks from global capitalism. Neoliberal capitalist restructuring became the framework of building the post-apartheid South Africa. A detailed systematic analysis of how neoliberalism has been pursued in South Africa since

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37 Amin: *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism*, pp. 143–146. For a detailed and comprehensive discussion on Amin's strategy and theory of delinking, see Amin: *Delinking*.

1994 is beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice to say, the main prescriptions of neoliberal economic policy are well known and include fiscal and monetary austerity, privatization, free trade, flexible exchange rate, cuts in public spending, tax reductions for corporates and high-income earners, deregulation of business activities, the liberalization of capital controls, and labor market flexibility.

In his seminal book *South Africa Pushed to the Limit: The Political Economy of Change*, Hein Marias provides a splendid analysis that puts forth the best overview of the political, economic, and social change in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>38</sup> He shows that the cardinal legacy of post-apartheid economic policies has been the facilitation of capital flight and disinvestment, the globalization of South Africa's largest corporations, and corporate unbundling and restructuring. Ben Fine and John Reynolds also correctly underscore a point that industrial development choices of the post-apartheid state locked the South African economy into four lows: low investment, low productivity, low wages, and low employment.<sup>39</sup> In analyzing the capital accumulation crisis (capital accumulation is a driver of growth in capitalist economies and is a function of investment and savings) that has befallen the post-apartheid neoliberal economy, Ben Fine further highlights contributing factors as the priority was afforded to the formation of a new elite class and the international financial and productive restructuring of the economy that have been parasitic, drawing more upon the appropriation of the surplus that is already being produced, rather than enlarging it.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, there is a social crisis emanating from the legacy of apartheid, which was not eradicated, and the neoliberal policies of post-apart-

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38 Hein Marais: *South Africa Pushed to the Limit: The Political Economy of Change*, Cape Town 2011.

39 John Reynolds/Ben Fine: Introduction: Revisiting Harold Wolpe in Post-Apartheid South Africa, in: John Reynolds/Ben Fine/Robert van Niekerk (Eds.): *Race, Class and the Post-Apartheid Democratic State*, Pietermaritzburg 2019.

40 Ben Fine: Post-Apartheid South Africa: It's Neoliberalism, Stupid!, in: John Reynolds/Ben Fine/Robert van Niekerk (Eds.): *Race, Class and the Post-Apartheid Democratic State*, Pietermaritzburg 2019.

heid South Africa, manifest in widespread poverty, massive unemployment, acute wealth inequalities, underdevelopment, poor governance, and declining democracy.

### The Socialist Challenge in South Africa

In South Africa, like in most countries in the periphery, socialist construction is not immediately possible because of the low levels of development of the productive forces and its reliance on foreign capital for investment, therefore subjecting it to an unequal exchange in global trade. Again, given South Africa is a country in Africa, we need to consider the problems with which Marxism is confronted: underlying problems of the linkage between national liberation and socialist revolution, socialist construction in a backward country, and conjunctural problems arising from the international situation, including the new Cold War between the US and China, proxy wars like the one between Russia and Ukraine, the world capitalist crisis, and North-South conflicts.

As Amin points out, the transformation of the world, from the perspective of the Global South, begins with anti-imperialist, national, popular – and potentially anti-capitalist – revolutions, which are the only ones on the agenda for the foreseeable future since socialist revolution/construction is still way into the future.<sup>41</sup>

However, this transformation will only be able to go beyond the first steps and proceed on the path to socialism if and when the peoples of the centers of the global capitalist system, the Global North, begin the struggle for communism, viewed as a higher stage of universal human civilization. The systemic crisis of capitalism in the center gives the world a chance for this possibility to be translated into reality. As the Chinese slogan goes, “the states want independence, the nations want liberation, the peoples want revolution.” Outside of Chi-

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41 See Amin: *Contemporary Imperialism*.

na, which is implementing a sovereign project of modern industrial development in connection with the renovation of family agriculture, the other so-called emergent countries of the South (the BRICS) still walk only on one leg: they are opposed to the depredations of militarized globalization but remain imprisoned in the straightjacket of neoliberalism.

Changes in contemporary capitalism require an updating of definitions and analyses of social classes, class struggles, political parties, social movements, and the mode of the ideological forms in which they express their modes of action in the radical social transformation of society amidst the deepening crisis. The left will succeed if it meets that challenge and invents new forms of organizing and effective struggles that lead to victories of popular classes. We need to lay bare the reality of South African neoliberal capitalism and its integration into the global economy.

The starting point of being a communist today should be to reformulate an actual critique of late neoliberal capitalism. It is no longer sufficient to be generally against capitalism. We need to be against *this* capitalism, the neoliberal capitalism that combines the historical features of South Africa's capitalism and a global capitalism in which we increasingly see failures and crises. We need to build a new historical bloc of left and popular forces rooted in the social reality of post-apartheid South Africa. The anti-apartheid historical bloc disintegrated in the late 1990s when the leadership of working-class formations were co-opted into government and given positions in business. They now form part of the new black elite class.

Popular classes have been waging struggles to resist neoliberalism and pose radical alternatives. Though some victories have been registered over the last 20 years, there has been no significant success in sustaining effective mass struggles and building formidable mass movements capable of revolutionary advances in post-1994 South Africa. Why have things turned out like this? That is what we need to grapple with, both in theory and in practice. There are no easy answers to this question; it requires a dynamic discussion about move-



ment-building, with an outline of key tasks and social demands for the given historical phase and a long-term view on the struggle for socialism in the 21st century.

Latin America has played a pioneering role in rejecting neoliberalism and posing a viable model for socialist struggles in the 21st century. Popular movements, not political parties, were at the forefront of the struggles against neoliberalism. Those movements were engaged in concrete popular struggles made up of various social classes. They won decisive victories against forms of neoliberalism (privatization, neoliberal agriculture and land policies, unequal trade, water privatization, foreign debt, free education, etc.) in the different countries of Latin America.

In *A World To Build: New Paths toward Twenty-First Century Socialism*, Marta Harnecker documents the Latin American experiences in this regard and offers a theoretical reflection.<sup>42</sup> As Harnecker points out with regard to the experience of Latin America, even in those countries where the role of left parties was important, they were not in the vanguard of the fight against neoliberalism; the popular movements, however, were. These movements developed in the context of the neoliberal model's crisis of legitimacy and the crisis its political institutions were facing. In many countries, they grew out of the dynamics of resistance present in their communities or local organizations.

There is a need to rethink the vision and strategy of the left for anti-capitalist struggles and for building socialism. The starting point is to give up the old position of communist parties of conquering state power first and then building socialism. Instead, social and political conditions that allow for an advance toward socialism should be fostered. Hence, we need to build "popular movements toward socialism." This entails abandoning an approach to building socialism derived from the Soviet experience, which focused on nationalization

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42 Marta Harnecker: *A World To Build: New Paths Toward Twenty-First Century Socialism*, New York 2015.

and state planning. In contrast, “popular movements toward socialism” leave open the question of methods to be used in socializing the modern economy and the ongoing democratization of society.

The neoliberal capitalism inaugurated in the late 1970s when the postwar boom and its Keynesianism in the Global North and the momentum of the victories of national liberation movements in the Global South came to an end is now in a deep crisis. This is a crisis of multiple manifestations: an accumulation crisis, an ecological crisis, a crisis of development where poverty, hunger, and underdevelopment afflict the majority in the urban slums and rural areas of the Global South, and the political crisis of the decline of democracy and the ruling classes that have been discredited and lost all legitimacy.

The crisis of neoliberalism is proving that neoliberal capitalism has reached a dead-end with no reformist runaway outlet,<sup>43</sup> as postwar capitalism (1945–1975) had with Keynesianism in the Global North and victorious national liberation movements followed by sovereign development projects in the Global South. Immanuel Wallerstein argues that this crisis will deepen over the next 20 to 40 years and that capitalism will not get out of it alive.<sup>44</sup> Capitalists are aware of this, he says, so they are not trying to save capitalism; instead, they are trying to build another social system that still has the class hierarchy and exploitation of capitalism, even though it will not be capitalism as we have it today.

In *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?*, Amin argues that the current crisis is a profound crisis of the capitalist system itself, bringing forward an era in which wars, and perhaps revolutions, will once again shake the world.<sup>45</sup> He analyses the attempts of the

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43 Utsa Patnaik/Prabhat Patnaik: Neoliberalism at a Dead End, in: *Monthly Review* 71/2019, no. 3.

44 Immanuel Wallerstein: *UTOPISTICS: Or, Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century*, New York 1998; Immanuel Wallerstein: *Structural Crisis in the World-System: Where Do We Go From Here?*, in: *Monthly Review* 62/2011, no. 10.

