Rosa Luxemburg
or: The Price of Freedom

For Lovis and her friends

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

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# or: The Price of Freedom

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**Between Love and Anger: Rosa Luxemburg**



**Rosa Luxemburg**



**About Rosa Luxemburg**

**Appendix**

Communism … – to hell with the reality of it, but may God save it as a constant threat to the propertied classes. God save communism so that the cheeky riff-raff does not grow even cheekier, so that the society of those with the exclusive license for hedonism […] may at least go to bed with heartburn! So that they shall at least no longer feel like preaching morals to their victims and shall cease making jokes at their expense.

Karl Kraus, 1920

In January 1919, I attended a KPD [German Communist Party] meeting where Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were speaking. I gathered the impression that they were the intellectual leaders of the revolution, and I decided to have them killed. Following my orders, they were captured. One has to decide to break the rule of law … This decision to have them both killed did not come easy to me … I do maintain that this decision is morally and theologically legitimate.

Captain Waldemar Pabst, 1962

# Between Love and Anger: Rosa Luxemburg

## Memories for the Future

*Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently*

The political Left has only rarely managed to convey their abstract ideas of freedom and of emancipation of the individual, and of society as a whole, in such a way that less politicised people could relate to them, and indeed be drawn unto them. The political Left has often tried to compensate for this by having freedom fighters from the distant past attest to their good intentions. Let us remember Spartakus*, the Brothers Gracchus, Thomas Müntzer or Tommaso Campanella, Jacques Roux, Gracchus Babeuf, Charles Fourier or Robert Owen, Friedrich Engels, Michail Bakunin, Ferdinand Lassalle or Pjotr Kropotkin. Later, contemporaries such as: August Bebel and Clara Zetkin, Wladimir Iljitsch Lenin and Augusto Sandino, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Trotzki, Jossif Stalin and Mao Tse-tung, Patrice Lumumba, Ho Chi Minh and Frantz Fanon were also invoked. However, attending demonstrations nowadays, no matter where in the world, they are almost entirely conspicuous by their absence.

However, there are some exceptions. One German Jew from Trier is consistently present, yet so ubiquitous that he is often forgotten – Karl Marx. Apart from him, there are three more people whose images are shown almost everywhere: a Polish Jew who was heinously murdered in Germany, an Argentinean whose killers caught up with him in Bolivia in 1967, and an Italian who was finally released by the Fascists in 1937 after years of incarceration. They are Rosa Luxemburg, Ernesto Che Guevara and Antonio Gramsci. All three of them do not merely represent the rare unity of word and activism, but also an independence of thought not subordinated to any doctrine or apparatus. And all three paid for their convictions with their lives. However, they were murdered by their enemies, as opposed to being killed by enemies from their own camp, as it so often happened in the 20th century.

Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci have something else in common: they never had to exercise state power themselves, nor did

* Biographical data on most persons mentioned in the introduction can be found in the appendix.

they have to tarnish their names by participating in a dictatorial or totalitarian regime. The Social Democrat and Co-Founder of the German Communist Party, Rosa Luxemburg, did not live to see the rise of Stalin; in January 1919 she was pistol-whipped and then shot in the back. The Social Democrat and Co-Founder of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci, was imprisoned in Italy from 1928 until he fell chronically sick. Only Ernesto Che Guevara was governing in revolutionary Cuba, although he, the partisan, was not to remain there for long.

Guevara to the present day inspires the youth; Gramsci has for years particularly appealed to the intellectuals; when it comes to Rosa Luxemburg however, most are only familiar with her name and fate, but not with her thinking and work.

The present text wants to counter this tendency. It aims to awake an interest in her work and her person, one of the most unique people in the history of the European Left. She was a woman who refused to be treated preferentially on account of her gender, knowing that this type of behaviour only served to legitimate gender inequality. She was a thinker who strove for equality through freedom and solidarity, without subordinating one to the other.

The 20th century, rife with murder, treason and torture, is a nightmare stifling the political Left. The Left will only be able to free itself from this nightmare if it remembers its original virtues, which it has been robbed off in the torture chambers as well as on countless party conferences. These are: honesty towards its own actions both in the past and the present; genuine thought, especially where this becomes uncomfortable; decency, especially towards its enemies – since shiftiness promotes dictatorships but not the emancipation from exploitation and repression. Rosa Luxemburg represents all of these things.

## Jewish, Polish, German – Revolutionary

*Her humanism was deeply rooted in the humanism of earlier thinkers that have had a lasting influence on European culture. She drew inspiration from her engagement with the history, literature and art of peoples and nations in other continents. Her decisiveness in acting, and her ability to analyse new social developments and phenomena and to respond to new issues undogmatically – these developed as her experiences in the social-democratically organized labour movements grew.*
Annelies Laschitza

During the Russian Revolution of the years 1905 to 1907, Rosa Luxemburg returned to her native Poland and fell into the hands of the Warsaw police. At that point, Poland was not a sovereign nation-state but was divided between the Russian, Prussian and Austrian Empires. The Polish capital Warsaw belonged to the vast Russian Empire, in which the Tsarist regime desperately clung onto power with the aide of the secret police, corrupt bureaucracy and police terror. Under these conditions, being taken into custody for political reasons represented a very real danger to one's life. Therefore, her closest friends in Poland collected money to bail her out as well as to bribe a senior officer. Moreover, they circulated a threat that the lives of the most senior of Russian public servants would not longer be safe if she was to suffer at all. She was released shortly after and travelled to Finland, which was then also part of the Russian Empire, and from there escaped to Germany. She was never to see her native Russian Poland again.

Rosa Luxemburg over many years led a political double life: She was a member of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) as well as being a co-founder of the almost forgotten SDKPiL (the Social Democrats of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania), whose existence was barely known in German Social Democracy. She had come to Germany via Switzerland which was then the freest county in the world where even women were allowed to study. However, to the German authorities she was known as Rosalia Luebeck. By way of a marriage of convenience to a German son of immigrants, lasting from 1898 to 1903, the newly graduated 27-year old economist had obtained German citizenship in 1898.

In Russian Poland, people like her were banned to Siberia, whereas in Germany, the biggest social democratic Labour party had been

legally active since 1890, having previously been involved in the illegal contestation of the infamous Sozialistengesetz* as well as winning a number of victories at the polls. It was an obvious choice for a Polish Socialist to move to the imperial Prussia, which included annexed Polish territories in its East. She spoke and wrote the German language more fluently then most Germans, notwithstanding her exemplary language skills in Polish, Russian, French and English.

The young woman rapidly became well known in the SPD. Situated in the left wing of the party, she soon became its spokesperson. The German labour movement either loved or hated Rosa Luxemburg, although she did not make it easy even for admirers to like her. However, the SDKPiL remained her political home. The little party had, in 1893, split from the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which was founded a year earlier. The SDKPiL was initially called »Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom« (SDKP); subsequently, with the joining of the Lithuanian Left under leadership of the Polish aristocrat Feliks Dzierżyński, it was renamed »Social Democracy of the Kingdoms of Poland and Lithuania«. The argument with the majority of the PPS had originated in the issue of a sovereign Polish state. The circle of friends that Rosa Luxemburg was a part of, rejected such a state since they feared a breaking-up of the anti-capitalist forces in society. Moreover they opposed all nationalism, including Polish nationalism, since it was synonymous with repression and exploitation.

As much as one may agree with this assessment, and as much as the fear of a Polish nationalism may have been legitimate, this position was highly unrealistic. In the Europe of the turn of last century, intentionally incited nationalism led to chauvinism and xenophobia in most countries. At the end of the day, the position of Rosa Luxemburg and her friends led to an isolation of the internationalist Left in Poland, which they have not been able to abandon to the present day. Rosa Luxemburg remains a persona non grata in her native Poland, even 80 years after her violent death.

* *Sozialistengesetz [Socialist Laws – transl.]:* »Law Against the Dangerous Endeavours of Social Democracy to the General Public« (1878). Proposed by Bismarck, it banned the Social Democratic Party's press and literature, only its parliamentary seats remained. It meted out roughly 1000 years of custodial sentences as well as including social reforms (»Zuckerbrot und Peitsche« [»Sugared Bread and Whip«]). Since social democracy was the political expression of the labour movement, and the law served to strengthen the confidence of workers and therefore of social democracy, the legislation was not renewed in 1890. The SPD subsequently internationally became the strongest and most influential socialist party, and a role model to parties in other countries.

However, Luxemburg's and her friends' inability to deal with the national issue – an issue which has not been addressed sufficiently by anyone on the Left – enabled them to focus on the social question and its resolution. There was a conviction amongst European Social Democrats before World War I that the social injustices characteristic of capitalism could only be redressed by its elimination. Yet in practical politics, the leaders of European Social Democracy were focusing on the strengthening of their own movements, which they believed could best be achieved through an ever growing influx of followers, i.e. more unionised workers, more party members and increased parliamentary seats. This also included a push for stronger proletarian environmental organizations, such as building societies, »Jugendweihe« (a non-denominational dedication ceremony for children or young people) or the funeral system as administered through non-denominational communities. This worked particularly well where workers were living in the same milieu and experiencing the same problems. As soon as they moved however, this social setting also changed; as opposed to the petty-bourgeois habitus, there was something fleeting about the proletarian way of life. Only two parties had a different take on practical politics – that is, consistently working towards the overcoming of capitalism. These were the Russian Bolsheviks* surrounding Lenin, and the SDKPiL around Rosa Luxemburg and her friends. However, the politicians around Lenin sought to build a strict, hier-

* *Bolsheviks – Bolshevism; Mensheviks – Menshevism, Half-Menshevism:* In 1903, at the Second Party Conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), the followers of Lenin and his newspaper »Iskra« (»Spark«) gained a majority (Russian: bolshinstvo) in the election to the leading party organs, having campaigned for a highly organised and centralised party of professional full-time revolutionaries. The faction that wanted to see the party organised according to traditional social-democratic principles remained in the minority (Russian: menshinstvo). From then on, Lenin's followers called themselves Bolsheviks, although they actually remained in the minority within the RSDLP. In 1912, The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks finally split into two independent opposing parties. Whilst the Bolsheviks – like Rosa Luxemburg and her friends – rejected World War in 1914, the Mensheviks – like the majority of the SPD – supported it. In the February Revolution of 1917, when a bourgeois government replaced the Tsarist regime, the Mensheviks supported the suppression of the Bolsheviks; after the 1917 – October Revolution, the Bolsheviks pursued the Mensheviks increasingly radically. Bolshevism describes the policy of the Bolsheviks at a given time; the label of Menshevik or follower of Menshevism represents a stigmatisation that could hardly be surpassed and that usually led to harassment and persecution. It was not only used for genuine Mensheviks but also for those who came into conflict with the particular party line of Bolsheviks at a given time. Stalin's labelling of Rosa Luxemburg's positions as »half-menshivist« (1931, cf. page 36 ff.) made it impossible for any members of the Communist International (cf. page 38) to positively relate to Luxemburg. Aside from himself, the only »Gods« that remained were Marx, Engels and Lenin, which was shown by the appropriate emblem used by all socialist parties worldwide.

archical-militarily organised fighting party, whereas the intellectual leaders of the SDKPiL were striving for a party that would enable workers to take independent anti-capitalist action. Nevertheless, both shared the deep conviction that capitalism was leading humanity into catastrophe and therefore had to be overcome. It is thus no coincidence that after World War I, many of the leading personalities of the Polish Communist Party, the Russian Bolsheviks and the former German Communist Party were recruited from the tiny SDKPiL. Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches, who was the organisational head of the KPD and Luxemburg's life partner for one and a half decades, were killed in 1919 in the course of the German counter-revolution. Other former SDKPiL members died during the Stalinist counter-revolution, such as the entire leadership of the Polish Communist Party (in 1937).

The SDKPiL was unique in terms of their organisation and membership. It was made up of people from a similar age group and with similar social and cultural backgrounds; many were part of the assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie of Poland, and had emigrated to pursue their studies. Amongst them was a Róza Luksenburg, a short young woman born in 1871 in the small town of Zamość and raised in the metropolis of Warsaw. The SDKPiL did not function as a »typical« labour party but rather as a peer group, a group of equals who not only pursued a common political project but also entertained close personal relationships. Everyone was accepted regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, and people could rely on one another unreservedly. Rosa Luxemburg felt at home here. These were the friends that, in 1906 in Tsarist custody, saved her life by threatening terrorist action – this despite their rejection of terrorism and the fact that they never resorted to using it.

## From Marxism to Marx

*Our prevailing »Marxism« unfortunately dreads*
*any intellectual activity like an arthritic old man.*
Rosa Luxemburg, 1913

*These learned Marxists have forgotten the ABC of socialism*
Rosa Luxemburg, 1918

Leo Jogiches was four years older than Rosa Luxemburg and the son of a very wealthy Jewish family from Vilnius. He had already spent years doing conspirative work in Lithuania, as well as spending some months in prison. Jogiches met Luxemburg when she was a student of zoology, but quickly introduced her to economics and politics. He was not only Luxemburg's mentor on issues of socialism, but also her first partner in life. After their private relationship ended around 1906, they remained close, and not only politically – although Luxemburg at one point bought a gun to defend herself against Jogiches who had threatened to kill her. Jogiches was highly educated, but was not a writer or academic. He was a revolutionary, a man of actions. He not only commanded natural authority but was also an authoritarian, which especially in his youth brought him some lifelong enemies as well as approval. By the age of 19, Jogiches was already well versed in the repertoire of the lonesome conspirator, from illegal agitation, to the forging of documents and smuggling of activists across borders, to strikes which he organized on his own. In 1887, even the assassins of Russian Tsar Alexander III asked the 20-year old to smuggle two persecuted people abroad, which Jogiches routinely did. Thirty years later, during the First World War, he was responsible for the organisation of the illegal fight of the Spartakusgruppe* against genocide. Two months after Luxemburg's murder, during March 1919, he was also killed in his cell in Berlin-Moabit, whilst being imprisoned on remand.

* *Spartakusgruppe [Spartakus Group]:* Formed as »Gruppe Internationale« on 2nd January 1915 on the initiative of Rosa Luxemburg and the historian of the labour movement Franz Mehring, in protest against the SPD's support of the war. Soon the name Spartakusgruppe became common, following the publication of the »Spartakusbriefe« [Spartakus Letters] by the »Gruppe Internationale«. Its members were systematically persecuted because of their illegal propagandist work and its leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, imprisoned. Renamed into Spartacist League on 9th November 1918 and having organisational sovereignty, the group became – alongside the »International Communists of Germany« – the organisational and political core of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), which then took over the leadership of the Spartacist League.

The political relationship between Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches was symbiotic. Luxemburg was fast rising to become an extra-ordinarily educated Marxist by virtue of her studies at Zurich University as well as in the various immigrants circles in Switzerland. Whilst she rapidly became known as the theorist of the SDKPiL, she moreover had the theoretical skills of a first-class scientist, which she was to prove with her very own theory of accumulation in 1913. Nonetheless she was not overly interested in theory for theory's sake. Towards the end of her studies, she was writing and publishing prolifically, but the majority of her output was political journalism, focused on action and not theory. She wanted to act, to affect change, to shake things up. However, her political focal points were for many years not set by her, but rather chosen by Leo Jogiches. He often spoke through her and would have remained mute without her; Russian being his native tongue, he was lacking the patience and fluency for expressing himself in the written word, although he was of course able to speak both Polish and German.

In Zurich, Rosa Luxemburg had become a Marxist, initially not without orthodox traits. However she was never in danger of ending up in the proverbial ivory tower. Her restless mind and her temperament, fed by a strong lust for life, prevented her from this fate. Early on, she had found the appropriate vehicle for this energy in her written work: polemics. 100 years on, it can be said with certainty that Rosa Luxemburg is one of the most brilliant polemics of world literature. Not only was she unsurpassed in her life time, but by virtue of their polemic features, many of her writings on contemporary events have remained particularly relevant until today. Rosa Luxemburg, with seeming ease yet great discipline, did for political polemics what Kurt Tucholsky did for political satire of the 20th century.

Little wonder then that many of her enemies found her insufferable and denounced her accordingly, especially those who could not stand up to her poignant writing, and her sharp tongue at SPD party congresses. Some did not stop at labelling her a quarrelsome hag, but tried to degrade her publicly. Her short stature of 1.50m, her overly large head, long nose and a damaged hip (which she usually managed to hide) meant that the more vulgar amongst the Social Democrats tried to compensate for their own inferiority by cheap mockery. Rosa Luxemburg who undoubtedly suffered from this ridicule, protected her-

self, as much as possible, by resorting to self irony. For instance, she explained her preference for tall, strong maids – those were the days when keeping a household was a full-time job – by joking that, otherwise, visitors may be led to think that they had arrived in a dwarves' house. Likewise, when it came to men, she looked not only for exceptional intellectual attributes, but also physical height. Nonetheless, she was desired more than she desired. There is a fascinating photograph from a meeting of the bureau of the Second International* in 1907, which shows a beaming Rosa Luxemburg in the centre, surrounded by several dozens of elderly men. Younger men were no less fascinated by her. Apart from Leo Jogiches, all her partners were younger than her: Kostja Zetkin (1885 – 1980), the son of Clara Zetkin, for 14 years, Paul Levi for 12 years, and Hans Diefenbach (1884 – 1917), a doctor who died in the World War, for 13 years. In public, Rosa Luxemburg was mostly very cautious about her private life; bar her marriage of convenience, she was never wed and had no children. This was because in the prudish climate of Wilhelm's Germany, a woman travelling alone was seen as objectionable, in particular if she had Luxemburg's demeanour.

The existing double moral standards led her not to voice all her beliefs publicly: »Regarding Frau von Stein, with all due respect to her ivy leaves: God may punish me, but she was a cow. When Goethe left her she behaved like a nagging wash woman, and I insist that the character of a woman shows not where love begins but rather where it ends« (from a letter to Mathilde Jacob).

The fact that Luxemburg's relationship with Paul Levi only became publicly known in 1983 – many decades after both their deaths, when his family published most of the letters exchanged between the two – highlights the extent to which she was forced to be »discreet«. Levi had been her lawyer in the Frankfurt law suit for disobedience just before the World War; in 1919 he succeeded her as leader of the KPD. They had had a short-lived but intense relationship in 1914, but friendship and mutual trust were to last until Luxemburg's death. Levi also

* *Second International:* International organisation of socialist parties and trade unions (1889–1914), intended to co-ordinate economic and political actions between its members. Declarations were formulated at regular congresses, in between which there existed an International Socialist Bureau, in which Rosa Luxemburg represented the SDKPiL. At the start of World War I, the leaders of all parties betrayed their long-standing vows of pacifism, and became »defenders of the nation«, inciting workers of all countries against one another.

saved her estate and published »The Russian Revolution« in 1922, amidst much hostility. Of Luxemburg's work, this is the one most frequently cited and misunderstood, containing the seemingly self-evident categorical imperative that »Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently.«

»Refined« is what best characterises her attitude to life, argues one of her biographers. »She kept her personal relationships as neatly sorted as her possessions. Everyone had their proper place and was only allowed to come closer if invited, and even then only one step at a time. But her relationship to people was never stiff or formal. Within her closer circle, she developed a loyalty and devotion which could have turned into love, had she permitted it« (Peter Nettl).

Rosa Luxemburg was adamant in political debate, and particularly in her critique of capitalism. Initially, she limited her newly-acquired knowledge of Marxism to the application of contemporary issues. In 1899 she became well-known with the publication of the pamphlet »Social Reform or Revolution?«, in which she was reckoning with Eduard Bernstein, one of Friedrich Engels' few personal students. During the time of the Sozialistengesetze, Berstein had led the exiled press from abroad, and was considered an eminent authority in questions of theoretical socialism amongst European Social Democrats. A few months after Engels' death however, he had started to distance himself from one of the common theoretical understandings of socialism: that the social problems based on capitalist production will become increasingly exacerbated, and that capitalist society must therefore not only be challenged but entirely overcome. Bernstein was seemingly finding evidence to the contrary: inequalities would be weakened as opposed to becoming exacerbated, so that co-operation with bourgeois-capitalist society was preferable to confrontation.

At the end of the day, Bernstein had only verbalised what many social-democratic parliamentarians and leaders of the trade unions were thinking but did not dare to publicly admit. The leaders of the trade unions had never been seriously in favour of the idea of a fundamental opposition, since they felt it endangered the existence of their fragile organisations, and therefore their own power. This was particularly the case in situations of crisis, as the Sozialistengesetze had shown.

Even so, only very few dared to publicly back Bernstein. Without noticing, he had committed a grave sacrilege. The reactions of the

»guardians of the temple«, led in particular by Karl Kautsky, the theoretical architect of the SPD, were suitably fierce. Until the SPD party conference in 1903, there was a so-called »revisionism debate«*, in which Rosa Luxemburg became a significant player, even though, in terms of content, she only summarised familiar Marxist positions. The contradictions within capitalism would intensify and lead humanity into barbarism. The task of the labour movement was to try everything to avoid this process. Socialism was saving humanity from its downfall, hence the formula: »Socialism or Barbarism«.

Some experts argue that no other book has warmed more people to the endeavour of Marx – to free society from exploitation, oppression and war forever – than Luxemburg's early work »Social Reform or Revolution?«. Even today, it provides, in an exciting manner, a good overview of original Marxism, i.e. the Marxism which had not yet been rendered into a caricature by the late Kautsky and by Stalin and his followers.

