The Luksenburg family lived in this house until Rosa was three years old.

Rosa Luxemburg was descended from a Jewish family which felt affiliated to the Jewish Enlightenment. Her parents were intellectuals and were particularly interested in German and Polish literature. Rosa Luxemburg’s father was a respected tradesman in Zamość and owned a house on the marketplace.

There are no sources about the family’s material living conditions. However, the Luxemburg family most certainly did not enjoy permanent prosperity.

“...my poor father is not a banker and can’t take a vacation whenever he pleases, totally dependent as he is on his penny’s worth of miserable business...”

Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches 1899

Various biographies also stated the 25th December 1870 and 5th March 1870 as being Rosa Luxemburg’s date of birth. This misunderstanding could be attributed to the fact that Rosa Luxemburg for a long time used false documents.

Many thanks for your birthday card, which I laughed about: my “official” date of birth is actually wrong (I’m not quite as old as that) but, as a respectable person, I don’t have a real birth certificate, but an “acquired” and “corrected” one.

Rosa Luxemburg in a letter to Henriette Roland-Holst dated 30th January 1907

In her curriculum vitae, which she sent to Zurich University, Rosa Luxemburg gave her date of birth as being 5th March 1871.
1873

In 1873, the Luxemburg family moved to Warsaw into a rented flat in Zlotastraße 16, which was in a good residential area. Warsaw had the advantages of being an anonymous city with an open multicultural society.

Rosa Luxemburg seldom mentioned her childhood. In 1904, she wrote about her childhood memories to Luise Kautsky from Zwickau prison:

>... and that was also the best moment before the empty, noisy, heating life of the large tenement block awoke. The solemn silence of the morning weighted on the triviality of the street: the morning gold of the young sun glittered in the window panes above, and way beyond warm rosy coloured, airy clouds before dissolving in the grey city sky. I firmly believed that ‘life’, the ‘real life’ is somewhere far away, hidden behind tall roofs. Since then I have been travelling after it, but it always keeps hiding behind one roof or another. Perhaps in the end it was all a wanton game with me, and the real life is really still there in the yard where we read the ‘Beginnings of Civilization’ with Antoni for the first time?«

Until she was 9, Rosa Luxemburg was educated at home. In 1880 she was accepted to the 1st year of the girl’s gymnasium. This was only possible because of her excellent academic achievements.

The gymnasium was primarily reserved for Russian girls whose fathers were soldiers of the occupying power and for daughters of the nobility. As a Jewish child, Rosa Luxemburg ranked at the bottom of the hierarchy.

At Christmas 1881 when she was ten years old, Rosa was witness to a pogrom. The hordes ravaged for days not only in the Warsaw Ghetto, but also violently plundered in Zlota Street, which was where the Luksenburgs lived.

Rosa Luxemburg was a lively, inquisitive child. With the help of her mother, she learned to read and write when she was five years old.

1880

In 1884, before the impending visit of the German Kaiser Wilhelm I to Warsaw, Rosa Luxemburg wrote a satirical poem in Polish:

«At last we shall see you, ruler of the west, or that is if you come to the Saxon Garden, as I will not be visiting your court. I don’t care for your mark of respect. I would like to know what you chat about. You should be on familiar terms with ‘ours’. As far as politics is concerned I’m still a stupid sheep, which is why I don’t want to talk to you much. There is only one thing which I want to say to you, dear Wilhelm: ‘For the sake of Europe tell, may order thy foxy scoundrel Bismarck never to sulky peace.»

In 1884, before the impending visit of the German Kaiser Wilhelm I to Warsaw, Rosa Luxemburg wrote a satirical poem in Polish:

»Real« life is somewhere beyond the roofs.
The «Proletariat» party, which was founded in 1882 and was a predecessor of the modern socialist movement, was almost wiped out. Rosa Luxemburg understood: «The world must be changed!». Like her friends, Adolf Warski and Julian Marchlewski, she joined a revolutionary group under the leadership of the roofer, Marcin Kasprzak. This group maintained contact with socialist groups in Poland and Russia. They rejected individual terror. The group’s role model was a mass organisation such as German Social Democracy. After about 2 years of political agitation amongst Warsaw’s pupils and students, Rosa was on the verge of being arrested. It was presumably Marcin Kasprzak who helped her to flee over the Polish-German border hidden under straw in a farmer’s cart.

As a schoolgirl Rosa witnessed how in the nearby citadel revolutionary socialists were locked up, sent away to do forced labour or hanged. Among them were also young women. «During the eighties, after the assassination of Alexander II, a period of paralyzing hopelessness enveloped Russia. The liberal reforms of the sixties with regard to the judiciary and to rural self-administration were everywhere repealed. A death-like silence prevailed during the reign of Alexander III. Discouraged by both the failure to realize peaceful reforms and the apparent ineffectiveness of the revolutionary movement, the Russian people were completely overcome with depression and resignation.»

Rosa Luxemburg later described the political situation in Tsarist Russia during her schooldays in her introduction to Wladimir Korolenko’s «The history of my contemporary». With her many talents, learning came easily to Rosa. During her entire school life, she was always the best student. Despite this, she was not awarded the gold medal which she deserved when she left school. The education system was dominated by anti-Semitic and anti-Polish regulations. The language used in lessons was Russian and the students were not allowed to speak Polish with each other.

From a poem written by Rosa Luxemburg in Polish whilst still at school. «I want to burden the conscience of the affluent with all the suffering and all the hidden, bitter tears.»
Rosa Luxemburg found her ideal sanctuary in Zurich. The university there was the only one in Europe to have opened its doors to women who wanted to study. Zurich also had a politically interesting and extensively equipped library. Half of the women studying there originated from Russia.

In the first year Rosa Luxemburg enrolled in the university’s Faculty of Philosophy and attended lectures on mathematics, botany and zoology. She remained greatly interested in these subjects for the rest of her life. From 1890 onwards, she enrolled in political and economic science as well as history.

Rosa Luxemburg hardly took any notice of Ricarda Huch and Anita Augspurg, who were studying in Zurich at the same time.

Zurich was the most important meeting place for Polish and Russian emigrants. In the bars and »Slav pensions« popular with Russians, discussions were heated and the topic was almost always »the basic theory of social democracy« and the »revolution«.

During her time as a student in Zurich, Rosa came into contact with leading Polish and Russian Marxists such as Georgi Plechanow, Vera Sassulitsch (Zasulic) und Pawel Axelrod and many others. Her fellow students were also her friends from Warsaw, for example Julian Marchlewski (Karski) and Adolf Warszawski (Warski) and the young revolutionary Leo Jogiches from Vilnius.

On 20th July 1898, Rosa was awarded her doctorate. She attained the »magna cum laude« and left university as Doctor of Public Law and Political Science.
Besides studying at Zurich University and researching for her doctorate in libraries in Paris, Rosa Luxemburg also independently edited the Russian-Polish underground newspaper »Sprawa Robotnicza« (Workers’ Cause) in Paris together with Julian Marchlewski and Adolf Warszawski. Under a pseudonym she wrote numerous articles and organised the typesetting, printing and often the distribution of the paper. German socialists helped to smuggle the paper over the border to Poland. A part also reached Poland for distribution from Munich.

Rosa Luxemburg also collaborated in the »Arbeiterstimme« (The Workers’ Cause), a magazine published by Robert Seidel in Zurich, as well as writing for Karl Kautsky’s »Neue Zeit« (The New Time), a weekly journal of German Social Democracy, which was published in Stuttgart.

At the end of the 19th century, German Social Democracy was held in great esteem within the Socialist International. It was a revolutionary workers and opposition party with the proclaimed long-term aim of defeating capitalism and creating a socialist society. At that time, the SPD had more than 100,000 members. August Bebel and Paul Singer were party leaders, Wilhelm Liebknecht was editor in chief of »Vorwärts« (Forward) and Karl Kautsky was chief editor of the magazine »Neue Zeit« (The New Time). Rosa Luxemburg decided to move to Berlin in order to be able to use the SPD press as a platform for her journalistic and theoretical work.

