

I really
hope
to die
at my
post

**Rosa Luxemburg in
the German Revolution**
A Chronicle

UWE SONNENBERG
JÖRN SCHÜTRUMPF

ROSA LUXEMBURG



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PREFACE

Mathilde Jacob, the closest confidante of Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches, described the Revolutionary Days of 1918–19 as follows: “Rosa did nothing without his advice, they had political discussions with each other almost every day...” Originally, Luxemburg and Jogiches had also been privately linked, and up until Luxemburg’s assassination on 15 January 1919, they not only continued their partnership politically, but also constituted an exception among the leaders of the Spartacus League: they were the only two to have experienced a revolution. In 1905–06 they had thrown themselves into the conflict in the Russian-occupied area of Poland, and had prepared analyses of what they had witnessed.

What had reached Germany, however, was Rosa Luxemburg’s call for the use of the mass strike as a political weapon, not least to avert war. All other texts that assessed the revolution had been published in Polish, and hardly any of Luxemburg’s supporters in Germany had noticed them during the post-revolutionary years of the depression.

Rosa Luxemburg knew that when the forces of the first onslaught were exhausted, every revolution would inevitably suffer a setback. In her analysis of the Russian Revolution of 1905–06, she had come to the conclusion that the further the revolution had advanced from political to social upheaval, the less significant this setback would be. Should the counterrevolutionary side be put under sufficient pressure, it would prefer a secure compromise—with the rule of law and parliamentary democracy—to an uncertain triumph.

For this reason, Rosa Luxemburg intended to use the newly founded Spartacus League on 11 November 1918 to push the German revolution as far as possible in the direction of socialism; in other words, it was to be a “shot across the bow” of the counterrevolutionary side. In practice, however, this all remained pure theory. Reality looked different: the balance of power within society stood against any further progress of the revolution. A working class that a few weeks earlier had willingly followed a military dictator like Erich Ludendorff did not become a supporter of socialism overnight.

Rosa Luxemburg knew about the political balance of power, so a short-term transition to socialism seemed illusory to her. On this point she was mostly misunderstood.

When Luxemburg received the news of her release on 8 November 1918, she still had 68 days to live. During this time, she was barely able to influence the revolution, as she, the Spartacus League and later the KPD increasingly became a projection screen: a hallucinated Bolshevik substitute for all political camps who sought at all costs to prevent the November Revolution from moving toward a social revolution. Hegemony in the revolution was in the hands of the SPD leadership from the outset, and remained so until bourgeois Germany had adjusted to the new situation and no longer needed it. Rosa Luxemburg had no choice but to warn against this development within the revolution from day one.

The present chronicle is the result of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Berlin’s work around the centenary of the November Revolution. Across social media and at a dedicated website, the daily events of 100 years ago were made available each morning in German and English. Here, for the first time, the entries have been combined into one text. The last days of Rosa Luxemburg’s life are recounted along two lines:

○ **The private and public Rosa Luxemburg, in her encounters and her appearances, using primary sources and references from the secondary literature;**

○ **Her work situated in the general events of the revolution, with its centre in Berlin.**

It should be noted that no claim is made to have presented the revolutionary events comprehensively, or to have offered a detailed interpretation of individual episodes. For the printed edition, the individual entries have been reviewed and in some cases stylistically altered. We would like to thank Nora Weiler, Alina Voinea, Hannah Wagner and Heike Schmelter as well as the Karl Dietz Verlag for their great help in the preparation of the chronicle.

Uwe Sonnenberg

Jörn Schütrumpf

Berlin, September 2020



CHRONICLE

8 NOVEMBER 1918



ROSA LUXEMBURG

Held in “protective custody” by the military for 852 days.



REVOLUTIONARY UPRISINGS IN THE EMPIRE

The mutiny of sailors in Wilhelmshaven and Kiel has, since 3 November, developed into a revolt. Revolutionaries attempt to carry it into the interior of the country primarily along the railroad lines. In numerous cities, hastily-created workers’ and soldiers’ councils take over the essential functions of the regime that is collapsing before their eyes. The red flag is raised at the duke’s palace in Brunswick. In Munich, a massive demonstration occupies the state parliament. From there, Kurt Eisner (USPD) declares Bavaria to be a free state on the night of 8 November. He becomes head of a SPD/USPD coalition government, and announces that “a new age is dawning.” The fate of the revolution will have to be decided in Berlin, however, where the few battalions still believed to be loyal are now dispatched.



PLANS FOR UPRISINGS IN BERLIN

Owing to the military siege, Berlin is largely cut off from the outside world. Although the situation within the city is relatively calm, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and those few members of the Spartacus Group still at large have been busy for weeks developing comprehensive plans for a rebellion. Conscious of the uprisings throughout the empire, increasing numbers of representatives urge action in the assemblies. A small quantity of arms has been distributed, but the concrete date for action is postponed repeatedly—until it is finally set for 11 November. But when in the course of the day Ernst Däumig (USPD) and a leading representative are arrested in possession of written plans for the insurrection, the Executive Committee of Revolutionary Shop Stewards together with the board of the USPD decide to call on Berlin workers to take action the very next day.



NOTIFICATION OF ROSA LUXEMBURG'S RELEASE

Rosa Luxemburg had been arrested many times in her life for *"lèse-majesté"* and *"encouraging disobedience"*. Most recently, to *"avert danger to the security of the empire"*, the military dictatorship placed her in *"protective custody"*—first in Berlin, then in Wronke, until she was transferred to Breslau (Wroclaw). Her friend Mathilde Jacob, following her there, supplied essential items and maintained contact with the Spartacus Group. Even from prison, Rosa Luxemburg remains the most important figure within the group, which in the meantime has been held together by her old companion Leo Jogiches. In a letter dated 14 September 1918, she reflects on the upcoming tasks required in the approaching revolution, looks after her herbarium and otherwise passes the time *"sitting, working, reading—waiting."* Luxemburg receives notification of her release on 8 November—so late in the day that she spends an additional night in prison of her own free will. She leaves a note for Paul Löbe, the chairman of the SPD in Breslau, in which she offers to be at his disposal at any time. She finds it *"absolutely necessary"* to come to an agreement about the demonstrations planned in Breslau for the following day.

9 NOVEMBER 1918

REVOLUTION IN BERLIN

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Spartacus Group distribute thousands of leaflets calling for a general strike over the course of the morning. As is hoped, huge groups of demonstrators form in large factories and march to the city centre and military barracks, where soldiers join them. Government buildings and offices are occupied and prisons stormed. Surrounded by thousands of workers, the police headquarters surrenders. The leaders of the SPD, who had long resisted the general strike, now place themselves at its head. Leading party functionaries found their own workers' and soldiers' councils. Without receiving authorization, Chancellor Prince

During the First World War, Rosa Luxemburg was held in the women's prison at Barnimstraße (1915–16, pictured here), in Wronke Fortress (1916–17), and in Breslau Prison (1917–18).



Max von Baden announces the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and transfers the office of Chancellor to Friedrich Ebert (SPD). At around 14:00, Philipp Scheidemann (SPD) announces from a window of the Reichstag building that a “German Republic” has been established. Approximately two hours later, Karl Liebknecht (Spartacus Group) proclaims the founding of the “Free Socialist Republic”.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH MATHILDE JACOB

In the morning Rosa Luxemburg telephones Mathilde Jacob, her long-time secretary in Berlin. Luxemburg relays the news of her release the previous day and expresses her definite intention now to join the ongoing revolutionary events—yet she remains trapped in Breslau. Jacob is charged with updating Luxemburg regarding the Berlin situation. Until she is able to leave Breslau, Luxemburg will stay with the Schlich ... family. The Schlichs have already looked after her for many months.

ON DOMPLATZ IN Breslau

After her release from prison, Rosa Luxemburg meets the local SPD leader Paul Löbe. They intend to come to an agreement regarding the day’s planned demonstrations, as protests are also taking place in Breslau. Luxemburg delivers a speech (the text of which has not survived), on Domplatz, before a massive crowd. Löbe, however, stops her from appearing in the Breslau Jahrhunderthalle, which holds 10,000 people at capacity. Following the demonstration, Luxemburg is prevented from traveling to Berlin on account of the suspension of train travel for civilians; trains are now reserved for the large-scale transportation of troops. Luxemburg spends another night in Breslau.

IN THE BERLIN REICHSTAG AT NIGHT

Leading representatives of the USPD discuss the SPD leadership’s offer to enter into a joint revolutionary government on an equal basis. When asked if he would be willing to participate, Karl Liebknecht refuses. Likewise opposed, Richard Müller from the Revolutionary Shop Stewards the following day calls on all workers to found councils

⋮
 ▼ in the factories. Later, they will be able to join together in a general assembly to form a government. At this turn, the SPD leadership prints a large run of leaflets calling on all troops who stand with social democracy to elect soldiers' councils.

10 NOVEMBER 1918

FIRST REACTIONS

○ It is the “greatest of all revolutions”, writes Theodor Wolff, editor-in-chief of the influential *Berliner Tageblatt*. Like a “sudden tempest”, the revolution “toppled the imperial regime and everything that belonged to it, above and below”. While the social-democratic *Vorwärts* calls for unity, not wanting to see a “struggle amongst brothers” after the unprecedented “victory” of the German people and “in particular, the proletariat of Berlin”, the *Rote Fahne* draws a clear line: “No more ‘Scheidemanns’ should be allowed in the government. No Socialist should enter government so long as there is a government Socialist still in it. There can be no coalition with those who betrayed us over the course of four years.” It will not be easy to overcome the rifts on the left created during and by the First World War.

MORNING IN THE REICHSTAG

○ The leaders of the SPD and USPD continue to negotiate the terms of a possible government in the Reichstag. Under pressure from the almost uncontrollable stream of events, Friedrich Ebert is now prepared to make extensive concessions to the USPD. He is even willing to offer a single-party government. Around noon, a temporary agreement emerges. It stipulates the formation of a cabinet of six “People’s Commissioners” working on an equal footing: Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann and Otto Landsberg for the SPD; Hugo Haase, Wilhelm Dittmann and Emil Barth for the USPD.
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GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BERLIN WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS' COUNCILS

In the late afternoon around 3,000 workers and soldiers gather at Busch-Roland Circus in Berlin. Acting now as the Council of the People's Deputies, they ratify the provisional government previously assembled at the Reichstag. They elect an Executive Council consisting of seven representatives of the SPD and USPD, as well as 14 soldiers; it is to wield executive power for the entire republic. Richard Müller becomes chairman, as does Captain von Beerfelde for a short period. Friedrich Ebert and Hugo Haase are loudly applauded for their speeches, but Karl Liebknecht arouses resentment when, looking at the leadership of the SPD, he warns of a gathering counterrevolution. Emil Barth's proposal to elect Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht to the Executive Council is rejected by a majority. The meeting then passes a "Call to the Working People", which declares Germany a socialist republic in which workers' and soldiers' councils hold political power.

ROSA LUXEMBURG ARRIVES IN BERLIN

A rumour circulates that trains from Breslau are now being redirected to Frankfurt (Oder). Rosa Luxemburg's friends in Berlin arrange for a car to meet her, but it breaks down at the start of their journey. As Mathilde Jacob reports, the art historian Eduard Fuchs then requisitions two more cars from military depots, but they turn out to be just as useless. When Jacob, Fuchs, and their fifteen-member escort are still not outside the Berlin suburbs after five hours, they abandon their plans. Rosa Luxemburg, meanwhile, has boarded a packed train from Breslau that, unexpectedly, travels directly to Berlin and arrives at Schlesischer Bahnhof (what is today Ostbahnhof) at about 22:00. The nearly three years in prison have aged her. Her hair, once deep black, has turned white. Luxemburg appears even more fragile than she had in the past, due to her hip condition. She has returned to Berlin twenty years after first arriving there, and walks directly into the revolution she has long desired and expected.

Sailors from the battleship Prinzregent Luitpold on deck with a plate reading:
"Soldiers' Council Warship Prinzregent Luitpold. Long live the Socialist Republic."

Photo: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-J0908-0600-002/CC-BY-SA 3.0



THE STRUGGLE FOR THE *ROTE FAHNE* (I)

Rosa Luxemburg meets with Mathilde Jacob immediately after her arrival in Berlin. The two pay a visit to the Scherl publishing house. A squad of armed workers had occupied it the previous day, to the end of publishing the *Rote Fahne* there (rather than at Scherl's Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger). But the staff now refuses to carry out the print run. According to the testimony of Hermann Duncker (Spartacus Group), Rosa Luxemburg delivers "such a vivid and passionate speech" that the publisher is compelled to bring into print the second edition of the Spartacus Group's paper. Afterwards, Leo Jogiches, Paul Levi, Karl Liebknecht, and Ernst Meyer, together with Luxemburg, continue their discussion at the Hotel Exelcior, opposite the Anhalter train station. According to first-person accounts, Karl Liebknecht is criticized for his willingness the previous day to enter into a revolutionary government.

THE EBERT-GROENER PACT

Only years later will it be revealed that on this night lieutenant-general Wilhelm Groener (of the Supreme Army Command) and Friedrich Ebert are conferring by telephone to determine how future "order" may be maintained in the empire against further revolutionary advances. The conversation does not merely concern logistical questions about troop demobilization. Groener promises Ebert recognition by the old guard in the military if he is to campaign against "Bolshevism". The two forge an alliance that will prove disastrous for the development of the revolution.

11 NOVEMBER 1918

A PRIVATE TELEGRAM

In its Monday edition, the Social Democratic party organ *Vorwärts* announces Rosa Luxemburg's release from prison succinctly but accurately: "According to a private

telegram from Breslau, Rosa Luxemburg has been free since Saturday morning [9 November] at 9:00.”

THE ARMISTICE OF COMPIÈGNE

The November Revolution was, at its origin and in essence, a revolution to end the war. As leader of the German side, the Catholic Centre Party delegate Matthias Erzberger signs an armistice agreement in a railway carriage at noon. World War I, which has cost millions of lives, is over. Church bells sound across Berlin. The armistice marks the beginning of complex negotiations over the post-war order, which will ultimately reshape global politics.

FORMATION OF THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE

The so-called Spartacus Group gathers for its first ever legal meeting in Berlin’s Hotel Exelcior. The group numbers around 50 supporters in the city. It resolves to refound itself as the Spartacus League. It is not to be considered an independent political party. According to member statements, among them those of Rosa Luxemburg, the League will remain and work within the organizational framework of the USPD for as long as possible with the intention of winning the entirety of the party over to its agenda, yet to be devised. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht will take charge of the *Rote Fahne*. The 13-member central core of the party includes Willi Budich, Käthe Duncker and Hermann Duncker, Hugo Eberlein, Leo Jogiches, Paul Lange, Paul Levi, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Ernst Meyer, Wilhelm Pieck, and August Thalheimer. They are to take up their work in the Hotel “Stadt Halle” (Wilhelmstraße 114).

FORMATION OF THE VOLKSMARINEDIVISION (PEOPLE’S NAVAL DIVISION)

The creation of the *Volksmarinedivision* marks the emergence of a central actor in the revolutionary events of the coming weeks. The *Volksmarinedivision* comprises many of the revolutionary sailors—“mostly men from Berlin who were on leave”

(Richard Müller). The unit determines its commanders by vote. The first commander is Petty Officer Second Class Paul Wieczorek. Housed in the Berlin Palace, the *Volksmarinedivision* initially assumes guard functions at important buildings in the city centre.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE ROTE FAHNE (II)

Conflict at the *Rote Fahne's* publisher continues. Through the force of her address the previous day, Luxemburg had been able to salvage the paper's second edition; now, the publisher has bribed the soldiers who had commandeered the printer, and they have reversed themselves. Paul Levi witnesses the incident, and years later he will describe the scene as "almost symbolic" of the entire German Revolution of 1918–19.

NO SEIZURE OF STATE POWER

Among the first official acts of the Council of People's Deputies is an order given to all undersecretaries and heads of Reich authorities to resume their duties. Even the Supreme Army Command—which had caused such misery among both enemy countries and within Germany itself during the war—is recognized by the Council of People's Deputies. The soldiers' subordination to commanding authority is also restored.

12 NOVEMBER 1918

THE FIRST GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME

The Council of People's Deputies announces its first government programme in Berlin. It grants new civil liberties and fulfils long-standing demands of the workers' movement. By 1 January 1919 at the latest, a "maximum eight-hour work day is to enter into force". Effective immediately, the Council guarantees the right to free assembly and to form associations; censorship is ended, and freedom of speech

and the practice of religion established. The Council abolishes the three-class franchise and introduces both active and passive voting rights for women. The programme moreover declares the Council's intent to ensure food security, and to aid the unemployed and build new housing. The programme is however silent on the question of the relations of property ownership. It outlines no specifically socialist objectives.

THE FIRST VICTIMS OF THE REVOLUTION IN BERLIN

The political upheaval in Berlin is unfolding mostly peacefully. Nevertheless, there are still deaths to mourn, 15 so far. The first victim was Erich Habersaath, a 24-year-old toolmaker active in the socialist youth movement. On the morning of 9 November, he stood at the front of the demonstration at the *Maikäferkaserne* (Chausseestraße) when a police officer fired into the crowd. The Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils resolves to bury all victims of the revolution with dignity. Their final resting place will be the cemetery of the March Victims in Friedrichshain, where the martyrs of the 1848 street battles were laid to rest 70 years before.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE *ROTE FAHNE* (III)

In the conflict over the *Rote Fahne*, the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils sides with the Spartacus League. It orders the Scherl publishing house "to print the daily newspaper *the Rote Fahne* under the editor Mrs R. Luxemburg (her deputy being Mr. E. Meyer) and to deliver the newspaper to the facilities responsible for production and distribution". This order is signed by the chairman of the Executive Council, Richard Müller. However, it fails to persuade the typesetters and publisher's staff to resume their work. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* hopes to solve the matter by petitioning the Council of the People's Deputies.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Rosa Luxemburg begins preparations for the publication of the theoretical weekly journal *Die Internationale*, discontinued after its debut issue in 1915. She has plans to

publish special newspapers for young people and women as well as a soldiers' paper, and also contemplates the creation of a special propaganda division inside the army. She relies on Hermann and Käthe Duncker for agitation among women, youth and soldiers. The two are among the most trusted in her circle of comrades.