Marx himself had rejected the idea of »Marxism« and had mockingly stated that he certainly would not be a Marxist, should such a thing exist. Karl Kautsky, who – besides Bernstein – was the other authority of theoretical socialism, had tried since the 1880s to popularise and systematise the thinking of Karl Marx through a number of his writings. He called the end result »Marxism«: a construct of theses, argumentations, historical lines and »scientific explanations«. For each newly-emerging question, Kautsky – the party's never-tiring expert on theoretical issues – came up with his own theory. Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg – who rose from anonymity to becoming the second-most influential German Marxists with her »Social Reform or Revolution?« – as well as thousands of now-forgotten Marxists all learned from his teachings.

* *Revisionismusdebatte, Revisionismusstreit [revisionism debate]:* 1896–1903, caused by Eduard Bernstein's series of articles in the »Neue Zeit« entitled »Problems of Socialism«, in which he critiqued the theoretical basis of social democratic policy as utopianism and demanded a revision. Socialism did supposedly not come out after the collapse of capitalism but rather but rather grew in the midst of bourgeois-capitalist society through the pressures of the labour movement. It would be important to break with all revolutionary illusions, instead a purely evolutionary politics was to be pursued. Rosa Luxemburg on the contrary pursued a radical revolutionary politics; the Dresden party conference of 1903 agreed with her and »finished« the debate. Nonetheless, Bernstein's positions became largely commonplace after 1907. Neither Bernstein's approach nor Luxemburg's revolutionary one have led to socialism; historically, the debate remains without a winner. The most relevant concept may be that of a »revolutionary realpolitik« that Luxemburg later developed.

Up until the »revisionism debate«, Kautsky was the undisputed leader of any kind of theoretical interpretation. The quarrel with Bernstein further cemented his position, since the »revisionism debate« was resolved in his favour at the party conference. Through this resolution precipitated by him, the party's executive had opened a Pandora's box: for the first time in a large political organisation – besides the Catholic Church – questions of theory and ideology were being dragged from the realm of intellectual debate into that of politics, and »decided« there. This violation of the intellect would later become commonplace in the communist movement.

In any case, the overcoming of capitalism with all its consequences remained the primary goal. This was despite the SPD-executive no longer being all that revolutionary; rather they acted pragmatically. The SPD had, almost accidentally, achieved something rather odd: amidst a Germany ascending to world power status – with its militarism, covert anti-Semitism, colonial obsession and costume fetishism – the party had created its own proletarian society, a counter-world with institutions and safety nets of its own.

The »Fourth Rank« as Theodor Fontane (the novelist of the pre-World War era) named it – called the Proletariat or the working class by others, including Marx – had firstly being crushed in the up-rising of the Silesian weavers in 1844. When the young Gerhard Hauptmann was bringing this scandal to the stage of the Berlin Deutsches Theater half a century later, his Majesty cancelled his box. In the Prussian Germany of the Wilhelmian* era – a product of the failed 1848-revolution and victorious war against Austria in 1866, put together in Versailles in 1871 after the victory against France – the Proletarian was not worth a penny.

It was the early labour movement in Germany that had first given self-confidence to the proletarian. This movement was influenced by Karl Marx, a Jew who had been driven into exile, and was led by the powerfully eloquent Ferdinand Lassalle, also a Jew. People of Jewish origin, even if they were no longer practising their religion, were playing a significant role in the German proletarian movement prior to

* *Wilhelmian Era:* Period in which German Emperor Wilhelm I was governing (1888-1918). Characterised by modernisation in the economy, science and technology, reactionary domestic policy and militarism as well as aggressive imperialism and colonialism. High point of a non-authentic culture, consisting of overloaded historicism and public stage-craft. Lead to the civilisational break of World War I.

World War I. This was also true for the early KPD, which had however already become »judenfrei« [free of Jews] voluntarily in the years before their crushing. Both workers as well as the children of the assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie (such as Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky) were ostracised by capitalist-feudal German society, which brought them together and led to the formation of a new political force. In the traditional highly-educated bourgeois spheres, many assimilated Jews, amongst them Albert Einstein and Stefan Zweig, were very successful, whereas the zenith of Jewish influence in the business elites was long surpassed by the turn of the century. Unless they managed to flee Germany, they or their descendants all died in Auschwitz or other death camps. Mathilde Jacob, Rosa Luxemburg's often underestimated »right hand«, had already been transported to Theresienstadt by the time a cheque for her ransom had been made available in the US.

The »revisionism debate« had a posed severe problem for the eight members of the SPD-executive of which neither Karl Kautsky nor the young upstart politician Rosa Luxemburg were aware of. In their eyes, Eduard Bernstein was actually right. Yet, it seemed dangerous to give up voluntarily the theory which they believed held together their counter-world. Within their segment of German society – multiply structured, with its own socialist worldview – they regarded themselves as, and in some ways also were, the proverbial one-eyed men. The revisionism of Eduard Bernstein thus appeared to threaten their highly successful project, which had led to a steady increase of membership in the trade union and party, in the sporting clubs, cooperatives and amongst the Free-Thinkers and more seats in parliament with every election. Anything that appeared to endanger their inevitable progress had to be suppressed – including a deserving comrade like Bernstein, with whom their long-established alliance naturally continued outside of official protocol. The balance between the guardians of the organisation and those of ideology was always carefully sustained by the SPD leadership.

Rosa Luxemburg did not belong to the SPD's inner circle, a circle of elderly and old men. She therefore at best had a vague idea of these processes, but was in good spirits. The party's co-chairman August Bebel, who was an honest man yet also a tactician intent on preventing the failure of his life's work, liked the young woman but also used her for his own purposes. She for her part was positively enthralled by the

old man. At one of the party conferences, she let slip the phrase »I love you, August« in public.

When Luxemburg, disguised as German journalist Anna Matschke, fell into the trap of the Tsarist police in Warsaw in 1906, Bebel pulled out all the stops to protect her life and bail her out of custody. She did however refuse his offer, after her release, to help her financially with party resources. Likewise, whilst in custody, she had rejected the notion of asking the German chancellor for diplomatic intervention to bring about her release. She first and foremost remained a citoyen, a citizen as understood in the context of the French Revolution. Self-confident and mindful of her freedom, she was a rarity in Germany. She rejected gratefulness that would force her into dependence. She was prepared to pay a high price for this freedom; indeed too high a price, as one of her friends posited. Luxemburg hated to be holed up – she only felt free in an open struggle.

She detested tepidity, but it was precisely that which had become the norm amongst the former heroes of the time of the Sozialistengesetz. One Sunday in early 1907, Luxemburg was invited for dinner at Karl Kautsky's family home together with her old friend Clara Zetkin, herself an early and resolute feminist. The two women had been enjoying a walk and arrived late. The SPD-chairperson August Bebel, who was also present, therefore jokingly remarked that the guests had already expected the worst. Luxemburg laughingly retorted that, should they ever become victims of a crime, the inscription on the grave should read: »Here lay the last two men of German Social Democracy«.

1907 represented the SPD-strategists' personal Waterloo in the shape of the elections for the Reichstag. The SPD had no serious programme with which to counter the ultra-nationalist campaigns of the bourgeois and monarchist parties against the supposed »riff-raff and betrayers of the nation«. The party, thus far spoiled by success, lost numerous constituencies and mandates, although they had gained votes in absolute terms. The proletarian counter-society firstly reached its limits, which were increasingly reinforced by the Wilhelmian social majority. In this majority society, the governing politicians had managed to embed the dream of »a place in the sun«, tied up with the nationalist obsession of the time. This had also had effects on the proletarian milieu.

The SPD-leadership had to realise the limits of their proletarian counter-society – which lay precisely in the extent in which this so-

ciety developed. The two societies could only co-exist as long as they kept closed off from one another. Since the 80s however, the majority society – previously always hermetically sealed off »downwards« – had successfully sought to enlist the proletarian classes through ideological integration, that is to say through nationalism. The elections of 1907 demonstrated clearly the effectiveness of this strategy in limiting and pushing back the influence of social democracy.

Strategically, this implied a failure of the social democratic tactics developed to overcome capitalism. Theory and practice were in constant tension. Theoretically, the key issue at stake was a rigorous overcoming of capitalism and thus a socialist ideology with which the SPD-leadership expected to bring about a high level of cohesion. The outcome of the »revisionism debate« had once again underlined this matter. In practice however, the party engaged in compromises and an increasingly non-confrontational parliamentarianism – a strategy which was far less dangerous for its organisations. In the last instance, the votes of a steadily growing proletarian society were meant to overrule the traditional majority society, thus bringing about socialism in a peaceful transition. In 1907 at the latest, the SPD-leadership realised that their practical understanding was wrong and that they would never gain the majority of votes of both societies. The propagated theoretical understanding that did not rule out a revolution was not an option for their political practice.

There was a choice between two scenarios: either to lead an offensive battle for socialism with a group of socialists which was stagnating, and indeed strategically becoming smaller – this was Rosa Luxemburg and the Left's demand. This strategy however ran the risk of losing influence over the party's clientele which were turning to nationalism, and of a smashing of the power the organisation had built thus far. The other option was to quietly turn over all existing concepts and change direction. The SPD-leadership chose the latter. As long as they were still strong enough, they would aim to lead their own counter-society into bourgeois society and thus at least sharing power. This naturally entailed that the overcoming of capitalism was no longer the primary goal; instead, it was now to be constrained only. Externally, hardly anything changed initially, whereas almost everything changed internally. This decision to strategically integrate into Wilhelmian society manifested in various stages, such as the agreement to war bonds (4th

August 1914), becoming a governing party (3rd October 1918) and finally the smashing of the labour movement (2nd May 1933).

In the eyes of the SPD-leadership, the socialist-internationalist Left had lost their function as a guarantor for a uniting ideology by 1907. Many on the Left, unable to cope with their slow but steady isolation, gave up on their beliefs and became »party soldiers«. This was the first instance of a phenomenon which is still bemoaned today: that most Leftists do not pursue a revolutionary-socialist politics which aims at the overthrowing of capitalism, but rather »get on with life« from a certain point onwards, merely claiming to follow leftist politics.

After 1907, the Left within the SPD shrank to a residual unwilling to capitulate. From 1911 onwards, a »Vanguard of the Upright« formed around Franz Mehring and Rosa Luxemburg, which after the beginning of the war was also joined by Karl Liebknecht. Other well-known Leftists such as the founder of the party's academy, Heinrich Schulz, finally succumbed to nationalism.

In this time of covert changes in the SPD, Rosa Luxemburg was already not as involved in the party as she had been prior to her travels to the revolutionary Russian Poland. In the face of the revolutionary battles in Russia, in particular the mass strike, she had abandoned a number of orthodox Marxist positions. It was in particular her relationship to proletarian organisation that was fundamentally changed. In the Marxist canon, a strong organisation was regarded as the quintessential prerequisite for any type action, especially revolutionary action. Luxemburg now came to believe that the organisational structure of the SPD had become a hindrance for revolutionary action. This was because the SPD-leadership regarded actions as a threat to the existence of its organisations, and valued their protection against a crushing by the police state above actions against the majority of society. This was already so before 1907, and certainly the case after.

In Russia, she had experienced how organisational structure came out of revolutionary action, not least the mass strike; indeed, how action preceded organisation. Armed with the notion of political mass strike, she had come to the SPD-party conference of 1906, and had failed utterly. In retrospect, the brochure she had developed especially for the conference – »Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions« became the theoretical basis for the becoming independent of the Left within the SPD, although Luxemburg had intended precisely the opposite:

not to separate from the SPD but rather to win over the party for a revolutionary politics. If necessary, this could have been limited to a mobilisation of the basis of the party against their increasingly conservative leadership.

In terms of a social-democratic understanding of politics, Rosa Luxemburg, with her advocacy of political mass strikes, dared to raise a highly contentious issue. The demand for mass or general strikes was considered in social-democratic circles as expression of an abhoration which was to be opposed, i.e. anarchism. Karl Marx had hopeless fallen out with Michael Bakunin in the early1870s. Bakunin was a Russian socialist who had been on the barricades in Dresden during the revolution of 1848. Marx believed that the liberation of the working class from exploitation and oppression was grounded in historical regularities which were a product of economic conditions. A will to change alone was not enough. A revolutionary politics required the analysis of such regularities and the appropriate action in order to consciously speed up the evolution towards a society without exploitation and oppression. Bakunin on the other hand understood socialism from a moral and ethical standpoint and placed the individual and his or her liberation at the core. For him, the will to action – nurtured by an awareness of the glaring injustices produced by capitalism – and political agitation were important elements of revolutionary politics. Anarchists wanted to use strikes not just as a weapon in the economic battle between labour and capital, as the unions did, but rather in the political battle. A few even hoped that a general strike would lead to a collapse of the entire system.

When considering Marx and Bakunin, and even more so their disciples, a so-called scientific socialism and a libertarian socialism (also referred to as anarchism) oppose one another irreconcilably. Objectively speaking there were actually a number of similarities between the two sides, but these were purposely relegated to the background. Instead the two ageing men were exacerbating their undeniable differences with their hostility and thus rendered unto the Left an absurd schism that persists to the present day. Both sides were hardly different as far as their fundamental goals were concerned; the real differences lay in the issue of how to achieve these goals. This was the initial dispute which in the 20th century was to divide the Left into ever-smaller groups and sub-groups – into the Leninists and their splinter groups,

the Trotskyites with even more splinter groups, the Maoists … and so on ad infinitum.

As Kurt Tucholsky once sneered, isn't everyone so right. Each of these groups alone knew the rightful path out of the hell-hole of capitalism. Each of them bitterly fought all other »Infidels«, assuming that the closer they were to one another ideologically, the more dangerous they were. This infantile attitude has characterised large parts of the 20th century for the European Left. In the meantime, capitalism has been thriving, causing terrible wars in the process.

It was only the Stalinists, masking as »Marxist-Leninists« which were to become successful. They evolved out of a group of younger revolutionaries, with the self-chosen label of »Stalinists« only becoming a stigma much later on. They differed from the »older« group around Lenin, which actually included many young and educated emigrants, in a number of ways. Firstly, they had very little experience of emigration and were therefore mainly influenced by the semi-barbaric Russian conditions. Secondly, the revolutionary struggle in Russia had left them with little time to systematically acquire an education, particularly where political theory was concerned – their »theory« was cast in black-and-white, friend-or-foe' terms. They in particular had acquired a cruel recklessness in the years of the civil war following the October Revolution, but were not taken entirely serious by the »older« revolutionaries (including many of their peers).

When the world revolution – which the Bolsheviks had understood as being kick-started by the October Revolution – had failed to materialise, they had begun to increasingly make concessions to the urban and rural bourgeoisies. Soviet Russia was steadily turning into a capitalist »newly industrialising country«, and the end of the Bolshevik rule appeared to be in sight. But from 1927 onwards, the general-secretary of the CPSU Stalin assumed the role of dictator and established a left-radical totalitarian regime. Through terror and murder, an egalitarian society was meant to be systematically installed which would be unable to rise up. Labelled as »socialism«, the terror regime turned against everyone, from peasants and workers to intellectuals and party functionaries.

Rosa Luxemburg's thinking posed an incalculable threat for the Stalinist regime. Everything she had despised – the dictatorship of a clique, presumed leadership instead of consensual hegemony, the replacement of political debate with police terror, bureaucracy as the

most important active element in society, tat instead of culture – formed the basic tenets of Stalinist rule.

The Stalinists had placed the protection of their own power in the centre of their entire thought and action. Theory was understood as »Agitation and Propaganda«, or »Agitprop«, which functioned first and foremost to legitimate current policy. The only communality with Marxism, or Marx, lay in the name. Indeed, Marx – and Rosa Luxemburg alongside him – were a danger to the Stalinist regime. Luxemburg in particular had to be gagged even after her death, having already vociferously criticised the early days of the Bolshevik rule. This was not possible in the case of Marx; he was indispensable for propaganda purposes, since Stalinism masked itself as »Marxism-Leninism« (which put many people off the study of Marx' texts). Moreover, the reception of the scattered thoughts of Marx was not straight-forward; systematic work was required in order to find fault with »real existing socialism« from within his work. Nonetheless, Marx's writings remained subversive. Time and again, young people who had been staunch followers of Stalin in their early political days turned into critics of the regime following their in-depth analysis of Marx' writings.

Particularly outside of the Soviet Union, many, including a large number of intellectuals, understood the regime as socialist. Stalinism was interpreted as an inevitable manifestation of socialism which presented the only alternative to the capitalist system responsible for war, exploitation and oppression. The aura of the October Revolution of 1917 and the victory over Fascism in 1945 strengthened Stalinism further and allowed it to integrate much of the anti-capitalist forces. This naturally weakened the basis of emancipatory movements such as Rosa Luxemburg had sought to establish. Under these conditions, it was a formidable challenge to pursue a socialist politics without following the Soviet Union. In 1920's Germany, the National-Socialists were borrowing their dress code and vocabulary from the labour movement. Likewise, the Stalinists employed a particular ideology and specific demands where those seeking their realisation sacrificed their freedom, and sometimes paid with their lives.

Rosa Luxemburg was spared from all of this. She experienced, in all innocence, merely the beginnings of these absurd developments. She also did not try to overcome the division between Marxists and Anarchists – a division which would take on genocidal dimensions in the

Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) when Soviet Marxism completely converge into Stalinism. Instead, Luxemburg verbally dissociated herself from Anarchism all her life – more vociferously the more she grew closer to it. Her plea for more action, less grooming of the organisation with its growing bureaucracy and especially her demands for mass strikes were interpreted as her wanting to smuggle anarchism into social democracy and thus jeopardising everything that had been achieved.

Rosa Luxemburg withstood all these charges, even at the cost of politically isolating herself for years. These were the years preceding the First World War, when Karl Kautsky, her closest ally in German Social Democracy, continuously invented new Marxist theories in order to justify the politics of adjustment to the Wilhelmian regime by the SPD-executive. This lead to the two of them increasingly growing distant, and Marxism becoming a swearword for Rosa Luxemburg.

Although she had started off as a loyal Marxist in the social-democratic movement, she had hardly referred to herself as such – this was not the done thing in the parties of the Second International. In the first decade of the 19th century, she had then abandoned most, if not all, dogmas of Kautskian Marxism and had found her own path to Marx' work and the application of his method. Hardly any of her peers could compete with her in this regard (certainly none of those who took over the Communist Party after 1923, co-founded by Luxemburg in 1918, such as Ruth Fischer, Ernst Thälmann and Walter Ulbricht). From 1910 onwards, she used the terms Marxists and Marxism mainly in inverted commas and in a negative sense.

When, during World War I, Karl Kautsky went as far as explaining the SPD's truce with the warring German empire [»Burgfrieden«] from within Marxism, Luxemburg could merely acridly ridicule this »ism«: »German Social Democrats, with the outbreak of the war, hurried to grace the foray of German imperialism with an ideological shield unearthed from the junk room of Marxism; they declared it the liberation campaign against Russian tsarism that our past masters had yearned for.«

The only »ism« that Luxemburg doubtlessly always accepted was socialism, and this was entirely sufficient for her cause. In her presentation to the founding conference of the German Communist Party on 31st December 1918 – attended by Leftists of various ideological persuasions, including many overt followers of Marxist ideas – she returned once more to Marxism. As not to scare off anyone, she did not

polemicize against Marxism in general, but rather distinguished between »official Marxism« and »true Marxism«. For the new party, she however chose a different context. She stated not: »we have rejoined Marxism«, but rather »we have rejoined Marx, we are advancing under his flag. If today we declare in our program that the immediate task of the proletariat is none other than – in a word – to make socialism a truth and a fact, and to destroy capitalism root and branch, in saying this we take our stand upon the ground occupied by Marx and Engels in 1848, and from which in principle they never swerved.«

Countless people worldwide have sacrificed themselves and given their lives for the ideals of Marxism – that is to say the eradication of all oppression and exploitation – throughout the 20th century. However, these ideals were betrayed and abused by those ruthless politicians, some of them mass murderers, which used Marxism to explain and legitimate almost everything. This included the claim in the early 1930s that social democrats were social fascists, the pact between the two totalitarian dictatorships in Europe, the Hitler-Stalin pact against the Polish people in 1939, and the repression of the Prague Spring of 1968. Stalin, Berija and Molotov as well as Mao-Zedong and Pol Pot considered themselves good »Marxists« and pursued their politics of extermination under the banner of Marxism.

## Between Social Democrats and Bolsheviks

*Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken …; she was mistaken …; she was mistaken …;*
*she was mistaken …; she was mistaken …*
*But in spite of her mistakes she was – and remains for us – an eagle.*
Lenin, 1922

*… not through a majority to revolutionary tactics,*
*but through revolutionary tactics to a majority –*
*that is the way the road runs.*
Rosa Luxemburg, 1918

Rosa Luxemburg was not concerned with political mass strike as a form of struggle in its own right. For her, it was rather a synonym for a whole range of actions with which the proletarian masses could empower themselves in their struggle against the economic and political regime, and thus emancipate themselves from the tutelage of their

leaders. She did however entertain a number of illusions about the »proletarian masses«.

The Chartists* in England and Marx in Germany had in the first half of the 19th century both believed to have found, in the proletariat, the social subject that the Left had been seeking for centuries in order to realise their ideas of improving the world. Whether one was a reformist or a revolutionary, this understanding was largely taken for granted in the social democratic movement of the turn of the century. Later on, under Stalinism, it was taken to an absurd level. On the one hand, those workers still employed on shop floors and the rural populations forcibly transformed into workers were, just as in early capitalism, stripped of their political rights and in some countries even increasingly exploited. On the other hand, there was an official deification of the »working class«, accompanied in the early stages by a particular practice in the recruitment of willing »cadres«: Only those with a pure proletarian background were considered first class citizens and thus suitable for the new ruling class. All others were to be mistrusted, even though many »non-proletarian forces« were simply indispensable. Such a social-racist understanding of the proletariat does not characterise the work of Rosa Luxemburg. For her, the working class consisted of those who engaged in and with it against the prevailing conditions, notwithstanding of social background or standing. Action, not status was her criterion. She understood class as a movement.

