

# THE BREAK WITH KAUTSKY, 1910-1911: From Mass Strike Theory to Crisis over Morocco- and Hushed-Up 'Woman Question'

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(A draft chapter from a new work-in-progress, Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution.)

## I SPONTANEITY AND ORGANIZATION

ONCE SPONTANEITY HAD TAKEN the form of an outright revolution, Luxemburg's usual sensitivity to the phenomenon took on the dimension of a universal, the method of revolution. As she had written to Luise Kautsky early in 1906, soon after she landed in Poland in December, 1905: "The mere general strike alone has ceased to play the role it once had. Now nothing but a direct, general fight on the street can bring about the decision . . ."

By mid-August, as she was working on *The Mass Strike, The Political Party and the Trade Unions*,<sup>2</sup> it was clear that, far from the pamphlet being restricted to the topics in the title, she was, in fact, beginning to question not just the conservative trade union leadership, but the relation of Marxist leadership to spontaneity. She had always been highly responsive to proletarian acts of spontaneity. What was different this time was that the 1905 Revolution had disclosed a totally new relationship also to Marxist leadership. The most excitingly new phenomenon was that the so-called backward Russian workers proved themselves far in advance of those in the technologically advanced countries, Germany particularly. Moreover, the Russian Revolution was not just a national happening. In the impact both in the East and in the West, it had displayed an elemental force and reason of world scope. Luxemburg at once began working out its application to Germany.

In a word, spontaneity did not mean just instinctive action as against conscious direction. Quite the contrary. Spontaneity was a driving force, not only of revolution but of the vanguard leadership, keeping it left. As Luxemburg expressed it in her pamphlet:

"The element of spontaneity, as we have seen, plays a great part in all Russian mass strikes without exception, be it as a driving force or as a restraining influence . . . In short, in the mass strikes in Russia, the element of spontaneity plays such a predominant part, not because the Russian proletariat are 'uneducated', but because revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them."

In working out the dialectic of the mass strike, Luxemburg moved from her characteristic search for "root cause" to concentrating, instead, on the interrelationship of cause and effect. History had shifted the question of the general strike from its anarchist non-political "origins" to its genuine political nature. The 1905 Revolution actually revealed, Luxemburg maintained, "the historical liquidation of anarchism." Marxist leadership of the general strike signified the unity of economics and politics.

She traced through the strikes in Russia from 1896 to 1905 and concluded: "Throughout the whole of the spring of 1905 and into the middle of the summer there fermented throughout the whole of the immense empire an uninterrupted economic strike of almost the entire proletariat against capital . . ." Nor was it only a question of the general strike embracing the entire proletariat. For the first time she was impressed even with what she disliked most—the lumpen proletariat. The revolution irradiated the genius of all people, and the revolutionary masses in motion, "even knocked at the gates of the military barracks."

Luxemburg proceeded to show the effectiveness of the strikes: how the fight for an 8-hour day meant its immediate institution, even before the outbreak of the

revolution in January, 1905. The oil workers in Baku won the 8-hour day in December, 1904; the printing workers in Samara in January, 1905; the sugar workers in Kiev in May, 1905. By the time of the October Days and the second general strike, the economic struggle formed "a broad background of the revolution from which, in ceaseless reciprocal action with the political agitation and the external events of the revolution, there ever arise, here and there, now isolated explosions and now great general actions of the proletariat . . ." Naturally, the question of the soldiers' revolts in Kronstadt, Libau, Vladivostok were singled out to show the breadth and depth of the revolution; "Within a week the 8-hour day prevailed in every factory and workshop in Petersburg . . ."

Once one recognizes that this was the essence of what Luxemburg considered to be the genius of revolution, then it is clear that—with her specific historic examples of how many mass strikes, what duration they ran, and how they were transformed from an economic to a general political strike which led to "a general popular uprising"—she was actually developing a strategy of revolution. Moreover, she was developing it not only on the basis of Russia, a "backward" country, but also with eyes fixed on technologically advanced Germany. Clearly, it was no longer a question just of experience, much less just a national experience, but a universal phenomenon that was so little separated from any national boundaries that it eliminated the difference between national and international as well as the difference between theory and practice.