45 Samir Amin: *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?*, Cape Town 2011.

triad powers to revive the global system to pre-2008 levels and impose their domination on the peoples of the South by intensifying military institutions such as NATO. As Amin posits, since the 1950s, the left's position has shifted from the project of an uninterrupted socialist revolution to the project of a bourgeois national revolution.<sup>46</sup> He asserts that both of these positions underestimated the polarization inherent in capitalist expansion and that Marxism has gradually become fossilized because of its failure to integrate the global polarization dimension. Both bourgeois revolution (the perspective of social democrats and radical nationalists in the Third World) and "socialist revolution" (the perspective of Leninism, Maoism, and Trotskyism) avoid the real question: What kind of revolution is on the agenda when the polarization of global capitalism that is in a deepening crisis makes both bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution impossible?

I propose the following five pillars toward a socialist strategy that initially pursues a radical popular project in South Africa:<sup>47</sup>

- **Build a sovereign industrial production system** of consumer and capital goods manufacturing industries to largely replace imports that flood the domestic markets and create a balance of payments problem since South Africa exports more than it imports. This should also include exports that can compete on global markets without relying on captured markets, such as is the case in mineral commodities or unequal trade schemes such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This should include building an agricultural system that guarantees food security and food sover-

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46 Samir Amin: *A Life Looking Forward: Memoirs of an Independent Marxist*, London 2006.

47 These five pillars are inspired by Luxemburg's thought of linking democracy to the struggles and vision for socialism and the essentiality of mass power. These ideas are spread throughout her writings, but for ease of reference, see *Reform or Revolution*, *Russian Revolution*, and *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*. They are also inspired by Amin's delinking strategy and his ideas of building a mass movement as a nucleus of leftist renewal as contained in Amin: *Popular Movements Toward Socialism: Their Unity and Diversity*.

eignty. This sovereign project should include tenets such as the socialization of monopolies, definancialization, a monetary and financial policy that allocates credit to local industry and important sectors such as agriculture, lowers interest rates, and tightens exchange controls, and an expansive fiscal policy that supports industrial development, which must be ecological by reducing environmental risks. It should also include social expenditure to mitigate against the crisis of social reproduction in ways that tackle extreme poverty. Expansive government spending on education, health, social security, and basic income grants will be essential to redress the social reproduction crisis since late capitalism can no longer create jobs on a large scale because of technologies that increase productivity with less labor.

- **Strengthen democracy from below:** The deepening social crisis post-1994 in South Africa is associated with the serious decline of democracy. This is shown in lower voter turnouts, a lack of public confidence in public institutions, and brazen corruption by state officials. Weak mass organization among popular classes is also a sign of declining popular democracy because it means weak forms of direct participation outside elections. Reviving democracy means strengthening both direct participatory forms and electoral forms of democracy. Strengthening democracy is more about the ongoing democratization of the management of society, and that goes beyond election and formal institutions. It is about the power of popular classes finding expression in the economy, politics, and culture that favor popular classes, who constitute the overwhelming majority of South African society. For as long as the power of capital is dominant in the economy, politics, and culture, there can be no meaningful democratic advance. Democracy must always be associated with social progress, and social progress must also be accompanied by ongoing democratization in the management of society. The neoliberal option gives power to the elites who are in the service of finance capital and block any

meaningful social transformation in favor of the majority, thus leading to social crisis.

- **Address the land and agrarian question:** Agriculture no longer constitutes a means of livelihood for most South Africans who live in rural areas. In rural areas, there is widespread poverty and no source of sustainable livelihoods. Agriculture does not provide sustainable petty production for the majority of rural communities. The Expanded Public Works Programme, public servants' jobs, small business operations, and remittances from relatives who work in the urban areas are the major sources of livelihood in rural areas. This then becomes a major source of poverty in both urban towns (with the expansion of shanty areas flooded by migrants from rural areas) and in rural areas because industrial expansion and urbanization in the Global South are not capable of absorbing all those who migrate from rural areas into the workforce, as was the case in 19th-century Europe. A radical land reform that affords sustainable livelihoods for black family farmers in both urban and rural areas is impossible without expropriating land from whites, whose much-trumpeted 'success' has been based on the super-exploitation of African farm laborers and the wastage of land that they own in abundance. Of course, white farmers have since sold a considerable portion of their land to multinational corporations, who earn income from it in speculative ways. Hence, the expropriation of land without compensation is crucial to any land reform.
- **Ecology:** With the deepening ecological crisis and the loss of biosystems, the depletion of natural resources such as water and energy, and the worsening climate change emergency, socialism in the 21st century cannot be anything but ecological. It is high time the left seriously integrated the ecological question into its socialist vision and program. The deepening capitalist crisis based on the logic of endless capital accumulation has brought about

the destruction of nature and the worsening climate change that is now threatening the survival of human life on the planet. Capitalism as a system based on the exchange value, ignoring the use value, is proving incapable of resolving the deepening ecological crisis even with the best reforms. Taking into account the use value therefore means the socialism we are struggling for today cannot be anything but ecological. Building an eco-socialist society means resisting attempts to impose “green capitalism” by multinational corporations and powerful capitalist states from the Global North. Further important anti-neoliberal struggles include organizing community struggles around the electricity crisis, a socially responsible restructuring of Eskom to counter the looming privatization, and pushing for revolutionary changes in the production, consumption, and usage of energy as part of the pathway to ecological survival.

- **A popular movement toward socialism:** This component is given concrete expression in the next section, where I conclude by discussing mass movements and mass struggles.

### Conclusion: Popular Movements Toward Socialism

Communist parties no longer offer a viable model for effective left parties and movements to challenge capitalism and pose revolutionary advances in today’s world. Even though some communist parties, like in China, Cuba, Vietnam, and India, continue to be effective in building sovereign projects that challenge global capitalism to varying degrees, the popular class struggles they led registered historic radical victories when challenging the power of capital, something that the South African Communist Party lacks because of its unconditional attachment to the ANC. The Communist Party of India, for example, has kept its distance from the Indian National Congress, hence why it was able to register radical victories and build radical projects.

Instead, I propose we build new movements, which should be popular movements toward socialism. These should allow for an open-ended approach on how to build socialism from below instead of a vanguardist approach that has it “all figured out” through the Marxist–Leninist template. I use the concept of “the left” to refer to political forces that adopt an anti-capitalist dimension in their pursuit of social transformation to address the plight of the popular classes that make up the majority. These popular classes are largely black, reflecting the racist past of our country, the history of colonialism and apartheid, and how it adds to the post-1994 social crisis of governance and social transformation failures.

The anti-capitalist dimension of the South African left falls into two broad categories. First, there are those from the various communist and socialist traditions who frame their visions and strategies around resolving the basic contradiction of capitalism between labor and capital and going beyond capitalism toward socialism. Second, there are those who fight for the immediate social demands of popular classes without going too far into the future. While their social transformation measures do not seek to replace capitalism outright, as in the case of communists, they still challenge the foundations of South Africa’s capitalism, which has shaped economic and social relations since the Industrial Revolution of the late 19th century. Activists and organizations that are part of this second category include liberation movements, feminists, environmental justice activists, and those struggling for radical reforms in community development in urban township and rural areas and for basic public services such as housing, electricity, transport, youth development, healthcare, and education. We need to encourage diverse lines of descent in the formation and advancement of socialist thought and action, of unity and diversity among the forces of the left.

There is a need to rethink and renew trade union organizations in light of the changes brought about by the neoliberal restructuring of the workplace and the capitalist economic crisis, particularly its impact on the Global South with its already underdeveloped industrial

bases, that worsens poverty with the closure of factories and industries, leading to massive unemployment. The drastic decline of trade unions in the post-1994 period can partly be explained by their failure to adapt to these changes. The worsening unemployment and poverty levels also mean there is a need to connect deeper factory struggles with community struggles for survival, livelihood, and social change driven from townships. The demand for a basic income grant set at R1400, as per the upper-bound poverty line determined by StatsSA, should feature prominently in these struggles. This kind of discussion on movement-building amidst the deepening capitalist crisis made worse by the Covid slump is exemplified by the “Movement building in the shadow of COVID19” paper by the COVID-19 Working Class Campaign,<sup>48</sup> which is made up of grassroots organizations and NGOs.

The left should work with the popular classes to build strong grassroots and sector movements to fight for the immediate social demands of these classes on health, education, housing, food, women, youth, decent jobs, sports, arts, culture, and so on. While the struggles should be about immediate social demands, they must have a clear anti-capitalist outlook and seek to go beyond the limits of the current capitalist society. They must express a yearning for a better society that is not capitalist. The struggles and mass movements must be connected through a coherent vision and political efforts to build an anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal historic bloc in South Africa and connect with other struggles of popular classes in Africa and the wider world.

