luxemburg

socialism or barbarism

The Selected Writings of
Rosa Luxemburg

Edited by Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott

GET POLITICAL

Socialism or Barbarism

www.plutobooks.com

1 **marx & engels**
The Communist Manifesto
Introduction by David Harvey 9780745328461

2 **lenin**
Revolution, Democracy, Socialism
Edited by Paul Le Blanc 9780745327600

3 **sivanandan**
Catching History On The Wing
Foreword by Colin Prescod 9780745328348

4 **fanon**
Black Skin, White Masks
Forewords by Homi K. Bhabha and Ziauddin Sardar 9780745328485

5 **shahak**
Jewish History, Jewish Religion
Forewords by Pappe / Mezvinsky/ Said / Vidal 9780745328409

6 **boal**
Theatre of the Oppressed
9780745328386

7 **iyer**
Staying Power
Introduction by Paul Gilroy 9780745330723

8 **holloway**
Change the World Without Taking Power
9780745329185

9 **luxemburg**
Socialism or Barbarism
Edited by Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott 9780745329888

Socialism or barbarism

Selected Writings

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Edited and with an introduction by
Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott

PlutoPress
www.plutobooks.com

This edition first published 2010 by Pluto Press
345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

www.plutobooks.com

Distributed in the United States of America exclusively by
Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St Martins Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

This edition copyright © Paul Le Blanc and Helen C. Scott 2010

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7453 2989 5 Hardback
ISBN 978 0 7453 2988 8 Paperback

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data applied for

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental standards of the country of origin.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Designed and produced for Pluto Press by
Chase Publishing Services Ltd, 33 Livonia Road, Sidmouth, EX10 9JB, England
Typeset from disk by Stanford DTP Services, Northampton, England
Printed and bound in the European Union by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

CONTENTS

Part One:
Introductory Essay

1
INTRODUCTION TO ROSA LUXEMBURG

Helen C. Scott and Paul Le Blanc

Perhaps more than any other Marxist, Rosa Luxemburg has been remembered in various and diverse works of art: in lithographs by Conrad Felixmüller and Käthe Kollwitz; poems by Bertolt Brecht and Oskar Kahnel; fiction by Alfred Döblin; film by Margaretha von Trotta; painting by Diego Rivera and R.B. Kitaj; and more recently in a novel by Jonathan Rabb and music by the British 'post-punk' bands Ludus and The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg. Possibly this is because although her life was short – she was only 48 when she was killed – she had a profound impact on world history. In fact, thousands gather in Berlin on the anniversary of her death, bringing red carnations to honour her memory.

Nor is Luxemburg simply a focal-point for the European avant-garde. In 2003 Dr Zweledinga Pallo Jordan, South Africa's then Minister of Arts and Culture and prominent in the ruling African National Congress (ANC), commemorated the anniversary of the assassination of South African Communist Chris Hani with a speech highlighting Luxemburg's famous remarks on socialist democracy: 'Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of "justice" but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when "freedom" becomes a special privilege.' In the following year, a remarkable gathering of radical students and township activists well to the left of the ANC placed Red Rosa at the centre of a 2004 Conference on War and Imperialism. The People's Republic of China has hosted more

than one international conference on Rosa Luxemburg in recent years. In an Indian political context in which the left is overwhelmingly dominated by Communist parties largely influenced by traditions associated with Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, one of the most important left-wing scholars, Dr Sobhanlal Datta Gupta of the University of Calcutta, has presented a remarkable volume interweaving Luxemburg's writings with those of V.I. Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Leon Trotsky, and Georg Lukács.[1]

Rosa Luxemburg was the product of an age of change and instability, when socialism was central to a mass labour movement, and worldwide socialist revolution was a concrete possibility. Her premature death also marks a turning point in history. Close analysis of this moment, as in Pierre Broué's monumental history of the German Revolution, for example, brings to mind an alternative reality, one in which Luxemburg was not murdered; socialist revolution succeeded in Germany, rescued Soviet Russia and spread across the globe; and the twentieth century was spared Stalinism, fascism, and World War II.

But while such speculation may be tempting, it is more fruitful to look instead at the tangible legacy left to us by Rosa Luxemburg, which is both inspiring and instructive to those seeking progressive social change. Her clear sighted contributions to Marxism offer much that is relevant today: elaboration of the destructive and anarchic process of capitalist accumulation, inherently prone to militarism, imperialism, and crises; recognition of the impossibility of gradually reforming away these negatives, and therefore of the necessity of a revolutionary strategy; and an understanding of the world's working class as the vibrant force capable both of winning reforms and of forging a humane and sane alternative.

Early Life in Poland

Rosa Luxemburg grew up in Russian occupied Poland at a time of rapid economic and social transformation. She was born in 1871 (shortly before the insurgency of the French workers that led to the Paris Commune) in the Lublin border district, where many of the privations of serfdom were intact, even while young capitalist

development brought new hardships. The Luxemburg family was relatively well off – her father managed a timber business – but nonetheless experienced periods of financial hardship, and of course faced the particular discrimination against Jews in Poland. Her parents were literate and cultured, and the children were encouraged to read broadly and achieve a rounded education. The family moved to Warsaw, which offered more opportunities even for those who suffered the triple 'yoke of oppression' in the words of Rosa's main biographer, Paul Frölich: '[Rosa Luxemburg] belonged to the Russian people enchained by tsarism, the Polish people suppressed by foreign rule, and to the down trodden Jewish minority.'[2] She was also female in a patriarchal society, and, due to a mistreated hip disease in childhood, suffered a physical disability. These personal experiences, and the suffering she saw around her – in addition to pervasive and brutal class inequality, at the age of ten she witnessed a violent pogrom – must surely have contributed to her lifelong abhorrence of oppression. While still at school she wrote a poem containing the line 'I want to burden the conscience of the affluent with all the suffering and all the hidden, bitter tears.'[3]

At the end of the nineteenth century the confluence of democratic revolution and industrial capitalist transformation was galvanising the global socialist movement. Luxemburg was part of this development in Poland: as a teenager she joined the underground party, *Proletariat*, that was engaged in organising trade unions and strikes, and running illegal factory circles around illicit Marxist literature. When that organisation was crushed by a series of mass arrests and executions, Luxemburg, like many of the other surviving members, went into exile.

The next period of her life was spent in Zürich, Switzerland, where she acquired a formal education at the university – she was awarded her doctorate in Public Law and Political Science in 1898 – and also became immersed in the exile Marxist networks that thrived there. Even at this young age she showed the political independence and courage that were to become her trademarks; she was never afraid to challenge the established authorities whether in the University or the Marxist movement. She soon

started to make an impact in the Second Socialist International, the federation of parties from different nations that succeeded Marx's International Working Men's Association. She presented at her first Congress of the International in 1893; contributed articles to the German based journal *Die Neue Zeit* and many other publications; and helped found what would become the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL), along with fellow expatriate Leo Jogiches, who was a life-long comrade and for many years also her romantic partner.

German Social Democracy

It was a logical step to go from Zürich to Berlin, home to the largest party in the International, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), generally considered to represent the future for socialist organisation. Despite her outsider status – she was after all young, female, Polish, Jewish, physically small and walked with a limp – Luxemburg rapidly became not only a leading member of this formidable party, but one of its most outspoken internal critics.

Socialism had an undeniably mass following in Germany, which was at the forefront of the ascending global socialist movement. Pierre Broué describes the German working class as it was at the turn of the twentieth century:

> Relatively well-educated, familiar with technology and machines, with a sense of collective work and responsibility, with a taste for organization, the German proletarians were modern workers, able to defend their immediate interests, to devote themselves to militant activity, and to become conscious of a society which treated them merely as tools, and also aware that their solidarity made them into a force which could change their lives…[4]

The powerful and breathtakingly class-conscious labour movement had within it working class radicals such as those described by Mary Nolan in her detailed case study of Düsseldorf, *Social Democracy and Society*. She writes:

> For the workers in Düsseldorf, who lacked an autonomous and shared culture, social homogeneity, and a dissenting political tradition, social democracy provided a vocabulary for analyzing society and a vision toward which to struggle. It offered a vehicle for coping with urban industrial society and protesting against the inequities of capitalism and political authoritarianism. In the process of filling these functions, social democracy created a political and economic movement and a new kind of worker's culture, which brought together thousands of Düsselfdorf workers previously divided by skill and occupation, by religion and geographic origin, by experiences and expectations.[5]

Since socialism had become legal in 1890, the SPD was in the process of transforming from a small, underground, revolutionary organisation, to a mass party containing not only, to use Luxemburg's words, 'the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat', but a formidable apparatus of political, social, and cultural institutions. The German sociologist Max Weber famously described the SPD in 1907 as a 'state within a state'. In 1912, the SPD was the largest party in Germany's parliament, the Reichstag, with 110 deputies elected by four and a quarter million voters (34.7 percent of the electorate). SPD membership soon exceeded a million, and its ninety daily newspapers had 1.4 million subscribers throughout Germany. In addition to the party branches, there were associated trade unions containing millions of members, an extensive network of SPD-affiliated consumer co-operatives, a multifaceted youth movement, a large women's movement, an array of social services, not to mention innumerable sports and cultural organisations. SPD branches and activities are estimated as having been worth 21.5 million marks, and (in addition to innumerable dedicated socialist 'volunteers') approximately 3,500 paid employees worked full-time in the apparatus of the German Social Democracy's various components.[6]

The SPD provided organisational and educational resources for workers, such as the *Volkshaus* (People's House) opened in 1909 by the Düsseldorf SPD, and described by one of its members, Peter Berten, as 'a home where workers are master and not dependent

on the goodwill of speculating parasites… a home in which they can raise themselves above the misery of daily life, if only for a few hours'.[7]

Rosa Luxemburg was always closely connected to this larger working class movement. Her first task on joining the SPD was to tour the hardscrabble Polish-speaking communities of Upper Silesia – something few of the established party bureaucrats wanted to take on. Her political speeches won leadership and respect among the miners and steel workers of Königshütte, Katscher, Gleiwitz and elsewhere: 'Those who listened brought her flowers and did not want to let her go.'[8] Her status as a mass leader was to be repeatedly confirmed: by the huge crowds that met her on release from her major prison sentences; by the audiences who turned out to hear her speak on the Russian revolution of 1905 or for her anti-war tour in 1914; and by the mass silent demonstration that accompanied her funeral.

Revolutionary Critique of Reformism

The prodigious growth of both the SPD and the socialist trade unions was accompanied by the emergence and consolidation of a conservative bloc within their leaderships. As Carl Schorske elaborates in his thorough history of the organisation, the SPD over two decades developed a massive bureaucracy of paid functionaries oriented on parliament and increasingly hostile to radical change. This is corroborated by Peter Gay: 'The party gave the appearance of being strictly devoted to revolutionary ends (it even rewrote its programme in 1891 to underline its intransigence) while, in reality, it was becoming parliamentary and reformist. This split between thought and action… helps to explain much subsequent history.' As this apparatus became more and more part of the establishment, it departed from the central principles of Marxism: accepting the terms of German nationalism; abandoning principled opposition to colonialism and militarism; attempting to rein in labour struggle, and limit it to 'bread and butter' rather than 'political' questions.[9]

Luxemburg saw this process perhaps more clearly than anyone else in the Second International. She captured the underlying dynamics in a speech at the party conference in Stuttgart as early as 1898, responding to the reformist anti-Marxist leader of the Bavarian SPD, Georg von Vollmar:

> Vollmar has reproached me bitterly of wanting to instruct the old veterans, as only a young recruit in the movement. That is not the case… I know that I must first collect my epaulettes in the movement; but I want to do this in the left wing, where one wants to fight with the enemy and not in the right wing, where one wants to compromise with the enemy.[10]

By 1907 her critique was even sharper: 'The masses, and still more the great mass of comrades, are inwardly tired of parliamentarism, I feel. They would joyously welcome a fresh breeze in party tactics; however, the old experts (*Autoritäten*), and even more the upper stratum of opportunist editors, deputies, and trade union leaders, are a dead weight.'[11]

The theoretical expression of these developments came to be known as reformism, or revisionism, and one of its primary spokespeople was Eduard Bernstein, a German socialist who went into exile in Britain at the time of the anti-socialist laws and settled there. He was profoundly influenced by Britain's moderate trade union leadership and its militantly class-collaborationist and gradualist reform-socialists, the Fabians (whose leading personalities included Sidney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, and H.G. Wells). Bernstein wrote a series of articles under the title 'Problems of Socialism' for *Neue Zeit*, and then published a book, *Evolutionary Socialism*. He argued that Marx's analysis of capitalism's inherent tendency to crisis had been superseded, and that socialism could be achieved gradually and peaceably through parliamentary legislation and patient work in the trade unions and worker co-operatives. One of Luxemburg's most important and enduring contributions to socialist theory was her response to revisionism, most famously in her 1899 polemic, *Reform or Revolution*.

The work is a study in the historical materialist method, which starts with an analysis of the whole capitalist system, understanding each individual event or fact in its relation to the concrete social totality even when it is obscured from view. Materialists reject the perspective of the individual capitalist in favour of that of the oppressed majority, the only class that can end the horrors of capitalism and bring into being a new society. Luxemburg argues:

> Bernstein's theory does not seize these manifestations of contemporary economic life as they appear in their organic relationship with the whole of capitalist development, with the complete economic mechanism of capitalism. His theory pulls these details out of their living economic context. It treats them as the *disjecta membra* (separate parts) of a lifeless machine.[12]

Far from updating Marxism as he claimed, Bernstein had removed its scientific basis, and therefore took a step backward, to the pre-Marxist conception of socialism as an abstract utopia.

Luxemburg rejects the opposition between reform and revolution and declares that socialists cannot choose one or the other:

> The daily means of engaging and working for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the social democracy the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal – the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labor. Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the social democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.[13]

She argues that reformists do not offer an alternative means to the same end – worker emancipation – but throw out this aim altogether. She writes:

> [t]hose who pronounce themselves in favor of the method of legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal.[14]

The aim of revolutionary struggle is the working class majority taking power; because it argues that this is no longer necessary, reformism is not only utopian, but is antithetical to working class liberation.

In a brilliant analysis, Luxemburg shows that Bernstein reverses reform and revolution: Reforms cannot substitute for the future revolution; they are actually the product of the last revolution, because 'revolution is the act of political creation in the history of classes'. The extant legal constitution was made possible by the bourgeois revolution that replaced feudal absolutism with capitalism. The possibilities of reform, however, are now limited by the economic and social relations of capitalism, the dominant system, established by and for the ascendant capitalists. Thus, far from themselves being the *ends*, reforms are important primarily as *means* toward the necessary end of socialist revolution, through giving workers the experience and confidence necessary to confront the capitalist state. Reform*ism* is nothing more than 'the attempt to replace revolution with an endless series of reforms', and it is a doomed attempt.

Revolutionary Rehearsals

While Luxemburg identified and rejected revisionism as a threat to the socialist movement, she believed that working class struggle would reinvigorate the SPD and provide the necessary counter to bureaucratic stagnation. The 1905 outbreak of revolution in Russia confirmed her in this, and her participation in the 'Great Dress Rehearsal' was perhaps the most significant experience of her life. Determined to be at the heart of the revolutionary action, Luxemburg crossed the border at considerable personal danger, travelling incognito in a train full of counter-revolutionary soldiers, in order to join her comrades in the party she helped

found and continued to lead in exile, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL). This party stood the test of revolution, growing rapidly from a membership of 1,500 in 1904 to 40,000 in 1906, and winning leadership among the revolutionary masses. She drew out crucial generalisations in an article called 'What Next?', advocating the mass strike and urging agitation for a republic in Germany.[15]

When the revolution was defeated, Luxemburg, along with countless other revolutionary leaders, found herself in prison. This incarceration was harsh and took a toll on her health until she was released – in response to political pressure exerted by social democrats in Germany and Poland. But the first-hand experience of working class revolt taught her crucial lessons that she would draw on for the rest of her life. On her return to Germany she toured the country, eager to bring these experiences to a broader audience:

> A personal participant in the great events in Russia, she was naturally in great demand at local public meetings. At one meeting in Mannheim the crowd brushed aside the formal agenda with shouts of: 'Tell us about Russia.'… these were the crowds, the masses who would ultimately make and unmake the party's policy. And what they wanted to hear was precisely what Rosa really wanted to talk about – the lessons of Russia.[16]

In *The Mass Strike* Luxemburg vividly captures the transformative power of the galvanised working class, and identifies the mass strike as a central and necessary feature of revolution. Tracing the political and economic, small and large worker actions as they had built upon one another and developed an independent momentum over the previous decade, Luxemburg describes the infectious character of strike waves. Through extended organic metaphors she conveys the independent vitality of mass strikes. She frequently compares them to the human body: 'We see a bit of pulsating like of flesh and blood, which cannot be cut out of the large frame of the revolution but is connected with all parts of the revolution by a thousand veins.' And she compares them to

bodies of water: 'It flows now like a broad billow over the whole kingdom, and now divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring and now is completely lost under the earth.'[17]

In stirring descriptions she captures the moment at which these strike waves became explicitly socialist and revolutionary, in the spring and summer of 1905:

> [T]here fermented throughout the whole of the immense empire an uninterrupted economic strike of almost the entire proletariat against capital – a struggle that embraced, on the one hand, all the petty bourgeois and liberal professions, commercial employees, technicians, actors, and members of artistic professions, and on the other hand, penetrated to the domestic servants, the minor police officials, and even to the stratum of the lumpenproletariat, and simultaneously surged from the towns to the country districts and even knocked at the iron gates of the military barracks.[18]

These developments fuelled Luxemburg's critique of the German trade union leadership.

The increasingly entrenched permanent bureaucracy emphasised centralised control from the top down; winning legal reforms within the system; and political 'neutrality', which meant establishing a clear break between socialism and unionism, and emphasising 'economic', bread and butter issues as opposed to 'political' matters. They, like the conservatives within the SPD, feared the mass strike as something that could spiral out of their control and jeopardise all their careful work of winning small concessions and reforms through the government and courts. At union and party congresses measures were taken to limit, and in the case of the trade unions prohibit, the mass strike, or to restrict it to the 'demonstration strike': a symbolic and highly choreographed action safely within prescribed boundaries. While arguing against these attempts to curtail workers' most powerful weapon – their ability to withhold their labour and shut down entire regions and industries – Luxemburg also showed that at revolutionary moments workers take affairs into their own hands,

making a mockery of the idea that a few union bureaucrats could either pronounce or prevent a mass strike.

Luxemburg had argued in *Reform or Revolution* that trade union work was like the labour of Sisyphus – the mythological figure doomed to repeatedly roll a huge stone to the top of a hill only to watch it roll back down again – because legal labour victories are limited, temporary, and as long as the capitalist mode of production continues, can and will be rolled back. Luxemburg characterised trade unions as crucial in the struggle to defend and improve workers' immediate conditions, but incapable of achieving lasting gains. She opposed the bureaucrats' call for 'parity' between the SPD and the unions on the grounds that while social democracy represents the *future* emancipation of the working class, labour unions negotiate the terms of workers' exploitation in the capitalist *present*.

Therefore while trade unionism assumes and emphasises divisions – of workplace and occupation, between the organised and unorganised, and so on – socialism breaks down the boundaries of ordinary capitalist society, especially the sectionalism that usually prevents workers from acting collectively:

> [I]n order to carry through a direct political struggle as a mass the proletariat must first be assembled as a mass, and for this purpose they must come out of the factory and workshop, mine and foundry, must overcome the levigation [grinding down] and the decay to which they are condemned under the daily yoke of capitalism.[19]

In place of these divisions Luxemburg saw solidarity, and the dismantling of prejudice, as witnessed for example in the prominent role of women, as well as in the common cause between Russian workers and those of the oppressed nations such as Poland. Also in the course of a revolutionary mass strike, ordinary men and women exhibit immense bravery and idealism, as they put the goal of liberation above their own group or individual wellbeing. In this way, the offensive mass strike is actually a microcosm of true democracy and of socialism itself, as workers collaborate not

only for the victory of their strike, but also to take care of peoples' social needs even while production is shut down.

Luxemburg described this latter tendency elsewhere, in a letter to friends from Poland in February 1906:

> [A] quiet heroism and a feeling of class solidarity are developing among the masses… workers everywhere are, by themselves, reaching agreements… the feeling of solidarity… is so strongly developed that you can't help but be amazed even though you have personally worked for its development. And then too, an interesting result of the revolution: in all factories, committees, elected by the workers, have arisen 'on their own' which decide on all matters.[20]

Here, interestingly, Luxemburg refers to the worker councils, or soviets, that would be crucial to socialist revolution in 1917 and would feature in every worker revolution of the coming century. In 1905 this political formation was so new, however, that it is not even explicitly registered in *The Mass Strike*.

It is also worth noting that although the concept is not explicitly developed, at times Luxemburg anticipates the theory of permanent revolution developed by Leon Trotsky. It was assumed throughout the Second International that the Russian revolution would be bourgeois: the empire was still in the grips of feudalism, and many of the demands of the mass strikes of 1905 were democratic demands – the right of assembly, freedom of speech and so on. At the same time, while in the past democratic revolutions had been led by the bourgeoisie, that class at this point in history was more scared of the working class than of the tsar; therefore it was left to the workers to lead the democratic transformation which is a precondition for the struggle for socialism. But in the process of challenging tsarism, workers inevitably also confront capitalism. As Luxemburg puts it towards the end of *The Mass Strike*,

> [T]he Russian proletariat… who are destined to play the leading part in the bourgeois revolution, enter the fight free from all illusions of bourgeois democracy, with a strongly developed consciousness of their specific class interests, and at a time when the antagonism

> between capital and labor has reached its height… the struggle of the proletariat is directed simultaneously and with equal energy against both absolutism and capitalist exploitation.[21]

Michael Löwy writes that Luxemburg 'arrived at a premonition of the most crucial idea of the theory of permanent revolution – the historical combination and practical fusion between bourgeois and socialist revolutions'.[22] Luxemburg, like Trotsky, also recognised that capitalism's development is combined and uneven, and so too revolutionary movements break out not in a 'beautiful straight line but in a lightning-like zig-zag' (to borrow one of her metaphors); and as happened in Russia in 1917, a revolution may begin in a 'backward' country, and then spread internationally to more economically advanced nations.

Luxemburg has in mind the tremendous solidarity, valour, and creative democracy she witnessed in Russia when she contends that the revolutionary mass strike makes workers 'fit to rule'. In order to overthrow the current regime 'the proletariat requires a high degree of political education, of class consciousness and organisation. All these conditions cannot be fulfilled by pamphlets and leaflets, but only by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight, in the continuous course of the revolution.'[23] And again later on she writes:

> In the case of the enlightened German worker the class consciousness implanted by the social democrats is theoretical and latent… In the revolution when the masses themselves appear upon the political battlefield this class consciousness becomes practical and active. A year of revolution has therefore given the Russian proletariat that 'training' that thirty years of parliamentary and trade union struggle cannot artificially give to the German proletariat.[24]

More than anything else, Luxemburg's participation in the revolution of 1905 confirmed her faith in the central principle of Marxism: that socialist emancipation must be the act of workers themselves. Over and again she emphasises the spontaneous movement of working class men and women, including, and in

many cases especially, those who were previously unorganised and apolitical.

Organisational Questions

This emphasis on spontaneous struggle, and her well-documented disputes with the Russian revolutionary Lenin have been used to present Luxemburg as a 'spontaneist', one who is opposed to the project of building a revolutionary organisation akin to the Bolsheviks. In brief, the argument goes something like this: Luxemburg opposed the split between the Bolshevik (majority) and Menshevik (minority) factions of the Russian Social Democratic Party; she criticised Lenin for his ultra-centralist and top down methods which she saw as anti-democratic and elitist; she, in contrast, favoured an open, democratic, and loose organisational form. Although oft repeated, this schematic opposition is, as Paul Le Blanc has argued, 'a myth which obscures not only the realities of Lenin's politics but also of Luxemburg's'. Lars Lih's exhaustive scholarship on Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* confirms Le Blanc's perspective.[25]

First, before 1914 *both* Lenin and Luxemburg looked to the open and democratic organisational model of the SPD as the ideal. Lenin's Bolsheviks operated under conditions of illegality, which precluded open socialist organising; the SDKPiL were frequently aligned with the Bolsheviks, and, facing comparable conditions of illegality, functioned in a similar way. Second, Luxemburg's critique of Lenin in 1904 was based on a strawman version of 'ultra-centralism' that did not resemble Bolshevik practice: Lih and Le Blanc have taken up what is false both in the standard accounts of Luxemburg's position and in its portrayal of Lenin. There is no evidence that Luxemburg had read Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*, and she does not engage with the actual content of his *One Step Forward*. Lih suggests that she relied on secondary accounts supplied by his critics. Certainly Lenin responded to her essay by showing point by point how she misrepresents him. Third, it is likely that Luxemburg's suspicion of centralised leadership was directed at the Executive Committee of the SPD.

When she writes, 'social democratic organisational form cannot be based on blind obedience and on the mechanical subordination of the party militants to some centralised power…', she is describing a tendency in her own organisation more than anything in Lenin's theory or practice.[26] And finally, Luxemburg consistently stressed the necessity of organised revolutionary leadership, and like Lenin, she conceptualised this leadership not in the way it is understood by elected politicians and union bureaucrats, as control and orchestration from above, but rather as leadership from within that can enable the struggle to go forward, both in the midst of revolutionary struggle and during non-revolutionary times. In speaking of the vanguard organisation, Lenin and Luxemburg often use strikingly similar formulations. This is Luxemburg in 1906:

> [T]he social democrats are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the 'revolutionary situation,' to wait for that which, in every spontaneous peoples' movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavor to accelerate events.[27]

Compare Lenin in 1902:

> The spontaneity of the masses demands a high degree of consciousness from us Social-Democrats. The greater the spontaneous upsurge of the masses and the more widespread the movement, the more rapid, incomparably so, the demand for greater consciousness in the theoretical, political and organisational work of Social-Democracy.[28]

Luxemburg in 1904:

> Social Democratic centralism… can only be the concentrated will of the individuals and groups representative of the most class-conscious, militant, advanced sections of the working class. It is, so to speak, the 'self-centralism' of the advanced sectors of the proletariat. It is the rule of the majority within its own party.[29]

And Lenin in 1920:

> How is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact… merge… with the broadest masses of the working people… Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard… provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct.[30]

After their post-1905 prison sentences, Luxemburg and Lenin spent a summer together in Finland, where they forged what would be an enduring alliance. The editors of a special issue of *Revolutionary History* on Luxemburg point out that while Luxemburg condemned the split between Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the Russian party, her criticisms of both factions were equally harsh. At the same time as berating Lenin's *methods*, Luxemburg in 1911 argued that

> [o]ur comrades who are familiar with Russian Mensheviks… are able to reach no other conclusions than the conviction that the former group is ruinous for the labour movement… there is no place in the ranks of the party of the revolutionary proletariat for this liquidationist opportunist putrefaction. There is no serious difference in the political evaluation of the Mensheviks between us and Lenin's current.[31]

1905 showed her that revolutionary leadership is crucial especially during revolutionary times because mass strikes alone do not combat the power of the state. They weaken and disorient, but do not vanquish, the ruling class; and as happened in 1906, a threatened ruling class becomes desperate to regain ground, and is willing to use all the armed might of the state against the popular movement. In the absence of an equally organised and determined political force on the side of the working class, the system will reassert itself.

Nonetheless, Luxemburg assumed that the SPD would provide this revolutionary leadership in Germany, and not until 1918

did she and other revolutionaries launch a distinct revolutionary organisation. Even so, much that she wrote about socialist organisation is valuable beyond the specific context. What stands out is her awareness of the twin perils faced by socialists who have to operate in the present, which is circumscribed by the inequalities and oppressive ideologies of capitalism, while at the same time aspiring towards a socialist future:

> On the one hand, we have the mass; on the other, its historic goal, located outside of existing society. On one hand, we have the day-to-day struggle, on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectical contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way.
>
> It follows that this movement can best advance by tacking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its mass character; the other, the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect; the other, the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform.[32]

A Marxist Education

In the years between the two revolutionary waves Luxemburg taught every winter at the SPD's Party School in Berlin, established as an alternative source of education for socialist workers. Conservatives in the Executive, worrying that Luxemburg and other revolutionaries were too radical, wanted to delimit instruction. An exchange at the 1908 Party Congress revealed what was at stake. The reformist Kurt Eisner argued against teaching revolutionary abstractions: 'Do the masses have to know the theory of value? Do the masses need to know what the materialist theory of history is?' He answered that on the contrary, such teachings can be harmful: 'Theory frequently has the actual effect of killing the power to come to conclusions and to take action.' This was Luxemburg's response to the Eisner camp:

> They think the materialist conception of history, as they understand it, has on them the effect of crippling their ability to act and they

> therefore think that theory should not be taught at the Party School, but hard facts, the hard facts of life. They haven't the faintest idea that the proletariat knows the hard facts from its everyday life, the proletariat knows the 'hard facts' better than Eisner. What the masses lack is general enlightenment, the theory which gives us the possibility of systematizing the hard facts and forging them into a deadly weapon to use against our opponents.[33]

Here again we see Luxemburg's rejection of the artificial divisions of bourgeois thought, her consistently dialectical understanding of the interdependence of theory and practice that is at the heart of Marxism.

From all accounts she was an exacting and compelling teacher, and one who influenced many future leaders of the party through her teaching. Hers was a student-centred pedagogy of the oppressed, decades before these terms were coined. Paul Frölich provides a moving and evocative account of her classroom disposition:

> She knew how to get her pupils to use their own minds and imaginations, and, by raising ever new objections and questions, she subjected their knowledge and ideas to a thorough testing until they were able to form a picture of life as it really was… the actual development of their thinking processes was up to the pupils themselves. And she did not concern herself only with gifted students: she always held everyone under her spell… she created an atmosphere charged with tension, in which all the pupils could develop their intellectual capacities and a spirit of enthusiastic creativity and mutual emulation… some of them had certainly come to the party school filled with prejudices… Needless to say she won all of them over, and even those who later became her opponents in the working class movement never failed to show their gratitude to her or their respect for her. In this way she conquered people and inspired them with the wealth of Marxist ideas and the will to fight for the realization of these ideas.[34]

Her teaching experience also generated two important publications: the *Introduction to Economics* (only fragments of which survived) and the *Accumulation of Capital* (1913).

This latter text begins with what she perceived to be a theoretical flaw in the second volume of Marx's *Capital*, and develops a powerful and distinctive analysis of imperialism as a central component of capitalist development. Luxemburg argues that workers in the advanced capitalist nations, who are paid less than the value of what they produce, have insufficient buying power, which leads to crises of under-consumption. Therefore capitalists need to expand into non-capitalist areas in search of new markets and investment possibilities, which inevitably leads to the destruction of non-capitalist social forms; the ensuing contradictions will cause 'the standstill of accumulation' and capitalist collapse. Many Marxist economists have challenged aspects of this analysis, and history has shown that capitalist accumulation is much more adaptive than Luxemburg predicts, managing to find ever new ways to expand. But much in the analysis is prescient and remains germane to global capitalism in the twenty-first century.

Luxemburg recognises the negative impact of capitalist expansion on the world's population. Drawing on Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation in *Capital*, she says of capitalist accumulation and imperialism:

> The historical career of capitalism can only be appreciated by taking them together. 'Sweating blood and filth with every pore from head to toe' characterizes not only the birth of capital but also its progress in the world at every step, and thus capitalism prepares its own downfall under ever more violent contortions and convulsions.[35]

The result is,

> colonial policy, an international loan system – a policy of spheres of interest – and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.[36]

Luxemburg draws attention to the disastrous consequences of these processes on the peoples and cultures of the world. Here

and in other works she points to the dispossession of the peasants and artisans of Europe; the obliteration of the native-Americans; the enslavement of Africans; the devastation of the small farmers in the Western United States; the colonisation of the Algerians by France; and the brutality of British colonialism in India, China, and South Africa. 'Each new colonial expansion is accompanied, as a matter of course, by a relentless battle of capital against the social and economic ties of the natives… from the point of view of the primitive societies involved, it is a matter of life or death.'[37]

Her economic analysis is accompanied by a keen awareness of the human costs of capitalist expansion and exploitation, as in her 1914 article 'The Proletarian Woman':

> The workplace of the future needs many hands and passionate enthusiasm. A world of female misery awaits deliverance. Here the wife of the small farmer groans, almost breaking down under the burden of life. There in German Africa in the Kalahari Desert the bones of defenseless Herero women bleach, driven to a cruel death from hunger and thirst by German soldiers. In the high mountains of Putumayo on the other side of the ocean, unheard by the world, death screams die away of the martyred Indian women in the rubber plantations of the international capitalists.[38]

Her words remain descriptive of the brutal processes of neoliberal globalisation at the turn of the next century.

Capitalism and War

Luxemburg is perhaps most famous for her consistent opposition to imperialism and militarism, which, as we have seen, she understood to be inherent components of capitalism. The Second International had been founded on principled opposition to imperialist war, but this issue became a central fault line of the SPD, as the revisionists increasingly distanced themselves from anti-colonial and anti-militarist tenets, despite the activism of Luxemburg and other revolutionaries such as Karl Liebknecht.

Eduard Bernstein's statements about colonialism indicate how wide was the gap between the right and left wings of the SPD:

> We must get away from the utopian notion of simply abandoning the colonies. The ultimate consequence of such a view would be to give the United States back to the Indians (Commotion). The colonies are there; we must come to terms with that. Socialists too should acknowledge the need for civilized peoples to act somewhat like guardians of the uncivilized. Lasalle [sic] and Marx recognized this.… Our economics are based, in large measure, on the extraction from the colonies of products that the native peoples had no idea how to use.[39]

Luxemburg, with the collaboration of Lenin, proposed an anti-war resolution in the Second International Stuttgart congress of 1907 containing this pledge:

> In the event of war threatening to break out, it is the duty of the workers and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved to do everything possible to prevent the outbreak of war by taking suitable measures, which can, of course, be changed or intensified in accordance with the exacerbation of the class struggle and the general political situation.
>
> Should war break out nevertheless, it is their duty to advocate its speedy end and to utilize the economic and political crisis brought about by the war to rouse the various social strata and to hasten the overthrow of capitalist class rule.[40]

The International passed this, and another anti-war resolution, at the congress of 1912, but many within the International did not in practice support these policies despite their verbal acquiescence.

The right wing of the SPD strengthened its position, assisted by Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925), who was to play a major role in severing the party from its revolutionary credentials and consolidating the professional bureaucracy's control. During this period the executive went on the offensive against Luxemburg, though their attack usually took personal rather than political form. Her long time alliance with Karl Kautsky came to an end in 1910. But, as biographer John Peter Nettl puts it 'as she

lost her influence with the executive and the party leaders, she was more than ever in demand at the periphery of party life' receiving many invitations to speak.[41] The principal division in a party now containing a left, right, and centre, was 'the deeper antithesis between theoretical and practical revolutionaries'. By 1912 a distinct radical opposition was consolidating around Luxemburg, but despite the popularity of these figures with the membership, within the party leadership they were marginalised and the executive 'kept the machine and the power'.[42]

In the run up to World War I Luxemburg threw herself into anti-war agitation, speaking before mass audiences. One such speech led to her arrest for inciting soldiers to mutiny. She was charged, in June 1914, with 'insulting the military' for condemning the 'systematic abuse of soldiers'. In her defence 30,000 soldiers attested that 'They were victims or witnesses of such abuse and agreed to give evidence in court.'[43] She was sentenced to a year in prison, but she continued to speak out against the war until her actual detention.

When the war started in August, the majority of the labour and socialist parties of the belligerent nations, including the SPD, supported their respective governments' war efforts. Luxemburg responded with searing irony to those leaders, such as her one time ally Karl Kautsky:

> For the proletariat there is not one vital rule, as scientific socialism has hitherto proclaimed, but rather there are two such rules: one for peace and one for war. In peacetime the class struggle applies within each country, and international solidarity vis-à-vis other countries; in wartime it is class solidarity within, and the struggle between the workers of the various countries without. The global historical appeal of the Communist Manifesto undergoes a fundamental revision and, as amended by Kautsky, now reads: proletarians of all countries, unite in peacetime and cut each other's throats in war![44]

Despite her earlier predictions about the dire consequences of the SPD's conservatism, this widespread betrayal of working class internationalism was nonetheless a terrible blow, and it is said that

the usually resilient Luxemburg even contemplated suicide. But instead she, with other revolutionaries such as Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin, mobilised opposition. Luxemburg was to spend most of the war in prison, but this did not curtail her contribution: she wrote the *Crisis in German Social Democracy* behind bars, and it was smuggled out in 1915, though not distributed until 1916.

This work is generally known as *The Junius Pamphlet*, after the pseudonym she adopted following the pen name of an influential critic of King George III, who is assumed to have taken it from the legendary founder of the Roman Republic, Lucius Junius Brutus. It is a powerful anti-war pamphlet that has continued to resonate throughout the century. The opening section describes the devastation of capitalist war with biting sarcasm and controlled fury, deploying her finest figurative language:

> Shamed, dishonored, wading in blood and dripping with filth, thus capitalist society stands. Not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics – as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity – so it appears in all its hideous nakedness.[45]

Luxemburg proceeds to name and condemn the Second International's betrayal of the international working class, analyse and explain the nature of imperialist war, and present socialist internationalism as the only alternative for humanity. In contrast to nationalist capitulation, she explains the role the SPD should have played:

> The highest duty of the social democracy toward its fatherland demanded that it expose the real background of this imperialist war, that it rend the net of imperialist and diplomatic lies that covers the eyes of the people. It was their duty to speak loudly and clearly, to proclaim to the people of Germany that in this war victory and defeat would be equally fatal, to oppose the gagging of the fatherland by a state of siege, to demand that the people alone decide on war and peace, to demand a permanent session of parliament for the period of the war… to demand the immediate removal of all political inequalities, since only a free people can adequately govern its country, and finally, to oppose to the

> imperialist war, based as it was upon the most reactionary forces in Europe, the program of Marx, of Engels, and Lassalle.[46]

Instead, the International lined up behind the murderous ruling classes who sent a generation to their death in the battlefields of Europe. Luxemburg's descriptions of the terrible human cost of this capitalist slaughter evoke the anti-war poetry of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and other great soldier poets: 'The flower of our youthful strength, hundreds of thousands… are rotting upon the battlefields. The fruit of the sacrifices and toil of generations is destroyed in a few short weeks, the choicest troops of the international proletariat are torn out by the life roots.'[47]

In January 1916 Luxemburg's closest allies in the socialist movement, including Franz Mehring, Clara Zetkin, Leo Jogiches, and Paul Levi, formed the Spartacus League (*Spartakusbund* – named after the slave revolt against the Roman empire), to rally socialist workers and intellectuals in opposition to the war. As they had predicted, the nationalist hysteria of 1914 progressively faded, and public opinion turned against the war, as the slaughter of soldiers continued, while economic conditions at home deteriorated.

Socialism or Barbarism

William Pelz is one of the few historians to attempt a serious study of the Spartacus League, which is all too often superficially dismissed as inconsequential. His summary is worth considering:

> Struggling underground, the Spartakusbund was able to grow, propagate its ideas and develop linkages with like-minded revolutionary groups and individuals, based heavily in urban industrial areas. Thus, Luxemburg, Liebknecht and the other Spartakusbund leaders directed what was the heart of a growing revolutionary workers movement. Young, active and concentrated in the most modern vital sections of the economy, Spartakusbund members were to prove the revolutionary voice within the ideological vacuum [that the bureaucratized leadership of the German] Social Democracy labored to maintain.[48]

By 1916 the SPD's right wing, led by Gustav Noske, Philipp Scheidemann, and Friedrich Ebert, supported the war and endorsed a non-strike pledge from the unions; the centre, led by Karl Kautksy, Georg Ledebour, Rudolf Hilferding, and Eduard Bernstein, favoured a negotiated end to war; and the left wing, led by the Spartacus League, argued for mass strikes and soldier mutinies against the war, and raised the slogan 'the main enemy is at home'. These contradictions could no longer be contained, and in May 1916 after the centre attacked the government's war policies, the SPD right wing expelled them: the new Independents (USPD), consisting of the centrists and lefts, had 120,000 members; while the Majority (M-SPD) boasted 170,000, and control over the party mechanisms.

Anti-war conferences at Zimmerwald in 1915 and Kienthal in 1916 had raised the prospect of a new International, and while the Spartacus League agreed with this in theory, they were divided about how and when to launch such a formation. 1917 saw the February Russian revolution that overthrew the tsar, and the October revolution which ended the war with Germany and led millions of workers to see socialist revolution as a tangible possibility. From prison Luxemburg eagerly followed events, seeing in them confirmation of her critique of reformism and her faith in the revolutionary potential of the working class. While critical of the Bolshevik leadership, her *Russian Revolution* nonetheless recognises their world historical achievement:

> Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary farsightedness and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honor and capacity which western social democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honor of international socialism.[49]

Throughout 1918, German workers suffering the hardships of war became radicalised by the example of Russia, and the USPD grew rapidly. In November sailors mutinied in Kiel, which sparked a

wide rebellion in the army and a general strike that overthrew the Kaiser and brought down the German government. With worker councils installed in cities across the country, the German Republic was proclaimed.

But it was the right wing M-SPD who now took control, while the USPD remained splintered and in a reactive role. Luxemburg and the other revolutionaries founded the German Communist Party (KPD) in December, but it was weak in comparison to the M-SPD, which now became ruthlessly counter-revolutionary, establishing the *Freikorps* – a right wing militia – and defending the capitalist state against the revolutionary masses, even while vaunting its socialist credentials.

The KPD disastrously lacked centralised leadership. In January 1919 Liebknecht took part in a premature uprising, even while Luxemburg and others were opposed to it. In the repression that followed, *Freikorps* members, with the tacit approval of SPD leaders, murdered both revolutionary leaders. In the words of Pierre Broué:

> The new-born Communist Party was from the start isolated from the masses, and it was doomed to impotence before it had swung into action. The events of January and the assassination of Liebknecht and Luxemburg were to finish it off. The task of building links with the working masses had to be started all over again.[50]

The story did not end there: the next four years saw sporadic mass revolutionary upsurges, the growth of worker councils, widespread disenchantment with the SPD, and at some points exponential growth of the KPD. But as Soviet Russia faced dire economic and social crises, and revolution failed to spread more broadly, the possibility for socialist transformation in Germany diminished, and by the end of 1923 was extinguished. Luxemburg's prediction that the alternative to socialism would be barbarism was confirmed in the Stalinisation of the Soviet Union, the rise of fascism across Europe, and the catastrophic scale of World War II.

Conclusion

While the murder of Rosa Luxemburg rightly counts as a historical crime, it should not overshadow her legacy. She famously wrote to a friend, just two weeks before her death, 'You know that, in spite of it all, I really hope to die at my post, in a street fight or in prison.'[51] She made a lasting contribution to socialist theory and practice, and her enduring commitment to working class self-emancipation has guided and inspired countless revolutionaries in the last century. As Paul Frölich writes at the end of his biography: 'In the long run, no bonfire and no dictatorial order can destroy ideas that have once lived in the minds of great masses of people.'[52] The best way to recognise Luxemburg's life work is to read and engage with the written record she left behind, and to draw out the lessons for the ongoing struggle for a different and better world.

* * *

Our own time is quite different, in multiple ways, from the world that Luxemburg inhabited. Why read Rosa Luxemburg today? What can one find in Luxemburg's writings that can have value for comprehending (and changing) the present and the future?

First of all, it is important to read Rosa Luxemburg today because, on at least some matters, in this age of globalisation, inequality, and economic downturn, the perspectives of Karl Marx are relevant now more than ever. And Luxemburg was one of the most insightful revolutionaries writing in the Marxist tradition. Specifically, one is struck by

- Luxemburg's clarity regarding the capital accumulation process as being destructive, irrational, and corrosive in relation to human needs;
- Luxemburg's clarity regarding the impossibility of gradually reforming the negative aspects of capitalism out of existence, and the necessity of reform struggles being an integral part of a revolutionary strategy for fundamental social transformation;

- Luxemburg's clarity regarding the centrality of the working class – the emerging majority in our capitalist-penetrated world – as a vibrant and creative force (despite exploitation and oppression) that is capable, ultimately, of effectively resisting capitalist degradation and bringing into being a better world based on a socially owned, democratically controlled, and humanistically motivated economy.

All of this comes straight from Marx and was as essential to Luxemburg as it is for us today. It is by working within this conceptual framework – whose details are elaborated in the *Communist Manifesto*, *Capital*, and other works – that Luxemburg made her own distinctive contributions.

These contributions include: (1) the way she conceptualised the interplay of the working-class political party, trade unions, and often spontaneous or semi-spontaneous mass action – and her alertness, even greater than what we find in Marx and Engels, to problems of routinism, opportunism, bureaucracy, and elitism in the workers' movement; (2) a profound understanding of the centrality of imperialism and militarism to capitalist development and of their devastating impact on diverse world cultures; (3) an incredibly clear conceptualisation of the 'socialism or barbarism' choice facing humanity.

Related to these overarching contributions are other qualities that are no less important for us today. These include:

- a way of comprehending Marxism as a body of thought and method engaged with living reality, both open and active, a critical-minded blend of theory and practice – consisting not only of ideas but of a utilisation of ideas to advance real struggles for freedom, social justice, liberation;
- an underlying sensuous and passionate interconnection with reality – people and other creatures and all of nature – generating an approach that is deeply humanistic but also alive to the understanding that humanity is part of a vast and complex web of life and creation;

- an identification and sense of connection with the ethnically and culturally diverse peoples of our world (with sensibilities one finds among the best cultural anthropologists), which permeate her analyses of and her fierce hostility to imperialism;
- an understanding of socialism as being inseparable from the profoundest freedom and democracy, as necessarily the product of expansive working-class self-activity (a key notion that animated her thinking on strategy and tactics), an understanding that enabled her to offer a still invaluable critique of limitations and errors associated with an early Soviet Republic which she nevertheless embraced.

Luxemburg offers us rich insights even in what some on the Left consider to be problematical texts – for example, when she expresses views divergent from Lenin's on imperialism, the national question, in the Russian Revolution on the question of land to the peasants and the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and in 1904 on questions of party organisation. On certain issues she may, in fact, see more deeply and clearly than Lenin – but even when she doesn't, she nonetheless adds to our thinking.

Especially important for us today, also, is the unresolved issue with which she wrestled over decades: the interplay of Marxist activists with the larger labour movement, negotiating between what she called 'the two dangers' of 'sinking back to the condition of a sect' or 'becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform'. We owe it to Luxemburg and to ourselves to give all that she wrote and said and did around this issue both a sympathetic and a critical reading, seeking to develop new and useful insights for advancing the labour and socialist movements, a goal for which she herself was always reaching.

Notes

1. Victor Grossman, 'Unity – In Memory of Rosa Luxemburg' (http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/grossman170106.html); Pallo Jordan, '15 Years Since the Murder of Chris Hani', *Links* (http://links.org.au/node/342); Paul Le

Blanc, 'Rosa Luxemburg in South Africa' (http://marxsite.com/Rosa%20Luxemburg%20in%20South%20Africa.htm); Paul Le Blanc, 'Conference and Discussion on Rosa Luxemburg at Wuhan University, People's Republic of China', *Labor Standard* (http://www.laborstandard.org/New_Postings/Rosa_in_China.htm); Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, ed. *Readings in Revolution and Organisation: Rosa Luxemburg and Her Critics – Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Stalin, Lukacs* (Calcutta: Pearl Publishers, 1994).

2. Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Ideas in Action*, 1939, trans. Joanna Hoornweg (London: Pluto, 1972), 28.
3. Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Exhibition. http://www.rosalux.de/cms/index.php?aktuell
4. Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution 1917–1923*, 1971, trans. John Archer (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 17.
5. Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society: Working-Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 3.
6. See Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917*, 1955 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Vernon Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Roger Fletcher, ed., *Bernstein to Brandt, A Short History of German Social Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987).
7. Quoted in Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society*, 136.
8. Exhibition.
9. See Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, and Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 62.
10. Quoted in Exhibition.
11. Quoted in Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 138.
12. Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, in Helen Scott, ed., *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2007), 70.
13. Ibid., 41.
14. Ibid., 90.
15. Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 126; J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 304, 420.
16. Ibid., 369.
17. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, in Helen Scott, ed., *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2007), 140.
18. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, 128.
19. Ibid., 163.
20. Letter to Karl and Luise Kautsky from Poland, 5 February 1906, in Stephen E. Bronner, ed., *Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978), 114.
21. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, 163.
22. Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London: Verso, 1981), 38.
23. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, 130.
24. Ibid., 160.
25. Paul Le Blanc, 'Luxemburg and Lenin on Revolutionary Organization', in *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings* (New York: Humanity Books,

1999), 82; Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: 'What Is To Be Done?' In Context* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2006).
26. Quoted in Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 99.
27. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, 161.
28. V.I. Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?' in Paul Le Blanc, ed., *Revolution, Democracy, Socialism: Selected Writings* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 138.
29. Luxemburg, 'Organizational Question of Social Democracy' in Mary-Alice Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 119.
30. V.I. Lenin, '"Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder', in Le Blanc, *Revolution, Democracy, Socialism*, 307.
31. 'On the Situation in the Russian Social Democracy', 'Rosa Luxemburg Selected Political and Literary Writings', *Revolutionary History* 10.1 (2009), 72.
32. Rosa Luxemburg, 'Organizational Question of Social Democracy', in Waters, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, 128–9.
33. Rosa Luxemburg, 'Speech to Nurnberg Congress (1908)', in Dick Howard, ed., *Selected Political Writings* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 281–2.
34. Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 158.
35. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 364–5. For a fuller discussion, see Paul Le Blanc, 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Global Violence of Capitalism', http://www.marxsite.com/Rosa%20Luxemburg%20and%20the%20Global%20Violence%20of%20capitalism.htm
36. Ibid., 452–3.
37. Ibid., 370, 371.
38. 'Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political and Literary Writings', *Revolutionary History* 10.1 (2009), 52.
39. John Riddell, ed., *The Communist International in Lenin's Time: Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International, Documents: 1907–1917; the Preparatory Years* (New York: Monad Press, 1984), 10–11.
40. Quoted in Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 178.
41. J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 441.
42. Ibid., 455–6.
43. Exhibition.
44. Luxemburg, 'Rebuilding the International', in Paul Le Blanc, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings* (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 1999), 202.
45. Luxemburg, 'The Junius Pamphlet', in Waters, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, 262.
46. Ibid., 314.
47. Ibid., 327.
48. William A. Pelz, *The Spartakusbund and the German Working-Class Movement, 1914–1919* (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 1987) quoted in Le Blanc, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 25.