In 1893 at the II. International Socialist Congress in Zurich, Rosa Luxemburg tried in vain to fight for a mandate. The party—the SDK-PIL (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania) – which had been newly founded by her, Leo Jogiches, Julian Marchlewski and Adolf Warszawski, stood in stark contrast to the PPS (Polish Socialist Party), which had put the national struggle at the top of its political agenda.

However, immigration and political agitation required German citizenship. For this reason, Rosa Luxemburg entered a marriage of convenience in April 1898 with Gustav Lübeck, the son of German émigrés.

«Rosa, 23 years old at the time, was quite unknown outside one or two socialist groups in Germany and Poland… I can see her now: how she rose from amongst the delegates and stood on a chair to make herself better heard. Small and looking very frail in a summer dress which cleverly concealed her physical defects, she represented her cause with such magnetism and such compelling words.»

The Belgian socialist leader Emile Vandervelde remembers.
The economic statistical reasoning required for her dissertation demanded that Rosa Luxemburg exert tedious effort and that she spend endless days researching in libraries. She therefore felt hindered in her desire to do more practical work.

«… The dissertation can be credited with a full command of the subject matter, great accuracy, great reasoning power. It unlocks the subject without ever becoming longwinded and testifies for theoretical talent as well as a practical view: the style is rather poor, the viewpoint somewhat one-sided. The writer is a socialist and an adherent of the so-called materialist view of history. From time to time, she uses sources from socialist pamphlet literature. However, that does not detract from the competence of the achievement, which exceeds by far what is demanded of a thesis. I therefore request that it be accepted.«

Robert Seidel was editor, teacher and lecturer. He had come to Switzerland when he was twenty as a clothworker from Saxony. He was politically active in the city and canton of Zurich and then in the National Assembly. Rosa Luxemburg, he and his wife Mathilde were friends for many years.

She was proud and happy when she received her printed dissertation in the post.

«… how interesting, how significant! A woman was needed to deliver the first thorough work on Russia-Poland’s industrial development and at the same time of Russia and to show that both of these countries are economically linked and thus politically interdependent. We congratulate womankind on this new moral victory! It is a new justification of the right of women for equality with men, insofar as this right still needs justifying. We congratulate our comrade on her profound, clear and gripping dissertation.«

Robert Seidel in the newspaper ›Zürcher Volksrecht‹.
In May 1898, Rosa Luxemburg moved to Germany. German Social Democracy was in the midst of an election campaign. She spent the first few days in Munich at her friends, Adolf and Jadwiga Warszawski.

On 16th May, Rosa Luxemburg arrived in Berlin.

Ignaz Auer gave Rosa Luxemburg the handbook of the SPD to study and entered her name in the party address book. From now on Rosa Luxemburg was a member of the legal German Social Democratic Party. Rosa Luxemburg was entrusted with the task of tackling neglected political agitation amongst workers and miners in Upper Silesia. No party official wanted to take on the hardship of moving to this remote, famine-struck and miserable region.

This first tour as political agitator amongst the Polish speaking miners and steel-workers in Königshütte, Katscher, Gleiwitz etc. was a great success. Those who listened brought her flowers and did not want to let her go.
From then on Rosa Luxemburg was relentlessly busy on behalf of the party and constantly out and about. She toured Berlin’s working class bars and appeared at numerous election meetings in the whole of the Reich. At party conferences she debated with the »patriarchs«, whom she wanted to »push forwards«.

She took part in the big international social congresses where she was also considered an expert on Polish and Russian matters.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote articles and cutting commentaries for leading socialist newspapers and journals. Occasionally, she was editor for the »Sächsischen Arbeiterzeitung« (Saxony Workers’ Paper), the »Leipziger Volkszeitung« (Leipzig People’s Paper) and »Vorwärts« (Forwards).

Rosa Luxemburg served her first gaol sentence on 26th August 1904 in Zwickau. She had been sentenced to 2 months imprisonment for offending the sovereign.
Social reform or revolution? This was the disputed issue at the time when Rosa Luxemburg began working actively for the German Social Democracy.

She opposed these ideas with her view:
Reform as well as revolution!

Karl Kautsky and Franz Mehring, who were considered trustees of Marx’s legacy, and August Bebel and Clara Zetkin were on Rosa Luxemburg’s side in the conflict with the revisionists. In various articles in the »Leipziger Volkszeitung«, which later in 1899 were published in two brochures, Rosa Luxemburg fiercely attacked and ridiculed Bernstein and his adherents, for example Georg von Vollmar, Wolfgang Heine etc.

Thus, she became widely known in the international labour movement. With increasing frequency she was to lament the lack of revolutionary zeal and idealism within German Social Democracy. She missed humaneness, solidarity and spontaneity.

Before soon, she became a nuisance to some comrades. A woman, a Polish and Jewish woman had dared to demonstrate her intellectual superiority. She did not fit the picture of the established party leaders and career conscious officials.
On 22nd January 1905, 140,000 peaceful demonstrators marched to the Winter Palace in Petersburg in order to hand over a petition to the Tsar. They were received with gunfire. More than one thousand people died. Countless were injured. This bloodbath resulted in a wave of protest strikes and peasants’ revolts against Tsarism.

Rosa Luxemburg was determined to collaborate. From Berlin she maintained contact to comrades in the SDKPiL in Krakow and Warsaw. She wrote for Polish illegal newspapers and reported in German workers’ papers and in socialist international circles on the events in Russia and Poland. She was constantly on the road in order to pay tribute to the Russian workers’ struggle for freedom at assemblies. At the end of the year Rosa Luxemburg decided to take part in the revolution herself. After a series of adventurous and risky detours, she finally arrived in Warsaw on 29th December 1905.

For only two months was she able to work underground together with Leo Jogiches and other comrades in the SDKPiL. These were days of great expectation and extraordinary exertion. Despite all possible precautionary measures, Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches were discovered, arrested in their flat on 4th March 1906 and taken to the notorious X. Pavillon in Warsaw Citadel.

Rosa Luxemburg was threatened with deportation to do forced labour. After the provision of bail and the payment of bribes, she was released from imprisonment on 28th June 1906. In August, she managed to flee from Poland to Finland. In December 1906, Leo Jogiches was sentenced to 8 years forced labour, was able to flee in April 1907, and in May was once again in Berlin.
For years Rosa Luxemburg had tried to engender an understanding for the weapon "mass strike". At the party congress in September 1905 in Jena, most trade union leaders insisted on rejecting a political strike on principle.

For Rosa Luxemburg and her adherents this was a victory to make them proud and confident. As a result of her speech at the congress, Rosa was sentenced to 2 months in prison by the criminal court in Weimar for «encouraging class hatred».

In Kuokkala she also wrote her 64 page pamphlet «Mass Strike, Party and Trade Union». In this text, she analysed the course of the revolution in Russia and showed that political mass strike was a new revolutionary weapon of the proletariat for future class struggles.

Rosa Luxemburg discussed her experiences in the revolution and her views on the mass strike with Lenin, Pawel Axelrod and Wera Sassulitsch. They all met up in their hideaway in Kuokkala, Finland.

In the end, the congress justified political strike as a weapon which, under certain circumstances, had to be used even by the German working class.

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«...A general strike that has in advance been bound to the fetters of legality is like an artillery demonstration that starts with the shot being thrown into the water in front of the enemy's very eyes... Such a restrained threat... will not even frighten a child, let alone a ruling class that is struggling desperately to keep its political power...»

R.L. Das Belgische Experiment (The Belgian Experiment)

At the party congress in Mannheim in the autumn of 1906, Rosa Luxemburg was to be bitterly disappointed. There were fierce conflicts. Her text was rejected for being too radical by the trade union leaders. This time the leadership of the party gave in:

Mass strike was rejected by a majority.