In dwelling in detail on the mass strike in October, November and December, Luxemburg not only emphasized how "the workers threw themselves with fiery zeal into the waves of political freedom," but stressed especially the fact that the proletariat's intellectual development was boundless: "the most precious, because lasting, thing in this rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat." By the time Luxemburg came to the question of organization, of daily political meetings, of formation of clubs, she dealt with the question of trade unionism as something the new force of workers had "immediately taken in hand." What is especially striking about that new force "taking unions in hand" is that it was concerned not only with the organized but with the unorganized workers.

Put differently, Luxemburg was against the trade union leadership not only because they were conservative, but because they were concerned only with organized workers, whereas the unorganized workers, she showed, were every bit as revolutionary and important. And just as she included even the lumpen proletariat as likewise affected by the storm of revolution, so she drew into the totality and genius of spontaneity everyone from the lumpen proletariat to the artist as being in this great whirlwind of revolution. What, amazingly, was not singled out to the point of making it a universal was the soviet form of organization. However, the whole question of organization—be it the small Marxist organization that became a mass organization literally overnight, a mass organization, or totally new forms of organization like the soviets—had henceforth become inseparable from mass activity.

From 1906—and all the way until the break with Kautsky, 1910-11—what Luxemburg singled out was the general strike—the interrelationship of economic and political work which "formed a broad background of the revolution . . ." The point of the historical tracing of strikes from 1896 to 1905, and the detailed examination of the actual 1905-1906 revolution, led her to the conclusion that the mass strike is:

"The method of motion of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in revolution . . . in a word: the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political center to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilization of the soil for the economic struggle. Cause and effect here continually change places . . ."

<sup>1</sup> From letter to Luise Kautsky, Jan. 2, 1906 included in Rosa Luxemburg: *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, edited by Luise Kautsky and translated from the German by Louis P. Lochner (New York: Robert McElrath & Co., 1925).

<sup>2</sup> This 1906 pamphlet, *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften*, is included in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974), pp. 90-170. The pamphlet was first translated into English by Patrick Levin (Detroit: Marxist Educational Society, 1925). For those passages which were quoted by Rosa Luxemburg in her 1930 article, "Theory and Practice," I have used the translation of David Wills.

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Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin walking to the 1910 Magdeburg Congress of the German Social-Democratic Party.

Finally, the events in Russia show us that the mass strike is inseparable from the revolution."

Finally, she approached the question of applying the lessons of the Russian Revolution to the German scene: "A year of revolution has therefore given the Russian proletariat that 'training' which 30 years of parliamentary and trade union struggles cannot artificially give to the German proletariat." No doubt she did not then (1906) know that her climactic ending — that "the masses will be the active chorus and the leaders only the 'speaking parts,' the interpreters of the will of the masses" — was actually laying the ground, not alone for her usual fights with the trade union leaders, but for one with the established German Social-Democratic — that is, Marxist — leadership. But, in fact, this was what happened in 1910. And since in that concrete period and place we will best see both the ramifications of her 1906 general strike thesis, as well as her sensitivity to the smell of opportunism in the highest levels of "orthodox Marxism", it is to 1910 that we now turn.

## II UNIFIED REVOLUTIONARY THEORY —PRACTICE VS. "TWO STRATEGIES"

LUXEMBURG CONSIDERED THE interaction of economic strikes and political demonstrations to be a pre-revolutionary situation. 1910 was the year she felt it opportune to begin applying to Germany the lessons of the General Mass Strike she had drawn from the Russian Revolution. Not only was it a year when a new wave of strikes broke out in Germany, but on Feb. 4, when the government published the draft of the so-called electoral "reform" bill, with its three-class-voting limitations, there was mobilization of mass opposition. Every single Sunday during the months of February and March there were massive demonstrations for equal suffrage. At the same time, the waves of strikes that began the year continued and expanded.