This is not to lose sight of political power that results from elections but rather to build popular power on the ground, on whose base genuine left political alternatives should be advanced. Rebuilding an alternative left political pole should be based on mass struggles and the vision of democratic eco-socialism. The mass political party or parties that come out of such efforts should be non-vanguardist, open-ended, long-term, and linked to mass movements without con-

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48 COVID19 Working Class Campaign: Movement Building in the Shadow of COVID19, online: <https://karibu.org.za/movement-building-in-the-shadow-of-covid19/>.



trolling them. A left electoral victory based authentically on a radical program is only possible after the victory of popular struggles, not before. Luxemburg emphasized this in 1918:

“Socialism is not a question of parliamentary elections, but a question of power. ... For us socialists it isn't a question of governing, but of overthrowing capitalism. ... If the Revolution does not come from the masses themselves, it isn't worth anything at all. ... We want the majority of the proletariat to take political power in their own hands. ... Formal democratic equality is a pack of lies as long as the economic power of capital persists.”<sup>49</sup>

Amin made a similar point but confined himself to the era of late contemporary capitalism:

“As long as the established powers remain what they are, social change, far from dispossessing them, leaves them able to co-opt it, to take it over, to make it reinforce, rather than weaken, capitalist power. The sad fate of environmentalism, made into a new field for the expansion of capital, bears witness. [...] Will the unfolding movements toward organized and politicized reconstruction go so far as to understand and teach that the capitalist monopolies are to be expropriated, nationalized in order to be socialized? Until that breaking point has been reached the ultimate power of the capitalist/imperialist monopolies will remain untouched.”<sup>50</sup>

Popular struggles to characterize the left renewal must be made up of both protest and developmental work. Community development

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49 Rosa Luxemburg: Extraordinary General Assembly of the German Independent Social Democratic Party of Greater Berlin, trans. by Zachary King, in: Helen Scott/Paul Le Blanc (Eds.): *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. V, New York 2024 (1918), pp. 316 and 318.

50 Samir Amin: *The Democratic Fraud and the Universalist Alternative*, in: *Monthly Review* 63/2011, no. 5, pp. 41 and 45.

activities could cover art, culture, media (including magazines), poetry, cultural movements, people's heritage from below, and knowledge production from below (including research, studies, and publications of all types). These efforts should seek to build a popular movement for meaningful social transformation based on a coherent anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal vision. However, none of this will be possible without sustained activist development and political education in order to build a critical mass of conscious, confident, capable, and effective activists who can carry out the tasks at hand.

The system of neoliberal globalization has entered a terminal phase of crisis; its implosion is clearly visible, as indicated by, among other things, Brexit, Donald Trump's election (and possible re-election in 2024), the Russia-Ukraine proxy war, and the rise of various forms of neofascism like Israeli genocide in Gaza. This system's rather inglorious end opens up a potentially revolutionary situation in all parts of the world. But this potential will only become a reality if radical left forces know how to seize the opportunities offered and design and implement bold offensive strategies based on the reconstruction of the internationalism of workers and peoples in the face of the cosmopolitanism of the imperialist powers' financial capital. If that does not happen, then the left forces of the West, East, and South will share responsibility for the ensuing disaster.

We are at the historic moment Luxemburg described as "socialism or barbarism," that Amin described as "revolution or decadence."<sup>51</sup> South Africa, as a country that is a microcosm of contradictions within global capitalism, has the potential to show the way, in actual struggles, toward the much-needed revolutionary advance to save humanity from a capitalism that is senile and crisis-ridden. The South African left has to renew and rebuild mass movements capable of waging mass struggles toward a revolutionary advance.

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51 See Samir Amin: *Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis*, New Delhi 1980, p. 249; Samir Amin: *Revolution or Decadence?*, in: *Monthly Review* 70/2018, no. 1.

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# 14 The Portrayal of Rosa Luxemburg in German Film<sup>1</sup>

*Julia Killet*

## Introduction

In his biography *Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Life, Work and Impact), Dietmar Dath looks at two films in which Rosa Luxemburg is portrayed. He notes that there are two ways to realize Rosa Luxemburg's life artistically: Firstly, "this death ... can be seen as an inadmissible attempt by her enemies to eradicate and make forgotten that which actually constituted her life,"<sup>2</sup> as Günter Reisch portrays it in his film *Trotz alledem!* (1972), and secondly, "Luxemburg's life is narrated ... as something that led to precisely this death, precisely this kind of death, and is retroactively sanctified by it, as it were."<sup>3</sup> Dath refers here to the film *Rosa Luxemburg* by Margarethe von Trotta (1986). In the following, Dath's interpretation of Rosa Luxemburg's portrayal in these two films will be considered.

*As Long As There Is Life In Me and In Spite Of Everything!*  
by Günter Reisch

The historical character Rosa Luxemburg appears as a minor character in the two-part film biography *Karl Liebknecht* by the GDR

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<sup>1</sup> The article appeared in the dissertation Julia Killet: *Fiktion und Wirklichkeit. Die Darstellung Rosa Luxemburgs in der biographischen und literarischen Prosa*, Hamburg 2020, pp. 275–292. The chapter was supplemented and shortened for this publication. The quotes in this article were translated by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Dietmar Dath: *Rosa Luxemburg. Leben, Werk und Wirkung*, Berlin 2010, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Dath: *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 128.

film company DEFA,<sup>4</sup> directed by Günter Reisch<sup>5</sup> and scripted by Michael Tschesno-Hell.<sup>6</sup> In the first part from 1965, entitled *Solange*

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4 The abbreviation DEFA stands for Deutsche Film AG.

5 The film director and screenwriter Günter Julius Hermann Reisch (1927–2014) was born in Berlin. In 1944, at the age of 16, he became a member of the NSDAP and was drafted for military service. He eventually became an American prisoner of war. In 1945, he was one of the co-founders of a theater group of the Antifa Youth in the FDJ in Potsdam. After graduating from high school, he initially took acting lessons himself but then received training as a director at the DEFA junior studio. In 1947, he joined the SED. At the age of 20, he was already working as an assistant director on films such as *Ernst Thälmann – Son of His Class* and *Ernst Thälmann – Leader of His Class*. Reisch directed his first feature film of his own, entitled *Junges Gemüse* (Young Vegetables), in 1955. A year later, he taught at the Babelsberg Film Academy. Until 1989, Reisch shot more than 20 films for DEFA and co-wrote screenplays. His thematic focus included biographical films dealing with the Wehrmacht officer Rudolf Petershagen, Lenin, Liebknecht, the revolutionary Max Hoelz, and the writer Georg Büchner. He was awarded numerous national prizes in the GDR. After the fall of the Wall, Reisch taught as a film teacher at universities in Munich, Graz, Cologne, Kassel, and Weimar. Aune Renk: Reisch, Günter, in: Helmut Müller-Enbergs et al. (Eds.): *Wer war wer in der DDR? Ein biographisches Lexikon*, Augsburg 2006, p. 692.

6 Michael Tschesno-Hell (1902–1980) was born in Vilna. In the early 1920s, he studied law and political economy in Jena and joined the KPD. He wrote as a journalist for numerous left-wing newspapers and magazines of the Weimar Republic, above all for the *Blätter* edited by Willi Münzenberg. He also worked as a press officer in the film department of the Russian trade mission in Berlin. After the National Socialists seized power, he emigrated to Paris and became involved with the exiled Communist Party and Red Aid Germany. Despite his activity with the Soviet military intelligence service GRU (Glawnoje Raswedywatelnoje Uprawlenije), an investigation was launched into him by the Moscow CI headquarters in 1936. In exile in France, he was interned several times. Shortly before the end of the war, he collaborated with Stephan Hermlin, among others, on the exile magazine *Über die Grenzen*. After the war, he moved back to Berlin and was assigned a position as vice-president of the Central Administration for Resettlers. In 1946, he joined the SED and founded the publishing house Volk und Welt the following year. From the 1950s onward, he wrote or co-authored various screenplays, including a two-part film about the life of Ernst Thälmann (1954/56). From the mid-1960s, he was president of the Association of Film and Television Workers of the GDR. See Bernd-Rainer Barth/Heinz Hirdina: *Tschesno-Hell, Michael*, in: Müller-Enbergs, *Wer war wer*, p. 854.

*Leben in mir ist* (As Long As There Is Life In Me),<sup>7</sup> the character Rosa Luxemburg makes a total of three brief appearances and has two speaking parts. In the second part, *Trotz alledem!* (In Spite Of Everything!),<sup>8</sup> from 1971, Luxemburg appears twice in the picture speaking.