49. Luxemburg, 'The Russian Revolution', in Waters, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, 375.
50. Broué, *The German Revolution 1917–1923*, 225.
51. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, eds, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 374.
52. Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 305.

Part Two:
Luxemburg's Selected Writings, 1893–1919

2

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Among the earliest of Luxemburg's political writings, and presented here in English for the first time, what follows are excerpts from 'On the Occasion of the Hundredth Anniversary of 1793' that appeared in the July 1893 issue of *Sprawa Robotnicza* (Workers' Cause), published in Paris and distributed secretly in Poland.

Written when Luxemburg was only 22, this early piece reveals a passionate political engagement blended with a sharply analytical mind. This can be seen in the way she discusses the radical left of the Revolution – the Montagnards (also tagged by contemporaries and historians as the Jacobins) and the primitive-communist Babeuf. Rather than presenting the radicals in idealised form, Luxemburg deals with them sympathetically yet also critically. Employing the tools of Marxist analysis, she suggests that the actual historical-social context prevented these earlier revolutionaries from having the more mature insights and perspectives that could only have developed through experiences provided in a later period of social development. In common with others in the socialist movement of her time, she embraces the earlier democratic revolutions and movements while emphasising that the struggle for political democracy can only be completed by the victory of economic democracy – socialism, brought about by the emerging working-class majority.

This article, written under the pseudonym 'K', was authenticated with the assistance of Polish historian Feliks Tych (Warsaw). It was translated from Polish to French by Fabien Perrier, Jean-Paul Piérot, with Jean-Numa Ducange, and appeared in the French daily journal *L'Humanité* on 15 January 2009. Translation to English is by Paul Le Blanc with assistance from Arlette Umuhire. Some bracketed explanations and clarifications have been inserted, in italics, by the editors of this volume.

The year 1793! A century has passed since this time, which the labouring people's enemies – tsars, kings, nobles, princes, the factory owners and all the other wealthy capitalists – cannot remember, even today, without feeling terror. They tremble whenever they hear: the year 1793!

Why is that? Because that is when the labouring people in France, and particularly in its capital, Paris, for the first time got rid of the yoke of many centuries and sought to end aspects of exploitation and to begin a new and free life.…

[*Luxemburg evokes the first stages of the Revolution: economic crises and deepening social discontent forcing the king to call together representatives of the clergy, of the nobles and of the great mass of common people; the coming together of these representatives in the National Assembly dominated by the bourgeoisie; the mass mobilisations of the lower classes; the storming of the Bastille and other radical mass actions; the replacement of the absolute monarchy with the beginnings of a constitutional republic, limiting the king's power with the power of the rising class of capitalist property owners. – Editors*]

'For what reason did I fight? Why did I spill my blood?' the French people asked themselves in disappointment. 'Why I did offer my chest to the musket-balls of the soldiers of the king? Only to replace one oppressor by another? End the power and privileges of the nobility and to transmit them to the bourgeoisie?'

And the people of Paris began a new struggle. It was the second revolution – the popular revolution – on 10 August 1792. This day was the day the people stormed the royal Palace and the City Hall. The bourgeoisie was on the side of king, who, equipped with a weakened power, defended his interests against those of the people. That did not prevent the people from reversing the throne. The bourgeoisie held the Town Hall and the municipal administration with a firm hand and wanted to dominate the people with their police and the National Guard. That did not prevent the people from assaulting and seizing the City Hall, expelling the bourgeoisie and taking into their work-worn hands the municipal administration of Paris. At this time, the administration of the Commune of Paris was completely independent of

the administration of the central government. [*This refers to the insurrectionary Commune, or municipality, of Paris, established 10 August 1792. The well-known later short-lived radical working-class government, the Paris Commune of 1871, was named after it. – Editors*]

The Commune, relying on the victorious revolutionary people, forced the Convention (the new National Assembly), meeting in September 1792 and immediately proclaiming the Republic, to make important concessions. Without the menacing power of the people, the Convention would probably have done as little as the preceding Assemblies for the popular masses. The great majority of the members of Convention were hostile with the changes imposed by the revolution of 10 August. One party of Convention – the party of the Gironde (thus named, because its principal leaders came from this area in France) carried out an open fight against the sovereignty of the revolutionary Commune of Paris. The Girondins, republican representatives of the medium-sized bourgeoisie, were ardent partisans of the Republic and bitter adversaries of any major economic reforms that would benefit the labouring people. Only a minority of Convention, Mountain (or Montagnards, thus named because its members occupied the highest benches in the room of Convention), faithfully defended the labouring people's cause. As long as the Girondins were in the Convention, the Montagnards could do little, because the Girondins always seemed to have the majority on their side.…

[*Luxemburg describes the fall of Gironde under the violent popular pressure in the streets of Paris on 31 May and 2 June, 1793. – Editors*]

Let us examine what the labouring people won in the short period in which they played a dominant role. Popular leaders, like the members of the municipal administration and the Montagnards, ardently wished for the complete economic liberation of the people. They sincerely sought to realise the formal equality of all before the law, but also a real economic equality. All their speeches and their acts were based on an idea: in the democratic republic, there should be neither wealthy people nor the poor; the democratic republic, that is to say a free country

based on popular sovereignty, could not long survive if the people, sovereign politically, found themselves economically dependent on and dominated by the wealthy.

But how could there be economic equality for all? In our time, the Social Democratic labour parties of all the countries have inscribed on their banners that the goal of their struggle is economic equality for all. And to carry out this objective, they require the abolition of the private property of all the means of production; the property of land, factories, workshops, etc. must be transferred to the unit of the labouring people. The party of the Mountain sought to solve this problem differently. Very few among them, and also among the members of the Commune, shared the point of view of the Social Democracy of today… Only some isolated voices, which disappeared in the mass of the others. They did not even find a favourable hearing among the more progressive of the people of Paris: proletariat. On the contrary, neither the proletariat nor the Montagnards thought of the abolition of the private property of the means of production. They wanted to achieve the economic equality of all while giving to all the French citizens who did not have anything, a piece of private property. In a word, neither the Parisian proletariat of that time nor the Montagnards were socialist.…

To the contrary, a hundred years ago in France, as in other countries, the proletariat represented barely a fraction of the labouring masses. The peasantry, which constituted the greatest part of the French people, was satisfied with what it had obtained during the Revolution. Actually, as we've noted, only the richest farmers could buy land. The poorest part of the French peasantry did not wish the socialist collective property, but an increase of their share of the land. The Montagnards intended precisely to give to the peasants all the land of the nobility and the clergy which had not been sold yet. The distance between the Montagnards and socialism is shown by the fact that, in agreement with other representatives in the Convention, they divided among some of the peasants what remained of old communal property (meadows, fields, grounds in waste lands).…

After all that, it is clear that the Montagnards, regardless of all their good intentions, were unable to achieve their burning desire: economic equality of all. This aspiration was not realisable in that time. More, the means which they used themselves could only delay for a short period the development of capitalism, that is to say, the greatest economic inequality.…

As long as the Mountain held power, they sought salvation in coercive economic means, in particular to prevent the people of Paris from dying of hunger. These means were the following: the fixing of a maximum price for bread and other foodstuffs, forced loans from the rich, and, especially in Paris, the purchase of bread on behalf of the Commune in order to distribute it to the people at the lowest price possible. All these were only surface interventions in French economic life. It could only lead to the impoverishment of the rich and provide only a temporary relief to the famished people – nothing more. And even if the intentions of the party of the Montagnards to give land to all those who wished to work had been realised, economic equality would not have persisted for long. At the end of last century, France occupied in the capitalist system the same position as the other countries of Western Europe. It saw the inevitable transformation of small property-holders into proletarians and the consolidation of property – including landed property – into the hands of the wealthy.

… After the fall of the Commune and Mountain, the Parisian proletariat beset by hunger would still rise up, at times, against de-radicalised Convention, while shouting: 'bread and the Constitution of 1793'. However these were nothing more than the weak flickers of a revolutionary flame in process of extinction. The forces of the proletariat were exhausted. As for the conspiracy organised in 1796 by the Socialist Babeuf against the government, with an aim of introducing a socialist project, it was also very unsuccessful. Babeuf had understood well that economic equality was not compatible with the private property of the means of production that he wanted to socialise. He was mistaken however when he supposed to be able to apply it in the France of that time through a conspiratorial plot. Babeuf and his friends could

even less count on a success than the Montagnards. His socialist projects were crushed in the egg.

… The conspiracy of Babeuf could only monetarily disturb the calm of the satiated French bourgeoisie as it grew rich. It had already forgotten the 'frights of the year 1793'. It was certainly the bourgeoisie and not the proletariat which gathered all the fruits of the French Revolution. The considerable violence that the Mountain deployed against the nobility and its property was not used for the proletariat but for the bourgeoisie. The major part of the requisitioned goods – 'national goods' [*i.e., church property possessed by the revolutionary government. – Editors*] – were bought and fell into the hands of the upper bourgeoisie. The impoverishment of the clergy and the nobility only reinforced the economic, social and political power of the French bourgeoisie.

… Such are the immediate social effects of the French Revolution. Currently, a century later, we clearly see the ultimate consequences of the Great Revolution. It installed certainly the bourgeoisie on the throne, but the reign of the bourgeoisie is inseparable from the development of the proletariat.

And it is particularly now that we see with our own eyes at which point its success over the nobility led to its ruin.…

The French proletariat's premature attempt to bury the freshly hatched bourgeoisie in 1793 was necessarily doomed. But after a hundred years of rule, the bourgeoisie weakens under the weight of the years. To bury that old sinner is today a trifle for the overflowing energy of the proletariat. At the end of the last century, the proletariat – not very numerous and without any clear class consciousness – disappeared within the mass of the petty bourgeoisie. At the end of our century, the proletariat finds itself at the head of the whole of the labouring people of the most important countries and gains to its cause the mass of the petty bourgeoisie of the cities as well, more recently, as the peasantry.

At the time of the great French Revolution, the best personalities were on the side of the bourgeoisie. In our time, the noblest personalities flow from the bourgeoisie (of the 'intellectual layer') to the side of the proletariat.

At the end of the last century, the victory of the bourgeoisie over the nobility was an historical necessity. Today, the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie has the same claim of historical necessity.

But the victory of the proletariat means the triumph of socialism, the triumph of the equality and the freedom of all. This economic equality, which existed for a hundred years as the great dream of some idealists, today crystallises in the labour and socialist movements. The motto 'Freedom, Equality, Fraternity' was at the time of the great French Revolution only a parade slogan in the mouth of the bourgeoisie, and a weak sigh in the mouth of the people – this watchword is today the threatening war-cry of an army of several million workers. The day approaches when it will take form and become reality.

In the year 1793, the people of Paris succeeded in holding power within their hands for a short duration; but it was unable to use this power to be liberated economically. In our time, the proletariat of all the countries leads resolutely and tirelessly at the same time a political and economic struggle.

The day when the proletariat will hold the political power will be also the day of its economic emancipation.

3

REFORM OR REVOLUTION

The German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* – SPD), was in many ways the outstanding working-class organisation in the world as the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth. It had a membership in the hundreds of thousands, a voting base in the millions, with affiliates and auxiliaries – ranging from powerful trade unions, to educational and cultural institutions, a network of consumer co-operatives, daily newspapers as well as weekly and monthly publications with mass readerships, an array of women's and youth groups, singing societies and sports teams, pension societies and burial funds, and more – that added up to a powerful sub-culture, a way of life, for significant layers of the German working class. Its official ideology was Marxism, which projected an eventual working-class revolution (once the workers' movement had grown sufficiently powerful and capitalism sufficiently crisis-ridden) that would usher in a bright socialist future.

By the late 1890s, however, one of the SPD's foremost ideologists, Eduard Bernstein, called for a revision of the party's Marxist ideology – arguing that an accumulation of social reforms through the efforts of the Social Democratic movement would eliminate the need for revolution. Instead, there would be a gradual evolution of the increasingly reformed, improved capitalism (with class conflict giving way to increasingly benign social relations) into something approximating the socialist goal. Revolutionary perspectives in Marx's thought were attributed by Bernstein to the influence of the well-known advocate of insurrection by revolutionary elites, Auguste Blanqui. Bernstein sought to 'rescue' Marx's mature thought from such revolutionary inclinations. His views can be found in English translation in the book *Evolutionary Socialism*. These views – although challenged by 'orthodox' SPD political leaders such as August Bebel and leading theorists such as Karl Kautsky – reflected the views and political practice among a growing layer of party functionaries and a significant percentage of its membership. One leading SPD official, Ignaz Auer, privately wrote to Bernstein: 'My dear Ede, one does not formally

make a decision to do the things you suggest, one doesn't *say* such things, one simply *does* them.'

Luxemburg had recently joined the SPD, after an apprenticeship in the revolutionary underground of the Polish workers' movement. She wrote the most vigorous and uncompromising defences of revolutionary Marxist theory and politics, and surely the sharpest of polemics against Bernstein's orientation – to which the terms 'reformism', 'revisionism' and 'opportunism' have been applied. As these brief excerpts from her polemic demonstrate, Luxemburg – while scathing in her characterisation of Bernstein's views – was satisfied with neither literary insults nor appeals to 'orthodoxy', but passionately focused her readers' attention on hard-headed social-political analysis, and the realities of economic development, and the dynamics of social struggle. The entire work can be found in Helen Scott, ed. *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*. Written in 1898 and 1899 for the *Leipziger Volkzeitung*, it came out as a small book in 1900, and was published in English, translated in the 1930s by a person utilising the name 'Integer'. It has been reprinted a number of times since then.

Introduction

At first view the title of this work may be found surprising. Can the Social Democracy be against reforms? Can we contrapose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the Social Democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.

It is in Eduard Bernstein's theory, presented in his articles on 'Problems of Socialism', *Neue Zeit* of 1897–98, and in his book *Die Voraussetzungen des Socialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie** that we find, for the first time, the opposition of the two factors of the labour movement. His theory tends to counsel us to renounce the social transformation, the final goal of Social Democracy and, inversely, to make social reforms, the means of the class struggle, its aim. Bernstein himself has very clearly and characteristically formulated this viewpoint when he wrote: 'The final goal, no matter what it is, is nothing; the movement is everything.'

But since the final goal of socialism constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire labour movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order – the question: 'Reform or Revolution?' as it is posed by Bernstein, equals for the Social Democracy the question: 'To be or not to be?' In the controversy with Bernstein and his followers, everybody in the Party ought to understand clearly it is not a question of this or that method of struggle, or the use of this or that set of tactics, but of the very existence of the Social Democratic movement.

* *The Pre-Conditions of Socialism and the Tasks for Social Democracy* [English translation: *Evolutionary Socialism*].

Upon a casual consideration of Bernstein's theory, this may appear like an exaggeration. Does he not continually mention the Social Democracy and its aims? Does he not repeat again and again, in very explicit language, that he too strives toward the final goal of socialism, but in another way? Does he not stress particularly that he fully approves of the present practice of the Social Democracy?

That is all true, to be sure. It is also true that every new movement, when it first elaborates its theory and policy, begins by finding support in the preceding movement, though it may be in direct contradiction with the latter. It begins by suiting itself to the forms found at hand and by speaking the language spoken hereto. In time the new grain breaks through the old husk. The new movement finds its forms and its own language.

To expect an opposition against scientific socialism at its very beginning, to express itself clearly, fully and to the last consequence on the subject of its real content: to expect it to deny openly and bluntly the theoretic basis of the Social Democracy – would amount to underrating the power of scientific socialism. Today he who wants to pass as a socialist, and at the same time declare war on Marxian doctrine, the most stupendous product of the human mind in the century, must begin with involuntary esteem for Marx. He must begin by acknowledging himself to be his disciple, by seeking in Marx's own teachings the points of support for an attack on the latter, while he represents this attack as a further development of Marxian doctrine. On this account, we must, unconcerned by its outer forms, pick out the sheathed kernel of Bernstein's theory. This is a matter of urgent necessity for the broad layers of the industrial proletariat in our Party.

No coarser insult, no baser aspersion, can be thrown against the workers than the remarks: 'Theocratic controversies are only for academicians.' Some time ago Lassalle said: 'Only when science and the workers, these opposite poles of society, become one, will they crush in their arms of steel all obstacles to culture.' The entire strength of the modern labour movement rests on theoretic knowledge.

But doubly important is this knowledge for the workers in the present case, because it is precisely they and their influence in the movement that are in the balance here. It is their skin that is being brought to market. The opportunist theory in the Party, the theory formulated by Bernstein, is nothing else than an unconscious attempt to assure predominance to the petty bourgeois elements that have entered our Party, to change the policy and aims of our Party in their direction. The question of reform or revolution, of the final goal and the movement, is basically, in another form, but the question of the petty bourgeois or proletarian character of the labour movement.

It is, therefore, in the interest of the proletarian mass of the Party to become acquainted, actively and in detail, with the present theoretical knowledge. If such knowledge remains the monopoly of a handful of 'academicians' in the Party, the Party will face the danger of going astray. Only when the great mass of workers take the keen and dependable weapons of scientific socialism in their own hands, will all the petty bourgeois inclinations, all the opportunistic currents, come to naught. The movement will then find itself on sure and firm ground. 'Quantity will do it.'

The Opportunist Method

If it is true that theories are only the images of the phenomena of the exterior world in the human consciousness, it must be added, concerning Eduard Bernstein's system, that theories are sometimes inverted images. Think of a theory of instituting socialism by means of social reforms in the face of the complete stagnation of the reform movement in Germany. Think of a theory of trade union control. Consider the theory of winning a majority in Parliament, after the revision of the constitution of Saxony and in view of the most recent attempts against universal suffrage. However, the pivotal point of Bernstein's system is not located in his conception of the practical tasks of the Social Democracy. It is found in his stand on the course of the objective development of capitalist society, which, in turn is closely bound to his conception of the practical tasks of the Social Democracy.

According to Bernstein, a general decline of capitalism seems to be increasingly improbable because, on the one hand, capitalism shows a greater capacity of adaptation, and, on the other hand, capitalist production becomes more and more varied.

The capacity of capitalism to adapt itself, says Bernstein, is manifested first in the disappearance of general crises, resulting from the development of the credit system, employers' organisations, wider means of communication and informational services. It shows itself secondly, in the tenacity of the middle classes, which hails from the growing differentiation of the branches of production and the elevation of vast layers of the proletariat to the level of the middle class. It is furthermore proved, argues Bernstein, by the amelioration of the economic and political situation of the proletariat as a result of its trade union activity.

From this theoretic stand is derived the following general conclusion about the practical work of the Social Democracy. The latter must not direct its daily activity toward the conquest of political power, but toward the betterment of the condition of the working class, within the existing order. It must not expect to institute socialism as a result of a political and social crisis, but should build socialism by means of the progressive extension of social control and the gradual application of the principle of co-operation.

Bernstein himself sees nothing new in his theories. On the contrary, he believes them to be in agreement with certain declarations of Marx and Engels. Nevertheless, it seems to us that it is difficult to deny that they are in formal contradiction with the conceptions of scientific socialism.

If Bernstein's revisionism merely consisted in affirming that the march of capitalist development is slower than was thought before, he would merely be presenting an argument for adjourning the conquest of power by the proletariat, on which everybody agreed up to now. Its only consequence would be a slowing up of the pace of the struggle.

But that is not the case. What Bernstein questions is not the rapidity of the development of capitalist society, but the march

of the development itself and, consequently, the very possibility of a change to socialism.

Socialist theory up to now declared that the point of departure for a transformation to socialism would be a general and catastrophic crisis. We must distinguish in this outlook two things: the fundamental idea and its exterior form.

The fundamental idea consists of the affirmation that capitalism, as a result of its own inner contradictions, moves toward a point when it will be unbalanced, when it will simply become impossible. There were good reasons for conceiving that juncture in the form of a catastrophic general commercial crisis. But that is of secondary importance when the fundamental idea is considered.

The scientific basis of socialism rests, as is well known, on three principal results of capitalist development. First, on the growing anarchy of capitalist economy, leading inevitably to its ruin. Second, on the progressive socialisation of the process of production, which creates the germs of the future social order. And third, on the increased organisation and consciousness of the proletarian class, which constitutes the active factor in the coming revolution.

Bernstein pulls away from the first of the three fundamental supports of scientific socialism. He says that capitalist development does not lead to a general economic collapse.

He does not merely reject a certain form of the collapse. He rejects the very possibility of collapse. He says textually: 'One could claim that by collapse of the present society is meant something else than a general commercial crisis, worse than all others, that is a complete collapse of the capitalist system brought about as a result of its own contradictions.' And to this he replies: 'With the growing development of society a complete and almost general collapse of the present system of production becomes more and more improbable, because capitalist development increases on the one hand the capacity of adaptation and, on the other – that is at the same time, the differentiation of industry.'

But then the question arises: Why and how, in that case, can we attain the final goal? According to scientific socialism, the historic necessity of the socialist revolution manifests itself

above all in the growing anarchy of capitalism, which drives the system into an impasse. But if one admits with Bernstein that capitalist development does not move in the direction of its own ruin, then socialism ceases to be objectively necessary. There remain the other two mainstays of the scientific explanation of socialism, which are also said to be consequences of capitalism itself: the socialisation of the process of production and the growing consciousness of the proletariat. It is these two matters that Bernstein has in mind when he says: 'The suppression of the theory of collapse does not in any way deprive socialist doctrine of the power of persuasion. For, examined closely, what are all factors enumerated by us that make for the suppression or the modification of the former crises? Nothing else, in fact, than the conditions, or even in party the germs, of the socialisation of production and exchange.'

Very little reflection is needed to understand that here too we face a false conclusion. Where lies the importance of all the phenomena that are said by Bernstein to be the means of capitalist adaptation – cartels, the credit system, the development of means of communication, the amelioration of the situation of the working class, etc.? Obviously, in that they suppress or, at least, attenuate the internal contradictions of capitalist economy, and stop the development or the aggravation of these contradictions. Thus the suppression of crises can only mean the suppression of the antagonism between production and exchange on the capitalist base. The amelioration of the situation of the working class, or the penetration of certain fractions of the class into middle layers, can only mean the attenuation of the antagonism between Capital and Labour. But if these factors suppress the capitalist contradictions and consequently save the system from ruin, if they enable capitalism to maintain itself – and that is why Bernstein calls them 'means of adaptation' – how can cartels, the credit system, trade unions, etc., be at the same time 'the conditions and even, in part, the germs' of socialism? Obviously only in the sense that they express most clearly the social character of production.

But by presenting it in its capitalist form, the same factors render superfluous, inversely, in the same measure, the transformation of this socialised production into socialist production. That is why they can be the germs or conditions of a socialist order only in a theoretic sense and not in an historic sense. They are phenomena which, in the light of our conception of socialism, we know to be related to socialism but which, in fact, not only do not lead to a socialist revolution but render it, on the contrary, superfluous.

There remains one force making for socialism – the class consciousness of the proletariat. But it, too, is in the given case not the simple intellectual reflection of the growing contradictions of capitalism and its approaching decline. It is now no more than an ideal whose force of persuasion rests only on the perfection attributed to it.

We have here, in brief, the explanation of the socialist programme by means of 'pure reason'. We have here, to use simpler language, an idealist explanation of socialism. The objective necessity of socialism, the explanation of socialism as the result of the material development of society, falls to the ground.

Revisionist theory thus places itself in a dilemma. Either the socialist transformation is, as was admitted up to now, the consequence of the internal contradictions of capitalism, and with the growth of capitalism will develop its inner contradictions, resulting inevitably, at some point, in its collapse, (in that case the 'means of adaptation' are ineffective and the theory of collapse is correct); or the 'means of adaptation' will really stop the collapse of the capitalist system and thereby enable capitalism to maintain itself by suppressing its own contradictions. In that case socialism ceases to be an historic necessity. It then becomes anything you want to call it, but it is no longer the result of the material development of society.

The dilemma leads to another. Either revisionism is correct in its position on the course of capitalist development, and therefore the socialist transformation of society is only a utopia, or socialism is not a utopia, and the theory of 'means of adaptation' is false. There is the question in a nutshell.…

Conquest of Political Power

The fate of democracy is bound up, we have seen, with the fate of the labour movement. But does the development of democracy render superfluous or impossible a proletarian revolution, that is, the conquest of political power by the workers?

Bernstein settles the question by weighing minutely the good and bad sides of social reform and social revolution. He does it almost in the same manner in which cinnamon or pepper is weighed out in a consumers' co-operative store. He sees the legislative course of historic development as the action of 'intelligence', while the revolutionary course of historic development is for him the action of 'feeling'. Reformist activity, he recognises as a slow method of historic progress, revolution as a rapid method of progress. In legislation he sees a methodical force; in revolution, a spontaneous force.

We have known for a long time that the petty bourgeoisie reformer finds 'good' and 'bad' sides in everything. He nibbles a bit at all grasses. But the real course of events is little affected by such combination. The carefully gathered little pile of the 'good sides' of all things possible collapses at the first fillip of history. Historically, legislative reform and the revolutionary method function in accordance with influences that are much more profound than the consideration of the advantages or inconveniences of one method or another.

In the history of bourgeois society, legislative reform served to strengthen progressively the rising class till the latter was sufficiently strong to seize political power, to suppress the existing juridical system and to construct itself a new one. Bernstein, thundering against the conquest of political power as a theory of Blanquist violence, has the misfortune of labelling as a Blanquist error that which has always been the pivot and the motive force of human history. From the first appearance of class societies having the class struggle as the essential content of their history, the conquest of political power has been the aim of all rising classes. Here is the starting point and end of every historic period. This can be seen in the long struggle of the Latin peasantry against the financiers and

nobility of ancient Rome, in the struggle of the medieval nobility against the bishops and in the struggle of the artisans against the nobles, in the cities of the Middle Ages. In modern times, we see it in the struggle of the bourgeoisie against feudalism.

Legislative reform and revolution are not different methods of historic development that can be picked out at the pleasure from the counter of history, just as one chooses hot or cold sausages. Legislative reform and revolution are different *factors* in the development of class society. They condition and complement each other, and are at the same time reciprocally exclusive, as are the north and south poles, the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Every legal constitution is the *product* of a revolution. In the history of classes, revolution is the act of political creation, while legislation is the political expression of the life of a society that has already come into being. Work for reform does not contain its own force independent from revolution. During every historic period, work for reforms is carried on only in the direction given to it by the impetus of the last revolution and continues as long as the impulsion from the last revolution continues to make itself felt. Or, to put it more concretely, in each historic period work for reforms is carried on only in the framework of the social form created by the last revolution. Here is the kernel of the problem.

It is contrary to history to represent work for reforms as a long-drawn-out revolution and revolution as a condensed series of reforms. A social transformation and a legislative reform do not differ according to their duration but according to their content. The secret of historic change through the utilisation of political power resides precisely in the transformation of simple quantitative modification into a new quality, or to speak more concretely, in the passage of an historic period from one given form of society to another.

That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the

old society. If we follow the political conceptions of revisionism, we arrive at the same conclusion that is reached when we follow the economic theories of revisionism. Our programme becomes not the realisation of *socialism*, but the reform of *capitalism*; not the suppression of the wage labour system but the diminution of exploitation, that is, the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of suppression of capitalism itself.

Does the reciprocal role of legislative reform and revolution apply only to the class struggle of the past? Is it possible that now, as a result of the development of the bourgeois juridical system, the function of moving society from one historic phase to another belongs to legislative reform and that the conquest of State power by the proletariat has really become 'an empty phrase', as Bernstein puts it?

The very opposite is true. What distinguishes bourgeois society from other class societies – from ancient society and from the social order of the Middle Ages? Precisely the fact that class domination does not rest on 'acquired rights' but on *real economic relations* – the fact that wage labour is not a juridical relation, but purely an economic relation. In our juridical system there is not a single legal formula for the class domination of today. The few remaining traces of such formulae of class domination are (as that concerning servants) survivals of feudal society.

How can wage slavery be suppressed the 'legislative way', if wage slavery is not expressed in the laws? Bernstein, who would do away with capitalism by means of legislative reforms, finds himself in the same situation as Uspensky's Russian policeman who said: 'Quickly I seized the rascal by the collar! But what do I see? The confounded fellow has no collar!' And that is precisely Bernstein's difficulty.

'All previous societies were based on an antagonism between an oppressing class and an oppressed class' (*Communist Manifesto*). But in the preceding phases of modern society, this antagonism was expressed in distinctly determined juridical relations and could, especially because of that, accord, to a certain extent, a place to new relations within the framework of the old. 'In the midst of serfdom, the serf raised himself to the rank of a member of the

town community' (*Communist Manifesto*). How was that made possible? It was made possible by the progressive suppression of all feudal privileges in the environs of the city: the corvée, the right to special dress, the inheritance tax, the lord's claim to the best cattle, the personal levy, marriage under duress, the right to succession, etc., which all together constituted serfdom.

In the same way, the small bourgeoisie of the Middle Ages succeeded in raising itself, while it was still under the yoke of feudal absolutism, to the rank of bourgeoisie (*Communist Manifesto*). By what means? By means of the formal partial suppression or complete loosening of the corporative bonds, by the progressive transformation of the fiscal administration and of the army.

Consequently, when we consider the question from the abstract viewpoint, not from the historic viewpoint, we can *imagine* (in view of the former class relations) a legal passage, according to the reformist method, from feudal society to bourgeois society. But what do we see in reality? In reality, we see that legal reforms not only do not obviate the seizure of political power by the bourgeoisie but have, on the contrary, prepared for it and led to it. A formal social-political transformation was indispensable for the abolition of slavery as well as for the complete suppression of feudalism.

But the situation is entirely different now. No law obliges the proletariat to submit itself to the yoke of capitalism. Poverty, the lack of means of production, obliges the proletariat to submit itself to the yoke of capitalism. And no law in the world can give to the proletariat the means of production while it remains in the framework of bourgeois society, for not laws but economic development have torn the means of production from the producers' possession.

And neither is the exploitation inside the system of wage labour based on laws. The level of wages is not fixed by legislation but by economic factors. The phenomenon of capitalist exploitation does not rest on a legal disposition but on the purely economic fact that labour power plays in this exploitation the role of a merchandise possessing, among other characteristics, the agreeable quality of producing value – *more* than the value it consumes in

the form of the labourer's means of subsistence. In short, the fundamental relations of the domination of the capitalist class cannot be transformed by means of legislative reforms, on the basis of capitalist society, because these relations have not been introduced by bourgeois laws, nor have they received the form of such laws. Apparently, Bernstein is not aware of this for he speaks of 'socialist reforms'. On the other hand, he seems to express implicit recognition of this when he writes, on page 10 of his book, 'the economic motive acts freely today, while formerly it was masked by all kinds of relations of domination by all sorts of ideology'.

It is one of the peculiarities of the capitalist order that within it all the elements of the future society first assume, in their development, a form not approaching socialism but, on the contrary, a form moving more and more away from socialism. Production takes on a progressively increasing social character. But under what form is the social character of capitalist production expressed? It is expressed in the form of the large enterprise, in the form of the shareholding concern, the cartel, within which the capitalist antagonisms, capitalist exploitation, the oppression of labour-power, are augmented to the extreme.

In the army, capitalist development leads to the extension of obligatory military service to the reduction of the time of service and consequently to a material approach to a popular militia. But all of this takes place under the form of modern militarism in which the domination of the people by the militarist State and the class character of the State manifest themselves most clearly.

In the field of political relations, the development of democracy brings – in the measure that it finds a favourable soil – the participation of all popular strata in political life and, consequently, some sort of 'people's State'. But this participation takes the form of bourgeois parliamentarism, in which class antagonisms and class domination are not done away with, but are, on the contrary, displayed in the open. Exactly because capitalist development moves through these contradictions, it is necessary to extract the kernel of socialist society from its capitalist shell. Exactly for this

reason must the proletariat seize political power and suppress completely the capitalist system.

Of course, Bernstein draws other conclusions. If the development of democracy leads to the aggravation and not to the lessening of capitalist antagonisms, 'the Social Democracy', he answers us, 'in order not to render its task more difficult, must by all means try to stop social reforms and the extension of democratic institutions' (page 71). Indeed, that would be the right thing to do if the Social Democracy found to its taste, in the petty bourgeois manner, the futile task of picking for itself all the good sides of history and rejecting the bad sides of history. However, in that case, it should at the same time 'try to stop' capitalism in general, for there is no doubt that the latter is the rascal placing all these obstacles in the way of socialism. But capitalism furnishes besides the *obstacles* also the only *possibilities* of realising the socialist programme. The same can be said about democracy.

If democracy has become superfluous or annoying to the bourgeoisie, it is on the contrary necessary and indispensable to the working class. It is necessary to the working class because it creates the political forms (autonomous administration, electoral rights, etc.) which will serve the proletariat as fulcrums in its task of transforming bourgeois society. Democracy is indispensable to the working class because only through the exercise of its democratic rights, in the struggle for democracy, can the proletariat become aware of its class interests and its historic task.

In a word, democracy is indispensable not because it renders superfluous the conquest of political power by the proletariat but because it renders this conquest of power both *necessary* and *possible*. When Engels, in his preface to *The Class Struggles in France*, revised the tactics of the modern labour movement and urged the legal struggle as opposed to the barricades, he did not have in mind – this comes out of every line of the preface – the question of a definite conquest of political power, but the contemporary daily struggle. He did not have in mind the attitude that the proletariat must take toward the capitalist State at the time of the seizure of power but the attitude of the proletariat while in the bounds of the capitalist State. Engels

was giving directions to the proletariat *oppressed*, and not to the proletariat victorious.

On the other hand, Marx's well known sentence on the agrarian question in England (Bernstein leans on it heavily), in which he says: 'We shall probably succeed easier by buying the estates of the landlords', does not refer to the stand of the proletariat *before, but after its victory*. For there evidently can be a question of buying the property of the old dominant class only when the workers are in power. The possibility envisaged by Marx is not of the *pacific exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat* and not the replacement of the dictatorship with capitalist social reforms. There was no doubt for Marx and Engels about the necessity of having the proletariat conquer political power. It is left to Bernstein to consider the poultry-yard of bourgeois parliamentarism as the organ by means of which we are to realise the most formidable social transformation of history, *the passage from capitalist society to socialism*.

Bernstein introduces his theory by warning the proletariat against the danger of acquiring power too early. That is, according to Bernstein, the proletariat ought to leave the bourgeois society in its present condition and itself suffer a frightful defeat. If the proletariat came to power, it could draw from Bernstein's theory the following 'practical' conclusion: to go to sleep. His theory condemns the proletariat at the most decisive moments of the struggle, to inactivity, to a passive betrayal of its own cause.

Our programme would be a miserable scrap of paper if it could not serve us in *all* eventualities, at *all* moments of the struggle and if it did not serve us by its *application* and not by its non-application. If our programme contains the formula of the historical development of society from capitalism to socialism, it must also formulate, in all its characteristic fundamentals, all the transitory phases of this development and it should, consequently, be able to indicate to the proletariat what ought to be its corresponding action at every moment on the road toward socialism. There can be no time for the proletariat when it will be obliged to abandon its programme or be abandoned by it.

Practically, this is manifested in the fact that there can be no time when the proletariat, placed in power by the force of events, is not in the condition or is not morally obliged to take certain measures for the realisation of its programme, that is, take transitory measures in the direction of socialism. Behind the belief that the socialist programme can collapse completely at any point of the dictatorship of the proletariat lurks the other belief that the *socialist programme is generally and at all times, unrealisable*.

And what if the transitory measures are premature? The question hides a great number of mistaken ideas concerning the real course of a social transformation.

In the first place, the seizure of political power by the proletariat, that is to say by a large popular class, is not produced artificially. It presupposes (with the exception of such cases as the Paris Commune, when the proletariat did not obtain power after a conscious struggle for its goal but fell into its hands like a good thing abandoned by everybody else) a definite degree of maturity of economic and political relations. Here we have the essential difference between *coups d'état* along Blanqui's conception which are accomplished by an 'active minority' and burst out like pistol shot, always inopportunely, and the conquest of political power by a great conscious popular mass which can only be the product of the decomposition of bourgeois society and therefore bears in itself the economic and political legitimisation of its opportune appearance.

If, therefore, considered from the angle of political effect the conquest of political power by the working class cannot materialise itself 'too early' then from the angle of conservation of power, the premature revolution, the thought of which keeps Bernstein awake, menaces us like a sword of Damocles. Against that neither prayers nor supplication, neither scares nor any amount of anguish, are of any avail. And this for two very simple reasons.

In the first place, it is impossible to imagine that a transformation as formidable as the passage from capitalist society to socialist society can be realised in one happy act. To consider that as possible is, again, to lend colour to conceptions that are

clearly Blanquist. The socialist transformation supposes a long and stubborn struggle, in the course of which, it is quite probable the proletariat will be repulsed more than once so that for the first time, from the viewpoint of the final outcome of the struggle, it will have necessarily come to power 'too early'.

In the second place, it will be impossible to avoid the 'premature' conquest of State power by the proletariat precisely because these 'premature' attacks of the proletariat constitute a factor and indeed a very important factor, creating the political conditions of the final victory. In the course of the political crisis accompanying its seizure of power, in the course of the long and stubborn struggles, the proletariat will acquire the degree of political maturity permitting it to obtain in time a definitive victory of the revolution. Thus these 'premature' attacks of the proletariat against the State power are in themselves important historic factors helping to provoke and determine the *point* of the definite victory. Considered from this viewpoint, the idea of a 'premature' conquest of political power by the labouring class appears to be a political absurdity derived from a mechanical conception of the development of society, and positing for the victory of the class struggle a point fixed *outside* and *independent of* the class struggle.

Since the proletariat is not in the position to seize power in any other way than 'prematurely', since the proletariat is absolutely obliged to seize power once or several times 'too early' before it can maintain itself in power for good, the objection to the 'premature' conquest of power is at bottom nothing more than a *general opposition to the aspiration of the proletariat to possess itself of State power*. Just as all roads lead to Rome so too do we logically arrive at the conclusion that the revisionist proposal to slight the final aim of the socialist movement is really a recommendation to renounce the socialist movement itself....

Opportunism and Theory in Practice

Bernstein's book is of great importance to the German and the international labour movement. It is the first attempt to give

a theoretic base to the opportunist currents common in the Social Democracy.

These currents may be said to have existed for a long time in our movement, if we take into consideration such sporadic manifestations of opportunism as the question of subsidisation of steamers. But it is only since about 1890, with the suppression of the anti-socialist laws, that we have had a trend of opportunism of a clearly defined character. [Georg] Vollmar's 'State Socialism', the vote on the Bavarian budget, the 'agrarian socialism' of south Germany, Heine's policy of compensation, [Max] Schippel's stand on tariffs and militarism, are the high points in the development of our opportunist practice.

What appears to characterise this practice above all? A certain hostility to 'theory'. This is quite natural, for our 'theory', that is, the principles of scientific socialism, impose clearly marked limitations to practical activity – insofar as it concerns the aims of this activity, the means used in attaining these aims and the method employed in this activity. It is quite natural for people who run after immediate 'practical' results to want to free themselves from such limitations and to render their practice independent of our 'theory'.

However, this outlook is refuted by every attempt to apply it in reality. State socialism, agrarian socialism, the policy of compensation, the question of the army, all constituted defeats to our opportunism. It is clear that, if this current is to maintain itself, it must try to destroy the principles of our theory and elaborate a theory of its own. Bernstein's book is precisely an effort in that direction. That is why at Stuttgart all the opportunist elements in our party immediately grouped themselves around Bernstein's banner. If the opportunist currents in the practical activity of our party are an entirely natural phenomenon which can be explained in the light of the special conditions of our activity and its development, Bernstein's theory is no less natural an attempt to group these currents into a general theoretic expression, an attempt to elaborate its own theoretic conditions and the break with scientific socialism. That is why the published

expression of Bernstein's ideas should be recognised as a theoretic test for opportunism and as its first scientific legitimisation.

What was the result of this test? We have seen the result. Opportunism is not a position to elaborate a positive theory capable of withstanding criticism. All it can do is to attack various isolated theses of Marxist theory and, just because Marxist doctrine constitutes one solidly constructed edifice, hope by this means to shake the entire system from the top to its foundation.

This shows that opportunist practice is essentially irreconcilable with Marxism. But it also proves that opportunism is incompatible with socialism (the socialist movement) in general, that its internal tendency is to push the labour movement into bourgeois paths, that opportunism tends to paralyse completely the proletarian class struggle. The latter, considered historically, has evidently nothing to do with Marxist doctrine. For, before Marx and independently from him, there have been labour movements and various socialist doctrines, each of which, in its way, was the theoretic expression corresponding to the conditions of the time, of the struggle of the working class for emancipation. The theory that consists in basing socialism on the moral notion of justice, on a struggle against the mode of distribution, instead of basing it on a struggle against the mode of production, the conception of class antagonism as an antagonism between the poor and the rich, the effort to graft the 'co-operative principle' on capitalist economy – all the nice notions found in Bernstein's doctrine – already existed before him. And these theories were, *in their time*, in spite of their insufficiency, effective theories of the proletarian class struggle. They were the children's seven-league boots thanks to which the proletariat learned to walk upon the scene of history.

But after the development of the class struggle and its reflex in its social conditions had led to the abandonment of these theories and to the elaboration of the principles of scientific socialism, there could be no socialism – at least in Germany – outside of Marxist socialism and there could be no socialist class struggle outside of the Social Democracy. From then on, socialism and Marxism, the proletarian struggle for emancipation and the Social Democracy,

were identical. That is why the return to pre-Marxist socialist theories no longer signifies today a return to the seven-league boots of the childhood of the proletariat, but a return to the puny worn-out slippers of the bourgeoisie.

Bernstein's theory was the *first*, and at the same time, the *last* attempt to give a theoretic base to opportunism. It is the last, because in Bernstein's system, opportunism has gone – negatively through its renunciation of scientific socialism, positively through its marshalling of every bit of theoretic confusion possible – as far as it can. In Bernstein's book, opportunism has crowned its theoretic development (just as it completed its practical development in the position taken by Schippel on the question of militarism), and has reached its ultimate conclusion.

Marxist doctrine can not only refute opportunism theoretically. It alone can explain opportunism as an historic phenomenon in the development of the party. The forward march of the proletariat, on a world historic scale, to its final victory is not, indeed, 'so simple a thing'. The peculiar character of this movement resides precisely in the fact that here, for the first time in history, the popular masses themselves, *in opposition* to the ruling classes, are to impose their will but they must effect this outside of the present society, beyond the existing society. This *will* the masses can only form in a constant struggle against the existing order. The union of the broad popular masses with an aim reaching beyond the existing social order, the union of the daily struggle with the great world transformation, that is the task of the Social Democratic movement, which must logically grope on its road of development between the following two rocks: abandoning the mass character of the party or abandoning its final aim, falling into bourgeois reformism or into sectarianism, anarchism or opportunism.

In its theoretic arsenal, Marxist doctrine furnished, more than half a century ago, arms that are effective against both of these two extremes. But because our movement is a mass movement and because the dangers menacing it are not derived from the human brain but from social conditions, Marxist doctrine could not assure us, in advance and once for always, against the anarchist and opportunist tendencies. The latter can be overcome only as

we pass from the domain of theory to the domain of practice but only with the help of the arms furnished us by Marx.

'Bourgeois revolutions,' wrote Marx a half century ago, 'like those of the eighteenth century, rush onward rapidly from success to success, their stage effects outbid one another, men and things seem to be set in flaming brilliants, ecstasy is the prevailing spirit; but they are short-lived, they reach their climax speedily and then society relapses into a long fit of nervous reaction before it learns how to appropriate the fruits of its period of feverish excitement. Proletarian revolutions, on the contrary, such as those of the nineteenth century, criticise themselves constantly; constantly interrupt themselves in their own course; come back to what seems to have been accomplished, in order to start anew; scorn with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weakness and meanness of their first attempts; seem to throw down their adversary only to enable him to draw fresh strength from the earth and again to rise up against them in more gigantic stature; constantly recoil in fear before the undefined monster magnitude of their own objects – until finally that situation is created which renders all retreats impossible and conditions themselves cry out: "Hic Rhodus, hic salta!" Here is the rose. And here we must dance!' [Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*].

This has remained true even after the elaboration of the doctrine of scientific socialism. The proletarian movement has not as yet, all at once, become social-democratic, even in Germany. But it is becoming more social-democratic, surmounting continuously the extreme deviations of anarchism and opportunism, both of which are only determining phases of the development of the Social Democracy, considered as a process.

For these reasons, we must say that the surprising thing here is not the appearance of an opportunist current but rather its feebleness. As long as it showed itself in isolated cases of the practical activity of the party, one could suppose that it had a serious political base. But now that it has shown its face in Bernstein's book, one cannot help exclaim with astonishment: 'What? Is that all you have to say?' Not the shadow of an original

thought! Not a single idea that was not refuted, crushed, reduced into dust by Marxism several decades ago!

It was enough for opportunism to speak out to prove it had nothing to say. In the history of our party that is the only importance of Bernstein's book.

Thus saying good-bye to the mode of thought of the revolutionary proletariat, to dialectics and to the materialist conception of history, Bernstein can thank them for the attenuating circumstances they provide for his conversion. For only dialectics and the materialist conception of history, magnanimous as they are, could make Bernstein appear as an unconscious predestined instrument, by means of which the rising working class expresses its momentary weakness but which, upon closer inspection, it throws aside contemptuously and with pride.

4

EIGHT-HOUR DAY – HOW TO WIN REFORMS

This article, following an SPD Congress in 1902, has been characterised as reflecting an 'almost humdrum orthodoxy' (by Dick Howard) – although Luxemburg's willingness to suggest a critical attitude toward August Bebel, the 'grand old man of German Social Democracy', for whom she herself retained affection, suggests a radical edge hardly the norm in SPD 'orthodoxy'. While Howard and others have denigrated the SPD's historic Erfurt Programme of 1891 as being a blunt instrument for revolutionary socialists, and are critical of Luxemburg for being 'stuck' in Erfurt 'orthodoxy', such recent scholars as Lars Lih have argued that the Erfurt Programme represented, in fact, a revolutionary forward-step for the German (and international) workers' movement. What is interesting here, in addition to such afore-mentioned left-edginess, is (1) a practical demonstration of how Luxemburg, far from rejecting the struggle for reforms, saw them as an essential aspect of advancing a revolutionary working-class strategy, and (2) a practical-minded approach on how to achieve reforms, with a revolutionary perspective being essential to winning victories for the working class in the here-and-now. The article first appeared in the *Leipzeiger Volkseitung* on 19 September 1902. Translated into English by Rosemarie Waldrop, it appeared in Dick Howard, ed. *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg* in 1971.

An extensive debate concerning the eight-hour day followed the report on parliamentary activity at our Party Congress last Wednesday and Thursday. It is true, it ended with the usual referral of demands to our parliamentary delegation. But I hope our representatives have nevertheless gathered from this debate that their procedure concerning the eight-hour day has caused a certain dissatisfaction in large segments of the Party. This debate, started by Comrade [Emil] Eichhorn and many delegates from Berlin, was therefore quite useful. But it perhaps missed a few important points.

It would indeed grotesquely minimise the issue of our parliamentary tactics concerning the eight-hour day if we turned it into a mere question of the Reichstag's order of business, as some of our representatives did at the Congress. Even admitting that the ordinary mortal comrade may lack the correct understanding of this mysterious and complicated matter called the Reichstag order of business, nevertheless, the order of business can only decide *when* and in what *form* we present the demand for an eight-hour day to the Reichstag. In our view, however, the heart of the matter is that our representatives are not asking for the *eight-hour day* at all, but so far only for the *ten-hour day*!