LEGIONNAIRES APPROACHING

Polish legionnaires are advancing on the province of Posen, annexed by Prussia. The conflicts with the Polish-speaking majority will continue to escalate over the coming weeks, resulting in what has been called the Greater Poland Uprising (from 27 December 1918), which subsequently spreads to the hinterlands and leads to the reincorporation of the city of Poznan and large parts of the Prussian province of Posen into the re-established Polish state.

13 NOVEMBER 1918

THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE RELOCATES

The rooms in the Hotel Stadt Halle have grown too small for the central headquarters of the Spartacus League. Adding to this, the owner is no longer inclined to accept all the bustling activity around the hotel. The headquarters is therefore moved to Friedrichstraße 217, where the Russian telegraph agency ROSTA had been based until recently. The editorial office of the *Rote Fahne* (whose relaunch is still pending), headed by Rosa Luxemburg, remains at the old location.

COMMANDER OF THE VOLKSMARINEDIVISION (PEOPLE'S NAVAL DIVISION) IS SHOT

Petty Officer Second Class Paul Wiczorek had overseen the occupation of the military airfield in Johannisthal and the disarming of the staff of the military aviation corps on 9 November. On 11 November, he convened the *Volksmarinedivision's*

founding assembly in the Marstall in Berlin, which in turn selected him as its principal commander. Two days later, in an attempt to curtail the division's independence, lieutenant-commander Friedrich Brettschneider shoots Wiczorek—and is lynched himself shortly thereafter. The new commander of the *Volksmarinedivision* is sailor Otto Tost. As a metal worker and trade union activist, Tost had participated in the organization of the January 1918 strike.

NEW GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Over the course of a few days, new governments are being established all over the country. In Bremen, an action committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council composed of USPD and left-wing radicals takes over the city government, while the former Bremen Senate continues to function as head administrative authority. A council of people's deputies composed of members of the SPD and USPD replaces the royal government of Saxony in Dresden, and a people's government likewise replaces the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg, who emigrates to Denmark. After being deposed by the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Gotha, Carl Eduard Duke of Saxe-Coburg now also declares his abdication. The only one refusing to renounce the throne is Prince Friedrich von Waldeck-Pyrmont, who prefers to wait for the results of a general referendum.

14 NOVEMBER 1918

TELEGRAM TO CLARA ZETKIN

Rosa Luxemburg telegraphs her long-standing friend and comrade in Stuttgart: "Thousand greetings. Travel totally impossible for me. Cannot allow you to travel in good conscience. Absolutely opposed to your trip. Wire reply, whether express letter communication possible or e.g. [Paul] Levi to come. Kisses and hellos. Answer and letters to Mathilde [Jacob]. Will try to telephone. Rosa"

○ **THE COUNCIL OF INTELLECTUAL WORKERS**

Over the preceding week, workers' and soldiers' councils have been established in many places. In keeping with the appeal to working people, the new socialist republic's political authority is based on their power. Now there are calls for the formation of additional councils. Among these is an exhortation from theologians to form "People's Church Councils" and a Protestant church acting independently of the state. Even a "Council for Deserters" is created. Inspired largely by Kurt Hiller, a "Council of Intellectual Workers" comes together in Berlin. Its programme demands, among other things, an unconditional policy of peace, "sexual freedom", and a "radical reform of public education". It holds furthermore that "manual and intellectual labour" will be deserving of all profits, and that capitalist enterprises will be converted into "productive worker cooperatives". The "guiding star of all future policies" is to be the "sanctity of life". A full version of the programme is subsequently published in the *Weltbühne*.

○ **THE NEW SEASON BEGINS**

The *Schauspielhaus* (theatre) and opera in Berlin have been nationalized. Opening the new season are performances of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Enlightenment-themed play *Nathan the Wise* and Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

15 NOVEMBER 1918

○ **LAUNCH OF NEWSPAPER *DIE FREIHEIT***

This day marks the release of the first issue of the Berlin-based USPD's daily paper *Die Freiheit*. Siegfried Nestriepke, previously the cultural editor for several Social Democratic newspapers, including *Vorwärts*, initially serves as its interim senior editor. Rudolf Hilferding will succeed him and assume chief editorship before the end of the year. Hilferding has previously taught national economics at the SPD party school and worked as political editor and editor of *Vorwärts*.



THE STINNES-LEGIEN AGREEMENT

Industrial magnate Hugo Stinnes and union leader Carl Legien sign an agreement “on the cooperation between industrial and commercial employers and employees in Germany” in the Hotel Continental. Their agreement stipulates an eight-hour workday—already promised by the Council of People’s Deputies—and guarantees workers’ freedom of association. It also recognizes trade unions as equal partners in negotiations and collective bargaining with employer representatives for the first time ever. In the future, a central committee with equal representation for both sides is to resolve all fundamental questions. Needless to say, such a form of social partnership renders the task of “expropriating the expropriators” (Karl Marx) far more difficult. One week after the revolution, the agreement stabilizes the continued existence of the capitalist economic order.



16 NOVEMBER 1918



A TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH CLARA ZETKIN

In this phone conversation with Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg reiterates her and Leo Jogiches’s view that the Spartacus League ought to remain part of the USPD and should not presently form an independent party. Their position is that breaking with the USPD would be too disruptive at this point.



THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The *Berliner Tageblatt* publishes an appeal by its chief editor Theodor Wolff to found a new democratic party. Wolff is supported by 60 distinguished figures, including Albert Einstein. Four days later, the German Democratic Party (the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei*, or DDP) is officially founded by members of the Progressive People’s Party (*Fortschrittliche Volkspartei*) and the social-liberal wing of the National Liberal Party (*Nationallibrale Partei*). It is comprised mostly of those elements of the



- ⋮ left-liberal bourgeoisie willing to defend the republic. The DDP will soon join the Weimar Coalition.

17 NOVEMBER 1918

○ LETTER FROM CLARA ZETKIN

Clara Zetkin is delighted to have heard Rosa Luxemburg's voice on the phone after a long period of silence. Zetkin would like to share her thoughts on revolutionary developments with Luxemburg in greater detail. In her letter, Zetkin presents her view on recent events, relays political developments in Württemberg and expresses relief that the two agree on the question of the Spartacus League: it ought to remain inside the USPD as it advances an "unrelenting fundamental critique" of it. Although Zetkin would much rather join Luxemburg in Berlin, she resolves now to participate more intensely "in the political life of the Stuttgart Spartacists". Her main focus is the women within the movement: "Our struggle today needs women more than ever."

○ "THE BEGINNING" AND "THE OLD GAME"

Despite the unresolved conflict over the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg composes a number of articles for the paper's first issues. In addition to taking stock of what has been accomplished thus far, she formulates goals and tasks for the revolutionary movement. She believes that all steps should ultimately be geared toward transferring power over to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, as well as "securing the revolutionary work from its lurking enemies". "The Beginning" has taken place, she continues; the natural law of revolutions is "rapid progress" and "growing beyond themselves". At the same time, she notes that "The Old Game" is already underway through libellous rabble-rousing, targeted rumours and attempts to poison public opinion "in order to create a pogrom atmosphere and to politically assassinate the Spartacus programme before it even has the opportunity to make the broadest masses aware of its policies and goals."

“A DUTY OF HONOUR”

The first set of articles Rosa Luxemburg produces for the *Rote Fahne* includes “A Duty of Honour”, which concerns the promise she and Karl Liebknecht made to the “shorn prison brothers” and the “poor vice girls and thieves” when “leaving the hospitable rooms in which we recently resided”: “We won’t forget you!”

Luxemburg and Liebknecht demand the abolition of the death penalty: “In four years of imperialist genocide, blood has flowed in rivers and streams. Now every drop of the precious liquid must be guarded with reverence in crystal bowls. The most ruthless revolutionary energy and the broadest humanity—this alone is the true air of socialism.”

APPROVAL OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION

Reassuring and gratifying news for Rosa Luxemburg and the Berlin headquarters of the Spartacus League: the USPD’s regional party conference in Württemberg has nearly unanimously approved the Spartacus League’s Action Programme.

THE REPUBLICAN SOLDIERS’ DEFENCE FORCE (REPUBLICANISCHE SOLDATENWEHR)

The town major of Berlin, Otto Wels, calls for the creation of a Republican Soldiers’ Defence Force. This means there now exists a third paramilitary force, alongside the *Volksmarinedivision* (People’s Naval Division) and the 3,000-strong security service commanded by chief of police Emil Eichhorn (USPD), competing for the maintenance of public order.

18 NOVEMBER 1918

PUBLICATION OF THE THIRD ISSUE OF THE *ROTE FAHNE*

Since 9 November, the Spartacus League has been struggling with the Scherl publishing house, where the paper’s first two issues were brought out, over the fate

of the *Rote Fahne*. At one point, the Spartacists had even considered buying out the company. But now it is impossible to print the *Rote Fahne* with Scherl. Meanwhile, negotiations with the *Kleines* journal on Königgrätzer Straße 40/41 (today Stresemannstraße) bear fruit. The third issue of the *Rote Fahne* is published there finally on this date. Working alongside Paul Levi, Rosa Luxemburg becomes chief editor and henceforth writes most of the articles for a journal hobbled by constant shortage of paper. In her first articles, she warns against illusions about what has been achieved thus far, rejects the repeated accusation of “putschism”, and makes a formal apology. The Social Democratic *Vorwärts* immediately welcomes the re-foundation of the *Rote Fahne*, as Berlin now has three socialist papers; according to *Vorwärts*, the actions and objectives of the Spartacus League will now be more transparent.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE ROTE FAHNE

Now that the *Rote Fahne* can finally go to press after a period of difficult negotiations, Rosa Luxemburg calls on her political friends to contribute. She “cannot wait to hear Franz Mehring’s opinion”, and transmits a request to Clara Zetkin via telegraph to send her a “little article” as soon as possible, “anything about women welcome”. Not only is it an important issue—as Rosa Luxemburg acknowledges in another letter to Clara Zetkin—but also one on which “none of us here” is an expert. Wolfgang Fernbach, whose contribution to the paper has been expected, is advised by Luxemburg that they have a lot of work ahead of them: the plan is to produce additional publications aside from the *Rote Fahne*.

LETTER TO THE GECK FAMILY

Amidst her professional correspondence, Rosa Luxemburg learns of the death of Brandel Geck, the son of her old friends Marie and Adolf Geck. Like so many others, he was senselessly killed in France in the very last days of the war. She sends condolences in a letter to Offenburg. In commiserating with the family, Luxemburg writes that her only “consolation” is the “grim thought ... that I too” may perhaps soon

be sent to the other world—perhaps by a bullet from our enemies who are lurking on all sides”. The letter is also signed by Karl Liebknecht.

A SOCIALIZATION COMMISSION

Under pressure from the USPD, the Council of People’s Deputies sets up a commission to prepare for the socialization of all branches of industry deemed “ready”. The commission is tasked with presenting its recommendations on this question and its independent assessment. Those invited to act as the commission’s members include “renowned economists”, scientists, as well as representatives of both the trade unions and the employers.

HOTEL MOLTKE

The Hotel Excelsior shows the Spartacus League the door. Rosa Luxemburg relocates to Hotel Moltke (today Königgrätzer Straße 103). Henryk Walecki pays her a visit there and later reports that she and Karl Liebknecht are lodging there “incognito” for their own protection.

19 NOVEMBER 1918

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR COUNCIL GOVERNMENT?

The demand for elections to a national assembly constitutes the major dividing line between the moderate and the radical left. The Council of People’s Deputies also fails to develop a consistent position on the question, but reaches a preliminary compromise: the results of the revolution must be consolidated first before any national assembly may be convened. During the assembly of the Workers’ Councils of Berlin at Circus Busch on 19 November, the controversy erupts again over the alternatives of a “national assembly or council government”. Karl Liebknecht and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards demand the establishment of a government of

councils, while the SPD supports elections to a national assembly. Although many USPD members agree with the SPD, they prefer to hold elections at some future date.

THE “COMMITTEE OF THE 53”

In Wilhelmshaven, representatives from the soldiers’ councils on the North Sea and Baltic naval bases form a new Main Committee: a supreme council for all sailors’ councils on the naval base. It subsequently moves to the Reich Naval Office (*Reichsmarineamt*) in Berlin, where it will take a revolutionary position in its dealing with the Council of the People’s Deputies.

STRIKES IN THE BROWN COAL FIELDS

Workers begin their first strikes for higher wages and shorter working hours in the brown coal fields around Halle, Sangerhausen, Zeitz and Weißenfels.

20 NOVEMBER 1918

ON THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

In an article published on this day in the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg intervenes in the ongoing debate regarding elections of the National Assembly as demanded by the SPD and all bourgeois forces. According to Luxemburg, national assemblies are a “surviving heirloom of the bourgeois revolutions”, a “shell without content”, a “prop from the times of petty-bourgeois illusions of the ‘united people’, of ‘freedom, equality and brotherhood’”. Convening a national assembly, she continues, represents a detour and will only strengthen the position of the bourgeoisie. In her view, socialism will only emerge from the consciousness of the majority of the proletariat; the development of this consciousness requires a class organ of its own, a “Reich parliament of the proletariat in city and country”. After all, she writes,

if “parliamentary cretinism” had been “a weakness yesterday”, it would become “ambiguous today” and “a betrayal of socialism tomorrow”.

ON THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT

In the same article on the National Assembly, Rosa Luxemburg also presents her understanding of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”: “The question put on the agenda by history is: bourgeois democracy or socialist democracy. For dictatorship of the proletariat is democracy in the socialist sense. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not bombs, coups, riots, ‘anarchy,’ as the agents of capitalist profit purposefully counterfeit, but rather the use of all political means of power for the realization of socialism, for the expropriation of the capitalist class—in the sense and through the will of the revolutionary majority of the proletariat, that is, in the spirit of socialist democracy.”

BURIAL OF THE VICTIMS OF THE REVOLUTION

The plans for the exact schedule of the memorial ceremony for the first victims of the revolution in Berlin have changed repeatedly over the previous week. In the end, the ceremony commences on Tempelhof field in the morning of 20 November. Friedrich Ebert (SPD) and Hugo Haase (USPD) are among the speakers addressing the more than 30,000-strong crowd. A funeral procession of incalculable size will take three hours to make its way from Tempelhof to the city centre, and then to the Cemetery of the March Victims of 1848. There, Luise Zietz (USPD) and Karl Liebknecht—contrary to the agreed-upon schedule—deliver speeches “calling for a universal world revolution” (according to the *Berliner Morgenpost*). Emil Barth speaks alongside them. They vow that the victims will not have died in vain. Traditional elements of a funeral service merge with the revolutionary symbolism of the political left. Eight of the twenty known victims of the first days of the revolution are laid to rest in the cemetery.

Funeral procession
in Berlin on
20 November, 1918



21 NOVEMBER 1918

LUXEMBURG IN NEUKÖLLN

The Spartacus League organizes three large rallies in Berlin. Karl Liebknecht speaks at the Pharussäle ballroom, Paul Levi at the Café Bellevue in Rummelsburg, and Rosa Luxemburg at the Passage auditorium in Neukölln. At the event with Liebknecht, the crowds are so large that another meeting is called at the Bock brewery. Luxemburg's speech, which includes her criticism of Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann, is delivered to rapturous applause. The biggest mistake, she tells the audience, was to have all civil servants remain in their positions. When asked whether she approves of various measures taken by the Bolsheviks in Russia, she replies that socialism, at any rate, can only be established by the great majority of the proletariat. Her extensive treatment of the Russian Revolution, which she composed while in prison, will not be published until 1922.

STRIKES IN THE METAL INDUSTRY

After management at the Siemens factories in Berlin refuses to recognize the Workers' and Employees' Council in its demand for wage increases, around 6,000 workers walk off the job. They have detonated a strike that quickly spreads to metalworks all over Berlin, and extends even to staff in the city's large newspaper printing houses. The strike is intended to force employers to stand by the concessions made during the first days of the revolution. It is a wildcat, one which the Council of People's Deputies decries as "economic madness" and a "sabotage of socialism".

ANOTHER VICTIM!

Four days after learning the news, Rosa Luxemburg memorializes the senseless death of Brandel Geck in the *Rote Fahne*: "A last stray bullet of the great butchery mowed down another human life, snapped a pure, hardly developed bud, destroyed a beautifully sprouting hope of the party. Lieutenant Brandel Geck, the eldest son of our



loyal comrade Adolf Geck, in the end stayed behind on the killing fields where he had managed to escape death throughout the previous four years of hell. He was destined for far greater glory than descending to his early grave during this mass human slaughter. While he can no longer be among us, his memory certainly always will."