This staging of Luxemburg in the background is surprising in that both parts are set in a period (1913–1919) in which Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht intensified their collaboration and acted together, especially at the beginning of the First World War and during the November Revolution. The second part of the film was dedicated to Liebknecht on what would have been his 100th birthday. However, this dedication could just as well have been to Rosa Luxemburg since both were born in the same year and murdered at the same time.

The starting point for the Liebknecht film was the SED's desire "to make the leaders of the German workers' movement the main characters in DEFA's major productions."<sup>9</sup> Since the focus is exclusively on Liebknecht, it must be assumed that Luxemburg was not one of them in the GDR at that time. Barbara Könczöl states the following in this regard: "Even before the founding of the state, the SED had begun to develop Liebknecht's position as a party flag at the expense of Luxemburg. Just as it stylized Ernst Thälmann as the personal incarnation of the anti-fascist struggle of German communists, so the SED made Liebknecht the personification of the struggle against militarism and imperialism."<sup>10</sup> Rosa Luxemburg's state reputation in the GDR had risen in the course of the student revolts in the FRG, when left-

7 Günter Reisch: *Solange Leben in mir ist*. Ein Film über Karl Liebknecht, DEFA, Potsdam-Babelsberg 1965. In 1966, the film was awarded the National Prize II Class for the collective Michael Tschesno-Hell, Günter Reisch, Horst E. Brandt and Horst Schulze. See DEFA Foundation: Programme supplement to the DVD edition 'Solange Leben in mir ist' and 'Trotz alledem!,' edited by Ralf Schenk, 8/2005, p. 2.

8 Günter Reisch: *Trotz alledem!* Ein Film über Karl Liebknecht, DEFA, Potsdam-Babelsberg 1972. The film was awarded the rating "Especially Valuable" in the GDR and received the Art Prize of the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB) in 1972.

9 DEFA-Stiftung, Programmbeilage, p. 4.

10 Barbara Könczöl: *Martyrer des Sozialismus. Die SED und das Gedenken an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht*, Frankfurt a. M. et al. 2008, p. 169.



wing groups again dealt intensively with Luxemburg's writings.<sup>11</sup> In the Progress press information on the film from 1971, Reisch himself comments on why Luxemburg was only marginally staged:

“In this context, a thought on the portrayal of Rosa Luxemburg: Just as one could not do full justice to the personality of Friedrich Engels in a film about Karl Marx, we were not able to fully appreciate the character of Rosa Luxemburg in this film about Karl Liebknecht. The greatness of this wonderful woman and outstanding representative of the working class needs its own great film. We only see her in two scenes here. However, I believe that the author Michael Tschesno-Hell and the actress Zofia Mrozowska succeeded in letting the basic tone of the personality and political militancy echo in these scenic fragments.”<sup>12</sup>

There was no feature film about Luxemburg in the GDR. It was not until 1970 that a 20-minute DEFA documentary film dedicated to Luxemburg was released.<sup>13</sup>

However, none of this plays a role in Dath's consideration of the film in his Luxemburg biography. Although he notes that Luxemburg is “annoyingly only a minor character” in Reisch's film, he then points to the entire cinematic treatment of the historical situation of the November Revolution as “the brief upsurge and brutal crushing of the German Revolution by reaction and the SPD.”<sup>14</sup>

The first part of the film deals with the May Day demonstration planned by Liebknecht and Luxemburg in 1916, after which they were both arrested. The second part covers the period of the November Revolution up to the assassination of the two revolutionaries. The first

11 Könczöl, *Martyrs*, p. 184.

12 Bruno Pioch: *Trotz alledem! Ein Film über Karl Liebknecht*, Kino DDR, Progress-Press-Information, Berlin 1971, pp. 12–13.

13 The documentary film entitled *Rosa Luxemburg. Stationen ihres Lebens* (Stations of Her Life) was directed by Renate Drescher and written by Günter Radczun.

14 Dath, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 129.

time the character Luxemburg meets Liebknecht is on the train, just as he is returning from the front (01:22:33).<sup>15</sup> At this point, about two-thirds of the film is already over. In this film, Luxemburg is played by Zofia Rysiówna.<sup>16</sup> Apparently, Reisch deliberately chose a Polish and politically influenced actress in order to come as close to Luxemburg's historical personality as possible.<sup>17</sup> The voice of the character is dubbed by the well-known singer and Brecht interpreter Gisela May. The actress' appearance bears a certain resemblance to the historical Rosa Luxemburg: A petite character with a fine angular face, a large nose, alert, melancholy eyes, and the familiar combed-up hairstyle with gray temples at the sides.

In the second part, *Trotz alledem!*, the Polish actress Zofia Mrozowska took on the role of Rosa Luxemburg and was dubbed by the GDR actress Inge Keller. The actresses from the first and second parts of the Liebknecht film were very similar in appearance; however, they differed in the way they performed. While Rysiówna appears strong, determined, and in control in the first part, she is characterized by a reserved manner. Mrozowska appears hectic and excited in the scenes of the second part, which is obviously meant to illustrate Luxemburg's joy at her regained freedom as well as her determined drive in the November Revolution. The image of Rosa Luxemburg in the film is one of an internationalist,<sup>18</sup>

15 In this scene from Chapter 5, Liebknecht tells her that he will speak at the Easter Youth Conference in Jena and thus prepare for May Day. The author makes use of historical facts here because Liebknecht actually spoke to the Socialist Youth in Jena on 24 and 25 April 1916, thus alluding to the time narrated in the film.

16 Zofia Rysiówna was born on 17 May 1920 in Rozwadów, Poland, and died on 17 November 2003 in Warsaw. She interrupted her training at the State Drama School in Warsaw during the war and took an active part in the Polish resistance movement against National Socialism. From 1941 to 1945, she was imprisoned in the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. After liberation, she completed her training in Poland and worked as an actress in the theater and on television.

17 In the same way, he chose a Russian actress for the character of Sophie Liebknecht: Ludmilla Kasyanova.

18 The figure of Rosa Luxemburg appears as a hopeful fighter for the international proletariat: "Der erste Mai. The first May after two years of war. The fate of socialism depends on how the proletariat will know how to fight for peace. The more

revolutionary, and intellectual editor,<sup>19</sup> but the small snippets of the film in which the character Rosa Luxemburg plays any role at all clearly show that there should be no other opinion in the film besides that of Karl Liebknecht. In the film, the character of Liebknecht denies being a hero or a martyr<sup>20</sup> but is nevertheless characterized as a straightforward revolutionary without weaknesses or faults. Rosa Luxemburg, with her critical thinking, including concerning the October Revolution, did not fit into this picture. Not once is reference made to differences of opinion<sup>21</sup> between her and Liebknecht, which certainly existed during the revolutionary period.<sup>22</sup> This is also made clear in the booklet accompanying the DVD, which states: “The internal contradictions in the

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quietly the masses accept everything, the more madly the sabre dictatorship will go. And the proletarians of all countries cut their throats. Strength, consistency, sharpness are what we need” (01:22:49–01:23:38). In this quotation, there is a reference to the real Rosa Luxemburg’s authentic statement, for which she was tried by the Frankfurt Criminal Court in 1914 and sentenced to a year in prison: “If we are expected to raise the murder weapon against our French and other brothers, then we shout: We will not do it!” Annelies Laschitzka: *Im Lebensrausch, trotz alledem. Rosa Luxemburg. Eine Biographie*, Berlin 2002, p. 437. Shortly before the May Day demonstration, the figure thinks of the comrades in other countries: “How might it look at this hour in Petersburg, in Paris, in London? Holiday of the international proletariat” (01:33:10–01:33:17).

- 19 In the second part, the figure of Rosa Luxemburg appears mainly in the editorial office of the Red Flag: “We have to bring clarity into people’s minds. We have a lot of catching up to do. At last we have a daily newspaper. There it is. *The Red Flag*. But we still need a newspaper for the youth, for the women and for the soldiers. I don’t need to tell you. Excuse me, comrades. I’ve been alone with our plans for so long. I am so hungry for work” (51:30–51:57).
- 20 It was important to the author to create an image of Liebknecht in which he does not stand out from the mass of people but comes from their ranks.
- 21 The unity of the two characters is even emphasized at two points in the film: “Oh, we’re both stubborn, Karl. To be quite honest, in your place, I would act the same way. And you in mine the way I do” (01:35:01–01:35:09). This is repeated in her last appearance in the second part when she rejects an escape to Bremen: “We should leave Berlin now? We’ll stay at our fighting post. I say this also in the name of Karl Liebknecht” (01:44:26–01:44:50).
- 22 See Ottokar Luban: *Demokratische Sozialistin oder ‘Blutige Rosa’? in: Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 2/1999*, pp. 177–207.