Comrade Rosenov's report on parliamentary activity as well as Comrade Edmund Fischer's remarks made it clear that our delegation considers it a mere formality and narrow pedantry to distinguish between demanding an eight-hour bill or a ten-hour bill with the prospect of a later eight-hour bill. But in fact this is not a matter of form, but of essential tactics.

It is clear that you must not demand a ten-hour day if you want the eight-hour day. Do the contrary and you'll do well: if there is any possibility of getting legislation to limit working time to ten hours, it is only by constantly pressing for an eight-hour day. All our experiences point this up. Only by demanding from bourgeois society *all* that it is capable of granting have we succeeded here and there in obtaining a small part. It is a very new principle of so-called 'practical politics' in our party to hope, on the contrary, to get great effects through modest and moderate demands.

Therefore we consider Bebel's argument, cited by Edmund Fischer, as completely wrong. Bebel suggests: we will demand the ten-hour day in order to force the bourgeois parties to prove they meant their often repeated promises of this reform. No matter how popular and appealing this tactical turn may seem, it altogether misses the mark. Nobody can possibly believe that our too extreme demands made it impossible for the bourgeois parties to show their good will. On the contrary, everyone knows very well that the bourgeois majority of the Reichstag could be absolutely certain of our support if ever they wanted to put through a bill for just the ten-hour day. No, it is exactly by demanding the eight-hour bill that we can force the bourgeoisie to show its good will at least with a more modest reform. Here as in other cases, it is only our pressure, our pushing the bourgeois reforms to extremes, which squeezes a quarter ounce of 'good will' out of the bourgeoisie. It is obviously bad logic to count on bringing its so-called good will out by taking the pressure off.

It is true that our faction has by no means formally given up its demand for the eight-hour day, but it also has kept it only *formally*. The Social Democratic Party has been the only party consistently to stick to the unamended eight-hour bill. If even our party now postpones this bill in favour of a different, more easily achievable bill, we thereby admit its present impossibility. In that case, it is evident that bourgeois society will no longer consider this reform at all. Put off until some time in the future, put after the more easily realised demand for the ten-hour bill, the eight-hour day will in fact be removed from practical politics for us. We must not deceive ourselves about this.

However, the legal eight-hour day is one of the demands on our minimal programme. i.e., it is the very least minimum of social reform which we, as representatives of the workers' interests, must demand and expect from the present state. The fragmentation of even these minimal demands into still smaller morsels goes against all our tactics. We must make our minimum demands in unamended form. Even if we are ready to accept *any* instalment, we must leave it to the bourgeois parties themselves to whittle down our demands to fit their interests.

If, on the other hand, we choose the way our delegation has taken concerning the eight-hour day, we stop being the party of the most advanced social progress. Indeed, how do we look even now with our ten-hour bill, compared to the petition of the Christian Miners' Association of Upper Silesia for the eight-hour day? And above all, in how awkward a position do we put our unions! They are already fighting for the nine-hour or eight-hour day and have even pushed it through here and there.

But let us have aside all practical considerations. The changing of our minimal demands into the yet smaller coin of *bourgeois* demands, as we see in the question at hand, is also distressing because it shows a dangerous tendency. The remarks of our delegates Rosenov, Edmund Fischer, and others showed beyond any doubt that they have simply been hypnotised into believing that there is *no prospect* of the Reichstag passing the eight-hour bill. But if we *ourselves* start believing that our demands are excessive and practically impossible, then we are making the saddest moral concession to bourgeois society.

We do not have much hope that the proposals referred to our representatives will immediately influence their procedure in the Reichstag. There is all the more reason to heed the excellent arguments of comrade Zetkin that the heart of our fight for the eight-hour day must be outside: in the country, in agitation, not in the Reichstag. In this issue too, our parliamentary actions must be prompted and given the necessary impetus by the great mass of workers. And the latter know no diplomatic tricks: they stand fast by the cause of the eight-hour day, a cause that international Social Democracy has pleaded for decades, a cause for which twelve May Days have been celebrated with heavy sacrifices.

5

STAGNATION AND PROGRESS OF MARXISM

In 1903, two decades after Marx's death, Luxemburg wrote one of the most sophisticated discussions of Marx's thought – as a methodology and as a body of analyses – to be offered by any major Marxist theorist. Critical of rigid and dogmatic 'orthodoxies' associated with Marx, she argued the richness and complexity of Marx's thought had yet to be fully understood and absorbed by the organised socialist movement. Far from being superseded by events as many critics and revisionists asserted, she argued that Marx's analyses, if utilised seriously and creatively in the critical spirit of Marx himself, would continue to shed light on historical, social, economic, and cultural dynamics far into the future: 'Not until the working class has been liberated from its present conditions of existence will the Marxist method of research be socialised in conjunction with the other means of production, so that it can be fully utilised for the benefit of humanity at large, and so that it can be developed to the full measure of its functional capacity.' This essay was translated by Eden and Cedar Paul and appeared in David Ryazanoff, ed. *Karl Marx: Man, Thinker and Revolutionist* (New York: International Publishers, 1927).

In his shallow but at times interesting causerie entitled *Die soziale Bewegung in Frankreich und Belgien* (*The Socialist Movement in France and Belgium*), Karl Grün remarks, aptly enough, that [Charles] Fourier's and [Claude Henri] Saint-Simon's theories had very different effects upon their respective adherents. Saint-Simon was the spiritual ancestor of a whole generation of brilliant investigators and writers in various fields of intellectual activity; but Fourier's followers were, with few exceptions, persons who blindly parroted their master's words, and were incapable of making any advance upon his teaching. Grün's explanation of this difference is that Fourier presented the world with a finished system, elaborated in all its details; whereas Saint-Simon merely tossed his disciples a loose bundle of great thoughts. Although it seems to me that Grün pays too little attention to the inner, the essential, difference between the theories of these two classical authorities in the domain of utopian socialism, I feel that on the whole his observation is sound. Beyond question, a system of ideas which is merely sketched in broad outline proves far more stimulating than a finished and symmetrical structure which leaves nothing to be added and offers no scope for the independent effort of an active mind.

Does this account for the stagnation in Marxism doctrine which has been noticeable for a good many years? The actual fact is that – apart for one or two independent contributions which mark a theoretical advance – since the publication of the last volume of *Capital* and of the last of Engels' writings there have appeared nothing more than a few excellent popularisations and expositions of Marxist theory. The substance of that theory remains just where the two founders of scientific socialism left it.

Is this because the Marxist system has imposed too rigid a framework upon the independent activities of the mind? It is undeniable that Marx has had a somewhat restrictive influence upon the free development of theory in the case of many of his pupils. Both Marx and Engels found it necessary to disclaim responsibility for the utterances of many who chose to call themselves Marxists! The scrupulous endeavour to keep 'within the bounds of

Marxism' may at times have been just as disastrous to the integrity of the thought process as has been the other extreme – the complete repudiation of the Marxist outlook, and the determination to manifest 'independence of thought' at all hazards.

Still, it is only where economic matters are concerned that we are entitled to speak of a more or less completely elaborated body of doctrines bequeathed us by Marx. The most valuable of all his teachings, the materialist-dialectical conception of history, presents itself to us as nothing more than a method of investigation, as a few inspired leading thoughts, which offer us glimpses into the entirely new world, which open us to endless perspectives of independent activity, which wing our spirit for bold flights into unexplored regions.

Nevertheless, even in this domain, with few exceptions the Marxist heritage lies fallow. The splendid new weapon rusts unused; and the theory of historical materialism remains as unelaborated and sketchy as was when first formulated by its creators.

It cannot be said, then, that the rigidity and completeness of the Marxist edifice are the explanation of the failure of Marx's successors to go on with the building.

We are often told that our movement lacks the persons of talent who might be capable of further elaborating Marx's theories. Such a lack is, indeed, of long standing; but the lack itself demands an explanation, and cannot be put forward to answer the primary question. We must remember that each epoch forms its own human material; that if in any period there is a genuine need for theoretical exponents, the period will create the forces requisite for the satisfaction of that need.

But is there a genuine need, an effective demand, for the further development of Marxist theory?

In an article upon the controversy between the Marxist and the Jevonsian Schools in England, Bernard Shaw, the talented exponent of Fabian semi-socialism, derides Hyndman for having said that the first volume of *Capital* had given him a complete understanding of Marx, and that there were no gaps in Marxist

theory – although Frederick Engels, in the preface of the second volume of *Capital*, subsequently declared that the first volume with its theory of value, had left unsolved a fundamental economic problem, whose solution would not be furnished until the third volume was published. Shaw certainly succeeded here in making Hyndman's position seem a trifle ridiculous, though Hyndman might well derive consolation from the fact that practically the whole socialist world was in the same boat![*]

The third volume of *Capital*, with its solution of the problem of the rate of profit (the basic problem of Marxist economics), did not appear till 1894. But in Germany, as in all other lands, agitation had been carried on with the aid of the unfinished material contained in the first volume; the Marxist doctrine had been popularised and had found acceptance upon the basis of this first volume alone; the success of the incomplete Marxist theory had been phenomenal; and no one had been aware that there was any gap in the teaching.

Furthermore, when the third volume finally saw the light, whilst to begin with it attracted some attention in the restricted circles of the experts, and aroused here a certain amount of comment – as far as the socialist movement as a whole was concerned, the new volume made practically no impression in the wide regions where the ideas expounded in the original book had become dominant. The theoretical conclusions of volume 3 have not hitherto evoked any attempt at popularisation, nor have they secured wide diffusion. On the contrary, even among the Social Democrats we sometimes hear, nowadays, re-echoes of the 'disappointment' with the third volume of *Capital* which is so frequently voiced by bourgeois economists – and thus the Social Democrats merely show how fully they had accepted the 'incomplete' exposition of the theory of value presented in the first volume.

* William Stanley Jevons helped initiate marginal-utility theory in economics, an alternative approach to the classical theories of political economy represented by Adam Smith and David Ricardo (utilising the labour theory of value) on which Marx based much of his own economic perspectives. George Bernard Shaw was a famous playwright, essayist, and Fabian socialist (the Fabians being exponents of a very gradualist reformism). H.M. Hyndman helped to popularise Marx's ideas in England – but presented them as a rigid 'orthodoxy'. – *Editors*.

How can we account for so remarkable a phenomenon?

Shaw, who (to quote his own expression) is fond of 'sniggering' at others, may have good reasons here, for making fun of the whole socialist movement, insofar as it is grounded upon Marx! But if he were to do this, he would be 'sniggering' at a very serious manifestation of our social life. The strange fate of the second and third volumes of *Capital* is conclusive evidence as to the general destiny of theoretical research in our movement.

From the scientific standpoint, the third volume of *Capital* must, no doubt, be primarily regarded as the completion of Marx's critique of capitalism. Without this third volume, we cannot understand, either the actually dominant law of the rate of profit; or the splitting up of surplus value into profit, interest, and rent; or the working of the law of value within the field of competition. But, and this is the main point, all these problems, however important from the outlook of the pure theory, are comparatively unimportant from the practical outlook of the class war. As far as the class war is concerned, the fundamental theoretical problem is the origin of surplus value, that is, the scientific explanation of exploitation; together with the elucidation of the tendencies toward the socialisation of the process of production, that is, the scientific explanation of the objective groundwork of the socialist revolution.

Both these problems are solved in the first volume of *Capital*, which deduces the 'expropriation of the expropriators' as the inevitable and ultimate result of the production of surplus value and of the progressive concentration of capital. Therewith, as far as theory is concerned, the essential need of the labour movement is satisfied. The workers, being actively engaged in the class war, have no direct interest in the question of how surplus value is distributed among the respective groups of exploiters; or in the question of how, in the course of this distribution, competition brings about rearrangements of production.

That is why, for socialists in general, the third volume of *Capital* remains an unread book.

But, in our movement, what applies to Marx's economic doctrines applies to theoretical research in general. It is pure

illusion to suppose that the working class, in its upward striving, can of its own accord become immeasurably creative in the theoretical domain. True that, as Engels said, the working class alone has today preserved an understanding of and interest in theory. The workers' craving for knowledge is one of the most noteworthy cultural manifestations of our day. Morally, too, the working class struggle denotes the cultural renovation of society. But active participation of the workers in the march of science is subject to fulfilment of very definite social conditions.

In every class society, intellectual culture (science and art) is created by the ruling class; and the aim of this culture is in part to ensure the direct satisfaction of the needs of the social process, and in part to satisfy the mental needs of the members of the governing class.

In the history of earlier class struggles, aspiring classes (like the Third Estate in recent days) could anticipate political dominion by establishing an intellectual dominance, inasmuch as, while they were still subjugated classes, they could set up a new science and a new art against obsolete culture of the decadent period.

The proletariat is in a very different position. As a nonpossessing class, it cannot in the course of its struggle upwards spontaneously create a mental culture of its own while it remains in the framework of bourgeois society. Within that society, and so long as its economic foundations persist, there can be no other culture than a bourgeois culture. Although certain 'socialist' professors may acclaim the wearing of neckties, the use of visiting cards, and the riding of bicycles by proletarians as notable instances of participation in cultural progress, the working class as such remains outside contemporary culture. Notwithstanding the fact that the workers create with their own hands the whole social substratum of this culture, they are only admitted to its enjoyment insofar as such admission is requisite to the satisfactory performance of their functions in the economic and social process of capitalist society.

The working class will not be in a position to create a science and an art of its own until it has been fully emancipated from its present class position.

The utmost it can do today is to safeguard bourgeois culture from the vandalism of the bourgeois reaction, and create the social conditions requisite for a free cultural development. Even along these lines, the workers, within the extant form of society, can only advance insofar as they can create for themselves the intellectual weapons needed in their struggle for liberation.

But this reservation imposes upon the working class (that is to say, upon the workers' intellectual leaders) very narrow limits in the field of intellectual activities. The domain of their creative energy is confined to one specific department of science, namely social science. For, inasmuch as 'thanks to the peculiar connection of the idea of the Fourth Estate with our historical epoch', enlightenment concerning the laws of social development has become essential to the workers in the class struggle, this connection has borne good fruit in social science, and the monument of the proletarian culture of our days is – Marxist doctrine.

But Marx's creation, which as a scientific achievement is a titanic whole, transcends the plain demands of the proletarian class struggle for whose purposes it was created. Both in his detailed and comprehensive analysis of capitalist economy, and in his method of historical research with its immeasurable field of application, Marx has offered much more than was directly essential for the practical conduct of the class war.

Only in proportion as our movement progresses, and demands the solution of new practical problems do we dip once more into the treasury of Marx's thought, in order to extract therefrom and to utilise new fragments of his doctrine. But since our movement, like all the campaigns of practical life, inclines to go on working in old ruts of thought, and to cling to principles after they have ceased to be valid, the theoretical utilisation of the Marxist system proceed very slowly.

If, then, today we detect a stagnation in our movement as far as these theoretical matters are concerned, this is not because the Marxist theory upon which we are nourished is incapable of development or has become out-of-date. On the contrary, it is because we have not yet learned how to make an adequate use of the most important mental weapons which we had taken out

of the Marxist arsenal on account of our urgent need for them in the early stages of our struggle. It is not true that, as far as practical struggle is concerned, Marx is out-of-date, that we had superseded Marx. On the contrary, Marx, in his scientific creation, has outstripped us as a party of practical fighters. It is not true that Marx no longer suffices for our needs. On the contrary, our needs are not yet adequate for the utilisation of Marx's ideas.

Thus do the social conditions of proletarian existence in contemporary society, conditions first elucidated by Marxist theory, take vengeance by the fate they impose upon Marxist theory itself. Though that theory is an incomparable instrument of intellectual culture, it remains unused because, while it is inapplicable to bourgeois class culture, it greatly transcends the needs of the working class in the matter of weapons for the daily struggle. Not until the working class has been liberated from its present conditions of existence will the Marxist method of research be socialised in conjunction with the other means of production, so that it can be fully utilised for the benefit of humanity at large, and so that it can be developed to the full measure of its functional capacity.

6

ORGANISATIONAL QUESTIONS OF RUSSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

In 1904 Luxemburg wrote this critique of the revolutionary wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) – the Bolshevik (i.e., majority) faction led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. This is – to a large extent – a polemic on behalf of Lenin's opponents in the RSDLP, led by Julius Martov, George Plekhanov, and other well-known Russian Social Democrats, the Mensheviks (or minority faction, although which faction actually had majority status would fluctuate over the years). At this time, the Polish organisation to which she was affiliated (the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, SDKPiL), operating partly within the Russian empire, was temporarily aligned with the Mensheviks.

Targeting an early analysis by Lenin that sought to explain the split in the RSDLP, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, Luxemburg argued that the orientation of Lenin's Bolsheviks was largely pre-Marxist and un-Marxist. She compares them to the Jacobins – the most radical elements in the leadership of the French Revolution of 1789–94 – and to August Blanqui and his followers of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, who sought to bring about a revolution through a centralised conspiratorial network of 'pure' revolutionaries who would seize power and rule on behalf of the labouring masses. Lenin's capable response (reprinted in V.I. Lenin, *Revolution, Democracy, Socialism: Selected Writings*, ed. by Paul Le Blanc) has been widely ignored, as has Luxemburg's own repudiation of the charges she levelled at Lenin as her own Polish organisation drew closer to the Bolsheviks (see 'Blanquism and Social Democracy', in this volume). Nonetheless, this essay – renamed 'Leninism or Marxism?' and presented with a distorted but influential interpretation by Bertram D. Wolfe – became a staple of Cold War anti-Communism.

There is much in this essay, however, which retains a freshness and relevance transcending its specific polemical context. This is because, in part, its subtext involved a questioning of the over-centralised, bureaucratic tendencies evident in the German Social Democratic Party in which Luxemburg was seeking to

strengthen revolutionary perspectives. She also draws on her own experiences, and those of her close comrades, operating in Germany, Poland, and Russia. The general problems of organisation with which she wrestles have faced revolutionary activists throughout the world, and her insightful reflections on them have provided much food for thought over the decades.

This translation was made in 1934 by a person using the name 'Integer'.

I

An unprecedented task in the history of the socialist movement has fallen to the lot of the Russian Social Democracy. It is the task of deciding on what is the best socialist tactical policy in a country where absolute monarchy is still dominant. It is a mistake to draw a rigid parallel between the present Russian situation and that which existed in Germany during the years 1879–90, when Bismarck's anti-socialist laws were in force. The two have one thing in common – police rule. Otherwise they are in no way comparable.

The obstacles offered to the socialist movement by the absence of democratic liberties are of relatively secondary importance. Even in Russia, the people's movement has succeeded in overcoming the barriers set up by the state. The people have found themselves a 'constitution' (though a rather precarious one) in street disorders. Persevering in this course, the Russian people will in time attain complete victory over the autocracy.

The principal difficulty faced by socialist activity in Russia results from the fact that in that country the domination of the bourgeoisie is veiled by absolutist force. This gives socialist propaganda an abstract character, while immediate political agitation takes on a democratic-revolutionary guise.

Bismarck's anti-socialist laws put our movement out of constitutional bounds in a highly developed bourgeois society, where class antagonisms had already reached their full bloom in parliamentary contests. (Here, by the way, lay the absurdity of Bismarck's scheme.) The situation is quite different in Russia. The problem there is how to create a Social Democratic movement at a time when the state is not yet in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

The circumstance has an influence on agitation, on the manner of transplanting socialist doctrine to Russian soil. It also bears in a peculiar and direct way on the question of *party organisation*.

Under ordinary conditions – that is, where the political domination of the bourgeoisie has preceded the socialist movement – the bourgeoisie itself instils in the working class the rudiments of political solidarity. At this stage, declares the *Communist*

Manifesto, the unification of the workers is not yet the result of their own aspiration to unity but comes as a result of the activity of the bourgeoisie, 'which, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the proletariat in motion…'

In Russia, however, the Social Democracy must make up by its own efforts an entire historic period. It must lead the Russian proletarians from their present 'atomised' condition, which prolongs the autocratic regime, to a class organisation that would help them to become aware of their historic objectives and prepare them to struggle to achieve those objectives.

The Russian socialists are obliged to undertake the building of such an organisation without the benefit of the formal guarantees commonly found under a bourgeois-democratic setup. They do not dispose of the political raw material that in other countries is supplied by bourgeois society itself. Like God Almighty they must have this organisation arise out of the void, so to speak.

How to effect a transition from the type of organisation characteristic of the preparatory stage of the socialist movement – usually featured by disconnected local groups and clubs, with propaganda as a principal activity – to the unity of a large, national body, suitable for concerted political action over the entire vast territory ruled by the Russian state? That is the specific problem which the Russian Social Democracy has mulled over for some time.

Autonomy and isolation are the most pronounced characteristics of the old organisational type. It is, therefore, understandable why the slogan of persons who want to see an inclusive national organisation should be 'Centralism!'

At the Party Congress, it became evident that the term 'centralism' does not completely cover the question of organisation for the Russian Social Democracy. Once again we have learned that no rigid formula can furnish the solution of any problem in the social movement.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, written by Lenin, an outstanding member of the *Iskra* group, is a methodical exposition of the ideas of the ultra-centralist tendency in the Russian movement. The viewpoint presented with incomparable vigour and logic in this book, is that of pitiless centralism. Laid down

as principles are the necessity of selecting, and constituting as a separate corps, all the active revolutionists, as distinguished from the unorganised, though revolutionary, mass surrounding this elite.

Lenin's thesis is that the party Central Committee should have the privilege of naming all the local committees of the party. It should have the right to appoint the effective organs of all local bodies from Geneva to Liège, from Tomsk to Irkutsk. It should also have the right to impose on all of them its own ready-made rules of party conduct. It should have the right to rule without appeal on such questions as the dissolution and reconstitution of local organisations. This way, the Central Committee could determine, to suit itself, the composition of the highest party organs. The Central Committee would be the only thinking element in the party. All other groupings would be its executive limbs.

Lenin reasons that the combination of the socialist mass movement with such a rigorously centralised type of organisation is a specific principle of revolutionary Marxism. To support this thesis, he advances a series of arguments, with which we shall deal below.

Generally speaking it is undeniable that a strong tendency toward centralisation is inherent in the Social Democratic movement. This tendency springs from the economic makeup of capitalism which is essentially a centralising factor. The Social Democratic movement carries on its activity inside the large bourgeois city. Its mission is to represent, within the boundaries of the national state, the class interests of the proletariat, and to oppose those common interests to all local and group interests.

Therefore, the Social Democracy is, as a rule, hostile to any manifestation of localism or federalism. It strives to unite all workers and all worker organisations in a single party, no matter what national, religious, or occupational differences may exist among them. The Social Democracy abandons this principle and gives way to federalism only under exceptional conditions, as in the case of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

It is clear that the Russian Social Democracy should not organise itself as a federative conglomerate of many national

groups. It must rather become a single party for the entire empire. However, that is not really the question considered here. What we are considering is the degree of centralisation necessary inside the unified, single Russian party in view of the peculiar conditions under which it has to function.

Looking at the matter from the angle of the formal tasks of the Social Democracy, in its capacity as a party of class struggle, it appears at first that the power and energy of the party are directly dependent on the possibility of centralising the party. However, these formal tasks apply to all active parties. In the case of the Social Democracy, they are less important than is the influence of historic conditions.

The Social Democratic movement is the first in the history of class societies which reckons, in all its phases and through its entire course, on the organisation and the direct, independent action of the masses.

Because of this, the Social Democracy creates an organisational type that is entirely different from those common to earlier revolutionary movements, such as those of the Jacobins and the adherents of Blanqui.

Lenin seems to slight this fact when he presents in his book (page 140) the opinion that the revolutionary Social Democrat is nothing else than a 'Jacobin indissolubly joined to the organisation of the proletariat, which has become conscious of its class interests'.

For Lenin, the difference between the Social Democracy and Blanquism is reduced to the observation that in place of a handful of conspirators we have a class-conscious proletariat. He forgets that this difference implies a complete revision of our ideas on organisation and, therefore, an entirely different conception of centralism and the relations existing between the party and the struggle itself.

Blanquism did not count on the direct action of the working class. It, therefore, did not need to organise the people for the revolution. The people were expected to play their part only at the moment of revolution. Preparation for the revolution concerned only the little group of revolutionists armed for the coup.

Indeed, to assure the success of the revolutionary conspiracy, it was considered wiser to keep the mass at some distance from the conspirators. Such a relationship could be conceived by the Blanquists only because there was no close contact between the conspiratorial activity of their organisation and the daily struggle of the popular masses.

The tactics and concrete tasks of the Blanquist revolutionists had little connection with the elementary class struggle. They were freely improvised. They could, therefore, be decided on in advance and took the form of a ready-made plan. In consequence of this, ordinary members of the organisation became simple executive organs, carrying out the orders of a will fixed beforehand, and outside of their particular sphere of activity. They became the instruments of a Central Committee. Here we have the second peculiarity of conspiratorial centralism – the absolute and blind submission of the party sections to the will of the centre, and the extension of this authority to all parts of the organisation.

However, Social Democratic activity is carried on under radically different conditions. It arises historically out of the elementary class struggle. It spreads and develops in accordance with the following dialectical contradiction. The proletarian army is recruited and becomes aware of its objectives in the course of the struggle itself. The activity of the party organisation, the growth of the proletarians' awareness of the objectives of the struggle and the struggle itself, are not different things separated chronologically and mechanically. They are only different aspects of the same struggle, there do not exist for the Social Democracy detailed sets of tactics which a Central Committee can teach the party membership in the same way as troops are instructed in their training camps. Furthermore, the range of influence of the socialist party is constantly fluctuating with the ups and downs of the struggle in the course of which the organisation is created and grows.

For this reason Social Democratic centralism cannot be based on the mechanical subordination and blind obedience of the party membership to the leading party centre. For this reason, the Social Democratic movement cannot allow the erection of an air-tight

partition between the class-conscious nucleus of the proletariat already in the party and its immediate popular environment, the nonparty sections of the proletariat.

Now the two principles on which Lenin's centralism rests are precisely these:

1. The blind subordination, in the smallest detail, of all party organs to the party centre which alone thinks, guides, and decides for all.
2. The rigorous separation of the organised nucleus of revolutionaries from its social-revolutionary surroundings.

Such centralism is a mechanical transposition of the organisational principles of Blanquism into the mass movement of the socialist working class.

In accordance with this view, Lenin defines his 'revolutionary Social Democrat' as a 'Jacobin joined to the organisation of the proletariat, which has become conscious of its class interests'.

The fact is that the Social Democracy is not *joined* to the organisation of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat. And because of this, Social Democratic centralism is essentially different from Blanquist centralism. It can only be the concentrated will of the individuals and groups representative of the working class. It is, so to speak, the 'self-centralism' of the advanced sectors of the proletariat. It is the rule of the majority within its own party.

The indispensable conditions for the realisation of Social Democratic centralism are:

1. The existence of a large contingent of workers educated in the class struggle.
2. The possibility for the workers to develop their own political activity through direct influence on public life, in a party press, and public congresses, etc.

These conditions are not yet fully formed in Russia. The first – a proletarian vanguard, conscious of its class interests and capable of self-direction in political activity – is only now emerging in

Russia. All efforts of socialist agitation and organisation should aim to hasten the formation of such a vanguard. The second condition can be had only under a regime of political liberty.

With these conclusions, Lenin disagrees violently. He is convinced that all the conditions necessary for the formation of a powerful and centralised party already exist in Russia. He declares that, 'it is no longer the proletarians but certain intellectuals in our party who need to be educated in the matters of organisation and discipline'. He glorifies the educative influence of the factory, which, he says, accustoms the proletariat to 'discipline and organisation'.

Saying all this, Lenin seems to demonstrate again that his conception of socialist organisation is quite mechanistic. The discipline Lenin has in mind is being implanted in the working class not only by the factory but also by the military and the existing state bureaucracy – by the entire mechanism of the centralised bourgeois state.

We misuse words and we practise self-deception when we apply the same term – discipline – to such dissimilar notions as: (1) the absence of thought and will in a body with a thousand automatically moving hands and legs, and (2) the spontaneous co-ordination of the conscious, political acts of a body of men. What is there in common between the regulated docility of an oppressed class and the self-discipline and organisation of a class struggling for its emancipation?

The self-discipline of the Social Democracy is not merely the replacement of the authority of bourgeois rulers with the authority of a socialist central committee. The working class will acquire the sense of the new discipline, the freely assumed self-discipline of the Social Democracy, not as a result of the discipline imposed on it by the capitalist state, but by extirpating, to the last root, its old habits of obedience and servility.

Centralism in the socialist sense is not an absolute thing applicable to any phase whatsoever of the labour movement. It is a *tendency*, which becomes real in proportion to the development and political training acquired by the working masses in the course of their struggle.

No doubt, the absence of the conditions necessary for the complete realisation of this kind of centralism in the Russian movement presents a formidable obstacle.

It is a mistake to believe that it is possible to substitute 'provisionally' the absolute power of a Central Committee (acting somehow by 'tacit delegation') for the yet unrealisable rule of the majority of conscious workers in the party, and in this way replace the open control of the working masses over the party organs with the reverse control by the Central Committee over the revolutionary proletariat.

The history of the Russian labour movement suggests the doubtful value of such centralism. An all-powerful centre, invested, as Lenin would have it, with the unlimited right to control and intervene, would be an absurdity if its authority applied only to technical questions, such as the administration of funds, the distribution of tasks among propagandists and agitators, the transportation and circulation of printed matter. The political purpose of an organ having such great powers is understandable only if those powers apply to the elaboration of a uniform plan of action, if the central organ assumes the initiative of a vast revolutionary act.

But what has been the experience of the Russian socialist movement up to now? The most important and fruitful changes in its tactical policy during the last ten years have not been the inventions of several leaders and even less so of any central organisational organs. They have always been the spontaneous product of the movement in ferment. This was true during the first stage of the proletarian movement in Russia, which began with the spontaneous general strike of St Petersburg in 1896, an event that marks the inception of an epoch of economic struggle by the Russian working people. It was no less true during the following period, introduced by the spontaneous street demonstrations of St Petersburg students in March 1901. The general strike of Rostov-on-Don, in 1903, marking the next great tactical turn in the Russian proletarian movement, was also a spontaneous act. 'All by itself', the strike expanded into political demonstrations, street agitation, great outdoor meetings, which the most optimistic revolutionist would not have dreamed of several years before.

Our cause made great gains in these events. However, the initiative and conscious leadership of the Social Democratic organisations played an insignificant role in this development. It is true that these organisations were not specifically prepared for such happenings. However, the unimportant part played by the revolutionists cannot be explained by this fact. Neither can it be attributed to the absence of an all-powerful central party apparatus similar to what is asked for by Lenin. The existence of such a guiding centre would have probably increased the disorder of the local committees by emphasising the difference between the eager attack of the mass and the prudent position of the Social Democracy. The same phenomenon – the insignificant part played by the initiative of central party organs in the elaboration of actual tactical policy – can be observed today in Germany and other countries. In general, the tactical policy of the Social Democracy is not something that may be 'invented'. It is the product of a series of great creative acts of the often spontaneous class struggle seeking its way forward.

The unconscious comes before the conscious. The logic of the historic process comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process. The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role. Experience shows that every time the labour movement wins new terrain those organs work it to the utmost. They transform it at the same time into a kind of bastion, which holds up advance on a wider scale.

The present tactical policy of the German Social Democracy has won universal esteem because it is supple as well as firm. This is a sign of the fine adaptation of the party, in the smallest detail of its everyday activity, to the conditions of a parliamentary regime. The party has made a methodical study of all the resources of this terrain. It knows how to utilise them without modifying its principles.

However, the very perfection of this adaptation is already closing vaster horizons to our party. There is a tendency in the party to regard parliamentary tactics as the immutable and specific tactics of socialist activity. People refuse, for example, to consider

the possibility (posed by Parvus) of changing our tactical policy in case general suffrage is abolished in Germany, an eventuality not considered entirely improbable by the German Social Democracy.

Such inertia is due, in a large degree, to the fact that it is very inconvenient to define, within the vacuum of abstract hypotheses, the lines and forms of still nonexistent political situations. Evidently, the important thing for the Social Democracy is not the preparation of a set of directives all ready for future policy. It is important: (1) to encourage a correct historic appreciation of the forms of struggle corresponding to the given situations, and (2) to maintain an understanding of the relativity of the current phase and the inevitable increase of revolutionary tension as the final goal of class struggle is approached.

Granting, as Lenin wants, such absolute powers of a negative character to the top organ of the party, we strengthen, to a dangerous extent, the conservatism inherent in such an organ. If the tactics of the socialist party are not to be the creation of a Central Committee but of the whole party, or, still better, of the whole labour movement, then it is clear that the party sections and federations need the liberty of action which alone will permit them to develop their revolutionary initiative and to utilise all the resources of the situation. The ultra-centralism asked by Lenin is full of the sterile spirit of the overseer. It is not a positive and creative spirit. *Lenin's concern is not so much to make the activity of the party more fruitful as to control the party – to narrow the movement rather than to develop it, to bind rather than to unify it.*

In the present situation, such an experiment would be doubly dangerous to the Russian Social Democracy. It stands on the eve of decisive battles against tsarism. It is about to enter, or has already entered, on a period of intensified creative activity, during which it will broaden (as is usual in a revolutionary period) its sphere of influence and will advance spontaneously by leaps and bounds. To attempt to bind the initiative of the party at this moment, to surround it with a network of barbed wire, is to render it incapable of accomplishing the tremendous task of the hour.

The general ideas we have presented on the question of socialist centralism are not by themselves sufficient for the formulation of a

constitutional plan suiting the Russian party. In the final instance, a statute of this kind can only be determined by the conditions under which the activity of the organisation takes place in a given epoch. The question of the moment in Russia is how to set in motion a large proletarian organisation. No constitutional project can claim infallibility. It must prove itself in fire.

But from our general conception of the nature of Social Democratic organisation, we feel justified in deducing that its spirit requires – especially at the inception of the mass party – the co-ordination and unification of the movement and not its rigid submission to a set of regulations. If the party possesses the gift of political mobility, complemented by unflinching loyalty to principles and concern for unity, we can rest assured that any defects in the party constitution will be corrected in practice. For us, it is not the letter, but the living spirit carried into the organisation by the membership that decides the value of this or that organisational form.

II

So far we have examined the problem of centralism from the viewpoint of the general principles of the Social Democracy, and to some extent, in the light of conditions peculiar to Russia. However, the military ultra-centralism cried up by Lenin and his friends is not the product of accidental differences of opinion. It is said to be related to a campaign against opportunism which Lenin has carried to the smallest organisational detail.

'It is important,' says Lenin, 'to forge a more or less effective weapon against opportunism.' He believes that opportunism springs specifically from the characteristic leaning of intellectuals to decentralisation and disorganisation, from their aversion for strict discipline and 'bureaucracy', which is, however, necessary for the functioning of the party.

Lenin says that intellectuals remain individualists and tend to anarchism even after they have joined the socialist movement. According to him, it is only among intellectuals that we can note a repugnance for the absolute authority of a Central Committee.

The authentic proletarian, Lenin suggests, finds by reason of his class instinct a kind of voluptuous pleasure in abandoning himself to the clutch of firm leadership and pitiless discipline. 'To oppose bureaucracy to democracy,' writes Lenin, 'is to contrast the organisational principle of revolutionary Social Democracy to the methods of opportunistic organisation.'

He declares that a similar conflict between centralising and autonomist tendencies is taking place in all countries where reformism and revolutionary socialism meet face to face. He points in particular to the recent controversy in the German Social Democracy on the question of the degree of freedom of action to be allowed by the Party to socialist representatives in legislative assemblies.

Let us examine the parallels drawn by Lenin.

First, it is important to point out that the glorification of the supposed genius of proletarians in the matter of socialist organisation and a general distrust of intellectuals as such are not necessarily signs of 'revolutionary Marxist' mentality. It is very easy to demonstrate that such arguments are themselves an expression of opportunism.

Antagonism between purely proletarian elements and the nonproletarian intellectuals in the labour movement is raised as an ideological issue by the following trends: the semianarchism of the French syndicalists, whose watchword is 'Beware of the politician!'; English trade-unionism, full of mistrust of the 'socialist visionaries'; and, if our information is correct, the 'pure economism', represented a short while ago within the Russian Social Democracy by *Rabochaya Mysl* (*Labour Thought*), which was printed secretly in St Petersburg.

In most socialist parties in Western Europe there is undoubtedly a connection between opportunism and the 'intellectuals', as well as between opportunism and decentralising tendencies within the labour movement.

But nothing is more contrary to the historic-dialectic method of Marxist thought than to separate social phenomena from their historic soil and to present these phenomena as abstract formulas having an absolute, general application.

Reasoning abstractly, we may say that the 'intellectual', a social element which has emerged out of the bourgeoisie and is therefore alien to the proletariat, enters the socialist movement not because of his natural class inclinations but in spite of them. For this reason, he is more liable to opportunist aberrations than the proletarian. The latter, we say, can be expected to find a definite revolutionary point of support in his class interests as long as he does not leave his original environment, the labouring mass. But the concrete form assumed by this inclination of the intellectual toward opportunism and, above all, the manner in which this tendency expresses itself in organisational questions depend every time on his given social milieu.

Bourgeois parliamentarism is the definite social base of the phenomenon observed by Lenin in the German, French, and Italian socialist movements. This parliamentarism is the breeding place of all opportunist tendencies now existing in Western Social Democracy.

The kind of parliamentarism we now have in France, Italy, and Germany provides the soil for such illusions of current opportunism as overvaluation of social reforms, class and party collaboration, the hope of pacific development towards socialism etc. It does so by placing intellectuals, acting in the capacity of parliamentarians, above the proletariat and by separating intellectuals from proletarians inside the socialist movement itself. With the growth of the labour movement, parliamentarism becomes a springboard for political careerists. That is why so many ambitious failures from the bourgeoisie flock to the banners of socialist parties. Another source of contemporary opportunism is the considerable material means and influence of the large Social Democratic organisations.

The party acts as a bulwark protecting the class movement against digressions in the direction of more bourgeois parliamentarism. To triumph, these tendencies must destroy the bulwark. They must dissolve the active, class-conscious sector of the proletariat in the amorphous mass of an 'electorate'.

That is how the 'autonomist' and decentralising tendencies arise in our Social Democratic parties. We notice that these

tendencies suit definite political ends. They cannot be explained, as Lenin attempts, by referring to the intellectual's psychology, to his supposedly innate instability of character. They can only be explained by considering the needs of the bourgeois parliamentary politician, that is, by opportunist politics.

The situation is quite different in tsarist Russia. Opportunism in the Russian labour movement is, generally speaking, not the by-product of Social Democratic strength or of the decomposition of the bourgeoisie. It is the product of the backward political condition of Russian society.

The milieu where intellectuals are recruited for socialism in Russia is much more declassed and by far less bourgeois than in Western Europe. Added to the immaturity of the Russian proletarian movement, this circumstance is an influence for wide theoretic wandering, which ranges from the complete negation of the political aspect of the labour movement to the unqualified belief in the effectiveness of isolated terrorist acts, or even total political indifference sought in the swamps of liberalism and Kantian idealism.

However, the intellectual within the Russian Social Democratic movement can only with difficulty be attracted to an act of disorganisation. It is contrary to the general outlook of the Russian intellectual's milieu. There is no bourgeois parliament in Russia to favour this tendency.

The Western intellectual who professes at this moment the 'cult of the ego' and colours even his socialist yearnings with an aristocratic morale, is not the representative of the bourgeois intelligentsia 'in general'. He represents only a certain phase of social development. He is the product of bourgeois decadence.

The *Narodniki* ('Populists') of 1875 called on the Russian intelligentsia to lose themselves in the peasant mass. The ultra-civilised followers of Tolstoy speak today of escape to the life of the 'simple folk'. Similarly, the partisans of 'pure economism' in the Russian Social Democracy want us to bow down before the 'calloused hand' of labour.

If instead of mechanically applying to Russia formulae elaborated in Western Europe, we approach the problem of

organisation from the angle of conditions specific to Russia, we arrive at conclusions that are diametrically opposed to Lenin's.

To attribute to opportunism an invariable preference for a definite form of organisation, that is, decentralisation, is to miss the essence of opportunism.

On the question of organisation, or any other question, opportunism knows only one principle: the absence of principle. Opportunism chooses its means of action with the aim of suiting the given circumstances at hand, provided these means appear to lead toward the ends in view.

If, like Lenin, we define opportunism as the tendency that paralyses the independent revolutionary movement of the working class and transforms it into an instrument of ambitious bourgeois intellectuals, we must also recognise that in the initial stage of a labour movement this end is more easily attained as a result of rigorous centralisation rather than by decentralisation. It is by extreme centralisation that a young, uneducated proletarian movement can be most completely handed over to the intellectual leaders staffing a Central Committee.

Also in Germany, at the start of the Social Democratic movement, and before the emergence of a solid nucleus of conscious proletarians and a tactical policy based on experience, partisans of the two opposite types of organisation faced each other in argument. The 'General Association of German Workers', founded by Lassalle [in 1863], stood for extreme centralisation. The principle of autonomism was supported by the party which was organised at the Eisenach Congress with the collaboration of W. Liebknecht and A. Bebel.

The tactical policy of the 'Eisenachers' was quite confused. Yet they contributed vastly more to the awakening of class-consciousness of the German masses than the Lassalleans. Very early the workers played a preponderant role in that party (as was demonstrated by the number of worker publications in the provinces), and there was a rapid extension of the range of the movement. At the same time, the Lassalleans, in spite of all their experiments with 'dictators', led their faithful from one misadventure to another.

In general, it is rigorous, despotic centralism that is preferred by opportunist intellectuals at a time when the revolutionary elements among the workers still lack cohesion and the movement is groping its way, as is the case now in Russia. In a later phase, under a parliamentary regime and in connection with a strong labour party, the opportunist tendencies of the intellectuals express themselves in an inclination toward 'decentralisation'.

If we assume the viewpoint claimed as his own by Lenin and we fear the influence of intellectuals in the proletarian movement, we can conceive of no greater danger to the Russian party than Lenin's plan of organisation. *Nothing will more surely enslave a young labour movement to an intellectual elite hungry for power than this bureaucratic straightjacket, which will immobilise the movement and turn it into an automaton manipulated by a Central Committee.* On the other hand there is no more effective guarantee against opportunist intrigue and personal ambition than the independent revolutionary action of the proletariat, as a result of which the workers acquire the sense of political responsibility and self-reliance.

What is today only a phantom haunting Lenin's imagination may become reality tomorrow.

Let us not forget that the revolution soon to break out in Russia will be a bourgeois and not a proletarian revolution. This modifies radically all the conditions of socialist struggle. The Russian intellectuals, too, will rapidly become imbued with bourgeois ideology. The Social Democracy is at present the only guide of the Russian proletariat. But on the day after the revolution, we shall see the bourgeoisie and above all the bourgeois masses as a steppingstone to their domination.

The game of bourgeois demagogues will be made easier if at the present stage, the spontaneous action, initiative, and political sense of the advanced sections of the working class are hindered in their development and restricted by the protectorate of an authoritarian Central Committee.

More important is the fundamental falseness of the idea underlying the plan of unqualified centralism – the idea that the

road to opportunism can be barred by means of clauses in the party constitution.

Impressed by recent happenings in the socialist parties of France, Italy, and Germany, the Russian Social Democrats tend to regard opportunism as an alien ingredient, brought into the labour movement by representatives of bourgeois democracy. If that were so, no penalties provided by a party constitution could stop this intrusion. This afflux of nonproletarian recruits to the party of the proletariat is the effect of profound social causes, such as the economic collapse of the petty bourgeoisie, the bankruptcy of bourgeois liberalism, and the degeneration of bourgeois democracy. It is naïve to hope to stop this current by means of a formula written down in a constitution.

A manual of regulations may master the life of a small sect or a private circle. An historic current, however, will pass through the mesh of the most subtly worded paragraph. It is furthermore untrue that to repel the elements pushed toward the socialist movement by the decomposition of bourgeois society means to defend the interests of the working class. The Social Democracy has always contended that it represents not only the class interests of the proletariat but also the progressive aspirations of the whole of contemporary society. It represents the interests of all who are oppressed by bourgeois domination. This must not be understood merely in the sense that all these interests are ideally contained in the socialist programme. Historic evolution translates the given proposition into reality. In its capacity as a political party, the Social Democracy becomes the haven of all discontented elements in our society and thus of the entire people, as contrasted to the tiny minority of capitalist masters.

But socialists must always know how to subordinate the anguish, rancour, and hope of this motley aggregation to the supreme goal of the working class. The Social Democracy must enclose the tumult of the nonproletarian protestants against existing society within bounds of the revolutionary action of the proletariat. It must assimilate the elements that come to it.

This is only possible if the Social Democracy already contains a strong, politically educated proletarian nucleus class conscious

enough to be able, as up to now in Germany, to pull along in its tow the declassed and petty bourgeois elements that join the party. In that case, greater strictness in the application of the principle of centralisation and more severe discipline, specifically formulated in party bylaws, may be an effective safeguard against the opportunist danger. That is how the revolutionary socialist movement in France defended itself against the Jauresist confusion.* A modification of the constitution at the German Social Democracy in that direction would be a very timely measure.

But even here we should not think of the party constitution as a weapon that is, somehow, self-sufficient. It can be at most a coercive instrument enforcing the will of the proletarian majority in the party. If this majority is lacking, then the most dire sanctions on paper will be of no avail.

However, the influx of bourgeois elements into the party is far from being the only cause of the opportunist trends that are now raising their heads in the Social Democracy. Another cause is the very nature of socialist activity and the contradictions inherent in it.

The international movement of the proletariat toward its complete emancipation is a process peculiar in the following respect. For the first time in the history of civilisation, the people are expressing their will consciously and in opposition to all ruling classes. But this will can only be satisfied beyond the limits of the existing system.

Now the mass can only acquire and strengthen this will in the course of day-to-day struggle against the existing social order – that is, within the limits of capitalist society.

On the one hand, we have the mass; on the other, its historic goal, located outside of existing society. On one hand, we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectic contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way.

* This refers to the reformist current in the French socialist movement led by Jean Jaures. – *Editors*.

It follows that this movement can best advance by tacking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its mass character; the other, the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect; the other, the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform.

That is why it is illusory, and contrary to historic experience, to hope to fix, once and for always, the direction of the revolutionary socialist struggle with the aid of formal means, which are expected to secure the labour movement against all possibilities of opportunist digression.

Marxist theory offers us a reliable instrument enabling us to recognise and combat typical manifestations of opportunism. But the socialist movement is a mass movement. Its perils are not the product of the insidious machinations of individuals and groups. They arise out of unavoidable social conditions. We cannot secure ourselves in advance against all possibilities of opportunist deviation. Such dangers can be overcome only by the movement itself – certainly with the aid of Marxist theory, but only after the dangers in question have taken tangible form in practice.

Looked at from this angle, opportunism appears to be a product and an inevitable phase of the historic development of the labour movement.

The Russian Social Democracy arose a short while ago. The political conditions under which the proletarian movement is developing in Russia are quite abnormal. In that country, opportunism is to a large extent a by-product of the groping and experimentation of socialist activity seeking to advance over a terrain that resembles no other in Europe.

In view of this, we find most astonishing the claim that it is possible to avoid any possibility of opportunism in the Russian movement by writing down certain words, instead of others, in the party constitution. *Such an attempt to exercise opportunism by means of a scrap of paper may turn out to be extremely harmful – not to opportunism but to the socialist movement.*

Stop the natural pulsation of a living organism, and you weaken it, and you diminish its resistance and combative spirit – in this

instance, not only against opportunism but also (and that is certainly of great importance) against the existing social order. The proposed means turn against the end they are supposed to serve.

In Lenin's overanxious desire to establish the guardianship of an omniscient and omnipotent Central Committee in order to protect so promising and vigorous a labour movement against any misstep, we recognise the symptoms of the same subjectivism that has already played more than one trick on socialist thinking in Russia.

It is amusing to note the strange somersaults that the respectable human 'ego' has had to perform in recent Russian history. Knocked to the ground, almost reduced to dust, by Russian absolutism, the 'ego' takes revenge by turning to revolutionary activity. In the shape of a committee of conspirators, in the name of a nonexistent Will of the People, it seats itself on a kind of throne and proclaims it is all-powerful.* But the 'object' proves to be the stronger. The knout is triumphant, for tsarist might seems to be the 'legitimate' expression of history.

In time we see appear on the scene an even more 'legitimate' child of history – the Russian labour movement. For the first time, bases for the formation of a real 'people's will' are laid in Russian soil.

But here is the 'ego' of the Russian revolutionary again! Pirouetting on its head, it once more proclaims itself to be the all-powerful director of history – this time with the title of His Excellency the Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Russia.

The nimble acrobat fails to perceive that the only 'subject' which merits today the role of director is the collective 'ego' of the working class. The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history.

Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.

* This refers to the revolutionary-populist group, *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), that conspired to overthrow tsarism in the late twentieth century by utilising individual terrorism against hated authorities in order to help spark a popular uprising.

7

SOCIALISM AND THE CHURCHES

These are excerpts from a very substantial essay written in 1905, in the wake of the working class insurgencies that swept through Eastern Europe. These developments helped to turn relatively small Marxist groups into mass organisations with many thousands of workers throughout much of the Russian empire (including in Poland). Among the workers drawn into the socialist movement were those adhering to one or another form of Christianity – the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and various Protestant denominations.