22 NOVEMBER 1918



THE LAUNCH OF THE GERMAN NATIONAL PEOPLE'S PARTY DNVP (*DEUTSCHNATIONALE VOLKSPARTEI*)

The revolution has fundamentally shaken the relations among political parties. While (left-)liberal forces have entered the initially successful German Democratic Party DDP (*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*) and national-liberal forces in the German People's Party (*Deutsche Volkspartei*), the pro-monarchy, anti-Semitic right has begun to flock to the anti-republican DNVP. This formation has arisen out of the fusion of the German Conservative Party DKP (*Deutschkonservative Partei*), the (Prussian) Free Conservative Party FKP (*Freikonservative Partei*), the Fatherland Party (*Vaterlandspartei*) and smaller right-wing groups. The DNVP's most well-known leaders include Kuno Count of Westarp, Oskar Hergt, Alfred Hugenberg, and Karl Helfferich. On 30 January 1933, the DNVP will become part of Hitler's cabinet before entirely merging into the Nazi Party (NSDAP) six months later.

23 NOVEMBER 1918



A VISIT FROM HENRY WALECKI

Before World War I, Henryk Walecki competed with Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg for leadership of Polish Social Democracy. Walecki has lived in Zurich

since 1915. Now that the war is over, Walecki wants to return to Poland to help build a revolutionary party. On his journey back, he stops in Berlin and pays a visit to Rosa Luxemburg. He meets with Jogiches as well. They agree in their critique of the terroristic methods of the Bolsheviks.

THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL DECLARES AND RESOLVES

Two weeks previously, Germany was proclaimed a Socialist Republic on the basis of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. However, the Berlin Executive Council of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils repeatedly experiences active boycotts of its orders. Even the Council of People's Deputies shows problems in recognizing the authority of the Executive Council. Thus the Executive Council today publicly declares once again its tasks within the revolutionary structure. It regards itself as the supervisory authority of the Provisional Government. It is also responsible for appointing (and dismissing) "the decision-making cabinet of the republic". Furthermore, it resolves to convene a National Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Berlin, to be held no later than 16 December.

24 NOVEMBER 1918

"A DARING GAME"

In the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg rejects the accusations of putschism which have been made repeatedly against the Spartacus League in the Social Democratic press. The socialist proletariat, she explains, "does not need to destroy its own illusions through bloody acts of violence, to dig an abyss between oneself and bourgeois society". It is rather "the bourgeois gentlemen"—afraid of losing their property, profits, privileges and other rights—who urgently need terror and a reign of terror. They would blame the proletariat for the "fictitious anarchy, false coups, just to unleash real coups, to unleash real anarchy through their agents at the convenient

moment, to strangle the proletarian revolution, to let the socialist dictatorship sink into chaos and to build the class dictatorship of capital forever on the ruins of the Revolution". This is quite a daring game in her eyes, because the present moment in history belongs to the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism.

LETTER TO CLARA ZETKIN

Rosa Luxemburg's letter to Clara Zetkin on 24 November is mainly concerned with the *Rote Fahne's* problems and its future content. In Berlin, there are already plans to increase the length to six pages or two editions per day. All those involved in the revolution are to be given a platform. In Stuttgart, August Thalheimer and Edwin Hoernle would therefore require Clara Zetkin's help, Luxemburg explains. What is now needed more than anything, alongside a soldiers' and a youth publication, is a women's journal. Whether it is a periodical in its own right or a daily supplement to the *Rote Fahne*, this is "such an urgent matter! Every day lost is a sin". Rosa Luxemburg adds that she can currently be reached by mail at Mathilde Jacob's address. Since her release from prison she has still not yet been home.

25 NOVEMBER 1918

TO THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD!

The *Rote Fahne* publishes a call by the Spartacus League, directed to all the workers of the world and signed by Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin. It is simultaneously distributed as a leaflet. It states that it is not the case that "in Germany all power actually lies in the hands of the working people". The German proletariat requires international solidarity. The "peace and justice" which "the ruling classes" are now planning after the "twelve million murdered victims" is no more than another act of violence, from which the "hydra of oppression, hatred and fresh bloody wars raises its thousand heads". Not a new imperialism, but only "socialism [...] is in

a position to complete the great work of permanent peace and to heal the thousand wounds from which humanity is bleeding". The situation is clear: Either "dissolution and downfall in capitalist anarchy, or regeneration through the social revolution." For the International, they conclude, "the hour of action has struck": The task of the day is now to "give a human aspect to the disfigured world" once again.



REICH CONFERENCE OF THE FEDERAL GERMAN GOVERNMENTS

Representatives of the new federal German governments meet in Berlin in order to clarify their relation to the Reich and establish guidelines for their future cooperation. With few exceptions, the participants agree to convene a national assembly.

KURT EISNER AT THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF BERLIN

The Bavarian governor (*Ministerpräsident*) Kurt Eisner also travels to his hometown of Berlin in order to participate in the Reich Conference of federal German governments. There he will meet with the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and others, to whom he will report on the course of the revolution in Bavaria. According to a report in the *Rote Fahne*, he also encourages the council to better organize Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in opposition to a bankrupt bourgeois parliamentarianism. In foreign policy, Eisner assumes that none of the victorious powers will refuse peace to a radically socialist-oriented government and demand as a precondition the convocation of a national assembly. In his view, the Entente is more interested in negotiating with governments that actually have the masses behind them.

26 NOVEMBER 1918

A STATEMENT

In order to prevent any misunderstandings, the Spartacus League, in this day's *Rote Fahne*, is compelled to publish the following statement: "A few bourgeois papers continue to repeat the false report that a member of the Spartacus League is allegedly involved in the government. We wish to point out, however: the Spartacus League is represented neither in the government nor the Executive Council, and it fundamentally rejects cooperation with the majority socialists inside those organizations."

DOCUMENTS ON THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

A few days earlier, the new Bavarian governor (*Ministerpräsident*) Kurt Eisner has published secret documents dating from 1914. They testify to the marked pro-war attitude among the German military and provide evidence of the old imperial elite's responsibility for the outbreak of World War I. The documents raise the chances for lenient peace terms. However, as can be gathered from today's issue of *Vossische Zeitung*, the Foreign Office has lodged an objection to the publication of the documents. On the orders of Secretary for Foreign Affairs Dr. Solf, who has often conspicuously attempted to sabotage the revolution, Undersecretary of State Dr. David will now review the files.

27 NOVEMBER 1918

"THE ACHERON IN MOTION"

In today's article for the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg addresses the strike movement which has reached national prominence and has been ongoing for several days. Taking "Acheron" as her title, Luxemburg makes an implicit comparison between the

striking workers and the river Acheron of Greek mythology—one of the rivers which leads to Hades, and to which some sources attribute the power of cleansing from sin. The “masses of the proletariat”, she observes, are now overturning “the house of cards of revolutionary class harmony”. In spite of the revolution, the proletariat has not yet experienced any real change for the better in everyday life. The strikes mark only the beginning of a new and more fundamental conflict between capital and labour, Luxemburg explains. For workers can only liberate themselves, and only workers can prepare the ground for the “socialization” of the economy—effecting the transition to social ownership and control. Luxemburg is convinced that “pretty little plans of a good, tame, ‘constitutional’ German revolution that maintains ‘order and peace’ and regards the protection of capitalist private property as its first and most urgent task” will certainly fail.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, CHAINS AND SHACKLES

The USPD party leadership now takes an official stance of opposition against the early convocation of a national assembly in a statement issued by the party’s central organ, *Die Freiheit*. Only when the soldiers “have once again returned to their homeland”, only when the workers “have found permanent work and a home”, and only, following a ceasefire agreement, when “free and unmanipulated” elections are held even in the occupied areas—only then could a national assembly be conceivable. Moreover, the party leadership writes that elections would only be worthwhile “if voters are informed about the underlying questions”. Haven’t the majority socialists noticed that they are conducting “business for reaction” by “joining in the clamour of the workers’ enemies”? After all, the bourgeoisie wanted to put an end to “all more deeply-reaching social changes” by asserting that “the socialist government has no right to issue laws before the constituent assembly’s convocation, nor is it permitted to enact any decisions regarding the socialization of industry”. So far, the “chains of political oppression” may have been broken, but the “shackles of economic exploitation” have only been loosened.

28 NOVEMBER 1918

KURT TUCHOLSKY ON CURRENT EVENTS

Writer Kurt Tucholsky also is concerned with political events and life in the revolution. In a letter to doctor and poet Hans Erich Blaich (Dr. Owlglass), he shares his observations: “Berlin has largely returned to calm—people shouldn’t always be saying that the *Berliner Schnauze* (“Berlin Snout”) and Bolshevism are on the loose here. The *Berliner Schnauze* has nothing to eat, because the thought of the Reich only reaches down to the navel—it actually stops short at the stomach, whereas I always believed that’s where it really begins ... And as for Liebknecht, I’d say there’s worse things that happen at sea. The only thing I’m really worried about is that the entire bourgeoisie might side with the most brainless reaction imaginable just to have its peace for once. We shouldn’t linger in however great a past it was—for things are only just beginning.”

NEW AUTHORIZATIONS

Rosa Luxemburg gives Wilhelm Pieck and Hugo Eberlein the authority to sign on behalf of the Spartacus League.

LINDENSTRASSE NO. 2, BERLIN SÜDENDE

When Rosa Luxemburg moved from Zurich to Berlin in 1898, she first found refuge at Cuxhavener Straße 2. A year later she moved to Wielandstraße 23, in the district of Friedenau, before living just around the corner at Cranachstraße 58 from 1902 to 1911. Finally she took up residence at Lindenstraße No. 2, where she stayed until her murder in 1919. During the years of her forced “preventive custody”, actress Tilla Durieux and art historian Eduard Fuchs financed this apartment. Mathilde Jacob looked after the cat. Since Rosa Luxemburg was released from prison 20 days previously, she has not yet had a chance to “come home”. She has spent most of her time at the *Rote Fahne* editorial offices or the print shop. Shortly before midnight she will return for the first

time for a brief moment—but only because she and Karl Liebknecht have been rejected from “all the hotels in this area (around Potsdamer Platz and Anhalter Bahnhof station)”, as Rosa Luxemburg will write to her friend Clara Zetkin the next morning.

29 NOVEMBER 1918

○ AGAINST HALF MEASURES AND EQUIVOCATIONS

Demands are being made all over the Reich that the USPD hold an extraordinary party conference. Rosa Luxemburg supports this cause and comments in the *Rote Fahne* on the public image of the party, so far marked by weakness and incomprehensible compromises. In her view, the USPD does not follow a clear line. The German proletariat needs “a socialist party at its head that is up to the task of the hour”. There is no space or time for half measures or equivocations in a revolution, Luxemburg explains. Accordingly, a party conference is clearly necessary to clarify the “important questions”, not least those concerning its position on elections for a constituent national assembly.

○ LETTER TO CLARA ZETKIN

Rosa Luxemburg’s life is “as if in a witch’s cauldron”, she writes in a letter to Clara Zetkin. In this letter, she laments the current state of the *Rote Fahne* and its development thus far, even though it is perceived by many to be “the only socialist paper in Berlin”. The paper of the USPD in Berlin, *Die Freiheit*, has disappointed even its own people “to the utmost”, Luxemburg notes. Recent days had suggested what is now official: a decision has been made to supplement the *Rote Fahne* with a weekly women’s paper. Clara Zetkin is asked to actively play a role in its editing. Rosa Luxemburg moreover informs Zetkin that Ernst Däumig, Emil Eichhorn, Georg Ledebour, Luise Zietz and Kurt Rosenfeld, well-known USPD politicians in Berlin, will clearly commit themselves to the Spartacus League.

Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg, 1910



A POSSIBLE ELECTION DATE

The Council of the People's Deputies passes a national election law for the proposed constituent National Assembly which will vote on a constitution for the new republic. Pending the approval of the Reich Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, which will be meeting on 16 December, 16 February 1919 is set as a possible election date.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Adolf Hoffmann, a co-founder of the USPD in 1917, has become the Prussian Minister of Science, Culture and National Education in the course of the revolution. One of his priorities in this capacity is to enact a strict separation of church and state in schools. Consequently, he orders the abolition of the churches' religious supervision of schools and obligatory morning prayer in Prussia. He also issues a decree stating that the participation in religious education is now voluntary and that religion itself will no longer be considered a valid examination subject.

30 NOVEMBER 1918

TELEGRAM TO CLARA ZETKIN

Rosa Luxemburg can now send her letter to Clara Zetkin, written the day before. She adds a *post scriptum*, assuring Zetkin that, even in view of the notorious paper shortage, there are no longer any obstacles to launching the women's supplement to the *Rote Fahne*, and that Zetkin can now begin to work on it immediately. Luxemburg then requests in a telegram that Zetkin write "general women's leaflet, brief, accessible, agitational, on the role of women in the revolution".

WITH CRITICAL THOUGHT

Rosa Luxemburg shares her comrade Adolf Warski's reservations and concerns, and thus the position that Polish Social Democracy has adopted towards the Bolsheviks

and their policies in Russia. But as she writes to him these days, Luxemburg recognizes in the Bolshevik terror above all the weakness of the European proletariat.

THE LAST GERMAN MONARCH

On this day, Wilhelm II, King of Württemberg, is the last of the German monarchs to abdicate his throne. The Provisional Government has pledged to grant him an annual pension of 200,000 reichsmarks, the lifelong right of residence in his hunting lodge (or rather chateau), as well as the right to unlimited disposition of his private property in return.

1 DECEMBER 1918

ANTI-JEWISH POGROMS AND "NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION"

Lemberg (Lviv) is one of the oldest and largest centres of Eastern European Jewry. On 21 and 22 November, it suffers particularly severe pogroms, aggravated by the new borders drawn up as a result of the First World War. As many as 150 are estimated to have died. In this day's article for the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg takes the fate of Lemberg's Jews as exemplary, and draws attention to the problem of nationalist abuses of the concept of "national self-determination". Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches had opposed this since the 1890s. Most recently, they expressed their rejection of it in the Spartacus Letters (January 1918), by reference to the policies of the new Soviet government in Russia.

SPEECH AT THE BERLIN TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

The central office of the Spartacus League holds six different public gatherings across Berlin on this Sunday morning. Rosa Luxemburg is at the Berlin Teachers' Association (Alexanderstraße 41) and speaks in front of some 3,000 people about the League's

future programme. According to the report from the Social Democratic *Vorwärts*, she receives overwhelming approval, even if her presentation does not introduce any new points of view.

2 DECEMBER 1918

A NEW WEEK BEGINS

Following her speech of the previous day, Rosa Luxemburg returns to her editorial work for the *Rote Fahne*. Karl Liebknecht addresses more than 10,000 workers and employees from German ammunition factories at Circus Busch in Berlin. Many of them advocate for the socialization of their workplaces. The Spartacus League is calling for mass gatherings across the Reich.

THE FIRST DEMAGOGIC POSTERS

The day before, the publicist Eduard Stadtler officially founded the “Anti-Bolshevist League” and opened its “General Secretariat for the Study of and Fight against Bolshevism” at Lützowstraße 107 in Berlin—with the support of numerous major donors, including Deutsche Bank. Stadtler is a former staff member of the German embassy in Moscow. His league is committed to fighting against the “Jewish-Bolshevist world conspiracy”. It circulates mass-produced leaflets and posters calling for the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

3 DECEMBER 1918

THE “IMMATURE” MASS

According to reports, a tumultuous atmosphere prevailed the previous Thursday, 28 November, at the meeting of the Soldiers’ Councils of Berlin in the conference hall of the Reichstag. Rosa Luxemburg may have been present as well. She takes today’s session as an opportunity to comment on the proletarian masses’ state of political consciousness. Contrary to the Social Democratic *Vorwärts*, she is convinced that “Only the struggles of revolution will raise the proletariat to full maturity in every sense”.

AN ASSOCIATION OF RADICAL ARTISTS

The November Group (*Novembergruppe*) holds its first meeting in Berlin. Its members are painters, writers, architects, composers, sculptors. Their aim is to change society through revolutionary art and thereby contribute to building a new society. The November Group’s exhibitions are comprised of styles of art beyond any dogma. It becomes a much respected “agent of the avant garde”.

4 DECEMBER 1918

ON THE SOCIALIZATION OF SOCIETY

The *Junge Garde*, the one-week-old paper of the *Freie Sozialistische Jugend* (Free Socialist Youth), asks Rosa Luxemburg for a contribution; it will be reprinted subsequently by various papers. Luxemburg appeals to working-class youth: they could form the “foundation of the socialist economy”. In “Socialization of Society”, she outlines the character of this economy, the first steps toward its establishment “on a completely new basis”, and according to what criteria the reorganization of factories, plants and agricultural enterprises ought to take place.

○ **THE REPUBLIC OF RHINELAND WESTPHALIA**

The final outcome of the revolution in Berlin remains unresolved. But by no means is the city the only hotspot. In the Ruhr region, Württemberg, Bavaria, Braunschweig, Bremen, Dresden, Halle, or Hamburg, events are taking place, sometimes rapidly. On this day, however, observers are rather surprised to learn of meetings occurring in Cologne with the participation of the cathedral city's mayor, Konrad Adenauer (*Zentrum*). They demand the establishment of a Republic of Rhineland Westphalia— for fear of the revolution spreading there, which may also mean socialization.

5 DECEMBER 1918

○ **THE SOCIALIZATION COMMISSION CONVENES**

Although reports vary, it is likely on this day that the “Socialization Commission”, set up on 18 November, begins its work. It is chaired by Karl Kautsky (USPD), one of German Social Democracy's most influential theoreticians. The commission is tasked with elaborating proposals for concrete measures of socialization, now widely expected after a month of revolution. According to *Vorwärts*, however, its duties also include acting “with a calming effect, so as to prevent any kind of unreasonable experiments”. This is most likely the reason for the commission's direct subordination to the Reich treasury, headed by an outspoken opponent of socialization.