KPD, which was founded at the end of 1918, remain unnoticed in the film. . . . Important members of the Spartacus League, who argued with and alongside Liebknecht but who held quite different opinions on the strategy and tactics of the struggle, are consistently left out, such as Leo Jogiches, Paul Levi, or Clara Zetkin.”<sup>23</sup> This film’s plot is thus contrary to the self-proclaimed goals of director Günter Reisch. In the 1971 press release, he says: “With the film, we have set ourselves the task of making historical contexts tangible. That is why we attached importance to the full shaping of the contradictions, including in the working class of that time.”<sup>24</sup> Dietmar Dath believes that the film takes up the view of Luxemburg’s enemies, who wanted to erase and make forgotten her political struggle for socialism through her death.<sup>25</sup> However, Luxemburg’s struggle is only hinted at in passing in the film.

In the film, their enemies are the politicians of the SPD government who joined forces with the military loyal to the Kaiser to put down the revolution. In the booklet accompanying the DVD, the authors rightly point out that “the history of the SPD from 1913 onward is discredited as a series of opportunistic, ‘workers’ traitorous’ acts” and that “there is no pardon for the ‘traitors,’ not even the right to be seen in a differentiated way.” In this way, the film “follows the canon of SED historiography.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, from today’s perspective, the individual groups of the revolution appear shadowily divided into good and evil. Even if the film is classified as a school film today,<sup>27</sup> the propaganda intention cannot be overlooked. This was also pointed out by a reviewer in 1992, who reports his memory of the film screening in the GDR:

“So a number of parole and reparation films appeared on the screen, and I can remember exactly how we always moved into the village

23 DEFA-Stiftung, Programmbeilage, p. 7.

24 Pioch, *Trotz alledem*, p. 13.

25 Dath, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 129.

26 DEFA-Stiftung, Programmbeilage, p. 5.

27 Karl Liebknecht (Zwei Teile), online: [www.filmsortiment.de/karl-Liebknecht-%2528zwei-teile%2529/dvd/unterrichtsfilm-lehrfilm-schulfilm/22706](http://www.filmsortiment.de/karl-Liebknecht-%2528zwei-teile%2529/dvd/unterrichtsfilm-lehrfilm-schulfilm/22706).

cinema in closed school formation to watch *The Flag of Krivoy Rog* (Kurt Matzig, 1968) ... or *Trotz alledem!* ... Even the educators did not seem particularly impressed by the schematic selection of history, for neither in German nor in civics lessons did they make use of the cinematic arguments in matters of dialectical worldview. Of course, our organized sitting out was very convenient for the statistics: the films were billed with up to two million visitors and celebrated propagandistically as great successes.”<sup>28</sup>

The propagandistic input is also clear at the point where the character Lenin pays tribute to Liebknecht and Luxemburg: “Yesterday, some copies of the *Red Flag* arrived. ... At the head of the *Red Flag* are such leaders, famous throughout the world, such faithful companions of the German working class: Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. They pose the question correctly: the unpostponable foundation of the Communist Party of Germany” (01:26:47–01:27:39). The character Lenin connects his appreciation of the characters Luxemburg and Liebknecht with the founding of the KPD. In the film, this is a reference to the failure of the November Revolution, namely the foundation of the KPD being too late. From a propagandist point of view and with regard to the statement in the film, this means that the November Revolution could only have progressed through the KPD.

The deaths of Luxemburg and Liebknecht are staged in the film first with a longer view of the Landwehr Canal – the place of Luxemburg’s death – and then with an authentic newspaper article from the *Red Flag* with the headline “Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg murdered.” In another scene, trees and the sun are reflected in the Landwehr Canal, and in the next cut, the funeral procession for the revolutionaries is re-enacted. The ending shows the self-confident, advancing proletariat that does not let itself be dissuaded from its struggle by the military’s prohibitions: thus, chanting turns into whistling,

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<sup>28</sup> Jürgen Bretschneider: VEB Kunst – Aus der Traum, in: Wolfgang Jacobsen (Ed.): Babelsberg. Ein Filmstudio. 1912–1992, Berlin 1992, p. 290.

whistling into humming. Kitschy, one would say today, but at that time, it was meant to illustrate the steadfastness of the revolutionary proletarian movement.

### *Rosa Luxemburg* by Margarethe von Trotta

The “biopic”<sup>29</sup> *Rosa Luxemburg* by Margarethe von Trotta<sup>30</sup> is, to date, the only feature film<sup>31</sup> made about Rosa Luxemburg. Von Trotta both directed the film and wrote the screenplay.<sup>32</sup> She worked intensive-

29 The term “biopic” comes from the English words “biographical” and “motion picture” and refers to a film biography.

30 Margarethe von Trotta was born an illegitimate child in Berlin on 21 February 1942. Her mother was a Baltic-Russian noblewoman who had emigrated to the German capital after the Russian Revolution. She only ever got to see her father, the painter and illustrator Alfred Roloff, for a few periods each year as he mainly lived with his wife and family. When Margarethe was six years old, her mother moved with her to Bad Godesberg and, after her father’s early death in 1951, to Düsseldorf. Through a scholarship for gifted children, she was offered the opportunity of a grammar school education. After graduating from a commercial high school, she went to Paris as an au pair. There she discovered her love of film. Back in Düsseldorf, she briefly attended the local art academy but then decided to study Romance and German Studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, which she continued in Munich. Her main interest, however, was film. She worked on small film projects and decided to take classes at an acting school in Munich before graduating. She played her first roles at theaters in Dinkelsbühl and Frankfurt. She received her first opportunities to appear in films from Rainer Werner Fassbinder in 1968, and from then on, she appeared in more than 28 films. In 1971, she married the director Volker Schlöndorff and practised directing herself. In 1975, she made her film debut alongside her husband as co-director and writer with the film *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*. She was awarded numerous prizes for the more than 23 films she directed from then on. One focus of von Trotta’s filmography was on famous and militant women, e.g., she portrayed Hannah Arendt, Hildegard von Bingen, Christiane and Gudrun Ensslin, as well as the women from Rosenstrasse during National Socialism. Today, Margarethe von Trotta lives in Munich and Paris. See Antje Kahnt: *Düsseldorfs starke Frauen*. 30 Portraits, Düsseldorf 2016, pp. 169–174; Thilo Wydra: *Margarethe von Trotta. Filmen, um zu überleben*, Berlin 2000.

31 There is another television play entitled *Die rote Rosa* by Walter Jens, which was produced by Bayerischer Rundfunk and broadcast on television in 1966. In it, the

ly on the film for four years. It was produced in 1985 and first released in Germany in 1986. The premiere took place on 8 April 1986 in Saarbrücken. The film was shown on television for the first time on 22 October 1989 on ARD. Von Trotta's drama received numerous awards in West Germany<sup>33</sup> and a prize in the GDR.<sup>34</sup>

She had taken over the commission for the film from the director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who died in 1982 and with whom von Trotta had a long friendship. His original script, written by Peter Märthesheimer, remained in Fassbinder's estate. However, von Trotta did not want to use it as a model, as she described in an interview:

“I found the script too Hollywood-like. I also told him [Peter Märthesheimer] that I didn't understand at all how someone who wants to make a film about Rosa and writes all the speeches and everything she says himself. Rosa gives several speeches in Märthesheimer's script, all of which he wrote. If you make a film about a woman whose main activity was writing and speaking, and then don't take a single authentic word from her, not a single speech, but invent everything yourself – I found that impossible at the time. To push the kind

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Tübingen philosophy professor and writer Walter Jens creates a tribunal against Rosa Luxemburg's murderers. The director was Franz Josef Wild. The role of Rosa Luxemburg is played by the German-Austrian theater and film actress Ursula Lingen. Since the genre is a television play, i. e. a filmed play, it is not counted here as a feature film in the manner of Margarethe von Trotta. See *Klassiker des deutschen Fernsehspiels. Die Rote Rosa*, online: <http://krimiserien.heimat.eu/fernsehspiele/fernsehspiele/19660901ard-dieroterosa.htm>.

32 Because von Trotta was responsible for the screenplay and the direction at the same time, the film is also classified as a so-called auteur film.

33 The Deutsche Film- und Medienbewertung (German Film and Media Rating) awarded the biopic the rating “Especially Valuable.” The leading actress Barbara Sukowa was awarded Best Actress in Cannes in 1986. She also won Best Actress in a Leading Role at the German Film Awards, and von Trotta was awarded the 1986 Film Prize in Gold for Best Feature Film. In the same year, she received the Guild Film Award in Gold. The film was also very well received in the GDR.