At a meeting at the fringes of the Mannheim Congress, Rosa Luxemburg was called upon by the enthusiastic masses to speak about the revolution in Russia. At the end of her speech she said:

«... I can tell you without exaggeration and in total honesty that the months I spent in Russia were the happiest of my life. »

R.L. in «Mass Strike, Party and Trade Union»

Rosa Luxemburg joined the debates with great fervour.

1906
In October 1907, Rosa Luxemburg took up a lecturers post at the SPD party school in Berlin which had been opened by August Bebel. It was a task that she enjoyed greatly and attended to with great diligence. The school was not so much an academic workshop, but rather she was supposed to qualify party members for propaganda purposes.

"Why must we study political economy as a science? As long as economic relations between people regulated themselves without difficulty, these relations did not require scientific study. With the onset of a capitalist style economy this has changed. Crises are a side effect of this economic style. Unemployment is also a constant phenomenon of today's society as well as the daily and hourly price fluctuations by which one individual can become a millionaire in a short time without having to lift a finger, while another will become a beggar. These phenomena are not natural-ly so and are not inevitable. They have been brought about by human institutions, are of human creation and, nevertheless, bourgeois society is at a loss when faced with it as if it were dealing with uncontrollable elemental forces. We stand before an anarchist style of economics that has outgrown us. This is the reason for having to study the relations of economic life in a scientific manner …

… political economy is the science of all sciences; it prepares the ground on which we want to walk in the country of the future …"
During her work at the party school, Rosa Luxemburg began one of her most important scientific works: *Introduction to Political Economy*. In 1909/10, she initially wanted to publish this work in the form of eight booklets and then as a book. In February 1910, she considered two of the booklets to be ready for print. The book could only actually be published in 1925. With this work, Rosa Luxemburg wanted to rekindle awareness for the historic need to replace capitalism with a new, fairer social order.

In 1913 Rosa Luxemburg wrote *The Accumulation of Capital*. **...the constant change of industrial economy forces the trade unions to defend former accomplishments from new attacks by the capital at every downfall, and at every step forward to first fight in order to raise depressed wages to a standard appropriate to the favourable situation. The trade unions will thus always be forced into the defensive.**

R. L. Ges. Werke V, S. 764 (Collected Works)

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The increase in class differences has aroused thoughts of sharper weapons. The danger of a great war breaking out in Europe loomed ever more ominously on the horizon. At the socialist international congresses, Rosa Luxemburg tried to win over and reinforce the solidarity of the European proletariat against the war. At the International Socialist Congress in August 1907, Rosa Luxemburg was not only an SPD delegate but also a delegate of the Polish and Russian socialist democratic workers parties. She was looking forward to seeing Clara Zetkin, Lenin, and Jaures from France. Together with Lenin and Martow she wrote a resolution, which, after consulting Bebel, had to be reworked until it found a form that would not give the public prosecutor grounds to press charges or even to ban the German Social Democracy. The decisive sentences of this resolution are:

«... In the event of a threat of war it is the duty of the workers and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved to do everything possible to prevent the outbreak of war by taking suitable measures, which can, of course, change or be intensified in accordance with the intensification of the class struggle and the general political situation. In the event of war breaking out nevertheless, it is their duty to take measures to bring it to an end as quickly as possible, and to utilise the economic and political crisis brought about by the war to arouse the masses of the people and accelerate the overthrow of capitalist class rule.»

«This small, delicate woman teemed with unrestrained revolutionary power. Despite all those who mocked and hated her, she managed again and again to captivate listeners at party conferences with her fiery temperament and received rapturous applause even from the opposition. And all the time, what was characteristic of her was that her intellect never lost control of her temperament.»

Max Adler

At the beginning of 1910, indignation at the military build-up, the economic crisis and the unfair Prussian three-tier election law grew amongst the population. There were huge demonstrations all over the country. The miners prepared for a big strike. Political mass strike was deemed to be an adequate means by various workers organisations. Rosa Luxemburg travelled from place to place in order to speak at mass demonstrations. During this time of frequent unrest, demonstrations and strikes, Rosa Luxemburg wrote an article for «Vorwärts» in which she propagated mass strike. The article was rejected. Most of the leaders of Social Democracy, and particularly of the trade unions, did not want to risk a strike due to electoral campaign tactics. Relations broke up with the party leadership and with Karl Kautsky, who was chief editor of «Vorwärts». At a public gathering on 25th September 1913 in Flechheim, Rosa Luxemburg posed the question of whether the war should be accepted with impunity. When the answer came from the audience: «Never!», she continued:

«If they expect us to murder our French or other foreign brothers, then let us tell them: 'No, under no circumstances!'»

For the public prosecutor this was reason to press charges for encouraging disobedience of the law and of the authorities’ orders.
Her speech for her defence on 20th February 1914 before the criminal court in Frankfurt was a great intellectual success for Rosa Luxemburg. She justified her fight against war and militarism with great blows against the public prosecutor and the officers’ caste.

Darling, imagine, how splendid.

»… We are of the opinion that the great mass of working people does and must decide about the question of war and peace – that this is not a matter of commands from above and blind obedience from below. We think that wars can only come about as long as the working class either supports them enthusiastically because it considers them justified and necessary, or at least accepts them passively. But once the majority of working people come to the conclusion – and it is precisely the task of the Social Democracy to arouse this consciousness and to bring them to this conclusion – when, as I say, the majority of people come to the conclusion that wars are nothing but a barbaric, unsocial, reactionary phenomenon, entirely against the interests of the people, then wars will have become impossible … «

»Sir, I believe you, you would run away; a social democrat does not. He stands by his deeds and laughs at your judgements. And now sentence me.«

Rosa Luxemburg was sentenced to one year in prison. The verdict triggered profound outrage amongst the German workforce. Rosa Luxemburg and her lawyer, Paul Levi, were invited to countless gatherings in many cities in order to give an account of the trial.

»… I assure you that I would never flee even if the gallows threatened and for the simple reason that I believe it necessary for our party to get used to the fact that sacrifices are part of a Socialist’s trade and that this goes without saying. You are right: »Long live the struggle!« «

In June 1914, Rosa Luxemburg was again charged, this time for insulting the military. She had referred to the systematic abuse of soldiers in the army in words and writing. Her defence was able to collect 30,000 signatures of dismissed soldiers. They were victims or witnesses of such abuse and agreed to give evidence in court.

In order to avoid further disgrace to the judiciary and above all to the military, legal proceedings were discontinued indefinitely.

Rosa Luxemburg remained the political and moral winner.
At the end of July 1914, the anti-war demonstrations hit their peak.

On 29th July, the International Socialist Office in Brussels opened its meeting. In her speeches, Rosa Luxemburg urged for swift and decisive action and described the fight against the war as the most important topic of the coming International Socialist Congress.

Rosa Luxemburg felt a strong rapport with Jean Jaurès, the leader of the French workers movement. He appealed to the power of the proletariat, which he said must express its demands for peace. Jean Jaurès was murdered by a French nationalist during his journey home from the congress.

As she said herself, 4th August 1914 was the bleakest of days for Rosa Luxemburg. She found it incomprehensible that the German working class let itself be driven into the massacre without the slightest resistance, that German Social Democracy capitulated as a matter of course, and that the Socialist International broke down.

The outbreak of war had a terrible effect on Rosa, even worst was the effect of the position of German Social Democracy… The approval of the war credits by Social Democracy in the German Reichstag was a signal for her to finally disown her former comrades whom she had been alienated from for a long time, and to begin her underground educational work in the German workforce with a small handful of selected adherents …


The first issue of the magazine «Die Internationale» (The International) appeared in spring 1915 under the editorial auspices of Franz Mehring, Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin. It was to explore all the problems of the workers movement raised by the war. The magazine was banned as soon as it was published. The editors, publishers and printers were accused of high treason. The 5000 copies that had already been sold were passed around amongst comrades and workers.

Small groups of so-called «radical socialists» who agitated against the war formed in isolation all over the Reich. They gave their community the name «Spartacus Groups».