Yet, even she was not entirely free of a belief in the worker as the chosen one. Contrary to the secretly disillusioned SPD-leadership, she expected workers to have an almost socially genetic affinity to an anti-capitalist, if not revolutionary, stance. In her understanding, it was the task of politics to awaken this stance through the practices of the movement, to »kiss awake« the »class« as it were. She held on to this belief until her death, despite the fact that she did on occasion despair of the »proletarian masses«. When the parliamentary faction of the SPD agreed to war bonds on 14th August 1914 and large parts of the »proletarian masses« set off to the battle field, hungry for honour and booty and decorated with wreaths, she seriously contemplated suicide in order to set a sign and shake up the masses. Her alter ego in the question of war

* *The Chartists:* Early British labour movement. Their programme was the People's Charter (1837/38), a petition demanding universal suffrage by secret ballot, annual election of parliament and pay for members of parliament.

and peace, the French socialist and pacifist Jean Jaurès, was killed by French war fanatics at that time. There, nothing happened either; likewise, the »proletarian masses« willingly went to their own slaughter.

At the end of the day, the Left has not been pleased with their »revolutionary subject« the working class, although sociologically speaking, workers represent the majority of those which have at least temporarily warmed to revolutionary ideas or actions. Taking an international perspective, two approaches to the relationship of the Left to the working class became relevant in the early 20th century and remain worthy of analysis today: The German Left as far as it concerns the circle around Rosa Luxemburg, and the Russian Left as far as it concerns the Bolsheviks around Lenin.

Both approaches interpreted the alignment of German social democracy – seen as an example for proletarian parties and movements in other countries, especially those united in the Second International – as »aberration« and »betrayal« by the political leaders. They could not accept the idea that workers may not strive for socialism as a »class«, but rather numerically produce the most people responsive to socialist ideals. Both approaches understood the socialist-internationalist Left to be politically the most explicit part of the proletariat, thus forming its political arm. And for both groups, gaining significant influence on the working class was the precondition for an improvement of the world. For them, socialism remained a task for workers. It was not possible for them to conceptualise the movement to socialism as anything other than a workers' movement. The lasting merit of both groups is to have kept alive socialist thought in the political realm – as opposed to the SPD, which deemed it a normative value at most.

But the two approaches were fundamentally different in one aspect. Following Karl Kautsky, Lenin argued that the proletariat could not independently become aware of the fact that it was the carrier of socialism; this consciousness would have to be introduced »from the outside«. For Luxemburg, on the contrary, socialism was not a theory which was to be acquired and then followed like the Ten Commandments. She despised education »from above«, which for her ultimately contradicted the emancipatory claims of socialism. The proletariat was meant to become aware of its tasks through its own lived praxis – through the experiences of its own successes and even more so through its defeats – and thus be clear about the choice between »Socialism or Barbarism«.

Education was of central importance to her – together with Franz Mehring, she founded the SPD academy and also taught there. However, she understood education not as a means to introduce »lacking consciousness from the outside«, that is to say to impose on somebody, but as a help to self-help. For her, emancipation did not begin after power was gained (whether through parliament or through a revolution) but within the movement – which in turn could not be conceived of without broad-based education. This is why she assigned the party a different function to both the old German social democracy and the Russian Bolsheviks. For the former, the party had increasingly become a club which was meant to gain as many parliamentary seats as possible, and which after the electoral defeat of 1907 was willing to make more and more concessions to chauvinism and militarism in Germany. For the latter, the party was a machinery with which to gain power in a revolution and so redeem all historical evil. Ultimately, the more success-ful they became, the more their relationship with the class for which they claimed to act became instrumental and patronising. Rosa Luxem-burg could not stand either of the two variations. As once the representatives (of the age) of Enlightenment led the middle class to the realization of its own political interest and enabled it irreversibly to independent political activities, the Socialist party should help the proletariat to develop the will to liberation. Rosa Luxemburg wanted to rouse the unbreakable will »to change all the conditions that make man a humiliated, an enslaved, a desolate, a contemptuous being« (Marx).

Lenin could not forgive her for this »aberration«. Even years after her death, he pronounced in Jesuit manner a five-fold … »She was mistaken« …, until he conceded to a »but«.

As far as parliament was concerned, she was in agreement with Friedrich Engels for whom it was no more than a stage for political propaganda. For her, society could only emancipate itself if the proletariat emancipated itself. Emancipation through praxis, through incremental changes in the balance of power, was for her the only path of emancipation. At the centre of her aspirations lay not a permanent growth in members of proletarian organisations and voters, but rather a growth in self-confidence and the ability for political action. The party should make suggestions to the workers but leave the decisions up to them – even if this meant rejection, which was to be accepted.

She was not to solve the question of revolution, despite or perhaps especially because she was a revolutionary. Here again, she was more powerful in her polemics than in positive explanations. She was however very clear about what she did not want – any form of Blanquism. Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), who had spent most of his life in prison, had developed the idea of a highly organised secret order which would take power through a putsch and thus bring about socialism. Rosa Luxemburg has firstly accused Lenin and the Bolsheviks of Blanquism in 1904: Lenin's new party, the Bolshevik party of professional revolutionaries, was more a Blanquist than a workers party and would not be concerned with the interests of labour if it was politically opportune. Rosa Luxemburg would be proved right to an extent that even she would not have been able to foresee. Contrary to what theory had postulated, after taking power the relatively small group of Bolsheviks relied on a movement of revolutionary peasant soldiers, and not on the labour movement. Following Trotsky's initiative, they created a new military power subordinated to them, the Red Army, thus giving themselves a social and political foundation. Surviving even the extermination of the entire leadership in 1938*, the Red Army, alongside the Stalinist party and state apparatus and the Political Police, remained the decisive base of Bolshevik rule until 1991. Likewise, contemporary political processes in Russia cannot be comprehended outside of these three elements, although they have of course outwardly adapted to the new arrangements.

Lenin's understanding of the revolution was not just oriented towards power but also mechanical: With a fighting party, the breakthrough in a revolutionary situation was meant to occur at the point in society that was easiest to change. This point was state power, which was to be conquered and never to be surrendered again. Society was subsequently, with the aide of state power, meant to be transformed from above starting with property relations. What had appeared divine in theory produced in practice something much less divine: real existing socialism. It went through three phases: a revolutionary one

* Since 1934, Stalin and his group had had killed the political leaders of revolutionary Bolshevism. In 1938, almost the entire leadership and officers of the Red Army were murdered – roughly 20,000 people. Altogether, some 10 million people became victims of Stalinist terror – from peasants and scholars to professional full-time revolutionaries and the children of agents, who were active for the Soviet Union abroad.

until 1927/ 1928, a totalitarian one until 1953, and one characterised by a slowly disintegrating bureaucratic dictatorship until 1989/91. In the end, it collapsed like a hollow tree, its social debris leaving Russia in a wretched state until the present day; notwithstanding the murdered millions of its totalitarian phase.

Rosa Luxemburg, on the contrary, was in awe of any form of life. As a Botanist and animal-lover, her thinking was organic as opposed to mechanical. Where Lenin planned and organised for the big breakthrough, she was rather concerned with those lasting transformations which were not as easily reversible as the taking over of political power. She did not want power to be taken by a small group, or the minority ruling over the majority. She wanted to see a maturing and emancipation of the working class until she was not able to fully develop her thoughts in this respect before her death.

Especially with regards to the revolution, Rosa Luxemburg had stayed very close to traditional Marxism. She worked with theoretical notions derived from the French Revolution of 1789, or the French Commune of 1871 at best. She was not able to solve the contradiction between emancipation and revolution, between emancipation and violence. Rather than embedding the revolution as a moment of conflict in her approach to emancipation, she was not able to let go of a conception of revolution as inevitable freedom (deriving from Marx' early work). Luxemburg regarded a »traditional« revolution, as opposed to the pursuing of her own approach to emancipation, to lead to the overcoming of capitalism. This was an error which she and other leaders of the Communist Party paid for with their lives.

Luxemburg did not conceive of revolutions as the »locomotives of history«, through which glaring contradictions could be solved and paths to democratic development could be cleared. She remained caught up in the notion that the »socialist« revolution would lead to an entirely different outcome than the »bourgeois« revolution (this statement is not so much directed against revolutions as such, which will carry on existing, but rather against a conception of revolutions as saviours of our souls). Yet, and this demonstrates her greatness, Rosa Luxemburg was fully aware that she had not been able to satisfactorily answer a number of questions. In the last hours of her life, expecting another spell in prison, she planned the thorough analysis of the revolution that had just occurred.

She would not have had to start at square one, since she did possess a general framework for the development of an understanding of the revolution. In her theory of accumulation, she had sought to analyse the causes or imperialism. She assumed that the capitalist economy is in need of constant growth and thus needs to subordinate increasing parts of the non-capitalist world in the colonies until there no longer exists a non-capitalist economy and capitalism turns into barbarism. The task of the proletarian masses and their party was to avoid this trajectory by virtue of a socialist transformation. She accordingly formulated, in reference to Marx, the alternatives of »Socialism or Barbarism«.

It was clear to Rosa Luxemburg that this transformation was to be achieved through a »revolutionary realpolitik« that would employ all means possible including reforms. Yet, she thought a revolution highly probable, if not necessarily desirable. However she was ultimately unclear about how to behave in a revolutionary situation. Lenin, on the contrary, knew exactly what he wanted: to take power at the first available opportunity and then decide on the further course of action.

Concerning the question of an organisational split with social democracy, there was a further difference to Lenin. Whilst the Bolsheviks saw in the question of organisation the root of all revolutionary praxis and acted accordingly, Rosa Luxemburg had drawn the opposite conclusion from the Russian Revolution (1905-1907). She thought that the Left should remain in the big parties of social democracy, and thus close to labour, for as long as possible.

It was for this reason that she refused steadfastly, even after the beginning of the war and the treason of 4th August 1914, to resign from the SPD. She did form, with Franz Mehring, the »Gruppe Internationale«, renamed the Spartacist League shortly thereafter, but she did so from within social democracy. When, in 1917, the SPD split around the question of war and peace, Rosa Luxemburg entered the »Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany« (USPD), wishing to remain independent. She felt that the establishment of a separate party would be detrimental. If it came to revolution, the mass movement would establish the appropriate organisational formations, much like the Russian Soviets in 1905. This is why she only agreed to the transformation of the »Spartakus Group« into the Spartacist League after the revolution broke out. The evolution of the League into the German Communist Party – a name with which she was not happy – was a product of that revolution.

## In the »wrong« revolution

*Rosa Luxemburg sought to communicate the meaning of the revolution to the proletariat in her articles and manifestos … Yet, how many workers and soldiers could understand Liebknecht and Luxemburg? In the minds of the soldiers was ignorance. Liebknecht is the one that cried »Down with war«. The soldier could agree with that … Now Liebknecht called for a new war, the war of the oppressed against their opressors … The soldier could not comprehend that. And what did they even know about Luxemburg? … The masses did not understand either of the two …*
Fritz Heckert, 1921

In Bockenheim (near Frankfurt) in 1913, Rosa Luxemburg had called upon soldiers to disobey orders in the case of an outbreak of war. For this, she had been sentenced to prison for one year, which she spent in the women's prison in Berlin's Barnimstrasse. She was only out of prison for a short time thereafter; up until the November Revolution she was held in »protective custody« in Wronke (Silesia) and Wroclaw, whilst the »Spartakus Group« was engaged in difficult and dangerous anti-war propaganda. Visibly aged, the 47-year old joined the revolution on 8th November 1918.

And again, she counted on the »proletarian masses«. The SPD leadership, having for four years supported the slaughtering of millions of workers on the battle fields of World War I, had been rewarded for their loyalty on 3rd October 1918 – they entered into government. They felt then as though they had finally reached their goal of a sharing of power between the old society and the proletarian counter-society. This is why when in November 1918 a revolutionary movement of soldiers abolished this sharing of power, they entered into an agreement with the old, power-deprived leadership of the Reichswehr, and thus saving militarism for the German elites.

The Spartakus Group that had worked towards the revolution for many years had at most a marginal influence on it. The group only joined the action when it was already over: the emperor had fled, the war ended, the republic was declared, the 8-hour working day decided upon and the class-based electoral system in Prussia disappeared. The movement of soldiers disintegrated as rapidly as it had begun, with husbands and sons just wanting to return home.

The Left around Luxemburg and Liebknecht, fixated upon a tired working class about which they had briefly assumed that it was revolutionised, grasped too late that the majority of the working class not only did not want a revolution but also did not have a relationship with

the republic that the soldiers had left them. This republic was not a product of the labour movement. The SPD-leadership, content with the sharing of power, had not wanted it. Neither did the USPD which was set on the ending of the war, or the Spartakus Group which was focused on an anti-capitalist revolution.

For the proletarian masses, it was politically only the Prussian electoral system that was a problem – which could equally have been solved in a constitutional monarchy. The Germans had almost accidentally lost the Brandenburg-Prussian monarchy. Peace, bread and a slightly modernised, more cosmopolitan system was all they really wanted. Instead, they got a republic, several years of near-civil war and eventually hyperinflation, which disposed the middle classes and pushed people in the cities to slaughter horses from pure hunger.

This was in 1923 when Rosa Luxemburg's half-decayed body had long been put into a grave in Friedrichsfelde. Her corpse had been in the water for some months, and could only be identified due to her handbag and a medallion. She had died during the first wave of the civil war in January 1919. When fights broke out in Berlin's inner city – to the present day wrongly referred to as the »Spartakus Uprising« – and she was forced to comment for or against a hopeless action, she had chosen to support it for propagandist reasons. Karl Marx had done the same during the Paris Commune of 1871. However, he had done so from the safety of London, whereas Rosa Luxemburg's murderers caught up with her in Wilmersdorf. As has been proven some years ago, the newly-appointed commander-in-chief of the Reichswehr, Gustav Noske (SPD), had given his blessing to this.

## Spat at, adored, but also indispensable?

> *They (Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg) thought up a utopian and half-menshivist scheme – that of the permanent revolution (a caricature of the Marxist revolutionary scheme), imbued with a thoroughly menshivist denial of the policy of the worker-peasant alliance – and set it against the Bolshevik scheme of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry …*
> Stalin, 1931

Fear of the »short woman« would not dissipate amongst her enemies (neither those in her nor in the hostile camps) even after her death. Straight away in 1933, the Nazis had the red star removed from the

Monument to the Revolution that had been designed by Mies van der Rohe and erected near the graves of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. In 1935, the whole monument was taken down, and the graves were levelled. The headstones can today be found in the museum.

The enemies from her own camp had to make much more of an effort. When Stalin attempted to »cleanse« the labour movement and the idea of socialism of any kind of democracy, and to replace it with a »democratic centralism« (as the Stalinist system was euphemically described) Rosa Luxemburg received a strange honour in 1931. Stalin remembered a concept once created by one of his former rivals, the chairman of the Communist International* Grigori Zinoviev – Luxemburgism.

This was particularly strange, given that Luxemburg had, bar her theory of accumulation, never systematically laid out her theoretical positions but rather developed them in opposition to other views. There exists no coherent theory of Rosa Luxemburg containing its own political economy, philosophy, political theory or social psychology.

Yet, what has been handed down by Luxemburg and what made her so dangerous for Stalinism was not some theoretical concepts but rather her political positions: her uncompromising demands for democracy and for transparency in the Left, as well as her incorruptible insistence on freedom as the fundamental basis for any emancipatory movement. Since it was hardly possible to contest these, a coherent theory had to be made up, with Stalin's ideologues going about the task meticulously and knowledgably.

They combed through the works of Lenin and Luxemburg with a view to a number of issues, filtering out the differences and, in canonising Lenin's positions, declared Luxemburg's as »mistakes«. These »mistakes« were finally systemised, and so Luxemburgism was born. These findings of Luxemburg's »utopian and half-menshevist formula« were presented to a Communist International in which no one dared protesting any longer.

The Stalinists only made this much of an effort with Trotsky, Stalin's opponent for whom another »ism« was coined: Trotskyism. Trotsky's followers did however later turn this label around and used it for their

* *Communist (or Third) International:* 1919-1943; founded to co-ordinate the world revolution. After the end of the revolutionary wave in Europe, it became an instrument of Soviet foreign politics. Just before her death, Rosa Luxemburg had spoken out against the formation of a new International, after the Second International had collapsed at the start of the First World War (cf. page 17).

own purposes. Whilst the stigma of Trotskyite almost automatically led to being killed from the mid-1930's onwards, Luxemburgism was only characterised as »half-menshevist« – an attribute which only specialists can decode. It can be translated as »weak Trotskyism«. The central point was to destroy Luxemburg's authority and to make sure that no one in Stalin's sphere of influence would ever refer to her demands for democracy and freedom again.

However, the Stalinists did have use for Luxemburg's dead body, since – unlike Trotsky who had not been murdered yet – they could use the revolutionary as a mute icon once it had been »cleansed« of her work. This schizophrenic approach was practiced up until 1989 in the Eastern Bloc. In the GDR, those responsible for falsifying Luxemburg's positions would stand on a heated podium, year in year out, on every second Sunday of January, and let the crowds cheer them on. Tens of thousands would pay their honours in a spot which had especially been created for the purpose in 1951 – far away from the original graves of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

Since 1990 however, the second Sunday of January is once again dedicated to the mourning for the two victims of white terror, mixed for many with the mourning at the failure of the Left in the 20th century. In the city where the murder occurred in 1919, divided between 1948 and 1989, there are more monuments for Rosa Luxemburg than for any other person – although none so far on the square that carries her name, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz where the Volksbuehne has stood since 1914.

The first attempt to erect a monument had been stopped by the SED-leadership in 1951. Only in 2006, a memorial has been put up in the square. It was decided, certainly in line with her own self-image, knowing full well that this was the easiest way to be ignored, not to put her on a pedestal. Instead, 100 sentences written by her were put into the ground in metal letters. Whether Rosa Luxemburg would not have broken into her dreaded laughter at the thought of having her statements cast in bronze for eternity is thankfully not something the creators of the monument will ever find out. However, the gesture as such is not meant to be denounced here.

What else will remain of this Rosa Luxemburg, born in the Polish town of Zamość and murdered in the Berlin Tiergarten. So many people are aware of her name and the story of her death, but otherwise only know legends. A few pointers will have to suffice here.

An idea that is becoming increasingly important, despite almost startling in its banality, is Luxemburg's concept of movement. With her understanding of class as a movement as opposed to status, she has left behind a key for future resistance. Today, with orthodox conditions of class being increasingly eroded and being replaced by new formations, the idea of common action as a precondition for emancipation gains new currency. Incidentally, the same is true for the concept of emancipation understood as liberation from one's self-caused minority, as formulated by Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant. Where for a while and in some instances something akin to a »class« used to function through the proletarian milieu, common cultural and life circumstances are today the exception. Commonality and thus effective resistance can, if at all, only come into being through action, through a movement. Rosa Luxemburg is a great inspiration for this, and one which is yet to be discovered fully.

Public access is for Luxemburg the first prerequisite for any democracy. She pushed what she believed to be of public interest into the public eye with a vengeance. Polemics were her weapons of choice. This made her be loved by some and hated by others. Today, where spin is commonplace and real facts are kept hidden, polemics must be learned anew as a medicine against proudly-cultivated voluntarism.

Incidentally, Luxemburg had found her credo in the work of Ferdinand Lassalle, the forerunner of social democracy. She used to like quoting it frequently, to the dismay of her enemies, the »Realpolitiker« and spin doctors, who ultimately feel that left politics are only spoiled by the »mob« and should in all seriousness only be practiced in the back room: »The most revolutionary act is to always say out loud, what is.« In this way, it is easy to make powerful enemies, but hard to make courageous friends.

In times like these, where under the banner of »individualisation« society is smashed into defenceless individuals, unable to co-operate and thus to resist, individualism can be learnt from Rosa Luxemburg. She was a great individualist – sometimes to the point of eccentricity – but she knew very well that individualism without co-operation leads to ineffectiveness. This she feared more than death.

No less timely is Rosa Luxemburg's critique of bureaucracies and organisations. Today, in the age of large self-sufficient bureaucracies, her argument of organisations transforming into superfluous shells as

soon as they primarily act in self-interest is of frightening topicality. They stifle all movement, all life, and replace it with pseudo-life. This signifies the end of any emancipatory intent, since then it is only available to those who take charge of it. This was not only the case in Stalinism.

Last but not least what remains of Rosa Luxemburg is world literature – a sparkling spirit which in its writings and letters always sought to protest and of which little is left in today's Left.

Rosa Luxemburg has set a standard in her politics and her private life, her theory and her praxis, which has since rarely, if ever, been reached. Denounced and defamed, even today she is bearable and useful for many only as a mute icon. The short great woman therefore remains a challenge and more so an encouragement.

Jörn Schütrumpf,
Berlin, in February 2006

It was an impossible idea for Rosa Luxemburg to ban parties as such; to ban movements with the aid of the police, to take away the air they breathe. This was not because of the reformists, but rather because of the revolution and the revolutionaries themselves, who can only overcome their internal weaknesses if they have the freedom to learn from mistakes. This is because the experiences that the revolutionaries gain from the struggle against reformism cannot be substituted by any leader, police authority or Cheka. They have to make these experiences in their own struggle.