Luxemburg offered a respectful Marxist analysis of Christianity which embraced its early radicalism while explaining why so much of the institutional hierarchy of the various modern Christian denominations – most notoriously the upper reaches of the Russian Orthodox Church – was on the side of powerful ruling classes, not the oppressed masses with whom Jesus identified. Published by the Polish Social Democratic Party in 1905, the essay appeared in Russian in a 1920 Moscow publication, and was published by the French Socialist Party in 1937. Translated from French to English by Juan Punto, it appeared in the English journal *Socialist Review* in 1937.

Some of the themes in Luxemburg's essay were later developed in Karl Kautsky's 1911 classic *The Foundations of Christianity* – but they are also consistent with aspects of early twentieth-century Protestant writings associated with such theologians as Walter Rauschenbusch, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr; with later Catholic writings of Liberation Theology to be found in the works of such figures as Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutierrez, Ernesto Cardenal, and Frei Betto; as well as with diverse studies produced by such scholars as John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, Richard Horsley, Gerd Thiessen, Eduardo Hoornaert, Hans Küng, Bart Ehrman, and others.

The workers can easily satisfy themselves that the struggle of the clergy against the Social Democrats is in no way provoked by the latter. The Social Democrats have placed before themselves the objective of drawing together and organising the workers in the struggle against capital, that is to say, against the exploiters who squeeze them down to the last drop of blood, and in the struggle against the tsarist government, which holds the people to ransom. But never do the Social Democrats drive the workers to fight against clergy, or try to interfere with religious beliefs; not at all! The Social Democrats, those of the whole world and of our own country, regard conscience and personal opinions as being sacred. Every man may hold what faith and what opinions seem likely to him to ensure happiness. No one has the right to persecute or to attack the particular religious opinion of others. That is what the socialists think. And it is for that reason, among others, that the socialists rally all the people to fight against the tsarist regime, which is continually violating men's consciences, persecuting Catholics, Russian Catholics, Jews, heretics and freethinkers. It is precisely the Social Democrats who come out most strongly in favour of freedom of conscience. Therefore it would seem as if the clergy ought to lend their assistance to the Social Democrats who are trying to enlighten the toiling people. If we understand properly the teachings which the socialists bring to the working class, the hatred of clergy towards them becomes still less understandable.

The Social Democrats propose to put an end to the exploitation of the toiling people by the rich. You would have thought that the servants of the Church would have been the first to make this task easier for the Social Democrats. Did not Jesus Christ (whose servants the priests are) teach that 'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven'?

The Social Democrats try to bring about in all countries social regimes based on the equality, liberty and fraternity of all the citizens. If the clergy really desire that the principle 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' be applied in real life, why do they not welcome keenly the propaganda of the Social Democrats? The Social Democrats try, by a desperate struggle, by the education and

organisation of the people, to draw them out of the downtrodden state in which they now are and to offer a better future to their children. Everyone should admit, that at this point, the clergy should bless the Social Democrats, for did not he whom they serve, Jesus Christ, say 'That you do for the poor you do for me'?

However we see the clergy on the one hand, excommunicating and persecuting the Social Democrats, and, on the other hand, commanding the workers to suffer in patience, that is, to let themselves patiently be exploited by the capitalists. The clergy storm against the Social Democrats, exhort the workers not to 'revolt' against the overlords, but to submit obediently to the oppression of this government which kills defenceless people, which sends to the monstrous butchery of the war millions of workers, which persecutes Catholics, Russian Catholics and 'Old Believers'. Thus, the clergy, which makes itself the spokesman of the rich, the defender of exploitation and oppression, places itself in flagrant contradiction to the Christian doctrine. The bishops and the priests are not the propagators of Christian teaching, but the worshippers of the Golden Calf and of the Knout which whips the poor and defenceless.

Again, everyone knows how the priests themselves make profit from the worker, extract money out of him on the occasion of marriage, baptism or burial. How often has it happened that the priest, called to the bedside of a sick man to administer the last sacraments, refused to go there before he had been paid his 'fee'? The worker goes away in despair, to sell or pawn his last possession, so as to be able to give religious consolation to his kindred.

It is true that we do meet churchmen of another kind. There exist some who are full of goodness and pity and who do not seek gain; these are always ready to help the poor. But we must admit these are indeed uncommon and that they can be regarded in the same way as white blackbirds. The majority of priests, with beaming faces, bow and scrape to the rich and powerful, silently pardoning them for every depravity, every iniquity. With the workers the clergy behave quite otherwise: they think only of squeezing them without pity; in harsh sermons they condemn the 'covetousness' of the workers when these latter do no more than

defend themselves against the wrongs of capitalism. The glaring contradiction between the actions of the clergy and teachings of Christianity must make everyone reflect. The workers wonder how it comes about that the working class, in its struggle for emancipation, finds in the servants of the Church, enemies and not allies. How does it happen that the Church plays the role of a defence of wealth and bloody oppression, instead of being the refuge of the exploited? In order to understand this strange phenomenon, it is sufficient to glance over the history of the Church and to examine the evolution through which it has passed in the course of the centuries.…

[A substantial account of this evolution – involving the development of bureaucratic institutional hierarchy and far-reaching compromises gradually made with the Roman (and other) ruling classes, from the time of the ancient slave civilisations, through the rise of feudalism, and then through the rise of capitalism – is outlined by Luxemburg. – Editors]

Thus were the relations between the Church and the people modified with the passage of time. Christianity began as a message of consolation to the disinherited and the wretched. It brought a doctrine which combated social inequality and the antagonism between rich and poor; it taught the community of riches. Soon this temple of equality and fraternity became a new source of social antagonisms. Having given up the struggle against individual property which was formerly carried on by the early Apostles, the clergy itself gathered riches together, it allied itself with the possessing classes who lived by exploiting the labour of the toiling class. In feudal times the Church belonged to the nobility, the ruling class, and fiercely defended the power of the latter against revolution. At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the people of Central Europe swept away serfdom and the privileges of the nobility. At that time, the Church allied itself afresh with the dominant classes – with the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. Today, the situation has changed and the clergy no longer possess great estates, but they own capital which they try to make productive by the exploitation of the people through commerce and industry, as do the capitalists.…

Thus the Social Democrats everywhere lift up the people and strengthen those who lose hope, rally the weak into a powerful organisation. They open the eyes of the ignorant and show them the way of equality, of liberty and of love for our neighbours.

On the other hand, the servants of the Church bring to the people only words of humiliation and discouragement. And, if Christ were to appear on earth today, he would surely attack the priests, the bishops and archbishops who defend the rich and live by exploiting the unfortunate, as formerly he attacked the merchants whom he drove from the temple so that their ignoble presence should not defile the House of God.

That is why there has broken out a desperate struggle between the clergy, the supporters of oppression and the Social Democrats, the spokesmen of liberation. Is this fight not to be compared with that of the dark night and the rising sun? Because the priests are not capable of combating socialism by means of intelligence or truth, they have recourse to violence and wickedness. Their Judas-talk calumniates those who rouse class-consciousness. By means of lies and slander, they try to besmirch all those who give up their lives for the workers' cause. These servants and worshippers of the Golden Calf support and applaud the crimes of the tsarist government and defend the throne of this latest despot who oppresses the people like Nero.

But it is in vain that you put yourselves about, you degenerate servants of Christianity who have become the servants of Nero. It is in vain that you help our murderers and our killers, in vain that you protect the exploiters of the proletariat under the sign of the cross. Your cruelties and your calumnies in former times could not prevent the victory of the Christian idea, the idea which you have sacrificed to the Golden Calf; today your efforts will raise no obstacle to the coming of Socialism. Today it is you, in your lies and your teachings, who are pagans, and it is we who bring to the poor, to the exploited the tidings of fraternity and equality. It is we who are marching to the conquest of the world as he did formerly who proclaimed that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

8

THE MASS STRIKE, THE POLITICAL PARTY, AND THE TRADE UNIONS

Antonio Gramsci, writing in his remarkable notebooks from a fascist prison in the early 1930s, characterised Luxemburg's pamphlet on the mass strike as 'one of the most significant documents theorising the war of manoeuvre [i.e., revolutionary tactics] in relation to political science'.*

The excerpts presented here from chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of Luxemburg's pamphlet make it clear that she does not conceptualise what she calls 'the mass strike' simply as a synonym for a general strike or mass demonstration that might be called by a trade union or party leadership. Rather, it refers to spontaneous or semi-spontaneous 'mass actions' or (utilising the terminology of social historian George Rudé) 'crowd actions'. Luxemburg – drawing from the revolutionary experiences of 1905–06 in Eastern and Central Europe that she herself had witnessed and lived through, and connecting this with historical experiences of previous revolutionary upsurges that she had studied, and that had been absorbed into Marxist theory – sought to link such actions with the primary organisations of the workers' movement – the mass socialist party, and the trade unions.

Bureaucratic-conservative leaders of the German trade unions under Social Democratic influence, distorting the positions of Luxemburg and other revolutionaries in the SPD, scoffed that 'the general strike is general nonsense'. Making common cause with reformist party functionaries, they banned discussion of the mass strike concept. This step in the fateful de-radicalisation of the SPD was resisted by Luxemburg and other revolutionaries, but it led to their relative marginalisation, nonetheless. What the functionaries could not accomplish, however, was the elimination of the elemental realities that Luxemburg insightfully analysed in 1906.

This pamphlet was translated into English by Patrick Lavin and published by the Marxist Educational Society of Detroit in 1925.

* Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 233.

The Interaction of the Political and the Economic Struggle

We have attempted in the foregoing to sketch the history of the mass strike in Russia in a few strokes. Even a fleeting glance at this history shows us a picture which in no way resembles that usually formed by discussions in Germany on the mass strike. Instead of the rigid and hollow scheme of an arid political action carried out by the decision of the highest committees and furnished with a plan and panorama, we see a bit of pulsating life of flesh and blood, which cannot be cut out of the large frame of the revolution but is connected with all parts of the revolution by a thousand veins.

The mass strike, as the Russian Revolution shows it to us, is such a changeable phenomenon that it reflects all the phases of the political and economic struggle, all stages and factors of the revolution. Its adaptability, its efficiency, the factors of its origin are constantly changing. It suddenly opens new and wide perspectives of the revolution when it appears to have already arrived in a narrow pass and where it is impossible for anyone to reckon upon it with any degree of certainty. It flows now like a broad billow over the whole kingdom, and now divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring and now is completely lost under the earth. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes of individual branches of industry and general strikes in individual towns, peaceful wage struggles and street massacres, barricade fighting – all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another – it is a ceaselessly moving, changing sea of phenomena. And the law of motion of these phenomena is clear: it does not lie in the mass strike itself nor in its technical details, but in the political and social proportions of the forces of the revolution.

The mass strike is merely the form of the revolutionary struggle and every disarrangement of the relations of the contending powers, in party development and in class division, in the position of counter-revolution – all this immediately influences the action

of the strike in a thousand invisible and scarcely controllable ways. But strike action itself does not cease for a single moment. It merely alters its forms, its dimensions, its effect. It is the living pulse-beat of the revolution and at the same time its most powerful driving wheel. In a word, the mass strike, as shown to us in the Russian Revolution, is not a crafty method discovered by subtle reasoning for the purpose of making the proletarian struggle more effective, *but the method of motion of the proletarian mass*, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution.…

Lessons of the Working Class Movement in Russia Applicable to Germany

… An artificially arranged demonstration of the urban proletariat, taking place once, a mere mass strike action arising out of discipline, and directed by the conductor's baton of a party executive, could therefore leave the broad masses of the people cold and indifferent. But a powerful and reckless fighting action of the industrial proletariat, born of a revolutionary situation, must surely react upon the deeper-lying layers, and ultimately draw all those into a stormy general economic struggle who, in normal times, stand aside from the daily trade-union fight.…

It therefore inevitably follows that the pure political mass strike, which is operated with for preference, is, in Germany, a mere lifeless theoretical plan. If the mass strikes result, in a natural way from a strong revolutionary ferment, they will equally naturally, exactly as in Russia, change into a whole period of elementary, economic struggles. The fears of the trade union leaders, therefore, that the struggle for economic interests in a period of stormy political strife, in a period of mass strikes, can simply be pushed aside and suppressed rest upon an utterly baseless, schoolboy conception of the course of events. A revolutionary period in Germany would also so alter the character of the trade union struggle and develop its potentialities to such an extent that the present guerrilla warfare of the trade unions would be child's play in comparison. And on the other hand, from this elementary economic tempest of mass strikes, the political struggle would

always derive new impetus and fresh strength. The reciprocal action of economic and political struggle, which is the main-spring of present-day strikes in Russia, and at the same time the regulating mechanism of the revolutionary action of the proletariat, would also naturally result in Germany from the conditions themselves.

Co-operation of Organised and Unorganised Workers Necessary for Victory

In connection with this, the question of organisation in relation to the problem of the mass strike in Germany assumes an essentially different aspect.

The attitude of many trade union leaders to this question is generally summed up in the assertion: 'We are not yet strong enough to risk such a hazardous trial of strength as a mass strike.' Now this position is so far untenable that it is an insoluble problem to determine the time, in a peaceful fashion by counting heads, when the proletariat are 'strong enough' for any struggle. Thirty years ago the German trade unions had 50,000 members. That was obviously a number with which a mass strike on the above scale was not to be thought of. Fifteen years later the trade unions were four times as strong, and counted 237,000 members. If, however, the present trade union leaders had been asked at the time if the organisation of the proletariat was then sufficiently ripe for a mass strike, they would assuredly have replied that it was still far from it and that the number of those organised in trade unions would first have to be counted by millions.

Today the number of trade unionists already runs into the second million, but the views of the leaders are still exactly the same, and may very well be the same to the end. The tacit assumption is that the entire working class of Germany, down to the last man and the last woman, must be included in the organisation before it 'is strong enough' to risk a mass action, which then, according to the old formula, would probably be represented as 'superfluous'. This theory is nevertheless absolutely utopian, for the simple reason that it suffers from an internal contradiction, that it goes in a vicious circle. Before the workers can engage in any direct

class struggle they must all be organised. The circumstances, the conditions, of capitalist development and of the bourgeois state make it impossible that, in the normal course of things, without stormy class struggles, certain sections – and these the greatest, the most important, the lowest and most oppressed by capital, and by the state – can be organised at all. We see even in Britain, which has had a whole century of indefatigable trade union effort without any 'disturbances' – except at the beginning in the period of the Chartist movement – without any 'romantic revolutionary' errors or temptations, it has not been possible to do more than organise a minority of the better-paid sections of the proletariat.

On the other hand the trade unions, like all fighting organisations of the proletariat, cannot permanently maintain themselves in any other way than by struggle, and that not struggles of the same kind as the war between the frogs and the mice in the stagnant waters of the bourgeois parliamentary period, but struggle in the troubled revolutionary periods of the mass strike. The rigid, mechanical-bureaucratic conception cannot conceive of the struggle save as the product of organisation at a certain stage of its strength. On the contrary, the living, dialectical explanation makes the organisation arise as a product of the struggle. We have already seen a grandiose example of this phenomenon in Russia, where a proletariat almost wholly unorganised created a comprehensive network of organisational appendages in a year-and-a-half of stormy revolutionary struggle.

Another example of this kind is furnished by the history of the German unions. In the year 1878 the number of trade union members amounted to 50,000. According to the theory of the present-day trade union leaders this organisation, as stated above, was not nearly 'strong enough' to enter upon a violent political struggle. The German trade unions however, weak as they were at the time, did take up the struggle – namely the struggle against the anti-socialist law – and showed that they were 'strong enough', not only to emerge victorious from the struggle, but to increase their strength five-fold: in 1891, after the repeal of the anti-socialist laws, their membership was 277,659. It is true that the methods by which the trade unions conquered in the struggle against the anti-

socialist laws do not correspond to the ideal of a peaceful, bee-like, uninterrupted process: they went first into the fight absolutely in ruins, to rise again on the next wave and to be born anew. But this is precisely the specific method of growth corresponding to the proletarian class organisations: to be tested in the struggle and to go forth from the struggle with increased strength.

On a closer examination of German conditions and of the condition of the different sections of the working class, it is clear that the coming period of stormy political mass struggles will not bring the dreaded, threatening downfall of the German trade unions, but on the contrary, will open up hitherto unsuspected prospects of the extension of their sphere of power – an extension that will proceed rapidly by leaps and bounds. But the question has still another aspect. The plan of undertaking mass strikes as a serious political class action with organised workers only is absolutely hopeless. If the mass strike, or rather, mass strikes, and the mass struggle are to be successful they must become a real *people's movement*, that is, the widest sections of the proletariat must be drawn into the fight. Already in the parliamentary form the might of the proletarian class struggle rests not on the small, organised group but on the surrounding periphery of the revolutionary-minded proletariat. If the Social Democrats were to enter the electoral battle with their few hundred thousand organised members alone, they would condemn themselves to futility. And although it is the tendency of Social Democracy wherever possible to draw the whole great army of its voters into the party organisation, its mass of voters after thirty years experience of Social Democracy is not increased through the growth of the party organisation, but on the contrary, the new sections of the proletariat, won for the time being through the electoral struggle, are the fertile soil for the subsequent seed of organisation. Here the organisation does not supply the troops of the struggle, but the struggle, in an ever growing degree, supplies recruits for the organisation.

In a much greater degree does this obviously apply to direct political mass action than to the parliamentary struggle. If the Social Democrats, as the organised nucleus of the working

class, are the most important vanguard of the entire body of the workers and if the political clarity, the strength, and the unity of the labour movement flow from this organisation, then it is not permissible to visualise the class movement of the proletariat as a movement of the organised minority. Every real, great class struggle must rest upon the support and co-operation of the widest masses, and a strategy of class struggle which does not reckon with this co-operation, which is based upon the idea of the finely stage-managed march out of the small, well-trained part of the proletariat is foredoomed to be a miserable fiasco.

Mass strikes and political mass struggles cannot, therefore, possibly be carried through in Germany by the organised workers alone, nor can they be appraised by regular 'direction' from the central committee of a party. In this case, again – exactly as in Russia – they depend not so much upon 'discipline' and 'training' and upon the most careful possible regulation beforehand of the questions of support and cost, as upon a real revolutionary, determined class action, which will be able to win and draw into the struggle the widest circles of the unorganised workers, according to their mood and their conditions.

The overestimate and the false estimate of the role of organisations in the class struggle of the proletariat is generally reinforced by the underestimate of the unorganised proletarian mass and of their political maturity. In a revolutionary period, in the storm of great unsettling class struggles, the whole educational effect of the rapid capitalist development and of Social Democratic influences first shows itself upon the widest sections of the people, of which, in peaceful times the tables of the organised, and even election statistics, give only a faint idea.

We have seen that in Russia, in about two years a great general action of the proletariat can forthwith arise from the smallest partial conflict of the workers with the employers, from the most insignificant act of brutality of the government organs. Everyone, of course, sees and believes that, because in Russia 'the revolution' is there. But what does that mean? It means that class feeling, the class instinct, is alive and very active in the Russian proletariat, so that immediately they regard every partial question of any

small group of workers as a general question, as a class affair, and quick as lightening they react to its influence as a unity. While in Germany, France, Italy and Holland the most violent trade union conflicts call forth hardly any general action of the working class – and when they do, only the organised part of the workers move – in Russia the smallest dispute raises a storm. That means nothing else however, than that at present – paradoxical as it may sound – the class instinct of the youngest, least trained, badly educated and still worse organised Russian proletariat is immeasurably stronger than that of the organised, trained and enlightened working class of Germany or of any other west European country. And that is not to be reckoned a special virtue of the 'young, unexhausted East' as compared with the 'sluggish West', but is simply a result of direct revolutionary mass action.

In the case of the enlightened German worker the class consciousness implanted by the Social Democrats is *theoretical and latent*: in the period ruled by bourgeois parliamentarism it cannot, as a rule, actively participate in a direct mass action; it is the ideal sum of the four hundred parallel actions of the electoral sphere during the election struggle, of the many partial economic strikes and the like. In the revolution when the masses themselves appear upon the political battlefield this class-consciousness becomes *practical and active*. A year of revolution has therefore given the Russian proletariat that 'training' which thirty years of parliamentary and trade union struggle cannot artificially give to the German proletariat. Of course, this living, active class feeling of the proletariat will considerably diminish in intensity, or rather change into a concealed and latent condition, after the close of the period of revolution and the erection of a bourgeois-parliamentary constitutional state.

And just as surely, on the other hand, will the living revolutionary class feeling, capable of action, affect the widest and deepest layers of the proletariat in Germany in a period of strong political engagement, and that the more rapidly and more deeply, more energetically the educational work of Social Democracy is carried on amongst them. This educational work and the provocative and revolutionising effect of the whole present policy of Germany will

express itself in the circumstances that all those groups which at present in their apparent political stupidity remain insensitive to all the organising attempts of the Social Democrats and of the trade unions will suddenly follow the flag of Social Democracy in a serious revolutionary period. Six months of a revolutionary period will complete the work of the training of these as yet unorganised masses which ten years of public demonstrations and distribution of leaflets would be unable to do. And when conditions in Germany have reached the critical stage for such a period, the sections which are today unorganised and backward will, in the struggle, prove themselves the most radical, the most impetuous element, and not one that will have to be dragged along. If it should come to mass strikes in Germany it will almost certainly not be the best organised workers – and most certainly not the printers – who will develop the greatest capacity for action, but the worst organised or totally unorganised – the miners, the textile workers, and perhaps even the land workers.

In this way we arrive at the same conclusions in Germany in relation to the peculiar tasks of *direction* in relation to the role of Social Democracy in mass strikes, as in our analysis of events in Russia. If we now leave the pedantic scheme of demonstrative mass strikes artificially brought about by order of parties and trade unions, and turn to the living picture of a peoples' movement arising with elementary energy, from the culmination of class antagonisms and the political situation – a movement which passes, politically as well as economically, into mass struggles and mass strikes – it becomes obvious that the task of Social Democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but, first and foremost, in the *political leadership* of the whole movement.

The Social Democrats are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the 'revolutionary situation', to wait for that which in every spontaneous peoples' movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events. This they cannot do,

however, by suddenly issuing the 'slogan' for a mass strike at random at any odd moment, but first and foremost, by making clear to the widest layers of the proletariat the *inevitable advent* of this revolutionary period, the inner *social factors* making for it and the *political consequences* of it. If the widest proletarian layer should be won for a political mass action of the Social Democrats, and if, vice versa, the Social Democrats should seize and maintain the real leadership of a mass movement – should they become, in a *political sense*, the rulers of the whole movement, then they must, with the utmost clearness, consistency and resoluteness, inform the German proletariat of their tactics and aims in the period of coming struggle.

The Role of the Mass Strike in the Revolution

We have seen that the mass strike in Russia does not represent an artificial product of premeditated tactics on the part of the Social Democrats, but a natural historical phenomenon on the basis of the present revolution. Now what are the factors which in Russia have brought forth this new phenomenal form of the revolution?

The Russian Revolution has for its first task the abolition of absolutism and the establishment of a modern bourgeois-parliamentary constitutional state. It is exactly the same in form as that which confronted Germany in the March 1848 Revolution, and the Great French Revolution of the end of the eighteenth century. But the condition, the historical milieu, in which these formally analogous revolutions took place, are fundamentally different from those of present-day Russia. The essential difference is that between those bourgeois revolutions in the West, and the current bourgeois revolution in the East, the whole cycle of capitalist development has run its course. And this development had seized not only the West European countries, but also absolutist Russia. Large-scale industry with all its consequences – modern class divisions, acute social contrasts, modern life in large cities and the modern proletariat – has become in Russia the prevailing form, that is, in social development the decisive form of production.

The remarkable, contradictory, historical situation results from this that the bourgeois revolution, in accordance with its formal tasks will, in the first place, be carried out by a modern class-conscious proletariat, and in an international milieu whose distinguishing characteristic is the ruin of bourgeois democracy. It is not the bourgeoisie that is now the driving force of revolution as in the earlier revolutions of the West, while the proletarian masses, swamped amidst a petty bourgeois mass, simply furnish cannon-fodder for the bourgeoisie, but on the contrary, it is the class-conscious proletariat that is the active and leading element, while the big bourgeois sections turn out to be either openly against the revolution or liberal moderates, and only the rural petit-bourgeoisie and the urban petit-bourgeois intelligentsia are definitively oppositional and even revolutionary minded.

The Russian proletariat, however, who are destined to play the leading part in the bourgeois revolution, enter the fight free from all illusions of bourgeois democracy, with a strongly developed consciousness of their own specific class interests, and at a time when the antagonism between capital and labour has reached its height. This contradictory situation finds expression in the fact that in this formally bourgeois revolution, the antagonism of bourgeois society to absolutism is governed by the antagonism of the proletariat to bourgeois society, that the struggle of the proletariat to bourgeois society is directed simultaneously and with equal energy against both absolutism and capitalist exploitation, and that the programme of the revolutionary struggle concentrates with equal emphasis on political freedom, the winning of the eight-hour day, and a human standard of material existence for the proletariat. This two-fold character of the Russian Revolution is expressed in that close union of the economic with the political struggle and in their mutual interaction which we have seen is a feature of the Russian events and which finds its appropriate expression in the mass strike.

In the earlier bourgeois revolution where, on the one hand, the political training and the leadership of the revolutionary masses were undertaken by the bourgeois parties, and where, on the other hand, it was merely a question of overthrowing the old

government, the brief battle at the barricades was the appropriate form of the revolutionary struggle. Today the working class must educate itself, marshal its forces, and direct itself in the course of the revolutionary struggle and thus the revolution is directed as much against capitalist exploitation as against the *ancien régime*; so much so that the mass strike appears as the natural means to recruit, organise and prepare the widest proletarian layers for revolutionary struggle, as the means to undermine and overthrow the old state power, as well as to contain the capitalist exploitation. The urban industrial proletariat is now the soul of the revolution in Russia. But in order to carry through a direct political struggle as a mass, the proletariat must first be assembled as a mass, and for this purpose they must come out of the factory and workshop, mine and foundry, must overcome the atomisation and decay to which they are condemned under the daily yoke of capitalism.

The mass strike is the first natural, impulsive form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and the more highly developed the antagonism is between capital and labour, the more effective and decisive must mass strikes become. The chief form of previous bourgeois revolutions, the fight at the barricades, the open conflict with the armed power of the state, is in the revolution today only the culminating point, only a moment in the process of the proletarian mass struggle. And therewith in the new form of the revolution there is reached that civilising and mitigating of the class struggle which was prophesied by the opportunists of German Social Democracy – the Bernsteins, Davids, etc. It is true that these men saw the desired civilising and mitigating of the class struggle in the light of petty bourgeois democratic illusions – they believed that the class struggle would shrink to an exclusively parliamentary contest and that street fighting would simply be done away with. History has found the solution in a deeper and finer fashion: in the advent of revolutionary mass strikes, which, of course, in no way replaces brutal street fights or renders them unnecessary, but which reduces them to a moment in the long period of political struggle, and which at the same time unites with the revolutionary period and enormous cultural work in the most exact sense of the words: the material and intellectual

elevation of the whole working class through the 'civilising' of the barbaric forms of capitalist exploitation.

The mass strike is thus shown to be not a specifically Russian product, springing from absolutism but a universal form of the 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 Revolution of March, and the present Russian Revolution – form a continuous chain of development in which the fortunes and the end of the capitalist century are to be seen. In the Great French Revolution the still wholly underdeveloped internal contradictions of bourgeois society gave scope for a long period of violent struggles, in which all the antagonisms which first germinated and ripened in the heat of the revolution raged unhindered and unrestrained in a spirit of reckless radicalism. A century later the revolution of the German bourgeoisie, which broke out midway in the development of capitalism, was already hampered on both sides by the antagonism of interests and the equilibrium of strength between capital and labour, and was smothered in a bourgeois-feudal compromise, and shortened to a miserable episode ending in words.

Another half century, and the present Russian Revolution stands at a point of the historical path which is already over the summit, which is on the other side of the culminating point of capitalist society, at which the bourgeois revolutions cannot again be smothered by the antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, but, will, on the contrary, expand into a new lengthy period of violent social struggles, at which the balancing of the account with absolutism appears a trifle in comparison with the many new accounts which the revolution itself opens up. The present revolution realises in the particular affairs of absolutist Russia the general results of international capitalist development, and appears not so much as the last successor of the old bourgeois revolutions as the forerunner of the new series of proletarian revolutions of the West. The most backward country of all, just because it has been so unpardonably late with its bourgeois revolution, shows

ways and methods of further class struggle to the proletariat of Germany and the most advanced capitalist countries.

Accordingly it appears, when looked at in this way, to be entirely wrong to regard the Russian Revolution as a grandiose spectacle, as something specifically 'Russian', and at best to admire the heroism of the fighting men, that is, as outside onlookers of the struggle. It is much more important that the German workers should learn to look upon the Russian Revolution *as their own affair*, not merely as a matter of international solidarity with the Russian proletariat, but first and foremost, as a *chapter of their own social and political history*. Those trade union leaders and parliamentarians who regard the German proletariat as 'too weak' and German conditions 'as not ripe enough' for revolutionary mass struggles, have obviously not the least idea that the measure of the degree of ripeness of class relations in Germany and of the power of the proletariat does not lie in the statistics of German trade unionism or in election figures, but – in the events of the Russian Revolution. Exactly as the ripeness of French class antagonisms under the July monarchy and the June battle of Paris was reflected in the German March Revolution, in its course and its fiasco, so today the ripeness of German class antagonisms is reflected in the events and in the power of the Russian Revolution. And while the bureaucrats of the German labour movement rummage in their office drawers for information as to their strength and maturity, they do not see that that for which they seek is lying before their eyes in a great historical revolution, because, historically considered, the Russian Revolution is a reflex of the power and the maturity of the international, and therefore in the first place, of the German labour movement.

It would therefore be a too pitiable and grotesquely insignificant result of the Russian Revolution if the German proletariat should merely draw from it the lesson – as is desired by Comrades Frohme, Elm, and others – of using the extreme form of the struggle, the mass strike, and so weaken themselves as to be merely a reserve force in the event of the withdrawal of the parliamentary vote, and therefore a passive means of parliamentary defensive. When the parliamentary vote is taken from us there we will resist.

That is a self-evident decision. But for this it is not necessary to adopt the heroic pose of a Danton as was done, for example, by Comrade Elm in Jena; because the defence of the modest measure of parliamentary right already possessed is less a Heaven-storming innovation, for which the frightful hecatombs of the Russian Revolution were first necessary as a means of encouragement, then the simplest and first duty of every opposition party. But the mere defensive can never exhaust the policy of the proletariat, in a period of revolution. And if it is, on the one hand, difficult to predict with any degree of certainty whether the destruction of universal suffrage would cause a situation in Germany which would call forth an immediate mass strike action, so on the other hand, it is absolutely certain that when we in Germany enter upon the period of stormy mass actions, it will be impossible for the Social Democrats to base their tactics upon a mere parliamentary defensive.

To fix beforehand the cause and the moment from and in which the mass strikes in Germany will break out is not in the power of Social Democracy, because it is not in its power to bring about historical situations by resolutions at party congresses. But what it can and must do is to make clear the political tendencies, when they once appear, and to formulate them as resolute and consistent tactics. Man cannot keep historical events in check while making recipes for them, but he can see in advance their apparent calculable consequences and arrange his mode of action accordingly.

The first threatening political danger with which the German proletariat have concerned themselves for a number of years is a coup d'état of the reaction which will wrest from the wide masses of the people of the most important political right – universal suffrage. In spite of the immense importance of this possible event, it is, as we have already said, impossible to assert with certainty that an open popular movement would immediately break out after the coup d'état, because today innumerable circumstances and factors have to be taken into account. But when we consider the present extreme acuteness of conditions in Germany, and on

the other hand, the manifold international reactions of the Russian Revolution and of the future rejuvenated Russia, it is clear that the collapse of German politics which would ensue from the repeal of universal suffrage could not alone call a halt to the struggle for this right. This coup d'état would rather draw after it, in a longer or shorter period and with elementary power, a great general political reckoning of the insurgent and awakened mass of the people – a reckoning with bread usury, with artificially caused dearness of meat, with expenditure on a boundless militarism and 'navalism', with the corruption of colonial policy, with the national disgrace of the Königsberg trial, with the cessation of social reform, with the discharging of railway workers, the postal officials and the land workers, with the tricking and mocking of the miners, with the judgement of Löbtau and the whole system of class justice, with the brutal lockout system – in short, with the whole thirty-year-old oppression of the combined dominion of Junkerdom and large trustified capital.

But if once the ball is set rolling then Social Democracy, whether it wills it or not, can never again bring it to a standstill. The opponents of the mass strike are in the habit of denying that the lessons and examples of the Russian Revolution can be a criterion for Germany because, in the first place, in Russia the great step must first be taken from an Oriental despotism to a modern bourgeois legal order. The formal distance between the old and the new political order is said to be a sufficient explanation of the vehemence and the violence of the revolution in Russia. In Germany we have long had the most necessary forms and guarantees of a constitutional state, from which it follows that such an elementary raging of social antagonisms is impossible here.

Those who speculate thus forget that in Germany when it once comes to the outbreak of open political struggles, even the historically determined goal will be quite different from that in Russia today. Precisely because the bourgeois legal order in Germany has existed for a long time, because therefore it has had time to completely exhaust itself and to draw to an end,

because bourgeois democracy and liberalism have had time to die out – because of this there can no longer be any talk of a *bourgeois* revolution in Germany. And therefore in a period of open political popular struggles in Germany, the last historically necessary goal can only be the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. The distance, however, of this task from the present conditions of Germany is still greater than that of the bourgeois legal order from Oriental despotism, and therefore, the task cannot be completed at one stroke, but must similarly be accomplished during a long period of gigantic social struggles.

But is there not a gross contradiction in the picture we have drawn? On the one hand it means that in an eventual future period of political mass action the most backward layers of the German proletariat – the land workers, the railwaymen, and the postal slaves – will first of all win the right of combination, and that the worst excrescences of exploitation must first be removed and on the other hand, the political task of this period is said to be the conquest of power by the proletariat! On the one hand, economic, trade union struggles for the most immediate interests, for the material elevation of the working class; on the other hand the ultimate goal of Social Democracy! Certainly these are great contradictions, but they are not contradictions due to our reasoning, but contradictions due to capitalist development. It does not proceed in a beautiful straight line but in a lightning-like zig-zag. Just as the various capitalist countries represent the most varied stages of development, so within each country the different layers of the same working class are represented. But history does not wait patiently till the backward countries, and the most advanced layers have joined together so that the whole mass can move symmetrically forward like a compact column. It brings the best prepared parts to explosion as soon as conditions there are ripe for it, and then in the storm of the revolutionary period, lost ground is recovered, unequal things are equalised, and the whole pace of social progress changed at one stroke to the double-quick.

Just as in the Russian Revolution all the grades of development and all the interests of the different layers of workers are united

in the Social Democratic programme of the revolution, and the innumerable partial struggles united in the great common class action of the proletariat, so will it also be in Germany when the conditions are ripe for it. And the task of Social Democracy will then be to regulate its tactics, not by the most backward phases of development but by the most advanced.

9

BLANQUISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

This 1906 polemic against George Plekhanov, 'father of Russian Marxism' and prominent member of the Menshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, is at the same time a defence of V.I. Lenin and that party's Bolshevik faction.

For all practical purposes, Luxemburg's article reverses her own well-known criticism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, 'Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy' (Chapter 6 in this volume), written two years before. Also striking is Luxemburg's insistence that non-Marxist revolutionaries of the mid-to-late nineteenth century – such as August Blanqui and the *Narodnaya Volya* militants – be treated fairly and respectfully.

This article first appeared in *Czerwony Sztandar*, paper of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. It was translated from French to English by Peter Manson and was published in the *Weekly Worker* (No. 753, January 2009) by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Comrade Plekhanov has published an exhaustive article in the *Courier* entitled, *How Far Does the Right Go?*, in which he accuses the Bolsheviks of Blanquism.

It is not incumbent upon us to defend the Russian comrades upon whom comrade Plekhanov rains the blows of his erudition and dialectic. They are perfectly capable of doing so themselves. But it is worth commenting on certain remarks which our readers too will find of interest. That is why we are devoting some space to them.

In order to define Blanquism comrade Plekhanov quotes Engels on Blanqui – a French revolutionary of the 1840s, whose name is used to describe the tendency.

Engels says:

> In his political activity he was mainly a 'man of action', believing that a small and well organised minority, who would attempt a political stroke of force at the opportune moment, could carry the mass of the people with them by a few successes at the start and thus make a victorious revolution…
>
> From Blanqui's assumption, that any revolution may be made by the outbreak of a small revolutionary minority, follows of itself the necessity of a dictatorship after the success of the venture. This is, of course, a dictatorship, not of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small minority that has made the revolution, and who are themselves previously organised under the dictatorship of one or several individuals. [Engels, *The Programme of the Blanquist Fugitives from the Commune*]

Frederick Engels, Karl Marx's comrade in arms, is undoubtedly a great authority, but whether this characteristic of Blanqui is perfectly just can still be discussed. For in 1848 Blanqui did not foresee his group forming a 'small minority' at all; on the contrary, in a period of powerful revolutionary upsurge, he was certain that, upon his call, the entire working people – if not in France, then at least in Paris – would rise up to fight the ignominious and criminal policies of the bourgeois government, which was trying to 'steal victory from the people'.

Nevertheless, this is not the main question. What concerns us is whether, as comrade Plekhanov strives to demonstrate, Engels' description of Blanqui can be applied to the Bolsheviks (whom comrade Plekhanov labels the 'minority' moreover, because they found themselves in a minority at the reunification congress [of the RSDLP in 1906]).

He says exactly: 'This whole description applies completely to our present minority.' And he justifies this proposition on the following basis:

> The relationship of the Blanquists with the popular masses was utopian in the sense that they had not understood the meaning of the revolutionary autonomy of the masses. According to their schemes, only the conspirators were active properly speaking, while the masses were content to support them, led by a well organised minority.

And comrade Plekhanov affirms that this is 'Blanquism's original sin', to which the Russian Bolshevik comrades (we prefer to keep to this usual denomination) succumbed. In our opinion this reproach has not been substantiated by comrade Plekhanov. For the comparison with the members of *Narodnaya Volya*,* who were effectively Blanquists, proves nothing, and the malicious remark that [Andrei] Zhelyabov [who assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881], the hero and leader of *Narodnaya Volya*, was gifted with a sharper political instinct than the Bolshevik leader, Lenin, is in too bad taste to ponder over. For the rest, as we have said, it is not for us to go guns blazing to defend the Bolsheviks and comrade Lenin: they have not yet been flummoxed by anybody. What is important is to go to the heart of the question and ask: in the current Russian revolution is Blanquism possible? If such a tendency could only exist, could it exert some sort of influence?

We think that anyone with just a little familiarity with the present revolution [of 1905–06], anyone who has had some direct contact with it, would answer this question in the negative. The difference between the situation in France in 1848 and the

* People's Will, a revolutionary-populist organisation of the late nineteenth century, engaging in acts of individual terrorism against tsarism.

current situation in the Russian empire lies precisely in the fact that the relationship between the *organised minority* – that is, the proletarian party – and the masses is fundamentally different. In 1848, revolutionaries, in as much as they were socialists, made desperate efforts to bring socialist ideas to the masses, in order to prevent them supporting the hollow ideas of bourgeois liberalism. That socialism was precisely utopian and petty bourgeois.

Today, in Russia, things are rather different. Neither your old, rancid liberal democrats nor the Cadet organisation [i.e., the Constitutional Democratic Party], Russia's constitutional tsarists, nor any other 'progressive' national bourgeois party have been able to win the broad working masses. *Today those masses have gathered beneath the banner of socialism*: when the revolution exploded, they rallied of their own initiative, almost spontaneously, to the red flag. And this is the best recommendation for our party. We are not going to hide the fact that in 1903 we were still only a handful and in terms of a party, in the strictest sense of the word, in terms of effectively organised comrades, we were at most several hundred; and when we came out to demonstrate only a small group of workers would join us. Today we are a party of tens of thousands.

Why the difference? Is it because we have in our party inspired leaders? Perhaps because we are such well known conspirators? Not at all. None of our leaders – that is, none of those whom the party has entrusted with responsibility – would wish to risk ridicule by inviting a comparison with Blanqui, that lion of past revolution. Few of our militants can match the old conspirators of the Blanquist club when it comes to personal radiance and capacity to organise.

How to explain our success and the failure of the Blanquists? Quite simply by the fact that the famous 'masses' are no longer the same. Today they are made up of working class troops fighting tsarism, of men made socialist by life itself, of men who have been nurtured on hate for the established order, of men taught by necessity to think in Marxist terms. That is the difference. It is neither the leaders nor even the ideas they produce, but the social

and economic conditions which *rule out a common class fight of the proletariat and bourgeoisie*.

Thus, since the masses are different, since the proletariat is different, one cannot speak today of conspiratorial, Blanquist tactics. Blanqui and his heroic comrades made superhuman efforts to lead the masses towards class struggle; they did not succeed at all, because they were faced with workers who had not yet broken with the system of corporations, who were still immersed in petty bourgeois ideology.

We Social Democrats have a much simpler and easier task: today we need only work to direct the class struggle, which has been inflamed with inexorable necessity. The Blanquists tried to drag the masses behind them, whereas we Social Democrats are today pushed by the masses. The difference is great – as great as that between a sailor who strives to realign the current to his boat and one whose task is to hold the line of a boat carried by the current. The first will never have enough power and will fail in his goal, while the second must only ensure that the boat does not deviate from its route, is not broken on a reef or beached on a sandbank.

In this sense comrade Plekhanov ought not to worry about the 'revolutionary autonomy of the masses'. Such autonomy exists – nothing will hold it back and all the bookish sermons on its necessity (please excuse this expression, but we are unable to think of another) will only cause those who work with, and at the heart of, the masses to smile.

We would dispute comrade Plekhanov's reproach to the Russian comrades of the current 'majority' that they have committed Blanquist errors during the revolution. It is possible that there were hints of them in the organisational draft that comrade Lenin drew up in 1902 [i.e., the pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*], but that belongs to the past – a distant past, since today life is proceeding at a dizzying speed. These errors have been corrected by life itself and there is no danger they might recur. And we should not be afraid of the ghost of Blanquism, for it cannot be resuscitated at this time.

On the contrary, there is a danger that comrade Plekhanov and the partisans of the 'minority' who fear Blanquism so much will go to the opposite extreme and ground the boat on a sandbank. We see this opposite extreme in the fact that these comrades fear above all remaining in a minority and are counting on *the masses outside the proletariat*. Hence the calculation favouring participation in the *duma* [the limited parliamentary body established by the Tsar]; hence the false rallying cries in the central committee directives to support the gentlemen of the Cadets, the attempt to revive the slogan, 'Down with the bureaucratic ministry!' and other similar errors.

There is no danger that the boat will remain grounded on the sandbank: the tumultuous events of the revolution will soon carry forward the proletarian boat. But it would be a pity if we became diverted by such errors, if only for an instant.

In the same way, the notion of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has taken on a different meaning from before. Frederick Engels correctly stresses that the Blanquists were not dreaming of a dictatorship of 'the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small minority that has made the revolution'. Today things are quite different. It is not an organisation of conspirators who 'made the revolution', who can contemplate their dictatorship. Even the *Narodnaya Volya* people and those who claim to be their heirs, the Socialist Revolutionaries of Russia, have long ceased to dream of such a thing.

If today the Bolshevik comrades speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat, they have never given it the old Blanquist meaning; neither have they ever made the mistake of *Narodnaya Volya*, which dreamt of 'taking power for itself' (*zachvat vlasti*). On the contrary, they have affirmed that the present revolution will succeed when the proletariat – *all* the revolutionary class – takes possession of the state machine. The proletariat, as the most revolutionary element, will perhaps assume the role of liquidator of the old regime by 'taking power for itself' in order to defeat counter-revolution and prevent the revolution being led astray by a bourgeoisie that is reactionary in its very nature. No revolution can succeed other than by the dictatorship of one class, and all

the signs are that the proletariat can become this liquidator at the present time.

Clearly no Social Democrat falls for the illusion of the proletariat being able to maintain itself in power. If it could, it would lead to the domination of its working class ideas and it would realise socialism. But it is not strong enough *at this time*, for the proletariat, in the strictest sense of the word, constitutes a *minority* in the Russian empire. The achievement of socialism by a minority is unconditionally excluded, since the very idea of socialism excludes the domination of a minority. So, on the day of the political victory of the proletariat over tsarism, the majority will claim the power which the former has conquered.

Concretely, after the fall of tsarism, power will pass into the hands of the most revolutionary part of society, the proletariat, because the proletariat will take possession of all posts and keep watch over them until power is placed in the hands of those legally called upon to hold it – in the hands of the new government, which the Constituent [Assembly], as the legislative organ elected by the whole population, is alone able to determine. Now, it is a simple fact that it is not the proletariat that constitutes a majority in society, but the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, and that, as a consequence, it will not be the Social Democrats who form a majority in the Constituent, but the democratic peasants and petty bourgeois. We may lament this fact, but we will not be able to change it.

Broadly speaking, this is the situation as the Bolsheviks understand it, and all Social Democratic organisations and parties outside Russia itself share this vision. Where Blanquism fits into it is difficult to imagine.

To justify his claim, if only in appearance, comrade Plekhanov is obliged to take the words of Lenin and his comrades out of context. If, for our part, we wished to do the same, we would be able to demonstrate that the 'Mensheviks' have recently acted like Blanquists, beginning with comrade Parvus [Alexander Helphand] and ending with comrade… Plekhanov! But that would be to play a sterile scholastic game. Comrade Plekhanov's article is bitter in

tone – it is full of bitterness – which is a bad thing: 'When Jupiter becomes incensed, it is because Jupiter is wrong.'

It is high time to finish with such scholasticism and all this hullabaloo to identify who is a 'Blanquist' and who is an 'orthodox Marxist'. Rather we need to know if the tactic recommended by comrade Plekhanov and his Menshevik comrades, which aims to work through the duma as far as possible, is correct *now*; or, on the contrary, if the tactic we are applying, just like the Bolshevik comrades, is correct – the tactic based on the principle that the centre of gravity is situated outside the duma, in the active appearance of the popular revolutionary masses.

The Menshevik comrades have not yet been able to persuade anyone of the correctness of their views – and no-one will be persuaded any the more when they attach the Blanquist label to their opponents.

10

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Imperialism in various forms flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Russian empire, popularly known as a 'prison-house of nations' kept 'good company' with the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Ottoman empire, the British empire, along with French, Dutch, and Belgian colonial networks, not to mention the 'Open Door' variety of dollar diplomacy and gunboat diplomacy practised by US business interests and their government. One consequence was the development of competing nationalist ideologies. There were the varieties of nationalism utilised to justify the economic and political expansionism of the various imperialist powers – but there were also forms of nationalism that arose among various peoples oppressed by these voracious empires.

As we can see in these excerpts, Luxemburg – seeking to develop a distinctive Marxist analysis – was inclined to be scathingly critical of all forms of nationalism. For her the primary orientation for Marxist revolutionaries is the struggle of the working classes of various countries against the exploitative capitalist classes of those various countries. The guiding principle for her was the dictum 'workers of all countries, unite!' Nationalism, she argued, is a form of bourgeois ideology which must be opposed by the proletarian ideology, and goal, of socialism. Other Marxists were not inclined to be so dismissive, however, of all forms of nationalism, which had developed deep roots within the working classes of various countries. In some cases, this was related to 'patriotic' opportunism among socialists who were breaking from revolutionary perspectives – but not in all cases. In particular Lenin developed a very different perspective from Luxemburg – making a sharp distinction between the nationalism of oppressor nations (which should be opposed by revolutionaries) and the nationalism of oppressed nations (which should be supported by revolutionaries). This revolutionary nationalism, Lenin argued, was essential to the struggle against imperialism and against the oppressive empires dominating so much of the world. It also represented a powerful

revolutionary-democratic current that naturally intertwined with the struggle for socialism.

Luxemburg saw things differently. In stark contrast to a majority of Polish socialists (gathered in the sizeable Polish Socialist Party), Luxemburg and her co-thinkers in the smaller Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania rejected the cause of Polish nationalism, in the name of working class internationalism. Her views were explained in a series of articles on 'The National Question and Autonomy', appearing in the Polish journal *Przeglad socialdemokratyczny* in 1908–09. These were published in English along with related writings, in *The National Question – Selected Writings*, edited and introduced by Horace B. Davis, from which the following excerpts are taken.

… [T]he political programmes of the modern workers' parties do not aim at stating abstract principles of a social ideal, but only at the formulation of those practical social and political reforms which the class-conscious proletariat needs and demands in the framework of bourgeois society to facilitate the class struggle and their ultimate victory. The elements of a political programme are formulated with definite aims in mind: to provide a direct, practical, and feasible solution to the crucial problems of political and social life, which are in the area of the class struggle of the proletariat; to serve as a guideline for everyday politics and its needs; to initiate the political action of the workers' party and to lead it in the right direction; and finally, to separate the revolutionary politics of the proletariat from the politics of the bourgeois and petit bourgeois parties.