In answer to Karl Kautsky’s declaration that the International was not a weapon in the war, Rosa Luxemburg wrote under the pseudonym «Mortimer»:

«... the world historic appeal of the communist manifest has undergone a significant amendment and, after Karl Kautsky’s correction, now reads: Workers of the world unite in peace and slash your throats in war! So for today: «A Russian for every shot – a Frenchman for every stab!» ... and tomorrow after the peace treaty: «Embrace, millions!»...»
Although Rosa Luxemburg was granted a reprieve until 31st March 1915 because of illness, the Frankfurt public prosecutor issued an immediate arrest warrant on 18th February. During this period in detention Rosa Luxemburg wrote two significant works. In "ANTI CRITICISM", she got even with the critics of her book "Accumulation of Capital". In "THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY", she analysed the reasons for the war and highlighted its horrors and the failure of German and international social democracy.

Besides her socio-political studies, Rosa Luxemburg also occupied her time with ornithology and botany. She was particularly fond of her herbarium.

"... thank you especially for the flowers; you don't know what a good deed you have done. I can start botanising again, my passion and the best relaxation ..."  
—R.L. to Mathilde Jacob on 9th April 1915, Berlin-Barnimstraße

With the help of her secretary and friend Mathilde Jacob, the manuscripts could be smuggled out of prison. Only after Rosa Luxemburg's release from prison could a publisher be found. She chose the name "Junius" as pseudonym. The work became internationally known as the JUNIUS PAMPHLET. After this year in prison, Rosa Luxemburg was in poor health. Nevertheless, she called to the more than one million women workers who were waiting for her with flowers at the prison gate:  

"I have returned to freedom with a tremendous appetite for work!"  
—R.L. to Mathilde Jacob on 23rd February 1915
I've got "involuntary" leisure time again.

On 10th July 1916 Rosa Luxemburg was again arrested. In the opinion of the Berlin police commissioner she was a danger to public security.

Police prison Berlin Alexanderplatz, women’s prison Berlin Barnimstraße, Wronke prison by Posen and Breslau prison; these were to be the places where she spent the next 2 1/2 years.

»… dive on Alexanderplatz where in the 1 square metre sized cell I declaimed Mörike morning and night without light, squashed between the bed and the iron bunk …«

R.L. to Mathilde Wurm on 28.12.1916

»Police prison Alexanderplatz … the month and a half I spent there turned my hair gray and left me with nerves wrecked so badly that I'll never be the same …«

R.L. to Hans Diefenbach on 29.6.1917

In Wronke prison Rosa Luxemburg was granted special facilities as a prisoner of "protective custody". She could receive visitors on request and accept flowers, books, food and personal belongings. She could arrange her two small rooms as she wished and wear her own clothes. She had created a small garden in the prison yard. The doors were open during the day. From here she wrote the most beautiful letters to her friends.

»… a great tit is sitting on the grate at my window turning its little head from side to side in order to look through the glass pane at me. I am sitting here at my desk working, enjoying the ticking of the clock - a cozy, comforting sound.«

R.L. to Hans Diefenbach on 13th August 1917

During her time in protective custody, Rosa Luxemburg translated Wladimir Korolenko’s »Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen« (The History of My Contemporary) from Russian and also wrote the foreword. The book was published in 1919 by Paul Cassirer.

Rosa Luxemburg was visited regularly by Mathilde Jacob and Marta Rosenbaum. Not only German newspapers found their way into her cell, but also Russian newspapers and pamphlets. Rosa Luxemburg observed the revolutionary activities in Russia and the mass demonstrations and strikes in Germany with great interest. In her contributions to the Spartacus Letters she admired the Russian proletariats and sharply criticised the attitude of the German Social Democrats, where the right wing was still propagating rallying calls.

On 8th November 1918 Rosa Luxemburg was finally released from Breslau prison.

The Spartacus Group had joined up with the "Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany", which had been founded in April 1917. From then on Rosa Luxemburg was a member of the USPD.

»Things can't go on like this much longer. Now that Dittmar and Karl Eiser have been set free, I am sure that the door will soon be open for myself, and for Karl too. We had better wait until we can meet in Berlin. …«

R.L. to Sophie Liebknecht on 18th October 1918
In March 1917, the Petrograd workers’ armed revolt began.
It seized the whole country. Tsarism was overthrown. On 17th April 1917, Lenin returned to Russia from Switzerland and urged the Party of the Bolsheviks to continue the revolution.

Rosa Luxemburg soon expresses her doubts as to the chances of success.

> “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…”

Rosa Luxemburg repeatedly emphasized the need for a revolution in other countries, particularly in Germany. For Rosa Luxemburg there was no such thing as a victorious revolution in one single country.

In the summer of 1918, Rosa Luxemburg wrote very critical articles on the events in Russia. Her comrades Ernst Meyer and Paul Levi refused to publish these articles in the »Spartacus letters«. In order to convince them of the accuracy of her critique, Rosa Luxemburg wrote an article in which she paid tribute to the revolution but critically analysed Bolshevik policies in matters of agricultural reform, and the reforms of the country’s powers of self determination, democracy and terror.

> “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 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…”

The incomplete works were summarised by Paul Levi and published by him in 1922 as a booklet. The booklet was cause for controversy for a long time.

–> Die Russische Revolution (The Russian Revolution) a critical acknowledgement from the works of Rosa Luxemburg. Published by and with an introduction by Paul Levi, Berlin 1922
By the autumn of 1918 the revolution could not be stopped in Germany either. Beginning with the Wilhelmshaven mutiny on 3rd November, the revolution had reached its height by 9th November. Workers’ and soldiers’ councils organised themselves in the whole of the country. In the late evening on 10th November, Rosa Luxemburg arrived in Berlin from Breslau prison. She was ill and had aged. Nevertheless, she took on the work as editor of the »Rote Fahne« (The Red Flag).

«Dearest, just two quick lines. Since I got off the train yesterday I have not set foot in my flat. The whole time until yesterday there was a chase for the ›Rote Fahne‹. Will it come out – will it not come out? This was what the struggle was revolving around from morning to night. At last here it is – I’ll keep it short! We want your name immediately. Write something about women, it is very important right now and none of us knows much about the subject. Darling, in a rush, with love. Your RL»

R.L. to Clara Zetkin on 18th November 1918, Berlin, Hotel Moltke

»… the abolition of the rule of capitalism, the realization of the social order of socialism – this and nothing less is the historical theme of the present revolution. This is an huge work which cannot be completed in the twinkling of an eye by a few degrees from above: it can be born only of the conscious action of the masses of workers in the cities and in the country, and brought successfully through the maze of difficulties only by the highest intellectual maturity and unflagging idealism of the masses of the people. The path of the revolution follows clearly from its end: its method follows from its task. All power in the hands of the working masses, in the hands of the workers’ and soldiers’ councils: protection of the work of revolution against its lurking enemies …«

R.L. in »Die Rote Fahne« (Red Flag) on 18th November 1918

«… relentless revolutionary energy and the most tolerant humaneness, this alone is the breath of socialism. A world must be overturned, but every tear that flows is an accusation; and every man rushing to do something important who treads even on a worm through pure carelessness is committing a crime …»

R.L. in »Die Rote Fahne« (Red Flag) 18th November 1918

November 1918

Hoch die Leibe die Revolution!
“... revolutions know no half measures, no compromise, no creeping and ducking. Revolutions need open visors, clear principles and determined hearts...”

R.L. in “What does the Spartacus League want?”

“... the bigger the task, the more we will unite forces; and we will not forget: the revolution knows how to carry out its tasks with the utmost of speed...”

Schlußwort der Rede zum Programm

Counter-revolutionary powers were urging to disband the workers’ and soldiers’ councils as quickly as possible and to hold elections for the national assembly.

At the Reich’s conference of the Spartacus League, delegates decided on 30th December 1918 to leave the USPD and to found a new party: the “Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus League)”.

Embittered and angry, Rosa Luxemburg argued with the leaders of the USDP (Independent Socialist Party of Germany).