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Carl Schorske shows that no less than 370,000 workers were involved in work stoppages that year.<sup>3</sup>

In mid-February, Luxemburg had written an analysis of the current situation in relationship to the principle of the General Mass Strike. She entitled it "What Next?"<sup>4</sup> and submitted it to the Party paper, *Vorwärts*. It was returned to her with a note saying that the "Executive" had instructed the paper not to carry on agitation for the mass strike at present when what was most important was the electoral campaign. Luxemburg, on the contrary, thought that it was precisely the present situation, both on the question of the struggle for electoral reform and on the question of strikes, that made discussion of the General Mass Strike relevant. She resubmitted the article, this time to the theoretical organ *Neue Zeit*, of which, in name, she was deputy editor. Where, heretofore, Luxemburg considered the prestigious Party School and her theoretical work in it to be so important that she allowed nothing to divert her from it, this time the priority went to the need for agitation. She took two months off from teaching at the Party School to go barnstorming throughout Germany, her talks both on suffrage and on work stoppages naturally included the idea of a General Mass Strike. The opposition to Luxemburg that had opened in the top echelons of the German Social-Democracy (GSD) was revealed in some curious ways. Thus, while all the papers in Frankfurt, for example, were reporting Luxemburg's speeches one way, *Vorwärts* struck out one sentence of the report, to wit: "The speaker evoked the enthusiastic approval of the participants when she advocated propaganda for the mass strike." Luxemburg, meanwhile, was doing her reporting to Luise Kautsky. One letter dated March 15, 1910, described how many meetings she addressed, how large they were, and how enthusiastically she had been met by the last one which had numbered 1,000.

At the end of the two months' lecture tour, Luxemburg returned to Berlin. There she found a note from Kautsky, as editor of *Neue Zeit*, that said her article was "important" and "very fine," but he suggested that the paragraph propagandizing for a republic be cut. Meanwhile, he was polemicizing against her views. She at once saw to it that her article was published in *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. As for the paragraph on the question of a republic, she had developed it into a separate article, and had that published as well. Which didn't mean that she would let Kautsky off the hook for not publishing her article, much less for starting a

3 Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1903-1917* (Harvard, 1955).

4 "Was Weiter?" *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 2, pp. 285-299, is variously referred to as "What Next?" by Neft; "What Further?" by Schorske; and "The Next Step" by Lockie. It was Robert Lockie who finally published it in English in his *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), p. 148. To complicate things still further, one of Karl Kautsky's articles in opposition to Luxemburg is called "Was Nun?" ("What Now?")

Luxemburg hit back with everything she could, entitling her article the same as Kautsky's.<sup>6</sup> First she quoted from her own pamphlet on the mass strike:

"So the mass strike shows itself to be no specifically Russian product, arising from absolutism, but a universal form of proletarian class struggle resulting from the present stage of capitalist development and class relations. From this standpoint, the three bourgeois revolutions—the great French revolution, the German March revolution, and the present Russian one—form an onrunning chain of development in which the prosperity and the end of the bourgeois century are reflected . . . The present revolution realizes, in the special circumstances of absolutist Russia, the universal results of international capitalist development; and in this it seems less a final posterity of the old bourgeois revolutions than a forerunner of a new series of proletarian revolutions in the West. Just because it has so inexcusably delayed its bourgeois revolution, the most backward land shows ways and methods of extended class struggle for the proletariat of Germany and the most advanced capitalist lands."

Then she quoted Kautsky in 1910 portraying how "chaotic" the peasant uprisings of 1905 were and how "inapplicable" they were to Germany. She contrasted these 1910 statements to what he had written in 1907, holding that it was a reversal of the truth as to both facts and theory.

Kautsky, she continued, had written in his "Theory and Practice" article that he was re-establishing true Marxist dialectics "against the distortion of the dialectic totality through an over-emphasis on the limited and purely political aim." Luxemburg exposed Kautsky's claim as follows:

"The picture of chaotic, 'amorphous, primitive' strikes by the Russian workers . . . is a blooming fantasy . . . These strikes, from which as bold a creation as the famous Petersburg Council of Workers' Delegates was born for unified leadership of the entire movement in the giant empire—these Russian strikes and mass strikes were so far from being 'amorphous and primitive' that, in boldness, strength, class solidarity, tenacity, material gains, progressive aims and organizational results, they could safely be set alongside any 'western European' trade union movement."