6 DECEMBER 1918

○ **AN ATTEMPTED COUP IN BERLIN**

Several columns of soldiers—among them the grenadier guard regiment “Kaiser Franz”, so-called “Franzers”—march to the Reich Chancellory at 17:00 to demand

elections to the National Assembly by December. They proclaim Friedrich Ebert president with power of dictatorship. Ebert thankfully rejects this call on the grounds that in such an important matter he would first have to confer with the Council of People's Deputies. Other soldiers detain the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils at the Prussian House of Representatives, allegedly on the orders of the Reich government. After some time, however, they are convinced that they have been manipulated for the purposes of a coup attempt.

A BLOODBATH

The attempted coup, which was carried out amateurishly, ends in a bloodbath shortly before 18:00. Guards ordered to the corner of Chausseestraße and Invalidenstraße by city commander Otto Wels shoot into a spontaneous demonstration against the coup attempt. For the first time since the beginning of the revolution, machine gun rounds are fired in Berlin. They kill at least 16 people and severely injure several dozen protesters, among them Willi Budich of the Red Soldiers' League, to whose recovery Rosa Luxemburg is especially committed. What exactly triggered the massacre remains unknown.

ATTACK ON THE EDITORIAL OFFICES OF THE *ROTE FAHNE*

While these events are taking place, soldiers from the grenadier guard regiment also seize the offices of the *Rote Fahne*. The next day, Paul Levi reports: "Around quarter past six, some 20 Franzers appeared. Around 200 men had encircled the building. The commander [Heinrich] Sprio declared that he had come on behalf of the 'Soldiers' Council' of the guard and had direct orders from [Friedrich] Ebert who had been proclaimed president. Their first question concerned ... the whereabouts of the safe. A room adjacent to the editorial office was broken into and searched from top to bottom. No one was allowed into or out of the building. After an hour and a half, a member of the Executive Council arrived with an order issued by [Hugo] Haase revoking the 'order' against the *Rote Fahne*. Spiro had disappeared without a word. An engineer named Franz, who had overseen the search, was arrested. The soldiers left confused."

7 DECEMBER 1918



MORE THAN JUST AN ASSAULT BY THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

In the morning everyone blames one another for the massacre at Chausseestraße. For her editorial in the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg reconstructs the events of the previous day—as far as is possible at this point in time—and attempts an initial assessment. In her judgment, it was more than just a “bloody assault by the counter-revolution”. Rather, an attempted coup by counter-revolutionary military staff must be assumed, although it is not the manipulated and incited soldiers she holds responsible, but the governing majority—the Social Democrats. Rosa Luxemburg accuses them of having created “a veritable pogrom atmosphere” in Berlin by invoking “the bogey of ‘Bolshevism’”. She asserts that workers and soldiers are now called upon to save their “work of 9 November”: the revolution.



A CALL FOR MASS STRIKE

In response to the attempted coup of the previous day, the Spartacus League calls for a mass strike, heeded by only a few thousand workers. Nevertheless, the protest march will be the first ever organized independently by the League. In the heated atmosphere, the League now for the first time brings an armoured vehicle and machine guns to its demonstration. When further machine-gunners pointing at the demonstration are spotted near Humboldt University, only the courageous intervention of police president Emil Eichhorn (USPD) prevents another bloodbath. Meanwhile, the search has begun in Berlin for the instigators and masterminds of the coup attempt.



8 DECEMBER 1918

MORE DEMONSTRATIONS

The situation in Berlin has still not calmed down. The mood is tense. Numerous demonstrations take place throughout the city. At a USPD event, Georg Ledebour calls on USPD members to resign from the Council of People's Deputies. The Spartacus League is mobilizing for a mass protest at Treptower Park, where the larger part of its leadership will address crowds from several platforms. Among them is Rosa Luxemburg, who, before a crowd of tens of thousands, calls for the continuation of the revolution. When the demonstrations merge in the city centre, the demonstration grows to 150,000 people and is joined by the security guards from police headquarters. In front of the Reich Chancellery (*Reichskanzlerpalais*), chants go up demanding the resignation of the entire Council of the People's Deputies.

9 DECEMBER 1918

THE SPARTACUS OFFICES ARE SEARCHED

The *Rote Fahne* warns of a "great danger for the revolution". Royalist troops have been dispatched around Berlin to "maintain order, stabilize the Ebert-Haase government, and suppress the Spartacus League". Over the course of the day, military units under orders of city commander Otto Wels appear at the Spartacus League's headquarters and occupy its offices under the pretence of searching for weapons.

A NEW COMMANDER FOR THE PEOPLE'S NAVAL DIVISION

It appears the Workers' and Soldiers' Council has concluded that Herrmann von Wolff-Metternich must have been part of the botched coup attempt three days before.

Not only did he and some of his subordinate soldiers participate in the attempt to install Friedrich Ebert as president with dictatorial powers, but Wolff-Metternich was also caught trying to obtain new passports with the help of the foreign office. The fact that at the beginning of November he switched from the army's intelligence division directly to the revolutionary sailors fits this picture all too well. The People's Naval Division appoints Fritz Radtke, a locksmith by trade, as its new commander. There are already new rumours circulating in the city, as well as serious indications of further imminent attempts to stop the revolution.

10 DECEMBER 1918

○ **THE GARDE-KAVALLERIE-SCHÜTZEN-DIVISION MARCHES INTO BERLIN**

Riding through the festively decorated Brandenburg Gate on horseback, heavily armed troops march into Berlin. Among them is the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division*, under the command of captain Waldemar Pabst. They are welcomed by lieutenant-general Lequis (commander-in-chief of the general headquarters), Berlin's mayor Adolf Wermuth, and Friedrich Ebert, the latter of whom greets them with the words: "No enemy has defeated you. It was only when the superiority of their manpower and supplies became obvious that we chose to cease fighting." Officially, the troops are returning from the frontlines now that the war is over, and Ebert wants to win them over for the protection of the republic. Armed to the teeth with heavy weapons, however, the troops are simultaneously pursuing a plan for counter-revolution devised by lieutenant-general Wilhelm Groener (Supreme Army Command)—ready to fight from house to house in the working-class districts and poised for a full-fledged military takeover of the capital.

Patrol of revolutionary sailors



A SOVIET DELEGATION IS TURNED AWAY

In preparation for the Reich Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils has also issued an invitation to the Central Committee of the Russian Workers' and Soldiers' Council. However, the Council of People's Deputies now denies the Soviet delegation (Adolf Joffe, Christian Rakovsky, Nikolai Bukharin, and Karl Radek) entry into Germany. The group is detained near Vilnius and escorted back to the border. Karl Radek subsequently heads to Berlin on his own.

A PUSH FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF THURINGIA

69 delegates of the Thuringian Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the governments of the various small state governments, and the Thuringian Ministry of Nutrition gather in the council chamber of Erfurt's city hall to discuss questions regarding the "end to the *Kleinstaaterei* [proliferation of small states] in Thuringia". Their collective resolution to "subsume the regions represented by them under one common State of Thuringia as part of a unified German republic" marks the beginning of a process which culminates in the establishment of the State of Thuringia on 1 May 1920.

11 DECEMBER 1918

ON THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

In the pages of *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg reflects on the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. She sees the invasion of heavily armed front troops of the previous day as a threat and provocation aimed "above all" at the Executive Council. She fears its imminent "elimination", its "consignment to complete powerlessness and insignificance" vis-à-vis the Council of the People's Deputies. According to Luxemburg, this matter is of "utmost importance" for an understanding

of the “fate of the revolution”. Although the Executive Council, at least according to the resolutions passed a month prior, is formally the “highest authority of the republic”, “Ebert and co.” have already managed to secure “actual power” for their side.

ADDITIONAL TROOPS ARE DISPATCHED TO BERLIN

After the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division* had already reached Berlin a day earlier, the German Jäger Division (light infantry)—welcomed by Hugo Haase—now moves in. The Executive Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils’ protest against this invasion, but is in the end ignored. It remains unclear whether Friedrich Ebert knew about or was even involved in lieutenant-general Wilhelm Groener’s plans for a coup.

“DRIPPING WITH BLOOD”

The coup attempt in Berlin of 6 December was conducted by a group of mid- and lower-ranked officers with ties to the Ministry of War and the Foreign Office. Most newspapers, however, actually blame the “Spartacists”. They are held responsible for the bloodbath which killed 16; they are supposedly spreading chaos, attempting to establish a terror regime, and preparing incessantly for a coup themselves. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht are singled out for demonization. The *Coburger Zeitung*, for example, writes on this day of the “degenerate son” of Wilhelm Liebknecht’s, and of Rosa “dripping with blood”.

12 DECEMBER 1918

NO REST

Today is Thursday. But what does that matter during a revolution? Peace, rest, relaxation have never existed for Rosa Luxemburg. Her physical condition is deteriorating. Paul Levi, a close confidante, will later recall the first few weeks after the

outbreak of the revolution: “We spent [it] in a mad rush between one hotel room and another, without so much as a chance, as we often told ourselves, to even read a book. We were in the editorial offices and the printing rooms from 11:00 until 12:00. Rosa Luxemburg would be the last to leave, and was often so weak that she would have to be taken by cab.” To Mathilde Jacob, however, she constantly insisted, despite the exertions: “I’ve finished everything I took on. I am satisfied.”

MORE TROOPS ARE DISPATCHED TO BERLIN

For the third consecutive day, frontline troops are moving into Berlin. Philipp Scheidemann, another member of the Council of the People’s Deputies, now receives and welcomes the soldiers. The invasion by the heavily armed contingents (a total of ten divisions) will not be completed for another two days. However, the plan to use the troops to carry out a counter-revolution evaporates just as rapidly, as many of the soldiers discard their uniforms and discharge themselves upon their arrival in Berlin.

NEW SPARTACUS CONSTITUENCIES

A local branch of the Spartacus League was founded in Munich on the previous day. Today, new sub-groups and committees of the League are formed in Berlin. At first, they exist only in the north-east of the city (Weißensee, Heinersdorf, Hohenschönhausen) as well as in Neukölln (Neckarstraße 3, at Fritz Haberland’s). In the coming weeks, the remaining parts of Berlin—all the way down to Johannisthal—will see new chapters join.

13 DECEMBER 1918

THE BOOK OF THE SEASON

What would Rosa Luxemburg’s “book of the season” have been if she had found the time to pick up a good book over the course of these tumultuous days? Could it

have been Heinrich Mann's *The Patrioteer*? The complete edition of the book, whose manuscript was already finalized in 1914, was published in Leipzig by the Kurt Wolff publishing house on 30 November. Hundreds of thousands of copies have been sold in the first weeks alone. Like few others works, it is able to capture the morally degraded part of bourgeois civil society, and to provide a picture of Germans under the German Empire of Wilhelm II. Karl Kraus's *The Last Days of Mankind* has also exerted lasting influence. On this day, Kraus publishes the epilogue as a supplement to the magazine *Die Fackel* [The Torch]. In the end, the text will have developed into a collage composed of 220 loosely connected scenes set at 137 different locations during World War I.

CIVIL WAR AGAINST SPARTACUS

While city commander Otto Wels has the offices of the *Rote Fahne* searched once more, Rosa Luxemburg continues work on a text she had begun some time ago. Until 9 November 1918, Spartacus had stood for the fight against war and monarchy. In the subsequent weeks, the erstwhile conspiratorial circle had become a legal group, the object of projected hopes and desires for some, and fears for others. But the masses did not rally behind the Spartacus League. The internal civil truce among the parties (*Burgfrieden*) from the war years turned into a civil war, with yesterday's proponents of the party-truce arrayed against the Spartacus League, including large sections of the working class exhausted from the World War. Rosa Luxemburg's intention is to counteract this with a programmatic text.

14 DECEMBER 1918

WHAT DOES THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE WANT? (I)

The *Rote Fahne* publishes an article titled, "What does the Spartacus League Want?" The intention behind Rosa Luxemburg's programmatic text is to distance the Spartacus League from the kind of "verbal radicalism" that is widespread among its

adherents. Simultaneously, she develops a vision for the continuation of the revolution throughout the article. As a first step, Rosa Luxemburg hopes that the Spartacus League will win a majority inside the USPD based on this programme, and thus enable the party to advance a resolutely anti-capitalist, democratic-socialist politics. Luxemburg continues to reject the founding of a new party, which some supporters have been increasingly vehement in demanding. No one foresees that Luxemburg's text will become the programme of the KPD only two weeks later.

WHAT DOES THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE WANT? (II)

Rosa Luxemburg demands "a complete transformation of the state and a complete overthrow of the economic and social foundations of society". With this, she remains true to her general political approach. These changes could not be "decreed by any bureau, committee, or parliament". If there is to be any success, the masses must want these changes and carry them out themselves: "The Spartacus League is not a party that wants to rise to power over the mass of workers or through them. The Spartacus League is only the most conscious, purposeful part of the proletariat, which points the entire broad mass of the working class toward its historical tasks at every step, which represents in each particular stage of the Revolution the ultimate socialist goal, and in all national questions the interests of the proletarian world revolution."

AN ASSURANCE

"What Does the Spartacus League Want?" defines the aim and the task at hand clearly: "There is a world to win and a world to defeat". Rosa Luxemburg also includes an assurance that the Spartacus League will "never take over governmental power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany, never except by the proletariat's conscious affirmation of the views, aims, and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League." "The victory of the Spartacus League", she adds, "comes not at the beginning, but at the end of the Revolution: it is identical with the victory of the great million-strong masses of the socialist proletariat."



“WE WERE ALONE”

At a workers’ conference in the Presnya district of Moscow, Lenin explains the reasons for his optimism: “We were alone. Now we are not. Today, there is a revolution in Berlin, Austria, Hungary; even in Switzerland, Holland and Denmark, free countries that were not touched by the war, the revolutionary movement is growing and the workers are demanding that Soviets be formed. Now it seems there is no alternative. Revolution is maturing all over the world. We were the first and we must defend the revolution until our allies, the workers of all Europe, catch us up. The further their governments get into the mire, the closer these allies will be to us.”

15 DECEMBER 1918



THOUGHTS PRIOR TO THE OPENING OF THE FIRST REICH CONGRESS OF COUNCILS

In her article for the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg calls for vigilance in the face of creeping counter-revolutionary measures. Once again, she identifies Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann as its agents and denounces their government’s actions: “Not a day without a decree putting another little brick back into the rotten edifice of capitalist rule, another brick that was threatening to fall out.” This is not the best time for the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils to gather for their first Reich Congress to elect a central council. In Luxemburg’s view, the revolution has lost its initial lustre, and the councils have thus far failed to counter the boundless hostile agitation of the old regime. It is also clear that they have “left the entire apparatus for influencing ‘public opinion’ in the hands of the government” and have watched in silence “as this government, this counter-revolutionary club, attempted to set fire to their house on a daily basis.” Nevertheless, Luxemburg points out, despite the current weakness of the councils, the revolution continues to expand and is already becoming a proletarian revolution in some respects.

A MISUNDERSTANDING OR AN ERROR

As the *Vorwärts* reports, Rosa Luxemburg is due to participate in a meeting of the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils tomorrow, speaking on the topic of "socialization". Her talk is also noted on the delegate cards. As it turns out, however, this information is based on a "misunderstanding or an error" which Paul Levi exposes in the *Rote Fahne* before the end of the day. According to Levi, an offer to give this presentation had been made, but it was "explicitly" rejected by the Spartacus League because the key issues would already have been decided, "after which the discussion about socialization would be a purely academic exercise". The precise facts of the matter cannot be determined from either of the two press reports.

EXTRAORDINARY ASSOCIATION ASSEMBLY OF THE USPD

In line with her recommendations from her article in the day's edition of the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg criticizes the politics of USPD leaders during her talk at the Extraordinary Association General Assembly of the USPD leadership. The resolution Rosa Luxemburg has prepared demands the immediate resignation of the USPD representatives from the Council of the People's Deputies, convocation of a party conference, the "immediate assumption of all political power" by the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, as well as the disarming of the counter-revolution and formation of a Red Guard for the protection of the revolution. Her resolution, however, only receives 195 votes. Rudolf Hilferding's simultaneous motion to prioritize the organization of the elections to the National Assembly as the party's main political task is supported by 485 delegates. Rosa Luxemburg's speech is published in two parts in *Die Freiheit* on 16 and 17 December 1918.