“It is sheer insanity to believe that capitalists would good-naturedly obey the socialist verdict of a parliament or of a national assembly, that they would calmly renounce property, profit, the right to exploit.”

R.L. in “Rote Fahne” (Red Flag) 29th December 1918

Socialism or barbarism.
On 4th January 1919, the social democratic government had declared the dismissal of the Chief of the Berlin Police, Emil Eichhorn, who belonged to the left wing of the UPSD. This provoked unprepared armed struggles of the revolutionary workers and soldiers of Berlin, which ended in their defeat on 12th January.

«... The violent political crises, which we see here in Berlin every two weeks or even more often, are hindering the course of educational and organisational work. But at the same time they are a great school for the masses. And after all one must take history as it comes... Right now the battle is raging through Berlin, a lot of our brave boys have fallen, Meyer, Ledebour and (as we fear) Leo (Levi) have been arrested. For today I must close. A thousand embraces! Your R.»

R. L. to Clara Zetkin on 11.1.1919

Government troops tanks at Alexanderplatz

The revolutionary workers’ uprising was brutally put down by the government troops, or Freikorps, which were called upon by the SPD.

«... You cannot imagine the situation in Berlin. The white terror is raging as it did only under the tsarist regime. Landsberg, Ebert, Scheidemann, who played the guardians of legality, are giving free hand to the marauding troops, whom they have assembled and indoctrinated from old officers and sergeant elements and sons of the bourgeoisie... The wildest troublemakers over the bolshevist terror carried out or tolerated dreadful riots, which, were they to be reported from Petersburg or Moscow; would provoke an outcry of the so-called civilized world.»

Haase, Ernst: Hugo Haase. Sein Leben und Wirken. (Hugo Haase. His life and work)

10th December 1918, Brandenburg Gate: welcome speech of the people’s representative Ebert on the arrival of the guard troops in Berlin (under the de-facto command of captain Pabst)

January battles in the newspaper quarter

Government troops tanks at Alexanderplatz

The closing words of the final article «Order prevails in Berlin», which Rosa Luxemburg wrote for the «Rote Fahne» (Red Flag) on 14th January 1919, read as follows:

«The leadership failed. But a new leadership can and must be created by the masses and from the masses. The masses are the crucial factor. They are the rock on which the ultimate victory of the revolution will be built. The masses were up to the challenge, and out of this defeat, they have forged a link in the chain of historic defeats, which is the pride and strength of international socialism. That is why future victories will spring from this defeat... «Order prevails in Berlin!»

You foolish lackeys! Your «order» is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will rise up again, clashing its weapons, and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing: I was, I am, I shall be!»

German army minister, Gustav Noske, visits government troop positions.
The victory of the counter-revolution in January 1919 led directly and logically to the victory of Hitler in January 1933.

Paul Frölich

On 15th January, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck were tracked down in Mannheimerstraße 43 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, arrested and taken to the Hotel Eden.

After a short interrogation and a telephone call with the German Army minister Noske (MSPD), Pabst ordered that the prisoners be transported to Moabit prison. This transfer order was already part of the murder plan.

On 15th January, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht und Wilhelm Pieck were tracked down in Mannheimerstraße 43 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, arrested and taken to the Hotel Eden.

**The Murder**

Rosa Luxemburg’s corpse was washed ashore at the Freiarchenbrücke on the Landwehrkanal on 1st June 1919. Mathilde Jacob was able to identify the corpse by the remains of her clothes. She had to pay for the “recovery” of the body.

On 13th June Rosa Luxemburg was buried next to Karl Liebknecht in the cemetery in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde. The funeral procession turned into a powerful demonstration.

In the spring and summer of 1919, a terrible civil war raged over Germany in the course of which several thousand workers were brutally murdered.

Leo Jogiches managed to track down the accomplices to the crime. He was able to take a photo of their feast after the murder. He repeatedly published accusations in the “Rote Fahne”, until finally there was a trial. It ended in a farce.

The murder remained unpunished.
Leo (Leon) Jogiches.
Pseudonyms: Grosovski, Jan Tyszka, Leonie, Otto Engelmann, K. Krysztalowicz, was born in 1867 and came from a rich, Russian-Jewish, very cultured family.

In 1890, at the age of 23, he left his birth-town Vilnius for Switzerland as a political refugee and enrolled at Zurich University. Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches most probably became acquainted at the national economics lectures.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote innumerable letters to Leo Jogiches. More than 1000 have been preserved. These are letters of a special kind. Amongst reports and opinions on political events or people, there are unexpected declarations of love, examinations of their mutual feelings, and critique of her lover’s behaviour.

At this time in their partnership, Jogiches was the absolute intellectual authority for Rosa Luxemburg and this remained so for a long time. It was Jogiches who proofread and corrected many of her manuscripts, even her doctoral dissertation.

Despite the many and intense conflicts, and their ultimate break up in 1906/07, they continued to work together politically. In emergencies they supported each other as friends. It was Leo Jogiches who managed to track down Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht’s murders.

They were never able arrange this »personal life« together, not because it was not what they would have wanted, but rather because the big »task« of the revolutionary struggle that they had assigned to was in the way.

On 10th March 1919, after brutal abuse in the police prison in Moabit, Leo Jogiches was also shot by the police officer Tamschick »whilst fleeing«. Tamschick committed two more political murders; he killed the trade unionist Silt and the marine lieutenant Dorrenbach. He was promoted to the position of police lieutenant by the interior minister Severing (SPD).
Don’t be alarmed,
I’m already better.

Mathilde Jacob lived in Berlin-Moabit with her mother and sister. She ran a small office for secretarial work and replication. One of her first «clients» from socialist circles was Franz Mehring.

In 1913, she became Rosa Luxemburg’s secretary and confidante. Rosa Luxemburg spoke of her as her «good angel».

As her secretary, Mathilde Jacob had the most frequent access to Rosa Luxemburg in prison. She smuggled secret messages and reports in books, newspapers, flowerpots, bunches of flowers and shopping bags. She brought coded orders into and answers out of the prison.

She looked after Rosa’s diet, her flowers, her washing, her books and everything that made her life and work in prison easier. She also looked after Rosa Luxemburg’s beloved cat Mimi.

During the exhausting, hard days of the revolution, Mathilde Jacob was not just a «good angel» for Rosa Luxemburg, but a reliable, tireless fighter in the Spartacus League.

Born 8th March 1873
in Berlin

Mathilde Jacob

died (murdered)
27th July 1942
in Theresienstadt

Rosa Luxemburg 1913 – 15th Jan. 1919

Charlotte Beradt, Rosa Luxemburg im Gefängnis (Rosa Luxemburg in prison)

…”I was lucky enough to get to know Rosa Luxemburg personally in 1913. No woman had ever made such a big impression on me. Her large bright eyes, which seemed to understand everything, her modesty and kindness, her almost childish delight in all that was beautiful, made my heart miss a beat. The first personal contact between Rosa Luxemburg and I resulted from the publication of the Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz (Social Democratic Correspondence) which was primarily written and edited by Karols (Julius Marchlewski), Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring. I had been charged with its technical production and distribution …“

Charles Schüddekopf – Versuch eines Dialogs: »Mathilde Jacob im Gespräch« (Attempt at a dialogue «Mathilde Jacob in conversation»)

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Charlotte Beradt, Rosa Luxemburg im Gefängnis (Rosa Luxemburg in prison)

…”when will I sit with you and Mimi in Südende and read Goethe to you both? I embrace you and Mimi with terrible yearning, your R.L.”

L. to Mathilde Jacob on 7th January 1917

R.-L. 24-35 09 English.indd   22.01.09   08:36
Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin’s friendship began in 1898 after the party conference in Stuttgart. Clara Zetkin was then 41 years old. She could look back on 20 years work in the German and international labour movement. For her young comrade, Rosa Luxemburg, this proved a great help in orientating herself within inner party connections. Clara Zetkin valued Rosa Luxemburg’s theoretical knowledge and analytic reasoning. Both women were excellent journalists and speakers.