In fact, Luxemburg insisted, the so-called two strategies of "attrition" and "overthrow" for which Kautsky was making that "crude contrast between revolutionary Russia and parliamentary Western Europe" was "nothing but a rationalization of Kautsky's refusal to favor a mass strike." Furthermore, she continued, spontaneity in the Russian mass strikes was not lacking in "a rational" strike leadership as Kautsky now claimed, but in fact, both as rational leadership and as spontaneous strikes, the General Mass Strike in Russia achieved more, concretely, for the Russian proletariat, than any "plan" of the GSD.

In her "Theory and Practice" article, she stressed that the so-called "two strategies," far from being "historically" justifiable, were a total deviation from the burning questions of the here and now—the 1910 strikes and demonstrations, as well as the preparations for the 1912 election. Not only was the real issue whether or not the GSD should, under the concrete circumstances of the day, agitate for a General Mass Strike, but with Kautsky the whole relationship of theory to practice was thereby made very nearly irreconcilable:

"Heaven-storming theory — and 'attrition' in practice; most revolutionary perspectives in the clouds—and Reichstag mandate as sole perspective in reality . . . It seems that 'theory' does not merely 'stride forward' more slowly than 'practice'; alas, from time to time it also goes tumbling backwards . . . Reichstag elections and mandate—that is Moses and the prophets!"

Finally, with her article, "Attrition or Collision?"<sup>7</sup> Luxemburg moved in, if not for the kill, certainly for the denouement of Kautsky's "history cutting." Supposing, she wrote, that we would see something relevant for our day in those two strategies in ancient Rome; it still would remain a fact that the way Kautsky tells

polemic against her views without having published them.

Kautsky had opened up the floodgates of a dispute with Luxemburg which was to take up no less than one-fifth of the space of the most prestigious journal in the German Social-Democracy, which in this case meant established world Marxism. What it presaged was the birth of a new wave of opportunism that soon led to the break with Kautsky. Luxemburg was out to expose that it was not just the trade union leaders and reformists who were opportunists. She was out to show that opportunism was eating at the very vitals of the Marxist leadership: the German Social-Democracy.

To this day, even those revolutionaries, who, armed with hindsight, do see that the dispute between Luxemburg and Kautsky first exposed the abysmal opportunism at the top which was to lead to nothing short of the Party's betrayal, still act as if Luxemburg's present stand was "accidental." The truth is that Luxemburg sensed opportunism four years ahead of all others, Lenin included. The truth is that long before the Party's outright betrayal at the outbreak of World War I, Luxemburg saw in the Social-Democracy's slavish parliamentarianism so great a diversion from the revolutionary road that she felt compelled not to let go of the "lactic" of general strike until all those who opposed it were shown to be opportunists. To try to deflate the dispute as if it were a mere "personal matter," and say that it was simply a question that Luxemburg felt "insulted" at Kautsky's refusal to publish her article, is to blind oneself to just how historic, what a great determinant for world Marxist development, was Luxemburg's break with Kautsky.

Luxemburg's writings in that period demonstrate that, far from the "Luxemburg affair" causing the disturbance in the GSD, it was the objective situation, both the actual strikes and the actual struggles for electoral reform, that caused the crisis. Her position rightly was: why let anyone, even if he were internationally recognized as the "greatest Marxist," gild the lily of parliamentarianism with "heaven-storming theory" when, in fact, that theory was nothing but a rationale for opportunist actions?

