

# BEFORE AND AFTER THE 1905 REVOLUTION:

## two turning points in Rosa Luxemburg's life— 1898-99, and 1905-07

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### I ENTRANCE ON THE GERMAN SCENE

**R**OSA LUXEMBURG'S very entrance, May 1898, into the German arena, center of the Second International, shook up the largest and most prestigious of world Marxist organizations — the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). From the start, she became a subject of contention—contention that would not abate until her life was snuffed out by the most vicious counter-revolutionary murder, January, 1919.

No sooner had she arrived in Germany than she plunged to meet the greatest challenge ever to the theory of Marx, by no less a person than Eduard Bernstein, the literary executor of Marxism, so designated by Marx's closest collaborator, Frederick Engels. This first revision of Marxism, entitled Evolutionary Socialism, was answered by many orthodox leaders, but it was Luxemburg's Reform or Revolution (1899) that became the classic answer to revisionism. That a young woman of 27, within a year of her arrival, could rise to such high stature tells a great deal more than just how dramatic was her entrance. It discloses the type of theoretician, the type of personality, the type of activist she was.

It is true that, with Leo Jogiches, she already headed the small underground party in Poland; at age 22 she already had been made editor of its paper, Workers' Cause. But, in German eyes, that would not have counted for much alongside the achievements of the massive German Party with its unchallenged international reputation. And surely, the quick acceptance of her as theoretician was not due to the fact that she had already shown Marxist-economist acuity in her doctoral dissertation on the Polish economy. Though The Industrial Development of Poland was considered an important contribution — "for a Poie" — the German Social Democratic Party had many economic theoreticians with reputations greater than hers.

Furthermore, the fact that she related this economic study to her intense opposition, as an internationalist, to self-determination for Poland — especially since it meant turning Marx's own position on Poland upside down — would hardly have won her the high praise she achieved within a single year. On the contrary. Such overly bold self-confidence would only have led the German Party hierarchy to keep her out of the leadership, as, indeed, was evident from the fact that they tried, at first, to limit her work to what was then called the "Woman Question." While this didn't mean that she was oblivious to the "Woman Question"—though she herself, as well as today's Women's Liberationists and old male colleagues alike, try to picture it that way—she categorically refused to be pigeonholed.

Not only that. She did, indeed, feel herself to be "a land of boundless possibilities." As she wrote to Jogiches on May 4, 1899:

"I feel, in a word, the need, as Heine would say, to 'say something great.' It is the form of writing that displeases me. I feel that within me there is maturing a completely new and original form which dispenses with the usual formulas and patterns and breaks them down . . . But how, what, where? I don't know yet, but I tell you that I feel with utter certainty that something is there, that something will be born."

On the "Woman Question," too, she had something to report in her letter to Jogiches of Feb. 11, 1902, about her organizational tour, which discloses that she was both theoretically and practically aware of the question:

"I was formally interpolated on the women's question and on marriage. A splendid young weaver, Hoffman, is zealously studying this question. He has read Behel, Lill Braun and Gleichelt, and is carrying on bitter argument with the older village comrades who keep maintaining 'a woman's place is in the home' . . ."

She naturally sided with Hoffman and was pleased that her advice was accepted as "the voice of authority."

It was that theoretic "voice of authority" — not on the "Woman Question," but on revisionism — that made the Party hierarchy recognize Rosa Luxemburg as one who would brook no limits to her range of interests. No matter what limitation would be attempted—be it the "Woman Question," or anti-Semitism (which, though never admitted, was not too far below the surface)<sup>1</sup>, or concentration on any single issue—it was the totality of the revolutionary goal that characterized the totality that was Rosa Luxemburg.

She was uncompromising in her many-faceted involvements and made clear that they were as far-reaching as the whole new revolutionary continent of thought Marx had discovered. She had every intention of practicing it on an international scale, beginning right there, and right then, at that world focal point of the Social Democracy: Germany.

As she was to be throughout her life, Luxemburg was active enough that first year in Germany. And, whether or not it was her activity that energized the German Party, it was, in her case, intellect become will become act. For that matter, it was not only the German Social Democracy that her intellect challenged. Living in Germany also meant experiencing certain changes in herself insofar as her relationship with Jogiches was concerned. All one has to do to see the changes is to compare the letters she wrote from France in 1894 and those she wrote from Germany in 1898-99.