Clara Josephine Zetkin (Zundel) née Eißner, born on 5th July 1857 in Wiederau/Saxony, died on 20th June 1933 in Archangelskoje near Moscow.

1892 — 1917, head of the social democratic women’s magazine “Die Gleichheit” (equality); from 1919, leading member of the KPD and the communist parliamentary party in the Reichstag.

Clara Zetkin at the beginning of the 1930s

Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg in 1919 at the Kapp-Putsch party conference

Clara Zetkin at the beginning of the 1930s

«… We will write to one another, Clara and I, which I’m very happy about …»

L. to Leo Jogiches on 2nd February 1899

«Small, delicate Rosa embodied energy without equal. She demanded the utmost of herself every minute and achieved it. If she was in danger of breaking down due to overexertion, she recovered with even greater work. She grew wings when working and fighting.»

Clara Zetkin to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht 1919

«… imagine if Clara already had her mandate and were to sit in the Reichstag with Rosa! Then you would see something! …»

Victor Adler to August Bebel in a letter dated 5th August 1910

In Sillenbuch house, the home of Clara Zetkin, her sons and Friedrich Zundel, Rosa Luxemburg often sought and found peace and relaxation. Here she met many of her friends, such as the Geck family, Hans Diefenbach, the Kautskys, the Bebels and Lenin. She spent many pleasant evenings there enjoying music, song and readings.

Clara Zetkin in: Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht 1919

«… Oh Rosa, what days! I see before me so clearly the historic greatness and meanings of all your actions … My dearest, my only Rosa. I know you never wished for a better death than to fall fighting for the revolution. But what about us? Can we spare you? I cannot think I only feel. I embrace you and press you close to my heart. Always yours, Clara.»

Clara Zetkin to Rosa Luxemburg on 31st January 1919 from Stuttgart

«… the worst thing is that I can’t come and see you now, not even for two days: I have lots to do here, I must cure myself and I hardly feel capable of travelling 3. We must save money (you, I and all of us!). And then you go and send me such flower baskets and the poet (Friedr. Zundel, Clara’s husband) indulges in such luxuries! Oh you hopeless grand seigneurs of the heart — with holes in your pockets! A long talk with you would be so liberating. But what use is that! Even that must be taken quietly and cheerfully …»

R.L. to Clara Zetkin on 10th March 1916 from Sildende-Berlin

Clara Zetkin, around 1920

Clara Zetkin to Rosa Luxemburg on 2nd February 1899
Luise Kautsky,
born 1864. Karl Kautsky's second wife. In the summer of 1944 at 80 years of age, she was arrested by the Germans in Holland, seized and taken to the concentration camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she died (was murdered) in December of the same year.

Rosa Luxemburg nurtured a deep friendship with Luise and Karl Kautsky's family for many years. With them she also spent many relaxing holidays in Switzerland and Italy. Rosa Luxemburg's friendship with Luise did not break up even after the dispute with Karl Kautsky.

Luise Kautsky about Rosa Luxemburg:
«... she was small and would have been unprepossessing had her looks not been enhanced by her beautiful shining eyes, her fine oval shaped face, beautiful complexion and her full dark hair and in particular her intelligent expression. What was the charm of her being? Its liveliness, the ability to quickly empathise with every mood of the other, and her accomplished art of listening, her loving way of empathising with the joys and sorrows of others, her sparkling humour, her clear, sensible judgement, her cheefulness with which she injected her partner, and on the other hand the deep moral earnest with which she approached all the problems that her eventful life confronted her with every day.»

Rosa Luxemburg and Luise Kautsky during their stay in Switzerland

From Luise Kautsky «Rosa Luxemburg, ein Gedenkbuch» (Rosa Luxemburg, a memorial book)
«... when she (Rosa Luxemburg) had founded her own household, she also began to be interested in housework; did not disdain cooking and loved it when her guests felt comfortable in her home. By no means did she harbour a contempt of domestic virtue, was very tidy and clean, and had a pronounced sense of beauty. When she was tired of intellectual work, she often also took up needlework. I have seen a number of sofa cushions and blankets that have bloomed in her skillful fingers...»

And he happy, do you understand?
Hans Diefenbach, born 1884 in Stuttgart, killed in action in October 1917. He was blown to pieces by a grenade in France while serving as a military doctor.

Hans Diefenbach came from Stuttgart to Munich to study medicine. In the house of the socialist doctor Mrs. Hope Bridges Adams-Lehmann, he found a second home. Here he became acquainted with many famous social democrats. When he moved to Berlin, he was immediately welcomed in social democratic circles. It was here that he also first met Rosa Luxemburg. A deep and cordial friendship developed between the two.

> … Hänschen, good morning, here I am, I feel so lonely today and will have to revive myself a bit by chatting to you. A robin sat on the wall behind me and sang for me a bit. (...) It has a very small, delicate little voice and is performing strange intimate melodies that sound like a prelude, like a piece of revetille … performed in a quiet tremolo tone so infinitely sweet that it seems hazy, like a memory lost in dreams. My heart quivers with delight and pain when I hear this song and I immediately see my life and the world in a new light just as if the clouds were parting and a bright ray of sunshine were falling to earth …

R.L. to Dr. Hans Diefenbach on 23rd June 1917 from Wronke prison

> … I can say, to my honour, that I have not much nationalism in me, but am not entirely able to deprive myself of the thought of being in some way bound to the idea of my origins in Württemberg and the relationship to the historic hills, to the places from which Schelling, Schiller, Hegel, Mörder, Hölderlin came.

R.L. to Luise Kautsky: Rosa Luxemburg, ein Gedenkbuch (Rosa Luxemburg, a Memorial Book)

> … only one thing torments me: that I shall have to enjoy so much beauty alone. I want to call out loudly over the wall: Oh please, note the beautiful day! Do not forget, however busy you may be, even if you are rushing over the yard going about your daily business, do not forget to quickly raise your head and glance at the enormous silvery clouds and the still blue ocean in which they are swimming. Note the air, which is heavy with the passionate breath of the last lime flowers and the glow and beauty that rest on this day, because this day will never come back. It has been given to you like a fully open rose which lies at your feet and is waiting to be picked up and pressed to your lips.

R.-L. 24-35 09 English.indd   5   22.01.09   08:36
My little girl
— chin up —
stay firm and calm.

Sophie (Sonja) Liebknecht
born 1884
in Rostov-on-Don,
Art Historian
Second wife of
Karl Liebknecht,
died 1964

Rosa Luxemburg always cared
lovingly for Sophie Liebknecht,
who suffered greatly from the
imprisonment of her husband,
Karl Liebknecht.

From prison, Rosa Luxemburg
wrote her comforting and
encouraging letters.

“… Sonyusha, dearest, 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
everything.”

R.L. to Sophie Liebknecht from Wronke in December
1917

“… Sonyusha, you are feeling embittered because of my
long imprisonment. You ask: How can human
beings dare to decide the fate of their fellows? What is
the meaning of it all? You won’t mind — I couldn’t
help laughing as I read. In Dostoyevsky’s novel, The
Brothers Karamazoff, one of the characters, Madame
Etkhabloeva, used to ask the same questions; she
would look round from one member of the company
to another, and would then blurt out a second ques-
tion before there had been time to begin an answer to
the first. My dear little bird, the whole history of civil-
isation (which according to a modest estimate extends
through some twenty thousand years) is grounded
upon human beings deciding the fate of their fellows
— the practice is deeply rooted in the material condi-
tions of existence. Nothing but a further evolution,
and a painful one, can change such things. At this
hour we are living in the very chapter of the transi-
tion, and you ask: What is the meaning of it all? —
Your query is not a reasonable one to make concern-
ing the totality of life and its forms. Why are there
blue-tits in the world? I really don’t know, but I’m
glad that there are, and it is sweet to me when a hasty
›zeezeebey‹ sounds suddenly from beyond the
wall…”

R.L. to Sophie Liebknecht on 23rd May 1917 from
Wronke prison

“… I suppose I must be out of sorts to feel everything
so deeply. Sometimes, however, it seems to me that I
am not really a human being at all but like a bird or
a beast in human form. I feel so much more at home
even in a scrap of garden like the one here, and still
more in the meadows when the grass is humming with
bees than — at one of our party congresses. I can say
that to you, for you will not promptly suspect me of
treason to socialism! You know that I really hope to die
at my post, in a street fight or in prison. But my
innermost personality belongs more to my tomtits
than to the comrades.…”

R.L. to Sophie Liebknecht on 2nd May 1917 from Wronke prison
Mathilde Wurm - Comrade and Friend

Rosa Luxemburg 1871–1918

»Disappointment with the masses« is always the most lamentable excuse for a political leader.