RUSSIAN CONDITIONS

Vorwärts reports on three gatherings convened by the SPD in Berlin the day before. At the restaurant "Hofjäger" in Königgrätzer Straße 121, Philipp Scheidemann of the Council of the People's Deputies took aim at the Spartacus League, "to

rapturous applause". According to Scheidemann, the article states that "the unity of the workers' movement has quickly been destroyed by those who fantasize about imposing Russian conditions on the German people". In addition to this, *Vorwärts* quotes Scheidemann's remarks about "Liebknecht's and Luxemburg's pleasure ride with machine guns" and other "Bolshevist acts of violence committed in Neukölln and Mariendorf", which must naturally foster "thoughts about defending themselves" among the bourgeoisie.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISTS OF GERMANY (IKD)

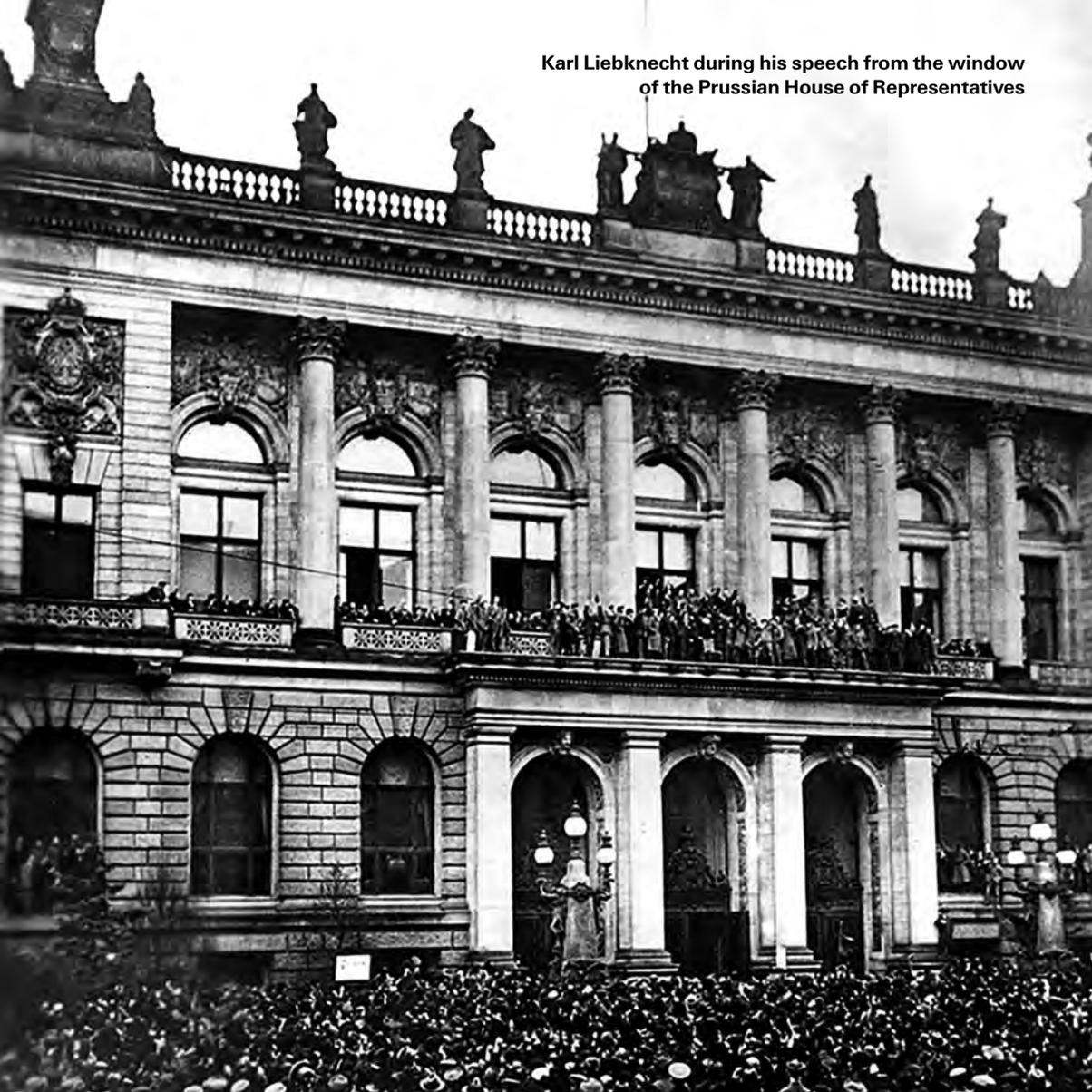
Overshadowed by the two major parties, independent revolutionary groups from various places across the Reich convene in Berlin for a national conference that is little noticed. The best-known group among them is the Bremen Radical Leftists (*Bremer Linksradikale*) and their paper *Arbeiterpolitik*, edited by Johann Knief. During their two-day conference, they officially found the International Communists of Germany (IKD). They call for the "immediate establishment of communism", by which they mean a society "in which all the means of production and transport are in the hands and under the control of all working people and in which commodity production is replaced by production based on needs". The new party declares its support for a potential government made up of representatives of the Spartacus League and the left wing of the USPD, given certain conditions.

16 DECEMBER 1918

FIRST CONGRESS OF COUNCILS COMMENCES

The Workers' and Soldiers' Councils are the symbols and protagonists of the revolution. In many places, they have taken over administrative functions, maintaining public life. They meet for their first ever Reich Congress at the Prussian House of Representatives in Berlin at 10:30. There is much to discuss, and even more to decide.

Karl Liebknecht during his speech from the window of the Prussian House of Representatives



With 296 delegates, the vast majority supports the SPD. 96 delegates are aligned with the USPD, and eleven form the “United Revolutionaries” (*Vereinigte Revolutionäre*). Adding to this are 24 delegates of the “Democrats” (*Demokraten*), the only non-socialist faction at the congress, as well as 37 independents, and 25 individuals participating in the congress simply as “soldiers”. Of the 489 delegates, two are women. Richard Müller initiates the congress on behalf of the host, the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Greater Berlin.

NO MANDATE

The Reich Congress of Councils has its first scandal in the afternoon. Due to relatively restrictive election regulations pertaining in Berlin, neither Rosa Luxemburg nor Karl Liebknecht have a mandate. Twice, at the beginning and at the end of the session, a motion is put forward without success to admit them to the congress with at least an advisory vote. In the end, “purely procedural reasons, irrespective of the affected persons” prevent the motion’s approval. The congress minutes note “tumultuous scenes during the vote” and “continuous intense agitation”. Meanwhile, Karl Liebknecht takes the opportunity to greet the huge crowd gathered outside the House of Representatives from a window. Reports—probably heavily exaggerated—speak of 250,000 people.

17 DECEMBER 1918

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR COUNCIL GOVERNMENT?

In the *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg raises the “primary question of the revolution”: National Assembly or Council Government—a question that will also be discussed at the Reich Congress of Councils. To Luxemburg, the dilemma is obvious: either a National Assembly and therefore the renunciation of socialism, or a council structure and thus “the fiercest class struggle of a fully equipped proletariat against the bourgeoisie”. She describes the attempt to introduce socialism via majority votes in

parliament as idealist. In her view, such a plan regresses even behind the historical experience of the bourgeois revolutions, and does not take into account the “the specifics of proletarian revolution”. Luxemburg’s historical deliberations take her back to Ferdinand Lasalle and his dictum: “The revolutionary act is always to express what is”. And they also lead her to declare: “What was considered equality and democracy until now: parliaments, national assemblies, equal ballots, was a pack of lies! Full power in the hands of the working masses, as a weapon for smashing capitalism to pieces— this is the only true equality, this is the only true democracy!”

TENSION AND “ALL THAT BERLIN NONSENSE”

The Reich Congress enters into its second day. The negotiations in the “revolutionary parliament” (Ernst Däumig) are thwarted by proposals on procedural matters and debates on bylaws. More importantly, however, they are marked by tensions and accusations between the Council of the People’s Deputies and the Executive Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils. Several speakers are already complaining about “all that Berlin nonsense and conflict” (G. Garbe, Kiel). The bulk of the session is taken up by the debate on yesterday’s statement of accounts regarding the activities of the Executive Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils, delivered by Richard Müller.

DISARMING THE COUNTERREVOLUTION!

Regardless of the many interruptions due to procedural questions, delegates unanimously extend the speaking time of Otto Braß (USPD) from Remscheid when he reports on numerous counter-revolutionary activities in the western parts of the republic. He reveals a secret order of the army high command. It will keep armed those divisions regarded as “reliable” in the eyes of the counterrevolution—a violation of the demobilization agreement. With a mixture of indignation and concern, Braß asks: “Who actually governs this socialist republic? The People’s Deputies or the Supreme Army Command?” Among his demands are the immediate arrest of the generals, dissolution of the standing army and the disarmament of its officers. They correspond to the set of demands of a delegation of 17 Berlin regiments, presented by Heinrich

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▼ Dorrenbach (of the People's Naval Division). Later, this delegation will storm the executive committee, and the session will once again be closed "in a general uproar".

18 DECEMBER 1918

○ DEMOCRATIZING THE ARMY

Following the actions of the Berlin regiments, the previous day's session of the Reich Congress of Councils ended in turmoil. Nonetheless, they did still agree to put the presented demands to a vote. By the time the Congress commences at 9:30 on its second day, a committee has already passed a resolution on them and published them in *Vorwärts*. They receive support, especially from Hamburg comrades, whose Soldiers' Council has already implemented the following points, now up for a vote and which will be approved by the Reich Congress of Councils by a large majority. The measures include:

- The power of command over the army, navy and protection forces shall be transferred to the People's Deputies (under supervision of the Executive Council).
- All military insignia denoting rank are to be removed.
- The Soldiers' Councils will assume exclusive charge of maintaining discipline.
- At the same time, soldiers shall elect their commanders and the disbandment of the standing army is to be accelerated.

Friedrich Ebert attempts to soften these soon-to-be-named *Hamburger Punkte* (Hamburg Points), but fails due to his overly transparent attempt to diminish their significance by declaring them mere "guidelines".

○ FURTHER MOTIONS AT THE REICH CONGRESS OF COUNCILS

▼ Delegates approve the previous day's motion for the "immediate disarming of the counter-revolution". They further resolve to impose restrictions on the "overwhelming

economic might of the major capitalist press corporations” so as to ensure freedom of the press for all sections of society. From now on, publishers of daily newspapers must pay into the national treasury on any earnings exceeding an interest of four per cent on their investments.

THE PROBLEMS OF A “REVOLUTIONARY PARLIAMENT”

The Reich Congress of Councils is progressing very uneasily. New delegations of Berlin workers arrive constantly. Their demands are a reminder to Richard Müller “that we are living in revolutionary times” and that “a people” cannot be “governed from the armchair”. The elected chairman of the Congress, Robert Leinert (SPD), makes it clear that he will not tolerate any “further disruptions” of the proceedings via the “appearance of such deputations” — given that, according to Leinert, the Congress is not only working for the benefit of the proletariat of Berlin, but for the workers of the entire nation. At one point, he also rebukes a speaker: “You really need to get used to the idea that, when you hear the chairman ring the bell, you stop talking.” Motions regarding the conference agenda alternate with well-rehearsed “personal statements” attempting to reopen long-concluded debates. At the end of the day, the rules commission declares 72 of the Congress mandates to be temporarily invalid.

THE TASKS OF YOUTH WORK

On the side-lines of the Reich Congress of Councils, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches meet with Willi Münzenberg to discuss the imminent tasks and aims of planned youth work. Münzenberg has travelled to Berlin from Stuttgart. Up until his expulsion a month before, he had been in charge of the international office of socialist youth organizations in Switzerland. In the coming months, from his current location in Germany, he will revive his contacts from that period, and will be one of the core initiators of the Communist Youth International, subsequently becoming its first chairman.

19 DECEMBER 1918

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR COUNCIL SYSTEM?

This question, which has come to a head in such an acute form, is the dominant theme of the fourth day of the Congress. It is addressed right at the outset. Max Cohen and Ernst Däumig (both from the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils) are, respectively, for and against the Executive Council's motion to maintain the council system as the constitutional basis of the socialist republic; the motion is rejected by a large majority. Even before this more principled vote, however, Cohen's motion to set the election date for the National Assembly to 19 January 1919 has already been approved. Several reports are later added to the session's minutes, suggesting that people only voted against Däumig's motion simply because it pitted a council system against a National Assembly. "To support the revolution", the council system rather ought to coexist "alongside the National Assembly". But this is not put to a vote.

THE ELECTION OF THE CENTRAL COUNCIL

Overshadowed by the vote on the elections to the National Assembly, the new Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils is elected. A subsection in a previous resolution defines its task as the "parliamentary supervision of the German and Prussian cabinet". In the debate over what exactly is meant by "parliamentary supervision", opinions vary widely. The USPD faction demands that the Central Council should have the right to reject or approve bills before they officially enter into effect. After losing the vote on this motion, it leaves (as the minutes note) "in an uproar", and refuses to participate in the vote for the Central Council. The result of this is that all 27 members of the Central Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils are from the SPD slate. It is obvious that the Central Council in this form and composition will amount to little more than an advisory body for the Council of the People's Deputies.



DEEP IN THE LIFE OF THE NATION

From Kassel, Paul von Hindenburg of the Supreme Army Command sends a telegram to all army high commanders. A change that “so deeply transforms the life of the nation” as the “Hamburg Points” on the democratization of the military—passed by the Reich Congress of Councils the day before—could only “be decided by the National Assembly elected by the entire people”. In this statement which is rather unusual for a field marshal general, he argues that all orders issued by the Supreme Army Command remain effective. This means that the army “remains loyal to the Ebert government”, from which, however, it now expects that “the pledge it has made to maintain the [standing] army” will be kept, and that the corps of officers and corporals will be allowed to continue to perform their duties.

KARL RADEK ARRIVES IN BERLIN

After his Soviet delegation was denied entry at the border on 10 December, Karl Radek, together with three others, among them Ernst Reuter, set off on their own to Berlin. He had been Rosa Luxemburg’s opponent ever since their time together in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL), and then later inside the left wing of German Social Democracy. Now he has been issued a specific mandate by the leader of the revolution Lenin himself, and once he is in Berlin he immediately contacts the members of the Spartacus League. They meet in a workers’ tavern on Friedrichstraße. According to Paul Levi, Rosa Luxemburg’s hostility toward Radek remains; in her view, a “commissioner for Bolshevism” is the last thing that is needed. If it were up to her, the Bolsheviks would just stay home with their tactics.

20 DECEMBER 1918

“EBERT’S MAMELUCKEN”

That is the heading of an article in today’s edition of the *Rote Fahne*. The term refers to slaves who have risen to be local ruling elites, but who are still by their very nature slaves: those in the Reich Congress of Councils, given the state to which it has been reduced, according to Luxemburg. She is outraged by the brazenness and cynicism with which “Ebert’s people” set the conference “in motion like a puppet, taking advantage of the parliamentary helplessness and guilelessness of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Delegates”. She cites examples such as the vote on the resolution concerning elections to the National Assembly, during which she observed the application of “the same ‘authorities’ of the old party and trade unions in preparing the ground for the moral claptrap of 4 August [1914]”.

RIPE FOR SOCIALIZATION?

The most important motion put forward under pressure from rank-and-file delegates on the Congress’s fifth day reads: “The Congress of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils instructs the government to proceed immediately with the socialization of all industries deemed mature for this measure, particularly the mining sector.” It is approved by a large majority. Socialization is seen by many as a step beyond mere nationalization. The sponsor of this proposal, Heinrich Schliestedt (USPD, Remscheid), emphasizes that the most important task is to reorganize the way workplaces operate. In particular, the administration of firms ought to be included, and workers should take part in this with their councils.

“PARTY COMRADES!”

The first Reich Congress of Councils comes to an end. There were pioneering, contradictory and controversial resolutions—but there is still another new development in store: Käthe Leu (USPD), the delegate from Danzig, is the first

woman ever to address a German parliament as a member. She, together with a Klara Noack (SPD, Dresden), are the only women in a congress made up of men, and she opens her speech with a greeting to both the male and female comrades in the party—“*Parteigenossen und Parteigenossin!*” She supports the ultimately successful proposal that the Congress declare it “a special task of the revolution to proactively advance the interests of women, who have been marginalized in all areas of life up to now”. She argues that “securing the revolution can only succeed with the participation of women”, and that, beyond this, one of its “greatest tasks” is to “familiarize the women of Germany with socialism”.

A DELIVERY FOR LENIN

Shortly after Karl Radek’s arrival in Berlin, Rosa Luxemburg asks Eduard Fuchs to travel to Moscow. She hands him a letter conveying warm greetings “from our family” (meaning the Spartacus League), and particularly from Karl Liebknecht and Franz Mehring. Rosa Luxemburg also gives Fuchs a package for Lenin that contains the week-old programmatic pamphlet, “What Does the Spartacus League Want?” First and foremost, however, she demands that Moscow—where preparations for the foundation of a new International are already underway—abstain from any interference whatsoever in the German revolution. Fuchs is instructed to deliver this message to Lenin in person.

LETTER TO CLARA ZETKIN

Seeing as Emil Unfried, member of the Stuttgart Workers’ Council, is currently still in Berlin (most likely because of the Reich Congress), Rosa Luxemburg seizes the opportunity and gives him a letter for Clara Zetkin to take back home with him. In the short letter, Luxemburg sends “a thousand greetings and hugs” to Zetkin. She finds Zetkin’s latest article “superb”, and informs her that it has already gone to print. To Luxemburg, the article above all shows that Clara Zetkin is “refreshed and lively again”. It will appear in the *Rote Fahne* the following day under the title, “One Bit of Socialization”.

21 DECEMBER 1918

"A PYRRHIC VICTORY"

The results of the first Reich Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils are sobering for Rosa Luxemburg. All in all, she asserts, they amount to a "victory for the Ebert government" and a "victory for the counterrevolution in every respect". Instead of safeguarding the achievements of the revolution and "seizing political power for the business of the Revolution", which in Luxemburg's view "was its mission", the Reich Congress, as the highest authority of the revolution, has instead "committed suicide and surrendered the political power entrusted to it". Yet this is no more than a Pyrrhic victory. For the old Germany no longer exists, and the Reich Congress has "cast aside all the veils from the heart of the counterrevolution" so thoroughly in a matter of just a few days that it now ought to "rouse the conscience of the proletarian masses like a mine blast".

BURIAL OF THE VICTIMS OF 6 DECEMBER

The dead of the November Revolution are buried for a second time in the Cemetery of the March Victims in Berlin's district of Friedrichshain. This time, they are the 14 dead who were murdered by machine gun rounds fired into a registered demonstration on 6 December, as the military coup was taking place simultaneously. The Spartacus League has organized the funeral procession—and indeed, it is a massive demonstration of somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 people marching from the Siegesalle to the Cemetery of the March Victims. Delegations from all major plants and workplaces in Berlin are present. Karl Liebknecht addresses the crowd at several stops during the procession. The Revolutionary Shop Stewards once again demand the withdrawal of all USPD representatives from the Council of the People's Deputies.