From Paris she wrote of love and sadness and complained that she could not share her impressions with her comrades, since "unfortunately, I don't love them and so I have no desire to do this. You are the one I love, and yet . . . but I just said all that. It's not true that now time is of the essence and work is most urgent. In a certain type of relationship you always find something to talk about, and a bit of time to write." From Berlin on April 21, 1899, she wrote: "Dziadziuchna, be a philosopher, do not get irritated by details . . . In general, more than once I wanted to write, that you are extending your methods, which are applicable only in our Polish-Russian shop of 7 1/2 people, to a party of a million." And she followed that up with a postcard, April 23, where she wrote: "Oh, Dziadzio, when will you stop baring your teeth and thundering . . ."

She may not have been fully aware of all that that signified. After all, there was not only deep love between them and deep comradeship, as well as shared leadership, but she held him in especially great esteem when it came to organization. Though he was nearly as young as she when they met in Zurich — four years separated them — he had already founded the first revolutionary circle in Vilna in 1885, had already been arrested twice, had already escaped from jail, and at the very assembly point for army conscripts again escaped into exile. At the same time, as Clara Zetkin, who knew them both intimately, was later to express it, Jogiches "was one of those very masculine personalities — an extremely rare phenomenon these days — who can tolerate a great female personality . . ."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it was a fact that Rosa Luxemburg was beginning to take issue with him in his very specific preserve — organization — where not only had she previously acknowledged his superiority, but where she, herself, was quite indifferent to the whole topic.

As it happened, by no means accidentally, she had at once to plunge into the burning debate in Germany and in the whole International; in meeting the very first challenge to Marxism from within Marxism by the original revisionist, Eduard Bernstein, she established herself as the one who delivered the most telling blow, because it was so total. She battled Bernstein on all fronts, from analysis of Marx's economic laws of capitalism leading to collapse, through the political question of the conquest of power, to the proletariat's need for the dialectic.

1 See letter to Leo Jogiches, May 1, 1899, which makes reference to an anti-Semitic Polish jingle: "Hard up—what to do? Go to the Jew/Hard times are through/Out the door, Jew!"  
2 Paul Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Work (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 14.



Rosa Luxemburg

As against Bernstein's nightmares about the fatal effect that would result from the proletariat's attempt to gain political power "prematurely," she maintained, in *Reform or Revolution*:

"The proletariat is not capable of seizing power in any sense other than 'prematurely.' Once or even several times it must inevitably take power 'too soon' in order to capture it permanently and so the opposition to such premature seizures is nothing else than opposition to the very notion of seizure of power on the part of the proletariat."

And as against Bernstein's demand that "the dialectical scaffolding" be removed from Marx's theories, she wrote:

"When he directs his keenest arrows against our dialectic system, he is really attacking the specific mode of thought employed by the conscious proletariat in its struggle for liberation. It is an attempt to break the sword that has helped the proletariat to pierce the darkness of its future. It is an attempt to shatter the intellectual arm with the aid of which the proletariat, though materially under the yoke of the bourgeoisie, is yet enabled to triumph over the bourgeoisie. For it is our dialectical system that . . . is already realizing a revolution in the domain of thought."

Those first two years in Germany where she had experienced so many changes were also where she manifested that flash of genius on imperialism as the global shift in politics. Before even that word, imperialism, was coined by Hobson (to whom all later Marxists, from Hilferding to Lenin, expressed their indebtedness) she posed the world significance of Japan's attack on China in 1895 which led to the intrusion of European powers into Asia and Africa. Indeed, an entire new epoch of capitalist development—the emergence of imperialism—had begun. As she wrote to Jogiches on Jan. 9, 1899, she had meant to include this analysis in the *Reform or Revolution* pamphlet. On March 13, 1899, she wrote on



Rosa Luxemburg, with Japanese socialist Sen Katayama and Russian Georg Plekhanov at 1904 Amsterdam Congress of the International, where they demonstrated international solidarity against the Russo-Japanese war.

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this global shift in politics for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. She was to call attention to it, again, in the 1900 Congress. It became even more concrete, that is to say, directly related to the Social Democratic Party silence on the "Morocco incident" and was to become, of course, an underlying cause for the break with Kautsky in 1910. And, we must emphasize, once again, that all happened long before anyone, including Lenin, had sensed any reformism in the unchallenged world leader of Marxism. It became, as well, the ground for her greatest theoretical work, *Accumulation of Capital*.<sup>3</sup>

## II THE FLASH OF GENIUS AND THE FIRST RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

**H**ERE WHAT IS EXCITING is to see that flash of genius at its very birth, in the letter to Jogiches on Jan. 9, 1899:

"Around 1895, a basic change occurred: the Japanese war opened the Chinese doors and European politics, driven by capitalist and state interests, intruded into Asia. Constantinople moved into the background. Here the conflict between states, and with it the development of politics, had an extended field before it: the conquest and partition of all Asia became the goal which European politics pursued. An extremely quick dismemberment of China followed. At present, Persia and Afghanistan too have been attacked by Russia and England. From that, the European antagonisms in Africa have received new impulses; there, too, the struggle is breaking out with new force (Fashoda, Delegoa, Madagascar)."