Mathilde and Emanuel Wurm were part of the USPD’s left wing, which was called the »Sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft« (Social democratic group). For Rosa Luxemburg, the leading representatives were not decisive enough in their opposition to the party executive’s authoritarian actions and to the political perseverance of the social democrat majority. Mathilde Wurm had to endure her anger about the »weaklings and cowards«.

»... your last letter made me seethe with rage because, despite its brevity, it shows me in every line how very much you are again under the influence of your milieu. This whining tone, this ›alas‹ and ›alack‹ about the ›disappointments‹ which you have experienced –disappointments which you blame on others, instead of just looking into the mirror to see the whole of humanity’s wretchedness in its most striking likeness! ... your grousing, peevish, cowardly and half hearted nature has never been as alien, as hateful to me, as it is now ... let me tell you, as soon as I can stick my nose outside again, I will chase and hunt your company of frogs with trumpet calls, cracks of the whip and bloodhounds... Do you have enough now for a New Years Greeting? Then see to it that you remain a Mensch. Being a Mensch means happily throwing one's life ›on fate's great scale‹ if necessary, but, at the same time, enjoying every bright day and every beautiful cloud. Oh, I can't write you a prescription for being a Mensch. I only know how one is a Mensch, and you used to know it too when we went walking for a few hours in the Südende fields with the sunset's red light falling on the wheat. The world is beautiful even with all its horrors, and it would be even more beautiful if there were no weaklings and cowards. Come, you still get a kiss, because you are a sincere little dear. Happy New Year!«

R.L. to Mathilde Wurm on 28th December 1916 from Wronke prison

»My dear Tilde!
... that you now have neither
time nor interest for anything
except the ›single issue‹, namely
the quarreling of the party, is
calamitous. Such one-sidedness
also clouds one's political judg-
ment; and above all, one must
live as a full person at all times.
... why do you come with your
special Jewish sorrows? I feel just
as sorry for the wretched Indian
victims of the rubber plantations
in Putumayo, the negroes in
Africa with whose bodies the
Europeans play catch. Do you
remember the words written on
the work of the Great General
Staff about Trotha's campaign in
the Kalahari desert? And the
death-rattles, the mad cries of
those dying of thirst, faded away
into the sublime silence of eterni-
ty! Oh, this ›sublime silence of eter-
nity‹ in which so many screams
have faded away unheard! It
rings within me so strongly that I
have no special corner of my
heart reserved for the ghetto: I am
at home wherever in the world
there are clouds, birds and
human tears...«

R.L. to Mathilde Wurm on 16th February 1917 from Wronke prison

»My dear Röschen, ... day after
day I open the papers expecting to
read at last of your release. Day
after day I am disappointed. Our
present democratic government
is so wonderful that we don't
even have a law of amnesty and
you are still in protective custo-
dy. How you must be suffering to
be robbed of your freedom at this
particular moment!«

R.L. to Mathilde Wurm on 7th November 1918 in Breslau prison

Lore Agnes (MSPD) – Clara Zetkin (KPD) – Mathilde Wurm (USPD)

Born in 1874, author and Social Democrat, member of the USPD, from 1917 – 1919 representative of the city of Berlin, mainly active in the social sector. She committed suicide in exile in London.

Mathilde Wurm née Adler
Mathilde Wurm – Comrade and Friend

Rosa Luxemburg 1871–1918

»Disappointment with the masses« is always the most lamentable excuse for a political leader.

Mathilde and Emanuel Wurm were part of the USPD’s left wing, which was called the »Sozialdemokratische Arbeitsgemeinschaft« (Social democratic group). For Rosa Luxemburg, the leading representatives were not decisive enough in their opposition to the party executive’s authoritarian actions and to the political perseverance of the social democrat majority. Mathilde Wurm had to endure her anger about the »weaklings and cowards«.

»... your last letter made me seethe with rage because, despite its brevity, it shows me in every line how very much you are again under the influence of your milieu. This whining tone, this ›alas‹ and ›alack‹ about the ›disappointments‹ which you have experienced –disappointments which you blame on others, instead of just looking into the mirror to see the whole of humanity’s wretchedness in its most striking likeness! ... your grousing, peevish, cowardly and half hearted nature has never been as alien, as hateful to me, as it is now ... let me tell you, as soon as I can stick my nose outside again, I will chase and hunt your company of frogs with trumpet calls, cracks of the whip and bloodhounds... Do you have enough now for a New Years Greeting? Then see to it that you remain a Mensch. Being a Mensch means happily throwing one's life ›on fate's great scale‹ if necessary, but, at the same time, enjoying every bright day and every beautiful cloud. Oh, I can't write you a prescription for being a Mensch. I only know how one is a Mensch, and you used to know it too when we went walking for a few hours in the Südende fields with the sunset's red light falling on the wheat. The world is beautiful even with all its horrors, and it would be even more beautiful if there were no weaklings and cowards. Come, you still get a kiss, because you are a sincere little dear. Happy New Year!«

R.L. to Mathilde Wurm on 28th December 1916 from Wronke prison

»My dear Tilde!
... that you now have neither
time nor interest for anything
except the ›single issue‹, namely
the quarreling of the party, is
calamitous. Such one-sidedness
also clouds one's political judg-
ment; and above all, one must
live as a full person at all times.
... why do you come with your
special Jewish sorrows? I feel just
as sorry for the wretched Indian
victims of the rubber plantations
in Putumayo, the negroes in
Africa with whose bodies the
Europeans play catch. Do you
remember the words written on
the work of the Great General
Staff about Trotha's campaign in
the Kalahari desert? And the
death-rattles, the mad cries of
those dying of thirst, faded away
into the sublime silence of eterni-
ty! Oh, this ›sublime silence of eter-
nity‹ in which so many screams
have faded away unheard! It
rings within me so strongly that I
have no special corner of my
heart reserved for the ghetto: I am
at home wherever in the world
there are clouds, birds and
human tears...«

R.L. to Mathilde Wurm on 16th February 1917 from Wronke prison

»My dear Röschen, ... day after
day I open the papers expecting to
read at last of your release. Day
after day I am disappointed. Our
present democratic government
is so wonderful that we don't
even have a law of amnesty and
you are still in protective custo-
dy. How you must be suffering to
be robbed of your freedom at this
particular moment!«

R.L. to Mathilde Wurm on 7th November 1918 in Breslau prison

Lore Agnes (MSPD) – Clara Zetkin (KPD) – Mathilde Wurm (USPD)
Kostja (Konstantin) Zetkin
born 1885, died 1980,
Doctor, son of Clara Zetkin

Rosa Luxemburg already knew Kostja Zetkin as a boy. In the spring of 1907, a love affair began. She became his teacher, friend and lover. She shared with him her thoughts, worries and pleasures.

Your sweet letter today was such a comfort to me.

«... sweet Beloved, on the 21st I received your kind, long letter and today the short one... I am happy that Ferdinand Lassalle has captivated you, I too enthuse about him and will not let anyone or anything put me off him. As far as I am concerned, he still and always incites me to work and to science, which through him is always so full of life and genius. Marx may be more powerful and profound, but by far not as sparkling and colourful...»