22 DECEMBER 1918

○ **“C’EST LA RÉVOLUTION”**

In the midst of all the “tumult”, Rosa Luxemburg hardly finds time to think about her own wellbeing. “*C’est la revolution*”, she writes in a few terse lines to Clara Zetkin. Rosa Luxemburg is relieved to hear that Zetkin’s condition is improving. Otherwise, the work is developing “splendidly”. She announces that Willi Münzenberg “will do the best job of telling you” about her views on the most important political questions when he returns. Münzenberg and Luxemburg had already met on the side-lines of the Congress to discuss the pending tasks and goals of the youth work. As long as the forces of the Spartacus League in Berlin permit it—for Käthe Duncker is currently “very ill and not capable of doing much”—the activities regarding women’s and educational issues shall resume and be intensified.

○ **THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE SETS A CONFERENCE DATE**

The central leadership of the Spartacus League resolves to convene a Reich conference on 30 December. The deteriorating relationship with the USPD, of which the Spartacus League has been a part since the founding of the party, must be clarified. The consequences of the defeat at the Reich Congress of Councils require analysis and the League’s position regarding the announced elections to the National Assembly must be determined. The Spartacus League urges the USPD leadership to convene a party conference in order to publicly discuss its continued support for the Council of the People’s Deputies.

○ **DISABLED WAR VETERANS IN FRONT OF THE MINISTRY OF WAR**

German society will have to get used to these images: a demonstration of around 10,000 disabled war veterans marches to the Ministry of War, protesting the continued lack of urgently needed reforms in the provision of aid for injured veterans.



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▼ The demonstration is led by blind ex-servicemen with their dogs. Several hundred amputees follow them on crutches.

23 DECEMBER 1918

“COUNTING THEIR CHICKENS BEFORE THEY’VE HATCHED”

Rosa Luxemburg concedes political defeat at the Reich Congress. That does not mean, however, that the “capitalist protection force” has won. Their plan must be thwarted. She does not believe the National Assembly represents the values of socialism. Nevertheless, Luxemburg announces in the *Rote Fahne* that she intends to use the “platform” of the National Assembly: “Just as we exploited the infamous Prussian three-class franchise system in order to fight against the three-class parliament from within the three-class parliament, so will we exploit the election of the National Assembly for the struggle against the National Assembly.” Thus far, she continues, they have been counting their chickens before they’ve hatched. The fate of the revolution will not be determined by parliamentary majorities, but by the “the real bearers of the revolution”, the “proletarian mass outside, on the shop floors and in the street”. In Luxemburg’s eyes, the future belongs to the proletarian revolution.

INFLAMED PASSIONS

The fact that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were not granted the right to speak at the Reich Congress of Councils continues to inflame passions and divide the workers in the factories. Corresponding reports about the atmosphere at the assembly of the Workers’ Councils of Greater Berlin are published by *Vorwärts* and *Die Freiheit*.

“THIS CAN’T CONTINUE A SINGLE HOUR LONGER”

According to Emil Barth’s recollection, the demonstrations on 21 December left a lasting impression on Friedrich Ebert. During the meeting of the Council of the People’s Deputies, he exclaims (at least according to Barth): “Colleagues, things cannot continue like this. No one in the world has the nerves for this. We can no longer govern from here, in Berlin, not even a single hour longer. On Saturday, no, it is hardly bearable, here in Berlin, everything was turned upside down once again. Should 12 armed men walk in here now, and our guards don’t resist, and we don’t resist, then they will simply remove us, and this government will be over. With all these deputations showing up and the constant threats, we can’t continue a single hour longer. We must move to Weimar or Rudolstadt before the day is over.”

THE PEOPLE’S NAVAL DIVISION

For several days, the pressure has been mounting on the People’s Naval Division to retreat from the Berlin city palace and the Marstall. It is falsely alleged that there has been looting and vandalism of the old imperial furnishings. Moreover, the People’s Naval Division is urged to reduce its troops from 2,000 to 600 and be integrated into the new Republican Soldiers’ Guard which city commander Otto Wels has recently formed. At this point, Wels is even withholding the soldiers’ pay, declaring that the division should consider itself dissolved. Sailors subsequently occupy all access roads to the Reich Chancellery and later take Otto Wels and his deputy prisoner. The same evening, the Reich Chancellery is surrounded by troops commanded by lieutenant-general Lequis, yet the People’s Naval Division is supported by the security guard of Police President Emil Eichhorn. Friedrich Ebert successfully negotiates the retreat of the troops and promises to deal with the Naval Division’s demands the next day, during the meeting of the Council of the People’s Deputies.

24 DECEMBER 1918

“BLOODY CHRISTMAS” AT THE BERLIN CITY PALACE

Contrary to the agreements made the previous day, war troops under the command of lieutenant-general Arnold Lequis march to the Berlin Palace in the early morning hours. Reinforced by the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division* as well as the *Republikanische Soldatenwehr* and obviously supported by Friedrich Ebert, at 8:00 they call on the few remaining sailors to clear the palace within 10 minutes. After this period expires they begin an assault with heavy artillery. Riled up by the thundering cannons and alerted by the factory sirens, thousands of workers from all districts of Berlin come rushing to the sailors’ defence, break through the lines around Schlossplatz and push the troops back in an embarrassing defeat. Following their surrender, the army command counts 56 dead. 11 perish on the sailors’ side, along with an unknown number of supporters. Precautions are drawn up to evacuate the Council of People’s Deputies from Berlin.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISTS AND THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE

Only one week after their official founding, the International Communists of Germany decide to merge with the Spartacus League at their second Reich Congress in Berlin. The previous “principled tactical differences” between the two “organizations of the revolutionary struggle” had been overcome by the development and overall situation of the German Revolution and “been reduced to differences of formulating the same view”. The Spartacus League was now to propose a “founding conference of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus League)”. Karl Radek’s personal address to Johann Knief had a decisive influence on this development.

CHRISTMAS EVE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE PRISON WALLS

Rosa Luxemburg celebrates her first Christmas Eve outside of prison with Paul Levi. They had met in 1913. As her lawyer, Levi defended her in the Frankfurt court in 1914 against the accusation of having called for disobedience. The two entered into a brief and passionate love affair which soon transformed into an intimate friendship. Has Luxemburg also been thinking about the previous 24 December in the midst of the present Berlin “Christmas skirmishes”? It was just before Christmas in 1917 when she had written her “Buffalo letter” [*Büffelbrief*] to Sophie Liebknecht, which Karl Kraus subsequently published in his magazine *Die Fackel*, calling it “a unique document of humanity”.

25 DECEMBER 1918

REACTIONS TO THE “CHRISTMAS SKIRMISHES”

Demonstrations take place all around the country expressing their solidarity with the People’s Naval Division. Thousands of Berlin residents flock to the square in front of the palace, which is heavily damaged from the shootings. A huge mass gathering organized by the Berlin branch of the USPD, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, the People’s Naval Division and the Spartacus League turns into a demonstration heading straight for the editorial offices of *Vorwärts*, which are subsequently occupied. The national press is referring to the “Christmas skirmishes” as a “coup attempt by sailors”, while lieutenant-general Lequis has been defending the military action by reference to his “being ordered to do so by the Reich government”, and explains his own failure by claiming his men would not shoot at women and children. There are also rumours that Karl Liebknecht is already governing in Berlin.



The Berlin Palace after the "Christmas Skirmishes" in 1918.

Photo: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R72464



LETTER TO CLARA ZETKIN

For the first time since her release from prison, Rosa Luxemburg is back at her desk in her apartment in Lindenstraße 2. She uses the time to write to Clara Zetkin, informing her about the “tumult” of the last few days. Meetings, editorial work, and again and again, warnings that she and Karl Liebknecht are “threatened by gangs of killers”, carry on until she finds that the matter “has become too stupid”. Alongside all this, there are constant “revolutionary disturbances” such as the “enormous demonstration” taking over the *Vorwärts* offices, welcomed by Luxemburg. The events have also interfered with Rosa Luxemburg’s daily schedule. She hopes to receive support from Julian Marchlewski in Berlin soon. Furthermore, in her view, the USPD “is in complete disarray”. She is only able to send the letter the following day.



26 DECEMBER 1918



A VAST FIELD OF OPERATIONS AND OPEN ARMS

Rosa Luxemburg responds immediately to a message she receives from Clara Zetkin during the day: “Dearest, I just received the lines you wrote on 23 December. That I should come visit you now is unthinkable, I can’t abandon the paper [*Rote Fahne*] for even one day. The prospect that you would come here gives me a thousand reasons to rejoice. Here you have friends waiting for you longingly, also a vast field of operations, and me with open arms. My little home is naturally at your disposal and awaits you. From now on I will send you the *Rote Fahne* myself every day. Write as soon as possible whether and when you are coming. The thought of it makes me happy. I embrace you with all my heart, as ever, your RL”.



27 DECEMBER 1918

○ AGREEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED *VORWÄRTS*

The *Vorwärts* building has been occupied for two days. When the demonstrators entered, they discovered at least 18 machine guns, more than 20 boxes of hand grenades and an armoured car in the courtyard. They demanded the resignation of the “Ebert government” and produced several pamphlets as *Roter Vorwärts* to make their demands. Philipp Scheidemann reported yesterday at the meeting of the Council of the People’s Deputies that even Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had stopped by the building. The SPD demands its return, but has hardly any means of enforcing this. On the day before, moreover, the assembly of Revolutionary Shop Stewards and other workers’ shop floor representatives passed a resolution expressing sympathy with the “grievances of the working masses”. But the occupation of the *Vorwärts* is no longer recognized as the correct means by which “to take up the sweeping final fight against the counterrevolution, in both its open and disguised forms”. The Revolutionary Shop Stewards recommend that the action be broken off. The occupiers accept the recommendation after they are assured the statement will be printed immediately in the regular version of *Vorwärts* once it resumes publication.

28 DECEMBER 1918

○ TOO LATE AND FINISHED?

The leadership of the USPD has refused, on spurious grounds, to convene a special party congress as demanded by the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Spartacus League. Now there will be no more opportunities for debate within the party before the elections set for 19 January 1919. The Reich Conference of the Spartacus League, still scheduled for 29 December, will have to react to this. Rosa Luxemburg is already

preparing herself for the events of the days ahead. For the *Rote Fahne*, she looks back on the formation of the Spartacus League from 4 August 1914, and writes about the tasks facing it today and the “chasms” which began to separate it from the USPD in the midst of the revolution. Even if the leaders of the USPD were soon to dissolve the “the shameful gang of the Ebert government under the pressure of general scorn and their own moral collapse”, it would still be “too late” for them. This is because, politically, they are already “finished” as far as the proletariat and the future development of the revolution is concerned.

THE USPD’S DEPARTURE FROM THE COUNCIL OF THE PEOPLE’S DEPUTIES

The Council of the People’s Deputies and the Central Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils hold an emergency meeting. They debate for hours, sometimes bitterly, over the “Christmas skirmishes” of 23 and 24 December. Finally, it becomes clear that many were not only taken by surprise by the events of that night, but that the USPD representatives were deliberately ignored and then lied to. As a consequence, Hugo Haase, Wilhelm Dittmann and Emil Barth resign that very night. They declare that they had to leave the Council of the People’s Deputies “out of loyalty to [their] own convictions and a sense of duty”, as “it has become ever more clear that the majority socialists are holding on to the old military force in order to rely on it for themselves”. They now know that they can no longer serve this committee without endangering the revolution and socialism. In this respect, they are acting precisely in the sense discussed repeatedly by Rosa Luxemburg, but also exactly according to the plans of Friedrich Ebert and the Supreme Military Command (OHL). As *Die Freiheit* reported three days earlier, the OHL had regarded the idea of a “cabinet dispute” in early December—one resulting the expulsion of the USPD representatives—to be “expedient”.

NEW COMMANDER OF THE CITY OF BERLIN

The former Franciscan priest Lt. Anton Fischer (SPD) replaces Otto Wels as Berlin city commander. That very evening, the three SPD people’s deputies declare that

⋮ they are in agreement with his new counter-insurgency programme, which includes
 ⋮ authorization to use arms as soon as—according to a later statement by Fischer—
 ⋮ “either troops or demonstrators appear”, who intended to oust his subordinates from
 ⋮ their posts (for example in building protection) and refuse orders to stand down. “If
 ⋮ this request is not complied with, the weapon—firearm and striking weapons—may
 ▼ be used until there are reinforcements or the attackers are repulsed.”

29 DECEMBER 1918

○ TELEPHONE CALL WITH MATHILDE JACOB

Mathilde Jacob, who maintained Rosa Luxemburg’s connection to the Spartacus Group during her imprisonment by every conceivable ruse, notes a phone call between the two on this date. They have not seen each other for quite some time. Rosa Luxemburg might have a couple of free hours today and would like Mathilde to visit. But Mathilde Jacob is evasive, as she feels insufficiently appreciated by Rosa Luxemburg and remains constrained by the work she is currently taking over for Leo Jogiches. As it turns out, only the phone call takes place—Luxemburg will not have a free hour in the end. The work in the *Rote Fahne*, but above all the events to come, demand her full attention.

○ A NEW COUNCIL OF PEOPLE’S DEPUTIES

After the three USPD representatives leave the Council of People’s Deputies during the night, Gustav Noske (responsible for military and navy) and Rudolf Wissell (responsible for economic and social policy) stand ready as their successors. Paul Löbe, who was approached initially, rejected his appointment. The Council of People’s Deputies thus consists of only five members, all reliable representatives of the majority Social Democrats. After a few days, they begin to call themselves officially the “provisional government”.

REICH CONGRESS OF THE SPARTACUS LEAGUE

The Spartacus League decides to break from the USPD at the non-public part of the Reich Congress. There are only three dissenting votes: Leo Jogiches, Werner Hirsch, and Carl Minster. Because Rosa Luxemburg knows that the head of the International Communists of Germany, Johann Knief, plans to build his own party, she decides to join forces with the International Communists of Germany. She does not want to see a new party emerge alongside the Spartacus League. The Reich Congress is interrupted to allow delegates to attend in the burial of the victims of “Bloody Christmas”, but then reconvenes in the ballroom of the Prussian House of Representatives. It is now time to make preparations for the steps which must inevitably follow.

INTERMENT OF THE “CHRISTMAS SKIRMISHES” DEAD

For the third time in a month, victims of the (counter-)revolutionary struggles are buried in the *Friedhof der Märzgefallenen*. Little is known of the eight soldiers and sailors. The funeral processions, however, grow larger, more threatening and more menacing. More than 100,000 people join the final convoy. At the same time, the German Democratic Party and the SPD hold rallies which develop into additional marches throughout the city: against “terror” or—as it is also called—the “bloody dictatorship” of the Spartacus League.

30 DECEMBER 1918

OPENING OF THE FOUNDING CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GERMANY IN BERLIN

At least 115 delegates from the Spartacus League and the International Communists of Germany gather in the ballroom of the Prussian House of Representatives to found a new party. They represent coalitions from 56 locations, including heterogeneous radical currents within and outside of the USPD. The chairmanship of the conference

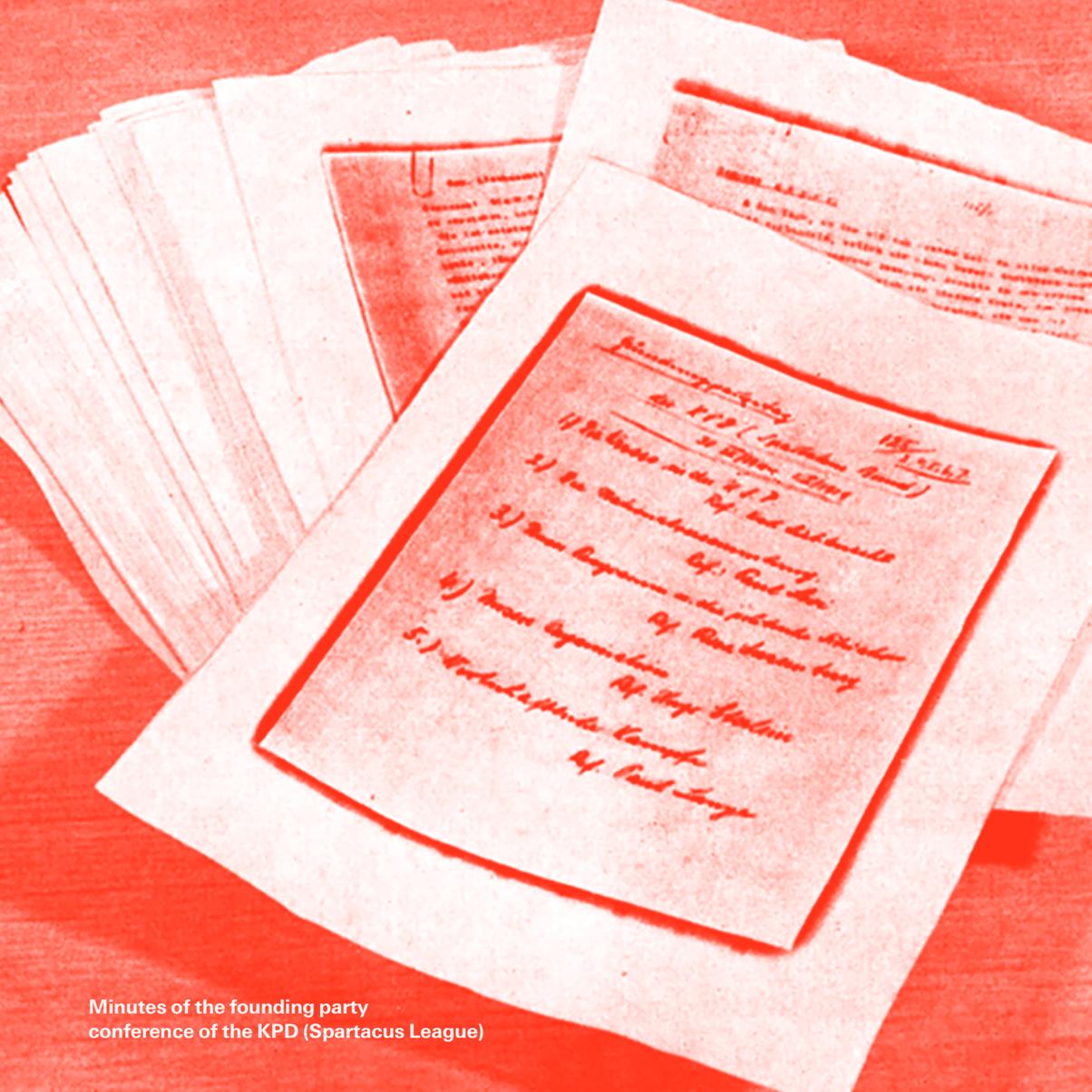
is taken up by Wilhelm Pieck (Berlin) and Jakob Walcher (Stuttgart). Fritz Heckert (Chemnitz) and Rosi Wolfstein (Witten/Düsseldorf) are elected as secretaries. The conference agenda includes a speech by Karl Liebknecht on the “Crisis of the USPD”. Paul Levi will speak on the question of the National Assembly and Rosa Luxemburg will give a talk on “Our Programme and the Political Situation”. Hugo Eberlein will present reflections on questions of future organization, Paul Lange is to concentrate on the “Economic Struggles” and Hermann Duncker will venture a look at the possibilities of a new International. Karl Radek, an illegal guest as an official representative of revolutionary Russia, is the first to create a sensation. He confirms for members of the press in attendance every prejudice about the intentions of the Bolsheviks.