It's clear that the dismemberment of Asia and Africa is the final limit beyond which European politics no longer has room to unfold. There follows then another such squeeze as has just occurred in the Eastern question, and the European powers will have no choice other than throwing themselves on one another, until the period of the final crisis sets in within politics . . . etc., etc."

By the beginning of the 20th century the extension of capitalism into its imperialist phase opened a totally new epoch because there also emerged its total opposite — revolution. Beyond any doubt this new global dimension — the Russian Revolution of 1905 that was signaling a new world stage in the East as well — made the dialectic of history very real for Luxemburg. Far from dialectic being either just an abstraction or a journalistic euphemism for attacking revisionism, it was now the very breath of new life. Soon the dialectic of revolution, as of history, came alive before her very eyes in the 1905 Revolution in Poland, which was then part of the Tsarist Empire.

She wished to become one with the proletariat in making history. Jogiches, who was already in Poland making that history, and her German colleagues, were hardly encouraging her, however, to return to Poland during such tumultuous times. The so-called "Woman Question" was no longer any sort of generalization, but

<sup>3</sup> For my critique of that work, see the Appendix to *State-Capitalism and Marx's Mismisism* (Detroit: News & Letters, 1967).

gelled her in a most personal form as she kept being told that the risks to her, as woman, were greater than to the male revolutionary emigres, who were returning. Although she was delayed in leaving for Poland, this type of argument only assured her going.

She reached Poland on Dec. 30, 1905 and, at once, plunged into a whirlwind of activities. There was nothing she didn't attempt — from writing and editing to taking revolver in hand to force a printer to run off manifestoes, articles, leaflets, pamphlets; from participating in strikes and demonstrations to making endless speeches at factory gates. Within three days, on Jan. 2, 1906, she wrote to Kautsky: "Mere general strike by itself has ceased to play the role it once did . . . Now nothing but a general uprising on the streets can bring a decision . . ."

It was awe-inspiring to see the familiar strikes of advanced German workers become a General Political Strike of "backward" Poles. No wonder that the whole concept of "backward" and "advanced" underwent a total transformation in the ongoing revolution. Luxemburg now saw the so-called "backward" Russian working class as the vanguard — not only of their own revolution, but of the world working class movement. The leaflets and manifestoes made clear not only the class content of the revolution but the totality of the change that the revolution was initiating—from the General Political Strike as the new method of class struggle, to the Soviet as a new political form of organization; and from the call for, and actual practice of, the eight-hour day to the demand for "full emancipation of women."

She was to make a category of the General Political Strike both as road to revolution and as theory of revolution, as well as relationship of Party to spontaneity of masses. As we shall see later, when we deal with what, theoretically, resulted from the experience—The Mass Strike, The Trade Unions and the Party — the actual events that gave rise to the so-called theory of spontaneity were happening before her very eyes. Moreover, it was not only the activities of the masses; it was also the phenomenal organizational growth that made a crucial impact on Luxemburg.

To witness a small underground Party which had no more than a few hundred members after a decade of work, grow nearly overnight into a mass party of 30,000 was proof enough that it was neither conspiracy nor experience accumulated over slow years, much less the wisdom of the leaders, that "taught workers" either organization or class consciousness. It was the masses themselves, in motion, who brought about the end of her "German period." She began to "speak Russian"—Russian and Polish — rather than German.

With her participation in an ongoing revolution, her personal leap to freedom included also freedom from Jogiches, though she was not to become aware of that until the following year. Now there were endless activities, common principles, the momentum of an ongoing revolution. She was soon arrested and imprisoned. No sooner had she got out of prison than she proceeded to Kuokkala, Finland, where a group of Bolsheviks, including Lenin, were living in exile; and she joined them in intense discussions on the Revolution. It was in Kuokkala that she wrote one of her greatest pamphlets — the one on the mass strike, which she hoped to present to the German party so that they could see it was not only a Russian event but could be "applied" in Germany.