As was his wont in any debate, Kautsky was trotting out a brand new theory. The so-called "strategy of attrition" (*Ermattungsstrategie*) and "strategy of overthrow" (*Niederwerfungsstrategie*), culled from ancient Roman history, were now used with a great show of erudition—but in a very different form than those "two strategies" were introduced first in 1907 in Kautsky's *Social Revolution* and in 1909 in his *Road to Power*. Now (1910) in his "Theory and Practice" article, said Luxemburg, these same theories which had been used in favor of the 1905 Revolution, had become "a frightfully fundamental revision" of the 1905 Resolution passed at the Jena Congress which recognized the general strike as the method of revolution and not only for Russia.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It was this Resolution that she used as proof of German proletarian solidarity with the Russian proletariat, in her greetings to the 1907 Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDRP). See Appendix for my translation of the entire speech.

<sup>6</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, "Theory and Practice", *Neue Zeit*, July 22 and 29, 1910, is found in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 2, pp. 378-420. The first English translation of this article by David Wolff has been published by News & Letters and can be ordered for \$2 by writing to 2832 E. Grand Blvd., Detroit, Mich. 48211.

<sup>7</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, "Attrition or Collision?" is included in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 2, pp. 344-377. A translation of the section on Fabius Cunctator is included in the N&L publication of "Theory and Practice" (see fn. 6).



Nama and Herero guerrillas resisted German imperialism in German S.W. Africa (1894-97). The center figure (seated) is the great Nama guerrilla leader — Jacob Morenga, who was murdered by the Cape Mounted in the Kalahari Desert, 1908.

history, it is totally false. The great historian, Mommsen, has long since shown that the inventor of the theory of attrition, Fabius Cunctator, became "famous" for his "masterly inaction" theory since, far from winning any battles against Hannibal, he earned such infamy that the Romans decided not to suffer any longer from his generalship and had him replaced.

As she had already shown in both her "Theory and Practice" and her "Attrition or Collision?" articles, this stretching into Roman history—which was supposedly more relevant to the 1910 dispute than were her articles on General Mass Strike—was not only irrelevant but totally false. All it did was to lead Kautsky into glorifying German history as a "century of Prussian glory." As she pointed out in "Our Struggle for Power":

"And now let's take a look at the wars which Germany has fought in the meantime. The first was the 'glorious' Chinese war, whose slogan ran: Prisoners will not be taken, etc. Then in 1904 came the even more glorious Herero war. The Hereros are a Negro people who for centuries have clung to their native soil, and made it fertile with their sweat. Their 'crime' lay in this: that they would not spinelessly surrender themselves to the rapacious rubber barons of industry, to the white slave owners; that they defended their homeland against foreign invaders. In this war as well, German arms richly covered themselves with—renown. Herr von Trotha issued the well-known general order: every Negro found armed will be shot down—no quarter will be given. The men were shot; women and children by the hundreds were hunted into the burning desert, and the wreath of their parched bones bleached in the murderous Omaheke—a glory garland of German arms!"<sup>8</sup>

### III "THE MOROCCO INCIDENT"

EVER SINCE SHE HAD LANDED in Germany, back in 1893, and plunged into the debate against reformism, the question that kept cropping up was what we now call the "Third World." No matter what the year, no matter what the place, no matter whether it was a question of theory or of practice, her hawk's eye kept following advanced capitalism's extension into imperialism. As we saw in the first chapter, she had written to Jogiches in 1899 (and, in fact, it was published in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on March 13, 1899) that a new shift in global politics had been taking place ever since 1895, when Japan attacked China. Moreover it wasn't only a question of Japan's imperialist intrusion. There was the German imperialist venture, the Anglo-Boer war, the U.S. intrusion into Latin America.

And here we were in 1910 and she found no one less than Kautsky lauding a "century of Prussian glory" as if it wasn't personified by Wilhelm II's exhortation to the German soldiers in that "Hunn campaign" to emulate their ancestors the Huns and teach the Chinese a lesson in "rightfulness." The Chinese didn't forget. But they remembered it as an anti-imperialist popular uprising that broke out in northern China in 1899!

In 1900, at the very first Congress Luxembourg attended when she became a German citizen, she had

already projected a need for anti-colonial action. On May 15, 1902, she had an article in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on imperialist maneuvers worldwide, specifically Martinique. In 1906, with the first "Morocco incident" she at once raised questions of anti-militarism and anti-imperialism.