The formula, 'the right of nations to self-determination', of course doesn't have such a character at all. It gives no practical guidelines for the day-to-day politics of the proletariat, nor any practical solution of nationality problems. For example, this formula does not indicate to the Russian proletariat in what way it should demand a solution of the Polish national problem, the Finnish question, the Caucasian question, the Jewish, etc. It offers instead only an unlimited authorisation to all interested 'nations' to settle their national problems in any way they like. The only practical conclusion for the day-to-day politics of the working class which can be drawn from the above formula is the guideline that it is the duty of that class to struggle against all manifestations of national oppression. If we recognise the right of each nation to self-determination, it is obviously a logical conclusion that we must condemn every attempt to place one nation over another, or for one nation to force upon another any form of national existence. However, the duty of the class party of the proletariat to protest and resist national oppression arises not from any special 'right of nations', just as, for example, its striving for the social and political equality of sexes does not at all result from any special 'rights of women' which the movement of bourgeois emancipationists refers to. This duty arises solely from the general opposition to the class regime and to every

form of social inequality and social domination, in a word, from the basic position of socialism. But leaving this point aside, the only guideline given for practical politics is of a purely negative character. The duty to resist all forms of national oppression does not include any explanation of what conditions and political forms the class-conscious proletariat in Russia at the present time should recommend as a solution for the nationality problems of Poland, Latvia, the Jews, etc., or what programme it should present to match the various programmes of the bourgeois, nationalist, and pseudo-socialist parties in the present class struggle. In a word, the formula, 'the right of nations to self-determination', is essentially not a political and problematic guideline in the nationality question, but only a means of *avoiding that question*....

The general and cliché-like character of the ninth point in the programme of the Social Democratic Labour Party of Russia shows that this way of solving the question is foreign to the position of Marxian socialism. A 'right of nations' which is valid for all countries and all times is nothing more than a metaphysical cliché of the type of 'rights of man' and 'rights of the citizen'. Dialectic materialism, which is the basis of scientific socialism, has broken once and for all with this type of 'eternal' formula. For the historical dialectic has shown that there are no 'eternal' truths and that there are no 'rights'.... In the words of Engels, 'What is good in the here and now, is an evil somewhere else, and vice versa' – or, what is right and reasonable under some circumstances becomes nonsense and absurdity under others. Historical materialism has taught us that the real content of these 'eternal' truths, rights, and formulae is determined only by the *material* social conditions of the environment in a given historical epoch.

On this basis, scientific socialism has revised the entire store of democratic clichés and ideological metaphysics inherited from the bourgeoisie. Present-day Social Democracy long since stopped regarding such phrases as 'democracy', 'national freedom', 'equality', and other such beautiful things as eternal truths and laws transcending particular nations and times. On the contrary, Marxism regards and treats them only as expressions of certain definite historical conditions, as categories which, in terms of their

material content and therefore their political value, are subject to constant change, which is the *only* 'eternal' truth.

When Napoleon or any other despot of his ilk uses a plebiscite, the extreme form of political democracy, for the goals of Caesarism, taking advantage of the political ignorance and economic subjection of the masses, we do not hesitate for a moment to come out wholeheartedly against that 'democracy', and are not put off for a moment by the majesty or the omnipotence of the people, which, for the metaphysicians of bourgeois democracy, is something like a sacrosanct idol.

When a German like Tessendorf or a tsarist gendarme, or a 'truly Polish' National Democrat defends the 'personal freedom' of strikebreakers, protecting them against the moral and material pressure of organised labour, we don't hesitate a minute to support the latter, granting them the fullest moral and historical right to *force* the unenlightened rivals into solidarity, although from the point of view of formal liberalism, those 'willing to work' have on their side the right of 'a free individual' to do what reason, or unreason, tells them.

When, finally, liberals of the Manchester School demand that the wage worker be left completely to his fate in the struggle with capital in the name of 'the equality of citizens', we unmask that metaphysical cliché which conceals the most glaring economic inequality, and we demand, point-blank, the legal protection of the class of wage workers, thereby clearly breaking with formal 'equality before the law'.

The nationality question cannot be an exception among all the political, social, and moral questions examined in this way by modern socialism. It cannot be settled by the use of some vague cliché, even such a fine-sounding formula as 'the right of all nations to self-determination'. For such a formula expresses either absolutely nothing, so that it is an empty, noncommittal phrase, or else it expresses the unconditional duty of socialists to support all national aspirations, in which case it is simply false.

On the basis of the general assumptions of historical materialism, the position of socialists with respect to nationality problems depends primarily on the concrete circumstances of

each case, which differ significantly among countries, and also change in the course of time in each country. Even a superficial knowledge of the facts enables one to see that the question of the nationality struggles under the Ottoman Porte in the Balkans has a completely different aspect, a different economic and historical basis, a different degree of international importance, and different prospects for the future, from the question of the struggle of the Irish against the domination of England. Similarly, the complications in the relations among the nationalities which make up Austria are completely different from the conditions which influence the Polish question. Moreover, the nationality question in each country changes its character with time, and this means that new and different evaluations must be made about it. Even our three national movements beginning from the time of the Kosciuszko Insurrection could be seen as a triple, stereotyped repetition of the same historical play (that is, 'the struggle of a subjugated nationality for independence') only in the eyes of either a metaphysician of the upper-class Catholic ideology such as Szujski, who believed that Poland had historical mission to be the 'Christ of nations', or in the eyes of an ignoramus of the present-day social-patriotic 'school'. Whoever cuts deeper with the scalpel of the researcher – more precisely, of the historical-materialist researcher – will see beneath the surface of our three national uprisings three completely different socio-political movements, which took on an identical form of struggle with the invader in each case only because of external circumstances. To measure the Kosciuszko Insurrection and the November and January insurrections by one and the same yardstick – by the sacred laws of the 'subjugated nation' – actually reveals a lack of all judgement and the complete absence of any historical and political discrimination.…

The development of *world powers*, a characteristic feature of our times growing in importance along with the progress of capitalism, from the very outset condemns all small nations to political impotence. Apart from a few of the most powerful nations, the leaders in capitalist development, which possess the spiritual and material resources necessary to maintain their political and

economic independence, 'self-determination', the independent existence of smaller and petty nations, is an illusion, and will become even more so. The return of all, or even the majority of the nations which are today oppressed, to independence would only be possible if the existence of small states in the era of capitalism had any chances or hopes for the future. Besides, the big-power economy and politics – a condition of survival for the capitalist states – turn the politically independent, formally equal, small European states into mutes on the European stage and more often into scapegoats. Can one speak with any seriousness of the 'self-determination' of peoples which are formally independent, such as Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Rumanians, the Serbs, the Greeks, and, as far as that goes, even the Swiss, whose very independence is the product of the political struggles and diplomatic game of the 'Concert of Europe'? From this point of view, the idea of ensuring all 'nations' the possibility of self-determination is equivalent to reverting from Great-Capitalist development to the small medieval states, far earlier than the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The other principal feature of modern development, which stamps such an idea as utopian, is capitalist *imperialism*. The example of England and Holland indicates that under certain conditions a capitalist country can even completely skip the transition phase of 'national state' and create at once, in its manufacturing phase, a colony-holding state. The example of England and Holland, which, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, had begun to acquire colonies, was followed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by all the great capitalist states. The fruit of that trend is the continuous destruction of the independence of more and more new countries and peoples, of entire continents.

The very development of international trade in the capitalist period brings with it the inevitable, though at times slow ruin of all the more primitive societies, destroys their historically existing means of 'self-determination', and makes them dependent on the crushing wheel of capitalist development and world politics. Only complete formalist blindness could lead one to maintain that, for example, the Chinese nation (whether we regard the people of that

state as one or several nations) is today really 'determining itself'. The destructive action of world trade is followed by outright partition or by the political dependence of colonial countries in various degrees and forms. And if Social Democracy struggles with all its strength against colonial policy in all its manifestations, trying to hinder its progress, then it will at the same time realise that this development, as well as the roots of colonial politics, lies at the very foundations of capitalist production, that colonialism will inevitably accompany the future progress of capitalism, and that only the innocuous bourgeois apostles of 'peace' can believe in the possibility of today's states avoiding that path. The struggle to stay in the world market, to play international politics, and to have overseas territories is both a necessity and a condition of development for capitalist world powers. The form that best serves the interests of exploitation in the contemporary world is not the 'national' state, as Kautsky thinks, but a state bent on conquest. When we compare the different states from the point of view of the degree to which they approach this ideal, we see that it is not the French state which best fits the model, at least not in its European part which is homogeneous with respect to nationality. Still less does the Spanish state fit the model; since it lost its colonies, it has shed its imperialist character and is purely 'national' in composition. Rather do we look to the British and German states as models, for they are based on national oppression in Europe and the world at large – and to the United States of America, a state which keeps in its bosom like a gaping wound the oppression of the Negro people, and seeks to conquer the Asiatic peoples.…

The formula of the 'right of nations' is inadequate to justify the position of socialists on the nationality question, not only because it fails to take into account the wide range of historical conditions (place and time) existing in each given case and does not reckon with the general current of the development of global conditions, but also because it ignores completely the fundamental theory of modern socialists – the theory of social classes.

When we speak of the 'right of nations to self-determination', we are using the concept of the 'nation' as a homogeneous social

and political entity. But actually, such a concept of the 'nation' is one of those categories of bourgeois ideology which Marxist theory submitted to a radical re-vision, showing how that misty veil, like the concepts of the 'freedom of citizens', 'equality before the law', etc., conceals in every case a definite historical content.

In a class society, 'the nation' as a homogeneous socio-political entity does not exist. Rather, there exist within each nation, classes with antagonistic interests and 'rights'. There literally is not one social area, from the coarsest material relationships to the most subtle moral ones, in which the possessing class and the class-conscious proletariat hold the same attitude, and in which they appear as a consolidated 'national' entity. In the sphere of economic relations, the bourgeois classes represent the interests of exploitation – the proletariat the interests of work. In the sphere of legal relations, the cornerstone of bourgeois society is private property; the interest of the proletariat demands the emancipation of the propertyless man from the domination of property. In the area of the judiciary, bourgeois society represents class 'justice', the justice of the well-fed and the rulers; the proletariat defends the principle of taking into account social influences on the individual, of humaneness. In international relations, the bourgeoisie represent the politics of war and partition, and at the present stage, a system of trade war; the proletariat demands a politics of universal peace and free trade. In the sphere of the social sciences and philosophy, bourgeois schools of thought and the school representing the proletariat stand in diametric opposition to each other. The possessing classes have their world view; it is represented by idealism, metaphysics, mysticism, eclecticism; the modern proletariat has its theory – dialectic materialism. Even in the sphere of so-called 'universal' conditions – in ethics, views on art, on behaviour – the interests, world view, and ideals of the bourgeoisie and those of the enlightened proletariat represent two camps, separated from each other by an abyss. And whenever the formal strivings and the interests of the proletariat and those of the bourgeoisie (as a whole or in its most progressive part) seem identical – for example, in the field of democratic aspirations –

there, under the identity of forms and slogans, is hidden the most complete divergence of contents and essential politics.

There can be no talk of a collective and uniform will, of the self-determination of the 'nation' in a society formed in such a manner. If we find in the history of modern societies 'national' movements, and struggles for 'national interests', these are usually class movements of the ruling strata of the bourgeoisie, which can in any given case represent the interest of the other strata of the population only insofar as under the form of 'national interests' it defends progressive forms of historical development, and insofar as the working class has not yet distinguished itself from the mass of the 'nation' (led by the bourgeoisie) into an independent, enlightened political class.…

Social Democracy is the class party of the proletariat. Its historical task is to express the class interests of the proletariat and also the revolutionary interests of the development of capitalist society toward realising socialism. Thus, Social Democracy is called upon to realise not the right of nations to self-determination but only the right of the working class, which is exploited and oppressed, of the proletariat, to self-determination. From that position Social Democracy examines all social and political questions without exception, and from that standpoint it formulates its programmatic demands. Neither in the question of the political forms which we demand in the state, nor in the question of the state's internal or external policies, nor in the questions of law or education, of taxes or the military, does Social Democracy allow the 'nation' to decide its fate according to its own vision of self-determination. All of these questions affect the class interests of the proletariat in a way that questions of national-political and national-cultural existence do not. But between those questions and the national-political and national-cultural questions, exist usually the closest ties of mutual dependence and causality. As a result, Social Democracy cannot here escape the necessity of formulating these demands individually, and demanding actively

the forms of national-political and national-cultural existence which best correspond to the interests of the proletariat and its class struggle at a given time and place, as well as to the interests of the revolutionary development of society. Social Democracy cannot leave these questions to be solved by 'nations'....

11
THEORY AND PRACTICE

Karl Kautsky was considered, throughout Germany and internationally, as the foremost authority on, and an impressively creative practitioner of, Marxism. Up until 1909 – when his outstanding work on revolutionary strategy and tactics, *The Road to Power*, was published – he seemed to be, along with such figures as Luxemburg and Lenin, a mainstay of socialism's consistently Marxist left-wing. Certainly in the disputes with the explicitly revisionist and reformist currents in the SPD and the Socialist (Second) International, he and Luxemburg stood shoulder-to-shoulder. And Kautsky was among Luxemburg's champions when she initially advanced her mass strike conception.

By 1910, however, the SPD's central leadership – influenced especially by its vote-getting electoral apparatus, by its growing layers of functionaries with a vested interest in maintaining the stability of the movement's various institutions, and by a trade union bureaucracy focused on securing short-term gains within the capitalist economy – made it clear that Luxemburg's uncompromisingly revolutionary Marxism was unacceptable. If Kautsky continued to make common cause with her, he risked the marginalisation that was increasingly becoming her fate. Instead, in the name of Marxist 'orthodoxy', he took issue with his erstwhile ally, developing a different perspective regarding the mass strike. Kautsky argued that Luxemburg's conception was simplistic, failed to take account of differences between Russian and German realities, and could lead to a premature radicalisation of tactics that would be doomed to defeat. Realities called – in the present time – for a gradualist 'strategy of attrition' (in practical terms similar to the approach of the reformists), which could be replaced, when capitalism entered a later period of inevitable crisis, by a revolutionary 'strategy of overthrow'.

These excerpts from sections 2, 3, and 6 of Luxemburg's polemic 'Theory and Practice' give a sense of how she responded to Kautsky's attack, while at the same time developing and deepening her conceptualisation of revolutionary strategy and tactics. Kautsky was the editor of the German

Marxist theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit*, where he published his critique of Luxemburg. Her response appeared in the same journal in 1910. It was translated into English by David Wolff and was first published as a pamphlet in 1980 by the News and Letters Committees in Detroit.

II

… To explain his unexpected stand against the slogan of the mass strike in the latest Prussian voting rights campaign, Comrade Kautsky created a whole theory of two strategies: the 'strategy of overthrow' and the 'strategy of attrition'. Now Comrade Kautsky goes a step farther, and constructs *ad hoc* yet another whole new theory of the conditions for political mass strikes in Russia and in Germany.

He begins with general reflections on the deceptiveness of historical examples, and how plausibly one can, with insufficient caution, find appropriate justification in history for all strategies, methods, aims, institutions, and earthly things in general. These observations, of a harmless nature in their initial breadth and generality, soon show their less than harmless tendency and purpose in this formulation: that it is 'especially dangerous to appeal to revolutionary examples'. These warnings, in spirit somewhat reminiscent of Comrade Frohme's fatherly admonitions, are directed specifically against the Russian Revolution [of 1905]. Thereupon follows a theory intended to show and prove the total antithesis of Russia and Germany: Russia, where conditions for the mass strike exist and Germany, where they do not.

In Russia we have the weakest government in the world, in Germany the strongest; in Russia an unsuccessful war with a small Asian land, in Germany the 'glory of almost a century of continuous victories over the strongest great powers in the world'. In Russia we have economic backwardness and a peasantry which, until 1905, believed in the Tsar like a god; in Germany we have the highest economic development, and with it the concentrated might of the cartels which suppresses the working masses through the most ruthless terrorism. In Russia we have the total absence of political freedom; in Germany we have political freedom which provides the workers various 'safe' forms for their protest and struggle, and hence they 'are totally preoccupied with organisations, meetings, the press, and elections of all sorts'. And the result of these contrasts is this: in Russia the strike was the only possible form of proletarian struggle, and therefore the strike

was in itself a victory, even though it was planless and ineffectual – and further, because strikes were forbidden, every strike was in itself a political act. On the other hand, in Western Europe – here the German schema is extended to all of Western Europe – such 'amorphous, primitive strikes' have long been outmoded: here one only strikes when a positive result can be expected.

The moral of all this is that the long revolutionary period of mass strikes, in which economic and political action, demonstration and fighting strikes continuously alternate and are transformed one into the other, is a specific product of Russian backwardness. In Western Europe, and especially in Germany, even a demonstration mass strike like the Russian ones would be extremely difficult, almost impossible, 'not in spite, but because of the half-century old socialist movement'. As a means of struggle, the political mass strike could only be employed here in a single, final battle 'to the death' – and therefore only when the question, for the proletariat, was to conquer or die.

In passing only, I wish to point out that Comrade Kautsky's depiction of the Russian situation is, in the most important points, an almost total reversal of the truth. For example, the Russian peasantry did not suddenly begin to rebel in 1905. From the so-called emancipation of the serfs in 1861, with a single pause between 1885 and 1895, peasant uprisings run like a red thread through the internal history of Russia: uprisings against the landowners as well as violent resistance to the organs of government. It is this which occasioned the Minister of Interior's well-known circular letter of 1898 which placed the entire Russian peasantry under martial law. The new and exceptional in 1905 was simply that, for the first time, the peasant masses' chronic rebellion took on political and revolutionary meaning as concomitant and totalisation of the urban proletariat's goal-conscious, revolutionary class action.

Even more turned around, if this is possible, is Comrade Kautsky's conception of the question's main point – the strike and mass strike actions of the Russian proletariat. The picture of chaotic, 'amorphous, primitive strikes' by the Russian workers – who strike out of bewilderment, simply to strike, without goal

or plan, without demands and 'definite successes' – is a blooming fantasy. The Russian strikes of the revolutionary period effected a very respectable raise in wages, but above all they succeeded in almost universally shortening the working day to ten hours, and in many cases to nine. With the most tenacious struggle, they were able to uphold the eight-hour day for many weeks in St Petersburg. They won the right to organise not only for the workers, but for the state's postal and railway employees as well: and until the counter-revolution gained the upper hand, they defended this right from all attacks. They broke the overlordship of the employers, and in many of the larger enterprises they created workers' committees to regulate working conditions. They undertook the task of abolishing piecework, household work, night work, factory penalties, and of forcing strict observance of Sundays off.

These strikes, from which promising union organisations rapidly sprouted in almost all industries with vigorous life, and with solid leadership, treasuries, constitutions, and an imposing union press – these strikes, from which as bold a creation as the famous St 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 organisational results, they could safely be set alongside any 'West European' union movement. Granted, since the revolution's defeat most of the economic gains, together with the political ones, have little by little been lost. But this plainly does not alter the character which the strikes had as long as the revolution lasted.

Not 'organised' and hence 'planless', these economic, partial, and local conflicts continuously, 'spontaneously' grew into general political and revolutionary mass strikes – from which, in turn, further local actions sprouted up thanks to the revolutionary situation and the potential energy of the masses' class solidarity. The course and immediate outcome of such a general political-revolutionary action was also not 'organised' and elemental – as will always be the case in mass movements and stormy times. But if, like Comrade Kautsky, one wishes to measure the progressive

character of strikes and 'rational strike leadership' by their immediate successes, the great period of strikes in Russia achieved relatively greater economic and social-political successes in a few years of revolution than the German union movement has in the four decades of its existence. And all this is due to neither a special heroism, nor a special genius of the Russian proletariat: it is simply the measure of a revolutionary period's quickstep, against the leisurely gait of peaceful development within the framework of bourgeois parliamentarism.

As Comrade Kautsky said in his *Social Revolution*, second edition:

> There remains only one objection which can be, and hence all the more frequently will be raised to this 'revolutionary romanticism': that the situation in Russia proves nothing for us in Western Europe because our circumstances are fundamentally different.
>
> Naturally, I am not unaware of the differences in circumstances: but they should not, on the other hand, be exaggerated. Our Comrade Luxemburg's latest pamphlet clearly demonstrates that the Russian working class has not fallen as low and achieved as little as is generally accepted. Just as the English workers must break themselves of looking down on the German proletariat as a backward class, so we in Germany must give up viewing the Russians in the same way.

And further on:

> As a political factor, the English workers today stand even lower than the workers of the economically most backward and politically least free of European states: Russia. It is their living revolutionary Reason that gives the Russians their great practical strength; and it was their renunciation of revolution and self-limitation to immediate interests, their so-called 'political realism', that made the English a zero in real politics.

But for the present, let us set aside the Russian situation and turn to Comrade Kautsky's depiction of the Prusso-German situation. Strange to say, here too we learn of marvels. For example, it has been until now the prerogative of East Elbian Junkerdom

to live by the ennobling conviction that Prussia possesses 'the strongest contemporary government'. How Social Democracy, on the other hand, should in all seriousness come to acknowledge a government to be 'the strongest' which 'is nothing but a military despotism embellished with parliamentary forms, alloyed with a feudal admixture, obviously influenced by the bourgeoisie, shored up with a bureaucracy and watched over by the police' – I find that somewhat hard to grasp. That foolish picture of misery, the Bethmann-Hollweg 'cabinet': a government reactionary to the bone and therefore without a plan or political direction, with lackeys and bureaucrats instead of statesmen, with a whimsical zig-zag course; internally the football of a vulgar Junker clique and the insolent intrigues of a courtly rabble; in its foreign policy, the football of a personal authority accountable to none; only a few years ago the contemptible shoeshine boy of the 'weakest government in the world', Russian tsarism; propped up by an army which to an enormous extent consists of Social Democrats, with the stupidest drill, the most infamous mistreatment of soldiers in the world – this is the 'strongest contemporary government'! In any case, a unique contribution to the materialist conception of history, which until now has not deduced the 'strength' of a government from its backwardness, hatred of culture, 'slavish obedience', and police spirit.

Besides, Comrade Kautsky has done yet more for this 'strongest government': he has even wooed her with the 'glory of almost a century of continuous victories over the strongest great powers in the world'. In the veterans' associations they have lived, until now, solely on the 'glorious campaign' of 1870. To construe his 'century' of Prussian glory, Comrade Kautsky has apparently added in the Battle of Jena – as well as the Hunn Campaign in China led by our Count Waldersee, and Trotha's victory over the Hottentot women and children in the Kalahari.

But as it says in Comrade Kautsky's beautiful article of December 1906, 'The State of the Reich', at the end of a long and detailed description:

> Comparing the Reich's shining outward state at its beginning with the present situation, one must confess that never has a more splendid inheritance of might and prestige been more rashly squandered…, never in its history has the German Reich's position in the world been weaker, and never has a German government more thoughtlessly and wilfully played with fire than at the present time.

Of course, at that time the main thing was to paint the shining electoral victory that awaited us in the 1907 elections and the overwhelming catastrophes which, according to Comrade Kautsky, would inevitably follow it – with the same inevitability with which he now has them follow the next Reichstag election.

On the other hand, from his depiction of economic and political conditions in Germany and Western Europe, Comrade Kautsky constructs a strike policy which – measured against reality – is a downright astonishing fantasy. 'The worker', Comrade Kautsky assures us, 'in Germany – and throughout Western Europe as a whole – takes up the strike as a means of struggle only when he has the prospect of attaining *definite successes* with it. If these successes fail to appear, the strike has failed its purpose.' With this discovery, Comrade Kautsky has pronounced a harsh judgement on the practice of German and 'West European' unions. For what do the strike statistics in Germany show us? Of the 19,766 strikes and lockouts we have had, in all, from 1890 to 1908, an entire quarter (25.2 per cent) were wholly unsuccessful; almost another quarter (22.5 per cent) were only partly successful; and less than half (49.5 per cent) were totally successful.

These statistics just as crassly contradict the theory of Comrade Kautsky that because of the effective development of the workers' organisations as well as the cartels, 'the struggles between these organisations likewise grow ever more centralised and concentrated' and on this account 'ever more *infrequent*'. In the decade 1890 through 1899, we had a total of 3,722 strikes and lockouts in Germany; in the nine years 1900 through 1908, the time of greatest growth for both cartels and unions, we had 15,994. So little are strikes growing 'ever more infrequent' that they have rather grown four times as numerous in the last decade.

And while in the previous decade 425,142 workers took part in strikes, in the last nine years 1,709,415 did: once again four times as many, and thus on the average approximately the same number per strike.

According to the schema of Comrade Kautsky, one quarter to one half of all these union struggles in Germany have 'failed their purpose'. But every union agitator knows very well that 'definite successes' in the form of material gains absolutely are not and cannot be the sole purpose, the sole determining aspect in economic struggles. Instead, union organisations 'in Western Europe' are forced step by step into a position which compels them to take up the struggle with limited prospects of 'definite successes': as specifically shown by the statistics of purely defensive strikes, of which a whole 32.5 per cent turned out completely unsuccessful. That such 'unsuccessful' strikes have, nevertheless, not 'failed their purpose'; that on the contrary they are a direct condition of life for the defence of the workers' standard of living, for sustaining the workers' fighting spirit, for impeding future onslaughts by the employers: these are the elementary ground rules of German union practice.

And further, it is generally known that besides a 'definite success' in material gains, and indeed *without* this success, strikes 'in Western Europe' have perhaps their most important effect as beginning points of union *organisation*: and it is specifically in backward places and hard-to-organise branches of labour that such 'unsuccessful' and 'ill-advised' strikes are most common, from which over and over arise the foundations of union organisation. The history of the Vogtland textile workers' struggles and sufferings, whose most famous chapter is the great Crimmitschau strike, is but a single testimony to this. The 'strategy' which Comrade Kautsky has now set forth is not merely incapable of directing a great political mass action, but even a normal union movement.

But the above-mentioned schema for 'West European' strikes has yet another gaping hole – just at the point, in fact, where the economic struggle brings the question of the mass strike and thus our own proper theme, into consideration. That is, this schema

entirely excludes the fact that it is just 'in Western Europe' where ever longer more violent strikes without much 'plan' break like an elemental storm over those regions where a great exploited mass of proletarians stands opposed to the concentrated ruling power of capital or the capitalistic state: strikes which grow not 'ever more infrequent' but ever more frequent; which mostly end without any 'definite successes' at all – but in spite, or rather just because of this are of greater significance as explosions of a deep inner contradiction which spills over into the realm of politics. These are the periodic giant strikes of the *miners* in Germany, in England, in France, in America; these are the spontaneous mass strikes of the *farm workers*, as they have occurred in Italy and in Galicia; and further, the mass strikes of the *railway workers* which break out now in this state, now in that one.

As it says in Comrade Kautsky's excellent article on 'The Lessons of the Miners' Strike' of 1905 in the Ruhr district:

> In this way alone can substantial advances be realised for the miners. The strike against the mine owners has become hopeless: from now on the strike must step forward as *political*; its demands, its tactics must be calculated to set legislation in motion…

And Comrade Kautsky continues:

> This new union tactic of the *political strike*, of uniting union and political action, is in fact the only one which remains possible for the miners; and it is the only one certain to reanimate union as well as parliamentary action, and to give heightened aggressive strength to both.

It could appear, perhaps, that here under 'political action' we are to understand parliamentary action and not political mass strikes. Comrade Kautsky destroys every doubt, declaring point-blank:

> But the great decisive actions of the struggling proletariat will be fought out more and more through various sorts of political strikes. And here practice strides forward faster than theory. For while we discuss the political strike and search for its theoretical formulation

> and confirmation, one mighty political mass strike after another flames up through the spontaneous combustion of the masses – or rather every mass strike becomes a political action, every great political test of strength climaxes in a mass strike, whether among the miners, the proletariat of Russia, the Italian farm workers and railway workers, etc.

So wrote Comrade Kautsky on 11 March 1905.

Here we have 'the spontaneous combustion of the masses' and the union leadership, economic struggle and political struggle, mass strikes and revolution, Russia and Western Europe in the most beautiful confusion, all rubrics of the schema fused together in the living interconnection of a great period of fierce social storms.

It seems that 'theory' does not merely 'stride forward' more slowly than practice: alas, from time to time it also goes tumbling backwards.

III

We have briefly examined the factual basis of Comrade Kautsky's newest theory on Russia and Western Europe. But the most important thing about this latest creation is its general tendency, which runs on to construct an absolute contradiction between revolutionary Russia and parliamentary 'Western Europe', and sets down the prominent role played by the political mass strike in the Russian Revolution as a product of Russia's economic and political *backwardness*.

But here Comrade Kautsky finds himself in the disagreeable position of having proved much too much. In this case, somewhat less would have been decidedly more.

Above all, Comrade Kautsky has not noticed that his current theory destroys his earlier theory of the 'strategy of attrition'. At the centre of the 'strategy of attrition' stands an allusion to the coming Reichstag elections. My inexcusable error lay in this: I held that the mass strike was already called for in the present struggle for Prussian voting rights, while Comrade Kautsky

declared that our overwhelming victory-to-come in next year's Reichstag elections would create the 'entirely new situation' which might make the mass strike necessary and appropriate. But now Comrade Kautsky has demonstrated with all desirable clarity that conditions for a period of political mass strikes in Germany – indeed, in all of Western Europe – are lacking after all. 'Because of the half-century old socialist movement, Social Democratic organisation and political freedom', even simple demonstration mass strikes of the extent and momentum of the Russian ones have become almost impossible in Western Europe.

Yet if this is so, then prospects for the mass strike after Reichstag elections seem fairly problematic. It is clear that all the conditions which make the mass strike absolutely impossible in Germany – the strongest contemporary government and its glittering prestige, the slavish obedience of the state employees, the unshakeable opposing might of the cartels, the political isolation of the proletariat – that all this will not suddenly disappear after next year. If the reasons which speak against the political mass strike no longer lie in the situation of the moment, as the 'strategy of attrition' would have it, but in the direct results of 'half a century of socialist enlightenment and political, freedom', in the highly developed level of 'Western Europe's' economic and political life – then postponement of expectations for a mass strike until the year after the Reichstag elections turns out to be no more than a modest fig leaf covering the 'strategy of attrition's' only real content: the commendation of Reichstag elections. In my first reply I tried to show that in reality the 'strategy of attrition' amounted to 'Nothing-But-Parliamentarism'. Now Comrade Kautsky himself confirms this in elaborating his theories.

Yet more. Comrade Kautsky has, to be sure postponed the great mass action until after the Reichstag elections: but at the same time he must admit that in the present situation, the political mass strike could become necessary 'at any moment' – for 'never in the history of the German Reich were the social, political, and international contradictions under such tension as now'. But if in general the social conditions and historic ripeness of 'Western Europe', and specifically of Germany, make a mass strike action

impossible now, how can such an action suddenly 'at any moment' be set in motion? A brutal provocation by the police, a massacre at a demonstration could greatly heighten the masses' agitation and sharpen the situation: yet it obviously could not be that 'great occasion' which would abruptly overturn the entire economic and political structure of Germany.

But Comrade Kautsky has proved yet another superfluous thing. If the general economic and political conditions in Germany are such as to make a mass strike action like the Russian one impossible, and if the extension which the mass strike underwent in the Russian Revolution is the specific product of Russian *backwardness*, then not only is the use of the mass strike in the Prussian voting rights struggle called into question, but the Jena resolution as well. Until now, the resolution of the Jena party convention [of 1905] was regarded both here and abroad as such a highly significant announcement because it officially borrowed the mass strike from the arsenal of the Russian Revolution, and incorporated it among the tactics of German Social Democracy as a means of political struggle. Admittedly this resolution was formally so composed, and by many exclusively interpreted so that Social Democracy seemed to declare it would only turn to the mass strike in case of an attack on Reichstag voting rights. But once, in any case, Comrade Kautsky did not belong to those formalists; indeed, in 1904 he emphatically wrote:

> If we learn one thing from the Belgian example, it is that it would be a fatal error for us in Germany to commit ourselves to a specific time for proclaiming the political strike – *for example, in the event of an attack on the present Reichstag voting rights*.

The chief significance, the essential content of the Jena resolution lay not in this formalistic 'commitment', but in the fact of German Social Democracy's principled acceptance of the lessons and example of the Russian Revolution. It was the spirit of the Russian Revolution which ruled the convention of our party in Jena. And now when Comrade Kautsky directly derives the role of the mass strike in the Russian Revolution from Russian *backwardness*,

thereby constructing a contradiction between revolutionary Russia and parliamentary 'Western Europe'; when he emphatically warns against the examples and methods of revolution – yes when by implication even the proletariat's defeat in the Russian Revolution is debited in his account to the grandiose mass strike action, through which the proletariat 'must eventually be exhausted' – in short, when Comrade Kautsky declares point-blank 'but be that as it may, the schema of the Russian mass strike before and during the revolution does not fit German conditions': then from *this* standpoint it seems an incredible blunder, that German Social Democracy officially borrowed the mass strike directly from the Russian Revolution as a new means of struggle. At bottom, Comrade Kautsky's current theory is a frightfully fundamental revision of the Jena resolution.

To justify his individual, cockeyed stand in the last Prussian voting rights campaign, Comrade Kautsky step-by-step sells out the lessons of the Russian Revolution – the most significant extension and enrichment of proletarian tactics in the last decade….

VI

At the beginning of March, in view of the voting rights campaign which had begun and the mounting demonstration movement, I declared that if the party wished to lead the movement farther forward it must make the slogan of the mass strike the order of the day, and that a demonstration mass strike would be the first step toward this in the present situation. I considered that the party faced a dilemma: it would either raise the voting rights movement to sharper forms or, as in 1908, the movement would go back to sleep after a short time. Indeed, this was what summoned Comrade Kautsky to the field of battle against me.

And what do we see? Comrade Kautsky points out that, me to the contrary, we have certainly not experienced a hint of a mass strike; he triumphs that the situation has struck my initiative 'dead as a doornail'. Now it seems that in his polemic zeal, Comrade Kautsky has completely overlooked something else that has

unfortunately been struck 'dead as a doornail': namely the demonstrations, and with them the voting rights movement itself.

Comrade Kautsky argues against me that an intensification of the demonstrations is entirely unnecessary, that the party faces no dilemma, that the main thing is 'to bring about the wider employment of street demonstrations – not to slacken in this, but on the contrary to make them ever mightier'. Well, since April the street demonstrations have totally ceased. And not, indeed, through some lack of enthusiasm and fighting spirit among the masses: their inner creativity has not gone to sleep. No, the street demonstrations were simply called off by the leading party authorities in the face of the struggles and endeavours of the provinces, as the 1st of May has shown, as the May demonstrations in Breslau and Braunschweig have further shown – deliberately called off. Just as I wrote in my first reply in the *Neue Zeit*, even at the end of March – without awaiting the further course of events and of the situation – under pressure of the mood of the provinces, they arranged the 10th of April demonstration with the feeling: An end to this at last! And an end has been made. No demonstrations, not even meetings take up the voting rights question, the storm-breathing rubric of the voting rights struggle has disappeared from the party press. And this circumstance can serve as surest symptom that the thing, for the time being, is over and no longer actual: that our leading central organ *Vorwärts* began to concern itself with tactics in the voting rights struggle. 'The popular movement in the grand style' is meanwhile sent back home.

What does Comrade Kautsky say to this? Does he who brought 'Jest, Satire, Irony and Deeper Meaning'* to bear on me venture the slightest word of reproach to the 'higher authorities' who, despite his warning 'not to slacken in the street demonstrations', have plainly killed the demonstration movement? On the contrary: here Comrade Kautsky is all admiration, he can find only words of wonder for 'the latest demonstration campaign' which 'was the model of a successful strategy of attrition'. Quite right. This

* Title of a comedy by German dramatist Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801–1836).

is just how it looks in practice, this 'strategy of attrition' which, 'worn down' by two bold steps forward, rests on its laurels and lets the crashing overture of the 'popular movement in the grand style' run down into the gentle purring of preparations for Reichstag elections.

So the voting rights movement is again brought to a standstill for one, perhaps two years: and what is more, at such a well-chosen moment that we have rendered the government the greatest service anyone could have possibly done it.

The withdrawal of the suffrage bill by [German Chancellor Theobald von] Bethmann-Hollweg was the decisive moment. The government was in a tight corner. The parliamentary patchwork of electoral reform and the parliamentary horse-trading were bankrupt. The enemy was at the end of his rope. If we really were serious about practising the 'voting rights storm', about the slogan 'no peace in Prussia', about the great words of the Prussian party convention, then the collapse of the government bill was the given moment to immediately launch a general, grandiose attack out of this fiasco of parliamentary action with the cry 'Give us a new bill!', with street demonstrations across the whole country which would then have led to a demonstration mass strike and mightily driven the struggle forward. Comrade Kautsky, who has most graciously proposed to acknowledge such brain storms as 'armed' assembly in Treptower Park as the application of my 'strategy', has here a clear example of what 'my strategy' really calls for. Not childish Don Quixoteries like those Comrade Kautsky demands of me, but political exploitation of the enemy's defeat as the only victory – which, moreover, is not so much the discovery of some 'new strategy', but rather the ABC of every revolutionary, yes, of every serious battle tactic.*

That was the party's task. And I am not here pronouncing the party's unqualified duty to open a 'revolutionary period'

* This refers to a demonstration called, in the face of a ban on demonstrations by the government, on the part of the Berlin SPD for free, equal, universal suffrage. It was originally set for Treptower Park on 6 March 1910, but due to a massive concentration of police there, the march of 150,000 was successfully redirected to the Berlin zoo, until the authorities arrived.

every Monday and Thursday. But I feel that *if* the party begins an action, if it has summoned up the storm and called its men-at-arms, the people, to the field of battle, if it has spoken of a 'popular movement in the grand style' and attack 'by all forces' – then it dare not, after two advances, suddenly scratch its head, gape about, and declare: 'Never mind… we didn't mean it seriously this time… let's go home.' In my opinion such storm-mongering on approval and at word of command is unworthy of the party's greatness and the seriousness of the situation, and inclined to discredit the party in the eyes of the masses. Further, the voting rights and demonstration movement which had begun was an excellent opportunity for arousing and enlightening the indifferent masses, and for winning unsympathetically-minded circles of workers as our regular agitation is not in the least in a position to do. By deliberately stopping the movement short, the party has left this splendid opportunity unexploited after the most beautiful beginning.

But further, and above all, political points of view come into question. It is most short-sighted to mechanically divide the question of Prussian electoral reform from the question of Reichstag voting rights and to declare that our big guns won't go into action over the Prussian voting rights struggle, that we'll save them in case Reichstag voting rights are annulled after the Reichstag elections. Plainly, one must deliberately close one's eyes to the actual interconnections not to see that in the present situation, struggle for Prussian electoral reform is essentially nothing other than struggle for Reichstag voting rights. It is clear that an energetic and victorious campaign for Prussian voting rights is the surest way to parry, in advance, a blow against Reichstag voting rights. The resolute and persistent follow-through of the voting rights struggle would simultaneously have been a defensive action against the reaction's hankering for a coup d'état – an action which would have had all the advantages of an offence over a forced defence.

Now Comrade Kautsky objects – and this is his last trump – that since the mass strike has not, as we see, broken out, that is

the best proof how little it flowed from the situation and how mistaken my standpoint was:

> But the very fact that it is still being debated shows that the situation is still not this ripe. As long as one can still dispute and investigate whether or not the mass strike is opportune, the proletariat as a collective mass is not filled with that mass exasperation and sense of strength which are necessary if the mass strike is to be accomplished. If the necessary mood for it had been present in March, then a dissuasive voice like mine would have been smothered under a protest, of raging anger.

Here Comrade Kautsky shows an interesting oscillation between extremes: now the mass strike is a coup carefully hatched in the inner sanctum of the war council, secretly prepared in whispers; now it is 'an elemental upheaval whose commencement cannot be brought about at will, which one can await but not arrange'. I feel that the task of the Social Democratic Party and its leadership consists neither the secretive hatching of 'great plans' nor the 'awaiting' of elemental upheavals. 'Mass' strikes – as I clearly stated in my first article in the Dortmund *Arbeiter-Zeitung* – cannot be 'made' by an order from the 'supreme command', they must arise from the masses and their advancing action. But *politically*, in the sense of an energetic tactic, a powerful offensive, to so lead this action forward that the masses are ever more conscious of their tasks – that the party can do, and that is also its duty. Social Democracy cannot artificially create a revolutionary mass movement; but, circumstances permitting, it can certainly cripple the finest mass action through its wavering, feeble tactics. Proof is furnished by the aborted, or rather, the immediately countermanded voting rights mass strike of 1902 in Belgium.*

How effectively the party can prevent a mass strike, this 'elemental upheaval', by putting on the brakes under certain circumstances, even when the masses are battle-ready to the

* This refers to a 1902 mass strike in Belgium involving over 300,000 workers, called off by leaders of the Belgian Workers' Party, even though the strike's demand for extension of voting rights had been rejected by the Belgian parliament.

highest degree – Comrade Kautsky himself has reported this with regard to Austria. 'But even though', he tells us:

> Even though conditions in Austria favour a mass strike far more than they do here, and even though the Austrian masses were temporarily aroused to a level from which we in Germany remain far distant, to such an agitation that they could only be held back from launching into a mass strike by the utmost exertion of all forces; and finally, even though repeatedly and in the most positive way 'threatened' with the mass strike, the comrades responsible for the tactics of the party have violently put on the brakes and prevented one up till now.

It is self-explanatory that this obstructive role of the party leadership could appear most actively in Germany, in view of the extraordinarily developed organisational centralism and discipline in our party. As I earlier wrote in my article 'What Next?':

> In a party where, as in Germany, the principle of organisation and party discipline is so unprecedentedly cherished, and where in consequence the initiative of unorganised popular masses – their spontaneous, so to speak improvised capacity for action, such a significant, often decisive factor in all previous great political struggles – is nearly ignored, then it is the inescapable duty of the party to demonstrate the worth of this so highly developed organisation and discipline event for great actions, and their worth even for other forms of struggle than parliamentary elections.

The past fate of the Prussian voting rights movement almost seems to demonstrate that our organisational apparatus and our party discipline prove themselves better, just now, at braking than at leading great mass actions. When even in advance the street demonstrations are timidly and reluctantly worked out; when every necessary opportunity to raise the demonstrations to a higher power – like 18 March, like the 1st of May – is embarrassingly shunned: when our own victories like the conquest of our right to the streets on 10 April, as well as the defeats of the enemy like the withdrawal of the government bill are left totally unexploited; when finally the demonstrations are put back on the shelf after all

and the masses are sent home; in short, when everything is done to hold back, to cripple the mass action, to deaden the militancy: then obviously that tempestuous movement cannot arise from the masses, which must vent itself in a mass strike.

Naturally the obstructive effect of such leadership is most nearly decisive when the action is still in its initial stages – as is the case with us in Germany, where it is just taking its first steps. If once the revolutionary period is fully unfolded, if the clouds of battle are already rising high, then no brake-pulling by the party leaders will be able to accomplish much, for the masses will simply shove aside their leaders who set themselves against the storm of the movement. Thus could it also happen in Germany, one day. But in the interest of Social Democracy, I find it neither necessary nor desirable to steer that way. If we in Germany unquestioningly wait with the mass strike until the masses, with 'raging anger', storm right over their brake-pulling leaders, this obviously can happen only at the expense of the influence and prestige of Social Democracy. And then it could easily appear that the complicated organisational apparatus and the strict party discipline of which we are justly proud are, unfortunately, only a first-rate makeshift for the parliamentary and union daily routine; and with the given disposition of our leading circles they are a *hindrance* to the mass action in the grand style, to what is demanded by the coming era of violent struggles.

And in the same connection, another especially weak point in our organisational relations could have a disastrous effect. If the union leaders had publicly come out on their own against the slogan of the mass strike in the latest voting rights campaign, it would only have clarified the situation and sharpened the critique of the masses. But that they didn't have to do this, that instead through the medium of the party and with the aid of the party apparatus they could throw the total authority of Social Democracy into the balance to put the brakes on the mass action – that has brought the voting rights movement to a standstill, and Comrade Kautsky has merely provided the theoretical music.

Yet in spite of all this our cause moves forward. The enemy works for us so unceasingly, it is through no merit of our own

that we're in the clover both in and out of season. Yet in the end it is not the task of the class party of the proletariat simply to live on the sins and errors of its enemies despite its own errors, but to accelerate the course of events through its own energy and to release, not the minimum, but the maximum of action and class struggle in that impulse.

And when in the future the mass action again arises, then the party will face exactly the same problem it did two years ago and last spring. After these two trials, the broad circles of our party comrades must from now on clearly understand that a real mass action in the grand style can only be kindled and at length maintained when treated, not as a dry practice piece played to the time of the party leadership's baton, but as a great class struggle in which all significant economic conflicts must be utilised to the full and all forces which arouse the masses must be guided into the vortex of the movement, and in which one doesn't shun a mounting intensification of the situation and decisive struggles, but goes to meet them with resolute, consistent tactics. Perhaps the present discussion will contribute its part to this.

12

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND CLASS STRUGGLE

Luxemburg refused to become an authority on and spokesperson for 'the woman question' in the German socialist movement, as did her close friend Clara Zetkin. Rather than risking marginalisation in a predominantly male movement, she insisted on maintaining a focus as a Marxist and activist on more general questions of social, economic, and political analysis. This has created the illusion, for some, that Luxemburg didn't take seriously the issue of women's oppression – which flies in the face of considerable evidence.

The fact remains that this 1912 speech, on the struggle to secure women's right to vote in Germany, is one of the few examples of an explicit engagement on her part with 'the woman question'. Insistent on the interweaving of gender and class, Luxemburg was critical of tendencies in the SPD to adapt to the pro-capitalist feminism of liberal reformers. She insisted on the link between a consistent feminism that would embrace working-class women and a commitment to replace capitalism with socialism.

First appearing in English in the 1971 volume of Luxemburg's *Selected Writings* edited by Dick Howard, 'Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle' was translated by Rosemarie Waldrop.

'Why are there no organisations for working women in Germany? Why do we hear so little about the working women's movement?' With these questions, Emma Ihrer, one of the founders of the proletarian women's movement of Germany, introduced her 1898 essay, 'Working Women in the Class Struggle'. Hardly fourteen years have passed since, but they have seen a great expansion of the proletarian women's movement. More than 150,000 women are organised in unions and are among the most active troops in the economic struggle of the proletariat. Many thousands of politically organised women have rallied to the banner of Social Democracy: the Social Democratic women's paper* has more than 100,000 subscribers; women's suffrage is one of the vital issues on the platform of Social Democracy.

Exactly these facts might lead you to underrate the importance of the fight for women's suffrage. You might think: even without equal political rights for women we have made enormous progress in educating and organising women. Hence, women's suffrage is not urgently necessary. If you think so, you are deceived. The political and syndical awakening of the masses of the female proletariat during the last fifteen years has been magnificent. But it has been possible only because working women took a lively interest in the political and parliamentary struggles of their class in spite of being deprived of their rights. So far, proletarian women are sustained by male suffrage, which they indeed take part in, though only indirectly. Large masses of both men and women of the working class already consider the election campaigns a cause they share in common. In all Social Democratic electoral meetings, women make up a large segment, sometimes the majority. They are always interested and passionately involved. In all districts where there is a firm Social Democratic organisation, women help with the campaign. And it is women who have done invaluable work distributing leaflets and getting subscribers to the Social Democratic press, this most important weapon in the campaign.

The capitalist state has not been able to keep women from taking on all these duties and efforts of political life. Step by

* *Die Gleichheit* [Equality], edited by Clara Zetkin.

step, the state has indeed been forced to grant and guarantee them this possibility by allowing them union and assembly rights. Only the last political right is denied women: the right to vote, to decide directly on the people's representatives in legislature and administration, to be an elected member of these bodies. But here, as in all other areas of society, the motto is: 'Don't let things get started!' But things have been started. The present state gave in to the women of the proletariat when it admitted them to public assemblies, to political associations. And the state did not grant this voluntarily, but out of necessity, under the irresistible pressure of the rising working class. It was not least the passionate pushing ahead of the proletarian women themselves which forced the Prusso-German police state to give up the famous 'women's section' in gatherings of political associations and to open wide the doors of political organisations to women. This really set the ball rolling. The irresistible progress of the proletarian class struggle has swept working women right into the whirlpool of political life. Using their right of union and assembly, proletarian women have taken a most active part in parliamentary life and in election campaigns. It is only the 'inevitable' consequence, only the logical result of the movement that today millions of proletarian women call defiantly and with self-confidence: *Let us have suffrage!*

Once upon a time, in the beautiful era of pre-1848 absolutism, the whole working class was said not to be 'mature enough' to exercise political rights. This cannot be said about proletarian women today, because they have demonstrated their political maturity. Everybody knows that without them, without the enthusiastic help of proletarian women, the Social Democratic Party would not have won the glorious victory of 12 January [1912], would not have obtained four and a quarter million votes. At any rate, the working class has always had to prove its maturity for political freedom by a successful revolutionary uprising of the masses. Only when Divine Right on the throne and the best and noblest men of the nation actually felt the calloused fist of the proletariat on their eyes and its knee on their chests, only then did they feel confidence in the political 'maturity' of the people, and felt it with the speed of lightning. Today, it is the

proletarian woman's turn to make the capitalist state conscious of her maturity. This is done through a constant, powerful mass movement which has to use all the means of proletarian struggle and pressure.