When she returned to Germany and presented those ideas, she met with such great hostility that she wrote to Clara Zetkin on March 20, 1907:

"The plain truth is that August (Bebel), and still more so the others, have completely pledged themselves to parliament and parliamentarianism, and whenever anything happens which transcends the limits of parliamentary action they are hopeless — no, worse than hopeless, because they then do their utmost to force the movement back into parliamentary channels, and they will furiously defame as 'an enemy of the people' anyone who dares to venture beyond their own limits. I feel that those of the masses who are organized in the party are tired of parliamentarianism, and would welcome a new line in party tactics, but the party leaders and still more the upper stratum of opportunist editors, deputies, and trade union leaders are like an incubus. We must protest vigorously against this general stagnation, but it is quite clear that in going so we shall find ourselves against the opportunists as well as the party leaders and August."

A Congress of all the tendencies in the Russian Marxist movement was to meet in London in April, 1907<sup>4</sup> and Rosa Luxemburg participated in a dual capacity—both as bearer of greetings from the German Party and as Polish delegate.

4 The Fifth Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party is abbreviated in Russian as RSDRP, in English as RSDLP.

An endless series of reports, analyses, disputes, re-examinations continue to pour forth, very nearly ad infinitum, about the 1903 Second Congress, where the division between Menshevism and Bolshevism first appeared on the "Organizational Question." That avalanche notwithstanding, it is the 1907 Congress which was pivotal, because it centered about an actual revolution. It was that, just that, which became the Great Divide between Menshevism and Bolshevism, with all other tendencies needing to define themselves in relationship to it. As Luxemburg wrote while the revolution was still ongoing: "The revolution is magnificent. All else is blige."

At the same time, it was that Congress which illuminates some of the major problems we face today. This is so in relationship not only to Rosa Luxemburg's life and thought, but to the very concept of the theory, the philosophy of revolution in Marx. Everyone at the Congress, no matter what their interpretation of that revolution was, focused on the 1848 German Revolution.<sup>5</sup> That the intellectuals have paid so little attention to this Congress shows a great deal about how much more adept they are at rewriting history than at writing it.

Here we had a Congress where all tendencies came together to discuss a single topic which, though it seemed to be on the relationship to bourgeois parties was, in fact, on the nature of revolution. Here we had a Congress where everyone, everyone without exception was present—be it a Plekhanov who was then a right-wing Menshevik and the only one who didn't return to Russia during the revolution, or a Leon Trotsky who was the actual head of the first, and until 1917 the greatest, revolutionary Soviet, in St. Petersburg—as well as the one who drew a theory of Permanent Revolution out of the revolution of 1905; be it a Lenin who was supposedly "all centralized organization", or a Rosa Luxemburg who was "all spontaneity"; be it a Martov who was a left Menshevik, or the Bund. Here was a Congress where all were talking about revolution—a very specific, ongoing revolution—and all were supposedly still grounded in the most unique philosophy—Marx's; where everything was fully recorded, so that it is very easy to prove or disprove almost any point of view. And yet, to this date, 72 years after the event, we are yet to have an English translation of the Minutes. Why such total disregard for so revealing a Congress?

About all we have are participants' memoirs—and the authors of these are so busy emphasizing its "chaos" that we get not a whiff of the significance of that Congress.<sup>6</sup> Of course there was chaos; it began with the fight over the agenda precisely because the Mensheviks opposed Lenin's proposal that they put on the agenda the character of the present moment of revolution. And they were not alone. In supporting the Mensheviks, Trotsky, surprisingly enough, insisted that this Congress must be "business-like", must not go in for abstract theoretical resolutions:

"What I want to say is that the Congress, from beginning to end, should be political, that it has to be a meeting of the representatives of revolutionary parties and not a discussion club. . . . I need political directives and not philosophic discussions about the character of the present moment of our revolution. . . . Give me a formula for action!"<sup>7</sup>

"Who would have thought that under such circumstances the proposal would be made to remove all questions of principles from the Congress agenda?" Lenin asked, as he offered his explanation: "What is this but sophistry? What is this but a helpless shift from adherence to principle, to lack of principle?"

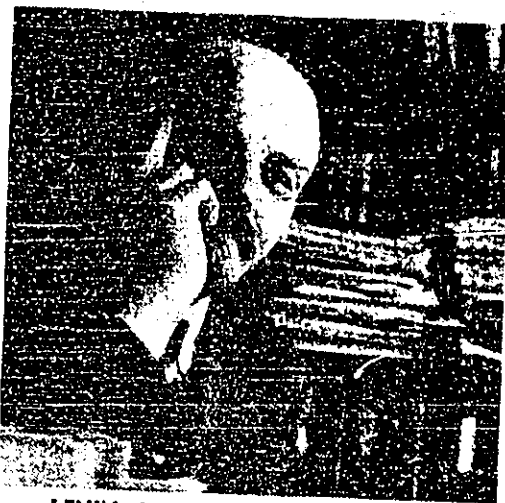
Later, Lenin expanded this to stress the relationship of theory to practice: "Our old disputes, our theoretical and tactical differences, always get transformed in the course of the revolution into direct practical disagreements. It's impossible to take any step in practical politics without bumping into these basic questions about the evaluation of the bourgeois revolution, about the relationship to the Cadets. . . . Practice does not erase differences but enlivens them. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

5 We will later develop the fact that none, nevertheless, brought out the conclusions Karl Marx drew in his 1850 Address to the Communist League following the defeat of the 1848 revolution.