Paul Levi, 1922

# The teacher

Besides her work as a writer and public speaker, Rosa Luxemburg was also a genuine teacher … She taught at the old party school … Rosa Luxemburg taught political economy there … (One is tempted to put »taught« in quotation marks, so different was what she did as a teacher) … How did she bring us to critically reflect and independently interrogate issues of political economy? By means of questions! By means of questions and more questions, she managed to extract from the class whatever knowledge there may have existed on a given issue. By means of questions, she tapped along the walls of our knowledge and thus enabled us to hear for ourselves where and how it sounded hollow. She explored the arguments and made us see for ourselves if they were sound, and by encouraging us to acknowledge our own errors, she led us to develop an airtight solution.

…

From time to time there were classes which felt to us like a baptism of sorts. This happened whenever the particular subject matter touched upon other areas. Whenever the students themselves were unable to come up with a solution on their own, Rosa Luxemburg gave coherent expositions from sociology, history or even physics. It was how she isolated the essentials and spoke in a succinct and accomplished way that did not rely on rhetoric which rendered her such a magnificent speaker and made one tremble in awe of this woman's universal intellect.

Rosi Wolfstein, 1920.
Wolfstein was Luxemburg's opponent
at the founding conference of the KPD,
and – together with her husband Paul Froehlich –
published the works of Rosa Luxemburg.
Excluded from the KPD in 1929.

# Rosa Luxemburg

## In the Shelter

The celebratory mood of our empire's capital has been horribly disrupted. Just as the devout began to sing that beautiful old carol »O du fröhliche, o du selige, gnadenbringende Weihnachtszeit«, news started spreading that the shelter for homeless people had fallen prey to a mass poison attack. It claimed the lives of old and young alike. There were the 21-year old shop assistant Joseph Geihe, Karl Melchoir, a 47-year old labourer and 65-year old Lucian Szczyptierowski; and with each day new lists of victims amongst the homeless were published. Death found them everywhere: in the shelter, in prison, in the public baths or simply on the street, hidden in a barn. Before the new year had arrived, 150 homeless people were in the throws of death and 70 had already died.

For several days, the simple building in Froebel Street, usually avoided by all, was at the centre of the public's attention. What was the cause for the mass disease? Was it an epidemic? Was it poisoning caused by the consumption of rotten food? The police hurriedly assured the honourable citizenry: there was no infectious disease and therefore no danger to the decent population, the better people of the city. The mass deaths were limited to the »homeless circles«, to those who had indulged in »very cheap« stinking kipper or poisonous booze for Christmas. But where had they obtained this bad fish? Had they bought it off one of the »flying fishmongers«, or picked it up from amongst the rubbish in the market hall? The latter assumption was rejected for the crucial reason that, as opposed to what economically uneducated folks may imagine, the rubbish in the market halls cannot simply be appropriated by the homeless. On the contrary, the rubbish is collected and sold to large pig farms where, once disinfected and ground, it is fed to the animals. Attentive market police ensure that the human vermin do not, without permission, steal the pigs' food and swallow it undisinfected and whole. So the homeless could under no circumstances have picked out their festive dinner from the rubbish of the market, as one may so frivolously imagine. Thus the police are looking for a »flying fishmonger«, or a landlord that sold the deadly moonshine to the home-

less. When still alive, Joseph Geihe, Karl Melchior and Lucian Szczyptierowski had never had this much attention devoted to their modest existence. All of a sudden – such honour! – respected medical councillors rummaged around their intestines with their own bare hands. Their bellies' contents, which no one had ever cared about in the least, was being examined meticulously and discussed at length in the press. Ten gentlemen (as the press assures us) are busying themselves with the cultivation of a pure culture of the deadly bacteria. The world moreover wants to know exactly where each of the homeless men fell ill, whether in the barn or already in the shelter. Lucian Szczyptierowski has suddenly turned into a celebrity and he would surely swell with pride, were he not a foul-smelling corpse on a dissecting table.

Yes, even the emperor himself – who, thanks to the latest increase in his allowance of three million marks[1] is spared the worst – was occasionally inquiring after the health of those poisoned in the municipal shelter. His eminent wife, in true feminine manner, was sending her condolences to the Mayor Kirschner via the Chamberlain von Winterfeldt. This despite the fact that the Mayor Kirschner had not savoured any of the rotten kipper despite its outstanding value, and he and his family are in excellent health. Nor, to the best of our knowledge, is he a relative of Joseph Geihe and Lucian Szczyptierowski. But at the end of the day, to whom else should the Chamberlain von Winterfeldt have passed on the condolences expressed by the Empress? He surely could not have communicated her majesty's regards to the individual parts of the corpses he found on the dissecting table. And the »bereaved families«? Who even knows who they are? Who is going to search for them in the local dives, in the orphanages, in the red light districts or in the factories and mines? The Mayor Kirschner therefore gracefully accepted the Empresses' condolences in their stead. This gave him the strength to keep his composure faced with the pain of the Szczyptierowski family. In the town hall, manly cold-heartedness was similarly displayed in spite of the catastrophe that had occurred at the shelter. One identified, examined, monitored, filled in pages and pages of reports and yet managed to remain positive, being brave and com-

1 Against the call of the Social Democrats the Prussian House of Parliament agreed to the increase of the »Krondotation« [Taxes to the Crown] on 9th June 1910. This ruling brought on additional 3.5 Mio. Mark, so that all together 19.2 Mio. Mark hat to be provided from government funds.

posed at the agony of others just like the heroes of antiquity were when facing their own death.

Yet the whole incident brought about a discord in public life. Usually our society is on the whole respectable, built as it is on values of decency, order and good manners. It cannot be denied that there are occasional shortcomings and imperfections. But doesn't even the sun have dark spots? Indeed, can true perfection exist here on this earth? The workers themselves – namely those that are better off, those organised in unions – like to believe that, all in all, the existence and struggle of the proletariat occurs within the boundaries of decency and correctness. Everyone knows that there are shelters, beggars, prostitutes, secret police and »unsavoury elements«. Yet, all of this is usually understood as something foreign, as somehow external to society proper. There is a devide between the honourable working class and those excluded from it, and one seldomly reflects about the wretched crawling in the muck on the other side of the divide. And suddenly something happens that has the effect of traces of terrible crimes and excesses being uncovered underneath exquisite furniture in the home of well-educated, friendly people. Suddenly the mask of decency is torn from the face of our society by a nasty spectre. Suddenly its respectability is revealed to be the makeup of a prostitute. Suddenly it becomes apparent that underneath the superficial frills of civilisation lies an abyss of barbarity; hellish visions are conjured up, visions of human creatures rummaging through rubbish for food, contorting in death throes and releasing the noxious fumes of their pestilence into the atmosphere.

And the divide separating us from this dark land of the shadows abruptly appears as a painted backdrop made from nothing but thin paper.

Who are the shelter's residents that fell victim to the rotten kipper and the poisonous booze? A shop assistant, a construction worker, a lathe operator, a metal worker – workers, all workers. And who are the nameless that could not be identified by the police? Workers, all workers – or at least those that still had work yesterday.

And no worker is safe from the shelter, from the deadly kipper and booze. Today he is still agile, honourable and diligent, but what happens to him if he is dismissed tomorrow because he has reached the fatal cut-off point of forty at which his boss declares him »unemployable«? What if tomorrow he is involved in an accident, rendering him a cripple, a beggar for his pension?

It is said that it is mainly the weak and corrupt that end up in shelters and prisons: demented old men, young criminals, abnormal people with diminished responsibility. Maybe that is true. But the weak and corrupt from the higher classes do not end up in shelters. Rather, they are sent to the sanatorium or to serve in the colonies where they can live out their tendencies with the blacks. Queens and countesses that have turned mad live out the end of their days in closed-off palaces, surrounded by luxury and deferential servants. For Sultan Abdul Hamid – the old insane monster responsible for thousands of deaths who has lost his mind through murder and sexual excess – society provides a pompous villa with its own pleasure garden, cooks and a harem of blossoming girls of the age of 12 upwards. For the youthful criminal Prosper Arenberg a prison with champagne, oysters and entertaining male company was provided. For abnormally inclined counts: corrupt courts, care by their heroic wives and the quiet solace of a good wine cellar; for the mentally ill general's wife from Allenstein who has committed a murder and is responsible for a suicide: a comfortable bourgeois existence, silky underwear and the discreet empathy of society.

But the old, weak, mentally ill proletarians drop like flies: in shelters or dark alleyways, their sole possession by their side – the tail of a rotten kipper. For the propertied vermin there is protection and hedonism to the last breath; for the proletarian Lazarus, only scorpions of hunger and the poisonous bacteria of death on the rubbish heap.

This is where proletarian existence in capitalist society comes full circle. The proletarian begins as a diligent and honourable worker, from childhood onwards in the treadmill of patient, daily drudgery for capital. Millions and millions are produced for the capitalists; a ever-swelling flood of riches sweeps through the banks and the stock exchanges, whilst every day the grey masses of silent workers leave the factory gates just as they enter them in the morning: as have-nots, as eternal traders who bring to the market place the only possession they have – their own skin.

From time to time, an accident or a methane gas explosion kills them in their dozens and hundreds. There will be a brief newspaper article and after a few days they are forgotten, their last sigh muted by the grinding and stamping of profit making. After a few days, new dozens and hundreds have taken their place under the yoke of capital.

From time to time there is a crisis, there are weeks and months of unemployment, of desperate struggles with hunger. Time and again, the worker manages to get on the treadmill, happy to be able to offer his body and mind to capital.

But his strength is slowly fading. A longer phase of unemployment, an accident, the onset of old age – and he is forced to take on the first available job, moving out of his profession and sinking irreversibly. Unemployment becomes ever more permanent, employment increasingly more irregular. Chance soon rules the life of the proletarian, bad luck follows him and the price hikes hit him the hardest. Finally he no longer has the energy to fight for that piece of bread, his self-respect is fading and he finds himself at the gates of the homeless shelter, or at the gates of prison as the case may be.

Every year, thousands of proletarians descend from the ordinary class conditions of labour into the darkness of pauperisation. Inaudibly, they join the sediment at the bottom of society; the used and useless elements out of which capital can no longer squeeze any juices; the human rubbish that is swept out with an iron brush. The police, hunger and the cold compete to claim them. Finally, bourgeois society passes the poisoned chalice to its pariahs.

Pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army, that is to say the employed, and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army, that is to say the unemployed, as Marx writes in »Capital«.

The development of pauperism is inexorably linked to the development of the existing unemployed working class; both are equally necessary, both are essential conditions of capitalist accumulation and the production of wealth. The greater the social wealth, the exploitative capital, the extent and the energy of its growth and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater the industrial reserve army. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour army the greater the mass of surplus pauperized population. This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation.[2]

2 Cf. Karl Marx: Das Kapital. Erster Band, in: Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: Werke, vol. 2, Berlin 1970, p. 673 f.

Lucian Szczyptierowski, who ended his life in the street poisoned by the rotten kipper, belongs to the proletariat just as much as any qualified, highly-paid worker who can afford printed New Year's cards and a golden chain for his watch. The homeless shelter or police custody are as much pillars of today's society as the palace of the Chancellor or the Central Bank. And the poisonous feast and cheap booze in the shelter are the invisible table ware for the caviar and champagne of the millionaires. The gentlemen medical councilors may continue investigating the deadly germ in the bowels of the poisoned and growing »pure cultures«, but the real poisonous bacteria that killed the homeless was the capitalist order in its purest form.

Every day homeless individuals die of hunger and cold, and no one bar the police report takes notice. It is merely the number of dead on this occasion that has caused such a reaction in Berlin. It is only in volume, as a mass of wretchedness, that the proletarian manages to force society to pay attention to him. Only as a mass can the homeless become a public concern, albeit as a heap of corpses.

Usually a corpse is a silent and unsightly object. But there are dead bodies that speak louder than words and shine brighter than torches. After the fight on the barricades on 18th March 1848, Berlin's workers lifted up the bodies of those killed, carried them to the king's castle and forced the despot to bow his head to the victims. Now, with millions of proletarians' hands, it is essential to lift up the corpses of the homeless that are of our own flesh and blood, carry them into a new year of the struggle and cry: down with the outrageous order that bears such horrors!

Die Gleichheit (Stuttgart), 22th ed., 1912, No. 8, pages 113-115.

I think there are very few writers in the history of world literature where, as in Rosa Luxemburg's case, the greatest extent of self analysis is matched by the extent with which she reliably explored the outside world. It is the social misery of this world that she summed up when she described the suffering of a Romanian buffalo … The humanity of our society will not least be measured by how dearly we will hold Rosa Luxemburg's heritage.

Walter Jens, 1988

Rosa Luxemburg

# I can more easily imagine pogroms against Jews in Germany …

**A letter from prison to Sophie Liebknecht**

Wroclaw, before 24th December 1917

Sonichka, my little bird, I was so happy to receive your letter and wanted to write back straight away, but then I had so much to do that needed focusing on that I could not afford myself the luxury. I rather waited for the right occasion since it is much nicer to be able to talk amongst ourselves without restraint.

Every day, as I was reading the news from Russia, I was thinking of you and I worried how you must needlessly be in sorrow with every telegram you receive. Whatever reaches us from over there at the moment are mostly just news from the Tartars – which is doubly true for the South.[3] The news agencies, both here and in Russia, like to exaggerate the chaos as much as possible and to blow out of proportion each unsubstantiated rumour. Until it all becomes clearer, there is no point in upsetting yourself – in advance as it were, and without knowing the facts. It seems as though events have in general unfolded without any bloodshed – at least any rumours of »battles« have remained unconfirmed. This is simply a fierce fighting within the party, which from the perspective of the bourgeois press always appears like rampant madness and absolute hell. As far as pogroms against Jews are concerned, any such rumours are complete lies. The time of pogroms in Russia is well and truly over. The power of the labour movement and of socialism is far too great there[4]. The air has been thoroughly cleaned of miasma and the stuffy air of reactionism by the revolution, so

3 Karl Liebknecht's wife, Sophie Liebknecht (1884 – 1964), was from Rostov on Don.

4 On 24th October 1917 (in Germany on 6th November, since the Julian calendar was used in Russia until 1918), the Bolsheviks had begun an armed uprising in Russia's capital Petrograd (today's St Petersburg). On 25th October, the Provisional Government led by Kerenski was overthrown and the October Revolution began. On 26th October, the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets agreed that all power shall pass to the Soviets of Workers, Peasants and Red Army Deputies. The first Soviet Government – the Council of People's Commissars – was formed with V. I. Lenin as its Chairman.

that Kishinev[5] is gone forever. I can more easily imagine pogroms against Jews in Germany … At least it has the appropriate atmosphere of malice, cowardice, reactionism and apathy. In any case you do not need to worry about the South of Russia. Since events have led to sharp conflicts between the government in St Petersburg and the Rada[6], a solution will have to come about very soon which shall enable an assessment of the situation. For all these reasons, there is no use in tearing your hair out with anxiety. Be brave, my little girl, keep smiling, do stay calm. Everything will turn out alright, do not always expect the worst to happen! ...

I am really hoping to see you here soon, already in January. I have been told that Mat[hilde] W[urm] wants to visit in January. I would find it very difficult to make due without your visit in that month, but naturally I am not able to organise this from here. If you say that you can only come in January, it may still be possible; and maybe Mat[hilde] W[urm] can visit in February. In any case I would like to know very soon when I will be seeing you.

Karl has been in Luckau[7] prison for a year now. I have been thinking of that so often this month and of how it is just a year since you came to see me at Wronke, and gave me that lovely Christmas tree. This time I arranged to get one here, but they have brought me such a shabby little tree, with some of its branches broken off, – there's no comparison between it and yours. I'm sure I don't know how I shall manage to fix all the eight candles that I have got for it. This is my third Christmas under lock and key, but you needn't take it to heart. I am as tranquil and cheerful as ever. Last night I lay awake for a long time. I have to go to bed at ten, but can never get to sleep before one in the morning, so I lie in the dark, pondering many things. Last night my thoughts ran this wise: How strange it is that I am always in a sort of joyful intoxication, though without sufficient cause. Here I am lying

5 In Kishinev in April 1903, an armed organisation formed by the Tsarist regime had terrorised Jews, students and revolutionary workers. The pogroms were a reaction of the regime against strikes and demonstrations. Cf. Judge, Edgar H. (1992), Easter in Kishinev: anatomy of a pogrom. New York University Press.

6 The Ukrainian Central Rada was founded in Kiev in April 1917 with participation of various Ukrainian parties and formations. After the October Revolution, it declared the Ukrainian People's Republic which was opposed to the »Council of People's Commissars«. At the first All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, held in Kharkiv in December 1917, the Ukrainian Soviet Government was set up as a parallel government. On 26th January (8th February) 1918, troups loyal to the Soviets occupied Kiev.

7 Karl Liebknecht was taken to Luckau Prison on 8th December 1916.

in a dark cell upon a mattress hard as stone; the building has its usual churchyard quiet, so that one might as well be already entombed; through the window there falls across the bed a glint of light from the lamp which burns all night in front of the prison. At intervals I can hear faintly in the distance the noise of a passing train or close at hand the dry cough of the prison guard as in his heavy boots, he takes a few slow strides to stretch his limbs. The gride of the gravel beneath his feet has so hopeless a sound that all the weariness and futility of existence seems to be radiated thereby into the damp and gloomy night. I lie here alone and in silence, enveloped in the manifold black wrappings of darkness, tedium, unfreedom, and winter – and yet my heart beats with an immeasurable and incomprehensible inner joy, just as if I were moving in the brilliant sunshine across a flowery mead. And in the darkness I smile at life, as if I were the possessor of charm which would enable me to transform all that is evil and tragical into serenity and happiness. But when I search my mind for the cause of this joy, I find there is no cause, and can only laugh at myself. I believe that the key to the riddle is simply life itself, this deep darkness of night is soft and beautiful as velvet, if only one looks at it in the right way. The gride of the damp gravel beneath the slow and heavy tread of the prison guard is likewise a lovely little song of life – for one who has ears to hear. At such moments I think of you, and would that I could hand over this magic key to you also. Then, at all times and in all places, you would be able to see the beauty, and the joy of life; then you also could live in the sweet intoxication, and make your way across a flowery mead. Do not think that I am offering you imaginary joys, or that I am preaching asceticism. I want you to taste all the real pleasures of the senses. My one desire is to give you in addition my inexhaustible sense of inward bliss. Could I do so, I should be at ease about you, knowing that in your passage through life you were clad in a starspangled cloak which would protect you from everything petty, trivial, or harassing.

I am interested to hear of the lovely hunch of berries, black ones and reddish-violet ones you picked in Steglitz Park. The black berries may have been elder – of course you know the elder berries which hang in thick and heavy clusters among fan-shaped leaves. More probably, however, they were privet, slender and graceful, upright spikes of berries, amid narrow, elongated green leaves. The reddish-violet

berries, almost hidden by small leaves, must have been those of the dwarf medlar; their proper colour is red, but at this late season, when they are over-ripe and beginning to rot, they often assume a violet tinge. The leaves are like those of the myrtle, small, pointed, dark green in colour, with a leathery upper surface, but rough beneath.

Sonyusha, do you know Platen's[8] »Verhängnisvolle Gabel«[9]? Could you send it to me, or bring it when you come? Karl told me he had read it at home. George's poems are beautiful. Now I know where you got the verse, »And amid the rustling of ruddy corn«[10], which you were fond of quoting when we were walking in the country. I wish you would copy out for me »The modern Amadis«[11] when you have time. I am so fond of the poem (a knowledge of which I owe to Hugo Wolf's setting) but I have not got it here. Are you still reading the »Lessing Legend«[12]? I have been re-reading Lange's[13] »History of Materialism«, which I always find stimulating and invigorating. I do hope you will read it some day.

Sonichka, dear, I had such a pang recently. In the courtyard where I walk, army lorries often arrive, laden with haversacks or old tunics and shirts from the front; sometimes they are stained with blood. They are sent to the women's cells to be mended, and then go back for use in the army. The other day one of these lorries was drawn by a team of buffaloes instead of horses. I had never seen the creatures close at hand before. They are much more powerfully built than our oxen, with flattened heads, and horns strongly recurved, so that their skulls are shaped something like a sheep's skull. They are black, and have large, soft eyes. The buffaloes are war trophies from Rumania … The soldier-drivers said that it was very difficult to catch these animals, which had always run wild, and still more difficult to break them in to harness. They had been unmercifully flogged – on the principle of »vae victis«[14] … There are about a hundred head in Breslau alone. They have been accustomed to the luxuriant Rumanian pastures and have

8 German poet and playwright, born 1796, died 1835.
9 »The Fatal Fork«, a satirical comedy.
10 »Der siebente Ring. ›Nun laß mich rufen‹« by Stefan George.
11 Poem by Christoph Martin Wieland.
12 »Die Lessing-Legende« by Franz Mehring.
13 Born in 1828, died 1875. In addition to the well-known »History of Materialism«, Lange wrote a widely-read work, »The Labour Question, its Significance for the Present and the Future«. Socialist in outlook, he was greatly interested in the foundation of the First International.
14 Woe to the conquered.

here to put up with lean and scanty fodder. Unsparingly exploited, yoked to heavy loads, they are soon worked to death. The other day a lorry came laden with sacks, so overladen indeed that the buffaloes were unable to drag it across the threshold of the gate. The soldier-driver, a brute of a fellow, belaboured the poor beasts so savagely with the butt end of his whip that the wardress at the gate, indignant at the sight, asked him if he had no compassion for animals. »No more than anyone has compassion for us men«, he answered with an evil smile, and redoubled his blows …At length the buffaloes succeeded in drawing the load over the obstacle, but one of them was bleeding … You know their hide is proverbial for its thickness and toughness, but it had been torn. While the lorry was being unloaded, the beasts, which were utterly exhausted, stood perfectly still. The one that was bleeding had an expression on its black face and in its soft black eyes like that of a weeping child – one that has been severely thrashed and does not know why, nor how to escape from the torment of ill-treatment … I stood in front of the team; the beast looked at me: the tears welled from my own eyes. The suffering of a dearly loved brother could hardly have nursed me more profoundly, than I was moved by my impotence in face of this mute agony. Far distant, lost for ever, were the green, lush meadows of Rumania. How different there the light of the sun, the breath of the wind; how different there the song of the birds and the melodious call of the herdsman. Instead, the hideous street, the foetid stable, the rank hay mingled with mouldy straw, the strange and terrible men – blow upon blow, and blood running from gaping wounds … Poor wretch, I am as powerless, as dumb, as yourself; I am at one with you in my pain, my weakness, and my longing.