Women's suffrage is the goal. But the mass movement to bring it about is not a job for women alone, but is a common class concern for women and men of the proletariat. Germany's present lack of rights for women is only one link in the chain of the reaction that shackles the people's lives. And it is closely connected with the other pillar of the reaction: the monarchy. In advanced capitalist, highly industrialised, twentieth-century Germany, in the age of electricity and airplanes, the absence of women's political rights is as much a reactionary remnant of the 'dead past as the reign by Divine Right on the throne. Both phenomena – the instrument of heaven as the leading political power, and woman, demure by the fireside, unconcerned with the storms of public life, with politics and class struggle – both phenomena have their roots in the rotten circumstances of the past, in the times of serfdom in the country and guilds in the towns. In those times, they were justifiable and necessary. But both monarchy and women's lack of rights have been uprooted by the development of modern capitalism, have become ridiculous caricatures. They continue to exist in our modern society, not just because people forgot to abolish them, not just because of the persistence and inertia of circumstances. No, they still exist because both – monarchy as well as women without rights – have become powerful tools of interests inimical to the people. The worst and most brutal advocates of the exploitation and enslavement of the proletariat are entrenched behind throne and altar as well as behind the political enslavement of women. Monarchy and women's lack of rights have become the most important tools of the ruling capitalist class.

In truth, our state is interested in keeping the vote from working women and from them alone. It rightly fears they will threaten the traditional institutions of class rule, for instance militarism (of which no thinking proletarian woman can help being a deadly enemy), monarchy, the systematic robbery of duties

and taxes on groceries, etc. Women's suffrage is a horror and abomination for the present capitalist state because behind it stand millions of women who would strengthen the enemy within, i.e., revolutionary Social Democracy. If it were a matter of bourgeois ladies voting, the capitalist state could expect nothing but effective support for the reaction. Most of those bourgeois women who act like lionesses in the struggle against 'male prerogatives' would trot like docile lambs in the camp of conservative and clerical reaction if they had suffrage. Indeed, they would certainly be a good deal more reactionary than the male part of their class. Aside from the few who have jobs or professions, the women of the bourgeoisie do not take part in social production. They are nothing but co-consumers of the surplus value their men extort from the proletariat. They are parasites of the parasites of the social body. And consumers are usually even more rabid and cruel in defending their 'right' to a parasite's life than the direct agents of class rule and exploitation. The history of all great revolutionary struggles confirms this in a horrible way. Take the great French Revolution. After the fall of the Jacobins, when Robespierre was driven in chains to the place of execution the naked whores of the victory-drunk bourgeoisie danced in the streets, danced a shameless dance of joy around the fallen hero of the Revolution. And in 1871, in Paris, when the heroic workers' Commune was defeated by machine guns, the raving bourgeois females surpassed even their bestial men in their bloody revenge against the suppressed proletariat. The women of the property-owning classes will always fanatically defend the exploitation and enslavement of the working people by which they indirectly receive the means for their socially useless existence.

Economically and socially, the women of the exploiting classes are not an independent segment of the population. Their only social function is to be tools of the natural propagation of the ruling classes. By contrast, the women of the proletariat are economically independent. They are productive for society like the men. By this I do not mean their bringing up children or their housework which helps men support their families on scanty wages. This kind of work is not productive in the sense

of the present capitalist economy no matter how enormous an achievement the sacrifices and energy spent, the thousand little efforts add up to. This is but the private affair of the worker, his happiness and blessing, and for this reason nonexistent for our present society. As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit. From this point of view, the music-hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman's first task.

For, exactly from this point of view, the proletarian women's claim to equal political rights is anchored in firm economic ground. Today, millions of proletarian women create capitalist profit like men – in factories, workshops, on farms, in home industry, offices, stores. They are therefore productive in the strictest scientific sense of our present society. Every day enlarges the hosts of women exploited by capitalism. Every new progress in industry or technology creates new places for women in the machinery of capitalist profiteering. And thus, every day and every step of industrial progress adds a new stone to the firm foundation of women's equal political rights. Female education and intelligence have become necessary for the economic mechanism itself. The narrow, secluded woman of the patriarchal 'family circle' answers the needs of industry and commerce as little as those of politics. It is true, the capitalist state has neglected its duty even in this respect. So far, it is the unions and the Social Democratic organisations that have done most to awaken the minds and moral sense of women. Even decades ago, the Social Democrats were known as the most capable and intelligent German workers. Likewise, unions and Social Democracy have today lifted the women of the proletariat out of their stuffy, narrow existence, out of the miserable and petty mindlessness of household managing. The proletarian class struggle has widened their horizons, made

their minds flexible, developed their thinking, shown them great goals for their efforts. Socialism has brought about the mental rebirth of the mass of proletarian women – and thereby has no doubt also made them capable productive workers for capital.

Considering all this, the proletarian woman's lack of political rights is a vile injustice, and the more so for being by now at least half a lie. After all, masses of women take an active part in political life. However, Social Democracy does not use the argument of 'injustice'. This is the basic difference between us and the earlier sentimental, utopian socialism. We do not depend on the justice of the ruling classes, but solely on the revolutionary power of the working masses and on the course of social development which prepares the ground for this power. Thus, injustice by itself is certainly not an argument with which to overthrow reactionary institutions. If, however, there is a feeling of injustice in large segments of society – says Frederick Engels, the co-founder of scientific socialism – it is always a sure sign that the economic bases of the society have shifted considerably, that the present conditions contradict the march of development. The present forceful movement of millions of proletarian women who consider their lack of political rights a crying wrong is such an infallible sign, a sign that the social bases of the reigning system are rotten and that its days are numbered.

A hundred years ago, the Frenchman Charles Fourier, one of the first great prophets of socialist ideals, wrote these memorable words: In any society, the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. This is completely true for our present society. The current mass struggle for women's political rights is only an expression and a part of the proletariat's general struggle for liberation. In this lies its strength and its future. Because of the female proletariat, general, equal, direct suffrage for women would immensely advance and intensify the proletarian class struggle. This is why bourgeois society abhors and fears women's suffrage. And this is why we want and will achieve it. Fighting for women's suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat.

13
LASSALLE'S LEGACY

Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864) was a brilliant socialist intellectual, a sometime collaborator of Marx, and the charismatic founder of Germany's first independent workers' party, the General Union of German Workers. His own orientation tended to be somewhat more rigid than that of Marx – articulating an 'iron law of wages' that discounted the value of trade unions, a tendency to glorify the state, and an inclination to concentrate all authority of his organisation into his own hands. He also entered into secret negotiations with Germany's reactionary Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, seeking to secure reforms from the monarchy at the expense of the pro-capitalist liberals.

While Marx and Engels were severely critical of Lassalle, after his death he became one of the icons of the socialist workers' movement. His organisation merged with a rival body led by Marx's comrades Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel – resulting in the formation of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), in which the perspectives of Lassalle and those of Marx tended to coexist in uneasy equilibrium. While not uncritical of Lassalle, however, Luxemburg seeks to nurture in the reader a sense of the man's positive qualities – which she then turns into an implicit critique of the SPD's bureaucratic and reformist tendencies. (It is interesting to note a similarity in the opening of this brief article and the conclusion of her more substantial essay 'The Russian Revolution', later in this volume.)

This article first speared in *Die Gleichheit* in 1913, and was translated by Ben Lewis for publication in the 15 January 2009 issue of the *Weekly Worker*, publication of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

> Hutten's error was merely that of all prophetic natures: namely to view and desire at once a shining ideal, which humanity can only achieve step by step and bit by bit after centuries of struggle.

With these words, David Friedrich Strauss closes his novel *Hutten*. And what applies to Hutten also applies to Lassalle in the same degree. Of course, centuries do not come into consideration in the speedy development of contemporary capitalist development. But what Lassalle managed to wrestle from history in two years of flaming agitation needed many decades to come about. Yet it is precisely this optical illusion – which all prophetic natures succumb to, and causes them like giants from the top of their mountain to imagine the far away horizons to be within their grasp – we must thank for the bold deed from which German Social Democracy emerged.

The emergence of an independent class party of the proletariat was an historical necessity, stemming from the capitalist economic system and the political nature of the bourgeois class state. German Social Democracy would have arisen with or without Lassalle, just as the class struggle of the international proletariat would have become the predominant factor of recent history with or without Marx and Engels. Yet the fact that the German proletarian class party already appeared at the gates with such radiance and splendour fifty years ago, more than two decades before all other countries, and acted as a role model for them, is thanks to Lassalle's life work and his maxim: 'I dared!'

Class struggle has been the driving force at the core of world history ever since private property separated human society into exploiters and exploited. The modern proletariat's struggle is merely the last in the series of class struggles running like a red thread through written history. And yet the last fifty years offers something that world history had not seen before: for the first time the spectacle of the great mass of the exploited emerging in an organised and purposeful struggle for the liberation of their class. All previous revolutions were those of minorities in the interest of minorities. And, as the first movements of the proletariat in England and France initiated modern class struggle, the masses

would step onto the stage only for a few moments and then melt away in the revolutionary downturn and become absorbed in bourgeois society over and over again.

Brought into existence by Lassalle, German Social Democracy was the first historic attempt to create a permanent organisation of the masses, the majority of the people, for class struggle. Thanks to Lassalle's political action and thanks to Marx's theory, German Social Democracy has radiantly solved this new task. Its fifty-year history has proved that on the basis of proletarian class interests it is possible to unite the ultimate goal of revolution with patient day-to-day struggle, to unite scientific theory with the most sober praxis, to unite tight and disciplined organisation with the mass character of the movement, to unite insight into historic necessity with conscious, dynamic will. The present-day size and power of Social Democracy is the fruit of this unity.

The history of Social Democracy hitherto can be quickly summarised as the utilisation of bourgeois parliamentarism for the enlightenment and centralisation of the proletariat into its class party. On this track, from which it never allowed itself to be lured either by brutal emergency laws or demagogic cunning, our party has advanced decade after decade to become by far the strongest political party in the German empire and the strongest workers' party in the world. In this sense, the last fifty years have seen the implementation of Lassalle's action programme, which was concentrated on two closely linked aims: the creation of a class organisation of the workers, independent of the liberal bourgeoisie; and the achievement of universal suffrage, in order to put it to the service of the workers.

The construction of this organisation and the systematic utilisation of universal suffrage – this was more or less Lassalle's legacy, and the lifeblood of Social Democracy over the last fifty years.

This programme has just about been pushed to its limits, where, according to the law of the historical dialectic, quantity must transform into quality, where the unstoppable growth of Social Democracy, on the ground of and in the framework of bourgeois parliamentarism, must eventually transcend this.

Germany's capitalist development, like that of the entire world economy, has now reached a point where the conditions in which Lassalle accomplished his great task appear as a clumsy child. Whereas back then in Europe, the framework of bourgeois national states was still being fashioned to suit the unrestricted rule of capital, today the last non-capitalist lands are being swallowed up by the imperialist monster, and capital is crowning its world dominance with a chain of bloody expansionist wars.

From its birth onwards, bourgeois parliamentarism on the European continent was ridden with impotence through fear of the red spectre of the revolutionary proletariat. Today, it is being crushed by the iron hooves of rampantly galloping imperialism; it becomes a hollow shell, degraded to an impotent appendage of militarism.

In fifty years of exemplary work, Social Democracy has pretty much taken everything it could from the now stony soil in terms of material profit for the working class and class enlightenment. The most recent, biggest electoral victory of our party has now made it clear to all that a 110-person-strong Social Democratic faction in the era of imperialist delirium and parliamentary impotence, far from achieving more in terms of agitation and social reforms than a faction the quarter of its size in the past, will achieve less.

And the hopeless foundering of the hub of Germany's internal political development today – voting rights in Prussia – has destroyed all prospects of parliamentary reform through mere pressure of electoral action.

Both in Prussia and in the empire, Social Democracy in its entire force is rendered powerless as it comes up against the barrier which Lassalle already foresaw in 1851:

> A legislative assembly never has overthrown and never will overthrow the existing order. All that [such an] assembly has ever done and ever been able to do is proclaim the existing order outside, sanction the already completed overthrow of society and elaborate on its individual consequences, laws, etc. Yet such an assembly will always be impotent to overthrow the society which it itself represents.

We, however, have arrived at a level of development where the most pressing and imperative defensive demand of the proletariat – the right to vote in Prussia and the people's militia in the empire – signify an actual overthrow of existing Prussian-German class relations. If the working class wants to pursue its life interests in parliament today, then it has to carry out this actual overthrow 'outside'. If it wants to make parliamentarism fertile again, then it has to lead the masses themselves onto the political stage through non-parliamentary action.

The last decade – with the mass strike resolution in Jena under the influence of the Russian Revolution [of 1905–06] and the campaign of street demonstrations in the struggle for the right to vote in Prussia three years ago – clearly shows that the transition from purely parliamentary to unstoppable mass action will force its way through – even if the consciousness of the party in Germany, as elsewhere, only follows this path unevenly, encountering many setbacks.

The 50th anniversary of German Social Democracy represents a proud, victorious completion of Lassalle's political testament. Yet simultaneously it is also a warning to the socialist proletariat to become fully conscious that nothing would be more contrary to Lassalle's spirit than following its well-worn routine at its usual steady pace and stubbornly clinging to a tactical programme which has already been overtaken by the course of history.

Lassalle's great creative work consisted in recognising the correct task of the proletariat at the right historical hour and daring to fulfil this with bold action. What is today the just continuation of Lassalle's work? Not clinging to Lassalle's political programme, but rather recognising the new great tasks of the contemporary situation and boldly tackling them at the right moment. Then, in the spirit of Lassalle, it can also say of itself: 'I dared!'

14

THE ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL – AN ANTI-CRITIQUE

One of Rosa Luxemburg's most profound contributions is the splendid work – an insightful and courageous economic, social, political, anthropological and, above all, revolutionary intervention – entitled *The Accumulation of Capital*. Published in 1913, on the eve of World War I, this important piece elicited an avalanche of negative criticism from her own comrades in the SPD.

As Paul Sweezy – who, following Lenin and others, viewed aspects of her analysis as being too rigid – commented in his fine 1942 study *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, 'The reaction of the official spokesmen of Social Democracy to Rosa Luxemburg's book did not include any significant theoretical contributions and is interesting chiefly for the state of mind it revealed. In the German movement, fear of revolution had by now become quite as characteristic of the "orthodox" as of the revisionist.'*

While Luxemburg was a partisan of revolutionary Marxism, she rejected any inclination to treat all of the writings of Marx and Engels as holy dogma. She saw her 1913 contribution partly as a correction of mistakes and limitations in Marx's masterwork *Capital*. At the same time, it was an analysis of imperialist realities that had developed after Marx died – the dynamics of capital accumulation made economic expansion and exploitative aggression a necessity.

While in prison for opposing the incredibly bloody imperialist war generated by the realities which she had sought to explain in 1913, Luxemburg produced her response to critics on the Left who, in many cases, had capitulated in the face of those very same realities. Excerpts from that 1915 'anti-critique', the opening and closing sections, are offered here. They first appeared in English in Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital – An Anti-Critique*, edited by Kenneth Tarbuck (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

* Paul M. Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 206.

The Questions at Issue

Habent sua fata libelli – books have their fates. When I wrote my *Accumulation* a thought depressed me from time to time: all followers of Marxist doctrine would declare that the things I was trying to show and carefully substantiate were self-evident. Nobody would voice a different opinion; my solution of the problem would be the only possible one imaginable. It turned out very differently: a number of critics in the Social Democratic press declared that the book was totally misguided to start with and that such a problem calling for solution did not exist at all. I had become the pitiful victim of a pure misunderstanding. There were events connected with the publication of my book which must be called rather unusual. The 'review' of the *Accumulation* which appeared in *Vorwärts* of 16 February 1913 was striking in tone and content even to the less involved reader; and all the more astonishing since the criticised book is purely theoretical and strictly objective, and directed against no living Marxist. Not enough. Against those who had published a positive review of the book a high-handed action was taken by the central organ. A quite unique and somehow funny event – a purely theoretical study on an abstract scientific problem was censured by the entire staff of a political daily paper (of whom probably two at the most may have read the book). They did this by denying to men like Franz Mehring and J. Karski any expert knowledge of economics, but allowed only those who pulled my book to pieces to be 'experts'. Such a fate has happened to no other party publication as far as I know and over the decades Social Democratic publishers have certainly not produced all gold and pearls. All these events clearly indicate that there have been other passions touched on, one way or another, than 'pure science'. But to judge that properly one has first to know at least the main points of the material in question.

What is this so vehemently opposed book about?

To the reading public some external accessories like frequently used mathematical formulae seem to be a great deterrent. In the criticism of my book these formulae are especially the focus. Some of the esteemed critics have undertaken to teach me a lesson by

constructing new and even more complicated formulae. The sheer sight of them brings quiet horror to the ordinary mortal. We shall see that my critics' preference for the formulae is not a matter of chance, but linked very closely to their points of view on the subject. Yet the problem of accumulation is itself purely economic and social; it does not have anything to do with mathematical formulae and one can demonstrate and comprehend it without them. Marx uses constructed mathematical models in the section on reproduction of the gross social capital in his *Capital*, so did Quesnay, the founder of the physiocratic school of economics as an exact science a hundred years before. But that was simply to help in explaining and clarifying their theories. It also assisted Marx as well as Quesnay to illustrate that the economic processes of bourgeois society are as much determined by strict laws as the processes of physical nature, in spite of superficial confusion and the apparent rule of individual caprice. My writings are partly based on Marx, partly critical of him – especially where he does not go any further into the question of accumulation than to devise a few models and suggest an analysis. This is where my critique begins, and so I must naturally use Marx's formulae with Marx's models. I could not arbitrarily omit them and I wanted especially to show the insufficiency of his line of argument.

Let us now try to understand the problem in its simplest form: the capitalist form of production is governed by the profit motive. Production only makes sense to the capitalist if it fills his pockets with 'pure income', i.e. with profit that remains after all his investments; but the basic law of capitalist production is not only profit in the sense of glittering bullion, but constantly growing profit. This is where it differs from any other economic system based on exploitation. For this purpose the capitalist – again in contrast to other historical types of exploiters – uses the fruits of exploitation not exclusively, and not even primarily, for personal luxury, but more and more to increase exploitation itself. The largest part of the profits gained is put back into capital and used to expand production. The capital thus mounts up or, as Marx calls it, 'accumulates'.

As the precondition as well as the consequence of accumulation, capitalist production widens progressively. To do this, the goodwill of the capitalist is not sufficient. The process is tied to objective social conditions which can be summed up as follows. Primarily, there must be a sufficient labour force. Historically, once capitalist production is functioning and fairly consolidated, capital ensures this through its own mechanisms:

1. by just enabling the worker to support himself for further exploitation and for reproduction;
2. by forming a constantly available reserve army of the industrial proletariat by the proletarianisation of the middle class as well as by facing the worker with the competition of machines.

After this condition is fulfilled, i.e. the proletariat is securely available for exploitation and the mechanisms or exploitation itself are governed by the wage system, a new basic condition of capital accumulation emerges – the possibility of selling the goods produced by the workers to recover, in money, the capitalist's original expenses as well as the surplus value stolen from the labour forces. 'The first condition of accumulation is that the capitalist must have contrived to sell his commodities, and to reconvert into capital the greater part of the money so received.' A steadily increasing possibility of selling the commodities is indispensable in order to keep the accumulation a continuous process. Capital itself (as we see) creates the basic condition for exploitation. The first volume of Marx's *Capital* analysed and described this process in detail. But what about the opportunities of realising the fruits of this exploitation; what about the market? What do they depend on? Can capital itself, or its production mechanisms, expand its market according to its needs, in the same way that it adjusts the number of workers according to its demand? Not at all. Here capital depends on social conditions. Capitalist production has this in common with all other historical forms of production, in spite of fundamental differences between them. Objectively it has to fulfil the material needs of society, although subjectively only the profit motive matters. This subjective aim can only be reached

so long as capital fulfils its objective task. The goods can be sold and the incoming profit turned into money only if these goods satisfy the requirements of society. So the continuous expansion of capitalist production, i.e. the continuous accumulation of capital, is linked to the equally continuous growth of social requirements. But what are the requirements of society? Can they somehow be more closely defined, measured, or must we depend only on this vague term? In fact, they seem intangible if one surveys the surface of day-to-day economic life from the standpoint of the individual capitalist. A capitalist produces and sells machines. His customers are other capitalists, who buy his machines to produce more goods. The one can sell more of his goods as the others expand their production. He can accumulate faster if others accumulate faster in their branches of production. This would be the 'requirements of society' on which our capitalist is dependent: the need of other capitalists is the precondition for the expansion of production. Another capitalist produces and sells the means of subsistence to the workers. The more workers are employed by other capitalists (and by himself), the more goods he can sell and the more capital he can accumulate. But how can the 'others' expand their plants? Obviously through the other capitalist; for example, the producers of machines, or means of subsistence, buying their goods in increasing measure.

So the social requirement, on which the accumulation of capital depends, seems at a closer look to be the accumulation of capital itself.

The more capital accumulates, the more it accumulates; it is all reduced to this blatant tautology, a dizzy circle. One cannot make out where it begins, or where the impelling force is. We are turning round in circles and the problem eludes our grasp. But it does so only for as long as we approach it from this superficial viewpoint, or examine it from the popular platform of vulgar economics, individual capital.

The pattern immediately takes shape if we approach it from the standpoint of total capital, once we see the process of capitalist production as a whole. This is the only relevant and right way. It is the standpoint Marx develops systematically for the first

time in the second volume of *Capital*, and on which he bases his whole theory.

The self-sufficient existence of the individual capital is indeed only an external form, the surface of economic life, which only the vulgar economists use as their sole source of knowledge. Beneath that surface and through all contradiction of competition there remains the fact that all individual capitals in society form a whole. Then existence and movement are governed by common social laws which, with the unplanned nature and anarchy of the present system, only work behind the back of the individual capitalist. When one looks at capitalist production as a whole, then social requirements become a measurable quantity which can be divided into sections.

Let us imagine that all goods produced in capitalist society were stacked up in a big pile at some place, to be used by society as a whole. We will then see how this mass of goods, is naturally divided into several big portions of different kinds and destinations.

Always, in any form of society, production has to provide two things. First it has to feed society, clothe it and satisfy cultural needs through material goods, i.e. it must produce the means of subsistence in the widest sense of the word for all classes and ages. Secondly, each form of production must replace used up raw materials, tools, factories and so on to allow the continued existence of society and the provision of work. Without the satisfaction of these two major requirements of any human society, cultural development and progress would be impossible. Even capitalist production with all its anarchy, and without injuring the profit motive, must meet these demands. Accordingly we will find in this aggregate of capitalist commodities produced, a large proportion for replacing the means of production used up in the year before. These are the raw materials, machinery, buildings, etc. (what Marx calls constant capital) which various capitalists must produce for each other and then exchange, so that production can be kept up in all branches. According to our assumption so far, it is capitalist business that provides all the necessary means for the work process. The exchange of commodities on the market

is an internal or family matter between capitalists. The required money for this process, of course, comes out of the capitalists' pockets – as every employer must lay out the money capital in advance – and returns into the pockets of the capitalist class after the exchange on the market has taken place.

As we only assume the replacement of the means of production to its former extent, the same amount of money will suffice to keep this periodic process going and let the money return into the capitalists' pockets for a period of rest. A second large department of commodities must contain means of subsistence for the population, as in every society. But how is the population structured in capitalist society, and how does it get its means of subsistence?

Two basic structures are characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. Firstly, a general exchange of goods, i.e. nobody receives anything from the social stock of commodities without the means of purchase – money. Secondly, the capitalist wage system, i.e. the majority of the working population, must exchange its labour power with capital to acquire means of purchase, while the propertied class receives its means of subsistence only by exploiting this relationship. Thus capitalist production presupposes two great classes: capitalists and workers, who differ entirely in their acquisition of means of subsistence. The workers must be fed to maintain their labour power for further exploitation, however little their individual fates concern the capitalist. From the total quantity of commodities produced by the workers, a certain share is assigned to them by the capitalists, in direct proportion to their usefulness in production. The workers receive wages in money form to purchase these goods. By means of exchange the working class thus receives a certain sum of money every year. With this they buy their provisions from the social stock of commodities, which are, of course, the property of the capitalist; these provisions are allotted to them according to their cultural level and the stage of the class struggle. The money that initiates this second big exchange again comes out of the capitalists' pockets. Every capitalist must advance the necessary money capital to purchase his labour force – what Marx calls 'variable capital' – in order to

keep his enterprise going. But this money returns, down to the last penny, into the pockets of the capitalists as a class, after the worker has bought his means of subsistence (and every worker must do so to maintain himself and his family) – since it is the capitalists who sell means of subsistence to the workers as commodities. But what about their own consumption? The means of subsistence already belong to the capitalists in the form of the commodity stock before exchange, by virtue of capitalist relations, according to which all commodities – except for labour-power – come into this world as the property of the capitalist. Of course, precisely because they are commodities, the 'better' class of provisions come into being as the property of many individual private capitalists. Therefore, as with constant capital, a general exchange must take place between capitalists before they can enjoy their own means of subsistence. This exchange, too, must be conducted with money, and the capitalist himself has brought the necessary amount into circulation. Once again, as with the renewal of constant capital, this is an internal, family arrangement of the employing class. Once more, this money-returns whence it began – into the pockets of the capitalists as a class.

The same mechanism of capitalist exploitation which regulates the wage system ensures that the necessary amount of goods and luxuries is produced for the capitalists. If the workers only produced as much as they actually needed, then from the standpoint of capital it would be pointless to employ them. It begins to make sense when the worker provides enough to maintain his employer, over and above what he needs for himself – i.e. his wage: when he produces what Marx calls surplus value. And this surplus value has to provide, among other things, the provisions and luxuries required by the capitalists, as by any other exploiters in the course of history. All that is left for the capitalists to do is to go to the frightful bother of mutual exchange and to obtain the necessary money-means, in order to maintain the hard and spartan existence of their class and ensure its natural reproduction.

So far we have dealt with two big portions of the aggregate quantity of commodities in society: means of production to

repeat the work process and means of subsistence to maintain the population, i.e. the working class and the capitalists.

Of course, what we have described could easily seem to be a creation of fancy. What living capitalist knows or cares what and how much is necessary to replace the used-up gross capital and to feed the entire population? Is it not the case that every capitalist goes blindly on producing, competing with others, and hardly sees what is happening in front of his nose? But there must obviously be invisible rules which somehow work in all this chaos of competition and anarchy, otherwise capitalist society would have been in ruins long ago. And it is the whole purpose of political economy as a science (and particularly of Marx's economic studies) to trace these hidden laws which organise the whole of society in the midst of the confusion of private enterprise. We have now to trace these objective invisible rules of capitalist accumulation – the amassing of capital through progressive extension of production. The laws which we expound here are not authoritative for the conscious actions of individual capitals; indeed, no general institution exists in society that would consciously construct and operate these laws. Consequently, production today is like a lurching drunkard, fulfilling its tasks through all these gluts and dearths, price instability and crises. But price instability and crises have only one function in society: to integrate chaotic private production into its broad general context, without which it would soon disintegrate. Let us here try to sketch, with Marx, the relation between total capitalist production and social needs. We will omit the specific capitalist *methods* of price fluctuation and crises, and concentrate on the basics.

There must be more than those two big portions of the social stock of commodities which we have dealt with so far. If the exploitation of the workers were only to permit a luxurious life for the exploiters, we would have a kind of modernised slave system of medieval feudalism, but not the modern rule of capital. Its aim and goal in life is profit in the form of money and accumulation of money capital. So the actual historical purpose of production only begins when exploitation aims beyond that. The surplus value must not only allow the capitalist class a living

'befitting their rank', but must also contain a part destined for accumulation. This actual purpose is so important that workers are only employed if they produce this profit and if there is the expectation that it can be accumulated in money-form.

In our assumed total stock of commodities in capitalist society we must accordingly find a third portion, which is destined neither for the renewal of used means of production nor for the maintenance of workers and capitalists. It will be a portion of commodities which contains that invaluable part of the surplus value that forms capital's real purpose of existence: the profit destined for capitalisation and accumulation. What sort of commodities are they, and who in society needs them?

Here we have come to the nucleus of the problem of accumulation, and we must investigate all attempts at solution. Could it really be the workers who consume the latter portion of the social stock of commodities? But the workers have no means beyond the wages covering bare necessities which they receive from their employers. Beyond that there is no possible chance of their being consumers of capitalist commodities, however many unsatisfied needs they may have. It is also in the interest of the capitalist class to make this portion of the gross social product and means of purchase as scarce as possible. According to the standpoint of the capitalists as a class – it is important to see this standpoint in opposition to the abstruse ideas of the individual capitalist – workers are not, like others, customers for their commodities, but simply the labour force, whose maintenance out of part of its own produce is an unfortunate necessity, reduced to the minimum society allows.

Could the capitalists themselves perhaps be the customers for that latter portion of commodities by extending their own private consumption? That might be possible, although there is enough for the ruling class in any case, even with its luxurious whims. But if the capitalists themselves were to spend the total surplus value like water there would be no accumulation. That would mean, from the standpoint of capital, a fantastic relapse into a sort of modernised slave economy, or feudalism. Of course, this is conceivable and even practised occasionally in reverse: we could

discern capitalist accumulation with forms of slavery and serfdom up until the sixties of the last century in the United States, still today in Rumania and various overseas colonies. But the other way, modern exploitation with a free wage system followed by ancient or feudal squandering of the surplus value, neglecting accumulation, this deadly sin against the *spiritus sanctus* of capital is unthinkable. Again, the standpoint of total capital differs basically from that of the individual employer. For the individual, the luxury of 'high society' is a desirable expansion of sales, i.e. a splendid opportunity for accumulation. For all capitalists as a class, the total consumption of the surplus value as luxury is sheer lunacy, economic suicide, for it is the destruction of accumulation at its roots.

Who then could be the buyer and consumer of that portion of commodities whose sale is only the beginning of accumulation? So far as we have seen, it can be neither the workers nor the capitalists.

But are there not all sorts of strata in society like civil servants, military, clerics, academics and artists which can neither be counted among the workers nor the employers? Must not all these categories of the population satisfy their needs, and could they not be the wanted purchasers of the surplus commodities? Once more: yes, they could for the individual capitalist! It is different again if we take the employers as a class, if we consider gross social capital. In capitalist society all those strata are economically only the hangers-on of the capitalist class. If we ask where the civil servants, clerics, officers, artists, etc., receive their means of purchase, we see that it is partly maintained out of the pockets of the capitalists, partly out of the wages of labour (via the indirect tax system). Economically these groups cannot be a special class of consumers, as they do not have any independent sources of purchasing power, but are included as parasites in the consumption of the two major classes, workers and capitalists.

So we still do not see any customers for the latter portion of commodities, who could initiate the process of accumulation.

In the end, the solution of the problem is quite simple. Perhaps we are acting like the rider who is desperately looking for the nag

he is sitting on. Perhaps the capitalists are mutual customers for the remainder of the commodities – not to use them carelessly, but to use them for the extension of production, for accumulation. Then what else is accumulation but extension of capitalist production? Those goods which fulfil this purpose must not consist of luxurious articles for the private consumption of the capitalists, but must be composed of various means of production (new constant capital) and provisions for the workers [variable capital].

All right, but such a solution only pushes the problem from this moment to the next. After we have assumed that accumulation has started and that the increased production throws an even bigger amount of commodities on to the market the following year, the same question arises again: where do we then find the consumers for this even greater amount of commodities? Will we answer: well, this growing amount of goods will again be exchanged among the capitalists to extend production again, and so forth, year after year? Then we have the roundabout that revolves around itself in empty space. That is not capitalist accumulation, i.e. the amassing of money capital, but its contrary: producing commodities for the sake of it; from the standpoint of capital an utter absurdity. If the capitalists as a class are the only customers for the total amount of commodities, apart from the share they have to part with to maintain the workers – if they must always buy the commodities with their own money, and realise the surplus value, then amassing profit, accumulation for the capitalist class, cannot possibly take place.

They must find many other buyers who receive their means of purchase from an independent source, and do not get it out of the pocket of the capitalist like the labourers or the collaborators of capital, the government officials, officers, clergy and liberal professions. They have to be consumers who receive their means of purchase on the basis of commodity exchange, i.e. also production of goods, but taking place outside of capitalist commodity production. They must be producers, whose means of production are not to be seen as capital, and who belong to neither of the two classes – capitalists or workers – but who still have a need, one way or another, for capitalist commodities.

But where are those buyers? Apart from the capitalists with their entourage of hangers-on, there are no other classes or strata in society today.

Here we get down to the heart of the problem. Marx, in the second volume of *Capital*, as in the first, presupposes that capitalist production is the sole and exclusive mode of production. He says in the first volume:

> Here we take no account of export trade, by means of which a nation can change articles of luxury either into means of production or means of subsistence, and vice versa. In order to examine the object of our investigation in its integrity, free from all disturbing subsidiary circumstances, we must treat the whole world as one nation, and assume that capitalist production is everywhere established and has possessed itself of every branch of industry.

And in the second volume: 'Apart from this class, according to our assumption – the general and exclusive domination of capitalist production – there is no other class at all except the working class.'

Under this condition, there are only capitalists cum hangers-on and workers in society; other classes, other producers and consumers are nowhere to be found. In that case, capitalist production is faced with the insoluble question which I tried to point out above.

You can twist and turn it as you wish, but so long as we retain the assumption that there are no other classes but capitalists and workers, then there is no way that the capitalists as a class can get rid of the surplus goods in order to change the surplus value into money, and thus accumulate capital.

But Marx's assumption is only a theoretical premise in order to simplify investigation. In reality, capitalist production is not the sole and completely dominant form of production, as everyone knows, and as Marx himself stresses in *Capital*. In reality, there are in all capitalist countries, even in those with the most developed large-scale industry, numerous artisan and peasant enterprises which are engaged in simple commodity production. In reality, alongside the old capitalist countries there are still those even

in Europe where peasant and artisan production is still strongly predominant, like Russia, the Balkans, Scandinavia and Spain. And finally, there are huge continents besides capitalist Europe and North America, where capitalist production has only scattered roots, and apart from that the people of these continents have all sorts of economic systems, from the primitive communist to the feudal, peasantry and artisan. Not only do all these social and productive forms co-exist, and co-exist locally with capitalism, but there is a lively intercourse of a specific kind. Capitalist production as proper mass production depends on consumers from peasant and artisan strata in the old countries, and consumers from all countries; but for technical reasons, it cannot exist without the products of these strata and countries. So there must develop right from the start an exchange relationship between capitalist production and the non-capitalist milieu, where capital not only finds the possibility of realising surplus value in hard cash for further capitalisation, but also receives various commodities to extend production, and finally wins new proletarianised labour forces by disintegrating the non-capitalist forms of production.

This is only the bare economic content of the relationship. Its concrete design in reality forms the historic process of the development of capitalism on the world stage in all its colourful and moving variety.

First, the exchange relation of capital with its non-capitalist environment confronts the difficulties of a barter economy, secure social relations and the limited demand of patriarchal peasant economy and artisan production. Here capital uses 'heroic means', the axe of political violence. Its first act in Europe is the revolutionary conquest of the feudal barter economy. Overseas, it begins with the subjugation and destruction of traditional communities, the world historical act of the birth of capital, since then the constant epiphenomenon of accumulation. Through destruction of the primitive barter relations in these countries, European capital opens the doors to commodity exchange and production, transforms the population into customers of capitalist commodities and hastens its own accumulation by making mass raids on their natural resources and accumulated treasures. Since

the beginning of the nineteenth century, accumulated capital from Europe has been exported along these lines to non-capitalist countries in other parts of the world, where it finds new customers and thus new opportunities for accumulation on the ruins of the native forms of production.

Thus capitalism expands because of its mutual relationship with non-capitalist social strata and countries, accumulating at their expense and at the same time pushing them aside to take their place. The more capitalist countries participate in this hunting for accumulation areas, the rarer the non-capitalist places still open to the expansion of capital become and the tougher the competition; its raids turn into a chain of economic and political catastrophes: world crises, wars, revolution.

But by this process capital prepares its own destruction in two ways. As it approaches the point where humanity only consists of capitalists and proletarians, further accumulation will become impossible. At the same time, the absolute and undivided rule of capital aggravates class struggle throughout the world and the international economic and political anarchy to such an extent that, long before the last consequences of economic development, it must lead to the rebellion of the international proletariat against the existence of the rule of capital.

This, in brief, is my conception of the problem and its solution. At first glance it may appear to be a purely theoretical exercise. And yet the practical meaning of the problem is at hand – the connection with the most outstanding fact of our time: imperialism. The typical external phenomena of imperialism: competition among capitalist countries to win colonies and spheres of interest, opportunities for investment, the international loan system, militarism, tariff barriers, the dominant role of finance capital and trusts in world politics, are all well known. Its connection with the final phase of capitalism, its importance for accumulation, are so blatantly open that it is clearly acknowledged by its supporters as well as its enemies. But Social Democracy refuses to be satisfied with this empirical knowledge. It must search for the precise economic rules behind appearances, to find the actual roots of this large and colourful complex of imperialist phenomena. As always

in these cases, only precise theoretical knowledge of the problem at its roots can provide our practical struggle against imperialism with security, aim and force – essential for the politics of the proletariat. Before Marx's *Capital* appeared, the fact that there was exploitation, surplus labour and profits, was well known. But only the precise theory of surplus value, the wage laws and the industrial reserve army, as Marx bases them in his theory of value, have given a strong foundation for the practical class struggle, on which the German and, in its footsteps, the international labour movement developed until the world war [World War I]. That theory alone is not enough; that one can sometimes connect the best theory with the worst practice is shown by the present collapse of German Social Democracy. This collapse did not occur as a result of Marxist theory, but in spite of it, and it can only be overthrown by bringing the practice of the labour movement into harmony with its theory. In the class struggle as a whole, as in each important part of it, we can only gain a secure foundation for our position from Marx's theory, from the buried treasures found in his fundamental works.

There is no doubt that the explanation for the economic roots of imperialism must be deduced from the laws of capital accumulation, since, according to common empirical knowledge, imperialism as a whole is nothing but a specific method of accumulation. But how is that possible, if one does not question Marx's assumptions in the second volume of *Capital* which are constructed for a society in which capitalist production is the only form, where the entire population consists solely of capitalists and wage labourers?

However one defines the inner economic mechanisms of imperialism, one thing is obvious and common knowledge: the expansion of the rule of capital from the old capitalist countries to new areas, and the economic and political competition of those countries for the new parts of the world. But Marx assumes, as we have seen in the second volume of *Capital*, that the whole world is one capitalist nation, that all other forms of economy and society have already disappeared. How can one explain imperialism in a society where there is no longer any space for it?

It was at this point that I believed I had to start my critique. The theoretical assumption of a society of capitalists and workers only – which is legitimate for certain aims of investigation (as in the first volume of *Capital*, the analysis of individual capital and its practice of exploitations in the factory) no longer seems adequate when we deal with the accumulation of gross social capital. As this represents the real historical process of capitalist development, it seems impossible to me to understand it if one abstracts it from all conditions of historical reality. Capital accumulation as the historical process develops in an environment of various pre-capitalist formations, in a constant political struggle and in reciprocal economic relations. How can one capture this process in a bloodless theoretical fiction, which declares this whole context, the struggle and the relations, to be non-existent?

Here especially it seems necessary, in the spirit of Marxist theory, to abandon the premise of the first volume, and to carry out the inquiry into accumulation as a total process, involving the metabolism of capital and its historical environment. If one does this, then the explanation of the process follows freely from Marx's basic theories, and is consistent with the other portions of his major works on economics.

Marx himself only posed the question of the accumulation of gross capital, but his answer went no further. As a basis for his analysis, he first selected that pure capitalist society; but not only did he not take this analysis to its conclusion, he also broke off at just this central question. In order to illustrate his conception he constructed some mathematical models, but hardly had he started on their significance for practical social possibilities and their verification from this standpoint when sickness and death forced him to stop writing. It was clearly left to his pupils to solve this problem (like many others), and my *Accumulation* was intended as an attempt in this direction.

The solution I proposed might have been judged as correct or incorrect; it could have been criticised, contested, supplemented; or another solution could have been produced. None of this happened. What followed was quite unexpected: the 'experts' explained that there was no problem to be solved! Marx's

illustrations in the second volume of *Capital* were a sufficient and exhaustive explanation of accumulation; the models there proved quite conclusively that capital could grow excellently, and production could expand, if there was no other mode of production in the world than the capitalist one; it was its own market, and only my complete inability to understand the ABC of Marx's models could persuade me to see a problem here….

Imperialism

… Of course, tactics and strategy in the practical struggle are not directly dependent on whether one considers the second volume of *Capital* to be a finished work or just a fragment, whether one believes in the possibility of accumulation in an 'isolated' capitalist society or not, whether one interprets Marx's models of reproduction one way or the other. Thousands of proletarians are good and brave fighters for the aims of socialism without knowing about these theoretical problems. For the reasons of a common basic understanding of the class struggle, one needs an incorruptible class instinct and the revolutionary traditions of the movement. But there is the closest connection between the understanding and treatment of theoretical problems and the practice of political parties over long periods. In the decade before the world war, German Social Democracy, as the international metropolis of proletarian intellectual life, displayed total harmony in theoretical as well as practical areas; in both areas the same indecision and ossification appeared, and it was the same imperialism as the overwhelmingly dominant manifestation of public life which defeated the theoretical as well as the political general staff of Social Democracy. The proud monolithic edifice of official German Social Democracy was revealed at its first historical trial to be a Potemkin village. Similarly, the apparent theoretical 'expert knowledge' and infallibility of official Marxism, which blessed every practice of the movement, turned out to be a grandiose façade hiding its inner insecurity and inability to act behind intolerant and insolent dogmatism. The sad routine moving along the old

tracks of the 'tried and tested tactics', i.e. nothing but parliamentarism, corresponded to the theoretical epigones who clung to the master's formula whilst renouncing the living spirit of his teachings. We have already noted in passing some proof of this thoughtlessness in the 'supreme court' of 'experts'.

But the connection with practice is in our case even more obvious than it may seem at first sight. It basically means two different methods of fighting imperialism.

Marx's analysis of accumulation was developed at a time when imperialism had not yet entered on to the world stage. The final and absolute rule of capital over the world – the precondition on which Marx bases his analysis – entails the *a priori* exclusion of the process of imperialism. But – and here lies the difference between the errors of a Marx and the crass blunders of his epigones – in this case even the error leads on to something fruitful. The problem posed and left unanswered in the second volume of *Capital* – to show how accumulation takes place under the exclusive rule of capitalism – is insoluble. Accumulation is simply impossible under these conditions. This apparently rigid theoretical contradiction has only to be translated into historical dialectics, in that it conforms to the spirit of the entire Marxist teaching and way of thinking, and the contradiction in Marx's model becomes the living mirror of the global career of capitalism, of its fortune and fall.

Accumulation is impossible in an exclusively capitalist environment. Therefore, we find that capital has been driven since its very inception to expand into non-capitalist strata and nations, ruin artisans and peasantry, proletarianise the intermediate strata, the politics of colonialism, the politics of 'opening-up' and the export of capital. The development of capitalism has been possible only through constant expansion into new domains of production and new countries. But the global drive to expand leads to a collision between capital and pre-capitalist forms of society, resulting in violence, war, revolution: in brief, catastrophes from start to finish, the vital element of capitalism.

Capital accumulation progresses and expands at the expense of non-capitalist strata and countries, squeezing them out at an

ever faster rate. The general tendency and final result of this process is the exclusive world rule of capitalist production. Once this is reached, Marx's model becomes valid: accumulation, i.e. further expansion of capital, becomes impossible. Capitalism comes to a dead end, it cannot function any more as the historical vehicle for the unfolding of the productive forces, it reaches its objective economic limit. The contradiction in Marx's model of accumulation is, seen dialectically, only the living contradiction between the boundless expansionist drive and the limit capital creates for itself through progressive destruction of all other forms of production; it is the contradiction between the huge productive forces which it awakens throughout the world during the process of accumulation and the narrow basis to which it is confined by the laws of accumulation. Marx's model of accumulation – when properly understood – is precisely in its insolubility the exact prognosis of the economically unavoidable downfall of capitalism as a result of the imperialist process of expansion whose specific task it is to realise Marx's assumption: the general and undivided rule of capital.

Can this ever really happen? That is, of course, theoretical fiction, precisely because capital accumulation is not just an economic but also a political process.

> Imperialism is as much an historical method for prolonging capital's existence as it is the surest way of setting an objective limit to its existence as fast as possible. This is not to say that the final point need actually be attained. The very tendency of capitalist development towards this end is expressed in forms which make the concluding phase of capitalism a period of catastrophes.…
>
> The more ruthlessly capital uses militarism to put an end to non-capitalist strata in the outside world and at home, the more it depresses the conditions of existence of all working strata, the more the day-to-day history of capital accumulation on the world stage changes into an endless chain of political and social catastrophes and convulsions; these latter, together with the periodic economic catastrophes in the shape of crises, make continued accumulation impossible and the rebellion of the international working class against

> the rule of capital necessary, even before it has economically reached the limits it set for itself.*

Here, as elsewhere in history, theory is performing its duty if it shows us the *tendency* of development, the logical conclusion to which it is objectively heading. There is as little chance of this conclusion being reached as there was for any other previous period of social development to unfold itself completely. The need for it to be reached becomes less as social consciousness, embodied this time in the socialist proletariat, becomes more involved as an active factor in the blind game of forces. In this case, too, a correct conception of Marx's theory offers the most fruitful suggestions and the most powerful stimulus for this consciousness.

Modern imperialism is not the prelude to the expansion of capital, as in Otto Bauer's model; on the contrary, it is only the last chapter of its historical process of expansion: it is the period of universally sharpened world competition between the capitalist states for the last remaining non-capitalist areas on earth. In this final phase, economic and political catastrophe is just as much the intrinsic, normal mode of existence for capital as it was in the 'primitive accumulation' of its development phase. The discovery of America and the sea route to India were not just Promethean achievements of the human mind and civilisation but also, and inseparably, a series of mass murders of primitive peoples in the New World and large-scale slave trading with the peoples of Africa and Asia. Similarly, the economic expansion of capital in its imperialist final phase is inseparable from the series of colonial conquests and world wars which we are now experiencing. What distinguishes imperialism as the last struggle for capitalist world domination is not simply the remarkable energy and universality of expansion but – and this is the specific sign that the circle of development is beginning to close – the return of the decisive struggle for expansion from those areas which are being fought over back to its home countries. In this way, imperialism brings

* Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 446, 466–7. The translation in the present volume is slightly different from that offered in the work just cited.

catastrophe as a mode of existence back from the periphery of capitalist development to its point of departure. The expansion of capital, which for four centuries had given the existence and civilisation of all non-capitalist peoples in Asia, Africa, America and Australia over to ceaseless convulsions and general and complete decline, is now plunging the civilised peoples of Europe itself into a series of catastrophes whose final result can only be the decline of civilisation or the transition to the socialist mode of production. Seen in this light, the position of the proletariat with regard to imperialism leads to a general confrontation with the rule of capital. The specific rules of its conduct are given by that historical alternative.

According to official 'expert' Marxism, the rules are quite different. The belief in the possibility of accumulation in an 'isolated capitalist society', the belief that capitalism is conceivable even without expansion, is the theoretical formula of a quite distinct tactical tendency. The logical conclusion of this idea is to look on the phase of imperialism not as an historical necessity, as the decisive conflict for socialism, but as the wicked invention of a small group of people who profit from it. This leads to convincing the bourgeoisie that, even from the point of view of their capitalist interests, imperialism and militarism are harmful, thus isolating the alleged small group of beneficiaries of this imperialism and forming a bloc of the proletariat with broad sections of the bourgeoisie in order to 'moderate' imperialism, starve it out by 'partial disarmament' and 'draw its claws'! Just as liberalism in the period of its decline appeals for a well-informed as against an ill-informed monarchy, the 'Marxist centre' appeals for the bourgeoisie it will educate as against the ill-advised one, for international disarmament treaties as against the disaster course of imperialism, for the peaceful federation of democratic nation states as against the struggle of the great powers for armed world domination. The final confrontation between proletariat and capital to settle their world-historical contradiction is converted into the utopia of an historical compromise between proletariat and bourgeoisie to 'moderate' the imperialist contradictions between capitalist states.

Otto Bauer concludes his criticism of my book with the following words:

> Capitalism will not collapse from the mechanical impossibility of realising surplus value. It will be defeated by the rebellion to which it drives the masses. Not only then, when the last peasant and the last petty bourgeois change into wage-workers, thus no longer providing a surplus market, will capitalism disintegrate: it will be cut down much earlier by the growing rebellion of the ever-rising working class, educated, united and organised by the mechanism of the capitalist mode of production itself.