6 In My Life (New York: Pathfinder, 1970) p. 202, Trotsky writes: "It was a protracted, crowded, stormy and chaotic Congress. . . . And in Impressions of Lenin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), Angelica Balabanoff stresses that "The discussion about the inversion of the agenda alone lasted over a week." (p. 27).

7 From Minutes of the 1907 Fifth Congress of the RSDLP, in Pyati Londonskii S'ezd RSDRP, April-mai 1907 goda, Protokoly (Moscow, 1963), p. 49. (My translation.)

8 Lenin's concluding remarks at the May 14 session of the Fifth Congress, reproduced in Vol. 12 of his Collected Works (Moscow: 1962, 1975), p. 470.



LENIN: in study and in party debate



What Lenin had called "sophistry" does contain part of the answer to why the Fifth Congress has been so long disregarded, but it is not the whole answer, as is evident from the fact that, under the topic of relations of Marxists to bourgeois parties, they did, in fact, touch the subject of the nature of the revolution. The full answer, rather, lies in the fact that most were not ready to stand up for the theory underlying their tactics; that is to say, the contradiction between theory and tactics was so glaring that evasiveness about the relationship of theory to practice ineluctably followed. The exceptions were Luxemburg and Lenin. And even then it took Lenin a full decade, and the simultaneity of a world war and the collapse of the Second International headed by Karl Kautsky, before he would recognize Kautsky's affinity to the Mensheviks, and the right-wing Mensheviks at that.

### III THAT PIVOTAL YEAR: 1907

**L**UXEMBURG'S PERSONAL BREAK from Jogiches had come just before the London Congress, which both attended and where they acted as one politically. That Luxemburg allowed none of the grave pressures — political and personal — to interfere with her very active participation and profound analysis of the burning question of the day, the Russian Revolution, was brilliantly clear from her three speeches to the Congress.

In her very first speech, when she was merely supposed to be bringing greetings from the German Party, Rosa Luxemburg, in fact, helped to determine the revolutionary character of the Congress, clearly separating herself from the Mensheviks. It is necessary here to reproduce at least the central point of that speech, which appears in full as an Appendix:

"The Russian Social Democracy is the first on whom fell the difficult task of applying the principles of Marxist teaching, not in a period of quiet parliamentary events, but in a stormy revolutionary period. The only experience that scientific socialism has previously had in practical politics during a revolutionary period was the activity of Marx himself in the 1848 revolution. The course itself of the 1848 revolution, however, cannot be the model for the present revolution in Russia. From it we can only learn how not to conduct oneself in a revolution. Here was the schema of this revolution: the proletariat participates with usual heroism but cannot utilize its victories; the bourgeoisie drives the proletariat back in order to usurp from it the fruits

of its struggle; finally, Absolutism tosses away the bourgeoisie in order to defeat both the proletariat and the revolution. The class isolation of the proletariat finds itself in the most embryonic state.

"It is true that it already had the Communist Manifesto — that great charter of the class struggle. It is true that Karl Marx participated in the revolution. But . . . the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was not so much an organ of the class struggle as of the extreme Left wing of the bourgeois revolutionary camp. It is true that Germany was not yet a bourgeois democracy, the idealistic expression of which was the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. But this is precisely the politics that Marx had to carry through with iron discipline in the first year of revolution. Undoubtedly, his politics consisted in this, that Marx had to support with all means the struggle of the bourgeoisie against Absolutism. But in what did the support consist? In this, that from the first to the last he mercilessly, relentlessly, whipped all the half-way measures, inconsistency, weakness, cowardice of bourgeois politics. (Applause from Bolsheviks and part of Center.) . . .

"Marx supported the national struggles of 1848, holding then that they were allies of the revolution. The politics of Marx consisted in this, that he pushed the bourgeoisie to the limit every moment to bring them to the revolution. Yes, Marx supported the bourgeoisie in the struggle with absolutism, but he supported it with whips and kicks. . . . From this, it is clear, comrades, that at the present time in Russia it is necessary to begin, not where Marx began, but where Marx ended his politics in 1848: with the clearly expressed independent class politics of the proletariat. . . . The Russian proletariat, in its actions, has to show that between 1848 and 1907 a half century of capitalist development has occurred, and, from the point of this development, taken as a whole, we are not at the beginning but at the end of this development. He has to show that the Russian Revolution is not just the last act in a series of bourgeois revolutions of the 19th century, but rather the forerunner of a new series of future proletarian revolutions in which the conscious proletariat and its vanguard, the Social-Democracy, are destined for the historic role of leader. (Applause.)"

