THE LEGACY OF ROSA LUXEMBURG, by Norman Geras (NLBooks) 1976

A compilation of essays, the 1st 2 in NLR 11/12/73 and 1-2/75.

I. Barbarism and the Collapse of Capitalism (his references are to Waters 1970 SWP, Dick Howard 1971, R. Looker 72). The only valuable part in the chapter is the critique of others (for example, P.M. discussing the Leninist theory of Org.) & basing himself on the th. of collapse but on a single sentence from her polemic against Lenin in 1904 attributes to Luxemburg a conception according to which experience and struggle, in mass actions, is sufficient for achievement of an adequate class consciousness and of the proletariat's his. objectives... For her, according to Mandel, the rev. P. 'will be created by the revolutionary action of the masses' ..." (p.18) (the reference is to EM's "The Len. Th. of Org.", 1971 pp 6-7, NG procedes to disprove it.

PP. 22-23 "Similarly Howard argues that for LUX. socialism is a necessity, the result of 'an internally self-contradictory system which must eventually break down and lead to a revolutionary transformation' but is not a 'metaphysical' or 'mechanical' necessity and her view is contrasted with that dominant in the SWP ... The point that NG makes here is that both Ecalich and Howard absolve her of a metaphysical & mechanical view but, nevertheless so interpret historical necessity as if it meant there was a fatalistic concept. On the other hand, NG seems to think that only "prima facie" is it true that there is a contradiction between her political economy which predicts automatic collapse of capitalism and her theory. NG then quotes from her Anti- Critique (p.60) to show that Acc. was not just a theoretical work but had a practical meaning in the fight against imperialism.

He also criticises [illegible] M. Lowy who wrote in 1971 a Spanish book translated in 1973 as "Dialectique et Revolutionion", that evidently still argues about spontaneity, as if the Junius pamphlet also proves that fact. On p.31 he lists Nettl along with Lowy on the whole question of fatalism and activism. They interpret Soc. or Barb in the same way. He, on the other hand, quotes both from her founding convention of the German CP speech (in Waters books on p.412 and NG quotes also from Acc. of Cap. (pp 466-7) and Anti Critique p. 147-8 on the question of imperialism and historical alternatives.

On p. 36 he quotes Lelio Basso who defends Lux that having always understood how the struggle must be. Evidently, this was written also against the Italian Il Manifesto group., whereas he quote Lux quoting Marx on Proudhon (Pov. of Filosophy p.98) that it's dogmatic to just contrast good to bad ..." What constitutes dialectical movment is the coexistence of two contradictory sides."

On p. 47 he argues that RL's position was not that of Trot. on the Permanent Revn because "she did not share LT's view that the vanguard role of the prol in the RR would 'destroy barriers bet. the min & max programs of SD ' would forge an unbroken chain' between its bourgeois democratic and soc. tasks, had therefore rendered obsolete the reigning orthodoxy of the separate and distinct state' (the reference is the Per. Rev. & results and prospects.

Whereupon NG claims that her position was closer to Lenin's which is likewise [illegible].

II - Between the Russian Revolutions. The only pages in this chapter that are relevant to us are the final three pages 105-108. That takes up the 1907 5th RSDP Congress, especially since the topic was how much the German SP had to learn from the Russian prol. And Rosa insisted that it's the Russian that was the vanguard of the inter'l working cl. struggle. Specifically, she wrote, that the RR was "not so much the last act in the series of bourgeois revns of the 19th c. as the forerunner of the new series of future prol revns in which the conscious prol. & its vanguard, SD, are destined to play the leading role." (He cites the Russian edition of that Congress.

She also attacked the Menshieviks at that conference and evidently LT associated with her. But it's there also (p.107) that he says LT alone drew the political conclusions and RL did not. He quotes something from Waters pp 367-8, 375&395.

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III - The Mass Strike. What is important in this is that he recognizes the question of RL as woman, pointing out the fact that whereas it is hard to see any connection between spontaneity and "woman" Lichtheim writes such nonsense as the question of "psychological roots", woman, & question of spontaneity — a typically feminine notion. (Lichtheim, Marxism, pp 337 n.)[NG p. 111]

p. 113 NG makes important reference to organization question including Waters pp88-89, Howard p394.

In ultimate page of that chapter, NG quotes Lenin about the questions on which Xwas wrong, but stresses that her works should serve as "manuals for training many generations of communists all over the world." It is supposed to be reference to Vol. 33 of Lenin's collected works, p.210 and also to Vol 31, pp 341-342 where L. has an article, "a contribution to the his. ques. of the dic."

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IV Bourgeois Power and SD: On the relation of Means & Ends. I'm not interested in this one at all, and I think the most significant part in the sense of what these Lefts who are accepting Rosa say is the final chapter, the Conclusions pp 195-204, and that one I will go through page by page.

1st he takes issue with Althusser who wrote in 1965 against supposed historicist errors among Marxist lefts, the most important of which was of course spontaneity in which he throws in RL and Karl Korsch. Then NG correctly shows that Korsch himself 30 years earlier had identified RL & L with the opposite error, as if the workers' movement had to be taught from the outside. (Althusser and Balibar pp 119-120 and 140-141)

NG then also shows how supercilious Rossana Rossanda (p.195) is. RR having concluded that RL's conclusion was 'condemned by the failure of the German [redacted] and the European revn'

p.196 has a most important expose of Betram Wolfe who decided to give his own title , "Leninism or Marxism?" to a work by RL thad had no such name, that was called by her "Organizational Questions of Russian Soc. Dem." Betram Wolfe's excuse for the misnaming is that his title is "most attractive" and if that isn't enough, Robert Conquest says that that title was supposedly RL's own choice as she supposedly found it 'suitable'. And then NG claims that even those who know differently, as Nettl surely does, do think that the article was a response to Lenin's What Is To Be Done?, whereas it was, in fact, an answer to VIL's "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back." I don't think that is really big stuff because the subject was the same.

(p.197 NG rightly says "As success breeds epigones, so failure encourages a certain kind of license" in the mt. of words, ostensibly on RL's inadequacies there are many that are connected only in the most tenuous way to what she actually wrote. Thus in the contradictory positions attributed to her by Althusser and Korsch, are simply inverted reflections of their own opposed posture." whereupon NG stupidly talks of her opposition or at least separation from both spontaneous & "organicist conception" and what in the hell is that? NG also makes a reference to Lenin's Col. Wks pp 474-477 (it must be One Step Forward, two Steps Back) NG ends, this time correctly, why even if it had been correct to blame her for failure of Germ Rev. 1918-19 how can we explain all the revns that have failed since?

of NG's ch 195

(add to N. Geras summary)

Rossanna Rossanda in her piece for the Socialist Register 1970 on Class and Party has a less than profound critique of RL pp 224-227, of which the following sentence is typical:

"As against Lenin's alleged external concept of the party, RL's feeling of need for it "was not derived from the absence of a political dimension of the w.c. struggles as such but from the obj. fragmentation of these struggles, which a unified strategy could alone overcome." "All through strategic is given a new meaning, specifically as "stategic unification". NB this is where first the word autonomy was first projected in Italy as " the autonomy of the political moment, which is precisely Machiavelli's discovery".

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