In order to direct this advice to me specifically, Bauer, a master of abstraction, had to abstract not only from the entire meaning and direction of my conception of accumulation, but also from the clear text of my statements. His own brave words, however, can once again only be construed as a typical abstraction of 'expert' Marxism, i.e. as the harmless but short-lived flickering of 'pure thought'. This is demonstrated by the position of this group of theoreticians towards the outbreak of the world war. The rebellion of the ever-rising, educated and organised working class suddenly changed into the policy of 'abstention' on epoch-making decisions of world history and 'silence' until the bells of peace ring out. 'The road to power', brilliantly illustrated down to the last detail in a period of serene peace, when there was still not a sound in the treetops, changed course straight to the 'road to impotence' at the first gust of reality. The epigones who held the official theoretical leadership of the Labour movement in the last decade bankrupted themselves at the first outbreak of the world crisis and handed leadership over to imperialism. A clear understanding of these connexions is one of the essential conditions for the reconstruction of a proletarian policy which would measure up to its historical tasks in the period of imperialism.

Once again, the self-pitying will bewail the fact that 'Marxists are arguing amongst themselves', that tried and tested 'authorities' are being contested. But Marxism is not a dozen people who ascribe the right to 'expert knowledge' to each other and before

whom the mass of faithful Moslems must prostrate themselves in blind trust.

Marxism is a revolutionary world outlook which must always strive for new discoveries, which completely despises rigidity in once-valid theses, and whose living force is best preserved in the intellectual clash of self-criticism and the rough and tumble of history. Thus, I agree with Lessing, who wrote to the young Reimarus:

> But what can one do! Let each man say what he thinks to be the truth, and leave truth itself to God.

15

THE CRISIS OF GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY (THE JUNIUS PAMPHLET)

Composed by Luxemburg when she was in a German prison for her opposition to World War I (1914–18), this work was smuggled out in 1915 and published in 1916. It was circulated clandestinely by the International Group (*Gruppe Internationale*), attracting such comrades of Luxemburg as Karl Liebknecht, Clara Zetkin, and Franz Mehring, who broke with the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party over its shocking capitulation to Imperial Germany's war effort. The International Group soon expanded into the more substantial Spartacus League (*Spartakusbund*), named after the leader of the great slave uprising in ancient Rome. Expelled from the SPD in early 1917, Luxemburg and the growing ranks of her co-thinkers were to become the nucleus of the German Communist Party.

Luxemburg's pamphlet analysed the horrific nature of the war, its imperialist roots, its impact on German society, and the devastating weaknesses in the political orientation of German Social Democracy which caused it to embrace the imperialist slaughter which it had previously promised to oppose. Michael Löwy has commented that one aspect of the formulation in Luxemburg's polemic of 'socialism or barbarism' emphasises (in contrast to common notions of 'socialist inevitability' posited by some dogmatic Marxists) that 'the "final victory" or defeat of the proletariat is not decided in advance', depending not only on economic crises of capitalism but 'also on the conscious action' of the working class. He concludes that 'the forecast of Rosa revealed itself to be tragically correct: the failure of the *socialist* revolution in 1919 led in the final analysis to the triumph of Nazi *barbarism* and the Second World War'.*

While Luxemburg was inclined to have this pamphlet published under her own name, concerned comrades persuaded her to utilise a pseudonym. She

* Michael Löwy, 'Rosa Luxemburg's Conception of "Socialism or Barbarism"', *On Changing the World* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993), 95.

chose 'Junius', used by an unidentified opponent of England's King George III, who probably took the name from Lucius Junius Brutus, a republican revolutionary of ancient Rome. Popularly known as 'the Junius Pamphlet', Luxemburg's work created a tremendous stir in Germany and internationally. This particular translation of the work into English was done by Dave Hollis on behalf of the Marxist Internet Archive. Excerpts from the first, seventh, and eight sections of the pamphlet are presented here.

Socialism is the first popular movement in world history that has set itself the goal of bringing human consciousness, and thereby free will, into play in the social actions of mankind. For this reason, Frederick Engels designated the final victory of the socialist proletariat a leap of humanity from the animal world into the realm of freedom. This 'leap' is also an iron law of history bound to the thousands of seeds of a prior torment-filled and all-too-slow development. But this can never be realised until the development of complex material conditions strikes the incendiary spark of conscious will in the great masses. The victory of socialism will not descend from heaven. It can only be won by a long chain of violent tests of strength between the old and the new powers. The international proletariat under the leadership of the Social Democrats will thereby learn to try to take its history into its own hands; instead of remaining a will-less football, it will take the tiller of social life and become the pilot to the goal of its own history.

Frederick Engels once said: 'Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.' What does 'regression into barbarism' mean to our lofty European civilisation? Until now, we have all probably read and repeated these words thoughtlessly, without suspecting their fearsome seriousness. A look around us at this moment shows what the regression of bourgeois society into barbarism means. This world war is a regression into barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the annihilation of civilisation. At first, this happens sporadically for the duration of a modern war, but then when the period of unlimited wars begins it progresses toward its inevitable consequences. Today, we face the choice exactly as Frederick Engels foresaw it a generation ago: either the triumph of imperialism and the collapse of all civilisation as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration – a great cemetery. Or the victory of socialism, that means the conscious active struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism and its method of war. This is a dilemma of world history, an either/or; the scales are wavering before the decision of the class-conscious proletariat. The future of civilisation and humanity depends on whether or

not the proletariat resolves manfully to throw its revolutionary broadsword into the scales. In this war imperialism has won. Its bloody sword of genocide has brutally tilted the scale toward the abyss of misery. The only compensation for all the misery and all the shame would be if we learn from the war how the proletariat can seize mastery of its own destiny and escape the role of the lackey to the ruling classes.

Dearly bought is the modern working class's understanding of its historical vocation. Its emancipation as a class is sown with fearful sacrifices, a veritable path to Golgotha. The June days, the sacrifice of the Commune, the martyrs of the Russian Revolution – a dance of bloody shadows without number. All fell on the field of honour. They are, as Marx wrote about the heroes of the Commune, eternally 'enshrined in the great heart of the working class'. Now, millions of proletarians of all tongues fall upon the field of dishonour, of fratricide, lacerating themselves while the song of the slave is on their lips. This, too, we are not spared. We are like the Jews that Moses led through the desert. But we are not lost, and we will be victorious if we have not unlearned how to learn. And if the present leaders of the proletariat, the Social Democrats, do not understand how to learn, then they will go under 'to make room for people capable of dealing with a new world'....

Capitalist politicians, in whose eyes the rulers of the people and the ruling classes are the nation, can honestly speak of the 'right of national self-determination' in connection with such colonial empire. To the socialist, no nation is free whose national existence is based upon the enslavement of another people, for to him colonial peoples, too, are human beings, and, as such, parts of the national state. International socialism recognises the right of free independent nations, with equal rights. But socialism alone can create such nations, can bring self-determination of their peoples. This slogan of socialism is like all its others, not an apology for existing conditions, but a guidepost, a spur for the revolutionary, regenerative, active policy of the proletariat. So long as capitalist states exist, i.e., so long as imperialistic world policies determine

and regulate the inner and the outer life of a nation, there can be no 'national self-determination' either in war or in peace.

In the present imperialistic milieu there can be no wars of national self-defence. Every socialist policy that depends upon this determining historic milieu, that is willing to fix its policies in the world whirlpool from the point of view of a single nation, is built upon a foundation of sand….

The events that bore the present war did not begin in July 1914 but reach back for decades. Thread by thread they have been woven together on the loom of an inexorable natural development until the firm net of imperialist world politics has encircled five continents. It is a huge historical complex of events, whose roots reach deep down into the Plutonic deeps of economic creation, whose outermost branches spread out and point away into a dimly dawning new world, events before whose all-embracing immensity, the conception of guilt and retribution, of defence and offence, sink into pale nothingness.

Imperialism is not the creation of any one or of any group of states. It is the product of a particular stage of ripeness in the world development of capital, an innately international condition, an indivisible whole, that is recognisable only in all its relations, and from which no nation can hold aloof at will. From this point of view only is it possible to understand correctly the question of 'national defence!' in the present war.

The national state, national unity and independence were the ideological shield under which the capitalist nations of central Europe constituted themselves in the past century. Capitalism is incompatible with economic and political divisions, with the accompanying splitting up into small states. It needs for its development large, united territories, and a state of mental and intellectual development in the nation that will lift the demands and needs of society to a plane corresponding to the prevailing stage of capitalist production, and to the mechanism of modern capitalist class rule. Before capitalism could develop, it sought to create for itself a territory sharply defined by national limitations. This programme was carried out only in France at the time of the great revolution, for in the national and political heritage left to

Europe by the feudal middle ages, this could be accomplished only by revolutionary measures. In the rest of Europe this nationalisation, like the revolutionary movement as a whole, remained the patchwork of half-kept promises. The German empire, modern Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey, the Russian empire and the British world empire are all living proofs of this fact. The national programme could play an historic role only so long as it represented the ideological expression of a growing bourgeoisie, lusting for power, until it had fastened its class rule, in some way or other, upon the great nations of central Europe and had created within them the necessary tools and conditions of its growth. Since then, imperialism has buried the old bourgeois democratic programme completely by substituting expansionist activity irrespective of national relationships for the original programme of the bourgeoisie in all nations. The national phase, to be sure, has been preserved, but its real content, its function, has been perverted into its very opposite. Today the nation is but a cloak that covers imperialistic desires, a battle cry for imperialistic rivalries, the last ideological measure with which the masses can be persuaded to play the role of cannon fodder in imperialistic wars.

This general tendency of present-day capitalist policies determines the policies of the individual states as their supreme blindly operating law, just as the laws of economic competition determine the conditions under which the individual manufacturer shall produce….

Thus the conception of even that modest, devout fatherland-loving war of defence that has become the ideal of our parliamentarians and editors is pure fiction, and shows, on their part, a complete lack of understanding of the whole war and its world relations. The character of the war is determined, not by solemn declaration, not even by the honest intentions of leading politicians, but by the momentary configuration of society and its military organisations….

The class-conscious proletariat cannot identify with any of the military camps in this war. Does it follow that proletarian policy ought to demand maintenance of the status quo, that we have no other action programme beyond the wish that everything should

be as it was before the war? But existing conditions have never been our ideal; they have never expressed the self-determination of peoples. Furthermore, the earlier conditions are no longer to be saved; they no longer exist, even if historic state borders continue to exist. Even before its results have been formally established, the war has already brought about immense confusion in power relationships, the reciprocal estimate of forces, of alliances, and conflicts. It has sharply revised the relations between states and of classes within society. So many old illusions and potencies have been destroyed, so many new forces and problems have been created that a return to the old Europe as it existed before 4 August 1914 is out of the question. [It is] as out of the question as a return to pre-revolutionary conditions even after a defeated revolution.

Proletarian policy knows no retreat; it can only struggle forward. It must always go beyond the existing and the newly created. In this sense alone, it is legitimate for the proletariat to confront both camps of imperialists in the world war with a policy of its own.

But this policy cannot consist of Social Democratic parties holding international conferences where they individually or collectively compete to discover ingenious recipes with which bourgeois diplomats ought to make the peace and ensure the further peaceful development of democracy. All demands for complete or partial 'disarmament', for the dismantling of secret diplomacy, for the partition of all multinational great states into small national ones, and so forth are part and parcel utopian as long as capitalist class domination holds the reins. [Capitalism] cannot, under its current imperialist course, dispense with present-day militarism, secret diplomacy, or the centralised multinational state. In fact, it would be more pertinent for the realisation of these postulates to make just one simple 'demand': abolition of the capitalist class state.

It is not through utopian advice and schemes to tame, ameliorate, or reform imperialism within the framework of the bourgeois state that proletarian policy can reconquer its leading place. The actual problem that the world war has posed to the socialist parties, upon the solution of which the destiny of the workers' movement

depends, is this: *the capacity of the proletarian masses for action in the battle against imperialism*. The proletariat does not lack for postulates, prognoses, slogans; it lacks deeds, the capacity for effective resistance to imperialism at the decisive moment, to intervene against it during [not after] the war and to convert the old slogan 'war against war' into practice. Here is the crux of the matter, the Gordian knot of proletarian politics and its long term future.

Imperialism and all its political brutality, the chain of incessant social catastrophes that it has let loose, is undoubtedly an historical necessity for the ruling classes of the contemporary capitalist world. Nothing would be more fatal for the proletariat than to delude itself into believing that it were possible after this war to rescue the idyllic and peaceful continuation of capitalism. However, the conclusion to be drawn by proletarian policy from the historical necessity of imperialism is that surrender to imperialism will mean living forever in its victorious shadow and eating from its leftovers.

The historical dialectic moves forward by contradiction, and establishes in the world the antithesis of every necessity. Bourgeois class domination is undoubtedly an historical necessity, but, so too, the rising of the working class against it. Capital is an historical necessity, but, so too, its grave digger, the socialist proletariat. Imperialist world domination is an historical necessity, but, so too, its destruction by the proletarian international. Step for step there are two historical necessities in conflict with one another. Ours, the necessity of socialism, has the greater stamina. Our necessity enters into its full rights the moment that the other – bourgeois class domination – ceases to be the bearer of historical progress, when it becomes an obstacle, a danger to the further development of society. The capitalist world order, as revealed by the world war, has today reached this point.

The expansionist imperialism of capitalism, the expression of its highest stage of development and its last phase of existence, produces the [following] economic tendencies: it transforms the entire world into the capitalist mode of production; all outmoded, pre-capitalist forms of production and society are swept away;

it converts all the world's riches and means of production into capital, the working masses of all zones into wage slaves. In Africa and Asia, from the northernmost shores to the tip of South America and the South Seas, the remnant of ancient primitive communist associations, feudal systems of domination, patriarchal peasant economies, traditional forms of craftsmanship are annihilated, crushed by capital; whole peoples are destroyed and ancient cultures flattened. All are supplanted by profit mongering in its most modern form.

This brutal victory parade of capital through the world, its way prepared by every means of violence, robbery, and infamy, has its bright side. It creates the preconditions for its own final destruction. It puts into place the capitalist system of world domination, the indispensable precondition for the socialist world revolution. This alone constitutes the cultural, progressive side of its reputed 'great work of civilisation' in the primitive lands. For bourgeois-liberal economists and politicians, railways, Swedish matches, sewer systems, and department stores are 'progress' and 'civilisation'. In themselves these works grafted onto primitive conditions are neither civilisation nor progress, for they are bought with the rapid economic and cultural ruin of peoples who must experience simultaneously the full misery and horror of two eras: the traditional natural economic system and the most modern and rapacious capitalist system of exploitation. Thus, the capitalist victory parade and all its works bear the stamp of progress in the historical sense only because they create the material preconditions for the abolition of capitalist domination and class society in general. And in this sense imperialism ultimately works for us.

The world war is a turning point. For the first time, the ravening beasts set loose upon all quarters of the globe by capitalist Europe have broken into Europe itself. A cry of horror went through the world when Belgium, that precious jewel of European civilisation, and when the most august cultural monuments of northern France fell into shards under the impact of the blind forces of destruction. This same 'civilised world' looked on passively as the same imperialism ordained the cruel destruction of ten thousand Herero tribesmen and filled the sands of the Kalahari with the

mad shrieks and death rattles of men dying of thirst; [the 'civilised world' looked on] as forty thousand men on the Putumayo River [Colombia] were tortured to death within ten years by a band of European captains of industry, while the rest of the people were made into cripples; as in China where an age-old culture was put to the torch by European mercenaries, practised in all forms of cruelty, annihilation, and anarchy; as Persia was strangled, powerless to resist the tightening noose of foreign domination; as in Tripoli where fire and sword bowed the Arabs beneath the yoke of capitalism, destroyed their culture and habitations. Only today has this 'civilised world' become aware that the bite of the imperialist beast brings death, that its very breath is infamy. Only now has [the civilised world] recognised this, after the beast's ripping talons have clawed its own mother's lap, the bourgeois civilisation of Europe itself. And even this knowledge is grappled with in the distorted form of bourgeois hypocrisy. Every people recognises the infamy only in the national uniform of the enemy. 'German barbarians!' – as though every people that marches out to do organised murder were not transformed instantly into a barbarian horde. 'Cossack atrocities!' – as though war itself were not the atrocity of atrocities, as though the praising of human slaughter as heroism in a socialist youth paper were not the purest example of intellectual cossack-dom!

None the less, the imperialist bestiality raging in Europe's fields has one effect about which the 'civilised world' is not horrified and for which it has no breaking heart: that is *the mass destruction of the European proletariat*. Never before on this scale has a war exterminated whole strata of the population; not for a century have all the great and ancient cultural nations of Europe been attacked. Millions of human lives have been destroyed in the Vosges, the Ardennes, in Belgium, Poland, in the Carpathians, on the Save. Millions have been crippled. But of these millions, nine out of ten are working people from the city and the countryside.

It is our strength, our hope, that is mown down day after day like grass under the sickle. The best, most intelligent, most educated forces of international socialism, the bearers of the holiest traditions and the boldest heroes of the modern workers'

movement, the vanguard of the entire world proletariat, the workers of England, France, Belgium, Germany, Russia – these are the ones now being hamstrung and led to the slaughter. These workers of the leading capitalist countries of Europe are exactly the ones who have the historical mission of carrying out the socialist transformation. Only from out of Europe, only from out of the oldest capitalist countries will the signal be given when the hour is ripe for the liberating social revolution. Only the English, French, Belgian, German, Russian, Italian workers together can lead the army of the exploited and enslaved of the five continents. When the time comes, only they can settle accounts with capitalism's work of global destruction, with its centuries of crime committed against primitive peoples.

But to push ahead to the victory of socialism we need a strong, activist, educated proletariat, and masses whose power lies in intellectual culture as well as numbers. These masses are being decimated by the world war. The flower of our mature and youthful strength, hundreds of thousands of whom were socialistically schooled in England, France, Belgium, Germany, and Russia, the product of decades of educational and agitational training, and other hundreds of thousands who could be won for socialism tomorrow, fall and moulder on the miserable battlefields. The fruits of decades of sacrifice and the efforts of generations are destroyed in a few weeks. The key troops of the international proletariat are torn up by the roots.

The blood-letting of the June days [1848] paralysed the French workers' movement for a decade and a half. Then the blood-letting of the Commune massacres again retarded it for more than a decade. What is now occurring is an unprecedented mass slaughter that is reducing the adult working population of all the leading civilised countries to women, old people, and cripples. This blood-letting threatens to bleed the European workers' movement to death. Another such world war and the outlook for socialism will be buried beneath the rubble heaped up by imperialist barbarism. This is more [significant] than the ruthless destruction of Liège and the Rheims cathedral. This is an assault, not on the bourgeois culture of the past, but on the

socialist culture of the future, a lethal blow against that force which carries the future of humanity within itself and which alone can bear the precious treasures of the past into a better society. Here capitalism lays bear its death's head; here it betrays the fact that its historical rationale is used up; its continued domination is no longer reconcilable to the progress of humanity.…

16

TWO PRISON LETTERS TO SONYA LIEBKNECHT

Karl Liebknecht, along with Luxemburg, was the most prominent opponent of World War I in the leading ranks of the German socialist movement. Like her, he was imprisoned for anti-war activity. Luxemburg had developed a close friendship with Sonya Liebknecht, his young Russian-born wife, and carried on an extensive correspondence with her from prison. As Luxemburg's biographer Paul Frölich has commented, Luxemburg 'was able to put herself in the position of others and knew their individual needs', and this was reflected in her prison letters:

> To Sonya she was protectively tender, encouraging and consoling; to Luise Kautsky she was comradely with a slight touch of cool irony; to Clara Zetkin she wrote in a tone of calm certainty indicative of their deep partnership in the revolutionary struggle; to [Hans] Diefenbach [a younger comrade with whom she had been romantically involved, now at the war front in the army] she chattered cheerfully, often playfully, and it is clear she was simply trying to shower him with pleasant things to take his mind off the danger she knew he was in.*

In fact, these two letters to Sonya Liebknecht suggest that there may have been greater mutuality in her correspondence – allowing Luxemburg to give expression to feelings that cried out for expression. One aspect of this involved her lifelong sense of connection with nature and all living creatures. 'She searched for joy in every bird-call,' Frölich noted, 'in every little blossom, among the ants building their tunnels between the stones, in the bumble-bee which once strayed into her cell, in the almost frozen butterfly which she was able to restore to life, and in the cumulus clouds piled high in the patch of azure visible to her'. (Some commentators see in such qualities of thought and

* Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 229.

feeling an ecological sensibility having special relevance for later decades.) But she also allowed herself the expression, in the second letter to Sonya Liebknecht, the expression of great sorrow and pain.

These and other letters were first published in a pamphlet in Berlin in the early 1920s, in part to help raise money for Karl Liebknecht's widow and children. Translated into English by Cedar and Eden Paul in the early 1920s, they were reprinted a number of times by socialist groups, and can be found in the Marxist Internet Archive.

End of May 1917

Sonyusha,

Where do you think I am writing this letter? In the garden! I have brought out a small table at which I am now seated, hidden among the shrubs. To the right is the currant bush, smelling of cloves; to the left, a privet in flower; overhead, a sycamore and a young slender Spanish chestnut stretch their broad, green hands; in front is the tall, serious and gentle white poplar, its silvery leaves rustling in the breeze.

On the paper, as I write, the faint shadows of the leaves are at play with the interspersed patches of sunlight; the foliage is still damp from a recent shower, and now and again drops fall on my face and hands.

Service is going on in the prison chapel; the sound of the organ reaches me indistinctly, for it is masked by the noise of the leaves, and by the clear chorus of the birds, which are all in a merry mood today; from afar I hear the call of the cuckoo.

How lovely it is; I am so happy. One seems already to have the Midsummer mood – the full luxuriance of summer and the intoxication of life. Do you remember the scenes in [composer Richard] Wagner's [opera] *Meistersinger*, the one in which the prentices sing 'Midsummer Day! Midsummer Day!', and the folk scene where, after singing 'St Crispin! St Crispin!' the motley crowd joins in a frolicsome dance?

Such days as these are well fitted to produce the mood of those scenes.

I had such an experience yesterday. I must tell you what happened. In the bathroom, before dinner, I found a great peacock-butterfly on the window. It must have been shut up there for two or three days, for it had almost worn itself out fluttering against the hard windowpane, so that there was now nothing more than a slight movement of the wings to show that it was still alive.

Directly I noticed it, I dressed myself, trembling with impatience, climbed up to the window, and took it cautiously in my hand.

It had now ceased to move, and I thought it must be dead. But I took it to my own room and put it on the outside window sill, to see if it would revive. There was again a gentle fluttering for a little, but after that the insect did not move. I laid a few flowers in front of its antennae, so that it might have something to eat. At that moment the black-cap sang in front of the window so lustily that the echoes rang. Involuntarily I spoke out loud to the butterfly, saying: 'Just listen how merrily the bird is singing; you must take heart, too, and come to life again!' I could not help laughing at myself for speaking like this to a half-dead butterfly, and I thought: 'You are wasting your breath!' But I was not, for in about half an hour the little creature really revived; after moving about for a while, it was able to flutter slowly away. I was so delighted at this rescue. In the afternoon, of course, I went out into the garden again. I am there always from eight in the morning till noon, when I am summoned to dinner; and again from three till six.

I was expecting the sun to shine, for I felt that it must really show itself once more. But the sky was overcast, and I grew melancholy.

I strolled about the garden. A light breeze was blowing, and I saw a remarkable sight. The over ripe catkins on the white poplar were scattered abroad; their seed-down was carried in all directions, filling the air as if with snow-flakes, covering the ground and the whole courtyard; the silvery seed-down made everything look quite ghostlike. The white poplar blooms later than the catkin-bearing trees, and spreads far and wide thanks to this luxuriant dispersal of its seeds; the young shoots sprout like weeds from all the crannies on the wall and from between the paving stones.

At six o'clock, as usual, I was locked up. I sat gloomily by the window with a dull sense of oppression in the head, for the weather was sultry. Looking upward I could see at a dizzy height the swallows flying gaily to and fro against a background formed of white, fleecy clouds in a pastel-blue sky; their pointed wings seemed to cut the air like scissors.

Soon the heavens were overcast, everything became blurred; there was a thunder storm with torrents of rain, and two loud peals of thunder which shook the whole place. I shall never forget what followed. The storm had passed on; the sky had turned a thick monotonous grey; a pale, dull, spectral twilight suddenly diffused itself over the landscape, so that it seemed as if the whole prospect were under a thick grey veil. A gentle rain was falling steadily upon the leaves; sheet lightning flamed at brief intervals, tinting the leaden grey with flashes of purple, while the distant thunder could still be heard rumbling like the declining waves of a heavy sea. Then, quite abruptly, the nightingale began to sing in the sycamore in front of my window.

Despite the rain, the lightning and the thunder, the notes rang out as clear as a bell. The bird sang as if intoxicated, as if possessed, as if wishing to drown the thunder, to illuminate the twilight.

Never have I heard anything so lovely. On the background of the alternately leaden and lurid sky, the song seemed to show like shafts of silver. It was so mysterious, so incredibly beautiful, that involuntarily I murmured the last verse of Goethe's poem, 'Oh, wert thou here!'

Always your
Rosa

Breslau, mid-December, 1917

Karl has been in Luckau prison for a year now. I have been thinking of that so often this month and of how it is just a year since you came to see me at Wronke, and gave me that lovely Christmas tree. This time I arranged to get one here, but they have brought me such a shabby little tree, with some of its branches broken off, – there's no comparison between it and yours. I'm sure I don't know how I shall manage to fix all the eight candles that I have got for it. This is my third Christmas under lock and key, but you needn't take it to heart. I am as tranquil and cheerful as ever. Last night I lay awake for a long time. I have to go to bed

at ten, but can never get to sleep before one in the morning, so I lie in the dark, pondering many things. Last night my thoughts ran thiswise: How strange it is that I am always in a sort of joyful intoxication, though without sufficient cause. Here I am lying in a dark cell upon a mattress hard as stone; the building has its usual churchyard quiet, so that one might as well be already entombed; through the window there falls across the bed a glint of light from the lamp which burns all night in front of the prison. At intervals I can hear faintly in the distance the noise of a passing train or close at hand the dry cough of the prison guard as in his heavy boots, he takes a few slow strides to stretch his limbs. The gride of the gravel beneath his feet has so hopeless a sound that all the weariness and futility of existence seems to be radiated thereby into the damp and gloomy night. I lie here alone and in silence, enveloped in the manifold black wrappings of darkness, tedium, unfreedom, and winter – and yet my heart beats with an immeasurable and incomprehensible inner joy, just as if I were moving in the brilliant sunshine across a flowery mead. And in the darkness I smile at life, as if I were the possessor of charm which would enable me to transform all that is evil and tragical into serenity and happiness. But when I search my mind for the cause of this joy, I find there is no cause, and can only laugh at myself. – I believe that the key to the riddle is simply life itself, this deep darkness of night is soft and beautiful as velvet, if only one looks at it in the right way. The gride of the damp gravel beneath the slow and heavy tread of the prison guard is likewise a lovely little song of life – for one who has ears to hear. At such moments I think of you, and would that I could hand over this magic key to you also. Then, at all times and in all places, you would be able to see the beauty, and the joy of life; then you also could live in the sweet intoxication, and make your way across a flowery mead. Do not think that I am offering you imaginary joys, or that I am preaching asceticism. I want you to taste all the real pleasures of the senses. My one desire is to give you in addition my inexhaustible sense of inward bliss. Could I do so, I should be at ease about you, knowing that in your passage through life

you were clad in a star-bespangled cloak which would protect you from everything petty, trivial, or harassing.

I am interested to hear of the lovely bunch of berries, black ones and reddish-violet ones you picked in Steglitz Park. The black berries may have been elder – of course you know the elder berries which hang in thick and heavy clusters among fan-shaped leaves. More probably, however, they were privet, slender and graceful, upright spikes of berries, amid narrow, elongated green leaves. The reddish-violet berries, almost hidden by small leaves, must have been those of the dwarf medlar; their proper colour is red, but at this late season, when they are over-ripe and beginning to rot, they often assume a violet tinge. The leaves are like those of the myrtle, small, pointed, dark green in colour, with a leathery upper surface, but rough beneath.

Sonyusha, do you know Platen's *Verhängnisvolle Gabel*?* Could you send it to me, or bring it when you come? Karl told me he had read it at home. George's poems are beautiful. Now I know where you got the verse, 'And amid the rustling of ruddy corn', which you were fond of quoting when we were walking in the country. I wish you would copy out for me [Goethe's] *The Modern Amades* when you have time. I am so fond of the poem (a knowledge of which I owe to Hugo Wolf's setting) but I have not got it here. Are you still reading [Franz Mehring's] *Lessing Legende*? I have been re-reading [Friedrich A.] Lange's *History of Materialism*, which I always find stimulating and invigorating. I do so hope you will read it some day.

Sonichka, dear, I had such a pang recently. In the courtyard where I walk, army lorries often arrive, laden with haversacks or old tunics and shirts from the front; sometimes they are stained with blood. They are sent to the women's cells to be mended, and then go back for use in the army. The other day one of these lorries was drawn by a team of buffaloes instead of horses. I had never seen the creatures close at hand before. They are much more powerfully built than our oxen, with flattened heads, and horns

* Poet and playwright August von Platen (1796–1835), author of *The Fatal Fork*, a satirical comedy.

strongly recurved, so that their skulls are shaped something like a sheep's skull. They are black, and have large, soft eyes. The buffaloes are war trophies from Rumania. The soldier-drivers said that it was very difficult to catch these animals, which had always run wild, and still more difficult to break them in to harness. They had been unmercifully flogged – on the principle of 'vae victis' [woe to the conquered]. There are about a hundred head in Breslau alone. They have been accustomed to the luxuriant Rumanian pastures and have here to put up with lean and scanty fodder. Unsparingly exploited, yoked to heavy loads, they are soon worked to death. The other day a lorry came laden with sacks, so overladen indeed that the buffaloes were unable to drag it across the threshold of the gate. The soldier-driver, a brute of a fellow, belaboured the poor beasts so savagely with the butt end of his whip that the wardress at the gate, indignant at the sight, asked him if he had no compassion for animals. 'No more than anyone has compassion for us men', he answered with an evil smile, and redoubled his blows. At length the buffaloes succeeded in drawing the load over the obstacle, but one of them was bleeding. You know their hide is proverbial for its thickness and toughness, but it had been torn. While the lorry was being unloaded, the beasts, which were utterly exhausted, stood perfectly still. The one that was bleeding had an expression on its black face and in its soft black eyes like that of a weeping child – one that has been severely thrashed and does not know why, nor how to escape from the torment of ill-treatment. I stood in front of the team; the beast looked at me: the tears welled from my own eyes. The suffering of a dearly loved brother could hardly have nursed me more profoundly, than I was moved by my impotence in face of this mute agony. Far distant, lost for ever, were the green, lush meadows of Rumania. How different there the light of the sun, the breath of the wind; how different there the song of the birds and the melodious call of the herdsman. Instead, the hideous street, the fetid stable, the rank hay mingled with mouldy straw, the strange and terrible men – blow upon blow, and blood running from gaping wounds. Poor wretch, I am as powerless, as dumb,

as yourself; I am at one with you in my pain, my weakness, and my longing.

Meanwhile the women prisoners were jostling one another as they busily unloaded the dray and carried the heavy sacks into the building. The driver, hands in pockets, was striding up and down the courtyard, smiling to himself as he whistled a popular air. I had a vision of all the splendour of war! …

Write soon, darling Sonichka.
Your Rosa

Never mind, my Sonyusha; you must be calm and happy all the same. Such is life, and we have to take it as it is, valiantly, heads erect, smiling ever – despite all.

17

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Substantial excerpts from Rosa Luxemburg's critique of early policies generated by the Bolshevik Revolution are presented here. This essay – composed while Luxemburg was in prison, and probably meant for publication in 1919 – was not presented publicly until 1922, when her close comrade Paul Levi left the German Communist movement with sharp criticisms of his own. It became her best-known work, at least in the English-speaking world, thanks to the efforts of the ex-Communist ideologist for the US State Department, Bertram D. Wolfe, during the Cold War era. Although Wolfe and others exploited this work to advance their own anti-Communist agenda, a careful reading of 'The Russian Revolution' reveals (for example, the first fourteen paragraphs below) Luxemburg's elemental kinship with Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

On the other hand, the balance of Luxemburg's essay sharply takes issue with the Bolsheviks. This is no less true of the portions not reproduced here (opposing Lenin's support for the self-determination of oppressed nationalities, and disagreeing with the Bolshevik policy of giving land to the peasants, rather than nationalising it). The portions below focus on issues of democracy. She challenges the Bolshevik/Communist Party's rapid drift toward a single-party dictatorship, toward a systematic suspension of civil liberties, and especially toward a theoretical rationalisation of such measures in the name of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. For Luxemburg (as for Marx), this term simply meant political power being held by the working class instead of by the landowning nobility or the wealthy businessmen, the goal being workers' democracy moving toward socialism instead of 'bourgeois democracy' preserving capitalism.

More than one commentator has noted the prophetic aspect of Luxemburg's critique, given the subsequent distance that the Communist mainstream departed, particularly in the Stalin era, from its earlier revolutionary-democratic beginnings. Yet Luxemburg was convinced that only the spread of socialist revolution to more economically advanced capitalist countries (such as Germany) could enable Lenin and his comrades to return to those

revolutionary-democratic policies to which they, along with Luxemburg herself, had been committed for so many years. Enduring elements of this essay explore the inseparable interrelationship between genuine democracy and genuine socialism. The reader of her earlier works can see the profound continuity between these critical reflections and her lifelong commitment to revolutionary socialism.

The first translation into English was done by Bertram D. Wolfe in 1940, when he was still a dissident Communist, for the publication *Workers Age*. It was republished by Wolfe (along with 'Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy' – rechristened 'Leninism or Marxism?') in 1961, with a tendentious new introduction by the translator/editor. This version was taken from the Marxist Internet Archive.

The party of Lenin was thus the only one in Russia which grasped the true interest of the revolution in that first period. It was the element that drove the revolution forward, and, thus it was the only party which really carried on a socialist policy.

It is this which makes clear, too, why it was that the Bolsheviks, though they were at the beginning of the revolution a persecuted, slandered and hunted minority attacked on all sides, arrived within the shortest time to the head of the revolution and were able to bring under their banner all the genuine masses of the people: the urban proletariat, the army, the peasants, as well as the revolutionary elements of democracy, the left wing of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

The real situation, in which the Russian Revolution found itself, narrowed down in a few months to the alternative: victory of the counter-revolution or dictatorship of the proletariat – Kaledin or Lenin. Such was the objective situation, just as it quickly presents itself in every revolution after the first intoxication is over, and as it presented itself in Russia as a result of the concrete, burning questions of peace and land, for which there was no solution within the framework of bourgeois revolution.

In this, the Russian Revolution has but confirmed the basic lesson of every great revolution, the law of its being, which decrees: either the revolution must advance at a rapid, stormy, resolute tempo, break down all barriers with an iron hand and place its goals ever farther ahead, or it is quite soon thrown backward behind its feeble point of departure and suppressed by counter-revolution. To stand still, to mark time on one spot, to be contented with the first goal it happens to reach, is never possible in revolution. And he who tries to apply the home-made wisdom derived from parliamentary battles between frogs and mice to the field of revolutionary tactics only shows thereby that the very psychology and laws of existence of revolution are alien to him and that all historical experience is to him a book sealed with seven seals.

Take the course of the English Revolution from its onset in 1642. There the logic of things made it necessary that the first feeble vacillations of the Presbyterians, whose leaders deliberately

evaded a decisive battle with Charles I and victory over him, should inevitably be replaced by the Independents, who drove them out of Parliament and seized the power for themselves. And in the same way, within the army of the Independents, the lower petty bourgeois mass of the soldiers, the Lilburnian 'Levellers' constituted the driving force of the entire Independent movement; just as, finally, the proletarian elements within the mass of the soldiers, the elements that went farthest in their aspirations for social revolution and who found their expression in the Digger movement, constituted in their turn the leaven of the democratic party of the 'Levellers'.

Without the moral influence of the revolutionary proletarian elements on the general mass of the soldiers, without the pressure of the democratic mass of the soldiers upon the bourgeois upper layers of the party of the Independents, there would have been no 'purge' of the Long Parliament of its Presbyterians, nor any victorious ending to the war with the army of the Cavaliers and Scots, or any trial and execution of Charles I, nor any abolition of the House of Lords and proclamation of a republic.

And what happened in the Great French Revolution? Here, after four years of struggle, the seizure of power by the Jacobins proved to be the only means of saving the conquests of the revolution, of achieving a republic, of smashing feudalism, of organising a revolutionary defence against inner as well as outer foes, of suppressing the conspiracies of counter-revolution and spreading the revolutionary wave from France to all Europe.

Kautsky and his Russian co-religionists who wanted to see the Russian Revolution keep the 'bourgeois character' of its first phase, are an exact counterpart of those German and English liberals of the preceding century who distinguished between the two well-known periods of the Great French Revolution: the 'good' revolution of the first Girondin phase and the 'bad' one after the Jacobin uprising. The Liberal shallowness of this conception of history, to be sure, doesn't care to understand that, without the uprising of the 'immoderate' Jacobins, even the first, timid and half-hearted achievements of the Girondin phase would soon have been buried under the ruins of the revolution, and that

the real alternative to Jacobin dictatorship – as the iron course of historical development posed the question in 1793 – was not 'moderate' democracy, but… restoration of the Bourbons! The 'golden mean' cannot be maintained in any revolution. The law of its nature demands a quick decision: either the locomotive drives forward full steam ahead to the most extreme point of the historical ascent, or it rolls back of its own weight again to the starting point at the bottom; and those who would keep it with their weak powers half way up the hill, it drags down with it irredeemably into the abyss.

Thus it is clear that in every revolution only that party is capable of seizing the leadership and power which has the courage to issue the appropriate watch-words for driving the revolution ahead, and the courage to draw all the necessary conclusions from the situation. This makes clear, too, the miserable role of the Russian Mensheviks, the Dans, Tseretellis, etc., who had enormous influence on the masses at the beginning, but, after their prolonged wavering and after they had fought with both hands and feet against taking over power and responsibility, were driven ignobly off the stage.

The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party and which, by the slogan – 'All power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry' – ensured the continued development of the revolution.

Thereby the Bolsheviks solved the famous problem of 'winning a majority of the people', which problem has ever weighed on the German Social Democracy like a nightmare. As bred-in-the-bone disciples of parliamentary cretinism, these German Social Democrats have sought to apply to revolutions the home-made wisdom of the parliamentary nursery: in order to carry anything, you must first have a majority. The same, they say, applies to a revolution: first let's become a 'majority'. The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that's the way the road runs.

Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which could advance things ('all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry'), transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hide like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation.

Moreover, the Bolsheviks immediately set as the aim of this seizure of power a complete, far-reaching revolutionary programme; not the safeguarding of bourgeois democracy, but a dictatorship of the proletariat for the purpose of realising socialism. Thereby they won for themselves the imperishable historic distinction of having for the first time proclaimed the final aim of socialism as the direct programme of practical politics.

Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in an historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and all the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which western Social Democracy lacked was represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism….

The Constituent Assembly

… from the special inadequacy of the Constituent Assembly which came together in October, Trotsky draws a general conclusion concerning the inadequacy of any popular representation whatsoever which might come from universal popular elections during the revolution.

'Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power,' he writes, 'the labouring masses acquire in the shortest time an accumulation of political experience, and they climb rapidly from step to step in their political development. The bigger the country and the more rudimentary its technical apparatus, the less is the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions able to keep pace with this development.'

Here we find the 'mechanism of democratic institutions', as such called in question. To this we must at once object that in such an estimate of representative institutions there lies a somewhat rigid and schematic conception which is expressly contradicted by the historical experience of every revolutionary epoch. According to Trotsky's theory, every elected assembly reflects once and for all only the mental composition, political maturity and mood of its electorate just at the moment when the latter goes to the polling place. According to that, a democratic body is the reflection of the masses at the end of the electoral period, much as the heavens of Herschel always show us the heavenly bodies not as they are when we are looking at them but as they were at the moment they sent out their light-messages to the earth from the measureless distances of space. Any living mental connection between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate, any permanent interaction between one and the other, is hereby denied.

Yet how all historical experience contradicts this! Experience demonstrates quite the contrary: namely, that the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them. How else would it be possible to witness, as we do at times in every bourgeois parliament, the amusing capers of the 'people's representatives', who are suddenly inspired by a new 'spirit' and give forth quite unexpected sounds; or to find the most dried-out mummies at times comporting themselves like youngsters and the most diverse little *Scheidemännchen** suddenly finding revolutionary tones in their breasts – whenever there is rumbling in factories and workshops on the street.

And is this ever-living influence of the mood and degree of political ripeness of the masses upon the elected bodies to be renounced in favour of a rigid scheme of party emblems and tickets in the very midst of revolution? Quite the contrary! It is precisely the revolution which creates by its glowing heat that

* 'Little Scheide-men', a play on the name of the pro-war, government Social Democrat, Philipp Scheidemann.

delicate, vibrant, sensitive political atmosphere in which the waves of popular feeling, the pulse of popular life, work for the moment on the representative bodies in most wonderful fashion. It is on this very fact, to be sure, that the well-known moving scenes depend which invariably present themselves in the first stages of every revolution, scenes in which old reactionaries or extreme moderates, who have issued out of a parliamentary election by limited suffrage under the old regime, suddenly become the heroic and stormy spokesmen of the uprising. The classic example is provided by the famous 'Long Parliament' in England, which was elected and assembled in 1642 and remained at its post for seven whole years and reflected in its internal life all alterations and displacements of popular feeling, of political ripeness, of class differentiation, of the progress of the revolution to its highest point, from the initial devout skirmishes with the Crown under a Speaker who remains on his knees, to the abolition of the House of Lords, the execution of Charles and the proclamation of the republic.

And was not the same wonderful transformation repeated in the French Estates-General, in the censorship-subjected parliament of Louis Philippe, and even – and this last, most striking example was very close to Trotsky – even in the Fourth Russian Duma which, elected in the Year of Grace 1909 under the most rigid rule of the counter-revolution, suddenly felt the glowing heat of the impending overturn and became the point of departure for the revolution?*

All this shows that 'the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions' possesses a powerful corrective – namely, the living movement of the masses, their unending pressure. And the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence – despite rigid party banners, outgrown tickets (electoral lists), etc. To be sure, every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy which Trotsky

* This was the Duma that – in the face of the revolutionary uprising of February/March 1917 – sent emissaries to the Tsar asking for his abdication.

and Lenin have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammelled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.

The Question of Suffrage

… But the Constituent Assembly and the suffrage law do not exhaust the matter. We did not consider above the destruction of the most important democratic guarantees of a healthy public life and of the political activity of the labouring masses: freedom of the press, the rights of association and assembly, which have been outlawed for all opponents of the Soviet regime. For these attacks (on democratic rights), the arguments of Trotsky cited above, on the cumbersome nature of democratic electoral bodies, are far from satisfactory. On the other hand, it is a well-known and indisputable fact that without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assemblage, the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable.

The Problem of Dictatorship

Lenin says the bourgeois state is an instrument of oppression of the working class; the socialist state, of the bourgeoisie. To a certain extent, he says, it is only the capitalist state stood on its head. This simplified view misses the most essential thing: bourgeois class rule has no need of the political training and education of the entire mass of the people, at least not beyond certain narrow limits. But for the proletarian dictatorship that is the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist.

'Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power,' writes Trotsky, 'the labouring masses accumulate in the shortest time a considerable amount of political experience and advance quickly from one stage to another of their development.'

Here Trotsky refutes himself and his own friends. Just because this is so, they have blocked up the fountain of political experience and the source of this rising development by their suppression of public life! Or else we would have to assume that experience and development were necessary up to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, and then, having reached their highest peak, become superfluous thereafter. (Lenin's speech: Russia is won for socialism!!!)

In reality, the opposite is true! It is the very giant tasks which the Bolsheviks have undertaken with courage and determination that demand the most intensive political training of the masses and the accumulation of experience.

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of 'justice' but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when 'freedom' becomes a special privilege.

The Bolsheviks themselves will not want, with hand on heart, to deny that, step by step, they have to feel out the ground, try out, experiment, test now one way now another, and that a good many of their measures do not represent priceless pearls of wisdom. Thus it must and will be with all of us when we get to the same point – even if the same difficult circumstances may not prevail everywhere.

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin–Trotsky theory of dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice. This is, unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately – not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realisation of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. What we possess in our programme is

nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that. Thus we know more or less what we must eliminate at the outset in order to free the road for a socialist economy. But when it comes to the nature of the thousand concrete, practical measures, large and small, necessary to introduce socialist principles into economy, law and all social relationships, there is no key in any socialist party programme or textbook. That is not a shortcoming but rather the very thing that makes scientific socialism superior to the utopian varieties.

The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, an historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realisation, as a result of the developments of living history, which – just like organic nature of which, in the last analysis, it forms a part – has the fine habit of always producing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously the solution. However, if such is the case, then it is clear that socialism by its very nature cannot be decreed or introduced by *ukase*. It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force – against property, etc. The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New Territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative new force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress. (Proof: the year 1905 and the months from February to October 1917.) There it was political in character; the same thing applies to economic and social life also. The whole mass of the people must take part in it. Otherwise, socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals.

Public control is indispensably necessary. Otherwise the exchange of experiences remains only with the closed circle of

the officials of the new regime. Corruption becomes inevitable. (Lenin's words, Bulletin No. 29.) Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering, etc., etc. No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconian penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralises.

When all this is eliminated, what really remains? In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins (the postponement of the Soviet Congress from three-month periods to six-month periods!). Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalisation of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages, etc. (Lenin's speech on discipline and corruption.)…

Democracy and Dictatorship

[Trotsky says:] 'We have never been idol-worshippers of formal democracy.' All that that really means is: We have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of *bourgeois* democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom – not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy – not to eliminate democracy altogether.

But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the *manner of applying democracy*, not in its *elimination*, but in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the *class* and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.

Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the world war, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably

bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles.

A crude proof of this is provided by the use of terror to so wide an extent by the Soviet government, especially in the most recent period just before the collapse of German imperialism, and just after the attempt on the life of the German ambassador. The commonplace to the effect that revolutions are not pink teas is in itself pretty inadequate.

Everything that happens in Russia is comprehensible and represents an inevitable chain of causes and effects, the starting point and end term of which are: the failure of the German proletariat and the occupation of Russia by German imperialism. It would be demanding something superhuman from Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat and a flourishing socialist economy. By their determined revolutionary stand, their exemplary strength in action, and their unbreakable loyalty to international socialism, they have contributed whatever could possibly be contributed under such devilishly hard conditions. The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics. When they get in their own light in this way, and hide their genuine, unquestionable historical service under the bushel of false steps forced on them by necessity, they render a poor service to international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion – in the last analysis only by-products of the bankruptcy of international socialism in the present world war.

Let the German Government Socialists cry that the rule of the Bolsheviks in Russia is a distorted expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. If it was or is such, that is only because it is a product of the behaviour of the German proletariat, in itself a distorted expression of the socialist class struggle. All of us

are subject to the laws of history, and it is only internationally that the socialist order of society can be realised. The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle.

What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescencies in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: 'I have dared!'

This is the essential and *enduring* in Bolshevik policy. In *this* sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realisation of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labour in the entire world. In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to 'Bolshevism'.

18

FOUNDING CONVENTION OF THE GERMAN COMMUNIST PARTY

The speech from which the following excerpts are taken has had various titles – 'Spartacus' or 'On the Spartacus Programme' or 'Our Programme and the Political Situation' or the one that we have selected here – since it was delivered in Berlin at the founding convention of the German Communist Party on New Year's Eve (31 December) of 1918. The context was the German Revolution of 1918–19. The monarchy of Imperial Germany – utterly discredited for its role in bringing on the horrific World War I, which ended in defeat and devastation – collapsed, as an insurgent working class prepared to realise the revolutionary destiny that Marx had foretold.

The high command of the German military – with support from the land-owning aristocracy and major business interests – moved quickly to make a deal with the reformist, pro-war leadership of the German Social Democratic Party, headed by Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann, Edouard David, Gustav Noske, and others. Such people as these were promised, by the ruling class representatives, substantial social reforms and a republic with the SPD in charge, enjoying the full backing of the German military. In payment, they would be expected to rein in the working class insurgency, preserving the wealth and economic power of the landowners, financiers, and industrialists.

Many socialist workers remained loyal to the SPD. Some adhered to the expelled Spartacus League. Larger numbers were drawn to an anti-war split-off from the SPD, the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, led by Hugo Hasse, Wilhelm Dittmann, and Rudolf Hilferding – and including, ironically, both Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky (who helped lead some of their comrades back into the SPD in 1922, when a majority ended up joining the Communists).

As 1918 flowed into 1919, Luxemburg and her comrades denounced the deal and the SPD, transformed the Spartacus League into a new Communist Party, and called on German workers to move forward in the revolutionary

direction taken by the working class of the newly-established Soviet Russia. In this speech, Luxemburg outlined a revolutionary Marxist orientation that represented a decisive break from the old Social Democracy. This was her final speech. It was translated into English by Eden and Cedar Paul, then slightly revised for publication in the US journal *The New International* in 1943, and is presented here with slight modifications in translation.