So sharply did Luxemburg express the class nature of the revolution, that what emerged was the relationship not only of the proletariat to the peasantry, but of the Russian to the international revolution. One could see, as well, the germ of future revolutions within the present Revolution. What had been clear from the very start of Bloody Sunday when the Tsar's army fired on that first mass demonstration on Jan. 9, 1905, was that Rosa Luxemburg was developing the question of continuous revolution.

And eight days before that mass demonstration, at the fall of Port Arthur to the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese war, Lenin had written:

"Yes, the autocracy is weakened. The most skeptical of the skeptics are beginning to believe in the revolution. General belief in revolution is already the beginning of revolution. . . . The Russian proletariat will see to it that the serious revolutionary onset is sustained and extended."

It is necessary to stress: revolution was in the air. Not only had both Mehring and Kautsky used the expression "permanent revolution" in the year 1905, but so had even the most right-wing of Mensheviks, Marty.



nov. A good part of Trotsky's speech at the 1907 London Congress was devoted precisely to Martynov, contrasting the difference in his 1905 and 1907 positions. Lenin, of course, had seriously analyzed the revolutionary aspect of "the democratic revolution" going over "to the socialist revolution. We are for continuous revolution, and we shall not stop halfway" (Sept. 14, 1905). Ten days later he extended it even to Europe: "We shall make the Russian Revolution the prologue to the European socialist revolution."

Nevertheless, it is true that it was Leon Trotsky alone, at the conclusion of the 1905 Revolution, when he was in prison, who created out of the 1905 events what later came to be known as a theory of Permanent Revolution. At the Congress, itself, however, that subject was not on the agenda. No whiff of it came from Trotsky, although Lenin, glad that Trotsky was voting for the Bolshevik resolution on the relationship to the bourgeois parties, said: "Quite apart from the question of 'uninterrupted revolution,' we have here solidarity on fundamental points in the question of the attitude toward bourgeois parties."

With much later hindsight, Trotsky referred to the affinity of Rosa Luxemburg's view to his on the question of Permanent Revolution in *My Life*:<sup>10</sup> "On the question of the so-called Permanent Revolution, Rosa took the same stand as I did." At the Congress itself he said: "I can testify with pleasure that the point of view that Luxemburg developed in the name of the Polish delegation is very close to mine which I have defended and continue to defend. If between us, there is a difference, it's a difference of shade, and not of political direction. Our thought moves in one and the same materialistic analysis."<sup>11</sup>

But Luxemburg had not spoken on the question of Permanent Revolution, which was nowhere on the agenda. There is no doubt that, in speaking about the relationship of Marxists to the bourgeois parties, she was developing ideas of the dialectics of revolution and the role of the proletariat as vanguard. But it is more likely that what Trotsky suddenly found an affinity to in her speech as Polish delegate was her taking issue with the Bolsheviks as well as Mensheviks. She had said: "True genuine Marxism is very far from a one-sided over-estimation of parliamentarianism as well as from a mechanistic view of revolution and over-estimation of the so-called armed uprising. On this point my Polish comrades and I differ from the views of the Bolshevik comrades."

She, however, did not at all like the idea that the Mensheviks and other non-Bolsheviks suddenly applauded her. Which is why she decided to re-emphasize, in her concluding remarks, what she thought was the essence of her speech:<sup>12</sup>

"Truthfully speaking, the brooha into which my critics fell just because I tried seriously to illuminate the relationship of the proletariat to the

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<sup>9</sup> See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 54. See also Ivar Spector, *The First Russian Revolution: Its Impact on Asia* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962). This study, which develops the impact of the 1905 Revolution on Iran, China and India, is also important for its Appendices, which reproduce the original "Petition of the Workers and Residents of St. Petersburg for Submission to Nicholas II on January 9, 1905" as well as the Soviet article on the 20th anniversary of that Revolution by M. Pavlovitch. For the relationship of that revolution and its impact on the 1979 revolution in Iran, see my Political-Philosophic Letter, "Iran: Unfolding of, and Contradictions in, Revolution (Detroit: News & Letters, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> Minutes of Fifth Congress, op. cit., p. 397.