34 In 1987, Margarethe von Trotta won the First Prize of the Association of Film and Television Workers of the GDR for the best film of 1986. See Wydra: Margarethe, p. 259.

of fictionality so far would end in arbitrariness and banality – that would be unworthy of Rosa Luxemburg. Yet she wrote such great, poetic letters and gave speeches that have their own passionate language. But then, one doesn't know what Fassbinder's film would have looked like in the end.<sup>35</sup>

It is already clear here that von Trotta was concerned with creating a picture of Luxemburg that was as authentic as possible and oriented toward documentary material. She read secondary literature and biographies<sup>36</sup> and sought advice from Luxemburg researchers Helmut Hirsch, Annelies Laschitza, and Bernhard von Mutius. She even found contemporary witnesses who were still alive and spoke to the anarchist and Spain fighter Augustin Souchy and the widow of Rosa Luxemburg's biographer Paul Frölich, Rosi Wolfstein-Frölich.<sup>37</sup> Both 90-year-olds gave their personal view of Luxemburg in their conversations with von Trotta.<sup>38</sup>

Laschitza also advised the director to study Rosa Luxemburg's letters deeply.<sup>39</sup> As von Trotta says in the DVD interview, she followed this advice and relied primarily on Luxemburg's letters published up to the time of production in 1985:

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35 Wydra, Margarethe, p. 139.

36 In the plot, there are similarities with the biographies of Kautsky, Frölich, and Nertl.

37 Riccardo Altieri: Rosi Wolfstein-Frölich. Sozialdemokratin und Antimilitaristin, Berlin/Leipzig 2021.

38 Wydra, Margarethe, p. 139.

39 When von Trotta began researching her film in 1982, only three volumes of the *Collected Letters* were available. Von Trotta managed to get permission from the CC of the SED to do research in the GDR. Laschitza says in retrospect that it was von Trotta's peace policy commitment in the FRG above all that led to this permission being granted. Laschitza also gave von Trotta insight into the other letter manuscripts and proofread the scripts for content. See Annelies Laschitza über die Freundschaft zu Margarethe von Trotta (Annelies Laschitza on her friendship with Margarethe von Trotta), online: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=87GCZ998cRk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87GCZ998cRk).



“Where I kept to it were her letters. And those were 2,500 letters that were still preserved. ... And some of them were very beautiful and wonderfully formulated poetic letters. ... And then I felt the human being in them. ... It was like a gate that opened, like a glimpse into another soul and not just into a theorist. And I read these letters five times. Without taking notes. And thought, what I’m left with then ... that’s what interests me about the woman.” (05:16–06:06)<sup>40</sup>

Fassbinder had planned to give the role of Rosa Luxemburg to the US actress Jane Fonda. However, von Trotta decided on Barbara Sukowa, with whom she had already made the film *Die bleierne Zeit* at the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>41</sup> Although Sukowa bore little resemblance to Luxemburg, she was so convincing in the role that she not only won major awards but also left a lasting impression on the audience. Von Trotta believes that “[e]ven today, people who have seen the film would still have Barbara Sukowa in their minds if they thought of Rosa Luxemburg.”<sup>42</sup>

In the 117-minute film, the character Rosa Luxemburg is at the center of the action. A closer look at the 92 scenes<sup>43</sup> reveals that von Trotta wants to emphasize five main aspects of Luxemburg’s biography: as a prisoner, as a lover, as a politician, among friends, and as a nature and animal lover. Most of the scenes in the drama show Luxemburg in captivity. This is why von Trotta originally planned to call the film *The Cheerful Patience of Rosa Luxemburg*.<sup>44</sup> Despite renouncing this title, the motif of patience runs through the film like

40 Quoted from DVD: Rosa Luxemburg. Ein Film von Margarethe von Trotta. Extras: Interview mit Margarethe von Trotta, Berlin 2009.

41 In it, Barbara Sukowa took on the role of Marianne, which von Trotta based on the historical figure of Gudrun Ensslin. She was a member of the Red Army Faction (RAF) and was portrayed in the film together with her sister Christiane (Juliane in the film), the editor of *Emma* and co-founder of the magazine.

42 Wydra, Margarethe, p. 140.

43 See Margarethe von Trotta/Christiane Ensslin: Rosa Luxemburg. Das Buch zum Film, Nördlingen 1986, pp. 12–107.

44 Wydra, Margarete, p. 143.

a red thread. On the one hand, von Trotta uses it to refer to the long periods of time during which Luxemburg was repeatedly imprisoned, and on the other, she uses it to point out the strength that Luxemburg needed to endure the prison sentences.

In the prison scenes, von Trotta has Luxemburg read aloud in her mind from her authentic prison letters. For example, in the film, she says:

“Sonyusha, you are bitter about my long imprisonment and ask: ‘How is it that people are allowed to decide about other people?’ My darling ..., I had to laugh out loud while reading. My little bird, the whole cultural history of mankind is based on the ‘decision of people over other people,’ which has deep roots in the material conditions of life. Only further agonizing development is capable of changing this. And you ask: what is the point of all this?”<sup>45</sup>

The original letter of 23 May 1917 reads:

“Sonyusha, you are bitter about my long imprisonment and ask: ‘How is it that people are allowed to decide about other people? What is the point of all this?’ Forgive me my darling, but I had to laugh out loud while reading. ... My little bird, the whole cultural history of mankind ... is based on the ‘decision of people over other people,’ which has deep roots in the material conditions of life. Only a further agonizing development is able to change this ..., and you ask: ‘What is the point of all this?’”<sup>46</sup>

These two letter excerpts exemplify how von Trotta deals with documentary material. She shortens quotations and changes them a little

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45 Quoted in the following according to von Trotta/Ensslin, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 12–107.

46 Rosa Luxemburg: Letter to Sophie Liebknecht, Wronke, May 23, 1917, in: Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 5, Berlin 1987, p. 244.

but mostly quotes from the wording. For the film version, she changes the date of the letters, for example, to adjust her narrated time.<sup>47</sup>

The prison scenes show Luxemburg as a political prisoner. However, in these scenes, the reason why Luxemburg ends up in prison only becomes marginally clear. This is because the letters selected by von Trotta do not provide any information about Luxemburg's political standpoints. Von Trotta lets her character – oriented on the letters – reflect on the general injustice in the world,<sup>48</sup> with which the director clarifies the historical narrative's context. It is not until the fifth scene that the commander in the Warsaw prison sums up her alleged offenses: "She fanatically incites to the propaganda of the deed, that is, to the overthrow of the present social order by revolutionary means, using the worst possible means."<sup>49</sup> The viewer is thus presumed to have prior biographical knowledge of the historical personality Rosa Luxemburg.<sup>50</sup>

In the next scenes, the love scenes between Luxemburg and her partner Leo Jogiches are at the center of the action.<sup>51</sup> Two scenes revolve around Luxemburg's desire for a bourgeois life with Jogiches; she longs for marriage and a child. Von Trotta bases this on two authentic letters from Luxemburg.<sup>52</sup> In scene 29, von Trotta allows the

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47 In the second scene "Cell in Wronke," for example, she quotes from an authentic letter written by Rosa Luxemburg to Sophie Liebknecht on 24 December 1917 but, in the script, gives the date as 7 December 1916.

48 Scenes 1 and 2.

49 Scene 17.

50 Ernst Schumacher also notes this in his review of the film: "The cinematic narrative style is ... achronological, associative, erratic, works with flashbacks and flash-forwards, a procedure that is likely to make access difficult at first for viewers who are not familiar with the life of Luxemburg." Ernst Schumacher: *Zwei Schritte vorwärts, einen Schritt zurück. Bemerkungen zu Margarethe von Trottas Film "Rosa Luxemburg"*, in: *Film und Fernsehen*, 14/1986, pp. 12–17, here p. 14.

51 Scenes 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13–15, 24, 29, 33, 80, 81, 90.

52 Scenes 15 and 24. See also Rosa Luxemburg: *Letter to Leo Jogiches*, Berlin, March 6, 1899, in: *Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 1, Berlin 2019, p. 285 and Rosa Luxemburg: *Letter to Leo Jogiches*, Friedenau, November 17, 1899, in: *ibid.*, pp. 424–425.

viewer to experience Luxemburg's emotional breakdown. The character cries, screams, lashes out at her lover, and finally separates from him because he has betrayed her.<sup>53</sup>

After that, the love affair with Kostja Zetkin is a central theme in the film.<sup>54</sup> Von Trotta is concerned with presenting Luxemburg as a woman with everyday feelings – heartache, pain, jealousy, and anger. These feelings can be read in the letters of the historical Rosa Luxemburg, which Laschitza also points out: “[A]fter reading her letters, one can learn how she lived, how she worked and how she rested, how she moved, what she thought about and enjoyed, why and how she was angry, whom she loved and whom she hated.”<sup>55</sup>

As a politician, the character of Rosa Luxemburg appears sporadically and concentrated on two topics in contrast to the two other focal points (Luxemburg as a prisoner or detainee and Luxemburg as a lover), i. e., the mass strike and anti-militarism.<sup>56</sup> Luxemburg's criti-

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53 Laschitza notes in her biography that Luxemburg had already had a relationship with Zetkin when Jogiches arrived in Berlin after his escape from Warsaw prison. Laschitza, *Im Lebensrausch*, p. 265. Laschitza does not give a reason for her separation from Jogiches.