R.L. to Kostja Zetkin on 27th September 1907

«... you sweet consoler, since yesterday I have experienced so many terrible things. Early in the morning, the most important lawyer for political trials came from Warsaw, sent especially to me; he and his colleague called on me to sort Europe out because of the atrocities in the war court, in the prisons and in the torture chambers. He spoke and I made notes from 10 in the morning till 7 at night, until he had to go in order to be in court again in the morning. We both cried whilst working. It is dreadful to see several executions a day; things happen in the prisons that make your hair stand on end. You can imagine how I felt...»

R.L. to Kostja Zetkin on 30th June 1908

«... today I went and painted for the first time in nature. I went to Schlachtensee and died of impatience but, oh God, what problems! I could only take a sketchbook, so had to paint on plain paper and in the air. But yet again I learnt something. Oh, if I could spend the next two years of my life only painting -- that would devour me... But what mad dreams, I am not allowed to, because not a soul needs my paintings, but the people need my articles...»

R.L. to Kostja Zetkin on 22nd August 1908

This liaison lasted for more than 2 years, they always remained friends.
1907

Karl Liebknecht was born in Leipzig as the second son of the family of the distinguished leader of German Social Democracy, Wilhelm Liebknecht and his wife Nathalie. After studying law at the universities in Leipzig and Berlin, Karl Liebknecht defended German social democrats, fighters against German militarism and Russian emigrants in eviction trials.

Within social democracy, Karl Liebknecht was part of the left wing. The first political field of action Karl Liebknecht devoted himself to was the fight against militarism.

In February 1907, Karl Liebknecht published a text entitled »Militarismus und Antimilitarismus« (Militarism and Anti-militarism), with particular regard to the international youth movement.

This text and Karl Liebknecht’s motions at party conferences for political agitation against militarism prompted the Prussian minister of war to press charges.

Karl Liebknecht was sentenced to 18 months prison for high treason which he had to begin to serve immediately.

1919

After the outbreak of the First World War, Karl Liebknecht was the first and initially the only social democratic Reichstag delegate to oppose the granting of war credits. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht waged the battle against the war together and, particularly during the November Revolution, thus became comrades in arms.

Together with Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht took on the chair of the newly founded Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

On 15th January 1919, Karl Liebknecht was murdered by members of the guard’s cavalry division, as was Rosa Luxemburg.
After dreadful party work for Poland (...) I must write a few words, in order to feel the sun and joie de vivre. Darling, if only you were with me for just a moment.

Paul Levi was the only person whom Rosa Luxemburg had entrusted with her manuscript «The Russian Revolution» which she had written in Breslau prison. In 1922, he published Rosa Luxemburg’s manuscript. Within the KPD and the Communist International, the publication caused hefty disputes.

Because of his critical stance on the Communist International and his criticism of the insurgent tactics of the KPD, Levi was expelled from the party in 1921. Paul Levi remained true to his left convictions in the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg within the communist group (KAG) and later in the SPD.

Paul Levi was probably very depressed at the outbreak of the war. On 31st July, Rosa Luxemburg wrote to him:

«... don’t despair, we now need fresh courage and a cool head in order to act.»

In the months before the First World War, Levi’s main sphere of activity was political agitation against militarism.

«When officers’ honour and law collide with one another, then in Germany the law has to remain silent.»

PL in «Volksstimme» (People’s voice)

In 1914

R. L. to Paul Levi around 20th/21st April 1914

In the trial against Rosa Luxemburg for prompting disobedience of the law, and the second trial for insulting the officers and sergeant corps, Paul Levi took on the defence along with Kurt Rosenfeld.

They could not prevent Rosa Luxemburg being sentenced to one year prison.

«No, your honour, the accused is not so poor (...) in Germany there are hundreds of thousands who love her and whom she loves and whom she will not let down, even for one year in prison. In that matter you can believe the accused.»

PL in his speech for the defence on 20th February 1914

Paul Levi and Rosa Luxemburg used the trials for widespread anti-militaristic agitation which received great repeat in the entire party.

After the first trial in Frankfurt, Rosa Luxemburg and Paul Levi got to know and love each other and were close friends for about half a year.

«After dreadful party work for Poland (...) I must write a few words in order to feel the sun and joie de vivre. Darling, if only you were with me for just a moment.»

PL to Paul Levi around 20th/21st April 1914

During a trial in which Paul Levi defended an editor who was accusing the examining magistrate, Paul Jorns, of not having solved but rather having covered up Luxemburg and Liebknecht’s murders, he became ill with pneumonia. Paul Levi died in an accident. After his tragic death on 9th February 1930, Carl von Ossietzky wrote an obituary in the «Weltbühne» on 18th February 1930:

«The communists were wrong to call him disloyal, the social democrats wrong in calling him a convert. He was an international socialist of Rosa Luxemburg’s school and never denied it. Paul Levi was as dedicated to Socialism as hardly anyone else.»

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MOURNING AND TRIBUTE

ROSA LUXEMBURG

She was and remains for us an eagle.
(Lenin)

To the funeral, citizens!
Noske guards stand in line!
Come and see us
all walking behind her corpse.
Her followers
Her brothers united
Look how we honour her
Profess our belief in her
And weep for her
This is not a funeral procession
But a procession of burning philanthropy
Loud accusation
of a people
for the victim of violence –
and the reign of blood
of its tyrants

Here lies buried
Rosa Luxemburg
A Jew from Poland
Who fought for the
German workers
Murdered on the orders of
German oppressors.

You who are oppressed;
Bury your differences!

Clarity and truth should meet –
against the haze that had risen
up and murdered hope.
The hopes, which we quite rightly saw;
for a stable German republic.
That would have had to have
been a single minded democra-
cy.

Peter Geide, Rosa Luxemburg
and the Weimar left

Memorial for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

On 15th June 1926, a memorial was unveiled in
Berlin-Friedrichsfelde.
It was designed by the Bauhaus architect Mies
van der Rohe, made of broken red, hard burned
brick from demolished buildings in Oldenburg.
It consisted of stacked up, staggered blocks and
was about twelve metres long and six metres
high, with a Soviet star with a hammer and
sickle and a flagpole as sculptural elements. The
monument was financed by donations from the
labour force.

At the time, Mies van der Rohe was already one
of the most famous architects in Germany.
In a conversation later, he explained:

Clarity and truth should meet –
against the haze that had risen
up and murdered hope.
The hopes, which we quite rightly saw;
for a stable German republic.
That would have had to have
been a single minded democra-
cy.

Peter Geide, Rosa Luxemburg
and the Weimar left

The monument was demo-
lished in 1935 by NS rulers.
The present monument was
erected in 1951.

Epitaph for
Rosa Luxemburg

Have lies buried
Rosa Luxemburg
A Jew from Poland
Who fought for the
German workers
Murdered on the orders of
German oppressors.
You who are oppressed:
Bury your differences!

Memorial for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

1926

1935

Memorial at Berlin-Friedrichsfelde cemetery 1926

Death certificate.

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The commemorative plaque for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on the Landwehrkanal was destroyed on numerous occasions.

In 1987, there was a proposal to call the new bridge over the Landwehrkanal »Rosa-Luxemburg-Brücke«. (Rosa Luxemburg had been thrown into the canal at this location after being murdered). The CDU/FDP majority in the Berlin parliament withheld their consent. On the bridge’s inauguration day members of the Berlin history workshop nonetheless mounted a nameplate. The plate was removed by police officers 30 minutes later.

In 1988, a monument was erected for Rosa Luxemburg on the Landwehrkanal. The monument was designed and supplied by the architects Schüler/Schüler-Witte.

Every year on the 15th January, the day of Rosa Luxemburg’s and Karl Liebknecht’s death, thousands of people visit the memorial site at the cemetery in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde.

Rosa Luxemburg University of Cologne

On the occasion of the third reading of the emergency powers act, the members of the SDS had on 30th May 1968 given their university a new name. The inscription carried the symbolic colour red.

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On the occasion of Rosa Luxemburg’s 125th Birthday a reading was held in Munich in her honour.

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