<sup>12</sup> Excerpted from Minutes of Fifth Congress, op. cit., pp. 432-437.

bourgeoisie in our revolution seems odd to me. After all, there is no doubt that precisely this relationship, precisely the definition, above all, of the position of the proletariat in relationship to its social antipode, the bourgeoisie, constitutes the core of the dispute, is the crucial axis of proletarian politics around which the relationship to all other classes and groups, to the petty-bourgeois, to the peasantry, and so forth, is crystallized. And once we conclude that the bourgeoisie in our revolution is not playing and cannot play the role of leader of the proletarian movement, then, in its very essence, it follows that their politics is counter-revolutionary, whereas we, in accordance with this, declare that the proletariat must look to itself, not as an assistant of bourgeois liberalism, but as vanguard to the revolutionary movement, which defines its politics independent of all other classes, deriving it exclusively from its own class tasks and interests . . . .

. . . Plekhanov said: 'For us Marxists the working peasant, as he appears in the contemporary commodity capitalist milieu, represents only one of the many petty, independent commodity producers, and, therefore, not without reason, we consider him to be part of the petty bourgeoisie.' From this follows that the peasant, as petty bourgeois, is a reactionary social element of society, and he who considers him revolutionary, idolizes him and subordinates the independent politics of the proletariat to the influence of the petty-bourgeoisie.

"Such an argument is, after all, only a classic example of the infamous metaphysical thinking according to the formula: 'Yea, Yes; Nay, Nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.'<sup>13</sup> The bourgeoisie is a revolutionary class — and to say anything more than that cometh of evil. The peasantry is a reactionary class and to say anything more than that cometh of evil . . . .<sup>14</sup>

"First of all, to try to make a mechanical transposition of the schema about the peasantry as a petty bourgeois reactionary layer onto the peasantry in a revolutionary period is, without doubt, a perversion of the historical dialectic. The role of the peasantry and the relationship of the proletariat to it is defined the same way as the role of the bourgeoisie, that is, not according to subjective desires and aims of those classes, but according to the objective situation. The Russian bourgeoisie is, despite its oral declamations and printed liberal programs, objectively a reactionary class, because its interests in the present social and historical situation compel a quick liquidation of the revolutionary movement by concluding a rotten compromise with Absolutism. As for the peasantry, despite the confusion and contradictions in its demands, despite the fogginess in its multi-colored aims — it is, in the present revolution, an objectively revolutionary factor because it has placed the question of land overturn on the agenda of the revolution, and because it thereby brings out the very question which is insoluble within the framework of bourgeois society, and which therefore, by its very nature, has to be solved outside of that framework.

"It may be that just as the waves of revolution will recede, just as soon as the land question finds, in the end, one or another solution in the spirit of bourgeois private property, substantial layers of the Russian peasantry will again be transformed into a clearly reactionary petty bourgeois party in the form of a peasant union like the Bavarian Bauernbund. But so long as the revolution is continuing, so long as the agrarian question is not solved, the peasant is not only a political rock against Absolutism but a social Sphinx, and therefore constitutes an independent ferment for revolution, giving it, together with the urban proletarian movement, that wide expanse which relates to a spontaneous national movement. From this flows the socialist utopian coloration of the peasant movement in Russia, which is not at all the fruit of the artificial grafting and demagoguery of the Social Revolutionary Party, but that which accompanies all great peasant uprisings of bourgeois society. It is enough to remember the Peasant Wars in Germany and the name of Thomas Muenzer."

Luxemburg also took issue with Plekhanov who had said: "Comrade Lieber asked Comrade Rosa Luxemburg on which chair is she sitting. Naive question! Comrade Rosa Luxemburg is not sitting on any chair. She, like Raphael's Madonna, reclines on clouds . . . lost in day

<sup>13</sup> Luxemburg is quoting from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, 5:27.

<sup>14</sup> Luxemburg is here being sarcastic about the way the "authoritative" Plekhanov had quoted that section of the Communist Manifesto where Marx speaks about the bourgeoisie being a revolutionary class in the overthrow of feudalism as if that was applicable to the 1905 Russian Revolution.

dreams . . ." But, in this case, it is better to quote Lenin who had risen to his feet on that point, not for purposes of defending Luxemburg, who needed no defense, but to stress what a miserable evasion of the whole point of social revolution was Plekhanov's speech:

"Plekhanov spoke about Rosa Luxemburg, picturing her as a Madonna reclining on clouds. What could be finer! Elegant, gallant and effective polemics . . . But I would nevertheless like to ask Plekhanov: Madonna or not—but what do you think about the substance of the question? (Applause from the Center and the Bolsheviks.) After all, it is a pretty bad thing to have to resort to a Madonna in order to avoid analysing the point at issue. Madonna or not — what must our attitude be towards 'a Duma with full powers'?"<sup>15</sup>