54 See scenes 34, 35, 36, 37, 50.

55 Annelies Laschitza: Gedanken zur Biographischreibung aus Erfahrungen über Rosa Luxemburg. In: *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR. Gesellschaftswissenschaften (SbAWDDR)*, 16 G/1984, pp. 26–39, here p. 29.

56 Luxemburg appears as a speaker before a workers' meeting for the first time in scene 22. Here, von Trotta quotes, abridged but in the wording, from Luxemburg's authentic speech at the SPD party conference in Mannheim in 1906. See *Rosa Luxemburg: Die russische Revolution. Rede am 25.09.1906 in Mannheim in einer Volksversammlung. Leipziger Volkszeitung*, September 29, 1906, in: *Rosa Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, 6th edition, Berlin 2004, p. 177–179). Luxemburg's struggle for a proletarian revolution is made clear here. As an anti-militarist, the figure appears in scene 26 at the Social Democratic Party Congress, also as a speaker. Again, von Trotta quotes from a speech by Luxemburg. *Rosa Luxemburg: Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands vom 23. bis 29.09.1906 in Mannheim*, in: *Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 171–173. The character speaks out against war and in favor of the mass strike as a political means in the struggle for socialism. In the scene, it becomes visible that both issues meet with rejection in the SPD. As an anti-militarist, she appears

cism<sup>57</sup> of Eduard Bernstein's revisionist positions in social democracy, for example, is portrayed by von Trotta as her refusal of his invitation to dance at a masked ball.<sup>58</sup>

In scene 46 (Assembly Hall), von Trotta shows Luxemburg at an international socialist congress at the beginning of the First World War. The historical Rosa Luxemburg called on the participants at the congress of the International Socialist Bureau in Brussels shortly before the beginning of the First World War to continue to fight the war resolutely.<sup>59</sup> In the film, however, Luxemburg resigns at the adapted congress. Von Trotta's character appears desperate, hopeless, powerless, tearful, shy, and despondent. This scene shows, on the one hand, Luxemburg's despair at the start of the war, which she, as an anti-militarist, always wanted to prevent. On the other hand, von Trotta wants to use it to highlight the ordinary and everyday nature of her character, to bring her down from her pedestal of legend and demystify the historical Luxemburg in order to offer a surface for identification.

The fact that Margarethe von Trotta was keen to portray Rosa Luxemburg's personal and private side is also clearly shown by the fourth focus (Luxemburg among friends)<sup>60</sup> and the fifth (Luxemburg

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again in scene 41, this time in Frankfurt in 1913. In this scene, she still receives applause from the audience of the Social Democratic meeting. A short time later, the SPD parliamentary group voted unanimously in favor of the war credits. Von Trotta's portrayal is based on the historical events of the time.

57 Rosa Luxemburg's 1899 paper "Sozialreform oder Revolution" (Social Reform or Revolution) was a critical examination of Eduard Bernstein's "Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie" (The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy, 1899) and caused a great stir in the party. On the theoretical conflict, see in detail Frank Jacob: Rosa Luxemburg. Living and Thinking the Revolution, Marburg 2021, pp. 23–40.

58 Scene 16. Von Trotta reconstructed the idea for her fictitious design of the masked ball from a photograph given to her by Rosi Wolfstein-Frölich in which Luxemburg was dressed as a Japanese geisha. Wydra: Margarethe, p. 139. In scene 30, Luxemburg states: "I can't amuse myself with you today and polemicize against them tomorrow, Comrade Bernstein."

59 Laschitz, *Im Lebensrausch*, p. 460.

60 In the fourth focus "Among Friends," Luxemburg appears in the circle of her friends (especially in scenes 25 and 32, both situated in the Kautskys' flat). The

as a nature and animal lover).<sup>61</sup> However, this focus of von Trotta's obscures Luxemburg's political side. This is why the biographer Dietmar Dath is of the opinion that the film "amounts to a kind of pathos that was by no means alien to Luxemburg's thinking and writing"<sup>62</sup> and justifies this with Sukowa's portrayal of Luxemburg: "Trotta's heroine, played by Barbara Sukowa, [knows little] of control ... but all the more of contradiction, defiance, rebellion and the fundamental, constitutional inability to simply resign oneself to anything merely found, be it in private life or in world history."<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, her portrayal of Luxemburg seems extremely emotional, sometimes even hysterical, melancholic, or desperate, as von Trotta's screenplay also suggests. But that is exactly what von Trotta wanted to express: the everyday life of a struggling politician. Laschitzka remarks in this context as early as 1984 that

"Even a Rosa Luxemburg did not spend her life standing daily on the barricades of the class struggle, thinking only about how the working class can defeat imperialism. She had housing, clothing, food, and health problems like everyone else. She fell into changeable moods, sought and avoided contact, had joys and sorrows in love like every woman. On the other hand, she struggled extraordinarily to find the physical and psychological strength to demonstrate human greatness under complicated conditions, such as years of imprisonment or

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figures appearing here are Luise and Karl Kautsky, Clara Zetkin, August Bebel, Mathilde Jacob, Paul Levi, Ignatz Auer, and Karl and Sophie Liebknecht. The historical Rosa Luxemburg was in correspondence with all of them, and thus their conversations in the film are often taken from historical sources. In this way, von Trotta sheds more light on Luxemburg's environment, hints at political debates through the conversations, but above all highlights her character traits, e.g., her irony in scene 50: "[H]ere rest the last two men of German social democracy."

61 It is Luxemburg's human side as well as her loneliness that von Trotta stages, for example when the character sits at the table with her cat Mimi and they eat dinner together (scene 40) or when, full of melancholy, she recites from her Buffalo letter to Sophie Liebknecht in prison (scene 85).

62 Dath, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 128.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

painful separation from parents, siblings, or lover, which is not inherent in everyone but which everyone can need and acquire.”<sup>64</sup>

The fact that Margarethe von Trotta did not want to place the political Rosa Luxemburg at the center of her film triggered a wave of criticism from East and West. The reviewer of the film, Manfred Scharrer, even speaks of “a falsification of history.”<sup>65</sup> This is shown above all in the film in Luxemburg’s relationship with the SPD.<sup>66</sup> In fact, this party appears in von Trotta’s film only marginally in the third focus (Luxemburg as a politician) and there as a spectator and in connection with von Trotta’s fourth focus (Luxemburg among friends). The film does not deal with the fact that after Luxemburg’s arrival in Berlin in 1898, a bitter struggle raged between her and the right wing of social democracy, which eventually led to the founding of the Spartacus League and later the KPD.<sup>67</sup> Von Trotta also omits the role of the MSPD in the November Revolution as well as the responsibility of the MSPD leadership for the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

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64 Laschitzka, *Biographischreibung*, p. 30.

65 Manfred Scharrer: *Das schwarze Wasser vom Landwehrkanal*, in: *Neue Gesellschaft Frankfurter Hefte* 5/1986, pp. 414–417, here pp. 416–417.

66 While Scharrer is of the opinion that in the film “the image of a mistress [emerges] who writes beautiful letters under difficult conditions” (Scharrer, *Wasser*, p. 416), *Emma* editor-in-chief Alice Schwarzer criticizes von Trotta’s statement that she portrayed Luxemburg primarily because of how she “never gave up being a woman.” Schwarzer’s response to this was as follows: “Only: Rosa never remained a woman through all this. At least not what is understood by ‘womanhood’ in the patriarchy.” Alice Schwarzer: *Margarethes Rosa*, in: *Emma* 4/1986, p. 14.

67 In the DEFA film, the founding of the KPD and the corresponding party congress are also left out. Günter Reisch stated: “[W]e attached importance to the full development of the contradictions.... It therefore did not seem right to us to show the founding of the party scenically. By revealing the contradictions, we want the necessity of founding the party to arise as a demand in the spectator. We want the spectator to recognise the demand for organising the revolutionary core of the working class as his own concern. This way of shaping absolutely separates our feature film about Liebknecht from a documentary film about that time.” Pioch: *Trotz alledem*, p. 13.