Meanwhile the women prisoners were jostling one another as they busily unloaded the dray and carried the heavy sacks into the building. The driver, hands in pockets, was striding up and down the courtyard, smiling to himself as he whistled a popular air. I had a vision of all the splendour of war!

Write soon.

Darling Sonichka.
Your R

Never mind, my Sonyusha; you must be calm and happy all the same. Such is life, and we have to take it as it is, valiantly, heads erect, smiling ever – despite all.

Paul Levi now wants to earn his merits with the bourgeoisie – and subsequently with the Second and Second-and-a-half International, its agents – by re-publishing exactly those works of Rosa Luxemburg where she erred … In the labour movement's backyard however, between the dung hills, chickens of the kind of Paul Levi, Scheidemann, Kautsky and all that lot will certainly be exhilarated by the mistakes of the great communist.

Lenin, 1922

# … always the same person

This, dear Clara, I will say openly – it would hardly be possible for us German communists (God forgive me for counting myself amongst them) to carry whatever the Russians are currently burdening communism with. This is if we still had a Communist Party (and God forgive me if I do not include the present one) …

The Russians now employ a handy method. Whoever speaks out [against them] is labelled a Menshevik. I believe that it is absolutely timely to analyse ideologically the true roots of the Russians' errors. In my opinion, this will demonstrate their origin in a Leninist position such as the one Rosa Luxemburg was fighting twenty years ago, and will allow one to distance oneself from Menshevism for its substance as well as its methods. The fact that a Lenin is able to label as Menshevik my articles shows how necessary such an undertaking is. A Lenin of all people should know that Menshevism is entirely different, and I shall attempt to demonstrate this. I do believe that all in all there is a profound difference between Rosa and the Mensheviks, as well as between her and the Bolsheviks. You, dear comrade Clara, are doing a similar (or even greater) injustice to Rosa if you simply put everything down to misunderstandings, misinformation (Rosa was very well informed) or simply a personal bad mood.

Someone with a comprehensive world view such as Rosa just happens to be the same always: whether she produces the Spartakus manifesto or whether she criticises the Bolsheviks, whether she writes articles or books, gives speeches or makes tactical decisions. Someone like that is always the same person, and it is precisely the existence of such people that is comforting.

Paul Levi on 23rd September 1921 in a letter to Clara Zetkin,
who had tried on behalf of Lenin to stop Levi
from publishing Rosa Luxemburg's
manuscripts on the Russian revolution.

# Rosa Luxemburg

## The Russian Revolution[15]

### I

The Russian Revolution is the mightiest event of the World War. Its outbreak, its unexampled radicalism, its enduring consequences, constitute the clearest condemnation of the lying phrases which official Social-Democracy so zealously supplied at the beginning of the war as an ideological cover for German imperialism's campaign of conquest. I refer to the phrases concerning the mission of German bayonets, which were to overthrow Russian Tsarism and free its oppressed peoples. The mighty sweep of the revolution in Russia, the profound results which have transformed all class relationships, raised all social and economic problems, and, with the fatality of their own inner logic developed consistently from the first phase of the bourgeois republic to ever more advanced stages, finally reducing the fall of Tsarism to the status of a mere minor episode — all these things show as plain as day that the freeing of Russia was not an achievement of the war and the military defeat of Tsarism, not some service of »German bayonets in German fists,« as the »Neue Zeit« under Kautsky's editorship once promised in an editorial. They show, on the contrary, that the freeing of Russia had its roots deep in the soil of its own land and was fully matured internally. The military adventure of German imperialism under the ideological bless-ing of German Social-Democracy did not bring about the revolution in Russia but only served to interrupt it at first, to postpone it for a while after its first stormy rising tide in the years 1911-13, and then, after its outbreak, created for it the most difficult and abnormal conditions.

Moreover, for every thinking observer, these developments are a decisive refutation of the doctrinaire theory which Kautsky shared with the Government Social-Democrats[16], according to which Russia,

15 Editorial Heading. – Unfinished manuscript, reproduced from: Rosa Luxemburg, Werke, Vol. 4, p. 332-365.

16 During the war the German Social-Democracy divided into three factions: the majority leadership, which openly supported and entered into the Imperial government; the Kautsky section, which declined responsibility for the conduct of the war but supplied many of the theoretical arguments for those who accepted such responsibility; and the section led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, which openly opposed the war and counterposed international solidarity and proletarian revolution to it.

as an economically backward and predominantly agrarian land, was supposed not to be ripe for social revolution and proletarian dictatorship. This theory, which regards only a bourgeois revolution as feasible in Russia, is also the theory of the opportunist wing of the Russian labor movement, of the so-called Mensheviks, under the experienced leadership of Axelrod and Dan. And from this conception follow the tactics of the coalition of socialists in Russia with bourgeois liberalism. On this basic conception of the Russian Revolution, from which follow automatically their detailed positions on questions of tactics, both the Russian and the German opportunists find themselves in agreement with the German Government Socialists. According to the opinion of all three, the Russian Revolution should have called a halt at the stage which German imperialism in its conduct of the war had set as its noble task, according to the mythology of the German Social-Democracy, i.e., it should have stopped with the overthrow of Tsarism. According to this view, if the revolution has gone beyond that point and has set as its task the dictatorship of the proletariat, this is simply a mistake of the radical wing of the Russian labor movement, the Bolsheviks. And all difficulties which the revolution has met with in its further course, and all disorders it has suffered are pictured as purely a result of this fateful error.

Theoretically, this doctrine (recommended as the fruit of »Marxist thinking« by the »Vorwärts« of Stampfer and by Kautsky alike) follows from the original »Marxist« discovery that the socialist revolution is a national and, so to speak, a domestic affair in each modern country taken by itself. Of course, in the blue mists of abstract formulae, a Kautsky knows very well how to trace the world-wide connections of capital which make of all modern countries a single integrated organism. The problems of the Russian Revolution, moreover – since it is a product of international developments plus the agrarian question – cannot possibly be solved within the limits of bourgeois society.

Practically, this same doctrine represents an attempt to get rid of any responsibility for the course of the Russian Revolution, so far as that responsibility concerns the international, and especially the German, proletariat, and to deny the international connections of this revolution. It is not Russia's unripeness which has been proved by the events of the war and the Russian Revolution, but the unripeness of the German proletariat for the fulfilment of its historic tasks. And to

make this fully clear is the first task of a critical examination of the Russian Revolution. The fate of the revolution in Russia depended fully upon international events. That the Bolsheviks have based their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution is the clearest proof of their political far-sightedness and firmness of principle and of the bold scope of their policies. In it is visible the mighty advance which capitalist development has made in the last decade. The revolution of 1905-07 roused only a faint echo in Europe. Therefore, it had to remain a mere opening chapter. Continuation and conclusion were tied up with the further development of Europe.

Clearly, not uncritical apologetics but penetrating and thoughtful criticism is alone capable of bringing out treasures of experiences and teachings. Dealing as we are with the very first experiment in proletarian dictatorship in world history (and one taking place under the hardest conceivable conditions, in the midst of the world-wide conflagration and chaos of the imperialist mass slaughter, caught in the coils of the most reactionary military power in Europe, and accompanied by the most complete failure on the part of the international working class), it would be a crazy idea to think that every last thing done or left undone in an experiment with the dictatorship of the proletariat under such abnormal conditions represented the very pinnacle of perfection. On the contrary, elementary conceptions of socialist politics and an insight into their historically necessary prerequisites force us to understand that under such fatal conditions even the most gigantic idealism and the most storm-tested revolutionary energy are incapable of realizing democracy and socialism but only distorted attempts at either.

To make this stand out clearly in all its fundamental aspects and consequences is the elementary duty of the socialists of all countries; for only on the background of this bitter knowledge can we measure the enormous magnitude of the responsibility of the international proletariat itself for the fate of the Russian Revolution. Furthermore, it is only on this basis that the decisive importance of the resolute international action of the proletariat can become effective, without which action as its necessary support, even the greatest energy and the greatest sacrifices of the proletariat in a single country must inevitably become tangled in a maze of contradiction and blunders.

There is no doubt either that the wise heads at the helm of the Russian Revolution, that Lenin and Trotsky on their thorny path beset by

traps of all kinds, have taken many a decisive step only with the greatest inner hesitation and with the most violent inner opposition. And surely nothing can be farther from their thoughts than to believe that all the things they have done or left undone under the conditions of bitter compulsion and necessity in the midst of the roaring whirlpool of events, should be regarded by the International as a shining example of socialist polity toward which only uncritical admiration and zealous imitation are in order.

It would be no less wrong to fear that a critical examination of the road so far taken by the Russian Revolution would serve to weaken the respect for and the attractive power of the example of the Russian Revolution, which alone can overcome the fatal inertia of the German masses. Nothing is farther from the truth. An awakening of the revolutionary energy of the working class in Germany can never again be called forth in the spirit of the guardianship methods of the German Social-Democracy of late-lamented memory. It can never again be conjured forth by any spotless authority, be it that of our own »higher committees« or that of »the Russian example.« Not by the creation of a revolutionary hurrah-spirit, but quite the contrary: only by an insight into all the fearful seriousness, all the complexity of the tasks involved, only as a result of political maturity and independence of spirit, only as a result of a capacity for critical judgement on the part of the masses, whose capacity was systematically killed by the Social-Democracy for decades under various pretexts, only thus can the genuine capacity for historical action be born in the German proletariat. To concern one's self with a critical analysis of the Russian Revolution in all its historical connections is the best training for the German and the international working class for the tasks which confront them as an outgrowth of the present situation.

## II

The first period of the Russian Revolution, from its beginning in March to the October Revolution, corresponds exactly in its general outlines to the course of development of both the Great English Revolution and the Great French Revolution. It is the typical course of every first general reckoning of the revolutionary forces begotten within the womb of bourgeois society.

Its development moves naturally in an ascending line: from moderate beginnings to ever-greater radicalization of aims and, parallel with that, from a coalition of classes and parties to the sole rule of the radical party.

At the outset in March 1917, the »Cadets«, that is the liberal bourgeoisie, stood at the head of the revolution. The first general rising of the revolutionary tide swept every one and everything along with it. The Fourth Duma, ultra-reactionary product of the ultra-reactionary four-class right of suffrage[17] and arising out of the coup d'état[18], was suddenly converted into an organ of the revolution. All bourgeois parties, even those of the nationalistic right, suddenly formed a phalanx against absolutism. The latter fell at the first attack almost without a struggle, like an organ that had died and needed only to be touched to drop off. The brief effort, too, of the liberal bourgeoisie to save at least the throne and the dynasty collapsed within a few hours. The sweeping march of events leaped in days and hours over distances that formerly, in France, took decades to traverse. In this, it became clear that Russia was realizing the result of a century of European development, and above all, that the revolution of 1917 was a direct continuation of that of 1905-07, and not a gift of the German »liberator.« The movement of March 1917 linked itself directly onto the point where, ten years earlier, its work had broken off. The democratic republic was the complete, internally ripened product of the very onset of the revolution.

Now, however, began the second and more difficult task. From the very first moment, the driving force of the revolution was the mass of the urban proletariat. However, its demands did not limit themselves to the realization of political democracy but were concerned with the burning question of international policy – immediate peace. At the same time, the revolution embraced the mass of the army, which

17 The electoral law of December 1905 divided the electorate into four curiae according to class. The landowners held special privileges and the number of delegates representing workers and peasants was restricted. This undemocratic electoral law was further curtailed after the political coup of 1907: the dominance of the landowners and bourgeoisie in the Duma was guaranteed, whereas the electoral rights of the peoples of Russia's imperial borderlands were vastly reduced or entirely removed.

18 The Tsarist government had dissolved the Second Duma on 3rd June 1907 and had had the members of the social democratic faction arrested. At the same time, it introduced a new electoral law without seeking the consent of the Duma. This coup allowed the government to claim a right-leaning majority, thereby rendering the Fourth Duma, elected in 1912, an organ of power of the »reactionary strata, the tsarist bureaucracy allied to the feudal landowners and the top bourgeoisie« (V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 19, pages 47-51).

raised the same demand for immediate peace, and the mass of the peasants, who pushed the agrarian question into the foreground, that agrarian question which since 1905 had been the very axis of the revolution. Immediate peace and land – from these two aims the internal split in the revolutionary phalanx followed inevitably. The demand for immediate peace was in most irreconcilable opposition to the imperialist tendencies of the liberal bourgeoisie for whom Milyukov[19] was the spokesman. On the other hand, the land question was a terrifying spectre for the other wing of the bourgeoisie, the rural landowners. And, in addition, it represented an attack on the sacred principle of private property in general, a touchy point for the entire propertied class.

Thus, on the very day after the first victories of the revolution, there began an inner struggle within it over the two burning questions – peace and land. The liberal bourgeoisie entered upon the tactics of dragging out things and evading them. The laboring masses, the army, the peasantry, pressed forward ever more impetuously. There can be no doubt that with the questions of peace and land, the fate of the political democracy of the republic was linked up. The bourgeois classes, carried away by the first stormy wave of the revolution, had permitted themselves to be dragged along to the point of republican government. Now they began to seek a base of support in the rear and silently to organize a counter-revolution. The Kaledin Cossack campaign against Petersburg[20] was a clear expression of this tendency. Had the attack been successful, then not only the fate of the peace and land questions would have been sealed, but the fate of the republic as well. Military dictatorship, a reign of terror against the proletariat, and then return to monarchy, would have been the inevitable results.

From this we can judge the utopian and fundamentally reactionary characters of the tactics by which the Russian »Kautskyans« or Mensheviks permitted themselves to be guided.

It is especially astonishing to observe how this industrious man (Kautsky), by his tireless labor of peaceful and methodical writing during the four years of the World War, has torn one hole after another in

19 The leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party (known as the »Kadets«), P. N. Milyukov, was Minister of Foreign Affairs in the first provisional government.

20 A. M. Kaledin, the Ataman of the Don Cossack Host, had mobilised the Cossacks and had supported the counter-revolutionary troops which, in August 1917 under the leadership of L.G. Kornilov, marched on Petrograd to quell the revolution and to establish a military dictatorship. Led by the Bolsheviks, workers and soldiers defeated the counter-revolutionaries.

the fabric of socialism. It is a labor from which socialism emerges riddled like a sieve, without a whole spot left in it. The uncritical indifference with which his followers regarded this industrious labor of their official theoretician and swallow each of his new discoveries without so much as batting an eyelash, finds its only counterpart in the indifference with which the followers of Scheidemann and Co. look on while the latter punch socialism full of holes in practice. Indeed, the two labors completely supplement each other. Since the outbreak of the war, Kautsky, the official guardian of the temple of Marxism, has really only been doing in theory the same things which the Scheidemanns have been doing in practice, namely: first the International an instrument of peace; second disarmament, the League of Nations and nationalism; and finally third democracy not socialism.[21]

Hardened in their addiction to the myth of the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution – for the time being, you see, Russia is not supposed to be ripe for the social revolution! – they clung desperately to a coalition with the bourgeois liberals. But this means a union of elements which had been split by the natural internal development of the revolution and had come into the sharpest conflict with each other. The Axelrods and Dans wanted to collaborate at all costs with those classes and parties from which came the greatest threat of danger to the revolution and to its first conquest, democracy.

In this situation, the Bolshevik tendency performs the historic service of having proclaimed from the very beginning, and having fol-

21 Here, as at various points in the manuscript, the passage is still in the form of rough notations which Rosa Luxemburg intended to complete later. Her murder by military agents of the Social-Democratic coalition government prevented her from completing and revising the work. The expression, »the International an instrument of peace« refers to the excuses Kautsky gave for its bankruptcy during the war (»an instrument of peace is not suited to times of war«). It probably refers also to the theory that the International, being peaceful, is not an instrument for revolutionary struggle. Kautsky substituted utopian talk of disarmament (without the removal of the causes and roots of war!) for a revolutionary struggle against war. He provided apologetics for the League of Nations which was supposed to have banished war from the world, and he justified socialists who abandoned internationalism, supported their own governments and ruling classes, and became in theory and practice nationalists instead of internationalists. When the struggle for socialism began in earnest, the Scheidemanns defended capitalism against socialism in practice, while Kautsky did so in theory by explaining that capitalist »democracy« was democracy in the abstract, and that they were defending »democracy.« Hence the third point means: the advocacy of democracy as against socialism.
The passage in slightly expanded form might read something as follows: (1) the International as an instrument for peace-time only and for the maintenance of peace; (2) advocacy of the doctrines of disarmament, apologetics for the League of Nations and nationalism against internationalism; (3) and the advocacy of »democracy« as against socialism.

lowed with iron consistency, those tactics which alone could save democracy and drive the revolution ahead. All power exclusively in the hands of the worker and peasant masses, in the hands of the soviets – this was indeed the only way out of the difficulty into which the revolution had gotten; this was the sword stroke with which they cut the Gordian knot, freed the revolution from a narrow blind-alley and opened up for it an untrammeled path into the free and open fields.

The party of Lenin was thus the only one in Russia which grasped the true interest of the revolution in that first period. It was the element that drove the revolution forward, and, thus it was the only party which really carried on a socialist policy.

It is this which makes clear, too, why it was that the Bolsheviks, though they were at the beginning of the revolution a persecuted, slandered and hunted minority attacked on all sides, arrived within the shortest time to the head of the revolution and were able to bring under their banner all the genuine masses of the people: the urban proletariat, the army, the peasants, as well as the revolutionary elements of democracy, the left wing of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

The real situation, in which the Russian Revolution found itself, narrowed down in a few months to the alternative: victory of the counter-revolution or dictatorship of the proletariat – Kaledin or Lenin. Such was the objective situation, just as it quickly presents itself in every revolution after the first intoxication is over, and as it presented itself in Russia as a result of the concrete, burning questions of peace and land, for which there was no solution within the framework of bourgeois revolution.

In this, the Russian Revolution has but confirmed the basic lesson of every great revolution, the law of its being, which decrees: either the revolution must advance at a rapid, stormy, resolute tempo, break down all barriers with an iron hand and place its goals ever farther ahead, or it is quite soon thrown backward behind its feeble point of departure and suppressed by counter-revolution. To stand still, to mark time on one spot, to be contented with the first goal it happens to reach, is never possible in revolution. And he who tries to apply the home-made wisdom derived from parliamentary battles between frogs and mice to the field of revolutionary tactics only shows thereby that the very psychology and laws of existence of revolution are alien to him and that all historical experience is to him a book sealed with seven seals.

Take the course of the English Revolution from its onset in 1642. There the logic of things made it necessary that the first feeble vacillations of the Presbyterians, whose leaders deliberately evaded a decisive battle with Charles I and victory over him, should inevitably be replaced by the Independents, who drove them out of Parliament and seized the power for themselves. And in the same way, within the army of the Independents, the lower petty-bourgeois mass of the soldiers, the Lilburnian »Levellers« constituted the driving force of the entire Independent movement; just as, finally, the proletarian elements within the mass of the soldiers, the elements that went farthest in their aspirations for social revolution and who found their expression in the Digger movement, constituted in their turn the leaven of the democratic party of the »Levellers«.

Without the moral influence of the revolutionary proletarian elements on the general mass of the soldiers, without the pressure of the democratic mass of the soldiers upon the bourgeois upper layers of the party of the Independents, there would have been no »purge« of the Long Parliament of its Presbyterians, nor any victorious ending to the war with the army of the Cavaliers and Scots, or any trial and execution of Charles I, nor any abolition of the House of Lords and proclamation of a republic.

And what happened in the Great French Revolution? Here, after four years of struggle, the seizure of power by the Jacobins proved to be the only means of saving the conquests of the revolution, of achieving a republic, of smashing feudalism, of organizing a revolutionary defense against inner as well as outer foes, of suppressing the conspiracies of counter-revolution and spreading the revolutionary wave from France to all Europe.

Kautsky and his Russian coreligionists who wanted to see the Russian Revolution keep the »bourgeois character« of its first phase, are an exact counterpart of those German and English liberals of the preceding century who distinguished between the two well-known periods of the Great French Revolution: the »good« revolution of the first Girondin phase and the »bad« one after the Jacobin uprising. The Liberal shallowness of this conception of history, to be sure, doesn't care to understand that, without the uprising of the »immoderate« Jacobins, even the first, timid and half-hearted achievements of the Girondin phase would soon have been buried under the ruins of the revolution,

and that the real alternative to Jacobin dictatorship — as the iron course of historical development posed the question in 1793 — was not »moderate« democracy, but … restoration of the Bourbons! The »golden mean« cannot be maintained in any revolution. The law of its nature demands a quick decision: either the locomotive drives forward full steam ahead to the most extreme point of the historical ascent, or it rolls back of its own weight again to the starting point at the bottom; and those who would keep it with their weak powers half way up the hill, it drags down with it irredeemably into the abyss.