As we see, prescience of the deep opportunism in Karl Kautsky, when all still considered him the authoritative voice of Marxism, was by no means limited to the question of the General Mass Strike, much less that of the question of suffrage, but was integral to the very concept of what is a proletarian revolution.

No doubt the GSD leadership thought they had brought her down to size when the Congress that year rejected her resolution "that the fight for suffrage in Prussia can be waged to victory only through great determined mass action in which all means must be employed, including the political general strike if necessary." But the 1910 battles with Kautsky and Bebel had no sooner ended than it once again became clear to her that the question of fighting opportunism was not only a matter of domestic policies, but of international policy.

On July 1, 1911, the German gunboat *Panther* sailed into Morocco. The first letters of the International Socialist Bureau that Luxembourg received as a member of that Bureau showed that the leadership was a great deal more concerned with the electoral battles going on in Germany, than with Germany's imperial act. Indeed, not only was no struggle against their government proposed at the moment, and not only was the news presented as if peace rather than war was in the air, but it was clear that the only thing that worried the GSD was that any opposition might harm the electoral

<sup>8</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, "Our Struggle for Power", *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 2, pp. 530-541.

<sup>9</sup> On May 29, 1913, in an article called "Die weltpolitische Lage" ("The World Political Situation") in *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, she wrote: "Then came the Hunn campaign in China, to which Wilhelm II sent the soldiers with the slogan: Quarter will not be given, prisoners will not be taken. The soldiers were to wreak havoc like the Huns so that for a thousand years no Chinese would dare cast quivering, envious eyes on a German." *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 3, p. 212.





Karl Liebknecht addressing an anti-war demonstration in 1910.

victory they counted on for the 1912 elections.

Luxemburg published the "private" letter and her own analysis in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of July 24, 1911. When more letters and leaflets, each one more ambivalent than the one before, continued to flow her way, she wrote the sharpest of all critiques, "Unser Marckto-Flughblatt," which appeared in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of Aug. 28, 1911 — after the executive's manifesto had been published in *Vorwärts* of Aug. 9, 1911. What she criticized was the pusillanimity, not to mention belatedness of their manifesto for any serious struggle against the war-mongering bourgeoisie. Instead of a serious Marxist analysis of a burning issue, she said, they were getting "Social-Democratic political twaddle." By now the question was more than "an international policy in general, and the Morocco affair in particular." What was imperative for German Marxists was an expose as to how the "Morocco affair" was related to the "internal development of German militarism . . . and Germany's urge for world power." She concluded:

"Let us add that in the whole of the leaflet there is not one word about the colonized nations, not a word about their rights, interests, and sufferings because of international policy. The leaflet several times speaks of 'England's splendid colonial policy' without mentioning the periodic starvation and spread of typhoid in India, extermination of the Australian aborigines, and the horse whip on the backs of the Egyptian peasants."

Whereupon, all the furies descended upon her for "breach of discipline," for "diskoyakty" and "indiscretion" for having published a letter that had been meant only for the eyes of the ISB.

By the time the 1911 Congress opened in September the Executive Committee tried reducing the question of what she did, and when she did it, as if it were only a question of making public what had been sent to her in "private." Yet so great still was the name of the GSD, and so far distant and unrelated to organizational growth was the question of imperialism, that the leadership did succeed in diverting attention from the political analysis to the question of "a breach of discipline."