This criticism was also shared by the literary scholar and Brecht reviewer Ernst Schumacher, who emigrated from Munich to the GDR, in a 1986 article in the magazine *Film und Fernsehen*. While researching the film, he found out that von Trotta deliberately deleted the founding party conference of the KPD and Luxemburg's role in it. This prompted him to ask two questions:

“Did she delete the sequence because she did not grasp the full significance of the historical change that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht themselves made when they broke away from social democracy and founded the Communist Party of Germany? Or did she consider that it must seem inopportune to the financiers and distributors of the film in the FRG, including Westdeutscher Rundfunk, to emphasize this historical alternative in a big way, according to its significance, in order to avoid conclusions for today's struggle against militarism and imperialism, for peace and international understanding?”<sup>68</sup>

Schumacher accuses von Trotta, on the one hand, of deliberately misjudging key points of Luxemburg's political work and, on the other, of not wanting to upset anyone with the film.<sup>69</sup> He therefore con-

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68 Schumacher: *Zwei Schritte*, p. 16. On this topic, see also Helmut Peitsch: “Aber ein Teil von Deutschland gehört ihnen nicht mehr”. Ernst Schumacher, der bayrische “Begründer der marxistischen Brecht-Forschung”, in: Margrid Bircken et al. (Ed.): *Reizland DDR. Deutungen und Selbstdeutungen literarischer West-Ost-Migration*, Göttingen 2015, pp. 233–262.

69 In this context, Schumacher refers to Bertolt Brecht, who told him about the difficulties of working on the Luxemburg play: “How do you want to portray the life of Rosa Luxemburg, her tragic struggle and downfall? ... We came to the conclusion that a truthful adaptation would only deepen the discord in the workers' movement, reopen old wounds. In view of the reaction, in view of the need to consolidate our own ranks, this was not justifiable. The struggle between Rosa and Lenin over the better party type, over the theory of spontaneity, had not yet been forgotten. I should have argued against the party in a certain way. But surely I'm not going to chop off my foot just to prove that I'm a good hack.” Schumacher, *Zwei Schritte*, p. 17.



cludes that von Trotta was concerned with the “mass appeal” of her filmography.<sup>70</sup>

In an open letter to von Trotta in 1987, GDR writer and director Freya Klier accused her of failing to stage Luxemburg’s criticism of the October Revolution in her film and called on the director to show solidarity with imprisoned cultural workers in the GDR.<sup>71</sup> The letter stated:

“[A]ll of a sudden ... functionaries shake your hand effusively with thanks ... an unusually large applause roars up, and the unified press of the state functionaries organizes veritable gymnastics ... – how do you explain this enthusiasm and above all the contradiction that arises? ... The ban on the GDR singer-songwriter Stephan Krawczyk

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70 Von Trotta returned to Schumacher’s criticism when she showed her film at the Academy of Arts of the GDR in 1986 and invited public discussion afterward. Peitsch notes: “The discussion only got going when Trotta attacked Schumacher for his criticism of her film.” Peitsch: Ernst Schumacher, p. 257. Here, von Trotta apparently saw an opportunity to respond to Schumacher’s criticisms. For example, she pointed out that she had deliberately left out the founding party congress of the KPD because Alexander Kluge was planning his own film about it. Furthermore, she said that the founding party congress, as only one episode, was not appropriate and sufficient for such an event. Von Trotta further pointed out “the creative difficulty of capturing the Lenin-Rosa conflict or the Polish debate on film. These are tasks for other Luxemburg films.” AdK-O, 2428: Veranstaltung “Akademie international”, Filmvorführung “Rosa Luxemburg” von Margarethe von Trotta am 30. und 31.10.1986, f. 78–79.: Information über die Diskussion zu den Aufführungen des Films “Rosa Luxemburg”, hs. Gen. Agde. The archive material was kindly made available to the author of this paper by Prof. Helmut Peitsch. See also Peitsch, Ernst Schumacher, p. 257.

71 Previously, cultural workers had been arrested at an LL demonstration in the GDR for carrying a poster with the Luxemburg quote “Freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently.” Killet: *Fiktion*, pp. 27–28. In 1988, Klier called on cultural workers from the FRG to show solidarity and not to perform in the GDR until the prisoners were free again. Among those arrested was Klier’s husband Stephan Krawczyk. Von Trotta signed a corresponding appeal. Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk/Arno Polzin (Eds.): *Fass dich kurz! Der grenzüberschreitende Telefonverkehr der Opposition in den 1980er Jahren und das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 571–572.

two years ago was justified, among other things, by the text he read out at his concerts: it was a quote from Rosa Luxemburg's essay on the Russian Revolution. You will know it. ... In your film, this approach does not play a role – and that is understandable, because they are not your approaches and not the sore points of Western countries. But the applause of our state functionaries should have warned you to be careful, because ... the gentlemen do not appear in your film, and thank you profoundly for that."<sup>72</sup>

Von Trotta's film was received positively by the audience at a two-day screening at the Academy of Arts of the GDR as part of the series "Akademie international." As archive documents show, the seats were completely booked out on both days of the screening, 30 and 31 October 1986: "unfortunately [many interested parties] had to be turned away."<sup>73</sup> In a report, an informant from the Ministry for State Security describes that the audience emphasized the unheroic, more differentiated, and richer design of von Trotta's film in comparison to similar films from the GDR. In his summary of the first evening, he states favorably: "In the substance of the discussion, it was noticeable that the viewers received hope and courage from the film and that they expect this kind of help in life from other works of art as well."<sup>74</sup> He gave a similar assessment of the second evening: "The discussants demonstrated historical and political maturity ... [there was no derisive applause] and pleaded for Rosa and thus for our cause."<sup>75</sup>

As these reviews show, the film was generally perceived as extremely different. First and foremost, von Trotta used Luxemburg's letters as the source material for her screenplay. In doing so, she hardly changed the documentary material she incorporated in order to make her character Luxemburg as much like the historical tastemakers as

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> AdK-O, 2428, f. 74 WA: Darstellende Kunst – Agde: Bericht über die beiden Veranstaltungen mit Margarethe von Trotta.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> AdK-O, 2428, pp. 78–80, here p. 80.

possible. In choosing her focal points for the creation of her Luxemburg image, she followed her personal perception. The result is a portrait of an extremely emotional and private side of Rosa Luxemburg, beyond her political life. Margarethe von Trotta's characterization of the political Rosa Luxemburg was that of an anti-militarist and internationalist, which was, however, only hinted at in an enigmatic way. Von Trotta avoided polarizing political debates in her film. In this way, the director remained true to her film style because even the adapted portrayal of Gudrun Ensslin in her film *Die bleierne Zeit* (1981) hardly provided any information about her political activities as a member of the RAF.

The fact that von Trotta's focus was appropriate at a time when Luxemburg was still stigmatized as "bloody Rosa" in West Germany and elevated to icon status in East Germany is also shown by the great reception the film received and the numerous prizes it was awarded. Von Trotta thus succeeded in making the film accessible to a broad audience. Like her portrayal of Ensslin, her Luxemburg picture encourages further independent research.

## Conclusion

With the posthumous publication of Rosa Luxemburg's fragmentary work *On the Russian Revolution* by Paul Levi in 1922, an image of her developed in the Comintern and KPD that would later dominate for many decades in the GDR and the Soviet Union: The communist leadership stylized Luxemburg as a revolutionary and co-founder of the KPD into a symbolic figure; a theoretical examination of her political thought was either absent or prevented. Her fragment – in which she advocated freedom of speech and the press, peace, and democracy – seemed too dangerous. All of Luxemburg's political positions were devalued as flawed under the term "Luxemburgism."

How Rosa Luxemburg was to be seen in the GDR was presented in the two biographical films about the life of Karl Liebknecht by

Günter Reisch. In both films, which focus on the November Revolution, Luxemburg stands in Liebknecht's shadow and agrees with him. Her function in the film is to make Liebknecht appear as the great revolutionary and infallible. With the founding of the German Democratic Republic on 7 October 1949, Rosa Luxemburg, as a socialist revolutionary, was also perceived as a danger in the West in connection with the anti-communism of the Adenauer era. The image of "bloody Rosa," the violent "red shotgun woman," a woman who favored political terror and deliberately let the masses of workers run into the knife to achieve her political goals in order to consecrate Germany to socialist ruin, had remained constant since the first mention in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1901. However, Margarethe von Trotta's film *Rosa Luxemburg* ensured that Rosa Luxemburg was freed from the power-politically instrumentalized attributions of the GDR and FRG. Von Trotta presented Luxemburg as a woman who, on the one hand, longed for love and a middle-class life with a family and, on the other, had found a mission in life in socialist politics. Politically, von Trotta emphasizes Luxemburg as an anti-militarist and internationalist, but her membership of the KPD and her fight for the socialist revolution are omitted. This focus ultimately led to the film being awarded numerous prizes in the West and contributed to a renewed and far-reaching popularization of Luxemburg. The only feature film about Rosa Luxemburg to date is still shown on television today.

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