Thus it is clear that in every revolution only that party capable of seizing the leadership and power which has the courage to issue the appropriate watch-words for driving the revolution ahead, and the courage to draw all the necessary conclusions from the situation. This makes clear, too, the miserable role of the Russian Mensheviks, the Dans, Zeretellis etc., who had enormous influence on the masses at the beginning, but, after their prolonged wavering and after they had fought with both hands and feet against taking over power and responsibility, were driven ignobly off the stage.

The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party and which, by the slogan – »All power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry« – insured the continued development of the revolution.

Thereby the Bolsheviks solved the famous problem of »winning a majority of the people«, a problem which has ever weighed on the German Social-Democracy like a nightmare. As bred-in-the-bone disciples of parliamentary cretinism[22], these German Social-Democrats have sought to apply to revolutions the home-made wisdom of the parliamentary nursery: in order to carry anything, you must first have a majority. The same, they say, applies to a revolution: first let's become a »majority«. The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority — that's the way the road runs.

Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which

22 A term first applied by Marx to those parliamentarians who think that all history is decided by motions, votes and points of parliamentary debate.

could advance things (»all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry«), transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hid like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation.

Moreover, the Bolsheviks immediately set as the aim of this seizure of power a complete, far-reaching revolutionary program: not the safeguarding of bourgeois democracy, but a dictatorship of the proletariat for the purpose of realizing socialism. Thereby they won for themselves the imperishable historic distinction of having for the first time proclaimed the final aim of socialism as the direct program of practical politics.

Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in an historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and all the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honor and capacity which western Social-Democracy lacked was represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honor of international socialism.

## III

The Bolsheviks are the historic heirs of the English Levellers and the French Jacobins. But the concrete task which faced them after the seizure of power was incomparably more difficult than that of their historical predecessors.[23] Surely the solution of the problem by the direct, immediate seizure and distribution of the land by the peasants[24] was the shortest, simplest, most clean-cut formula to achieve two diverse things: to break down large land-ownership, and immediately to bind the peasants to the revolutionary government. As a political measure to fortify the proletarian socialist government, it was an excellent tactical move. Unfortunately, however, it had two sides to it; and the reverse side consisted in the fact that the direct seizure of the land by

23 Note of Rosa Luxemburg at the margin of the manuscript: »Importance of the agrarian question. Even in 1905. Then, in the Third Duma, the right-wing peasants! The peasant question and defense, the army.«

24 According to the Decree on Land, passed by the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets on 8th November 1917, private property was abolished and landed estates as well as crown, monastery and church lands were confiscated without compensation. The land was distributed according to specific consumption-labour standards. The choice of system of land cultivation (e.g. individual, collective or artel farming) was left to the communities. Highly-developed agricultural farms were not to be distributed but to be transferred to the community or the state.

the peasants has in general nothing at all in common with socialist economy.

A socialist transformation of economic relationships presupposes two things so far as agrarian relationships are concerned: In the first place, only the nationalization of the large landed estates, as the technically most advanced and most concentrated means and methods of agrarian production, can serve as the point of departure for the socialist mode of production on the land. Of course, it is not necessary to take away from the small peasant his parcel of land, and we can with confidence leave him to be won over voluntarily by the superior advantages first of union in cooperation and then finally of inclusion in the general socialized economy as a whole. Still, every socialist economic reform on the land must obviously begin with large and medium land-ownership. Here the property right must first of all be turned over to the nation, or to the state, which, with a socialist government, amounts to the same thing; for it is this alone which affords the possibility of organizing agricultural production in accord with the requirements of interrelated, large-scale socialist production.

Moreover, in the second place, it is one of the prerequisites of this transformation, that the separation between rural economy and industry which is so characteristic of bourgeois society, should be ended in such a way as to bring about a mutual interpenetration and fusion of both, to clear the way for the planning of both agrarian and industrial production according to a unified point of view. Whatever individual form the practical economic arrangements may take — whether through urban communes, as some propose, or directed from a governmental center — in any event, it must be preceded by a reform introduced from the center, and that in turn must be preceded by the nationalization of the land. The nationalization of the large and middle-sized estates and the union of industry and agriculture — these are two fundamental requirements of any socialist economic reform, without which there is no socialism.

That the Soviet government in Russia has not carried through these mighty reforms — who can reproach them for that! It would be a sorry jest indeed to demand or expect of Lenin and his comrades that, in the brief period of their rule, in the center of the gripping whirlpool of domestic and foreign struggles, ringed about by countless foes and opponents — to expect that under such circumstances they should al-

ready have solved, or even tackled, one of the most difficult tasks, indeed, we can safely say, the most difficult task of the socialist transformation of society! Even in the West, under the most favorable conditions, once we have come to power, we too will break many a tooth on this hard nut before we are out of the worst of the thousands of complicated difficulties of this gigantic task!

A socialist government which has come to power must in any event do one thing: it must take measures which lead in the direction of that fundamental prerequisite for a later socialist reform of agriculture; it must at least avoid everything which may bar the way to those measures.

Now the slogan launched by the Bolsheviks, immediate seizure and distribution of the land by the peasants, necessarily tended in the opposite direction. Not only is it not a socialist measure; it even cuts off the way to such measures; it piles up insurmountable obstacles to the socialist transformation of agrarian agriculture.

The seizure of the landed estates by the peasants according to the short and precise slogan of Lenin and his friends – »Go and take the land for yourselves« – simply led to the sudden, chaotic conversion of large landownership into peasant landownership. What was created is not social property but a new form of private property, namely, the breaking up of large estates into medium and small estates, or relatively advanced large units of production into primitive small units which operate with technical means from the time of the Pharaohs. Nor is that all! Through these measures and the chaotic and purely arbitrary manner of their execution, differentiation in landed property, far from being eliminated, was even further sharpened. Although the Bolsheviks called upon the peasantry to form peasant committees so that the seizure of the nobles' estates might, in some fashion, be made into a collective act, yet it is clear that this general advice could not change anything in the real practice and real relations of power on the land. With or without committees, it was the rich peasants and usurers who made up the village bourgeoisie possessing the actual power in the hands in every Russian village, that surely became the chief beneficiaries of the agrarian revolution. Without being there to see, any one can figure out for himself that in the course of the distribution of the land, social and economic inequality among the peasants was not eliminated but rather increased, and that class antagonisms were further

sharpened. The shift of power, however, took place to the *disadvantage* of the interests of the proletariat and of socialism.

Lenin's speech on the necessity of centralization of industry, nationalization of banks, of trade and of industry. Why not of the land? Here, on the contrary, decentralization and private property. Lenin's own agrarian program before the revolution was different. The slogan taken over from the much condemned Socialist-Revolutionaries, or rather, from the spontaneous peasant movement.

In order to introduce socialist principles into agrarian relations, the Soviet government now seeks to create agrarian communes out of proletarians, mostly city unemployed. But it is easy to see in advance that the results of these efforts must remain so insignificant as to disappear when measured against the whole scope of agrarian relations.[25] (After the most appropriate starting points for socialist economy, the large estates, have been broken up into small units, now they are trying to build up communist model production units out of petty beginnings.) Under the circumstances these communes can claim to be considered only as experiments and not as general social reform.

Formerly, there was only a small caste of noble and capitalist landed proprietors and a small minority of rich village bourgeoisie to oppose a socialist reform on the land. And their expropriation by a revolutionary mass movement of the people is mere child's play. But now, after the »seizure,« as an opponent of any attempt at socialization of agrarian production, there is an enormous, newly developed and powerful mass of owning peasants who will defend their newly won property with tooth and nail against every attack. The question of the future socialization of agrarian economy – that is, any socialization of production in general in Russia – has now become a question of opposition and of struggle between the urban proletariat and the mass of the peasantry. How sharp this antagonism has already become is shown by the peasant boycott of the cities, in which they withhold the means of existence to carry on speculation in them, in quite the same way as the Prussian Junker does. The French small peasant become the boldest defender of the Great French Revolution which had given him land confiscated from the émigrés. As Napoleonic soldier, he carried the banner of France to victory, crossed all Europe and smashed feudalism

25 Note of Rosa Luxemburg at the margin of the manuscript: »Grain monopoly with bounties. Now, post-festum, they want to introduce the class war into the village!«

to pieces in one land after another. Lenin and his friends might have expected a similar result from their agrarian slogan. However, now that the Russian peasant has seized the land with his own fist, he does not even dream of defending Russia and the revolution to which he owes the land. He has dug obstinately into his new possessions and abandoned the revolution to its enemies, the state to decay, the urban population to famine.

The Leninist agrarian reform has created a new and powerful layer of popular enemies of socialism on the countryside, enemies whose resistance will be much more dangerous and stubborn than that of the noble large landowners.

The Bolsheviks are in part responsible for the fact that the military defeat was transformed into the collapse and breakdown of Russia. Moreover, the Bolsheviks themselves have, to a great extent, sharpened the objective difficulties of this situation by a slogan which they placed in the foreground of their policies: the so-called right of self-determination of peoples,[26] or – something which was really implicit in this slogan – the disintegration of Russia. The formula of the right of the various nationalities of the Russian empire to determine their fate independently »even to the point of the right of governmental separation from Russia«, was proclaimed again with doctrinaire obstinacy as a special battle cry of Lenin and his comrades during their opposition against Milyukov ist, and then Kerenskyan imperialism.[27] It constituted the axis of their inner policy after the October Revolution also, and it constituted the entire platform of the Bolsheviks at Brest-Litovsk[28]; all they had to oppose to the display of force by German imperialism.

One is immediately struck with the obstinacy and rigid consistency with which Lenin and his comrades struck to this slogan, a slogan which

26 The Soviet government acknowledged the principle of the self-determination of peoples, implying that the nations oppressed by Tsarism must not be forcefully attached to Russia.

27 The provisional government with P. N. Milyukov as foreign minister had continued the war and assured the Entente countries that it would perform its alliance duties to win the war. This policy was continued by the newly-formed government of May 1917, in which Kerensky was Minister of War. An offensive was launched in July 1917 which led to 60,000 Russian losses. The Bolsheviks countered this with demands for immediate peace without annexations – while regarding as annexation the forceful retention of Poland, Finland, Ukraine and the other non-Russian territories.

28 During the peace negotiations in Brest-Litovsk, the Soviet government demanded the right of all peoples to self-determination in the territories of the warring countries, including the right of all nations to form independent states. This right was to be realised by a referendum of the entire population of a given territory carried out under certain conditions.

is in sharp contradiction to their otherwise outspoken centralism in politics as well as to the attitude they have assumed towards other democratic principles. While they showed a quite cool contempt for the Constituent Assembly, universal suffrage, freedom of press and assemblage, in short, for the whole apparatus of the basic democratic liberties of the people which, taken all together, constituted the »right of self-determination« inside Russia, they treated the right of self-determination of peoples as a jewel of democratic policy for the sake of which all practical considerations of real criticism had to be stilled. While they did not permit themselves to be imposed upon in the slightest by the plebiscite for the Constituent Assembly in Russia, a plebiscite on the basis of the most democratic suffrage in the world, carried out in the full freedom of a popular republic, and while they simply declared this plebiscite null and void on the basis of a very sober evaluation of its results, still they championed the »popular vote« of the foreign nationalities of Russia on the question of which land they wanted to belong to, as the true palladium of all freedom and democracy, the unadulterated quintessence of the will of the peoples and as the court of last resort in questions of the political fate of nations.

The contradiction that is so obvious here is all the harder to understand since the democratic forms of political life in each land, as we shall see, actually involve the most valuable and even indispensable foundations of socialist policy, whereas the famous »right of self-determination of nations« is nothing but hollow, petty-bourgeois phraseology and humbug.

Indeed, what is this right supposed to signify? It belongs to the ABC of socialist policy that socialism opposes every form of oppression, including also that of one nation by another.

If, despite all this, such generally sober and critical politicians as Lenin and Trotsky and their friends, who have nothing but an ironical shrug for every sort of utopian phrase such as disarmament, league of nations, etc., have in this case made a hollow phrase of exactly the same kind into their special hobby, this arose, it seems to us, as a result of some kind of policy made to order for the occasion. Lenin and his comrades clearly calculated that there was no surer method of binding the many foreign peoples within the Russian Empire to the cause of the revolution, to the cause of the socialist proletariat, than that of offering them, in the name of the revolution and of socialism, the most

extreme and most unlimited freedom to determine their own fate. This was analogous to the policy of the Bolsheviks towards the Russian peasants, whose land-hunger was satisfied by the slogan of direct seizure of the noble estates and who were supposed to be bound thereby to the banner of the revolution and the proletarian government. In both cases, unfortunately, the calculation was entirely wrong.

While Lenin and his comrades clearly expected that, as champions of national freedom even to the extent of »separation,« they would turn Finland, the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic countries, the Caucasus etc. into so many faithful allies of the Russian Revolution, we have instead witnessed the opposite spectacle. One after another, these »nations« used the freshly granted freedom to ally themselves with German imperialism against the Russian Revolution as its mortal enemy, and, under German protection, to carry the banner of counter-revolution into Russia itself. The little game with the Ukraine at Brest[29], which caused a decisive turn of affairs in those negotiations and brought about the entire inner and outer political situation at present prevailing for the Bolsheviks, is a perfect case in point. The conduct of Finland, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic lands, the peoples of the Caucasus, shows most convincingly that we are not dealing here with an exceptional case, but with a typical phenomenon.

To be sure, in all these cases, it was really not the »people« who engaged in these reactionary policies, but only the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes, who – in sharpest opposition to their own proletarian masses – perverted the »national right of self-determination« into an instrument of their counter-revolutionary class politics. But – and here we come to the very heart of the question – it is in this that the utopian, petty-bourgeois character of this nationalistic slogan resides: that in the midst of the crude realities of class society and when class antagonisms are sharpened to the uttermost, it is simply converted into a means of bourgeois class rule. The Bolsheviks were to be taught to their own great hurt and that of the revolution, that under the rule of capitalism there is no self-determination of peoples, that in a class so-

29 The Ukrainian Rada had signed a treaty with the Central Powers on 27th January 1918, although at this point it had already lost control and the Soviets had been victorious in almost all of Ukraine. The treaty gave Germany the right to occupy the country; during the negotiations in Brest-Litovsk on 27th and 28th January 1918, it raised strong demands for annexation.

ciety each class of the nation strives to »determine itself« in a different fashion, and that, for the bourgeois classes, the standpoint of national freedom is fully subordinated to that of class rule. The Finnish bourgeoisie, like the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, were unanimous in preferring the violent rule of Germany to national freedom, if the latter should be bound up with Bolshevism.

The hope of transforming these actual class relationships somehow into their opposite and of getting a majority vote for union with the Russian Revolution by depending on the revolutionary masses – if it was seriously meant by Lenin and Trotsky – represented an incomprehensible degree of optimism. And if it was only meant as a tactical flourish in the duel with the German politics of force, then it represented dangerous playing with fire. Even without German military occupation, the famous »popular plebiscite,« supposing that it had come to that in the border states, would have yielded a result, in all probability, which would have given the Bolsheviks little cause for rejoicing; for we must take into consideration the psychology of the peasant masses and of great sections of the petty bourgeoisie, and the thousand ways in which the bourgeoisie could have influenced the vote. Indeed, it can be taken as an unbreakable rule in these matters of plebiscites on the national question that the ruling class will either know how to prevent them where it doesn't suit their purpose, or where they somehow occur, will know how to influence their results by all sorts of means, big and little, the same means which make it impossible to introduce socialism by a popular vote.

The mere fact that the question of national aspirations and tendencies towards separation were injected at all into the midst of the revolutionary struggle, and were even pushed into the foreground and made into the shibboleth of socialist and revolutionary policy as a result of the Brest peace, has served to bring the greatest confusion into socialist ranks and has actually destroyed the position of the proletariat in the border countries. In Finland, so long as the socialist proletariat fought as a part of the closed Russian revolutionary phalanx, it possessed a position of dominant power: it had the majority in the Finnish parliament, in the army; it had reduced its own bourgeoisie to complete impotence, and was master of the situation within its borders. Or take the Russian Ukraine. At the beginning of the century, before the tomfoolery of »Ukrainian nationalism« with its »Karbowentzen« and

»Universals«[30] and Lenin's hobby of an »independent Ukraine« had been invented, the Ukraine was the stronghold of the Russian revolutionary movement. From there, from Rostov, from Odessa, from the Donetz region, flowed out the first lava-streams of the revolution (as early as 1902-04) which kindled all South Russia into a sea of flame, thereby preparing the uprising of 1905. The same thing was repeated in the present revolution, in which the South Russian proletariat supplied the picked troops of the proletarian phalanx. Poland and the Baltic lands have been since 1905 the mightiest and most dependable hearths of revolution, and in them the socialist proletariat has played an outstanding role.

How does it happen then that in all these lands the counter-revolution suddenly triumphs? The nationalist movement, just because it tore the proletariat loose from Russia, crippled it thereby, and delivered it into the hands of the bourgeoisie of the border countries. Instead of acting in the same spirit of genuine international class policy which they represented in other matters, instead of working for the most compact union of the revolutionary forces throughout the area of the Empire, instead of defending tooth and nail the integrity of the Russian Empire as an area of revolution and opposing to all forms of separatism the solidarity and inseparability of the proletarians in all lands within the sphere of the Russian Revolution as the highest command of politics, the Bolsheviks, by their hollow nationalistic phraseology concerning the »right of self-determination to the point of separation«, have accomplished quite the contrary and supplied the bourgeoisie in all border states with the finest, the most desirable pretext, the very banner of the counter-revolutionary efforts. Instead of warning the proletariat in the border countries against all forms of separatism as mere bourgeois traps, they did nothing but confuse the masses in all the border countries by their slogan and delivered them up to the demagogy of the bourgeois classes. By this nationalistic demand they brought on the disintegration of Russia itself, pressed into the enemy's hand the knife which it was to thrust into the heart of the Russian Revolution.

To be sure, without the help of German imperialism, without »the German rifle butts in German fists«, as Kautsky's »Neue Zeit« put it, the Lubinskys and other little scoundrels of the Ukraine, the Erichs

30 *Karbowentzen (*or *Karbowantzen),* in 1918 the currency of the Ukraine; »Universals«, the name applied to certain manifestoes or declarations of the Ukrainian Rada (national assembly).

and Mannerheims of Finland, and the Baltic barons, would never have gotten the better of the socialist masses of the workers in their respective lands. But national separatism was the Trojan horse inside which the German »comrades«, bayonet in hand, made their entrance into all those lands. The real class antagonisms and relations of military force brought about German intervention. But the Bolsheviks provided the ideology which masked this campaign of counter-revolution; they strengthened the position of the bourgeoisie and weakened that of the proletariat.

The best proof is the Ukraine, which was to play so frightful a role in the fate of the Russian Revolution. Ukrainian nationalism in Russia was something quite different from, let us say, Czech, Polish or Finnish nationalism in that the former was a mere whim, a folly of a few dozen petty-bourgeois intellectuals without the slightest roots in the economic, political or psychological relationships of the country; it was without any historical tradition, since the Ukraine never formed a nation or government, was without any national culture, except for the reactionary-romantic poems of Shevchenko. It is exactly as if, one fine day, the people living in the Waterkant[31] should want to found a new Low-German (Plattdeutsche) nation and government! And this ridiculous pose of a few university professors and students was inflated into a political force by Lenin and his comrades through their doctrinaire agitation concerning the »right of self-determination including etc.« To what was at first a mere farce they lent such importance that the farce became a matter of the most deadly seriousness — not as a serious national movement for which, afterward as before, there are no roots at all, but as a shingle and rallying flag of counter-revolution! At Brest, out of this addled egg crept the German bayonets.

There are times when such phrases have a very real meaning in the history of the class struggles. It is the unhappy lot of socialism that in this World War it was given to it to supply the ideological screens for counter-revolutionary policy. At the outbreak of the war, German Social-Democracy hastened to deck the predatory expedition of German imperialism with an ideological shield from the lumber-room of Marxism by declaring it to be a liberating expedition against Russian Tsarism, such as our old teachers (Marx and Engels) had longed for. And to the lot of the Bolsheviks, who were the very antipodes of our govern-

31 A region in Germany where the German dialect known as *Plattdeutsch* is spoken.

ment socialists, did it fall to supply grist for the mill of counter-revolution with their phrases about self-determination of peoples; and thereby to supply not alone the ideology for the strangling of the Russian Revolution itself, but even for the plans for settling the entire crisis arising out of the World War.

We have good reason to examine very carefully the policies of the Bolsheviks in this regard. The »right of self-determination of peoples«, coupled with the League of Nations and disarmament by the grace of President Wilson, constitutes the battle-cry under which the coming reckoning of international socialism with the bourgeoisie is to be settled. It is obvious that the phrases concerning self-determination and the entire nationalist movement, which at present constitute the greatest danger for international socialism, have experienced an extraordinary strengthening from the Russian Revolution and the Brest negotiations. We shall yet have to go into this platform thoroughly. The tragic fate of these phrases in the Russian Revolution, on the thorns of which the Bolsheviks were themselves, destined to be caught and bloodily scratched, must serve the international proletariat as a warning and lesson.

And from this there followed the dictatorship of Germany from the time of the Brest treaty to the time of the »supplementary treaty«.[32] The two hundred expiatory sacrifices in Moscow. From this situation arose the terror and suppression of democracy.[33]

## IV

Let us test this matter further by taking a few examples.

The well-known dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in November 1917 played an outstanding role in the policy of the Bolsheviks. This measure was decisive for their further position; to a certain point it represented a turning point in their tactics.