## IV TONE-DEAFNESS TO MALE CHAUVINISM

**I**N THE PROCESS OF THE DEBATE on the so-called "breach of discipline," male chauvinism had raised its ugly head, as we will shortly see. That it was not only male chauvinism's ugly head, but that of

imperialism which the German Social-Democracy was not up to confronting, as Luxemburg rightly insisted, is seen clearest at the meeting of the International Socialist Bureau in Zurich, on Sept. 23, 1911, the week following the Congress in Jena. There, with international representatives like Lenin present, they withdrew their motion to censure Luxemburg; but managed, with the support of others, like Plekhanov, to contain the discussion over the Morocco crisis. Thus, when Lenin came to Luxemburg's defense, Zinoviev reported, "the thunder and lightning descended upon him as well. Vladimir Ilich appealed to Plekhanov . . . but . . . Com. Plekhanov replied that the ear should not grow beyond the forehead, that we (Russians) should keep silent; that when we had millions of members as the German Social-Democracy had, then we should also be considered. But for the time being we were merely 'poor relations.' After listening to Plekhanov, Vladimir Ilich slammed the door and left the meeting."<sup>10</sup>

The Minutes of the GSD Congress in Jena<sup>11</sup> the week before tell the whole story; it was there where the male chauvinism dominated the discussion over what they called "the Morocco incident."

It isn't that there wasn't also some humor in the discussion, for as Luxemburg put it: "When the party executive asserts something, I would never dare not to believe it, for as a faithful party member the old saying holds for me: *Credo quia absurdum*—I believe it precisely because it is absurd." And later she turned to Bebel, whom she accused of hearing only with his "right ear" (i.e. from the most conservative benches, where the Baden delegates sat): "In all my life, I have never seen a picture of such pathetic confusion. (Laughter. Bebel shouts: Now, now!) This is why I am not cross with you for your accusations. I forgive you and offer you the fatherly advice (Bebel: The motherly advice. Great amusement . . .): do better in the future."

Even when there were hisses for Luxemburg's attitude to Bebel, there was also great applause for her anti-militarist stand. Clearly, there was a deep anti-militarist and anti-colonialist feeling in the German Social-Democracy. As Ledebour (who was no friend of Luxemburg's) put it, rising to her defense:

"As I prophesied, a trap was set for Rosa Luxemburg out of the publication of the letter, and they made use of the truly unjustified over-haste with which she criticized the leaflet. All that is being used to disguise the real heart of the matter. Com. Luxemburg has frequently come into conflict with me . . . we will come into conflict even more often . . . (but) the mass demonstrations against war and the war-mongers such as have taken place are not the achievement of Muller and the executive . . . but of Com. Luxemburg, through her critique."

It wasn't for lack of awareness about the pervasive male chauvinism that Luxemburg acted tone-deaf. But so determined was she that nothing should divert from the political issues in dispute that she allowed the leaders to hush up the matter, though it involved her own leadership. It had been her principle always to ignore any sign of male chauvinism, not even letting the word pass her lips. It isn't that she wasn't aware of its existence but she held that since it was due to capitalism, it could be abolished only with the abolition of capitalism. Just as she had learned to live with an underlying anti-Semitism in the Party,<sup>12</sup> so she learned to live with what in our era has been challenged by name—specific-

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Olga Hess Gankin and H. H. Fisher in *The Bolsheviks and the World War* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1940), pp. 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> The quotes which follow were translated from *Protokoll . . . Jena, 1911* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1911).

<sup>12</sup> On the question of anti-Semitism as well as the whole question of how the Dreyfus affair affected the GSD in general and Rosa Luxemburg in particular, see Daniel Guérin's introduction to *Rosa Luxemburg: Le Socialisme ou la France* (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1971). For an English translation of Luxemburg's article, "The Socialist Crisis in France," see *New Internationalist*, July, 1937.

ally, male chauvinism. She took no issue with it, though it stuck out from all over that the polemics against her, now that she disagreed with the core of the orthodox leadership, had an extra sharp edge which no male opponent had to suffer. Here, for example, is a sample of the letters that passed between Bebel and Adler:<sup>13</sup>

"... the poisonous bitch will yet do a lot of damage, all the more because she is as clever as a monkey (blitzgescheit) while on the other hand her sense of responsibility is totally lacking and her only motive is an almost perverse desire for self-justification..." (Victor Adler to August Bebel, Aug. 5, 1910.)

"... with all the wretched female's squirts of poison I wouldn't have the party without her." (Bebel's reply to Adler, Aug. 16, 1910.)