A “MORE SOPHISTICATED RADICALISM”

Despite their commitment to council democracy, Rosa Luxemburg, Paul Levi, Karl Liebknecht and other prominent leaders of the Spartacus League would like to nominate the new party for the elections to the National Assembly. Luxemburg already outlined her arguments for this a week before. The congress debates this topic for three hours. After Paul Levi’s keynote address, the pros and cons are weighed over the course of more than 20 speeches. An open “Liebknecht/Luxemburg left list” is brought into play as a proposal. At the end, however, the result of the vote is 62 to 23 in clear support of Otto Rühle’s (Dresden) motion against participation in the elections—a defeat for Luxemburg. It is clear to her that non-participation means isolation. The SPD still retains the greatest influence over the labour movement. “You want to make your radicalism a little bit more comfortable”, she declares to the boycotters. By contrast, she would like to take up a “more sophisticated radicalism” based on utility and purpose, and develop participation in the elections into an instrument of revolutionary struggle.

“ISOLATED AND BITTERLY OUTVOTED”

Tomorrow the *Rote Fahne* will report that Rosa Luxemburg was “isolated” in the question of participation in the elections and was “bitterly outvoted”. The “animated applause”



185/2167

Gründungsprotokoll

am 1.1.19 (Freitag, 1.1.19)

in der Klasse in der 2.17

Vf. Carl Lang

- 1) Die Gründungsversammlung
- 2) Die Organisation in der 2.17
- 3) Die Organisation in der 2.17
- 4) Die Organisation in der 2.17
- 5) Die Organisation in der 2.17

Vf. Carl Lang

Minutes of the founding party conference of the KPD (Spartacus League)

that met her at the beginning was followed at the end of her debate contribution by a decidedly “weak” round of clapping. As a matter of fact, Luxemburg had also been unable to win support prior to this on another core matter at Spartacus headquarters: She had wanted to christen the party the “Socialist Party”, as it “must forge the link between the revolutionaries of the east and the socialists of Western Europe and accelerate the process of uncoupling the Western European socialists from reformism”. The name “Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus League)”, as ultimately proposed and accepted by an arbitration committee, would make it more difficult to meet this task.

31 DECEMBER 1918

“THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION REQUIRES NO TERROR...”

The programme of the new party will ultimately base itself on Rosa Luxemburg’s “What Does the Spartacus League Want?” Because the text has already been published, Rosa Luxemburg decides this afternoon not to pursue the question further in her keynote speech. Instead, she undertakes a historical excursus and once again assumes the role of a lecturer. Her aim is to convince the congress that all those present are part of a historical current from which no one can simply exit at will. The subsequent debate, however, reveals how strongly the views differ, particularly with regard to “violence” and “terror”. Ultimately, however, the programme is adopted without major alteration, and thus establishes the following: “During the bourgeois revolutions, bloodshed, terror, and political murder were an indispensable weapon in the hand of the rising classes. The proletarian revolution requires no terror for its aims; it hates and despises killing. It does not need these weapons because it does not combat individuals but institutions, because it does not enter the arena with naïve illusions whose disappointment it would seek to revenge. It is not the desperate attempt of a minority to mould the world forcibly according to its ideal [...]”

“WE’VE RETURNED TO MARX”

In her keynote speech, Rosa Luxemburg does not assert that “we have returned to Marxism”, but does make a point of stating that the new programme marks a “return to Marx, and takes up his cause” (i.e. of 1848). Since 1910, Luxemburg had increasingly come to deride “Marxism” as an ideology of legitimation for particular SPD policies, and ceased to refer to herself as a Marxist. In 1913, for example, she lamented: “Our ruling ‘Marxism’ fears every flight of thought like an old arthritic uncle.” Given that most attendees at the congress appear overwhelmed by both political and theoretical questions in any case, Rosa Luxemburg does not address the difference between Marxism and Marx to any greater extent in her talk, but rather distinguishes—in a quite conciliatory manner—“true Marxism” from a substitute Marxism.

A DELEGATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SHOP STEWARDS ARRIVES

According to the conference minutes, Rosa Luxemburg is “physically unwell” and has to leave the founding congress early. She will not be able to deliver a final statement during the debate on the programme, nor will she be able to participate personally in the negotiations with a delegation of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. The latter have demonstrated their extraordinary ability to organize in Berlin on various occasions over the past two years, mobilizing—and actually representing—more than one hundred thousand workers. The Shop Stewards themselves have also been discussing the formation of a new party, although there are just as many good reasons to merge directly with the KPD (Spartacus League). This is precisely what the delegation (including, among others, Richard Müller, Ernst Däumig and Georg Ledebour) is meant to negotiate when it makes its surprise appearance at the House of Representatives in the evening. The delegation is sceptical about the new party’s name, however. It also demands that the boycott the elections be reversed, and full parity granted within the new organization. The congress is first interrupted and then it is decided to prolong it by one day. Karl Liebknecht underscores the reason: “Meanwhile, the matter is of such import” that an extension is “justified”.

1 JANUARY 1919

ROSA LUXEMBURG'S "INNERMOST PERSONALITY"— AND INTO THE NEW YEAR

"Sometimes 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", Rosa Luxemburg wrote to Sophie Liebknecht from Wronke Prison on 2 May 1917. "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." After her collapse, Luxemburg is unable to witness the end of the KPD founding congress. However, she does not recover over the next few days, but shuttles back and forth between her sick bed and the writing desk she uses for her editorial work. Paul Levi is also ill. He is suffering from the "Spanish flu", which is resulting in millions of deaths worldwide.

NO AGREEMENT

As the founding congress of the KPD (Spartacus League) assembles again this morning, no breakthrough has occurred in discussions with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. The crux of the matter remains the electoral boycott to which the party is already committed. Karl Liebknecht announces the failure of these negotiations just before 14:00. A majority of the 42-member delegation from the Revolutionary Shop Stewards has, moreover, refused to endorse the programme prepared by the congress, while the new party's negotiating committee is also not yet willing to reopen discussions on questions that have already been decided. To accept the demands made by the Shop Stewards would, as Liebknecht says, "be to erase all the work of this congress right at its end." His position is affirmed from the still sparsely occupied rows of the Prussian House of Representatives. It is now being called the

⋮
▼ “first party congress” of the KPD, and ends around 15:00. with three cheers of “on with the international socialist world revolution!”

2 JANUARY 1919

○ **REPORT ON THE FIRST PARTY CONFERENCE**

Rosa Luxemburg is preparing her report on the KPD's first conference for the *Rote Fahne*, arguing in favour of the new formation. In her view, the party should not be seen as a clandestine construct of a handful of radical leaders, but rather as “a natural product of historical development”, located at the “turning point” between the first and second phase of the German revolution: the “transformation [...] into an out and out workers’ revolution”. She demands that revolutionary sentiment now be replaced by unyielding revolutionary conviction, spontaneous by systematic action. This entails new tasks for the “core troops” of the proletariat. “Contrary to the traditional ‘milestone’ type praise” however, Rosa Luxemburg also admits, with a view to the party conference, that it “has only been able to complete bits of the enormous work put before it, and has only been able to sketch outlines. Itself a fragment of the revolution, it shares its fate of not being able to boast about possessing sufficient thoroughness or of completing an exhaustive work.”

○ **“THE ENEMY STANDS TO THE RIGHT!”**

Today, the *Weltbühne* publishes Kurt Tucholsky's portentous lines: “For what, my God, has freedom bled?/ For what were men and maids whipped?/ Spartacus! Germans! Open your eyes!/ They are waiting to suck blood from your veins—/ The enemy stands to the right!”

3 JANUARY 1919

DIPLOMATICALLY OUT OF SORTS

Rosi Wolfstein today fills in as speaker for Rosa Luxemburg, who has fallen ill, at a meeting at Franke's Festsäle (an event hall on Badstraße, in the Berlin district of Wedding). It is a women's gathering to discuss the topic of "Women and the National Assembly". Simultaneously, Ernst Reuter substitutes for Paul Levi, who is also unwell, in the auditorium of the Andreas-Gymnasium grammar school (Koppenstraße, Berlin-Friedrichshain). There is a second reason, however, to explain Levi's and Luxemburg's absence from the meetings: had they not already been home sick, they would have been "diplomatically" ill: they consider the decision to abstain from participating in the elections to the constituent National Assembly on 19 January 1919 to have been a grave error, and they do not wish to defend it public.

THE RESIGNATION OF AN ENTIRE CABINET

After the resignation of the three USPD members from the Council of the People's Deputies in the night of 29 December 1918, USPD members in the government of the state of Prussia now follow suit: Heinrich Ströbel (Prime Minister), Adolph Hoffmann (Minister of Science, the Arts and Public Education), Kurt Rosenfeld (Minister of Justice), Georg Graf von Arco (ombudsman at the Council of the People's Deputies), Rudolf Breitscheid (Minister of the Interior), Paul Hoffmann (Alderman for Public Works), Adolf Hofer (Minister of Agriculture) and Hugo Simon (Minster of Finance).

A CAMPAIGN AGAINST EMIL EICHHORN

A press campaign against Berlin Police President Emil Eichhorn has been underway for several days. The revolution swept him into office on 9 November 1918, and the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils ratified his appointment. The representatives of the Council of the People's Deputies, however, consider him a

: nuisance, as he continues to act as an advocate for the revolutionary sections of the
 : working class. Now the security forces he commands are to be brought under control.
 : Numerous newspapers depict Eichhorn as a “thief” and a “Russian agent”, or simply
 : refer to him as morally corrupt. The *Politisch-Parlamentarische Nachrichten* (Political
 : and Parliamentary Bulletin) is already whispering: “Every day Herr Eichhorn remains
 ▼ in office he is a threat to public order”.

4 JANUARY 1919

○ LETTER TO MARTA ROSENBAUM

The otherwise close relationship with Marta Rosenbaum is somewhat strained at the moment. Rosa Luxemburg writes to her friend: “I have the most urgent need to see you, to hug you, to talk with you. Kurt [Rosenfeld] told me you felt hurt by me. For me that was like having a rooftop fall on my head. During the whole time of our friendship haven’t I earned so much trust that misunderstandings would be ruled out? It was painful for me. Well, even this has to be accepted; we have to talk, and no shadow can be allowed to stand between me and my dear Marta, with the heart of gold. I tried to reach you by phone yesterday, but the call didn’t go through, and later I didn’t have a moment to spare. I want to see if I can get through to you today. In the meantime I embrace you with all the love and loyalty of old, a thousand times, greeting you and your husband as well.”

○ EMIL EICHHORN IS SACKED

It had become increasingly clear over the past few days—at least once the USPD withdrew its ministers from the Prussian government—that this was going to happen: the government, which now consists exclusively of SPD members, removes Emil Eichhorn from his post as Berlin Chief of Police. Although it has no formal authority to do so, it receives the backing of the Central Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’
 ▼

Councils (also made up exclusively of SPD members). Emergency meetings are convened all over the city. The KPD leadership also debates what is to be done. There is consensus that no claim to political power ought to be made at this point, but rather that the KPD's protest should become more visible. "None of us imagined at the time that there would be more battles", Ernst Meyer will remember later. In the evening, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the leadership of the USPD in Berlin decide to call for a mass demonstration in Siegesallee for 14:00 the next day. Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck sign the appeal on behalf of the KPD Central Committee. The appeal is printed in the paper *Die Freiheit*, the central organ of the USPD, but not in the *Rote Fahne*.

5 JANUARY 1919



CONVALESCENT

Following her collapse at the KPD's founding conference, Rosa Luxemburg's health has been improving, but she is still too weak to make it to the editorial offices of the *Rote Fahne*. Käthe Duncker visits her in her apartment. Paul Levi writes the lead article for the newspaper.



"YOU MUST NOT ACCEPT THAT!"

It is not only about Emil Eichhorn, write the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, USPD and KPD in their call to the workers of Berlin, but that "you all will be robbed of all revolutionary achievements down to the very last. You cannot, you must not accept that! So go out into the streets in mass demonstrations!" The resulting turnout exceeds all expectations and is overwhelming: the streets and squares between Tiergarten park and police headquarters at Alexanderplatz are full of people. Eichhorn himself has ensconced himself inside police headquarters with his security guard. According to the report by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, he declares, speaking from a

balcony of the headquarters, that “the most crucial stage of the revolution” is at hand. In his view, it was a grievous mistake to have joined the government: “While our goal is socialization, the government has assumed the role of protecting capitalist circles and the bourgeoisie. [...] I received my office from the revolution—and I will only surrender it to the revolution.”

RIOTS IN BERLIN

Alongside Eichhorn, Georg Ledebour and Karl Liebknecht also address the crowds from the balcony of police headquarters. The protesters appear impatient and ready to act. And, indeed, at nightfall a few hundred armed demonstrators—for the most part led by provocateurs from the city command—once again occupy the *Vorwärts* building, as well as other publishing houses (Mosse, Ullstein, Scherl), a central printing works, and the Wolffs Telegraphic Bureau. A Revolutionary Committee with 33 members is established with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards at its core. However, two of the most important leaders of the revolution of 9 November—Richard Müller and Ernst Däumig—argue against overthrowing the government. The KPD is represented by Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck. Nevertheless, later there will be talk of the “Spartacist Uprising”.

THE GERMAN WORKERS’ PARTY IS ESTABLISHED

In close cooperation with the secret Thule Society, the German Workers’ Party (DAP) is founded in Munich. Its objective is to win over Social Democratic and Communist-oriented workers to their anti-Semitic and ethno-nationalist (*völkisch*) agenda. A year from now, the party will rename itself as National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP, the Nazi Party).

6 JANUARY 1919

THE MASSES SURPRISE ROSA LUXEMBURG

After the “proletarian masses”—which Rosa Luxemburg invoked so often—accepted the Reich Congress of Councils’ decision against a council government and in favour of elections for a National Assembly almost without resistance, Luxemburg senses that the revolutionary tide is at its ebb. Moreover, she considers yesterday’s demonstrations to have been no more than a final revolutionary flicker, and refuses to join the “Revolutionary Committee”. The many hundreds of thousands of people who have turned out today, however, surprise Luxemburg, reinvigorating her hope that the revolution has entered a new phase after all. At the same time, she realizes how little influence she herself has at this point, while Paul Levi writes to his sister of his own hope “that we don’t have to enter the government yet. The time is not yet right for that.”

FEATURES OF REVOLT

Already by morning the call to take to the streets is heeded by hundreds of thousands of demonstrators. Paul Levi summarizes these events in Berlin as “perhaps the largest proletarian mass action ever witnessed in history.” Although the Revolutionary Committee formed yesterday is now in session “permanently” and is calling for a general strike as well as the overthrow of the Ebert-Scheidemann government, it is unable to reach any agreement on how and where to lead the masses out on the street. Nevertheless, the demonstrations actually begin to resemble an uprising, with scattered street battles taking place. Elsewhere, shootouts are reported, and later the main telegraph office and the stations Anhalter Bahnhof and Potsdamer Bahnhof are occupied.

“SOMEONE HAS TO BE THE BLOODHOUND”

The SPD arms its members, mainly in order to defend the government buildings and the Reichstag. Their real objective, however, is to “establish order” in Berlin. The



Gustav Noske (center) speaks to Freikorps mercenaries.

Central Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils issues extraordinary powers of authorization to the "Reich leadership" (or *Reichsleitung*, constituted by the Council of the People's Deputies, which will refer to itself as the "Reich government" from the next days on). Friedrich Ebert appoints Gustav Noske as supreme commander of the troops in and around Berlin. Two days before, both had already visited units from the *Freikorps* commanded by major general Georg Maercker on the outskirts of the city. Upon his appointment, Noske is said to have remarked to his fellow people's deputies: "Fine then! Someone has to be the bloodhound, I won't shy away from that responsibility."

7 JANUARY 1919

WHAT ARE THE LEADERS DOING?