Comrades: Our task today is to discuss and adopt a programme. In undertaking this task we are not actuated solely by the consideration that yesterday we founded a new party and that a new party must formulate a programme. Great historical movements have been the determining causes of today's deliberations. The time has arrived when the entire socialist programme of the proletariat has to be established upon a new foundation. We are faced with a position similar to that which was faced by Marx and Engels when they wrote the *Communist Manifesto* seventy years ago. As you all know, the *Communist Manifesto* dealt with socialism, with the realisation of the aims of socialism, as the immediate task of the proletarian revolution. This was the idea represented by Marx and Engels in the revolution of 1848; it was thus, likewise, that they conceived the basis for proletarian action in the international field. In common with all the leading spirits in the working class movement, both Marx and Engels then believed that the immediate introduction of socialism was at hand. All that was necessary was to bring about a political revolution, to seize the political power of the state, and socialism would then immediately pass from the realm of thought to the realm of flesh and blood. Subsequently, as you are aware, Marx and Engels undertook a thoroughgoing revision of this outlook. In the joint preface to the re-issue of the *Communist Manifesto* in the year 1872, we find the following passage:

> No special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section Two. That passage would, in many respects, be differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of modern industry during the last twenty-five years and of the accompanying improved and extended organisation of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune [of 1871], where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in it some details that have become antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz: that the 'working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'.

What is the actual wording of the passage thus declared to be out of date? It runs as follows:

> The proletariat will use its political supremacy: to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie; to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.
>
> Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.
>
> The measures will, of course, be different in different countries.
>
> Nevertheless, in the most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable:
>
> 1. Abolition of property in land and application of all land rents to public purposes.
> 2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
> 3. Abolition of the right of inheritance.
> 4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
> 5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
> 6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transportation in the hands of the state.
> 7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state: the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally, in accordance with a concerted plan.
> 8. Equal obligation upon all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
> 9. Co-ordination of agriculture with manufacturing industries: gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population throughout the rural areas.
> 10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labour in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc., etc.

With a few trifling variations, these, as you know, are the tasks that confront us today. It is by such measures that we shall have to realise socialism. Between the day when the above programme was formulated, and the present hour, there have intervened seventy years of capitalist development, and the historical evolutionary process has brought us back to the standpoint which Marx and Engels had in 1872 abandoned as erroneous. At that time there were excellent reasons for believing that their earlier views had been wrong. The further evolution of capital has, however, resulted in this, that what was error in 1872 has become truth today, so that it is our immediate objective to fulfil what Marx and Engels thought they would have to fulfil in the year 1848. But between that point of development, that beginning in the year 1848, and our own views and our immediate task, there lies the whole evolution, not only of capitalism, but in addition that of the socialist labour movement. Above all, there have intervened the aforesaid developments in Germany as the leading land of the modern proletariat.

This working class evolution has taken a peculiar form. When, after the disillusionments of 1848, Marx and Engels had given up the idea that the proletariat could immediately realise socialism, there came into existence in all countries socialist parties inspired with very different aims. The immediate objective of these parties was declared to be detail work, the petty daily struggle in the political and industrial fields. Thus, by degrees, would proletarian armies be formed, and these armies would be ready to realise socialism when capitalist development had matured. The socialist programme was thereby established upon an utterly different foundation, and in Germany the change took a peculiarly typical form. Down to the collapse of 4 August 1914, the German Social Democracy took its stand upon the Erfurt Programme, and by this programme the so-called immediate minimal aims were placed in the foreground, whilst socialism was no more than a distant guiding star….

The 4th of August did not come like thunder out of a clear sky; what happened on the 4th of August was not a chance turn of affairs, but was the logical outcome of all that the German

Socialists had been doing day after day for many years. (*Hear! Hear!*) Engels and Marx, had it been possible for them to live on into our own times, would, I am convinced, have protested with the utmost energy, and would have used all the forces at their disposal to keep the party from hurling itself into the abyss. But after Engels' death in 1895, in the theoretical field the leadership of the party passed into the hands of Kautsky. The upshot of this change was that at every annual congress the energetic protests of the left wing against a purely parliamentarist policy, its urgent warnings against the sterility and the danger of such a policy, were stigmatised as anarchism, anarchising socialism, or at least anti-Marxism. What passed officially for Marxism became a cloak for all possible kinds of opportunism, for persistent shirking of the revolutionary class struggle, for every conceivable half-measure. Thus the German Social Democracy, and the labour movement, the trade union movement as well, were condemned to pine away within the framework of capitalist society. No longer did German socialists and trade unionists make any serious attempt to overthrow capitalist institutions or put the capitalist machine out of gear.

But we have now reached the point, comrades, when we are able to say that we have rejoined Marx, that we are once more advancing under his flag. If today we declare that the immediate task of the proletariat is to make socialism a living reality and to destroy capitalism root and branch, in saying this we take our stand upon the ground occupied by Marx and Engels in 1848; we adopt a position from which in principle they never moved. It has at length become plain what true Marxism is, and what substitute Marxism has been. (*Applause*) I mean the substitute Marxism which has so long been the official Marxism of the Social Democracy. You see what Marxism of this sort leads to, the Marxism of those who are the henchmen of Ebert, David and the rest of them. These are the official representatives of the doctrine which has been trumpeted for decades as Marxism undefiled. But in reality Marxism could not lead in this direction, could not lead Marxists to engage in counter-revolutionary activities side by side with such as Scheidemann. Genuine Marxism turns its weapons

against those also who seek to falsify it. Burrowing like a mole beneath the foundations of capitalist society, it has worked so well that the larger half of the German proletariat is marching today under our banner, the storm-riding standard of revolution. Even in the opposite camp, even where the counter-revolution still seems to rule, we have adherents and future comrades-in-arms….

What has the war left of bourgeois society beyond a gigantic rubbish heap? Formally, of course, all the means of production and most of the instruments of power, practically all the decisive instruments of power, are still in the hands of the dominant classes. We are under no illusions here. But what our rulers will be able to achieve with the powers they possess, over and above frantic attempts to re-establish their system of spoliation through blood and slaughter, will be nothing more than chaos. Matters have reached such a pitch that today mankind is faced with two alternatives: it may perish amid chaos; or it may find salvation in socialism. With the outcome of the Great War it is impossible for the capitalist classes to find any escape from their difficulties while they maintain class rule. We now realise the absolute truth of the statement formulated for the first time by Marx and Engels as the scientific basis of socialism in the great charter of our movement, in the Communist Manifesto. Socialism will become an historical necessity. Socialism is necessary, not merely because the proletarians are no longer willing to live under the conditions imposed by the capitalist class, but, further, because if the proletariat fails to fulfil its duties as a class, if it fails to realise socialism, we shall crash down together to a common doom. (*Prolonged applause*)

Here you have the general foundation of the programme we are officially adopting today, a draft of which you have all read in the pamphlet, *What Does Spartacus Want?* Our programme is deliberately opposed to the leading principle of the Erfurt Programme; it is deliberately opposed to the separation of the immediate and so-called minimal demands formulated for the political and economic struggle, from the socialist goal regarded as a maximal programme. It is in deliberate opposition to the Erfurt Programme that we liquidate the results of seventy years evolution,

that we liquidate, above all, the primary results of the war, saying we know nothing of minimal and maximal programmes; we know only one thing, socialism; this is the minimum we are going to secure. (*Hear! Hear!*)

I do not propose to discuss the details of our programme. This would take too long, and you will form your own opinions upon matters of detail. The task that devolves upon me is merely to sketch the broad lines wherein our programme is distinguished from what has hitherto been the official programme of the German Social Democracy. I regard it, however, as of the utmost importance that we should come to an understanding in our estimate of the concrete circumstances of the hour, of the tactics we have to adopt, of the practical measures which must be undertaken, in view of the probable lines of further development. We have to judge the political situation from the outlook I have just characterised, from the outlook of those who aim at the immediate realisation of socialism, of those who are determined to subordinate everything else to that end.

Our Congress, the Congress of what I may proudly call the only revolutionary socialist party of the German proletariat, happens to coincide in point of time with the crisis in the development of the German revolution. 'Happens to coincide', I say; but in truth the coincidence is no chance matter. We may assert that after the occurrences of the last few days the curtain has gone down upon the first act of the German revolution. We are now in the opening of the second act, and it is our common duty to undertake self-examination and self-criticism. We shall be guided more wisely in the future, and we shall gain additional impetus for further advances, if we study all that we have done and all that we have left undone. Let us, then carefully scrutinise the events of the first act in the revolution.

The movement began on 9 November. The revolution of 9 November was characterised by inadequacy and weakness. This need not surprise us. The revolution followed four years of war, four years during which, schooled by the Social Democracy and the trade unions, the German proletariat had behaved with intolerable ignominy and had repudiated its socialist obligations

to an extent unparalleled in any other land. We Marxists, whose guiding principle is a recognition of historical evolution, could hardly expect that in the Germany which had known the terrible spectacle of 4 August, and which during more than four years had reaped the harvest sown on that day, there should suddenly occur on 9 November 1918, a glorious revolution, inspired with definite class-consciousness, and directed toward a clearly conceived aim. What happened on 9 November was to very small extent the victory of a new principle; it was little more than a collapse of the extant system of imperialism. (*Hear! Hear!*)

The moment had come for the collapse of imperialism, a colossus with feet of clay, crumbling from within. The sequel of this collapse was a more or less chaotic movement, one practically devoid of reasoned plan. The only source of union, the only persistent and saving principle, was the watchword 'Form Workers' and Soldiers' Councils'. Such was the slogan of this revolution, whereby, in spite of the inadequacy and weakness of the opening phases, it immediately established its claim to be numbered among proletarian socialist revolutions. To those who participated in the revolution of 9 November, and who nonetheless shower calumnies upon the Russian Bolsheviks, we should never cease to reply with the question: 'Where did you learn the alphabet of your revolution? Was it not from the Russians that you learned to ask for workers' and soldiers' councils?' (*Applause*)

These pygmies who today make it one of their chief tasks, as heads of what they falsely term a socialist government, to join with the imperialists of Britain in a murderous attack upon the Bolsheviks, were then taking their seats as deputies upon the workers' and soldiers' councils, thereby formally admitting that the Russian Revolution created the first watchwords for the world revolution. A study of the existing situation enables us to predict with certainty that in whatever country, after Germany, the proletarian revolution may next break out, the first step will be the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils. (*Murmurs of assent*)

Herein is to be found the tie that unites our movement internationally. This is the motto which distinguishes our revolution

utterly from all earlier revolutions, bourgeois revolutions. On 9 November, the first cry of the revolution, as instinctive as the cry of a new-born child, was for workers' and soldiers' councils. This was our common rallying cry, and it is through the councils alone that we can hope to realise socialism. But it is characteristic of the contradictory aspects of our revolution, characteristic of the contradictions which attend every revolution, that at the very time when this great, stirring, and instinctive cry was being uttered, the revolution was so inadequate, so feeble, so devoid of initiative, so lacking in clearness as to its own aims, that on 10 November our revolutionists allowed to slip from their grasp nearly half the instruments of power they had seized on 9 November. We learn from this, on the one hand, that our revolution is subject to the prepotent law of historical determinism, a law which guarantees that, despite all difficulties and complications notwithstanding all our own errors, we shall nevertheless advance step by step toward our goal. On the other hand, we have to recognise, comparing this splendid battle-cry with the paucity of the results practically achieved, we have to recognise that these were no more than the first childish and faltering footsteps of the revolution, which has many arduous tasks to perform and a long road to travel before the promise of the first watchwords can be fully realised.

The weeks that have elapsed between 9 November and the present day have been weeks filled with multiform illusions. The primary illusion of the workers and soldiers who made the revolution was their belief in the possibility of unity under the banner of what passes by the name of socialism. What could be more characteristic of the internal weakness of the revolution of 9 November than the fact that at the very outset the leadership passed in no small part into the hands of the persons who a few hours before the revolution broke out had regarded it as their chief duty to issue warnings against revolution (*Hear! Hear!*) – to attempt to make revolution impossible – into the hands of such as Ebert, Scheidemann and Haase. One of the leading ideas of the revolution of 9 November was that of uniting the various socialist trends. The union was to be effected by acclamation. This was an illusion which had to be bloodily avenged, and the

events of the last few days have brought a bitter awakening from our dreams; but the self-deception was universal, affecting the Ebert and Scheidemann groups and affecting the bourgeoisie no less than ourselves.

Another illusion was that affecting the bourgeoisie during this opening act of the revolution. They believed that by means of the Ebert–Haase combination, by means of the so-called socialist government, they would really be able to bridle the proletarian masses and to strangle the socialist revolution. Yet another illusion was that from which the members of the Ebert–Scheidemann government suffered when they believed that with the aid of the soldiers returned from the front they would be able to hold down the workers and to curb all manifestations of the socialist class struggle. Such were the multifarious illusions which explain recent occurrences. One and all, they have now been dissipated. It has been plainly proved that the union between Haase and Ebert–Scheidemann under the banner of 'socialism' serves merely as a fig-leaf for the decent veiling of a counter-revolutionary policy. We ourselves, as always happens, in revolutions, have been cured of our self-deceptions. There is a definite revolutionary procedure whereby the popular mind can be freed from illusion, but, unfortunately, the cure involves that the people must be bloodied. In revolutionary Germany, events have followed the course characteristic of all revolutions. The bloodshed in Chausseestrasse on 6 December, the massacre of 24 December, brought the truth home to the broad masses of the people. Through these occurrences they came to realise that what passes by the name of a socialist government is a government representing the counter-revolution. They came to realise that anyone who continues to tolerate such a state of affairs is working against the proletariat and against socialism. (*Applause*)

Vanished, likewise, are the illusions cherished by Messrs Ebert, Scheidemann & Co., that with the aid of soldiers from the front they will be able forever to keep the workers in subjection. What has been the effect of the experiences of 6 and 24 December? There has been obvious of late a profound disillusionment among the soldiery. The men begin to look with a critical eye upon those who

have used them as cannon-fodder against the socialist proletariat. Herein we see once more the working of the law that the socialist revolution undergoes a determined objective development, a law in accordance with which the battalions of the labour movement gradually learn through bitter experience to recognise the true path of revolution. Fresh bodies of soldiers have been brought to Berlin, new detachments of cannon-fodder, additional forces for the subjection of socialist proletarians – with the result that, from barrack after barrack, there comes a demand for the pamphlets and leaflets of the Spartacus Group.

This marks the close of the first act. The hopes of Ebert and Scheidemann that they would be able to rule the proletariat with aid of reactionary elements among the soldiery have already to a large extent been frustrated. What they have to expect within the very near future is an increasing development of definite revolutionary trends within the barracks. Thereby the army of the fighting proletariat will be augmented, and correspondingly the forces of the counter-revolutionists will dwindle. In consequence of these changes, yet another illusion will have to go, the illusion that animates the bourgeoisie, the dominant class. If you read the newspapers of the last few days, the newspapers issued since the incidents of 24 December, you cannot fail to perceive plain manifestations of disillusionment conjoined with indignation, both due to the fact that the henchmen of the bourgeoisie, those who sit in the seats of the mighty, have proved inefficient. (*Hear! Hear!*)

It had been expected of Ebert and Scheidemann that they would prove themselves strong men, successful lion tamers. But what have they achieved? They have suppressed a couple of trifling disturbances, and as a sequel the hydra of revolution has raised its head more resolutely than ever. Thus disillusionment is mutual, nay universal. The workers have completely lost the illusion which had led them to believe that a union between Haase and Ebert–Scheidemann would amount to a socialist government. Ebert and Scheidemann have lost the illusion which had led them to imagine that with the aid of proletarians in military uniform they could permanently keep down proletarians in civilian dress. The members of the middle class have lost the illusion that,

through the instrumentality of Ebert, Scheidemann and Haase, they can humbug the entire socialist revolution of Germany as to the ends it desires. All these things have a merely negative force, and there remains from them nothing but the rags and tatters of destroyed illusions. But it is in truth a great gain for the proletariat that nothing beyond these rags and tatters remains from the first phase of the revolution, for there is nothing so destructive as illusion, whereas nothing can be of greater use to the revolution than naked truth.

I may appropriately recall the words of one of our classical writers, a man who was no proletarian revolutionary, but a revolutionary spirit nurtured in the middle class. I refer to Lessing, and quote a passage which has always aroused my sympathetic interest:

> I do not know whether it be a duty to sacrifice happiness and life to truth… But this much I know, that it is our duty, if we desire to teach truth, to teach it wholly or not at all, to teach it clearly and bluntly, unenigmatically, unreservedly, inspired with full confidence in its powers… The cruder an error, the shorter and more direct is the path leading to truth. But a highly refined error is likely to keep us permanently estranged from truth, and will do so all the more readily in proportion as we find it difficult to realise that it is an error… One who thinks of conveying to mankind truths masked and rouged, may be truth's pimp, but has never been truth's lover.

Comrades, Messrs Haase, Dittmann, etc., have wished to bring us the revolution, to introduce socialism, covered with a mask smeared with rouge; they have thus shown themselves to be the pimps of the counter-revolution. Today these concealments have been discarded, and what was offered is disclosed in the brutal and sturdy lineaments of Messrs Ebert and Scheidemann. Today the dullest among us can make no mistake. What is offered is the counter-revolution in all its repulsive nudity.…

In order to secure support from the only class whose class interests the government really represents, in order to secure support from the bourgeoisie – a support which has in fact been

withdrawn owing to recent occurrences – Ebert and Scheidemann will be compelled to pursue an increasingly counter-revolutionary policy. The demands of the South German states, as published today in the Berlin newspapers, give frank expression to the wish to secure 'enhanced safety' for the German realm. In plain language, this means that they desire the declaration of a state of siege against 'anarchist, disorderly and Bolshevist' elements, that is to say, against socialists. By the pressure of circumstance Ebert and Scheidemann will be constrained to the expedient of dictatorship, with or without the declaration of a state of siege. Thus, as an outcome of the previous course of development, by the mere logic of events and through the operation of the forces which control Ebert and Scheidemann, there will ensue during the second act of the revolution a much more pronounced opposition of tendencies and a greatly accentuated class struggle. (*Hear! Hear!*) This intensification of conflict will arise, not merely because the political influences I have already enumerated, dispelling all illusion, will lead to a declared hand-to-hand fight between the revolution and the counter-revolution; but in addition, because the flames of a new fire are spreading upward from the depths, the flames of the economic struggle.

It was typical of the first period of the revolution down to 24 December that the revolution remained exclusively political. Hence the infantile character, the inadequacy, the half-heartedness, the aimlessness, of this revolution. Such was the first stage of a revolutionary transformation whose main objective lies in the economic field, whose main purpose it is to secure a fundamental change in economic conditions. Its steps were as uncertain as those of a child groping its way without knowing whither it is going; for at this stage, I repeat, the revolution had a purely political stamp. But within the last two or three weeks a number of strikes have broken out quite spontaneously. Now, I regard it as the very essence of this revolution that strikes will become more and more extensive, until they constitute at last the focus of the revolution. (*Applause*) Thus we shall have an economic revolution, and therewith a socialist revolution. The struggle for socialism has to be fought out by the masses, by the masses alone,

breast to breast against capitalism; it has to be fought out by those in every occupation, by every proletarian against his employer. Thus only can it be a socialist revolution.

The thoughtless had a very different picture of the course of affairs. They imagined it would merely be necessary to overthrow the old government, to set up a socialist government at the head of affairs, and then to inaugurate socialism by decree. Another illusion? Socialism will not be and cannot be inaugurated by decrees; it cannot be established by any government, however admirably socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, must be made by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there must the chains be broken. That only is socialism, and thus only can socialism be brought into being.

What is the external form of struggle for socialism? The strike, and that is why the economic phase of development has come to the front in the second act of the revolution. This is something on which we may pride ourselves, for no one will dispute with us the honour. We of the Spartacus Group, we of the Communist Party of Germany, are the only ones in all Germany who are on the side of the striking and fighting workers. (*Hear! Hear!*) You have read and witnessed again and again the attitude of the Independent Socialists towards strikes. There was no difference between the outlook of *Vorwärts* and the outlook of *Freiheit*.* Both journals sang the same tune: Be diligent, socialism means hard work. Such was their utterance while capitalism was still in control! Socialism cannot be established thus-wise, but only by carrying on an unremitting struggle against capitalism. Yet we see the claims of the capitalists defended, not only by the most outrageous profit-snatchers, but also by the Independent Socialists and by their organ, *Freiheit*; we find that our Communist Party stands alone in supporting the workers against the exactions of capital. This suffices to show that all are today persistent and unsparing enemies of the strike, except only those who have taken their stand with us upon the platform of revolutionary communism.

* *Vorwärts* (*Forward*) was the daily paper of the old Social Democratic Party. *Freiheit* (*Freedom*) was the daily paper of the Independent Social Democratic Party.

The conclusion to be drawn is not only that during the second act of the revolution strikes will become increasingly prevalent; but, further, that strikes will become the central feature and the decisive factors of the revolution, thrusting purely political questions into the background. The inevitable consequence of this will be that the struggle in the economic field will be enormously intensified. The revolution will therewith assume aspects that will be no joke to the bourgeoisie. The members of the capitalist class are quite agreeable to mystifications in the political domain, where masquerades are still possible, where such creatures as Ebert and Scheidemann can pose as socialists; but they are horror-stricken when profits are touched.

To the Ebert–Scheidemann government, therefore, the capitalists will present these alternatives. Either, they will say, you must put an end to strikes, you must stop this strike movement which threatens to destroy us; or else, we have no more use for you. I believe, indeed, that the government has already damned itself pretty thoroughly by its political measures. Ebert and Scheidemann are distressed to find that the bourgeoisie no longer reposes confidence in them. The capitalists will think twice before they decide to cloak in ermine the rough upstart, Ebert. If matters go so far that a monarch is needed, they will say: 'It does not suffice a king to have blood upon his hands; he must also have blue blood in his veins.' (*Hear! Hear!*) Should matters reach this pass, they will say: 'If we needs must have a king, we will not have a parvenu who does not know how to comport himself in kingly fashion.' (*Laughter*)

Thus Ebert and Scheidemann are coming to the point when a counter-revolutionary movement will display itself. They will be unable to quench the fires of the economic class struggle, and at the same time with their best endeavours they will fail to satisfy the bourgeoisie. There will be a desperate attempt at counter-revolution, perhaps an unqualified militarist dictatorship under Hindenburg, or perhaps the counter-revolution will manifest itself in some other form; but in any case, our heroes will take to the woods. (*Laughter*)

It is impossible to speak positively as to details. But we are not concerned with matters of detail, with the question of precisely

what will happen, or precisely when it will happen. Enough that we know the broad lines of coming developments. Enough that we know that, to the first act of the revolution, to the phase in which the political struggle has been the leading figure, there will succeed a phase predominantly characterised by an intensification of the economic struggle, and that sooner or later the government of Ebert and Scheidemann will take its place among the shades.

It is far from easy to say what will happen to the National Assembly during the second act of the revolution. Perchance, should the Assembly come into existence, it may prove a new school of education for the working class. But it seems just as likely that the National Assembly will never come into existence. Let me say parenthetically, to help you to understand the grounds upon which we were defending our position yesterday, that our only objection was to limiting our tactics to a single alternative. I will not reopen the whole discussion, but will merely say a word or two lest any of you should falsely imagine that I am blowing hot and cold with the same breath. Our position today is precisely that of yesterday. We do not propose to base our tactics in relation to the National Assembly upon what is a possibility but not a certainty. We refuse to stake everything upon the belief that the National Assembly will never come into existence. *We wish to be prepared for all possibilities, including the possibility of utilising the National Assembly for revolutionary purposes should the assembly ever come into being.* Whether it comes into being or not is a matter of indifference, for whatever happens the success of the revolution is assured.

What fragments will then remain of the Ebert–Scheidemann government or of any other alleged Social Democratic government which may happen to be in charge when the revolution takes place? I have said that the masses of the workers are already alienated from them and that the soldiers are no longer to be counted upon as counter-revolutionary cannon-fodder. What on earth will the poor pygmies be able to do? How can they hope to save the situation? They will still have one last chance. Those of you who have read today's newspapers will have seen where the ultimate reserves are, will have learned whom it is that the

German counter-revolution proposes to lead against us should the worst come to the worst. You will all have read how the German troops in Riga are already marching shoulder to shoulder with the English against the Russian Bolsheviks….

To resume the thread of my discourse, it is clear that all these machinations, the formation of Iron Divisions and, above all, the before-mentioned agreement with British imperialists, must be regarded as the ultimate reserves, to be called up in case of need in order to throttle the German socialist movement. Moreover, the cardinal question, the question of the prospects of peace, is intimately associated with the affair. What can such negotiations lead to but a fresh lighting up of the war? While these rascals are playing a comedy in Germany, trying to make us believe that they are working overtime in order to arrange conditions of peace, and declaring that we Spartacists are the disturbers of the peace whose doings are making the Allies uneasy and retarding the peace settlement, they are themselves kindling the war afresh, a war in the East to which a war on German soil will soon succeed.

Once more we meet with a situation the sequel of which cannot fail to be a period of fierce contention. It develops upon us to defend, not socialism alone, not revolution alone, but likewise the interests of world peace. Herein we find a justification for the tactics which we of the Spartacus Group have consistently and at every opportunity pursued throughout the four years of the war. Peace means the world-wide revolution of the proletariat. In one way only can peace be established and peace be safeguarded – by the victory of the socialist proletariat! (*Prolonged applause*)

What general tactical considerations must we deduce from this? How can we best deal with the situation with which we are likely to be confronted in the immediate future? Your first conclusion will doubtless be a hope that the fall of the Ebert–Scheidemann government is at hand, and that its place will be taken by a declared socialist proletarian revolutionary government. For my part, I would ask you to direct your attention, not to the apex, but to the base. We must not again fall into the illusion of the first phase of the revolution, that of 9 November; we must not think that when we wish to bring about a socialist revolution it

will suffice to overthrow the capitalist government and to set up another in its place. There is only one way of achieving the victory of the proletarian revolution.

We must begin by undermining the Ebert–Scheidemann government, by destroying its foundations through a revolutionary mass struggle on the part of the proletariat. Moreover, let me remind you of some of the inadequacies of the German revolution, inadequacies which have not been overcome with the close of the first act of the revolution. We are far from having reached a point when the overthrow of the government can ensure the victory of socialism. I have endeavoured to show you that the revolution of 9 November was, before all, a political revolution; whereas the revolution which is to fulfil our aims, must, in addition, and mainly, be an economic revolution. But further, the revolutionary movement was confined to the towns, and even up to the present date the rural districts remain practically untouched. Socialism would prove illusory if it were to leave our present agricultural system unchanged. From the broad outlook of socialist economics, manufacturing industry cannot be remodelled unless it be quickened through a socialist transformation of agriculture. The leading idea of the economic transformation that will realise socialism is an abolition of the contrast and the division between town and country. This separation, this conflict, this contradiction, is a purely capitalist phenomenon, and it must disappear as soon as we place ourselves upon the socialist standpoint.

If socialist reconstruction is to be undertaken in real earnest, we must direct attention just as much to the open country as to the industrial centres, and yet as regards the former we have not even taken the first steps. This is essential not merely because we cannot bring about socialism without socialising, agriculture; but also because, while we may think we have reckoned to the last reserves of the counter-revolution against us and our endeavours, there remains another important reserve which has not yet been taken into account: I refer to the peasantry. Precisely because the peasants are still untouched by socialism, they constitute an additional reserve for the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. The first thing our enemies will do when the flames of the socialist

strikes begin to scorch their heels will be to mobilise the peasants, who are fanatical devotees of private property. There is only one way of making headway against this threatening counter-revolutionary power. We must carry the class struggle into the country districts; we must mobilise the landless proletariat and the poorer peasants against the richer peasants. (*Loud applause*)

From this consideration we must deduce what we have to do to ensure the success of the revolution. First and foremost, we have to extend in all directions the system of workers' councils. What we have taken over from 9 November are mere weak beginnings, and we have not wholly taken over even these. During the first phase of the revolution we actually lost extensive forces that were acquired at the very outset. You are aware that the counter-revolution has been engaged in the systematic destruction of the system of workers' and soldiers' councils. In Hesse, these councils have been definitely abolished by the counter-revolutionary government; elsewhere, power has been wrenched from their hands. Not merely, then, have we to develop the system of workers' and soldiers' councils, but we have to induce the agricultural labourers and the poorer peasants to adopt this system. We have to seize power, and the problem of the seizure of power assumes this aspect; what, throughout Germany, can each workers' and soldiers' council achieve? (*Bravo!*) There lies the source of power. We must mine the bourgeois state and we must do so by putting an end everywhere to the cleavage in public powers, to the cleavage between legislative and executive powers. These powers must be united in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils.

Comrades, we have here an extensive field to till. We must build from below upward, until the workers' and soldiers' councils gather so much strength that the overthrow of the Ebert–Scheidemann or any similar government will be merely the final act in the drama. For us the conquest of power will not be effected at one blow. It will be a progressive act, for we shall progressively occupy all the positions of the capitalist state, defending tooth and nail each one that we seize. Moreover, in my view and in that of my most intimate associates in the party, the economic

struggle, likewise, will be carried on by the workers' councils. The settlement of economic affairs, and the continued expansion of the area of this settlement, must be in the hands of the workers' councils. The councils must have all power in the state. To these ends must we direct our activities in the immediate future, and it is obvious that, if we pursue this line, there cannot fail to be an enormous and immediate intensification of the struggle. For step by step, by hand-to-hand fighting, in every province, in every town, in every village, in every commune, all the powers of the state have to be transferred bit by bit from the bourgeoisie to the workers' and soldiers' councils.

But before these steps can be taken, the members of our own party and the proletarians in general, must be schooled and disciplined. Even where workers' and soldiers' councils already exist, these councils are as yet far from understanding the purposes for which they exist. (*Hear! Hear!*) We must make the masses realise that the workers' and soldiers' council has to be the central feature of the machinery of state, that it must concentrate all power within itself, and must utilise all powers for the one great purpose of bringing about the socialist revolution. Those workers who are already organised to form workers' and soldiers' councils are still very far from having adopted such an outlook, and only isolated proletarian minorities are as yet clear as to the tasks that devolve upon them. But there is no reason to complain of this, for it is a normal state of affairs. The masses must learn how to use power, by using power. There is no other way. We have, happily, advanced since the days when it was proposed to 'educate' the proletariat socialistically. Marxists of Kautsky's school are, it would seem, still living in those vanished days. To educate the proletarian masses socialistically meant to deliver lectures to them, to circulate leaflets and pamphlets among them. But it is not by such means that the proletarians will be schooled. The workers, today, will learn in the school of action. (*Hear! Hear!*)

Our Scripture reads: In the beginning was the deed. Action for us means that the workers' and soldiers' councils must realise their mission and must learn how to become the sole public authorities throughout the realm. Thus only can we mine the ground so

effectively as to make everything ready for the revolution which will crown our work. Quite deliberately, and with a clear sense of the significance of our words, did some of us say to you yesterday, did I in particular say to you: 'Do not imagine that you are going to have an easy time in the future!' Some of the comrades have falsely imagined me to assume that we can boycott the National Assembly and then simply fold our arms. It is impossible, in the time that remains, to discuss this matter fully, but let me say that I never dreamed of anything of the kind. My meaning was that history is not going to make our revolution an easy matter like the bourgeois revolutions. In those revolutions it sufficed to overthrow that official power at the centre and to replace a dozen or so of persons in authority. But we have to work from below. Therein is displayed the mass character of our revolution, one which aims at transforming the whole structure of society. It is thus characteristic of the modern proletarian revolution, that we must effect the conquest of political power, not from above, but from below.

The 9th of November was an attempt, a weakly half-hearted, half-conscious and chaotic attempt, to overthrow the existing public authority and to put an end to ownership rule. What is now incumbent upon us is that we should deliberately concentrate all the forces of the proletariat for an attack upon the very foundations of capitalist society. There, at the root, where the individual employer confronts his wage slaves; at the root where all the executive organs of ownership rule confront the object of this rule, confront the masses; there, step by step, we must seize the means of power from the rulers, must take them into our own hands. Working by such methods, it may seem that the process will be a rather more tedious one than we had imagined in our first enthusiasm. It is well, I think, that we should be perfectly clear as to all the difficulties and complications in the way of revolution. For I hope that, as in my own case, so in yours also, the augmenting tasks we have to undertake will neither abate zeal nor paralyse energy. Far from it, the greater the task, the more fervently will you gather up your forces. Nor must we forget that the revolution is able to do its work with extraordinary

speed. I shall make no attempt to foretell how much time will be required. Who among us cares about the time, so long only as our lives suffice to bring it to pass? Enough for us to know clearly the work we have to do; and to the best of my ability I have endeavoured to sketch, in broad outline, the work that lies before us. (*Tumultuous applause*)

19

ORDER PREVAILS IN BERLIN

This editorial was the final piece of writing by Rosa Luxemburg – appearing in the Spartacus/Communist newspaper *Rote Fahne* (Red Flag) on 14 January 1919 in the wake of the crushing of the so-called Spartacus uprising and hours before the arrest and murder of Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

In the swirl of working class radicalisation, reformist sell-out, counter-revolutionary provocation, insurgency, and repression, Liebknecht had allowed himself to encourage a premature rising. The confusion and debilitating divisions in the workers' ranks were further deepened when some radicalised workers occupied the building of the SPD newspaper, *Vorwärts*. While initially critical, Luxemburg concluded that she must accompany her comrades through the experience of inevitable defeat, the better to rally radicalising forces for future struggles. The notorious *Freikorps* – paramilitary forces led by the Social Democrat Gustav Noske (now Minister of War in the new government of Ebert and Scheidemann) – contained many war veterans and others who would later find their way into the Nazi movement. Working with German military forces as effective death squads, they systematically rounded up and killed hundreds of working class militants. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were among these.

Translated by 'Marcus', this version of Luxemburg's article was made available on-line through marxists.org in 1999, and was secured for this volume through the Marxist Internet Archive.

'Order prevails in Warsaw!' declared Minister Sebastiani to the Paris Chamber of Deputies in 1831, when after having stormed the suburb of Praga, Paskevich's marauding troops invaded the Polish capital to begin their butchery of the rebels.

'Order prevails in Berlin!' So proclaims the bourgeois press triumphantly, so proclaim Ebert and Noske, and the officers of the 'victorious troops', who are being cheered by the petty bourgeois mob in Berlin waving handkerchiefs and shouting 'Hurrah!' The glory and honour of German arms have been vindicated before world history. Those who were routed in Flanders and the Argonne have restored their reputation with a brilliant victory – over three hundred 'Spartacists' in the *Vorwärts* building. The days when glorious German troops first crossed into Belgium, and the days of General von Emmich, the conqueror of Liège, pale before the exploits of Reinhardt and Co. in the streets of Berlin. The government's rampaging troops massacred the mediators who had tried to negotiate the surrender of the *Vorwärts* building, using their rifle butts to beat them beyond recognition. Prisoners who were lined up against the wall and butchered so violently that skull and brain tissue splattered everywhere. In the sight of glorious deeds such as those, who would remember the ignominious defeat at the hands of the French, British, and Americans? Now 'Spartacus' is the enemy, Berlin is the place where our officers can savour triumph, and Noske, 'the worker', is the general who can lead victories where [General Erich] Ludendorff failed.

Who is not reminded of that drunken celebration by the 'law and order' mob in Paris, that Bacchanal of the bourgeoisie celebrated over the corpses of the Communards? That same bourgeoisie who had just shamefully capitulated to the Prussians and abandoned the capital to the invading enemy, taking to their heels like abject cowards. Oh, how the manly courage of those darling sons of the bourgeoisie, of the 'golden youth', and of the officer corps flared back to life against the poorly armed, starving Parisian proletariat and their defenceless women and children. How these courageous sons of Mars, who had buckled before the foreign enemy, raged with bestial cruelty against defenceless people, prisoners, and the fallen.

'Order prevails in Warsaw!' 'Order prevails in Paris!' 'Order prevails in Berlin!' Every half-century that is what the bulletins from the guardians of 'order' proclaim from one centre of the world-historic struggle to the next. And the jubilant 'victors' fail to notice that any 'order' that needs to be regularly maintained through bloody slaughter heads inexorably toward its historic destiny – its own demise.

What was this recent 'Spartacus week' in Berlin? What has it brought? What does it teach us? While we are still in the midst of battle, while the counter-revolution is still howling about its victory, revolutionary proletarians must take stock of what happened and measure the events and their results against the great yardstick of history. The revolution has no time to lose, it continues to rush headlong over still-open graves, past 'victories' and 'defeats', toward its great goal. The first duty of fighters for international socialism is to consciously follow the revolution's principles and its path.

Was the ultimate victory of the revolutionary proletariat to be expected in this conflict? Could we have expected the overthrow of Ebert–Scheidemann and the establishment of a socialist dictatorship? Certainly not, if we carefully consider all the variables that weigh upon the question. The weak link in the revolutionary cause is the political immaturity of the masses of soldiers, who still allow their officers to misuse them, against the people, for counter-revolutionary ends. This alone shows that no *lasting* revolutionary victory was possible at this juncture. On the other hand, the immaturity of the military is itself a symptom of the general immaturity of the German revolution.

The countryside, from which a large percentage of rank-and-file soldiers come, has hardly been touched by the revolution. So far, Berlin has remained virtually isolated from the rest of the country. The revolutionary centres in the provinces – the Rhineland, the northern coast, Brunswick, Saxony, Württemburg – have been heart and soul behind the Berlin workers, it is true. But for the time being they still do not march forward in lockstep with one another, there is still no unity of action, which would make the

forward thrust and fighting will of the Berlin working class incomparably more effective. Furthermore, there is – and this is only the deeper cause of the political immaturity of the revolution – the economic struggle, the actual volcanic font that feeds the revolution, is only in its initial stage. And that is the underlying reason why the revolutionary class struggle is in its infancy.

From all this flows the fact that a decisive, lasting victory could not be counted upon at this moment. Does that mean that the past week's struggle was an 'error'? The answer is yes if we were talking about a premeditated 'raid' or 'putsch'. But what triggered this week of combat? As in all previous cases, such as 6 December and 24 December, it was a brutal provocation by the government. Like the bloodbath against defenceless demonstrators in Chausseestrasse, like the butchery of the sailors, this time the assault on the Berlin police headquarters was the cause of all the events that followed. The revolution does not develop evenly of its own volition, in a clear field of battle, according to a cunning plan devised by clever 'strategists'.

The revolution's enemies can *also* take the initiative, and indeed as a rule they exercise it more frequently than does the revolution. Faced with the brazen provocation by Ebert–Scheidemann, the revolutionary workers were *forced* to take up arms. Indeed, the *honour* of the revolution depended upon repelling the attack immediately, with full force in order to prevent the counter-revolution from being encouraged to press forward, and lest the revolutionary ranks of the proletariat and the moral credit of the German revolution in the International be shaken.

The immediate and spontaneous outpouring of resistance from the Berlin masses flowed with such energy and determination that in the first round the moral victory was won by the 'streets'.

Now, it is one of the fundamental, inner laws of revolution that it never stands still, it never becomes passive or docile at any stage, once the first step has been taken. The best defence is a strong blow. This is the elementary rule of any fight but it is especially true at each and every stage of the revolution. It is a demonstration of the healthy instinct and fresh inner

strength of the Berlin proletariat that it was not appeased by the reinstatement of Eichorn* (which it had demanded), rather the proletariat spontaneously occupied the command posts of the counter-revolution: the bourgeois press, the semi-official press agency, the *Vorwärts* office. All these measures were a result of the masses' instinctive realisation that, for its part, the counter-revolution would not accept defeat but would carry on with a general demonstration of its strength.

Here again we stand before one of the great historical laws of the revolution against which are smashed to pieces all the sophistry and arrogance of the petty USPD variety 'revolutionaries' who look for any pretext to retreat from struggle. As soon as the fundamental problem of the revolution has been clearly posed – and in *this* revolution it is the overthrow of the Ebert–Scheidemann government, the primary obstacle to the victory of socialism – then this basic problem will rise again and again in its entirety. With the inevitability of a natural law, every individual chapter in the struggle will unveil this problem to its full extent regardless of how unprepared the revolution is to solve it or how unripe the situation may be. 'Down with Ebert–Scheidemann!' – this slogan springs forth inevitably in each revolutionary crisis as the only formula summing up all partial struggles. Thus automatically, by its own internal, objective logic, bringing each episode in the struggle to a boil, whether one wants it to or not.

Because of the contradiction in the early stages of the revolutionary process between the task being sharply posed and the absence of any preconditions to resolve it, individual battles of the revolution end in formal *defeat*. But revolution is the only form of 'war' – and this is another peculiar law of history – in which the ultimate victory can be prepared only by a series of 'defeats'.

* Emil Eichorn was a left-wing member of the Independent Social Democratic Party who had become Berlin police chief at the end of World War I but was fired by the Minister of the Interior (in the new Ebert–Scheidemann government) for being too tolerant of Spartacus League agitation; his refusal to leave office sparked the week of radical ferment and unrest, culminating in the abortive revolution of 1919 and the aftermath of murderous repression in which Luxemburg was killed.

What does the entire history of socialism and of all modern revolutions show us? The first spark of class struggle in Europe, the revolt of the silk weavers in Lyon in 1831, ended with a heavy defeat; the Chartist movement in Britain ended in defeat; the uprising of the Parisian proletariat in the June days of 1848 ended with a crushing defeat; and the Paris Commune ended with a terrible defeat. The whole road of socialism – so far as revolutionary struggles are concerned – is paved with nothing but thunderous defeats. Yet, at the same time, history marches inexorably, step by step, toward final victory! Where would we be today *without* those 'defeats', from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism? Today, as we advance into the final battle of the proletarian class war, we stand on the foundation of those very defeats; and we cannot do without *any* of them, because each one contributes to our strength and understanding.

The revolutionary struggle is the very antithesis of the parliamentary struggle. In Germany, for four decades we had nothing but parliamentary 'victories'. We practically walked from victory to victory. And when faced with the great historical test of 4 August 1914, the result was the devastating political and moral defeat, an outrageous debacle and rot without parallel. To date, revolutions have given us nothing but defeats. Yet these unavoidable defeats pile up guarantee upon guarantee of the future final victory.

There is but *one* condition. The question of why each defeat occurred must be answered. Did it occur because the forward-storming combative energy of the masses collided with the barrier of unripe historical conditions, or was it that indecision, vacillation, and internal frailty crippled the revolutionary impulse itself?

Classic examples of both cases are the February revolution in France on the one hand and the March revolution in Germany on the other. The courage of the Parisian proletariat in the year 1848 has become a fountain of energy for the class struggle of the entire international proletariat. The deplorable events of the German March revolution of the same year have weighed down the whole development of modern Germany like a ball and chain.

In the particular history of official German Social Democracy, they have reverberated right up into the most recent developments in the German revolution and on into the dramatic crisis we have just experienced.

How does the defeat of 'Spartacus week' appear in the light of the above historical question? Was it a case of raging, uncontrollable revolutionary energy colliding with an insufficiently ripe situation, or was it a case of weak and indecisive action?

Both! The crisis had a dual nature. The contradiction between the powerful, decisive, aggressive offensive of the Berlin masses on the one hand and the indecisive, half-hearted vacillation of the Berlin leadership on the other is the mark of this latest episode. The leadership failed. But a new leadership can and must be created by the masses and from the masses. The masses are the crucial factor. They are the rock on which the ultimate victory of the revolution will be built. The masses were up to the challenge, and out of this 'defeat' they have forged a link in the chain of historic defeats, which is the pride and strength of international socialism. That is why future victories will spring from this 'defeat'.

'Order prevails in Berlin!' You foolish lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will 'rise up again, clashing', and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing:

I was, I am, I shall be!

SOURCES, FURTHER READING, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Of the Rosa Luxemburg biographies, the two outstanding works remain those of her younger comrade, Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Work* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972) and the scholarly opus of J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1966). Of the many shorter accounts, Wendy Forrest, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989) – presented as a 'children's book', but also worthy of grown-ups, is richly endowed with illustrations. One of Luxemburg's secretaries and comrades, Mathilde Jacob, has produced a loving and valuable memoir, *Rosa Luxemburg, An Intimate Portrait* (London: Lawrence Wishart, 2000).

An unsurpassed study of Luxemburg's thought remains Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Verso, 1983). Also of interest are: Tony Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Bookmarks, 1983), Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), and Andrea Nye, *Philosophia: The Thought of Rosa Luxemburg, Simone Weil, and Hannah Arendt* (Routledge, 1994).

A multi-volume collected works of Rosa Luxemburg is being projected by Verso. The first volume is the most substantial collection of her letters so far available in English, translated by George Shriver, under the editorship of Peter Hudis and a number of associates.

Other editions of Luxemburg's writings can be found in the following:

Bronner, Stephen Eric, ed. *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1993.

Buhle, Paul, ed. *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006.

Davis, Horace B., ed. *The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.

Ettinger, Elizbieta, ed. *Comrade and Lover: Rosa Luxemburg's Letter to Leo Jogiches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981.

Howard, Dick, ed. *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Hudis, Peter and Kevin B. Anderson, eds *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004.
Kautsky, Luise, ed. *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky from 1896 to 1918*. New York: Robert M. McBride Co., 1925.
Le Blanc, Paul, ed. *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999).
Looker, Robert, ed. *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings*. New York: Grove Press, 1974.
Luxemburg, Rosa. *The Accumulation of Capital*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968.
——. *The Accumulation of Capital – An Anti-Critique* (with Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*), ed. by Kenneth Tarbuck. New York: Monthly Review Press.
——. *The Industrial Development of Poland*. New York: Campaigner Publications, 1977.
——. *Letters from Prison* [to Sophie Liebknecht]. London: The Socialist Book Centre, 1946.
Scott, Helen C., ed. *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: 'Reform or Revolution' and 'The Mass Strike'*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008.
Waters, Mary-Alice, ed. *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970.
Wolfe, Bertram D., ed. *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1961.

The above-cited volume edited by Mary-Alice Waters remains the largest selection of complete texts.

Luxemburg's life and thought cannot be fully comprehended without reference to the political movements and struggles of which she was an integral part. A reasonable Social Democratic overview of the history is offered by Julius Braunthal, *History of the International, 1864–1943*, 2 vols (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967). The outstanding study of the de-radicalisation of the German Social Democracy remains Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955). Vernon Lidtke has provided two marvellous volumes on the German Social Democracy, one on its heroic early years, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878–1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), and another providing a rich account of its multifaceted sub-culture from the 1890s to World War I, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Mary Nolan's

excellent case-study, *Social Democracy and Society: Working-Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981) provides innumerable details and insights – among other things, one sees Rosa Luxemburg's influence within the ranks of the German Social Democratic Party.

Two other organisations in which Luxemburg was a central figure were the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) and the *Spartakusbund* (Spartacus League). The two most substantial English-language studies of each, to date, are Robert Blobaum, *Fekliks Dzierzhinski and the SDKPIL: A Study of the Origins of Polish Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), and William Pelz's splendid *The Spartakusbund and the German Working-Class Movement, 1914–1919* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987).

The German Revolution of 1918–19, the dramatic and tragic crescendo of Luxemburg's life, is the focus of John Riddell's very fine collection of materials, *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power: Documents, 1918–1919* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986). A remarkable memoir by a participant, at the time the young wife of one of its martyrs (but also a thoughtful militant in her own right), can be found in Rosa Leviné-Meyer, *Leviné: The Life of a Revolutionary* (Farnborough, UK: Saxon House, 1973). A magisterial study by Pierre Broué, *German Revolution 1917–1923* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), meticulously covers this ground and more, and has much to say about Luxemburg in this final phase of her life. A more popularised history, but still useful, is Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution: Germany, 1918 to 1923* (London: Bookmarks, 1982).

Explorations of Luxemburg's connection with the broader revolutionary Marxist tradition can be found in Paul Le Blanc, *From Marx to Gramsci: An Introduction to Revolutionary Marxist Politics* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1996), David McClellan, *Marxism After Marx* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), George Lichtheim, *Marxism, An Historical and Critical Study*, Revised (London: Routledge, 1964), and C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962). An early Marxist appreciation and critique can be found in Georg Lukács, 'The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg' and 'Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg's "Critique of the Russian Revolution"', in his 1923 classic *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971). Also see Ernest Mandel's 'Rosa Luxemburg and German Social Democracy', in *Revolutionary Marxism and Social Reality in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Steve Bloom (Amherst,

NY: Humanity Books, 1994), combined with the same author's *The Place of Marxism in History* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1994). An insightful discussion is offered in Michael Löwy's succinct essay, 'Rosa Luxemburg's Conception of "Socialism or Barbarism"', in his collection *On Changing the World: Essays in Political Philosophy, From Karl Marx to Walter Benjamin* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993).

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the supportiveness and generous assistance of the magnificent Marxist Internet Archive, the primary source of these selections, which provides what is by far the largest collection of Luxemburg's writings in English. This can be found on-line at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/

INDEX