And, indeed, there was a great deal more involved than just the topic under discussion, because what they were really discussing was: who were the genuine forces of revolution — the proletariat and the peasantry or the bourgeoisie? Lenin had already written about the "in-born creativeness" of the masses, had called the Soviets "embryos of revolutionary power," and in singling out the proletariat, considered it not only force but reason:<sup>16</sup>

"The point is that it is precisely the revolutionary periods that are distinguished for their greater breadth, greater wealth, greater intelligence, greater and more systematic activity, greater audacity and vividness of historical creativeness compared with periods of philistine, Cadet, reformist progress . . . They shout about the disappearance of sense and reason, when the picking of pieces of parliamentary bills by all sorts of bureaucrats and liberal 'penny-a-liners' gives way to a period of direct political activity by the 'common people,' who in their simple way directly and immediately destroy the organs of oppression of the people, seize power, appropriate for themselves what was considered to be the property of all sorts of plunderers of the people—in a word, precisely when the sense and reason of millions of downtrodden people is awakening, not only for reading books, but for action, for living human action, for historical creativeness."

And for Rosa Luxemburg, too, it was not only "the

proletariat supported by the peasantry" but, as we shall see from her 1906 pamphlet on the General Strike, she was already posing totally new questions of spontaneity and organization—and not only about this revolution, but future revolutions. That, in fact, it was a question of wars and revolutions became ever clearer in that pivotal year of 1907, as they all prepared to go to the International Congress in Stuttgart in August.

At that Congress, what, not accidentally, became known as the "Luxemburg-Lenin Anti-War Amendment" (though it was not only Lenin but also Trotsky and Plekhanov who helped to formulate it) was meant to issue a warning to the bourgeoisie that, if they dared to start a war, the masses of Social Democratic workers would oppose it. As Luxemburg put it in her speech to the International: "Our agitation in case of war is not only aimed at ending that war, but at using the war to hasten the general collapse of class rule."

In that same month of August, 1907, just before the Stuttgart Congress met, Luxemburg was also involved in the International Socialist Women's Conference. There she reported on the work of the International Socialist Bureau; she was the only woman member of that august body. Urging the women to keep their center for the Socialist Women's Movement in Stuttgart, and stressing the importance of having a voice of their own, i.e. Gleichheit, she concluded: "I can only admire Comrade Zetkin that she has taken this burden of work upon herself."<sup>17</sup> In a word, far from Rosa Luxemburg having no interest in the so-called "Woman Question", and far from Zetkin allegedly having no interest outside of that question, the truth is that both of them, as well as Kollontai and Balabanoff and Roland-Holst, were determined to build up a women's liberation movement that concentrated not only on organizing women workers but on having them develop as leaders, as decision-makers, as independent Marxist revolutionaries.

Through that Fifth Congress of the RSDLP in London when all tendencies were discussing the 1905 Revolution, 1907 let us in fact be witness to the dress rehearsal for 1917. And just as that Russian Congress was followed by the International Congress in Stuttgart where Luxemburg-Lenin attempted, with revolutionary anti-war politics, to prepare the proletariat to meet the challenge of the coming war, so what preceded the International Congress—the 11th International Socialist Women's Conference—proved that a new revolutionary force—women—had arisen which, in embryo, would become the genuine center of international anti-war activity at the very moment when the parent organization itself, the German Social Democracy, would collapse once the imperialist war broke out. That pivotal year, 1907, also was the year when Rosa Luxemburg, as brilliant teacher of theory at the Party school, would get to develop her magnum opus, *Accumulation of Capital*. And because that was the year when she began "to apply" to a technologically advanced land what she had learned from the Russian Revolution—a development which was to lead to the breakup with Karl Kautsky in 1910—it is imperative that we now turn to her mass strike pamphlet and grapple with that totally new phenomenon, the concrete relationship of spontaneity to organization.

<sup>15</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, p. 471.  
<sup>16</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. 7, p. 261. This 1906 pamphlet, *The Victory of the Cadets and the Tasks of the Workers' Party*, remained so integral to Lenin that he quoted large sections of it, after power, in 1920, in an article, "A Contribution to the Question of Dictatorship."

<sup>17</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2 (Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1974) for her speech to the International Conference of Socialist Women held Aug. 17-19, 1907, first published in *Verweise*, No. 192, on Aug. 18, 1907. See also Alexandra Kollontai, *Women Workers Struggle for Their Rights* (England: Falling Wall Press, 1973); and Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).