Male chauvinism was far from being just a creeping phenomenon in the established revolutionary socialist movement. Much less was it characteristic only of some rank-and-file members. In a well-documented thesis, "Clara Zetkin: A Left-wing Socialist and Feminist in Wilhelmian Germany,"<sup>14</sup> we see that, on the very same day that Bebel wrote the above letter to Adler (Aug. 16, 1910), he wrote to Karl Kautsky:

"It is an odd thing about women. If their partialities or passions or vanities come anywhere into question and are not given consideration, or, let alone, are injured, then even the most intelligent of them flies off the handle and becomes hostile to the point of absurdity. Love and hate lie side by side, a regulating reason does not exist."

The virulent male chauvinism permeated the whole party including both August Bebel, the author of *Woman and Socialism*, who had created a myth about himself as a veritable feminist, and Karl Kautsky, the main theoretician of the whole International. Thus, after Luxemburg's break with him in 1911, when Zetkin also supported Luxemburg's position, and as they faced an approaching Party Congress in 1913, Kautsky warned Bebel: "the two females and their followers are planning an attack on all central positions." None of this changed the standing of that fundamental text of the socialist women's movement, *Woman and Socialism*, which had gone through innumerable editions.

The myth very nearly continues to this day, and in

<sup>13</sup> Peter Neff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 432.

<sup>14</sup> Karen Honeycutt, Doctoral Thesis for Columbia University, 1975.

any case, in the 1910-11 period, both the authority of the GSD in general and Bebel in particular on the "Woman Question" was unchallenged everywhere in the world at the very time he was co-organizing the campaign against Luxemburg. It is high time to turn to this question now. This is not only because the hushed-up phenomenon of the "Woman Question" is totally unacceptable to women liberationists today, but because it is only today that Marx's very different concept of women's liberation is first being grappled with. It is no accident that only in our own day — 100 years after they were first written — has Marx's very last research, the *Ethnological Notebooks*, been published.<sup>15</sup>

It is therefore only now that we can see that it wasn't only that the "young Marx" in 1844 raised the Man/Woman relationship as a most important pivot in that new continent of thought he was discovering—a "new Humanism"—but that the mature Marx in the very last years of his life, 1880-1883, was engaged in the latest research in ethnology as well as in answering the sharpest question raised on the concrete scene of Russia and on the concrete relationship between the "West" and the "East", that is between the technologically advanced and the most backward countries. That this is also the most relevant question of our day is clear from both the emergence of the Third World and the new questions of world revolution.

The relationship of theory to revolution was a pre-occupation of Luxemburg long before the debate leading to the break with Kautsky. Just as both in 1908 at the Nuremberg Congress where she identified opportunism with hostility to theory as she spoke on the need for the Party School to continue, and in 1910 she related opportunism both to inaction and lack of revolutionary theory, so in 1911, there was no doubt whatever that Luxemburg considered theory the lifeblood of the movement in general and the leadership in particular, but held that the established leadership was quite anemic on the question. She decided that the new crisis caused by the phenomenon of imperialism had to be probed farther, much further.

Here is what she wrote to Konstantin Zetkin in November, 1911: "I want to find the cause of imperialism. I am following up the economic aspects of this concept... It will be a strictly scientific explanation of imperialism and its contradiction."

Her characteristic confidence in the masses and their spontaneity had, as we saw, so deepened with her experience in the 1905 Revolution that she considered leaders simply to be the ones who had "the speaking parts". Since "any mass action once unleashed, must move forward", the masses will also succeed in pushing the lackadaisical leadership forward. And what in the years 1910-11 did the leadership's role turn out to be? We aren't given the answer. Only one thing is clear beyond the shadow of a doubt, and that is that the break with Kautsky and Bebel was irrevocable, though there was no organizational break; the unity of the party remained to her unchangeable. But she kept her distance from the leaders who practiced leadership as if they were government rulers, though they did not have state power.

<sup>15</sup> For a full analysis, see draft chapter published in Jan.-Feb. 1979, *News & Letters*.