32 The German-Russian supplementary treaty of 27th August 1918 stipulated that Germany was to evacuate the territory it occupied east of the (yet to be determined) eastern frontiers of Estonia and Livonia. The territory east of the Berezina was to be evacuated in accordance with Soviet Russia's payment of reparations as determined in the financial agreement. Soviet Russia renounced sovereignty over Estonia, Livonia and Georgia. The agreement of 27th August 1918 required Russia to pay 6 billion marks to Germany.

33 The assassination, on 6th July 1918 in Moscow, of German ambassador Count Wilhelm von Mirbach-Harff marked the beginning of the revolt of the Left Social-Revolutionists to eliminate the Soviet government. The revolt was crushed and hundreds of Revolutionists arrested.

It is a fact that Lenin and his comrades were stormily demanding the calling of a Constituent Assembly up to the time of their October victory, and that the policy of ragging out this matter on the part of the Kerensky government constituted an article in the indictment of that government by the Bolsheviks and was the basis of some of their most violent attacks upon it. Indeed, Trotsky says in his interesting pamphlet, »From October Revolution to Brest-Litovsk«, that the October Revolution represented »the salvation of the Constituent Assembly« as well as of the revolution as a whole. »And when we said,« he continues, »that the entrance to the Constituent Assembly could not be reached through the Preliminary Parliament of Zeretelli, but only through the seizure of power by the Soviets, we were entirely right.«[34]

And then, after these declarations, Lenin's first step after the October Revolution was the dissolution of this same Constituent Assembly, to which it was supposed to be an entrance. What reasons could be decisive for so astonishing a turn? Trotsky, in the above-mentioned pamphlet, discusses the matter thoroughly, and we will set down his argument here:

»While the months preceding the October Revolution were a time of leftward movement on the part of the masses and of an elemental flow of workers, soldiers and peasants towards the Bolsheviks, inside the Socialist-Revolutionary Party this process expressed itself as a strengthening of the left wing at the cost of the right. But within the list of party candidates of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the old names of the right wing still occupied three-fourths of the places …«

»Then there was the further circumstance that the elections themselves took place in the course of the first weeks after the October Revolution. The news of the change that had taken place spread rather slowly in concentric circles from the capital to the provinces and from the towns to the villages. The peasant masses in many places had little notion of what went on in Petrograd and Moscow. They voted for ›Land and Freedom‹, and elected as their representatives in the land committees those who stood under the banner of the ›Narodniki.‹ Thereby, however, they voted for Kerensky and Avksentiev, who had been dissolving these land committees and having their members arrested … This state of affairs gives a clear idea of the extent to which

34 Leo Trotzki: Von der Oktober-Revolution bis zum Brester Friedens-Vertrag, Berlin, p. 90.

the Constituent Assembly had lagged behind the development of the political struggle and the development of party groupings.«

All of this is very fine and quite convincing. But one cannot help wondering how such clever people as Lenin and Trotsky failed to arrive at the conclusion which follows immediately from the above facts. Since the Constituent Assembly was elected long before the decisive turning point, the October Revolution,[35] and its composition reflected the picture of the vanished past and not of the new state of affairs, then it follows automatically that the outgrown and therefore still-born Constituent Assembly should have been annulled, and without delay, new elections to a new Constituent Assembly should have been arranged. They did not want to entrust, nor should they have entrusted, the fate of the revolution to an assemblage which reflected the Kerenskyan Russian of yesterday, of the period of vacillations and coalition with the bourgeoisie. Hence there was nothing left to do expect to convoke an assembly that would issue forth out of the renewed Russia that had advanced further.

Instead of this, from the special inadequacy of the Constituent Assembly which came together in October, Trotsky draws a general conclusion concerning the inadequacy of any popular representation whatsoever which might come from universal popular elections during the revolution.

»Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power«, he writes, »the laboring masses acquire in the shortest time an accumulation of political experience, and they climb rapidly from step to step in their political development. The bigger the country and the more rudimentary its technical apparatus, the less is the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions able to keep pace with this development.«

Here we find the »mechanism of democratic institutions«, as such called in question. To this we must at once object that in such an estimate of representative institutions there lies a somewhat rigid and schematic conception which is expressly contradicted by the historical experience of every revolutionary epoch. According to Trotsky's theory, every elected assembly reflects once and for all only the mental composition, political maturity and mood of its electorate just at the moment when the latter goes to the polling place. According to that, a

35 Luxemburg is not quite correct. Elections for the Constituent Assembly were mostly arranged prior to the October Revolution, but the elections took place after October.

democratic body is the reflection of the masses at the end of the electoral period, much as the heavens of Herschel always show us the heavenly bodies not as they are when we are looking at them but as they were at the moment they sent out their light-messages to the earth from the measureless distances of space. Any living mental connection between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate, any permanent interaction between one and the other, is hereby denied.

Yet how all historical experience contradicts this! Experience demonstrates quite the contrary: namely, that the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them. How else would it be possible to witness, as we do at times in every bourgeois parliament, the amusing capers of the »people's representatives,« who are suddenly inspired by a »new spirit« and give forth quite unexpected sounds; or to find the most dried-out mummies at times comporting themselves like youngsters and the most diverse little Scheidemaennchen[36] suddenly finding revolutionary tones in their breasts – whenever there is rumbling in factories and workshops on the street.

And is this ever-living influence of the mood and degree of political ripeness of the masses upon the elected bodies to be renounced in favor of a rigid scheme of party emblems and tickets in the very midst of revolution? Quite the contrary! It is precisely the revolution which creates by its glowing heat that delicate, vibrant, sensitive political atmosphere in which the waves of popular feeling, the pulse of popular life, work on the representative bodies in most wonderful fashion. It is on this very fact, to be sure, that the well-known moving scenes depend which invariably present themselves in the first stages of every revolution, scenes in which old reactionaries or extreme moderates, who have issued out of a parliamentary election by limited suffrage under the old regime, suddenly become the heroic and stormy spokesmen of the uprising. The classic example is provided by the famous »Long Parliament« in England, which was elected and assembled 1642 and remained at its post for seven whole years and reflected in its internal life all alterations and displacements of popular feeling, of political ripeness, of class differentiation, of the progress of the revolu-

36 »Little Scheidemen«, a play on the name of the pro-war, government Social-Democrat, Philipp Scheidemann.

tion to its highest point, from the initial devout skirmishes with the Crown under a Speaker who remains on his knees, to the abolition of the House of Lords, the execution of Charles and the proclamation of the republic.

And was not the same wonderful transformation repeated in the French Estates-General, in the censorship-subjected parliament of Louis Philippe, and even – and this last, most striking example was very close to Trotsky – even in the Fourth Russian Duma which, elected in the Year of Grace 1909 under the most rigid rule of the counter-revolution, suddenly felt the glowing heat of the impending overturn and became the point of departure for the revolution?[37]

All this shows that »the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions« possesses a powerful corrective – namely, the living movement of the masses, their unending pressure. And the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence – despite rigid party banners, outgrown tickets (electoral lists), etc. To be sure, every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy which Trotsky and Lenin have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammeled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.

Let's take another striking example: the right of suffrage as worked out by the Soviet government.[38] It is not clear what practical significance is attributed to the right of suffrage. From the critique of democratic institutions by Lenin and Trotsky, it appears that popular representation on the basis of universal suffrage is rejected by them on principle, and that they want to base themselves only on the soviets.

37 It was this Fourth Duma which, after popular demonstrations in February 1917, sent two emissaries to the Tsar to request his abdication.

38 According to the Soviet Constitution, the right to vote and to be elected was enjoyed by the following citizens of both sexes, irrespective of religion, nationality or domicile above the age of 18: »All who have acquired the means of livelihood through labour that is productive and useful to society, and also persons engaged in housekeeping which enables the former to do productive work, i.e. labourers and employees of all classes who are employed in industry, trade, agriculture etc., and peasants and agricultural Cossacks who employ no help for the purpose of making profits«.

Why, then, any general suffrage system was worked out at all is really not clear. It is also not known to us whether this right of suffrage was put in practice anywhere; nothing has been heard of any elections to any kind of popular representative body on the basis of it. More likely, it is only a theoretical product, so to speak, of diplomacy; but, as it is, it constitutes a remarkable product of the Bolshevist theory of dictatorship.

Every right of suffrage, like any political right in general, is not to be measured by some sort of abstract scheme of »justice,« or in terms of any other bourgeois-democratic phrases, but by the social and economic relationships for which it is designed. The right of suffrage worked out by the Soviet government is calculated for the transition period from the bourgeois-capitalist to the socialist form of society, that is, it is calculated for the period of the proletarian dictatorship. But, according to the interpretation of this dictatorship which Lenin and Trotsky represent, the right to vote is granted only to those who live by their own labor and is denied to everyone else.

Now it is clear that such a right to vote has meaning only in a society which is in a position to make possible for all who want to work an adequate civilized life on the basis of one's own labor. Is that the case in Russia at present? Under the terrific difficulties which Russia has to contend with, cut off as she is from the world market and from her most important source of raw materials, and under circumstances involving a terrific general uprooting of economic life and a rude overturn of production relationships as a result of the transformation of property relationships in land and industry and trade – under such circumstances, it is clear that countless existences are quite suddenly uprooted, derailed without any objective possibility of finding any employment for their labor power within the economic mechanism. This applies not only to the capitalist and land-owing masses, but to the broad layer of the middle class also, and even to the working class itself. It is a known fact that the construction of industry has resulted in a mass-scale return of the urban proletariat to the open country in search of a place in rural economy. Under such circumstances, a political right of suffrage on the basis of a general obligation to labor, is a quite incomprehensible measure. According to the main trend, only the exploiters are supposed to be deprived of their political rights. And, on the other hand, at the same time that productive labor powers

are being uprooted on a mass scale, the Soviet government is often compelled to hand over national industry to its former owners, on lease, so to speak. In the same way, the Soviet government was forced to conclude a compromise with the bourgeois consumers' cooperatives also. Further, the use of bourgeois specialists proved unavoidable. Another consequence of the same situation is that growing sections of the proletariat, for whom the economic mechanism provides no means of exercising the obligation to work, are rendered politically without any rights.

It makes no sense to regard the right of suffrage as a utopian product of fantasy, cut loose from social reality. And it is for this reason that it is not a serious instrument of the proletarian dictatorship.[39]

As the entire middle class, the bourgeois and petty bourgeois intelligentsia, boycotted the Soviet government for months after the October Revolution and crippled the railroad, post and telegraph, and educational and administrative apparatus, and, in this fashion, opposed the workers government, naturally all measures of pressure were exerted against it. These included the deprivation of political rights, of economic means of existence etc. in order to break their resistance with an iron fist. It was precisely in this way that the socialist dictatorship expressed itself, for it cannot shrink from any use of force to secure or prevent certain measures involving the interests of the whole. But when it comes to a suffrage law which provides for the general disfranchisement of broad sections of society, whom it places politically outside the framework of society and, at the same time, is not in a position to make any place for them even economically within that framework, when it involves a deprivation of rights not as concrete measures for a concrete purpose but as a general rule of long-standing effect, then, it is not a necessity of dictatorship but a makeshift, incapable of being carried out in life.[40]

But the Constituent Assembly and the suffrage law do not exhaust the matter. We did not consider above the destruction of the most im-

39 Note of Rosa Luxemburg at the margin of the manuscript: »It is an anachronism, an anticipation of the juridical situation which is proper on the basis of an already completed socialist economy, but is not in the transition period of the proletarian dictatorship.«

40 Note of Rosa Luxemburg at the margin of the manuscript: »This applies alike to the soviets as the foundation, and to the Constituent Assembly and the general suffrage law.« The following passage was found on an unnumbered loose sheet of paper in the manuscript: »The Bolsheviks designated the soviets as reactionary because their majority consisted of peasants (peasant and soldier delegates). After the Soviets went over to them, they became correct representatives of public opinion. But this sudden change was connected only with peace and land questions.«

portant democratic guarantees of a healthy public life and of the political activity of the laboring masses: freedom of the press, the rights of association and assembly, which have been outlawed for all opponents of the Soviet regime.[41] For these attacks (on democratic rights), the arguments of Trotsky cited above, on the cumbersome nature of democratic electoral bodies, are far from satisfactory. On the other hand, it is a well-known and indisputable fact that without a free and untrammeled press, without the unlimited right of association and assemblage, the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable.

Lenin says: the bourgeois state is an instrument of oppression of the working class; the socialist state, of the bourgeoisie. To a certain extent, he says, it is only the capitalist state stood on its head. This simplified view misses the most essential thing: bourgeois class rule has no need of the political training and education of the entire mass of the people, at least not beyond certain narrow limits. But for the proletarian dictatorship that is the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist.

»Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power«, writes Trotsky, »the laboring masses accumulate in the shortest time a considerable amount of political experience and advance quickly from one stage to another of their development.«[42]

Here Trotsky refutes himself and his own friends. Just because this is so, they have blocked up the fountain of political experience and the source of this rising development by their suppression of public life! Or else we would have to assume that experience and development were necessary up to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, and then, having reached their highest peak, become superfluous thereafter. (Lenin's speech: Russia is won for socialism!!!)

In reality, the opposite is true! It is the very giant tasks which the Bolsheviks have undertaken with courage and determination that demand the most intensive political training of the masses and the accu-

41 »Proletarian dictatorship suppresses the exploiters, the bourgeoisie – and is therefore not hypocritical, does not promise them freedom and democracy – and gives the working people genuine democracy. Only Soviet Russia has given the proletariat and the whole vast labouring majority of Russia a freedom and democracy unprecedented, impossible and inconceivable in any bourgeois democratic republic, by, for example, taking the palaces and mansions away from the bourgeoisie (without which freedom of assembly is sheer hypocrisy), by taking the print-shops and stocks of paper away from the capitalists (without which freedom of the press for the nation's labouring majority is a lie)« (V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 28, pages 104-112).

42 Cf. Leon Trotzky, Von der Oktober-Revolution bis zum Brester Friedens-Vertrag.

mulation of experience … [Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of »justice« but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when »freedom« becomes a special privilege.][43]

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice.[44] This is, unfortunately — or perhaps fortunately — not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. What we possess in our program is nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that. Thus we know more or less what we must eliminate at the outset in order to free the road for a socialist economy. But when it comes to the nature of the thousand concrete, practical measures, large and small, necessary to introduce socialist principles into economy, law and all social relationships, there is no key in any socialist party program or textbook. That is not a shortcoming but rather the very thing that makes scientific socialism superior to the utopian varieties: The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, an historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realization, as a result of the developments of living history, which – just like organic nature of which, in the last analysis, it forms a part — has the fine habit of always pro-

43 The sentences in square brackets are followed by Rosa Luxemburg, Breslauer Gefängnismanuskripte zur Russischen Revolution. Textkritische Ausgabe, Leipzig 2001, page 34. – The sentence: »Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently« is reproduced without the addition of »to express themselves«.

44 Note of Rosa Luxemburg at the margin of the manuscript: »The Bolsheviks themselves will not want, with hand on heart, to deny that, step by step, they have to feel out the ground, try out, experiment, test now one way now another, and that a good many of their measures do not represent priceless pearls of wisdom. Thus it must and will be with all of us when we get to the same point – even if the same difficult circumstances may not prevail everywhere.«

ducing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously the solution. However, if such is the case, then it is clear that socialism by its very nature cannot be decreed or introduced by ukases. It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force – against property etc. The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New Territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative new force, corrects itself all mistaken attempts. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress. (Proof: the year 1905 and the months from February to October 1917.) There it was political in character; the same thing applies to economic and social life also. The whole mass of the people must take part in it. Otherwise, socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals.

Public control is indispensably necessary. Otherwise the exchange of experiences remains only with the closed circle of the officials of the new regime. Corruption becomes inevitable. (Lenin's words, Bulletin No. 36)[45] Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering etc. No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin.[46] But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs.

45 Rosa Luxemburg mistakenly cites no. 29 in the original. The article »After the Russian Revolution« was published in the newsletter of the association of social-democratic party organizations in and around Berlin, no. 36, 8th December 1918. It contains a very detailed, partly verbatim, reproduction of V. I. Lenin's »The immediate tasks of the Soviet Government«.

46 Note of Rosa Luxemburg at the margin of the manuscript: »Lenin's speech on discipline and corruption.
In our case as everywhere else, anarchy will be unavoidable. The lumpenproletarian element is deeply embedded in bourgeois society and inseparable from it.
Proofs:
1. East Prussia, the »Cossack« robberies.
2. The general outbreak of robbery and theft in Germany. (Profiteering, postal and railway personnel, police, complete dissolution of boundaries between well-ordered society and penitentiary.).
3. The rapid degeneration (Verlumpung) of the union leaders. Against this, draconian measures of terror are powerless. On the contrary, they cause still further corruption. The only anti-toxin: the idealism and social activity of the masses, unlimited political freedom.«

Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconian penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes.

When all this is eliminated, what really remains? In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to

The following section was found in the original manuscript on a seperate sheet of paper:
A problem which is of great importance in every revolution is that of the struggle with the Lumpenproletariat. We in Germany too, as every-where else, will have this problem to reckon with. The Lumpenproletariat element is deeply imbedded in bourgeois society. It is not merely a special section, a sort of social wastage which grows enormously when the walls of the social order are falling down, but rather an integral part of the social whole. Events in Germany – and more or less in other countries – have shown how easily all sections of bourgeois society are subject to such degeneration. The gradations between commercial profiteering, fictitious deals, adulteration of foodstuffs, cheating, official embezzlement, theft, burglary and robbery, flow into one another in such fashion that the boundary line between honorable citizenry and the penitentiary has disappeared. In this the same phenomenon is repeated as in the regular and rapid degeneration of bourgeois dignitaries when they are transplanted to an alien social soil in an overseas colonial setting. With the stripping off of conventional barriers and props for morality and law, bourgeois society itself falls victim to direct and limitless degeneration [Verlumpung], for its innermost law of life is the profoundest of immoralities, namely, the exploitation of man by man. The proletarian revolution will have to struggle with this enemy and instrument of counter-revolution on every hand.
And yet, in this connection too, terror is dull, nay, a two-edged sword. The harshest measures of martial law are impotent against out-breaks of the Lumpenproletarian sickness. Indeed, every persistent regime of martial law leads inevitable to arbitrariness, and every form of arbitrariness tends to deprave society. In this regard also, the only effective means in the hands of the proletarian revolution are: radical measures of a political and social character, the speediest possible transformation of the social guarantees of the life of the masses – the kindling of revolutionary idealism, which can be maintained over any length of time only through the intensively active life of the masses themselves under conditions of unlimited political freedom.
As the free action of the sun's rays is the most effective purifying and healing remedy against infections and disease germs, so the only healing and purifying sun is the revolution itself and its renovating principle, the spiritual life, activity and initiative of the masses which is called into being by it and which takes the form of the broadest political freedom.«

approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins (the postponement of the Soviet Congress from three-month periods to six-month periods!). Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages etc. That is an overpowering objective law from which no party can be exempt.

The basic error of the Lenin-Trotsky theory is that they too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy. »Dictatorship or democracy« is the way the question is put by Bolsheviks and Kautsky alike. The latter naturally decides in favor of »democracy«, that is, of bourgeois democracy, precisely because he opposes it to the alternative of the socialist revolution. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, decide in favor of dictatorship in contradistinction to democracy, and thereby, in favor of the dictatorship of a handful of persons, that is, in favor of dictatorship on the bourgeois model. They are two opposite poles, both alike being far removed from a genuine socialist policy. The proletariat, when it seizes power, can never follow the good advice of Kautsky, given on the pretext of the »unripeness of the country«, the advice being to renounce socialist revolution and devote itself to democracy. It cannot follow this advice without betraying thereby itself, the International, and the revolution. It should and must at once undertake socialist measures in the most energetic, unyielding and unhesitant fashion, in other words, exercise a dictatorship, but a dictatorship of the class, not of a party or of a clique – dictatorship of the class, that means in the broadest possible form on the basis of the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of the people, of unlimited democracy.

»As Marxists«, writes Trotsky, »we have never been idol worshippers of formal democracy.« Surely, we have never been idol worshippers of socialism or Marxism either. Does it follow from this that we may throw socialism or Marxism à la Cunow, Lensch and Parvus [i.e. Move to the right] on the scrap-heap, if it becomes uncomfortable for us? Trotsky and Lenin are the living refutation of this answer. We have never been idol worshippers of formal democracy. All that that really means is: We have always distinguished the social kernel from the po-

litical form of bourgeois democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom – not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy – not to eliminate democracy altogether.

But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy, not in its elimination, but in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.

Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the world war, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles.

A crude proof of this is provided by the use of terror to so wide an extent by the Soviet government, especially in the most recent period just before the collapse of German imperialism, and just after the attempt on the life of the German ambassador. The commonplace to the effect that revolutions are not pink teas is in itself pretty inadequate.

Everything that happens in Russia is comprehensible and represents an inevitable chain of causes and effects, the starting point and end term of which are: the failure of the German proletariat and the oc-

cupation of Russia by German imperialism. It would be demanding something superhuman from Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat and a flourishing socialist economy. By their determined revolutionary stand, their exemplary strength in action, and their unbreakable loyalty to international socialism, they have contributed whatever could possibly be contributed under such devilishly hard conditions. The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics. When they get in there own light in this way, and hide their genuine, unquestionable historical service under the bushel of false steps forced on them by necessity, they render a poor service to international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion – in the last analysis only by-products of the bankruptcy of international socialism in the present world war.

Let the German Government Socialists cry that the rule of the Bolsheviks in Russia is a distorted expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. If it was or is such, that is only because it is a product of the behavior of the German proletariat, in itself a distorted expression of the socialist class struggle. All of us are subject to the laws of history, and it is only internationally that the socialist order of society can be realized. The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle.