After two days of demonstrations, Rosa Luxemburg expresses her conviction in the latest edition of *Rote Fahne* that the workers of Berlin have "have grown enormously in political terms through the school [...] of the most recent events". In her view, "Berlin's working class has learned, to a high degree, how to act" and—in contrast to two months before—knows what it wants and what it should do. She is sceptical, however, about the leadership qualities of their political representatives, who still seem not to have to "learned anything new". They remain silent and are nowhere to be seen, whereas the provisional government is not "getting bogged down" in deliberations. Rosa Luxemburg's greatest fear is that secret negotiations geared towards some kind of compromise are already underway. She contends, however, that "uncompromising measures" and swift action are now necessary.

MEETING OF THE ZENTRALE

The KPD's *Zentrale* (guiding committee) convenes in the afternoon to discuss the current situation. Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches argue for clearer leadership of

the struggles. They do not want speeches like those made by Karl Liebknecht, for example, who without prior consultation declares on the boulevard Unter den Linden that Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann are “deposed” in the name of the Revolutionary Committee.

A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

The USPD’s party leadership attempts to mediate between those occupying the newspaper district of Berlin and the Council of the People’s Deputies. The latter, however, reacts by issuing a call exclusively to the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, thereby indicating that they know exactly who is the only force capable of exerting real influence over the workers in the midst of the unrest. According to a report in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the Council explains the following to the Revolutionary Shop Stewards: “To us, it is a matter of conscience to apply violence exclusively as a defence from violence. We will remain true to this principle. We shall not use armed force in order to attack. If we are to reach any kind of agreement, we can only do so after the buildings seized on the evening of the 5th and over the course of the 6th of January have been relinquished.”

8 JANUARY 1919

NEGLECTED OBLIGATIONS

In Rosa Luxemburg’s view, the revolutionary process has time and again revealed the “brusque, naked and implacable alternatives” over the past eight weeks: “either the revolution has to abandon its proletarian character and its socialist mission, or Ebert-Scheidemann and its supporters have to be driven from power”. However—and this reflects the “revolution’s weakness and immaturity”—it is far from certain, as the events of the past few days have shown, “how we are to conduct the struggle to clear out the Ebertian government, how we translate the step of the

revolution’s inner maturity, which we have already reached, into deeds and power relations”. In her *Rote Fahne* article, Luxemburg lists several examples of neglected obligations, specifically on the part of the USPD leadership and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. The “masses”, she continues, cannot simply be called upon, but must also become politically active and involved in making decisions. According to Luxemburg, organizing the revolutionary struggle is distinct from merely structuring the organization on whose behalf the “movement’s spirit, its aims and ability to act have been abandoned” in Germany’s past.

RETREAT

After three days, the workers’ demonstrations in Berlin are subsiding, but gunfights are increasing across the city. The Revolutionary Committee forms a sub-committee tasked with heightening the efficiency of (military) actions, although so-called government troops are already recapturing some of the occupied buildings. Given the ebbing of the revolutionary tide, Leo Jogiches categorically demands a public critique of the uprising during a discussion at KPD headquarters, and insists that Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck—against their will—resign from all committees of the armed struggle.

“THE HOUR OF RECKONING IS APPROACHING”

The Council of the People’s Deputies publishes a manifesto: “Fellow citizens! Spartacus is now fighting for absolute power. The government, which within ten days wants to bring about the free decision of the people on its own destiny, is to be overthrown by force. The people are not to be allowed to speak. Their voice is to be suppressed. You have seen the results. Where Spartacus rules all personal freedom and safety are abolished. [...] The government is taking all measures necessary to smash this reign of terror and prevent its re-emergence once and for all. Decisive actions can no longer be waited for. But a thorough job has to be done, and it requires preparation. Just have patience for a little while longer, be confident, as we are, and resolutely take your place next to those that want to bring you freedom and order. [...]

⋮ The hour of reckoning is approaching! The Reich government. Ebert. Scheidemann.
 ▼ Landsberg. Noske. Wissell.”

9 JANUARY 1919

○ GOING UNDERGROUND

Sometime before dawn, shots are fired at the offices of the *Rote Fahne*. Rosa Luxemburg, however, calmly continues her work, as Karl Radek will recount later. It takes the “greatest effort” on the part of Paul Levi to persuade her to leave the building. An attack on the editorial offices is very likely. Over the course of the day, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and other members of the KPD’s *Zentrale* meet at “an acquaintance’s”. They decide that Radek, Liebknecht and Luxemburg should go into hiding. Likewise, Käte and Hermann Duncker receive—separate—cover addresses. In the meantime, the newspaper *Hamburger Echo* publishes a false report that Rosa Luxemburg has arrived in Hamburg and is preparing a coup together with the Communists.

○ ACCUMULATING MORAL CAPITAL

Yesterday’s publication of the Council of the People’s Deputies’ manifesto, “The Hour of Reckoning is Approaching”, now compels even the otherwise moderate Hugo Haase to write a call for workers “to defend against the looming violence of the White Guard” (and its “protector” Gustav Noske). The Revolutionary Shop Stewards publish the leaflet in *Die Freiheit*, explicitly as a joint appeal by Berlin’s political left, including (but without their knowledge) the KPD’s *Zentrale*. The general strike and armed struggle are to be maintained, which causes a predicament for the KPD: given its current state, more planned than already-existing, can it abstain from participating in the struggle, or should it take the side of the militants? It is quite clear to Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches, and Paul Levi that both would be a mistake. The leadership

of the KPD resolves—with a view to future—to build up moral capital; that is, to act as the most reliable partner of the working masses who have been set in motion.

AGAINST THE BLOODSHED

Meanwhile, the unrest has caused the first fatalities and injuries in Berlin. The street battles are not only continuing, but growing even more severe, hopeless, and desperate. Workers, mainly from the AEG and Schwartzkopff factories, launch an initiative to end the bloodshed. They demand the resignation of all worker leaders, especially Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann, but also Georg Ledebour and Karl Liebknecht. Furthermore, workers' councils are to be newly-elected at all levels, based on a fixed parity between SPD, USPD, and KPD. The government is to include representatives from all socialist parties. In the midst of the processes of radicalization, this united movement from below quickly crosses the threshold of a mass movement—and not only in Berlin.

10 JANUARY 1919

THE LEADERS' FAILURE

It is not easy for Rosa Luxemburg to find a suitable hiding place. A pogrom atmosphere is spreading, and many no longer dare to take her in. For the time being, she can stay with a friend of hers, the physician Dr. Alfred Bernstein (Blücherstraße 13, near Hallesches Tor). She picks up where she left off two days before with her article on "Neglected Obligations" for the *Rote Fahne*, and now accuses the political leaders of the uprising of "the most lamentable failure". In her view, they lacked determination, energy, revolutionary enthusiasm, and lagged far behind the readiness of the masses to fight. They have hesitated—in the case of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards—or are pursuing a "politics of the bog", as in the case of the USPD. Adopting the wording introduced by the Council of the People's Deputies, she asserts that a "settling of

accounts with the Ebert-Scheidemann lot” would at this point entail the “liquidation” of the USPD, given that its negotiating tactics simply serve as a “battlements for the Ebert-Scheidemann lot”. The article will appear the following day.

COUNTER-ATTACKS

The negotiations between the USPD party leadership and the SPD members of the Council of the People’s Deputies, which ultimately come to nothing, have provided sufficient time for more troops to amass outside the city limits. The “Reich government” now commands 20,000 armed men gathered with general staff in and around Berlin. In the early morning, the train stations Halensee and Zoologischer Garten are seized and occupied. Over the morning hours, *Freikorps* soldiers seize the town hall in Spandau, abusing and killing four of the prisoners they take in the process. In the afternoon, major von Stephani receives orders to storm the symbolically important *Vorwärts* building. During the night, artillery and mortars are brought into position.

SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF BREMEN

It is a matter of fact that there are enormous revolutionary demonstrations across Germany. The Berlin uprising, however, does not develop with lasting effect. But this would have been its only chance. One exception is Bremen, where Adam Frasunkiewicz (USPD) proclaims the Socialist Republic of Bremen following a demonstration with tens of thousands of participants. The senate and the city council are dissolved. A workers’ council of the USPD and KPD, each with thirty representatives, assumes power. Following a strike action lasting multiple days, the workers’ council of Düsseldorf also removes the mayor from office.

MAJOR DONATIONS FROM GERMANY’S BUSINESS ELITES

During a fundraising event at Johannisthal Airfield in southern Berlin, the Anti-Bolshevist League, founded on 1 December 1918, collects up to 500 million reichsmarks from leading industrialists. The event is hosted by the director of

⋮ Deutsche Bank. The money (collected as “voluntary self-taxation”) flows into a newly-established “Anti-Bolshevist Fund of German Industry”, which will finance the development of both far-right *Freikorps* units and media companies.

11 JANUARY 1919

INSIDE THE DRAGOON BARRACKS

In the wake of crushing artillery fire, the occupiers of the *Vorwärts* end the unequal struggle and surrender the building. They send a negotiating team of seven members of parliament, among them Wolfgang Fernbach, who are immediately arrested and subjected to severe abuse. They are then taken to the dragoon barracks where they are brutally murdered. Over the course of the day, another 300 occupiers from the *Vorwärts* building are arrested and taken to the barracks, among them a woman who is mistakenly identified as Rosa Luxemburg. An officer manages to prevent her from being murdered at the last minute.

OF LIGHT AND SHADE

Käte Duncker pays Rosa Luxemburg a visit in her hideout. Luxemburg also manages to finally respond in detail to Clara Zetkin’s last letter, and presents her analysis of the founding conference of the KPD. Luxemburg’s defeat on the question of participation in the elections to the National Assembly was merely “the triumph of a rather childish, half-baked, one-dimensional radicalism”. It is important not to forget, she writes, that “the ‘Spartacists’ are for the most part a fresh generation, free of the stupefying traditions of the ‘grand old party, tried and true.’” This, she continues, must be “viewed in both its aspects, of light and shade”. Furthermore: “if the course of events continues as it has so far,” it seems very questionable “whether things will even reach the point of elections and a National Assembly”. While Luxemburg is writing the letter, she reports, “the battles are continuing” in Berlin. “Many of our brave lads

... have fallen. [Ernst] Meyer, [Georg] Ledebour, and (we fear) [Leo] Jogiches have been arrested.”

12 JANUARY 1919

ELECTIONS IN BAVARIA AND WÜRTTEMBERG

While in Berlin the last “January battles” end with the capture of police headquarters and further arbitrary executions of detainees by “government troops”, elsewhere the first state elections take place. They anticipate the balance of forces that will be demonstrated across the country in elections to the National Assembly a week later. The Bavarian election results are as follows: Bavarian People’s Party receives 66 seats, the SPD 61, the German People’s Party 25, the Agrarian Party and National Liberals 9, and the USPD 3 seats. Results in Württemberg are 52 seats for the SPD, 38 for the German Democratic Party, 31 for the Centre Party, 11 for the local branch of the German National People’s Party (*Bürgerpartei*), 10 for the Agrarian League, and 4 seats for the USPD.

NEW LODGINGS

Rosa Luxemburg’s and Karl Liebknecht’s current refuge no longer appears safe. They flee to a worker’s apartment in Neukölln (probably Weisestraße 8). From there, at the risk of endangering their new hideout, they continue as best they can to maintain their political structures and working relationships. There are meetings in the smallest of spaces “with a quite remarkable number of comrades attending”. Hugo Eberlein also arrives. He wants to consult them about his invitation to Moscow, where he is assigned to represent the KPD at the foundation of a new International. Rosa Luxemburg compels him to reject it as premature. (Eberlein will subsequently abstain during the vote in early March 1919). Following supper, Karl Liebknecht reads bedtime stories to their host’s child.

A SHOCKING DEATH

Mathilde Jacob likewise pays a visit to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in their new refuge. She informs them about the murder of Wolfgang Fernbach, whose death is a shock to both of them. “Weeping softly”, Rosa Luxemburg passes a letter to Mathilde Jacob for Fernbach’s wife Alice, which, according to Jacob’s recollection, reads roughly as follows: “Dear Comrade Fernbach, my hand clasps yours in your pain. I have seen so many of my friends on my side fall right and left. That is the fate of the revolutionary fighter. I have, myself, only one wish — to find my own death in the fight for our cause as well. I am convinced that you will be brave.”

13 JANUARY 1919

HOUSE OF CARDS

“The Ebert-Scheidemann government” will only be able to “rule by the bayonet” — this is Rosa Luxemburg’s conviction as expressed in her *Rote Fahne* article. The bourgeoisie, meanwhile (with or without Ebert and Scheidemann), is going “all out” again and calling for “the full restoration of the ‘old order.’” Yet nothing could be established on the ruins of last week’s events that “could last for any length of time”. Whatever may “come about tomorrow or the day after as the result of and solution to the crisis” can only be temporary, a “house of cards”. The revolution cannot be “turned back, inverted”, she continues. As soon as “the corpses of this latest episode” are cleared away, the revolution will resume its work.

IN VAIN

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards announce the end of the general strike and Gustav Noske imposes a military siege on Berlin. New troops move into the city. *Freikorps* and “self-defence militias” spread terror in the workers’ districts. Given the danger of being identified, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht hardly ever leave their

hideout. Various organizations offer rewards of at least 50,000 Reichsmark each for their capture. The day before, Mathilde Jacob had still tried in vain to persuade the two to go into hiding separately. Now, she herself is mistaken for Rosa Luxemburg in the street and detained, but ultimately is released and—in order to prove her identity—allowed to return to her apartment. There, Paul Levi waits for her, and both are taken into pretrial custody for 10 days. Meanwhile, *Vorwärts* contributes to the pogrom atmosphere with its own agitation.

14 JANUARY 1919

RELOCATING TO MANNHEIMER STRASSE

Now Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht's are finding their refuge in Neukölln unsafe. Hugo Eberlein and Wilhelm Pieck arrange a new hideout in Mannheimer Straße 43 (now 27) in Wilmersdorf. Without thinking, they once again fail to consider placing Luxemburg and Liebknecht in separate locations—and there, too, the continual coming and going of leading comrades quickly resumes.

"ORDER" PREVAILS IN BERLIN

In her article in *Rote Fahne*, Rosa Luxemburg takes stock of the struggles of the past week. In her view, they have been a mistake. Yet Rosa Luxemburg reiterates her stance: the political leaders have failed and the "masses" are the last remaining "rock" "on which the victory of the revolution will be built". It is her last article. It closes with the words that later became famous: "'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!" However, only few will be able to actually read the article. The purges continue in the various districts of Berlin, conducted by regular units of the army, as well as by the paramilitary right-wing *Freikorps* and "self-defence militias". Under these

circumstances it is extremely difficult for the *Rote Fahne* to be effectively circulated. Furthermore, a guard at Anhalter Bahnhof has seized 50,000 copies of the current edition intended for delivery nationwide.

“KARL, IS THAT OUR PROGRAMME?”

Reportedly, Karl Liebknecht’s answer to this question from Rosa Luxemburg is silence. Through a facsimile in *Vorwärts*, Luxemburg only now receives the declaration of 6 January 1919 on the “Ousting of the Ebert-Scheidemann Government” signed by “The Provisional Government of Ledebour, Liebknecht, Scholze”. This, combined with previous hints and indications, now brings Luxemburg, together with Paul Levi and August Thalheimer, to the realization that the signers in the last days have fanned a putschist politics she has always ridiculed. This is a fundamental contradiction of her own main political concerns as formulated in the “Programme of the Spartacus League” and her “Fragment on the Russian Revolution”.

15 JANUARY 1919

MURDERED

Without really considering the danger they are in, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht remain in Berlin and continue working on their texts. A “civil defence militia” has now tracked them down at the Marcusson family residence at Mannheimer Straße 43. They are taken to the Eden Hotel, the headquarters of the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division* commanded by captain Waldemar Pabst—who has long made up his mind about the orders he is about to issue. Historians agree that those complicit in the murder included German soldiers and officers Hermann Souchon, Kurt Vogel, Otto Runge, Heinz and Horst von Pflugk-Hartung, Heinrich Stiege, Ulrich von Ritgen, and Rudolf Liepmann. The murders were to be disguised as a lynching by an agitated crowd and a thwarted attempt to flee. Around 23:45, Rosa

Luxemburg's corpse is thrown into the Landwehrkanal, close to the Liechtenstein Bridge. Military prosecutor Paul Jorns later tries to cover up the murders; some of the perpetrators receive short prison sentences which are largely evaded through organized escape.

OBITUARIES

Rosa Luxemburg's body would not be found washed up on the banks of the Landwehrkanal until 31 May 1919. There have been enough obituaries of her—some even decades after her death. Most of them, however, served only one function: to elevate her to a such degree that she became unrecognizable. There were left-wing currents for whom only Luxemburg's corpse, some letters from prison, and a few selected early writings were useful. This Polish Jewish woman was simply too free-spirited and relentlessly democratic, and she bore no traces of slave blood whatsoever. Neither the Bolsheviks nor the Social Democrats of the Weimar Republic were able to come to terms with her legacy. Most texts that did not fall into a kind of schizophrenia by transforming her into an icon and simultaneously suppressing her principles—to the point of falsifying them and defaming her work—have been forgotten today.

At the conclusion of the online original of the chronicle "Rosa Luxemburg and the German Revolution", we referred to some of these texts. They are linked to there, as are many of the primary sources from contemporary publications used in previous entries, along with the *Collected Works of Rosa Luxemburg*: www.rosalux.de/revolutionschronik.





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“Sometimes 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.”

Rosa Luxemburg from the Wronke prison
to Sophie Liebknecht, 2 May 1917

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