What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescencies in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this,

Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutten: »I have dared!«

This is the essential and enduring in Bolshevik policy. In this sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labor in the entire world. In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in this sense, the future everywhere belongs to »Bolshevism«.

47 The Landwehrkanal is a canal in Berlin, where the dead bodies of Luxemburg and Liebknecht were disposed of.

The man became a sieve, the woman
had to swim, the sow,
for herself, for no-one, for everyone –
The Landwehrkanal[47] will not roar.
Nothing falters.

Paul Celan

# A short life

A short life; full of persecution, constantly spied on, time and again living illegally or being incarcerated, being released then imprisoned again, she was living on the margins of society. She entered into marriage to obtain a German passport; her face eventually betraying the scars of martyrdom in full knowledge of what was to come: she that wanted to die »at her station«, in open battle, fell into the hands of murderers in uniform, unaccompanied by any of her comrades: »Here comes little Rosie, the old harlot«, cried the soldiers as she entered Hotel Eden to be abused and mistreated. One of the perpetrators later offered for sale a shoe which the victim had lost in that unimaginably grim death dance.

Again – a short life full of persecution. Short due to her execution by those who, on the night of 15th January 1919, had proven themselves to be just as Rosa Luxemburg had described them: inhumane and merciless.

A short life, but one that – as her letters show – was characterised by enthusiasm and inspiration, by great triumphs and battles won for the social-democratic Left. A life characterised by daring love stories oscillating between ecstasy and estrangement, by affairs with younger men and, later on, friendships with older women – adventures and tightrope walks on the boundaries between politics and the personal/private, between great love and the pragmatism of small disclosures.

Walter Jens
From: »Rosa Luxemburg –
Weder Poetin noch Petroleuse«

# Selected Dates

**1789-1799**

French Revolution against the absolutist rule of the Bourbon monarchy and the late-feudal social conditions, which aided in bringing about a bourgeois-capitalist system in Europe. Declaration of the rights of the citizen and the rights of man with the demand for »Freedom, Equality, Fraternity« – a progress that cannot be overestimated even today, although »under the sugar coded formal equality and freedom, the bitter truth of social inequality and restriction freedom is hidden« (Rosa Luxemburg). It's the beginning of European modern history. Until 1974, the revolution moved ever further to the left, until it ended in the terror regime of the Jacobins, who had originally been strictly democratically-minded. As with the aftermath of every revolution, this led to an era of restoration. Napoleon, waging war and destruction across Europe and North Africa for 10 years until 1814, made a return to pre-1789 conditions impossible and thus became the executor of the French Revolution. All revolutionaries of the 19th and 20th century knew the French Revolution intimately and also saw their own actions in the context of this revolution. After the October Revolution, the question of who would become the new Napoleon was omnipresent. In order to avoid Leo Trotsky's ascent to power (besides Lenin the leader of the October Revolution and the organiser of the Red Army), important Bolshevik leaders (cf. page 13) joined forces, thus without noticing paving the way for Josef Stalin – who in the 1930s had almost all of them killed.

**1830**

July Revolution in France. After the defeat and fall of Napoleon, the Bourbon monarchy had been restored. The »beautiful revolution« of July 1830 replaced the Bourbon regime with a »popular monarchy« under Louis-Philippe; the haute bourgeoisie was given a share of power. France accepts political immigrants, especially from Germany; amongst them are Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Boerne and later Karl Marx.

**1848**

European Revolution. Starting from Paris, German states also become involved; however, the goal of a unified German republic is not achieved; counter-revolution and reaction are victorious; subsequently, bourgeois-capitalist society becomes dominant through a »revolution from above« (cf. biographical data, Otto von Bismarck).

**1864, 1866, 1870/71**

The German-Danish, Prussian-Austrian and Prussian-French wars (»blood and iron«) guarantee Prussian's hegemony in Germany; militarism becomes increasingly accepted in the population.

**1871**

Paris Commune: the proletarian and petty-bourgeois population of Paris formed a government and proclaimed socialist aims; after 72 days the Commune is violently crushed; Prussian-German troops which after the victory over the French army are near Paris are watching the French government troops' backs during the massacre.

**1878–1890**

Sozialistengesetz (cf. page 12)

**1896-1903**

Revisionism debate (cf. page 19)

**4th August 1914**

With the outbreak of World War I the parliamentary faction of the SPD votes for war bonds and betrays their policies up to that point; »Fall from grace« for the SPD that brings about the split of the German Left.

**3rd October 1918**

After the fall of the dictatorship that existed during the war, the SPD enters government as a junior partner; the governing socialists feel as though they have fulfilled their dreams.

**9th November 1918**

German Revolution; fall of the monarchy; the SPD enters an alliance with the Reichswehr to avoid a continuation of the revolution; as a compromise to the revolutionary forces the Weimar Republic is formed which due to this compromise only has a weak social grounding in the population.

**15th January 1919**

Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht are murdered by Reichswehr troops; Gustav Noske gives permission (cf. page 37).

**30th January 1933**

President of the Reich Hindenburg nominates Hitler as Chancellor; end of the Weimar Republic; beginning of Nazi-Fascist dictatorship with agreement of the traditional German elites.

**2nd May 1933**

Crushing of the trade unions; six weeks later banning of the SPD; end of the first wave of the German labour movement.

# Biographical Data

**Alexander III** (reigned 1881-1894) – the assassination attempt in March 1887 on Russian Tsar Alexander III failed; the assassins, as far as they could be caught, were executed, amongst them the older brother of Lenin

**Babeuf, Gracchus** (born Francois Noel, 1760-1797) – during the French Revolution leader of the »Conspiracy of the Equals«, the first »truly acting communist party« (Marx); failed in the attempt to push the revolution to a communist transformation with the aide of dictatorship of the people; executed.

**Bebel, August** (1840-1913) – together with Wilhelm Liebknecht founder and leader of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (»Eisenacher«, 1869) and after the fusion with the General German Workers' Association (»Lassalleaner«) in 1875 leader of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany – the later SPD; imprisoned several times; as a Marxist he pursued political reforms and expected a breakdown of capitalism; main works: »Women and Socialism« (1883), »From My Life« (1910-1914).

**Bakunin, Michail Alexandrovich** (1814-1876) – Russian revolutionary supporting a libertarian, ethics-based socialism, generally referred to as anarchism; took part in virtually all revolutionary movements of his time in Western Europe; extradited to Russia and escape from exile in 1861; member of the First International; his falling out with Marx in 1872 led to the split of the revolutionary-minded segments of the labour movement in a Marxian socialism and an autonomous anarchism; Bakunin influenced the movement that through its work wished to inspire the peasantry to resist in Russia, as well as the Italian and Spanish labour movements.

**Berija, Lavrenti Pavlovich** (1899–1953) – one of the main perpetrators in Stalinism; 1922 significantly partaking in the subjugation of Georgia; 1938-1945 head of the secret police GPU (successor to the »Cheka«); 1946 member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU; after Stalin's death (5th March 1953) ousted, sentenced and executed (together with Malenkov and Molotov).

**Bernstein, Eduard** (1850–1938) – as a follower of Marx immigrated to Zurich during the Sozialistengesetz (cf. page 12), later to London; edited the »Sozialdemocrat«; from the mid-1890s increasingly propagated a peaceful evolution to socialism through the parliamentary route and thus became the founder of a »revisionism« of Marx's positions (cf. page 19) who had considered the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production as inevitable; Rosa Luxemburg became his most important critic.

**Bismarck, Count Otto** (1815–1898) – from 1862 onwards Prussian Prime Minister; unified Germany under Prussian hegemony by exclusion of Austria from the German Bund and through three wars (against Denmark in 1864, against Austria in 1866 and against France in 1870/71); secured power for the reactionary elites by including the capitalist aristocracy in a »revolution from above« in government, by paralysing the democratic movement through universal suffrage and by containing capitalism through social reforms; his attempts to crush political Catholicism and social democracy (cf. page 12) failed; fall in 1890; for the so-called German elites Bismarck remains an ideal politician and a key figure of identification until today.

**Blanqui, Auguste** (1805–1881) – cf. page 33.

**Dzierżyński, Feliks Edmundowich** (1877–1926) – unified the Social Democracy of Lithuania with the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland to form the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania in 1900; joined the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution of 1905; from 1907 onwards member of the Central Committee; imprisoned for many years; organized the secret police »Cheka« in 1917 with which the Soviet government crushed any political resistance.

**Campanella, Tommaso** (born: Giovanni Domenico, 1568–1639) – Whilst incarcerated during inquisition, conceptualised in his book »The City of the Sun« (1623), a communal system led by a hierarchy of sages based on communal property, organised production and distribution as well as universal duty to work and education.

**Engels, Friedrich** (1829–1895) – founder, together with Karl Marx, of »scientific socialism«, which understood economic development as the ultimate cause of social development; major works: »The Condition of the Working Class in England« (1845), »The Communist Manifesto« (1848), »The Development of the Socialism from Utopia to Science« (1883).

**Fanon, Frantz** (1925–1961) – French-Algerian theorist and psychiatrist; understood »First World« exploitation as the cause for the underdevelopment of the »Third World« through which he legitimated resistance; joined the Algerian National Liberation Front in 1956; major work: »The Wretched of the Earth« (1961).

**Fischer, Ruth** (born: Elfriede Golke, 1895–1961) – co-founder of the Austrian Communist Party; since 1919 important in the KPD; pursued »Bolshevisation« since 1924 and was the first to vilify Rosa Luxemburg's work which she labelled syphilis; fell out with Stalin in 1924; 1926 exclusion from the KPD; after 1945 denounced her brothers Gerhard and Hanns Eisler as communists in the McCarthy Committee.

**Fourier, Charles** (1772–1837) – criticised capitalist society; argued for the formation of agricultural manufacturing co-operatives (»Phalanxes«), in which collective competition, common desires and abilities and the sharing of all goods that were created would attract people to work and bring into harmony individual and social goods.

**Gramsci, Antonio** (1891–1937) – co-founder of the Italian Communist Party in 1921 and of the newspaper »Unitá« 1924; 1924-27 general-secretary of the PCI; 1928 sentenced to 20 years in prison under Italian Fascism; died of the consequences of his prison sentence; his theoretical writings which were mainly done in prison keep influencing contemporary debates around a non-authoritarian and emancipatory democratic socialism.

**Gracchus, Tiberius Sempronius** (162 BC–133 BC) – as a plebeian tribune, he wanted to redistribute public land that was in the hands of wealthy noble landowners in order to improve the situation of the Roman peasantry; killed together with 300 of his followers; in his brother Gaius picked up his programme, was voted plebeian tribune and was eventually killed with 3,000 of his followers.

**Guevara, Ernesto »Che«** (1928–1967) – doctor; since 1956 fought as a guerilla-leader against the Cuban Batista-dictatorship alongside Fidel Castro; after their victory in 1959 various leadership positions; his attempt to mobilize the indigenous population in Bolivia for an uprising failed; killed together with his guerilla-troop.

**Heckert, Fritz** (1884–1936) – bricklayer; was on the Left of the SPD even before World War I; had a leading part in the formation of one of the biggest Spartakus groups in Chemnitz in 1916; consistently had leading positions in the KPD.

**Ho Chi Minh** (»the one who is enlightened«, born: Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1890–1969) – co-founder of the French Communist Party and in 1930 of the Communist Party of Indochina; from 1941 led a guerilla group (»Viet-Minh«) first against the Japanese occupation (until 1945), then against the French one (until 1954); proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam in 1945 and became its President; after the division of the country in 1954 President of North Vietnam; due to the successful struggle against US aggression (1964-1975) he became a symbol for the resistance of the »Third World« against materially stronger powers.

**Jacob, Mathilde** (1873–1943) – ran a translation and transcription service where Rosa Luxemburg and her friends had the articles for the »Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz« typed, reproduced and mostly likely also mailed out; became Luxemburg's closest confidante, who kept in touch with her during her time in prison during World War I; after Luxemburg's death she was the closest staff of Paul Levi, whose publications she edited until 1928; died in 1943 in Theresienstadt.

**Jogiches, Leo** (1867–1919) – cf. page 15 f.

**Kautsky, Karl** (1854–1938) editor of the »Neue Zeit«, the most important theoretical journal of the Second International (cf. page 17); formed »Marxism« in order to make Marx's and Engels' positions intelligible to workers; with this he created a »vessel« which to the present day is used by Leftists of all persuasions for their own ideas which are passed off as those of Marx and Engels; until 1910 one of Rosa Luxemburg's closest allies.

**Kraus, Karl** (1874–1936) – editor of the Viennese newspaper »Die Fackel« which he wrote on his own since 1911; uncompromising critic of the cultural decline of modern society and of militarism; major work: »The Last Days of Mankind« (1918/19).

**Kropotkin, Prince Pjotr** (1842–1921) – revolutionary-minded member of the Russian nobility; fled from a Russian prison in the West in 1876 where he influenced the anarchist movement; advocated the abolishment of private property and of central government and wanted to build a communalist society of voluntary associations.

**Lassalle, Ferdinand** (1825–1864) – advanced the formation of an independent labour movement that emancipated itself from the bourgeois tutelage; first President of the »General German Workers' Association«, which merged with the »Eisenacher« in 1875 (cf. August Bebel); died in a duel; to the present one of the personalities that the SPD and some German Leftists draw upon.

**Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich** (born: Ulyanov, 1870–1924) – studied law; leader and most important theorist of the Bolsheviks (cf. page 13) who shared with Rosa Luxemburg a revolutionary mindset and the wholesale rejection of capitalism and imperialist war; differences existed since 1904, especially on issues of organisation and democracy, but their communalities only ceased to exist with Lenin taking power in Russia.

**Levi, Paul** (1883–1930) – Rosa Luxemburg's lawyer in 1914; leader of the KPD after the murder of Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches; 1921 exclusion from the party due to his criticism of putschism; return to the SPD; together with Mathilde Jacob he secured Luxemburg's estate after her death and published »On the Russian Revolution« (1922) and »Introduction into Political Economy« (1925).

**Liebknecht, Karl** (1871–1919) – lawyer; son of Wilhelm Liebknecht; 1907 President of the Socialist Youth International; rejected militarism and armament policy; was the first Social Democrat to vote against further war bonds in December 1914; imprisoned before and during the war; in 1919 leader, together with Rosa Luxemburg, of the KPD and murdered alongside her on 15th January 1919; major work: »Militarism and Anti-Militarism« (1907).

**Liebknecht, Wilhelm** (1826–1900) – co-founder and leader, together with August Bebel, of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (»Eisenacher«, 1869) and after the fusion with the General German Workers' Association (»Lassalleaner«) of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany – the later SPD – in 1875; imprisoned several times; co-founder of the Second International (cf. page 17); author of the »Volksfremdwörterbuch« (1874), which continued to be reprinted until the 1950s; the first labour leader to be buried on the Armenfriedhof [poor people's cemetery] in Friedrichsfelde near Berlin.

**Lumumba, Patrice** (1925–1961) – co-founder and chairman of the Congolese national movement; as a President of the Republic of Congo-Kinshasa (today Democratic Republic of Congo) fought the Belgian intervention and the split of the Katanga province; murdered after a coup d'état.

**Mao Zedong** (1893-1976) – from 1927 significantly involved in the erection of Soviet territories in China; from 1935 de-facto leader of the Communist Party of China; lead China into independence in 1947, and out of Soviet hegemony in the early 1960s; one of the leaders in the Non-Aligned Movement; in 1966 initiated the Cultural Revolution in which several million people, particularly intellectuals and politicians were exiled to the countryside and killed; the Cultural Revolution had a huge appeal on parts of the student movement in the West in the 1960s.

**Marx, Karl** (1818–1883) – founder, together with Friedrich Engels, of »scientific socialism«, which understood economic development as the ultimate cause of social development; major works: »The Communist Manifesto« (1848), »The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte« (1854), »Capital« (Vol. I: 1867; Vol. 2: 1884; Vol. 3: 1894). With her theory of accumulation, Rosa Luxemburg drew on the economic theory of Marx and tried to develop it further (cf. page 35); Leftists worldwide continue to refer to Marx or any given interpretation of »Marxism«.

**Mehring, Franz** (1846–1919) – historian and publicist; joined the SPD in 1891; 1902-1907 editor-in-chief of the »Leipziger Volkszeitung«; from 1908 teacher at the SPD party academy; from 1911 alongside Luxemburg one of the leaders of the Left.

**Molotov, Vyacheslav** (1890–1986) – one of the main perpetrators in Stalinism; 1930-1941 Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (Prime Minister); signed the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939; ousted In 1957.

**Müntzer, Thomas** (1489–1525) – initially a follower of Martin Luther, from 1521 the theologist developed an independent reformist position seeking a class-less society without authority; during the Peasants' War he tried to centralize the uprising as its spiritual leader; caught, tortured and executed after the defeat near Frankenhausen.

**Nettl, Peter** (1926–1972) – published the first Rosa Luxemburg comprehensive biography (German edition 1965).

**Noske, Gustav** (1868–1946) – Social Democrat who as Governor of Kiel suppressed the Sailor's Mutiny in September 1918; as Defense Minister sanctioned the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht; became well known for his statement: »One has to be the bloodhound!«

**Parvus, Alexander** (born: Israel Lazarevich Helphand, 1867–1924) – editor-in-chief of the »Sächsischen Arbeiter-Zeitung« (1896–1898), alongside Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg the third well-known Leftist speaking out against revisionism; later an arms dealer; one of the most glamorous figures on the European Left; the theory of permanent revolution, initially concerned with the relationship between the proletariat and the peasants in the revolution, was from 1924 one of the main charges of the Stalinists against Trotsky (as well as against Parvus and Luxemburg).

**Pabst, Waldemar** (1880–1970) First Officer of Freikorps division who gave the order for the killing of the arrested KPD-leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

**Plekhanov, Georgi Valentinovich** (1856–1918) – co-founder, in 1883, of the first Russian Marxist organization; initially supported Lenin but joined the Mensheviks in 1903; major works: »Anarchism and Socialism« (1894); »Essays on the History of Materialism« (1896).

**Pol Pot** (born: Saloth Sar, 1928–1998) – studied in Paris where he joined the Communist Party; built a guerilla organization in Cambodia (»Khmers Rouge«) and propagated the position that Cambodia's problems stemmed from an insurmountable urban-rural conflict which had to be resolved in favour of the rural population; designed a terror regime which systematically killed millions, amongst them virtually all educated people; 1979 ousted in the course of the Vietnamese invasion.

**Roux, Jacques** (1752–1794) – clergyman; during the French Revolution ideologue of the far Left (»Enragés – the enraged); criticised the Jacobins because their constitution did not sufficiently address the needs of the lower classes (»Sansculottes«); suicide in prison.

**Sandino, Augusto César** (1895–1934) – leader of the popular war in Nicaragua against the US-intervention (»General of Free Men«); the later dictator Somoza had him killed; The Sandinistas National Liberation Front which ousted Somoza in 1979, invoked Sandino.

**Zinoviev, Grigori Yevseevich** (born: Ovsei-Gershon Aronovich Radomyslsky, 1883–1936) – personal staff of Lenin; Chairman of the Communist International (cf. page 38) after the October Revolution; ousted in 1926, tortured 1936 and sentenced to death in the »first show trial«.

**Spartakus** (died 71 BC) – leader of the biggest slave uprising in Antiquity (74-71 BC), the 60,000 slaves initially had great success; died in the decisive battle at the river Silarus (Apulia); 6,000 of his followers were crucified along the Via Appia.

**Stalin, Joseph Vissarionovich** (born: Dzhugashvili, 1879–1953) – member of the Bolshevik leadership; as general-secretary from 1922 he systematically extended his power and eliminated all enemies and rivals; from 1928 absolute dictatorship that sought to overcome the bourgeois conditions of the Restoration with a left-radical totalitarian system; through terror that millions of people of all classes fell victim to he sought to bring about socialism; in World War II the Soviet peoples made a significant contribution to the fall of Hitler's Fascism; after Stalin's death the CPSU-leadership sought to remain in power with a bureaucratic dictatorship that did not use terror; in 1991 they decided to bring about the Restoration Stalin had wanted to avoid.

**Thälmann, Ernst** (1886–1944) – transport worker and chairman of the KPD; submitted, from 1925 onwards, the KPD to the Stalinist dictate; 1933 arrested by the Nazis; the planned show trial failed due to his steadfastness; killed in Buchenwald concentration camp.

**Trotsky, Leon Davidovich** (born: Bronstein, 1879–1940) – besides Lenin the most important organizer of the October Revolution; 1917/18 Commissar for Foreign Affairs; as People's Commissar of Army and Navy Affairs he formed the Red Army (1918–1925) and thus saved the revolution from a counter-revolution; from 1923 on he criticised the policies of the bureaucratic apparatus; clear-ed off all duties; exiled then expelled from the Soviet Union; murdered by one of Stalin's agents in Mexico; the various »Fourth Internationals« continue to invoke him and »Trotskyism«.

**Ulbricht, Walter** (1893–1973) – de-facto leader of the KPD in Soviet exile after their crushing in 1935; suppressed all rivals after 1945 and strongly influenced the GDR; ousted in 1971.

**Vandervelde, Emil** (1866–1938) – Belgian socialist; chairman of the Second International 1900-1914.

**Wilhelm II** (1859–1940) – German Emperor (since 1888); pursued armament of army and navy as well as an aggressive colonialisation; led Germany into World War I in 1914; fled to Doorn (Netherlands) to escape judgment.

**Zetkin, Clara** (1857–1933) – the founder and leader of the international proletarian women's movement was a close friend and political ally of Rosa Luxemburg; remains a figure of identification for the Left.